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Improving Student Engagement and Motivation: Perspectives of Iranian EFL Learners

Abstract

One critical problem most educators have possibly experienced is that some students drop out of school probably due to loss of enough motivation. Research indicates student engagement could not only increase motivation but help to sustain it at high levels. This relationship between these two constructs has already been researched quantitatively in language education. However, little research seems to have been done on exploring the ways of increasing student engagement and motivation in relation to each other using a qualitative design. The present study thus aimed at investigating the ways to improve student engagement as well as motivation with a qualitative design. The participants were 30 male, intermediate EFL learners of the Iran Language Institute (ILI) in Gorgan, Iran. These participants, selected through convenience sampling, attended the semi-structured interview sessions voluntarily. The findings of the study led to a model of determinants of student engagement and language learning motivation. These determinants include teacher behavior, teacher personality, and student behavior for student engagement, and teacher, self, and parents for language learning motivation. It is expected the outcomes will be to the benefit of language teachers, language learners, and materials developers.

Keywords: qualitative study, student engagement, language learning motivation, learner perspective

Motivation has been a hot topic for research in second and foreign language learning as it is one important factor playing a major role in the students' success (Brown, 2014; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 2007). Loss of motivation is said to be the reason why some students quit school (Menken, 2010; Parvaresh, 2008). Accordingly, investigation into the motivating strategies among EFL learners can have benefits for language teachers and learners. Moreover, student engagement has been proved to help improve and sustain students' motivation at high levels (Ghelichli et al., 2020). Student engagement and motivation to learn have earned research interest for their impacts on both student achievement and dropout rates (Greene & Miller, 1996; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Hence, need arises as to explore ways of promoting students' motivation and engagement and make them assume ownership of their own language learning.

Language learning motivation can be defined as how much effort an individual exerts on language learning since the individual wishes for and gains satisfaction through it (Gardner, 1985). Dörnyei (2005) contended that motivation provides the initial impetus to begin language learning and subsequently accounts for why one continues the tedious process of language learning. Dörnyei believed that motivation is connected to all other factors playing a role in second or foreign language learning. In this study, language learning motivation has been informed by self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), as consisting of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Student engagement, on the other hand, may be defined as "the student's psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote" (Newmann, 1992, p. 12). In general, it pertains to involvement in the activities and tasks students do in school (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2018). Reeve (2012) provided a more exact definition for engagement as it "refers to the extent of a student's active involvement in a learning activity" (p. 150), or a "person's enthusiastic participation in a task" (Reeve et al., 2004, p. 147).

Research studies have been conducted on student engagement and motivation together in the same study with quantitative designs employing survey questionnaires or experiments (see, e.g., Ghelichli et al., 2020; Kanellopoulou & Giannakouloupoulos, 2020; Karimi & Sotoodeh, 2019; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017; Reeve & Lee, 2014; Xiong et al., 2015). However, as O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015) argued, "[c]onstructs such as engagement are not always easily reduced to measurable items on survey instruments or a reflection of examination performance and so warrant further investigation" (p. 94). In other words, in order to gain deeper understanding of the constructs like motivation and student engagement, other designs and data collection instruments are also needed. Accordingly, the novelty of the present study is that it has used another instrument, that is, interviews, and another research design, that is, the qualitative one, to investigate this relationship by inquiring about students' opinions of

the ways in which student engagement and language learning motivation could be enhanced. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in the fact that it could be one of the first few studies investigating the constructs in question using a qualitative design from the students' perspectives in the domain of language education.

The Theoretical Framework

The present study was based on self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT has achieved growing recognition as a plausible explanation for human motivation (McClelland, 2013). Employing empirical approaches, Deci and Ryan (2000) described SDT as an attitude to the student character and motivation, which is composed of three basic, psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This theory was adopted as the theoretical ground because it includes both constructs of the study—student engagement and language learning motivation. Moreover, engagement can be seen in terms of SDT, assuming “students’ active involvement in and reflection on their own learning” (Nichols & Dawson, 2012, p. 471). To conclude, as Reeve (2012, pp. 151–152) maintained, an empirical study on student engagement and motivation can be conducted based on the principal theoretical framework informed by SDT.

Motivation, according to SDT, is seen as a construct based on the various causes or aims that result in a behavior. The most fundamental division is between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56). Simply put, one is intrinsically motivated to do something because the action itself brings joy and satisfaction for its doer. In contrast, extrinsic motivation could be seen as “a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 60). In other words, an individual does an activity not for its enjoyment but for its instrumental value. Moreover, Deci and Ryan (2000) defined another similar condition related to the two abovementioned terms, that is, *amotivation*. Amotivation is defined as “a state in which people lack the intention to behave, and thus lack motivation” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 237). Based on SDT, Deci and Ryan (2000) argued, individuals may be considered to be amotivated “when they lack either a sense of efficacy or a sense of control with respect to a desired outcome” (p. 237).

Student engagement is also seen as a kind of motivation involving emotional and cognitive processes, which develop gradually (Nichols & Dawson, 2012). According to SDT, all students, regardless of their age, gender, socio-

economic status, nationality, or cultural background, possess inherent growth tendencies (e.g., intrinsic motivation, curiosity, psychological needs) that provide a motivational foundation for their high-quality classroom engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The dimensions of student engagement, however, might include various categories and terminologies. Four most recent ones, on which the present study has focused, include *emotional*, *behavioral*, *cognitive*, and *agentic engagement* (Reeve, 2012).

Research Description

This study aimed to explore the possible ways of increasing student engagement and motivation. The research question of the study was thus as follows:

RQ: What are the ways of increasing student engagement and language learning motivation from the students' perspectives in the Iranian EFL context?

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 30 male intermediate language learners learning English at the Iran Language Institute (ILI), a language institute located in Gorgan, Iran. Following the researchers' invitation for the interviews, these participants, aged between 14 and 19 years old, attended the interviews voluntarily. Their classes met twice a week in the evening. These participants, all native Persian speakers, were selected as they were available to the researchers. It needs to be noted that the language learners of the ILI adults' branch are mostly high school students, taking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses as an extracurricular activity during their teenage years.

Data Collection Instrument and Research Procedure

The semi-structured interview sessions were held in the teachers' office of the aforementioned institute when the teachers were busy teaching in the classrooms. However, the interviewer, the first author, had organized the interview

sessions in such a way that no interview was scheduled during the teachers' tea break between classes. Each day ten participants came for the interviews, which were arranged on three non-consecutive days. The interviews were audio-recorded, taking around 15 minutes or so each. All the participants in the interviews had already signed the informed consent forms prior to conducting the interviews. By the end of the third day, the interviewer felt that the data were about to achieve saturation; that is to say, the interviewees seemed to not have any new ideas different from those of the previous participants. On the whole, 30 participants were interviewed, all of whom were interviewed by the first researcher. The names of the interviewees were anonymized in order to keep their confidentiality.

Data Analysis

When transcribing the interviews, the researchers did not use verbatim transcription because the focus of the study was not on the syntactic or linguistic analysis of the data, but rather it was on the topic of the discussion. Therefore, it was not essential to transcribe every interview in detail; instead, a tape analysis was carried out (Dörnyei, 2007). In this approach, according to Dörnyei (2007), while the researcher is listening to the recordings, they take notes and possibly mark those parts of the data that could provide more elaborate subsequent analysis. The interviews were conducted in the students' native language, that is, Persian, so the transcription was in Persian, too. The translation into English was done at the point of giving codes to what topics the interviewees meant.

In order to conduct the data analysis, MAXQDA software, Pro 2018, was used. Since the questions were asked to elicit information from the participants regarding the possible ways of motivating and encouraging students in their language learning, a thematic analysis method, a typical qualitative analysis technique used in mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), was employed to allow for themes to emerge from the data. The interview data were thus analyzed through open coding for generating initial codes that emerged from the data. These initial codes were then grouped to generate categories or themes using the process of axial coding. The analysis was done to achieve saturation of identified themes and subthemes (Creswell, 2012). In the axial coding phase, the codes were put together in the same category or theme based on their connection and relevance. In the last phase, selective coding, the categories were analyzed to see if there existed any possible links between them. Finally, the themes were associated together to obtain a tentative model for the study.

Validity of the Qualitative Data

Validity of the qualitative data could be determined through several strategies, two of which are at least recommended by Creswell (2007). Accordingly, the present researchers adopted two of the strategies as they are the most popular and cost-effective. The first technique was member-checking, a frequently used strategy in which the researcher takes accounts of the findings such as major themes back to main participants in the study and asks them whether the findings are an accurate reflection of their experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 173). The second strategy, as Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p. 173) explained, was to ask others or peers to examine the data, that is, peer reviewing. In fact, the present researchers asked three faculty members who were familiar with qualitative research and the content area of the study to review the database and the qualitative results using their own criteria. Credibility of the findings was secured by member checking, inter-coder agreement, and the academic advisors and supervisor's auditing (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007).

Therefore, as for the first strategy, member checking, since the classes had been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviewer (i.e., Yahya Ghelichli) had no way but using the phone to contact the participants. Thus, the interviewer obtained the participants' phone numbers from the staff of the ILI and called the interviewees. The interviewer asked them if he understood what the participants meant properly. Almost all the participants agreed that the interviewer grasped correctly what they said and what they wanted to convey. Second, the interviewer consulted some colleagues of his by asking them to examine the codes and categories or themes that the researchers came up with while analyzing the qualitative data. In so doing, the interviewer took a number of screenshots of the interview texts or transcriptions and emailed them to three of his colleagues. Except for a few minor modifications, the interviewer got his colleagues' approval. In fact, the cases over which there was disagreement were discussed and the concepts were clarified. Accordingly, the validity, or trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative analysis of the data were checked through the ways recommended by Creswell (2007), and Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). Reliability plays a minor part in qualitative research because the researcher focuses on the value of their subjective interpretations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Based on the outcomes of the study, it was observed that students enjoyed high levels of engagement because the different dimensions of their engagement were shown to be high. For example, most students said that they would like to engage in class activities, however different their purposes or reasons were. Further, when the students indicated interest to welcome challenge, it could mean that they would like to engage in activities that tax their mental capacity. In other words, the students were interested to be involved in tasks which required them to solve a problem. Accordingly, these are proofs of high behavioral and cognitive engagement.

As for the other two dimensions, emotional and agentic engagement, the students showed high levels of engagement when they agreed with the sample items of each dimension. For instance, regarding emotional engagement, and the question whether they were interested in language learning, one participant, Reza said, "I have always been interested in language learning, so my parents enrolled me in language classes of institutes." Likewise, another participant, Nader stated "I really enjoy my English classes, especially if I like the teacher."¹ In total, 27 out of 30 students expressed great interest in language learning. As for agentic engagement, the participants were asked whether they expressed their wants and desires in class. About 25 out of 30 respondents stated that they would express their desires and preferences in class. These can thus be viewed as evidence of students' high levels of agentic engagement.

Having conducted the analyses of qualitative data, the researchers also came up with several guidelines to increase student engagement and language learning motivation from the students' perspective. In the interviews, the participants were asked to tell the interviewer their opinions regarding reasons for amotivation and ways of motivating students and increasing student engagement by focusing on their class participation. Class participation is said to be the objective manifestation of both behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). The interviewees mentioned three influential components or determinants of increasing students' motivation: self, parents, and teacher. In addition, what the interviewees suggested about teachers' ways of encouraging students to participate in class activities could be categorized into three main themes: teacher behavior, teacher personality, and learner behavior. A schematic representation of the emerged model of the study for promoting students' motivation and engagement is depicted in Figure 1.

¹ The participants' responses are quoted in the original.

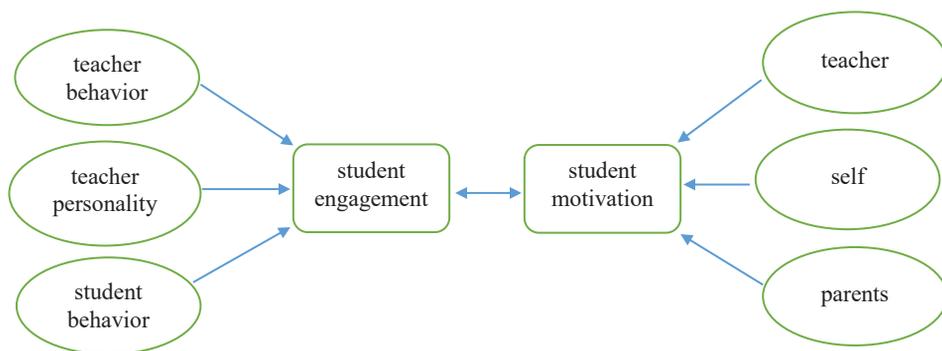


Figure. 1. The determinants of student engagement and motivation (Authors' own work).

Needless to say that these ideas were made by language learners from their own perspectives, so they may not be as comprehensive as it might be expected. A summary of the participants' suggestions is presented below.

How Students Can Motivate Themselves

The results of the interviews showed that students need to pursue their interests in order to stay motivated. About half of the interviewees, 14 out of 30 participants, believed that students should follow their interests such as listening to music, watching videos they like, etc. if they desire to be motivated. Alternatively, several interviewees believed that they should use the Internet to remain motivated: using YouTube and listening to podcasts. One participant, Rashid posited:

I think we should pursue our hobbies like listening to our favorite singers or watching our favorite movies in the original language so that we can keep our motivation at higher levels or even increase this motivation. Of course, reading will help as well.

Others maintained that they need to have communications with their peers and native speakers. Another participant, Mehdi, expressed: "We need to listen to or watch native speakers speak. So I suggest using YouTube to watch such videos. Or we can download podcasts and listen to them later on." Finally, some others stated that students should think about their future, language benefits, good grades, and their future goals.

How Parents Can Motivate Their Children

The findings of the interviews with the participants showed that most participants agreed that parents should support their children. This support can be done financially or emotionally, for example, by showing satisfaction with what their children are doing in language learning. One participant, Masoud stated: “Sometimes I want to buy an English book or CD. My parents should give me the money to buy it.” Other kinds of support include providing conditions, for example, sending the kids to language classes, giving rewards, or taking the kids on trips abroad. Another participant, Arsham said:

I think if parents take their kids on trips to other countries, especially to an English speaking country, their children can become interested in language learning because their children can actually see what benefits knowing a second language may have.

Parents can also show their support through not being so strict and critical. Maziar expressed, “I don’t like it when I fail and my parents put all the blame on me. I need their kindness and help in such a situation.” Other interviewees were of the opinion that parents need to encourage their kids to read books or see movies in the original language, or to encourage them to get good grades. The last group believed that parents must talk with their kids about their future and about such topics as the uses, benefits, and significance of knowing a second or foreign language in the present century. This might seem rather unusual since many adults may think that teenagers do not tend to take their advice seriously. Hamid stated, “I believe that parents should talk to their kids about the advantages and importance of knowing a second language. Such advice, I think, will work in the long term.”

How Teachers Can Motivate Students

Teacher’s role is very prominent in motivating language learners. Dörnyei (2001) was of the view that teachers play a major part in doing so. However, they need to be equipped with the required skills in order to motivate language learners. As mentioned earlier, in the pilot study, the interview protocol was modified. For example, when the interviewees were asked how the students could be motivated, they talked about three main components: teachers, parents, and students themselves. But whose job is it really to motivate language learners? Dörnyei (2001) believed that “it is every teacher’s [responsibility] who thinks of the *long-term* [emphasis original] development of his/her students” (p. 27). Therefore, this is discussed in more details.

One theme most students emphasized was that the teacher should use humor and fun in class. For instance, Ali said:

I really enjoy the relaxed atmosphere the teacher creates in class. The teacher, for example, can use his sense of humor to make the class fun. In fact, if the class is fun and the atmosphere stress-free, I do want to come to class and learn.

Similarly, other participants maintained that the teacher should not be strict with them. For example, if students forget to do their assignments, he should not get angry with them. Instead, the teacher should understand the student and give him or her a second chance. Reza stated:

Sometimes we're overloaded with school work and don't have enough time to do all homework for all sessions. If I feel that I would be blamed for not doing my homework, I may not be very interested to come to class in certain sessions.

When probed on this comment, Reza continued, "This harshness on the part of the teacher can in the long run result in my being uninterested in language learning." Other behaviors the students may not particularly like about their teacher include negative attitudes toward some students, the teacher's fearful threats, boring class, and weak class management.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was related to the teacher's content knowledge. They believed that they are interested to attend the classes in which the teacher has broad enough knowledge about the language item or topic in question. Mehdi expressed, "When the teacher has a lot of knowledge about language grammar and vocabulary, I'm eager to attend his class because I think I'm not wasting my time." This extensive knowledge can turn the teacher into an academic authority in whom the students can put trust. And when the students trust their teacher, they could learn more and better (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013). This learning can in turn lead to an increase in the students' motivation. Simply put, the students must approve of and have trust in their teacher. Some other things the teacher can do to make students more interested and motivated include having eye contact with the students, calling them by their names, especially their first names, and moving about the classroom.

What most interviewees agreed upon teachers' way of motivating students was about the teacher's adoption of useful techniques in his methodology. For example, many believed that the teacher should have fun in class. Other suggestions included giving scores to students for their class activities, using L1 in teaching, especially in teaching grammar, using group work, employing games, and applying modern teaching methods. Ali posited, "Some grammar concepts

are difficult to understand in English, so I'd like the teacher to use Persian at times to explain the point in question." Some others maintained that the teacher should not ask too many questions. In fact, they felt that asking questions may concern them and prevent their participation. Some other students were of the opinion that the teacher should involve them in the activities done in class such as class discussions and decision making activities.

Some suggestions were made about the teacher's behavior and personality. For example, some students believed that the teacher should have a good rapport with the students and be committed to his or her profession. Dörnyei (2001, p. 31) also argued that the teacher behavior and his or her good relationship with the students can motivate them. Most of these kinds of suggestions indicated that the teacher should have a good temper and not be strict. Another series of suggestions were about what the teacher should do and talk about in class, including the teacher talking about students' future career, encouraging students by giving them rewards verbally and nonverbally, reminding the students of language benefits, and assigning homework to the students to do in or out of class. Regarding assignments, one interviewee, Mehdi, had an interesting idea. He stated:

Teachers must give the students different types of homework to do in class and at home. I think if the homework is the same, there is the possibility that some students might be tempted to copy from each other, so there is no point in assigning homework to the students.

Some interviewees stated that if the teacher changes his or her teaching methodology for the better, some students may be motivated to study English harder. In other words, they were saying that students' motivation is connected to the teachers' style of teaching. In this regard, Amir expressed:

The teacher's way of teaching becomes so unintelligible and boring at times. I mean we sometimes can't figure out what the teacher means. I believe the teacher must be able to change his teaching method when the students are puzzled so that he could attract the students' attention and help to solve their problems.

This is not surprising as Dörnyei (2001) also argued that effective teaching is crucial in motivating students. He reasoned that if the teaching methodology lacks clarity and students cannot understand what is being taught, learning motivation is unlikely to thrive.

The ways of motivating the language learners mentioned by the interviewees had already been emphasized by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) as "ten commandments," for example, creating a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the

classroom, developing a good relationship with the learners, or making the language classes interesting. Clearly, it goes without saying that the present study could not cover everything about language learning motivation. In fact, it was not feasible to explore language learning motivation from all aspects. Thus, it focused on the roles of three players—teachers, parents, and learners—in motivating language learners. Others may have influences on the students' motivation, which were regarded as being beyond the scope of this study.

Why Some Students Lack Motivation (Amotivation)

The rationale for incorporating the concept of amotivation in the interview protocol was the notion that if reasons for the language learners' lack of interest and motivation are identified, they can be better helped to be motivated in language learning. Moreover, since amotivation is identified in SDT as another dimension of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this topic was also explored by the researchers in the interviews.

The reasons articulated by the participants for amotivation could be classified into three categories: *educational issues*, *learner issues*, and *family issues*. As for educational issues, most interviewees believed that students are not motivated because they think language learning is difficult. One participant, Shayan, stated, "I think because language learning is difficult, some students are not interested in it. Specifically, I myself have problem understanding some grammar points." Other reasons include boring classes, first poor teacher, lack of technology use and interesting materials in the classes, and teacher-centered classes.

Regarding learner issues, many interviewees stated that because some students are poor in learning, they are not interested in language learning. Another reason stated by many was that some students may not know about language uses and benefits. Several other interviewees expressed that some students might have had bad experiences in their early periods of language learning. Other participants in the interviews enumerated some other reasons such as being aimless, lazy, and shy.

As for family issues, most interviewees were of the view that parents' pressure in sending their children to language classes forcefully could be the main reason for students' amotivation. Alireza said, "Some parents send their kids to language classes by force. And since some kids are slow in language learning, they become frustrated and have no motivation to continue at all." Other participants believed that familial problems in not providing the proper conditions for the students' language learning can account for some students' amotivation.

How Student Engagement Can Be Increased

In order to inquire about the interviewees' opinions regarding the ways of promoting student engagement, they were asked what their opinions were about class participation. Class participation, as stated earlier, is viewed as an indicator of behavioral engagement, the most obvious form of student engagement since it is action-oriented (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Furthermore, Skinner and Pitzer (2012) reasoned that students' actions and interactions with the academic tasks may be seen as indicators of student engagement as well. Moreover, class participation, according to Fredricks and McColskey (2012), is an indicator of both behavioral and cognitive engagement. To whatever dimension of student engagement they belong, these actions or behaviors boil down to be seen as student engagement on the whole.

As mentioned earlier (see Figure 1), three main themes related to student engagement emerged: *teacher behavior*, *teacher personality*, and *learner behavior*. Regarding teacher behavior, most students believed that in order to encourage students to participate in class activities teachers should consider scores for students' participation. One interviewee, Arad said:

Teachers can encourage students to take part in class activities by explicitly announcing that any correct answer can have a point or score for the respondent. I feel such incentives can encourage students to participate more in class activities. Students are even satisfied with the teacher verbal compliments.

Other suggestions include selecting students' favorite topics, asking questions, assigning activities such as presentations to the students, reducing students' stress, valuing their participation, and not highlighting their mistakes. Another participant, Asghar stated, "Teachers should ask questions of different levels of difficulty so that even poor students can sometimes answer some questions."

As for teacher personality, interviewees believed that the teacher should be fair, cooperative, supportive, active, and energetic in class. One interviewee, Taghi argued:

The teacher himself should teach energetically and enthusiastically so that the students are encouraged to listen to him attentively and participation is increased. When the teacher has passion for teaching, this can be felt by the students. Also, he should treat students in a fair way.

They also believed that the teacher should be approachable so that the students can develop a good rapport with their teacher. These two quali-

ties—being approachable and developing relationship—was also suggested by Dörnyei (2001) as attributes of an effective teacher. For instance, Saeed stated, “I sometimes have questions and need more explanations, but I’m afraid of the teacher.” It implies that students like Saeed could raise their questions or ask for more elaborations in class if they had a better relationship with the teacher.

Still some other participants held that participation in class activities requires providing a few prerequisite conditions. For example, Pedram maintained:

Class activities should be done under the teacher supervision. Besides, it’s better to do these tasks in groups so that we can help each other. The teacher should also walk around the class while he’s monitoring the students in case a group needs guidance.

On the other hand, given learner behavior, they also believed that learners should be sociable, and have enough knowledge about the topic, and be interested in class participation activities. One interviewee, Nader expressed:

Some students are too shy to ask their questions or volunteer for an activity. I myself should know about the topic in question so that I can take part in the activity. At times, I prefer not to participate because I’m not sure about my answer. Other times, I don’t like the topic.

Since class participation is seen as indicative of student engagement, the interviewees were questioned about how to increase such participation. They focused on the three notions of teacher behavior, teacher personality, and learner behavior, each of which was described in the above lines.

In summary, as the findings indicate, it can be inferred that the more engaged the students are, the more motivated they become. When students are engaged, they can enter into friendships and form peer groups with their classmates who are more engaged in school (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). In addition, teachers’ reactions to more engaged students are more supportive. Analyses of the data indicated that students’ emotional engagement could be measured through their interest in language learning. Hence, when students show interest in language learning, it means they are taking pleasure from being in such environments, which will result in an increase in their sense of belonging. In general, when students become more engaged, their sense of belonging becomes stronger (Juvonen et al., 2012). And this stronger sense of belonging and ownership will help students to become more motivated to learn (Brooks et al., 2012). In short, the increase in the sense of belonging will lead to an increase in the students’ motivational levels.

Based on the results of the present study, one thing teachers can do is assign problem solving activities to their students which help them reach that level of confidence to do the tasks on their own or in the company of others. When students achieve their desired outcomes, they become motivated through the regulation of their actions and behaviors (Bandura, 1999). Hence, if the students are provided with challenging tasks they would feel efficacious. When students feel more efficacious, according to Lam et al. (2012), they would be more engaged in school activities. Research has shown that there is a strong positive association between student engagement and self-efficacy (Lam et al., 2012). So one way of promoting student engagement is increasing students' self-efficacy. In other words, if students believe that they are capable of successfully accomplishing a task, they become more engaged. Therefore, teachers can adopt instructional practices that help students to master challenging tasks, which will increase students' self-efficacy. And this increase in self-efficacy, Lam et al. argued, will lead to an increase in student engagement in the instructional contexts in which such tasks are provided.

According to SDT, when students perceive that their school can meet their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they become more engaged in school activities (Connell, 1990, as cited in Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Fredricks & McColsky, 2012). Hence, school authorities and/or teachers need to provide a school setting where such needs can be met. For example, if teachers create a caring and supportive environment, students' need for relatedness can be satisfied. The students' need for autonomy is met when they are given a choice. And their need for competence is met when their self-efficacy is promoted through making them believe achieving the desired ends is possible (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Another way of increasing student engagement is to involve students in learning tasks because such tasks can be inherently satisfying (Davis & McPartland, 2012). When students enjoy doing the task, for example, reading novels in their spare time or as a school task, this pleasure, as Davis and McPartland (2012) put, can result in more motivation. Accordingly, when instructional tasks bring pleasure for the students, the level of motivation would be promoted due to the enjoyment and satisfaction obtained from completing these activities.

One more thing mentioned by the interviewees to promote student engagement is the teachers' good rapport with the students. When students have a personal and respectful relationship with the teachers and administrators in a school they are likely to be more engaged (Davis & McPartland, 2012). However, teachers may not know students well unless the class size is small. Therefore, it is suggested that the class size be kept small enough for the teacher to know all the students in order to maintain a close relationship with individual students.

The relationship between language learning motivation and student engagement can also be reciprocal. That is to say, if students are motivated, they are more engaged in doing learning tasks (Guthrie et al., 2012). Similarly, Dörnyei (2001) was of the opinion that when students are involved in doing instructional tasks, they become more motivated. He contended that it is the teacher's job to provide the students with such tasks to increase students' involvement.

Teachers need to know that students may be less engaged if they are passively receiving knowledge, for example, when they are listening to the teacher lecturing (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012). Thus, teachers should use instructional methods in which they can have students work and learn with peers. In fact, students should be active participants in their own learning. Moreover, the most tangible dimension of student engagement is behavioral engagement, in which attendance and homework completion can be observed (Fredericks & McColsky, 2012). However, emotional and cognitive engagements are not directly observable and need to be inferred from the students' behaviors.

Conclusion

The current study was conducted on the two constructs of student engagement and motivation by using interviews as an instrument for data collection. Further studies can employ other methods such as observation to delve more into the linkage of these constructs. In addition, the participants in this study comprised male intermediate EFL learners. Future studies can focus on language learners of other levels of language proficiency and/or of the opposite gender. To sum it up, as Dörnyei (2018) indicated, student engagement can be viewed as a novel, potential research avenue in the domain of language education.

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Die Förderung von Engagement und Motivation bei Studierenden: Perspektiven der iranischen EFL-Lernenden

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel der vorliegenden Studie war es, die Methoden zur Förderung von Engagement und Motivation bei Studierenden aus der Perspektive von iranischen EFL-Lernenden zu untersuchen. Hierfür nahmen 30 EFL-Lernende an freiwilligen semistrukturierten Interviews teil. Daraus ergab sich ein Modell der Determinanten für Engagement der Studierenden und Sprachlernmotivation. Dazu gehören: das Lehrerverhalten, die Lehrerpersönlichkeit und das Lernerverhalten für das Engagement der Studierenden sowie der Lehrer, das Ich und die Eltern für die Sprachlernmotivation. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung können sowohl für Sprachlehrer und –lerner als auch für Autoren von Unterrichtsmaterialien nützlich sein. Abschließend wurden die pädagogischen Implikationen der Studie und Ansätze für weiterführende Forschung dargestellt.

Schlüsselwörter: qualitative Studie, Engagement der Studierenden, Sprachlernmotivation, Lernerperspektive