

# **THE STUDY OF EFFECTS OF USING INFORMATION GAP TASKS ON DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION LEVEL AND MOTIVATION OF THE INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS**

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**Abstract:** In the last three decades, tasks have played substantial and prominent role in language teaching and learning. One of the important type of tasks is information gap task. The current study aimed to investigate the impacts of using information gap tasks on developing reading skill and their effects on motivation. To this aim, 56 learners were selected by the researcher randomly. Two groups were determined: the experimental group and the control group. The treatments of this study were information gap tasks. The study was collected data from multiple sources through: a) OPT test, b) motivation questionnaire, and c) information-gap tasks, and d) pre-test and post-test. For analyzing the data the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test was run for the pretest-posttest comparison of the reading based on information gap tasks in the experimental group. The Independent Samples T-Test was run for the posttest comparison of the motivation between the control and the experimental groups. The results of the study revealed that that information gap task did not have any statistically significant effect on reading comprehension and motivation of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

**Index Terms:** information gap tasks, motivation, reading comprehension, tasks

## **1. Introduction**

One of the fundamental skills in language teaching is reading skill that helps people to read proficiently and think carefully, and conclude properly. This skill requires different processes such as concentration, auditory processing skills, visual processing skills, memory and reasoning. These skills are developed over a period of many years. Reading is a receptive skill that refers to a process in which you do not produce but receive, deal with and understand a language (Ur, 1996). This skill assists us to read signs, instructions, news articles and other written information. According to Widdowson (1994), reading is the active production skill and use of written production. In addition, reading is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Walker, 1989). Reading helps us to know what kinds of situations are there in the world. Reading as a language skill used for supports learning in multiple ways and it is required an interactive method. This indicates the significance of reading skill in second or foreign language learning.

It is necessary to adopt an appropriate method to facilitate reading skill and ultimately language learning. There were different methods in language teaching. One of those striking methods was Task based language teaching. This method focuses on the use of authentic language through meaningful tasks. The curriculum or course designer attempts to provide-

tasks that develop a language learning context in which the learners can be involved and supported in their efforts to communicate fluently and efficiently (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). In this method, students need more opportunity to practice English and use it communicatively inside and outside the language classroom (Ellis, 2003). Florez and Burt (2001) emphasize that "pair and group work activities can provide learners with opportunity to share information and build a sense of community" (Florez & Burt, 2001, p. 30). This method consists of different types of tasks such as jigsaw, information-gap, problem-solving tasks and so on. This study is based on the information-gap tasks. This type of task might make the students interact easily in reading activity. Sari (2008, p.3) expresses that "The core of information gap method is a corporation between groups and pairs". Information gap activities involve the learners in sharing the information that they have in order to solve a problem, gather information or make decisions (Rees, 2005). In addition, Ur (1996) mentions that students can participate in the process of learning actively with information gap tasks. According to Dornyei (2001), tasks can foster learners' motivation, because they can provide good atmosphere for learners.

Motivation is another important construct in this study. Motivation is a necessary element not only of the teaching-learning process, but of all of the actions human beings perform daily and throughout their lives. Pintrich (1988) defines motivation as internal processes which spur on us to satisfy some need (Pintrich, 1988). Pintrich and Schunk (1996) regard it as the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained. Without regarding to all recent improvements in language teaching and especially in reading instruction, traditional strategies and methods are used in most of Iranian language contexts. It means that language tasks can be efficient in the language learning process, they are not used in Iranian language contexts extensively and EFL learners have difficulties in language learning and specifically learning reading. Learners in language contexts need to be motivated to learn effectively. Iranian language learners usually lack of motivation in the classroom context. To fill the gaps of this study, this study tried to examine the effects of using information gap tasks on developing reading comprehension level and motivation on the intermediate EFL learners.

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

### **2.1 Task**

In the past decades, the role of tasks has been extensively developed. According to Long (1985), tasks are simply defined as the things people perform in their life such as buying shoes and making reservations. Also, Ellis (2003) defined task as the meaning-focused activities where students utilize whatever language resources they have to do the task to achieve its non-linguistic outcome. In means that task emphasizes on the meaning rather than the form.

### **2.2 Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is one of the most leading methods in language teaching in the recent decades. Tasks have prominent and crucial roles in TBLT. Accordingly, Nunan (2004, p.1) believes that "task is an important element in syllabus design, classroom teaching, and learners assessment". Richards and Rogers (2001) claim that "task-based language teaching refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core units of planning and instruction in language teaching" (p.223). According to Crookes (1986), a task is "a piece of work or activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research" (Crookes, 1986, as cited Kris Van Den Branden, 2006). Prabhu (1987) defines task as an activity which needs learners to achieve an outcome by using given information. Based on these activities, the classes should be more student-centered and learners can interact in target language and also they can focus on the meaning rather than form.

### **2.3 Information-Gap Task**

In second/foreign language teaching, there has been an increasing interest in using information gap tasks in recent years. Based on this type of task, students are needed to use the language to exchange information while they can attend on

meaning instead of forms. As Ellis (2003) defines this type of task as “A task where one participant holds information that the other participant(s) do(es) not have and that must be exchanged in order to complete the task”(p. 213). Also, Ur (1996) mentions that information gap task is “A particularly interesting type of task which is based on the need to understand or transmit information finding out what is in a partner’s picture, for example” (p.54).

#### **2.4 Reading**

Reading is one of the most important skills in language and it has a significant influence on the learners' learning. There are different definitions about reading. According to Widdowson (1979), reading is the process of getting linguistic information via print. In simple words, reading is the communication of thoughts, moods, and emotions through which one receives from others their ideas and feelings. Nuttall (1996) regards reading as the process of “getting out of the text as nearly as possible the message the writer put into it” (1996, p. 4). Doff (1997) believes that reading is an active and cognitive process. Urquhart and Weir (1998) define reading as “the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print” (Urquhart & Weir, 1998, p. 22).

The main purpose of reading is to comprehend a text and answer comprehension check questions, to do grammar activities, to solve language problems, to improve language ability, to achieve pleasure and information, to know the instruction of using a particular tool, to be familiar with a particular country or place, to decode message from a printed document, to get idea from inscription from any objects and so on.

#### **2.5 Motivation**

Motivation is one of the influential psychological constructs in the language teaching and learning process. As Gardner (2010) defined motivation as a psychological, physical or social need which reinforce individuals to achieve their goals and fulfill their needs. According to Dörnyei and Otto (1998), motivation is as “the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out” (Dörnyei & Otto, 1998, p. 65). Moreover, as Dörnyei (1998) states motivation is the key of learning. He continues that it is an inner source, desire, emotion, reason, need, impulse or purpose that moves a person to a specific action.

#### **2.6 Empirical Studies**

Fallahi, Malayeri and Bayat (2015) conducted a study to examine the effects of information gap and opinion gap tasks on improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Based on the purpose of the study, a quasi-experimental design was utilized. The results of the pretest and posttest in data analysis through statistical procedure such as One-Way ANOVA confirmed the superiority of the experimental groups to the control group, and task based instruction helped to improve reading comprehension.

Emanian and Moloudi (2015) studied the effect of concept mapping and information gap task on Iranian post graduate EFL learners' writing. The subjects were forty two Iranian postgraduate students majoring in TEFL at Islamic Azad University. They were assigned into two twenty one experimental groups of concept mapping and information gap task. Then, both groups sat for the pre-test, which was a TOFEL writing test. The purpose of this test was to measure the learners' initial writing ability. The results revealed that the application of concept mapping and information gap task improved learners' writing. The findings of this study could have a number of important implications for teaching writing to EFL learners effectively.

Shabrina, Yufrizal, and Suka (2013) studied the effects of information gap task in teaching English at the second year students. This research was quantitative descriptive research. The design of this research was one group pretest-posttest, experimental design. The participants were 30 learners. In collecting the data, the researcher administered speaking test and interview. The researcher found that there were significant improvements in students' speaking ability. It means that there was improvement in speaking ability. Information gap task used in this research stimulated the students to speak a lot in the classroom.

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions are formulated:

**RQ1:** Does information gap task have any statistically significant effect on reading comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

**RQ2:** Does information gap task have any statistically significant effect on motivation of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

Four classes were considered for this study (N=82). They were both males (N= 32) and (N= 48) females. All of these participants were studying English in Gouyesh Language Institute. The participants' language proficiency levels were similar. They were in the intermediate level. The learners had 3 years-experience in language learning. The first language of the participants was Persian. Their ages were between 15 to 18 years old. The learners assigned into two intact groups. It should be mentioned that all participants in two groups were informed that they were part of a research project.

#### **3.2 Instruments**

Four instruments were utilized to collect the data in the present study:(1) An Oxford Placement Test which measures a test taker's ability to homogenize the participants. (2) Information Gap Tasks: The tasks were based on four short stories from the textbook "facts and figures" by Patricia Ackert and Linda Lee. The learners were given some tables with missing information and they had interactions together and guessed the answers about the specified stories. (3) Dörnyei's motivation questionnaire (2001): This questionnaire had seven sections. This questionnaire was based on the likert scale from (strongly disagree to strongly agree).The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was 0/87 that was based on Alfa Cronbach that indicates high and acceptable reliability coefficient. This questionnaire was valid because it has been performed several times in different contexts. (4) According to this study, for pre-test and post-test examination, 3 reading texts were selected from the textbook "facts and figures" by Patricia Ackert and Linda Lee. 40 multiple choice items and true/false items were selected as comprehension questions tests. The topics of were 'oranges', 'The Dolphin' and 'The Camel'. Both pre-test and post-test were same. For pre-test, the researcher applied the reading comprehension test before starting the experiment. The post-test was applied for comparing the results between pre-test and post-test.

#### **3.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Before the administration of the questionnaires and the test, the researcher gave participants an oral description of the objectives and procedures of the study in order to make the instructions clear thoroughly. Then, the instrument OPT was administered in one session and the participants answered it. In this stage, the learners were homogenized and fifty six learners were determined. The learners were divided in two groups: an experimental and a control groups. Also, the learners were given the motivation questionnaire. In the second session, a pre-test reading exam was administered to determine the current level of the participants before giving treatment. In the next session, the teacher divided an experimental group into two small groups and gave four reading texts to them. The teacher introduced and talked about the text in the classroom. After that, the learners had 20 minutes to read their paragraph and asked some questions from their teacher. Later, both groups were given 20 minutes to discuss and get the missing content of the text. Then, he provided some tables with missing information about the texts to the learners and gave 10 minutes to fill the tables with discussion. This process continued in four sessions. After giving treatment, the participants filled the motivation questionnaire again. At last, a post-test reading exam was administered to compare the results of pre- and post- tests.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, package of SPSS (version 19) was used which is a statistical analysis software.As to the first research question, the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test was run for the pretest-posttest comparison of the reading in the experi-

mental group. For the second research question, the Paired t-test was run for the pretest-posttest comparison of the motivation in the experimental group. Moreover, the Independent Samples T-Test was run for the posttest comparison of the motivation between the control and the experimental groups.

### 3.5 Design

The design of the present study was quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design. The participants were non-randomly assigned into two experimental groups.

## 4. Result

In order to have homogenized participants in terms of their general English language proficiency, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered. The descriptive analysis for the OPT test is displayed in the following table.

**Table 4.1**

*The Descriptive Statistics of the OPT Score*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
OPT	82	15.00	37.00	26.2439	5.92038	35.051
Valid N (listwise)	82					

Out of the 82 participants, 56 were considered homogenous members based on one standard deviation above and below the mean (26.24+/- 5.92). The homogenized participants were randomly assigned into two groups of control and experimental (N= 28). The following procedures are related to the first question: In order to choose the appropriate test for the pretest-posttest comparison within the experimental group, the researcher ran the test of normality. The following table shows the normality analysis result.

**Table 4.2**

*Result of Normality Test for Reading Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Exp Pretest	.109	28	.200*	.966	28	.448
Exp Posttest	.195	28	.006	.904	28	.012

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As it can be seen in table 4.2 above (result of Shapiro-Wilk), the data is not normally distributed for the two sets of scores (Sig< .05 for the posttest). Therefore, the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test was used for pretest-posttest comparison. The descriptive statistics of the two scores is presented below.

**Table 4.3**

*Descriptive Statistics for Reading Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Exp Pretest	28	13.00	24.00	19.4138	2.89726	8.394
Exp Posttest	28	22.00	27.00	25.3793	1.34732	1.815
Valid N (listwise)	28					

The means of the pretest and posttest are 19.41 and 25.37 respectively. The result of the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test is presented below.

**Table 4.4**

*The Result of the Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test for Reading Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group*

	Exp Posttest - Exp Pretest
Z	-4.638 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

As it can be seen in table 4.4 above, the obtained Sig value is less than p.05. Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that information gap task does not have any statistically significant effect on reading comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

The second question of this study tries to investigate the possible significant effect of information gap task on motivation of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. In order to choose the appropriate test for the pretest-posttest comparison within the experimental group, the researcher ran the test of normality. The following table shows the normality analysis result.

**Table 4.5**

*Result of Normality Test for Motivation Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PreMotExp	.114	28	.200*	.967	28	.472
PostMotExp	.106	28	.200*	.933	28	.058

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As it can be seen in table 4.8 above (result of Shapiro-Wilk), the data is normally distributed for the two sets of scores (Sig> .05). Therefore, the Paired Samples T-Test was used for pretest-posttest comparison of motivation. The descriptive statistics of the two scores is presented below.

**Table 4.6**

*Descriptive Statistics for Motivation Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 PreMotExp	141.3333	28	8.83306	1.61269
PostMotExp	163.8667	28	11.44020	2.08869

The means of the pretest and posttest are 141.33 and 163.86 respectively. The result of the Paired Sample T-Test is presented below.

**Table 4.7**

*The Result of the Paired Sample T-Test for the Motivation Pretest-Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group*

Pair	Mean	Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
1 PreMotExp - PostMotExp	22.53333	14.51452	2.64998	-27.95314	-17.11352	8.503	27	.000

As it can be seen in table 4.7 above, the obtained Sig value is less than p.05. Therefore, the researcher safely rejects the research hypothesis that information gap task does not have any statistically significant effect on motivation of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, results reveal that using information gap activities as a method to improve students' reading proficiency level had not a significant impact on improving students' reading proficiency. The results of the researcher's findings are not in line with the conclusions from several previous studies in using information gap activities in EFL learners. Unlike Fallahi's study (2015), information-gap tasks had a positive effect on the students' reading comprehension ability, the researcher rejected the research hypothesis that information gap task does not have any statistically significant effect on reading comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

Another study conducted by Karimi (2010) revealed that the EFL learners' degree of learning increases when they learn new words by the use of information-gap tasks in the classroom. Also the learners in the experimental group – taught through the use of information-gap tasks – were gradually seen to become less dependent upon teacher's assistance. So, the findings of this research recommended giving students opportunities to develop strategies for interpreting and comprehending language as it is actually used by native speakers.

Jondeya (2011) studied the effectiveness of using information gap on developing speaking skills for eight graders in Gaza governorate schools. For achieving this aim, she adopted the experimental approach. The results proved that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the pre & post speaking test of the experimental group in each level of speaking skills in favor of posttest. The results also indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of each level of speaking skills in the post test for experimental group compared with the control group.

This study examined the impacts of using information gap tasks on developing reading proficiency level and motivation on the intermediate EFL learners. The study was typically grounded in the task-based framework of research investigating the relationship between different variables. One of those variables was information gap tasks. This type of task involves a transfer of given information from one person to another or from one form to another, or from one place to another – generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. Sari (2008, p.3) mentions that "The core of information gap method is a corporation between groups and pairs". The primary findings of this study were that information gap task does not have any statistically significant effect on reading comprehension and motivation of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Generally, the results of the study did not show any significant differences between the variables (information gap tasks, reading proficiency level and motivation) and they weren't in line with previous studies.

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