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Factors Influencing Reading Motivation in ESL and EFL Learners:
A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

This literature review presents a comprehensive examination of factors influencing reading motivation and its impact on reading comprehension and performance. It explores a wide range of dimensions, including reading comprehension, reading performance, reading interest, teachers' instructional practices, interventions, metacognition, neuropsychological elements, attention-related issues, and memory. The review underscores the importance of considering not only the cognitive and affective aspects but also the physical well-being of learners in fostering reading motivation. A holistic understanding of the underlying constructs that shape reading motivation is crucial for developing effective pedagogical strategies. Rather than isolating individual factors, an integrated framework that acknowledges the interplay and synergistic effects of these constructs is recommended for enhancing reading motivation. Furthermore, the review highlights the need for future research to focus on practical interventions that effectively promote reading motivation, bridging the current gaps in knowledge and providing valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. Addressing these research gaps can contribute to refining instructional practices and advancing our understanding of the mechanisms that drive reading motivation among learners.

Keywords: English as a second language, English as a foreign language, reading motivation

Background and introduction

Motivation, a complex psychological construct, is a vital determinant that guides and maintains human behavior (Stipek, 1988). According to Dornyei (1998), it provides individuals with both energy and direction for their actions. In the field of language education, motivation plays an important role in learners' language development. Numerous studies have discussed factors that motivate learners in second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Stipek, 1988). In current ESL and EFL learning, the five fundamental skills - listening, reading, writing, speaking, and culture - are highly valued (Wei, 2023). While reading and listening are considered input-oriented skills, writing and speaking are output-oriented, and culture is context-oriented. Among these skills, reading is an essential skill for successful academic work and goal accomplishment, and thus, motivating learners to read or helping them gain

more reading motivation has become an important mission for language teachers, instructors, educators, and policymakers in recent years.

Literature review and discussion

Reading motivation

Motivation is a significant area of inquiry in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) studies. Specifically, reading motivation pertains to the driving force that enables individuals to engage in reading activities. When individuals possess positive beliefs and attitudes towards reading, they are more inclined to actively participate in more meaningful and challenging reading experiences.

Despite its significant impact on readers and learners, reading motivation did not receive substantial attention until the 1990s. Grabe and Stoller (2019) acknowledge that the focus on reading motivation has only emerged in the past decades. It is important to distinguish reading motivation from general learning motivation, as they are distinct concepts that require separate analysis and examination. Furthermore, it is essential to differentiate between L1 and L2 motivation. While research has shown that reading habits in the L1 can predict those in the L2 context (Takase, 2007), it is crucial to acknowledge the contextual differences between L1 and L2 learning settings, such as the learning environment, goals, exams, and parental support. Therefore, L2 reading motivation should be examined independently from L1 reading motivation (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). In this review, the primary focus will be on learners' L2 reading motivation exclusively.

Reading motivation is a complex and multifaceted construct that has attracted considerable scholarly interest. Researchers have made significant efforts to identify and understand the different factors that contribute to learners' motivation to engage in reading activities. Through their investigations, they have identified nine key constructs that play a role in shaping individuals' reading motivation, including self-efficacy, competition, curiosity of interest, preference for challenge, involvement, recognition, social interaction, work avoidance, and grades (Guthrie et al., 2007).

One of the most important constructs is self-efficacy, which refers to individuals' beliefs about their own competence and capability to perform reading tasks successfully (Bandura, 1993). Learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to be motivated to engage in reading activities, as they believe in their ability to comprehend and interpret texts effectively. Competition is another construct that influences reading motivation, as individuals may be motivated to read in order to compare their performance with others or to achieve specific reading-related goals (Wei, 2016).

Curiosity and interest also significantly impact reading motivation. When learners find a particular topic or subject intriguing, they are more willing to engage in reading materials related to that topic. Additionally, for learners who possess a preference for taking challenges, they might be motivated to read because they enjoy tackling difficult texts and solving reading problems (Guthrie et al., 2007). With greater curiosity and interest, the involvement in reading may be enhanced (Renninger, 2000). Involvement in reading refers to the degree of personal investment individuals have in the reading process. When individuals feel emotionally connected to the content or characters in a text, they are more likely to be motivated to read and explore the text further.

Social interaction plays a significant role in reading motivation, as individuals may be motivated to read in order to engage in discussions, share insights, or connect with others who have similar reading interests. On the other hand, work avoidance represents a construct where individuals are motivated to read to avoid other tasks or responsibilities they perceive as less desirable or demanding. Lastly, grades can impact reading motivation, particularly in educational settings. Learners may be motivated to read in order to achieve good grades or academic success, as they recognize the importance of reading proficiency in achieving their educational goals.

By identifying and understanding these various constructs, researchers and educators can

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gain insights into the complex nature of reading motivation and develop strategies to foster and sustain learners' motivation to engage in reading activities.

Reading motivation, reading comprehension, and reading performance

Reading motivation, reading comprehension, and reading performance are intertwining constructs that require a comprehensive analysis. Scholars have shown a keen interest in understanding the relationship between reading motivation and reading comprehension. Past studies have highlighted the significance of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation in reading comprehension among L1 readers. These factors serve as strong predictors of reading comprehension development and subsequently impact reading performance (Guthrie et al., 2007; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009; Retelsdorf, Koller, & Moller, 2011; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2010). Guthrie et al. (2007) conducted research focusing on elementary school students and found a positive correlation between reading motivation and reading comprehension. Their study utilized both multi-regression analysis and semi-structured interviews, revealing that higher levels of reading motivation were associated with increased reading absorption. However, they also noted that general motivation growth did not always align with specific instances of reading motivation.

As learners become more engaged in reading, they develop a sense of competence and view themselves as readers (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). This self-efficacy further sustains their reading motivation and time investment in reading. Additionally, the content and genres of texts also influence learners' reading motivation (Guthrie, 2008). Children's motivation to read can be influenced by the texts they encounter. Informational texts may be less likely to inspire children, whereas texts with exciting or emotional elements are more likely to attract and stimulate their reading motivation. It is therefore recommended to provide interesting texts appropriate for the grade level to engage children and enhance their reading motivation.

Reading motivation and interest

Reading motivation and interest are closely intertwined and have been extensively discussed in the previous literature. Renninger (2000) emphasized that highly interested readers are more engaged and immersed in the reading process. They are more likely to acquire knowledge in their areas of interest, process information more effectively, and derive greater enjoyment from reading. Alexander and Murphy (1998) also noted that students with a strong interest in reading tend to invest more time and effort into their reading activities. It is a natural inclination for individuals to be more engaged with activities they find enjoyable. For example, teenagers may choose to spend hours reading popular novels like Harry Potter and The Hunger Games instead of engaging in required school reading. These novels capture their interest and provide a sense of accomplishment, leading to substantial time investment in reading them. However, it is essential to explore ways to transfer or channel their interest in extracurricular reading to core academic subjects. This is a significant consideration for educators and researchers alike.

Without a doubt, affect and enjoyment play a significant role in reading interest, as they generate strong positive emotions that reinforce intrinsic reading motivation (Monteiro, 2013). These positive feelings further enhance intrinsic motivation, which is a crucial factor in initiating L2 reading. Similarly, Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, and Perencevich (2004) found that intrinsic reading motivation can be stimulated by internal factors such as curiosity, involvement, and taking on challenges. Therefore, motivation driven by intrinsic factors can have a positive impact on improving reading comprehension.

Reading enjoyment is closely associated with reading interest. It is assumed that higher levels of enjoyment and interest in reading lead to enhanced reading motivation. Retelsorf, Köller, and Möller (2011) highlighted the positive influence of reading enjoyment and reading self-concept on reading motivation. Their study revealed that when participants found reading interesting and enjoyable, task values had a positive effect on

intrinsic motivation. These findings echo previous research, including the study conducted by Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, and Guthrie (2009), which found that when learners approach texts they find desirable, their motivation is energized, and comprehension of the texts become more efficient. Learners activate their background knowledge, employ reading strategies, and engage in metacognition to build a deeper understanding and derive greater joy from reading.

As learners successfully complete a reading task, a sense of achievement is experienced, which significantly contributes to their motivation. Learners' thoughts and feelings of satisfaction hold great value in their motivation, including in reading tasks (Gagné, 1985; Julkunen, 2001). Learners' perception of the task plays a crucial role in their motivation (Boekaerts, 1993). When learners have a preference for the reading task, their reading motivation toward it tends to increase.

Instruction, intervention, and reading motivation

Reading motivation is not only a predictor of reading comprehension growth but also a product that can be cultivated through appropriate intervention and instruction. The role of teachers in fostering reading motivation has been explored, as there is a correlation between teacher involvement and learners' reading motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Social interaction within the learning process has been found to enhance learners' performance, academic achievement, and self-esteem (Monteiro, 2013). Teachers play a significant role in students' engagement, and there is a positive correlation between teachers' encouragement and students' engagement. Teachers' actions in the reading class can make a substantial difference in students' reading motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Researchers have demonstrated that reading motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, can be developed through effective instruction (Guthrie, 2008; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2010). Among various instructional techniques, social interaction is considered one of the most powerful strategies. The innate human desire to understand others and be understood is embedded in the process of socialization (Monteiro, 2013). Reading serves as a bridge that connects individuals to others, communities, societies, cultures, and even the world at large. The social nature of learning and the influences of others contribute to the construction of meaning in reading (Friedland & Truesdell, 2004; Gisbert & Font, 2008; Monteiro, 2013). Social interactions facilitate the development of interpersonal skills, survival instincts, academic abilities, problem-solving skills, and reading proficiency in students. Furthermore, the school environment can be viewed as a social microcosm, and schooling experiences mark the beginning of the socialization process for most individuals. Given the ample opportunities for reading within the school setting, engaging students in reading is of utmost importance. One effective technique often employed is social support from peers. As early as 1980, scholars demonstrated the positive impact of social support on academic achievement and perseverance in challenging tasks (Sarason, Levine, Bashman, & Linder, 1983). Students need higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills when facing difficult tasks, and receiving encouragement and assistance from their peers significantly increases their persistence in completing the tasks. Additionally, creating an encouraging environment is another outcome of implementing social support in the reading class. Subsequent research supports these findings, with Guthrie and Knowles (2001) emphasizing the importance of social interaction in reading motivation. Cooperative instructional styles and classrooms, as opposed to competitive or individualistic instruction, provide support for learners' reading motivation. Johnson and Johnson (2003) also indicate that support from peers generates higher reading motivation compared to support from authorities, such as teachers. Peer comments trigger more interest and curiosity from internal motivations. Peer discussions enrich social interaction in the classroom, and cooperative learning benefits students both mentally and academically, as they absorb more learning content from the instruction. Furthermore, advanced peers can serve as role models for others to emulate (Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Saleh, Lazonder, & Jong, 2005). Learners tend to imitate peers with better

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reading performance, leading to the growth of their motivation and competencies in reading. This process of vicarious learning is crucial for successful learning and can be viewed as a form of socialization. Social interactions between peers also help develop communicative competence, which is valuable for learners in the future.

To promote social support and peer interaction, interventions can be implemented in the classroom. One example is the Pair Reading Program (PRP) suggested by Monteiro (2013) for elementary school students. In the PRP, pairs consist of a tutee with lower reading proficiency and a tutor with higher reading proficiency. The pair can choose to read simultaneously, read alone, or engage in discussions to enhance reading comprehension. Simultaneous reading involves both the tutor and tutee reading aloud together, with adjustments in reading speed. If the tutee makes mistakes, the tutor provides corrections. As the tutee gains confidence, they can read alone while being monitored and corrected by the tutor. The tutor can also read alone to serve as a model. During the text comprehension process, the tutor and tutee engage in discussions to promote comprehension. The discussions can take various forms, such as asking and answering questions. The results of the PRP intervention show significant improvements in self-concept, reading pleasure, and social recognition among participants. Working in cooperation enhances learners' engagement, effort, and persistence in teamwork, as they encourage each other to work harder and take responsibility. Overall, interventions that foster social support and peer interaction, such as the PRP, can effectively enhance students' reading motivation, performance, and social development.

Metacognition, reading comprehension, and reading motivation

Flavell (1979) introduced the term "metacognition" to refer to the cognitive process of "thinking about thinking" or "cognition about cognitive phenomena" (p. 906). He further highlighted that past learning experiences serve as a "quality control" mechanism for future learning as learners can refine their goals and monitor their learning process based on prior knowledge. Schraw and Moshman (1995) noted the integration of cognitive knowledge and cognitive regulation within metacognition, with Schraw (1998) emphasizing the monitoring function as crucial for promoting cognitive regulation. Consequently, metacognition can be viewed as a set of learning strategies applicable to all individuals (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Implementing metacognition as a monitoring system in the reading process transforms it into a strategy that enhances not only learners' reading comprehension but also their confidence in reading. Metacognition offers several advantages, such as shaping learners' coping strategies and perseverance in the learning process. Moreover, metacognition encompasses the concepts of self-control and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Flavell, 1979; Schunk, 1984), as learners recognize tasks they believe they can accomplish with reasonable effort.

Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1990) suggested that metacognition may be one of the most influential factors in predicting students' learning outcomes. Its activation enhances learning efficiency, leading to improved results. Consequently, numerous scholars and researchers have investigated the application and contribution of metacognition. Clifford (1984) proposed that learners develop their own metacognition to regulate their learning process, driven by their pursuit of success and avoidance of undesirable outcomes. This learning attitude, whether positive or negative, guides learners in regulating their learning efforts (Johnston & Winogard, 1985; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). In the context of reading, metacognition enables readers to control attention, memory, and speed, all of which play significant roles in consolidating reading coherence and comprehension.

Metacognition guides learners in clarifying the purpose and nature of texts when they encounter new tasks or challenges in reading. Consequently, their engagement and task outcomes are enhanced. Even in familiar tasks, the use of metacognitive strategies enables learners to approach them more efficiently and appropriately.

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As tasks are completed, learners' abilities are further accumulated and strengthened (Carr, 2004; Flavell, 1979; Wenden, 1999).

Factors of declining reading motivation

Numerous factors contribute to the decline in reading motivation, encompassing both mental and physical aspects. Retelsdorf, Köller, and Möller (2011) conducted a longitudinal study investigating the effects of reading motivation on the performance of German secondary school students. Their findings revealed a negative correlation between reading performance and competition, indicating that competition can hinder reading performance. However, other researchers have noted the positive impact of English competitions on learning motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998), particularly within closer peer groups (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). It is important to differentiate the effects of competitions based on their purpose and scale, as larger-scale competitions may exert different pressures on reading motivation. Careful planning and caution are advised when incorporating competition into language classes.

Physical factors also play a significant role in reading motivation. Physical difficulties such as dyslexia, brain damage, and nerve disorders can impede reading comprehension and subsequently harm motivation (Wasserman, 2012). These difficulties often persist from childhood into adulthood, leading to increased frustration during the learning process (Rapp et al., 2007). Understanding the impact of physical constraints on reading motivation is crucial for language educators to better support students with reading difficulties. Enhancing comprehension abilities, potentially through metacognitive training, is key to fostering successful reading performance and higher motivation. Furthermore, learners' physical conditions can directly affect reading motivation. Overcoming physical constraints and improving reading comprehension can positively impact motivation, as learners feel content and satisfied with their reading abilities (Wasserman, 2012). Attention and working memory are crucial factors that influence reading coherence and comprehension. Language teachers should cultivate and connect different types of attention to enhance reading comprehension.

Neuropsychological perspectives suggest that brain function affects both mental and physical aspects. Deficiencies in certain brain elements can impair attention, hindering comprehension and attention in reading (Wasserman, 2012). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is often comorbid with reading disorder (RD), might further compromising reading abilities (Sonuga-Barke, 2003). RD is associated with specific pathways in the brain that affect attention and reading performance. Chemicals such as noradrenaline and the noradrenaline circuit also influence reading performance (Wasserman, 2012).

Considering both mental and physical conditions is essential when addressing low reading motivation, enabling language teachers to identify and address the underlying factors affecting learners' motivation.

Conclusion

This comprehensive literature review critically analyzes a multitude of factors that exert a substantial influence on the formation and cultivation of reading motivation. The factors discussed encompass a wide range of dimensions, including reading comprehension, reading performance, reading interest, teachers' instructional practices, interventions, metacognition, neuropsychological elements, attention-related issues, and memory. To effectively foster reading motivation, it is imperative for educators to take into account not only the cognitive and affective aspects but also the physical well-being of learners. An integrative understanding of the fundamental constructs that underpin reading motivation becomes crucial for formulating pedagogical strategies that yield optimal outcomes. Rather than isolating individual factors, a holistic framework that encompasses the interplay and synergistic effects of these constructs is highly recommended to enhance reading motivation (Guthrie et al., 2007). In light of the current gaps in knowledge, future research endeavors should prioritize the exploration of practical interventions

that effectively promote reading motivation, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon. By addressing these research gaps, we can further refine instructional practices and provide valuable insights into the mechanisms that drive reading motivation among learners.

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