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## An investigation into the relationship between L2 reading motivation and reading achievement

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### Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between learners' motivation towards reading in a foreign language and their reading achievement on a chosen reading task. For this purpose, 114 freshman students enrolled in English Language Teaching department of a major state university in Turkey took part in the study. Data were collected through a scale on foreign language reading attitudes and motivation, and a reading comprehension test. The data gathered through these two instruments were subjected to statistical analyses. Based on these analyses, the question as to the types of reading motivation dominantly favoured by the learners, as well as whether there was a significant relationship between students' motivation and attitudes towards reading in English and their reading achievement were answered. The statistical analysis indicated that the learners were primarily motivated to read in English due to the linguistic utility of texts, followed by extrinsic utility value of reading, intrinsic value of reading and their own reading efficacy respectively. The study did not identify a significant correlation between students' reading motivation scores and reading achievement scores. Since situated reading motivation appeared to be a more probable indicator of reading achievement, a call for further research was made to explore reading achievement in relation to situational interest.

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*Keywords:* motivation; attitudes; reading achievement in a foreign language

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### 1. Introduction

As a prominent individual learner difference with an extensive influence on second / foreign language learning process, motivation has always been an issue of primary importance for L2 researchers and practitioners alike.

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Indeed, for second and foreign language learners, motivation might be regarded as a precondition for success since lack of motivation can damage a language learning process to a great extent even when all the other essential conditions are provided (Dörnyei, 2005, 2010). Therefore, with its vital importance for the process of L2 learning, motivation has been one of the issues at the top of the agenda of L2 researchers for decades (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner, 2007; Ushioda, 2010). The attractiveness of the topic might be attributed to the complex and multifaceted nature of L2 motivation for the most part.

The complex construct of motivation has been an impetus for the recurrent attempts to define and describe the concept with its constituents. Accordingly, the concept has been subject to various distinctions ranging mainly from instrumental & integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) to intrinsic & extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The attempts to elucidate the motivational constructs evident in L2 learning have also resulted in the emergence of various models of L2 motivation (see for example Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985). Arising as a social psychological construct, motivation then started to be addressed from a cognitive situated perspective, and developed into a dynamic construct in time due to a process-oriented perspective as opposed to the former models viewing it as a static concept (Dörnyei, 2005).

### 1.1. L2 reading motivation

Despite the multitude of research studies on L2 motivation, the primary focus has been on language learners' motivation and attitudes towards communication with speakers of the language learnt; however, due mainly to not having such an opportunity, foreign language learners are mostly dependent on reading texts in terms of target language input (Mori, 2002, 2004). Building on the idiosyncratic nature of L2 motivation for foreign language learners, the domain-specific structure of the relevant concept (Grabe, 2009) points to the presence of some specific motivational constructs pertaining to reading.

Departing mainly from the studies of L1 reading motivation, the initial L2 reading motivation research was grounded on models of reading motivation in first language. One such prominent model of L1 reading motivation belonged to Wigfield and Guthrie (1995), who explored the relevant construct under three major categories: (1) *competence and reading efficacy*; (2) *achievement values and goals*; and (3) *social aspects of reading*. These categories involved a total of eleven sub-components as well. This noteworthy endeavour to delineate the construct of motivation to read in first language was accompanied by the development of the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995). The multidimensional structure of L1 reading motivation was also corroborated by empirical findings of a study in which the aforementioned questionnaire was administered to reveal the underlying aspects of reading motivation (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Guided by this multidimensional construct of motivation to read in the first language, Mori (2002) explored the constituents of foreign language reading motivation and developed a questionnaire to investigate Japanese students' motivation towards reading in an EFL context. Statistical analysis performed to discover how the questionnaire items were related to one another and converged on specific motivational constructs revealed a four-factor resolution comprised of (1) *intrinsic value of reading*; (2) *extrinsic utility value of reading*; (3) *importance of reading*; and (4) *reading efficacy*. The multifaceted structure of L2 reading motivation was also acknowledged by several other studies (e.g. Erten, Zehir Topkaya, & Karakaş, 2010; Kondo-Brown, 2006).

As opposed to the earlier attempts to elucidate the nature of L2 reading motivation based on the construct and existing models of motivation to read in first language, Erten et al. (2010) noted that the underlying constructs of L1 and L2 reading may differ from one another both cognitively and psychologically. Without taking any existing theories of motivational make-up as a reference point, the aforementioned study attempted to discern the specific aspects involved in foreign language reading motivation. The Foreign Language Reading Motivation and Attitudes Scale (FLRAMS) developed for this purpose indicated a four-factor structure involving *intrinsic value of reading*, *reading efficacy*, *extrinsic utility value of reading*, and *foreign language linguistic utility* (Erten et al., 2010). Of these four factors, intrinsic value of reading referred to the items reflecting reading as an engaging and enjoyable activity; reading efficacy signified the way the learners evaluated their own skills of reading in foreign language; extrinsic utility value of reading indicated the contribution of reading in terms of self-development, future careers or education; and lastly foreign language linguistic utility emphasized the benefits of reading with respect to language development.

## 1.2. Interaction between L2 reading motivation and reading achievement

The current perspective pertaining to L2 motivation is called a socio-dynamic perspective, and its distinctive features are “a focus on the situated complexity of the L2 motivation process and its organic development in interaction with a multiplicity of internal, social, and contextual factors” as well as “a concern to theorize L2 motivation in ways that take account of the broader complexities of language learning and language use in the modern globalized world” (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012, p. 398). Within this complexity, the need to investigate motivation to read in foreign language in its own contextualized setting turns out to be of critical value. L2 reading motivation, as a newly-emerging field of study, seems to be quite promising in this sense.

The close relationship between motivation and language learning achievement is recurrently highlighted by numerous researchers (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994, 1998, 2005; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). However, it was also pointed out that the studies on the relationship between motivation and second/foreign language learning prioritized the interaction between motivation and measures of general achievement avoiding specificity (Dörnyei, 2003). A call for specifically researching different domains of motivation has often been made in the literature (e.g. Bong, 2004; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). One such specific domain worthy of further research is apparently motivation for reading and its relation to reading comprehension. The assertion that motivation for reading contributes greatly to reading comprehension and achievement (Guthrie, Wigfield, Humenick, Perencevich, Taboada, & Barbosa, 2006) needs to be supported by research findings. Such a path has been followed in L1 settings by various researchers (e.g. Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Guthrie, Wagner, Wigfield, Tonks, Humenick, & Littles, 2007). A similar route may provide insights into the nature of reading motivation and its relationship with reading comprehension and achievement in foreign language settings.

As noted by Grabe (2004) and Kondo-Brown (2006), there is a neglect of research interest in interaction between motivation and reading comprehension. Exploring the impact of reading attitudes in L1 and L2 on L2 extensive reading, Yamashita (2004) made one of those few attempts. In a similar vein, Kondo-Brown (2006) investigated the relations of motivational variables and Japanese L2 reading ability. Following a slightly different route, the present study sought to examine the relationship between learners’ motivation towards reading in a foreign language and their reading achievement on a chosen reading task. To do this, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What types of L2 reading motivation are dominantly favoured by the learners?
2. Is there a significant relationship between students’ motivation and attitudes towards reading in English and their reading achievement?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Setting and participants

The present study was conducted at a major state university in Turkey. A total of 114 freshman students enrolled in the department of English language teaching (ELT) took part in the study. Due to female dominance of the department, 82% of the participants (n = 94) were female, and 18% (n = 20) were male. Participants were assumed to have a similar level of proficiency in English as they came from the same year of study at the ELT department. The programme accepts cohorts of students through a centrally administered competitive university entrance exam in which test of English and particularly reading comprehension occupy an important place. Students often come from a very narrow percentile band and are likely to have very similar language proficiency in English.

### 2.2. Instruments

*L2 reading motivation:* The data regarding the participants’ L2 reading motivation levels were gathered through the Foreign Language Reading Attitudes and Motivation Scale (FLRAMS) developed by Erten et al. (2010). The FLRAMS is a four-factor scale involving a total of 31 items. As stated before, these factors are intrinsic value of reading (16 items), reading efficacy (6 items), extrinsic utility value of reading (5 items), and foreign language linguistic utility (4 items). The scale has a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very appropriate for me to not

appropriate for me at all. During the development of the scale, all the essential validity and reliability procedures were followed. For the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated as 0.94 for the first subscale (intrinsic value of reading); 0.87 for the second subscale (reading efficacy); 0.84 for the third (extrinsic utility value of reading); and 0.73 for the fourth (foreign language linguistic utility). These values indicate a satisfactory level of reliability. The original Turkish form of the scale was administered to the participants in this study. The alpha values calculated with the data belonging to this study are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Alpha values per subscale

Factors	Alpha
Factor 1: Intrinsic value of reading	.94
Factor 2: Reading efficacy	.86
Factor 3: Extrinsic utility value of reading	.75
Factor 4: Foreign language linguistic utility	.85

An examination of the table above indicates that the reliability analysis provided sufficiently high alpha values, as was the case in the original study of FLRAMS. Therefore, the present study corroborated the reliability of the scale in a sense.

*Reading achievement:* A reading comprehension test was administered to measure the participants' reading achievement. The test involved a reading text with 13 comprehension questions in TOEFL reading test format. Three types of reading comprehension were included in the test based on Day and Park's (2005) taxonomy of types of comprehension involving a total of six components: *literal comprehension*, *inference*, and *evaluation*. Of these three types of comprehension, literal comprehension refers to the comprehension of straightforward meanings of reading like pieces of information and facts. Inference, on the other hand, requires readers to get beyond literal meanings of texts, integrate what is read with background knowledge about the topic, and make a deduction. As for evaluation, readers attempt to reach a global understanding of the text and evaluate what is read by combining literal meaning with background knowledge.

### 2.3. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from 1<sup>st</sup> year ELT students in 2014-2015 academic year. The instruments were administered by a lecturer during class time at Lexical Competence course, in which reading is frequently used as a classroom activity. Initially, the FLRAMS was administered at the beginning of the class, and then the participants took the reading comprehension test.

The acquired data were subjected to statistical analysis. Participants' motivational orientations for reading in English were examined by means of descriptive statistics. Due to normal distribution of data, a Pearson correlation coefficient test was performed to measure the possible relationship between L2 reading motivation and reading achievement.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Participants' motivational orientation

Descriptive statistics were employed to find out the types of motivation for reading in English dominantly favoured by the participants. The results of descriptive analysis of data from FLRAMS can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean values of types of L2 reading motivation

Type of L2 reading motivation	N	Mean	SD
Intrinsic value of reading	114	4.19	.58
Reading efficacy	114	3.87	.57
Extrinsic utility value of reading	114	4.34	.56
Foreign language linguistic utility	114	4.56	.51

As displayed in the table above, the mean values belonging to four dimensions of L2 reading motivation ranged from 3.87 to 4.56. The dimension of L2 reading motivation reported to be most extensively exhibited by participant students was foreign language linguistic utility ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = .51$ ). The second dimension of L2 reading motivation of significant value to participants was extrinsic utility value of reading ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = .56$ ). These were followed by intrinsic value of reading ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = .58$ ), and lastly reading efficacy ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = .57$ ).

### 3.2. Relationship between participants' L2 reading motivation and reading achievement

The data gathered through FLRAMS and the reading comprehension test were subjected to a Pearson correlation coefficient test in order to investigate the presence of a potential relationship between L2 reading motivation and reading achievement. The results of the test are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Relationship between L2 reading motivation and reading achievement

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Reading achievement	1				
2. Intrinsic value of reading	.046	1			
3. Reading efficacy	.092	.497**	1		
4. Extrinsic utility value of reading	.120	.202*	.044	1	
5. Foreign language linguistic utility	-.045	.282**	.131	.369**	1

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Pearson correlation coefficients revealed that of four dimensions of L2 reading motivation, none were correlated with reading achievement at a statistically significant level ( $p > .05$ ). In other words, contrary to what was expected, no correlation was found between subscales of L2 reading motivation and reading achievement.

## 4. Discussion and conclusion

Motivational constructs have started to be addressed from a domain-specific perspective for the last couple of decades. One such domain worthy of further research is motivation for reading especially in foreign language where research is scarce in the literature (e.g. Erten et al., 2010; Kondo-Brown, 2006; Mori, 2002, 2004; Takase, 2007; Yamashita, 2004). A reason for such significance is that due to requiring efforts on the part of the reader, engagement in reading activities is in close association with motivation (Wigfield et al., 2004). In an effort to explore the case in EFL settings, this study sought to investigate the relationship between the learners' motivation towards reading in English and their reading achievement on a chosen reading task.

The present study found that participant students were primarily motivated to read in English due to the linguistic utility of texts, followed by extrinsic utility value of reading, intrinsic value of reading and their own reading efficacy respectively. In other words, the participants preferred to read English texts mostly due to being in an effort to contribute to their language development. In a foreign language learning context, this is a quite promising finding in that the intended purpose of doing readings in foreign language education is language development, rather than reading for pleasure. Students' being inclined to read English texts primarily for language development, therefore, indicates that they appear to possess such awareness. A call for further attention to the dimension of linguistic utility

value of reading was also made by Erten et al. (2010) as this factor appeared to constitute an independent dimension regarding particularly language learning. Thus, this study also verifies the crucial place of foreign language linguistic utility within the construct of L2 reading motivation.

Although participants were mainly motivated to read English texts because of their linguistic value, they also reported to be motivated to read due to extrinsic value of reading as this was the second dimension of reading motivation favoured most extensively by students. Participants' preference for extrinsic value of reading along with foreign language linguistic utility indicates that they are primarily interested in the instrumental features of reading and the benefits of reading in particular. However, similar mean values attained for each of the four dimensions of L2 reading motivation demonstrate that along with instrumental reasons, participants are also motivated to read due to intrinsic value of reading and a belief in their self-efficacy.

Along with the motivational orientations of learners in terms of reading in English, the current study also investigated any possible correlation between students' motivation to read in English and their success in a chosen reading test. However, contrary to expectations, none of the dimensions of L2 reading motivation correlated statistically significantly with reading achievement. This result of the present study is congruent with the findings of Takase's (2007) study investigating the influence of motivation on extensive reading in Japanese EFL setting. The aforementioned study found no significant correlation between motivation and L2 reading comprehension, as was the case in the current study.

The lack of correlation between L2 reading motivation and reading achievement might probably have resulted from the nature of specific constructs measured by the FLRAMS. Since this scale measures overall attitudes and motivation to read in a foreign language, it probably did not interact with students' level of comprehension of the written text used in this particular study. Rather than general reading behaviors, language learners' task-specific behaviors such as reading strategies or situated reading motivation might be a better indicator of reading achievement. Situational interest refers to a temporary state of mind which is a result of existing environmental conditions such as some particular features of a reading text, beyond established internal needs of a person (Schiefele, 1999). There is a better chance of exhibiting motivated behaviors in the long run when such situational interest develops into motivation by way of enjoyment and engagement in the activity (Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2005).

The fact that engagement in reading results in better comprehension and greater reading achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) justifies the need for researching reading comprehension in relation to text generated interest or task generated motivation. Thus, a future research route to follow in a Turkish EFL context might be a study on the interaction between reading comprehension and situated reading motivation, rather than general reading motivation. In other words, L2 reading motivation might be studied in relation to the situational factors specific to the relevant reading task through further research.

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