

## Exploring the Predicting Roles of Iranian EFL Learners' Learning Autonomy and Motivation for Reading Comprehension Success Courses

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Autonomy, Language Learners' Autonomy, Language Learning Motivation, Reading Achievement

### ABSTRACT

The study is a detailed analysis of Iranian EFL learners' language learning autonomy, motivation, and reading achievement. The significant predicting roles of motivation and autonomy for reading comprehension were distinctly explored through multiple regression analyses. In addition, all the items of the scales were distinctly examined. Some 103 randomly selected EFL learners participated, who completed the autonomy and motivation scales, accompanied by a reading comprehension test, successively in one session. A correlational design was utilized to explore the interplay among the learners' autonomy, motivation, and reading achievement as well as to seek the significant predicting roles of motivation and autonomy for reading achievement. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to analyze the relationship between each pair of variables. In addition, multiple regression analyses were used to explore the correlation coefficients among the variables and to check the predicting values of the independent variables of the participants' motivation and autonomy for reading comprehension, as the dependent variable. The results showed significant relationship between autonomy and reading achievement as well as motivation and reading achievement. Moreover, a significant relationship was found between motivation and autonomy, rarely investigated by other researchers. Although both autonomy and motivation significantly predicted reading success, autonomy acted as a more significant predictor, something of sheer novelty. The findings have some novel implications for language teachers to focus on linguistic and psychological elements simultaneously to develop effective methodologies, inevitably leading to the learners' considerable success.

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### Introduction

Reading is a very important skill, which students gradually acquire throughout their school years. However, many students face major problems in the process of learning to read, and in some cases, they cannot understand properly even from the first paragraph of the text. One of the main reasons for this problem can be insufficient mastery of basic reading and text analysis skills. Despite many years of education, many students are not able to acquire the necessary abilities to understand the texts deeply and completely (Mutiarra & Bugis, 2018). Peñafiel (2014) believed that many students are weak in reading skills despite the fact that they have to study many textbooks and academic sources every year. Many students are not motivated to read because the textbooks are not interesting and unrelated to their personal interests. Textbooks are usually dry and lack the variety of literary charms, which can discourage students. This lack of attractiveness makes students unable to study actively and effectively, leading to the inability to understand and analyze the texts. The problems related to teaching methods can be also influential. Anwar (2020) believed that providing attractive diverse educational programs,

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utilizing new educational methods, and paying attention to the psychological needs of students as useful ways to increase their interests and abilities to read.

Reading comprehension is widely acknowledged as a productive skill, enabling students to acquire the necessary knowledge and information presented in written texts. At its core, the essence of reading lies in comprehension, the ability to understand and make meaning from the material being read. While the act of reading involves decoding words and understanding grammar, true proficiency in reading extends beyond mere word recognition to encompass the higher-order cognitive processes associated with comprehension (Chamba & Ramirez-Avila, 2021). Reading should be given special attention by both teachers and learners, due to its very positive effects on enhancing students' vocabulary, spelling and, ultimately, writing skills. When language learners regularly and carefully read different texts, they unconsciously encounter new vocabularies, and this repeated exposure causes these words to be fixed in their minds and added to their active vocabulary treasure. Also, reading helps learners get to know different ways of using words in sentences and texts, which also improves their spelling and writing ability. In addition, reading helps language learners gain more knowledge in various subjects. Every text, book or article that is read not only strengthens language skills but also provides new information about various topics (Al-Jarf, 2021).

Additionally, English language learning has changed over time from a teacher-centered approach to a learning-centered or competency-based approach. In the past, educational systems were mostly designed based on teacher-centered models, so that the teacher acted as the main source of knowledge and information in the classroom, and the students had a passive and receptive role, without paying attention to their psychological learning needs. Teacher made all the decisions related to the educational content, how to present it and evaluate the students (Holmes, 2021). However, in learning-centered approach, language learners are directed by their learning process, motivating them to actively participate in learning and take responsibility for their own learning. This change has made learning English a dynamic and more personalized experience, which fits the needs and goals of each individual. On the basis of this point, learners' needs are the main part and the focus of attention in the classroom in which both teachers and students can teach and being taught simultaneously (Marisa & Utami, 2021).

Moreover, students study more independently and take responsibility for their learning by relying on their abilities. This autonomous learning approach allows students to determine their own learning path and acquire knowledge and skills in a way that is consistent with their personal needs and interests. This type of learning also creates more responsibility in students, as they realize that their success and progress depend on their own efforts and decisions. In fact, by accepting responsibility for their own learning, students change from a passive role in the education process to an active and participatory role (Ivanova, 2017). In learning-centered approach, developing important life skills such as self-management, independent decision-making, and critical thinking are taught to students comprehensively because they are very effective not only for fulfilling academic purpose but also for dealing with daily life social affairs. Hence, autonomy in learning helps students become self-sufficient, responsible and confident individuals, able to face various challenges in their lives (Qoura, Hassan, & Mostafa, 2018). Finally, learner autonomy has a special emphasis on strengthening one's self-confidence and communication skills. In addition, autonomy in learning makes a person feel that he has more control over his learning process. This sense of control not only increases self-confidence, but also makes learners take more responsibility for their academic and professional

development. Also, enhanced communication skills allow learners to communicate well with others in various social and professional situations and participate effectively in groups and work teams. In general, learner autonomy transforms learners into independent responsible people with strong communication skills, who are able to succeed and progress in all aspects of their lives (Marisa & Utami, 2021).

Moreover, motivation is a determining factor in language learning. It is assumed that motivated learners can achieve success in L2 learning, regardless of their language aptitude. However, less motivated learners are unlikely to continue language learning in spite of their talent (Dornyei, 2010). One major factor, which can strengthen the degree of learners' motivation, is to create a dynamic and diverse learning environment. Educators should use different teaching methods so that each learner can benefit from the learning process according to their learning styles. On the other hand, establishing a connection between the educational content and the daily life of language learners can play an effective role in increasing their motivation. When the learners feel that what they learn is applicable in real life and everyday situations, they become interested in learning more effectively (Mahmoodi & Yousefi, 2022).

Concerning the above-mentioned points, the present study is a systematic attempt to scrutinize the probable significant relationships among language learners' autonomy, motivation, and reading comprehension in an academic EFL setting in Iran. Autonomy in language learning is often hindered by institutional structures and pedagogical practices, which prioritize teacher-centered approaches over learner-centered ones, leading to not taking responsibility for learning process among learners. Lack of attention to language learners' autonomy inhibits learners' ability to take control of learning processes and making meaningful decisions about proper learning paths. Actually, language learners' autonomy acts as an underlying asset, regulating motivation, which plays a pivotal role in language learning process. Despite the previous studies, investigating the probable significant relationship between autonomy, motivation, and academic performance, little research has been carried out, exploring the mutual links between these two psychological facets and reading achievement in an Iranian EFL context, which is of great significance. In addition, the predicting values of language learners' autonomy and motivation for reading comprehension process have been systematically probed in this study, which is of sheer novelty and has been scarcely examined in the previous studies. This dimension of the study overemphasizes the fact that psychological facets exert considerable influence on linguistic behaviors, the contribution of which should not be neglected by language teachers. Despite the recognition of the importance of language learning motivation and autonomy, there exists a particularly notable gap in the research domain, concerning the relation between these factors and their combined influence on EFL learners' reading achievement as well as their predicting role for reading comprehension, deserving further systematic investigation.

The findings can be insightful because autonomy is an essential prerequisite for language learning, which empowers learners to take control of their learning process. Research suggests that autonomous learners are more motivated, engaged, and successful in their language acquisition endeavors. Through investigating the relationship between autonomy and reading achievement, educators gain insights into how fostering learner autonomy can positively influence reading outcomes. This understanding is particularly relevant in today's educational landscape, where learner-centered approaches are increasingly advocated for their effectiveness in promoting deep learning and long-term retention. In fact, it is assumed that autonomy may cat as an umbrella under which motivation works. One dimension of the study is seeking the degree

of influence of autonomy and motivation on reading success. The presumption is that autonomy can predict better reading success than motivation, which justifies the prominent role of autonomy for language learning. This dimension of the present study has not been extensively explored in the previous studies, adding the novelty of the present research too.

Language learning motivation also serves as a driving force behind language learning endeavors, influencing learners' willingness to work on the reading materials and persevere through challenges. Through examining the relationship between motivation and reading achievement, educators can identify useful strategies to enhance learners' intrinsic motivation and cultivate a genuine interest in reading. Understanding the factors influencing motivation, such as individual differences, cultural backgrounds, and learning contexts, allows educators to tailor their instructional practices to better meet the diverse needs of learners, ultimately leading to improved reading outcomes.

Moreover, reading achievement is a fundamental component of language proficiency and academic success. Proficient reading skills not only facilitate language comprehension and communication but also enhance learners' ability to engage critically with texts across various disciplines. This knowledge enables educators to design targeted interventions and instructional strategies, aimed at fostering autonomy, enhancing motivation, and ultimately improving reading proficiency among language learners.

The findings of the study are of significance, providing fruitful insights into the factors that affect Iranian EFL learners' reading achievement. It seeks to bridge a gap in the current relevant literature on the relationship between language learners' autonomy, motivation, and academic performance. The results can be something of a novelty because the predicting roles of Iranian EFL learners' motivation and autonomy for reading achievement have been rarely investigated in the previous studies. In other words, through analyzing the learners' motivation and autonomy, language teachers can assume the degree of learners' reading success. It means that the students who are intrinsically less motivated and less autonomous cannot deal with reading comprehension challenges successfully, leading to failure and great frustration. Thus, language teachers should pave the way for successful reading process through increasing the learners' autonomy and motivation through developing their strategic competence and encouraging them to adopt a positive attitude toward learning a second language. The investigation into the relationship among EFL language learner's autonomy, motivation, and reading achievement holds profound significance due to its potential impact on various stakeholders within the field of language education. Teachers can gain insights into the effective ways to foster a conducive environment, which promotes autonomy and motivation, thereby enhancing students' reading proficiency. This knowledge is pivotal for refining pedagogical approaches and creating targeted instructional materials, tailored to the specific needs of EFL learners. The study can also have direct implications for curriculum designers and developers by guiding the integration of learner autonomy and motivation components into language learning programs.

The findings may potentially contribute to the existing academic literature, filling a gap in research on the specific relationships among EFL language learner's autonomy, motivation, and reading achievement. Researchers in the field of applied linguistics and language education can build upon this study's findings, exploring related dimensions and further refining theoretical frameworks that capture the complexities of language learning in diverse EFL contexts. Moreover, policymakers in the field of education can benefit from this study by considering the implications for broader language learning policies. Insights into the factors influencing EFL

reading achievement can guide the formulation of policies that support learner autonomy and motivation at institutional and systemic levels, contributing to more effective language education policies.

In particular, the study seeks to explore the answers to the following questions:

**RQ1:** Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' autonomy and their reading achievement?

**RQ2:** Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' motivation and their reading achievement?

**RQ3:** Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' motivation and their autonomy?

**RQ4:** Which variable (Iranian EFL learners' autonomy or motivation) can better predict reading achievement?

## Literature Review

### Language Learners' Autonomy

A study by Sapan and Mede (2022) investigated the influence of different English instructional methods on L2 language achievement, language learning motivation, and learners' autonomy. The results demonstrated that the application of differentiated education led to the overall improvement of language achievements, foreign language learning motivation and learner self-management among the participants. In addition, both groups of students and teachers experienced the positive and beneficial effect of differentiated instruction in the process of learning and teaching English. Both students and teachers believed that the utilization of differentiated instructional methods develop the learning and teaching quality and increased the motivation and self-management of learners in English classes. This research emphasizes the importance of using diverse and appropriate teaching strategies to optimize learning results and motivate learners.

Engaging in autonomous activities can lead to reduced anxiety levels, as it enhances feelings of control and self-efficacy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Likewise, studies have shown that allowing students to participate in autonomous learning can significantly decrease academic anxiety. For example, when students have the choice in their learning processes, they tend to feel more competent and less anxious (Schunk, 2003). Autonomy has been linked to better mental health outcomes Mall-Amiri (2024). One study by Weisz et al. (2006) revealed that adolescents who engaged in autonomous activities, such as choosing personal topics displayed lower levels of anxiety. However, the impact of autonomous activities may not be considered constant across cultures. The research study conducted by Chirkov et al. (2003) highlights the influence of cultural attitudes on gaining autonomy and managing anxiety: "in collectivist cultures, the relationship might be less direct, as the communal aspects of choices can interplay with individual anxiety" (p. 101).

Aryanjam, Rashtchi, and Maftoon (2023) investigated the effectiveness of teaching strategies in improving reading achievement in self-directed supportive environments. For this purpose, the research was designed in a mixed and descriptive manner. In this research, 50 second-year TEFL students were divided randomly into two different treatment and control groups after passing the Preliminary English Test (PET). Learners' performance in the reading

part of the PET test was scored separately as a pre-test, which showed that before starting the experiment, the students of the two groups had similar reading ability. This research investigated two different methods: the intensive-extensive reading method (I-ERM), which included 26 participants, and the CALL-based interactive reading method (RCRM), which included 24 participants. After the treatment, the participants participated in the post-test and also filled out a questionnaire about cognitive strategies and metacognition. The results proved that after the intervention, the students in the two groups had significant improvement in their reading achievements, and the results of interviews also confirmed that the participants were satisfied with the effectiveness of the teaching that helped them improve reading skill.

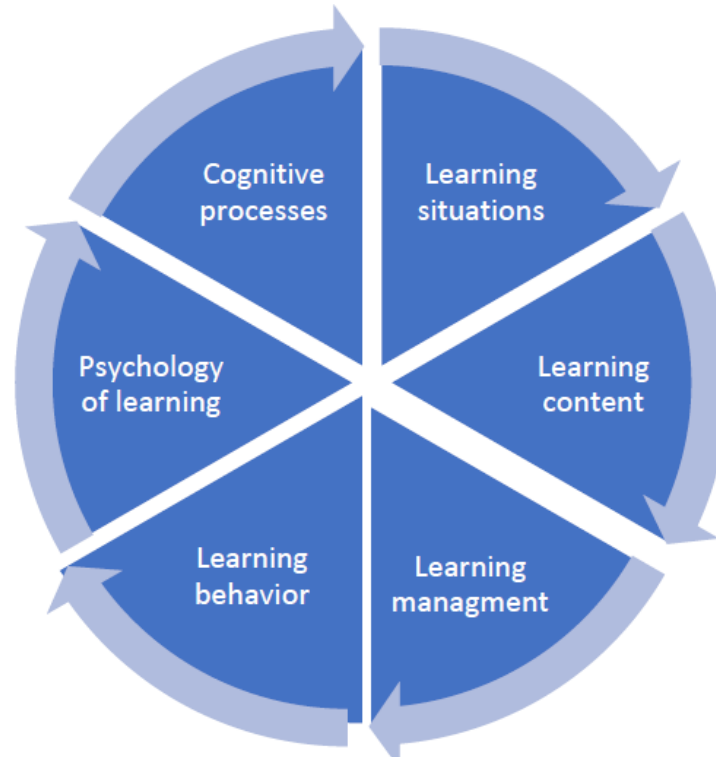
Bayat (2011) examined the relation between perceived self-regulation and reading comprehension of 560 university students. The findings demonstrated that among the participants, 161 people had high levels of self-management, and there was a significant relationship between the students' self-management level and success in reading comprehension. These findings emphasize the importance of the role of self-management in improving reading achievements and show that improving the level of self-management can help improve performance in understanding texts and reading materials. This research can be helpful for designing educational programs, which strengthen self-management and improve reading skills.

Liu, Rios, and Borden (2015) aimed to better understand the concept of self-management and examine its relationship with motivation among EFL students. The findings demonstrated that the students showed a satisfactory self-management level in terms of understanding their responsibility, but in terms of participation in learning activities inside or outside the classroom, their level of self-management was not satisfactory. In addition, the results showed that the students in all three levels of language proficiency generally evaluated their ability as an average. The research also found significant differences in all three aspects of learner self-regulation for participants with different levels of motivation. The findings also indicate that motivation and self-management have a positively strong relation, and the frequency of participation in learning activities has the highest relationship with motivation, while the perception of ability and responsibility are in the next ranks. Finally, the research results showed that motivation was able to be an effective predictor of self-management and was able to explain about 50% of the variance of the dependent variable. These findings emphasize that strengthening motivation can help increase learner autonomy and help improve the learning process of language learners.

It should be notified that the description of autonomy covers six interdependent dimensions, for which a learner should be responsible for the learning process. The dimensions are shown in Figure 1.

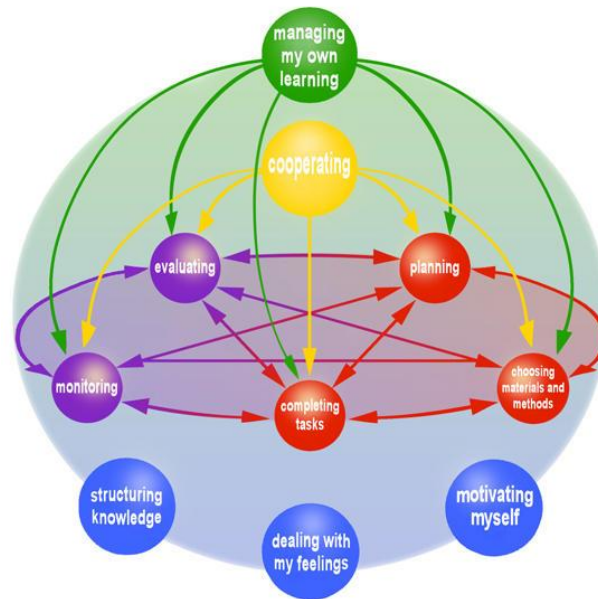
**Figure 1**

*The Model of the Interdependent Dimensions of a Learner's Autonomy (Derived from Jiao, 2025)*



Concerning the depicted model of language learners' autonomy, it is inferred that language learning is an autonomous process, in which learners should be accountable for learning process through passing several related steps. First the learners are confronted with a new learning situation, which is full of negative linguistic and psychological barriers that should be resolved by the learner independently. Then, the learner faces new learning content that has to deal with profoundly through a severe problem –solving activity without the assistance of others. The learner has to manage the learning setting effectively and should adopt an acceptable behavior to deal with linguistic and psychological challenges of the learning process. In the end, the learner is cognitively involved with the learning process, which leads to successful autonomous learning.

The next model of learners' autonomy has been derived from Tassinari (2010), consisting of several interconnected elements.

**Figure 2***Dynamic Autonomy Model (Derived from Tassinari ,2010)*

As depicted in the model, learning autonomy is a dynamic process, comprising several interactive components. The relation between the components is not hierarchical, but of equal importance and interaction. During learning process, learners have to manage their own learning process through metacognitive awareness, including planning, monitoring and evaluation. They also cooperate with each other in choosing materials and methods to complete the tasks successfully. In autonomous learning process, learners are not only equipped with structural knowledge but also should overcome their negative feelings such as anxiety and demotivation and should positively motivate themselves. Therefore, learning autonomy is positively related to motivation. If learners are highly motivated, they are highly responsible and accountable for learning process. On the contrary, if they are demotivated, they are least accountable, leading to debilitating learning process. Thus, language learning autonomy and motivation are interrelated and cannot be investigated independently.

### Language Learning Motivation

Motivation in language learning, as a basic driver, can exert a major influence on the quality, speed, and sustainability of the learning process. When a person learns a language with a strong and specific motivation, this motivation gives him/her the strength to practice and study continuously. Thus, it can be said that language learning motivation is dynamic and multifaceted, influenced by various factors. Combining these factors and focusing on strengthening internal and external motivations can contribute to more effective and enjoyable language learning. Recognizing and understanding these motivations help people to see language learning as a positive and rich experience in their lives and continue this path with more enthusiasm. (Gao & Zhang; Guerrero, 2017). Internal motivations are also very influential in this process. Great

interest in language learning, curiosity about other languages and cultures, and enjoyment of the learning process can be strong motivations to keep going. These types of motivations help a person to remain determined and committed in the face of challenges and difficulties. In general, a combination of different motivations such as communicative, professional, personal, and intrinsic can contribute to language learning (Guerrero, 2017).

The essence of motivation in language learning is undeniable, as a key factor in learning success. Without motivation, the learning process may slow down or even stop, because learning a language requires constant effort and concentration. One of the important aspects of motivation is a person's ability to face the challenges of language learning. Learning a new language is usually accompanied by difficulties such as learning grammar, new vocabularies, and understanding cultural differences. When a person learns a new language for strong and personal reasons such as an interest in a particular culture or professional goals, his/her desire to learn becomes deeper and more practical. In other words, motivation can make a person participate more actively in the learning process, understand the material better and improve his/her language abilities. Thus, motivation, as one of the main components in the success of language learning, allows a person to continue to focus on his goal and continue to progress in the face of difficulties and challenges. Creating and strengthening motivation in the language learning process can help a person attain the desired goals and use the learning experience as a valuable opportunity for personal growth and development (Geary & Xu, 2022).

### **Reading Motivation in Foreign Language Learning**

Wigfield and Guthrie (2000) scrutinized the way the children's motivation is relate to the breadth of their L1 reading. In their study, the reading motives of intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy beliefs, aims for learning, and social features of motivation, were evaluated by a reading motivation questionnaire. The results revealed that the breadth and amount of reading were influenced more significantly by intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic motivation. In contrast to L2 learning motivation studies that have been directed by numerous theoretical models based on L2 (e.g., Csizer & Dornyei, 2005; Dornyei, 2009; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). As a pioneer, Mori (2002) made an effort to recognize the fundamental construction of motivation in reading among Japanese learners. Four principal elements were reported to play significant role in reading progress of the students under the investigation. They were intrinsic significance of reading, importance of reading skill, extrinsic usefulness worth of reading, and efficacy for reading. On the other hand, Dhanapala and Hirakawa (2016) found out that learners' curiosity, hard reading struggle, involvement, constructive reading behavior, and useful worth of reading skill are the sub-components of intrinsic motivation. However, learners' social sharing, recognition, and getting good grades are considered as the important sub-components of extrinsic motivation.

### **Method**

#### **Design of the Study**

A correlational design was utilized to probe the relationship among language learners' autonomy, motivation, and reading achievement. The design is actually quantitative survey design, in which the relationship between the variables is explored, and also the predicting roles

of the learners' autonomy and motivation for their reading achievement is explored through multiple regression analysis.

### Participants

In this study, 103 EFL learners were requested to participate from Safir and Zabansara language institutes in Neyshabur, Iran. Their age ranges were between 17 and 23. To carry out the sampling of the current study, out of a pool of 140 students, 103 were randomly selected through using Morgan and Krejcie's (1970) sample size table. The initial 140 population were homogeneous and at the intermediate level due to the scores they got in OPT test, as a test of proficiency. The participants' mother tongue was Persian. The target sample comprised unequal proportion of male and female students. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Information of the Participants*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Female	77	74.8	74.8	74.8
Male	26	25.2	25.2	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

### Data Collection Procedure

Initially, the participants were informed about the major aims of the study, and any ambiguities regarding the questions were resolved. First, participants completed the Learner Autonomy Scale, which lasted about 15 minutes. After that, the participants completed the Motivation for Learning Questionnaire, which took about 10 minutes. Finally, the participants were given a reading comprehension test, expected to take 90 minutes to complete. Then, all the gathered data were entered into SPSS for statistical investigation.

### Data Analysis

The normality of data was checked through Kolmogrow- Smirnow test. After proving the normality of data, Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is used to check the strength of the relation between the two variables. Then, multiple regression analyses were conducted to check the relations among the variables as well as exploring the predicting roles of the language learners' autonomy and motivation for reading achievement. Also, related descriptive statistics were used. In addition, multiple regression analyses were used to check the predicting role of language learners' autonomy and motivation for reading achievement.

## Results

### Addressing the First Research Question

In the first stage of data analysis, the descriptive statistics were used, the results of which are demonstrated in Table 2. This basic method of data analysis allows the researcher to accurately measure the average of responses and their dispersion for each of the questionnaire items. This preliminary analysis helps to identify the main characteristics of the data collected and provides an initial insight into the distribution and general tendencies of the respondents.

**Table 2**

#### *Learner Autonomy Scale*

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1) I feel confident when I learn English by myself.	4.40	.867
2) I can learn English without much help from my teacher.	4.30	.916
3) I am able to set goals for myself when learning English.	4.29	.976
4) I prefer to be responsible for my own learning rather than being told what to do.	4.34	.966
5) I enjoy finding ways to learn English that work best for me.	4.22	1.047
6) I like to reflect on my English learning progress.	3.97	1.272
7) I believe that I have control over my English learning.	4.45	.915
8) I find it easy to motivate myself to learn English.	4.11	1.145
9) I am willing to take risks and try new things when learning English.	4.06	1.211
10) I believe that I am responsible for my own success in learning English.	4.18	1.109
11) I can work independently when learning English.	4.16	1.073
12) I like to choose the activities that I do when learning English.	4.04	1.188
13) I have a good understanding of my strengths and weaknesses in learning English.	4.15	1.052
14) I feel comfortable asking questions when I need help learning English.	4.29	.946
15) I enjoy learning English on my own time.	4.17	1.024
16) I believe that I can learn English without the help of others.	4.22	1.038
17) I am able to monitor my own progress when learning English.	4.18	1.127
18) I find it easy to stay motivated when learning English.	4.31	1.010
19) I prefer to work through difficulties in learning English by myself.	4.32	.972
20) I believe that I am capable of teaching myself English.	3.89	1.228

Table 2 is dedicated to the Learner Autonomy Scale, indicating the descriptive statistics each item. This table helps to analyze and examine the level of autonomy of language learners in learning English. High averages in most items indicate high self-confidence and autonomy in language learning by language learners. For example, item 7 with a mean of 4.45 and a standard deviation of 0.915 indicates that language learners feel that they have significant control over their English language learning. Also, items 1 and 4 with averages of 4.40 and 4.34 respectively indicate self-confidence and eagerness to take on responsibility in learning the language independently. In addition, items with relatively lower means, such as item 20 with a mean of 3.89, indicate some challenges or doubts in trusting their abilities to teach language independently. In general, the analysis of descriptive statistics of these items shows the existence of a positive and active attitude in the field of independent language learning, although in some cases, such as "self-learning", the need for improvement or more support from educational resources may be felt.

**Table 3**

*Correlation between Learners' Autonomy and Reading Achievement*

		Autonomy	Reading Achievement
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	.631**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	103	103
Reading Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.631**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	103	103

Table 3 shows the Pearson's correlation coefficient between learners' autonomy and reading achievement. As indicated in the table, Pearson correlation coefficient between autonomy and reading achievement is  $r = 0.631^{**}$ ;  $p = 0.000$ , indicating the existence of a significant positive relation between these two variables. In other words, language learners who have a higher level of autonomy in learning are usually more successful in their reading achievement. These findings emphasize the importance of the role of autonomy in improving students' reading achievement, showing that increasing the autonomy level can lead to significant improvement in reading performance.

**Addressing the Second Research Question**

This question seeks to identify and analyze the relation between language learning motivation and EFL students' reading abilities. The descriptive statistics for each questionnaire item are indicated in the table.

**Table 4**

*The Motivation for Learning Questionnaire (MLQ)*

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1) I enjoy learning English.	5.30	1.720
2) I am interested in improving my English skills.	4.71	1.724
3) Learning English is important to me.	4.60	1.676
4) I am motivated to learn English because it will help me in my future career.	3.98	1.826
5) I am motivated to learn English because it is required for my studies.	4.81	1.744
6) I feel competent in my ability to learn English.	4.60	1.880
7) I derive satisfaction from learning English.	4.46	1.787
8) I value the personal benefits of learning English.	3.96	1.798
9) I believe that learning English will make me a more well-rounded person.	4.61	1.622
10) I feel challenged by learning English.	5.07	1.711
11) I am motivated to learn English because it is enjoyable.	5.30	1.507
12) I feel confident in my ability to succeed in learning English.	5.20	1.745
13) I am motivated to learn English because it is interesting.	5.75	1.289
14) I feel a sense of achievement when I learn English.	5.59	1.354
15) I am motivated to learn English because it is a useful skill	5.19	1.585

This table shows that language learners are generally highly motivated to learn English. For example, the mean of 5.75 for the item "Learning English is interesting to me" and the mean of 5.59 for the item "Feeling of achievement when learning English" indicate a high level of motivation among learners. These results indicate that learners do not only care about learning English in terms of fun and attractiveness, but also the feeling of success and progress in this process is very important for them. In addition, items such as "Learning English is important to

me" with a mean of 4.60 and "Feeling competent in learning English" with a mean of 4.60 show that learners attach great importance to learning the language and have high self-confidence in their abilities. These factors, in turn, can help improve the quality of learning and progress in this skill. The feeling of empowerment and the importance of learning as two key factors can directly affect the success of language learners. Thus, it is necessary to pay attention to these aspects in educational programs.

**Table 5**

*Correlation between Learners' Motivation and Reading Achievement*

		Motivation	Reading Achievement
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.479**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	103	103
Reading Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.479**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	103	103

Table 5 analyzes the correlation between the motivation of language learners and their achievement in reading skills. Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables of motivation and reading achievement is reported as  $r = 0.479^{**}$ , indicating a positive and significant relation. The significance level of 0.000 also confirms that this relation is statistically strong and valid. In other words, increasing motivation of language learners is positively correlated with improvement in their reading performance.

### Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study to collect data on language learners' autonomy, motivation, and reading achievement.

#### The Learner Autonomy Scale (LAS)

The Scale was developed by Gao and Zhang (2005), utilized to measure learners' autonomy. It comprised 20 items, rating on a one to five-point Likert scales, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The reliability coefficient was checked by the researcher in a pilot study in the Iranian context, as  $\alpha = .90$  using Cronbach's alpha. The validity of the LAS was checked by Orakci and Gelisli (2017). They provided detailed information on the methods used to establish validity and present evidence supporting the validity claims of the LAS. Following this, Orakci and Gelisli (2017) assessed the psychometric properties of the LAS, including exploratory factor analysis to analyze the underlying structural factors and confirmed its internal consistency. The content validity and face validity were also checked by three reviewers in the field of research, as emphasized by Zohrabi (2013). The English version of the scale was employed in this study. The allotted time to answer the items was about 15 minutes.

#### The Motivation for Learning Questionnaire (MLQ)

The scale was developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) to measure learners' motivation in language learning. It comprised 15 items, rating on a one to seven-point Likert scale, ranging from *not at all true* (1) to *very true* (7). The reliability index of the questionnaire was checked through Cronbach's alpha, as  $\alpha = 0.82$ , confirming the high reliability of questionnaire. The

language of the questionnaire is English. Credé and Phillips (2011) did a study to determine the validity of the MLQ, offering comprehensive details about the approaches employed to establish validity and presented supporting evidence for the validity assertions of the MLQ. The allotted time to answer the items was about 10 minutes.

### Reading Achievement Test

The reading comprehension section of the Barron’s TOEFL test was utilized to check the reading proficiency level of the students. The test comprised five passages, followed by 50 multiple-choice items. To confirm the reliability, KR -21 formula was utilized this purpose, and the reliability index was found as  $r = 0.79$ , confirming the high reliability index. The allotted time to answer the questions was about 90 minutes, based on the feedback of the participants

### Addressing the Third Research Question

The question examines the existence of a meaningful relation between Iranian EFL learners’ motivation and autonomy. Table 6 shows the Pearson’s correlation coefficient between the leaners’ autonomy and motivation.

**Table 6**

*Correlation between Learners’ Motivation and Autonomy*

		Motivation	Autonomy
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.522**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	103	103
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.522**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	103	103

According to the table, the Pearson correlation coefficient between motivation and autonomy is  $r = 0.522^{**}$ , indicating a significant positive relation between the two variables. The significance level of 0.000 also confirms that this correlation is statistically very valid. In other words, the results show that language learners who are more motivated to learn a language usually have higher autonomy in their learning process.

### Addressing the Fourth Research Question

The fourth question of the current research investigates which variable, autonomy or motivation of Iranian EFL learners, can be a better predictor of success in reading skills. This question is of particular importance, because understanding the factors affecting the improvement in reading skills can help to design more effective educational programs and improve teaching methods.

**Table 6**

*Multiple Regression Analyses for Predicting Reading Achievement Based on Autonomy and Motivation*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	26.521	8.605		3.082	.005
Autonomy	1.452	1.296	.941	11.204	.000
Motivation	1.226	1.187	.741	10.115	.000

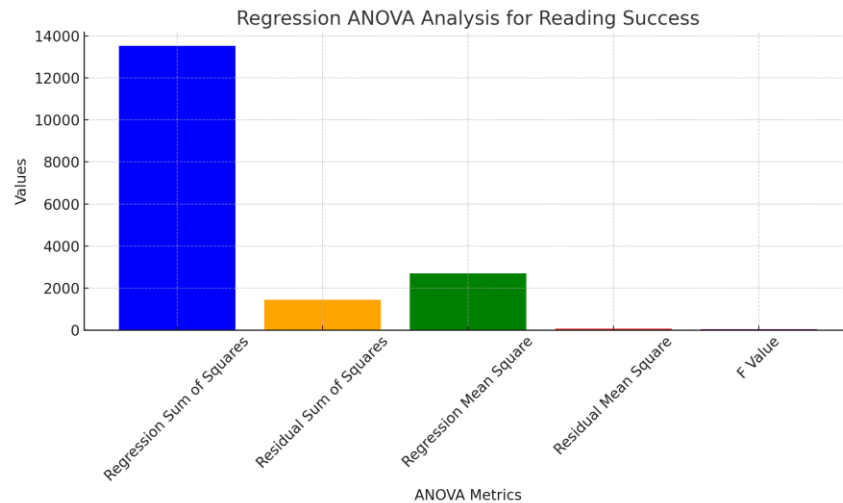
Table 6 shows multiple regression analyses for predicting success in reading skills based on autonomy and motivation. According to this table, both autonomy and motivation variables are significantly able to predict reading success. The standardized beta coefficient for autonomy is  $B = 0.941$  and for motivation is  $B = 0.741$ , indicating that autonomy has more predicting power than motivation for reading achievement. In other words, language learners' autonomy can better predict their reading success. Based on the findings, both variables have a significant impact on reading success. Unstandardized coefficients show that with an increase of one unit in autonomy, reading achievement increases by 1.452 units, and with an increase of one unit in motivation, reading achievement increases by 1.226 units. These results show that to improve reading achievement, focusing on increasing learners' autonomy and motivation can be effective, but autonomy plays a more prominent role. Table 8 indicates the regression analyses of variance (ANOVA) for the prediction model of reading success, based on autonomy and motivation.

**Table 8**

*Regression ANOVA Table*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	13514.537	2	6757.269	112.126	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	1446.130	100	14.461		
Total	14960.667	102			

According to this table, the regression sum of squares is equal to 13514.537, indicating the amount of changes explained by the model. Also, the residual sum of squares is equal to 1446.130, representing the amount of changes that are not explained by the model. Through dividing the sum of the regression squares by the degree of freedom ( $df = 2$ ), the regression mean square is equal to 6757.269. Also, through dividing the sum of the remaining squares by the remaining degree of freedom, the mean of the remaining squares is equal to 14.461. The  $F$  value is equal to 112.126 at  $p = 0.000$ , proving that the regression model is able to significantly predict the changes in reading achievement based on autonomy and motivation. These results confirm that both variables of autonomy and motivation significantly affect reading success, and the model is well able to explain this relationship. Table 7 shows that an increase in the level of students' autonomy and motivation can significantly improve their reading results and this model can be used as an effective tool to analyze and predict reading success. The significance level (Sig. < 0.000) highlights the model's effectiveness in predicting changes in reading success. These results confirm the significant impact of autonomy and motivation on reading success, demonstrating the model's capacity to explain this relationship. Figure 3 demonstrates Regression Analysis for reading comprehension success.

**Figure 3***Regression ANOVA Analysis for Reading Success*

### Discussion

The present study was an attempt to probe the relationships among language learners' autonomy, motivation, and reading achievement. The findings indicated a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' autonomy and reading achievement. The findings are in accordance with Zarei and Gahremani (2010), having reported a positive relation between MA students' autonomy and their reading ability. The results are also in line with Zafarian and Nemati (2016), having examined the effect of learner autonomy on EFL learners' reading comprehension. They proved a significant positive relationship between learners' autonomy and reading comprehension. In addition, they revealed that learner autonomy could predict EFL learners' reading comprehension. The findings also support the findings of the previous researchers stating that reading comprehension is a challenging task, requiring high degree of learners' autonomy through social interaction and collaboration in the classroom. Through increasing the learners' autonomy, learners get self-motivated and responsible for their learning process, which accelerates the independent reading process. The importance of learners' autonomy in language learning process has been also emphasized by the previous researchers (e.g., Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014).

The findings also showed significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' motivation and reading achievement. The findings are in accordance with Sapan and Mede (2022), having found a positive relationship between foreign language achievements and learning motivation among Turkish students. They emphasized the importance of using diverse and appropriate teaching strategies to optimize learning results and motivate learners. The findings are in line with those of Liu, Rios, and Borden (2015), having proved that motivation and self-management have a positive and strong relationship with language learning. The findings have been justified by Gan and Hong (2022), having proved the positive role of motivation, in students' English reading comprehension. Moreover, there was a significant relation between Iranian EFL

learners' motivation and autonomy. Finally, both autonomy and motivation variables were significantly able to predict reading success. However, language learners' autonomy was proved to better predict reading comprehension in this study. The findings are of significance, adding the novelty of research, because of the greater contributing role of the learners' autonomy to reading success, rarely investigated in the previous studies. Hence, the findings are in accordance with Zafarian and Nemati (2016), having explored the predicting role of autonomy for reading comprehension.

### Conclusion

The findings of the current study demonstrated a significant relation between the Iranian language learners' autonomy and their success in reading comprehension. In other words, the higher the autonomy level of language learners, the more probably they are to succeed in reading skills. The findings encourage language teachers to modify teaching activities in a way that promote learners' autonomy and creativity. Autonomy in learning means the ability of language learners to manage, plan, and control their learning process, which help them be independent in making important decisions, related to learning, choosing appropriate resources and effective methods to improve their reading skills. In this research, autonomy has been investigated as one of the key factors in the progress of language learners in reading skills. The findings of this study demonstrated that language learners with higher level of autonomy outperform in reading tests. This could be justified as autonomous people are usually more motivated and responsible in learning and actively participate in reading-related activities.

In addition, the findings proved a significant relation between the motivation of Iranian language learners and their success in reading. The highly motivated learners usually view learning challenges as proper opportunities for growth. They accept their failure, correct their mistakes, and pave the way for future success. High learning motivation makes language learners devote more time to study and learn more seriously and persistently. Motivation also helps learners show more resistance when faced with complex texts and search for more effective solutions and strategies to comprehend the texts profoundly. On the other hand, the use of diverse teaching methods and educational technologies by language teachers can arouse the interest of language learners, leading to increased motivation and success in reading skills. High language learning motivation acts as a strong stimulus for continuation and sustainability of learning even at advanced levels. Therefore, strengthening motivation in language learners can lead to significant improvement in language learning, in general and reading comprehension, in particular.

Furthermore, the results demonstrated a significant relation between Iranian EFL learners' motivation and autonomy, proving that motivation and autonomy are strongly related and can simultaneously affect the progress of language learners. The findings also showed that strengthening each of these variables can lead to the improvement of the other. For example, creating learning environments, which increase the motivation of language learners, can help them strengthen their autonomy. When language teachers provide learners with dynamic learning environments, interesting instructional materials, and active learning opportunities, they take on greater responsibility, higher level of autonomy, and stronger motivation to face the challenging reading tasks.

Finally, the results proved that both autonomy and motivation are able to significantly predict reading success, emphasizing the prominent role of the two variables. Specifically, the learners who are more autonomous are usually more willing to search, study, practice, and take full advantage of learning opportunities. This independence in learning allows them to identify their difficulties in reading and use different methods to improve these weaknesses, which ultimately leads to reading success. On the other hand, motivation, as a strong psychological factor, encourages language learners to work continually with more interest and enthusiasm, even in terms of inevitable failures.

Teachers can improve learners' reading motivation and autonomy by creating opportunities for independent learning such as research projects, creative task-based reading activities and free reading. In addition, using educational games, collaborative techniques, and digital tools can help learners increase their motivation and deeper interaction with the reading content. Teachers can give constructive corrective feedback to the learners in a way that learners' autonomy and motivation are not disturbed. Thus, using educational materials, which are motivating and responsive to the learners' needs and interests, is of paramount importance. Any language teaching curriculums should be flexible in a way that allows learners to study independently and use a variety of motivating resources for learning.

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