

## Relationship between cultural awareness and Iranian EFL Learners' motivation

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### Suggested Citation:

Mowlaie, B. & Arasteh, Y. (2017). Relationship between cultural awareness and Iranian EFL learners' motivation. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. 7(1), 59-70.

Received September 16, 2016; revised November 23, 2016; accepted February 25, 2017.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc. Prof Dr. Ali Rahimi, Bangkok University, Thailand.

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### Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between Cultural Awareness and Female Iranian EFL learners' Motivation. To this end, 140 EFL learners studying in a well-known language institute located in Tehran, Iran were selected randomly and were given two questionnaires: Cultural Awareness questionnaire and Motivation questionnaire with 11 subscales. The result indicated a significant and positive relationship between the two variables. Regression analysis showed that for a unit change in motivation, % 41 changes occur in cultural awareness. It also indicated that for each unit change in Travel Orientation, % 32 changes occur in cultural awareness. To achieve a deep understanding of the variables of interest, 10 participants were also randomly selected from among 140 and were interviewed. The result showed that they were more integratively motivated than instrumentally.

Keywords: Motivation, culture, cultural awareness, EFL, travel orientation.

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## 1. Introduction

According to Dornyei (2012) motivation has been admitted to a large degree as one of the essential components that affect success in second or foreign language learning. Actually, it might be posited that all the other components which are included in L2 acquisition depend on motivation to some extent. If motivation is not enough, neither are individuals with the astonishing capabilities able to achieve aims that will last over a long period of time; nor are suitable curricula and good teaching sufficient on their own to make sure learners can reach their aims. On the other hand, individuals who are highly motivated, compensate for the significant shortage in both an individual's aptitude and learning situations. Gardner and Lambert (1972) emphasize that, though language aptitude is an important part of whole of learners' variability in what they can do by their effort in language learning, motivational elements can be more important than the aptitude effect. In fact, in certain language environments, due to some social requirement (e.g. when the L1 is a language spoken in a particular area or by a group, while the L2 is the national language); a lot of people appear to learn the languages skilfully without paying attention to the learners' aptitude dissimilarities.

L2 motivation is inevitably a complicated construct, and explaining its central features needs particular oversight. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) define motivation as the procedure, which directs towards aims, it can initiate an action and it can maintain until the desired goal is achieved. Johnston (1999) considers motivation as a stimulus for accomplishing a special aim. Likewise, according to Deci and Ryan (2000) to be motivated is meant to improve or to be in movement to do something. In the same line, Ellis (1994) considers motivation as attempts that learners make in order to learn a second language because they wish to learn it. Lightbown and Spada (2001) identify motivation in acquisition of second language as a complicated fact, which is not completely known and can be explained in terms of two factors: students' needs for communication and the way of thinking towards the second language society. Their belief is that when students think that they require talking in the second language with the goal of communicating with others or achieving particular and committed wishes and aims, they will be encouraged and enthused to achieve expert knowledge and skill in it.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) made a distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation. It is confirmed by the research (Cook, 2000; Ellis, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 2001) that the achievement or lack of success in second language learning count on these two types of motivation very much. According to Gardner and Lambert, the integrative motivation is learning the language with the purpose of engaging in their people's culture. Moreover, instrumental motivation suggests that a student learns the language for professional or related motives. These two types of motivation can influence and control the process and result of learning.

Comparing these two kinds of motivation with each other, Ellis (1994) believes that integrative motivation is carefully organized. On the importance of the role played by these two types of motivation, Cook (2000) believes that learners who do not have instrumental or integrative motivation will come across difficulties and obstacles to learn and obtain knowledge of a second language in the classroom, and totally, it would be hard for them to learn the language. Weiner (1991) maintains that the motivated learners have more than just an imagination of an aim they want to accomplish. They have a strong desire or interest to achieve that target. Motivated learners begin acts, make greater attempts, and persevere in those attempts.

## 2. Cultural Awareness

Tomlinson (2001) states that Cultural Awareness includes gradually raising inner feeling of the equality of cultures, a raised understanding of one's own and other people's culture, and increasing interest in knowing the differences and similarities among cultures. He claims that raising cultural awareness equips students with broadened mind, increased patience, and fosters cultural understanding and sympathy. Galloway (1984) has suggested a framework for holding cultural understanding based generally on process skills, but including accurate and sociolinguistic background as follows:

### *2.1 Convention*

Galloway (1984) states that the goal of this classification is to make students recognize how people in the marked culture typically behave in ordinary conditions. According to Galloway, context determined conventions include extra-linguistic behaviours that are characteristics in a given situation whereas function-determined conventions are related to sociolinguistic formulae or conventional utterances that are used to perform task in a context. For example, if one were teaching about snack, the teacher might focus on such context-determined factors as snack time, and types of snack as well as suitable expressions related to accepting or declining invitations for snack time and making reservations at a cafe.

### *2.2 Connotation*

Galloway (1984) suggests that this category deals with many culturally important meanings that are related with words. As students examine their own network association, they can start to discover that understanding meanings of words are determined by their cultural frame of reference; for example, the word 'time' may make one nervous because at the symbolic level, it represents pressure, stress, deadlines, schedules, responsibility and simply, a person may fear death.

### *2.3 Conditioning*

Galloway (1984) mentions that this third category of cultural understanding deals with the fact that people operate in a way that is in the shape of their culture, and all people feedback in culturally conditioned ways to primary human needs to learn how to define behaviours that are distinct from their own without judgments based on their own standards. If students start to assume differences between cultures as normal and unavoidable and realize that there are actually various probable differences to the general demand for food and shelter, they might begin to see the other culture more vigorously.

### *2.4 Comprehension*

This category of cultural understanding includes such skills as inspection, hypothesis formation, and tolerance of ambivalence. Comprehension aims can be achieved by considering the source of one's information, inspecting one's conventional image, keeping away from overgeneralization, and the ways to find a solution to disagreement.

## **3. The Relationship between language and culture**

Kramersch (1998) believes that language is the most important way by which we organize our social lives. When it is used in communication background, it is closely connected with culture in various and complicated directions. To start with, the words individuals say are connected with usual experience. They show truths, opinions or occurrence, which can be used to communicate with other people because they are connected with a supply of information about the world which other people share. Words also show the writer's way of thinking and ideas, their outlook, which are also those of others.

However, Kramersch (1998) mentions that individuals of a social group do not only indicate experience, they construct experience via language; they make it meaningful by the medium they select to interact with each other, for instance, speaking on the telephone, face to face, or writing a message. The ways by which individuals make use of the spoken, written, or visual means themselves make meanings that are comprehensible to the group they are a member of, for instance, via a speaker's accent, conversational style, gestures and facial experiences. By all its verbal or written features, language is a system of signs which appears as including cultural value. Speakers recognize themselves and others by using language; they see their language as a symbol of their social ego.

Based on the points mentioned, the first aim of this study is to examine which factors could contribute to motivated EFL learners. More importantly, the second purpose of this study is to determine whether there is any statistically significant relationship between cultural awareness and motivation in learning the foreign language. The rationale for the attempt stems from both the related literature and more compellingly from the professional experience and concern witnessing that for many years, teaching English to foreign language learners have put emphasis on grammar and language skills, mainly ignoring the focus on motivation and cultural differences. However, as widely recognized, there are necessarily different factors that can contribute to learners' success or failure in second or foreign language learning. Learners need not only the driving motives when they initiate learning a language in order to be identified as successful learners but also the driving motives are required to sustain success.

The third aim of this study is to examine in detail whether there is any statistically significant relationship between cultural awareness and Iranian EFL learners' motivation subscales which constitute instrumentality promotion, instrumentality prevention, travel orientation, fear of assimilation, ethnocentrism, criterion measures, attitudes toward learning English, English anxiety, integrativeness, cultural interest and attitudes toward L2 community.

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1 Participants*

This study involves a sample of 140 teenage Iranian intermediate participants studying in a well-known language Institute in Tehran, Iran. The main reason to choose this number was the practical limitation imposed on this study. Their age ranged from 15 to 18 years, with an average of 16.5 years and they studied English for an average of nearly five years, mainly in the institute mentioned. The participants were high school and junior high school students. Their English proficiency level was intermediate. In other words, although they were not necessarily 'native like' in their linguistic competences in English, they were able to communicate almost fluently in the target language. Based on the information in their registration forms, they seemed to be fairly from a similar socio-economic background.

### *4.2 Instruments*

The main instruments used in this study were, one questionnaire on motivation, one questionnaire on cultural awareness, and an interview.

#### *4.2.1 Motivation Questionnaire*

The researchers used Dornyei (2010) motivation questionnaire. The entire questionnaire consists of 76 items and 16 subscales. Eleven subscales which seemed to be more related to cultural awareness variable were selected for this research. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be 0.80 using Cronbach's alpha. The subscales are as follows:

Instrumentality Promotion subscales including six statements seeks information about how respondents feel about the relevance of learning English for their own future success regarding their prospective job and education. Instrumentality Prevention subscale asks about the necessity and relevance of learning English regarding passing or failing a term, course, and exams such as IELTS. Travel Orientation subscale asks the respondents about how it is necessary to learn English mainly because of their own interest or due to travelling to foreign countries. Fear of Assimilation subscale seeks information about the possible relationship between learning a foreign language like English and losing the importance of one's own cultural values. Ethnocentrism subscale asks respondents about how strongly they believe in their own cultures. Criterion Measures subscale aims at exposing the possible connection between learning English and personal attribute like diligence or assertiveness. Attitudes toward Learning English subscale aims at showing how respondents feel

about the atmosphere of the class and how eager they regard themselves. English Anxiety subscale seeks to know about the respondents' apprehension in language classes or while talking with foreigners. Integrativeness subscale aims at knowing how appealing it is for respondents to become like English people. Cultural interest subscale aims at showing how fascinating respondents think English culture is; and finally attitudes toward L2 Community subscale wants to know how gripping it is to know about English people.

#### 4.2.2 Cultural Awareness Questionnaire

In order to determine the participants' cultural awareness, a questionnaire from Integrated Curriculum for Achieving Necessary Skills (ICANS) was used. The questionnaire includes ten statements which ask students to answer how they believe about other cultures, how they react toward their own culture and other cultures and it checks if there are any differences between students' own culture and the foreign culture. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be 0.74 by using Cronbach's alpha.

#### 4.3 Procedure

To start with, four branches of a well-known language Institute were chosen randomly, then three classes of teenage intermediate learners were chosen randomly from each branch and the total participants were amounted to 140 learners.

To have in depth understanding of the matter and to investigate which factors contributed to learners' motivation, the data were triangulated by interviewing 10 participants who had been chosen randomly from among motivated learners.

In the next step, the motivation questionnaire (Dornyei, 2010) was presented to the participants. Then, to investigate the extent they were aware about the target culture, the participants were provided with the cultural awareness questionnaire. Totally, a group of 140 students completed both questionnaires.

One hundred and thirty five out of 140 participants filled the questionnaires completely and the relationship between their cultural awareness and motivation was calculated to check whether there was any statistically significant relationship between the variables of interest or not and also the relationship between cultural awareness and motivation subscales were checked.

#### 4.4 Results

##### 4.4.1 Testing the First Aim

As stated above, the first driving force behind conducting this study was to investigate the factors that can contribute to motivated learners.

Q1: Which factors contributed to EFL learners' motivation?

To answer this research question 10 participants were selected randomly from among the motivated learners and answered 11 questions based on motivation subscales and cultural awareness.

The First Question

Q1: Do you study English because you want to find a good job in the future? (Instrumentality-Promotion)

Most of the students, 90%, answered that they like to study English because finding a good job is an important factor. The high rate of connection between learning English and finding a good job should be surprising considering the global influence of English as a lingua franca even in EFL context like Iran.

### *The Second Question*

Q1: Do you study English because you want to pass the term? (Instrumentality-Prevention)

All of the students mentioned that this is the last reason to study English which is a good indicator of role of Instrumentality-Prevention factor. The reason which can be postulated for the unanimity of the participants might be the EFL context in which they study English, i.e. outside of class, they do not seem to have a viable means to improve their English and obviate the insurmountable obstacle of different exams which plague most of the learners' educational life occasionally.

### *The Third Question*

Q1: Do you like English class and do you enjoy learning English? (Attitudes toward Learning Language)

All of the students gave priority to this factor and mentioned that they enjoy learning English and it is one of the most important reasons to keep coming to English classes. This should not mislead us into believing that this is the general atmosphere of English classes. A point that must be borne in mind is that the classes where the participants were studying were in a private institute with highly qualified and motivated instructors as well as good educational facilities, a point that should not be generalizable to mainstream classes in the governmental schools.

### *The Fourth Question*

Q4: Do you learn English because you want to travel to English speaking countries? (Travel Orientation)

All of the students mentioned that they want to travel to English language countries and learn about their culture. This is one of the most important reasons to study this language. Their willingness can partly be attributed to their age and middle class socio-economic background as well as their inevitable exposure to English speaking countries and culture.

### *The Fifth Question*

Q5: Do you think that if other cultures were like Iranian culture it would be better? (Ethnocentrism)

None of the students answered 'yes' to this question. This might seem a surprise which can be explained by two following reasons. First of all not very positive attitude these ten interviewees held about their own culture which can be described through Socio-politico-economic factors and also the second and more important reason which was the focus of students' attention as they have mentioned can be learning captivating aspects of the foreign culture which might open up new ways of thinking for language learners.

### *The Sixth Question*

Q6: Do you think that because of learning English Iranian forget about their own culture? (Fear of Assimilation)

None of the students answered 'yes' to this question. The unanimous disagreement indicates that the interviewees had their native culture deeply rooted though they had not very positive attitude about it showing that it is not easy to discard some cultural factors by merely being exposed to another culture tangentially via formal learning the related language. On the other hand, we should take into account that the foreign language learners deeply believed that culture needs innovation

and modification and if there are any changes, there is no need to be restricted because that might be a sign of genuine changes.

#### *The Seventh Question*

Q7: Do you feel stressed when you are in English class and when you speak with foreigners? (English Anxiety)

More than fifty percent of the participants mentioned that the first sessions of English class they felt stressed because they were worried about making grammatical or lexical mistakes. Again this point cannot be extrapolated to the mainstream classes in governmental schools. The main reason of the exclusive nature and the limit amount of stress in the classes of the institute might be the motivated teachers, learners' high level of motivation, low number of students in each class and less competitive atmosphere due to communicative language approach propagated in the educational system of the institute.

#### *The Eighth Question*

Q8: Do you like to be similar to English people? (Integrativeness)

Fifty percent of the participants mentioned that they like to learn about English people and culture and change in some aspects. This might be partly due to the influence of the image they might get from English programmes, films, series, reading, and telecommunication with some friends overseas via social media.

#### *The Ninth Question*

Q9: Do you like English films, magazines and culture? (Cultural Interest)

They all mentioned that they enjoy watching and reading in English and they all mentioned that by reading and watching they can learn about their culture. This is not surprising since watching films and series are one of the most important and common leisure time for the young people. Part of this can be attributed to the unsatisfactory quality of domestic product which has led to cinematic market usurp by Hollywood product.

#### *The Tenth Question*

Q9: Do you like to travel to English speaking countries and know about their lifestyle? (Attitudes toward L2 Community)

They all mentioned that they enjoy travelling to English language countries and learning their culture. This is in line with their willingness to be part of the English speaking culture and might be due to their age and interest in English culture.

#### *The Eleventh Question*

Q11: Do you like to try very much for learning English? (Criterion Measures)

They all mentioned that they like to do their best to get the best result. Extensive and continuous years of leaning English can attest to their unwavering attitude about learning English. Based on the results, it can be concluded that learners interviewed in the current research were more concerned about learning English to know more about the target culture and to be integrated into the target community which seem to be in line with four criteria put forth by Dornyei (1990) for integrative motivation: a general interest in foreign languages, cultures and people, a desire to broaden one's view, to be cosmopolitan and up-to-date, a desire for new stimuli and challenges, a desire to be part of another community with the help of the target language.

Although the participants in this research mentioned the answers which were related to both instrumental and integrative motivation; they gave priority to questions connected with integrative motivation and it can be concluded that the participants in this research were more integratively motivated than instrumentally. Also the results showed that the participants in the current research were more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically. According to Deci and Ryan (1985) "Intrinsic motivation is in evidence whenever students' natural curiosity and interest energize their learning, when the educational environment provides optimal challenges, rich sources of stimulation, and a context of autonomy, this motivational wellspring in learning is likely to flourish" (p. 245).It can partially be concluded that the participants in this research were more likely to be intrinsically than extrinsically motivated because they all mentioned that they enjoy learning English and this is the first reason to study this language.

#### 4.4.2. Answering the Second Research Question

As stated earlier, the second driving force behind conducting this study was to systematically investigate the possible relationship between Iranian EFL learners' motivation and cultural awareness. Therefore, the research question the present study intends to answer was:

Q2: Is there any statistically significant relationship between cultural awareness and Iranian EFL learners' motivation?

To answer this research question, the data were analyzed using the Pearson's rank order coefficient of correlation. Table1. shows the result of this analysis.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation between Motivation and Cultural Awareness

	Motivation	Cultural Awareness
Motivation	1	0.41
Cultural Awareness	0.41	1
Correlation is significant $P^* < 0.01$		

The results obtained shows a significant and positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = 0.41$ ,  $P < 0.01$ . Based on the result, by increasing motivation scores, cultural awareness scores increase as well.

#### 4.4.3 Testing the Third Research Question

The third research question was to investigate the relationship between cultural awareness and motivation subscales.

Q3: Among subscales of motivation which one has more statistically significant relationship with cultural awareness?

To answer this research question, the data were analyzed using the Pearson's rank order coefficient of correlation. Table 2 shows the result of the analysis.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation between Each Subscale of Motivation and Cultural Awareness

Instrumentality Promotion	**0.31
Instrumentality Prevention	0.09
Travel Orientation	**0.43



Fear of Assimilation	-0.006
Ethnocentrism	0.16
Criterion Measures	**0.45
Attitudes Toward Learning English	**0.42
English Anxiety	** -0.28
Integrativeness	0.06
Cultural Interest	**0.40
Attitudes toward L <sub>2</sub> Community	**0.37
**P < 0.01	

As shown in Table 2, the results of the correlation coefficients show that cultural awareness has the most statistically significant relationship with criterion measures ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), travel orientation ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), attitudes toward learning English ( $r = 0.42$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), cultural interest ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), attitudes toward L<sub>2</sub> community ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), instrumentality promotion ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) and English anxiety ( $r = -0.28$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) respectively. According to the results obtained, no significant correlations were found between cultural awareness and other subscales of motivation. The positive correlation coefficient of motivation subscales and cultural interest show that if the figures related to criterion measures, travel orientation, attitudes toward learning English, cultural interest, attitudes toward L<sub>2</sub> community and instrumentality promotion increase, the figure of cultural awareness will increase as well. And the negative correlation coefficient between cultural awareness and English anxiety shows that by increasing English anxiety, the cultural awareness is bound to decrease

Based on column B in Table 3 showing the regression line width, the equation can be written as follows:

$$Y: 21.84 + 0.90 X_1 + 0.87 X_2 - 0.39 X_3$$

Beta standardized coefficient shows that travel orientation has the most significant effect. For each unit change in travel orientation, %32 changes will occur in cultural awareness. Since significance level is less than 0.01, the hypothesis of equality of this coefficient to zero is rejected and it must not be excluded from regression equation. In other words, this variable can predict another variable.

Table 3. Regression Correlation Coefficients for Predicting Cultural Awareness based on Criterion Measures, Travel Orientation and English Anxiety

	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig
Constant Amount	21.84	4.73		4.61	0.001
CM	0.90	0.27	0.27	3.31	0.001
TO	0.87	0.21	0.32	4.09	0.001
EA	-0.39	0.15	-0.18	-2.45	0.016

## 5. Discussion

The present study was designed to investigate the possible relationship between cultural awareness and motivation in Iranian EFL Learners. The first research question was developed to check which factors contributed to motivated learners. The results showed that the participants were more interested in travelling to English language countries, to know about their culture and their community and the most important factor they mentioned was the fact that they really enjoyed learning English. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that they were more integratively and intrinsically motivated. A research conducted by Wei (2007) had a contrary result to this research. A total of 57 female and male students enrolled in English classes participated in that study. The results of that study showed that the mean instrumental motivation was significantly higher than the mean integrative motivation. The learners were more concerned about the role English played in their academic and career advancement; therefore, the participants were motivated more instrumentally than integratively. The reason for the difference between the results of two studies might be because of the fact that in the study done by Wei (2007) the male and female participants were in the second year of an undergraduate environmental science program at a university in Beijing, but in the current study the participants were teenagers who were concerned about their dream rather than the down-to-Earth reality in their environment.

The same reason can be mentioned on the difference between the findings reported by Al-Dhaimat and Kreishan (2013) and the current one. In their research, including 166 students majoring in English, French or German in a university in Jordan, it was concluded that Jordanian students had high extrinsic motivation in addition to integrative orientation and intrinsic motivation which was different from current research result due to the fact that participants in the current research were teenagers but in the study done by Al-Dhaimat and Kreishan (2013) the participants were adults.

Also, in a study conducted by Kim (2004), the relationship between motivation and intercultural sensitivity in English achievement was checked. The participants were 437 undergraduate EFL Korean learners of both genders (M = 208 and F = 229). They were all native speakers of Korean. The test composed of three subtests, academic motivation scale, sensitivity scale and a background information questionnaire. The results showed that social reasons were the strongest predictor of intrinsic motivator to learn English. This lends support to the findings in the qualitative part of the present study based on which it can be concluded that the learners who were really eager to learn English and took pleasure in reading, watching and listening and were self-determined to learn English were more intrinsically motivated. In other words, learners were not influenced by social reasons to study this language. The reason for the different results might be due to age difference of the participants; i.e. teenagers vs. adults. Based on the second research question which focuses on the relationship between cultural awareness and Iranian EFL learners' motivation, the results of the statistical analyses in the current study indicated that there was a significant correlation between cultural awareness and motivation ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $n = 135$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ).

Contrary to the differences in the results between this study and the others mentioned previously which were attributed to age differences, Forouzandeh and Mirzaei's (2013) study which investigated the relationship between intercultural communicative competence and L2 learning motivation of Iranian EFL Learners supports the significant correlation between cultural awareness and motivation found in the present study since the correlation results in this study indicated that there was a strong positive relationship between L2 learners' intercultural communicative competence and L2 learning motivation. Although the participants were undergraduate students of English literature or translation and graduate TEFL students at several Iranian universities, the results were the same as this research with teenage participants only. This can be due to heightened level of cultural awareness because of accessibility of social media as well as exposure to different English programmes including films and series via satellite receivers whose users include both teenagers as well as adults.

The findings are also in line with that of Youssef (2009) who explored the relationship between cross-cultural communication activities and students' motivation in studying second language. It was concluded that there was a strong relationship between the cross-cultural communication and studying L2.

It highlighted the significant role of cross-cultural study in arousing students' motivation in learning L2. According to Youssef, developing intercultural learning within the context of the foreign language learning experience can assist learners acquire the ability to understand and adapt to the

difference and the ability to be flexible and open in dealing with new experiences. The researcher thinks that learners need to be interculturally aware in order to recognize the differences between their own culture and other cultures and they can modify themselves to obtain success in interaction with people from other cultures.

According to Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002), gradually gaining more awareness in the intercultural dimension in language teaching has to do with realizing that the goals are to provide learners with intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence and to make them ready for communication with people of other cultures as well as to make it possible for them to comprehend, and possibly acknowledge possible and inevitable intercultural differences and diverse viewpoints, beliefs, and behaviors; and to assist them to understand that every interaction is an improving experience. This awareness is hoped to pave the way to a more peaceful atmosphere in the troubled area like Middle East.

Finally, this research indicated that for each unit change in motivation % 41 changes occur in cultural awareness. The other point is that criterion measures as one of the subscales of motivation has the most statistically significant relationship with cultural awareness ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $n = 135$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Travel orientation has the most significant effect on cultural awareness (by each unit change of travel orientation %32 changes occur in cultural awareness). However, because this particular analysis seems to be novel in the studies dealing with cultural awareness and motivation subscales; no previous studies were explored this relationship; the results of this analysis cannot be compared with similar results.

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