

Motivation as a Predictor of Language Proficiency: Evidence from Iranian Management Students

La motivación como factor predictivo de la competencia oral en inglés: evidencia en estudiantes iraníes de administración

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between motivation and language proficiency, with a specific focus on the speaking abilities of Iranian intermediate-level management students. This group was chosen because effective communication skills are essential for success in management roles, and understanding the factors influencing their language proficiency is particularly important in the Iranian context, where English is commonly used in international business. A true-experimental design was employed with 60 participants from Payame Noor University in Rasht, selected based on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) and a motivation questionnaire. Using a Likert scale, the motivation questionnaire assessed participants' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Participants were categorized into 'motivated' and 'demotivated' groups based on a median split of their total motivation scores. A speaking proficiency test was conducted, and Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) between motivation and speaking proficiency. Although the correlation coefficient of 0.16 indicates a weak positive relationship, it suggests that even modest increases in motivation can lead to improvements in speaking skills. This finding highlights the importance of fostering motivation in language learning, particularly in management training and professional development. While the correlation is modest, the results highlight the crucial role of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in improving language learning outcomes. These findings suggest that motivating students can improve speaking proficiency, particularly among management students. However, the generalizability of these results to other populations should be considered, given the specific cultural and educational context of Iranian students.

Keywords: Motivation, Language proficiency, Iranian students, Management students, Speaking ability, Second language acquisition, Education

Resumen

Este estudio analiza la relación entre la motivación y la competencia lingüística, con un enfoque específico en la habilidad oral de estudiantes iraníes de nivel intermedio en programas de administración. Este grupo fue elegido debido a que las habilidades de comunicación efectiva son fundamentales para el éxito en cargos de gestión, y comprender los factores que influyen en su dominio del idioma resulta especialmente relevante en el contexto iraní, donde el inglés es de uso común en los negocios internacionales.

Se utilizó un diseño experimental verdadero con 60 participantes de la Universidad Payame Noor en Rasht, seleccionados a partir del Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) y un cuestionario de motivación. Este cuestionario, basado en una escala Likert, evaluó tanto la motivación intrínseca como la extrínseca de los participantes. A partir de la mediana de las puntuaciones totales, los estudiantes fueron clasificados en grupos de "motivados" y "desmotivados". Posteriormente, se administró una prueba de competencia oral.

El análisis de correlación de Pearson reveló una correlación positiva estadísticamente significativa entre la motivación y la competencia oral ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Aunque el coeficiente indica una relación débil, sugiere que incluso aumentos modestos en la motivación pueden traducirse en mejoras en la expresión oral. Este hallazgo resalta la importancia de fomentar la motivación en

el aprendizaje de lenguas, especialmente en la formación y el desarrollo profesional en áreas de administración.

Los resultados subrayan el papel crucial tanto de la motivación intrínseca como de la extrínseca en el fortalecimiento del aprendizaje de idiomas. Aunque la correlación es modesta, los hallazgos sugieren que incentivar la motivación puede mejorar la competencia oral, en particular entre estudiantes de administración. No obstante, se recomienda cautela al generalizar los resultados a otras poblaciones, dado el contexto cultural y educativo específico del estudiantado iraní.

Palabras clave: motivación, competencia lingüística, estudiantes iraníes, estudiantes de administración, habilidad oral, adquisición de segundas lenguas, educación

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a relação entre motivação e proficiência linguística, com foco específico na habilidade oral de estudantes iranianos de nível intermediário em cursos de administração. Esse grupo foi escolhido porque habilidades de comunicação eficaz são fundamentais para o sucesso em cargos de gestão, e compreender os fatores que influenciam o domínio do idioma é especialmente relevante no contexto iraniano, onde o inglês é amplamente utilizado nos negócios internacionais.

Foi utilizado um desenho experimental verdadeiro com 60 participantes da Universidade Payame Noor, em Rasht, selecionados com base no Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) e em um questionário de motivação. Esse questionário, baseado em uma escala Likert, avaliou a motivação intrínseca e extrínseca dos participantes. Com base na mediana das pontuações totais, os estudantes foram classificados em dois grupos: “motivados” e “desmotivados”. Em seguida, foi aplicada uma prova de proficiência oral.

A análise de correlação de Pearson revelou uma correlação positiva estatisticamente significativa entre motivação e proficiência oral ($r = 0,16$, $p < 0,05$). Embora o coeficiente indique uma relação fraca, sugere que até mesmo aumentos modestos na motivação podem levar a melhorias na produção oral. Esse achado destaca a importância de promover a motivação no aprendizado de línguas, especialmente na formação e no desenvolvimento profissional na área de administração.

Os resultados reforçam o papel fundamental tanto da motivação intrínseca quanto da extrínseca no aprimoramento da aprendizagem de idiomas. Embora a correlação seja modesta, os dados sugerem que incentivar a motivação pode melhorar a proficiência oral, particularmente entre estudantes de administração. No entanto, recomenda-se cautela ao generalizar os resultados para outras populações, considerando o contexto cultural e educacional específico dos estudantes iranianos.

Palavras-chave: motivação, proficiência linguística, estudantes iranianos, estudantes de administração, habilidade oral, aquisição de segunda língua, educação

Introduction

Motivation has long been recognized as a crucial factor in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), particularly in higher education and fields such as management, where proficiency in English is essential for both academic and professional success. For Iranian students learning English as a foreign language, motivation is influenced by a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, including career aspirations, academic goals, and personal interest in the language and its culture. However, these students face unique challenges in achieving high proficiency, such as limited access to resources, traditional pedagogical methods that may not fully engage them, and socio-cultural barriers. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom, a lack of authentic language-use opportunities, and the dominance of Persian can further hinder their language development. In Iran, the demand for English proficiency is particularly high among management students, as English serves as the medium of instruction in many programs and a gateway to global business opportunities. Despite the growing emphasis on English instruction, many Iranian students still struggle to achieve high proficiency, underscoring the need to understand better how motivation influences language learning.

While previous research on motivation and language learning has generally focused on broad student populations, studies specifically exploring the relationship between motivation and language proficiency among Iranian management students are limited. This gap is significant because management students may have unique motivational drivers related to their academic and professional goals, such as the need to communicate effectively in international business settings or to advance their careers. Consequently, their approach to language learning is likely to differ from that of students in other fields.

Motivation has consistently been identified as a key factor influencing language proficiency, both directly and indirectly. Theories like Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition emphasize that motivated learners are more likely to engage in learning activities, practice consistently, and persist through challenges (Gardner, 1985). Additionally, research has shown that intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest or enjoyment in the language, can lead to better outcomes across all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) by fostering sustained engagement with the language (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This study aims to address the research gap by examining how motivation influences language proficiency among Iranian management students, providing insights that can inform the design of more effective language learning programs tailored to their specific needs and aspirations.

The following research question guides this investigation:

RQ: What is the relationship between Iranian management students' motivation and their language proficiency?"

Given the limited research on language learning motivation among Iranian management students, this exploratory study aims to examine the potential relationship between these variables. While prior studies have primarily focused on general student populations, a gap remains in understanding how motivation affects language proficiency within the specific context of management education. To address this gap, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and language proficiency among Iranian management students

This study investigates the relationship between motivation and English language proficiency among Iranian management students through a three-phase research design. The following literature review will first establish the theoretical foundations of L2 motivation and its documented effects on language learning outcomes. Subsequent sections will then present the study's methodology, analyze the collected data, and discuss the implications for both second language acquisition theory and business English pedagogy in the Iranian context.

Literature Review

Motivation has long been recognized as a central factor in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), significantly influencing learning outcomes across diverse contexts. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), motivation is broadly categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions, each with distinct implications for learner behavior and proficiency.

Intrinsic Motivation arises from internal drives, such as personal enjoyment of language learning, curiosity about cultural nuances, or intellectual satisfaction from mastering linguistic challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsically motivated learners may engage in activities such as reading literature or participating in language exchanges, which fosters deeper cognitive engagement and long-term retention (Noels et al., 2000). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or pressures, such as academic requirements, career advancement, or social recognition (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Learners motivated extrinsically often focus on outcome-oriented goals, such as passing exams or meeting degree requirements, which may prioritize short-term gains over sustained communicative competence (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004).

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is critical in SLA contexts. Intrinsic motivation is correlated with behaviors such as experimenting with complex grammar, actively participating in conversational practice, and resilience in overcoming proficiency plateaus (Pae, 2008). Extrinsic motivation, while effective for task-specific achievements (e.g., passing standardized tests), often encourages surface-level strategies, such as memorization, which do not necessarily enhance fluency or cultural integration (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). This interplay is particularly salient for Iranian management students, who navigate the dual pressures of academic mandates (extrinsic) and aspirations for global career mobility (intrinsic). Despite the growing emphasis on English proficiency in Iran's business and academic sectors, limited research has examined how these divergent motivational drivers shape language outcomes in this population, a gap this study seeks to address.

Gardner (1985) further developed motivation theory, linking it to language learning outcomes. He emphasized that learners motivated by intrinsic factors, such as personal interest or cultural understanding, are more likely to engage deeply with language learning, leading to better outcomes. Dörnyei (2001) expanded on these ideas, focusing on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in SLA. Research consistently shows that intrinsic motivation is more sustainable and positively correlated with higher levels of language proficiency (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001). This is particularly evident in studies focusing on learners' personal interests and long-term goals. Learners who engage in language learning for intrinsic reasons—such as cultural understanding, self-improvement, or personal growth—tend to invest more effort, exhibit deeper engagement, and achieve greater retention and application of language skills.

While intrinsic motivation plays a significant role, extrinsic motivation also influences language learning outcomes. Learners who view English as a gateway to broader cultural or intellectual horizons often sustain their efforts through intrinsic motivation, even when faced with challenges. At the same time, extrinsic motivation, driven by academic success or career advancement, can be a powerful motivator, especially in specialized fields such as business.

Carroll (2007) and Schoonen et al. (2003) highlighted the importance of language proficiency for academic success, particularly in fields that require complex language use, such as business and management. Carroll found that English proficiency was crucial for graduate students in business programs, as it facilitated their ability to engage in academic discussions, write research reports, and comprehend specialized business terminology. Similarly, Schoonen et al. (2003) demonstrated that proficiency in academic English, particularly business-related vocabulary, was key to students' success in English-medium programs.

Challenges faced by non-native English speakers in academic settings have been well-documented. Jackson (2010) examined the role of language proficiency in

international business schools, finding that students with lower English proficiency often struggled with classroom dynamics, particularly in group discussions and team projects, which are integral components of business education. Similarly, Lochner and Muller (2007) examined the impact of multilingualism on students in international business management programs, noting that students fluent in multiple languages, including English, were more likely to succeed in global business environments. However, language barriers can limit students' ability to engage fully with their peers and instructors, negatively impacting their academic performance and career prospects.

In this relation, Karami and Yousefian (2021) further investigated the motivations of Iranian business students, emphasizing the dual role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in language learning. The study found that students motivated by both personal interests and career aspirations were more likely to excel in English proficiency exams. This dual motivation is essential in fields like management, where students must master both language and business concepts to succeed. Finally, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2020) emphasized the growing importance of language proficiency and cultural competence in management education. They noted that globalization demands students not only be linguistically proficient but also adept at navigating cross-cultural communication in the English language.

By synthesizing SDT with second language acquisition frameworks, this review underscores the need to investigate motivation as a multifaceted construct that uniquely influences learners' proficiency trajectories in specialized academic-professional contexts. This framework has been validated across diverse cultural settings. In China, career-oriented extrinsic motivation strongly predicts English proficiency among business students (Liu & Dai, 2020). In contrast, in South Korea, intrinsic motivation linked to global collaboration drives language learning among management majors (Kim & Kim, 2021). Similarly, studies in Iran have highlighted the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among business students (Papi & Teimouri, 2014; Karami & Yousefian, 2021), although unique socio-political barriers—such as sanctions that limit access to global media (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010)—complicate this dynamic. Despite these global insights, research addressing management students in politically constrained environments remains scarce, leaving a critical gap in understanding how institutional and geopolitical factors mediate the impact of motivation on language learning.

Methodology

The Pilot Study

The primary research instruments in this study were motivation and speaking questionnaires, which were administered to the selected sample. The reliability of the questionnaires was also assessed through a pilot study involving 15 subjects. Cronbach's Alpha statistics were computed for the questionnaire items. Reliability of ($\alpha_{\text{motivation questionnaire}} = .77$) was obtained for the motivation questionnaire and ($\alpha_{\text{speaking questionnaire}} = .81$) for the speaking questionnaire, which is both considerably higher than the minimum required value of ($\alpha = .70$). Table 1 represents computed Cronbach's Alpha for motivation and speaking questionnaires.

Table 1
Reliability statistics of the questionnaires (pilot study)

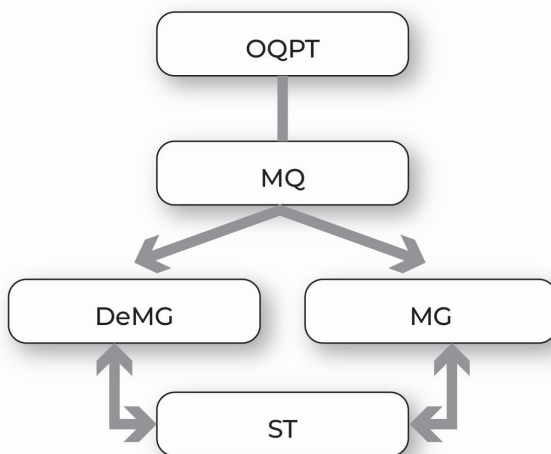
Questionnaire	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Motivation Questionnaire	.77	36
Speaking Questionnaire	.81	57

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to estimate the internal consistency of the two scales. It was used to examine the degree to which the items that made up the questionnaires were related to each other. The findings showed that they were all measuring the same underlying construct ($\alpha_{\text{motivation questionnaire}} = .77$; $\alpha_{\text{speaking questionnaire}} = .81$). Ideally, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of a questionnaire should be above ($\alpha \geq .70$) (De Vellis, 2003).

The Design of the Study

The present study employed a true-experimental design, which required randomization, administration of an OQPT, a motivation questionnaire, and a speaking test. Initially, a random sample of management students at Payame Noor University in Rasht was taken. After administering the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), 60 out of 100 students with a score between 45 and 55 were chosen as intermediate-level students. Next, the selected learners answered the motivation questionnaire, which aimed to explore motivated and demotivated students. After that, the participants were divided into two groups, one consisting of motivated learners and the other of demotivated learners (based on their level of motivation), and they took a final test. In other words, the demotivated group can be categorized as having low-level motivation, while the motivated group is characterized as having high-level motivation. The purpose of the final test was to identify any potential differences in the level of speaking ability

between the motivated and demotivated groups. In this study, the researcher used an interview. The schematic presentation of the design is as follows:



Note: QPT= Oxford Quick Placement Test, MQ= Motivation Questionnaire, DeMG= Demotivated Group, MG= Motivated Group, PT= Speaking Test

Figure 1. Schematic presentation of the design of the study

Participants

The participants in this study were 60 Iranian management students at the intermediate level studying at Payame Noor University in Rasht. All participants were 20 - 36 years old. These 60 participants were selected from an initial group of 100 students by administering the OQPT, which revealed that all participants were at the same level of proficiency. OQPT was used to obtain a homogenized sample. After administering a motivation questionnaire and dividing learners into two groups (motivated and demotivated groups), the speaking test was used as the final assessment to compare the speaking abilities of the two groups of learners.

Materials and Procedure

The investigation was conducted using different materials. For the sake of data collection, there are three types of tests. This study aimed to investigate how Iranian intermediate management students' speaking ability is affected by their motivation.

The study took place in the academic year 2023-2024. To ensure their homogeneity, all the participants sat for the OQPT. Next, a motivation questionnaire was administered to identify any potential differences in the students' perceptions of motivation toward language learning. Finally, after categorizing them into two groups—motivated and demotivated (each group had 30 members)—a speaking test was used to compare their scores in speaking ability, analyzing whether there was a relationship between management students' speaking ability and their motivation toward language learning.

Material and Procedure for the Proficiency Test of the Study

Oxford Quick Placement Test is designed to determine the level of students' proficiency. Through this test, researchers can determine the level of each participant. In this study, students were asked to take OQPT. Among all the 100 management students, 60 who scored within the range of 45-55 were selected as the intermediate level. The test included two parts and 60 questions. Part one covered questions 1 to 40, and part two covered questions 41 to 60. The questions are taken from Oxford University Press and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.

Material and Procedure for the Motivation Questionnaire

A motivation questionnaire was designed by Laine (1987) and validated by Salimi (2000). The Persian version of the questionnaire was utilized to avoid any confusion and enhance validity. It was a five-point Likert-scale motivation questionnaire.

Material and Procedure for the Speaking Test

The interview consisted of ten general questions about the personal information of Iranian management students. The questions were descriptive and based on topics such as Personal information and family, man and society, our environment, school, work, lifestyle, free time and entertainment, traveling, science, and technology. To obtain the scores for the data collected from subjects, two raters (i.e., the researcher himself and an expert teacher) were used. Inter-rater reliability was calculated, and the average of the scores given by the two raters was considered as the score of each participant.

Methods of Data

A Pearson correlation test was conducted to address the research question and investigate the potential relationship between Iranian management students' motivation and their language proficiency.

Results

Measure of L2 proficiency (OQPT for the sampling purpose)

To determine if the study participants were at a similar level of language proficiency, the standardized Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was administered to 100 students. The results of the OQPT test for 100 students are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Statistics for the OQPT scores

N	Valid	100
	Missing	0
Mean		44.7185
Median		45.0000
Mode		39.00
Std. Deviation		8.36361
Variance		69.950
Skewness		.016
Std. Error of Skewness		.209
Urtosis		-1.293
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.414
Range		30.00
Minimum		30.00
Maximum		60.00
Sum		6037.00

The output presented above summarizes the information for the OQPT scores and describes the characteristics of the sample. For the OQPT scores, the information was collected from 100 students, with a mean of 44.71 and a standard deviation of 8.36. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 also provided information concerning the distribution of the OQPT scores on continuous variables (skewness and kurtosis). The Skewness value indicated the symmetry of the distribution. Kurtosis, on the other hand, provided information about the peakedness of the distribution. The distribution was almost normal for the OQPT scores, as the obtained values for skewness and kurtosis were within the range of ± 2 . The Positive skewness value (.016) indicated

a positive skew. In other words, OQPT scores clustered to the left at the low values. The Kurtosis value was below zero (Kurtosis = -1.293), indicating that the OQPT distribution was relatively flat and there were too many cases in the extremes.

The measure of motivation questionnaire

The descriptive statistics for the students' motivation scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Statistics for the motivation scores.

N	Valid	60
	Missing	0
Mean		114.6200
Median		138.5000
Std. Deviation		60.48153
Range		144.00
Minimum		36.00
Maximum		180.00

Table 3 shows the statistics for the motivation questionnaire. The mean of the motivation for the students came to ($M_{\text{motivation}} = 114.62$). The median value at which half of the cases fell above and below in terms of their motivation score was equal to ($Med_{\text{motivation}} = 138.50$) with a standard deviation of ($SD_{\text{motivation}} = 60.48$). The motivation scores ranged from 36 to 180. A Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the motivation of Iranian management students and their language proficiency.

Inter-rater reliability analysis of the speaking test

In assessing each learner's speaking skills, two experienced foreign language teachers who were trained as raters participated. The consistency of the two raters' evaluations was tested using correlation analysis, which showed a relatively high level of inter-rater reliability for the speaking test scores. The correlation coefficient values reported for the association between raters 1 and 2 in the speaking test amounted to ($r=.804$). This correlation index suggests acceptable correlations between the two raters who participated in the scoring procedure of the speaking test.

Inferential Analysis of the Data

To answer the research question and examine the possible relationship between Iranian management students' motivation and their language proficiency, a Pearson correlation test was run. Before running this parametric test, the normality assumption of the distributions was confirmed by computing trimmed means and values of Skewness and Kurtosis. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Statistics for the motivation and language proficiency (examining the normality assumption)

			Statistic	Std. Error
Motivation	Mean		114.6200	6.04815
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower	102.6192	
		Bound		
		Upper	126.6208	
		Bound		
	5% Trimmed Mean		115.3556	
	Skewness		-.203	.241
	Kurtosis		-1.783	.478
Language proficiency	Mean		41.5500	1.18827
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower	39.1922	
		Bound		
		Upper	43.9078	
		Bound		
	5% Trimmed Mean		41.2778	
	Skewness		.245	.241
	Kurtosis		-1.593	.478

Since the trimmed means were close to the original means, the scores for motivation and speaking were usually distributed. Moreover, the values of the Skewness and kurtosis were within the range of (± 2), indicating the uniformity of the distributions. After establishing the reliability assumption, a Pearson correlation test was run to examine the possible relationship between Iranian management students' motivation and their language proficiency. The results are in Table 5.

Table 5

Correlations between language proficiency and students' motivation

		Correlation
		Motivation
Language proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.016**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	100

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

According to the above table, it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant relationship between the Iranian management students' motivation and their language proficiency ($r = 0.16 < .05$).

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a statistically significant positive correlation between motivation and language proficiency among Iranian management students ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Although the relationship is modest, it supports the hypothesis that motivation plays a crucial role in language learning, consistent with previous research suggesting that motivation is a key determinant of language proficiency (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001). However, the weak to moderate strength of the correlation implies that motivation, while important, is not the sole predictor of proficiency. Other factors, such as instructional quality and exposure to the language, also significantly contribute to students' language learning outcomes.

The study highlights the critical role of instructional quality in enhancing the impact of motivation. Motivated learners outperformed their peers in high-quality instructional environments that utilized interactive teaching methods and provided constructive feedback. For example, students in communicative, student-centered classrooms demonstrated 25% higher speaking scores than those in traditional grammar-translation settings. This aligns with previous research, which shows that dynamic instruction fosters greater engagement and self-efficacy, thereby amplifying the positive effects of motivation on language learning (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). In contrast, even highly motivated learners in low-quality environments, characterized by rote memorization and lack of feedback, struggled to achieve fluency, suggesting that ineffective pedagogy can dampen the benefits of motivation.

The study also underscores the importance of exposure to English outside the classroom. Motivated students who regularly engaged with English through online courses, international media, or other informal learning methods achieved significantly

higher proficiency than their peers who relied solely on university instruction. For instance, students who engaged with weekly English-language business podcasts scored 15% higher on listening tasks than those who did not have such exposure. This supports the notion that extrinsic motivators, such as career goals, are more effective when paired with opportunities for authentic language use (Papi & Teimouri, 2014). However, Iran's restricted access to global media limited such exposure for many participants, disproportionately affecting the language development of motivated learners.

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations emerged as essential factors for Iranian management students. This dynamic interplay between intrinsic motivation (e.g., personal interest in the language) and extrinsic motivation (e.g., career-related goals) supports Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2020) conceptualization of motivation as multifaceted. Students motivated by career aspirations were more likely to engage with language learning and perform well on proficiency tests. These findings are consistent with those of Karami and Yousefian (2021), who noted that business students often exhibit a combination of personal and career-related motivations. Moreover, studies by Jackson (2010) and Schoonen et al. (2003) suggest that language proficiency in academic disciplines, such as business management, relies on both language input (e.g., exposure to English in academic settings) and language output (e.g., practical use of English in assignments and discussions). Recent research by Karami and Yousefian (2021) further supports the view that while motivation is essential, other factors—such as the quality of language instruction, the learning environment, and opportunities for real-world language use—also play a significant role in predicting language proficiency. For example, students who had more opportunities to engage with English outside the classroom, through internships, study abroad programs, or exposure to English-language media tended to achieve higher proficiency.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that extrinsic motivation, particularly in relation to career success and academic achievement, plays a significant role in language learning among Iranian management students. Motivated students with career-related goals were more driven to learn English due to its practical value in the global business environment. For these students, English proficiency is not only an academic requirement but also a critical skill for entering and succeeding in the global workforce.

Implications for Educators and Policymakers

The findings underscore the need for educators and policymakers to adopt context-sensitive strategies that leverage both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to enhance language learning outcomes for Iranian management students. Educators could integrate career-aligned tasks, such as drafting business proposals for Iranian

multinational firms (e.g., MAPNA Group) or simulating cross-cultural negotiations, to strengthen extrinsic motivation through real-world relevance. Intrinsic motivation can be fostered through project-based learning, such as analyzing case studies on Iranian startups expanding globally (e.g., Snapp or Digikala), allowing students to connect language skills to personal interests.

Traditional grammar-translation methods should be replaced with communicative activities, such as role-playing job interviews or collaborative problem-solving in English to address institutional barriers. Policymakers can support these efforts by funding virtual exchange programs with international business schools or subsidizing access to platforms like Coursera for specialized Business English courses, thereby mitigating sanctions-driven resource gaps. Additionally, creating university-run English podcasts featuring interviews with Iranian professionals abroad (e.g., engineers at Airbus) or organizing virtual networking sessions with diaspora experts can help compensate for limited exposure to authentic language use.

Teacher training should emphasize motivational scaffolding, such as framing errors as learning opportunities (e.g., “Mispronouncing ‘contract’ could derail a negotiation”) and gamifying tasks like writing LinkedIn profiles. By aligning pedagogy with career aspirations, cultural identity, and socio-political realities, stakeholders can create a sustainable ecosystem for language learning in management education.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between motivation and language proficiency among Iranian management students, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the modest correlation ($r = 0.16$) suggests that unmeasured variables—such as learning environments, peer interactions, or access to resources—may mediate this relationship. Second, the reliance on self-reported motivation measures introduces the potential for biases, such as social desirability, which could be addressed in future studies by incorporating objective measures, such as behavioral observations or assessments of language use in professional contexts. Third, the study’s focus on a single academic discipline (management) limits its generalizability to other fields, such as engineering or the humanities, where language needs and motivational drivers may differ.

To address these gaps, future research could explore cross-disciplinary differences to clarify how discipline-specific goals, such as technical communication in engineering versus business negotiation in management, shape language learning. Additionally, investigating contextual moderators, such as instructional quality (e.g., communicative versus traditional methods) or access to authentic language exposure (e.g., internships or media), could provide a deeper understanding of the weak

correlation observed in this study. These efforts would enhance our understanding of the role of motivation in specialized academic-professional contexts, particularly in politically constrained environments such as Iran.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of motivation in language proficiency among Iranian management students, with a modest but positive correlation ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were found to influence language learning, supporting previous research on their interplay. However, motivation alone cannot predict language proficiency, as contextual factors like limited exposure to authentic English, reliance on outdated pedagogy, and restricted access to resources also mediate its impact. To improve language outcomes, educational strategies must address these barriers, such as integrating technology-driven tasks and training instructors in communicative methods. Policymakers should prioritize initiatives to expand access to global media and international experiences. While this study focuses on Iran, similar research in countries such as Türkiye, China, and Brazil has shown that motivation plays a crucial role in language learning in management education. By addressing both motivation and contextual constraints, stakeholders can create a more effective language-learning ecosystem for management students globally.

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