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## Iranian university English learners' discursive demotivation construction

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### ABSTRACT

Investigating how foreign language learners' discourse mediates their demotivation construction is a relatively new area of inquiry. This paper examined the discursive construction of four (two males and two females) Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' demotivation at Shiraz University, Iran. Employing Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis framework, the present study revealed that demotivation is not uni-dimensional and static; rather, it is complex, multi-dimensional, and dynamic, which is discursively constructed in the constant interaction between the individual and the social context. Findings also indicated that the discursive construction of demotivation involved simultaneous interaction of multiple levels of learners' interpersonal relationships, their future self-guides, and factors in local and broader social, cultural and political milieus.

**Keywords:** demotivation; discursive construction; future self-guides; legitimation; critical discourse analysis

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## Introduction

The study of motivation began with the seminal work of Gardner and Lambert (1959) who studied motivation in the bilingual context of Canada. Following their lead, many researchers all over the world attempted to investigate motivation from different perspectives (e.g., Csizér & Kormos, 2008; Gao, Zhao, Cheng, and Zhou, 2007; Humphreys & Spratt, 2008; Neisi, 2007; Xu, 2010). In an attempt to uncover the complexity of the motivation construct, different scholars postulated diverse motivation theories (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Ushioda, 2009; Weiner, 1986; Williams & Burden, 1997). Dörnyei (2005), for instance, conceptualized the “L2 Motivational Self System” central concept of which is the *ideal self* which refers to the representation of the attributes that someone would ideally like to possess. A complementary self-guide is the *ought-to-self*, referring to the attributes one believes one ought to possess (Dörnyei, 2005).

Gradually, the concept of demotivation was also introduced to the field of motivation research. Demotivation or “the dark side of motivation” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 148) refers to “various negative influences that cancel out existing motivation” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 149). Recently, many researchers have tried to examine the sources of students’ demotivation (e.g., Alavinia & Sehat, 2012; Hirvonen, 2010; Hu, 2011; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Kim, 2011; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Sakui & Cowie, 2011; Seo & Kim, 2012; Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012; Tuan, 2011). Nevertheless, the majority of demotivation studies have employed quantitative methodologies rooted in positivist psychometric approaches. Of course, employing quantitative approaches is by no means problematic; however, a strong need is felt to complement the findings of those studies by employing qualitative approaches.

## Literature review

In comparison to motivation, demotivation used to be a more neglected and under-researched area of inquiry. However, recently, some researchers attempted to examine the negative factors which reduce or diminish students’ motivation. As an example, Tuan (2011) examined the difference between perceived demotivating factors by demotivated and motivated learners of English in Vietnam. Data were gathered using a 27-item questionnaire survey of 147 EFL learners. Seven factors which were perceived as demotivating by both groups were extracted: student-related factors, namely, self-esteem, experience of L2 failure, lack of chance to use L2 in reality, and classroom atmosphere and teacher-related factors, namely, test outside lessons, teachers’ skill, and teachers’ knowledge. Findings of the study also indicated that demotivated students perceived more demotivating factors and with higher intensity than motivated ones.

Employing a mixed-method study, Seo and Kim (2012) investigated Korean elementary school students’ (N = 6301) foreign language learning demotivation and their teachers’ (N=17) perception of student demotivation by administering a questionnaire. A decrease in all motivational constructs including instrumental, intrinsic, integrative, parental/academic extrinsic motivations was revealed as the students advanced throughout the school grades. The findings were further analyzed using interviews and open-ended questionnaires with 17 English teachers. They attributed the students’ demotivation to three elements: 1) the negative impact of the English teacher such as incongruence with students’ needs, teachers’ impatience, and disinterest in teaching and in their students, 2) excessive social expectation of English proficiency, and 3) the widening English proficiency gap among the students.

In the context of Iran, Tabatabaei and Molavi (2012) attempted to determine the demotives affecting EFL learning of Iranian Islamic seminary students (N = 50). Results indicated that factors such as the improper method of English teaching, frequency of classes in a week, problems in understanding listening materials and lack of use of English in students' real life were the essential demotivating factors among Iranian seminary students. The study made the distinction between the motivated and demotivated EFL learners possible.

In another study in the context of Iran, Sahragard and Alimorad (2013) investigated demotivating factors in public schools of Iran by administering a 48-item questionnaire to 194 Iranian high school students. Through a principal axis factor analysis, seven demotivating factors were extracted among which lack of self-confidence was a demotivating factor for many Iranian high school students, especially for less motivated ones. In contrast to the results of previous research, Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles were not a very strong source of demotivation in comparison to the rest of demotivating factors. The study also showed that both more and less motivated learners did perceive lack of school facilities as highly demotivating.

Reviewing the available literature on demotivation highlights some important points which deserve further attention. First, in the majority of cases, demotivation was conceptualized as a stable and constant construct which could be objectively observed, evaluated, and measured (e.g., Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Seo & Kim, 2012; Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012; Tuan, 2011). Second, context was defined as an independent background variable which was theorized to affect demotivation, but over which learners had no control (e.g., Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Tuan, 2011). Therefore, no attempt was made to examine the dynamic and complex interaction between the individual and the social context. Moreover, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has so far attempted to examine the mediating role of discourse in the construction of students' demotivation during an extended period of time. As Gu (2009, p. 308) rightly puts it, "it is through discourse that the individual engages with the social and it is also through discourse that the social is expressed by the individual". Considering the role of discourse in mediating Iranian EFL learners' demotivation construction, this longitudinal case study attempted to shed light on the micro and macro influences which contribute to their discursive demotivation construction. To this aim and underpinned by a critical and discursive approach, it represents an empirical attempt to investigate how demotivation is discursively constructed in learners' comments about their English learning experiences, paying attention to the unique political conditions of Iran and the present status of English as the world lingua franca. Additionally, it intends to examine how Iranian EFL learners' demotivation is dynamically constructed through discourse and how socially-situated factors affect learners' demotivation construction. An emphasis on the role of discourse might contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the individual and the learning context in the process of demotivation construction.

### **Theoretical and analytical frameworks of the study**

Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) view of discourse was drawn upon in this study. According to them, discourse constructs the meaning of the social world and it is never permanent, but formed and transformed through interactions with other discourses. From a broader social perspective, their discourse theory provides valuable theoretical insights examining discourse in a philosophical manner, but it offers little in the way of detailed analytical tools. To compensate for this, Fairclough's (2003) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which emphasizes the interaction between the individual and the social context and provides specific mechanisms for the analysis of discourse, was employed as the analytical framework of this study. The contextualization of the components of the model within broader social discourses is one function of the present study.

Fairclough's (2003) CDA framework comprises three dimensions: text (spoken or written), discursive practice (text production and interpretation) and social practice. At the text level, the construction of demotivation was examined through the participants' use of modality. Modality choices are important in the process of demotivation construction because "what you commit yourself to is a significant part of what you are" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 166). Modality expresses the speaker's/writer's degree of affinity with or affiliation to a proposition or a text. That is, modality reflects the extent to which speakers/writers commit to representations in terms of truth or necessity (Fairclough, 2003).

At the level of discursive practice, how, why, when, and where a text was produced were taken into consideration (Fairclough, 2003). At this level, the two strategies introduced by Fairclough (2003, p. 87) were focused upon, namely, "logics of difference and equivalence" and "legitimation". The logic of difference is a tendency "towards creating and proliferating differences between objects, entities, groups of people, etc." (Fairclough, 2003, p. 88) while the logic of equivalence refers to "collapsing or subverting differences by representing objects, entities, groups of people, etc. as equivalent to each other" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 88). The latter logic can be achieved by placing words of similar ideological import throughout one's text in order to strengthen a particular ideological effect (Laclau & Mauffe, 1985). According to Fairclough (2003), these two strategies play a vital role, both in establishing and cultivating belief systems and in justifying the elements related to social structures.

Attempting to elucidate the semantic relations people use to claim the legitimacy of their actions, Fairclough (2003) referred to the issue of legitimation introduced by other scholars such as van Leeuwen, (n.d.), and van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) (as cited in Fairclough, 2003). More recently, however, van Leeuwen (2008) broadened and elaborated on the concept of legitimation and this new conceptualization served as the basis of data analysis in the present study. According to van Leeuwen, speakers or text producers use different legitimation strategies to justify their own beliefs. Believing that language is the most important vehicle for legitimation, he introduced four major categories of legitimation, namely, authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis.

Among these four legitimation categories identified by van Leeuwen (2008), authorization was the only strategy employed by the present participants; therefore, it will be introduced in detail. According to van Leeuwen (2008), authorization refers to "legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 105). It consists of six categories: personal authority, expert authority, role model authority, impersonal authority, the authority of tradition, and the authority of conformity.

At the level of social practice, the following questions were posed: To what kind of discourse network the text belongs? What its ideological and hegemonic effects are on "systems of knowledge and belief, social relations and social identities?" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 238). Examples are presented and discussed in the findings section where data for individual participants are presented in chronological order in order to capture the developmental process of demotivation construction over time. During data analysis process, the researchers presented the findings to the participants and asked them to correct any probable misrepresentation of what they had intended to express.

## Research questions

This study reports on a qualitative case study of four university English language learners' demotivation construction by examining their interpersonal relationships in the immediate learning environment, their future self-guides, and their personal struggles in social norms, and their alignment with these norms and requirements. With an interest in investigating the mediating role of learners' language in demotivation construction and in establishing the link between demotivation and language in use, Fairclough's CDA framework (2003) was employed. Instead of providing a description of the different components that contribute to the participants' demotivation and identifying the correlation between demotivation and learning outcomes, this study attempts to address the issue of demotivation through the following research questions:

1. How is the participants' demotivation constructed as they engage with the immediate learning community and broader national educational contexts?
2. How is their demotivation constructed from their future self-guides?

## Method

### *The setting of the study and the participants*

Four Iranian informants volunteered to participate in this study. All of them were BA senior Shiraz University students studying English Literature in the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics in the college of Humanities. Hector, Alex, Sinati and Nikki (all pseudonyms) were all classmates and their average age was 21 years old. Hector and Nikki were from Shiraz, Iran.

Hector started studying English formally when he was eleven years old. He graduated from a well-known language institute (I1 hereafter) before attending Shiraz University. He had studied mathematics at high school. At the time of this study, he was teaching English in two language institutes in Shiraz. Alex's major at high school was also mathematics but he was not teaching English at the time of this study. He, too, had learned English in another well-known language institute in Shiraz (I2 hereafter) and had received his senior (intermediate level) degree before entering Shiraz University. He began studying English when he was thirteen years old. Nikki, the third participant, started her English studies in the same institute as Hector when she was ten years old and received her senior degree when she was in grade two at high school. She was an English teacher at the time this study was conducted, too. Sinati began studying English when she was sixteen years old in a language institute in her own city and continued learning English until the year before she entered university.

Among these four participants, Alex and Sinati had taken "English-only entrance examination" for entering university. In this specific type of exam, students are required to take only general high school courses exams, namely, English, Persian Literature, Arabic Language and theology. Additionally, they are tested on a 100-item English test, called "specialized English test". Such students are only allowed to choose majors related to English language such as English Literature, English Translation, Linguistics and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Hector, however, had participated in both English-only and engineering entrance examinations. But he chose English Literature because of not being able to acquire the passing score to study engineering at university. Nikki had also participated in both English-only and Dentistry entrance examinations but she had the same situation as Hector.

The researchers' own experiences as BA, MA and Ph.D. students of the same university, both as an insider and as an outsider, contributed to a better and more comprehensive understanding of these participants. Being Iranian and also the former students of the same university made them quite familiar with the context and the culture of the study and helped them understand the participants' experiences better. Additionally, their further education helped them better understand their self and their learning and life experiences.

#### *Instruments and data collection procedures*

The data were collected in spring semester in 2011. Interviews, emails, and diaries were the main instruments employed during data collection. Altogether, five individual interviews, each about thirty minutes long, were conducted. Additionally, all four participants completed diary entries on a weekly basis: sixteen diary entries with an average length of 300 words per entry. The researchers also sent a total of 20 emails, 5 emails to each of them.

The interviews, conducted every three weeks, were semi-structured with open questions. All of them were conducted in Persian to avoid the effects of the students' level of English proficiency and their main focus was on the participants' English language learning experiences, their future plans, their motivation (or lack thereof) at different stages of their life, and the factors that influenced their motivation especially those which had a negative influence leading to their demotivation or a reduction of their motivation. Regarding diaries, they were encouraged to note any critical incidents they faced in their daily lives not only those incidents related to English learning but also other ones related to other aspects of their lives. In order to establish rapport between the researchers and the participants, the email exchanges were not limited to English learning but included other topics such as interpersonal relationships, friendly messages, congratulation messages for specific days of the year and so on. In this way, the researchers tried to create a trusting atmosphere while maintaining a balance.

#### *Data analysis procedure*

The process of data analysis was gradual, recursive and ongoing; that is, data collection and analysis were performed synchronically. This allowed the researchers to constantly evaluate, reevaluate, and reformulate the theoretical framework of the study, its coded categories, and its research questions. As soon as an interview was conducted or an email was received, a preliminary analysis was performed leading to new questions which were then posed in subsequent email exchanges or interview sessions. Diary entries, interviews, and email exchanges were examined together in order to cross-refer to the various available data sources. As part of data analysis, the transcription of the interviews was a significant and complicated aspect of the study. In order to transcribe interviews, the researchers first listened carefully to one part of each interview and then transcribed and translated it into English. Attempt was made to reproduce the utterances as exactly as possible and in order to maintain the original flavor, translation was done verbatim. However, pauses, fillers, and vocatives were not represented exactly because the focus of this study was on the texts themselves. To this aim, strict attention was paid to preserving and recording grammatical and linguistic features since these features were vital in this study.

At the outset, the researchers indicated that the participants could use whichever language (English or Persian) they felt comfortable with. They, however, answered all of the emails in English but regarding diaries, only 25% were written in English and the rest of them in addition to the interviews were in Persian. The researchers, having access to the diaries, translated diary entries originally written in Persian using a translation procedure similar to that of the interviews. In order to check if the translations were the same as what they said in the interviews and they wrote in their diaries, the translations of both the interviews and the diaries were returned to the participants.

After transcribing and translating the gathered data, all of them were coded thematically. A range of key themes which contributed to the learners' demotivation construction emerged.

## Results

### *Interpersonal relationships and EFL demotivation construction*

One of the important factors contributing to the present informants' demotivation construction was their interpersonal relationships with other individuals including parents, teachers, peers and other individuals in the society such as their relatives, university staff, etc. Hector, for example, repeatedly remembered his former friends' advice while choosing English Literature as his major at the university. He sometimes felt regretful because of not paying attention to their ideas:

Most of my friends told me that English is not a good major; it is a means; it must not be a university major. It must be a means beside a university major. All people must know English; not as their field of study. When I wanted to choose this field, most of my friends told me not to do this. You have studied mathematics. Study engineering instead of English. (Originally in English)

The use of modal verbs as part of modality choices is very illuminating in this context. When talking about what his friends told him regarding the status of English in the real world, Hector made use of different modal verbs. According to what he expressed, he depicted his friends as strongly committed to the truth of the proposition that "English plays a peripheral role in people's lives". To convey this intention, he made use of "must" and "is" by maintaining that "English is not a good major", "it must be a means" and "all people must know English; not as their field of study". He talked about the supplementary role of English studies by identifying his friends as fully legitimized individuals capable of expressing such degree of certainty. Hence, his friends' remarks played an influential role in reducing Hector's motivation to continue his English studies in the future and led to his demotivation construction. In addition, Hector felt frustrated because of not accepting his friends' suggestions and, in fact, he tried to legitimize his own English learning demotivation by resorting to "role model authority", that is, as stated in the study, the mere fact that his friends believed in the complementary role of English was enough to legitimize his demotivation (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 107). He was not satisfied with English as his field of study at university and he explicitly stated this several times during his interviews.

Comparing and contrasting Shiraz University with I1, Hector claimed,

University is not as good as I1 at all. English is not as interesting for me as it was before. It is dull for me. In I1, we were very active in the classroom but here, it is not that intimate as it must be because there is a professor-student kind of relationship which is too formal. In I1, the atmosphere was very friendly. There, all of my classmates were fresh. Their English knowledge and their speaking ability were very good. Here, I think my classmates are not at that level. (Translated version)

If we consider the above short extract from a process point of view, we can observe that 'relations of meaning inclusion' or what is called 'hyponymy' in semantics (Fairclough, 2003, p. 101), are being set up. Hence, Hector made use of the two logics of equivalence and difference simultaneously by putting I1 and Shiraz University in a contrastive relation of difference. Here, the relations of meaning inclusion or hyponymy are being set up by elaborating the meaning of 'I1 learning community' in terms of 'interesting', 'active students in the classroom' and 'a friendly and intimate atmosphere'. These expressions can be regarded as co-hyponyms of 'I1 learning

community'; that is, the meaning of the latter includes those of the former and they are made equivalent to each other in this way. When such relations are being set up, "the meaning differences between these expressions are backgrounded, making them secondary in the present context" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 101). 'Shiraz University', on the other hand, is textured as co-hyponym of 'a dull learning community', 'inactive' and 'a too formal relationship between students and professors'. The former expressions are hyponyms of 'I1 learning community' while the latter ones are co-hyponyms of 'Shiraz University learning community'. On the other hand, the two lists of co-hyponyms of 'I1' and 'Shiraz University' are set in a contrastive relation of difference. This logic of difference is built up through the range of contrastive relational structures and expressions mentioned above.

It is worth mentioning that not only Hector, but also Alex, Sinati, and Nikki always compared and contrasted university learning community with that of the private institutes they had attended before entering university. Their interpersonal relationship with the English Department community was constructed in the same manner, that is, all of them detected a great sense of dissonance with the department's atmosphere, as reflected in their use of legitimating strategies to justify these, mainly, in their use of logic of difference to construct contrasts between university, on the one hand, and private institutes learning communities, on the other.

Nikki, on the other hand, talked about another kind of relationship. She remembered her being mistreated in the English department by one of the university staff. Asked about her relationship with the professors and other university staff, she answered rather angrily that she hated some of the responsible authorities because she had been treated harshly by one of them. She decided to give up studying English Literature or even to move to another country to continue her studies because of this misbehavior. In order to legitimize her decisions, she made use of the same logic of difference emphasizing the differences between university and her private institute:

Here, responsible authorities are not willing to listen to us. We have no voice in choosing what to study, how to study, and when to study. Everything is dictated to us and everything seems to be redundant here. Apparently, everything is a review of what we have learned in I1. Nothing more and nothing new. (Originally in English)

Nikki talked about English courses at the university in an uncertain manner by trying to lower her own commitment to the truth of her propositions. To convey her attitudes and reveal her uncertainty regarding the ultimate goal of what they are taught at the university, she made use of verbs such as "seems" and adverbs like "apparently". She felt that they were reviewing what they had learned before and this review was useless and boring for her. In fact, such an attitude towards English studies at the university contributed to her demotivation construction. However, it can be argued that because of enrolling in private institutes before being accepted at university, these participants' past identities constructed in the institutes learning communities are in conflict with their present identities which are being constructed at the university. In fact, these two identities are opposing each other. Hence, the learning community of the institutes created some expectations that are not apparently satisfied at the university.

Alex, however, talked about another kind of relationship having a negative influence on his motivation:

My family disagreed with me when I wanted to choose English as my field of study at university. My sister who is an English teacher discouraged me and told me that there was no suitable job for a BA in English. You should continue your studies up to the Ph.D. level but I think engineering is much better than English. (Originally in English)



Alex's sister's previous experiences as an English learner and her current experiences as an English teacher created a negative attitude towards English studies in her and she tried to persuade her brother not to follow the same route. She talked confidently about the uncertain and unfortunate future employment opportunities of a BA or even an MA in English as was evident in her statement of "you should continue your studies up to the Ph.D. level". Her use of non-modalized 'is' and the modal verb 'should' positioned her as a fully legitimized person capable of making such strong claims. Hence, her discourse contributed to Alex's reduction of motivation and his demotivation construction. Trying to legitimize this situation, Alex employed both what van Leeuwen (2008) called "personal authority" (p. 106) and "expert authority" (p. 107) since his sister is simultaneously a member of his family and an English teacher or an expert in this profession.

About her demotivation, Sinati stated,

Before entering university, I had another viewpoint regarding university. I've lost my motivation to study English because of the way it is taught in university. Here, we are not allowed to do anything ourselves; they limit us; for example, when they ask us to write something, they do not let us choose a topic ourselves and do not let us write based on our own style. They have chosen topics, styles, everything. They do not allow us to use our own creativity and imagination. In fact, they destroy our creativity at university. They make us do whatever they want. Everything is dictated to us. (Originally in English)

In the above extract, Sinati has set up a "dialogical" or "polemical" relation (Fairclough, 2003, p. 128) between "her and her friends' discourses" and the discourses of "others" who are, in fact, their professors. She criticized what their teachers did by setting up a different discourse in which 'university environment' was referred to by terms such as 'limiting', 'destroying creativity' and 'dictating everything'. In fact, university environment is reconstructed by using these key vocabularies. Therefore, two kinds of opposing identities are constructed in Sinati's statements: "they" versus "we". Through this discourse strategy, Sinati constructed an "otherization" of "they" when talking about university professors while locating herself in the mainstream discourse community of her classmates who share beliefs and ideas by continuously using "we" as opposed to "I". In fact, she found her beliefs in congruence with those of the mainstream discourse community.

It is worthy of notice that none of these participants had a negative attitude towards studying English; rather, they believed that knowing English is necessary for everyone. As a result, they contended that English could not be a major by itself and it must be learned as a supplementary skill along with other majors. As far as studying English was concerned, they believed it was a necessary skill that must be acquired along with numeracy and literacy skills.

#### *Future self-guides and EFL demotivation construction*

According to Dörnyei (2009, p. 4), if L2 proficiency is part of one's ideal or ought-to-self, "this will serve as a powerful motivation to learn the language because of our psychological desire to reduce the discrepancy between our current and possible future selves". This assumption was used in this section to analyze the participants' accounts. As revealed by the textual analysis of the data, participants' future self-guides had a strong influence on their demotivation construction. The only person, among all four participants, who was still decided to continue his English studies, was Alex. As mentioned above, in spite of his family's strong disagreement, he himself decided to study English at the university. Therefore, this might be a reasonable justification for his decision to continue his study. Among the remaining three, Hector and Nikki decided to change their majors for their MA. As mentioned in their diaries and interviews, they wanted to study Master of Business Administration (MBA). Nikki wrote:

I really don't like studying English as my major because we never learn anything useful for our everyday life or we cannot use our knowledge in the society and have an appropriate job. So, actually I am about to change my field for my MA. I wanna study some useful lessons which would help me throughout life, something like MBA. (Originally in English)

Nikki used conjunctions such as “because”, “so”, “or”, and “and” to establish the link between her future self-guides and social discourses. When talking about her experiences of learning English at the university, she used negative expressions such as “we never learn anything useful for our life”, and “we cannot use our knowledge in the society” but while talking about MBA, she used positive terms such as “useful lessons”, and “would help”. In fact, she used these positive terms to characterize her future self and to legitimate her choice. Additionally, she used both “I” and “we” throughout her account. While talking about her own feeling towards English and her own decisions, she used “I”, but in other instances, she utilized “we” to position herself in the mainstream discourse community of her peers who have the same or similar beliefs and to emphasize that her beliefs are in line with those of other students in the discourse community.

Sinati's future self was more influenced by historical processes and social practices. In fact, her future self which affected her demotivation was constructed in the interaction between historical processes and societal practices:

I like to continue my study in the field of English Literature but because of some political issues affecting the relationship between my country and the Western world, this field is not supported very much here, in Iran, and based on what one of my university teachers said, available jobs for English Literature are less than those for TEFL. (Originally in English)

A close look at her account reveals that her future self has been constructed through interactions between the personal and the social processes. Her decisions for her future job are influenced by macro-factors in the whole world, that is, political challenges between her own country and the Western world. This points to the fact that demotivation is not static and fixed; rather, it is socially and historically constructed. Alex, however, tried to legitimize his own demotivation in another way:

I thought university is very different and more interesting than this. Most of my friends want to change their major for their MA. They say what this major is? Most of them are regretful; 70% of them. I see this in their behavior, in their speech. They do not do their homework well. They do not attend their classes regularly. Most of them have studied the natural sciences and liked to be accepted for medicine but they have not been accepted, especially girls. They are now regretful. Most of the boys liked engineering. Boys have seldom been interested in this major. The humanities belong to girls altogether. (Translated version)

Alex tried to legitimize his demotivation by making a strong commitment to the truth of his propositions and by locating most of his classmates in the mainstream discourse community who have the same or similar beliefs. His non-modalized declarative statements point to his strong commitment to the truth of what he claimed. In fact, he textured his own identity as a fully legitimized person to make such strong claims. He signaled his high degree of affinity to and certainty of what he claimed by using non-modalized verbs such as ‘want’, ‘are’, and ‘liked’ as opposed to their modalized counterparts.

#### *Alignment with social discourses and EFL demotivation construction*

The influence of the social context of Iran on the participants' demotivation gradually became salient when they started to talk about their future careers after graduation from university. For instance, Alex's sister's warning that “there are no appropriate jobs for this major in the future” indicates that social conditions have a great influence on their demotivation to continue studying

English. In one of his interviews, Alex admitted “the humanities are not suitable for men; they are appropriate for women only. And men prefer to study engineering rather than English”. This apparent tension in Alex’s remarks represents the dialogic relationship between the individual and the society. He is, in fact, oscillating on a continuum with the social beliefs at one end and his own desires and values at the other. Some people believe that the humanities are suitable for females rather than males. Although this might not be a reasonable justification, it contributed to Alex’s demotivation construction.

However, it seems that one possible justification for such a belief is the consideration of the financial aspects of careers related to the humanities. These careers are usually less paid in Iran and people involved in these jobs do not earn much money in comparison to engineers or doctors, for example. The same tension was also experienced by Hector, Nikki, and Sinati. They all admitted that future English-related jobs would not provide them with enough money to manage a good and comfortable life. For this reason, they decided to change their major in the future and continue their studies in other areas of knowledge.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

There is a paucity of research in the area of EFL demotivation construction particularly when the construction is done through the interaction between the individual and the social context by employing the notion of discourse.

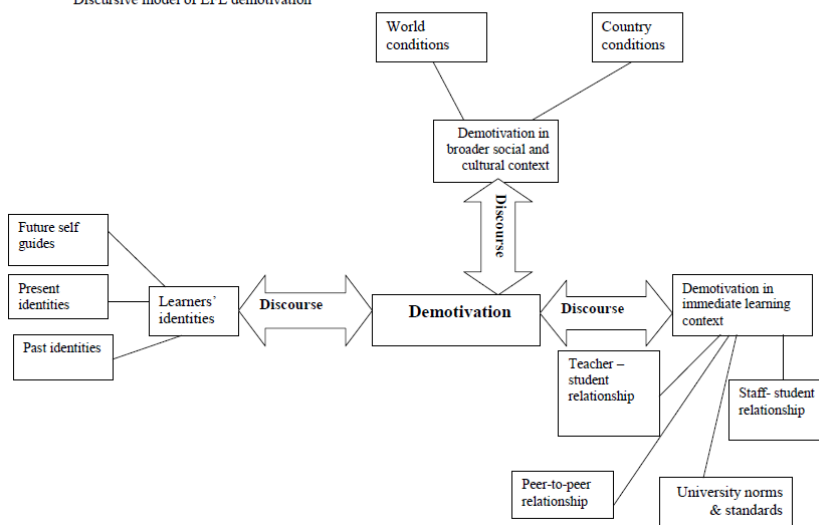
Attempting to answer the two research questions of this study, we found that these participants made use of different discursive strategies to legitimize their own demotivation. The two logics of equivalence and difference were set up simultaneously by these informants through relational structures and expressions of ‘meaning inclusion’ and ‘contrast’. Additionally, authorization was another major strategy utilized by them to legitimize their beliefs and behaviors. Their use of non-modalized verbs was also indicative of the fact that they viewed themselves as legitimized enough to make strong claims regarding their own and their friends’ demotivation construction.

By considering individual learners’ past and present English learning experiences, the environment where they were located, and the broad social and cultural context, demotivation was examined in an integrative and multidimensional model that is individually, historically, and socially constructed (Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates the integrative and multidimensional nature of EFL demotivation. EFL learners’ past and present experiences of learning constituted one of the dimensions affecting their motivational dispositions. Sometimes learners considered their past or present English learning experiences unpleasant or painful; in such situations, these memories did not form only learning experiences but also factors contributing to the gradual reduction of their motivation. These memories along with their future selves point to the historical nature of EFL demotivation. Their future selves themselves were influenced by the current social, cultural, and political conditions of their country. Additionally, their relationships with members of their families and other people in the society cannot be considered external influences devoid of negative effects on their motivation.

Contrary to the results of previous studies which viewed demotivation as an individual trait and identified its subcomponents while examining their accuracy, correlations, and causal relationships (e.g., Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012; Tuan, 2011), the present findings lent support to the dynamic nature of the construction of demotivation.

The present study employed a discursive approach to the study of demotivation in order to further explore the individual dimension of EFL demotivation and its interaction with the social and the cultural conditions. It is worth mentioning that all of the diverse factors identified influence demotivation simultaneously. That is, the broad social, cultural, and political conditions influenced EFL learners' English learning educational context at different levels of their relationships with their peers, teachers, and university staff along with their future selves and all of these factors played a vital role in their demotivation construction. The importance of the future financial support they receive in their life as well as the social status of English in their locale was shared by all four participants. Although they were all English learners from the same department, their processes of demotivation construction seemed to be distinct from each other because of the complexity of the factors contributing to their demotivation and the diverse degrees of their influence.

Figure 1  
Discursive model of EFL demotivation



One problem, however, was that all four participants were previously highly motivated learners who had graduated from private institutes and had received their senior degrees before being accepted at university. Future studies need to examine the process of demotivation construction of learners who are less proficient and who have not attended such institutes since, as observed in this study, their past experiences of English learning in those institutes greatly influenced their expectations of English learning which were not apparently satisfied at the university and led to a reduction in their motivation. Additionally, being proficient enough in English, they felt that their current learning practices were redundant and nothing new was added to their knowledge of English. To remedy such a situation, steps need to be taken in order to 'remotivate', (Cortazzi & Jin, 2013), such learners. In fact, motivation, demotivation, and remotivation are three points on the cycle of language learning experiences which are constantly turning into each other as the result of learners' constant interactions with various influencing factors in the local and broader social contexts.

In sum, this study specifically examined participants', as EFL learners, demotivation construction process through the discursive strategies they employed in their comments on their language learning experiences. Results indicated that demotivation is not a uni-dimensional and static

construct; rather, it is multi-dimensional, dynamic, and changing and is socially and historically constructed with the passage of time. The learners' past and present learning experiences in the immediate language learning context, their future selves as well as the macro- social and political factors all contribute to the construction of EFL learners' demotivation. Findings also revealed the complexity of the multitude of factors involved in EFL learners' demotivation construction along with the constant and complicated interaction among them. This is, in fact, a new area of investigation in the study of demotivation which merits further attention of researchers and practitioners all over the world.

The study may have some implications for practice including the following. First, it seems to be a good idea for teachers and practitioners to envisage ways to enhance their knowledge of the students' backgrounds in order to provide them with the necessary help and support. Second, the university curriculum needs to be made more up-to-date and more in harmony with societal changes. Third, we need to highly improve English teaching conditions of public high-schools. Fourth, university professors also need to weigh the importance of learning against just giving exams. The most important goal is, of course, student learning which needs to be achieved by, for example, providing students with the necessary feedback after they have taken an exam.

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