

# The Effect of Simulation on Middle School Students' Perceptions of Classroom Activities and their Foreign Language Achievement: A Mixed-Methods Approach

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## Abstract

The present study delved into a language learning model in the domain of English as a foreign language (EFL), i.e., simulation. The term simulation is used to describe the activity of producing conditions which are similar to real ones. We hypothesized that simulation plays a role in middle school students' perceptions of classroom activities (i.e., interest, challenge, choice, and joy). It was also conjectured that simulation affects foreign language achievement. To do so, the study utilized an experimental design consisting of 51 female participants (25 learners in the control group and 26 students in the experimental group). The results demonstrated the positive role of simulation in students' perceptions of classroom activities and their language achievement. A semi-structured interview was also held at the end of the study with a number of students in experimental group to investigate student's attitudes and emotional reactions towards simulation.

**Keywords:** Simulation, Perceptions of classroom activities, Language Achievement, Mixed-methods approach.

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## Introduction

Regarding the historical perspective of simulation and its success in English Language Teaching (ELT), it was originally used as a learning technique in military training and business (Sam, 1990). Simulation can be defined as the reality of function in a simulated environment (Jones, 1986). In other words, simulation is a structured set of circumstances which mirror real life situations (Sam, 1990). It is the act of stimulating the behavior of a situation or a process by the use of a suitably analogous phenomenon. Simulation is a teaching technique in which the behavior is not controlled and participants can bring their own experience, knowledge, and skills to the situation and consequently enrich the learning process, change the academic setting to a real life situation, and provide an effective and efficient language learning experience. Simulation can also be considered as a problem-solving activity to which learners bring their own distinct opinions, feelings, and

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personalities (Livingstone, 1983). Hyland (2009) has also declared that, “a simulation is a problem driven event that occurs in a clearly described realistic situation” (p. 10). Teachers can use simulations as an ideal technique to use language communicatively and creatively (Hyland, 2009).

There are various kinds of simulations used in different fields of knowledge (e.g., marine simulations, the medical simulations, flight simulations, military simulations, computer and educational simulations). The training and educational simulations in turn fall in three categories: a) live simulations in which real people use simulated equipment in the real world, b) virtual simulations in which real people use simulated equipment in a virtual environment or a simulated world, or c) constructive simulation in which simulated people use simulated equipment in a simulated environment.

Although simulations share a lot in common with role-plays, there are major differences between the two techniques (Lyu, 2006). In simulations, for instance, the necessary facts are provided to the participants for the functional part such as their age, job, gender, etc., while in role plays, participants have to invent facts or act out scenes based on a provided specific description or script. Moreover, participants in simulations take on functions, responsibilities, and duties according to their own preferences and personalities, instead of acting or playing the role. In addition to these differences, imagination may be involved in simulation, however avoidance of invention of key facts is a must. Consequently, as Bambrough (1994) points out, simulations are different from other role activities in which the roles function within a structure and the elements of this structure are represented in a dynamic way.

Another distinction can be made between simulations and games. Considering the similarities, both simulations and games are autonomous. In other words, the participants in a simulation and the players in a game are in charge of their roles within their particular environment (Jones, 1986). However, the participants of a game have only one role who has the same duty, they are always players and their duty is to win the game. The difference between the two techniques lies within the degree of reality of function. Simulations provide reality (i.e., simulations always present a high degree of reality of function, otherwise they are not simulations) whereas games present little or no reality of function. In this regard, there is no clear-cut division between simulations and games; rather it is a continuum.

Most of the studies on simulation have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of such a teaching technique and find its benefits related to some skills. Such studies prove that using simulation as a kind of language assessment model promotes cross-cultural communication (Crookall, Coote, Dumas, & Le Gat, 1987; Crookall & Oxford, 1990) and instrumental motivation by making the coursework more engaging (Jones, 1986, p. 10). Other studies support the fact that simulation lowers affective barriers to acquisition by reducing the fear of making mistakes (Nemitcheva, 1995) and presents real time scenarios and instantaneous feedback (Jones, 1986). It also benefits language learners to use language in highly specific contexts (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) and provides a meaningful way of learning a language (Sam, 1990). Moreover, simulation promotes metacognitive strategy use (Bullard, 1990), improves students' desires to learn (Davis, 1996), and makes learning and teaching process a rewarding experience for both students and teachers (Tompkins, 1998). Similarly, it guides learners progressively towards the final goal of learning as well as assessment purposes and lets the teacher to play the role of a facilitator who share students' knowledge and opinions among themselves (Albert, 1999). Besides such benefits it helps learners to set realistic and communicative goals, assesses the features of a language use situation, and helps students to plan responses and have control on the execution of such plans (Ranalli, 2008). It can also provide realistic sociocultural contexts for language learning by bridging

the gap between students and the foreign culture (Schwienhorst, 2002) and motivate shy learners to take part in discussions more actively (Freiermuth, 2002). In a similar vein, simulation gives learners the opportunity to solve problems without the authoritative persuasion of the teacher by providing a learner-centered context (Freiermuth, 2002, p. 187) and provides the content for language learning via meaningful and cohesive contexts (Purushotma, 2005, p. 84). It is also capable of enhancing learners' grammar and vocabulary knowledge (Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006), as well as causing them to reflect more positive attitudes towards collaboration and providing positive reaction to the modifications among the users (Ranalli, 2008). Simulation has been also found to be significant in promoting vocabulary skills (Ranalli, 2008) and students' second language vocabulary recall (deHaan, Reed, & Kuwada, 2010). Finally, it makes the teachers more flexible to take students' individual differences into account (Wang, 2010), motivates students by providing challenging opportunities for authentic discussions (deHaan, 2011), improve students' oral communicative skills (Javid, 2013), and promotes English vocabulary and pronunciation learning of ESP students (Meihami, Meihami, & Varmaghani, 2013).

Simulation can have a salient influence on the way students perceive their classroom activities and environment. Such perceptions reflect one's needs, emotions, and expectations. In the domain of education, students' perceptions of classroom activities consist of four main constructs namely; interest, challenge, choice, and joy (Gentry, Gable, & Rizza, 2002) each of which has a significant association with other student-related issues, such as, student involvement (Lee, Yin & Zhang, 2009); self-regulating learning and motivational beliefs (Kharrazi & Kareshki, 2010; Ghanizadeh & Alishahi, 2011); students' goal-orientations (Jahedizadeh, Ghanizadeh, & Ghonsooly, 2016); epistemological beliefs and learning approaches (Ozkal, Tekkaya, Cakiroglu, & Sunsur, 2008), and cognitive strategy use (Young, 1997).

Due to the encompassing position of simulation in teaching practices, the present study aimed at delving into the effect of simulation on students' perceptions of classroom activities. In this study, EFL middle school learners were investigated primarily due to the researchers' professional and educational expertise in the field. Furthermore, the effect of simulation on language learning achievement was explored.

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

The participants of the present study comprised 51 middle school students (all females) that were divided into two equal groups, i.e., experimental and control. They were learning English at the second grade of secondary school as an obligatory course. They were around 13 and 14 years old. The study used an intact-groups design with 25 participants in the control group and 26 participants in the experimental group. The design was quasi experimental. The participants were selected among EFL students learning English in an official context in Mashhad, a city in north east of Iran. To meet the requirement of experimental research and to ensure that the learners were homogenous in the point of their English proficiency level and their perceptions of classroom activities, a language test and a questionnaire were administered as pretest.

### *Instruments*

*The paper version of Babel English Language Placement Tests (BELPT).* The paper version of Babel English Language Placement Tests (BELPT) was utilized to determine language proficiency. It is closely based on the Nelson Quick Check Placement Tests. The testing cycle

should require no more than 70 minutes of trainee time and does not require any specialist testers to administer it.

The tests were designed for the ease of administration in observing stringent test design standards. The tests were in multiple-choice format and consisted of items measuring the recognition of correct responses to reading prompts, grammatical forms and lexical choices in context.

*Students Perceptions of Classroom Activities Scale.* To determine students' perceptions about their classroom, this study employed 'Students Perceptions of Classroom Activities' scale which was designed by Gentry and Gable (2001) and was translated to Persian and validated by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015). The 'Students Perceptions of Classroom Activities' instrument contains 31 statements evaluating four dimensions (interest, challenge, choice, and enjoyment). The scale measures the four dimensions via a 5-point Likert-type response format (never, seldom, sometimes, often, and always). The questionnaire provided the participants with directions on how to complete the scale. As reported by Gentry, Gable, and Rizza (2002), the instrument was piloted and a confirmatory study was undertaken for a national sample. In Iranian context, the reliability and validity of the scale was confirmed through CFA and Cronbach's alpha estimates (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015).

Sample items for 'interest' dimension included: 1) The teacher involves me in interesting learning activities; and 2) What I do in my class gives me interesting and new ideas. Sample items for 'challenge' dimension are: 1) I have to think to solve problems in my class, and 2) What we do in class fits my abilities. Sample items included in 'choice' dimension are: 1) When we work together, I can choose my partners, and 2) When there are many jobs, I can choose the ones that suit me. Sample items for 'joy' dimension are: 1) The teacher makes learning fun and 2) I like what I do in my class.

*Interview.* In order to capture the quality of simulation technique and explore students' attitudes and reactions towards the technique, a semi-structured interview was held with 6 participants of the experimental group whom were chosen randomly. They were asked to talk about the experience of simulation, whether they liked it, and how it facilitated their learning. The interviews were recorded and analyzed accordingly.

#### *Procedure*

The data collection of this study took place in December 2015 and lasted to April 2016. In this study, for collecting the data, the Babel test along with the aforementioned questionnaires were distributed among the participants of the two groups at the beginning of the study to ensure they were at the same level of language proficiency and had relatively identical perceptions before the implementation of simulation. To gather reliable data, the purpose of completing the questionnaire was explained and the participants were assured that their views would be confidential.

The test and the questionnaire were also administered at the end of the term to examine whether significant differences would be observed in the perceptions and language achievement of students of experimental group after the introduction of simulation.

The two classes were conducted by the same teacher and the same materials were used for the instruction. The only difference was that in the experimental group, the conversations were taught through simulation technique. To do so, different scenarios were introduced at the beginning of the term and students were asked to register for each one according to their own interest and preferences.

The researcher searched about the most frequent ambiguous and problematic linguistic areas with which EFL learners face in middle schools. It was found out that those problems pertain to areas such as, adverbs of frequency, count and non-count nouns; some and any, possessive nouns; this/ that/ these/ those, comparative adjectives, preposition of time: in, on, at, and imperatives.

In accordance with these gaps, the scenarios included themes mostly covered in their books, such as, talking about habits-- related to appropriate use of adverbs of frequency--, having the meals --related to recognition of counts and non-count nouns-- , telling about clothing -- related to the use of some and any--, comparing the music --related to understanding the use of possessive nouns--, reporting leisure activities--directly referred to the use of different kind of comparative adjectives-- , and giving direction-- dealing with the preposition of time usage.

For this aim, the students in the experimental group were asked to work on the topic they selected a week before their presentation. They, then, performed it in the class in the form of a role-play. The students in the control group, nevertheless, worked on the conversion in the traditional mode of memorization and repetition.

Due to the administration constrains, ten sessions, each about 30 minutes out of the 90 minute- class time, were devoted to simulation. As an illustration, one session is briefly presented in the followings. It is worthwhile to mention in order to retain the fundamental element of simulation in creating a real situation, students put on costumes and outfits in line with the topic of conversation used and real objects such as microphone, and created real-like scenes, such as street.

*Session 1.* According to the students' need, a conversation was selected. Four students volunteered to perform the conversation according to their interest. The conversation was going to cover Countable and Uncountable Nouns in the frame of asking about eating habits. They were asked to prepare every material they needed in order to simulate a real situation

On the determined session, they generated the simulated conversation. One of the students acting as Jessica had a microphone as an interviewer and asked each person what she usually had for breakfast. She said hello to everyone.

She saw a teenage girl walking fast and asked: Excuse me, lady, do you eat breakfast?

The girl stopped and answered: yes, more or less.

Jassica: What do you have?

Girl: I generally have a bagel and a cup of tea.

Jessica: That's all? Do you have any juice or anything else to drink?

Girl: Not usually. Once in a while I have coffee instead of tea. I'm always in a hurry. Bye

Jessica: Ok, thanks, bye.

The interviewer took a look around her and said, "now, here's our next person". Meanwhile, she started her conversation with another student who looked as if she wanted to cross the street with her own child and asked: Mam, what do you have for breakfast?

Woman1: I never eat breakfast.

Jessica: Nothing at all?

Woman1: No. I'm on a diet. I'm always on a diet.

Jessica: Ok. Thank you...

At this time, the interviewer faced to the other student as a woman with a shopping bag containing some kind of fruits, vegetables, and so on. Then she asked:

Jessica: And what about you, ma'am? What do you have for breakfast?

Woman 2: Oh, I usually have a bowl of cereal and some yogurt with fruit-a banana, a peach, or an orange, or some strawberries. And I have eggs and toast and a glass of juice.

Jessica: Hmm. That sounds healthy.

Woman 2: Yes, I always eat a good breakfast.

Jessica: All right, thanks. Let's see what our next person says...

The team terminated their scenario alongside the other students as the audience applauded.

After ending the first scenario conducted by the students in the experimental group, the head of the above team who had selected other members, worked on the pronunciation of some fruits and foods such as a bagel, a cup of tea, some strawberries and a banana, a bag of cereal, a can of yogurt, and some slices of toasts. She also encouraged the use of a, an, any, and some. Next, she challenged them to talk about their eating habits, which food they like and which they don't like. The students answered and used the appropriate forms of the articles before each food. Then, she assured whether the students comprehended the parts of the conversation or not, so she wrote some questions about the conversation on the board as follows:

1. The man has .....

  - a. A big breakfast
  - b. A small breakfast
  - c. No breakfast at all

2. He usually drinks .....

  - a. Water
  - b. Coffee
  - c. Tea

3. The first woman ..... has breakfast.

  - a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes

4. Jessica thinks the ....has a healthy meal.

  - a. Man
  - b. First woman
  - c. Second woman

The students were actively and enthusiastically involved in the activities. They were occupied with understanding the use of count versus non-count nouns, use of quantifiers, and use of singular verbs with non-count nouns.

### Interview

Six students from the experimental group were randomly selected to sit for an interview to talk about their experience of simulating conversations in the class. The interview pursued a similar task to the questionnaires in that it sought students' opinions on classroom activities in the light of simulation. The distinctive feature of the interview was that it allowed us to obtain more in-depth information from the respondents on the broader context surrounding the process of language learning. They were asked to articulate about the experience of simulation, whether they liked it, and how it facilitated their learning.

### Results

#### The Results of Pretest on Language Proficiency

To examine whether there is any significant difference between control and experimental group regarding their English proficiency level, an independent samples t-test was run. Table 1 below summarizes the descriptive results of English proficiency level measured by the Babel test in the two groups. As the table shows, the mean scores of proficiency across participants in control and experimental groups are slightly different: control ( $M=14.96$ ,  $SD=3.57$ ), experimental ( $M=15.19$ ,  $SD=2.57$ ).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of English Proficiency Level across Control and Experimental Groups

		<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Experimental	26	15.1923	2.95323	.57918
Proficiency	Control	25	14.9600	3.57631	.71526

To see whether this observed difference is statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was run. Table 2 presents the results of t-test run on English proficiency level. As can be seen, there is not a statistically significant difference between the two groups regarding the degree of their proficiency ( $t= .253$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In other words, the two groups are homogenous regarding their English proficiency level before the study.

**Table 2.** Independent Samples T-Test Showing the Results of Pretest on English Proficiency

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Pre-test Proficiency	.253	49	.801	.2323	.91687

#### The Results of Pretest on Perceptions of Classroom Activities

To examine whether there is any significant difference between control and experimental groups regarding their perceptions of classroom activities (interest, challenge, choice, and joy), an independent samples t-test was run on each perception. Table 3 below summarizes the descriptive results of perceptions in two groups. As the table shows, the mean scores of perceptions across participants in control and experimental groups are different.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of Classroom Activities across Control and Experimental Groups in Pretest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interest	EXP	26	20.2308	5.87406	1.15200
	CON	25	17.1600	6.66258	1.33252
Challenge	EXP	26	15.9231	2.71180	.53183
	CON	25	14.7600	4.05463	.81093
Choice	EXP	26	16.6538	3.24891	.63716
	CON	25	16.1200	3.35807	.67161
Joy	EXP	26	17.5000	5.20192	1.02018
	CON	25	15.8000	6.39010	1.27802

To see whether these observed differences are statistically significant, independent samples t-tests were run. Table 4 presents the results of t-tests run on perceptions of classroom activities. As it can be seen, there are not statistically significant differences between the two groups regarding their perceptions: interest ( $t= 1.74, p<.05$ ), challenge ( $t= 1.20, p<.05$ ), choice ( $t= .57, p<.05$ ), joy ( $t= 1.04, p<.05$ ). In other words, the two groups were homogenous regarding their perceptions of classroom activities before the study.

**Table 4.** Independent Samples T-Test Showing the Results of Pretest on Student’s Perceptions of Classroom Activities

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Interest	1.748	49	.087	3.07077	1.75704
Challenge	1.209	49	.233	1.16308	.96238
Choice	.577	49	.567	.53385	.92515
Joy	1.044	49	.302	1.70000	1.62864

*The Results of Posttest on Language Proficiency*

To investigate the effect of simulation on students' language proficiency, the differences between the two groups on Babel test were calculated in post-test. The means of the both groups in the post-test were shown to be different. As it can be seen in Table 5, the mean of the experimental groups ( $M= 16.6154, SD= 2.5624$ ) is higher than that of control groups ( $M= 14.6400, SD= 3.7403$ ).

**Table 5.** Independent Samples t-Test Showing the Results of Post-test on English Proficiency

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test Proficiency	Experimental	26	16.6154	2.5624	.50254
	Control	25	14.6400	3.7403	.74806

To investigate whether this observed difference is statistically significant, an independent-samples t-test was run. As Table 6 shows, there is a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups ( $t= 2.20, p<.05$ ). In other words, it can be implied that experimental group gained higher scores in Babel test and this is an indication of the efficiency of simulation. The effect size calculated via Cohen's *d* was found to be 0.61 which is a large value according to Cohen's index value.

**Table 6.** Independent Samples T-Test Showing the Results of Post-test on English Proficiency

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Post-test Proficiency	2.208	49	.032	1.975	.89470

*The Results of Posttest on Perceptions of Classroom Activities*

To examine whether there is any significant difference between control and experimental groups regarding their perceptions of classroom activities (interest, challenge, choice, and joy), an independent samples t-test was run on each perception. Table 7 below summarizes the descriptive results of perceptions in two groups. As the table shows, the mean scores of perceptions across participants in control and experimental groups are different.

**Table 7.** Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of Classroom Activities across Control and Experimental Groups in Post-test

	Groups	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interest	EXP	26	25.6154	4.85038	.95124
	CON	25	18.6000	7.59934	1.51987
Challenge	EXP	26	21.9231	6.07897	1.19218
	CON	25	16.0800	5.35350	1.07070
Choice	EXP	26	23.3846	5.49965	1.07857
	CON	25	15.7600	3.16596	.63319
Joy	EXP	26	24.0769	4.48038	.87868
	CON	25	15.5200	5.65774	1.13155

To see whether these observed differences are statistically significant, independent samples t-tests were run. Table 8 presents the results of t-tests run on perceptions of classroom activities. As it can be seen, there are statistically significant differences between the two groups regarding all four perceptions as follows: interest ( $t= 3.946, p<.05$ ), challenge ( $t= 3.637, p<.05$ ), choice ( $t= 6.035, p<.05$ ), joy ( $t=6.000, p<.05$ ). In other words, simulation positively influenced student's perceptions of their classroom activities. The effect sizes for each t-value were then computed via Cohen's *d*. The magnitudes for interest, challenge, choice, and joy are 1.10, 1.02, 1.69, and 1.67, respectively, which are quite large values according to Cohen's index value.

**Table 8.** Independent Samples t-Test Showing the Results of Post-test on Student's Perceptions of Classroom Activities

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Interest	3.946	49	.000	7.01538	1.77796
Challenge	3.637	49	.001	5.84308	1.60646
Choice	6.035	49	.000	7.62462	1.26333
Joy	6.000	49	.000	8.55692	1.42609

### *Interview Results*

The interview questions were guided by research questions and evaluating students' attitudes and feedback towards simulation. Following are the interview questions:

Interview Questions:

- 1) What were your overall thoughts/feelings about the simulation?
- 2) How did you like it?
- 3) Does it have any role in your interest to do the classroom activities? In which ways?
- 4) How did conducting conversation in this creative way affected your learning?

In the followings, some responses extracted from students' interviews are provided:

*Mona: It is a new and attractive method in learning English language for me. I love being in those sessions whether as an actor or an audience. I feel that I am in a real situation of English conversion. I had a good feeling when I performed a role as a native speaker. English is so sweet.*

*Faeze: It is so challengeable. We had to check our intonation and pronunciation before implementation of simulation in order to act our roles naturally and in a native-like accent. Talking like a native speaker of English is very interesting.*

*Bitra: I hated English because I didn't like the English classroom in school at all. But through watching my classmates' performances I thought we were in a scene of cinema instead of a rigid English classroom.*

*Fateme: I don't like to finish the course of conversation through simulation, it was so interesting.*

*Mohadese: I took pleasure from this course. My friends and I were fun through the session. I never enjoyed English classrooms whether in school or institute, because I think all of them administrate a unit rule. We must learn whatever they want, we must act whatever they choose, and we must be evaluated whatever they arrange. I liked these kind of methodology because I was free to choose my role, my partner,... . I learned the conversations of English for using in daily life with my friends not for getting score to pass the course.*

*Azam: It was a good experience for me to choose what role I've liked. I wish educational system in our country consider this kind of practical and authentic activity in our textbooks so that we can put ourselves in a real situation like this and perform the text as naturally as possible.*

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The present study is the amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative research in that it employed an experimental design with control and experimental groups alongside the follow up interview. It aimed at exploring the effect of simulation on EFL learners' perception of classroom activities, their language achievement, and their attitudes toward this innovative technique. Primarily, this study probed students' improvement regarding their perceptions of classroom activities (interest, challenge, choice, and joy). The results indicated that simulation influenced all four perceptions positively and significantly. Findings after implementing this creative technique indicated that all four perceptions were significantly higher in experimental group showing that language classes got enjoyable, interesting, challenging, and fluid for most of the students as there were some limitations and deficiencies for teaching English programs in Iranian middle schools.

In particular, it was found that students in experimental group displayed more interest in their classroom activities under the influence of implementing simulation in their class. This is in line with Haertel, Walberg, and Haertel (1981) and Fraser (1991) who reported that stimulating, protective, and challenging learning atmosphere can interestingly develop performance and increase the level of interest and involvement in every classroom context. Consistent with the above finding, Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff (2002) as well as Hidi and Renninger (2006) contended that interest promotes effort, attention, recall, and

achievement, and the characteristics of relevance and a sense of reality in simulation are desirable and interesting because simulation allows students to use the target language to express themselves.

Moreover, the results of both quantitative and qualitative data showed that through learning in the light of the simulation technique, learners perceived their classroom activities joyful in that as stated earlier it inherently tends to promote real-life and authentic communication (Crookall, Coote, Dumas, & Le Gat, 1987; Crookall & Oxford, 1990; Nemitcheva, 1995), enhances instrumental motivation by making the coursework more engaging (Jones, 1986, p. 10), lowers affective barriers to acquisition by reducing the fear of making mistakes (Nemitcheva, 1995), and presents real time scenarios and instantaneous feedback (Jones, 1986).

The findings also suggested that students in experimental group reckoned that they had more opportunities to choose the type of term project, rules, roles, etc. in their classroom. This is due to the fact that as mentioned earlier, simulation gives students the freedom to make their own choices and decisions, and allows students to base their choices and decisions on their own experience. Furthermore, since students were not considered as active agents in class in the traditional system of learning English language in schools, they did not have any choice in classrooms while performing a given task. It is suggested that this lack of choice is related to the teacher-centeredness of classes in our country and teacher makes decisions instead of students about everything related to classroom; that is, designing a course, teaching, and curriculum (Ghanizadeh, 2016). Simulation, nevertheless, seems to provide ample opportunities for students to choose language functions, their roles, scenarios, ... etc. Cray and Currie (1996) maintained that teachers do not have to act on behalf of their learners, but with their learners which is parallel to the discoveries of this research, as classes were teacher-centered and they did not take students' needs and preferences into account. Therefore, there should be a combination of teachers' and learners' views to improve the quality of learning.

Furthermore, because the technique gives students the chance to perform a task or solve a problem together, it has been perceived as challenging. So, the learners were more involved and enthusiastic in the activities which were perceived as more challenging and fluid. In other words, simulation positively influenced students' engagement in challenging tasks.

In this study, it was also found that simulation contributed to language learning. We can argue that since the purpose of the simulation is to assist students' conceptual learning, the actors through the conversations who were selected based on their needs and interests, can make improvements in their language use via verbal prompts, cues, and/or questions to guide or scaffold the students' language proficiency. Meanwhile, their cognitive understanding and consequently their language proficiency improved. It can also be argued perceptions of classroom activities mirror subsequent learning in the class. So, when these perceptions are enhanced, student learning experiences and the effort they dedicate to learning will in turn improve (Csizer & Kormos, 2009) resulting in higher language achievement.

The interview protocols suggested that all interviewees had favorable attitudes towards simulation and enjoyed the experience. Initial feelings that all participants reminded before the simulation were being intimidated, anxious, uninterested, and not motivated. These initial feelings were more related to a phobia about their language ability to use English language for the extended period of time. Simulation changed this phobia to a high desire to learning English, leading to an attitudinal change in their motivation to learn.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

The findings of the present study can have important implications for second language learning research in general, and EFL teacher education in particular. Results of this study, in accordance with previous research, revealed that using simulation technique in performing conversations in the classrooms provide the perception phenomena in the students. These perceptions in turn assist learners shape their conceptualization toward their learning English. In the other word, if students perceive their classroom activities as challenging, interesting, and joyful with various options to choose a particular task, their first priority would be adapting motivation and making attempts to learn effectively. Taken together, it can be concluded that the benefits of short-term implementation of the simulation technique to supplement traditional classroom instruction yields a cost effective means for students to acquire a greater use of the target language while building confidence and motivation. Even a short ten-session period with holding the classroom activities through simulation, as shown by this study, can build positive perceptions, motivation, and language proficiency. All in all, simulation not only is a tool for influencing students' attitudes to language learning, but also a facilitator of students' learning at increasingly higher levels of conceptualization.

As mentioned earlier, student's views and perceptions are salient areas to consider when designing effective educational experiences. In school reform efforts, emphasis is often placed on achievement measures, whereas student attitude also plays a large role in school success simultaneously.

One of the prominent roles of EFL teachers is to enhance learning outcomes and help students adapt good habits toward learning environment by implementing innovative and appealing techniques. Teachers in an EFL context can shape these perceptions by providing challenging activities, interesting tasks with vast ranges of options, and enjoyable learning activities (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015). Designing such activities need time, energy, cost, motivation, and support of educational authorities, but the point is that it's worth doing. Although, making all EFL learners interested in learning process is a tough job, it is possible to lead students toward using real conversations by emphasizing on their proficiency in learning, not their marks at the end of the course. The implications mentioned here are totally practical if the ultimate objective of motivated methodology of presenting the subjects is to ameliorate students' functionality rather than superficial teaching of the course.



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