

# The Motivational Impact of Enhancing Reading Comprehension through Pictorial Fictions on the Involvement of Iranian English as a Foreign Language Students in Writing Activities

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**Abstract**—Determining the motivational impact of enhancing reading comprehension, through pictorial fictions, on the English as a foreign language (EFL) students to involve them more in writing activities, is the prime purpose of the present study. The study took place in the Iranian Language Institute, the branch of Mahabad. Key English Test administrated to a hundred students to select the subjects of the present study. Finally, 60 male students were selected and randomly divided into the experimental and control groups. The experimental group received pictorial fictions as treatment, utilizing input reading comprehension enhancement through typographic elements, and direct and indirect feedback provided to them, while the control group received pictorial fiction texts without such inputs, then to collect the intended data, the “Academic Writing Motivation Questionnaire” was administered to both groups separately in two stages of pre-tests and post-tests. The results showed that enhancing reading comprehension has a significant motivational impact on the writing engagement of Iranian EFL learners.

**Keywords**—Reading comprehension, Motivation for writing, Pictorial fictions.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Students’ lack of inspiration is one of the most serious challenges to the teachers in many teaching classes worldwide” (Chen et al., 2005; Ushioda, 2011). Therefore, “finding appropriate methods of eliciting, improving, and stimulating students’ motivation are the most interesting area of study to researchers and instructors” (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2010). The study of “motivational beliefs and practices” conducted by English teachers in a Hungarian school (Dornyei et al., 1998) can be considered as a valuable reference related to the title of the recent study in two ways: It is the first survey conducted about the second language motivational strategies; in addition, it “made motivational patterns more simpler and functional by offering an empirically based list of 10 macrostrategies that language teachers need use to encourage their students.”

The creation of a motivational atmosphere in language teaching classes by the teacher is a really important factor that helps both teachers and learners to get to their pedagogical goals more effectively Alison, J et al. (2002). Developing motivational methods to engage students in their “academic activities” such as “reading and writing” are always fascinating to the teaching program developers Dornyei (2001). Recently, growing trends of using writing as a scale to evaluate productivity of learners in the language teaching classes are more tangible. According to Çakır (2010), “writing helps students to be aware of their learning achievements through different stages, self-evaluate the level of their language knowledge, combine the vocabularies and patterns which students learned, identify errors, increase language competence, think creatively, transfer the information from short-term memory to long-term memory, and transform the student’s competence into performance.”

To improve their writing skills, learners need to have writing desires innately; therefore, to flourish this inner desire of writing, students must be motivated through different exercises and activities Chambers (1999). Hashemian and Heidari (2013) pointed out that “learners with a positive view about writing are more active in their classes.” Based on the findings of Silva and Nicholls (1993), “the concept of writing among adult college learners is closely related to their innate motivation.” Dilts (1998) believes that “motivation is a force that moves a person or organism to act or respond.” Motivating students to be involved in writing activities through reading necessitates a clear definition of reading as a language learning activity. Pang (2003) defined reading as “an attempt to understand a written text that involves both perceptions and thought, and carried out through two phases of word recognition and comprehension.” Furthermore, they believe that reading is “a language acquisition means which is used to establish communications and to share information and ideas.” Effective reading is always an attractive activity for learners. Providing instructions in the form of games improve reading comprehension skills. Pang (2003) stated “interaction between text and reader shapes the prior knowledge, experience, attitude, and communication ability of the readers.” Reading allows students “spend their time on their academic activities effectively, has access to the new information, expands their vocabulary range, and improves their structural and grammatical knowledge.”

One of the main goals of reading is the comprehension of the text. In general, the process of making sense of expression, sentences, and all of the text is called comprehension that can be improved through reading activities Ushioda (2008). By taking into account, the importance of writing activities, the “RAND” Reading Study Group (2002) defined reading comprehension as “the process of eliciting meaning through communicate with the written language simultaneously.” Students can explore their reading competence and potential through performing different reading activities at their classes. The meaning of the text will be easy to figure out when students interact their thoughts with writing.

Arianna (2014) argued that “recognizing of word/s is the process of thinking about how written symbols are in accordance with one’s spoken language.” He also stated that “reading comprehension includes of three elements; the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading” (ibid). Comprehension of texts influenced by the ability of reading texts accurately and fluently; on the other hand, knowledge of text structure and genre, reasoning, and inferential skills Harmer (1991). Some factors are involved in understanding of a written text, these factors include “background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and previous experience with the text” (Arianna, 2014). Despite the idea that pictorial fictions offer new and exciting reading opportunities for all students with different levels, Birketveit (2013) believed that “picture books or fictions seem to be unknown for the learner of English as a foreign language (EFL) today.” He added that “these texts come with sufficient visual support that will enable learners of English to deal with more advanced texts than they usually have.” By reading pictorial fictions,

learners are “exposed to the genuine stories and expand their vocabulary range more effectively than course books or graded readers do” (Birketveit, 2013).

Birketveit (ibid) highlighted another key benefit of using pictorial fiction in the second language learning classes and believes that “they help learners to develop their visual literacy as well.” Conventionally, literacy is the ability to read and write written texts, yet, today due to the great influence of visual stimuli in different societies, literacy has also come to include the ability to read images and pictures as well Johnson (1995). In general, “seeing is an active process of meaning-making and is not considered as a passive reception of stimuli” (Birketveit and Rimmereide, 2013). Birketveit (2013) says “most of the children and young adults today read and produce a variety of texts in their free times.” Pictorial fictions ranging from very simple and easy-to-understand fictions to the most complicated and conceptual stories; therefore, they create good opportunities to readers with various preferences and with different reading skills. Pictorial fictions are valuable to English language learners with different backgrounds and experiences. Various advantages have also been enumerated for the use of pictorial fiction in language classes. Pictorial fiction like other texts can improve cultural and linguistic awareness in general, and at the same time, motivate learners to pursue their educational aim more eagerly. Pictorial fiction is very effective to improve all four language skills Hyland (2003). Recently, more attention has been paid to visual images and pictorial course books in studying programs; consequently, the importance of conveying information through a combination of words and images has dramatically increased. Carry (2012) advocated that “Visual images as well as words in pictorial and visual books or fictions can be decoded, interpreted, created, questioned, challenged, and evaluated.” She also argued that “literate learners visually can read, interpret the intended meaning of the text, and evaluate the form, structure, and features of the text and they can also use the picture and word images appropriately to express meaning.”

## II. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

It is attempted, through this study, to determine the motivational impact of enhancing reading comprehension through pictorial fiction on writing performance of students. Furthermore, to discover the effect of reading pictorial fictions on the reading comprehension ability of EFL students is another aim of this research. This study is a quasi-experimental research and randomly selected groups were compared before and after an intervention treatment. Accordingly, the following research question and null hypothesis were raised:

Q: Is there any effect of enhancing reading pictorial fictions as a comprehension activity on motivation for writing among EFL learners?

To investigate the aforementioned research question, the following research null hypothesis is formulated:

H0: Reading pictorial fictions do not have a motivational effect on the writing performance of EFL learners.

Participants of the current study were selected among male students of Mahabad English Language institute (Iranian Language Institution) with an age range of 12–18 years old. The participants were homogenized with Key English Test (KET). There were 100 male participants in elementary level who were given KET as the homogenization test. Sixty participants with scores of 1 standard deviation above and below the mean were selected, and they were assigned as elementary EFL learners in this study. Then, the researchers divided them randomly into two groups of 30 participants as experimental and 30 participants as the control group. Their first language was Kurdish, but during the conducting this study, the participants were asked to communicate to each other in English language.

#### *A. Treatment/Materials*

The materials for the present research were four pictorial fictions namely, “Run for your life” (Stephan Waller, 2012), “April in Moscow” (Stephan Rabely, 2002), “Robin Hood” (John Escott, 2009), and “Treasure Island” (Robert Louis Stevenson, 2000). The treatment was conducted in 10 sessions. In these sessions, the participants of both groups read four pictorial fictions as their treatment. The researchers as the teacher taught students the treatment tips during 10 sessions for both groups.

#### *B. Instruments*

- KET

“KET” is an elementary exam for English learners and designed to evaluate the development of students’ communication skills at the elementary level. KET covers the four main skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking Hornby (2000). Participants who pass the KET test successfully are expected to meet their daily communication needs in English. The form and type of questions have been devised to determine the language level of students and also are used as a placement test in many language centers and universities. KET examination has been chosen due to its communicative importance in learning English, taking into consideration the need for clarity and accuracy.

As it is mentioned above, researchers utilized the “KET” to select 60 participants among 100 participants as the homogenization test in the current study. The test consisted of 100 questions (reading and writing 55 questions, listening 25 questions, and for speaking the researchers asked them 25 questions about two topics that were in the test sheet). The time of the test was 60 min and scores of the KET test for each person were from 100. During the test, the participants did not have any difficulties with the test. At the end of the test, 60 participants who attained scores with a standard deviation of one were selected as subjects of the study. In the next step, these 60 participants were randomly divided into two groups of control and experimental with 30 members in each group.

#### *C. Pilot Study*

The pilot study aimed at checking the credibility and legitimacy in the questionnaire. To achieve reliable results, the researchers utilized a pilot study. The researchers administrated this questionnaire to 30 high school students who were selected as a sample among the population randomly. Thirty students answered the questions which experts in the field had confirmed each question’s validity in advance. Factors such as available literature review on writing motivation and educators’ guidelines were the main concentration in developing the questionnaire to determine Academic Writing Motivation. Due to lack of relevance to the goals of research and to prevent from declining the legitimacy and acceptability of questions, some parts of the questionnaire had been updated. The findings of the pilot study were quite reliable and to measure internal consistency “Cronbach’s alpha” applied to the Academic Writing Motivation Questionnaire for the above-mentioned subjects.

#### *D. Pre-test*

To reach to a clear conclusion about the research question of the current study, the AWMQ which developed by Payne (2012) applied once as a pre-test for both groups before reading fictions and once after treatment as the post-test for both groups to reveal the students’ perspective about their own writing and reading comprehension progress after receiving treatment in this section. The AWMQ called Likert scale questionnaire, consists of 37 items; each item enjoys its own statement that encourages subjects to state their level of agreement with the statement. The collected data have been evaluated based on scales ranged from 0 to 4 as shown in the following line:

0 = Absolutely Disagree; 1 = Disagree; 2 = Uncertain; 3 = Agree; 4 = Absolutely Agree.

The importance of this study and steps of doing the research explained in details to the participants and enough time had been devoted to the students’ questions about research before administrating the questionnaire. Furthermore, students were allowed to respond to the items at their speed. The collecting data in the pre-test phase took approximately 10 min and students found the test procedures very easy and clear, reportedly.

#### *E. Post-test*

Post-test administered after both groups have been taught the selected treatment at the end of the tenth session. Finally, and in the 10<sup>th</sup> session, the AWMQ also was administered for both groups as a post-test. The AWMQ helped researchers to find the effect and extent of their motivation for writing performance by enhancing reading comprehension through pictorial fictions. Therefore, the AWMQ was conducted among the participants of both groups and they answered the items of the questionnaire again to show the effect and extent of enhancing reading comprehension on their motivation for writing through pictorial fictions among Iranian EFL learners. The procedures of the current studies went through the steps summarized in the following paragraphs.

Initial data were gathered through KET test to obtain homogeneity of the participants who were 12–18 years old. This study was implemented in the Iranian Language Institute of Mahabad. It worth mentioning that the piloting process included 30 students similar to those who participated in the study to obtain the validity of the questionnaire. The questionnaire included 37 items using a 5-point scale format. The model called AWMQ proposed by Payne (2012) administered as this study pre-test. Afterward, the authentic instructions were offered to both experimental and control groups in 10 sessions. In the next phase of research, and to measure the motivational impacts of instructions on the subjects, the same questions with a different order presented to the students as the post-test, then collected data analyzed by SPSS software.

After the piloting procedure, researchers administered AWMQ as the pre-test to find out the extent of their motivation for writing and as a diagnostic test. The participants answered the items based on their initial understanding of the questionnaire in 10 min. Collected data analyzed by ANOVA from SPSS software. After these stages, researchers taught both groups the instructions as the study treatment, and 10 sessions of teaching were managed.

The AWMQ questionnaire was administered to gain the effectiveness and extent of motivation for writing from each participant. The pictorial fictions as the treatment of the study were taught. To enhancing reading comprehension through pictorial fictions, the researchers used typographic elements including underlining, highlighting, bolding, and italicizing sentences and words. To more emphasizing and focusing on comprehension, researchers gave meaningful directions through asking, answering, and involving the participants in a free discussion classes to encourage them to engage more with writing activities. The same questionnaire with just different order of questions presented to the students participated in the study as the post-test to discover the influence of treatment on motivating students to be involved more eagerly in writing activities. To make a comparison between the performances of both groups, gathered data were analyzed carefully and the results are presented in the next session in more detail and illustrated through tables and figures.

### III. RESULTS

To find meaningful answers to the proposed research questions, a one-way ANOVA analysis test done by researchers to evaluate collected data. Table I summarizes the results concerning ANOVA analysis of both groups, within and between groups, total results, significant level, and analysis of one-way variance for acquired scores of both groups are presented.

Table I presents the results of one-way ANOVA analysis between both groups (experimental and control groups) statistically. As it can be seen, in the pre-test, regarding the amount of calculated F (16.454), by one degree of freedom and 58 is higher than F value, therefore with a confidence level of

95%, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test. Furthermore, data presented in Table I show that there is a significant difference between the two groups' performance in post-test; consequently, the null hypothesis is not accepted. Based on the same "findings," there is a meaningful impact of enhancing reading comprehension on motivating students to be more involved in writing activates. Eta square is analyzed in Table II.

Detailed analysis of covariance presented in Table II. Presented numbers indicate a meaningful difference between the participant's scores in both groups. The eta square is interpreted as the proportion of variance of test variable that is adherent of group variable and the amount of zero that means the difference of average scores equals to zero. Furthermore, the eta coefficient at the pre-test stage is 22%. Analyzed data of covariance at the post-test stage depicted in Table III.

Table III shows a significant difference between the participant's scores; consequently, the null hypothesis was

TABLE I: THE RESULTS OF ANOVA ANALYSIS OF BOTH GROUPS

ANOVA	Sum of squares	df.	Mean square	F	Sig.
Pre-test					
Between groups	1.809	1	1.809	16.454	0.000
Within groups Members	6.378	58	0.110		
Total	8.188	59			
Post-test					
Between groups	20.510	1	20.510	239.969	0.000
Within groups Members	4.957	58	0.085		
Total	25.467	59			

TABLE II: ANALYZING OF COVARIANCE (PRE-TEST)

Tests of between-subjects effects						
Dependent variable: Pre-test						
Source	Type III sum of squares	Def.	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected model	1.809	1	1.809	16.454	0.000	0.221
Intercept	169.186	1	169.186	1538.436	0.000	0.964
Groups	1.809	1	1.809	16.454	0.000	0.221
Error	6.378	58	0.110			
Total	177.374	60				
Corrected Total	8.188	59				

A. R squared=0.221 (adjusted r squared=0.208)

TABLE III: ANALYZING OF COVARIANCE (POST-TEST)

Tests between-subjects effects						
Dependent Variable: Post-test						
Source	Type III sum of squares	def.	Mean square	F	Sig.	The partial eta squared
Corrected model	20.510 <sup>a</sup>	1	20.510	239.969	0.000	0.805
Intercept	413.767	1	413.767	4841.073	0.000	0.988
Groups	20.510	1	20.510	239.969	0.000	0.805
Error	4.957	58	0.085			
Total	439.235	60				
Corrected Total	25.467	59				

a. R squared=0.805 (adjusted R squared=0.802)

rejected. The eta square is interpreted as the proportion of variance of test variable that is adherent of group variable and the amount of zero that means the difference of average scores equals zero. Furthermore, the eta coefficient in the post-test is 80%. Concerning the difference of eta coefficient between pre-test and post-test ( $80-22=58$ ); it is revealed that the amount of motivation for writing enhancement is 58% in the experimental group. Therefore, the extent of motivation for writing progress is 58%.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Findings of the current study showed that there is a meaningful effect of enhancing reading comprehension on motivating students to write through pictorial fiction among Iranian EFL learners. Finally, this study put into consideration the hypothesis of the study to see whether the findings confirm or not. According to the results presented in Table II analysis of covariance (pre-test), and Table III analysis of covariance (post-test), the hypothesis of this study was rejected. The findings of current study support some previous researches such as Zainal and Husin (2011), Lo and Hyland (2007), Kirin (2010), Al- Mansour and Al-Shorman (2014), Gupta and Woldemariam (2011), Al-Shourafa (2012), Lam and Law (2006), Hamidun et al. (2012), Salehi et al. (2015), and Birketveit and Rimmereide (2013).

These findings are in line with Lam and Law (2006) by which they investigated what and how instructional practices and performance of students in writing activities are related to each other. The results showed that motivating of students can affect their writing performance.

In this regard, Ackerman (2006) in his study pointed out that "the students can motivate to use technology to write." He explored that "technology, such as for weblogs, can develop motivation for writing." However, educators should recognize the key to motivate writing among students. Hence, the students need to be more active in educational communities. Furthermore, Birketveit and Rimmereide (2013) investigated "the impact of extensive reading through authentic picture books on the learners' writing skills." The study showed that the picture books improved learners' motivation to read and make progress in their writing performance. At the other hand, the findings showed that the performance of the experimental group proved the effectiveness of treatments. The researchers used enhancement of reading comprehension for the experimental group utilizing typographic elements the same techniques were not applied to the control group members. Consequently, the analyzed data made it clear that motivational treatment on the experimental group is more effective than on the control group, regarding writing activities.

#### V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of enhancing reading comprehension on motivation for writing through pictorial fiction among

Iranian EFL learners. To do so, by conducting an AWMQ, primary data were collected. The main findings of the data analyses are shown in tables, indicated the positive answers to the research questions of the study. The findings indicate that enhancing reading comprehension had a positive impact on motivating Iranian EFL learners to write through reading pictorial fictions. Higher mean scores obtained by the experimental group in the post-test proved these findings. Besides, the pre-test results applied to both groups did not reveal any statistically significant difference between them. This means that receiving treatment both groups were at the same level of reading competence. That is to say, they had approximately, the same language background. Comparing of acquired results from the performance of experimental group members, as illustrated by the tables, indicates that there is a significant impact between their performance before and after pre- and post-tests. Specifically, the experimental group's motivation raised more noticeably than that of the control group in post-test.

Based on the analyzed data and findings of the present study, there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of their performance. First, during the 10 sessions of the experiment, the experimental group used to read pictorial fictions and enjoyed some other treatment guidelines provided by researchers. The guidelines include emphasizing methods of the text by underlining, highlighting, bolding, and italicizing to comprehend the text easier, but the control group did not have the same opportunity. It could be noted that such reading materials have enhanced the experimental group's reading comprehension virtually. Second, the teamwork activities used for the experimental group provided participants unique opportunities to read pictorial fictions with given topographic elements and direct and indirect critical analysis. As a result, they became more aware and more confident to write in the English language.

The role of reading pictorial fictions as an exciting tool to develop visual as well as verbal literacy is highlighted through the positive results acquired in this study. Such finding confirms that a review of research and literature led students to conclude that pictorial fictions might be a valuable and valid means to help participants being motivated to be engaged in writing activities in the classrooms, because it provides EFL learners with a close-to-real-life reading situation.

The current study can contribute to the Iranian educational reform process, encouraging an effective implementation of the motivation for writing in Iranian EFL classrooms. Hence, the present study suggests several procedures before the implementation, such as promoting students' motivation to write by adding pictorial "reading comprehension" and more attractive methods of students' involvement in academic activities related to language skills, especially writing skills. Overall, the study results indicated that the motivation for writing is as applicable to the Iranian context as it is in the other contexts. Thus, its adoption in Iranian schools may be extremely necessary. The recommendations and pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the foregoing conclusions and implications are as follows:

- Educational policy-makers should rereview existent course books and pay extra attention to the motivational models like one presented in this research.
- English language teachers should facilitate the process of writing performance through motivation for writing by enhancing reading comprehension with reading pictorial fictions or short stories.
- Local ELT textbook writers should work to improve writing performance through typographic elements and reading pictorial fictions.

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