

Speaking Task Types and Their Influence

on Learner Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on research into the influence of learner-centred tasks such as individual presentations and group discussions on upper-intermediate students' motivation. An exploratory case study was conducted in a naturalistic setting; the research used both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection/analysis and focused on the relationship and impact of such speaking tasks as individual presentations/group discussions on learner motivation. Acknowledging the approach suggested by van Lier (1996, p.102) that "actions are judged as motivated on the basis of a combination of factors..." the study set out to investigate the effect of various tasks and task characteristics on Armenian upper-intermediate learners' motivation. The research involved video recording of the course lessons during which students made presentations or had group discussions, and each student was asked to complete a questionnaire after both tasks. The researcher was the English language instructor of the subjects involved in this study. The findings revealed that there is a strong relationship between the speaking tasks implemented in this study and learner motivation. The results obtained through qualitative/quantitative methods suggest that because of such factors as the task focus and the level of personal responsibility required for the completion of the tasks implemented in this study there is a difference in impact between such learner-centred activities as individual presentations and group discussions.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades learner-centered tasks/activities have obtained considerable application in Armenian educational institutions. Taking for granted the assumption that learner-centered activities stimulate student motivation in EFL learning and foster target language acquisition, such tasks as group discussions/individual presentations have been extensively incorporated in EFL curriculums of many Armenian institutions of higher learning (this statement is based on personal experience). Moreover, the mentioned tasks have been implemented on the assumption that they motivate students, but without any demonstrated proof of this. Thus, the assumption that the above-mentioned learner-centered tasks/activities motivate students should be tested.

1.1 Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework for this study is embodied in the literature that focuses on general motivation theories (Brophy, 1988; Dörnyei, 2001; Maslow, 1970; van Lier, 1996; Woolfolk, 2001) and learner motivation in an EFL context (Stipek, 1996; Williams & Burden, 1997). Contextual factors that influence students' motivation have come forward as a significant theme in the study of motivation. (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Slavin, 1991; Thanasoulas, 2002; Ur, 1985; Woolfolk, 2001). Studies have also been conducted aiming to determine the relevance of the type/degree of motivation to learners' target language proficiency (Burstall, 1975; Genesee, Rogers & Holobow, 1983; Lukmani, 1972; Spector, 1998; Strong, 1984). In focusing on the relationship between such a component of an EFL context as a teaching/learning task and students' language performance, scholars (among them Bygate, 2001; Skehan, 1989; Willis & Willis, 2001) argue that the task focus affects learners' language development and different task types have different impacts on learners. Crookes (1989) and Ortega (1999) claim that planning time allotted to the task preparation influences task performance. Swain (1996) states that it is possible to design tasks that encourage students to produce language and then reflect upon its form.

In general, motivational research in language learning is partial: among a number of issues that should be investigated such as motivational processes in an immediate learning situation (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993; Dörnyei, 2001; van Lier, 1996), factors of student motivation and factors that determine the degree of student motivation, there is a need to determine how the nature of various tasks implemented in EFL settings affect learner motivation (Bygate, 2001).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of the current study is to determine the relationship between such tasks as group discussions/individual presentations and learners' affective domain, mainly motivation. The further aim of the study is to realize whether there is a difference in impact between the mentioned tasks and to try to detect the factors that cause a difference in impact on learner motivation.

For classroom activities this research aims to uncover whether group discussions/individual presentations enhance learners' motivation during their undergraduate studies to facilitate instructors' task selection in their own teaching situation. And last but not least, the purpose of this research is to contribute to the development and implementation of different program level syllabuses.

1.3 Overview of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters. In Chapter One the purpose and the scope of the study is stated. A historical perspective for the study is established in Chapter Two which starts with a review of a range of definitions of the concept of motivation, then types of motivation are discussed, followed by a review of student motivation and factors that account for it in an EFL setting. Afterward the pedagogical value of EFL teaching/learning tasks, mainly group discussions and student individual presentations, is considered and several explicit/implicit factors involved in oral communication are evaluated. In Chapter Three the research design is

introduced. Details relating to the participants of the study, the materials used, and the description of data collection instruments and analysis procedures are provided in this chapter. Chapter Four provides evidence for the findings and the discussion concerning such tasks as group discussions/individual presentations and their impact on the students' motivation. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study with implications and limitations of the research, followed by suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews how the concept of motivation has been defined by different scholars and specialists in the field. It considers the types of motivation and the dichotomy accepted by some of the scholars in the field. Then student motivation and what accounts for it is reviewed. Subsequently, a general definition is provided and the pedagogical value of EFL teaching/ learning tasks are considered, mainly bringing forth such activities as group discussions and individual student presentations. The chapter ends with an evaluation of a number of explicit and implicit factors which are involved in oral communication and an explanation of the propose of the current research.

2.1 The Concept of Motivation

Language educators unanimously agree on the supreme importance of motivation in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Maslow, 1970; van Lier, 1996; Woolfolk, 2001).

According to scholars such as Dörnyei (2001) and Maehr & Braskamp (1986), motivation can be regarded as a dynamic entity which is not constant but fluctuates between regular ups and downs and changes over time, depending on how much effort is invested by a person in the pursuit of a particular goal. Motivation is viewed as “a dynamic and continuous flow of events” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 78) which does not yield any kind of static interpretations. So, it is assumed that by interpreting the state of variables during a limited period of time we cannot claim that our results validate the real dynamic state. As Woolfolk (2001) points out such researchers as Brophy (1998), Deci, Koestner & Ryan (1999) acknowledge motivation as “a general trait and a situation specific state” (Woolfolk, 2001, p.402).

It is acknowledged in the field that in the main, motivation stimulates, sustains and regulates a person’s behavior. Van Lier (1996) suggests that the concept of motivation should be regarded as a construct which has at its core intrinsic motivation. He suggests that intrinsic motivation interacts dynamically with various forms of extrinsic motivation. In view of this,

motivation can be regarded as interplay between intrinsic, i.e. innate, and extrinsic, i.e. environmental, factors. Allwright & Bailey (1991) provide a wider view of motivation stating that a "... key term for motivational factors is receptivity" which includes attention, anxiety, competitiveness, self-esteem and reinforcement. (Allright & Bailey, 1991, cited in van Lier 1996, p. 105). Their view of motivation is based on extensive empirical study of classroom interaction.

Different theories of human nature expand different approaches to motivation. For example, expectancy-value theories focus on what directs and shapes learners' motivation rather than on what motivates them, acknowledging the assumption that humans are innately active learners with an inborn curiosity. Goal-orientation theories highlight achievement goal constructs, i.e. "mastery orientation" and "performance orientation" (Dörnyei, 2001, p.27).

There are major differences between humanistic, cognitive and behavioral approaches to motivation. Humanists view a person as both "a physical and cognitive entity" but emphasize primarily his emotional needs, while cognitive theorists are mainly concerned with an individual's intellectual potential (Woolfolk, 2001, pp.371-372). From the humanistic perspective to motivate people means to encourage their sense of competence, self-esteem, autonomy and self-actualization (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Behaviorists focus on the development of individuals' self concept of their personal sense of reality, i.e. their physical and interpersonal needs as human beings. And cognitive theories which were developed as a reaction to behavioral views emphasize intrinsic motivation, for example, such cognitive theorists as Schunk (1996) and Stipek (1996) believe that a person's behavior is determined by his mentality.

Although all motivational theories emphasize selected motivational aspects of L2 learning, for example, attitudes, learners' physical, social and psychological needs, for the most part they are limited and do not acknowledge emergent sources of motivation (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). Moreover, most motivation theories lack rationality and as a rule fail to reasonably interpret their premises (Dörnyei, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993). It can be deduced from this that motivational research in language education is partial: social and psychological aspects of

language learning have not been exhaustively explored. There is a need to conduct ethnographic research, case studies, action research and experimentation aiming to add valuable data to existing information (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; van Lier, 1996).

2.2 Types of Motivation

In terms of language learning, motivation is generally viewed as a person's mental state which can be stimulated by a person's inclination to act in a particular way. The notions of "instrumental" and "integrative" motivation were initially introduced by the two social psychologists Robert C. Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972). They claimed that the main concern of motivation theory is the relationship between motivation and orientation, i.e. integrative and instrumental orientation. So, integrative orientation implies a positive disposition towards the target language group and the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of that community. Instrumental orientation is considered to be "the utilitarian counterpart of integrative orientation" (Dörnyei, 2001, p.49) in Gardner's theory, associated with the potential pragmatic gains of L2 proficiency, e.g. getting a better job, or a higher salary. It should be mentioned that as Gardner and Lambert expanded the number of contexts they explored their premises regarding which one of the two types of motivation accounts for better target language acquisition were challenged (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

Lambert's original hypothesis concerning integrative motivation, which implies perfect L2 proficiency in case of complete integrative motivation, was also disputed by a number of scholars (Burstall, 1975; Genesee, Rogers & Holobow, 1983; Lukmani, 1972; Spector, 1998; Strong, 1984). Burstall (1975) found that her subjects' achievement was linked to both types of motivation. Genesee, Rogers & Holobow's (1983) study which involved English-speaking Canadian students learning French as a second language determined another perspective on the issue of the relationship between motivation and context: "target language learners' expectations of motivational support from the TL group was a significant predictor of their SL performance" (cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p.175). Strong's (1984) research on Spanish-speaking children

learning English in an American classroom found that students' intensity of integrative motivation increased relative to their English language proficiency. Lukmani (1972) found that students with instrumental motivation did better in learning the target language than those with integrative motivation. Her study investigated the relationship between the English proficiency of Marathi-speaking high school students in India and their motivational orientation. Research conducted by Spector (1998) involved adult Soviet emigrants in Germany and Israel learning German and Hebrew and revealed the following results: learners' integrative motivation did not enable them to totally acquire native proficiency.

In Gardner and Lambert's (1972) approach a number of limitations were also identified. First, learners' motivation in learning the target language is regarded as their attitude towards the speakers of that language, but no justification is provided regarding how these are interrelated. Second, it ignores how affective factors and motivation are interrelated, so motivation as a construct in learning is not clearly defined. And finally, the relation between factors that exist in the immediate learning context and motivation are not considered (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; van Lier, 1996).

The dichotomy between instrumental versus integrative as well as "intrinsic", i.e. self-determined and "extrinsic", i.e. determined by others types of motivation is acknowledged by several researchers among them Brophy (1988), Crookes & Schmidt (1991), Deci et al. (1991), Deci & Ryan (1992), Finegan (1999) and Norris-Holt (2001). Crookes and Schmidt (1991) and Finegan (1999) are of the position that integrative motivation is one of the main components in assisting learners to develop proficiency in the language, "integrative motivation typically underlines successful acquisition of a wide range of registers and a nativelike pronunciation" (Finegan, 1999, cited in Norris-Holt, 2001, without pagination). Whereas, Norris-Holt (2001) regards instrumental motivation, that is "the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language", as the condition typical in the EFL context as there is no learner integration into a community using the target language. Deci et al. (1991) distinguish between integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation, that is, in the former case the activity is

personally important for some valued outcome, while in the latter case it is interesting in itself. Brophy (1988), Deci, Koestner & Ryan (1999), Ryan & Deci (1996) "regard intrinsic motivation as voluntary and spontaneous in nature, not dependent on reinforcement or biological drives" (van Lier, 1996, p.107).

Deci & Ryan (1992) point out such factors as the relation of a person's abilities to the task requirements, the degree of social support available for an individual to promote autonomy, environmental affordances on the basis of which they indicate a difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Although, Deci & Ryan (1992) identify intrinsic motivation as an organism's response to certain psychological needs which can be claimed as the needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy, van Lier (1996) defines a construct of intrinsic motivation as a compound of organismic motivation, i.e. intentionality, affect, effort, and human motivation, i.e. consciousness and choice. He argues that "not only is there no opposition between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, they are actually two essential forces that must work in concert to stimulate learning" (van Lier, 1996, pp.112-113). He asserts that there is an obvious relationship between the two types of motivation and this relationship is observable in all fields of human learning and activity.

From the research on the issue of motivation we can realize that the discrepancy in attitudes can be explained by vagueness in the definition of integrative and instrumental motivation as well as a number of contextual factors. This review on intrinsic/extrinsic motivation reveals that there is a lack of information concerning how the inherent needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy are transformed into goals.

As Dörnyei (2001) states an increasing gap between general and L2 motivational theories was recognized by a number of researchers, among them Brown (1994), Crookes & Schmidt (1991), Dörnyei (1994a, 1994b), Julkunen (1989), Oxford & Shearin (1994,1996), Schmidt et al.(1996), Skehan (1989, 1991), Ushioda (1994,1996) and Williams (1994). Finally, starting from the 1990s a major shift in thinking resulted in researchers paying increasing attention to motivational processes underlying classroom learning (Dörnyei, 2001).

2.3 Student Motivation in ESL/EFL Learning

Understanding student motivation is of utmost importance in terms of its practical implications in EFL teaching/learning contexts. Although Lambert & Gardner (1972) offered a model in which students' language aptitudes and orientation lead to motivation, which in turn accounts for success in L2 learning, there are researchers who emphasize that students' success in language learning leads to improved motivation (Ushioda, 1996; Woolfolk, 2001). They accept that students' sense of efficacy, control and self-determination are among the most powerful factors that influence intrinsic motivation. Moreover, a number of scholars focus on the premise that each individual is motivated differently, though a person's motivation is on the whole influenced by social and contextual factors (Ames, 1992; Stipek, 1996; Williams & Burden, 1997). Ames' (1992) approach is that student motivation is influenced by the nature of the task, the level of student autonomy, how students are recognized for their accomplishments, grouping practices, evaluation procedures as well as scheduling of time for the lesson. Stipek (1996) observes that "students bring some motivational baggage-beliefs, expectations and habits to class" (cited in Dörnyei, 2001, p.106), but their motivation is strongly affected by such immediate factors as instructional context, nature of the tasks, how performance is evaluated, how much autonomy they have and how rewards are used. According to van Lier (1996), personal achievement, knowledge, skills and rewarding social relationships are tied to intrinsic motivation through the person's self-determination and autonomy. In EFL teaching/learning contexts learners are motivated to different degrees, i.e. intensities, and under various circumstances. The awareness of the degree vs. types of student motivation is of practical importance in the field of applied linguistics.

The degree of learners' motivation can be observed in their actions.

Actions are judged as motivated on the bases of a combination of factors,
most commonly intensity of engagement, attention, effort and persistence.

(van Lier, 1996, p.102)

Thus, we can make a logical inference that students' motivation in language learning contexts can be influenced by such factors as learners' attitudes, beliefs about self, goals,

involvement, environmental support and personal attributes (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). It can be fostered under such conditions as “appropriate teacher relationship with students, supportive classroom atmosphere and cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms” (Dörnyei, 2001, p.120). The types of goals learners set influence the amount of motivation for attaining them, for example, students who have mastery goals tend to seek challenges and persist when they encounter difficulties, while students with performance goals are concerned with demonstrating their ability to others (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Stipek, 1996).

Although scholars in the field are of complementary opinions concerning the issue of student motivation in language learning such factors as ability and self-determination, success in target language learning and contextual factors need to be viewed as some of the key prerequisites for motivation. Also personal goals established by learners influence the amount of effort invested and enthusiasm devoted to the accomplishment of a specific task and learning in general. Thus, any task in the EFL classroom context is immediately influenced by the learners’ attitudes and personal strategic investment in their own learning process.

2.4 Definition of Teaching/Learning Tasks

Making teaching materials relevant to students’ needs, their natural development and language proficiency level is one of the important ways to sustain learner motivation (Crookes, 1989; Deci et al, 1991). In order to determine the impact of tasks on learners’ motivation in EFL classrooms it is first important to define and understand what a “task” is. According to Crookes & Chaudron (2001), a task is a separate element of a lesson that is implemented to practice language for achieving a particular goal. Long (1985) claims that a task should be viewed as “[a] piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward” (cited in Crookes & Chaudron, 2001, p.35). Nunn (2002) states that “a task is an activity which simulates real-life language use” (Nunn 2002, without pagination). Whereas, Skehan (1996) suggests that we regard tasks as activities in which meaning is most important: there is an interrelation between the task and the real world. Nunan (1993) advocates that a task is:

...a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.

(cited in Luoma, 2004, p.30)

Jane Willis (1996) defines a task as an activity in which learners through communicating in the target language are intended to achieve an outcome. Thus, by evaluating the above definitions a task can be accepted as a meaningful component of a lesson (Luoma, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Nunan, 1993) which enables learners through mutual communication and interaction to achieve an outcome (Crookes & Chaudron, 2001; Willis, 1996).

2.5 Pedagogical Value of ESL/EFL Learning Tasks

Many researchers suggest that in order to increase student motivation learner autonomy should be stimulated (Benson, 2000; Little, 1991; Thanasoulas, 2002; Wenden, 1991). One of the means for enabling learners to attain autonomy is applying student-centred activities in which students are assigned specific roles in a meaningful, purposeful context (Benson, 2000; Dickinson, 1995; Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998; Ushioda, 1996). But when it comes to classroom task design and implementation in EFL teaching practice the motivational factor of an activity is often ignored (Dörnyei, 2001; Keller, 1983; Thanasoulas, 2002). In language learning contexts the main elements of a task are considered task input, i.e. data that learners are to work on (linguistic/non-linguistic or hybrid), roles and setting. In addition, tasks most likely have either explicit or implicit goals (Luoma, 2004; Nunan, 1993). Since "student motivation and performance are dependent to a large extent on the interest and enjoyment generated by the activity" (Ur, 1985, p.15), it would seem that if the task input corresponds to learners' target language level and the task requirements match with learners' personal goals, these tasks will arouse learners' curiosity and stimulate motivation.

Researchers such as Slavin (1991), Thanasoulas (2002), Ur (1985) and Woolfolk, (2001), who acknowledge that in order to sustain motivation tasks implemented in the classroom context

should provide learners with the opportunity to develop confidence and a sense of responsibility, to encourage positive self-evaluation and to increase their satisfaction in the learning process. Learning tasks should also enable students to acquire and demonstrate their mental abilities, to provide them with opportunities to exchange information and opinions, to simulate real-life conversation and create learner autonomy. Thus, it can be inferred from the above-mentioned sources that if in the immediate learning context such motivational components of a tasks as conditions that enhance students' positive self-evaluation, stimulate curiosity and engage them in real learning are considered, students are more likely to find satisfaction in learning, seek challenges and appreciate the value of learning.

Some scholars are of the opinion that tasks can provide conditions which influence the level of complexity, accuracy or fluency that learners will produce. According to Crookes (1989) and Ortega (1999), allowing planning time before task performance is essential for promoting learners' accuracy, fluency and a combination of other factors. Others argue that the task focus can affect learners' language development and different task types have a different impact on learners (Bygate, 2001; Skehan, 1989; Willis & Willis, 2001). Swain (1996) claims that it is possible to design tasks which oblige students to produce language and then reflect upon its form. Bygate (2001) argues that there is no rational confirmation regarding whether tasks can enable students to focus on particular kinds of language features and how fluency, accuracy and complexity can be integrated in various combinations and types of activities. There is also no evidence regarding how consistently complexity, accuracy or fluency of particular language features can be influenced by tasks.

According to Bygate (2001), the assumption that linguistic complexity is probably affected by the cognitive complexity of tasks is based on the research conducted by Skehan & Foster (1997). "Some [tasks] led to more accurate and fluent but less complex language, others produced more complex and accurate language, while yet others generated more complex but less accurate language" (Bygate, 2001, p.17). For example, such tasks as group/pair work demand a relatively low level of accuracy while tasks which oblige learners to make an oral

presentation or to prepare a written report require a higher level of accuracy (Willis & Willis, 2001). Thus, an inference can be made from the above-mentioned summary that task focus can have an effect on various language features and task type can influence accuracy or fluency of the linguistic output. But it is unclear how tasks operate within classroom contexts and affect perceptions of learners and their language development.

2.5.1 Group Discussions in the EFL Context

According to Ur (1985), the importance of fostering learners' ability to communicate in the target language is evident; this suggests that it is essential to increase the amount of time and energy allotted to discussions and group-work in the teaching context. Thus, during the last two decades in Armenia, according to requirements of the new national curriculum, in this EFL teaching/learning context learners' communicative ability is emphasized in order to meet the societal needs of the country. As a result, the communicative aspect of the target language, that is learners' oral performance has become one of the main concerns in Armenian EFL classroom. Therefore, in order to foster students' speaking skills communicative activities have been commonly implemented.

Using pair work, group work or other cooperative learning activities help in not putting too much pressure on individual students in front of the whole class. There are authors, among them Tsui (2001), Scarcella & Oxford (1992), who accept that learning is more effective when students are relaxed since in stress-free situations they perceive the provided information more easily. Collaborative tasks also help learners relax and focus on the content. Group discussions, as one type in a variety of communicative tasks in EFL settings, are said to provide the following benefits:

- simulate real-life conversation;
- enable students to exchange information, opinions, attitudes for the real purpose;
- involve both predictable and unpredictable communication;
- require the participants' understanding;
- allow an opportunity to initiate, negotiate and contribute to the communication;

- provide support for mixed-ability groups, i.e. enable both weak and strong students to participate in the communication;
- provide intensive practice in language functions.

(Nunn, 2002, without pagination)

According to Tsui (2001, p.123) "it has been argued that learners' engagement in the negotiation of meaning... provides learners with the opportunity to obtain comprehensible input, to express concepts which are beyond their linguistic capability and to focus on the part of their utterance requiring modification".

The results of some experimental studies provide convincing counter arguments that negotiation for meaning is not a strategy that language learners are predisposed to employ (Foster, 1998; Varonis & Gass, 1985). In the study conducted by Foster (1998), intermediate EFL students in dyads or small groups were engaged in required and optional information exchange activities. The results of her study confirmed that language learners are unable to clarify problem utterances when they encounter them during oral interaction. The study conducted by Varonis & Gass (1985) provided evidence that group-discussions are more likely to facilitate SLA when the interaction is between a native speaker (NS) and non-native speakers (NNSs) only when the input provided by a NS is incomprehensible and requires confirmation, clarification resulting in the modification of the structure of interaction. Hence, it can be assumed that learners' skills at making conversational adjustments in the target language and their language acquisition are more easily enhanced when the interaction takes place between learners and a native speaker.

Thus, it can be concluded that during oral interaction in the target language, learners' strategies for negotiation of meaning can be fostered if students are encouraged to interact with each other. Hence, such tasks as group discussions will be motivating and enable learners to develop their target language speaking skills if students are supported and appreciated for their effort to learn the target language.

2.5.2 Individual Presentations as a Means of Improving Oral Proficiency

Oral presentations, if properly counselled and organized, can add to students' learning experience and teach them life-long skills that will be beneficial for them both in academic contexts and their future careers. Like any learner-centred communicative activity, they have such positive aspects as enabling learners to realize the relation between language study and language use, employ the four language skills in a naturally integrated way, inquire, select and organize information, and encourage their active and autonomous learning (Meloni & Thompson, 1980; King, 2002).

Despite the above-mentioned positive arguments, there are some scholars who question the appropriateness of implementing such learner-centred activities as students' individual presentations in different cultural contexts. In still basically teacher-centred EFL settings, they put emphasis on the social principles underlying this activity (Altschuler, 1996; Claes, 1998; Cothran, 1995; Ellis, 1996). According to Claes (1998), the effect of different cultures on the style of presentations is also significant, for example, presentations made by British people are more concrete, linear, thoroughly planned with reduced body language. By contrast, presentations made by people from Mediterranean regions are less structured, full of anecdotes and with rich body language.

Unfamiliar activities having a communicative or process orientation were not highly valued by students from traditional backgrounds...a gap between the current level of performance and the intended learning experience results in a breakdown of language production and frustration for learners.

(Ellis, 1996:214)

Although oral presentations are accepted as activities that help learners to acquire speaking and communicating skills, problems underlying this activity, e.g. speech anxiety, group boredom, or lack of presentation skills, may often defeat its primary purpose. "Speaking in public sometimes actually undermines students' confidence and is ineffective in developing students' oral proficiency" (King, 2002, p. 404). Probably one of the main reasons for students' anxiety and stress is their lack of experience in making presentations. Another reason for their

frustration may be their lack of target language proficiency and communicative skills. Other challenging aspects connected with making individual presentations, as King (2002) claims, are memorized speeches presented rapidly and monotonously, which result in audience boredom. These presentations eventually impede the audience's listening comprehension, resulting in their complete loss of interest.

Thus, a logical conclusion regarding oral presentations as a communicative task can be the following: making presentations is a very demanding task as it imposes many challenges on learners. But it is also a rewarding activity as it contributes to learners developing effective communication skills. It is assumed that making presentations sustains autonomous learning, but in the Armenian EFL context it is a new experience for students, and the impact of this activity on students' perception of the task and their motivation remains unknown.

2.6 Factors Underlying Group Discussions and Oral Presentations

Learning a foreign language is psychologically threatening to learners' self-esteem; as a result, many learners adopt the avoidance strategy of being reticent in order to cope with anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1991). A number of studies show that one of the factors for students' reserved behaviour and emotions are cultural norms: for example, Asian students' behaviour is strongly influenced by their perception of proper classroom behaviour (Johnson, 1995; Tsui 2001). Moreover, speaking a foreign language is the most difficult part in language learning; some of the evident reasons are students' insufficient practice in speaking and lack of skills for expressing their own thoughts in connection with a situation. Shumin (2004, p.206) identifies the following factors that influence EFL learners' oral communicative skills:

- learners' age as well as sociocultural (i.e. values, beliefs) and affective factors (i.e., emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude and motivation) are some of the determinant factors of success or failure in the EFL learners' interactive behaviour;

- the role of listening comprehension, which is closely related to speaking, which is the basic mechanism for communicating in the target language;

Group discussions are supposed to enhance learners' communicative skills and during such tasks all the participants are assumed to be involved in oral interaction: they initiate and respond to each other's questions as well as being able to maintain communication. A factor such as a lack of "symmetry" in participants speaking rights may restrict their enthusiasm to expand the subject matter, negotiate for meaning and initiate topics (Bygate, 2001, p.16). Learners' familiarity with the interlocutor or the content and type of speech act could also have an impact on non-native speakers' talk (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Selinker & Douglas, 1985). "Observable interaction could be affected by a number of [unobservable] factors, e.g. individual learning styles: while some learn better by actively participating, others learn better by listening and internalising the input" (Tsui, 2001, p.123).

It should be stated that in group discussions such factors as the group's structure, its developmental level and the teacher's leadership style and behaviour have an impact on peer relationships and influence learner motivation. Clements et al. (1994) found that perceived group cohesiveness substantially contributes to the learners' overall motivation. According to Shumin (2004), speaking, which is obviously the basic mechanism of such tasks as group discussions, student presentations and many other activities that require oral interaction, involves very powerful nonverbal communication. Non-native speakers' lack of familiarity with the nonverbal messages may result in misunderstanding of target language communication.

During oral presentations most speaking is produced spontaneously, so time pressure may result in learners' production of grammatically more "fragmented", more "formulaic" statements. This kind of speech may be affected by repetition of words and phrases as well as undergoing adjustment on the part of the speaker, in addition to containing various kinds of hesitation, which affect the language that is typically produced (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Selinker & Douglas, 1985).

Thus, it follows from the above that learner motivation during group discussions can be affected by such factors as their psychological condition, attitudes towards the task, group structure, relationship between the participants and their individual preferences concerning classroom activities. It can be assumed that students can become frustrated about oral presentations because of such factors as time pressure, their grammatically fragmented speech and insufficient delivery skills.

Based on this concise review, it might be concluded that the most comprehensive approach to the construct of motivation is to regard it as a dynamic entity that changes depending on various factors and one of them is the amount of effort invested by a person for attaining a particular goal. In the main internal motivation stimulates and regulates a person's behaviour. Receptivity, which includes attention, anxiety, competitiveness, self-esteem and reinforcement, can be viewed as a key term for motivational factors (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). The degree of learner motivation can be observed in their actions, for example, intensity of engagement in the task, attention, effort and persistence (van Lier, 1996). Personal goals, that is learning versus performance goals, established by learners can influence the amount of effort devoted to the accomplishment of specific tasks.

Teaching/learning tasks are immediately influenced by the learners' attitudes and strategic investment in the learning process. In the main, tasks can be accepted as activities which are based on some task input data and have implicit or explicit goals (Nunan, 1993). Task focus, as well as level of linguistic and cognitive complexity are not the same for different activities. Learner self-sufficiency and motivation can be stimulated by implementing various student-centred activities in which students are assigned specific roles in a meaningful context. Thus, it can be assumed that group discussions foster learners' ability to communicate in the target language, enable them to initiate, negotiate for meaning, and contribute to the communication while not putting too much pressure on individual students. By assigning autonomous tasks (e.g., individual presentations), learners can be provided with the opportunity to develop self-confidence, a sense of responsibility, and to acquire and demonstrate their mental and linguistic

abilities. Although, oral presentations are supposed to facilitate learners' acquisition of speaking and communicating skills, autonomous learning and motivation; problems like speech anxiety, group boredom, and lack of presentation skills, that underlie this task may inhibit learner motivation (King, 2002).

'Speaking', which is the core mechanism of such activities as group discussions, individual presentations or any other activity that requires oral interaction, involves very powerful nonverbal communication. In EFL teaching/learning context participants are rarely involved in equal oral interaction during activities. And learners' observable behaviour can be affected by such unobservable factors as teachers' and learners' psychological states, their beliefs, self-perception, anxiety, individual learning styles, and all these factors affect their motivation in language learning.

2.7 Aims and Research Questions

This review of literature revealed the state of affairs regarding the construct of motivation, and the impact of tasks as an element of teaching on learners' affective domain, i.e. motivation. Based on this review, we can conclude that several studies have been conducted aiming to determine the type and degree of motivation and its relevance to learners' target language proficiency (Burstall, 1975; Genesee, Rogers & Holobow, 1983; Lukmani, 1972; Spector, 1998; Strong, 1984). There are scholars, among them Altschuler (1996), Claes (1998), Cothran (1995) and Ellis (1996), who question whether individual presentations as learner-centred activities are appropriate in all cultural contexts. There were also studies which demonstrated the relation of the time allotted to task preparation and task performance (Crookes, 1989; Ortega, 1999). But on the whole, motivational research in language learning remains partial: there is need to gain knowledge from ethnographic research as well as focus attention to motivational processes underlying classroom learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993; Dörnyei, 2001; van Lier, 1996). There is a need to take into account the factors of student motivation and the factors that determine the degree of student motivation. There is also a need

to realize how the nature of various tasks implemented in EFL classroom contexts affect learner motivation. "Studies into the impact of tasks on students' processing skills are in their infancy and far more are needed into the longitudinal effects of task types and task conditions" (Bygate, 2001, p.19). And, finally, there is a need to realize the relevance of teaching materials to the students' needs in different cultural contexts.

In relation to Armenian reality, it should be stated that learning tasks and activities which incorporate communicative approaches have gained extensive application during the last two decades. However, realizing that there has probably been no research conducted in Armenia as there is no data available (this statement is based on the results of personal inquiries), I decided to conduct this research to investigate the effect of various tasks/task characteristics on Armenian learners' motivation. The position accepted by van Lier (1996, p.102) that "actions are judged as motivated on the basis of a combination of factors, most commonly intensity of engagement, attention, effort and persistence" was followed in this research. The definition offered by Nunan (1993, cited in Luoma, 2004, pp 30-31) that "tasks contain some input data ... and have implicit or explicit goals" is also accepted in this study. Finally, small group discussions and individual presentations have been implemented during the research process as student-centered activities.

Based on the above mentioned rationale, this research was carried out to address the following research questions.

1. Is there a relationship between speaking tasks and learner motivation?
2. Is there a difference in impact between such tasks as group discussions and individual presentations?
3. What features (if any) of the individual presentations and group discussions make a difference in impact on learner motivation in the classroom context?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the research design. It provides details relating to the subjects of the study and the materials used. It then presents the procedure followed for collecting and analyzing the data.

3.1 Subjects

The participants of the study, all of whom are preparatory program students at the European Regional Institute of Information and Communication Technologies in Armenia (ERIICTA), were 30 learners of English as a foreign language. They are students (6 males and 24 females, ages 16-22) at the upper-intermediate proficiency level, where they have been placed on the basis of the results of the entry test administered by the department as an admission exam. All the subjects have had a traditional Armenian education, except for one student who studied in the USA for one academic year. Most of the subjects who participated in this study work hard to be eligible to enter the university, and it can be said that they are motivated, capable, have good classroom behavior and attend regularly their English course. The class meets three times a week for two hours (15 weeks per term). The researcher is at the same time the English language instructor of the subjects involved in this study.

3.2 Materials

The textbooks used in the preparatory program contribute to a learner-centered approach by providing authentic reading materials and task-based activities that allow learners to personalize tasks, make use of their own knowledge and experiences and express their own ideas and opinions. There are also sets of supplementary teaching materials developed by the instructors of the English department. All the above-mentioned factors are supposed to help teachers create a classroom environment which promotes learner motivation.

Tasks used in this study for group discussions were problem-solving activities adapted from the students' course book "Prospects: Upper-intermediate" by Wilson, Taylor & Howard-

Williams (2000) and a textbook "Reading Skills for First Certificate" by Mann & Taylore-Knowles (2003). The task requirements were that students assume roles appropriate for the situation described in the assignment, discuss a problem, provide their opinions and find a solution to the problem being discussed.

Students were also required to make a presentation for which they were allowed to choose topics according to their own preference a month prior to the due date. They were explicitly told what it means 'to make presentations' and provided with handouts in advance which included major points on how to make presentations. Students were also given presentation evaluation forms developed by the English department at ERIICTA (see Appendix 1).

The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) used for collecting quantitative data was developed following the guidelines provided by Farhady (1995), i.e. "questions should follow a clearly established theory: if information is to be obtained on a variable the theoretical definition of the variables should be stated" (p. 218). Scientific principles offered by Dörnyei (2003) were also followed for making it a valid research instrument. The questionnaire was piloted among the third year ERIICTA upper-intermediate students. As a result of piloting from the initial 30 statements 24 were left, and in order to avoid ambiguity, the wording of all the statements was once again reflected upon and adjusted to the subjects' level. The final version of the questionnaire consists of two parts with 12 statements in each part to which subjects register the extent to which they agree with each statement on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "1-strongly disagree" to "6-strongly agree". The statements included in the first part of the questionnaire focused on motivation, while statements included in the second part looked at students' self-report accounts. All the statements, which were both positive and negative, included in the questionnaire were modified from the questions provided by Dörnyei (2001, pp.260-269). Closed questions used in this questionnaire allowed the researcher to limit and focus on certain types of responses. As to the Likert rating scale, it enabled the researcher to use the data for statistical analysis, though it restricted the range and the content of the responses. Accordingly, the questionnaire was intended to enable the researcher to obtain information

regarding the variable "learner motivation". Although learners' motivation could be investigated through a variety of methods, the researcher has chosen the Likert type scale being aware of the fact that these scales are the most frequently-used techniques for the measurement of learner motivation. They are also not very time-consuming to construct and administer, and tend to yield more reliable results than other scales for investigating motivation.

3.3 Procedure

The subjects involved in this study were assigned one individual presentation and had four small group discussions within a two-month period. The course lessons during which students held their individual presentations or had group discussions were recorded on video with the purpose of collecting qualitative data. The permission for video-recording was received from all the participants. The qualitative data needed for the study was information about students' attitudes regarding such tasks as group discussions/individual presentations, their behavior, i.e. enjoyment and interest during the task completion. The researcher used 'Presenter Evaluation Forms' and 'Listener Evaluation Forms' (see Appendices 3, 4) adapted from Cummings (1992, pp. 183-184), which she completed as the task was viewed using the data from the video recordings for further analysis.

The procedure for group discussions was the following: in order to effectively observe the groups involved in discussions the class was divided into four groups (7-8 students in each). During the first half of the lesson (40 min.) two of the groups had a discussion while the other two groups were assigned a written task. During the second half of the lesson the former groups were assigned a written task while the other two groups had a discussion. Thus, all the groups had the same tasks but in different order.

Students' 'Group Discussion Observation Forms' (see Appendix 5), drawn up by the researcher using Wajnryb's (2000) guide for classroom observations, were used for obtaining and further analyzing the data from video recordings. While watching the video recorded material for group discussions the researcher's attention was mainly focused on students'

behavioral domain, willingness to answer the questions, their engagement in the task, language of 'task-doing' that could be heard with the purpose of finding meaningful patterns. So, comments were made on each of the four group discussions on 'Group Discussion Observation Forms' (see Appendix 5). The data regarding task instructions and students' involvement and interaction during the task were also recorded and later reflected upon by the researcher. From the observational data for individual presentations the researcher wanted to determine meaningful patterns concerning affective factors of the task and students' behavior during the task performance. Accordingly, each student's performance was commented and evaluated on presenter evaluation forms (see Appendix 3). As a person's level of motivation can be observed from his/her explicit actions, mainly the following components of all the subjects' behavior were analyzed: a student's ability to maintain eye-contact with the audience during his/her presentation, his/her speech speed and comprehensibility, adequacy of gestures and speaking tone as well as skills for handling visuals. The audience's/listeners' behavior during presentations was also monitored and recorded by the researcher on the 'Listener Evaluation Forms' (see Appendix 4) focusing mainly on such elements as eye-contact with the presenter, avoidance of distracting mannerisms, attention and appropriateness of the questions.

Quantitative data was obtained through a student questionnaire which focused on learners' motivation regarding the assignment and their 'self-report' accounts (see Appendix 2). Each student was asked to complete a questionnaire after his/her individual presentation and as soon as they finished the fourth group discussion. All the statements included in the questionnaire were clarified to the students in order to eliminate any misinterpretation by the students and to ensure reliability of the data.

Finally, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used by the researcher with the purpose of having a comprehensive view of the implemented tasks. And comparing the results regarding each task the researcher aimed to determine whether the findings obtained by either method compliment or contradict each other.

3.4 Data Analysis

The observational data recorded on 'Presenter Evaluation Forms' were analyzed to determine how many students were able to employ such presentation techniques as maintaining eye-contact, adequate tone/speed of presentation delivery, effective use of stage space as well as handling of visuals. Comments made on 'Listener Evaluation Forms' and 'Group Discussion Observation Forms' provided information about the audience's attitude/behavior during the presentations and whether the participants were able to understand the task and how much interaction/collaboration took place during each group discussion. Thus, students' better performance at the implemented tasks might be considered as a sign of greater motivation.

Data collected by the student questionnaires were processed using an SPSS statistical package. For the data received through the student questionnaire such statistical procedures as descriptive statistics and paired/matched t-test were applied. The descriptive statistics enabled the researcher to create a frequency table of each statement included in the questionnaire for group discussions and individual presentations. From the data provided by descriptive statistics the researcher was mostly interested in "modes", i.e. most frequently obtained value for each statement included in the questionnaire and those statements which received the highest means and percentages. The t-test enabled the researcher to compare two means for each statement obtained from 30 subjects for individual presentations and group discussions with the purpose of determining the difference between the two task factors.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter reports on the results obtained through the quantitative method of data collection with a discussion of the findings related to the speaking tasks implemented in the study and their impact on students' motivation. Then it provides the data obtained through the qualitative method related to individual presentations and group discussions as well as a discussion of the corresponding findings.

4.1 Results and Discussion of the Student Questionnaires

Table 4.1 summarizes the means and modes for individual presentations and group-discussions for the focus on motivation section of the student questionnaires. The analyses and comparisons of the data obtained through the questionnaires for group discussions and individual presentations revealed that on the 6 point scale the highest means (from 4.56 to 5.36 for individual presentations / from 4.4 to 5.26 for group discussions) and modes (5/6 for either task) were obtained for all the positive statements concerning the motivational factor for either task (see statements 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 in Table 4.1). And the opposite picture (mean values ranging from 1.46 to 3.1 for individual presentations / mean values ranging from 1.46 to 2.6 for group discussions) was observed for the negative statements for both tasks (see statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 12 in Table 4.1).

From Table 4.1 we can observe that all the statements included in the questionnaire both for individual presentations and group discussions have very close or the same mean values and modes, for example, for statement 2 the mean 4.86 for presentations and 4.96 for group discussions, or the same mean values (mean = 4.93) for both the tasks for statement 11. The mean of 5.36 awarded for statement 3 for presentations and the mean of 5.26 awarded for the same statement for group discussions enables us to suppose that the participants agree that both tasks will be useful for their future careers. From the mean values (5.36 for presentations and 4.76 for discussions) observed for statement 9, we can infer that students realize that making individual presentations enhances their writing skills more than having group discussions.

Table 4.1 Results of Student Answers for **Focus on Motivation** Section

Sts.	The assignment ...	Individual Presentations		Group Discussions	
		means	modes	means	modes
1.	... enabled students to realize that learning English is a burden for them	2.1	1	1.56	1
2.	... enabled students to understand how important using spoken English is	4.86	5	4.96	5
3.	... will be useful for students' future career	5.36	5	5.26	5
4.	... helped students realize that learning English is a difficult task	3.16	2	2.66	2
5.	... was of little use and students did it just for the sake of doing	2.5	1 2	2.13	1
6.	... was mandatory and students could not skip it	3.1	2	2.6	2
7.	... enabled students to realize that learning English is important for them	5	6	5.33	6
8.	... provided an interesting challenge for students	4.56	5	4.4	5
9.	... will help students write articles/reports in English in future	5.36	6	4.76	5
10.	... helped students realize that an educated person should speak English	5.06	6	5	5
11.	... is needed later for students' studies, job, etc.	4.93	5	4.93	5
12.	... made students realize that they could lose interest in studying English	1.46	1	1.46	1

As was already mentioned, it can be seen from Table 4.1 that statements 1, 4, 5, 6 and 12 received lower mean values as compared to statements 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. For example, the mean of 3.1 obtained for statement 6 for presentations and the mean of 2.6 for discussions obtained for the same statement show that most of the students disagree that their motivation was that the tasks *were mandatory and they could not skip them*, so these data enable us to suppose that the students had a positive attitude towards both tasks. The means of 1.46 awarded for statement 12 suggest that both the tasks were equally motivating for most of the participants and likely to increase their satisfaction in learning.

The analyses of the questionnaires indicate that students perceived the value of the activities in which they were engaged. For example, from the mean values obtained for the

statements "*this assignment will be useful for my future career*" (mean =5.36) and "*this assignment will help me write articles/reports in English in future*" (mean =5.36) for individual presentations (see statements 3, 9 in Table 4.1), we realize that this task enhances students' self-determination and awareness of personal achievement. While, the mean value awarded for the statement "*this assignment enabled me to realize that learning English is important for me*" (mean =5.33) for small group discussions (see statement 7 in Table 4.1) suggests that group discussions generate students' positive attitude towards the target language. From the mean value given to statement 10 for individual presentations "[the assignment] *helped me realize that an educated person should speak English*" (mean = 5.06) we realize that this task encourages students' positive self-evaluation. And finally, statement 6 "*this task was mandatory and I could not skip it*" with mean of 3.1 for individual presentations prompts us to realize that this task probably enhances students' sense of responsibility, while the mean of 2.1 obtained for statement 1 individual presentations "*this task enabled me to realize that learning English is a burden for me*" shows that at the upper-intermediate level, this task enhances more students' sense of personal responsibility than group discussions.

From Table 4.2 it can be observed that all the statements contain positive information and all the awarded means are higher than 3, though the difference in mean values for each statement between the tasks allows us to assume that the tasks have a different impact on learners. For example, making presentations *increased students' interest in learning* (see statement 5 in Table 4.2), while from the means of 4.73 for presentations and 4.9 for discussions (see statement 2 in Table 4.2) it can be assumed that group discussions *made the learning experience more enjoyable* for the students. If we compare the mean values for the first (4.6 for presentations, 4.76 for discussions) and sixth (4.43 for presentations, 4.63 for discussions) statements we might think that group discussions were a more personally meaningful task for the participants than making presentations. And finally, the figures for statements 8 and 12 imply that group discussions can help students improve their speaking skills. This task may possibly *make the process of learning English less threatening* for the students.

Table 4.2 Results of Student Answers for "Self-Report" Accounts" Section

Sts.	The assignment ...	Individual Presentations		Group Discussions	
		means	modes	means	modes
1.	... helped students pursue personally meaningful goals	4.6	4 5	4.76	5
2.	... made the learning experience enjoyable for the students	4.73	5	4.9	5
3.	... involved students actively in the learning process	4.56	5	4.6	4
4.	... contributed to students' positive learning experience	4.46	5	4.23	5
5.	... increased students' interest in learning	4.9	5	4.66	5
6.	... contributed to meeting students' individual learning goals	4.43	5	4.63	5
7.	... helped students assume a level of personal responsibility	4.43	4	4.4	4
8.	... helped students to make the process of learning English less threatening	3.4	4	4	4
9.	... enabled students to gain more knowledge	4.63	5	4.36	5
10.	... helped students like the process of learning English	4.8	5	4.96	5
11.	... was an interesting intellectual activity for students	5.03	5	5.06	6
12.	... enabled students to improve their speaking skills	4.2	5	4.46	5

The similar patterns of means and modes for both tasks seen in tables 4.1 and 4.2 show that in general there might be no significant difference between such tasks as individual presentations and group discussions relating to students' motivation in learning, as both the tasks generate students' interest and enjoyment. Thus, it can be also assumed that there is a relationship between speaking tasks and learner motivation.

Information about the number and (percentage) of students both for positive (> 3) and negative (<3) values recorded as a result of the analysis of the student questionnaires is provided in Tables 4.3 and 4.4. Table 4.3 shows that for the positive statements included in the questionnaire (statements 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) the least number of students who agreed that making presentations is a motivating activity is 24 fewest for the negative statements (1, 4, 5, 6, 12) the highest number of students who agreed with any of the negative statements is 14. For

group discussions the fewest number of students who agreed with the positive statements is 26 and the highest number of those who agreed with the negative statements is 10.

Table 4.3 Student number (percentage) for >3 and <3 values

Sts.	Focus on Motivation			
	Individual Presentations		Group Discussions	
	Ss' N (%) for >3 values	Ss' N (%) for <3 values	Ss' N (%) for >3 values	Ss' N (%) for <3 values
1	4 (13.3)	26 (86.7)	1 (3.3)	29 (96.7)
2*	24 (80)	6 (20)	8 (93.3)	2 (6.7)
3*	30 (100)	0 (0)	29 (96.7)	1 (3.3)
4	14 (46.7)	16 (53.3)	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)
5	8 (26.7)	22 (73.3)	4 (13.3)	26 (86.7)
6	11 (36.6)	19 (63.4)	8 (26.7)	22 (73.3)
7*	25 (83.3)	5 (16.7)	30 (100)	0 (0)
8*	26 (86.7)	4 (13.3)	23 (86.7)	4 (13.3)
9*	29 (96.7)	1 (3.3)	28 (93.3)	2 (6.7)
10*	29 (96.7)	1 (3.3)	30 (100)	0 (0)
11*	28 (93.3)	2 (6.7)	27 (90)	3 (10)
12	2 (6.7)	28 (93.3)	1 (3.3)	29 (96.7)

The positive statements are awarded with asterisks (*).

From Table 4.4 we can observe that for individual presentations the fewest number of students who agreed with statement 8 referring to *this assignment helped students to make the process of learning English less threatening* is 17, and for group discussions the fewest number of students who agreed with the same statement is 20 out of 30 subjects involved in the study. Thus, the results of the student questionnaire suggest that students at the upper intermediate level perceive group discussions as a more motivating activity than making presentations.

Table 4.4 Student number (percentage) for >3 and <3 values

Sts.	"Self Report" Accounts			
	Individual Presentations		Group Discussions	
	Ss' N (%) for >3 values	Ss' N (%) for <3 values	Ss' N (%) for >3 values	Ss' N (%) for <3 values
1	29 (96.7)	1 (3.3)	27 (90)	3 (10)
2	27 (90)	3 (10)	28 (93.3)	2 (6.7)
3	28 (93.3)	2 (6.7)	30 (100)	0 (0)
4	26 (86.7)	4 (13.3)	24 (80)	6 (20)
5	28 (93.3)	2 (6.7)	27 (90)	3 (10)
6	24 (80)	6 (20)	27 (90)	3 (10)
7	26 (86.7)	4 (13.3)	24 (80)	6 (20)
8	17 (56.7)	13 (43.3)	20 (66.7)	10 (33.3)
9	24 (80)	6 (20)	25 (83.3)	5 (16.7)
10	27 (90)	3 (10)	26 (86.7)	4 (13.3)
11	28 (93.3)	2 (6.7)	28 (93.3)	2 (6.7)
12	23 (76.7)	7 (23.3)	26 (86.7)	4 (13.3)

The questionnaires were focused on students' perception of the tasks so the results obtained may have been influenced to some extent by such factors as students' self-esteem or "how individuals perceive themselves in various life contexts... and according to various characteristics.... as well as the evaluation one gives oneself on a specific task" (Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976 cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p.184)

In order to determine whether the difference in impact on students' motivation between the tasks is statistically significant paired t-test was also conducted. So, the mean awarded to each statement for group discussions was compared to the mean for each statement for individual presentations of the same group of students. This procedure enabled the researcher to compare the values obtained for each statement of the two different tasks. The results of the t-test (see Table 4.5) revealed that there was a statistically significant difference for statement 1, which referred to "the assigned task enabled me to realize that learning English is a burden" and statement 9, which referred to "this task will enable me to write articles, reports in English in future" in the questionnaires for individual presentations.

Table 4.5 Paired Samples for Focus on Motivation Section

Sts.	Paired samples	Mean values		T-values	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Ind. Pr.	Gr. D.		
1.	Pair 1.	2.1	1.56	2.151	.040*
2.	Pair 2.	4.86	4.96	-.571	.573
3.	Pair 3.	5.36	5.26	.648	.522
4.	Pair 4.	3.16	2.66	1.654	.109
5.	Pair 5.	2.5	2.13	1.076	.291
6.	Pair 6	3.1	2.6	1.525	.138
7.	Pair 7	5	5.33	1.471	.152
8.	Pair 8	4.56	4.4	.694	.493
9.	Pair 9	5.36	4.76	2.473	.019*
10.	Pair 10	5.06	5	.290	.774
11.	Pair 11	4.93	4.93	.000	1.000
12.	Pair 12	1.46	1.46	.000	1.000

Ind. Pr. (Individual Presentations)
Gr. D. (Group Discussions)

Thus, there appears to be a significant difference in the way students perceive statements 1 and 9. Moreover, by comparing the obtained mean values of the two speaking tasks, we realize that the task focus as well as the level of personal responsibility required for the completion of the mentioned tasks is different, and these might be some of the factors that account for the fact that students perceive the tasks differently in terms of motivation.

Table 4.6 shows the results obtained through t-test for the self-report accounts section of the questionnaire. The results of the t-tests revealed that there appears to be no statistically significant differences for any of the statements included in this section of the student questionnaire.

Table 4.6 Paired Samples for "Self-Report" Accounts Section

Sts.	Paired samples	Mean values		T-values	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Ind. Pr.	Gr. D.		
1.	Pair 1.	4.6	4.76	-.724	.475
2.	Pair 2.	4.73	4.9	-.740	.465
3.	Pair 3.	4.56	4.6	-.166	.869
4.	Pair 4.	4.46	4.23	.851	.402
5.	Pair 5.	4.9	4.66	.909	.371
6.	Pair 6	4.43	4.63	-1.030	.312
7.	Pair 7	4.43	4.4	.128	.899
8,	Pair 8	3.4	4	-1.621	.166
9,	Pair 9	4.63	4.36	.803	.428
10,	Pair 10	4.8	4.96	.817	.420
11,	Pair 11	5.03	5.06	-.122	.904
12,	Pair 12	4.2	4.46	-.597	.555

Ind. Pr. (Individual Presentations)

Gr. D. (Group Discussions)

Thus, regarding students' perception of the two tasks it can be stated that no statistically significant difference was found in the "self-report" accounts section of the student questionnaire.

4.2 Results and Discussion of the Video Recorded Material

The video recorded material was reviewed by the researcher with the intention of making inferences from the students' performance on individual presentations and group discussions. The participants' performance was observed on the video with the purpose of making inferences regarding their ability to use such presentation techniques as maintaining eye-contact, adequate tone/speed of presentation delivery, effective use of stage space and handling of visuals.

Analyzing the qualitative data obtained from the video recordings concerning students' individual presentations, it was found that 17 of the 30 participants were not able to maintain eye-contact during their presentations. Those students who had poor eye contact presented their topics in a monotonous way mainly speaking from memory with much hesitation and stumbling. It was also observed that some students purposefully tried to avoid the audience in order to concentrate on the ideas they tried to communicate. Only 11 students who appeared to be interested in their topics had normal eye contact and were able to interest the audience. Students who had adequate eye contact with the listeners were sufficiently confident in themselves and very enthusiastic about their topics. These students were able to involve the audience not only by effectively introducing the topics of their presentations but also making jokes and addressing questions to the audience. These students were very persuasive and made an impression on the listeners.

Regarding students' ability to use such elements of a presentation as adequate voice, tone and speed of delivery, it was observed that 9 participants were very anxious which was observed from their rapid, monotonous speech. From this kind of behavior we can assume that these students lacked confidence which resulted in audience boredom. Only 4 students were able to deliver their presentations in a convincing and enthusiastic manner. They presented their topics using Power Point slides. The audience showed real interest and animation during these presentations.

As to the participants' ability to use adequate hand gestures and stage space, only 8 students displayed undesirable mannerisms such as playing with their hair, clasping arms over their chest or inadequately gesticulating with their hands.

Thus, students' visible nervousness, which was determined from the observation of their overt behavior (i.e., rapid speech, inadequate personal mannerisms) was probably because of their lack of confidence in making presentations. This kind of unconscious behavior was also an expression of the fact that making presentations is a stressful activity for upper intermediate students. Such behavior may be accepted as natural taking into consideration the fact that for these students making presentations in English was a completely new experience. Learners' anxiety can also be attributed to their lack of presentation delivery techniques. Students' anxiety which influenced their task performance can also be significantly correlated with their self-esteem and awareness of being evaluated. The fact that their presentations were video recorded is also a significant reason for nervousness. Above all, the researcher acknowledges that, as Horwitz et al. (1991) claim, speaking in a foreign language is very psychologically threatening process.

Thus, comparing the results of students' responses on the questionnaires regarding individual presentations with their actual presentations, we realize that students had a more positive attitude towards the task as compared to their real presentations. The evidence gained from their actual presentations confirmed the fact that they need more practice in this task.

The qualitative data obtained for group discussions revealed that Armenian students are not predisposed to employing the technique of oral negotiation for meaning in the target language when the provided language input is incomprehensible. This assumption is based on the observation that during the task completion process most of the students switched to their mother tongue for clarification. This fact can be explained by the students' insufficient target language speaking skills and cognitive resources. The cognitive complexity of the problem-solving tasks offered for discussions can also be one of the factors that restrains students' oral interaction. Furthermore, some students' inadequate negotiation for meaning, which is inferred from the

observation of their passive interaction during group discussions, can be explained by a personal attribute such as 'tolerance of ambiguity'. "Persons with low tolerance of ambiguity may experience frustration... make frequent appeals to authority, such as requesting a definition for every word. (Naiman et al., 1978, cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p.191).

The overall impression of the students' behavior on the task performance is the following: majority of them were engaged in the task, showed curiosity, some of them were able to demonstrate their speaking abilities (e.g., made requests, expressed their opinions). Thus, from the students' overt behavior we realize that most of them were motivated by the task. This assumption is based on the definition provided by Rubin (1975):

Good language learners are willing to guess, willing to use what knowledge they have of the target language in order to create novel utterances. However, there might be an upper threshold to 'risk-taking' beyond which further risk-taking could be detrimental.

(cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p.188)

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings, then it deals with the discussion of possible implications of the research related to the impact of speaking tasks on learner motivation. It then considers limitations of the study and gives suggestions for further research, followed by a conclusion.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

With regard to research question 1, "Is there a relationship between speaking tasks and learner motivation?" the findings reported in this study seem to present evidence that there is a strong relationship between such speaking tasks as individual presentations and group discussions and learner motivation.

Regarding research question 2, "Is there a difference in impact between such tasks as group discussions and individual presentations?", the data obtained through both the quantitative and qualitative methods suggest that group discussions as compared to individual presentations are a more motivating activity for upper-intermediate students.

As regards research question 3, "What features (if any) of the individual presentations and group discussions make a difference in impact on learner motivation in the classroom context?", the conducted t-test results showed that a difference in impact was determined by such factors as the task focus and the level of personal responsibility required for making individual presentations.

As to the extent to which these research results complement other researchers' findings, the following should be stated: the focus of this research was to determine the influence of speaking tasks on learner motivation, while the majority of research in this field has sought to determine the relevance of learners' target language proficiency and the type/degree of motivation (Burstall, 1975; Genesee, Rogers & Holobow, 1983; Lukmani, 1972; Spector, 1998; Strong, 1984). Studies were also conducted investigating whether planning opportunity results in increased focus on form and production outcomes during task performance providing evidence

that planning before doing a task can promote an increased focus on form (Ortega, 1999). Results obtained by Crookes (1989) reveal that providing learners with time to plan their utterances results in interlanguage productions that are more complex. Finally, it should be stated that no similar study was uncovered by the researcher, so it is quite possible that no similar studies have been conducted yet.

5.2 Implications for Teaching and Learning

The research reported in this paper has some implications for administrators, course designers and instructors working with adolescents, in particular in Armenian EFL teaching/learning settings. An important implication for course designers and instructors that emerged from this study was the significant influence that various learner-centred speaking tasks had on student motivation.

The findings of this study may contribute to the development and implementation of different program level syllabuses. As a result of the data revealed in the study, course designers and instructors who intend to create a positive motivational environment may re-consider the appropriateness of including such tasks as individual presentations and group discussions in lower than upper-intermediate level course syllabuses particularly in Armenian educational institutions. Furthermore, they may want to consider the support needed to perform these tasks.

The data reported in the study revealed that participants have a highly appreciative attitude to individual presentations but most of them lack ability to use presentation delivery techniques because of insufficient practice in presentation skills. Hence, in the case of supportive teacher-student relationships, those students who value the importance of such tasks as individual presentations but have inadequate skills for making successful presentations may adopt a more positive attitude and overcome their frustration regarding the task.

For the classroom activities these research findings uncovered tasks that influence classroom teaching/learning process and may enhance student motivation. The findings of this study should encourage Armenian teachers/instructors to consciously consider their task selection in educational institutions.

The data suggest that administrators and instructors could work towards making EFL teaching/learning contexts less threatening for some students and thus create more motivating academic contexts.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

There are some limitations to the present study that should be considered. First, the study is not large scale: it included only 30 students. This fact obviously threatens the external validity and the generalizability of the findings. Second, it is not clear to what extent the participants' motivation was dependent on the implemented task factors. Another factor that might have to some extent conditioned students' overall positive attitude of the procedures going on in the class is their desire to successfully accomplish their preparatory courses and pass the ERIICTA entrance exams.

Limitations of the present study raised several interesting questions for further research. As it was already mentioned, the subjects of the study were upper-intermediate students from Armenian secondary schools; most of them had no prior experience in such tasks as making presentations, so this could also have biased their high appreciation of the task. A survey type of research including participants representing such proficiency levels as pre-intermediate, intermediate and advanced may supply us with more generalizable findings. Moreover, it is essential to conduct future research to determine the impact of the tasks implemented in this study on different L2 proficiency level students' target language learning motivation.

5.4 Conclusion

The research discussed in this paper focused on speaking tasks/task characteristics and their influence on learner motivation in an Armenian EFL academic context. The findings reported in this paper contribute to the study of student motivation in an EFL context by providing qualitative and quantitative evidence of the impact learner-centred tasks have on individuals and their motivation. The complexity of exploring students' motivation and the academic goals they pursue is also highlighted in this study acknowledging the fact that such factors as students' self-esteem or "how individuals perceive themselves in various life contexts..." might influence the results of this study (Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976, cited in Larsen- Freeman & Long, 1991, p.184).

This study could be considered significant in terms of the issues it addresses: learner-centred task types and their influence on student motivation in the classroom context. As was mentioned above, it might be the first time that such educational research has ever been conducted. It is highly likely that no similar study has ever been conducted in Armenia.

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APPENDIX 1.

PRESENTATION EVALUATION FORM

Name of presenter _____ Instructor _____

Topic of presentation _____ Grade _____

3=excellent 2=average 1=poor 0=unacceptable

Delivery / Format

- _____ Maintained eye contact with listeners
- _____ Spoke loudly and used appropriate tone
- _____ Spoke in a natural manner (did not read or memorize)
- _____ Used effective posture, movement, and gestures
- _____ Handled visual aids

Communicative ability

- _____ Spoke clearly
- _____ Spoke fluently, without too much hesitation or repetition
- _____ Used reasonably accurate grammar and vocabulary
- _____ Used appropriate register

Project content

- _____ Fulfilled assignment
- _____ Met time limit
- _____ Developed topic with sufficient reasons, examples, and details
- _____ Demonstrated originality and creativity

Organization

- _____ Introduced topic effectively
- _____ Organized ideas logically
- _____ Provided concise and sufficient details
- _____ Concluded presentation effectively

Discussion

- _____ Responded appropriately to questions

Overall comments:

APPENDIX 2. Questionnaire (for students)

I would very much appreciate it if you would answer the following questions based on your experience/opinion about the provided task in the following way: for each of the statements below place in the cell that most accurately describes your attitude.

1 – strongly disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 – slightly disagree;
4 – partly agree; 5 – agree; 6 – strongly agree

Focus on Motivation

The assignment							
1)	... enabled me to realize that learning English is a burden for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2)	... enabled me to understand how important spoken English is for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3)	... will be useful for my future career.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4)	... helped me to realize that learning English is a difficult task.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5)	... was of little use for me and I did it just for the sake of doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6)	... was mandatory and I could not skip it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7)	... enabled me to realize that learning English is very important for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8)	... provided an interesting challenge for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9)	... will help me to write articles/reports in English in future.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10)	... helped me to realize that an educated person should speak English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11)	... is needed later for my studies, job, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12)	... made me realize that I could lose interest in studying English.	1	2	3	4	5	6

'Self-report' Accounts

The assignment							
1)	... helped me to pursue personally meaningful goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2)	... made the learning experience enjoyable for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3)	... involved me actively in the learning process.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4)	... contributed to a positive learning experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5)	... increased my interest in learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6)	... contributed to meeting my individual learning goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7)	... helped me to assume a level of personal responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8)	... helped me to make the learning process less threatening.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9)	... enabled me to gain more knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10)	... helped me to like the process of learning English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11)	... was an interesting intellectual activity for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12)	... enabled me to improve my speaking skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6

All participants are guaranteed anonymity.

APPENDIX 3. Analysis of the Videotaped Material

Students' Individual Presentations

Presenter Evaluation Form

Presentation Components	Evaluation / Comments
1. Eye contact (with the audience)	
2. Platform Skills a. Voice b. Volume c. Speed of delivery d. Tone/Level	
3. Gestures / Body Language a. Hand gestures b. Body positions c. Posture d. Use of stage space e. Handling of visuals/objects	
4. Other comments:	

APPENDIX 4. Analysis of the Videotaped Material
Students' Individual Presentations

Listener Evaluation Form

Listening Characteristics	Evaluation /Comments
1. Maintained eye contact.	
2. Appeared interested in what the speaker had to say.	
3. Avoided distracting mannerisms (e.g. shaking feet, fidgeting, etc.).	
4. Asked questions when necessary.	
5. Understood what the speaker was trying to say.	
6. Other comments:	

APPENDIX 5. Analysis of the Videotaped Material

Small Group Discussions

Observing the Learners

1. Was the level of the task appropriate for the level of the learners?

2. Were the Instructions adequate for the task?

3. Were the learners able to 'process' the task?

4. Were the learners able to 'perform' the task?

5. Was collaboration/interaction involved?

Comments on the language of 'task-doing' that you overheard: