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Freshman Students' Motivated Behavior Indicators in EAP Courses

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Attendance, L2 motivation, and language learning achievement indicators were pursued in an EAP course at a Civil Engineering Department for freshman students. Quantitative methodology via motivated behavior scale, first midterm grades and attendance was employed. The survey instrument was translated into Turkish, and both translation and back translation procedures were conducted to ensure the content validity of the instruments. The study was conducted at a state university in the North of Turkey, with 45 participants. These participants were 1st year students between the ages of 18 and 22. All of the participants -at the time of data collection- were A1 level students, as measured according to descriptors proposed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). The quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS Statistics. Parametric tests were employed as the data showed a normal distribution. Both descriptive statistics and inferential analysis including Independent Samples T-test, One-way ANOVA, Pearson Correlation were applied and conclusions were drawn. The results demonstrated that the freshman learners in the educational context had medium level L2 learning motivation. Female students were a little more successful in their language achievement compared to male students. While motivation had a big impact on language learning achievement and was central in the interplay between the variables, absence had no effect at all. The higher was the motivation, the higher were the grades. This study concludes that achievement is stimulated by motivation.

Keywords: L2 motivation, language learning achievement, EAP

Birinci Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Akademik Amaçlı İngilizce Derslerinde Motive Davranış Göstergeleri

Öz

Devam, L2 motivasyonu ve dil öğrenme başarı göstergeleri, İnşaat Mühendisliği Bölümünde birinci sınıf öğrencilerine yönelik bir akademik amaçlı İngilizce dersinde takip edildi. Motivasyonlu davranış ölçeği, birinci ara sınav notları ve devam için nicel metodoloji kullanılmıştır. Anket aracı Türkçeye çevrildi ve araçların içerik geçerliliğini sağlamak için hem çeviri hem de geri çeviri işlemleri yapıldı. Çalışma, 45 katılımcı ile Türkiye'nin Kuzeyindeki bir devlet üniversitesinde gerçekleştirildi. Bu katılımcılar, 18-22 yaşları arasındaki 1. sınıf öğrencileriydi. Tüm katılımcılar - veri toplama sırasında - Ortak Avrupa Dil Referans Çerçevesi'nde (Avrupa Konseyi, 2001) önerilen tanımlayıcılara göre ölçülen A1 düzeyinde öğrencilerdi. Nicel veriler SPSS ile analiz edildi. Veriler normal dağılım gösterdiğinden parametrik testler kullanıldı. Bağımsız Örnekler T-testi, Tek Yönlü ANOVA, Pearson Korelasyonunu içeren hem tanımlayıcı istatistikler hem de çıkarımsal analizler uygulanmış ve sonuçta varılmıştır. Sonuçlar, eğitim bağlamında birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin orta düzeyde L2 öğrenme motivasyonuna sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Kız öğrenciler, erkek öğrencilere göre dil başarılarında biraz daha başarılı olmuştur. Motivasyon, dil öğrenme başarısı üzerinde büyük bir etkiye sahipken ve değişkenler arasındaki etkileşimin merkezinde yer alırken, devamsızlığın hiçbir etkisi olmamıştır. Motivasyon ne kadar yüksekse, notlar da o kadar yüksek olmuştur. Bu çalışma, başarının motivasyon tarafından teşvik edildiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: dil öğrenme motivasyonu, dil öğrenme başarısı, akademik amaçlı İngilizce

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Several studies have investigated the relationship between attendance and grades or motivation and grades. In the scant quantitative literature that surround educational issues of attendance and achievement, the results are mixed. Many studies were conducted which support the positive relationship between L2 motivation and achievement (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Skehan & Dörnyei, 2003; Engin, 2009). In Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) study it was seen that motivation gave the learners an initial drive at the beginning of learning process and sustained this energy and power later on. Weak motivation is therefore a reason for failure. Lamdin (1996) relied on aggregate data to show that student attendance had a positive and significant relationship with academic performance. Silvestri (2003) did a correlation study between the number of absences and course grades and found a weak negative correlation with students who missed a few courses and strong negative correlation with students who missed four or more courses. The relationship between language learning achievement and L2 motivation has also gained a lot of attention over the last decade. Al-Shehri (2009), in one of his seminal studies, investigated the interaction of visual learning style, vision, ideal L2 self and motivated learning behavior in 200 Saudi EFL learners. He hypothesized that learners with visual preferences were better at creating a vivid vision of their ideal L2 self than the learners with less visual capabilities. The results of the study have proven his hypothesis and revealed strong relationship among visual learning style, creation of a vivid vision of the ideal L2 self and motivated learning behavior. Dörnyei and Chan (2013) also made an investigation on 172 eight-grader learners of English and Mandarin in Hong Kong. The results suggested a positive correlation between future L2 self-guides, vision, visual and auditory styles, motivated behavior and L2 achievement. The last study performed by Kim and Kim (2014) included 2682 Korean EFL students and justified the relation among perceptual styles, future self-guides, imagery, motivated behavior and achievement. This study confirmed that there was a positive relation between visual and auditory learning styles and L2 motivation except kinesthetic learning. Visual learning had the most significant effect on language learning success, while ideal L2 self and L2 motivation were the intervening variables. When the relationship between imagery, ideal L2 self, L2 motivation, and visual and auditory learning styles are considered some researchers have also suggested that the brain area which is responsible for creating imagery is similar to the visual area (Kosslyn, Cacioppo, and Davidson, 2002; Modell, 2003). Therefore learners with visual preferences may be more successful in creating and visualizing their ideal L2 self.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What's is the participants' level of motivation?
2. Is there a relationship between participants' gender and level of achievement?
3. How does motivation and absence from the lessons effect language learning achievement?
4. To what extent is motivation related to achievement?

2 | METHOD

Method section may include research design, the study group or participants of the study, data collection tools, data analysis. This section involves the methodological procedures followed in this study. It starts with a theoretical framework section on quantitative studies, especially survey studies. Then, the study will be depicted in details. The setting where the data were collected will be described, an elaborate section on the participants will be presented, and the instruments used in the study will be reported. Next, they will be followed by a detailed section on data collection procedures and finally data analysis procedures will be covered.

Research Design

In this study, quantitative research design has been adopted. Muijs (2004) states that contrary to the qualitative research, quantitative design uses numbers to explain the phenomenon under investigation. Quantitative perspective is based on realism or positivism which describes reality as standing “out there” independent from the individual people (2004, p. 4). Therefore, the researcher should have an etic perspective not an emic one and view the issue as an outsider in order not to ruin its nature and should use appropriate instruments serving that purpose. Muijs further (2004) suggests that “a well-designed quantitative study will allow us not just to look at what happens, but to provide an explanation of why it happens as well. The key lies in your research design and what variables you collect.” (p. 10).

Depending on the statements above, it can be easily argued that quantitative design is very practical in many areas and can find correct answers to research questions as long as it is well-designed.

Survey Studies

In this study, the researcher has adopted a survey research. Creswell (2014) emphasizes the numeric and highly generalizable nature of survey studies since they can describe and explain many topics such as ideas or attitudes of the participants. They are painless to conduct with large numbers of randomly assigned participants as well. Many researchers in the area has underlined that motivation is not a construct that can be ensured via observation (Dörnyei, 2005). Dörnyei et al. (2016) emphasize its unstable nature since it displays continuous ebbs and flows; with a wide range of circumstances and events having the potential to substantially impact their motivation in varying positive and negative ways. That's why it has to be assessed out of a scale. They are also much more effective in terms of time and money in reaching the large sample. Another advantage of questionnaires is the use of standardized questions which hinder the misinterpretations by the researchers.

Study

This study aims to investigate the interaction among motivated behavior, attendance and L2 academic achievement of freshman level language learners in Turkish context. Although these subjects have been formerly studied in some countries, the absence of research in the Turkish EFL context has been the very reason for starting out this research. It is evident that these variables are highly context-bound and can be easily affected by the infrastructure of the country. So, a distinctive relations network is expected to come to the fore.

Setting

The study was conducted at a state university Civil Engineering Department. The students take compulsory English course at their first academic year in two terms entitled as YDB 1001 and YDB 1002. The aim of this course is to teach English for general purposes and develop grammatical literacy in one-year intensive education. The students have 3 hours of contact-hour per week. Classes are between 13:00 and 16:00 on Fridays. The language curriculum applied is based on Focus on Form (FonF) which is an approach to language education in which learners are made aware of the grammatical form of language features. *Live English Grammar* graded series grammar book Beginners level from MM Publications is used for one academic year long. Throughout the semester, the students have one midterm and one final exam as assessment tools.

Participants

The participants from Civil Engineering Department consisted of 45 adult learners of English as a foreign language. Among them, 32 students are males and 13 students are female. All of the participants have gone through very similar English instruction until university, following the Ministry of Education's primary, secondary and high school curricula. They started learning English in elementary school from the 4th grade onward and still continue learning. They are A1 level according to CEFR. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22. At the end of the language instruction they get this year their level will be B1, and when they get a minimum of 50 out of 100 as a composite score of the term, they will pass the course.

Instrumentation

For the current study, data were collected using a 18-item survey instrument in Likert Scale Format. (see Appendix B). To measure the motivated behavior and effort of the learners, a questionnaire from Al-Shehri (2009), which was developed with cooperation of Al-Shehri and Dörnyei was used. The Cronbach's alpha value of this motivated behavior scale was reported by Al-Shehri (2009) to be $\alpha = .89$. It is clear that the instrument has a high level of reliability, and therefore has been used by the researchers many times (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2011; Kim, 2012; Kim & Ma, 2013).

For the motivated behaviour scale of that 18-item instrument, a 5 point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "all the time" was used. Academic achievement score (Midterm Grades) in the English course was the second most significant variable of this study and it referred to how much attainment learners got to reach the objectives of their English courses in the first half of the school term. It was a 20 item and 100 points multiple choice test measuring the grammar topics until 9th week (see appendix A for the test and answer key). L2 academic achievement of the respondents from Civil Engineering department was assessed based on the answer key. The third instrument used in this study is the attendance of the students. The students had 27 hours English course (9 weeks) until the midterm; three hours per week. The students were asked to sign up the role-call when they attended the courses. The absence of the students were calculated out of those attendance lists.

Translation and Back-translation Procedures

Considering the low proficiency levels of the participants, the instrument used needed to be translated into Turkish. A translated version of the motivated behavior scale was taken from the Master's thesis of a colleague (Demir, 2016). As stated in the thesis, to make sure there was no meaning difference or loss between the original and translated versions of the questionnaires, translation and back-translation procedures were performed and during that process some professional English majors were asked to assist. First, the researcher translated the instruments into Turkish and then asked five M.A or PhD level colleagues to grade the consistency between the original and translated versions of the instruments. She also asked for feedback from these colleagues regarding how problematic statements would be translated more clearly. Then, she made some corrections based on the reactions of her colleagues and she asked for another colleague with the same qualifications stated above to translate the Turkish version back to English. After creating a back-translated English version of the instruments, two native speakers of English were asked to rate the synonymy between the original and back-translated questionnaires, and 95.2% synonymy between them was achieved.

DATA COLLECTION

In both classes, the researcher was available during the survey application; so that would have an opportunity to clarify the points that may be confusing to the respondents and observe the situation under which the respondents fill in the questionnaire. Finally, achievement scores and attendance of the participants were obtained from the other colleague at the end of the academic term.

Data Analysis

Rationale for the Use of Parametric Tests

To determine whether parametric or non-parametric tests would be more appropriate to analyze the available data, a test of normality was conducted, administering Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk, Histogram and Q-Q plot.

According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, absence variable in the study had values which were statistically significant ($p < .05$), specifying that these tests produced a non-normal distribution. Furthermore, Shapiro-Wilk test also revealed that tests were not normally distributed ($p < .05$) as they had statistically significant scores. Review of the Kolmogorov-Smirnova ($KS = .215$, $df = 45$, $p = .000$) and Shapiro-Wilk ($SW = .875$, $df = 45$, $p = .000$) tests showed violation of normal distribution. The results can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1. Test of Normality

	Sig	df	Men	Trimmed Mean	Std. Deviation	Md	Std. Error
Kolmogorov-Smirnova	.000	45	3.80	3.72	2.74	3.00	.409
Shapiro-Wilk	.000						

An overview of the QQ Plot results (Figure 1) indicates that the data in this study had a normal distribution. Figure 1 shows a nearly perfect straight line of scores suggesting that the data of absence seems to be normally distributed.

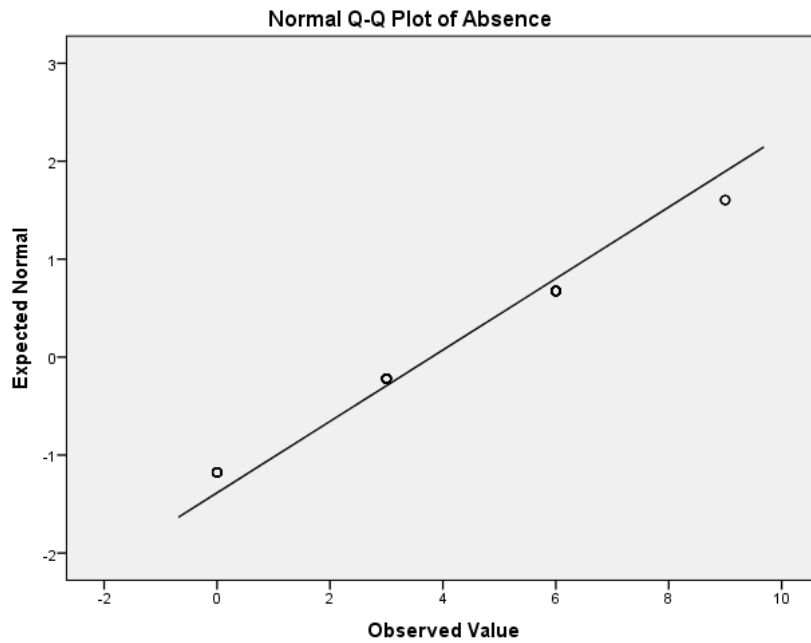


Figure 1. Normal probability plots of absence test

Since the current research study had a small sample group, there was a need to examine these figures with Histogram as well to be sure of the distribution.

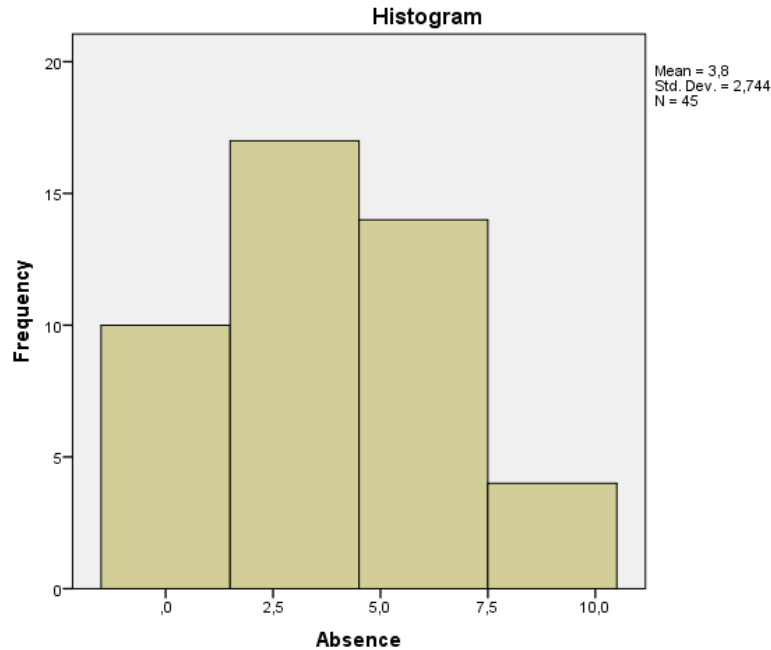


Figure 2. Histogram of absence test

The initial investigation of the analysis appeared to show a non-normally distributed data. However, Pallant (2010) states that this is a commonly observed situation and the real form of the distribution can be viewed in histograms or normal probability plots (Q-Q plots). She also suggests that "If you have the 'right' sort of data, it is always better to use a parametric technique if you can." (p. 213). Although the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed numerical results of non-normal distribution, the visuals of normality tests (Q-Q plots and Histogram) displayed normal distribution with reasonably straight lines. Therefore, the researcher preferred to use parametric tests rather than non-parametric ones based on the normal probability plots presented in the figures above.

3.2. Tests Employed

Data was analyzed quantitatively, and both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were applied using SPSS Statistics 20.0. Both the normal distribution of the data and the interval level scaling of it comply with the assumptions of parametric techniques (Pallant, 2010), and therefore parametric tests were preferred in this study. For the first research question, descriptive statistics was applied and mean values of motivated behavior scale was calculated. The second research question regarding gender effect on achievement was analyzed via Independent Samples T-test. The third research question was analyzed via one-way ANOVA. One-way ANOVA is used to compare the mean values of the same group on more than two different situations (Pallant, 2010). That research question was concerned with the impact of motivation on absence and language learning achievement. For the fourth research question, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient which "...is used when you want to explore the strength of the relationship between two continuous variables." (Pallant, 2010, p. 103) was performed. The relationship among the variables of L2 motivation, and L2 learning achievement was explored through that analysis model.

RESEARCH ETHICS

Before starting the data collection process, the researcher applied for the permission of the Civil Engineering Department Administration. She visited both classes within the knowledge of the school administration and the teacher of the courses, and first, she briefly informed the students about this study. They were told that this questionnaire would be used only for the purposes of that research study, it would not be shared by any other people or institutions and it would not have any negative effect on their grades. After making sure that

the learners were comfortable with participating and confirmed their participation, the researcher conducted the questionnaires.

3 | FINDINGS

In this section, the researcher will present the results of the analyses following the order of the research questions. Firstly, the research questions will be restated. Then, the findings for each research question will be presented describing the statistics regarding each question. Lastly, the chapter will be concluded with a summary section.

Participants' levels of motivation

Research question 1: What is the participants' level of motivation?

Descriptive statistics showed that the participants appeared to have a medium level of motivation with the mean value (mean = 2.87, SD = .87) indicating that they are reasonably enough motivated.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Level of L2 Motivation

	N	Men	Std. Dev.	Md	Min	Max
Motivated Behavior	45	2.87	.87	2.83	1.00	5.00

Relationship between Gender and L2 achievement

Research question 2: Is there a relationship between participants' gender and language learning achievement?

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare language learning achievement of males and females. There was a significant difference in scores for males (M = 67.50, SD = 17.46) and females (M = 73.08, SD = 13.31); $t(45) = -1.033$, $p = .307$ (two tailed) with moderate ($d = 0.35$) effect size (Cohen, 1988).

Table 3. Gender difference in language learning achievement

	Gender	N	Men	SD	Mean Difference	t value	df	Sig.
Midterm Grade	Male	32	67.50	17.46	-5.577	1.033	43	.307
	Female	13	73.08	13.31				

Impact of motivation and attendance on language learning achievement

Research question 3: How does motivation and absence from the lessons effect the language learning achievement?

To see the impact of motivation and attendance on language learning achievement and see whether they are significantly different from each other, one-way ANOVA was employed. As seen in Table 4 One-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference and between absence and language achievement attribution ($F(13, 44) = .726$, $p = .725$)

Table 4. Analysis of Variance on absence attribution according to the language learning achievement

Absence	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Group	77.235	13	5.948	.726	.725
Within Groups	253.87	31	8.190		
Total	331.20	44			

As seen in Table 5 One-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference between motivation and language achievement attribution ($F(13, 44)=2.283, p=.030$).

Table 5. Analysis of Variance on motivation attribution according to the language learning achievement

Motivation	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Group	16.40	4	1.262	2.283	.030
Within Groups	17.13	31	.553		
Total	33.53	44			

Based on the guidelines offered by Cohen (1988), the results of this study present a large effect size, partial eta squared = .48 (>.14) in motivation and achievement relationship.

The relationship between the variables motivation and achievement

Research question 4: Is motivation related to language learning achievement?

Table 6. Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Motivation and Achievement

	Achievement	Motivation
1. Achievement	1	
2. Motivation	.523	1

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between language learning achievement and motivation. As the results in Table 6 show the variables investigated in this study were correlated strongly and statistically significant. Having explored the correlations between L2 learning achievement and the other independent variable motivated behavior, it can be clearly said that there was a positive and statistically significant correlation between language learning achievement and L2 motivation ($r = .523, p < .01$).

4 | DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Level of Motivation

The L2 motivation of the participants which have been revealed to be at medium level is considerably in line with the previous research studies. In line with the situation in Turkey, Engin (2009) indicates that the

majority of the learners in the Turkish context have both instrumental motivations to learn L2, such as finding a well-paid and high status job together with integrative orientation such as communicating with native speakers, listening to Anglophone music or understanding Anglophone films. He argues that the enthusiasm of these learners to achieve L2 learning couples with the effort to reach their individual goals. Hence, there is a positive relationship between integrative motivation and L2 achievement. The results of this study is similar to Engin's (2009) study. Considering that the participants of this particular study were freshman level learners, it is quite reasonable that L2 learning is a substantial and indispensable part of their life especially as a requisite for their future profession. They will have to use English when they a lot throughout their career. Since they have completed the transformations of the adolescence and created their selves as mature individuals, they are at a developmental stage to make much more stable and realistic decisions about themselves and create their own wishes (Carlson, 1965). Therefore, it may be suggested that ages and developmental levels of the learners may have affected their high ideal L2 self. The findings also ascertained that motivation level of the participants' which is reasonably high is likely to have been affected by the norms of Turkish culture and educational context. In Turkey L2 learning is seen as an obligation in order to have a good academic career or job, a satisfactory salary, and a privileged status in the society. Therefore, it can be asserted that the adult learners in the country are quite aware of these obligations and needs, and language learning holds a substantial place in their life.

Gender Effect on Language Achievement

From the biological viewpoint, females and males differ from each other in terms of cognitive ability and learning style. These differences derive mainly from physiological differences, such as differences in the development of brain, and higher-level cortical functions. Males and females don't have similar patterns of lateralization, males are more left-hemisphere dominant compared to females (Banich, 1997, p. 306-312.) Although gender differences follow essentially stereotypical patterns on achievement tests in which boys typically score higher on math and science, females have the advantage on school grades regardless of the material (Voyer & Voyer, 2014). School marks reflect learning in the larger social context of the classroom and require effort and persistence over long periods of time, whereas standardized tests assess basic or specialized academic abilities and aptitudes at one point in time without social influences. Most studies show that, on average, girls do better in school than boys. The theorists of Second Language Acquisition assert that female learners demonstrate superiority in their second language learning process (Boyle, 1987; Ehrlich, 2001). Girls get higher grades and complete school at a higher rate compared to boys (Jacob, 2002). The findings of this study is therefore congruent with the literature in terms of gender effect.

Effect of Motivation on Language Learning Achievement

Many studies were conducted so far supporting the positive relationship between L2 motivation and language learning achievement (e.g. Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015; Skehan & Dörnyei, 2003), and the current study also adds to that already considerable amount of literature with the same conclusion. This study revealed that L2 motivation and language learning achievement are largely related to each other and L2 motivation is a very strong predictor of language learning achievement. Concerning these findings, Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) suggest that L2 motivation gives the learner the initial impetus to start the learning behavior as well as the power to sustain the effort until accomplishing the final goal of learning. Huitt (2001) suggests that the importance and necessity of language should be demonstrated to learners to help them improve their motivation in case of inadequate intrinsic motivation.

Suggestions for Further Research

As the number of the participants increase, the reliability and generalizability of the study increases. So, the aforementioned study could be replicated with a larger sample size. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding, other constructs could be added.

Summary of the Study

This study was performed to examine the relationships among attendance, L2 motivation and language learning achievement of freshman level EFL learners at a state university. Besides revealing the interactions among these concepts, it also targeted finding out the predictors of L2 learning achievement and L2 motivation. Bryman (2012, p. 35) defines quantitative research as a strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data and denotes amounting something, which in this study is amounting motivation level and L2 relationship. The results obtained could help the L2 educators to plan and structure their classes with more awareness of the issues investigated in this study. These investigations were also attempted to shed light on the advancements in the foreign language education field in Turkish context by providing new information that would be helpful and effective for L2 instructors, curriculum and material developers, and teacher trainers.

This research study was conducted in a quantitative design using scales as data collection tools. It was carried out with 45 freshman level EFL learners at a state university. Motivated Behavior and Effort Scale by Al-Shehri (2009) was used as an instrument of this study. 5 point Likert scale was used. Language learning achievement of the participants was measured using the composite scores of the term, and data was analyzed via SPSS Statistics V24.

Main findings of the study are presented below:

1. The participants had reasonably high level of motivation.
2. They were mainly present in the classes, therefore absence didn't have any impact on language learning achievement.
3. Female students scored higher compare to male students.
4. Motivation was a significant predictor of success in the participants' language learning.

STATEMENTS OF PUBLICATION ETHICS

You may specify the details of your approval of ethics committee here (date, document number etc.).

RESEARCHERS' CONTRIBUTION RATE

Please specify the contribution rate of each article in the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Please specify if this study has any conflict of interest.

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