

## The Effect of Topic Interest on FL Learners' Interest Level and Reading Achievement: Focusing on Age Differences

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Research Paper

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**Abstract:** In the present study the impact of employing interesting class materials on FL learners' interest level and their achievement in foreign language reading was investigated. The interaction pattern between interest and age in the context of Interest-Based Language Teaching (IBLT) was examined as well. Sixty-six university students of law and accounting in Hidaj IAU, Iran were used in the investigation. The participants were randomly divided into two groups of experimental (N=33) and control (N=33). Unlike the control group who received the instruction in the usual way, the experimental group received it in a way in which the reading texts were selected based on learners' interest. The results indicated that the use of IBLT increased learners' situational interest and improved their performance in FL reading, though it was not statistically significant. Moreover, some patterns of interaction between interest and age were observed with respect to the participants' performances in FL learning. The study findings could offer efficient uses for FL teaching researchers, teachers, and particularly syllabus designers as applying interest-based materials in ELT instruction will bring considerable benefits for FL learners when materials are matched with their interest areas.

**Keywords:** Age Differences, EFL/ESL Teaching, Interest Level, Reading Achievement, Topic Interest

### Introduction

Affective factors have been shown to play a crucial role in developing L2 skills. Learners' emotions, attitudes and interests are highly influential in L2 learning (Adella, 2019; Chastain, 1988; Norhasikin et al., 2021). Developing positive attitudes is the overriding priority in L2 classrooms (Stevick, 1982). Interest is an affective factor that has an impact in L2 learning process. Interest has been defined as "heightened attention and emotional engagement that emerges when a person has a positive interaction with a content area or a task" (Hidi and Renninger, 2006, p. 112). Schiefele (1991) holds that interest may take root in Herbart's ideas in the 1800s, which is identified as a factor that could generate the necessary motivation to learn and improve a long-term information storage. Interest has been divided into two basic types: situational and individual interest (Renninger, 2000). The first type is characterized as an undivided attention, and an effective response that is sparked immediately by the context stimuli, which may endure or stop over the passage of time (Hidi, 1990). For the second type, there seems to be some lasting predisposition for learners to get involved with specific content and area over in individual interest (Renninger, 2000). Currently researchers recognize interest as a construct which is highly structured around three aspects of impact, competence and meaningfulness (Tobias, 1994).

IBLT can be considered as a component of content based L2 teaching since what is being taught in the classroom is related to a content area that has been selected as the content for teaching. Trumper (2006) maintains that learners' interest, attitudes, perspectives towards a topic and real-life activities related to that topic, are among the four factors affecting their interests in language learning. Shah (2020)

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stated that interest balances learning by paving the way for learners to overcome ups and downs in the learning process and facilitates learning. Even though teachers may manage to provide fruitful learning situations for the learners, changing their negative attitude to learning seems difficult, which creates challenges for promoting interest in EFL/ESL learning. This is consistent with the argument presented by Wahjuni (2012) who argues that IBLT offers Student-Centered-Learning syllabus and learning procedures. Therefore, IBLT is likely to encompass the same principles considered in pedagogy of Student-Centered-Learning.

The textbooks that are used for the '*General English Course*' at Iranian universities usually contain passages on different topics, such as arts, places, sports, business, recreation, society, health and etc., which vary in different books. Normally, students are not likely to be interested in all these topics. In addition, they may tend to show more interest in some topics compared to others, and this point is not usually discerned by teachers and syllabus designers. Teachers can exploit students' interest areas and select those units which may increase the necessary motivation and incentive among learners to succeed. Some studies (Amiryousefi, 2016; Ebrahimi and Javanbakht, 2015; Sadeghpour, 2013) have conducted on the relation between interest and FL learning in Iran, however there is no direct focus on the relation between interest in language learning and with a focus on learners' age factor. Accordingly, the investigation aimed at examining closely the impact of learners' interest-based materials and their achievement in L2 reading, and its likely interaction with age.

### Review of the literature

It is assumed that interest is the key to success in education and language learning in particular. Interest is defined by Schraw and Lehman (2001) as "liking and willful engagement in a cognitive activity that is shown as active engagement and focused attention in learning" (p. 23). Also, Hidi (2001) believes that students' interest has a leading role in increasing their willingness to learn, which assists them in having strong determination and increasing intense concentration. Mazer (2013), further, contends that lack of interest plays an important role in learners' lack of inclination towards engaging with various learning activities. As a result, interest and motivation can be regarded as a determining factor in motivating learners to make every effort to actively engage in the tasks of language learning and learning. Some language teaching experts (e.g., Mazer 2013; Naz et al., 2020; Schraw & Lehman, 2001; Senko et al., 2022; Weber, Martin, & Cayanus 2005; Zezarwati et al., 2022) put considerable effort into exploring the features of interest in language learning and education, and developing appropriate instruments to measure it. Mazer (2013), for instance, argued that interest features are complex and difficult to understand, and it requires to be studied in terms of emotional and cognitive aspects.

The findings of several studies (e.g., Ainley, 2002; Amin, 2019; Celik, 2010; Ebrahimi & Javanbakht, 2015; Magliano, Durik & Holt, 2011; Schiefele & Krapp, 1996; Wahjuni, 2012; Wang et al., 2021) have revealed that student interest in learning is related to cognitive and emotional interest and learners' achievement in learning. Schiefele and Krapp (1996) studied the changes in learners' recall in expository texts when the topics were interest-based. The results indicated a noticeable impact of topic interest on language learners' ability to recall idea units, an increase in the amount of the information storage, and also deeper comprehension of the texts. Magliano et al. (2011), examined the impact of topic interest on learners' performance in reading the texts that had been standardized. The results confirmed that the learners' engagement with the text was increased, and the emergence of interest resulted in higher comprehension by facilitating the process of learning. Similarly, Eidswick (2010) studied the effect of prior knowledge and interest on language learners' reading comprehension and found higher scores for the texts that were more interesting to learners.

However, some research findings provided evidences showing that raising interest level in the teaching context could not always enhance the achievement in language learning. Accordingly, Clark and

Mayer (2003) warn that integrating unrelated materials like background music can work as a distracting factors for learners. Harp and Mayer (1998) refer to such extraneous factors as “*seductive details*,” and contend that the factors can cause negative change on learners' motivation. Flowerday, Schraw, and Stevens (2004) who studied reading engagement and attitude, found no significant interaction of interest and learning achievement. The results of the investigation by Reber, Hetland, Chen, Norman and Kobbeltvedt (2009) revealed that example choice had no effect on attention and interest. Also, Sedeghpour (2013) reported that topic interest could not significantly EFL learners' immediate and late recall of reading texts.

The results of Wahjuni's (2012) study confirmed that IBLT improve learners' communicative skills. Celik (2010) scrutinized the relationship between IBLT and learners' motivation and language production in an ELT classroom. The results indicated that IBLT generated intrinsic motivation, and increased participation in classroom. Ebrahimi and Javanbakht (2015) investigated the relation between topic interest and reading comprehension, and reported that topic interest had a positive effect on learners' achievement in L2 reading. The impact of interest has also been examined extensively in L1 teaching context compared to L2 teaching settings. Lee and Pulido (2017) provide confirming evidence from previous empirical investigation that approve the impressive effects of selecting topic based on learners' interest on L1 reading.

The above short review confirms the influence of interest on reading in language learning that has often been improved by other individual factors like gender and language proficiency; yet, additional research is investigation needs to be conducted on the effect of topic interest on EFL/ESL learning by considering other individual variables. Besides, few studies have focused on the relationship between interest and age. Hence, to add newer findings on the interaction between attending to learners' interest, learners' performance and age, the following research questions have been addressed.

**Research Question One:** Does topic interest have any significant effect on learners' situational interest?

**Research Question Two:** Does topic interest have any significant effect on learners' achievement in FL reading?

**Research Question Three:** Is there any interaction between interest and age if class materials are matched with learners' interest?

## Method

### Participants

Sixty-six students (42 male and 24 female) from Hidaj Azad University in Iran, participated in this study. Their major was law and accounting, and their age varied from 19 to 34. The students were freshmen and sophomores and were taking the ‘general English’ course which is a required one for all university students in the first or second year of college in Iran.

### Procedure

The participants were divided into two groups in a random way, each group consisting of thirty-three students. One group was employed as the experimental group, while the other one as the control group. To ascertain the participants were at the same or similar level of in terms of English proficiency, before conducting the research, an OPT reading test was administered. The results showed there was not a significant difference between the groups concerning their level of reading proficiency. Unlike the control group, the experimental group took the 'Reading Interest Survey' questionnaire that was seeking to

identify learners' interest areas. The results of the survey were used to determine the participants' interest areas in the experimental group were. Based on the attained results, the students were most interested in the topic '*world issues*' among the textbook topics, which was the second section in the textbook, with five passages about this topic. The reading topics for the control group were determined by the teacher. Next, all participants in the two groups were taught five lessons of the book in separate classes, where the teacher was the same. Finally, all participants took an achievement test to determine the likely differences in learners' achievement of the course materials. In addition, to examine participants interest level an interest scale was given to them at the end of the study. Using independent sample t-test (SPSS version 16) the collected data was closely analyzed to provide responses to the questions of the research.

## **Instruments**

### ***The Oxford Placement Test (OPT)***

To check if the participants were at the same level concerning proficiency, OPT was employed that is a standardized and generic test, which had 40 items. Its reliability had been confirmed in many different previous studies, and in this study the amount was 0.78. This test is usually used for such purposes in EFL/ESL teaching. It contained four passages with twenty multiple choice reading comprehension questions.

### ***Reading Interest Survey***

The survey is in fact a questionnaire that has 5 general topics. The topics have been extracted from a textbook entitled 'Cause and Effect' by Patricia Ackert employed in this investigation, which was supposed to help tailor the topics to the interest of the students. The involved topics were *explorers, world issues, mishmash, health and science.* They were the topics taken from the mentioned book with titles of the lessons, which were used in a questionnaire to discover the learners' interest to each of the topics. In designing this survey, the form of Reading Interest Survey from Heilman, Collins-Thompson, Eskenazi, Juffs and Wilson (2010) was used. The survey was reviewed by four field experts who confirmed it as a valid instrument for the determined purpose.

### ***Learner Empowerment Scale (LES)***

It was used as a scale for measuring interest level of students, which was made and presented by Weber, Martin, and Cayanus (2005). The Learner Empowerment Scale is a scale with 18 items including three subcategories that measure the perceptions of meaningfulness and competence of the students. The subscales are identified as the dimensions of student interest. LES was used to examine students' interest level. Weber et al. (2005) found  $\alpha$  of 0.91 as its internal consistency level. The scale reliability and validity has also been verified by Amirousefi (2016).

### ***The Achievement Test***

It was made on the points taught in the course to determine students' performance in the end of the course. Its reliability was examined by the researcher using KR-21, which showed an acceptable level of internal consistency ( $r=0.65$ ) and using expert assistance, the test validity was also verified.

### ***The Course Book***

(*Cause and Effect* by Patricia Ackert and Linda Lee, 2010) is a pre-intermediate level textbook to teach reading and vocabulary. Its materials include five chapters of '*explorers, world issues, medicine or health, mishmash or hodgepodge and science,*' each consisting of five lessons.

## Results

Before the treatment, and the Oxford Placement Test was administered to ascertain that the participants in different groups were not significantly different regarding their general English proficiency. Table 1 shows the related data.

**Table 1**

### *Descriptive Data of the OPT*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. error means
OPT (G1)	33	7	19	13.75	3.132	0.545
OPT (G2)	33	8	19	13.18	3.025	0.526

*Note: G1=experimental group and G2=control group*

As Table 1 shows, the participants in different groups (experimental and control) had different mean scores, 13.75 with SD of 3.132 for one and 13.18 with SD of 3.025 for the control group. An independent samples test was used to compare the difference between the two mean scores. Table 2 depicts the related data.

**Table 2**

### *Independent Samples T-Test for Proficiency Test*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	0.102	0.750	0.750	64	0.450
Equal variances not assumed			0.759	63.922	0.450

As depicted in Table 2, the Levene's test significance level is 0.750 (higher than 0.05) and so the variances of the scores are not significantly different between the groups. Hence, the level of significance for independent samples with equal variances is employed for the judgment. The significance level is 0.450, higher than 0.05 level. The number, actually shows lack of significant difference between the groups concerning their mean scores.

A Reading Interest Survey scale was developed to disclose the level of student interest level to each topic, used in the textbook. The book consisted five topics, '*world issues,*' '*mishmash,*' '*explorers,*' '*science*' and '*health.*' The participants showed the amount of their interest to each topic by selecting a choice from five options, representing the five options differing from 'not interested at all' as 1 to very interested' as 5. Table 3 demonstrates the descriptive statistics related to the results of the reading interest survey.

**Table 3***Descriptive Statistics Related to Reading Interest Survey*

General Topics of the Textbook	N	Mean	SD
Explorers	33	2.88	1.386
World issues	33	3.88	1.192
Mishmash	33	3.06	1.297
Science	33	3.18	1.261
Health	33	3.33	1.314

As it is shown in Table 3, the topic of '*explorers*,' earned the lowest mean score (2.88), while '*world issues*' earned the highest (3.88), which means the participants in experimental group had higher interest in the '*world issues*' topic which is the second section of the textbook.

**Research Question One**

The first research question examined whether interest-based materials had an effect on learners' interest in L2 learning settings. To find response for this research question, the data obtained from LES, as a measure of student interest, was compared and analyzed. The participants expressed their views through scoring one of the options, *strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, not agree nor disagree=3, agree=4 and strongly agree=5*. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics related to the survey data.

**Table 4***Descriptive Statistics Related to LES*

	N	Mean	Std.	Std. error means
Experimental group (G1)	33	3.97	0.34418	0.05991
Control group (G2)	33	3.57	0.41760	0.07269

As it is clear from Table 4, the experimental mean score (3.97) is higher than the control group mean score (3.57). To examine the significance of this difference, independent samples t-test was utilized. The results are depicted in Table 5.

**Table 5***Independent Samples Test for LES*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.
Equal variances assumed	0.882	0.351	4.253	64	0.00
Equal variances not assumed			4.253	61.748	0.00

As demonstrated in Table 5, the significance level is 0.351 that is above 0.05. Therefore, the significance level for independent samples test with equal variances assumed can be employed for the decision. As the number is 0.00 that is under 0.05, it can be claimed that a significant difference is seen between the two groups mean scores, suggesting a higher interest for the participants in the experimental group.

**Research Question Two**

The second research question dealt with effect of selecting interesting topics for class materials on learners' performance EFL learning. To find responses to the question, using independent samples t-test, the scores attained from the achievement test were analyzed. The related statistics are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Descriptive Statistics Related to Achievement Test*

Tests or Scales	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Std. error means
Achievement test (G1)	33	8	20	15.39	3.051	0.531
Achievement test (G2)	33	7	19	13.96	3.196	0.556

As it is shown in Table 6, the mean score for the experimental group (15.39) is higher than the mean score (13.96) of the control group. To see whether this difference is significant, the Levene's test for equality of variances was run on the scores earned from the achievement test. This test was followed by the test for equality of means. Table 7 shows the related results.

**Table 7**

*Independent Samples T-Test for the Achievement Test*

	Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.
Equal variances assumed	0.186	0.668	1.852	64	0.069
Equal variances not assumed		1.852	2.364	63.862	0.069

As it is demonstrated in Table 7, the Levene's test significance level is 0.668 (higher than 0.05), which means there is not any significant difference between the score variances. Thus, the significance level for independent samples test with equal variances was used for analyzing the difference. It turned out to be 0.069 which is higher than 0.05, suggesting that there is no significant difference between two groups mean scores in the achievement test. The finding implies that the experimental group has had better performance compared to the control group in learning the class materials; this difference is not statistically significant, though.

**Research Question Three**

In the third question, the researchers attempted to discover differences between the learners in learning the materials concerning their age difference, when the topics had been selected based on the interest of learners. The learners in the experimental group were initially divided two groups: learners with age of 25 and older and learners of 24 and younger. Twenty younger learners and thirteen older ones were sorted out in the two groups. Accordingly, the scores of the achievement test related to the identified learners were sorted out separately. Using independent sample t-test, the score means were compared and analyzed. Table 8 shows the related statistics.

**Table 8***Achievement Test Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.	Std. error means
Learners (Younger)	13	8	19	14.23	2.919	0.809
Learners (Older)	20	10	20	16.15	2.960	0.662

As seen in Table 8, the mean score for the older learners (M=16.15) is higher than the mean for the younger learners (M=14.23). To check whether the difference between the means is significant the test for equality of variances was initially run on the achievement test scores of older and younger groups. The test for equality of means was also conducted afterwards. The related results can be seen in Table 9.

**Table 9***Independent Samples Test for the Achievement Test (Younger and Older Separated)*

	Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.
Equal variances assumed	0.001	0.974	1.829	31	.077
Equal variances not assumed			1.835	26.051	.078

As Table 9 shows, the significance level in Levene's test for equality of variances is 0.974 that is above 0.05. This suggests that there is not a significant difference between the score variances. Hence, the significance level of independent samples test with equal variances assumed can be used for analysis. The amount is 0.077 that is above 0.05. Therefore, although the older learners, considering the mean scores, have done better than younger ones, the difference between the means of older and younger learners, concerning their performance in language learning, is not significant,

### Discussion

This investigation pursued three major objectives. The research sought to find if selecting class materials based on student' topic interest could enhance students' interest level in their L2 learning. The study also attempted to disclose if selecting class materials based on learners' topic interest could assist students in learning the course materials better in EFL learning. In addition, the study examined to see if students of different age learned the materials differently when the materials had been selected based on learners' topic interest. The researchers ran into some limitations because there were many studies conducted in area involved. As Schraw and Lehman (2001) state, the impact of interest and its many aspects in EFL teaching has not been studied enough. However, the results of the present study can certainly shed some light on the L2 literature concerning the efficiency of using learners' interest areas in L2 learning.

First, the obtained results suggest that IBLT increases learners' situational interest in L2 class. This supports the earlier findings (e.g. Eddy-U, 2015; Mazer, 2013; Walkington, Sherman & Howell, 2014) referring to interest as a strong factor in L2 learning, which attracts learners attention to the material and improves their tendency to learn. These findings are further consistent with the arguments proposed by some researchers (e.g., Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011; Mazer, 2013) contending that interest can raise learners' motivation, and help them have better performance and achievement in language learning. The results can be justified by the point that learners, facing instructional materials consistent with their

interest, become more willing to attend the learning setting. With a heightened interest level, learners tend to have better motivation and attention in class which can serve a supporting role in their learning. Eventually, such learners are shown to be more resolute in their endeavor to learn instructional materials. Likewise, learners make themselves more involved in learning the assigned instructional materials (Heilman et al., 2010; Walkington, 2013).

Also, the findings, here, reveal that selecting and teaching based on students' topic interest partly contributes EFL learners to have better performance in language learning. Although the results do not suggest a very strong and significant influence of interest-based teaching on L2 reading, we can come up with some tentative suggestions about the difference between the participant learners. The findings, showing slightly better achievement of learners as a result of facing interesting instructional materials, are in line with the findings of Claus (2012) and Eddy-U (2015) and Myers and Claus (2012). The results of these studies support that that EFL learning is supported due to the influence class context and situational factors. Furthermore, the research results, by confirming the impact of cognitive and motivational factors in L2 enhancing learners' performance in learning vocabulary and reading, provide empirical acknowledgement and confirm the involvement load hypothesis (Laufer and Hulstijn's, 2001). The findings of the investigation are yet approved by some earlier research results (e.g., Ebrahimi & Javanbakht, 2015; Magliano et al., 2011; Schiefele & Krapp, 1996) that widely support the positive role of topic interest in facilitating EFL teaching and learning. However, the results of the current study are, to some extent, against the results of some research works completed previously. For instance, Sadeghpour (2013) didn't find any significant impact of interest on learners' ability to recall materials from the taught passages. In similar studies (e.g., Carrell & Wise, 1998; Joh, 2006) due to the earned results, the researchers reported no significant relationship between selecting topics based on interest and learners' L2 reading.

These findings can be justified by the idea that as a result of using interest based materials, some situational interest is developed for learners. Such emerged interest encourages learners to perform with heightened level of attention and motivation in EFL teaching context that probably facilitates performance of learners (Ebbers, 2011; McDaniel, Waddill, Finstad & Bourg, 2000). The results can further be explained by the idea selecting the materials based on the interesting topics that are desired by the learners will assist the dynamism in EFL class grow, which will possibly end in heightening learners' motivation and interest that assist them to maintain in more attentive in learning setting. Such state of the learning context can turn learning into more efficient experience for the language learners (Hidi, 2001). The novelty that students face in their learning context and materials may also serve as one of the reasons that improves the performance of learners in their language learning experience. To put it simply, most of the students usually face a system of language learning in which they rarely see changes, mostly due to some various reasons such as the policies of the educational system and consequently the absence of allowance for teachers from from educational decision makers to exert any type of change or innovation in material selection process (Guya & Izadi, 2002). The improvement in learners' achievement in EFL learning can also be justified by the argument that learners' desire and attention grow as a result of having interesting materials, which can possibly make learning easier and more enjoyable. In other words, as some educational researchers (e.g., Celik, 2010; Stevens, 1980; Walkington & Bernacki, 2014) report that with higher intrinsic motivation, learners mostly learn the class materials readily that happens as they take the learning situation inspiring and constructive. Higher interest and motivation in EFL classes result in more effective language learning, which seems to be brought by the higher attention and respect provided as a result of paying to students' needs and desires. It's worth mentioning that considering the affective elements in the EFL teaching context including class materials makes the teaching and learning more attractive and simpler for both teachers and learners. Furthermore, intense interest seems to help language learners to be more energetic and perseverant in their learning, and as a consequence, be more diligent in their endeavor to learn L2.

Due to the findings of the study, older and younger learners perform somehow differently language learning, dealing face the topics selected based on their interest preference, however the difference is not very high. In fact, the findings confirm a slight interaction of age and topic interest in learning the materials. However, there is a small level of interaction of topic interest and age in EFL learning, which is partly advocated as the older learners' mean scores is slightly higher than that for the younger ones' (Table 8). This indicates that interest-based material is effective to some extent for older learners compared to younger ones. This is in line with the findings of a study by Okuniewski (2014) who studied the interaction of gender differences with motivation and interest to learn. He reported that older learners, who were more motivated and interested performed with higher group attitude compared to younger students. Accordingly, as Kormos and Csizer (2008) investigated models of motivation across three learner groups, and found that when the L2 or FL cultural issues were attractive, learners' motivation and interest of the secondary school pupils were more affected, whereas for the older age groups it was international posture that served as an important predictive variable in affecting interest and attitudes. These results are further supported by Xu and Case's (2014) study that surveyed school students in China, and found that there were significant differences in motivation and interest of the learners, which could distinguish middle school students from elementary and high school students.

The results concerning age related differences and interest in L2 learning, on the other hand, are clearly in contrast with '*critical period hypothesis*,' which refers to the notion that foreign language is better learned during the young age, and in old age learners face certain constraints in the ability to learn or acquire a foreign language (Scovel, 2001). Moreover, the findings are not in line with Ellis's (1986) idea, contending that language acquisition can occur normally and efficiently in a certain period, but after this age the brain is no longer able to process language in the previous manner. More importantly, the slightly better achievement of older learners in this study somehow contradicts Lenneberg's (1967) idea of '*lateralization*,' pointing out that in puberty the localization of language-processing ability in learners' left hemisphere takes place, which means that younger learners' brains are more flexible than adults' brain in language learning. The concept of lateralization was later referred by Lamendella (1977) as the '*sensitive period*,' asserting that the possibility of language learning may continue over the age of five.

The findings can be explained in light of learners' motivation which may vary based on their age factor. The learners' intrinsic motivation for learning a language may depend on developments that may take place in different periods (Gardner, 2001; Lamb, 2004) whereas its triggering, maintenance and consolidation are related to the stimulations from the social and learning environment (Wu, 2003). This may imply that when the foreign language learning provides learners with a safe and motivating context by familiar activities to satisfy their current situational interests, or to find L2 or FL learning useful at school or life, it contributes to the development and increase of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) to learn, which appears to be considered more vigorous for the older learners. Accordingly, because of such differences, older or younger learners may prefer to learn L2 using diverse topics and materials from various areas. In the meantime, there is a chance by conducting similar studies the interaction with more participants in different contexts, the interaction between topic interest and learners' age in ESL gets more evident.

### Conclusion

There are evidences attained form research findings that show the existence of individual and or group differences that have crucial role in EFL/ESL teaching. Based on the findings reported in results section, topic interest is important and enhances students' achievement in EFL learning and contributes to growth of students' interest level. The results of the study also show that selecting the class materials due to students' topic interest leads to better performance in EFL learning, and furthermore, learners' topic interest and gender seem to have interaction. In other words, older learners performed slightly, though not

significantly, better than younger ones in interest-based learning course. Matching the instructional materials with the topic interest of the students seem to exert an impressive influence on EFL teaching and learning in the future.

### **Implications**

The results of the present investigation show that the using personalized approaches for EFL teaching helps students learning English have better achievement in their learning. Consequently, any approach used for EFL teaching is supposed to take into account the differences that the students have due to the individual learning styles and capabilities. The approaches should normally consider the individual expectations and try to make the instructional materials tailed to these learners' individual features as such traits are capable of providing learners with attractive course materials and grow their interest level. It is worth mentioning that integrating topic interest into EFL/ESL teaching and its positive impact on students' learning performance can probably change the nature and trend of language teaching to a large extent. This trend has the potential to make a revolution in EFL teaching and learning by providing more customized and better learning performance, which seems to be available because of the controlled and desired learning context provided. The results of the present study should support teachers and syllabus designers to consider and employ the impact of selecting interesting topics as class materials in their planning for language teaching programs. They are expected to bring more systematic and beneficial changes in the textbooks through including more diverse and attractive topics and materials to generate great interest among second language learners (Hidi, 2001; Renninger & Hidi, 2002; Schraw & Lehman, 2001). Furthermore, teachers and researchers are greatly recommended to take topic interest as a complex construct with different aspects, each requiring thorough investigations. Therefore, learners' individual or group interests, feature and motives should be taken into account in designing L2 materials and courses in order to create a more pleasant and stimulating learning environment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Like other studies, this study, too, has faced some limitations that were somehow inevitable. The first limit was related to the sample size, which was relative small. This can impede generalizing the findings of the study to other similar contexts. In addition, the students participating in the study belonged to only one university, Hidaj IAU, which is another problem on the way of generalizing the results found in the investigation. It is clear that carrying out research in different EFL/ESL teaching and learning contexts can enforce the efficacy of the study findings. Also the study focused only reading that cannot be imagined as the whole language. Certainly, studying the impact of topic interest on other aspects and skills on language learning can provide more diverse and useful help in language teaching. Hence, future studies are hoped to consider a closer deeper look on the impact of the effect of selecting interesting topics on different learning skills in different EFL/ESL learning and teaching.

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I have no conflict of interest to declare.

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