The Impact of Four Reading Motivational Constructs on Motivating EFL Learners to Read Online Texts in English

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ABSTRACT

It is generally acknowledged that motivation plays a critical role in second-language (L2) reading. The technology-enhanced learning environment, specifically the computer-assisted reading environment as an interactive tool with distinctive attributes, is said to motivate English as a foreign language (EFL) learners to make more sustained efforts in online reading and show greater perseverance. Such an environment encourages students to devote more time to reading due to its ability to more profoundly engage English learners in reading accessible, electronic English texts. The present study investigates the relative contribution of four motivational constructs that constitute the EFL learner’s online reading motivation: the intrinsic value of reading online English texts, the extrinsic value of reading online English texts, the attainment value of reading, and reading efficacy. The study closely measures the views of EFL learners in preparatory programs at selected Saudi universities regarding the value of online reading with respect to these four motivational constructs. In addition, it explores differences in these motivational constructs according to the perspectives of both genders who are attending preparatory programs, as well as examines the motivational attitude of EFL learners toward the value of reading online English texts. A 35-item survey was administered to the selected respondents to identify the four dimensions of EFL learners’ online English reading motivation. The findings indicate that the four online reading motivational constructs contribute positively to EFL learners reading online English texts in the following order: extrinsic, attainment, intrinsic, and efficacy. The questionnaires were analyzed by use of within- and between-subjects ANOVA and post-hoc pairwise comparisons, whereas the open-ended questions were analyzed by use of content analysis. The results also show that both male and female EFL learners have high motivation to read online English texts, with female learners scoring significantly higher than male learners on the attainment scale. A thorough discussion that incorporates the present results is provided, along with proffering and highlighting practical technical and pedagogical implications for computer-assisted language learning (CALL) reading classrooms beyond the given context. Areas of potential future research are delineated as well.

Keywords: Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Computer-Assisted Reading Environment, English, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Learning Environment Technology, Online Text

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INTRODUCTION

Computer technology, with its idiosyncratic technological features, adds a further dimension to reading in a foreign or second language (L2), as it is one of the essential language skills among the four macro skills in the process of learning an L2. Specifically, the current electronic reading environment appears to be enhancing in particular the aspect of reading motivation, among other L2 reading variables and constructs, as a sustaining and most influential factor in the process of learning to read in the target learned language of learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). This is attributable to the fact that, in an online reading environment, L2 readers can readily access a vast array of sources of interesting information that is provided in multiple representational means and in varied modalities that allow for more reader control of and interaction with textual content. Students thus become more motivated to read in English. They are able to process reading materials more deeply, show more persistence than unmotivated readers, exhibit a greater interest in the reading materials under study, engage in reading those materials more profoundly, and achieve higher scores on text comprehension tasks (Lim & Shen, 2006; Lück, 2008; Pan & Huang, 2009; Lin, 2010).

Within the EFL context, therefore, reading motivation has come to the fore with the use of computers in comparison to that of more conventional reading modes. The use of computers to teach such skills has also gained in popularity through its relevance to four motivational components of reading—namely, the intrinsic value of reading English, the extrinsic utility value of reading English, the attainment value of reading, and reading efficacy. This theoretical hypothesis should be empirically tested, however, to determine whether computer-assisted reading strengthens and maintains the reading motivation of EFL learners in general and with respect to these motivational variables in particular. Information about the effects of the online reading environment on EFL learners’ reading motivation will provide EFL specialists with some valuable insights. In particular, this information answers the question of whether such a reading environment makes electronic texts suitable for second or foreign language reading in general and suitable specifically as potential facilitators of L2 reading motivation. Hence, tangible evidence of the expected positive effects of using electronic texts to reinforce L2 reading motivation has not yet been established, especially knowing that the rapid changes in the information age have resulted in literacy becoming more technologically oriented. As a result, it has a great impact on the amount of online versus paper-based materials that the EFL learners read, based on the assumption that suggests the process of reading information online is the trend among EFL learners and others since they all are constantly exposed to such a source.

Recognizing the increasingly promising importance of L2 reading motivation as an affective factor with respect to the computer-assisted L2 reading environment as an indispensable resource for facility and the influential component of L2 reading pedagogy, this study investigated the contribution of the aforementioned four motivational constructs on the connection to EFL learners’ online reading motivation. It did so by closely measuring the perceptions of EFL learners who were in their preparatory year at selected Saudi universities and by exploring differences, if manifested, in these motivational constructs between both genders represented in the study.

It is hoped that this study will add to a growing compendium of literature aimed at developing a deeper understanding of online reading motivation and how it can be exploited effectively, thus enabling EFL learners to gain optimal benefits from it in cultivating their reading ability and skills. This goal is driven by the fact that reading in L2 requires a lot of time, effort, and perseverance. The ultimate aim of nurturing EFL learners’ motivational orientations within the online reading environment is most likely to yield positive results.
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