An Investigation of the Effects of Group Work Dynamics on Iranian Male and Female EFL Learners' Motivation in Communicative Tasks

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effects of group work dynamics (GWDs) on the motivation of Iranian male and female EFL learners during communicative tasks. This mixed-methods research was conducted with 80 intermediate-level Iranian EFL learners randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Each group comprised 20 male and 20 female participants. All participants completed a pretest and a posttest assessing speaking performance and motivation. The experimental group received structured group work interventions over 20 sessions featuring communicative tasks such as object assembly, information gap activities, and comic strip storytelling. In contrast, the control group completed the same tasks individually without collaborative strategies. Participants' interactions were video-recorded for observation, and ten learners were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including t-tests and ANOVA. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were thematically coded and analyzed to evaluate the complexity and effectiveness of group dynamics. Results revealed that learners in the experimental group showed a statistically significant increase in motivation (M = 4.0138 posttest) compared to the control group (M = 3.5038 posttest), with the difference confirmed by a paired samples t-test (p ≤ .05). Gender-based analysis showed that while male learners experienced a greater gain in motivation (1.036-point increase), female learners had higher absolute motivation scores at both pretest and posttest stages. ANOVA results confirmed significant posttest differences among the four subgroups (male/female, control/experimental), indicating the intervention's overall impact. Observational data revealed differing gender-based interaction patterns, with males exhibiting competitiveness and females demonstrating collaborative support. Interview responses confirmed that positive group energy and peer support enhanced learner engagement and sustained motivation throughout the program. Group work dynamics significantly improve EFL learners' motivation when implemented effectively. While both genders benefit, the nature of their interaction influences the quality and style of motivation enhancement.

Keywords: Group work dynamics, Motivation, Communicative tasks, EFL learners, Gender differences, Collaborative learning.

1. Introduction

The dynamic and multifaceted nature of language learning has driven extensive inquiry into the psychological, pedagogical, and social variables that influence learners' success in second or foreign language acquisition. Among these variables, motivation has emerged as a fundamental determinant of learners' willingness, persistence, and engagement in language learning activities (Asl et al., 2024; Egitim, 2024; Fitria, 2024). Motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts is not merely an internal trait but a dynamic, evolving process shaped by pedagogical approaches, classroom dynamics, and learners' sociocultural environments. In particular, group work dynamics (GWDs)—defined as the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive patterns of interaction among learners in collaborative settings—have become a focal point of interest for researchers seeking to enhance learner motivation and communicative competence in EFL settings (Alogiliy, 2024; Faramarzi Babadi et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2023; Li, 2023).

In the context of Iranian education, where traditional teacher-centered methods often dominate, the integration of collaborative learning practices presents both an opportunity and a challenge. While Iranian EFL learners may show high levels of academic ambition, their classroom environments frequently lack the interactive mechanisms necessary for sustaining motivation through communicative tasks (Rahimi, 2019). In such contexts, group work activities can play a transformative role in fostering motivation by facilitating peer interaction, shared responsibilities, and emotional support among learners. As highlighted by (Assalihee et al., 2019), effective group-based pedagogies can enhance learners' engagement, particularly when the collaborative structure aligns with learners' linguistic goals and psychological needs.

The theoretical grounding for this study is closely tied to dynamic systems theory (DST), which posits that language learning processes are inherently nonlinear and susceptible to contextual variability (Han, 2019). DST provides a useful lens through which to understand how individual learner characteristics interact with group-level dynamics to shape motivational trajectories. As elaborated by (Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020), classroom emotions—such as anxiety, enjoyment, and empowerment—are emergent properties arising from interpersonal interactions. When group work is implemented with pedagogical intentionality, it can create emotionally safe learning environments that facilitate positive affect and reduce language anxiety.

Motivation itself, as understood in this study, encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic elements that drive learners toward achieving language proficiency. The role of motivation is especially salient in speaking tasks, which require learners to overcome psychological barriers and participate actively in oral exchanges. (Hamad et al., 2019) noted that enhancing speaking skills through multimedia tools such as YouTube or imitation strategies was effective only when learners were sufficiently motivated to engage with these resources. Similarly, group work serves as an enabler of such engagement by embedding language use within a social context. The motivation to collaborate, explain, and negotiate meaning becomes an intrinsic part of the learning process, as shown in (Namaziandost et al., 2018).

E-learning platforms and technological tools have further reshaped the landscape of motivational strategies in language classrooms. According to (Rajaee Harandi, 2015), e-learning fosters motivation by granting learners autonomy and control over their learning process. Yet, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in EFL classrooms must also be aligned with pedagogical frameworks that account for learners' psychological and social needs. (Akobirove, 2017) explored how technology impacts language motivation, particularly when learners interact across different cultural and linguistic settings. Similarly, (Kreutz & Rhodin, 2016) emphasized that digital tools are most effective when embedded within collaborative frameworks that nurture peer support and cooperative learning.

Beyond digital technologies, the physical and interpersonal dynamics of classroom interaction remain central to learners' motivational development. Group work provides a venue for learners to not only co-construct knowledge but also to negotiate meaning and exercise agency. (Costley & Lange, 2018) found that group work moderated the relationship between cognitive load and learner motivation, highlighting the importance of interpersonal support in managing task difficulty. These findings align with the participatory approach advocated by (Fatehirad et al., 2017), who emphasized the need for learners to engage in meaningful, context-relevant tasks with their peers to build both confidence and competence.

The present study is also informed by the broader pedagogical shift toward learner-centered instruction, where student agency, collaboration, and real-world applicability are prioritized. (Collins & Halverson, 2018) contextualizes this shift within the broader educational transformations

prompted by the digital age, arguing that traditional methods of knowledge transmission are increasingly inadequate for addressing 21st-century learning needs. In the EFL context, this shift necessitates a reevaluation of how motivation is cultivated and sustained across different instructional modalities.

In recent years, a growing number of studies have examined the effects of group dynamics on second language acquisition (SLA). For instance, (Mirzaei et al., 2017) demonstrated that cumulative group dynamic assessment can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, particularly when learners are engaged in reflective and collaborative tasks. Similarly, (Savasci & Kaygisiz, 2019) emphasized the tension between individuality and collaboration in L2 writing, suggesting that learners' preferences and interpersonal dispositions must be accounted for in group-based pedagogies.

The emotional dimension of group work also plays a critical role in shaping learners' motivation. (Derakhshan, 2022) proposed the "5Cs" model of positive teacher interpersonal behavior—care, clarity, credibility, confirmation, and control—as key enablers of learner empowerment. When group work is guided by supportive teacher-student relationships, learners are more likely to experience emotional safety and engagement. (De Ruiter et al., 2019) similarly observed that real-time teacher support can mediate emotional responses during language tasks, further enhancing motivation and resilience.

Affective and contextual factors also interact with demographic variables such as gender, age, and prior learning experiences. (Weyage & Adade, 2024) and (Edouard et al., 2024) both found that learner motivation is closely linked to external influences such as parental involvement and institutional support. While these studies were conducted outside the Iranian context, their implications underscore the need to consider broader social ecologies when analyzing classroom dynamics. (Mugala & Kabeta, 2023) emphasized that teacher motivation strategies directly affect learners' academic outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

The quality of instructional materials and authenticity of learning tasks also influence learners' motivation. According to (Sample, 2015), authentic materials serve as motivational tools by connecting classroom learning with real-world applications. This principle is echoed in (Abduramov, 2017), who found that cooperative learning approaches are particularly effective when tasks are designed to mimic real-life communicative scenarios. In the

Iranian context, where speaking proficiency is often underdeveloped due to limited opportunities for authentic interaction, group work may serve as a bridge between classroom practice and communicative competence.

Finally, the quality of empirical evidence supporting group-based motivational strategies must be critically evaluated. (Paquot & Plonsky, 2017) highlighted the importance of methodological rigor in learner corpus research, advocating for more nuanced analyses that capture the complexity of classroom interaction. As the present study employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches, it seeks to contribute to this methodological discourse by providing robust data on how group work dynamics affect motivation across different learner profiles.

In summary, this study is situated at the intersection of several evolving strands in applied linguistics and educational psychology. It seeks to explore how group work dynamics, shaped by social, emotional, and instructional factors, influence Iranian EFL learners' motivation in communicative tasks.

2.   Methods and Materials

The applied research is going to measure the effects of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' group work dynamics on motivation in communication skills in a gender-based setup. In this section, the design of the study, participants, materials and instruments, and procedure for data collection and analysis will be explained.

The initial pool of participants considered of 120 learners. The present research was a mixed methods study and used both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The research participants were intermediate learners of Iranian English language institute in Anzali, Gillan. This research had a total of 120 participants that have been randomly chosen. All 120 took the SPT test and 80 learners were randomly chosen for control and experimental groups. Forty learners were in the control group and forty learners were in the experimental group. There were 40 male and 40 female participants that were equally placed in the control and experimental group for a total of twenty females and twenty males in each group. Each group had 20 male and 20 female participants. The learners' ages ranged from 12 to 18.

Motivation questionnaires had 20 questions and it was a five-point Likert scale ranging 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (neutral) 4 (disagree), or 5 (strongly disagree). The questionnaires were adapted from Gardner (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB).

First, the participants took a placement test before the study so that the participants at the intermediate level would be selected. Two groups were assigned for this research. One control group and one experimental group. Then, both groups have been provided with a pretest. After the pretest, motivation questionnaire has been given to participants.

Then, each group had one communicative task, and they had to complete these tasks every week. There were 20 sessions with 10 communication tasks for each group which included assembling an object, identifying differences, drawing, information gap, comic strip stories, and ranking. Each group had to complete one communicative task every week. Each session was one and a half hours in total of three hours a week. The participants' activities in class were being recorded to monitor their behaviors for observation and group work activities in completing the tasks. The experimental group have received the group work treatment during the sessions and the control group received no treatment. In another word, all the participants in the experimental group completed the communication tasks in groups and work with each other, and they have stayed in the same group through all the sessions and tasks. The experimental group was provided with group work instructions in order to complete the communication tasks.

On the other hand, the control group did not receive any treatments. Participants in the control group have completed the tasks individually and in an academic setting classroom. Participants were informed with instructions through the process of pretest and posttest. Learners were expected to submit the assessment activities within the deadlines. At the end of the sessions, the participants received a posttest. After the posttest, they received the motivation and socio-affective strategy questionnaire again. In the end, there was an interview with ten of the learners which were randomly chosen. Confidentiality and ethics were considered before carrying out the questionnaires and interview. Later, data collection was done descriptively and inferentially. The interview and observation data are analyzed qualitatively. The interview was at end of the research and monitoring was during the sessions. The interview type was semi-structured and ten participants were randomly interviewed. The reason for the interview was to have a better comprehension of complex group work dynamics and to better understand the participants' experiences throughout this research from the participants' point of view. Another objective of the interview was to have a better understanding of group work dynamics form the participants' point of view. The

complexity of group work dynamics was included in the coded descriptive data analysis.

To measure the complexity of the group work dynamic, this research has included the attitude and behavioral pattern of groups in observation analysis to see if there are any problem-solving, teamwork, and productivity in groups to complete the communicative tasks to discover if the group work dynamics is positive or negative. Also, statistics have measured the differences and similarities of variables. Meanwhile, the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of participants were recorded, transcribed, and coded for observation to measure the group work dynamics and give it a meaningful weight that was assigned for each characteristic. The descriptive data analysis from interviews and observation have been coded. The result of descriptive and statistic data altogether determined if a GWDs is positive or negative. In this research, a descriptive data analysis of the qualification method determined the key sets of elements that create strong or weak group work dynamics of each group. Criteria such as checklist and coding were used to enhance the descriptive data analysis. Gender-based data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially.

Qualitative data are descriptive data analyses from interviews and monitoring/observing of participants' activities. Furthermore, inferential statistics of data analysis was carried out to measure the motivation and socio-affective strategies employed by the participants. Also, statistic data analysis was used to determine the positive or negative group work dynamics between each group. The collected data were analyzed by SPSS to measure the means, standard deviations, variances, and standard error of mean and differences of variables of research.

3.   Findings and Results

In order to answer the research questions, the potential effects of using GWDs on the degree of motivation of Iranian male and female intermediate EFL learners were explored. In other words, the participants' responses to the questionnaire items were evaluated in groups. The parametric paired t-test was also employed to calculate the mean differences between the pre-test and posttest for the male and female groups that were given both treatment instructions.

To collect data using observational technique, this research has focused on dimensions of class setting (GWD), interactions (including eye contact), relationships and actions. Based on Poupore (2018) observation notes were

done by the researcher to consider key sets of elements from the transcribed interaction that represented critical moments in the shaping of GWD for each group.

the overall observation between male and female participants, there were some aspects that could be seen in different genders. For male, there was more competition and fighting for leadership in working with each other to complete the tasks. The male groups had more energy and there was eagerness in groups more like a competition on who is going to win. This competition has even been seen within the groups. This mindset helped the male participants to do the task in the best way possible. On the other hand, the female groups were completely deferent in working with each other. There was some competition between each different groups, but there has not been any competition inside the groups. The relationships within the groups were more supportive that the male groups. The male groups wanted to prove leadership as for the female groups, both partners were leaders and used emotional and mental supports to lift each other up in learning English language. Although, both genders had different approaches and methods to work in groups, both of the succeeded to do the tasks successfully.

The interview provides an in-depth information to interpret the data collected. The interviewees were informed that the interview would take around thirty minutes. The form of the interview is relatively free, resembling a conversation. Ten learners were randomly chosen from the groups for the interview. The interview type was semi-structured.

The first question of the interview asks about the goals that participants have for learning English. Some of the participants' goals were to just learn English because it is the international language and to be able to use it to communicate with people around the world. Some participants wanted to learn English to get a good score in IELTS exam to get better job opportunities or travel abroad. A few of the participants, cared about their profession and wanted to learn English in order to get better at their jobs and profession by being able to search about their jobs in GOOGLE, read articles in English, and being able to talk to foreign customers.

Next were the questions about the motivation of learners. Almost all the interviewees said that the support and help that they got from their group buddy helped them to learn English better. Another positive aspect was the energy of the group that helped each other not to get lazy about learning the language and staying serious throughout the course and tasks. The most important part of the groupwork that motivated the participants was the competition with each other both within and outside the groups. Most of the participants' answers for the motivation was about the competition that was present in their minds to outdo each other. After the competition, another important aspect was the goals of participants that helped with their motivation of learning English. Overall, the participants seemed more motivated towards learning in group with positive group work dynamics than before.

First of all, Table 1 shows the results of the differences in motivation of learners in male and female groups.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Questionnaire between Male and Female Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Female	40	3.2175	.63028	.09966
	Male	40	2.8950	.74126	.11720
Posttest	Female	40	4.1113	.52041	.08228
	Male	40	3.9313	.82023	.12969

The mean score of the female and male groups in the posttest was higher than the pretest, as indicated in Table 1. It means that learners in both groups experienced a better environment during the treatment procedure, and as a result, their level of motivation increased in the final survey. Also, female learners are more motivated than male learners, and

it can be said that female learners have greater satisfaction with language teaching in both ways.

To investigate the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire responses from a different perspective, the results of the descriptive statistics of the two control and experimental groups were examined, and the findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Questionnaire between Control and Experimental Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Control	40	3.0037	.69443	.10980
	Experimental	40	3.1088	.71566	.11316
Posttest	Control	40	3.5038	.55231	.08733
	Experimental	40	4.0138	.72554	.11472

The results of Table 2 reveal that the mean score of the control group in the pretest (M = 3.0037) is slightly lower than that of the experimental group (M = 3.1088). This small difference suggests that, at the beginning of the study, the motivation levels in both groups were quite similar, with no significant variation. The standard deviations for both groups are also close (Control: SD = 0.69443, Experimental: SD = 0.71566), indicating a comparable distribution of scores. In the posttest, the difference between the two groups becomes more noticeable. The control group's mean score increases to 3.5038, while the experimental group's mean reaches 4.0138. This increase suggests that the intervention applied to the experimental group likely had a positive impact on their motivation. Additionally, the standard deviation for the experimental group in the posttest (SD = 0.72554) is slightly higher than that of the control

group (SD = 0.55231), indicating greater variability in the experimental group's responses. These results imply that the intervention was effective in enhancing motivation in the experimental group, as their posttest scores are significantly higher than those of the control group.

Research Question 1: Does GWDs have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' motivation?

The possible impacts of employing GWDs on the level of motivation of Iranian intermediate EFL learners have been investigated in order to provide an answer to the first research question. In other words, the responses of the participants to the questionnaire items were analyzed within groups. The parametric paired t-test was used to calculate the mean differences between the pre-test and posttest for the control and experimental groups that received different treatment instructions. The results are shown in Tables 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Scale for the Control and Experimental Groups

Group			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Group A (Control)	Pair 1	Pretest	3.0037	40	.69443	.10980
		Posttest	3.5038	40	.55231	.08733
Group B (Experimental)	Pair 2	Pretest	3.1088	40	.71566	.11316
		Posttest	4.0138	40	.72554	.11472

As shown in Table 3, the control group's mean score increased from 3.004 in the pretest to 3.504 in the posttest, whereas the experimental group's mean score increased from 3.109 in the pretest to 4.014 in the posttest. The Paired

Samples T- test was then used to determine whether the mean change within group was statistically significant for each group. Table 4 displays the results of the paired samples t-test.

Table 4

Paired Samples T-Test of Motivation Scale for the Control and Experimental Groups

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Control Group	Pretest - Posttest	-.50000	.79276	.12535	-.75354	-.24646	-3.989	39	.000
Experimental Group	Pretest - Posttest	-.90500	1.04310	.16493	-1.23860	-.57140	-5.487	39	.000

As seen in Table 4, both groups had greater motivation in the posttest than in the pretest. The improvement in learners' motivation was measured, and it was discovered that the control group advanced by 0.5 points in the posttest, but the experimental group advanced by 0.905 points in the posttest. According to the paired samples t-test results, this progress was statistically significant for both groups (P ≤ .05). This meant that these language learners reported an increase in their enthusiasm to learn English, and that implementing GWDs produced an engaging environment that resulted in changes in learners' levels of motivation.

Research Question 2: Is there any statistically significant difference in the effect of GWDs on Iranian intermediate male and female EFL learners' motivation?

In order to answer the second research question, the potential effects of using GWDs on the degree of motivation of Iranian male and female intermediate EFL learners were explored. In other words, the participants' responses to the questionnaire items were evaluated in groups. The parametric paired t-test was also employed to calculate the mean differences between the pre-test and posttest for the male and female groups that were given both treatment instructions. Table 5 indicates the outcomes.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Scale for the Female and Male Groups

Group			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Group A (Female)	Pair 1	Pretest	3.2987	40	.65599	.10372
		Posttest	4.1113	40	.52041	.08228
Group B (Male)	Pair 2	Pretest	2.8950	40	.74126	.11720
		Posttest	3.9313	40	.82023	.12969

The mean score for the female group improved from 3.299 on the pretest to 4.111 on the posttest, while the mean score for the male group increased from 2.895 on the pretest to 3.931 on the posttest, as shown in Table 5. The mean change within group was then tested for statistical significance for each group using the Paired Samples T-test. The outcomes of the paired samples t-test are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Paired Samples T-Test of Motivation Scale for the Female and Male Groups

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Female Group	Pretest - Posttest	-.81250	.86749	.13716	-1.08994	-.53506	-5.924	39	.000
Male Group	Pretest - Posttest	-1.03625	.97940	.15486	-1.34948	-.72302	-6.692	39	.000

The findings of Table 6 showed that both groups were more motivated in the posttest than in the pretest. The change in learners' motivation was measured, and it was found that the male group improved by 1.036 points in the posttest while the female group improved by 0.813 points. The paired samples t-test outcomes showed that this advancement was statistically significant for both groups (P ≤ .05). This indicated that even though the male group had better mean differences, the female group's mean score for motivational level was higher than that of the male group on both the pre- and post-tests. The psychological characteristics of female learners and their greater concentration while learning make them more motivated to learn English.

To summarize the aforementioned two questions, the ANOVA test was utilized. The ANOVA test assessed if the differences in the motivation mean scores of the four groups were statistically significant before and after offering the determined types of instruction to the learners in different groups. Table 7 shows the results.

Table 7

One-way ANOVA for the Pretest and the Posttest Scores of Motivation Scale in the Four Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pretest	Between Groups	2.301	3	.767	1.580	.196
	Within Groups	75.703	156	.485		
	Total	78.004	159			
Posttest	Between Groups	8.606	3	2.869	6.465	.000
	Within Groups	69.228	156	.444		
	Total	77.834	159			

As shown in Table 7, the pretest scores of the four groups did not show a statistically significant difference ($F_{(3, 156)}$ = 1.580, p = .196), meaning that before the intervention, the motivation levels among the groups were relatively similar. However, the posttest results reveal a statistically significant difference among the groups ($F_{(3, 156)}$ = 6.465, p = .000), contrary to the original interpretation. This indicates that, by the end of the study, the motivation levels among the groups were significantly different, suggesting that the intervention had a meaningful impact on motivation. The corrected interpretation should emphasize that while the groups started with similar motivation levels, the intervention led to significant differences in motivation in the posttest. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these changes in pretest and posttest motivation scores.

Figure 1

The comparison among the means of the four groups at the pretest of motivation
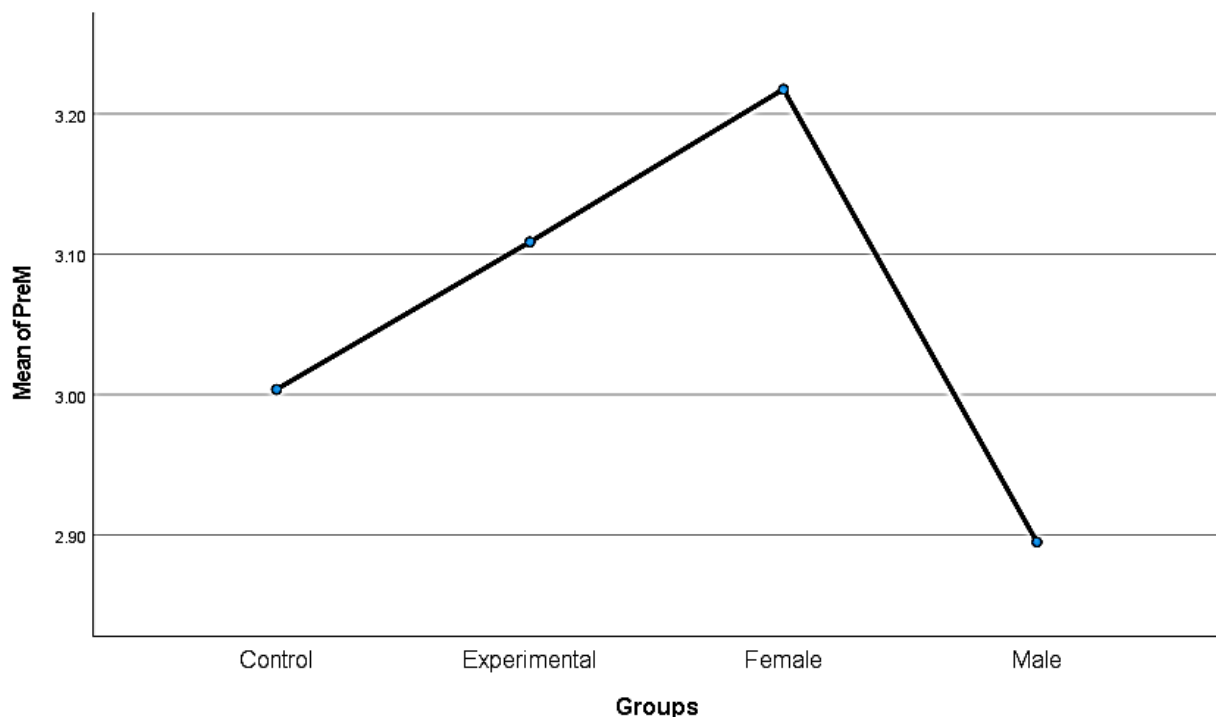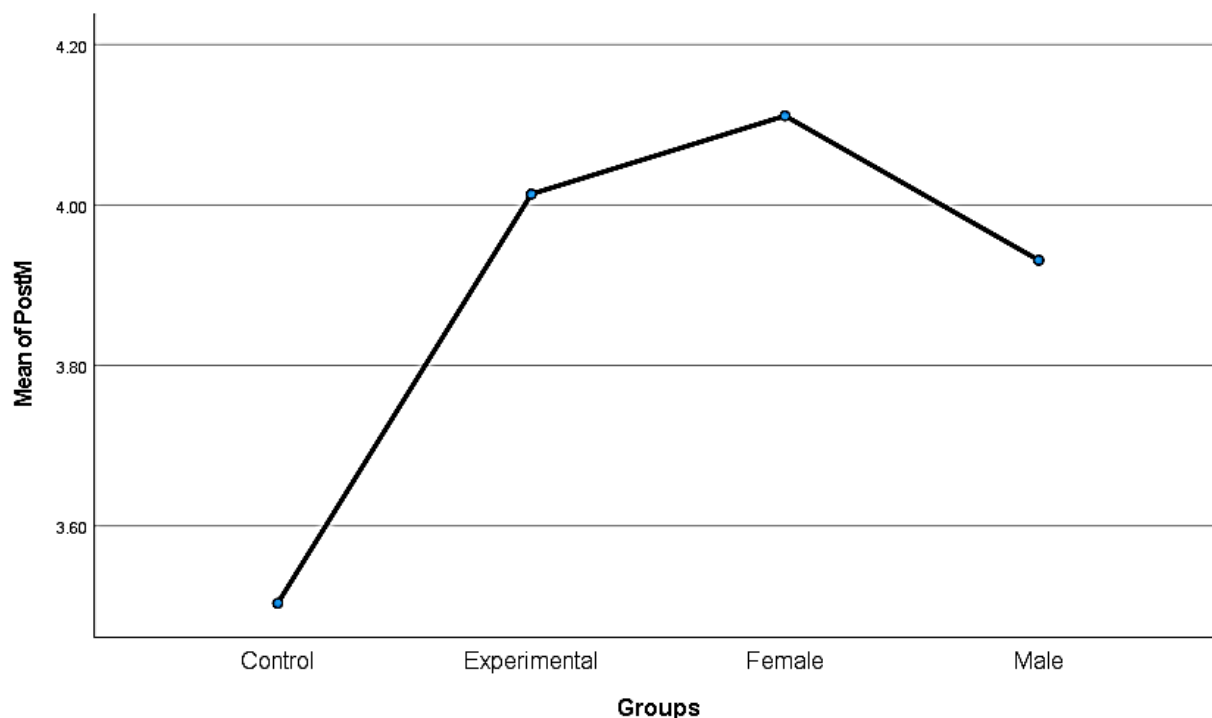
Figure 2

The comparison among the means of the four groups at the posttest of motivation

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the impact of group work dynamics (GWDs) on Iranian male and female EFL learners' motivation during communicative tasks. The findings revealed that both the control and experimental groups demonstrated increased motivation in the posttest compared to the pretest, but this improvement was significantly more pronounced in the experimental group, which had received structured group work treatment. Specifically, the experimental group exhibited a 0.905-point gain in motivation, compared to a 0.5-point gain in the control group. Furthermore, when disaggregated by gender, male participants showed a larger increase in motivation (1.036 points) than their female counterparts (0.813 points), although females consistently scored higher in overall motivation on both assessments.

These findings strongly support the hypothesis that group work, when properly facilitated, can positively influence learners' motivational states. The structured interaction in group settings likely served as a motivational catalyst by fostering a sense of community, responsibility, and collaborative purpose among learners. This aligns with the perspective of (Costley & Lange, 2018), who found that group work significantly moderates cognitive load and increases learners' motivation by reducing perceived task difficulty. In the current study, the collaborative nature of communicative tasks appeared to facilitate engagement through shared responsibilities and interdependence, factors that have been shown to promote internal motivation.

Moreover, the observed gender differences in motivational gains shed light on the nuanced ways in which GWDs influence learner engagement. Male participants, despite having lower baseline motivation, benefitted more from the competitive and dynamic nature of group interactions, as observed during class observations. This aligns with findings from (Derakhshan, 2022), who emphasized the importance of interpersonal teacher behaviors in reinforcing learner engagement. The more interactive and competitive orientation observed in male groups may have served as a motivational lever, encouraging greater effort and active participation. On the other hand, female learners demonstrated higher overall motivation, which could be attributed to the more emotionally supportive and cohesive interactions within their groups—an interpretation consistent with (De Ruiter et al., 2019), who stressed the role of emotional processes and real-time support in language learning.

The qualitative interview data further corroborated the quantitative results, revealing that learners consistently attributed their motivational improvements to the structure and energy of group interactions. Many participants emphasized the role of group cohesion, competition, and emotional support in helping them remain engaged and motivated throughout the sessions. This echoes (Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020), who found that learner emotions, such as enjoyment and reduced anxiety, are shaped by dynamic social interactions and can influence long-term learning outcomes. Similarly, (Hamad et al., 2019) observed that emotional engagement, particularly in speaking activities, enhances learners' willingness to participate, further suggesting that affective support is integral to motivation.

The design of the group tasks—ranging from problem-solving to storytelling—also contributed to increased motivation by contextualizing learning within authentic and socially meaningful interactions. This approach is supported by (Sample, 2015), who argued that authentic tasks rooted in real-world contexts enhance intrinsic motivation by linking classroom activities to learners' lives. Such design principles were clearly reflected in the current study, where participants noted that tasks such as information gaps and object assembly mirrored practical communicative situations, thus enhancing their sense of purpose and relevance in language use.

Interestingly, the posttest results showed statistically significant motivational gains not only within gender and treatment groups but also among the four subgroups, confirming that GWDs can influence motivation across demographic profiles. These findings are consistent with (Mirzaei et al., 2017), who demonstrated that group dynamic assessment could enhance linguistic performance by creating conditions that foster shared learning experiences. The structured feedback and observational notes collected during the sessions provided further evidence that learners became more autonomous, proactive, and socially engaged when embedded in collaborative learning environments.

Beyond classroom-level interactions, the findings also resonate with broader educational trends. For instance, (Collins & Halverson, 2018) emphasized that 21st-century pedagogy must adapt to the digital revolution by creating participatory and socially interconnected learning environments. Group work, as utilized in this study, represents a tangible manifestation of such pedagogy, allowing learners to co-construct knowledge while developing critical communication skills. Furthermore, the supportive group dynamics observed among female learners align with (Weyage & Adade, 2024), who argued that motivation and self-regulation are closely tied to emotional safety and positive peer relationships.

The gender-based motivational differences observed in this study also underscore the need to understand learners' sociocultural contexts and personality traits. As (Savasci & Kaygisiz, 2019) noted, individual preferences for collaboration or autonomy must be considered in instructional design to maximize effectiveness. In this case, the male learners' motivation may have been enhanced by the competitive framing of group tasks, whereas female learners thrived in emotionally supportive and cooperative environments. These findings suggest that while GWDs generally foster motivation, their specific effects may vary by gender and interpersonal dynamics.

Technology's role in enhancing motivation through collaborative learning was another indirect theme supported by the findings. Although this study did not directly incorporate digital tools, its implications align with studies such as (Akobirove, 2017) and (Kreutz & Rhodin, 2016), who showed that learners are more engaged when ICT tools are used to facilitate collaborative and interactive learning experiences. Group work that integrates multimedia resources—such as shared digital whiteboards or video-based tasks—might further enhance these motivational gains, especially among tech-savvy learners.

Another noteworthy observation involves the implications for teacher training and instructional practice. The effectiveness of group work hinges not merely on task design but also on the teacher's ability to guide, monitor, and facilitate interactions. This echoes the insights of (Fatehirad et al., 2017), who emphasized participatory teaching approaches as essential for fostering learner engagement and autonomy. In the present study, the teacher's role in sustaining positive group dynamics through feedback and structured observation was critical to the intervention's success.

The findings also affirm that motivation is both a personal and social construct, shaped by learners' perceptions of purpose, belonging, and efficacy. As (Abduramov, 2017) demonstrated, cooperative learning strategies are particularly effective when they cater to learners' intrinsic goals and social identities. Likewise, the motivational improvements seen here likely stem from the congruence between learners' aspirations and the interactive nature of the tasks, which offered opportunities for self-expression and peer validation.

Finally, the broader educational implications of this study are supported by research on teacher-student interactions and academic motivation. (Edouard et al., 2024) and (Mugala & Kabeta, 2023) emphasized that external motivators, such as parental involvement and teacher expectations, significantly influence learner outcomes. While the present study focused on classroom dynamics, its results suggest that institutional policies supporting collaborative pedagogy can create learning environments conducive to long-term motivational development. As (Paquot & Plonsky, 2017) emphasized, such research also underscores the importance of rigorous empirical validation to ensure that pedagogical interventions are grounded in sound evidence.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample was restricted to intermediate Iranian EFL learners in a single geographical region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or proficiency levels. Additionally, while gender was analyzed as a binary variable, the study did not explore other influential learner characteristics such as socioeconomic status, personality traits, or prior group work experience, which may also affect motivational responses. The qualitative data, though insightful, were limited to ten interviewees, potentially narrowing the range of perspectives captured. Moreover, the study relied on self-reported questionnaires, which are subject to social desirability bias and may not fully capture the nuances of learners' internal motivational states.

Future studies could expand on this research by examining how different configurations of group work—such as mixed-proficiency groupings or rotating leadership structures—impact learner motivation. Longitudinal designs could help identify how group work influences sustained motivation and language proficiency over time. Additionally, integrating digital tools such as collaborative writing platforms or video conferencing could illuminate the role of technology in mediating group dynamics. Exploring cultural dimensions and cross-cultural comparisons would also provide richer insights into how learners from diverse backgrounds perceive and respond to collaborative learning environments.

Language educators should consider incorporating structured group work into their lesson plans as a means of enhancing learners' motivation and communicative competence. Teachers should be trained to facilitate emotionally supportive and inclusive group environments, recognizing that different learners may respond better to varying interpersonal dynamics. Group tasks should be designed to be authentic, engaging, and socially meaningful, while offering opportunities for feedback and reflection. Finally, curriculum designers and administrators should support teacher autonomy and innovation in implementing collaborative pedagogies, thereby creating institutional conditions that empower both educators and learners.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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