The Association among Autonomy and Motivation of EFL Learners' Academic Achievement

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ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to examine the association among autonomy and motivation of EFL learners' academic achievement. To obtain the objectives of the present study two different research instruments were administrated. The Autonomy questionnaire and Motivation questionnaire were employed. In order to collect the necessary data, the instruments were given to 120 male and female college students majoring in English translation, teaching and literature at Tehran University who were randomly selected. The analyzed data demonstrated that there are significant positive relationship between autonomy and academic achievement as well as motivation and academic achievement. While the findings of the study also depicted that learners' autonomy did not correlate with motivation significantly. In addition, according to the regression analysis, the scores' autonomy are better predictors of academic achievement than motivation scores.

Introduction

Distance education began in Russia in 1850. The trend was then followed in Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden and finally in other countries. The first such institution, "Open University", was established in U.K in 1969. Iran was among the first third world countries that developed this system during the seventies.

Distance education provides courses and learning materials to students studying at locations distant to the parent institution. Separation of both the teacher and the student is a main feature of distance education. This gap between the teacher and the student put high responsibility on the shoulders of the students, however. Distance learners must be more responsible for the conduct of their learning. "The term" distance learner" itself invites an assumption that a learner of this type is expected to have gained, to some extent, learner autonomy" [19]. Learner autonomy defined as opportunities for civic action, critical thinking, and personal responsibility in learning [32]. Distance or Open learning provides a wide access to education [17] and promotes learner autonomy [14]. Learner's motivation is another factor that is very much important in distance education and plays a key role in one's capacity to cope with the challenge of distance learning experiences [18]. Keller defines motivation as " the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect"[17], [9].

A number of factors affect motivation of the students in distance education: "loneliness, isolation, competing commitments, absence of the structuring aspects of face-to-face classes, and difficulty in adjusting to a distance language learning context" [23]. With a better understanding about learner's autonomy and motivation, teachers can implement effective ways to train students to take more responsibility for their own learning and to cope with such loneliness and isolation of the learner and the teacher in such systems [25]. Successful academic performance may partly be the result of being autonomous and/or motivated to learn on one's own.

Learning English is an important issue in the educational system in Iran. Distance and mainstream educational systems can be facilitating or debilitating and have effects on EFL academic performance in some aspects. One of the facilitating factors, as mentioned above, is learner autonomy. A teacher-centered system may make many students alien to learning autonomy. Teachers in the traditional system take most of the responsibility and most of the students are passive and they are not responsible for the conduct of their learning. Such students encounter a lot of problems in distance education. They can not be responsible for their own learning and they may lose motivation to pursue higher education on a distance-learning basis. These factors can affect their academic performance, especially when they are EFL learners. Therefore, it is very important to consider the role of autonomy and motivation in students' academic success in distance education. In light of the issue raised above, this study endeavors to look at the relationship between autonomy together with motivation and the academic EFL performance.

Literature Review

Autonomy and Academic Achievement

Many researchers considered learner autonomy as an important factor in effective language learning [17], [21], [24], [25], [31]. [33] studied distance learners of French, German, and Spanish via a pilot study done at the south region of UK Open University. Distance learners were given supplementary materials to develop critical reflection, metacognition, and autonomy. These students were active and sought interaction opportunities. This study revealed that language learners exercised a considerable degree of functional control in their learning. She also suggests that learners must be encouraged to enhance their capacities for reflection and self-direction; it is required to introduce them an explicit framework available to guide their progress and give them clear rationale, encouragement, support, along with the opportunity to practice within the course materials. All of the learners demonstrated

some critical reflection ability but those who used the supplementary materials demonstrated this largely.

The effects of learner autonomy on learning outcomes is investigated. They found that learner autonomy included independence and interdependence but neither of them had significant effects on learning outcomes [6].

[21] studied learner autonomy in a distance learning context in Thailand and the researcher found the skills of autonomous language learners. These skills were cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The researcher believed that it is necessary to teach many of these skills and strategies. [13] found that distance learners used more metacognitive skills, particularly self-management, involved in learner autonomy, than face-to-face learners.

[2] investigated the relationships among student individuality, uniqueness and successful completion of distance education courses versus successful completion of traditional classroom courses. He found that learning styles and self-directed learning readiness did not influence successful completion rates of distance contexts versus traditional context. [32] examined the relationships among learning style, learning performance, and learning autonomy of learners in traditional and non-traditional Associate Degree Nursing programs. The study found that the majority of the learners were autonomous but the learners in the traditional context were more autonomous than learners in the distance context. The study also revealed that students' classification (i.e. freshman or sophomore) did not influence the degree of learners' autonomy and examined the effects of distance context on students' achievement [11]. They also studied the impact of distance learning on students' attitudes. They found that there wasn't any negative effect on student achievement or students' attitudes. The effect of students' task value and self-efficacy on their achievement in a web-based course [4] and found that online learning environment could provide a self-directed, dynamic and autonomous learning environment for distance language learners.

A researcher [26] tried to determine the relationships among students enrollment in asynchronous learning, self-efficacy, self-regulatory learning, and performance outcome. Test analysis revealed that high and low SSSE and SRLs did not significantly affect students' performance outcome and explored readiness for Language Learning Autonomy among distance learners. This study was not enough comprehensive and it considered just three dimensions of autonomy. They were the learner's reliance on the teachers, the learner's perceptions towards the teachers' roles, and the learner's confidence in his or her own language learning ability. The researcher just explored the status of readiness of the learners for language learning autonomy. Moreover, the effect of curriculum innovation in language classes on learner autonomy [19]. The study found that use of self-regulated skills and language learning autonomy would improve language learning and the relationships among on transactional distance and learner autonomy and student performance in distance learning courses. The study revealed that higher structure and dialog had a positive effect on quantitative course grades. The study showed that transactional distance would predict self-ratings of performance but not grades .The study also suggest that students who have a more distance learning experience tend to predict higher grades.

The role of self-regulation on academic success is consider by the [17] study revealed that verbal ability and self-efficacy were significantly related to performance. Self-regulatory

attributes were: intrinsic goal orientations, self-efficacy for learning and performance, time and study environment management, help seeking, and Internet self-efficacy. The study found that intrinsic goal orientation, and Internet self-efficacy, help seeking and time, and study environment management were not significant predictors of performance [19] and it was investigated how the learners experienced a solo distance language-learning context. The Data collection cycle follows as below:

Table 1. The Data Collection Cycle

Phase	Timing	Means of Data Collection
Phase1	Prior to course	Naturalistic interviews
Phase2	Weeks1-2	Open-ended questionnaire; ranking exercises; responses to statement of expectations
Phase3	Weeks5-6	Individual telephone interviews to clarify questionnaire responses
Phase4	Weeks8-10	Scenario exercise; yoked subject procedures
Phase5	Weeks12	Phase 2 questionnaire and ranking tasks; individual and telephone interview

The study found that not only learner beliefs, but also certain learner characteristics contributed to how learners experience their first 12 weeks of self-instructed learning. The study suggests that individual difference between learners, tolerance of ambiguity, affect learners' reaction at the self-instruction interface. Moreover, the relationship between learner autonomy and Chinese students' English proficiency is investigated by [13]. The learner autonomy profile (LAP) was used to measure learner autonomy. To measure students' English proficiency the score of the college English test at level 4 (CET-4) was used. Data collection procedures were developed in 2 phases. First, multiple regression and correlation (MRC) was used to measure the degree of the relationship between the 4 factors of learner autonomy and English proficiency of the students. The results of the first phase showed that resourcefulness and gender (as a dummy variable) accounted for 12.5% of the variability in the proficiency score. To further explore the relationship between autonomy and English proficiency a semi structured phone interview was used in the second phase of the study. The results confirmed the role of resourcefulness and 2 other factors, persistence and initiative on English language proficiency. The researcher recommended a different MRC design with the LAP total score, motivation, and gender as independent variable, and the CET as the dependant variable.

[18] studied the relationship between autonomy, motivation and success in the distance context. The study found that motivation, tutor feedback and personal responsibility play a crucial role in success. She also found that students' confidence and self-regulation could increase in the process of learning at a distance.

Motivation and Autonomy

The influence of learner motivation on developing autonomous learning in an English-for-Specific-Purposes Course in examined by self-access language learning that was an important part of this course [7]. The study found that there were significant differences in regulation and self-efficacy between successful and less successful learners. It was also revealed that a number of social and contextual factors had an impact on the learners' success.

The Carnegie Project [10] asserts that increasing motivation and enhancing learners' personal control on their own learning

are related to each other. This Project claims that enhancing motivation will enhance learners' autonomy.

[11] noted that learners who are responsible for their own learning, their success enhances their own self-perception of competence and this enhances their motivation. [16] argue that success in learning enhances motivation and this in turn increases learners' autonomy. The motivation can be an antecedent of successful autonomous learning [28] and self-efficacy and effort, both part of a motivational construct would influence learners' autonomous behavior, and therefore it comes before it. A self-efficacy as: "an individual's beliefs that he or she has the capacity to reach a certain level of performance and achievement [16].

Authors' [21] studied academic autonomy in Japanese children. An interview was done with 30, 5th and 6th grade Japanese students to validate the Self-Regulation Questionnaire-Academic Domain. The Japanese SRQ-A (J-SRQ-A) was developed. After doing exploratory factor analysis, it was found that J-SRQ-A provided the best model fit. The results showed that there was a positive correlation between autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

Motivation and Academic Achievement

Various studies have pointed out that motivation will affect language attainment and progress [13], [23]. They found that perceived competence, perceived challenge, feedback, perceived interest and perceived curiosity would strongly support intrinsic motivation. The importance of affective factors on success in distance language learning. Her sample was novice Japanese and Spanish learners who studied in the distance context [9]. Learners pointed to nine conditions in their report. Motivation and confidence in one's capacity received the highest rankings. She concluded that affective factors such as motivation play a key role in students' success in the distance context.

[12] expresses the doubt that" we don't know whether it is motivation that produces successful learning or successful learning that enhances motivation"(p.119). A variety of factors affect students' motivation, among them how they perceive their own achievement [30]. Materials and what tasks they do in and out of the classroom also affect motivation. Other factors include students' autonomy; classroom methodology; students' relationship to the classroom group as well as to the society at large; their view of their teacher and power relationships with the educational institution; and their own anxiety, especially in classroom activities such as speaking and test taking.

Some online language schools and they found that online learning may influence successful uptake of cyber schools. They note that working in isolation in a cyber school, without any external deadlines or a framework to control learning progress, may affect learners' motivation. They also say that "Motivation is perhaps the hardest of all to deal with at a distance, but it is perhaps the most important of all to overcome if students and the cyber schools are to have successful outcomes [17] and found a positive correlation between integrative motivation and language proficiency, and a negative correlation between instrumental motivation and language proficiency. This study dealt with the acquisition of Norwegian by foreign students at the Bergen University, Norway. European and United States students were found to be more integratively motivated that Middle Eastern, Africa, and Asian students, who were fund to be more instrumentally motivated than the Western students. In the total group, a weak positive relationship between integrative

motivation and language proficiency and a negative relationship between instrumental and grades were found.

The studied in motivational variables (integrative and instrumental) towards learning English as a foreign language among senior students majoring in English at Shiraz state and Shiraz Islamic Azad university [23]. The results indicated that student at Shiraz state university and Shiraz Islamic Azad University. The results indicated that the students at Shiraz state university were more integratively oriented as compared with their peers at Azad University. Moreover, a positive relationship was found between integrative motivation and proficiency level.

The study on students who registered in English psychology class at French-bilingual University displayed that language learners who had valued goals for language learning, particularly the goal of self-development and enjoyment in learning, tended to be more involved and successful in that learning experience [27]. In other words, interesting and enjoyable learning is not enough and the importance of learning is important as well. He also found that the Deci, Ryan and Vallerand's self-determination hierarchy perfectly explained language learner motivation and it was less likely that self-determined learners feel anxious or to give up studying the language. The connection between intrinsic motivation and whether learners had autonomy and achieved useful feedback. They found that intrinsic motivation was related to greater language success, greater motivation intensity, greater perceived competence, and less anxiety. They also found that learners who had little autonomy were less intrinsically motivated.

Moreover, [13] found that achievement in language learning and motivation had correlation. They noted that integratively oriented person would achieve greater L2 competence. Likewise the used Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) for studying the effects on French language achievement of learners' aptitude, attitudes, and motivation. They found that motivation and achievement had a greater correlation than learners' attitudes toward the learning situation [15]. The Chinese University students' attitudes and motivation to learning English and their relationship with their achievement in English. He found that students had a positive attitude toward learning English and highly motivated to study it. He also found that students' attitude and motivation positively correlated with their English proficiency.

Many studies mentioned above have been largely confined to study of the relationship among learners' autonomy, motivation and GPA among students in mainstream context. Many other studies have been limited to validation of construct of autonomy [4], [33], and [11]. It is necessary to investigate a clear link between learner's autonomy, motivation and GPA among students in distance context which leaves a gap in the literature of distance learner's autonomy, motivation and GPA.

Method

The participants of the study consisted of 120 Tehran university students majoring in English language translation, teaching English, and literature. The subjects were randomly selected through convenient sampling. There were 60 female and 60 male participants. All the students were young with the age range of 20-24 years old.

The necessary data about the participants' autonomy and motivation were collected via a questionnaires developed by [23] and [14]. The autonomy questionnaire includes 40 items which employs a 5-point Likert-scale format. The choices range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Likewise, the Gardner's

Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) which was administered to measure learners' motivation. This questionnaire includes 20 items which employs a 5-point Likert scale format. The choices range from strongly agree to strongly disagree for both surveys. Besides, they were also assured on the confidentiality of the results and the researcher promised to let them know about the results. The participants were requested to answer the questionnaires during their regular class time and without time limit. All students agreed willingly to complete the questionnaires to investigate the relationship of autonomy, academic performance and motivation of EFL learners. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between Autonomy and GPA?
2. Is there a significant relationship between Motivation and GPA?
3. Is there a significant relationship between Autonomy and Motivation?

The reliability of the questionnaires for this study was established via Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha for the learner autonomy questionnaire appeared to be 0.79 and 0.76 which shows that the questionnaire is moderately reliable.

Results

In order to achieve the goals of this study in seeking the relationship among variables in this specific context, the data gathered were analyzed by the following statistical methods using SPSS software. First, descriptive statistics were utilized. Then, reliability indexes of the motivation questionnaire and learner autonomy questionnaires were obtained using Cronbach alpha. Pearson Product Moment formula was also used in order to find the correlation among the variables under the study. Finally, Regression analysis was used in order to "measure the degree and direction of influence the independent variable has on the dependant variables" [1].

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the students' academic achievement (GPA), learner autonomy and motivation were obtained utilizing Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results are provided in this part. Table 2. shows the descriptive statistics for the academic achievement (GPA).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Academic Achievement (GPA)

	N	Mini	Maxi	Mean	SD	Skewness
Autonomy	120	70.0	164.0	125.17	21.94	.170

The results show that GPA ranges from a minimum of 12.34 to a maximum of 18.37, with a mean of 14.83 and a standard deviation of 1.29. Based on the above table, there is a positive skewness in the distribution of students' GPA which means that students have achieved weakly. In order to test the normality of the scores an analysis was run the results of which appear in Table 3. shows the normality of the distribution of scores. A non-significant result (Sig. value of more than .05) indicates normality" (p. 62). In this case, the sig. value is .200, suggesting the normality of the distribution of scores [22].

Table 3. Tests of Normality of GPA

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
GPA	.061	60	.200[*]	.985	60	.660

a.   Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance

Table 4. indicates that the scores ranged from 70.00 to 164.00 (the scores are out of 200) which means that the variability of scores must be large; this is substantiated by the large standard deviation of 21.94. Meanwhile, an average score of 125.17 has been observed. This table shows that though their autonomy seems to be normally distributed, a slight negative skewness can be observed in the curve (Skewness= -.170) and scores are located in the right side of the horizontal axis which mean that students are more autonomous and responsible for their own learning.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for Autonomy

	N	Mini	Maxi	Mean	SD	Skewness
Autonomy	120	70.0	164.0	125.17	21.94	.170

In order to test the normality of the scores an analysis was run the results of which appear in Table 5. Table 5. illustrates the normality of the distribution of autonomy scores. As the table shows, the sig. value is .200, suggesting the normality of the distribution of scores.

Table 5. Tests of Normality of Autonomy

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Autonomy	.082	120	.200[*]	.979	120	.406

b.   Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance

According to Table 6., the scores range from 61.00 (which indicate the lowest score on Motivation) to 100.00 (that shows the highest Motivation score). The Standard deviation is 9.00. The distribution of scores is negatively skewed (Skewness= -.391) and scores are located in the right side of the horizontal axis which shows that the students are highly motivated.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for Motivation

	N	Mini	Maxi	Mean	SD	Skewness
Motivation	120	61.00	100.0	83.76	9.007	-.391

Again a test of normality was run with the resulting output

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness
GPA	120	12.34	18.37	14.83	1.29	.174

which is presented in Table 7 illustrates the normality of the distribution of motivation scores. As the table demonstrates, the sig. value is .200 which suggests that the distribution of motivation scores is nearly normal.

Table 7. Tests of Normality of Motivation

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Motivation	.088	60	.200[*]	.979	60	.378

c.   Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance

Results of the Correlation

In order to find out the possible relationship between each pair of variables in this study and to find out the strength of any linear relationship, Pearson correlation analysis was run. Table 8. reports the results of the correlation analysis between GPA, motivation and autonomy.

Table 8. Results of Correlation among Autonomy, Motivation &GPA

		GPA	Autonomy	Motivation
GPA	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.547[**]	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.385[**]	.079	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.547	

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8. reveals a significant positive relationship between the GPA and the Autonomy (r=.547, $p<0.01$), which indicates that EFL distance students who are more autonomous in English language teaching in Tehran University can achieve better GPAs in their studies. There appears to be a strong, positive correlation between the two variables (autonomy and GPA) for the sample as a whole (r=.547, $p<0.01$). The results also indicated that GPA and Motivation have a positive significant relationship (r=.385, $p<0.01$), which shows that students who are more motivated can have a better performance in their classes.

As the result shows the relationship between motivation and GPA is positive. The direction of the relationship between motivation and GPA is upward and indicates that the more students are motivated, the more they get good grades or ranks. Of course the correlation is moderately low (r=.385, $p<0.01$). Finally, the results indicates that autonomy and motivation have a positive relationship which is not significant (r=.079, $p<0.54$).

Results of the Regression analysis

As part of the design of the study, a linear regression analysis was run to predict the variance in a dependant variable from the variance in independent variables; that is, to see which variables predict academic achievement better. Because the correlation between autonomy and motivation was not significant, this procedure was used only for GPA (dependant variable) and autonomy and motivation (independent variables). According to [1] "regression analysis is an appropriate technique to measure the relationship between variables and assess their significance." The results of this analysis appear in Tables 9. and 10.

Table 9. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.646[a]	.417	.397	1.00715

a. Predictors: (Constant), Motivation, Autonomy
b. Dependant variable: GPA

Table 9. reveals that the value of R2 for Autonomy is .417 meaning that the Autonomy and GPA share 41% of the variance between themselves. According to Table 10, Beta values indicate that one standard deviation unit change in the score for Autonomy will result in 0.52 units of change in GPA. However, one standard deviation unit change in the score for Motivation will result in 0.34 units of change in GPA. Thus, with respect to

Table 10., Autonomy scores are better predictors of GPA than Motivation.

Table 10. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.837	1.389		4.920	.000
	Autonomy	.031	.006	.520	5.127	.000
	Motivation	.050	.015	.344	3.392	.001

a. Dependent Variable: GPA

Conclusions

The analysis of the data gathered in this study led to the following results:

First, the findings of this study showed students' GPA scores and their autonomy had a positive and significant correlation (r=.547, $p<0.01$). There was a large correlation between the two variables, suggesting a strong relationship between autonomy and GPA. Therefore, there is a positive and significant relationship between students' autonomy and their academic achievement. In other words, EFL distance students who are more autonomous in English language teaching in Payamenoor University can achieve higher GPA in their studies.

Second, the results also revealed that there was a significant and positive correlation between students' motivation and GPA (r=.385, $p<0.01$), suggesting a moderate relationship between two variables. This means that students who are more motivated can have a better performance in their classes.

Third, the findings revealed that there was a non significant and positive correlation between autonomy and motivation (r=.079, $p<0.01$). The strength of correlation between two variables was weak. The results indicate that the relationship between autonomy and motivation did not appear to be significant. In other words, it was found that there was not any significant relationship between autonomy and motivation. This non significant relationship between the two variables may be related to the small sample size and suggests a need for further research. According to [25]" with large samples, even quite small correlation coefficients can reach statistical significant"(p.122). So the non significant correlation between autonomy and motivation could be due to the fact that the sample in this study was limited to only one city or one university and the sample size was quite small. This was partly because the sample was related to students of Tehran University (distance context) and such students was not required to attend their regular classes; therefore, the researcher had difficulty finding a large sample.

This study started with the expectation to observe high motivation and autonomy on the part of participants. This expectation was grounded in the fact that the participants had achieved quite reasonable grades in the course of their study. Despite all the expectations to the contrary, the participants' autonomy was hampered by the policies set forth and implemented by the particular university. The participants proved, however, that they were highly motivated to adjust to a distance language learning context and maintain their study. This is implicitly reflected in their course grades they have passed and explicitly in their scores revealed by this study's

questionnaire. This finding is quite extraordinary due to the fact that they have achieved something with little or no support coming from the institution.

The findings of this study suggest support for several implications in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. Regarding the factors which are of high importance in this study, teachers should pay more attention to learners' autonomy. Measuring learners' autonomy and motivation at the beginning of each semester in the distance context, teachers will make students more responsible for their own learning and students would be imbued with more motivation for learning. Based on the principles of autonomy, syllabuses and the course books of the distance universities should be redesigned. They should be assessed on the basis of the criterion which encourages fostering learners' autonomy. The course books should be of a high quality, be self-contained and have self-instructional and over-explicit materials. Lack of teacher and face to face interaction between student and teacher or lack of peer contact may affect students' affective factors such as autonomy, motivation and so on [13]. So it is better to put into practice some in-service training on learner autonomy. For example it is useful to involve learners actively in posing problems, teach them how to take a risk in making efforts to change and how to plan and monitor their own learning process. Because of the concerns, doubts and misunderstandings, it is necessary to train teachers to clarify, advise, and motivate students.

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