

# Impact of Interest on EFL learners' Reading and Learners' Perceptions

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## Abstract

Improving the way of designing syllabus by making it more tailored to the needs and interest of the learners has been an important objective in language teaching, which leads to selecting and grading instructional materials with a consistent attention. This study focused on studying some dark areas of material selection in language teaching, aiming to make instructional materials more attractive to learners. There was also an attempt to see if learner's interest could affect reading and grammar differently. Lastly, the research also sought to find learners' perception on the use of interest in material selection and its possible effect in their performance. A mixed-method design was used to answer the research questions. The findings and results revealed that the use of interest in selecting class materials helped learners have better performance in reading, and the improvement showed a high correlation with learners' performance in grammar learning. Furthermore, the results of the questions asking for learners' perceptions disclosed the effectiveness of integrating interest to teaching materials in language learning. Researchers and teachers are suggested to seek ways to assist the syllabus planners to grow achievement by changing the materials to be more interesting, which can facilitate the language teaching and learning.

**Key Words:** EFL Teaching, Instructional Materials, Reading Performance, Interest, Perception

## Introduction

In EFL teaching, instructional materials are only the ones included in the textbooks, however, based on the results of some studies (Aghgolzade and Davari, 2014; Brinton, 1991; Gebhard, 1996; Riazi, 2005) EFL education can come into better results if they contain instructional materials from out-of-class sources, too. Similarly, researchers argue that EFL learners benefit more motivation in their learning with integrating out-of-class materials to the lessons they receive in class. In fact, it looks by using current interesting issues along with class materials or lesson materials, EFL learners experience better performance. This point is seen in Brinton's (1991) idea who contend that authentic materials and media will help EFL learners to have

direct relationship between the classroom materials and outside world. Learners' out-of-class perceptions and mental concerns or interest are often with them while they are learning in class. Learners usually review them in mind, and as a result, they are active in their mind in most of their class time. Researchers like Mendelsohn, (1994) and Widdowson (1993) point that learning happens by integrating prior knowledge with new materials. The construction of meaning appearing in reading is a combination of 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' processes, that is, our expectations, world view and perceptions make the way of learning the new materials. Reading a text successfully where our own schemata cannot be exploited in the work is hard and sometimes impossible. Bringing the interest of learners into class or with class materials may help them grow the schemata which is helpful in top-down learning. Learners are considered as individuals with differences in their personal features that lead to enjoying diverse issues of interest, which can attract their attention. There are varying and distinct events or topics happenings that are usually favored by learners differently. For instance, some learners like movies, some other like politics, a few enjoy talking on or playing sports and others are excited by adventures in nature like hiking or mountain climbing. Such differences in learners' interest is not usually attended to in developing materials for EFL learners.

### **Review of Literature**

Mainstream psychology changed from behavioral paradigm to cognitive paradigm in the 1970s, and this change started to appear in educational psychology as well, which could be seen especially in the area of motivation in learning. Different learning theories such as self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977), achievement-goal theory (Ames, 1992), task-value theory (Weigfield & Eccles, 1992), related to learning motivation, which were in line with cognitive framework, began to concentrate on students' beliefs and thoughts (Meyer & Truner, 2002). These theories were stating that learners' task-value, self-efficacy, attitudes and goals were found to have a positive role in their performance and effort in academic tasks and settings (Ames, 1992; Mynard & Mcloughlin, 2020; Safotso & Tempte, 2018; Weigfield & Eccles, 1992). This change resulted in emergence of cognitive paradigm in motivational research, which in turn helped affective variables and emotions be placed in the background and investigated in some aspects (Hidi & Baird, 1986). In particular, the learners' individual differences and their importance in learning were considered to be essential to be explored by researchers. Finally, they commonly agreed that learning affective processes and aspects needed to be researched as the results could be efficient in improving the way of learning. Accordingly, factors like learners' attitudes, perceptions, anxiety state, and interest level emerged to be important in learning process, as stated interest was one of these factors that was disclosed to be an assisting element and subsequently deserved studying. Interest is usually formed in terms of the interaction between learners and environment (Lestari, 2020; Renninger, 2000). When the learners start interacting with the environment and get positive emotions, their desires make such interaction endure with such activities, which might not be very attractive initially. Based on Ainley (2006) and Hidi and Renninger (2006), this conceptualization of interest focuses on the integration of cognition, affect and goals.

The research is theoretically related to some cognitive theories of language learning. The relation between schema theory and interest ends in the assumptions that lead to significant benefits in EFL learning. In the cognitive view of learning a larger role is assigned to the learner in learning a language. Chastain (1988) states that learners' internal knowledge and mental processes are important variables in language learning process. The cognitive factors like interest, cognitive style, attitude and etc. are seen to be the effective variables that have an impact in achievement in language learning. Cognitive psychologists argue that learning is a mental and internal process that happens in mind, which is like a computer processing

information. Whereas, it should be considered that the mind has different unique features like attitudes, feelings, interests, and that is why it is partly self-directed.

The research is also connected to the theories concerning the affective theories of language learning. In other words, language learners usually learn by the assistance attained from affective and cognitive elements, which serve effectively the learners in their learning experience. By the presence of positive attitude, the learning process and subsequently the teaching process are facilitated, which echoes the affective filter hypothesis. According to frequent research results (Ahmetovic, Becirovic, & Dubravac, 2020; Chastain, 1976; Rotgans, 2015) there are many affective elements like attitude, motivation, perseverance, self-concept, introversion or extroversion and even interest assist learners to develop L2/FL skills, and learners' willingness to attempt and learn grow because of high level affective state.

Interest is normally differentiated into two types, individual and situational interest. Individual interest includes dispositional quality, owned by an individual across situations (Schiefele, 1991). While situational interest emerges against the features of a situation (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Theoretical models of individual interest show that the environmental factors are necessary in the spark and development of such interest (e.g. Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Lena, Hilmi, Zekri, Netriwati & Amini, 2019; Schiefele, 2001). EFL teaching has witnessed some research (e.g. Amiryousefi, 2016; Asgari, Ketabi & Amirian, 2019; Carrell and Wise, 1998; Joh, 2006) reporting the positive impact of using interest on language learning. However, some other research has not been much successful in reaching insightful effect of interest on language learning. Carrell and Wise (1998), could not find any important interaction between interest and second language learning. While research results show the positive role of interest in education and language learning, it sounds that there is not enough research concentrating on the topic, particularly in Iraqi context, highlighting the need to examine the feature more closely. Accordingly, the following questions were developed to conduct this study hoping to find evidences on the usefulness of interest in language learning

*RQ1. Does integrating interest with instructional materials have any effect on learners' reading achievement?*

*RQ2. Does integrating interest with instructional materials have any effect on learners' grammar achievement?*

*RQ3. Do learners have different performance in grammar and reading achievement when the instructional materials are integrated with learners' interest?*

*RQ4. What are learners' perceptions on integrating interest with instructional materials in EFL teaching?*

## **Method**

### **Design**

To conduct this research, the researchers used a mixed-method design. The research employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design. Pretest and posttest were used to compare scores of the learners before and after the treatment to see what effect the treatment exerted on the experimented learners. To find answer to the last question that is a qualitative research question, a semi structured interview was used to get learners' perceptions on the change applied in the way of teaching. The collected data was analyzed using t-test and theme extraction.

### **Participants**

Sixty secondary school students from Iraq, were recruited to be studied in the investigation. They were selected by convenience sampling. They were randomly divided into two groups of control and experimental, each with 30 students. The participants were all female, and their age was 18.

## **Procedure**

The participants were divided into two groups. To ascertain the participants were at similar English level, a proficiency test was administered. The results approved the groups were not significantly different. To identify their interest areas, the experimental group participants were surveyed using a questionnaire. The participants took a pretest before the treatment was given. They also took an interest survey using a questionnaire to identify their interest level. The assigned units were taught to the groups by the researcher for five weeks. The treatment phase started for both groups, while the control group received the course materials as appearing in the assigned book but the experimental group faced with the teaching materials according to their interest. The post-test stage followed the treatment, where the learners' grammar and reading achievement were examined. The achievement tests were administered in the end of the last week. Then, to discover learners' perceptions on the use and role of interest in language learning, the learners were surveyed, followed by collecting and analyzing the data. The related results of the survey and tests for both groups were collected, compared and analyzed, using t-test for data analysis that was trying to show any probable differences between the groups. To extract the learners' perceptions on the use of interesting materials in language learning, the ideas were summarized, sorted and analyzed.

## **Instruments**

### **Guide to Facts and Figures**

It is a reading and vocabulary development textbook that has been written by Linda Lee and Patricia Ackert and has been published by Thomson publications. This book was used as the course book within the treatment period. It covers the topics of 'Animals,' 'Why and How,' 'Plants,' 'Music,' 'Work and Leisure,' 'Interesting People of the World' and 'Exploration and Adventures.'

### **The Reading Interest Survey**

This survey covered seven general topics taken from the textbook. The seven topics of the textbook units along with lesson titles were used in a questionnaire to discover the learners' interest level in each topic. This survey questionnaire followed the template of Reading Interest Survey from Heilman, Collins-Thompson, Callan & Eskenazi (2010). The survey was reviewed by experienced L2 research experts to assure its validity, and its reliability had been established in previous research.

### **Empowerment Interest Scale (EIS)**

The scale, developed by Weber et al. (2005), were used for measuring student interest to examine participants' interest. EIS was an 18-item instrument that contained three subscales for measuring students' perceptions of impact and competence and meaningfulness, as interest dimensions. An internal consistency of 0.91 had already been found for this scale by Weber et al. (2005), and its validity was verified through expert assistance. It needs noticing that two items were added to the scale to capture the participants' perceptions on the integrating of interest with class materials.

## Results

### Proficiency Test Results

Concerning the general English, the OPT was administered, and the results did not show any significant difference between the control and experimental groups.

**Table 1**

*Proficiency Test Descriptive Statistics*

#### Male Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Max	Min
OPT.Male	Experimental	30	11.86	3.87	19	4
	Control	30	11.46	4.16	18	3

As seen in Table 1, the average scores are slightly different, and to check the significance of this difference, a t-test was run. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Independent Sample T-test for Proficiency Test (Experimental and Control)*

#### Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Proficiency Test Score	.190	.664	.385	58	.702	.40000	1.03886	-1.67951	2.47951
Equal variances assumed			.385	58	.702	.40000	1.03886	-1.67974	2.47974
Equal variances not assumed			.385	57.697	.702	.40000	1.03886	-1.67974	2.47974

As depicted in Table 2, the t-test revealed no significant difference in means ( $t = 0.385$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p = 0.702$ ), suggesting that there is not any preexisting differences between the two groups regarding their general English.

### Interest Survey Results

The Reading Interest Survey was used to determine the experimental group participants' interest level in each assigned topic. The participants indeed chose one of the topics as the most attractive one to for them. Table 3 shows the related descriptive statistics.

**Table 3***The Results of the Interest Survey*

General Topics of the Textbook	N	Number of Students Interested	Interest in Percent
Animals	30	3	10
How? Why?	30	16	53.34
Plants	30	1	3.33
Music	30	2	6.66
World and Leisure	30	1	3.33
Interesting People of the World	30	6	20
Exploration and Adventure	30	1	3.33

As evidenced in Table 3, the topic of '*how and why*,' had the highest attraction level (53.34%), while '*interesting people of the world*' was the second highest (20%), and the other topics were ranked in the lower percent rates.

### Results for Research Question 1

The first research question was, "Does integrating interest with instructional materials have any effect on learners' reading achievement?" The groups' post-test results were compared. The descriptive statistics concerning the Post-test results are depicted in Table 4.

**Table 4***Post-test for Reading*

#### Post-test Descriptive Statistics for Reading

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
<b>Reading Post-test</b>	Experimental	30	15.6	2.76	20	8
	Control	30	13.13	3.39	18	5

As seen in Table 6, the average score are 15.6 for the experimental group 13.13 for the control groups. An independent samples t-test was run to see if there was a significant difference. The results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5***Independent Sample T-Test for Reading Post-test Scores between Experimental and Control Groups*

#### Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Reading post-test	Equal variances assumed	1.672	.201	3.089	58	.003	2.46667	.79847	.86836	4.06497
	Equal variances not assumed			3.089	55.717	.003	2.46667	.79847	.86697	4.06637

The independent samples t-test for reading post-test scores between the experimental and control groups revealed a significant difference in means ( $t = 3.089$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). Based on the results, the participants in the experimental group had better performance compared to the control group.

To support the findings, the pre-test and post-test results for the experimental group were also compared. The descriptive statistics on the reading post-test and pre-test for the experimental group are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Reading Pre-test and Post-test Results*

**Reading Pre-test and Post-test Statistics**

Group	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
Experimental	Pre-test	30	13.4	3.57	19	4
Control	Control	30	15.6	3.76	20	8

As seen in Table 8, the average scores are 13.4 for the pre-test and 15.6 for the post-test. In other words, the average score for pre-test is higher.

To verify the significance of the witnessed difference, a paired samples t-test was run. The results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Paired Samples T-Test for Reading Pre-test and Post-test within the Experimental Group*

### Paired Samples T-Test





							Lower	Upper
GrammarEqual	.029	.864	3.18458	.002	2.53333	.79558	.94080	4.12586
Post-test variances assumed								
Equal variances not assumed			3.18457482	.002	2.53333	.79558	.94050	4.12617

As indicated in Table 8, the independent samples t-test for grammar post-test scores revealed a significant difference in means ( $t = 3.189$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). The results suggest that the experimental groups has better performance in grammar learning.

To further confirm the found results, another comparison was made between the grammar test results for the pre-test and post-test within the experimental group. The descriptive are shown in Table 9.

**Table 6**

*Grammar Pre-test and Post-test Results*

**Grammar Pre-test and Post-test Statistics**

Group	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
Experimental	Pre-test	30	14.23	3.29	19	6
Experimental	Post-test	30	15.4	2.93	20	8

As seen in Table 9, the average score for the pre-test is 14.23, but for the post-test it is 15.4.

To see if the difference was significant, a paired samples t-test was run between the grammar pre-test and post-test results within the experimental group. The results are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10**

*Paired Samples T-Test for Grammar Pre-test and Post-test within the Experimental Group*

**Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Grammar Pre-test – Grammar Post-test	-1.16667	.64772	.11826	-1.40853	-.92480	-9.866	29	.000

As displayed in Table 10, the paired samples t-test for grammar pre-test and post-test scores within the experimental group revealed a significant difference in means ( $t = -9.866$ ,  $df = 29$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). These results suggest that the treatment has had a positive impact on learners' performance in grammar learning.

### Results for Research Question 3

The third research question was “Do learners have different performance in grammar and reading achievement when the instructional materials are integrated with learners' interest?” To answer this research question, the two sets of scores related to the post-tests of reading and grammar were correlated. The related descriptive statistics are shown in Table 11.

**Table 11**

*Reading and Grammar Post-test Results*

#### Reading and Grammar Post-test Statistics

Group	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
Experimental	Post-test	30	15.6	2.76	20	8
Experimental	Post-test	30	15.4	2.93	20	8

To find out how similar the participants' performance was in the reading and grammar tests, a Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between post-test scores in the experimental group.

**Table 12**

*The Correlation between Grammar Reading Post-test Scores in the Experimental Group*

#### Correlations between Grammar and Reading Post-tests

			PostRE	PostGE
Reading (experimental)	Posttest	Pearson Correlation	1	.979**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	30	30
Grammar (experimental)	Posttest	Pearson Correlation	.979**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	30	30

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 12, there is a statistically significant correlation between grammar post-test scores and reading post-test scores at the 0.000 level (2-tailed), with a Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.979, indicating a very strong positive correlation.

## Results for Research Question 4

The last research question was, "What are learners' perceptions on integrating interest with instructional materials in EFL teaching?" To answer this question, a comparison was made using the scores taken from the interest pre-test and post-test. The descriptive statistics are depicted in Table 13.

**Table 13**

*Interest Pre- and Post-test Scores for the Experimental Group*

	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
<b>Interest Survey</b>	Pre-	30	55.46	10.46	76	31
	Post-	30	62.03	13.65	86	37

As seen in Table 13, the average score for the post-test is higher compared to the pre-test average score. In order to answer the second research question, a paired samples t-test was also run to see if there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores within the experimental group. The results are shown in Table 14.

**Table 14**

*Paired Samples T-Test for Pre-test and Post-test Interest Scores Comparison within the Experimental Group*

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Experimental Pretest- Experimental Posttest	-6.56667	4.23193	.77264	-8.14689	-4.98644	-8.499	29	.000

As displayed in Table 14., the paired samples t-test for interest pre-test and post-test scores within the experimental group revealed a significant difference in means ( $t = -8.499$ ,  $df = 29$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The P value that is less than 0.05 suggests that learners' interest level has significantly grown as a result of the change applied in the study.

As the results of the interest survey approved the positive role of the treatment learners' interest, the Empowerment Interest Scale was again employed as it included the two questions that were seeking to find the responses on learners' perceptions about the treatment. The first question was 'Is selecting the materials based on your interest helpful in your learning?' The participants gave either a 'yes' or 'no' answer to the question, however a few of them were not sure about their responses and came up with the sentences 'I don't know,' 'I'm not sure.' In the meantime, most of them (27 out of 30) agreed with the effect of the change used in the materials selection method. The concerned descriptive data is depicted in the following Table 15.

**Table 15***Descriptive Statistics on Learners' Ideas about Efficacy of Interest*

<b>Idea</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Doubtful</b>
<b>Usefulness of Interest in Learning</b>	30	27	0	3
<b>(Numbers in Percent)</b>	100	90	0	10

As seen in Table 15, the efficacy of using interest as a measure in selecting the teaching content has been approved by most of the learners, and the results confirm that tailoring the instructional materials due to the preferences of learners is considered as a positive change in the learning procedure. Ninety percent of the surveyed language learners believe adding the feature of interest to instructional materials serves as a helpful element that facilitates learning.

The learners' perceptions were also surveyed by using a what question, 'what do you think of selecting the teaching materials based on your interest?' With this question, the learners were asked to present their opinions or perceptions about the use of attractive materials as course content through raising an open-ended question. It is worth mentioning that the learners were required to give their perceptions in one or two sentences in order to have enough clarity of the responses. Their perceptions varied based on the learners' ideas about the use they had found in the program. They included statements like:

"I think it is very respectful when we (learners') are seen in designing the plan of teaching"

"I really enjoyed the experience, and found it helpful."

"I felt important as my ideas were put into the work. This was great because I was given a chance to make a change."

"In guess my participation was important and could help the success of the group."

"I am really sure the learning was attractive to me and other students."

"This was good that I too had a role in class and teaching issues."

"The learning looked purposeful, so I felt more determined to learn."

"I felt that I was learning better this way, and this encouraged me to try and learn more."

"This class is important to me, and I can do well."

There were other similar and different ideas reflecting learners' perceptions, all of which could not be reported here. The perceptions were listed and summarized based on the similarities they had. The ideas were then coded and grouped under the assigned codes in order to extract more centralized perceptions. Some generalized ideas included 'usefulness,' 'meaningfulness,' 'respect,' 'importance,' 'influence,' 'attractiveness,' 'feeling valuable,' 'feeling successful,' 'feeling enjoyable,' 'feeling excited.' It was attempted to extract some generalized themes due to the closeness of the ideas, which led to exploring the following themes:

- 1) The use of interest in learning was considered as a change that looked **'respectful'** to learners.
- 2) Based on the learners' perceptions, tailoring the teaching materials according to their preferences sounds **'useful'** to learners.

3) Integrating interest to the course materials creates the '**feeling of success**' in learning for the learners.

The summary of the learners' perceptions is depicted in Table 16.

**Table 16**

*Descriptive Statistics on Learners' Perception*

<b>Explored Perceptions</b>	<b>Total N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Using interest in learning is respectful to learners</b>	30	23	69
<b>Using interest in learning sounds useful to learners.</b>	30	17	56
<b>Integrating interest into class materials creates feeling of success.</b>	30	16	53

As shown in Table 16, sixty-nine percent of the studied learners in the experimental group think that the use of selecting materials based on interest is respectful. 56 percent of the learners have the perception that using interest in choosing the course materials is useful and contributes to their learning. Also, nearly half of the learners consider the use of interest in learning as a change that creates the feeling of success. It is worth mentioning that the accumulated percent number is more than 100 percent because the participants had the chance to choose more than one option as their views.

### **Discussion**

The current research assigned some assigned objectives, and developed four research questions to be answered based on the related design. The research aimed to find if integrating interest with course materials could affect learners' reading and grammar. The study also tried to discover whether integrating interest with class materials could have different effect on learners' performance in reading and grammar. The aim was indeed to explore the possible similarity or difference between the two independent variables under the effect of the applied independent variable. Finally, the last research question was aiming to explore what learners think about using interest with teaching materials.

The results related to the first question confirmed that using interesting class materials based on learners' preferences assisted learners in reading. This is in line with the previous research findings (e.g. Asgari et al., 2019; Katz, Assor, Kanat-Maymon and Bereby-Mayer, 2006; Mayer, 2013), which found similar results and reported that interest served the learning performance usefully and improved their learning. The results in fact approved that the reading performance of the learners developed better because of receiving the teaching materials based on their preferences. This means that attention to learners' interest and willingness serves as an effective change in foreign language teaching. This can be explained by referring to the ideas presented by some FL teaching some researchers (e.g., Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011; LeLoup's, 1993; Walkington, Sherman & Howell, 2014) who see interest as potentially helpful to increase learners' motivation to learn and to simplify the performance in EFL learning. The results can also be explained by the point that learners working with interesting and preferred instructional materials provides them with the excitement and attraction that contribute to attending to the teacher and the lessons. The created feeling in turn makes the learning more attractive to learners, ending in improved learning for the learners. It also seems that the heightened level

of attention as Heilman et al., 2010 states, promotes motivation for trying and struggling to learn. According to the findings, it is also possible to conclude that considering learners' preferences in material selection decisions apply an efficient effect on learners' determination to learn a language, which is because learners' personal objectives are seen as important. The results actually serve as a confirmation to the view that the affective and cognitive factors play an important role in learning process and knowledge development (Asgari et al., 2019; Eddy-U, 2015; Hidi, 1990; Krashen, 1989).

The second research question was, "Does integrating interest with instructional materials have any effect on learners' grammar achievement?" The collected data and their analysis also revealed better performance for learners in learning grammatical points of the lessons as part of the assigned content. This was a newer proof that facing interesting content matching with learners' preferences improved grammar learning, too. The results echo the earlier findings (e.g. Eddy-U, 2015) that show the efficient role of integrating learners' preference in language learners' performance in different skills of language learning. The results can be explained by the fact that learning grammatical points always needs higher attention because it deals with some analogical thinking and relations existing in sentence structure. When the learning context is attractive to learners, the attention level is high too, which is helpful for students in learning the content that needs attention. In addition, the results support that cognitive or motivational elements contribute to learners have better performance in learning grammar, which requires more mental work for having the content with more schematic structure. In fact, grammar knowledge is not attained in parts, it is mostly learned in connected parts, where learning one task or aspect is also related to learning the following one (e.g., Chomsky, 1988; Levelt, 1989).

While the referred findings advocated the useful impact of using preferred content in facilitating EFL learning, the results taken from some other previous studies (Joh, 2006; Sadeghpour, 2013) did not report any remarkable impact of using attractive materials in language learning. This may be explained by the fact that grammar learning is engaged with learning the rules and regulations of the making smaller and bigger bits of language, which have limited space for applying any changes in the teaching system. That is, learners need to attain some logical relations related to different parts of language, which are intuitively hard to learn for most language learners. Accordingly, using innovative methods or applying some constructive changes in learning or teaching process may not always result in positive changes and improve the learners' performance.

The third research question was, "Do learners have different performance in grammar and reading achievement when the instructional materials are integrated with learners' interest?" This question was indeed trying to explore the possible similarity or difference between the two independent variables under the effect of the applied independent variable. The results revealed a strong positive relation between reading and grammar. The results confirmed that learners' reading and grammar achievement improved in an extremely similar way due to the use of interest-based selected instructional materials. The results are highly consistent with the findings of numerous research (Alderson, 2000; Chall, 1996; Zhang, 2012) that reported a great level of correlation between reading and grammar knowledge.

The results can be justified by the fact that reading and grammar knowledge skills are highly interconnected because any text is built up through putting together words, phrases or expressions employing some grammatical regulations. Any created sentence (small or big; simple or complex; long or short) needs to use the rules of grammar to construct a text with meaning and the power of sending a message. Such combination and consistency of the two variables studied in the study seem to be so interrelated that any improvement in one end in

development in the other. Understanding a text is not possible only by comprehending the meaning of the words, but also with conceiving the order and system of connecting the words together, which is possible through grammar knowledge.

The correlation happened between reading and grammar in the study results can further be justified by the point that words get together to form sentences not in a random way, but based on some rules that follow some regularity. Understanding cannot be resulted with attending only to either words or rules, so they require equal care when perfect comprehension is expected, which echoes the findings and view of similar previous research (Grabe, 2009; Jeon and Yamashita, 2014). Consequently, the existence of such close connection leads into the correlation found in this study, resulting in improvement and growth brought through both factors. The results are generally consistent with some studies (Chall, 1996; Kern, 1989; Kim & Cho, 2015; Kleeck, 2008; Zhang, 2012) conducted on the relationship or correlation between reading and grammar knowledge, which had revealed either a weak or a strong correlation between reading and grammar in understanding texts. Thus, the interconnectivity of the two factors sounds to serve as the reason to the correlation witnessed in the study.

The last research question tried to explore what learners think about using interest with the teaching materials. The related results confirmed that selecting the instructional materials based on the preferences of learners was seen as a positive change, improving the learners' performance in language learning. A very high number of the surveyed learners believed that the addition of learners' interest to instructional materials served as a useful factor that ended in facilitating learning for language learners. The results were in accordance with most of earlier research results (Amiryousefi, 2016; Asgari et al., 2019; Eddy-U, 2015; Hidi & Reninger, 2006; Joh, 2006; Mayer, 2013; Sadeghpour, 2013).

The participants were also asked to present their perceptions or ideas on the use of attractive materials as course content. The collected ideas showed that the use of selecting materials matched with their interest and desire was respectful for more than half of the learners. The learners' perceptions also approved that using interest in choosing the course materials was as an efficient change, contributing to learners' learning. The collected perceptions further disclosed that the learners considered the use of interest as a useful help, providing learners with a feeling of success. The results were in fact consistent with some previous research report (Asgari et al., 2019; Dornyei, 2009; Eddy-U, 2015; Hidi & Reninger, 2006). The results, besides, confirmed a feeling of success that happened as a result of integrating learners' interest to the course materials, which was in line with some similar research results (Eddy-U, 2015; Hidi & Reninger, 2006; Mitchell, 1993; Ainley et al, 2002).

The results can be explained by the fact that affective factors or learner factors are important to language learners because considering them is seen as attending to them and their expectations. The results imply that attending to learners' preferences provide them with decisive and effective role in learning cycle, and gives them the chance to share their decisions, which results in the appearance of satisfaction of the content and learning. The results may also be clarified by the point that when learners attain a role of influence in all or part of the learning or teaching activity, they enjoy some feeling of respect, which serves as a help in improving the learning process. As a matter of fact, positive emotional feelings can emerge through attending to learners' affection and emotional state, which somehow provides learners with a sense of significance.

### **Conclusion**

In the cognitive view of learning, learners' mind and cognition were seen to serve as an important factor that could lead their internal knowledge and mental processes to a more

effective state prepared for learning, hence, the cognitive factors like interest, attitude and etc. were seen to have an impact in language learning. The study specifically tried to find if integrating interest with instructional materials had any effect on learners' reading and grammar, along with any difference between these two features. The research also attempted to disclose the perceptions on integrating interest with instructional materials. Through using a mixed-method design, it was found that the considering interest in selecting class materials improved learners' performance both in reading and grammar learning, and the results were confirming that reading and grammar improved with a high correlation level. Ultimately, the results were revealing the effectiveness of using interest in language teaching in creating positive perceptions for the learners.

### **Implications**

Due to the results of the study, all decision makers concerned with syllabus designing are recommended to employ course materials in line with learners' interest, hoping to reach better learning outcome. The growing advancement in technology makes it possible to select the texts or course content from different sources that are available online. Therefore, teachers, and syllabus designers are suggested to use such grounds to find and employ the instructional materials due to the learners' interest. This is particularly important in teaching grammar where most EFL learners suffer and face challenges in building the knowledge of the sentence. Teachers and syllabus designers are also recommended to make learning more customized for learners through using the results of this investigation. Teachers are strongly recommended to choose the materials attractive to learners, which are found to provide better feelings and attitudes in the learning context as it assists learners to be successful in language learning.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

The researchers of this study tend to present some suggestions for further studies, which are expected to provide newer findings and develop the knowledge around the topic of the current research. The cognitive and student factors are attractive and important to be studied in more investigations as the research presents their remarkable role in the related studies conducted on the topic. The researchers are suggested to study more affective or learner factors, which are thought to have remarkable effects in language teaching and learning. Beside interest, some factors like hopefulness, confidence, perseverance, anxiety and etc. can also be investigated to improve language teaching. The students and researchers are also recommended to conduct studies in the area of the mentioned factors with different age or sex groups in diverse language teaching contexts. The reason to the importance of studying such factors is their insightful role on language learning process as the emphasis on individual or learner factors are increasing seen as important due to research results completed in various contexts.

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## **Biodata**