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EFL Turkish university students’ attitudes and motivation towards reading in English

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Abstract

This study investigated EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Turkish students’ attitudes and motivation towards reading in English with regards to their proficiency level and gender. The study was carried out at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University the School of Foreign Languages, with the participation of 61 intermediate, pre-intermediate and beginner level EFL learners. Data were collected through a perception questionnaire. A “Foreign Language Reading Attitudes and Motivation Questionnaire” was used to find out the students’ attitudes towards reading. The analyses of the data from the questionnaire revealed that the students’ attitudes towards reading in English were neutral, and there is a statistically significant difference between intermediate level learners and pre-intermediate and beginner level learners. Furthermore, the results revealed statistically no significant difference between males and females in relation to the participants’ attitudes toward reading. The comparison of the different levels of students indicated that high proficiency learners had a positive attitude towards reading.

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1. Introduction

Motivation, which is defined as “some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something” (Harmer, 2001, p.51), has been widely accepted to be a key factor in language learning (Ehrman, 1996; Grabe, 2009; Harmer, 2001; Van Lier, 1996). The high correlation between the strength of motivation and level of L2 achievement makes it clear that the connection between these two is quite significant (Saville-Troike, 2006). As well

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as playing a crucial role in learning a language, motivation also determines whether the learning is superficial or deep and internalized (Capen, 2010).

Attitudes and motivation regarding L2/FL reading is relatively a new area (Erten et. all.). Motivation plays a crucial role in reading development. Students bring basic attitudes toward L2 reading to the learning environment they are in (Grabe, 2009), and these reading attitudes are defined as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation" (Alexander & Filler cited in Yamashita, 2004, p.3) or "a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that makes reading more or less probable" (Smith cited in Yamashita, 2004, p.3). That is why attitudes towards reading have an impact on students’ achievement in reading. Learners’ attitudes affect both their motivation and future reading success by influencing the amount of time that learners spend on reading (Lazarus & Callahan, 2000).

Recent years have seen a steady interest in the number of publications concerning attitude and motivation in learning a foreign language. However, little research has been done on Turkish EFL learners’ attitudes towards, and motivation for reading in English in the Turkish context. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of Turkish EFL learners’ attitudes and motivation towards reading in English with regards to their proficiency level and gender.

1.1. Review of literature

Reading in a foreign language has been one of the primary foci of second language acquisition researchers in recent years. Zhou (2008) states that the acquisition of L2 reading skills is a priority for many language learners around the world. Many EFL students rarely experience a situation where they have to speak English on a daily basis, but they might need to read in English quite often in order to benefit from various pieces of information, most of which is recorded in English (Eskey, 1996). Moreover, reading is fundamental for all academic disciplines (White as cited in Lei, Rhinehart, Howard, & Cho, 2010). Hasbun (2006) highlights the importance of reading by stating that reading skills “lie at the heart of formal education” (p.38) and it is difficult to achieve many things without having the ability to read fluently and with good comprehension. Therefore, every person should be provided with the opportunity to be able to become a skilled L2 reader (Kulaç, 2011).

Over the past few last decades, much emphasis has been put on learners’ attitudes, motivation, beliefs, and perceptions of learning and teaching, especially within the field of second language acquisition (Cotterall, 1999; Gardner, 1983; Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; Nunan, 1988; O’Neill, 1991; Wenden, 1999; Yang, 1999). Motivation, which is defined as “some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something” (Harmer, 2001, p.51), has been widely accepted to be a key factor in language learning (Ehrman, 1996; Grabe, 2009; Harmer, 2001; Van Lier, 1996). The high correlation between the strength of motivation and level of L2 achievement makes it clear that the connection between these two is quite significant (Saville-Troike, 2006). As well as playing a crucial role in learning a language, motivation also determines whether the learning is superficial or deep and internalized (Capen, 2010). Students’ attitudes come under the spotlight at this point because attitudes towards the learning situation influence the students’ level of motivation to learn another language; in other words, they serve as foundations for motivation (Masgoret, Bernaus, & Gardner, 2001). Negative attitudes and feelings can stunt progress, even for the rare learner who fully understands all the technical aspects of how to learn a new language. On the other hand, positive emotions and attitudes can make language learning far more effective and enjoyable (Merisuo-Storm, 2007; Oxford, 1990). Therefore, “the most far-reaching consequences in motivating L2 learners can be achieved by promoting positive language-related values and attitudes” (Dörnyei, 2006, p 51).

Motivation plays a crucial role in reading development. Students bring basic attitudes toward L2 reading to the learning environment they are in (Grabe, 2009), and these reading attitudes are defined as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation" (Alexander & Filler cited in Yamashita, 2004, p.3) or "a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that makes reading more or less probable" (Smith cited in Yamashita, 2004, p.3). That is why attitudes towards reading have an impact on students’ achievement in reading. Learners’ attitudes affect both their motivation and future reading success by influencing the amount of time that learners spend on reading (Lazarus & Callahan, 2000). Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) also focus on motivation for reading because it is a great contributor to the amount and breadth of reading. Since reading is a skill that can best be improved by practicing, reading amount and breadth are important factors that contribute to reading achievement
and performance (Wigfield & Guthrie 1997). The relationship between motivation for reading and reading achievement can be explained by Grabe’s (2009) statement that “students with high interest are more engaged in reading tasks” (p.181).

Like many EFL learners in Turkey, the students at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University Basic English Department are not motivated to read in English. They are from different departments, and they see preparatory school as a burden before they take courses from their departments. Since they are not eager to learn the language, they are not motivated to read, as well. Despite the growing body of literature concerning attitude and motivation in learning a foreign language, little research has been done on Turkish EFL learners’ attitudes towards, and motivation for, reading in English. Therefore, this research study seeks to investigate Turkish EFL learners’ attitudes and motivation towards reading in English with regards to their proficiency level and gender.

Research Questions
1. What are the EFL students’ attitudes and motivation in reading in English at Bülent Ecevit University?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in reading attitudes and motivation among participants according to their levels of language proficiency?
3. Is there a gender-related difference in participants’ reading attitudes and motivation?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and setting

2.1.1. Setting

The study was conducted in an EFL setting, at the Department of Basic English at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, Turkey, where university students study English for general purposes during a complete academic year before they start their university education at their departments. These students are those who could not score 60 out of 100 points in the proficiency test given at the beginning of the year and who were required to register for the preparatory school. In the 2014-2015 academic year, 1077 students were studying at this preparatory school, and these students were placed in their classes on the basis of the results of the placement test which was given after the proficiency test. There are three levels of classes at the institution: B2, A1+ and A1. Those whose score falls into the range of 70 and 100 at the placement test are considered to be A1+ level students. If the students’ scores are between 0 and 69, they are placed in an A1 level class, and those who are enrolled for the English Language and Literature Departments are in B2 classes.

The students at A1 and A1+ level are taught the same two courses: Main Course including Writing, Speaking, Vocabulary and Video, and Lab courses. However, the time allocated for the main course is different for each level. B2+ level classes have 22 hours of main course per week, A1+ level classes have 26 hours, and A1 level classes have 30 hours of main course. Reading is integrated into the main course, in which the English File Course-book set is covered, and the texts in this set of course-books are the only reading materials used for the reading courses. Each unit of the book has a reading section which is designed in a way that includes different tasks and activities for reading comprehension and for teaching or revising the words in the texts. B2, A1+ and A1 classes are expected to cover one unit each week, and they spend two hours of the 22 main course on reading in a week. In reading courses, the texts in the course-books are covered, usually starting with a pre-reading activity which is followed by while- and post-reading activities. Throughout the academic year, assessment is based on quizzes, a writing portfolio, four mid-term exams which are evenly distributed in the two semesters, and a final exam given at the end of the year. The students are required to have a grade of at least 60% in order to be considered successful and pursue their education in their departments. Those who cannot manage to have an average grade of 60 are required to study at prep school one more year. Reading is assessed through quizzes, mid-terms and the final exam. The reading parts are given 20 points over 100 in quizzes, and 10 points over 100 in mid-terms and the final exam. Those sections usually consist of true/false questions, comprehension questions, matching, or vocabulary questions.
2.1.2. Participants

22 intermediate level and 39 pre-intermediate level students at the Department of Basic English at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, Turkey participated in the study. The students were all four-year undergraduate students. The study was carried out with intermediate level students and the pre-intermediate level students because they are expected to have learned the basic structures of the language, and gradually they start to read more complicated reading texts.

The students were from three intact classes. While choosing these particular classes for the study, the success rate of the students at the quizzes and mid-term exams were considered. These classes had been formed according to the results of the placement test which was given at the beginning of the academic year. B2 level students started their English education as intermediate level learners, A1+ level students started as pre-intermediate level learners and A1 level students started their education as beginner level students. When the data collection procedure was started, the A1+ and A1 level students were studying the pre-intermediate level course-book.

2.2. Materials and instruments

In this study, the Foreign Language Reading Attitudes and Motivation Scale (FLRAMS) which was developed by Erten, Topkaya and Karakaş (2010) to search the constructs in L2 reading attitudes and motivation was employed to gather data about the student’ present attitudes to reading. It was decided to use a questionnaire because questionnaires are effective tools to gather data from a group of people because they save time, effort and financial resources and as they are easy to prepare, and quick to administer (Dörnyei, 2003). The questionnaire consisted of 31 items in four different sub-categories: intrinsic value of reading, reading efficacy, extrinsic value of reading, and foreign language linguistic utility. The questionnaire was administered in English, but all items were explained to the students by their instructors. The questionnaire also included a section that consisted of an explanation about the purpose of the study, a part to thank the participants for their contribution to the study, and an informed consent form.

The questionnaire which was used in this study was taken directly from Erten et al’s (2010) study, which aimed to understand what constitutes students’ attitudes and motivation in FL reading and to develop a scale to explore motivational and attitudinal constructs in L2 reading. No changes were made related to the structure of the items. The reported internal consistency estimate of reliability for the 4 subscales of the instrument and Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were shown in Table 1.

| Factors                          | Alpha |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Factor 1 Intrinsic Value of Reading | .9408 |
| Factor 2 Reading Efficacy        | .8702 |
| Factor 3 Extrinsic Value of Reading | .8389 |
| Factor 4 Foreign Lang. Linguistic Utility | .7343 |
| Overall                          | .714  |

0.94 was calculated for the first subscale with 16 items; 0.87 for the second with 6 items; 0.84 for the third with 5 items; 0.75 for the fourth with 4 items and finally 0.81 for the fifth with 3 items, all estimated values indicating a high level of reliability.

Participants responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale, which provides the respondents with 5 possible responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As the students are pre-intermediate level students, in order to prevent possible language interference during implementation, all items were explained by their instructors. Before administering the questionnaire, an informed consent form that provided students with general information about the study and the questionnaire was given. Students were ensured that participation in this study was voluntary and their responses would be kept confidential.
3. Results and discussion

**RQ. 1. What are the EFL students’ attitudes and motivation in reading in English at Bülent Ecevit University?**

The 31 items in the questionnaire were used to gain insight into the participants’ attitudes towards reading in English in general. The questionnaire consisted of four different categories related to four different aspects that were thought to form the students’ attitudes to reading. These categories were defined as the intrinsic value of reading, reading efficacy, extrinsic value of reading, and foreign language linguistic utility. The participants were asked to mark the statement that best expresses their opinion in each one of the Likert scale items. There were five possible responses in the scale: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “not sure”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree” and a value was assigned to each of these alternatives (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree). Items involving negative statements were reversed so that for all items, a higher score indicated a more positive attitude to reading.

The mean score and standard deviations for the overall questionnaire were calculated to find out the participants’ attitudes towards reading. The mean scores of each category in the questionnaire were also calculated in order to gain insight into the different aspects of the participants’ reading related attitudes. Table 2 below shows the overall and categorical mean scores:

| Category Type                        | Mean | SD  |
|--------------------------------------|------|-----|
| Factor 1: Intrinsic Value of Reading | 2.82 | .281|
| Factor 2: Reading Efficacy           | 2.90 | .797|
| Factor 3: Extrinsic Value of Reading | 4.70 | .425|
| Factor 4: Foreign Lang. Linguistic Utility | 4.48 | .538|
| Overall                              | 3.36 | .296|

As can be seen in the table, the students at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University appeared to have a rather neutral attitude towards reading (m=3.36). In addition, as illustrated in the table, the mean scores indicate that the extrinsic value of reading category has the highest mean score. In other words, the participants generally agreed that being able to read in English is important for their success in English, which can be considered as a positive contribution to their attitudes. As for the second highest mean score, the students’ responses to the items in foreign language linguistic utility section showed that the participants had positive attitudes about the items implying that being able read in English is important for their linguistic ability. The students’ responses to the items in reading efficacy were just below the neutral mark, which revealed that the participants view themselves as neither good nor bad readers of English. The intrinsic value of reading category, which served the purpose of providing information about the students’ feelings about the unknown words in reading texts, had comparatively lower means, suggesting that the students are not intrinsically motivated to reading in English. Finally, based on the lowest means which belonged to the intrinsic value of reading category, it can be said that the participants do not put much effort into reading in English.

**RQ. 2. Is there a statistically significant difference in reading attitudes and motivation among participants according to their levels of language proficiency?**

Since there are 3 groups to compare, a One Way ANOVA test was used to analyze the effect of these groups on their attitude and motivation towards reading in English has been examined through. In Table 3, ANOVA descriptive are presented:
Table 3. Reading attitudes scores across proficiency levels

|                      | Sum of Squares | Mean Square | df | F       | Sig. |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------|----|---------|------|
| Between Groups       | 2053.526       | 1026.763    | 2  | 20.793  | .000 |
| Within Groups        | 2666.510       | 49.380      | 54 |         |      |
| Total                | 4720.035       | 56          |    |         |      |

When the Table 3 is examined carefully, it can be seen that groups have an impact on the relevant scores. Therefore, it’d be better to do a post hoc test to see their relations clearly.

Table 4: Post Hoc comparisons across students’ attitudes and motivation level with proficiency multiple comparisons

| (I) Proficiency | (J) Proficiency | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | Lower Bound |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------|------|-------------------------|-------------|
| B2              | A1+             | 10.22024*             | 2.33188    | .000 | 4.6004                  |             |
|                 | A1              | 13.64524*             | 2.19554    | .000 | 8.3540                  |             |
| A1+             | B2              | -10.22024*            | 2.33188    | .000 | -15.8400                |             |
|                 | A1              | 3.42500               | 2.35695    | .321 | -2.2552                 |             |
| A1              | B2              | -13.64524*            | 2.19554    | .000 | -18.9365                |             |
|                 | A1+             | -3.42500              | 2.35695    | .321 | -9.1052                 |             |

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out to determine if there were any significant differences in the participants’ reading attitudes and motivation among participants according to their levels of language proficiency. The results indicated that there was statistically a significant difference among the groups, $F(2,54)=20.79$, $p<.05$, with a strong effect size($\eta^2>.14$). Additionally, the results of Tukey’s post hoc test revealed differences between intermediate group and other groups with intermediate groups having higher mean score($M=112.09$) than pre-intermediate($M=101.87$) and beginner ($M=98.45$)levels. However, there were no significant differences between pre-intermediate and beginners.

RQ. 3 Is there a gender related difference in participants’ reading attitudes and motivation?

An independent-samples t-test was done to find out if there was gender-related difference in participants’ reading attitudes and motivation. The results of the independent-samples t-test revealed statistically no significant difference between males and females in relation to the participants’ attitudes towards reading, $t(59) = .127$, $p>.05$. However, when the means were carefully examined, it was found out that females scored better ($M=105.3$, SD= 8.79) than males ($M= 10.4$, SD = 10.86). Table 5 shows the gender difference in attitudes towards reading scores.
Table 5: Gender difference in attitudes towards reading scores

| Gender | N  | Mean | MD    | Sig. (2-tailed) | Standard D. | Standard Error Mean |
|--------|----|------|-------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Female | 21 | 105.300 | -4.30238 | 8.7971 | 1.3897 |
| Male   | 40 | 101.476 |          | 10.86497 | 2.37093 |
| Total  | 61 | 101.717 |          | 10.127  |           |

3. Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine Turkish EFL learners’ attitudes and motivation towards reading in English with regards to their proficiency level and gender. The findings of the study revealed that the students’ attitudes towards reading in English were neutral, and there is a statistically significant difference between intermediate level learners and pre-intermediate and beginner level learners. Furthermore, the results revealed statistically no significant difference between males and females in relation to the participants’ attitudes toward reading. The comparison of the different levels of students indicated that high proficiency learners had a positive attitude towards reading. This provided sufficient answers to the research questions. The findings were also in line with those of other studies conducted in Turkey such as (Kulaç, 2011). She also conducted a study with the students of the Department of Basic English at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, Turkey. In her study as well, the students’ attitudes towards reading in English were neutral. From this result, it can be concluded that the students do not have very strong feelings that reading in English is enjoyable. Likewise, they do not seem to be totally uninterested in or unhappy about reading in English.

The results of the study revealed that the students at Bülent Ecevit University had neutral attitudes towards reading in English. In other words, students neither like reading in English, nor do they hate it. This may be related to the students’ attitudes towards reading in Turkish since Coady (as cited in Hulstijn&Bossers, 1992) stated that poor reading in the second language may be because of the transfer of the students’ poor reading habits in their first language. Similarly, Grabe and Stoller (2002) also argued that students bring with them basic attitudes to L2 reading, which are usually based on their L1 reading experiences. The students’ perceptions of reading in their native language have an impact on their emotional responses to reading in a second or foreign language. As far as the students’ answers to the items classified under certain categories that were thought to form their reading attitudes are concerned, it can be said that their average scores varied for different categories. The mean scores indicate that the extrinsic value of reading category has the highest mean score. In other words, the participants generally agreed that being able to read in English is important for their success in English, which can be considered as a positive contribution to their attitudes. As for the second highest mean score, the students’ responses to the items in foreign language linguistic utility section showed that the participants had positive attitudes about the items implying that being able to read in English is important for their linguistic ability. The students’ responses to the items in reading efficacy were just below the neutral mark, which revealed that the participants view themselves as neither good nor bad readers of English. The intrinsic value of reading category had comparatively lower means, suggesting that the students are not intrinsically motivated to reading in English. Finally, based on the lowest means which belonged to the intrinsic value of reading category, it can be said that the participants do not put much effort into reading in English. Koda (cited in Grabe, 2009) and Grabe (2009) argue that whatever the purpose of the reader is, he is expected to create a link between the information presented in the text and make sense of that information. In this respect, the students may not be able to fully comprehend English texts, and so do not feel very comfortable with reading in English.

The results also indicated that there was statistically a significant difference among the groups. Additionally, the results of Tukey’s post hoc test revealed differences between intermediate group and other groups with intermediate groups having higher mean. However, there were no significant differences between pre-intermediate and beginners.
This shows that since the intermediate group students are English Language and Literature students, they are more eager to read. They find it necessary to read in English as in their departments as well, they need to be more proficient in English. It seems clear that the students’ eagerness to learn English helped them not to develop negative attitudes to reading. Based on their response, the high attitude students can be considered to have intrinsic motivation. This may be the reason why they do not want to give up reading. This finding of the present study, hence, echoes the findings of Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), which suggested that intrinsic motivation has a strong effect on the amount and breadth of reading.

Finally, the results of the independent-samples t-test revealed statistically no significant difference between males and females in relation to the participants’ attitudes towards reading. However, when the means were carefully examined, it was found out that females scored better than males.

To conclude, it is possible to say that the students generally attach importance to reading in English, but they do not think that reading in English is always enjoyable. Furthermore, their self-efficacy for reading in English can be said to be low. Additionally, they do not invest much effort into reading. As a result, all these aspects form their neutral attitudes towards reading in English when they are considered as a whole. Smith (cited in Yamashita, 2004) describes L2 reading attitudes as “a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and attitudes that make reading more or less probable” (p.5). Bearing in mind that reading can be best improved by practicing (Wigfield& Guthrie, 1997), it can be argued that students’ attitudes towards reading have an effect on their reading ability. Given these statements previously made in the literature, it is possible to say that the neutral attitudes of the participants in the present study may have a negative influence on their reading ability by resulting in a limited reading amount or engagement, because the less interested learners are in reading, the less engaged they are in reading tasks (Grabe, 2009). As can be inferred from what the abovementioned scholars say, the participants in the study would read more and become more skillful readers of English if they had more positive attitudes rather than neutral.

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