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The impact of project-based learning on Iranian EFL university students' motivation

Sonia Valizadeh ^{1*}, Dr. Rifat Gunday ²

^{1,2} University of Beykoz, School of Foreign Language Istanbul, Turkey

* Corresponding Author: Sonia Valizadeh

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Abstract

This research was conducted with the aim of investigating the impact of project-based learning on the academic motivation of first-year university students. The research method was semi-experimental with a pre-test and post-test design with a control group. A group of English language students was placed in the experimental and control groups. The students of the experimental group were trained for 10 sessions using the project-based learning method, while the students of the control group were trained using the traditional method. Before and after the training, the academic motivation test was taken in both groups as a pre-test and post-test. The obtained results showed that there is a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in academic motivation. The results confirmed the effectiveness of the project-based learning method on students' attitudes toward language learning.

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Introduction

Countless factors play a role in the psychological success of students in learning English. One of the most important factors is students' motivation and attitude toward the English language (Shirbeigi *et al.*, 2010) ^[10]. In the socio-educational model of language learning, motivation is a hidden variable that consists of the desire to learn the language, intensity of motivation, and attitude toward learning (Gardner 1994) ^[5]. Motivation is the key to learning, motivation is an internal source, emotional desire, reason, need, and goal drive that prompts a person to act (Chalak *et al.*, 2010) ^[11]. Research has shown that students who are more motivated learn a new language better than others. In fact, the quality of fast learning in a new language depends on the individual motivation of the learners. It has also been determined that students with less talent but high motivation achieve greater success and progress than students with high talent but low desire to learn (Noori, 2010) ^[8]. Overall motivation is one of the variables that influence foreign language learning. Motivation can be defined as a factor that empowers, guides, and maintains behavior (Saif, 2014) ^[11]. In simple words, motivation is something that forces oneself to improve, keeps improving, and determines where to go.

Motivation, as one of the most important conditions for learning, is one of the emotional areas that is discussed in education and is directly related to the overall feeling toward learning. Highly motivated students are eager to learn, interested, inquisitive, and hardworking, and easily ignore obstacles and problems and spend more time studying. In general, academic motivation theories accept that academic motivation positively affects students' performance.

In socio-educational models of language learning, motivation is a hidden variable that consists of desire to learn language, intensity of motivation and attitude to learning (Garden, Trempley, 1994). Language learning motivation is a combination of a goal, the desire to achieve that goal, a positive attitude toward language learning, and the effort to achieve the goal (Gardner, 1985). He classifies language learning motivation into two types of integrated motivation and instrumental motivation. In integrated motivation, the learner's goal is to be in harmony with the language, to be similar to the people, to participate in the culture of the studied language (Gardner, 1985).

Simply the learner wants to become like the natives whose language is their mother tongue. In instrumental motivation, the learner is interested in language learning because of special interests such as professional, scientific, and academic advancement. Although this classification is the most common classification in the field of language learning motivation, this classification does not include all the reasons for learning a foreign language. For this reason, researchers have presented different models of language learning motivation to include the motivation that language learners report for learning a foreign language or a second language (Dorney, 1994). Among these models are the extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation models proposed by Noz, Yellis, and Warland. This model was formed following the theory of "self-determination" (Deci and Ryan, 1985) [3] and based on it, the motivational orientation in learning a foreign language or a second language can be compared to the amount of self-determination that is the goal of learning on the foreign language or second language learning process. It is divided into three types, non-motivational orientation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Lack of motivation indicates a lack of purposefulness in performing an action (Ryan and Deci, 2000) [9]. In other words, when a person is unmotivated, he is not able to perform a valuable activity (Ryan, 1995). In extrinsic motivation, a person performs an activity to achieve an outcome. According to self-determination theory, extrinsic motivation is divided into 4 types. In the most controlling type of external motivation, called external regulation, people seek to fulfill external demands such as receiving rewards or avoiding punishment, which is the first motivation. But the second type is internal adjustment, where people with this orientation perform an activity under pressure in order to avoid guilt and anxiety or achieve a sense of pride. The third type, which is more independent and self-determining, is regulation by replication. In this type of adjustment, the person identifies with the importance and value that a behavior or activity has for him. Finally, the most self-determining type of external motivation is integrated alignment. This type of regulation occurs when the replication regulation is fully internalized. In fact, this type of adjustment of regulatory methods is coordinated and integrated with personal needs and values (Ryan and Deci, 2000) [9]. According to Ryan and Deci, the type of impact that external motivations have on performance depends on their effect based on the independence and competence of individuals. External motivations that increase the feeling of independence and competence have a positive effect on performance.

Task based learning

One of the important events in educational design is the constructivist approach. Based on the epistemological and psychological foundations of constructivist learning, this approach considers education design to include providing learning resources and processes in order to facilitate students' learning, which is the creation of meaning in their minds (Khosravi and Fardanesh, 2013) [7]. Among the methods based on this theory is the project-based learning method. In the project-based learning method, learning happens through experience. In this method, learners face real experiences. In project-based learning, emphasis is placed on teaching with real-world experiences. In this method, learners collaborate with each other to complete

projects while being independent. Learners are quite active and use different resources to complete projects. In this method, the teacher plays the role of guide and facilitator. Project-based learning involves students fully in the learning process. Therefore, it creates a deep sense of satisfaction in them. Project-based learning encourages learners to work together. This issue, in addition to increasing the responsibility of learners in their own learning, creates self-learning skills in them, and since project-based learning includes many activities, it is consistent with the needs and tastes of learners. Project-based learning is a crystallized method of teaching by which learners discover the problems of the world around them. Students are happy to do these projects because they say that they have their own choices in this way. Projects are their own works and can relate to their daily life. By leaving students free and giving them the opportunity to collaborate in designing their programs, it helps to increase the sense of belonging to the class society (Ciftci, 2015) [2].

Research Questions

1. Does the project-based learning impacts on EFL students' motivation in English learning?
2. Is there any significant difference in pre and post treatment students' motivation after project-based learning?

Methods

1. Participants and procedure

The statistical population of the research was first-year English language students at Tabriz Azad University. The statistical sample of this research included 45 first-year students of the English language at Tabriz Azad University, who were selected as a sample and randomly divided into the experimental group (22 people) and the control group (23 people). The experimental group was exposed to project-based learning for 10 sessions, and during this time, the control group was trained in the traditional teacher-centered model. Both groups were evaluated before and after the training using the academic motivation questionnaire. After forming groups, the participants take part in team activities and each session they did a new task, they were asked to make short videos and make podcasts, they were asked to make them collaboratively at first session, then from fifth session they started to do it individually. At the first session, students filled pre-survey and they learned about project-task learning. At the final day students completed English motivation questionnaire.

2. Data collection and analysis

The study was completed in two month and data were collected through questionnaires. The questionnaire included preliminary survey before the project and after survey which was filled after the class activities. Keller's questionnaire was used to gather the data.

Findings

Descriptive indices of pre-test and post-test show the motivation to learn English in the control and experimental groups. As can be seen, there is a visible increase in the variable of academic motivation in the post-test of the experimental group (project-based learning method class) compared to the control group.

Table 1: Descriptive results of language learning motivation in the experimental and control groups (Table 1 of the English article)

Academic attitude	statistics	Pre-test	Post-test
Experimental Group	Average	51.92	55.82
	The standard deviation	16.17	15.36
Control Group	Average	54.76	53.74
	The standard deviation	17.34	17.81

In order to find out in which aspects of motivation did project based learning affected in students' English learning, the gathered data from questionnaire were analyzed and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Pre- and Post-Treatment Students' ARCS Subscale Responses

		M	SD	t	p
Attention	Pre	22.80	4.231	-3.65	.00
	Post	24.42	3.127		
Relevance	Pre	33.20	6.352	-3.34	.00
	Post	35.20	4.301		
Confidence	Pre	26.90	2.526	-1.20	.29
	Post	26.84	2.267		
Satisfaction	Pre	32.02	4.468	-1.18	.26
	Post	31.15	3.894		

According to the results of Table 2, while the pre-mean score of attention (A score) is 22.08, the post-mean score is 24.42, which is higher than the pre-mean. Also, the t-value is -3.65 and the p-value is .00 ($p < .05$) which shows a significant difference. The relevance of the post-mean (35.02) is greater than the pre-test (33.02). There is also a significant difference between the t-value (-3.34) and the p-value (.00, which shows $p < .05$).

However, for confidence (C) and satisfaction (S), the pre-test and post-test the t-values are -1.20 and -1.80, and the p-values are .29 and .26, which are not significant. We can conclude that (C) and (S) are both motivational factors that can be developed in long term.

Conclusion

The results of this research showed that project-based learning is effective on the academic motivation of first-year English language students. In project-based learning, learners find opportunities to direct, manage and control their learning through self-control and self-management. Also, this approach pays attention to the participation and cooperation of students to a great extent. Living in the societies of the 21st century has caused the learners to encounter significant scientific advances. In order to prepare students to enter the real world and align with scientific developments, we must create learning environments so that students can actively and in a collaborative environment with the help of cognitive tools and technologies achieve a deep understanding of the Desired knowledge. For this reason, project-based learning becomes especially important today. In project-based learning, students are involved in meaningful and real issues. Just like experts, they investigate questions and present hypotheses and explain them, and they create challenges about their own ideas and others achieve new ideas. Also, students approach the cognitive skills needed in today's world like critical thinking, problem solving, cooperation, presentation and speaking skills.

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