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Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), Motivation and Language Achievement of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present study aimed to find the self-regulatory strategies that are most frequently used by Iranian EFL learners in Learning English, the relationship between motivation and SRL, and the relationship between SRL and L2 achievement. 130 EFL learners studying at two language institutes in Hamedan and Sanandaj were selected. A questionnaire including 46 items assessing self-regulated learning and motivation was administered. Running frequency analysis, five most frequently used self-regulatory strategies by Iranian EFL learners were specified. In addition, while a significant relationship was found between motivation and SRL, there was no significant relationship between SRL and L2 achievement.

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Keywords: Self-regulated learning; SRL strategies; Motivation; L2 achievement; Iranian EFL learners

1. Introduction

Attaining high level of foreign language proficiency depends on self-regulatory skills of a learner (Oxford, 2001). Self-regulated learning, is an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment (Pintrich, 2004; Schunk, 2005).

To self-regulate means “to change … oneself, or some aspect of oneself, so as to conform to some idea or concept” (Forgas, Baumeister, & Tice, 2009, p. 4). Self-regulation of learning takes place if students direct their own learning (Boekaerts, & Corno 2005). Self-regulatory control can involve thinking, emotions, motivation, behavior and environment. The progress of learning process is evaluated against criterion or standard. Self-regulation

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processes mediate between personal and environmental characteristics and achievement (Pintrich, 2004). Our capacity to self-regulate various aspects of our life is probably one of the most important qualities as human. Many of us, for example, try to be physically fit by doing exercises or staying away from unhealthy diets. However, the extent to which individuals self-regulate their own behavior is said to be determined by why they are doing and what sources of motivation are available in the context. The idea of motivation and self-regulation has cast light on why some students succeed in controlling their English learning while others do not. The Pintrich model and research conducted by him and his colleagues support the hypothesized links between learning, motivation, and self-regulation (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). Others support the predictions of the conceptual framework by showing linkages between motivation, self-regulation, and academic learning (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Pokay & Blumenfeld, 1990; Schunk, 1996; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). This linkage is significant not only for theoretical reasons but also for classroom practices, because it suggests that motivational and cognitive factors interact in complex ways to lead to learning. However, the fact is that there is an increasing need for developing students’ self-regulatory strategies and self-regulatory system.

The general conclusion is that students who display more adaptive self-regulatory strategies demonstrate better learning and higher motivation for learning (Pintrich, 2000). Thus, this study is designed to explore the relationship between motivational factors, self-regulated learning and language achievement of Iranian EFL learners in learning English and to help them develop their self-regulatory strategies and how to self-regulate their learning in English.

2. Review of the related literature

The shift from behaviourism to cognitivism in educational psychology has placed an increasing responsibility on learners for their own learning, and self-regulated learning has become a frequent area of educational research (Chen, 2002). A large number of studies have been done on the links between learning, motivation, and self-regulation (see Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992, Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Pokay & Blumenfeld, 1990; Schunk, 1996; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990).

Self-regulated learning strategies refer to actions and processes at acquisition of information or skills that involve agency, purpose, and instrumentality perceptions by the learners (Zimmerman, 1990). Although the concept of self-regulated learning strategies originated from educational psychology, recent research suggests its applicability to the field of language education. To promote SRL in classrooms, teachers must teach students the self-regulated strategies that facilitate learning.

Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) proposed 14 classes of SRL strategies: self-evaluation, organizing and transforming, goal setting and planning, seeking information, keeping records and monitoring, environmental structuring, self-consequences, rehearsing and memorizing, seeking peer assistance, seeking teacher assistance, seeking adult assistance, reviewing tests, reviewing notes, and reviewing texts. All of these strategies are parts of three cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioural strategies.

Pintrich and De Groot (1990) explored relations among self-regulation (use of metacognitive and effort management strategies), cognitive strategy use (rehearsal, elaboration, and organizational strategies), and motivation for learning and performing well in class among seventh graders in science and English. Using the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), they found that self-efficacy, intrinsic value (interest in and perceived importance of the learning), cognitive strategy use (e.g., rehearsal, organization, elaboration), and self-regulation (effort management, metacognition) were positively correlated and predicted achievement. Test anxiety was related negatively to self-efficacy. Regression analyses indicated that self-efficacy, self-regulation, and test anxiety predicted performance, whereas intrinsic value did not directly affect performance.

Additional evidence comes from research by Pintrich, Roeser, and De Groot (1994). The authors administered the MSLQ to seventh graders to assess motivational beliefs (intrinsic value, self-efficacy, text anxiety) and self-regulated learning (cognitive strategy use, self-regulation). Positive motivational beliefs were related to higher levels
of self-regulated learning. The authors also assessed students’ perceptions of classroom experiences (i.e., productive classroom work, teacher effectiveness, cooperative work). Intrinsic value later in the school year was related to classroom experience more strongly than intrinsic value early in the year. Self-efficacy, cognitive strategy use, and self-regulation were related positively to classroom experience. The results support the idea that motivation and self-regulated learning bear a complex reciprocal relation to each other.

Wolters, Yu, and Pintrich (1996) examined the relation between motivation and self-regulated learning in research with junior high students. Regression analyses across three subject areas (English, social studies, and mathematics) yielded a positive pattern of motivational beliefs for a mastery-approach goal and a performance-approach (relative ability) goal orientation to include adaptive levels of self-efficacy, task value, and test anxiety, along with higher levels of cognitive strategy use, self-regulation, and academic performance. In contrast, an extrinsic goal orientation reflecting a desire to obtain good grades was linked with motivational and cognitive outcomes. Research on the relation between self-regulated learning and academic achievement has generally shown disparate results. Turan and Demirel (2010) examined the relationship between self-regulated learning skills and achievement. The results of their study indicated that if learners’ self-regulated learning skills are developed, their understanding of subject area and efficiency of learning will improve and their self-efficacy will increase. Abbasnasa Sardareh, Mohd Saad and Boroomand (2012) investigated the relationship between the use of SRL strategies and students’ academic achievement. The findings of their study revealed that there is a strong relationship ($r = .80$) between the use of SRL strategies and students’ academic achievement. The findings of the study showed a difference between males and females as to the use of SRL strategies. Females did better than males in both academic achievement and the use of SRL strategies.

3. Research Questions

The present study was set out to answer the following questions:
1. What are the most frequently used self-regulatory strategies among Iranian EFL learners in Learning English?
2. Is there any significant relationship between motivation and SRL?
3. Is there any significant relationship between self-regulated learning and language achievement?

4. Methodology

4.1. Subjects

One hundred and thirty EFL students (77 males and 53 females) studying at two language institutes in Hamedan and Sanandaj took part in the study. Their ages were between 14 and 40. The participants were selected from different English proficiency levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced.

4.2. Instrument

For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire containing a variety of statements to assess motivational orientation, key source of motivational beliefs and SRL strategy use was used. The questionnaire was developed by Hirata (2010). It included three scales: (1) motivational orientation (12 items), (2) motivational beliefs (14 items) and (3) self-regulated learning strategies (20 items). In total, it was a 46-item questionnaire designed to assess variables related to each dimension on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’ depending on the nature of the questions.

4.3. Procedure

To prevent any difficulty or misunderstanding, the questionnaire was translated into Farsi and administered to the learners in both language institutes. Using SPSS software version 20, the results of Cronbach’s Alpha and factor analysis showed that the questionnaire had acceptable reliability and validity rates. In addition, the learners’ final scores were collected as their L2 achievement.
4.4. Data Analysis

To answer the first question of the study, a frequency analysis was run to find out the percentages of learners’ responses to each item of the questionnaire.

Regarding the second question, a Pearson product-moment correlation was used to find out the relationship between motivation and self-regulated learning.

Concerning the third question of the study, also a Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to find out the relationship between self-regulated learning and language achievement.

5. Results

Regarding the first question of the study and according to table 1, the results of frequency analysis showed that Iranian EFL learners use the following five SRL strategies most frequently out of twenty common SRL strategies in learning English.

| Self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies | percentages |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. I make associations between new English and other English I already know | 55% agree |
| 2. When I find English I do not understand but I should know I make sure I study it later. | 47.8% agree |
| 3. I regularly test my knowledge of English. | 46.5% agree |
| 4. I try and think of ways to make English learning more enjoyable. | 46.2% agree |
| 5. I keep records of English I have and/or haven’t mastered | 45.4% agree |

With respect to the second question of the study and in order to find out the relationship between motivation and SRL, Pearson product-moment correlation was run. The results revealed a significant relationship between motivation and self-regulated learning (Table 2).

| Motivation | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | N |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|---|
|            | .495                | .000            | 130|

| SRL        | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | N |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|---|
|            | .498                | .000            | 130|

The third research question concerned the relationship between self-regulated learning and language achievement. Based on our data, no significant relationship was found between these two variables (see Table 3). Language achievement was measured using students’ GPAs from the language institutes where they were studying.

| Motivation | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | N |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|---|
|            | .034                | .702            | 130|

| SRL        | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | N |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|---|
|            |                     |                 | 130|
6. Discussion

6.1. The SLR strategies used by Iranian EFL learners

As the findings of this study indicated (Table 1) Iranian EFL learners use five SRL strategies most frequently, including: 1. "Making associations between new English and other English I already know"; 2. "Making sure study English later when I do not understand it"; 3. "testing regularly my knowledge of English"; 4. "trying and thinking of ways to make English learning more enjoyable"; 5. "Keeping records of English I have and/or haven’t mastered". Out of these five strategies, the first and forth ones are cognitive strategies, the second one is a behavioural strategy, and the third and fifth ones are metacognitive strategies.

Hence, cognitive and metacognitive SLR strategies such as organizing and transforming, self-evaluation, keeping records and monitoring were mostly favoured by Iranian EFL learners. To be self regulated learners, Pintrich and De Groot (1990) hold that students should acquire the necessary knowledge and skill to choose and apply cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioural strategies. Teachers can make students aware of valuable learning strategies in various types of learning environments and help students use the proper learning strategies in later learning situations. Since the self-regulatory process of learning gives students a sense of control and encourages students to pay attention to their methods of learning (Zimmerman, Bonner, & Kovach, 1996), teachers can teach students how to learn by training students to use different SRL learning strategies.

6.2. The relationship between motivation and self-regulated learning

Self-regulated learning is controlled by an interconnected framework of factors that determine its development and sustainability (Boekaerts, 1999; Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2008) and motivation is a critical factor in this framework (Kurman, 2001; Ommundsen, Haugen & Lund, 2005; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). As Hadwin (2008) identifies three ways, in which motivation is involved in self-regulated learning. First, learner’s motivation knowledge and beliefs influence the types of goals that are set, the strategies that are chosen, and one’s persistence in a given task. Second, engagement in SRL produces new motivational knowledge and beliefs that influence engagement in current and future tasks. Third, students self-regulate their motivational states during learning.

Based on the findings of the study (table 2) a significant relationship was found between SRL and motivation, it can be understood that self-regulation and motivation work hand in hand to clarify students’ learning and success in the classroom. When students are motivated to learn, they are more likely to devote the necessary time and energy needed to learn and apply appropriate SRL skills, and when students are able to successfully employ self-regulation strategies, they are often more motivated to accomplish learning tasks (Zimmerman, 2000). The findings of the present study are in line with the study done by Zimmerman (2000) who demonstrated that if students are motivated to learn, they spend more time to learn and use more SLR strategies. The results also support a study by Pintrich, Roeser, and De Groot (1994) that motivation and self-regulated learning bear a complex reciprocal relation to each other.

Hence, it can be concluded that the extent to which EFL learners self-regulate their own learning is said to be determined by why they are learning and what sources of motivation are available in the context of learning English.

6.3. The relationship between self-regulated learning and language achievement

Self-regulated learning is seen as a mechanism to help explain achievement differences among students and as a means to improve achievement (Schunk, 2005). The results of this study showed no significant relationship between

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### Table 1: Pearson Correlation

| SRL          | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|
|              |                     |                 |
| N            |                     |                 |
| Pearson Correlation | .034 | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed)       | .702 | 130 |
| N              | 130                 | 130             |
the use of SRL strategies and L2 achievement, thus, in the case of the relationship between these two variables the findings are inconsistent with the findings of previous studies, e.g. Zimmerman, (1990), who found that self-regulated learners are distinguished by their systematic use of metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural strategies; by their responses to feedback regarding the effectiveness of their learning; and their self-perceptions of academic achievement.

Labuhn, Zimmerman, and Hasselhorn. (2010) found that learners who were taught SRL skills through monitoring and imitation were more likely to perform higher on measures of academic achievement compared to students who did not receive SRL instruction. Ruban and Reis (2006) indicated that self-regulated learners have high probability of success in their academic and professional life.

Thus, it can be concluded that Iranian EFL learners are not self-regulated learners at least in the contexts of the present study or it can be realized that there are other factors such as students’ social identities (Montalvo & Torres, 2008), educational system, materials, and teachers that can influence students’ academic behaviours and educational goals. As Pintrich (2004) put forward, self-regulation processes mediate between personal and environmental characteristics and achievement.

7. Conclusion and implication of the study

Based on the findings of the study, it can be said that Iranian EFL learners mainly use cognitive and metacognitive SLR strategies in learning English. Furthermore, self-regulation and motivation work closely to simplify EFL learners’ learning and success in the classroom. Additionally, although self-regulated learning can be seen as a mechanism to improve achievement, no significant relationship was found between the use of SRL strategies and L2 achievement of Iranian EFL learners. Thus, it seems that some other factors such as educational system, materials, and teachers might affect these learners' academic behaviours and educational goals than SRL strategies.

The findings imply that involving EFL learners in setting goals, evaluation criteria and self-evaluating their work gives them a sense control over learning and assessment outcomes, which enhance their motivation to try challenging tasks such as learning a foreign language. In addition, this involvement might prompt metacognition and strategic action because it requires learners to judge qualities of their learning processes and products and encourages adjustments in behaviours that will enhance learning and attainment (Winne & Perry, 2000).

Furthermore, EFL teachers can provide instrumental and responsive scaffolding to help learners acquire skills and strategies associated with effective learning and SRL. Hence, Teachers should help students to be more self-regulative in promoting their L2 achievement, motivation, and learning.

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