Motivational Fluctuations during Task-Supported Language Teaching: The Case of Young Iranian EFL Learners

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A B S T R A C T

Tasks have been given an ever-increasing attention on the part of researchers in the recent decades, particularly in relation to second language acquisition research. A highly influential factor in task performance, motivation, seems to have been neglected by educational researchers, and this negligence toward the role of motivation gets more prominence while considering the part played by motivational changes during task-supported instruction. Informed by this alleged gap in studies on the role of motivation on task performance, the researchers in the current study strived to probe the dynamic character of foreign language motivation during task-supported language instruction both within single lessons and sequences of lessons over a period of six weeks. Having chosen a sample of 7 young adults, the researchers gathered the data by means of: (1) detailed lesson plans, (2) interviews with selected participants conducted after each session during the study, and (3) Motometers filled out at five-minute intervals during a single class to gain information on motivational changes. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of data revealed that language learning motivation changed not only during a single lesson but also from one lesson to the next. Factors responsible for such changes were found to be related to task features, task implementation, and individual differences. The implications of findings are discussed throughout the paper.

Keywords: L2 motivational self-system; motivational changes; process-oriented view of motivation; task-supported language teaching

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Introduction

Since 1980s, English language teaching has revealed a great deal of interest in teaching through tasks, which prepare learners to use language communicatively in real-life situations (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998). Different researchers (e.g., Ellis, 2018) have highlighted the significance of tasks in communicative approach to language teaching.

Moreover, literature on second language acquisition (SLA) indicates that success in acquiring a second language is subject to a number of learner-specific characteristics (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2012) such as attitude, motivation, language aptitude, and empathy (to mention but a few). More specifically, considering the fact that task-supported language teaching (TSLT) is contingent upon learners' language use and performance on tasks, it goes without saying that learners' motivation plays a key role in their performance. Despite the rich body of research on tasks, learners' affective domain and motivational changes have not been addressed adequately in foreign language contexts (Lambert, 2017; Pawlak et al. 2014), in general, and in TSLT, in particular. Different theoretical models have been advanced for the purpose of explaining the role of motivation in SLA (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Similarly, a plethora of studies have shown interest in examining learners' main motives in their learning experience as well as gauging the sustainability of their efforts when involved in motivation-raising activities (Fenyvesi, 2018; Mauludin, 2021; Pawlak, 2012).

Moreover, Boo et al. (2015) pointed out that, due to accessibility issues, L_2 motivation research has concentrated predominantly on tertiary students, while school age is the ideal age for instructed language learning. They stress the need for further research on motivation at the primary and secondary stages of language learning in the instructional context. Though research on young learners is on the rise (e.g., Coyle et al. 2018), very scant research, if any, has addressed young learners' performance on tasks (e.g., Oliver et al. 2017; Shintani, 2016).

According to Lambert (2017), the evaluation of learners' motivational levels and affective responses to instruction constitutes the primary concern for teachers. Moreover, Pawlak et al. (2014) point to the scarcity of research on learners' motivational changes during one lesson and across different lessons. In light of the lack of such research, this study examined the dynamic nature of motivation among students instructed through TSLT both within one single lesson and over successive lessons. Additionally, learners' main motives for learning English were investigated. In contrast to much of the existing research on motivation which examines motivation among tertiary level students, this paper attempted to investigate motivational fluctuations within an under-represented sample, that is, young language learners within the age range of 12-15.

Review of literature

Task-based and task-supported language teaching

Although a multitude of explanations have been offered for the description of tasks (e.g., Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1989; Van den Branden, 2006), the general consensus is that a task is any type of activity that requires authentic language use in order to obtain a goal. Therefore, instances of tasks may include calling a sales center, making a business call, or going to a doctor. While some proponents of task-based language teaching (TBLT), like Long (2015), espouse a true TBLT approach, in which tasks are used as the basis of classroom instruction, some others (e.g., Bygate, 2015; Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis 2007) favor a task-supported approach to the implementation of TBLT.

In the present study, a task-supported approach was applied. The rationale underlying this decision was that due to institutional regulations, the researchers were not allowed to implement a task-based syllabus in its entirety; thus, task-supported methodology appeared to be the best option available. Moreover, as pointed out by Bygate (2015) and Ellis (2009), task-supported approach is an effective way to introduce TBLT to language education due to ease of implementation and non-availability of textbooks centered solely on the use of tasks. Further evidence for the appropriacy of TSLT for EFL contexts can be gleaned from by Shehadeh (2005).

One of the studies investigating individual learners' affective variables in task-based instruction is Ooyoung Pyun (2013). She investigated students' attitudes towards task-based language learning (TBLL) in terms of factors like self-efficacy, motivation and anxiety. In her study, there was a positive correlation between attitudes to TBLL and integrated and instrumental motivation. Anxiety was negatively correlated with attitudes and self-efficacy was revealed to be a strong predictor of attitudes. However, the study looked at motivation from a static point of view, while motivation was proven to fluctuate during a single session and over multiple sessions.

Phung (2016) investigated how affective factors and preferences for two different communicative L_2 tasks contributed to learners' behavioral, cognitive, and social engagement in L_2 use during task completion. Post-task interviews revealed that learners approached tasks with a positive feeling at the presence of optimum cognitive engagement, genuine demand for communication, topic familiarity and personal relevance, learners' positive impression of difficulty level, and their freedom to make their own choices and decisions.

Aubrey (2016) adopted the theory of flow to examine the manifestation of affective and emotional responses during a task-based EFL classroom involving inter-cultural and intra-cultural interactions. All in all, the study pointed to the participants' positive emotional feeling towards inter-cultural contacts which included novel and interesting content and involved interaction with international interlocutors rather than compatriots. Another study which used the theory of flow was the one conducted by Ibrahim and Al-Hoorie (2018). They investigated how the assignment of out-of-class tasks led to the facilitation of flow and the generation of motivation. Factors triggering flow were the formulation of a sense of belonging towards a group and collaborating to attain a shared goal, finding a personal value in the task, and experiencing a high degree of autonomy during task performance. The researchers suggested the application of out-of-class collaborative projects as an effective way to enhance motivation.

Finally, pointing to the lack of adequate research on the role of learners' affect in task performance, Lambert (2017) acknowledged the need to address learners' classroom motivation from a dynamic perspective, which might fluctuate throughout a single lesson. Moreover, in the Iranian context, due to institutional policies and heavy reliance on books and final examinations it is difficult to conceive of a language teaching program based on TBLT, which highlights the importance of TSLT to introduce tasks into language classrooms. Although there are some studies probing how learners' affective responses vary in accordance with task design and task implementation factors (e.g., Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2018; Phung, 2016), there seems to be a paucity of research on how learners' motivational intensity fluctuates on a minute-by-minute basis during a classroom instructed through task-supported language teaching.

Motivation

The dynamic nature of motivation, also referred to as process-oriented view of motivation, has been recognized by a number of motivation researchers (e.g., Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Guo et al. 2020; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Ushioda, 2001; Williams &

Burden, 1997). Process-oriented view of motivation postulates that language learning motivation is subject to change in response to a combination of intricate internal and external factors. These factors include learning environment, the tasks being performed, past experiences, etc., which in turn exert an effect on the maintenance or abandonment of the goals set at the beginning stages of language learning.

Dörnyei's (2009) L_2 motivational self-system can be taken as a quintessential instance of process-oriented approach to motivation. His model includes the following components:

(1) Ideal L_2 self, which encompasses those features desired by learners. This component of Dörnyei's model can help learners decrease the gap between actual and ideal selves, and entails both instrumental and integrative types of motivation.

(2) Ought-to L_2 self, which is connected with the abilities the person thinks s/he needs to possess in order to satisfy external expectations held by others and to avoid possible negative outcomes. This element is associated with extrinsic motivation.

(3) L_2 learning experience, which has to do with context-specific factors and learning experience.

Complex dynamic systems is another theory taking into consideration the changing nature of motivation (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). As Dörnyei et al. (2015) pointed out, complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) acknowledges the situated nature of motivation and helps explain changes in learners' motivation which take place on a daily basis. Additional evidence for the situated and relational nature of motivation can be provided by consulting sources like Taylor (2010). Thus, conducting research through the lens of CDST would help produce a comprehensive picture of how motivation changes in response to a number of learner-internal and learner-external factors.

Empirical research into the dynamic nature of motivation has adopted different theories to account for the dynamic character of motivation in the classroom. For instance, Pawlak (2012) and Pawlak et al. (2014) used L_2 motivational self-system to account for variability in language learning motivation. Both Pawlak (2012) and Pawlak et al. (2014) reported fluctuations in the level of motivation during a single session and over the whole instructional period. However, unlike Pawlak (2012) who claimed the stability of reasons for learning, Pawlak et al. (2014) came up with variability of language learning motives.

Moreover, in a more similar study to the one at hand, Waninge et al. (2014) employed complex dynamic systems theory to trace motivational patterns in language learning. The instruments used in their study consisted of a Motometer to trace temporal changes in motivation, and a questionnaire to assess learners' motivation. The study revealed that learners' motivation tended to demonstrate change within a single session. Furthermore, classroom context was shown to affect learners' motivational level. However, the limited number of participants restricted the possibility of drawing firm conclusions regarding factors affecting motivation.

In much the same way, Kruk (2016) explored the dynamic nature of motivation both in a single lesson and across a series of sessions held over a number of months. Using a variety of data collection tools, including questionnaires, grids, observations and interviews, he concluded that participants' motivation vacillated not only within a lesson but also across lessons over time.

The general insight that can be gleaned from these research findings is that factors contributing to each motivational pattern in language learning classroom are interrelated in a complex way. Thus, it seems impossible to isolate a specific factor and use it as a basis for the prediction of motivational intensity in another classroom. Moreover, research into how motivation changes in

response to tasks, particularly during TSLT is limited. With regard to the fact that task-supported instruction is an appropriate methodology to introduce tasks in foreign language contexts (e.g., Shehadeh, 2005), it seems important to explore how learners' motivation is shaped during this type of instruction. Based on the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated.

RQ₁: What factors initially motivate learners and how does TSLT instruction influence them?

RQ₂: Do levels of motivation fluctuate during the course of a single session taught through TSLT for intermediate EFL learners and what factors are responsible for these fluctuations?

RQ₃: Do levels of motivation change from one session to another during a semester?

The Study

As stated earlier, the major problem to be addressed in this study was to investigate possible interface between task-supported instruction and motivational changes among an under-researched age group, i.e. young language learners. More specifically, the study was after finding the possible changes in the main motivation for learning in response to task-supported instruction. Second, the researchers investigated motivational fluctuations during a single lesson and the reasons for these fluctuations. And finally, they probed the potential changes in the level of motivation over the period of six weeks.

Participants

The students participating in the current study were through the third year of their studies in a language school in Tehran. Out of the initial 9 participants, 7 constituted the final sample, since the remaining two did not attend all the sessions completely. As the study mainly enjoyed a qualitative nature and in terms of research design, it fell within the category of case study, the low number of participants was partly justifiable, yet this will certainly restrain the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, it must be admitted that another main cause of this restricted sample size was the low number of students in the young learners' department where the current study was conducted. Thus, the participants in the current research were selected based on availability and convenience.

Furthermore, all participants were female and their age ranged from 12 to 15. It must be noted that though the classes were of a co-ed nature, those who enrolled in the program came out to be all females. Though the homogeneity of the participants was checked through an in-house placement test, the researchers consulted Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for further assurance. Additionally, almost all learners' scores during the previous semester were very close to each other. As Alrabai (2014) noted, the ultimate level of attainment in the acquisition of a second or foreign language is dictated by motivation. Similarity of the participants' final exam scores testifies to the fact that the participants were comparable with respect to motivation and language proficiency.

Instrumentation

To gain information about fluctuations in the learners' level of motivation during a single lesson and a sequence of lessons over a period of six weeks, as well as the reasons leading to these fluctuations, the following data collection tools were employed:

• Detailed TSLT lesson plans, using Ellis (2003) as the underlying framework. The lesson plans were used to relate changes in the level of motivation to particular tasks and lesson foci.

• Motometers, which were adopted from Waninge et al. (2014) and were filled out by the participants to indicate their level of motivation at five-minute intervals on a scale of 0 to 100. Students received an A_4 size sheet of paper including ten Motometers and were asked to indicate their level of motivation by putting a mark on the scale. It's worth noting that the students had previously received instruction by one of the researchers in the current study on how to respond to the Motometers to make the process as unobtrusive as possible. In this scale, motivation was defined as the level of effort put into the learning material and the level of enjoyment experienced by the learner.

• Semi-structured focus group interviews carried out by the classroom teacher to detect any possible changes in motivation and the reasons for such changes. Two sets of questions were designed for this purpose. The first set, which was asked at the outset of the study and after the final session, probed into any possible changes in the main reasons for learning English. However, in the second set, the researchers addressed factors responsible for motivational fluctuations during each session. Following Willis and Willis' (2007) lead, the questions in this section inquired issues like learners' feelings and reactions toward the process of task completion, as well as the fluctuations occurring in their motivation. Interviews were held after each lesson and were mainly centered on the participants' perceptions towards lessons and tasks. As there were entirely 12 instructional sessions in the study, the interviews were held 12 times and a total of 10-15 minutes was allotted to each interview. All the interviews were conducted by the classroom teacher and were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

All the instruments and procedures had been piloted prior to the study with a comparable group of students and were modified with an eye on enhancing their quality in terms of validity and reliability. Furthermore, during the pilot phase, the designed tasks were checked against Ellis's (2003) criteria to make necessary improvements. Whenever deemed necessary, the participants' mother tongue, i.e. Persian was used in the instructions and interviews to avoid any difficulty the learners might have experienced in understanding questions and instructions expressing their opinions in English. The Motometer was presented in English while instructions were provided in Persian in the practice phases.

Procedure

As stated earlier, the study participants were within the age range of 12-15. As conducting research at this age-group may have its own complications in terms of the degree of willingness to respond and the amount of cooperation and awareness on the part of learners, the researchers tried to provide the required orientation for the learners, particularly with regard to filling Motometers.

The study was conducted over a period of six weeks in the course of ten regularly scheduled English classes. The classes lasted for one and a half hour with approximately 45 minutes allocated for checking homework and 45 minutes for teaching the new lesson (It's worth noting that the duration of some of the lessons was less than 45 minutes and lasted for only 25 minutes).

The class was taught by one of the authors of this article. The course book taught was Hey There 3. To track the research objectives, the researchers adapted the tasks and activities from the learners' course books, in an attempt to implement TSLT.

It must be mentioned that out of the entire class time which lasted for 1 hour and a half, only up to 45 minutes of each session was allotted to conducting the research and treatment. Thus, instruction via TSLT was carried out during the last 45 minutes of each session. As an instance, in lesson one, apart from the 10-minute pre-task phase, and 5-minute post-task phase, the remaining 30 minutes were allocated to while-task during which the learners were involved in pair-work and group-work activities around the topic of the lesson, i.e. fashion and appropriate clothes for different occasions. In the meantime, the teacher circulated, monitored students' work, and provided comments. It's worth reiterating that the learners were also required to complete the motometers at 5-minute intervals during all three phases of task performance.

In dealing with task-supported methodology, the three steps introduced by Ellis, i.e. pre-task, during-task, and post-task, were followed in sequence. Furthermore, in running the tasks, all 6 criteria put forth by Ellis (2003) were taken into account (*being based on a work plan*, *focusing on meaning*, *involving real-world communication*, *drawing on all four language skills*, *engaging the cognitive processes*, and *having a clear communicative outcome*).

In the pre-task phase, the students got familiar with the basic vocabulary or grammar needed for the topics. The tasks were presented in a way to induct learners to arrive at the intended vocabulary or grammar by themselves. The pre-task phase was used to reduce the cognitive complexity of the main task by offering the required language and strategies. During task performance, the learners encountered the main task and were required to use the language in the pre-task phase to complete the task and prepare for presentation of their views for the whole class. This phase of the task was carried out in pairs or groups with the teacher walking around to give the necessary help. At the end of the task cycle, it was time to turn to the relevant sections in the book and do the exercises and activities to receive the required feedback. Textbook exercises and activities were treated as opportunities to consolidate the previously presented language. In many cases, there was a need to change the order of the lesson sections. It was really important to have students express themselves with the language they had already learned.

Data Analysis

The main research tool was the Motometer intended to obtain information on self-report motivation at different time points during each session. Interviews and lesson plans were utilized to deepen our understanding of the dynamic nature of motivation. The obtained data went through quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis included (1) calculating the means and standard deviations for the items in the Motometer; and (2) comparing the overall means obtained via Motometers. Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare the highest and the lowest evaluations made by the learners, with the level of significance set at $p < .05$. The qualitative analysis, which included the transcribed version of interview data, included: (1) finding learners' main reasons for learning English, using Dörnyei's (2009) theory of motivational self-system as a point of reference, (2) identifying the recurring themes in the data to detect the reasons for motivational fluctuations, and (3) interpreting fluctuations in the level of self-reported motivation with respect to the interview comments, the characteristics of task-supported language teaching, the particular phase of task-supported instruction, and the specific focus of each lesson.

As indicated in the following section, for theme analysis and coding purposes concerning research question one, Pawlak et al.'s (2014) guidelines were used. For instance, learners' statements

focusing on their future aspirations like 'I learn English to be a pilot' were categorized under ideal L$_2$ self with a *promotion* focus, and utterances centering on immediate aims of learners like passing exams, were grouped as belonging to ought-to L$_2$ self with a *prevention* focus. Furthermore, as regards research question two, the main method of running theme analysis was hybrid in nature, because in addition to the emerging inductive categories, the pre-established deductive categories obtained from the literature on the issue were also employed in coding the data.

Results and Discussion

To come up with cogent responses to study questions, the data gathered through different means were consulted. Concerning research question one, the data garnered via interview were utilized; however, for research question two data came from Motometers and interviews. And for research question three, the main sources of data were Motometers. The following section deals with the results and discussion for research question one.

Research Question One

As regards RQ$_1$, reasons for studying English were interpreted with reference to the main components of Dörnyei's (2009) L$_2$ motivational self-system, and this is the only place where Dörnyei's model was used as a reference point. Qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed that the main motives underlying pursuing language studies were associated with ideal L$_2$ self with a *promotion* focus, to achieve desired hopes and goals (e.g., finding a well-paid job), and ought-to L$_2$ self with a *prevention* focus to avoid possible negative consequences (e.g., getting a low score at exams). The following excerpts demonstrate the instrumental nature of learners' motives comprising both promotion and prevention foci. It's worth noting that the categories assigned to each statement are selected based on Pawlak et al.'s (2014) taxonomy:

• I want to learn English because I need it to be a pilot in the future (ideal L$_2$ self with a *promotion regulatory focus*).

• I learn English because I want to go to university in a foreign country (ideal L$_2$ self with a *promotion regulatory focus*).

• I am coming to English classes to learn English well because I am going to be a doctor in the future and doctors need to know English (ideal L$_2$ self with a *promotion regulatory focus*).

• I take English classes to be able to pass my school exams (ought-to L$_2$ self with a *prevention regulatory focus*).

• I am studying English to get a good grade on the final exam (ought-to L$_2$ self with a *prevention regulatory focus*).

Another reason that was mentioned almost frequently, but not by all the learners in their interviews was their tendency to integrate with the international community – what Yashima (2002) and Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) refer to as an alternative to Gardner's (1985) concept of integrativeness, and call 'international posture'. This is demonstrated in the following excerpts:

• I want to learn English because it is important to know English to communicate with foreigners *(international posture)*.

• English is an international language and it is important to learn English. I have a pen pal who is from India. She speaks English very well and I cannot speak Indian. We talk to each other in English (*international posture*).

When it comes to changes in the main motives for learning English and the changes in the intensity of such motives, contrary to Pawlak et al.'s (2014) study, the analysis failed to reveal considerable modifications. The main motives referred to by learners in the study were related to ideal and ought-to L_2 selves that were found to remain constant. This finding can be justified on account of the fact that unlike Pawlak et al.'s (2014) investigation which sought to find the changes in learners' motives since the time of their learning inception, the current study only tracked the changes occurring during one semester, and hence lack of considerable change in participants' motives can be ascribed to this difference in the construct of two studies.

Furthermore, as regards the possible effect of age on learners' performance, the results of the study revealed that participants enjoyed clear ideal and ought-to L_2 selves for their studies. This might run contrary to Dörnyei (2001), who claims that young language learners express negative attitudes towards classroom learning. Nevertheless, as Pfenninger and Singleton (2016) contends, the role of age is comparatively lower than other factors, including socio-educational variables, in determining the motivational conditions and degree of accomplishment in learning.

Research Question Two

As regards RQ2, fluctuations in the intensity of motivation within the confines of a single instructional lesson and the reasons for these fluctuations were investigated by means of Motometers and interviews. Table 1 presents the group average motivation during the ten lessons (based on the information obtained via Motometers). As is evident in the table, the level of motivation was found to change at different phases of the lesson. This is in line with Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), who pointed to the increasing importance of the study of motivation from a dynamic and temporal point of view. Furthermore, MacIntyre and Serroul (2014) argued that L_2 classroom motivation is prone to change from one moment to another.

Table 1
Group Average Motivation during the Ten Lessons

Lesson	minute5	minute10	minute15	minute20	minute25	minute30	minute35	minute40	minute45
Lesson1	89.29	91.14	84.29	83.00	80.43	82.57	87.00	83.57	85.71
Lesson2	87.86	87.43	82.86	81.71	80.43	77.43	79.29	79.00	88.14
Lesson3	81.00	77.00	73.86	78.71	78.86				
Lesson4	84.14	82.29	69.43	71.00	74.86				
Lesson5	84.71	91.57	89.43	81.57	81.43				
Lesson6	95.14	94.71	73.29	72.14	75.29	79.86	79.57	76.14	76.14
Lesson7	82.00	80.57	84.71	86.00	84.71	78.71	78.71	78.86	79.57
Lesson8	100.00	96.86	96.43	96.57	96.43	89.71	86.86	81.57	92.29
Lesson9	78.71	77.00	73.57	78.29	78.86				
lesson10	90.86	88.57	71.29	78.57	85.00				

The following section illustrates some instances of motivational changes and the reasons for these fluctuations during different lessons. The data evaluation included the most noticeable patterns and was supported by the qualitative data obtained through the interviews. The analysis of motivational fluctuations for different lessons faced unique challenges due to the complex interplay among task characteristics, task implementation factors, and individual learner characteristics. Lack of specific information on individual learner characteristics (such as aptitude,

personality type, and language learning anxiety) made the task of data analysis even more complex.

Lesson 1 involved a speaking task with a fashion topic and revealed how the task topic, boredom as a result of repetition, and active/passive participation influenced the learners' motivation. As can be seen in Figure 1, the average motivational level was high at the outset of the study which was retained during the first 10 minutes. During this time period, the students were asked to mention different clothes and fashions of the time. During the interview, most of the students mentioned that they enjoyed sharing their thoughts about a topic related to their real-life experiences because they had enough information to talk about the topic. For instance, Yeganeh said, 'I liked to describe the clothes I wear to different places'. In keeping with previous studies (e.g., Aubrey, 2016; Qiu & Lo, 2016), students associated familiar and interesting topics with positive emotional feelings which might have contributed to their higher levels of motivation. Moreover, in Kim et al.'s (2017) study, students could relate better to tasks pertinent to their everyday life.
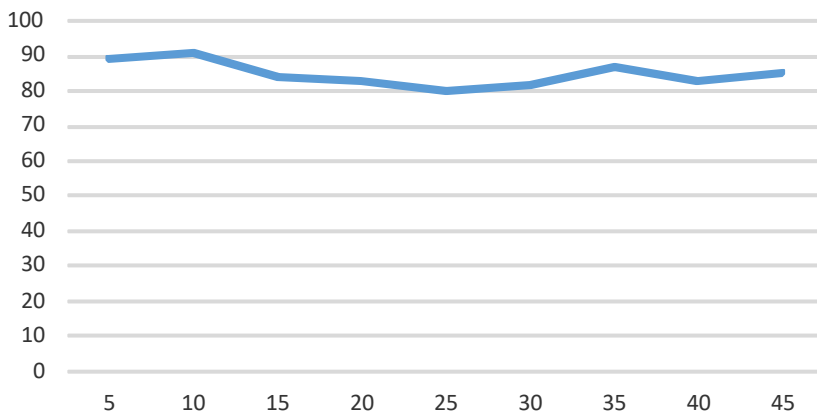

Figure 1. Changes in the Level of Motivation During Lesson 1

Furthermore, as regards lesson 1, the pattern of decline between minutes 10 and 25 could be the effect of boredom. At this phase of the lesson, the topic might have lost its novelty, with students having lost their curiosity as a result of repeating a task with a similar topic. This finding is consistent with Pawlak (2012) and Pawlak et al. (2014) who reported a decline in the motivational level as a result of performing successive tasks related to the same topic. Moreover, this finding, as did that of Aubrey (2016), indicated that students grew bored at repeating tasks with a similar content. The increase in the level of motivation from minute 25 to 35 points to a tentative conclusion that the level of motivation increased in response to approaching whole-class oral presentation time. Moving closer to whole-class performance seemed to act as an impetus to alleviate boredom and help learners regain motivation.

Minutes 35 to 45 were dedicated to whole class oral presentation, during which the students lost motivation as a result of sitting passively listening to presentations by other classmates. In this

regard, Yeganeh said: 'I do not like to sit and listen to others'. This reflects Kim et al.'s (2017) finding that students regarded active participation in the task performance as a positive aspect of learning through tasks.

One more factor determining the fluctuation of motivation was task characteristics with regard to the complexity and the nature of the outcome. A piece of evidence supporting the role of the outcome was obtained during lesson 6 (see Figure 2) which focused on writing skill and was about creativity in designing. The reported motivational levels were noticeably high in the first ten minutes, which involved picture description with the help of the teacher providing necessary vocabulary. This phase of the lesson did not impose much challenge and students possessed enough linguistic resources to complete the task. However, the level of motivation decreased from minute ten to fifteen. This might be attributable to the different nature of the challenge imposed on the learners.

It is worthwhile to mention that the type of task in this phase was an open-ended task in which learners had to discuss the necessary modifications they could make to improve each instance of creativity in designing. During this task, learners were required to think creatively and conceptualize task content. Kormos and Préfontaine (2017) also found that tasks taxing in terms of conceptualization demands (i.e. requiring learners to produce the content for a narrative task) provoked negative affective feelings. Thus, the highly demanding nature of the task explains part of the decline pattern. Additionally, the students were required to negotiate to achieve an agreement regarding the changes they could make to each invention. Two interpretations are possible here. First, students were not mature enough to consider different arguments to reach a decision. Second, students treated the task mechanically and did not view the task as an opportunity to practice speaking. This is consistent with Ellis's (2003) contention that learners feel more motivated when dealing with tasks resulting in 'genuine information exchange'.
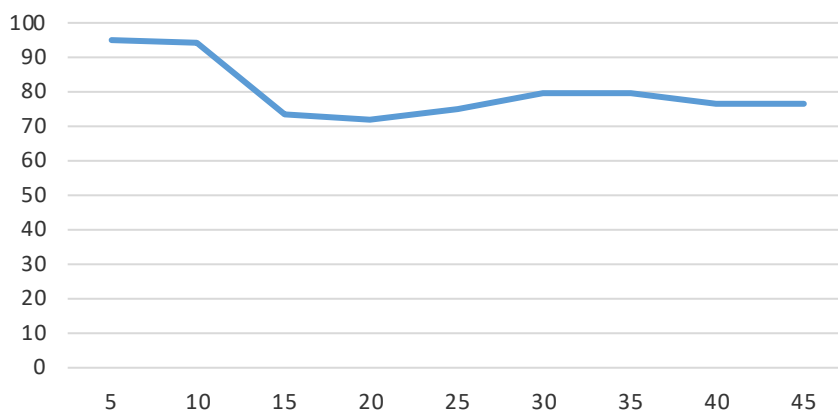

Figure 2. Changes in the Level of Motivation During Lesson 6

Though the open-ended nature of the outcome was found to negatively impact group's overall motivation, this impact was far from uniform for all of the students. Consider the comparison of two students' motivational fluctuations in Figure 3. As can be seen, both Maedeh and Yasaman displayed high levels of motivation during the first 10 minutes. After minute 10, Yasaman showed a considerable drop in the level of motivation in comparison with Maedeh. A brief description of these two students might help explain this result. When it comes to learning characteristics, these two students learned easily and obtained high grades. Considering general characteristics, Maedeh was serious about learning, seemed to be an independent learner, and did not ask the teacher many questions. Yasaman was also serious about learning, but what made her different from Maedeh was that she constantly looked for teacher's confirmations and asked the teacher for clarifications whenever she found something unclear. In line with prior research (e.g., Pawlak et al., 2014), individual learners' characteristics might help interpret the differing impact of the open-ended outcome on their motivational self-reports.
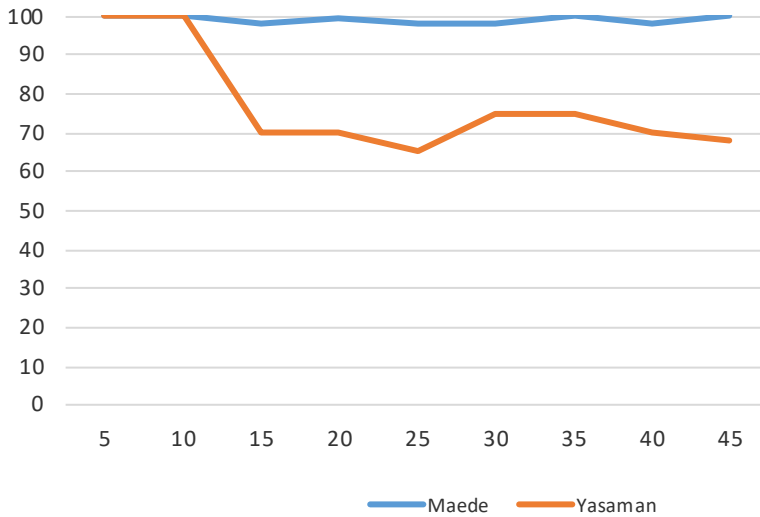

Figure 3. Comparison Between Motivational Levels of Maedeh and Yasaman During Lesson 6

A piece of evidence depicting the learners' preference for speaking about real life experiences over doing book exercises came from lesson 8. Additionally, data obtained from this lesson depicted how the relevance of book exercises to final exams had a positive effect on learners' motivational levels. Figure 4 displays group average motivational levels during lesson 8.
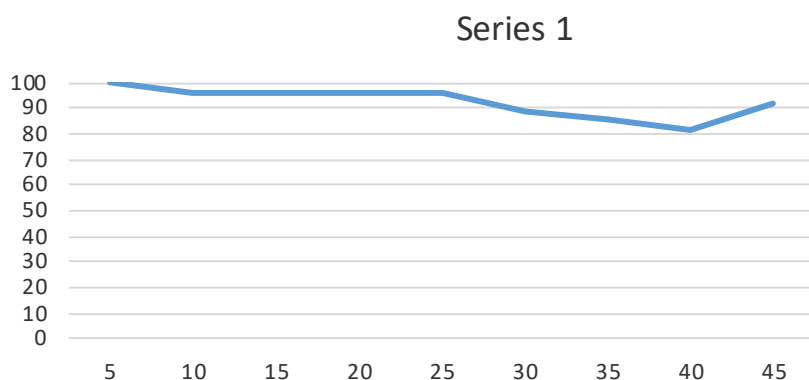
Series 1

Figure 4. Changes in the Level of Motivation During Lesson 8

The focus of this lesson was grammar and used a familiar and interesting topic (as evidenced by students' participation). The target structure in this lesson was 'past continuous with when and while'. The pre-task phase and main-task phases (i.e. the first 25 minutes of the lesson) were dedicated to recounting personal experiences for when an earthquake happened in Tehran, using the target feature. High self-ratings of motivation can be indicative of the fact that students enjoyed this part of the task. Akin to the finding of Phung (2016), students displayed a higher level of motivation and more positive affective response to talk about personally relevant topics. However, it must be noted that the participants' age-group was totally different in Phung's study (within the age range of 19-33), and this reveals both young adults and adults may experience similar levels of excitement by relevant topics.

Minutes 25 to 30 were dedicated to whole class presentation. Some of the students who did not like to take a passive role, as revealed through the interviews, manifested some degrees of motivational decline, but the group average still remained high. The learners were required to go over the exercises in the book between minutes 30 and 40. It was at this point when motivational intensity began to drop to stand at its lowest level (throughout the lesson) at minute 40. When asked about the reason for this low level of motivation, students pointed to the boredom they experienced when doing book exercises. Similar to Kruk's (2016) findings, working on the book was found to be a factor influencing learners' motivational intensity.

At minute 40, the teacher explained that some of the exercises in the book might appear in the final exam. It seems that the prospect of a final exam a few sessions ahead might have provided the impetus for learners to further their effort. This interpretation was corroborated through the data obtained during interviews, as most of the students expressed high levels of motivation to do tasks relevant to the final exam. This finding is in keeping with Pawlak et al.'s (2014) conclusion that the relevance of the classroom activities to the final exam was a factor influencing learners' motivational intensity.

The comparison of motivational scores in Lesson 8 and 9 provided a piece of evidence to demonstrate how a certain pre-task option i.e., *task implementation*, affected motivational intensity. Figure 5 includes a comparison of group average motivation in two grammar lessons: one taught through telling personal experiences (lesson 8) and the other through consciousness raising (lesson 9). A comparison of the pre-task phases in the two lessons (the first ten minutes) demonstrated that lesson 8 induced higher levels of motivation. As mentioned earlier, the first ten minutes of lesson 8 was dedicated to telling past memories regarding an earthquake, using 'past continuous'. The focus of lesson 9 was 'present perfect tense' and its pre-task phase was conducted through consciousness raising, where learners were provided with sentences including 'simple past' and 'present perfect' and were required to tell the difference between these two structures. Finally, they were required to work out a rule to explain how present perfect is formed. Thus, metalingual talk about a target structure triggered less motivation than recounting personal experience (as in Lesson 8) in teaching grammar.
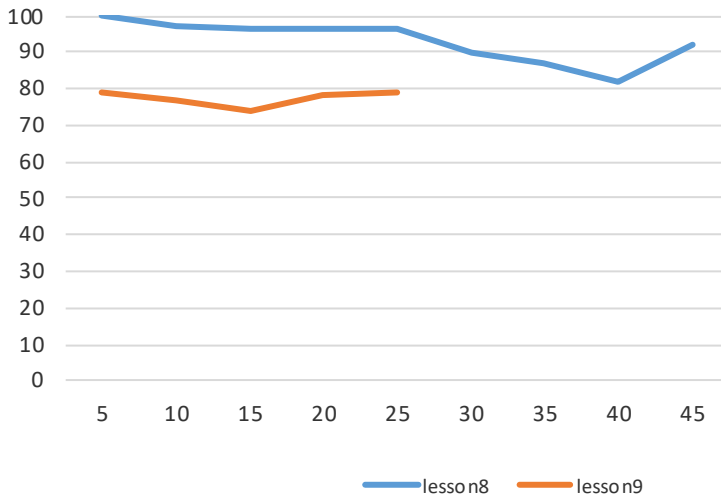

Figure 5. Comparison Between Motivational Levels During Lesson 8 and Lesson 9

Lesson 10, which involved listening and was relevant to a football fan's preference for home games or away games, depicted how *task difficulty* affected motivational intensity. Figure 6 illustrates the group average motivational levels during this lesson. The first ten minutes were dedicated to picture description and learners' predictions as regards the questions presented in the book. This phase of the lesson received relatively high ratings for motivational self-reports, with the motivational level oscillating between 88 and 90. At minute 15, there was a drop of 17 points followed by a gradual increase. As revealed through the interviews, listening tasks were among the least favorable tasks due to the difficulty students had to comprehend the whole listening. This finding is compatible with that of Kormos and Préfontaine (2017) who found that an important affective factor determining task performance was perceived success in task completion. They argued that lack of enough linguistic resources for task performance might result in negative affective responses. The gradual rising of motivation was accompanied by the teacher's pauses between the sentences to help learners figure out the listening part.
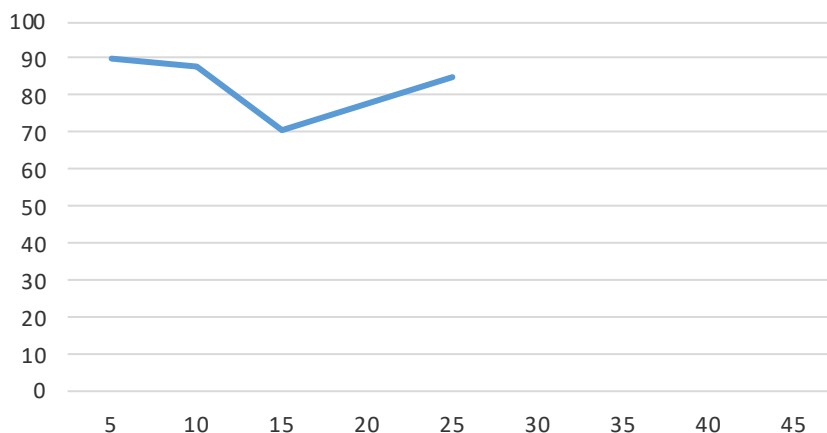
Figure 6. Changes in Motivational Intensity During Lesson 10

So far, a number of elements pertinent to task characteristics, task implementation factors, and learner-specific characteristics have been demonstrated to influence motivational intensity. The analysis of students' comments during interviews provided some more insights into the factors exerting an influence on self-reported motivation scores. As stated earlier in data analysis section, the researchers in the current study drew on a combination of inductive and deductive theme analyses (thus the term hybrid analysis). However, as regards the interview data, the researchers made use of inductive and deductive coding.

Among the prominent themes arising from the interview results the following can be highlighted. As mentioned by the study participants, a key factor that caused fluctuations in their level of motivation was the participatory structure. Thus, based on whether they were involved in interaction with the teacher or peers, they experienced different motivational levels. The following extract clarifies the effect of participatory structure on learners' motivation.

Extract 1

> *I feel more secure when talking to the teacher because when I make an error, my teacher corrects me and helps me say the right answer. But my classmates, some of them giggle when I make an error. I don't like pair work.*

Learners' preference for teacher-fronted classroom format can be explained with reference to Hall (2011), who pointed to cultural beliefs in shaping learners' inclination for teacher-fronted or more autonomous work in the form of peer-to-peer interactions. The learners in this study belonged to a non-Western culture who valued teacher-fronted classroom, with the teacher exerting authority. One more explanation would be related to group work dynamics and the amount of assistance and mutual help learners were able to provide to one another. According to Chen (2018), learners' inability to establish collaborative interaction with interlocutors might lead learners to view pair-work or group-work in a negative light.

Furthermore, learners' inclination toward teacher-fronted classroom can be justified on account of their specific age-group. Oliver et al.'s (2017) investigation with young learners might be taken as evidence for this preference of lower-age learners for teacher-frontedness, as they also highlight these learners' ineptness in resolving conflict in collaborative work. Further confirmation for the effect of age group on preference for collaborative activities can be gathered from the investigation done by Ibrahim and Al-Hoorie (2018), in which they concluded adult learners reveal more interest in collaborative projects.

Another major theme extracted from learners' responses was task difficulty. Indeed, when faced with tasks which were more demanding or about which they did not have sufficient knowledge, the learners felt more frustrated and hence less motivated. Extracts 2 and 3 below indicate the effect of task difficulty on learners' motivation. As is evident from extract 3, the learner has revealed more interest in completing a task with which she is more familiar.

Extract 2

I feel discouraged when I don't know what the answer to a question.

Extract 3

The most interesting part is describing pictures because I know the vocabulary, I don't like listening because it is too fast. I can hear a few single words but I can't put them together to understand the whole listening.

A further theme recurring in learners' responses was the amount of preparation the tasks and materials provided for their final exam. This theme is clearly stated in the following extract.

Extract 4

There were some parts that the teacher told us will appear in the final exam, such as the grammar exercises in the book. It was good to practice some exam questions.

Another issue that was highlighted throughout the interview was the interest generated by the extent to which the topics were related to their real-life experiences. It was revealed through learners' responses that more personally relevant topics sparked higher levels of interest. Evidence for this claim comes from the following sample extract. The following extract illuminates this point.

Extract 5

I liked the fashion topic more than the football topic. I didn't know the vocabulary for the fashion but it was interesting.

A further theme encountered was the influence of different language skills and components on learners' motivational fluctuations. Extracts 6 can be taken as evidence for this issue.

Extract 6

Reading is the most boring part because there are a lot of new words and the readings are long. But I like grammar because I can practice to use rules to talk about myself.

One more theme we explored was the learners' active participation in the classroom processes. Extract 7 below, illustrates this point.

Extract 7

I like to speak in the classroom; I feel bored when I sit down and read the book or listen to my friends. I did a lot of speaking this term which I liked.

Finally, feeling sense of agency and experiencing the locus of control in themselves rather than others was another emerging theme to which the participants referred. One student, for instance, said that writing at home gives her more freedom to set her own time limits (see Extract 8).

 Extract 8

I like writing the most, because I can talk more about my ideas. Writings that I can do at home. Because I can set my own time limits to do the homework and I don't feel stressed.

Research Question Three

As regards the third research question, changes in the motivational level from one lesson to the next were assessed by calculating the mean of scores on the Motometers during the 10 lessons. As can be seen in Figure 7 (depicting group mean scores for motivational levels during 10 lessons), the levels of motivation go through several fluctuations across different sessions during the semester.
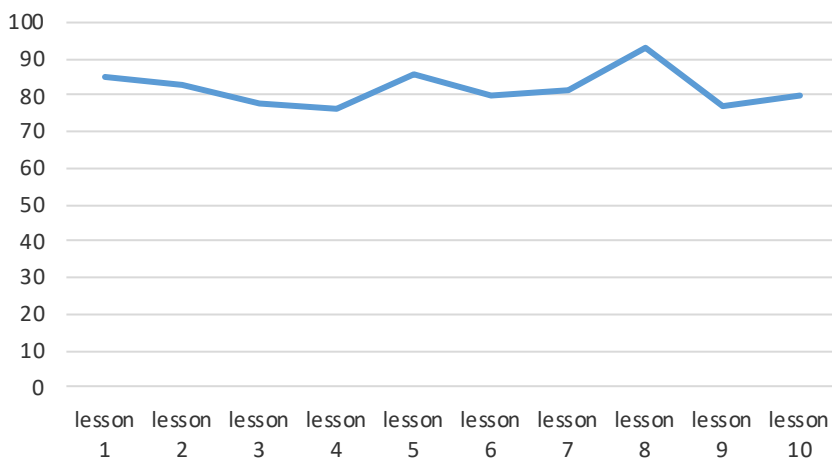

Figure 7. Means for Learners' Motivation during the Ten Lessons

To have a clearer view of how these fluctuations took place, the researchers provide more detailed information in Table 2. Thus, as seen in the table, students showed the lowest level of motivation for lesson 4 (76.62), which entailed listening task with a fashion topic. When it comes to the highest mean score, lesson 8 (92.96) received the highest score. Lesson 8 was devoted to grammar

and involved learners in telling their personal experiences during an earthquake. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed a statistically significant difference between the extreme mean scores (p < .05). This points to the importance of skill focus and task topic in determining students' motivational levels on a particular lesson. Additionally, as revealed in the discussion related to the second research question, listening tasks were among the most difficult tasks. Thus, the perceived difficultly level of a task influences learners' motivation in a particular lesson.

Table 2
Means for Learners' Motivation during the Ten Lessons

L8	92.96
L5	85.71
L1	85.22
L2	82.68
L7	81.22
L6	80.25
L10	79.88
L3	77.88
L9	77.28
L4	76.62

Conclusion

The study presented in this paper investigated the dynamic nature of motivation in foreign language learning, and it is one of the first to explore changes in motivational intensity during task-supported language instruction. The findings revealed that the main impetus for learning English was associated with ideal L_2 self and ought-to L_2 self. The other less frequent reason was learners' desire to communicate with the international community. The study failed to find any changes in the main reasons for language learning over time. The analysis of the data collected through Motometers, revealed that the level of motivation was subject to change during a single lesson and over a number of lessons. At the same time, the lesson plans and interview comments helped explore some of the factors affecting changes in motivational levels. Some of the factors influencing motivational fluctuations included task characteristics, task implementation factors and individual learner characteristics.

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers could ensure an optimal level of motivation by incorporating familiar and interesting topics, particularly those requiring the contribution of personal life experiences. This lends support to Ellis's (2003) contention that topics entailing a *'here-and-now'* orientation receive more favorable reaction on the part of learners. Relating tasks to learners' personal lives might help remove the negative influence of a mechanical orientation to a task rather than treating it as an opportunity for genuine information exchange. In addition, instructors need to be aware of how task features could influence learners' affect and motivation. In particular, tasks with straightforward outcomes and simple decision making created a favorable condition to produce high motivational levels. This is in line with Ellis (2003), who asserted that tasks with closed outcomes requiring a single right answer are easier than open tasks allowing learners to focus their attention more economically on the task. Additionally, students experience positive feelings and high levels of motivation when their linguistic and content knowledge is adequate to achieve the task outcome.

The findings of this study could also help instructors fine-tune their instruction by considering learner-specific characteristics, including their age and cultural beliefs, to decide on task implementation factors and the preferred participatory structure. For example, the participants of

this study found telling personal experiences more interesting and motivating than metalingual talk. They also revealed a strong preference for teacher-fronted participatory structure with the teacher exerting control over the whole process of teaching, which might have been due to belonging to an Asian culture. It is also possible to alleviate boredom and enhance motivation by assigning an active role to students or changing the activity. Shifting attention from textbook exercises to learner-generated content and practicing some exam items in the classroom might help improve learners' positive feelings and their level of motivation.

Although the study provided some useful evidence for the changes in the level of motivation and the factors contributing to these changes, it was not void of weaknesses. First, though attempts were made on the part of researchers to minimize the possible effect of learners' low age on their self-ratings of motivation (obtained through Motometers), the learners' particular age-group may have somehow influenced the accuracy of obtained information. Second, although the interviews were conducted after each session to detect factors contributing to motivational changes, students might have found it difficult to reflect on and express what was going through their head during the lesson. Third, though the learners had received instruction on how to complete the Motometers to shed light on minute-by-minute changes in the level of motivation, the data collection tool was not perfect, yet it was difficult to think of a different way of measuring motivational levels in real time in the classroom. Fourth, the students might have been disinclined to reveal their real attitudes towards the lessons at different time points as a result of the presence of their teacher. Fifth, the sample size was small, partly due to the nature of research which fell within the category of case study, and the participants were selected from one class. And finally, lack of specific information about individual differences (e.g., their personality types, language learning aptitude, and language learning anxiety) made interpretations rely mainly on the researchers' speculations.

To consolidate findings, similar studies in different settings are required to delve more deeply into the factors contributing to learners' motivation. After all, sensitivity to the interplay among all the factors underpinning classroom motivation can ultimately provide a clearer picture of the dynamic nature of motivation during task-supported instruction. Thus, the ultimate success of task-supported instruction would be dependent upon acknowledging the role of different factors impinging upon motivational fluctuations. This can be achieved via introducing appropriate motivational strategies and arranging the activities in a way that facilitates learning.

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