

## The Role of Self-assessment in Promoting Iranian EFL Learners' motivation in Reading English Texts

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**Abstract:** The role of language learning and testing has been paid remarkable attention by scholars. In addition, there is a general concept in the review of literature that motivation is one of the potential learner characteristics. The purpose of this present research was to explore the role of reading skills as a self-assessment technique in promoting Iranian EFL learners' motivation in reading English texts. The participants were 60 intermediate students in two groups at Rasht Azad University majoring English. The students in the experimental and control groups were all exposed to the same content and instructional method, and they had the same instructor. There was only one difference. The students in the experimental group self-assessed themselves, while the students in the control group were assessed by their instructor. The results revealed that self-assessment has no role in promoting the learners' motivation in reading English texts. [Ramin Rahmany, Mohammad Taghi Hassani, Vahid Noroozi Larsari. **The Role of Self-assessment in Promoting Iranian EFL Learners' motivation in Reading English Texts.** *Life Sci J* 2013; 10(7s):983-988] (ISSN: 1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 160

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### 1. Introduction

According to Harris (1997), it is necessary to assess the students' performance via using a variety of assessment techniques. In fact, He also believes that assessment is a potential key for language learning, enabling students to check their needs and focus on learner's perceptions of progress. However, in traditional classrooms, which are prevalent in Iran, the teacher is the only evaluator (Haddi Tamjid & Birjandi, 2010). Such evaluation is acceptable in case of tests whose items have one correct answer, but in performance tests, such as writing compositions and reading tests, the evaluation is not so straight-forward (Haddi Tamjid & Birjandi, 2010). On the other word, motivation is considered as a key element in the success of language learning (Nakanishi, 2002). Dörnyei (2000) argues that "motivation provides the primary impetus to embark upon learning, and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (p.425 as cited in Haddi Tamjid & Birjandi, 2010). Therefore, the intent of the present study is to see if self-assessment can have a significant role in promoting Iranian EFL language learners' motivation in reading English texts.

### 2. Review of the related literature

#### 2.1 Assessment

According to Wang and Wang (2007), the term 'assessment' comes from 'ad sedere' – means to sit down beside (as cited in Haddi Tamjid & Birjandi, 2010). They also discussed that the etymology of assessment is primarily based on the learner guidance

and feedback. Many methodologists have defined the definition of assessment in various ways. For example, Erwin (1991) defines assessment as "the process of defining, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development" (p.14). According to Angelo (1995), "assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards" (p.7). According to Richards and Schmidt (2002), assessment is a systematic approach to gather information and make inferences about students' performance.

Airasian (1994) defined assessment as gathering, separating and explaining information to make decisions on student performance. He also maintains that "in classroom, assessment can be done conducted to diagnose student problems, to judge their academic performance, to provide feedback to student and to plan instruction" (p.16).

#### 2.2 Self-assessment

As one form of alternative assessment, self-assessment has achieved remarkable attention in recent years in order to emphasis on measures of learners' language competencies (Naeini, 2011). Self – assessment refers to monitoring learners' performance on a language learning task after completing or checking their success in using a language (Richards

and Schmidt, 2002). They also maintain that self-assessment is an example of a meta-cognitive strategy in second language learning. According to Mousavi (1995), self-assessment is the students' own evaluation of their language ability, in terms of their capability to use the language in different situations. Harris (1997) argued that self-assessment is the key element in language learning which helps the learner towards autonomy which the students can monitor his/her progress his / her individual needs. Liang (2006) defined the term self-assessment as follows:

- Self-assessment plays as a central role in a learner-based curriculum.
- Self-assessment is different from teacher-assessment for different evaluation purposes.
- Self-assessment is an ability to evaluate learning progress and learning effectiveness.

### 2.3 Autonomy vs self-assessment

Many scholars have been making an attempt to define the term of autonomy from different aspects. In educational context, scholars and educators have various opinions on autonomy (Zareai, 2009).

According to Richards & Schmidt (2002), autonomy is the principle which the learners should assume a range of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn. Zareai (2009) maintains that the term “autonomy” and “learner autonomy” are an intimate and familiar word within the context of language learning and teaching.

With respect to the effect of self-assessment on promoting the students' autonomy, Nedzinskaite et al., (2006) made an experimental research on the impact of self-assessment on promoting the students' autonomy at the University of Kaunas. They were dealt with the students' achievements in language learning through self-assessment. Based on the obtained results, they stressed achievements in enhancing language skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening comes from the students themselves. Based on the obtained results, Nedzinskaite et al. (2006) believe that self-assessment as important instrument in the classroom enhance students autonomy and language skills through making students more active in evaluating their own progress and what they have learned.

In same way, Hadidi Tamjid and Birjandi (2011) investigated the changes in learner autonomy by means of journal writing as a technique of self-assessment. What was reveal by the results was that weekly journals helped students improve their autonomy through reflection on their learning, self-awareness, and self-evaluation.

Hadidi Tamjid and Birjandi (2011) also have conducted another research entitled their paper “Fostering learner autonomy through self-and peer

–assessment” at the Centre of Foreign Language at the University of Tabriz. Their paper was to explore how self-and peer –assessment as compared to teacher –assessment can promote Iranian EFL learners' autonomy. Based on the obtained findings and result, they found that the incorporation of self-and peer –assessment could have positive outcome with regard to the students' autonomy in writing classes. There was enhancement in learner autonomy, as they did not get any teacher feedback through the experiment, and had to depend only on their own evaluations and their peers.

In general, there seems to be few studies which have investigated the impact of self-assessment on improving learners' autonomy by various researchers. Considering the pertinent literature, it becomes obvious that autonomous learners need to develop a sense of awareness and self-reflection.

### 2.3 Advantages of self-assessment

According to some researchers such as Coombe & Canning (2002) have discussed the advantages of self-assessment. They discussed the advantages of self-assessment as follows:

- Enhancing learning.
- Raising learners' awareness of their own learning.
- Improving the goal orientation of individual learners.
- Increasing range of assessments into effective domains.
- Declining the burden of assessment placed on teachers.
- Improving learner's autonomy.

Harris (1997) maintains that one of the main reasons for introducing self-assessment, That is, self-assessment is a key learning strategy for autonomous language learning, which enables the students to check their progress and relate learning to individual needs.

Dickson (1987) proposes three reasons for using self-assessment in language learning. First, Self-assessment leads toward evaluation, which is as an important educational objective in its own place. Secondly, Self-assessment plays a vital role of self-determination. Thirdly, Self-assessment is one way of reducing the assessment burden on the teacher. Oscarsson (1989) also gives six rationales for self-assessment procedures. First, he emphasizes that self-assessment enhances learning. In fact, It gives learners training in evaluation which has advantageous results for language learning and thinking skills. Secondly, it raises the level of awareness of both students and teachers of perceived levels of abilities (as cited in Haddi Tamjid & Birjandi, 2010). Through self-assessment, learners are encouraged to look at course content more carefully, and develop evaluative

attitudes toward what and how they learn. According to Blanche (1988) stated that students need to know what their abilities are, how much progress they have made and what they can do with their skills they required. Thirdly, self-assessment is highly motivating with regard to goal-orientation. Learners gain knowledge of learning goals through reflection. Fourth, the involvement of learners in the assessment process results in the learner's broader perspective within the area of assessment. Fifth, by practicing self-assessment, students take part in their own evaluation, sharing the burden of assessment with their teacher. Finally, self-assessment may have long-term benefits, as one of the main aspects of autonomous language learning is the ability to assess the progress which is made. According to Dickinson (1987: p.136), "self-assessment is a necessary part of self-direction."

Liang (2006) also in summarizing the benefits of self-assessment notes that self-assessment through increasing learners' knowledge of their learning goals and their learning needs enhances their motivation and goal orientation.

#### 2.4 Motivation

Many definitions of motivation have been suggested over the decades. Most scholars have defined motivation in different ways. According to many researchers, there are so many definitions of what motivation is and what isn't (Nakanishi, 2002). The word "motivation" appears to be simple and easy but it's difficult to define. It seems to have been impossible for methodologists to reach opinion on a single definition. According to Covington (1998) states that "motivation", like the concept of gravity, is easier to describe—in terms of its outward, observable effects—than it is to define. Of course, this has not stopped people from trying it" (p.425).

According to Rahman et al. (2010), motivation is a very common concept and is regarded as important action, and is a concept widely used in variety of situations.

A few definitions of motivation were found during the research process:

- According to the Macmillan's dictionary (1979), to motivate somebody, means to provide with an incentive; move to effort or desire.
- Nakanishi (2002) states that motivation is the most important element in language learning.
- Keller (1983) maintains that motivation is the degree of the wide choices individuals make and the degree of effort or attempt they will put in action.

Moreover, when we read or hear the word "motivation", many words or expressions come across to our minds: Goal – desire – will – effect – reward.

Indeed, our daily life has been taken up by motivational issues.

In addition, Kanfer (1998) states that that motivation is "psychological mechanisms governing the direction, and persistence of actions not due solely to individual differences in ability or to overwhelming environmental demands that force action" (p.12).

### 3. The present study

#### 3.1. Research Participants

The participants of the present study were 60 intermediate TEFL students studying at Islamic Azad University of Rasht. There were two groups of students, 30 in the experimental group, and 30 in the control group. The students in the experimental and control groups were all exposed to the same content and instructional method, and they had the same instructor. There was only one difference, i.e., the students in the experimental group self-assessed themselves, while the students in the control group were assessed by their instructor.

#### 3.2. Instrumentation

In order to collect data, Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), as well as five reading comprehension tests involving questions that addressed one particular reading skill was used in the present study.

3.2.1 Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB): A questionnaire prepared by Gardner's (Gardner, 2004) to assess the subjects' degree of motivation. It includes 72 items and in front of each item six alternatives including 'Strongly Disagree', 'Moderately Disagree', 'Slightly Disagree', 'Slightly Agree', 'Moderately Agree', and 'Strongly Agree' are presented. The participants are instructed to answer each item by putting an underline or circle around these alternatives as quickly as possible.

#### 3.3. Procedure

A motivation questionnaire was given to the learners to judge the level of their motivation. From the second session on, the regular class teaching syllabus contains a teaching and practicing section on one of the reading skills for at least five consequent sessions. After that these two groups were taught the same skills and then a reading comprehension test was administrated. The students are required to assess their own mastery of the reading skill taught in each session on a 1-5 Likert scale.

The students of the experimental group was assessed by the student themselves as well as the instructor, but the students of the control group also received instruction on the same reading skills and practice those skills but there was no self-assessment given to them. Instead, traditional teacher-made methods of assessment such as multiple-choice are used to assess them.

At the end of the term, a post – treatment

questionnaire was given to these groups to see whether self-assessment had any impact on the motivation of the learners.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the experimental and control groups were compared to ensure there were no significant differences between them in demographics. The measurement was compared for the control and

experimental groups both pre test and post test.

### 4. Results and Discussion

To find out the impact of self-assessment on motivation, the scores in the questionnaire were analyzed. The particular analysis used was paired sample t-test. Within both experimental and control groups, this test was run to check the probable effect of self-assessment on promoting learners' motivation.

**Table 1:** T-test for experimental and control group

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pre	experimental	30	3.9633	.18975	.03464
	control	30	4.0220	.38809	.07086
post	experimental	30	4.1514	.22266	.04065
	control	30	4.3820	.38149	.06965

As it can be seen, table 1 illustrates the results for the experimental group. The results show a significant difference between the scores of pre-motivation questionnaire (M=3.96, SD=.189) and post-motivation questionnaire (M=4.16, SD=.225),  $t(29) = -6.713$ ,  $p < .01$ . In the control group, the results show a significant difference between the scores of pre-motivation questionnaire (M=4.02, SD=.388) and post-

motivation questionnaire (M=4.36, SD=.381),  $t(29) = -8.713$ ,  $p < .01$ . Therefore, it should be noted that the mean difference between the scores of the motivation questionnaire in the experimental and the control group was not significant at the beginning of the term due to the independent sample t-test. The following discussions indicate tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2:** Paired Samples Test for the experimental group

		Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pre - post	-.35993	.24393	.04454	-.45102	-.26884	-8.082	29	.000

In the above table, the Paired Sample Comparison test for the motivation scores of pre-test and post-test is given for the experimental group. This test is used to illustrate the impact of an intervention.

As the results indicate, a significant number, (sig. (2-tailed), in this test is 0.000 and lower than threshold is 0.05. Therefore; there are significant differences between the motivation scores of the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group. By looking up to the upper limit which is -.13755 and the lower limit which is -.25808, we found out that for the confidence interval differences of 95%, both limits are negative.

Thus; there are significant difference between the motivation scores' mean in the post-test, and the motivation scores' mean in the pre-test in the experimental group, and the mean in the post-test is higher than pre-test. Therefore, by doing this experiment, the motivation score's individuals increase in the experimental group. Statistic value, t, for this test is -6.713, and since a number of people were 30, so degree of freedom (df) is 29.

**Table 3:** Paired Samples Test for the control group

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pre - post	-.19782	.16140	.02947	-.25808	-.13755	-6.713	29	.000

In the above table, the paired sample comparison test for the motivation scores of pre-test and post-test is given for the control group. As it is specified, a significant number, (Sig. (2-tailed), in this test is 0.000 and lower than threshold is 0.05. Therefore; there are significant differences between the motivation scores of the pre-test and post-test in the control group. By

looking up to the upper limit which is 0.26884 and the lower limit which is 0.45102, we found out that for the confidence interval differences of 95%, both limits are negative. Thus; there are significant differences between the motivation scores' mean in the post-test, and the motivation scores' mean in the pre-test in the control group, and the mean in the

post-test is higher than pre-test. Statistic value, t, for this test is 8.082, and since a number of people were 30, so degree of freedom (df) is 29. Thus; although, the control group has not been interfered, but the results show that the motivation scores have been changed in the two stages, and it can indicate that the interferences

results in the test group that were carried out in the previous chart, are not due to self-assessment, and arise from another factor which is unknown and could have influenced both test group and control group.

**Table 4: Independent Samples Test experimental and control group**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	M Diff	Std. Err Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
pre-questionnaire	Equal variances assumed	6.226	.015	-.744	58	.460	-.05872	.07887	-.21660	.09916
	Equal variances not assumed			-.744	42.115	.461	-.05872	.07887	-.21787	.10044

As it can be seen in the table 4, the results show that the difference between the scores of the pre-motivation questionnaire in experimental group (M=3.96, SD=.189) is not significantly different from

the control group (M=4.02, SD=.388),  $t(42.115) = -.744$ ,  $p > .05$ . Based on the results in above tables, we can inference that self-assessment does not have any effect on promoting learners' motivation.

**Table 5: Paired Samples Test for the assessment of experimental group**

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		M	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	skillscore – self-asesment	-1.03333	2.42804	.44330	-1.93998	-.12669	-2.331	29	.027

In the above table, the paired sample comparison test for self-assessment and teacher-assessment are given. As the results indicate, a significant number, (Sig. (2-tailed), in this test is .027 and lower than threshold is 0.05. Therefore; there are significant differences between the self-assessment and teacher-assessment in the experimental group. By looking up to the upper limit which is -.12669 and the lower limit which is -1.93998, we found out that for the confidence interval differences of 95%, both limits are negative. Thus; there are significant differences between self-assessment scores and scores' mean teacher-assessment in the experimental group. Therefore; scores' mean self-assessment is higher than scores' mean teacher-assessment. Statistic value, t, for this test is -2.331, and since a number of people were 30, so degree of freedom (df) is 29.

### 5. Conclusion

The study examined the role of self-assessment in promoting Iranian EFL motivation as measured by improvement on multiple-choice in reading skills and constructed response tests. Despite the positive benefits cited in the research, this study yielded no conclusive evidence to suggest that the self-assessment have a strong effect on promoting Iranian EFL motivation. Although the researcher did not come to a specific conclusion to this study, it is hoped that other

researchers can achieve a specific conclusion about the role of self-assessment in promoting Iranian EFL motivation with other settings, further participants, and under another circumstance in the future. However, since self-assessment is performed through complex processes which are affected by many uncontrollable factors, there still remains much disagreement in the discussion with respect to the effective use of self-assessment. Despite a number of difficulties in appropriately implementing self-assessment, the ways in which we resolve these issues will certainly provide valuable insights into the nature of language teaching, learning, and assessment. When these challenges are met, it is hoped that language institutions and classroom teachers will consider the potential of self-assessment as both a valid and reliable supplement to traditional assessment, and its effective role in promoting self-directed learning.

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