

## An Investigation into the Demotivating and Remotivating Factors among Iranian MA and PhD Exam Candidates of TEFL\*

**Ali Derakhshan (corresponding author)\*\***

Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran.

**Mohammad Qafouri\*\*\***

MA in TEFL, Department of English and Literature, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran.

**Maryam Faribi\*\*\*\***

PhD Candidate in TEFL, Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran.

### Abstract

Learning outcomes will highly increase if barriers are identified and removed appropriately. Since demotivating factors can affect the learning process negatively, regaining the lost interest of learners leads to higher levels of academic achievement. Demotivation has been referred to as low motivation instead of being an independent concept on its own on the one hand, and the demotivating factors related to PhD exam candidates have not been taken into consideration so far on the other hand. As a result, this research attempted to examine both the demotivating and remotivating factors in the Iranian milieu, for which 100 MA and 78 PhD exam candidates from various universities took part in our study. The participants filled out a validated demotivating questionnaire for data collection, and 15 MA and 20 PhD participants participated in a semi-structured interview, encompassing five open-ended questions. The multivariate analysis of ANOVA depicted a significant difference between the most demotivating factor (economic problems) and the least demotivating one (curriculum decisions). Moreover, the data provided by the participants were analyzed to reduce the effect of these factors. Identifying the demotivating factors and trying to neutralize their negative effects by considering the remotivating options enables the policymakers to help the students move towards academic satisfaction which in the long run leads to their psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** *Motivation, Demotivating Factors, Remotivating Factors, MA Exam Candidates, PhD Exam Candidates, Positive Psychology*

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\*\*E-mail: a.derakhshan@gu.ac.ir

\*\*\*E-mail: Qafouri\_m@yahoo.com

\*\*\*\*E-mail: m.faribi69@yahoo.com

## 1. Introduction

The term ‘motivation’ has received considerable attention within the realm of the second language acquisition (SLA) research (Dörnyei, 1990; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Samsibar & Naro, 2018; Syukri & Humaera, 2019; Warden & Lin, 2000). Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) have defined motivation as “the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out” (p. 65). Dörnyei (2001) elaborated on this concept by asserting that it is the answer to the question of “why people decide to do something, how long they sustain the activity, and how hard they pursue it” (pp. 231-246). Furthermore, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) considered motivation the essential component of individual differences in relation to language learning outcomes. For instance, Trang and Baldauf (2007) noted that it directly influences students’ efforts in classrooms, their use of L2 learning strategies, their interaction with classmates, as well as their general proficiency, and L2 maintenance skills.

Keeping students motivated throughout the entire course of language learning is essential. This is heavily due to the complexity and dynamism of second language acquisition (Ellis, 2008). According to Wlodkowski (2008), motivated students “are more psychologically open to the learning material and better able to process information” (p.7). Additionally, motivation helps the individuals overcome language learning obstacles attentively and persistently, leading to the joy of doing and experiencing an activity (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). However, shedding light on the dark side of motivation reveals that the garden is not that rosy.

Notwithstanding the abovementioned concerns, when motivation declines, two scenarios may occur. The first one is called ‘demotivation’ that Dörnyei (2005) defined as “special external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behavior intention or an ongoing action” (p.143). The classroom milieu, teaching conditions,

teachers' behavior, and some other factors are regarded as those mentioned forces (Haryanto, Makmur, Ismiyati, & Aisyah, 2018). Although a person may be motivated at first, negative external influences can result in losing motivation afterward (Hassaskhah, Mahdavi Zafarghandi, & Fazeli, 2015).

Secondly, leaving the demotivating factors untouched gradually leads to a more negative and harsh state called 'amotivation'; that is, the complete loss of motivation (Balkis, 2018; Bonta, 2019). To cope with this issue, scholars have attempted to find solutions to refill students' motivation through the process of 'remotivation', which has been considered as the process of bringing back the L2 learners' lost or reduced motivation (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Falout, 2012). In this regard, care must be taken when studying the demotivating factors as Carpenter, Falout, Fukuda, Trovela, and Murphey (2009) mention that "there is no one-size-fits all motivational strategy package suitable for the students who arrive in our classrooms carrying their unique baggage, packed with various experiences, attitudes and beliefs about their language learning journeys" (p. 9).

While the demotivating factors have been clearly identified and documented in the literature, remotivation is still in its infancy, and it has been mostly examined regarding just school students and BA ones. Moreover, it is obvious from the available literature that both demotivation and remotivation have received relatively less attention compared to motivation. To the best of our knowledge, there have been similar efforts regarding the status of demotivation among university students in Iran (Ghadirzadeh, Hashtroudi, & Shokri, 2012; Sahragard & Ansaripour, 2014; Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012); however, the observed gap was that no attempts have been made for studying this construct among individuals that have finished their BA and MA and are preparing themselves to participate in the Iranian entrance exam for entering to the Iranian universities. More specifically, this sample was selected since BA and MA graduate students are usually hesitant to continue their studies in Iran due to many factors which are investigated in this research. In this regard, the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the demotivating factors among MA and PhD candidates of TEFL with regard to their frequency and order of importance in the context of Iranian universities?
2. With regard to the existing demotivating factors, what are the remotivating factors as proposed by the TEFL students themselves?

## 2. Literature Review

The terms motivation and demotivation have paramount significance due to researchers' paying a great amount of attention to the affective requirements of students these days. Motivation has been defined as "some kind of internal drive that pushes one to achieve something" (Harmer, 2001, p. 51). According to Ushioda and Dörnyei (2011), this concept explains the causes of conducting something, the amount of attempt someone makes, and the time that a person needs to do that activity. However, demotivation is newer, which "is concerning specific external forces that reduce or cancel out the motivational basis of the behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143). Although the majority of the previous studies have been conducted on the destructive forces, there is a dearth of research on those aspects of psychology which can help people to become successful even in inappropriate situations (MacIntyre, & Mercer, 2014). In other words, different problems such as depression, anxiety, and disorders have been the main focus of psychology so far; however, treating other constructs such as optimism, hope, resilience, and grit through the lens of positive psychology (PP) is considered relatively new (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2019). More specifically, the reactions of individuals to survival behaviors have been restricted to negative emotions, which have deleterious effects (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Instead of focusing on what goes wrong as psychology always does (Lopez & Snyder, 2009), Peterson (2006) defined positive psychology as "the scientific study of what goes right in life" (p.4), because "good health requires more than the absence of illness" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). It is worth mentioning that ignoring problems is not the main goal of PP as it attempts to show how people can overcome difficulties by thinking

positively (Held, 2004). That is why this study has emphasized not only the demotivating factors but also the ways to motivate the lost motivation. Knowing the factors that decrease the amount of motivation on the one hand (demotivating factors), and being aware of those activities which can recover the lost motivation (remotivating factors) on the other hand, can enable the students to overcome their academic drawbacks and lead them toward more academic satisfaction and personal well-being.

Since a plethora of studies have investigated motivation in relation to a variety of variables (Hwang & Duke, 2020; Pintrich, 2003; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2012), the role of the demotivating factors and the ways of motivating the demotivated learners worth more consideration. Oxford (1998) was one of the first researchers who inquired about the demotivating factors in her L2 studies. She asked 250 American students to write stimulated recall essays based on several writing prompts. Data analysis of her study revealed four broad sources of demotivation among L2 learners, namely “teacher’s personal relationship with the student, the teacher’s attitude towards the course or the material, style conflicts between teacher and students, and the nature of the classroom activities” (p.559). Since her findings had led to the conclusion that ‘teacher’s role’ is the most demotivating source, other factors were left unexplored. On the other hand, Ushioda (1998) asked a group of participants to determine the demotivating factors playing role in students’ L2 learning without identifying any prompts. The results of this study indicated the negative aspects of the ‘institutionalized milieu’ as the main source of demotivation.

In another attempt, Muhonen (2004) conducted a content analysis of 91 ninth graders. He also investigated the relationship between gender and level of achievement. The study revealed ‘the teacher’, ‘learning material’, ‘learner characteristics’, ‘school environment’ and ‘student’s attitude’ toward English as the five major influential demotivating factors. More precisely, ‘the teacher’ was regarded as the most dominating factor of all. Furthermore, Keblawi (2005) referred to ‘teacher-related’ factors as the main sources of demotivation, and

Tanaka (2005) confirmed this argument by stating that teachers have effects on both motivation and demotivation of learners to a large degree.

In another study, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) administered a 35-item questionnaire among 656 Japanese high school students to find out the sources of demotivation among this group. They enlisted 'learning contents and materials', 'teachers' competence' and 'teaching styles', 'inadequate school facilities', 'lack of intrinsic motivation' and 'test scores' as the major sources. The less motivated learners indicated 'lack of intrinsic motivation' and 'test scores' as the most influential factors.

On the other hand, Carpenter et al. (2009) targeted 285 Japanese university students from different majors and asked them to complete a motivation scale, write their learning histories, and complete a questionnaire. Their results revealed the following factors: 'the difficulty of classes/low comprehension', 'dissatisfaction with teaching method', 'dissatisfaction with teacher', 'boredom with lessons', 'entrance exam focus', 'negative feelings regarding ability to learn/competence', and 'lack of relevance or lack of interest in topic' for them. Not only did Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009) investigate these factors during one's learning an L2, but also they found the effect of past demotivating elements on the present proficiency. The findings depicted 'internal and behavioral reactions' as the most important factors in one's future learning.

Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi (2011) were the first to explore the demotivating factors in the Iranian context. Their study was designed to investigate the issue at the three levels of education, i.e.; junior high school, high school, and university. They considered other factors such as gender difference and levels of education in parallel with the demotivating factors by administering a 35-item questionnaire among 327 students. The factor analysis of the study identified 'the teacher' as the number-one demotivating factor along with 'learning contexts', 'materials and facilities', 'attitudes towards second language learning', 'the experience of failure', and 'attitude towards English speaking community'.

The next attempt of exploring demotivation in Iran was reported in Meshkat and Hassani's (2012) study, in which the demotivating factors for 421 second and third graders of four high schools in Qom were investigated. 'Lack of school facilities', 'overemphasis on grammar', 'long passages', and 'expectancy to use grammatically correct English in the classroom' were reported to be the major demotivating factors. In the same year, Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) found that 'teacher's behavior' was the most demotivating factor; however, 'reduced self-confidence' was reported as a vital demotivating factor among high school students (Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013). On the other hand, the construct of 'institution-related issues' was regarded as the most influential factor among English major students (Hassaskhah et al., 2015).

Taking remotivation into consideration, Sahragard and Ansaripour (2014) sought to unravel the demotivating and remotivating factors among Iranian MA students of TEFL. Their findings revealed that 'economic problems' was the most salient demotivating factor. It was indicated that if these factors are replaced by appropriate solutions and strategies, remotivation can take place so that students can "get rid of the existing demotivating factors" (Sahragard & Ansaripour, 2014, p.88). Similarly, Song and Kim (2017) analyzed demotivation and remotivation among 64 Korean high school EFL students by tracking their changes from kindergarten to high school. The results obtained from the analysis of only 28 participants' data were used for further analysis during this process. Fifteen students depicted a decline in motivation, while 13 of them showed a decline followed by progress. After analyzing the results obtained through administering an open-ended questionnaire and interviews, 'ineffective teaching methods', 'learning difficulty', and 'social pressure' were considered the demotivating factors for the first group; however, the second group became remotivated by 'changes in study methods', 'inspiration from classmates', 'cognizance of the role of English in society', and 'interest in English culture'. In comparison, Ali and Pathan (2017) listed factors such as 'grammar-based instruction', 'the atmosphere of the class', 'the

impacts of low grades', 'teachers' behavior', 'materials', and 'paucity of self-confidence' as the major demotivating elements.

Recently, Zeynali, Pishghadam, and Fatemi (2019) proposed a model of motivation/demotivation by creating a pattern scale in the EFL context. The participants were 800 students, and the results of the confirmatory factor analysis depicted that three motivational constructs had the ability to predict 56% of the changes in the grade point average of students. These three constructs were called demotivation/motivation, perfectionist/non-perfectionist, and collective/individual motivation. It was concluded that demotivation/motivating demotivation was the most vital construct influencing the performance of the students. Moreover, the feasibility of the graduates' overachieving was higher due to the weak performance of their professors instead of becoming demotivated.

By the same token, investigating the perceptions of both novice and experienced teachers regarding the demotivating factors, Afshari, Tajeddin, and Abbasian (2019) carried out a qualitative analysis by gathering data through semi-structured interviews, the results of which turned out to be almost similar for both groups with different levels of importance. The main demotivating factors were "method of instruction, teacher personality, classmates' behaviors, anxiety, and physical environment of the language institutes" (p. 59). Quite recently, Shagdarsuren, Batchuluun, and Lang (2020) analyzed the factors which help learners to learn English more efficiently within decreased credit hours of teaching English at the National University of Mongolia. The motivating and demotivating factors which affect English-majoring learners were investigated. The results indicated that the learners were highly demotivated by the 'attitudes of their teachers and peers', on the one hand, and 'low living conditions', on the other hand.

As can be seen, most of the abovementioned studies have focused on the demotivation of high school or BA and MA University students with inconclusive results, paving the way for further research in this regard. Consequently, the present study attempted to discover the demotivating and remotivating factors among TEFL BA and MA



graduates of Iran who are preparing themselves to participate in Iranian MA and PhD entrance exams.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Participants**

A total number of 178 (50% males and 50% females) BA and MA graduates from 10 universities in Iran with ages ranging from 24 to 40 ( $M=33.09$ ,  $SD= 4.40$ ) participated in this study. All of them were preparing themselves for the MA and PhD entrance exams which are held annually in Iran. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person method of data collection was not possible; therefore, two Telegram groups for BA and MA graduates were created, and 20 students from each of the following universities were added to either of the groups: Allame Tabataba'i University, Ferdowsi University, Golestan University, Isfahan University, Kashan University, Shahid Beheshti University, Shiraz University, Tabriz University, Tarbiat Moallem University, Tarbiat Modarress University, and Tehran University. Furthermore, the assigned students each added seven to nine students to the study through 'Snowball Sampling', through which "the initially selected subjects suggest the names of others who would be appropriate for the sample" (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018, p. 383). Finally, one Telegram group was created consisting of 100 BA graduates, with the other group including 78 MA graduates.

In order to take ethical considerations of doing research into account, all of the participants were required to fill out a consent form. What the participants were going to do, what the purpose of the research was, and who would collect the data were all the important pieces of information mentioned in the consent form. Moreover, informing the participants that their identities would not be revealed was also of paramount significance. These activities are in line with the term 'confidentiality' which means not harming the participants of a specific study in order to have both a good rapport with them and keep the appropriateness of the research (Baez, 2002).

### **3.2. Instruments**

First, an online 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire with 40 items, adopted from Sahragard and Ansaripour's (2014) study, was administered among the participants to investigate the nine constructs of demotivation in the present study context. The questionnaire was designed through 'Google Forms' in order to elicit the quantitative data, and the participants were asked to choose among either of the possible answers ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. For instance, they were supposed to answer this statement that '*professors respect them.*' by choosing "strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree or strongly disagree". The questionnaire enjoyed a Cronbach's alpha reliability index of .91 calculated by SPSS 20. According to George and Mallery (2019) "there is no set interpretation as to what is an acceptable alpha value. A rule of thumb that applies to most situations is: .9 = excellent, .8 = good, .7 = acceptable, .6 = questionable, .5 = poor and .4 = unacceptable" (p.244) which proves the excellent reliability index of the questionnaire in this study.

For the qualitative aspect of the study, a semi-structured interview was held including five questions (Sahragard & Ansaripour, 2014) which were used to ask 35 randomly-selected participants about their experiences/perceptions regarding the demotivating factors along with their proposed remotivating strategies (Appendix A).

### **3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The explanatory sequential design, which is one of the main types of mixed-method research, was adopted by focusing on first collecting quantitative data. Then, qualitative data were gathered to elaborate on the quantitative results. The participants were limited to Iranian males and females so that they knew what was expected of them. Data collection was done at two stages. First, all of the participants answered a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, the results of which were analyzed by running SPSS 20. Reporting the descriptive results regarding the frequency of the nine extracted factors was in accordance with Sahragard and Ansaripour's (2014) study. The researchers also conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) in order to

reveal any possible significant differences among the demotivation factors using SPSS 20.

At the next stage, having elicited the participants' permission, the researchers added the participants' phone numbers into 'www.random.org', and 35 individuals were selected randomly to answer the five interview questions. They were assured that their answers would be kept confidential. The qualitative analysis of the data was done using MAXQDA 20. First, the obtained data were transcribed and read several times at the coding stage of the analysis, which paved the way for conducting the content analysis. After that, the themes and sub-themes were extracted with their exact frequency reported by rereading the data. It is worth mentioning that inductive analysis was carried out, which means that the codes and themes emerged entirely from the data (Abrahamson, 1983). In order to ensure trustworthiness of the obtained results, checking for several principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, was essential (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Credibility refers to the extent to which the results are believable, while transferability relates to whether the interpretations can be transferred to other contexts which are similar or not (Nassaji, 2020). Dependability is also important to trustworthiness which shows the consistency and repeatability of the findings. Moreover, confirmability pertains to investigating whether the data can be confirmed by others or not through doing the 'audio trail' technique. In this study, the researchers recorded all the steps of coding and analysis and made them available for further checking of them. More specifically, in order to check the credibility and trustworthiness of the codes, 20% of them were checked by another coder independently. Moreover, explaining the exact analytical framework to the second coder can facilitate the confirmability of the results (Nassaji, 2020). It is worth mentioning that the inter-coder agreement coefficient between the two raters, obtained through Cohen's Kappa, was reported to be 93%, the differences of which were resolved by discussion among the coders. Ultimately, the participants were rewarded with a summary of Brown (2008) and Ellis

(2008), so that they could use it for reviewing the main SLA issues that are asked in the Iranian MA and PhD entrance exams.

Positionality “reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study” (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p.71), which might influence the results. Regarding the researchers’ positions about this study, the researchers themselves had experienced several demotivational factors when they were candidates of entrance exams, and they had lived in the same context as the present study participants, thus they can perceive the situation well. However, to ensure the trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research, the researchers tried not to make any assumption about the participants’ views based on their own perceptions of them. Moreover, during the process of collecting the qualitative data, one of the authors adopted the role of the qualitative researcher who listened to the factors which demotivated the participants when they wanted to take the entrance exams and the suggestions they put forward to improve this situation. He asked critical questions during the process to resolve any ambiguity in the participants’ answers which can facilitate not only the researchers’ own understanding but also the analysis of the data. To validate the results, the researchers conducted member checking by asking two participants to comment on the prior results.

#### **4. Results**

##### **4.1. The First Research Question**

###### **4.1.1. Quantitative Analysis**

In order to answer the first research question, the frequency and order of importance of the previously extracted demotivating factors (Sahragard & Ansaripour, 2014) were presented considering the results of the descriptive statistics. According to Table 1, ‘economic problems’ ( $M=4.1$ ,  $SD= .56$ ) and ‘future pessimism’ ( $M=4.04$ ,  $SD= .45$ ) were the most demotivating factors while ‘curriculum decisions’ ( $M=3.37$ ,  $SD= .44$ ) and ‘professors’ characteristics’ ( $M=3.38$ ,  $.41$ ) were considered the least demotivating ones among the MA and PhD exam candidates of TEFL, respectively.

*Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics of the Components of the Demotivation Questionnaire*

Components	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Professors' Characteristics</b>	3.38	.065	3.247	3.504
<b>Syllabus Design</b>	3.75	.057	3.638	3.864
<b>Administrative Decisions</b>	3.43	.063	3.303	3.553
<b>Facilities</b>	3.56	.066	3.427	3.689
<b>Scoring system</b>	3.44	.064	3.309	3.561
<b>Future Pessimism</b>	4.04	.048	3.941	4.129
<b>Economic Problems</b>	4.10	.049	4.003	4.196
<b>Classroom Environment</b>	3.52	.067	3.386	3.650
<b>Curriculum decisions</b>	3.37	.054	3.263	3.475

To see whether these changes among means are significant or due to chance, MANOVA was also run to compare the mean scores on nine components of the demotivation questionnaire, namely, 'professors' characteristics', 'syllabus design', 'administrative decisions', 'facilities', 'scoring system', 'future pessimism', 'economic problems', 'classroom environment', and 'curriculum decisions'(Table 2). It was ensured that the assumption of normality had been met. Significant differences were found between the means of the nine demotivating components:  $F(8,170) = 23.61, p=.000$ . Furthermore, a large effect size was found using the partial eta squared ( $\eta^2 = .526$ ).

*Table 2. The Multivariate Test Results ; The Components of the Demotivation Questionnaire*

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
<b>Pillai's Trace</b>	.526	23.611	8	170	.000	.526
<b>Wilks' Lambda</b>	.474	23.611	8	170	.000	.526
<b>Hotelling's Trace</b>	1.111	23.611	8	170	.000	.526
<b>Roy's Largest Root</b>	1.111	23.611	8	170	.000	.526

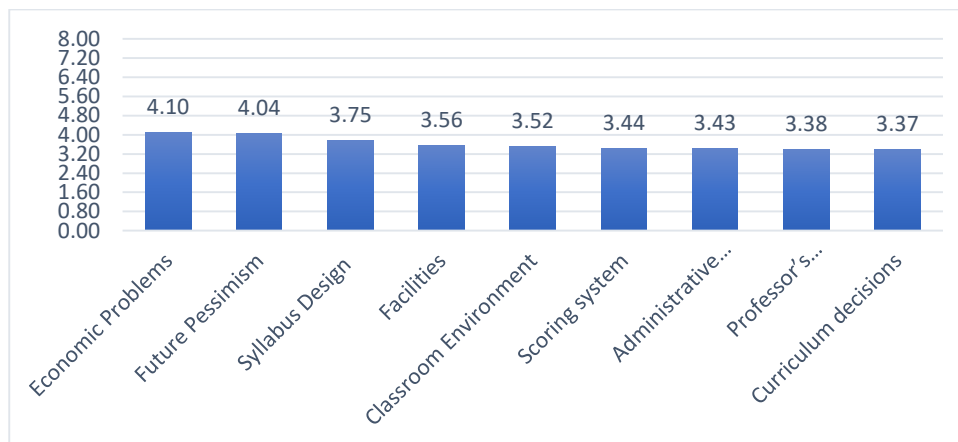


Figure1. The Order of the Means of the Demotivating Factors

Generally, the results of the post-hoc tests showed 24 significant comparisons among the 36 comparisons that had been made. Although the difference between the most demotivating factor ('economic problems') and the second one ('future pessimism') was not significant, since their means were very close to each other (Figure 1), 'economic problems' differed significantly from the least demotivating factor known as 'curriculum decisions'.

#### 4.1.2. Qualitative Analysis

Afterwards, 35 (15 females and 20 males) participants were asked to answer the three open-ended questions regarding demotivation along with the two questions asking them to propose solutions for the mentioned factors. All the answers were analyzed to find the most demotivating factors in line with the categories mentioned in the Sahragard and Ansaripour's (2014) study. Furthermore, two additional issues were declared by most of these 35 candidates. The data were transcribed and imported into MAXQDA (2020), which can be considered the first stage of this analysis. Secondly, the responses were analyzed in terms of different codes of demotivation and remotivation. Subsequently, several themes and sub-themes were identified under each category inductively, that can be regarded as a part of the thematic analysis process. For example, 'future pessimism' was identified as a

demotivating code entailing sub-codes such as lack of sufficient job position even with high academic degrees and low payments for language teachers and translators. At the next stage, the data were reread several times in order to create a refined list of themes. Generally, 657 sentences regarding these factors were identified, while 100 sentences of which were complementary ideas regarding the main themes. All the data were coded and then thematically analyzed at different levels (Table 3). It is worth mentioning that new codes and themes could be added at each stage of coding. All the themes and sub-themes were rank-ordered from the most demotivating factors to the least demotivating ones for each category.

In line with the quantitative results, ‘economic problems’ and ‘future pessimism’ were almost the most demotivating factors with the frequency of 35 and 34, respectively. In other words, they were mentioned by almost all of the participants in the sample; therefore, these two factors have the capacity to make people unmotivated. Surprisingly, one student emphasized that “we had a professor who directly told us to change our field at the MA level since TEFL has no future because of the low salary and lack of job opportunities”. Moreover, regarding the future pessimism factor, most of the participants referred to “low payment of English teachers in Iran although they hold MA or PhD degrees”. Most of them said that “there is not any appropriate job position even for PhD graduates, and also the salary of English teachers is very low despite their attempts”. Regarding their comments, it can be concluded that those teachers who have not majored in English and are satisfied with low wages are usually preferred. Here is a comment by one of the PhD participants:

“Although I am a PhD student, institutes do not offer a reasonable salary. For example, one of my friends who has a bachelor's degree in management teaches at a low-paying institution, and managers think about the salary they are supposed to pay instead of quality of the classes” (Participant 10).

The third and fourth factors are ‘syllabus design’ and ‘facilities’, the results of which are in congruence with the participants’ views

mentioned in response to the questionnaire (Table 3). The main sub-theme in the category of ‘syllabus design’ relates to the notion that professors usually focus on massive and complex books without paying attention to the capacity of students. In other words, they just want to cover what they want, not what is in line with the time of the course and the level of students. After that, 14 of the participants complained about the lack of academic writing courses to teach the stages of proposal, thesis, and article writing. One student believed that “these courses should be available in the BA program as well to make learners ready for more active participation in the world of research”. Moreover, the poor Internet connection is really demotivating in the context of Iran for both educational and recreational purposes.

*Table 3. The Main Categories of the Demotivating Factors Emerging from the Qualitative Data*

<b>Demotivating factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Economic problems</b>	35	1. Inflation	25
		2. The high cost of education in non-governmental universities	20
		3. Increased rate of transportation system	10
		4. Increased rate of materials	4
<b>Future pessimism</b>	34	1. lack of sufficient job position even with high academic degrees	4
		2. low payments for language teachers and translators	33



<b>Syllabus design</b>	31	1. Designing a syllabus with heavy loaded materials	20
		2. Paucity of academic writing courses	14
		3. Out of dated sources	10
		4. Focusing solely on the books	9
<b>Facilities</b>	30	1. Poor internet connection	18
		2. Lack of computer devices to implement CALL in the classroom	17
		3. Lack of projectors in several universities	13
<b>Professors' characteristics</b>	28	1. lack of support from the tutor	24
		2. biased behavior	20
		3. old teaching styles	17
		4. Poor academic levels	13
		5. Strict behavior	9
		6. Low level of awareness	2
		7. lack of creative professors in universities	
<b>View of the society</b>	24	1. lack of support from people	20
		2. Incoherence of learned knowledge with their business	14
<b>Classroom environment</b>	20	1. Crowded classes	14
		2. Size of the classes	8
		3. Unfriendly atmosphere	7

<b>Scoring system</b>	18	1. scoring biasedly	10
		2. scoring subjectively	10
		3. questions from materials that have not been covered	5
<b>Peer's characteristics</b>	15	1. Competitive relationship among peers	14
		2. Negative behavior of classmates	10
		3. Lack of support	4
<b>Administrative decisions</b>	12	1. Having acquaintances in the administration	10
		2. employment of people connected to high-ranking officials	5
		3. administering entrance examinations within short time limitation and favoritism in the interview	5
<b>Curriculum decisions</b>	5	1. incompatibility of curriculum design with students' educational needs	4
		2. impracticality of several courses in the curriculum	3

Although the BA and MA graduates thought that the factor of 'professors' characteristics' had little role in demotivation when they filled out the questionnaire, this element was ranked as the fifth factor in the interview data. More specifically, the participants were mostly frustrated by the way their professors had been behaving in the classroom. Lack of support from the tutor, biased behavior, old teaching styles, poor academic levels, strict behavior, low level of awareness, and lack of creative professors in universities are considered the vital complaints reported by the learners. This different order of importance

can be justified by the fact that the sample consists of just one-fifth of the whole population.

On the other hand, although the element of ‘view of the society’ was not considered one of the factors of the questionnaire, it turned out to be the main issue regarding the results of the interview data. Two main sub-themes were found that ‘lack of support from other people’ was one of them. In other words, they thought that learning English does not require studying English-related majors at the university. It is something which can be gained in different institutes and be taught by people whose majors are not related to English. Moreover, the two other factors are the ‘classroom environment’ and ‘scoring system’ with the frequencies of 20 and 18, respectively. Since scoring is one of the main debatable issues in the milieu of both schools and universities, several statements of students are worth mentioning:

“In my opinion, there should be some kind of supervision on professors’ scoring system because they usually act biasedly in this realm” (participant 3).

“I think descriptive exams should not be rated by only one professor because subjective scoring is really demotivating. In other words, professors may score the papers regarding their opinions” (participant 7).

“Professors usually pay more attention to the sheets of the cleverer students, which can affect their scoring method” (participant 34).

‘Peers’ characteristics’ is another factor declared by 15 students. Competitiveness of peers can not only enhance the stress level in the classroom but also reduce their level of concentration.

The last two factors are ‘administrative decisions’ and ‘curriculum decisions’ (Figure 2). The focus of the former is on decisions that are made by administrations, and the role that favoritism plays in the system. For instance, “the professors of several universities prefer to admit their own students in the interview of PhD exam”. On the other hand, the latter emphasizes the impracticality of the courses of the curriculum instead of including other valuable courses such as CELTA

and DELTA, which are really practical in helping pre-service teachers how to teach. Overall, the three most demotivating factors and the three least demotivating factors were shown in the code-sub code-segments models (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

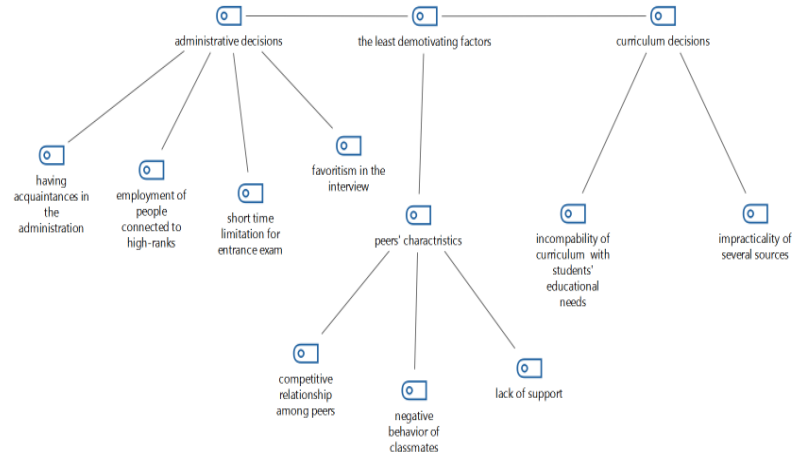


Figure 2. The Code-Sub Code-Segments Model (The Three Least Demotivating Factors)

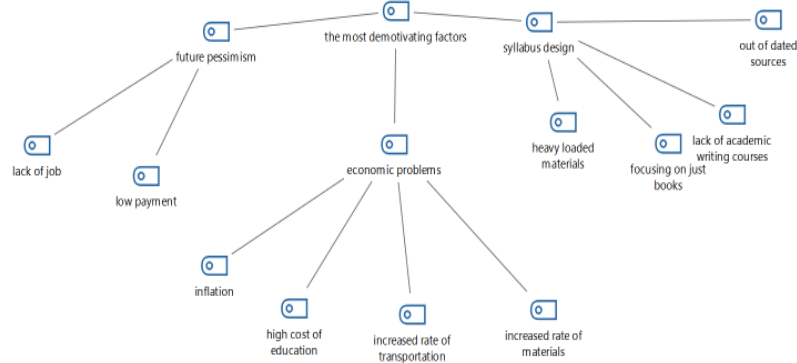


Figure 3. The Code-Sub Code-Segments Model (The Three Most Demotivating Factors)

#### 4.2. The Second Research Question

Several remotivating factors were proposed by the learners themselves in order to eliminate the role that these demotivating factors play in the minds of the students. Referring to ‘economic problems’ and ‘future pessimism’ as the main demotivating factors in both the quantitative and qualitative data, students explained the ways with the help of which their lost motivation can be regained so that they can envision the future more optimistically. Their main statements referred to ‘firing non-majored English teachers’ and ‘providing special services for university students’, so that they can become more motivated. They believed that when students are not concerned with economic or pessimistic issues, their stress and anxiety decrease on the one hand, and their job performance increases on the other hand. Since future pessimism is bold as a demotivator in the Iranian context, students also suggested that studying can result in teachers’ higher prestige in society and some of them declared having a positive outlook on career prospects.

As far as ‘syllabus design’ and ‘curriculum development’ are concerned, the use of appropriate materials based on students’ interests is suggested. With regard to ‘facilities’ and ‘classroom environment’, they offered the provision of some basic equipment and reducing the number of students in the classroom. Additionally, taking the ‘scoring system’ into account, they suggested that scoring the same paper twice or with more than one rater can reduce the percentage of errors and subjectivity of the professors.

As ‘characteristics of the teacher’ is considered the fifth main demotivating factor regarding interviews, twenty-six comments were given by the learners to solve this issue as well:

“Although there's no way to find a solution when it comes to teachers' disagreeable personality, some supervision can be made for professors' both personal and educational developments” (participant 22).

“Students’ guidance for the entrance exam of higher levels by professors should be done” (participant 30).

“Teachers can behave appropriately and teach creatively to increase students’ learning and motivation for learning” (participants 2).

“Professors’ interests should be enhanced as well” (participants 19).

Generally, it is worth mentioning that the distribution of suggestions to other demotivating factors known as ‘peers’ characteristics’, ‘view of the society’, and ‘administrative decisions’ were all equal to three. These are several suggestions for these three factors:

“Regarding administrative decisions, more autonomy should be given to learners in making educational decisions; therefore, they feel that they play a major role in this process. On the other hand, several random interviewers should be selected from the professors, so that students can be tested without feeling stressful for the interview of PhD exam” (participant 27).

“One of the ways to change view of the society is that managers of institutes do not hire those people who have not studied principles of teaching academically” (participant 15).

“Competitive relationship among peers can become cooperative by helping, introducing different sources, and explaining problematic areas to each other” (participant 32).

Also, two students stated that nothing could be done to improve this situation.

## **5. Discussion**

Applying the principles of positive psychology (PP) in the present study research, the researchers tried to shed light on both negative and positive sides of the motivation construct, which is a part of a bigger concept known as well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2016). To this end, the status of the demotivation and remotivation of students were probed, and it became clear that some students could not have good performance due to having little or not enough motivation. Furthermore, the mentioning of remotivating strategies by learners indicated that the participants can become motivated again even if there are lots of factors that are really disappointing in their contexts. This is

in line with the claims of positive psychology. In other words, this theory does not repudiate difficulties of life; however, it focuses on them through the perspectives of human strength (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). For example, although the factor ‘future pessimism’ has been viewed as a demotivating factor that is inevitable, it can be treated differently with a positive perspective due to the fact that negative emotions have the capacity to be transformed into positive emotions by learners (Vaid, 2006).

For answering the first research question, we ordered the demotivating factors with regard to their frequency and importance. Based on the quantitative results, ‘economic problems’ and ‘future pessimism’ were extracted to be the most demotivating factors of BA and MA graduates in Iran, which was in line with Sahragard and Ansari-pour’s (2014) study. Also, it corroborates the findings of Shagdarsuren et al.’s (2020) study because they referred to ‘poor living conditions’ as one of the most vital demotivating factors.

However, this result was in opposition to what was mentioned by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) and Meshkat and Hassani (2012), who referred to ‘learning contents and materials’ and ‘lack of school facilities’ as the most vital demotivators, respectively. The difference between these studies might be due to the fact that the participants in the mentioned studies were high school students whose concerns were totally different from BA and MA graduates. However, the participants of the current study think about the ‘future and job opportunities’ because they are at a stage where they want to work and have employment concerns.

Additionally, Afshari et al. (2019) found ‘the method used for instruction’ as the most important element while ‘syllabus design’ was ranked as the third element in this research. Although university students have to be autonomous and search for the useful materials themselves, the introduction of these sources should be done by the teachers. Proposing inappropriate materials and using outdated methods to teach them lead to dissatisfaction and waste of time.

Although two factors of ‘facilities’ and ‘the classroom environment’ were among the four last demotivating elements based on Sahragard and Ansaripour’s (2014) study, they were regarded as the fourth and fifth elements in this research. Since PhD exam candidates’ perceptions were analyzed in this study, it can be concluded that they were required to have access to both the Internet for their searches and appropriate equipment in the classroom so as to give better presentations which might add to the importance of these components. On the other hand, unlike this study, negative aspects of the ‘institutionalized milieu’ which can be equal to the construct of ‘classroom environment’ in this research, was ranked as the most important factor with regard to Ushioda (1998) and Hassaskhah et al.’s (2015) study.

Moreover, ‘professors’ characteristics’ was among the least demotivating factors in the current study, which resonated Falout et al.’s (2009) findings, stating that ‘poor teacher behaviors’ was not a substantial problem in Japan. In the same vein, as Zeynali et al. (2019) argued, it is more likely that graduates overachieve instead of becoming demotivated when their teachers have a weak performance. On the contrary, it is worth mentioning that it has been reported as one of the main factors in Oxford’s (1988) study which can be justified by this fact that the main focus was on teachers’ roles, and other factors did not receive considerable attention in Oxford’s (1988) research. Also, the results did not conform to the findings of Muhonen (2004), Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi (2011), and Song and Kim’ (2017) studies regarding the ‘teachers’ roles’ because high school students’ learning is more dependent on their teachers, while university students in the current study are more autonomous and independent. This construct was also ranked as the third element in the analysis of Carpenter et al. (2009). Furthermore, both teachers and learners stated that ‘teacher’s behavior’ can be considered the most vital factor when it comes to speaking English (Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012).

The other factors in the quantitative data were the ‘scoring system’, ‘administrative decisions’, and ‘curriculum decisions’, while the two newly-added factors from the interviews were ‘view of the society’ and



‘peers’ characteristics’. It is worth mentioning that the variable ‘administrative decisions’ has not been analyzed in any other studies before, except in Sahragard and Ansaripour’s (2014) study. Mentioning ‘peers’ characteristics’ was also in line with Afshari et al.’s (2019) findings, who also stated that several activities of peers avoid others to improve.

Taking remotivation as a unique concept, several suggestions have been offered by the participants. Although ‘economic problems’ was regarded as the most demotivating factor, no specific remotivation has been recommended by the learners, the reasons of which might be related to this fact that they are too disappointed and they are sure that no miracle will take place. On the contrary, the participants in Sahragard and Ansaripour’s (2014) research proposed offering a monthly amount of money and decreasing the amount of prices as the main solutions.

Despite referring to ‘future pessimism’ as the second main factor, MA and PhD exam candidates recommended to have a more positive perception, specific goals, and paying attention to their own passions as the main solutions, whereas MA students in Sahragard and Ansaripour’s (2014) study found out that applying for the universities abroad and receiving scholarships are the only remotivators. Additionally, the solutions given for the syllabus design were exactly the same as statements proposed by Sahragard and Ansaripour (2014), which are using more updated resources, not memorizing materials, and reducing the amount of sources. All the other factors have been almost the same; however, no remotivation has been offered to administrative decision makers in this study.

## **6. Conclusion**

The main aim of this study was to investigate both the demotivation and remotivation factors among TEFL MA and PhD candidates. Results of the current study revealed that the ‘economic problems’ and ‘future pessimism’ were the most demotivating factors in the Iranian context. Although the interview data obtained from the 35 participants placed ‘professors’ characteristics’ as the fifth component, the results of the

questionnaire referred to ‘professors’ as the eighth factor with a non-significant influence. Trying to remotivate these demotivating factors, the participants gave their suggestions which can lead to a broader view of the educational system, on the one hand, and an increase in the cognizance of the students, on the other hand. The addition of more skilled professors, access to the topics of the day, the publication of articles, and family support are all among the remotivating factors offered by the students.

It is hoped that this study makes a contribution to the importance of demotivational and remotivational factors in the EFL context. Pedagogically, the results can help teachers to identify which elements prevent learners to perform appropriately in the classroom environment and what can be done in order to compensate for these factors and make the situation better, especially in terms of the feelings of future pessimism that most of MA and PhD candidates have. Although this study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, a larger sample for the analysis of the qualitative data could be utilized. Moreover, despite analyzing students from different universities, no comparison was made between the needs of each university. Therefore, further research can conduct a comparative study in terms of different contexts and even fields of study to see whether the demotivation factors differ regarding various realms or not.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### *Questions of the Interview*

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1. Based on your experience of language learning in Iranian universities, what has ever disappointed you?
2. With regards to what you have heard from friends around you, can you mention any other factors having some negative effects on your learning?
3. Do you think any of these factors can act as a disappointing factor? If yes, would you please provide some evidence(s) for that? (General system of education, universities, facilities, professors, curriculum, future occupation, and system of scoring, lack of a socially motivating and humane environment, disagreeable teacher personalities or pedagogies, inappropriate courses or materials, no consistency in curriculum with clear goals, coursework pressure, professors' personality and competence, number of the students in the class, etc.).
4. What do you think can be the solutions for what you have stated as the demotivating factors?
5. Have you ever found anything appealing in spite of the existing negative elements?