

İran'da EFL Derslerinin Sözlü İletişimi ve Beceri ve Motivasyon Stratejilerine Yönelik Bir Araştırma

An Investigation Towards Motivational Strategies In Oral Communicational Skills In Iranian EFL Classrooms

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ÖZET

İran'da İngilizce öğrenme tutkusu artmaktadır. İran'da resmi rakamlar yaklaşık 8 milyon öğrencinin ortaokul, lise, üniversite ve özel dil eğitim kurumlarında ikinci bir dil olarak İngilizce öğrenmekte olduğunu göstermektedir. İran'da 14 yaşından sonra İngilizce öğrenimi zorunludur ve öğrenciler orta öğrenim düzeyinden 18 yaşında kadar İngilizce öğrenimine devam etmektedirler. 7 yıllık İngilizce öğretiminden sonra öğrencilerin İngilizce konuşma becerilerinin çok sınırlı kalması dikkat çekicidir.

Bu makalenin konusu İran'daki EFL (orta öğretim) öğrencileri arasında üç yıllık İngilizce öğrenimleri esnasında, sekizinci yıl odaklı olmak üzere, motivasyonla ilgili tavsiyeler konusundaki bir araştırmadır. Bu makalenin amacı, Orta öğrenimdeki 3 yıllık İngilizce dersinde hedef dilde konuşmak ve iletişim kurmak olarak düşünülen sözlü iletişim becerilerinin önündeki engelleri araştırma ve İran'daki yabancı dil sınıflarında iletişimde karşılaşılan farklı motivasyon engellerini içeren bir literatür incelemesi sunmaktır. Ayrıca, İran'daki yabancı dil sınıflarında uygun motivasyon stratejilerini ortaya koymaktır. Daha sonra İran'da İngilizce öğretiminin arka planına ışık tutulacak ve İran'da İngilizce öğretiminin sorunlarını değerlendirdikten sonra, bazı pratik öneriler sunulacaktır.

Yukarıdaki konuları göz önüne alarak bu araştırmada görüşme ve anket olmak üzere iki yöntem kullanıldı ve hem öğrenciler hem de öğretmenlerden en güvenilir ve doğru dönütleri almak için 7 farklı okuldan 111 öğrenci ile çalışıldı. İran eğitim ortamında en güvenilir ve doğru sonuçların alınmasını için bu iki yöntemin kullanılması uygun görüldü.

Bu yolla, orta öğrenim esnasında öğrencilerin motivasyonunun mu azaldığını yoksa yöntemlerin mi öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarını karşılamadığını görmek istedik. Araştırmanın amaçlarına uygun olarak, bu araştırmada bilgi ve eylem için iki önemli entelektüel proje türü uygulandı ve aşağıdaki iki araştırma sorusuna cevap arandı:

- 1) İranlı öğrencileri yabancı bir dil olarak İngilizce konuşmaya ne motive etmektedir?
- 2) İran'daki sınıf ortamı için uygun motivasyon stratejileri nelerdir?

Bu araştırma, İranlı öğrencilerin anadil konuşan öğretmenlerden yararlanmadığı ve ana dili konuşmayan öğretmenlerinin konuşmanın önemi üzerinde yeteri kadar durmadıkları sonucunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu sonuç, Orta Doğu ülkelerinde benzeri yeni araştırmalar yapılmasını gerekli hale getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Motivasyon, öğrenme stratejileri, öğrenenin özerkliği, endişe, kaygı

Çalışmanın Türü: Araştırma

ABSTRACT

The last few decades have seen a revolution in the world of communication, and specifically over the last ten years a huge demand among countries to interact and communicate in many different fields such as export and import goods, political discussions, education, management, bank transactions, negotiations and many others. This rapid increase in communication between the countries of the World led them to progress their ability to communicate in English as the International Language (Holliday, 2005:1). Unfortunately this crucial ability seems to be being neglected in the Iranian Educational System. Learning English from the age of 14 is a compulsory course in Iran and students will continue the English course until the age of 18 at Secondary level. Surprisingly, after 7 years studying English their ability to make small conversation in English is shaky (Jahangard, 2007:30).

This article is concerned with an investigation into motivational recommendations among Iranian EFL students during their three year English Language studies, with the focus on year 8. The aim of this article is to explore the obstacles of oral communication skills which would be considered to be speaking and interacting in the target language among learners in their 3 year English course in Secondary school.

Not being able to communicate in English after studying for nearly 3 years at the Secondary level, students are still struggling to apply English in their daily conversations. A review of literature will be addressed in the subsequent sections, which reveals a clear definition of different types of motivation and also the obstacles in communication in foreign language classrooms in Iran. Additionally, the advantages and disadvantages of research models and their definitions are presented. To evaluate the quality, validity and reliability of the research I am going to collect central criteria from a number of standardizations. Ethical issues are used to guide the research and at the end of this article I will provide further implications to this research project.

Considering the above issues, two methods were used in this survey, which were interviews and questionnaires. From my experience, applying these two methods in the Iranian education environment would have the most reliable and accurate results.

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Additionally by employing these two methods I can explore the results and investigation in more detail. In view of the context of the survey, I wish to emphasize the research aims in the following paragraphs.

This research is aimed at revealing the appropriate motivational strategies in Iranian foreign language classrooms. In this way, I wished to see whether learners become less motivated during secondary school or whether the methods do not meet the learners' needs. In view of the research aims, two significant types of intellectual project were applied in this research: knowledge for understanding and knowledge for action (Poulson and Wallace, 2003:23).

Elaborating on the research aims, two research questions were suggested as follows:

- 1) What motivates Iranian students to speak English as a foreign language?
- 2) What are the appropriate motivational strategies for the Iranian classroom environment?

These research questions were established for two reasons. The first research question focuses on the motivational skills to persuade Iranian learners to speak and to interact more in English as their second language and the second question focuses on the most suitable ways to teach within Iranian classrooms.

In the view of the above research questions, it is clear that Iranian learners are always struggling with oral skills, in and out of the school environment. To investigate the main reasons for this lack of motivation among students I am going to focus on 111 students from 7 different schools in order to achieve the most reliable and accurate feedback from both learners and teachers.

Moreover, learners are not only responsible for not being able to communicate in English after these years; the teachers and the design syllabus are also having an effect. According to the survey results, speaking is not appreciated by teachers in Iranian classrooms compared to the reading, writing and listening skills. This tragedy is also caused by not having native speakers in Iranian schools. Which, this catastrophe is affecting the learners' oral skills more than the other skills, and also, the course time is not sufficient to improve the students' speaking skills. In the light of all these points, I wish to investigate the lack of communication among Iranian students.

The fact that Iranian students are not able to benefit from native speakers and their non-native teachers are not focusing on the values of speaking in this modern society, led this survey to a new investigation in Middle Eastern countries. This survey researched an area that has rarely been explored; therefore I hope this investigation can introduce a real view of Iranian foreign language classrooms.

In Iran, the fever for learning English is rising. Official figures state that about 8 million learners are currently learning English as a foreign language at junior and high schools, universities, and private language institutes (Roshd FLT, 2008:15). However, despite this growth, there is little literature on the practical aspects of these classes available. In the Literature review section of this dissertation I am going to throw light on the problems and a brief background of teaching English in Iran, starting with a summary of some key notions about the current discipline in Iranian schools, according to Iranian and international teachers and authors. After evaluating the problems of English teaching in Iran, some practical suggestions are presented for improvements.

Learning and being able to communicate in English as a second language (ESL) is increasing rapidly in Iran. Generally, the instruction is structural and the pedagogical focus is, consequently, on the grammatical features of English. As Norozi Khiyabani believes, structural and grammar-translation methods of teaching are most common, and change is resisted. By applying the Grammar Translation Method, the best results will be achieved in the written exams where learners are able to spend more time answering the questions by referring to their grammatical knowledge which roles have been emphasized by their teachers (Krashen & Terrell, 1983:130).

Key words: Motivation, Learning strategies, learner's autonomy, anxiety, concern

The type of research: Research

INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with outlining the plan for an investigation into motivational recommendations among Iranian EFL students. The aim of this topic is to explore the obstacles related in oral communication skills.

A review of literature will be addressed in the subsequent sections which reveal a clear definition of different types of motivation and also the obstacles in communication in foreign language classrooms in Iran. Additionally, the advantages and disadvantages of research models and their definition are presented. To evaluate the quality, validity and reliability of the research I am going to collect central criteria from a number of standardizations.

I am going to structure this research project under the following subheadings: Context, Literature Review, Scope of Research, Selected Research Models, Selected Research Instruments, Ethical Issues, Validity and Reliability and further research implications.

CONTEXT

This research has been conducted in ten guidance schools and 12 secondary schools in my home town, Kerman city, where all of the teachers are non-native speakers and pupils begin their first level of English at the age of 12. There is no specific English proficiency assessment; consequently all of the students start learning English from a variety of different levels of English with a particular teacher for one year. The

designed course book's target is to promote students' fundamental skills in grammar and vocabularies and fulfilling the learner's need in understanding the deep structure of the target language. As a result pupils can gain a great number of rules and regulations in the target language without adequate communication activities, therefore this process of learning will become worthless and learners will no longer benefit.

By analyzing the data collection of this survey I have realized that at the beginning of the English courses Learners are full of enthusiasm with a high level of motivation but as they become more involved with learning materials they become more de-motivated and less enthusiastic towards their books. The teacher's behavior during classes is one of the main factors in motivating students in the classroom which could currently be argued to be an issue in Iran.

Teachers are the most dominant person in the classroom in terms of power relations and learners are the only listeners in the class. Teacher-student and student-teacher interaction happens very rarely and the only criteria to evaluate learners' English proficiency are examinations in a test-based system. The pedagogy is therefore teacher-led and didactic. When I was teaching in 'Kish' Institutes in my home town, I noticed that the majority of learners are quite good at examinations and written skills but when it comes to speaking and communication abilities they are deficient. This, therefore, draws my attention in examining to what extent motivational strategies are important, in order to enable pupils to speak and communicate during foreign language lessons.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE CONCEPT OF MOTIVATION AND DIFFERENT TYPES OF MOTIVATION

“Motivation, without question, is the most complex and challenging issue facing teachers” (Schiedecker and Freeman 1999; p116). Motivation in terms of scientific definition is like an umbrella which covers a wide range of factors, causing psychologists to decrease the general identifications of motivation in order to be able to explain the importance of this persuasive element in people's lives and actions (Dornyei, 2001; p9). To describe motivation we may not be able to explain the exact concept. For example, it is impossible to see or touch air but we are aware of the necessity of it, and it is obvious that we cannot live without air, the same is true for motivation, and it is more convenient to describe motivation on the surface than any deep explanation. (Dornyei, 2001; p7). My personal view of motivation is that to be determined enough to carry on and struggle with all the obstacles, goals and aims have to be satisfied and motivated in an appropriate direction (Brown, 2000; p160).

According to Gardner, one of the pioneer researchers in this field, learning will not be accessible without motivational factors. To identify the range of different reasons, Gardner categorized them in two variations: Instrumental and Integrative (Gardner and Lambert, 1959 cited in Dornyei, 2001; p49). One of the values of integrative motivation is to generate success among learners and instrumental motivation can also bring success and accomplishment. Therefore in the field of learning a second language, learners can have both Integrative and Instrumental motivations simultaneously in order to facilitate and accelerate their learning process (Ellis, 1994; p509).

It is argued that students are more likely to learn when they appreciate the value of classroom activities (not only in the foreign language classroom, but also in any kind of classroom), and when they believe that they will succeed if they apply reasonable effort. Hence, student motivation to learn is an acquired competence developed through general experiences but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction by others, especially teachers and parents (Broghy, 1986; p40). Teachers in this specific research topic (motivational strategies in EFL classrooms) have the biggest effect on learners' autonomy and self-motivation which seems to be becoming neglected in foreign language classrooms in Iran as we are faced with a number of students who are not encouraged to speak and participant in class activities. Is it because of the teacher's incompetence or lack of understanding of the benefits of alternative pedagogical strategies? Or is the designed course books related to learners' desire? It is my intention to investigate these concerns in this research assignment.

APPROPRIATE TEACHER BEHAVIOUR WITH GOOD STUDENT RAPPOR

Iranian learners prefer to have someone as a leader in the classroom as they have been guided for most of their lives. Therefore, teachers are the dominant controllers in the classroom and their behavior has a formative and motivational effect on students (Dornyei, 2001:120). Teachers need to be aware of their significant role and act accordingly by creating a friendly environment in the classroom where students can express their feelings with respect and trust.

According to Alison (1993), the main factor in this regard is to establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the learners, by means of talking with them on a personal level. He believes that this mutual trust could lead to enthusiasm, but unfortunately implementing Alison's proposal is somehow impossible in Iranian culture. Considering my own experience, talking with students on a personal level and getting down to their level has led to failure because students did not have the capacity to be given a high amount of freedom and unfortunately little by little, they forgot the teacher-student relationship and they began to misbehave. Consequently, they no longer obeyed their teacher and became more and more disrespectful. Therefore, creating a friendly environment without getting down to the students' level would be an inappropriate approach in Iranian schools.

SUPPORTIVE ATMOSPHERE TO INCREASE THE SELF CONFIDENCE OF PUPIL

Learning should take place in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere (Good & Brophy, 1994:215). Unfortunately, the following strategy is weakly implemented in Iranian schools as most of the students don't feel comfortable enough to express themselves and their opinions. The tense classroom climate in the majority of the Iranian schools can also undermine learning and de-motivate learners (MacIntyre, 1999 and Young, 1999).

Socio affective strategies can also help learners regulate and control confidence emotions, motivations, and attitudes towards learning by helping learners learn through contact and interaction with others. For instance, language learners can decrease their anxieties by using some mental techniques and solve the problems through teacher-student or peer interactions (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). As the result, socio affective strategies can be regarded as a useful approach for Iranian learners to accelerate their speaking competence and skills and vigorously interact with their classmates and also their teachers in the ESL classroom.

A COHESIVE LEARNER GROUP CHARACTERIZED BY APPROPRIATE GROUP NORMS

As the dominance of GTM group learning is the most neglected activities in Iranian foreign language classrooms. Students have been taught individually throughout their educational life and they are not accustomed to group norms. This problem may not have a significant effect in learning other subjects such as Math or Science but it has caused many deficiencies in learning English as a second language. Today, many English institutes have realized the necessity of group learning and they are trying to implement it in their learning processes (Roshd FLT, 2008:36).

There are several factors that promote group cohesiveness, such as time spent together and shared group history, learning about each other during the class, interaction between teachers and students, intergroup competition, common threat, and active presence of the leader (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998: 142). Therefore, teachers need to apply each and every one of these steps before commencing the group learning strategy, but like other strategies this approach needs to be adapted to the Iranian learning environment before applying it.

Finally and importantly, more efforts should be concentrated on helping Iranian students' motivation to learn English-speaking competence. Iranian Second Language Teachers need to provide students with practical practice and reinforcement of the use of schizo-affective strategies, such as co-operating with classmates and teachers. These activities can hopefully increase learners' motivation and efforts to master English-speaking competence (Kinoshita, 2003).

Iranian language learners should integrate socio affective strategies not only in the classroom contexts and environment but also in their everyday life by looking for opportunities to have conversations with

their friends and also their English teachers. Teachers can encourage learners with a reward when performing well in speaking English also asking questions in English can effectively help learners to stimulate their motivation to master English-speaking competence. (Chamot, 1999)

LEARNER SATISFACTION AND AUTONOMY WITH REWARDS AND GRADES

Learner satisfaction is certainly the best motivational strategy that can be implemented in Iranian schools. In the process of motivating students, the first step is to motivate them with rewards. This will bring them into the process and then we can go beyond that and satisfy them. In order to increase learner satisfaction, we should allow students to display and perform their work, and consequently allow them to celebrate their achievements and always give them a feeling of pride and confidence. As a matter of fact, grades mostly focus on the performance of learners, rather than the learning and the process itself (Covington, 1999:127).

To create learner autonomy, many educationalists believe that if we take responsibility for learner's learning process and give them the ability of independent learning, as a result, we can expect a beneficial achievement in learning. In fact, humanistic psychology is that the only type of learning that effectively increases the learning criteria is being self-discovered (Rogers, 1961:276). Additionally, learners by being self-discovered and by reaching the autonomic satisfaction will be able to enhance their motivation capacity; therefore autonomy is an essential skill for learners to have and should be more properly is considered as a possible educational goal (Rather cited in Little, 1991). At last, a fuller and deeper attention needs to be pictured to the learner's autonomy with an emphasis on the socio-cultural context. Unfortunately the learner's voice seems to be excluded from the teachers and professional discussions through the all over the World therefore a clear reflection of the learning procedure among learners and also the opportunity of expressing their own views on how and what they are learning is strongly required (Palfreyman & Smith, 2003: 259).

RESEARCH MATERIALS & INSTRUMENTS

MATERIALS

Participants of the intended study are including 101 Iranian EFL learners who are studying at the schools of the second educational district of Kerman City, Iran. Two high schools, one guidance school, and one pre-university school are randomly selected. Seven English teachers, working at the mentioned schools also are taking part in the study. In order to carry out the study, a ten item questionnaire is developed considering the features of the educational systems of the country and making reference to some of the conditions of motivation listed by Oliva (1992) and principles of improving motivation proposed by Chastain (1998). The questionnaire will be given to the students in Farsi (their native language) and for the translated version to be reliable; the questionnaires are going through a translation - re-translation process.

INSTRUMENTS

The second instrument of the study is a semi-structured interview, which includes eight questions driven from the above mentioned resources. The questionnaire is administered to the students in their English class and they will have enough time to answer the items and ask any possible questions they might have. To ensure the subjects' maximum understanding, the questionnaire is written in the participant's native language, Farsi. The teachers' interview is also in Persian and the questions are asked before the teachers go to the class. Collecting a 'captive audience' (in this research, pupils and teachers) is one the best ways of enabling the researcher to administer their questionnaire and interviews (Kumar. 1996; 113). On the other hand, there are some drawbacks related to these methods of data collection. For example, in questionnaires, like many other methods the evaluation occurs after the event, therefore participants may forget important issues. Also, since the questionnaires are standardized, it is not possible to explain any ambiguities in the questions that participants might misinterpret. By piloting the questions on a small group of students, or at least friends and colleagues, this may be solved.

Additionally, respondents may answer superficially especially if the questionnaire takes a long time to complete with too many questions to answer. The common mistake of asking too many questions should be avoided in order to have the most reliable answers from the respondents.

There are some disadvantages in using interviews for research data collection purposes. For instance, the interviewer can affect the data if she/he is not consistent. Also the interviewer's views might affect the interviewer's responses. This bias happens mostly when the interviewer guides the responses by using verbal signals; consequently the responses will not be reliable or logical. Compared to questionnaires, interviews are more costly and time consuming (Louis & Lawrence, M & Keith, M.2000; pp246-262).

To research this topic I devised the following questions:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What motivates Iranian students to speak English as a foreign language?
- 2) What are the most appropriate motivational strategies for the Iranian classroom environment?

DATA ANALYSIS

Elaborating on what motivates Iranian students to speak English, the participants in this research paid most attention to the purpose and aim of the course. As the value of second language learning has been neglected for the majority of learners, consequently they are not any more interested to carry on the learning process. According to the data analysis, the main responsibility of the teachers and also of the government is to increase the value of the English language among learners and make the materials of the books more relevant and practical to the real world of English and communication. Another urgent need for the education system in Iran is to increase teachers' level of English proficiency. Teachers themselves are recommended to speak in the target language and to increase their personal knowledge in this regard in order to be able to transfer their knowledge to the students. It can be also learned from the interviews that the participants lacked speaking activities. To tackle this issue the role playing activity seems to be tremendously beneficial for learners. I myself have the experience of this activity in my EFL classes and it worked extremely well.

Research Question 2: *What are the most appropriate motivational strategies for the Iranian classroom environment?*

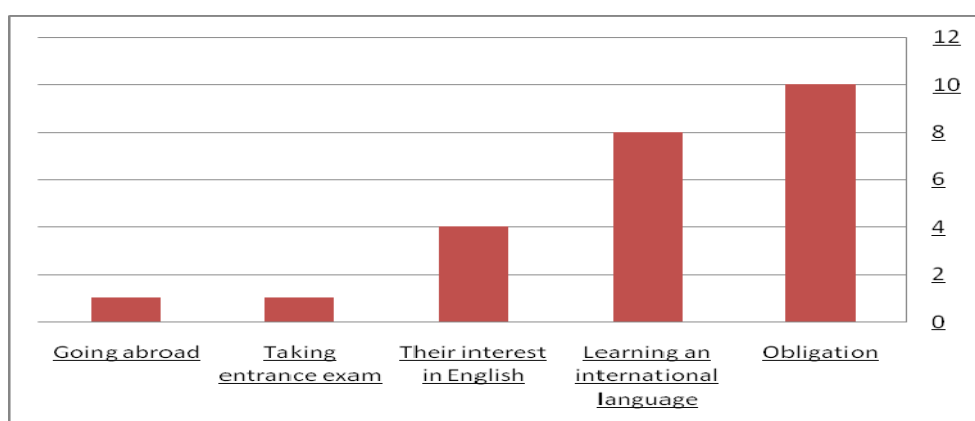
Through the interviews with teachers, nearly all of the teachers had the same opinion of utilizing a more accurate method of teaching rather than the grammar translation method. Students were also suffering from this old method as in this method the least attention has been paid to interaction and communication, which means that speaking skills will never be promoted. The task-based method, as used elsewhere in European countries, has been one of the most popular methodologies among both teachers and learners, this has to be employed in Iran in order to create a more interactive environment to the EFL classes. In Iran most of the teachers would prefer to use the method of teaching that they have been taught by, therefore GMT is still one of the main methods to be taught with. As Harmer indicates, the most beneficial methodology for learners is the method that gives the learners a sense of active learning. He also asks teachers to use the method according to the learners' background first and then teach them in an active and dynamic atmosphere (Harmer, 2001).

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DATA

Aims of learning English:

For example regarding question number one:

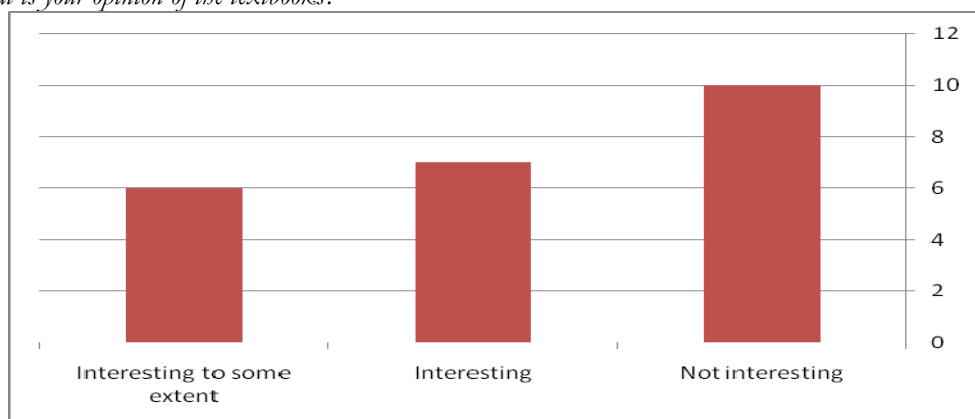
- 1) *What do you think is the aim of the English Language course?*



As it is clear from the figures above, vast majority of the students are somehow forced into the EFL classes as the aims of the course are not clear for them. According to their responses the most significant reason to study English is to pass the final exam and take the next step. This has not been clarified for students whether this course is designed to promote the oral skills of students or it is a criterion for only assessing their English proficiency at the end of their course as an exam based assessment. Although some of them have mentioned the necessity of English as the International language but I still the value of learning second language was not properly justified. Surprisingly one of the students said I love Learning English and I know how important is to be able to communicate in this language but I have to put more efforts in the other subjects like Math and Science rather than the English because they are the main criteria for universities entrance exam in Iran. Therefore, the value of English learning is becoming less important as the main concern of learners is to get the universities.

According to question number seventeen:

17) *What is your opinion of the textbooks?*



They specifically referred to the graphics and pictures of the book, saying that they could be much more attractive, nearly half of the students believed that the materials are too old to read and understand. One of the teachers who has been to English speaking countries before said that some of the examples of the books are based on the old fashion way of speaking of Western countries which is totally irrelevant to the way that Westerners are speaking now a days. Most of the teachers believed that the textbook materials were not tangible and are not consistent with real life situations. Some of the teachers tried to put the learners in real situations by relating the readings and dialogues of the textbooks to their real life to make the materials more fascinating for learners in order to motivate them to pay more attention to their textbook materials.

Moreover, both teachers and students were complaining about the impracticality of the sources. They do not appear related to real life which makes them less useful to read and little by little learning quality

diminishes. This can be the most catastrophic issue in EFL classrooms and EFL textbooks. One student asked me a very interesting question about the alcoholic drinks. Apparently they had a dialogue to present and the conversation was happening in a pub in England. Words like: cheers, beers, pints and top up was the most ambiguities part of the conversation. As Iran is an Islamic country, drinking alcohol is banded and there is no Pub and Disco in this country therefore, how we expect learners to memories and learn the words and places which they have never ever heard of them and never been there. This can make learners little by little less motivated and interest in the language learning.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the results of the interviews and the questionnaires of this survey proved that the most significant factors of not being motivated in learning a second language among Iranian learners is that there is no eager, enthusiasm and desire toward learning a second language. The majority of the participants were agreed that there is no need and necessity of learning another language in Iranian society. They can easily manage their social lives without engaging with any kind of languages part from Persian. There is no TV program in English or other languages and the newspapers are all published in Persian. In the sake of political issues, internationally travelling happens extremely rare and if it happens the least communication will happen during the journey. When I asked the students, why they are so unwilling in learning English, they all believed that learning English as a second language cannot change their future and careers and would not bring any benefits to their daily lives in the country of Iran.

Referring to the student's interview's results, there are variety of issues and problems which they need to be concerned about such as: poverty, housing, future life, job issues and marriage where language learning does not seem to be helpful in sorting these issues out.

However, the necessity of learning English for minority of the participants were clear enough but these minor population are associated to the very upper level of the society which belongs to the 10 percent of wealthy and posh level of the society. My concern is not to deal with the social issues in this research but to add something new to this research, there is an essential demand from Iranian families in regard of having the basic welfare for living. I would like to draw the government's attention to these essential issues among families in Iran to give them the chance of improving and enhancing their life's situation, which consequently more and more motivated and determined students will find out the benefits of learning in general and language learning will hopefully become more respected and appreciated.

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