

## **The Impact of Cultural Orientation on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension and Achievement Motivation**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the effect of cultural orientation on reading comprehension and achievement motivation of the EFL learners. To conduct this study, the researcher recruited 60 Iranian EFL learners at language institutes. All learners were selected from the intermediate level. They were assigned to two groups; experimental and control groups. The researcher used a number of cultural concepts and orientated the learners to these concepts as treatment in the experimental group. After the treatment the researcher administered the reading comprehension post test to measure the participants' reading comprehension and a questionnaire to assess their achievement motivation. The findings showed the impact of familiarity with the cultural concepts before starting the reading texts on the participants' reading comprehension and their achievement motivation.

**Key words:** culture, reading, EFL learners

### **Introduction**

Reading comprehension is essential especially to many EFL learners who rarely have a chance to speak English in their lives. In recent years, the focus of foreign language reading comprehension has turned from the text to the interaction between the texts and readers (Ajideh, 2003). Hence, content and cultural elements of the texts have received much attention. Brown (2007) stresses the importance of understanding what we mean by the process of cultural learning. Obviously, language and culture are interrelated. It is not possible to teach language without culture.

One crucial determinant of what and how can be read by learners is the amount of background knowledge readers possess to help them comprehend what they are reading. Although readers can turn printed symbols into sounds and word accurately, it can't guarantee the readers' comprehending. The readers should be prompted to improve their knowledge. Obviously, inadequate background knowledge especially cultural one can have an effect on all readers' reading comprehension.

The texts that represent different aspects of the readers' culture like the way of life, way of talking, dressing, food, artifacts and others, that are unique to the readers' culture are called culturally familiar texts (Yusoff, 2004). Brock (1990, cited in Yusoff, 2004) believes that culturally familiar texts or localized literature are texts that contain content, settings, cultural assumptions,

situations, characters, language, and historical references that are not new or strange for the second/foreign language reader. According to Reinmann (2009), cultural awareness raising is any activity which actively tries to engage learners and improve their understanding, and comprehension, increase sensitivity and tolerance of otherness and cultural diversity.

Language is closely related to culture. Language expresses cultural reality and culture exerts enormous influences on language. Thus, language learning is often culture learning. Moreover, in recent years, foreign language teaching has received more attention than before, and more and more language teachers are aware that second language is often second culture learning and cultural competence is as integral part of language (Zhao, 2011). It has long been recognized that language is an important part of a given culture and the influence of culture on a given language is something intrinsic and inseparable.

Abdolmanafi Rokni and Hajilari (2013) conducted a study where they chose 60 EFL learners from three classes and divided them into three groups randomly: a control group and two experimental groups. The participants were studying at pre-intermediate level in an institute. The control group did not receive any special treatment, whereas one experimental group received texts of British culture (BC) and another one received texts of Persian culture as well as British one (P-BC). The findings showed that learners from the BC group did better than the ones in the control group. Also the learners in P-BC group outperformed the ones in the other two groups in the posttest. The results showed that EFL learners should be aware of the culture of the new language as it affects the learning of new language (Demir, 2012).

As Droop and Verhoeven (1998) point out, cultural background knowledge plays a substantial role in comprehension of texts in curricula in educational parts. It affects not only the comprehension scores and the recall of text propositions, but also the reading efficiency of learners acquiring the language. It is important to add that the influence of cultural concepts on reading comprehension is only valid for texts of which the linguistic complexity is within the reading level of the learners.

Some studies show that the world knowledge also can influence on L1 reading comprehension. Beaugrande (1980) conducted a study and found evidence through miscues in oral reading that readers activate content schemata. Here, miscues are signals of the readers' predictions on the basis of the content schemata. For example, Beaugrande explains, a subject reading a text about a rocket which was fired in the presence of generals read "war" for "roar". He also presents that subjects try to add information to the text when recalling it on the basis of the content schema activated. When they wanted to recall a text about launching of a rocket from a desert, they tried to add information about the brightness of the sun in the desert.

Keshavarz and Atai (2007) carried out a study on the effects of linguistic simplification and content schemata on reading comprehension and recall. 240 Iranian male learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) as participants were chosen. There were 2 types of texts: content-familiar and content-unfamiliar. The participants were tested on one of the linguistic versions of

the content-familiar and content-unfamiliar texts. Data analysis showed a significant effect of the content and EFL proficiency on reading comprehension and recall.

Johnson (1981) examined the effects of the cultural origin of text on reading comprehension of 46 Iranian intermediate advanced ESL students at the university. Half of the subjects read the un-adapted English texts of two stories, one from Iranian folklore and one from American one. The other half read the same stories in adapted English. After reading, there were multiple-choice questions for the subjects to test their reading comprehension. The results of the test showed that the cultural origin of the story had a more prominent effect on comprehension than semantic or syntactic complexity of the text.

Salmani-Nodoushan (2003) examined the impact of text familiarity, task type, and language proficiency on test and task performance of university students. 541 Iranian students of university took the Task-Based Reading Test (TBRT). The same version of the IELTS General Training Reading Module, a self-report Questionnaire, and the Task-Based Reading Test were the instruments used in this study. Test familiarity was one of the independent variables. A self-report questionnaire was developed to collect data. The results showed that their overall test performance was found to be significantly influenced by text familiarity, language proficiency and the interaction between text familiarity and language proficiency.

Pulido (2004) studied the impact of cultural background knowledge on incidental vocabulary gain of nonsense words in reading and found that background knowledge does not help learners with weaker levels of L2 reading proficiency and restricted vocabulary knowledge.

In addition to culture, motivation may be an important factor in individuals' success or failure. Generally, motivation may be seen as a drive which may push other factors in people to move or stop moving toward their goals. Motivation refers to "the reasons underlying behavior" (Guay, Chanal, Marsh, Larose & Boivin, 2010, p. 712). Broussard and Garrison (2004) define motivation as "the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something" (p.106).

Wigfield et al. (2004) examined the effects of two different models of reading instruction: Concept- Oriented Reading Instruction and Strategy Instruction. Concept-Orientated Reading Instruction involves connecting reading and the topic together in order to encourage the development of reading comprehension and motivation. Strategy Instruction involves teaching various reading strategies, where the focus is on activating background knowledge, student questioning, searching for information, summarizing and organizing. Instructional programs can affect children's motivation, in turn affecting their achievement.

Many researchers have studied the relationship of achievement motivation with other variables like perceived difficulty of tasks (Capa, Audiffrent, & Ragot, 2008); academic and job (Collins, Hanges, & Locke, 2004). Achievement motivation may be very similar and related to different variables, but it is separate construct with its own specific differences (Balkis & Isiker, 2005).

Wang and Guthrie (2011) examined the extent that motivational processes facilitate the comprehension of passages and the extent of the role of culture in children's motivational processes of text comprehension. Fourth-grade students (187 American and 197 Chinese) were

administered a reading test and two questionnaires. The results showed that intrinsic motivation predicts text comprehension for both student groups after controlling for all variables. Extrinsic motivation predicts text comprehension except when associated with intrinsic motivation.

The relationship between motivational orientation and language learning performance was investigated by Noels, Clement, and Pelletier (1999, 2000). In the first research, 78 students enrolled in a summer French immersion course were asked to fill in the intrinsic, extensive, and motivation questionnaires. But there was not any significant relationship between intrinsic, extrinsic motivation, amotivation, and final grades. The researchers did another research two years later with 59 students in a program of a summer immersion at a French- English bilingual university in Canada. Interestingly, this time a significant correlation between intrinsic motivation and final course grades was found. Also there was a negative correlation between amotivation and final; course grades.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, this study addresses the issue of cultural background and its impact on the reading comprehension of EFL learners.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions have been raised:

- 1) Does cultural orientation have any impact on intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension?
- 2) Does cultural orientation make any significant difference in intermediate EFL learners' achievement motivation?

### **Participants**

To carry out the present study, the researcher selected 60 Iranian EFL participants as learners. The participants were at different language institutes. According to the placement test conducted by the institutes, the intermediate language learners were selected.

### **Instruments**

*General proficiency test:* The following instruments were utilized in this study; Firstly, General English Proficiency Test of PET (2004) was used as a placement test to select the homogenous groups of participants. The PET exam papers of Cambridge ESOL was concerned with listening, reading, writing, and speaking; it should be mentioned that speaking part was ignored and the test was administered in 125 minutes for the first three parts. The first paper consisted of reading and writing questions. The reading part consisted of 35 questions in 5 parts which tested a range of reading skills with a variety of texts, ranging from very short notices to longer continuous texts. The reading part comprised 25% of total marks of the whole examination. The writing section contained 7 questions in 3 parts which tested a range of written skills. There were different kinds of the questions as multiple choice items, true false questions, and cloze tests in reading, and also fill in the blanks questions, description and explanation about a picture or a

situation in writing part as well. The second paper was related to the listening with four parts ranging from short exchanges to longer dialogues and monologues and takes 25 questions.

*Reading comprehension test:* A teacher-made reading comprehension test was used both as pre and posttest to measure the participants' reading comprehension. The test was planned, constructed, and piloted by the researcher under the supervision of the advisor of the study. Therefore, the item and test characteristics was checked technically to make sure that it could be used as a research tool. The passages was meticulously selected from authentic sources while considering the interests, passage length, authenticity, difficulty level, cultural load of the texts.

Based on the four passages, a reading comprehension test was developed. The test consisted of 40 items, ten objective items for each text, since as Farhady et al. (1994, cited in Rahmany, 2003) state "ordinarily a passage of about 100 words yields three decent items" (p. 248). Maximum care was applied so that the difficulty level of the texts coincided with the level of the students' proficiency in English. The same pre-test was used after the treatment as the post-test. To exclude the effect of test facet, the same test was used as the post-test. However, the interval between the two tests was carefully decided upon to minimize and practice affect of the third administration. The results of the post-test were also compared with the pre-test not only in terms of test characteristics, but also in terms of the treatment effect.

*Achievement motivation questionnaire:* Thirdly, a questionnaire of achievement motivation was used to investigate the participants' point of view about their achievement motivation. Achievement Motives Scale (AMS) was designed for middle school and university students. The achievement motivation questionnaire was administered to the participants two times before and after the treatment to detect how providing cultural background for the participants influenced their achievement motivation. AMS consisted of 20 items originally and was translated and adapted to the Iranian educational context (Nikoopour, Alam & Tajbakhsh, 2012). The items of AMS were in a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely incorrect) to 5 (absolutely correct) and were divided into two equal halves, which provided information for one of the two AMS subscales: motivation to approach success (MS), and motivation to avoid failure (MF). Since its construction, AMS has been used widely in different studies. In order to account for the reasonable psychometric characteristics of the instruments, they were translated, piloted and revised. Hence, the reliability was observed for the Persian version of AMS. The participants in the study were asked to choose one of the five alternatives for each question in the questionnaire: "I totally agree", "I agree", "I don't have any idea", "I disagree", and finally "I totally disagree".

*Teachers' interview:* As the main concerns of the study were to detect the impact of cultural orientation on the two dependent variables; namely, reading comprehension and achievement motivation, they were measured by the use of a test and a questionnaire. As the fourth instrument an interview was given to a few EFL teachers to assess their ideas about the nature of the study. In this way, the quantitative aspects of the study were also taken into account. The interview consisted of 10 questions which reflect teachers' ideas about the treatment, students' motivation and feedback to cultural ordination. The results are quantitatively reported. The EFL teachers in

the study were asked to choose one of the five alternatives for each question in the table: “I totally agree”, “I agree”, “I don’t have any idea”, “I disagree”, and finally “I totally disagree”.

### Procedure

At the start of the study, the four research tools were designed based on the nature of the study, while focusing on the purpose of the study. Then, the tests, the questionnaire and the interview were piloted to be checked for their reliability and validity. In the next stage, the proficiency test was administered to the students to some different language institutes in Shahryar. The purpose was to select homogeneous participants for the study. There were 60 participants in two equal groups. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups; 30 in the control and 30 in the experimental group. Having finalized the reading test in terms of item tryout, the researcher administered the piloted reading comprehension test as a pretest to gauge the learners’ reading comprehension ability before the start of the study.

During the sessions, the procedure for conceptually explanation of a text was performed to the subjects in experimental group in about 15-20 minutes, and as an example, a reading passage was conceptually and culturally discussed with the subjects’ cooperation. During the rest of the time of the sessions, the reading texts were presented to the experimental group. On the other hand, the same reading texts were given to the control group members without any conceptual and contextual explanations.

Then, the researcher presented the treatment to the experimental group that consisted of cultural specifications related to each text in every session (4 sessions), while not giving this sort of instruction to the control group. The piloted questionnaire was given to the participants to elicit data on their achievement motivation at the end of sessions. While collecting data based on the learners’ questionnaire, the researcher interviewed some EFL teachers as well after the classes and considering the learners’ answers to the reading texts questions. The results of each of the research tools were analyzed to test the research hypotheses.

### Results

The normality test results showed  $p$ -value of .43 and .80 for reading pretest in control and experimental groups respectively. The Sig. for both groups were greater than the selected significance, .05 ( $p > \alpha$ ); thus it can stated that two sets of scores had a normal distribution. In addition, the normality test results showed  $p$ -value of .85 and .73 for reading posttest in control and experimental groups respectively, both of which are more than .05. Accordingly it can be asserted that these two sets of scores had a normal distribution as well. As a result, the parametric Independent Sample Test was applied to compare the mean reading score of two groups both on pretest and posttest. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 and the results of the T-test are presented in Table 2.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Statistics for Reading Pretest in Control and Experimental*

	Group	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Pretest	Control	30	7	24	31	28.03	28.00	28	1.712
	Experimental	30	8	24	32	27.43	27.00	27	2.046
Posttest	Control	30	8	26	34	30.30	30.00	30	2.120
	Experimental	30	9	28	37	32.53	33.00	34	2.446

Levene's Test showed that the hypothesis of equal of variances is supported because  $p$  value which was .22 is greater than .05 ( $P > \alpha$ ).

**Table 2.** *Independent Samples Test to Compare the Reading Pretest in Control and Experimental Groups*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
1.523	.222	1.232	58	.223	.600

$T$ -test results revealed that there was no significant difference in reading between control and experimental groups on pretest ( $t = 1.23, p = .22$ ), in which the  $t$ -observed was less than the  $t$ -critical, 2.00, and the  $p$ -value was larger than .05 ( $p > \alpha$ ). So, it can be concluded that the two groups had almost the same reading ability on the pretest.

Independent Samples Test detected a significant difference in reading comprehension between the two groups on the posttest (with  $t = 3.78, p = .000, \varepsilon = 0.91$ ), in which the  $t$ -observed was more than the  $t$ -critical, 2.00, and the  $p$ -value was less than .05 ( $p < \alpha$ ). Therefore, the first null hypothesis of this study which predicted that "Cultural orientation makes no significant difference in intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension was rejected. Consequently, with 95% confidence, it can be claimed that cultural orientation makes a significant difference in intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension.

**Table 3.** *Independent Samples Test to Compare the Reading Posttest in Control and Experimental Groups*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means			
F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
.923	.341	-3.780	58	.000	-2.233

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test revealed  $p$ -value of .76 and .96 for motivation pretest in control and experimental groups respectively. The Sig. for both groups are more than the selected significance, .05 ( $p > \alpha$ ); therefore, it can be stated that two sets of scores have a normal distribution. As a result, the parametric Independent Sample Test was used to compare the mean motivation score of two groups on pretest; otherwise the nonparametric Mann Whitney U Test would be used.

**Table 4.** *Descriptive Statistics for Motivation Pretest in Control and Experimental*

Group	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Control	30	28	55	83	66.77	66.50	67	7.886
Experimental	30	37	49	86	67.97	68.00	68	10.067

However, the normality test results found  $p$ -value of .54 and .01 for motivation posttest in control and experimental groups respectively. The  $p$ -value for control is larger than .05 and so it has normal distribution, but that for experimental is less than .05, and therefore not it is not normally distributed. Since one group does not meet the normality assumption, the Mann Whitney U Test, which is nonparametric, was utilized to compare the performance of the two groups on motivation questionnaire.

The results of Independent Sample Test on motivation pretest are presented in Table 5. Levene's Test showed that the hypothesis of equal of variances is supported because  $p$  value which was .13 is greater than .05 ( $P > \alpha$ ).

**Table 5.** *Independent Samples Test to Compare the Motivation Pretest in Control and Experimental Groups*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
2.351	.131	-.514	58	.609	-1.200

$T$ -test results showed that there was no significant difference in writing skill between control and experimental groups on pretest ( $t = -.51, p = .60$ ), in which the  $t$ -observed was less than the  $t$ -critical, 2.00, and the Sig. was more than .05 ( $p > \alpha$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that the two groups are almost equally motivated. The results of Mann Whitney U Test, to compare the posttest performance of the two groups on motivation questionnaire are set forth in Table 4.10.

**Table 6.** *Descriptive Statistics for Motivation Posttest in Control and Experimental*

Group	N	Median	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank
Control	30	65.50	8.666	24.40
Motivation on posttest Experimental	30	90.50	15.767	36.60
Total	60	68.50	13.897	

Mann Whitney U Test revealed a significant difference in the motivation of control group ( $Md = 65.50, n = 30$ ) and experimental group ( $Md = 90.50, n = 30, U = 267, z = -2.70, p = .007, \epsilon = 0.35$ ) in which the  $p$ -value was less than the significance level,  $.05 (p < \alpha)$ . As a result, the second null hypothesis of this study which predicted that “Cultural orientation makes no significant difference in intermediate EFL learners’ achievement motivation” was rejected. Accordingly, with 95% confidence, it can be asserted that cultural orientation makes a significant difference in intermediate EFL learners’ achievement motivation.

### Discussion

The main purpose of the present study was to examine the impact of cultural concepts on reading comprehension and achievement motivation of EFL learners. The role of reading as the most important academic language skill for EFL learners be ignored (e.g., Pourhoseini Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2001; Ajideh, 2003).

Addressing the first research question of the study, the following null hypothesis was tested: Cultural orientation doesn’t make any impact on intermediate EFL learners’ reading comprehension. The result of the present study showed that familiar cultural concepts enhance the EFL learners’ reading comprehension. The results of the study are in accordance with a number of studies which found that knowing foreign language cultural concepts pave the way of comprehension of reading texts (e.g., Jalilifar & Assi, 2008). As Harmer (2001) stated, a reader needs a series of clues to comprehend the writer’s meaning and concepts. Therefore, in the situation that the texts have cultural concepts that are new, unfamiliar and intangible for the foreigners, they need to have some clues as pre-reading activities. In the foreign language institutes, the teachers should discuss about the new cultural concepts to pave the way of reading comprehension for learners. Getting familiar with the second/ foreign language culture is very helpful in learning that language. In teaching an “alien” language, it’s necessary to pay attention to the fragility of students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding.

To confirm the role of cultural knowledge in reading comprehension, we can refer to Steffensen (1998) who believes that a significant problem for foreign learners is reading texts in which the cultural background knowledge and assumptions are different from their own. And he mentions that culturally loaded reading contexts are interesting for the learners because it’s as means for acquiring information for social survival.

This study may support Chang’s (2007) opinion that some students may experience difficulty or lose their interest while reading some cross-cultural materials if their cultural background knowledge has not been tapped. The second question of the current thesis was as follows: Does cultural orientation make any significant difference in intermediate EFL learners’ achievement motivation?

According to Wigfield, et al. (2004), motivation has an important role in different areas of learning. As reading texts are as the main part of learning a foreign language, the learners should have a strong interest in and motivation towards the topics. When the learners have background knowledge and cultural information, they can be encouraged to continue reading a text. This findings of this study support the results reported by Thang Kiet (2011) who argued that learners' willingness and motivation to engage culture learning need to be fostered. With motivation and willingness, learners can develop culture self-awareness and eliminate the fear of being distanced from their native culture. More new cultural exchanges with people from other cultural backgrounds should be also encouraged in order to enhance learners' curiosity and interest in culture learning. This study shows that there is a positive correlation between knowing cultural concepts and arousing the learners' motivation.

The findings of the study corroborate the findings of Jalilifar and Assi (2008) who investigated the role of cultural nativization in reading comprehension of target language short stories in Iranian EFL learners and showed that cultural nativization had a facilitative effect on comprehension of the stories. The findings of the study also corroborate the findings of Etern and Razi (2009) who conducted a study to examine whether cultural familiarity influences comprehension of short stories and whether nativizing the story or using reading activities can compensate for the lack of such familiarity and showed that the learners who read the nativized story had a better performance in comprehension. Our study shows that cultural information is an important factor in learning a foreign language and also on comprehending the reading part, which is in agreement with the findings of a study by Abdolmanafi Rokni and Hajlari (2013) who argued that EFL learners should be aware of the culture of the new language as it affects the learning of new language (Demir, 2012).

The results of the current study give further support to the argument by Rokhsari (2012) who suggests that cultural knowledge causes the development of a special culture's familiarity that affects the role of cultural knowledge in the process of reading comprehension. Each language has its own cultural information that influence of people's thought on how they act on and comprehend the text. Othman and Vanathas (2004) believe that learners should become familiar with the topic of the text and the new culture to comprehend the text easily because in this situation, they are able to relate it to their own background knowledge with their experience in their own language. The findings of our study support the results of Droop and Verhoeven (1998) who point out that cultural background knowledge plays a substantial role in comprehension of texts in curricula in educational parts. It affects not only the comprehension scores and the recall of text propositions, but also the reading efficiency of learners acquiring the language. It is important to add that the influence of cultural concepts on reading comprehension is only valid for texts of which the linguistic complexity is within the reading level of the learners.

In addition, the current results lend support to the suggestion made by Pressley (2000) who argues that in order to teach students effectively to use the processes that good readers use, higher-order comprehension processes are one of the major factors to be aware of. It seems that learners find it difficult to comprehend the text when they cannot access its content schematic area because of failure to get enough clues in the text.

The findings obtained in this study corroborate the results of some studies which have shown that world knowledge can influence L1 reading comprehension. Beaugrande (1980) conducted a study and found evidence through miscues in oral reading that readers activate content schemata. This is in accordance with a study by Steffenson, Joag-dev, and Anderson (1979, cited

in Anderson & Barnitz, 1988) who found that differences in existing knowledge about the content of text materials can be a main source of individual differences in comprehending a text.

Based on the results, we can support the idea that getting familiar with the second/foreign language culture is very helpful in learning that language. In teaching an “alien” language, it is necessary to pay attention to the fragility of students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding. Steffensen (1988) believes that a significant problem for ESL students is reading texts in which the cultural background knowledge and assumptions are different from their own. There is now substantial evidence that when cultural background assumptions and constructs are missing, reading can become a time-consuming, laborious and unsatisfactory enterprise. We support the argument by Chang (2007) who argued that students may experience difficulty or lose their interest while reading some cross-cultural materials if their background knowledge has not been tapped. With warm-up cultural hints of a story, quick figure and readers’ expectations of the story may elicit their interests and enhance their reading comprehension. Also, a number of other studies report the benefit of cross-cultural literature for raising readers’ general background knowledge and reading competence (e.g., Gajdusek, 1988).

We interpret the current results as giving support to Johnson (1981) who examined the effects of the cultural origin of text on reading comprehension of 46 Iranian intermediate advanced ESL students at the university and showed that the cultural origin of the story had a more prominent effect on comprehension than semantic or syntactic complexity of the text. These results also support the findings reported by Salmani-Nodoushan (2003) who examined the impact of text familiarity, task type, and language proficiency on test and task performance of university students and showed that their overall test performance was found to be significantly influenced by text familiarity, language proficiency and the interaction between text familiarity and language proficiency. Our results, however, do support those reported by Johnson (1982) who chose a reading passage on Halloween and compared ESL students’ recall showing that prior cultural experience prepared readers for familiar information comprehension about Halloween on the passage. This study showed that exposure to the unfamiliar words did not seem to have a significant effect on their reading comprehension. Our results do not support those obtained in a study by Pulido (2004) who studied the impact of cultural background knowledge on incidental vocabulary gain of nonsense words in reading and found that background knowledge does not help learners with weaker levels of L2 reading proficiency and restricted vocabulary knowledge.

Based on our results, we suggest that motivation may be the most important factor in individuals’ success or failure. Generally, motivation may be seen as a drive which may push other factors in people to move or stop moving toward their goals. As Nikoopour, et al. (2012) pointed out, achievement motivation is a result of presence or lack of affective reactions that is associated with achievement-related behavior. This is in line with the suggestions made by Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, and Perencevich (2004) who maintain that learners’ motivation towards not only reading but also other areas is strongly influenced by their experiences within the classroom. Hence, if a learner has a strong interest in and motivation towards the topic and a teacher is able to integrate reading and the topic, that learner may have the same motivation towards reading.

Moreover, our results support the findings of a study by Wigfield et al. (2004) examined the effects of two different models of reading instruction: Concept- Oriented Reading Instruction and Strategy Instruction showing that instructional programs can affect children’s motivation, in turn affecting their achievement.

Furthermore, our results are in agreement with those reported by Wang and Guthrie (2011) who examined the extent that motivational processes facilitate the comprehension of passages and

the extent of the role of culture in children's motivational processes of text comprehension and showed that intrinsic motivation predicts text comprehension for both student groups after controlling for all variables. These results are in line with many studies in various EFL settings in order to investigate whether there were any differences in influential motivational factors at work in second language and foreign language acquisition contexts. As Deci and Ryan (2000) state, language learning motivation is one of the important factors that affect the rate and success of foreign language learning. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are two basic types of motivation.

The results of our study support the findings of Noels, Clement, and Pelletier (2000) who studied the relationship between motivational orientation and language learning performance finding a significant correlation between intrinsic motivation and final course grades was found. Also there was a negative correlation between amotivation and final; course grades. Elliot and Bempechat (2002) believe that everyday exposure to a culture's customs and practices informally socializes individuals to a culture's values and beliefs. Individuals who acquire these cultural values a belief also acquire behaviors that might affect their motivation and achievement.

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