

The rise and fall of Iranian female students' motivation at different levels of language proficiency from high school to university

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Abstract: The present research is an attempt to find out the relationship between the rise and fall of Iranian female students' motivation and their different levels of language proficiency from high school to university and to discover whether the motivation of Iranian female students at different proficiency levels change over an academic semester. Furthermore, the focus of the study is on the possible reasons behind the rise and fall of motivation for students at different proficiency levels. This study was conducted in Mazandaran, Iran. The participants were 80 Iranian female students from among high school students and university BA students. The data was gathered using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. To analyze the data, a one-way ANOVA, repeated measure ANOVA and Pearson Correlation were run. The results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in the motivation level across different language proficiency groups over an academic semester. In addition, there is a significant positive relationship between the participants' motivation scores and their language proficiency scores. It also revealed that there are five demotivating factors responsible for the rise and fall of motivation for students at different proficiency levels including learning contents, materials, and facilities; attitude towards English speaking community; the teacher; experience of failure, and attitude towards second language learning. Among these, learning contents, materials, and facilities are the most prominent demotives in L2 learning, and attitude towards second language learning is the least important source of demotivation.

Keywords: Demotivating Factor, Proficiency Level, Rise and Fall of Motivation

1. Introduction

Since the late 60s and early 70s, there has been a significant shift within the field of language learning and teaching with greater emphasis on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. Learner autonomy is in line with current views on the active involvement of learners, popularity of learner-centered approaches, and learners' independence of teachers (Littlewood, 1996). The investigation of language learning motivation is an important field in language pedagogy since it is seen as one of the key variables contributing to the successful acquisition of a foreign or second language (Kormos & Csizer, 2010). Moreover, several studies related to foreign and second language learning have acknowledged the social and contextual influences on individual motivation (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). The original

impetus in research on second/foreign language motivation comes from social psychology since learning the language of another community simply cannot be separated from "learners' social dispositions towards the speech community in question" (Moinvaziri, 2008, p.126). According to Duvernay (2009), a variety of factors exist which can affect the level of success learners achieve in a second language learning environment. These include factors in the target language itself, learners' attitudes toward learning the target language, and social and cultural factors. Of these, motivation to learn the language, an affective, emotion-driven factor, is selected as the topic of this paper.

2. Research Questions

The present study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1-Does the motivation of Iranian female students at different proficiency levels change over an academic semester?

2-Is there any relationship between female students' language proficiency score and the rise and fall in their motivation?

3-What are the possible reasons behind the rise and fall of motivation for students at different proficiency levels?

3. Literature Review

Motivation is viewed as a dynamic, situated and social construct (Norton, 2000) and closely related to learners' identity construction (Gardner, 2000; Dornyei, 2005; Gao, Zaho, & Cheng, 2007). Gass and Selinker (2001) agreed that "it makes sense that individuals who are motivated will learn another language faster and to a great degree. Furthermore, numerous studies have provided statistical evidence that indicates motivation is a predictor of the language learning success" (p.25).

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According to Gardner (2007), it really is not possible to give a simple definition of motivation, though one can list many characteristics of a motivated individual. For example, the motivated individual is goal directed, expends effort, is persistent, is attentive, has desires (wants), exhibits positive effect, is aroused, has expectancies, demonstrates self-confidence (self-efficacy), and has reasons (motives). Motivation, believed as one of the most important factors determining the rate and success of second language (L2) attainment, provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process (Dornyei, 2001). Brown (2007) reviewed the definitions of motivation based on the three historical schools of thought as follows:

1) *Behaviorism*. This perspective sees motivation as the anticipation of reward. Driven to acquire positive reinforcement and based on our prior experience, we repeat the action to get rewards.

2) *Cognitivism*: It considers motivation as choices people make. The forces behind our decisions are the needs or drives. Ausubel (1968) identified six needs for the construct of motivation. They include the need for exploration, manipulation, activity, stimulation, knowledge, ego enhancement.

3) *Constructivism*: Each person is motivated differently and the emphasis is on social context and individual personal choices.

3.1. Motivation & Language Proficiency

It has been suggested that the most likely fundamental and salient factor affecting foreign language proficiency is motivation (Rahman, 2005). According to Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (1999), as motivation has a direct effect on the target language proficiency, it is a strong predictor of substantial foreign language proficiency as well.

Several studies on learner variables (motivation, attitude, anxiety) and their relationships with learners' foreign language proficiency have been carried out over the course of more than three decades. All of those studies have indicated that learner variables have influences on learners' language proficiency (Lukmani, 1972; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Brown, 1994 and 2000; Warden & Lin, 2000; Dornyei, 1994, 2002; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihie, 2004; and Rahman, 2005 cited in Langroudi & Amiri, 2013). According to Yu-mei (2009), motivation is one of the several important factors that may influence students' English achievement. Learners' motivation has been widely accepted as a key factor which influences the rate and success of second/foreign language learning (McDonough, 1983; Ellis, 1994, cited in Choosri, Intharaksa, 2011). With considerable amount of time and effort to achieve advanced language proficiency in a second language, learners who are strongly motivated are much more likely to succeed (Warschauer & Chin, 2011). Saville-Troike (2006, p. 86) found that there has been "a consistently high correlation between reported strength of motivation and level of L2 achievement [which] make it seem quite likely that the connection is indeed significant" (cited in Duvernay, 2009). Gass and Selinker (2001) agreed it makes sense that individuals who are motivated will learn another language faster and to a great degree.

Furthermore, numerous studies have provided statistical evidence that indicates motivation is a predictor of the language learning success. Duvernay (2009) in his studies quoted that, factors responsible for low English proficiency of the majority of Thai students include traditional pedagogical prescriptive approaches (Kongpetch, 2004; Forman, 2005; Bunnag, 2006), the influence of Thai culture, EFL learning environments (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2003; Saengboon, 2004) and low motivation in learning a foreign language (Srikrai, 2008). Clement and Kruidenier (1985) and Dornyei (1994) demonstrated that measures of proficiency in the second/foreign language are related to motivational characteristics of students. In this respect, Corria (1999) claimed that a full understanding of students' motivation is necessary to maximize English language results and positive outcomes. Kharm (1977) also found that different kinds of motivation to learn a foreign language may produce different rates and ultimate levels of proficiency.

Thus, the importance of motivation in enhancing second/foreign language learning is undeniable. Lifrieri (2005) pointed out "when asked about the factors which influence individual levels of success in any activity such as language learning, most people would certainly mention motivation among them" (p. 4). Brown (2000) stated that "it is easy in second language learning to claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation" (p. 160). With similar views, Gardner (2006) posited that "students with higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels" (p. 241). He further added if one is motivated, he/she has reasons (motives) for engaging in the relevant activities, expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, and enjoys the activities (Gardner, 2006).

Gardner (1985) found that motivation has close relationship with learners' achievement. He analyzed the role of attitude and motivation in second language acquisition through his previous study. The results indicated that the attitudinal motivational factors were also related to students' achievement. Sadighi and Maghsudi (2000) investigated the effect of two types of motivation (integrative and instrumental) on English proficiency of the EFL senior students at Islamic Azad University of Kerman. The results of their study showed a significant difference between English proficiency mean scores of integratively-motivated students and instrumentally-motivated ones, and there were significant correlations between integrative and instrumental motivation with students' English proficiency scores. It was also found out that the personal, social, and educational factors had significant relationships with EFL students' motivation. Many of Lambert's (1972) studies and one study by Spolsky (1989) found that integrative orientation generally accompanied higher scores in proficiency tests in a foreign language. The conclusion from these studies was that integrative orientation may indeed be an important requirement for successful language learning.

3.2. Motivation and Gender

According to Ribeiro, Tavares and Mesquita (n.d.) Investigations exploring gender effects on young adult foreign language learning unanimously stated the fact that language uptake is imbalanced between men and women and that language courses usually have a larger proportion of female participants. Ning (2010) defined gender as "the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is constructed socially". The results indicated that there are differences between males and females with regard to language learning strategies, language comprehension and language learning motivation (Aslan, 2009).

Ambu Saidi Al-Mahrooqi (2012) stated that research on gender differences in instrumental orientation is inconclusive, with some studies showing higher instrumental motivation among females (e.g., Bacon & Finneman, 1992); other studies indicated no gender

differences (e.g., Shaaban & Ghaith, 2000; Young, 2003), and still other studies indicated higher instrumental motivation among females for the study of some languages but not others (e.g., Dörnyei & Clément, 2001). A number of studies have demonstrated that females possess a higher integrative orientation and more positive attitudes towards L2 learning than their male counterparts (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001; Yang, 2003; Kissau, 2006; Mori & Gobel, 2006; Kormos & Csizér, 2008, cited in Ambu Saidi Al-Mahrooqi, 2012).

Yang (2003), in his study about the motivational orientation of East Asian language learners, indicated that female students had higher integrative motivational orientation than male students. A study of Japanese learners of English found that female participants had a higher integrative motivation and a stronger desire to study a foreign language than males (Mori & Gobel, 2006). Dörnyei and Clément (2001) adopted the scale by Dörnyei (1998) to assess integrativeness and instrumentality, which are conceptually similar to integrative and instrumental orientation respectively. The results showed that females had significantly higher scores on integrativeness.

Kissau (2006) performed a discriminate function analysis and the results showed that integrative orientation was a relatively accurate predictor of sex of the student, meaning that female students in Canada frequently reported that they wished to learn French to get to know French-speaking people. In contrast, Shaaban and Ghaith's (2000) study of 180 undergraduate Lebanese learners of English found no gender difference in integrative motivation. Ambu Saidi and Al-Mahrooqi (2012) mentioned gender differences in integrative orientation, but there is not yet a consensus on gender differences in instrumental orientation. Studies suggest that males and females differ in general academic motivation and females are more motivated to learn English than males (Mori & Gobel, 2006), which might explain their overall superiority in English (Aslan, 2009). Zare (2010) said female students are more competitive and pay more attention to rules and principles of language learning and take them more seriously. Ahmadi (2011) stated that female students have stronger integrative motivation than instrumental motivation, and male students have stronger instrumental motivation than integrative motivation. He also added it seems that females have a better talent for language than males.

There also appears to be an interaction between gender and language of study (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001; Williams et al., 2002; Kissau, 2006). For example, a study of secondary students learning foreign languages in England found that students considered French as a feminine language of love and German as a masculine language more associated with military history (Williams et al., 2002). As a result, boys exhibited a higher motivation to learn German whereas girls were more motivated to learn French. Similarly, a study of the ninth grade students of French in Canada found that boys felt less capable than girls in French, because they were less interested in

learning about French culture, which boys tended to view as girlish (Kissau, 2006). Even boys who were good at French and liked it frequently gave up studying the language due to their concerns about societal perception. Dörnyei and Clément's (2001) study of Hungarian adolescents' motivation also demonstrated a gender preference on choices of target language, with French and Italian preferred by females, German and Russian preferred by males, and English viewed as gender neutral. Compared to females, males have the same level of instrumental orientation but a higher integrative orientation (Warschauer & Lin, 2011). Bacon and Finneman (1992) and Dörnyei and Clément (2001) reported that females were likely to have a higher instrumental motivation while Shaaban and Ghaith (2000) and Yang (2003) did not see any differences in instrumental motivation between males and females. Prior research (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Dörnyei & Clément, 2001; Yang, 2003; Mori & Gobel, 2006) reported that males have a lower integrative orientation than females (cited in Warschauer & Lin, 2011).

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

The study was conducted on group of 80 Iranian EFL female students studying English from high school to university level in schools and universities in the north of Iran. Among 80 students who participated in this study, 32(40%) were high school students and 48(60%) were university students. The fact that all subjects pursued knowledge in different levels from high school to university level provided a variety of opinions about their EFL learning. All of the participants with the age range of 16 to 24 years old had already learnt English for at least three years in junior high school.

4.2. Instruments

This research utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. Three instruments were used in this study: The first instrument was Quick Placement Test, to determine the proficiency level of the participants. This test was developed by the Local Examination Syndicate at the University of Cambridge. This quick placement test is used as a widely recognized reliable and valid test which has been pretested and validated by more than 19,000 students in 6 countries (Oxford Online Placement Test) to determine proficiency levels of university participants. The second instrument was Instrumental Motivation Scale of the original 5-point Likert Scale format of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and Clement et al, (1985). The motivation test was administered three times to find out the rise and fall of the students' motivation. In connection with quantitative methods, an interview was used. The questionnaires were initially used for collecting rough data, and semi-structured interviews were conducted in the final stage to deepen the understanding and

interpretation of the results regarding the rise and fall of female students' motivation at different levels of language proficiency.

4.3. Procedures

The data collection occurred over a period of one academic semester. The data collection was done by three instruments: a proficiency test, a motivation questionnaire, and an interview. The proficiency test administered was Quick Placement Test, which included 60 items. The motivation test was administered three times during an academic semester. After the administration of the third motivation questionnaire, the students were interviewed about their motivation on the rise and fall of their motivation in the form of a semi-structured interview. Besides, there were three questions at the end of the interview that specified the reasons of the rise and fall of students' motivation. The purpose and different terms of the questionnaire were explained before the distribution by their teachers. During the completion process of the questionnaire, the teacher helped the respondents to understand all parts. Students were informed that the information they give would be kept confidential and be used for research purposes only. Before the administration of the instruments, the researcher added six demographic questions including name, age, semester, and average, on top of the first page of questionnaire. Then the students' answers to the questionnaires and the interview were codified and fed into the computer to be compared to the scores in the language proficiency test.

5. Results & Discussion

To reach the objectives of the present study, the learners took the proficiency test. In order to place the participants in three groups of low, intermediate, and advanced, descriptive statistics was used on the participant's proficiency test scores. Table 5.1 presents the basic statistical description for the participants' language proficiency scores.

Table 5.1. Descriptive Statistics on the Participants' Proficiency Test Scores

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
proficiency scores	80	27	20	47	33.12	6.128
Valid N (listwise)	80					

As Table 5.1 indicates, the proficiency scores ranged from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 47, with the mean of 33.12 and a standard deviation of 6.128. Taking each participant's score, the researcher classified the students into three groups of low (13), intermediate (45), and advanced (22) by considering one standard deviation above and below the mean. Those who scored 39.4 or higher were considered

as advanced; those whose scores were 27 or lower were in the low group, and the students whose scores were between 27 and 39.4 were put in the mid group.

Then, in order to see if there was a significant difference in the mean scores of the three groups, a One-Way ANOVA was run. In other words, the purpose of using ANOVA was to see if the classification of the participants in three levels of proficiency was properly done. Table 5.2 shows the results.

Table 5.2. One-Way ANOVA to Compare Three Levels of Participants' Proficiency Scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2440.370	2	1220.185	1.785E2	.000
Within Groups	526.380	77	6.836		
Total	2966.750	79			

As indicated in Table 5.2, the difference in three levels of participants was meaningful ($P < .05$). This means that the participants were properly classified into three groups. Then, the participants were given a motivation questionnaire which was in a 5-point Likert Scale format. Then, a sheffe test was run to obtain the participants' mean scores in the three levels of language proficiency. Table 5.3 reveals the results as follows.

Table 5.3. Scheffe Test for the Mean Scores of the Participants in the Three Levels

1=low,2=mid,3=high		Subset for alpha = 0.05		
	N	1	2	3
1	13	24.77		
2	45		31.60	
3	22			41.18
Sig		1.000	1.000	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

As Table 5.3 indicates, the low group had a mean score of 24.77, the mid group had a mean score of 31.60, and the high-group mean score was 41.18.

5.1. The First Research Question

The first question was to investigate whether the motivation of Iranian female students at different proficiency levels change over an academic semester. The within-group and between group factors are represented in Tables 5.4 and 5.5, respectively.

Table 5.4. Within Subjects' Factor

Motivation	Dependent Variable
1	M1
2	M2
3	M3

Within subject factor was motivation which was measured three times at different time intervals during a semester. The factor which was going to be taken into account between the participants was their proficiency level, which is presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5. Between Subjects' Factor

		N
1=low,2=mid,3=high	1	13
	2	45
	3	22

The between group comparison was to be made on the participants' scores at three levels of language proficiency. A repeated measure ANOVA was run and the results were presented and analyzed based on Wilks' Lambda. Table 5.6 shows the results of the comparison of the three levels of proficiency scores at different motivation intervals.

Table 5.6. Multivariate Tests in Repeated Measure ANOVA to Compare the Rise and Fall of Motivation in Three Levels of Proficiency Scores at Different Intervals

	Effect	Value	F	df	Error df	Sig.
Motivation	Pillai's Trace	.475	3.434E1 ^a	2.000	76.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.525	3.434E1 ^a	2.000	76.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.904	3.434E1 ^a	2.000	76.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.904	3.434E1 ^a	2.000	76.000	.000
Motivation * level	Pillai's Trace	.174	3.665	4.000		.007
	Wilks' Lambda	.826	3.807E0 ^a	4.000		.006
	Hotelling's Trace	.210	3.945	4.000		.004
	Roy's Largest Root	.210	8.100E0 ^b	2.000	77.000	.001

As Table 5.6 indicates, in the second row of Multivariate Tests, the value for Wilks' Lambda is .52, with a probability value of .000 ($p < .05$). The p value is less than .05; therefore, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in the participants' motivational level at time intervals. This suggests that there was a change in the

students' motivational level at different time intervals.

Then, to see the possible effect of proficiency level, in the second part of Multivariate Tests, where the interaction between proficiency and motivation levels are taken into account, the value for Wilks' Lambda is .82, with a probability value of .006 ($p < .05$). The p value is less than .05;

therefore, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between proficiency and motivation level. This suggests that there was a significant change in the participants' motivation across different proficiency levels. In order to see if the obtained results were statistically significant or just accidental, a summary of the test of within-subjects contrasts is presented as follows.

Table 5.7. Within-group Contrast to Compare Three Levels of Proficiency and Motivation Score in Time Intervals

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Motivation	38.526	1	38.526	5.002E1	.000
	13.053	1	13.053	1.013E1	.002
Motivation * level	5.698	2	2.849	3.699	.029
	14.710	2	7.355	5.708	.005
Error(Motivation)	59.302	77	.770		
	99.215	77	1.289		

As Table 5.7 indicates, in the test of within-subjects contrasts, the probability value is .000 ($p < .05$) for both the motivation level separately and the interaction between motivation proficiency level. In both cases the p value is less than .05; therefore, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant change in the level of participants' motivation during a period of time. In other words, students' motivation is not fixed and it is subject to fluctuations over an academic semester. Regarding the interaction between motivation and proficiency level, as the probability value is .029 ($p < .05$), one can conclude that there is a statistically significant change in the motivation level across different language proficiency groups. This suggests that students at different levels of language proficiency experienced changes in their level of motivation.

As it was indicated, there was a statistically significant difference in the motivation level across different language proficiency groups over an academic semester. This suggested that students at different levels of language proficiency experienced changes in their level of motivation. The result of this study were in line with the results of Campbell's study (n.d.) which asserted that motivation is diverse, complex, and undergoes many fluctuations. Her results showed that L2 learning motivation changes and fluctuates over an academic semester, confirming that 'within the context of institutionalized learning ... the common experience would seem to be motivational flux rather than stability'. Once language study had started, however, participants received greater ongoing motivation from enjoyment and satisfaction derived from the L2-learning environment. The result of the present study was in support of Vaezi's (2008) study. The result of her study showed that the majority of the students reported that they had actually become more motivated to learn English. Most of them believed that after entering university, they had realized the importance of English for becoming more successful in their education, But due to some reasons (e.g. the heavy burden of their own courses, time limitation)

they had become less motivated to learn English. The finding of this study was in line with the study of Sheibani(2012) who reported that the majority of the students were highly motivated to learn English. And the students had a higher degree of instrumental motivation than the integrative one. Further, she reported that learners had become less motivated to learn English mainly because of the heavy burden of their major courses and time limitation.

5.2. The Second Research Question

To answer the second research question stating *Is there any relationship between female students' language proficiency score and the rise and fall in their motivation*, Pearson Correlation was conducted. Table 5.8 shows Pearson correlation coefficients between motivation and language proficiency.

Table 5.8. Pearson Correlation between Motivation and Language Proficiency

		1=low,2=mid,3=high	Motivation first time	Motivation second time	Motivation third time
1=low,2=mid,3=high	Pearson Correlation	1	.589**	.547**	.575**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	80	80	80	80

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

As indicated in Table 5.8, Pearson correlation coefficients between participants' motivation scores at the first time and language proficiency is 0.58 with the P value of 0.00 which is less than the significant level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Moreover, according to the correlation coefficient which is positive and the gradient of the fit line in Figure 5.1, the relationship between the above-mentioned variables is positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between the participants' first motivation scores and their language proficiency score that means by increasing the learners' motivation (independent variable), the scores of learners' language proficiency (dependant variable) increases, too.

Table 5.8 also shows that Pearson correlation coefficient between the participants' second motivation score and language proficiency scores is 0.54 with the P value of 0.00 which is less than the significant level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Moreover, according to the correlation coefficient which is positive and the gradient of the fit line in Figure 5.2, the relationship between second motivation and language proficiency scores is positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between the second time motivation and language proficiency, that means by increasing the learners' motivation (independent variable), the scores of learners' language proficiency (dependant variable) increases too.

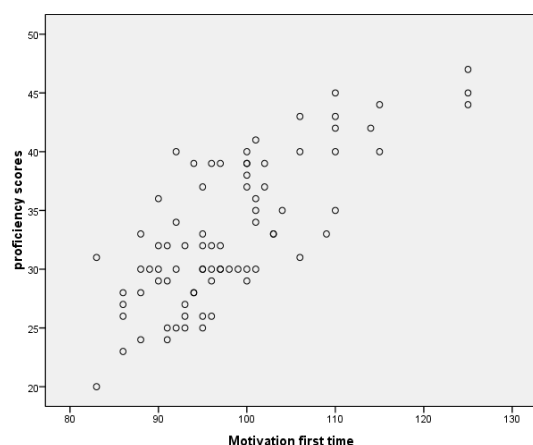


Figure 5.1 Scattergram for the Correlation between First Motivation and Proficiency

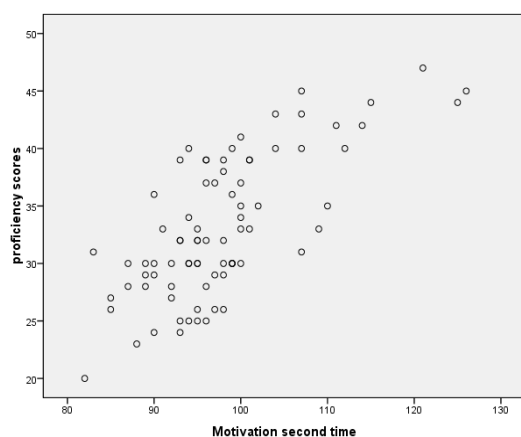


Figure 5.2 Scattergram for the Correlation between Second Motivation and Proficiency Scores

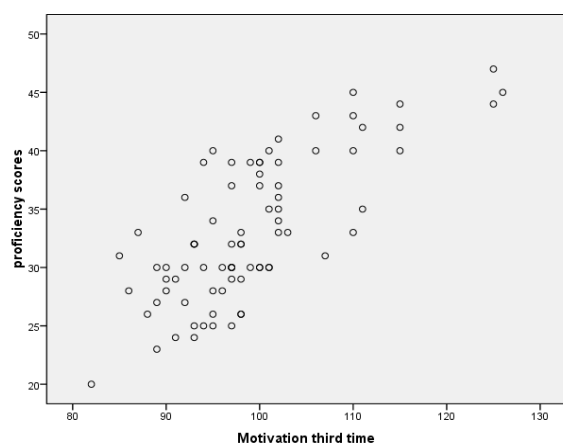


Figure 5.3 Scattergram for the Correlation between the Third Motivation and Proficiency Scores

In addition, Table 5.8 shows that Pearson correlation coefficients between third time motivation and language proficiency scores is 0.57 with the P value of 0.00, which is less than the significant level of $\alpha=0.05$. Moreover, as the correlation coefficient is positive and the gradient of the fit

line in Figure 5.3 is straight, the relationship between the motivation and proficiency variables is positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between the third time motivation and language proficiency, which means by increasing the learners' motivation (independent variable), the scores of learners' language proficiency (dependant variable) increases too.

According to scattering of the dots in the above scatter diagrams, it is clear that as the scores of motivation increase, the scores of language proficiency increases too, which shows a positive relationship between the variables. In other words, the more motivated the students are, the higher their scores of language proficiency will be. The findings of the current study indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between the participants' motivation scores and their language proficiency score, which means by increasing the learners' motivation (independent variable), the scores of learners' language proficiency (dependant variable) increases, too. Chihara and Oller's (1978) findings are against those of the present study. They found no significant correlation between integrative motivation and EFL proficiency as measured by the cloze test. Similarly, their instrumental motivation scarcely correlated with EFL proficiency. The findings of this study stood in contrast with Strong (1984) who studied the relationship between integrative motivations and acquired second language proficiency among a group of Spanish-speaking kindergarteners in America.

He found no positive relationship between integrative motivation and acquired English proficiency. There were some other scholars who found a negative correlation between integrative motivation and language proficiency (e.g., Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Lukmani, 1972; Oller, Hudson, & Liu, 1977). The results of the present study were in support of Matsumoto's (2009) study. He investigated the interaction effect of motivation and proficiency level. However, there was no significant interaction effect. That is, the frequency of strategy use of students in each proficiency level group increased similarly as their motivation levels went up. The findings of this study were in line with the study of Hsu (n.d.). Females' learning attitudes were significantly superior to males'. There was a significant correlation between attitude and proficiency. Also, a correlation was observed between motivation and proficiency. The interaction affected among learning attitude, motivation and effort on proficiency were insignificant. Pearson product-moment correlation analyses revealed that there was a significant correlation between motivation and proficiency.

This study showed the same results compared to Bagherzadeh and Azizi's (2012) study. They reported that there was a significant difference between the level of English language proficiency and motivation. In addition, English proficiency level had a significant effect on the motivation of non-English major EFL students. The more proficient participants reported holding strong beliefs in the

category of motivation and expectations.

The results of this study were in line with the results of Langroudi and Amiri's (2013) study who found that motivation has a direct effect on the target language proficiency; it is a strong predictor of substantial foreign language proficiency as well. In other words, there was a significant positive relationship between academic motivation and language proficiency.

The findings were also in line with that of other study conducted in Iran. For example Ghanea, Zeraat Pishhe, and Ghanea (2011) investigated the relationship between the learners' integrative and instrumental motivation and English proficiency among Iranian EFL learners of Shiraz Azad University. The main result was found as follows: There was a significant relationship between the integrative motivation and instrumental motivation with English proficiency among EFL learners

These findings also were in accordance with Fazel and Ahmadi's (2011) study who carried out empirical studies in different contexts showing the relationship between instrumental motivation and writing proficiency among Iranian IELTS candidates. Findings of the study indicated that there was a significant relationship between both instrumental and interogative motivation and writing proficiency among Iranian IELTS candidates.

5.3. The Third Research Question

The third question was to investigate what the possible reasons behind the rise and fall of motivation for students at different proficiency levels are. A description method was used to show participants' opinions about the questions. In response to the interview questions asking EFL learners to clarify their background, learning motivation and fluctuation of motivation, the responses varied, and they were classified as follows.

Part I: Learners' Background and Learning Motivation

There were 80 Iranian EFL female students studying English from high school to university level in schools and universities in the north of Iran. Among 80 students who participated in this study, 32(40%) were high school students and 48(60%) were university students. The fact that all subjects pursued knowledge in different levels from high school to university level provided a variety of opinions about their EFL learning. All of the participants with the age range of 16 to 24 years old had already learnt English for at least three years in junior high school.

English is taught in guidance schools, high schools and universities in Iran. It has the status of a compulsory subject for Iranian students. English language, as the first foreign language is now a part of our educational system commencing from the second grade of guidance school. It is included in the curricula of each school year. In response to the students' ideas about their English course at school, most of the students (85%) stated that learning English is difficult for them. Some of them believed that the learning and teaching of English has long been a difficult task for both

EFL students and teachers in Iran due to reasons such as lack of resources and little contact with the target language. They mostly blamed the educational system; they asserted that the system of the English language teaching in Iran is totally defective. It has not been revised for almost 25 years until quite recently. Another problem concerning these students was that, their secondary school teachers and university instructors were not competent enough to work on four skills.

Yet, another pressing drawback the students mentioned in relation to the educational system was the short hours which did not let teachers and instructors work on four skills adequately. Some others believed that language learning is difficult because of the boring teaching styles teachers have. Of course, there were some other students who blamed themselves. In other words, they believed that they were not talented; they were not interested in learning languages, and they were not studious enough.

However, there were few students (15%) who believed that learning English is not difficult for them. They had positive attitudes due to their enjoyment of English language learning and were interested in knowing about other people's culture who use English. Even a few of them had a strong affection for English; consequently, English was both enjoyable and easy for them.

Another question which was posed was about what was the motivation to learn English from the onset of learning English until now. The answers to this question were really different. Some of the most common motivational reasons were raised in the following statements:

1. *I have to use English in my future career.*
2. *I want to get good position and income.*
3. *I want to broaden my knowledge.*
4. *I want to know and communicate with foreigners.*
5. *I want to learn various events around the world.*
6. *I can read textbook and understand English movie, video or radio program.*
7. *I want to search for English information on the internet.*
8. *I want to get good grade and further my study.*
10. *I want to travel to English speaking countries.*
11. *Learning English can give me a sense of achievement.*
12. *The knowledge in English can enhance the achievement in various aspects.*
13. *An educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.*
14. *I want to keep in touch with foreign friends and acquaintance.*
15. *I want to learn their culture and various English speaking people.*
16. *I want to understand English arts, literatures, and history.*

As for the fluctuation of their motivation, the majority of the students (70%) reported that they had actually become more motivated to learn. Most of them believed that after entering university they realized the importance of English for becoming more successful in their education, especially for using the Internet and finding scientific sources

concerning their majors and studying reference books and journals. Especially those whose major was computer needed English for making use of up-to-date computer and engineering technologies to be prepared for their future jobs. As stated, only 11% of the students' attitudes and motivation toward English did not change much before or after they entered the university. And the rest of them (19%) reported that they had become less motivated to learn English mainly because of their other courses and time limitation. In fact, the burden of their studies caused many of the students to have fewer chances to access English and make effort to continue to learn the language. As a result, their English motivation would have probably decreased.

When asked if there was any relationship between their language proficiency level and the rise and fall in their motivation for learning English, almost all the students believed that, there was a relationship between their language proficiency level and the rise and fall in their motivation for learning English. In other words, they reported that as their language proficiency is high, their motivation increases, too. But when their language proficiency is low, their motivation decreases, too.

With respect to the possible reasons behind the rise and fall of their motivation for learning English, five demotivating factors were identified among the students' responses: 1) learning contents, materials, and facilities, 2) attitude towards English speaking community, 3) the teacher, 4) experience of failure, and 5) attitude towards second language learning.

The first one was the most prominent demotive in L2 learning. This indicated that the uninteresting topics of the learning materials and the learning contents including the grammar-based contents are demotivating in L2 learning. Furthermore, the results indicated that the lack of facilities such as videos, tapes, DVDs, CDs, and computers in language classes are demotivating, too.

'Attitude towards English speaking community' was the second source of students' demotivation. Negative attitudes towards L2 community affect the motivation to learn the target language. This may be related to their socio-cultural and religious affiliation. Also the latest American colony and campaign against some countries in the area might affect their motivation.

'The teacher' (their teaching methods and techniques and presenting the course contents, evaluating students' performance as well as their behavior in the class) was the third source of demotivation in the students' English learning experiences. 'Experience of Failure' was the fourth source of students' demotivation. This demotive included item related to the students' low or disappointing scores in examinations and their inability to memorize expressions and vocabulary. It was found that students' experience of failure in the language learning negatively affected their motivation. In fact, students' experience of failure in language learning leads to the loss of interest toward second language learning. Finally, 'Attitude towards Second Language Learning' was the last source of demotivation. In

fact, students' negative attitude towards second language learning was not such an influential demotive in the present study. This factor included students' attitudes toward the compulsory nature of language learning and the purpose of language learning. The compulsory nature of language learning decreased the students' motivation because they had to learn the language to achieve some instrumental ends such as passing examination or entering university rather than learning about or interacting with the second language community.

The result of the present study was in support of Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi. (2011). They reported five demotivating factors in their study: 1) Learning Contents, Materials, and Facilities, 2) Attitude towards English Speaking Community, 3) The Teacher, 4) Experience of Failure, and 5) Attitude towards Second Language Learning. The 'Learning Contents, Materials, and Facilities' was the most prominent demotive in L2 learning.

The findings are in line with the study of Dornyei (1998) who related students' demotivation to the learning material and contents. It was also in agreement with the results of the study by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) indicated that learning contents and materials, which focused on grammar and teaching materials such as textbooks, were the salient sources of students' demotivation.

The findings of the present study were in agreement with Meshkat and Hassani (2012) who reported that inadequate school facilities was a strongly demotivating factor. That is, insufficient school facilities whether on the part of schools or teachers can highly discourage students in learning English.

6. Conclusion

This study intended to investigate the rise and fall of Iranian female students' motivation at different levels of language proficiency from high school to university. It was also an attempt to know whether the motivation of Iranian female students at different proficiency levels changed over an academic semester. Another objective was to find out if there was any relationship between female students' language proficiency score and the rise and fall in their motivation. And what the possible reasons behind the rise and fall of motivation for students at different proficiency level were. The analyses of the data demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference in the motivation level across different language proficiency groups over an academic semester. This suggested that students at different levels of language proficiency experienced changes in their level of motivation. The findings of this study showed that negative experiences did not always result in overall demotivation. Overall demotivation was most likely avoided when participants consciously distanced themselves from the demotivating experience. To go further, findings of the current study indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between the participants' motivation scores and their

language proficiency score, which means by increasing the learners' motivation (independent variable), the scores of learners' language proficiency (dependant variable) increases, too. The last outcome of this study was the fact that there were five demotivating factors responsible for the rise and fall of motivation for students at different proficiency level including; learning contents, materials, and facilities; attitude towards English speaking community; the teacher; experience of failure; and, attitude towards second language learning. Among these, learning contents, materials, and facilities was the most prominent demotive in L2 learning. And attitude towards Second Language Learning was the least important source of demotivation.

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