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Exploring the Influence of Using Technology on Iranian EFL Students’ Motivation

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Abstract

Related literature indicates that the use of technology including the internet has an important role in foreign language learning. It is also obvious that attitudes of learners including their motivation affect learning processes significantly. This study aimed to investigate if there is any significant relationship between the use of technology in Iranian EFL university classes and the students’ motivation to learn English. To test this hypothesis a questionnaire developed by Binnur (2011) was distributed among a group of 60 Iranian EFL university students who were in EFL classes working with computer, mobile and power point to work on their English in different courses. Data gathered were analyzed statistically. The result indicated that Iranian EFL university students had a positive attitude towards the use of technology in their English classes.

Keywords: Technology; Motivation; EFL classrooms

1. Introduction

A socio-psychological factor frequently used to account for differential success in learning a second language is motivation. Many studies have indicated that it makes sense that individuals who are motivated will learn another language faster and more efficiently. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in motivation research, with numerous reviews and books and term length treatments of the topic (Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 2001; Macintyre, 2002; Ushioda, 2003). In general, motivation appears to be the second strongest predictor of success, trailing only aptitude (Skehan; 1989). However; one should always bear in mind that improving proficiency in a second language is a long term project. Motivation as an important drive of success in EFL can be in different types and degrees because of various sources of motivation. One of the probable Corresponding

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According to Wang (2004), when language learners have desirable and real communication factors, they can develop their language skills in classroom. He further goes on to say that using computers and every kind of technological equipment gives students the sense of freedom and encouragement. With the help of technology students can be active, motivated and involved in the language learning process. Materials which have high quality and authenticity with reasonable price can be provided by technology. In this way, the popularity of distance education increases. In the same line, Brown (2003) explains that internet and distance education increase the quality of language learning and provide available education. According to Stepp-Granny (2000), Web-learning offers well-selected activities and interactive learning. He further reports that technologically equipped classrooms increase students’ motivation because of the interactive nature of the activities. Isman, Caglar, Dabaj, Altnay, and Altnay (2004) implies that students always have positive and optimistic ideas for using computer in the classrooms and it gives opportunities to the students to create new ideas and develops their problem solving skills while providing self-responsibility, thus they feel comfortable. To show the importance of technology as an excellent motivator for EFL students, Zengin (2007) explains the importance of the technological classrooms because students are more motivated and interested in multi-media and technological lessons. Ellinger, Sandler, Chayen, Goldfrad, and Yarosky (2001) conducted a study on the use of internet in language classes. They believe that internet, as an important tool encourages students, increases autonomous learning potential, and brings enthusiasm into the classroom. Arcairo (1993) states that using authentic video in EFL classrooms, can be interesting and attractive for communicative dialogues. Chapple and Curtis (2000) point out that using authentic films in the classrooms motivate the learners because of many contextual clues of films, and they make learners use both of their hemispheres which are very important for language learning. Using technology in EFL classrooms improves students’ four skills. Kung (2003) explains his research results about web and language learning. According to his research web using enriches and supports good motivation in the development of speaking skill. Case and Truscott (1999) tell that computers and internet are good sources in developing reading skills. Computer-based reading texts are authentic, more effective, and motivating for every kind of language learners. Anderson and Speck (2001) mention that using technology in the classroom not only motivates the learners but engages them in speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Leu and Leu (1997) think that electronic books and stories used in EFL classrooms enrich students’ interest and lead them to be a good reader. Deeler and Grey (2000) indicate that the real motivating factor in using the internet for speaking skill can be video-conferencing and cross-curricular projects. Students can publish a class web page of their own, they can prepare simple fancy programs which are enjoyable during the difficult language learning process consequently they improve their writing skill. Distance learning is not limited so students can use this limitless knowledge for their improvement. Krajka (2000) explains the importance of internet and adds that with the help of websites and on-line techniques, writing skill can be more interesting, appealing and motivating. It can be said that technology also allows weak learners to reveal their capacity and creative mind. In addition to providing excellent authentic materials, technology offers language learners a chance to use daily conversations and rich vocabulary. In a study on the internet and computer-based classrooms conducted by Kang and Dennis (1995), there were interactive vocabulary choices for EFL students. Belz (2002) thinks that technology brings meaningful and communicative materials into the classroom such as tele-collaboration and interaction. Authentic materials which can be accessed in the internet easily are opportunities for language learners to compile interesting information and report it in English so they may improve both their reading and writing skills at the same time. There are plenty of advantages of using technology in EFL classrooms for providing easy, practical, and authentic activities as well as creative tasks. Although technology does not substitute for a good teacher, it will motivate the language learners and enrich classroom atmosphere. In order to use technology in the classroom effectively, teachers have important roles. They should plan and organize the lessons according to these materials (Deeler & Gray, 2000).

The aim of this study was to investigate whether using technology can help increase Iranian EFL students’ motivation in learning English. To this goal the following research question was addressed:

*RQ: Is technology a good motivator in Iranian EFL classes?*
2. Method

2.1 Subjects

In order to gather the required data for this study a group of 60 English students majoring in English translation were selected at random. They were studying English at Payam-e-Noor university of Andimeshk, Iran. The age range, sex, and background knowledge of English of the students were not controlled in this study.

2.2 Instruments

This empirical study was based on a questionnaire which was developed by Binnur (2011). The questionnaire was composed of 15 questions about motivation and technology use in EFL classrooms. The questionnaire was distributed among the subjects and then an item analysis was done. Then the data were entered into SPSS and chi-square statistical analysis was used. The significant level was taken as .05.

2.3 Procedure

As it was mentioned above, the purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of Iranian EFL university students towards the use of technology in their English classes. This seems to be deeply ingrained in the related literature in which some other studies which have already been carried out by many experts in different contexts with different subjects. But because of the limitations of these studies, the results obtained cannot be easily generalized. That is to say, in order to explore the attitudes of English language learners in general and EFL university students in particular toward the use of technology, we need to carry out more studies and even replicate the studies done before. Therefore, the present study is indeed a replication of an investigation already conducted by Binnur (2011) on a group of Turkish students, so the same procedures used in Binnur study were followed. This descriptive study is then based on the questionnaire which was prepared on purpose. It was composed of 15 questions about motivation and use of technology in EFL classrooms. The questionnaire whose reliability was already established by Binnur (2011) was administered to a representative group (60 students) of Iranian EFL students and then an item analysis was done. As mentioned above for the analysis of the data chi-square statistical analysis was used and the significant level was taken as .05.

2.4 Data Analysis and Results

A questionnaire comprising 15 questions was distributed among them. In the following tables the results obtained from the participants answering the questions in the questionnaire are given.

| Results          | Observed N | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
|------------------|------------|------------|---------|------------|----|-------------|
| Agree            | 52         | 20.0       | 86.7    | 32.267     | 1  | .000        |
| Neutral          | 0          | 20.0       | 0       |            |    |             |
| Disagree         | 8          | 20.0       | 13.3    |            |    |             |
| Total            | 60         | 20.0       | 100     |            |    |             |

Table 1 Use of Technology in our language classrooms increases my motivation.

As it is seen in table one, 86.7% of students believed that they are motivated to work more in their EFL classes if technology is used. Only 13.3% of the students disagreed with this. Based on the chi-square statistical analysis of the results
(p<.05, p=0), it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the number of students (86.7%) who agree that the use of technology increases their motivation in their EFL classes and those who are against this (13.3%).

| Results | Test Statistics |
|---------|-----------------|
|         | Observed N  | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df  | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree   | 49         | 20.0       | 81.7     | 63.300     | 2   | .000        |
| Neutral | 7          | 20.0       | 11.7     |            |     |             |
| Dis agree | 4            | 20.0       | 6.7      |            |     |             |
| Total   | 60         | 20.0       | 100.0    |            |     |             |

Table 2  We should use technology in our classroom for every lesson.

For question 2 of the questionnaire, chi-square results are presented in table 2. The results given in this table show that 81.7% of the participants in the study agreed with the idea that they should use technology in their classrooms for every lesson. Yet, only 6.7% of the students disagreed with this. Here p<0.5% (p=0) indicates a statistically significant difference between the students who agree and disagree with using technology in their classes for every lesson.

| Results | Test Statistics |
|---------|-----------------|
|         | Observed N  | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df  | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree   | 51         | 20.0       | 85.0     | 29.400     | 1   | .000        |
| Neutral | 0          | 20.0       | 00       |            |     |             |
| Dis agree | 9            | 20.0       | 15.0     |            |     |             |
| Total   | 60         | 20.0       | 100.0    |            |     |             |

Table 3  Authentic materials downloaded from the internet make me active in the learning process.

Based on the results given in table 3, it is revealed that most students (85%) participating in this study believe that authentic materials downloaded from the Internet make them active in the learning process. That is to say, based on the results obtained, it is evident that the difference between the participants who agree and those who disagree (at a level of probability of P<.05) with the power of Internet to provide them with authentic materials is statistically significant.

| Results | Test Statistics |
|---------|-----------------|
|         | Observed N  | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df  | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree   | 43         | 20.0       | 71.7     | 40.900     | 2   | .000        |
| Neutral | 5          | 20.0       | 8.3      |            |     |             |
| Dis agree | 12            | 20.0       | 20.0     |            |     |             |
| Total   | 60         | 20.0       | 100.0    |            |     |             |

Table 4  Computer-based teaching activities make the lessons more enjoyable.
As it is seen in table 4, 71.7% of the subjects believed that computer-based teaching activities make the lessons more enjoyable and only 20% of the students were not in agreement with this. When table four is examined it is seen that there is actually a statistically significant difference, \((p<15, \ p=0)\), between the students who were in favor of using computer to make their lessons more enjoyable and those who were not.

| Results | Test Statistics |
|---------|-----------------|
|         | Observed N | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree   | 15         | 20.0      | 25.0     | 35.267a    | 1  | .000        |
| Neutral | 2          | 20.0      | 3.3      |             |    |             |
| Dis agree | 43     | 20.0      | 71.7     |             |    |             |
| Total   | 60         | 20.0      | 100.0    |             |    |             |

Table 5 Technology can be boring and unnecessary.

As table 5 showed, 25% of all the subjects in this study thought of technology to be boring and unnecessary. Almost 71.7% of them did not think so. That is to say, most of the students believed that technology is neither boring nor unnecessary in their classes. If we examine table 5, we can conclude that there is an obvious statistically significant difference between the frequencies given in the above tables.

| Results | Test Statistics |
|---------|-----------------|
|         | Observed N | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree   | 53         | 20.0      | 88.3     | 39.900a    | 2  | .000        |
| Neutral | 0          | 20.0      | 0        |             |    |             |
| Dis agree | 7      | 20.0      | 11.7     |             |    |             |
| Total   | 60         | 20.0      | 100.0    |             |    |             |

Table 6 I can understand language better when my teacher uses technology in the class.

As table 6 shows, 53 (88.3%) out of 60 participants in the study agreed with the idea that they could understand language better when their teachers use technology in the class. As can be seen from table 6 there is a statistically significant difference between these students' viewpoints and those of the participants who disagreed with the idea that using technology can help them understand language better \((p<5, \ p=0)\).
We always need technological devices in language classrooms. About the idea that we always need technological devices in our language classroom, 75% of the students were in agreement with this fact. Only 13.3% were not in agreement with this. Based on the results given in table seven this difference is statistically significant. (p<%5, p=0)

Table 7: We always need technological devices in language classrooms.

|                | Observed N | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
|----------------|------------|------------|---------|------------|----|-------------|
| Agree          | 45         | 20.0       | 75.0    | 67.600a    | 2  | .000        |
| Neutral        | 7          | 20.0       | 11.7    |            |    |             |
| Dis agree      | 8          | 20.0       | 13.3    |            |    |             |
| Total          | 60         | 20.0       | 100.0   |            |    |             |

Table 8: Different technological devices should be used in the class to increase my motivation for learning English.

When table 8 is examined one can simply come to the conclusion that at the level of (p<%5, p=0) the difference between the frequencies given (71.7 % = Agree and 10 % = Disagree) is statistically significant. Therefore, we can hypothesize that different technological devices should be used in EFL classes to increase the students' motivation for learning English.

Table 9: If my teacher uses power point presentations, lessons can be more enjoyable.
The results of table 9 show that 50% of the students were in agreement with the idea that if their teacher used power point presentations, lessons could be more enjoyable. 16.7% of the students did not agree with this. Based on the data given in the table, the difference is found to be statistically significant (p<.05, p=0).

| Results       | Observed N | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df  | Asymp. Sig. |
|---------------|------------|------------|---------|------------|-----|-------------|
| Agree         | 7          | 20.0       | 11.7    | 64.300a    | 2   | .000        |
| Neutral       | 10         | 20.0       | 16.7    |            |     |             |
| Dis agree     | 43         | 20.0       | 71.7    |            |     |             |
| Total         | 60         | 20.0       | 100.0   |            |     |             |

Table 10  When we use technology every time, it makes the lessons boring.

The results given in table 10 indicate that 11.7% of the subjects in this research thought that when technology is used every time, it makes the lessons boring. But the majority of the students did not think so (71.7%). As it is indicated in table 10 this difference is statistically significant (P<.05, p=0).

| Results       | Observed N | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df  | Asymp. Sig. |
|---------------|------------|------------|---------|------------|-----|-------------|
| Agree         | 33         | 20.0       | 55.0    | 43.900a    | 2   | .000        |
| Neutral       | 10         | 20.0       | 16.7    |            |     |             |
| Dis agree     | 17         | 20.0       | 28.3    |            |     |             |
| Total         | 60         | 20.0       | 100.0   |            |     |             |

Table 11  Films, videos, CDs and e-learning can be helpful to develop my language skills.

Films, videos, CDs, and e-learning were found to be helpful to develop the participants’ language skills. That is, 55% of the participants were in agreement with the use of films, videos, etc., in their classes because they believed that this way they could develop their language skills much efficiently. Based on the data given in table 11, (p<.05, p=0) there is a statistically significant difference between the idea of those who agree and those who disagree with item 11 of the questionnaire (55% = agree, 28.3 = Disagree).

| Results       | Observed N | Expected N | Percent | Chi-Square | df  | Asymp. Sig. |
|---------------|------------|------------|---------|------------|-----|-------------|
| Agree         | 50         | 20.0       | 83.3    | 46.900a    | 2   | .000        |
| Neutral       | 4          | 20.0       | 6.7     |            |     |             |
| Dis agree     | 6          | 20.0       | 10.0    |            |     |             |
| Total         | 60         | 20.0       | 100.0   |            |     |             |

Table 12  I should use technology during my project works in EFL classes.
Based on the results given in table 12, it can be seen that the difference between the number of the students who agreed with the idea that they should use technology during the project works in EFL classes and those of the students who disagreed with this is statistically significant. In other words, 83.3% of the students agreed and 10% of them were in disagreement with item twelve in the questionnaire. Based on the results given in this table (p<%5, p=0) the difference is obviously significant.

| Results   | Test Statistics |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Observed N| Expected N      | Percent | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree     | 47              | 20.0    | 78.3       | 40.300a | 2 | .000        |
| Neutral   | 3               | 20.0    | 5.0        |         |   |             |
| Dis agree | 10              | 20.0    | 16.7       |         |   |             |
| Total     | 60              | 20.0    | 100.0      |         |   |             |

**Table 13** If we have a chance of teleconferencing via distance education with other universities, this can be challenging for me.

The results of table 13 show that 78.3% of the students believed that if they had a chance of teleconferencing via distance education with other universities, it could be challenging. Only 16.7% of the participants disagreed with this. Based on the results given in this table, this difference is significant.

| Results   | Test Statistics |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Observed N| Expected N      | Residual | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree     | 35              | 20.0    | 58.3       | 10.000a | 2 | .007        |
| Neutral   | 7               | 20.0    | 11.7       |         |   |             |
| Dis agree | 18              | 20.0    | 30.0       |         |   |             |
| Total     | 60              | 20.0    | 100.0      |         |   |             |

**Table 14** My teacher should use more technology in the classrooms.

This table shows that 58.3% of the subjects believed that their teacher should use more technology in their classrooms when teaching English and 30% did not think so. But if we examine the data given in table 14, we can come to the conclusion that this difference is statistically significant (p<%5, p=0).

| Results   | Test Statistics |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Observed N| Expected N      | Percent | Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
| Agree     | 49              | 20.0    | 81.7       | 13.900a | 2 | .001        |
| Neutral   | 9               | 20.0    | 15.0       |         |   |             |
| Dis agree | 2               | 20.0    | 3.3        |         |   |             |
| Total     | 60              | 20.0    | 100.0      |         |   |             |

**Table 15** Computer-based lessons are more enjoyable and effective than traditional lessons.
As it can be seen in table 15, the difference between the percentage of the students who were either in agreement or disagreement with the viewpoint that computer-based lessons are more enjoyable and effective than traditional lessons is statistically significant. 81.7% of the students agree and only 3% of them disagreed with item 15 in the questionnaire (p<.05, p=0).

3. Limitations and Pedagogical Conclusions

The results obtained from the study indicate that Iranian EFL university students have positive attitudes towards the use of technology in their English classes. That is to say, the analysis of the data obtained has supported the positive influence of technology on Iranian EFL university students. The results of this study also indicate that foreign language learning seems to be influenced by various technological equipments; including, computers, projectors, videos, films, the Internet, e-learning and multimedia. Based on the data gathered from the students’ responses to the questions in the questionnaire, it can be hypothesized that there is a great relation between language – learning motivational factors and using technology. One general fact to be mentioned here is that the technology in general and the Internet in particular have an important role and great potential in foreign language learning and teaching. This is in line with Chen (2007, p.153) who summarized the advantages of internet use in EFL learning in general sense:

“The internet enables English learners to access useful language resources and communicate directly with native English speakers. … Learners can practice applying information and overcome the de-contextualized predicament of English learning. Students can learn listening, speaking, reading and writing English interactively via real-world situations.”

In addition to the statements given above, some more specific aspects of application of technology in general and internet in particular in EFL learning can be mentioned. First, the Internet increases language use (Kasanga, 1996), enhances synchronous and asynchronous communication of language learners (Ken, 1995; Warschauer & Healy 1998), and helps students use language in real communication situations (Wiburg, Butker & Pasceo, 2002).

Second the technology changes the interaction between language learners and teachers (Kern, 1995). Put in another way, technology can change teacher and students’ roles and enhances their motivation to work better and learn language more efficiently. Based on the results obtained from many studies conducted in different contexts, we can conclude that there is indeed a positive relationship between the use of technology in EFL classes and the students’ motivation in language learning. The findings of this study are also in line with all the other studies carried out in the same area around the world (Some of the related studies were mentioned in the introduction and body of the present study). All in all, as it is the case with any other investigation, the present study may has its own limitations. One main limitation of the investigation is that it could be better to give the questionnaire to two groups of EFL students of which one have received technology based learning and the other have not. So we could statistically compare their attitudes toward either application or lack of use of technology in their courses.

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