

**MOTIVATION INFLUENCING THE IRAQI EFL  
LEARNERS' RECREATIONAL READING HABITS  
AT AL-IRAQIA UNIVERSITY**

**تأثير الحافز على عادات القراءة الترفيهية للمتعلمين العراقيين في الجامعة  
العراقية**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Many countries all over the world are paying attention and efforts to the increasingly undesired phenomenon of 'aliteracy' rather than the ordinary phenomenon of illiteracy (Edwards, 2008), that is choosing not to read. The fundamental aim in educational institution's policy is to teach students how to read. This aim has created an innumerable literature and resulted pedagogical approaches designed at enhancing the students' reading faculty and their overall achievement. Purcell-Gates et al. (2002) stress that educational institutions will not be able to achieve literacy targets if they continue producing individuals who have the reading ability but choose not to read. Smith (1988) affirms that aliterate students are the tragedies of our contemporary education, that creating 'illiterate' phenomenon. Therefore, it is very urgent to highlight the significance and implications of reading habits, more specifically, the recreational reading habits that students seem to prefer on other types of readings. Consequently, there is an essential need to understand the reading behaviour as well as the factors that might motivate EFL students to involve in recreational reading. A number of scholars (Krashen, 2008; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991; Samuels, & Paul, 2007; Parlette & Howard, 2010;) confirm that the high benefits which can be derived from the recreational reading that can lead to the improvement in the vocabulary number, reading comprehension and improving academic achievement. Krashen, (1988) have proved that foreign /second language learners can effectively improve their language depending on reading alone. The recreational reading is a behaviour which can be affected by a number of factors. One of them is the 'motivation' factor. in other words, learners tend to read only when they are motivated to do so. One of the theories that tackled the motivation factors is the Theory of planned behaviour' (TPB) by Ajzen' (1991). It comprises concepts that predict and explain the variance in any behaviour. The theory tries to analyze behaviour through testing and measuring variables that determinant behaviour. He stresses the fact that any behaviour is the consequences of the preceding intention to perform that exact behaviour.

The aim of this study is to explore the recreational reading habits in relation to the 'motivation' factor which, in turn, affects their general performance in English language. Thus, this research studied the relation between one of the Ajzen's Theory (i.e. motivation) and the recreational reading of the English majors at the Al-Iraqia University. The study applied a quantitative methods research design. 96 students are the participants of the study. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using SPSS AMOS software is used to analyse the relationships under study.

### Iraqi Educational system

The study deals with the motivation factor that positively pushes learners to read (in the case of high motivation level) or negatively drawbacks them from reading (in the case of low motivation level). Accordingly, the circumstances that Iraqi learners have been experiencing, primarily in the educational institutions, are in relation to the target matter to be highlighted. For instance, factors that are expected to increase or decrease the Iraqi learners' motivation to read are: teaching materials, teaching methods and EFL learners' role. They can be briefly explained as the following:

#### a. Teaching materials

Teaching materials is reviewed to be the concept that assists academic aims of learning curriculum, engaging learners, encouraging learning motivation (Toptas, et al. 2012). They include basic elements like teachers' guides, books, work books, pictures, maps, , CDs, slides, and a variety of other aids that assist the learning process. Learning aids can take different types of concrete objects, visual, audio visual, and others that assist help learning as well as educational settings. Courts and Ghai (1974) suggest that diverse teaching materials are essential in any educational goals and in the case of excluding them; teaching would turn to be rather passive. In Iraq, teaching materials do not cope with the needs of the learners since most of the teaching materials have not been available.

#### b. Teaching methods

There is a number of teaching methods that teachers can adobe throughout the teaching process and each of them has its pros and cons. To mention some are; Direct method Grammar translation method, , , Communicative teaching method, Audio-lingual method and others which have been applying in teaching

the second and foreign language (Freeman and Anderson, ٢٠١٣). Hamadat (2009) states that the methods of teaching English language in the Arabic countries are struggling behind traditional methods. They do not have regulatory technique that is recommended by the contemporary techniques. In his study, Saeed (2015) revealed that 80% of the English intermediate language teachers admit their need for more training courses on teaching techniques. He found that more than 70% of those teachers concentrate primarily on grammar and this part took place at the expense of others skills.

### c. EFL teacher's role

The teacher plays a basic role in the learning process. He or she is deemed to be the most influential element in the classroom (Edge, 1999). The teacher's task is to create and ensure a suitable environment for learners in order to help them improve their language competence. The teacher has the responsibility of performing many tasks during the educational term. Such responsibility consists of constructing the tests, evaluating learners, and deciding whether a student is qualified to proceed to the next educational level or not. Therefore, the teacher has to be skilled organizer and knows what method that could yield qualified learners. S/he should know how to exclude irrelevant information or/and confusing instructions which could result a waste in time and effort. Furthermore, the teacher should be a good prompter to the students (Wang, 2008) in order to motivate them which (i.e. *motivation*) is a significant factor that enables overcoming any obstacle in the learning process. In Jordan, Dweik (1986) studied the issue of motivation in Arabic intermediate school where the English teacher were not really motivated enough to provide/create friendly atmosphere for their students. The study revealed that, some kind of friendly atmosphere would encourage students' interaction and turn them to be more effective learners.

All the former mentioned circumstances have their effects on producing qualified/unqualified learners through increasing the level of motivation on the part of the learners. All in all, motivated learners tend to devote a greater effort to learn English through spending an extra span of time reading (especially the recreational reading type) English contexts.

### Statement of the Problem

Many scholars (Erik van Schooten & de Glopper, 2002; Miesen, 2003) have highlighted their concerns that the new generations are distinctly reading less than the previous generations, since their intentions to read is competing with the other leisure activities (i.e. doing sports, watching T.V, using social media, and others). In school or any other fields, reading is an essential element in the learning process; thus, university students are expected to be skillful readers who enjoy reading (Burak, 2004). Some other scholars (Mikulecky, 1978; Krashen, 2011), however, have a concern that aliteracy creates a threat to any society. Glopper (2002) indicates that perpetuated aversion from leisure reading can result in decline and loss of valuable reading skills needed for academic and career advancement. Krashen (2011) indicates that people tend to be satisfied with gathering basic literacy skills that is enough for functioning in life whereas disregarding the importance of literacy skills in their lives.

Despite the fact that the percentage of literacy in the Arab world in many countries is nearly over 90% (e.g. Kuwait & Jordan) (UNESCO, 2008), the recent UN declared a more exact calculation that an average Arab person reads only four pages a year (Russian News and Information Agency, 2008). Some scholars (i.e., Anderson et al, 1988; and Greaney, 1980) usually called a person alliterate if she / he reads less than 25 minutes per day. In Iraq, English language is taught as a foreign language from the first stage in which students who go to university are expected to have had some exposure to English language for twelve years. It has been found that there are big gap in English skills among those students. This gap has been the result of devoting different periods of time of English reading.

An interview was conducted by the researcher of the current study in April 2017 with five EFL instructors in Al-Iraqia University in Baghdad revealed serious problem concerning the reading habits of English students. The lecturers that were interviewed all agree that the Iraqi students are not avid readers as they also rarely read their academic textbooks. This issue contributes to the students' weakness in the English language in general and to reading in particular. Those lecturers also added the majority of the students showed poor language skills as a result of suffering from lack of motivation. Two of the lecturers agreed that "unfortunately, we are a culture of non-readers especially when it comes to English language".

This study aims at highlighting and filling the gap by identifying the EFL learners' recreational reading habits of English majors at the Al-Iraqia University. In addition, this current study aims at examining factors that could affect the engagement in recreational reading for the target of creating proper intervention schemes. Thus, this study utilised the Theory of Planned Behaviour as its framework to evaluate its applicability in predicting the EFL Iraqi students' intentions and behaviour of recreational reading. In this section, an important question is that: why this study is of great value to be applied on Iraqi population. The answer is claimed to be that, many Arab countries suffer the identical inconvenient circumstances primarily in the Educational issues; Iraq has even its own unique case due to the unstable political situation. This issue sheds its negative effects on learners' tendencies (i.e. motivation, which is the core element in this study) to learn. Individuals feel that there are other priorities than learning (Especially when they trust their degree of graduation would be of less benefit to help them to get a job with the same major that they had spent years and heaps of money to major). In this case, another question in this paragraph is that, does their motivation to read affect their recreational reading? Thus, The previously mentioned enquiries help provide a convenient territory for this study to be applied on the Iraqi subjects other than other Arab population.

## Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Investigate the influence of students' recreational reading motivation on their intention to read,
2. Examine whether students' intentions to read predict their future recreational reading habits.
3. Examine the relationship between students' intention to read in their general performance in English.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the current research:

1. What is the relationship between students' motivation toward recreational reading and their intention to read?
2. What is the relationship between students' intention to read and their intention to read?
3. What is the relationship between students' intention to read in their general performance in English.

## Hypotheses of the study

1. There is a relationship between students' motivation toward recreational reading and their intention to read.
2. There is a relationship between students' intention to read and their intention to read.
3. There is a relationship between students' intention to read in their general performance in English.

## Significance of the Study

The current study will benefit English language major students at Al-Iraqia University by providing a better understanding of their recreational reading habits in relation to motivation, intention to read, and consequently on general performance in English language. The study suggests remedial procedures to improve the pedagogical strategies that could increase the amount of time that is spent on recreational reading among EFL learners to improve their linguistic skills. It will also provide insights to the curriculum developers, instructors, and researchers in the field.

## Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

The conceptual framework of the present study is based on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (1991) which tries to explain human behaviour. This framework illustrates that 'motivation' (Independent Variables) to spend extra frequencies to read would increase the tendency of 'attention' (Mediator Variable) to read English context which in turn would positively affect their general performance' (Dependent Variable).



The conceptual framework of the study

## MATERIAL AND METHODOS

This study employed a quantitative method research design to investigate the recreational reading habits of English majors at the Iraqi University and other possible factors that influence those reading habits.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

The population of this study is English major students enrolled in Al-Iraqia University (N= 43), located in Baghdad, Iraq. Those participants are representative for most of the population at Iraqi universities since they are located in the in the capital (Al-Iraqia University) which encompasses students from all regions of the country.

### **INSTRUMENT**

This study applied self-administered questionnaires; to measure the two factors (motivation and intention) that are expected to affect the English general performance represented by written texts. All questionnaire items were measured through a five-point Likert-type scale with options ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The original reliability (Cronbach a) of items is (0.71) motivation, and (0.85) intention.

The questionnaire involves three parts as the following: The first part is the demographic one that asks questions to obtain general background about the participants. The second part comprises 50 questions which are all of the kind of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ). In spite of the fact that the big number of the questions (i.e. 50questions), the time that is needed to answer the questions is relatively short since answering the questionnaire demands merely ticking, filling the gaps, underlining, and matching. These questions are adopted from the book by Stageberg and Goodman (1981) which is titled: 'An introductory English grammar' which contains many MCQ exercises. Two marks are given for each correct answer and zero mark is given for each incorrect answer. The decision concerning the grades of the participants' performances is agreed to be 50% as the success mark. In other words, 49% is considered to be failure.

#### **3.4.1 Validity and Reliability**

Both questionnaires were tested for validity and reliability. Face validity refers to whether items on a questionnaire appear both appropriate to the phenomenon being measured and being, easily understood (Creswell, 2012). Content and face validity of the instruments were assessed through a panel of judges specialised in Applied Linguistics from English Department/ Al-Iraqia University. The judge's suggestions were taken into consideration and, accordingly, the questionnaire was further refined. The overall agreement of the judges indicates evidence of the content validity. Accordingly, a total of 15 questionnaires were used for the pilot testing. Reliability analysis was conducted by computing the Cronbach's a. The results of the pilot study's analysis indicated that the constructs' items accomplished acceptable reliability (as mentioned above) with Cronbach's (0.71) motivation, and (0.85) intention.

#### **Data collection Procedure**

The data collection procedures start with getting a formal permission from English Department of those participants to collect the study data. The method that was applied to collect the data was the survey design in a quantitative method which is, following other studies, suitable to present highly accurate answers to the questions study. The sampling that was adopted in this study was convenience sampling. The researcher met the participants to make sure that the participation of participants was really voluntary participation through explaining them the nature of the test and the relatively short time that the test would consume. As the instrument is mainly Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ), the average time that was needed to collect the data was 45 minutes. The researcher, after distributing the copies to them, simplified the required task by a brief explanation of the item of the test taking in consideration that the explanation is free of any hints which might affect the obtained results of the current study.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

SPSS was utilized in the current study which is reviewed to sophisticated software which is used by social scientists in addition to other professionals for the statistical analysis (Coakes & Steed, 2009). In the regression testing, the regression is between the accuracy level of the MR (Motivation of Recreational Reading) and P (i.e. Performance in English). From the supported answers that are provided by the participants, the study showed that there are the majority of the participants agreed regarding the existence of the relationship between the two variables ( $\beta = .565$ ), with a significant level at (.000). in

SPSS software, this statistics means that MR has a positive relationship with PR level in L2. The illustration of the statistics is shown in the following table.

**Results of Regression analysis  
efficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.447	.107		13.633	.000
MR	.427	.038	.565	10.812	.000

**CONCLUSION**

The study tested the recreational reading motivation and its effect on the English language proficiency by Iraqi EFL learners at college of Arts/ Al-Iraqya University. The participants who scored the highest marks are those who have highest level of motivation to practice recreational reading. Correspondingly, those who scored the lowest marks are those who have the lowest level of motivation to practice recreational reading. In view of these findings, the researcher concludes that the current research is consonant with the Theory of planned behaviour' (TPB) by Ajzen' (1991). In other words, motivation (towards recreational reading in the current study) has a positive effect on performance ( e.i. performance represented by the engagement in recreational reading and, consequently, showing a better performance in English language). In addition, the recreational reading is proved to be valuable in the pedagogical field whereas those participants who show a relatively better skills in English language proficiency have been motivated to practice (and they did practice) recreational readings.

**IMPLICATION**

The current study implies that the MR is a productive factor for improving the general proficiency in English language. Hence, this stud recommends that learners are to be made aware of the benefits that recreational reading provides to English learners in specific and other fields of learning in general. The study suggests remedial procedures to improve the pedagogical strategies that could increase the amount of time that is spent on recreational reading among EFL learners to improve their linguistic skills. The study implies that the motivation factor should be urged by those who are responsible for the learning process. For instance, on different occasions, teachers should highlight the benefits of recreational reading. As well as, teacher should advise learners to go through different English texts other than their study texts. The study also supports curricula developers to design the study books in a more interesting contexts and forms to increase learners' motivation to spend longer time to read such books (reading whether as homework or not).

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