Motivational Dynamics: The Case of Iranian EFL Learners' Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates temporal changes in Iranian EFL learners' L2 motivation and the possibility of predicting their motivated learning behaviour, ideal and ought-to L2 selves and L2 learning experience in light of Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivational self-system framework. To this end, 1,868 learners of four educational levels (i.e. junior high and high school levels, BA/BSc and MA levels) filled out the questionnaire developed by Taguchi et al. (2009). The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a higher motivational disposition for secondary school students and an age-related decline specifically concerning preventional-focus variables. Moreover, the results of the regression analyses showed that different factors predicted the three components of L2 motivational self-system and intended effort of the four educational groups. Most of the predicting factors of students' ideal L2 self, learning experience and motivated behaviour had a promotional focus whereas preventional-focus variables were among predictors of students' ought-to L2 self.

Keywords: Motivation, L2 motivational self-system, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, English learning experience, Iran

INTRODUCTION

L2 motivation is one of the influential factors in learning a language being extensively studied among other individual factors (Ellis, 2008). From time to time various motivational theories have been introduced, validated and investigated in different contexts. Among these theories, the L2 motivational self-system

(Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) is a relatively recent reconceptualisation of previous theories addressing the Gardnerian concept of integrativeness (Gardner, 1985, 2001) and conceptualisation of learners' identity (e.g. Lamb, 2009; Yashima, 2009). It includes three main constituents: the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and English learning experience. The ideal L2 self refers to the attributes one wishes to ideally hold (Dörnyei, 2010), that is, the ideal image the L2 user wishes to be in future such as being fluent in using L2 when interacting with other speakers of the language. Such vision can act as a powerful motivator in reducing the discrepancy between the person's actual self and ideal image. Ideal L2 self and integrativeness were significantly correlated explaining more variance in learners' intended effort (e.g. Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Taguchi, Majid, & Papi, 2009). In fact, these variables share the same underlying construct domain (Dörnyei, 2010).

The second dimension of L2 motivational self-system, ought-to L2 self, refers to "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.105). Various duties, obligations, or expectations one ought to fulfil to avoid possible negative outcomes are examples of this dimension. Ought-to L2 self, for example, can act as a major motivation in the case of learning an L2 to fulfil one's family or teacher's expectations. Family influence and instrumentality-prevention in Japan, China and Iran, have influences on this variable, but the effect on learners' motivated behaviour was far less than that of the ideal L2 self (Taguchi *et al.*, 2009). Also in Hungary, a similar relationship between parental encouragement and ought-to L2 self was found (Csizér & Kormos, 2009).

L2 learning experience "concerns situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.106). In many studies (e.g. Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Taguchi *et al.,* 2009), this constituent illustrated the strongest influence on motivated behaviour. Contextual factors (e.g. classroom environment, task design, cultural setting curriculum, teacher, peer group and teaching materials, have a critical role in motivating students since it is students' successful engagement with the learning process that motivates them, not their own internal or external self-images (i.e. ideal and ought-to L2 selves) (Dörnyei, 2009).

Considering the fluctuations in students' motivation during the long process of language learning and the contribution of this theory to advancing our knowledge of L2 motivation, this study will focus on dynamicity of learners' motivation in a context where English is a foreign language and everyone is required to learn it in school as a mandatory subject matter. Considering these conditions and other factors (e.g. learners' age groups, learning environment, socio-cultural context) different motivational patterns might be drawn. For this purpose, a short review of the language learning system and motivational studies of Iran will be provided; then, the research questions of this study will be explored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning in Iran

In Iran, the government primarily sets foreign language educational policies. At school level, the curriculum is mostly top-down and product-orientated in all aspects, and the Ministry of Education directs everything through the educational groups' monitoring (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). Teaching English for seven years as a mandatory school subject formally starts from the first grade of junior high school and proceeds to the last year of high school, and includes the pre-university level (i.e. when the data of this study were gathered). Throughout these years, English is practised and shaped in mainly teacher-centred classrooms with a specific textbook and rare support from the social context and exposure to the language outside the classroom. However, after the reform in educational system since 2010 and teaching newly designed English textbooks from 2013, the main aim is teaching the four skills and familiarising students with communicative approaches. Now students study English for six years from grade seven to 12 during the six years of junior and senior high school (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2014).

At universities, in BA/BSc programmes, all students are required to pass a three-credit general English course regardless of their field of study. In most fields of study, this course is followed by one or two ESP courses which cover the needs of each field to some extent. In graduate programmes, students of specific fields of study, mostly humanities rather than engineering, are required to pass a two-credit ESP course, while in other fields, offering such courses is optional and the decision is made by the scientific committee of each department.

At university level, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology sets the goals, defines the course syllabus and recommends the textbooks. Besides English textbooks compiled and written by university professors, usually General English and ESP books published by Samt are used at most universities. However, teaching English at university level and schools is similar in that reading, vocabulary and grammar learning are emphasised. Translation is also underscored and sometimes writing assignments is required; however, the two skills of listening and speaking receive the least attention.

Although English is taught as a required course at schools and universities, the private sector of English teaching is extensive and growing in the country. In private language institutes, prominence is mostly given to communicative skills and functional aspects of language. Unlike school textbooks that are designed by the Ministry of Education and are devoid of L2 cultural issues and authentic materials (e.g. Maftoon, 2002), the books used at private language institutes are written by native speakers and carry L2 ideological values and cultural issues (e.g. Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011). In addition, teachers seem to be more proficient, active and motivating, and the class sizes are relatively small. In addition, private English institutes offer various courses for interested learners of diverse age ranges from children

to adults according to their needs, such as communication, ESP and TOEFL and IELTS preparation courses.

Research on Motivation in Iran

In Iran, similar to studies conducted around the world, research on L2 motivation mainly rested on the Gardnerian motivational theory and integrativeness as its key constituent (e.g. Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid, 2010; Dastgheib, 1996). Following the introduction of the L2 motivational self-system, researchers around the world conducted studies to investigate different aspects of this theory. Likewise, the number of studies on the L2 motivational self-system is increasing in Iran. The studies of Azarnoosh (2014), Azarnoosh & Birjandi (2012), Kiany Mahdavy and Ghafar Samar (2012), Papi (2010), Papi and Teimouri (2012), Roohbakhshfar *et al.* (2011) and Taguchi *et al.* (2009) are examples that explored motivation from different perspectives. What follows is a short review of the findings of some of these studies.

In a study, Roohbakhshfar *et al.* (2011) investigated the relationship between two groups of university students' intended effort in learning English and the components of the L2 motivational self-system. They administered a questionnaire to 108 TESL freshmen and seniors. They found a strong association between the senior group's ideal L2 self and the effort they invested in learning English, whereas the freshmen attributed their intended effort to learning English based on their desire to integrate with the target-language community (i.e.

integrativeness). Roohbakhshfar *et al.* maintained that perhaps students' L2 identity and L2 self develop over time and with more involvement with learning the second language, which can also be an explanation for the dynamic nature of the ideal L2 self.

In another study (Taguchi *et al.* 2009), participants from China, Japan and 1,309 middle school and 719 university students from Iran filled out a questionnaire. In replicating Dörnyei's Hungarian study, ideal L2 self and integrativeness positively correlated, justifying the replacement of integrativeness with the ideal L2 self. Moreover, in all three samples, SEM analyses supported the validity of the L2 motivational self-system. Besides, two distinct types of instrumentality, promotion and prevention, were identified which each correlated more highly with the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self, respectively. However, an unexpected finding was the significant association of instrumentality, promotion and ought-to L2 self of Chinese and Iranian participants.

Additionally, Papi and Teimouri (2012) investigated age-related motivational differences among 1,041 school and university students. Students' ideal L2 self, L2 learning experience, instrumentality-promotion, attitudes towards L2 culture and community were the factors which improved with age up to university level. However, preventional-focus variables (i.e. ought-to L2 self, family influence and instrumentality-prevention) declined with age. Moreover, predictors of all students' motivated learning behaviour were only variables with

a promotional orientation among which English learning experience and ideal L2 self were strong. As students entered high school, they became more motivated to learn English. Being the best motivated group with high motivated behaviour and ideal L2 self, high school students ranked first specifically in attitudes towards language learning and L2 community and culture. Contrarily, preventional-focus variables were stronger among the younger learners.

In Kiany *et al.*'s (2012) study, 401 high school students filled out a questionnaire to reveal their L2 motivational changes across grades. Moreover, the impact of the education system on English learners' motivation was examined. Descriptive statistics revealed that except for L2 anxiety which increased as students approached the last years of high school, all motivational factors followed a systematic decline. In terms of motivational changes, students' instrumental-promotion, interest and ideal L2 self significantly declined in the last high school years. Likewise, although statistically insignificant, extrinsic motivational factors of ought-to L2 self and instrumental-prevention decreased but learners' L2 anxiety increased. They concluded that the "context is more in favour of extrinsic motivational forces rather than the intrinsic types" (p. 12) and "the curriculum has little effect on students' 'attitudes towards L2 community and cultural interest'" (p. 12) since there was almost no change in students' cultural orientations.

The abovementioned studies focused on the L2 motivational self-system of various cohorts of participants from different perspectives. However, none of them specifically investigated and compared the motivation of Iranian language learners, who only experience compulsory language learning in the four education levels (i.e. junior high, high school, BA and MA). Hence, investigating learners' level of motivation and identifying their sources of motivated learning behaviour seems essential to enriching our knowledge about learners' motivational status. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any significant difference between junior high, high school, BA/BSc and MA students' motivation?

2. Can ideal and ought-to L2 selves, English learning experience and intended effort of language learners be predicted from other motivational factors?

METHOD

Participants

The total participants of the present study included 3,015 language learners who were studying English as a required course at one of the educational levels (i.e. junior and high school levels, BA/BSc and MA levels excluding English fields of study). Since some participants had studied or were studying English in private language institutes, they were identified based on a question in the questionnaire and the corresponding data were excluded from the analysis.

School participants were 666 junior high school students: 324 females and

342 males, in the age range of 12 to 15 and the mean age of 13.88; and 618 high school students: 361 females and 257 males, ranging in age from 15 to 19 with the mean age of 16.32. The university participants were 584 students: 528 BA/BSc students (293 females and 235 males in the age range of 17 to 48 and mean age of 20.71) and 55 MA students (15 females and 41 males, ranging in age from 23 to 53 and mean age of 32.56). In addition, to minimise any school or university bias, the sample was randomly selected from schools and universities all over Semnan province and Mashhad, which were local areas available to the researchers of the study. In fact, schools and universities were chosen from different educational districts of the cities to ensure diversity of sample as much as possible. However, convenience sampling was used in selecting the classes.

Instrument

For data collection, the Persian version of the Taguchi *et al.* (2009) questionnaire was used. It was piloted with 244 students from all levels, who filled out the questionnaire with some joining follow-up interviews to insure the comprehensibility of the items. The questionnaire contained two parts: the first part measured learners' attitudes and motivation towards learning English and the second part consisted of questions about learners' background. The questionnaire consisted of eight factors measured by a 6-point Likert scale with acceptable reliability coefficient (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Reliability Estimates for the Scales

Scales	R
Ought-to L2 self (6 items)	.75
Family influence (6 items)	.73
Instrumentality (Promotion) (6 items)	.71
Instrumentality (Prevention) (8 items)	.73
Intended effort (6 items)	.85
Ideal L2 self (6 items)	.82
Attitudes to learning English (6 items)	.84
Attitudes to L2 community and culture (8 items)	.86

Procedure

To collect the data, the researchers first approached schools and universities and provided information about the survey and details of administration for the school principals and department heads. With their permission, the researchers and their assistants provided a brief explanation about the study for the students during their class time. Afterwards, the subjects filled out the questionnaires in almost 15 minutes on average.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To analyse the data SPSS 16 was used. To find out whether there is any significant

difference between junior high, high school, BA/BSc and MA students' motivation in terms of their L2 motivational self-system, after ensuring their homogeneity of variances, a one-way ANOVA was run. The significance levels associated with the F-observed values for the scales in Table 1 shows that there was a significant difference between learners' L2 motivational self-system on all scales ($p<.05$). Although the F-values of the scales denote significant differences between the mean scores of the four educational levels, the post-hoc Scheffe test was run in order to locate the exact place of differences between the four mean scores (See Table 2, Sequence).

TABLE 2
Differences in Language Learners' Motivation

Scale	Sample	Mean	SD	F	Sequence
Ideal L2 self	JHS	4.1589	1.21726	16.29	HS, BA< JHS
	HS	3.6837	1.21614		
	BA/BSc	3.9129	1.21323		
	MA	3.7068	1.27463		
Ought-to L2 self	JHS	3.6752	1.05819	15.77	HS, BA< JHS
	HS	3.2742	1.06184		
	BA/BSc	3.4316	1.04273		
	MA	3.2593	1.17346		
Family influence	JHS	3.7256	1.00165	42.14	HS, BA, MA<JHS
	HS	3.1653	1.01295		
	BA/BSc	3.2512	.96238		
	MA	2.8839	1.09449		
Instrumentality-promotion	JHS	4.4346	1.00284	11.06	HS<JHS, BA
	HS	4.1436	1.00806		
	BA/BSc	4.4141	.92140		
	MA	4.3622	.88667		
Instrumentality-prevention	JHS	4.4333	.92162	11.41	HS, BA, MA<JHS
	HS	4.2036	.93355		
	BA/BSc	4.1616	.91052		
	MA	3.9955	1.03553		
Intended effort	JHS	4.0740	1.17770	13.91	HS<JHS, BA, MA
	HS	3.7176	1.25476		
	BA/BSc	4.0601	1.16680		
	MA	4.3909	.96504		
Attitude to learning English	JHS	3.9288	1.22054	13.91	HS<JHS, BA, MA
	HS	3.5534	1.18471		
	BA/BSc	3.8855	1.10135		
	MA	4.1569	1.11724		
Attitudes to L2 community and culture	JHS	3.6282	1.23845	6.38	HS<BA
	HS	3.4630	1.25135		
	BA/BSc	3.7862	1.20498		
	MA	3.6961	1.21533		

JHS = junior high school students; HS = high school students; "<" and ">" indicate significant difference and comma denotes no significant difference. In the Sequence column, where one of the groups is not present in a crossed row (e.g. MA in the ought-to L2 self sequence box), it means that there is no significant difference between that group and the reported ones in terms of the respective variable.

The results of the ANOVA indicated that students of junior high schools had developed a higher ideal L2 self than high school and BA/BSc students. Similarly, this age-related decline was observed in terms of junior high students' ought-to L2 self, instrumentality prevention and family influence. While MA students' ideal and ought-to L2 self did not differ from others', their level of instrumentality prevention and family influence was similar to that of the other older groups and lower than that of junior high school students.

The results also revealed that from the two younger groups of students, high school students had a lower level of attitudes towards learning English, instrumentality-promotion, intended effort and attitudes to L2 community and culture than other educational levels had. That is to say instead of observing a decline with age, these motivational factors increased with age/educational level. Concerning their English learning experience, which is a more situation-specific variable and their intended effort, high school students scored the least among all other groups. In other words, all groups except for high school students were more willing to invest in their language learning and had a more positive attitude towards learning English. In addition, MA students did not show any significant difference from other groups in terms of instrumentality promotion and attitudes to L2 community and culture; it was the BA/BSc group who had a more positive attitude towards English community and culture.

In the second phase of data analysis, a series of multiple regression analyses each with a stepwise approach was run to identify the predictors of students' ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, English learning experience and intended effort. In this approach, each time a predictor (i.e. an independent variable) is added to the regression equation, the least useful predictor with the least appreciable contribution is removed (Field, 2005) and while order of importance of variables are evaluated, useful subsets of variables are selected (Lewis, 2007). The first multiple regression analysis was run for students' ideal L2 self. As presented in Table 3, instrumentality-promotion, English learning attitudes, attitudes towards the L2 community and culture, intended effort and ought-to L2 self were predictors of the two younger groups' ideal L2 self. Attitudes towards L2 community and culture and family influence explained 70% of variance of MA students' ideal L2 self. These two factors with the highest variance were the only predictors and the former was the strongest one for MA students. In addition to these factors, the two types of instrumentality and intended effort predicted BA/BSc students' ideal L2 self. For the school and undergraduate levels, instrumentality-promotion and intended effort were the first and second strongest predictors that showed significant variances in those groups' ideal L2 self. The only negative predictor of ideal L2 self was instrumentality prevention, which negatively influenced the undergraduate group's motivation.

TABLE 3
Results of Regression Analysis for Students' Ideal L2 Self

Variables	Secondary School $R^2 = 0.62$			High School $R^2 = 0.63$			BA $R^2 = 0.60$			MA $R^2 = 0.70$		
	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)
Instrumentality-promotion	.361	.050	.297	.411	.053	.337	.460	.060	.354			
Attitudes to learning English	.132	.048	.137	.106	.049	.103						
Attitudes to L2 community and culture	.171	.035	.178	.129	.038	.132	.197	.037	.198	.764	.097	.701
Intended effort	.221	.049	.214	.231	.045	.238	.356	.044	.344			
Ought-to L2 Self	.163	.040	.143	.173	.043	.149						
Family influence							.141	.050	.112	.419	.104	.358
Instrumentality-prevention							-.219	.050	-.163			

p<0.01

TABLE 4
Results of Regression Analyses for Students' Ought-to L2 Self

Variables	Secondary School $R^2 = 0.65$			High School $R^2 = 0.72$			BA $R^2 = 0.66$			MA $R^2 = 0.71$		
	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)
Family influence	.536	.035	.509	.568	.031	.554	.571	.039	.525	.864	.087	.844
Instrumentality-prevention	.287	.038	.246	.225	.032	.201	.297	.039	.257			
Ideal L2 self	.125	.033	.142	.128	.029	.149						
Attitudes to learning English	.082	.031	.096									
Instrumentality-promotion							.159	.046	.142			
Intended effort				.108	.028	.129	.075	.034	.084			

p<0.01

TABLE 5
Results of Regression Analyses for Students' English Learning Experience

Variables	Secondary School $R^2 = 0.68$			High School $R^2 = 0.67$			BA $R^2 = 0.72$			MA $R^2 = 0.70$		
	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)
Intended effort	.556	.038	.522	.446	.034	.473	.560	.029	.595	.469	.113	.425
Attitudes to L2 community and culture	.292	.031	.294	.396	.029	.419	.328	.028	.364	.490	.093	.536
Ideal L2 self	.149	.038	.144									
Instrumentality-prevention				-.141	.039	-.111						
Instrumentality- promotion				.152	.049	.128						

p<0.01

Among the predictors of ought-to L2 self, family influence was the strongest variable for all students and the only one for MA students (Table 4). Instrumentality prevention ranked second among other predictors of ought-to L2 self for junior and high school students as well as BA/BSc students. Instrumentality-promotion and intended effort were also found to be the other predictors of BA/BSc students' ought-to L2 self. For the junior high school group, 65% of the variance of students' ought-to L2 self was explained by four factors; however, for high school students, 72% of the variance associated with four predictive factors.

Concerning students' English learning experience, for all levels, the predictors were intended effort and attitudes to L2 community and culture (Table 5). The only difference was in their predictive power for the four educational levels. For school and undergraduate levels, the strongest predictor of learning experience was intended effort, whereas for the MA students it was attitudes towards L2 community and culture. While these two factors were the only predictors for university students with a predictive power of 70% and 72% for MA and BA/BSc groups respectively, ideal L2 self was another predictor for the younger group and the two aspects of instrumentality were predictors for high school students' English learning experience. Although significant, instrumentality prevention as a negative predictor showed a impact on high school learners' learning experience.

The last regression analysis was conducted to identify the predictors of learners' intended effort in learning English. As expected, attitudes towards learning English was the strongest predictor among others for students of all age groups and educational levels (Table 6). Other predictors for school students and university students at BA/BSc level included instrumentality promotion and attitudes to L2 community and culture, among which the latter had a negative impact on how much the students invested in learning English. Ought-to L2 self was also found to be a significant predictor explaining the variance in high school and MA students' intended effort.

TABLE 6
Results of Regression Analyses for Students' Intended Effort

Variables	Secondary School			High School			BA			MA		
	$R^2 = 0.66$			$R^2 = 0.66$			$R^2 = 0.68$			$R^2 = 0.57$		
	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)	B	SEM	(ß)
Attitudes to learning English	.502	.037	.535	.515	.043	.485	.626	.043	.589	.566	.098	.625
Instrumentality-promotion	.271	.045	.230	.248	.054	.197	.284	.048	.226			
Ideal L2 Self	.196	.040	.201	.223	.043	.217	.240	.040	.249			
Attitudes to L2 community and culture	-.066	.033	-.071	-.175	.037	-.174	-.159	.036	-.166			
Ought-to L2 Self				.235	.042	.196				.268	.094	.308

** p<0.01

Considering the results of the ANOVA and regression analyses, age-related differences and dynamicity of Iranian language learners' motivation in terms of the constituents of L2 motivational self-system and intended effort to learn English will be discussed. Accordingly, the socio-educational context of Iran and the compulsory nature of language learning will be considered.

In investigating the differences among the four educational levels' perspective on their motivational dispositions, students' different views revealed the importance of each factor in motivating them to learn English. The results of the ANOVA revealed two opposite trends, an age-related decline in some motivational factors and an increase in others. Concerning the age-related decline, junior high students were found to be quite different from older students in that the preventional-focused variables (i.e. family influence, ought-L2 self and instrumentality prevention) had a higher mean for the youngest group of learners. Learners in the highest level of ought-to L2 self were under greater pressure of family and significant others and had preventional reasons to study in order not to fail or get bad marks. This might be because of the preventional regulatory focus of these three variables that motivated them to regulate their behaviour by avoiding undesired end-states (see Higgins, 1997).

Junior high students also possessed the highest level of ideal L2 self, which declined by age. This is in line with results found in various linguistic contexts where foreign language learning is compulsory (e.g. Lamb, 2007; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Henry, 2009). The source of motivation for many students does not originate from within the self nor from outside, but from the successful involvement in the actual language learning process (Dörnyei, 2009), which is not always provided in school environments through compulsory language learning. Moreover, since instrumentality and attitudes towards L2 community are complementary aspects of the ideal language self in terms of agreeableness and achievement-related efficiency (Dörnyei, 2005), for high school students, the low levels of ideal L2 self and instrumentality promotion were not far from expectation. Moreover, as Oyserman and James (2011) maintain, "people are motivated to act in ways that feel identity-congruent, to attain the futures they believe that people like them can attain, and to avoid identity-incongruent futures" (p. 118). It happens that almost all students do not consider English important for their future studies, career, promotion or for gaining special goals. Thus the low levels of ideal L2 self is predictable since learning English does not provide every student with a vivid and unique image of their self.

Moreover, many studies (e.g. Hassani, 2003; Azarnoosh, 2011) looked into various aspects of language learning and teaching at schools in Iran, and the shortcomings, needs and reasons for students' dissatisfaction and demotivation. Teaching methodologies, assessment and exams, school facilities, the content of text

books and lack of cultural values, besides the viewpoint of society at large and socio-cultural elements are some factors to mention. Studies like Kiany *et al.* (2012) and Papi and Teimouri (2012) support the findings as they point to the factors that affect students' language learning attitudes, the time and effort they put into learning English and their motivation in general.

The results also revealed that MA students gained the highest and high school students gained the lowest mean scores on intended effort and attitudes to learning English. Contrary to high school students, MA students regarded these two factors as decisive constituents of their motivation. Similar age-related differences can be observed in terms of students' attitudes towards L2 community and culture and instrumentality promotion. While high school students regarded these factors as being the least important, older students at undergraduate level considered them to be more motivating. Based on the findings for instrumentality-promotion and Ideal L2 self, high school students had the lowest mean. These findings are not in line with the results of Papi and Teimouri's (2012) study in which high school students were the best motivated group with high motivated behaviour and ideal L2 self, ranking first specifically in attitudes towards language learning and L2 community and culture. This noticeable difference can be attributed to the participants' extra language learning experience at private language schools or extracurricular classes (i.e. 3.7% of junior high, 54% of high school and 17.2% of university students), which participants of this study did not enjoy. Our findings, however, support the idea that instrumental motives with a promotion focus are associated with the ideal self (Higgins, 1998). As students grow older, they step into a new stage of self-conceptualisation. In fact, their view of self considerably changes during the adolescence period (e.g. Long *et al.*, 1968), as does their ideal L2 self (Kormos & Csizér, 2008). It seems that during this stage, students shape their personal ideals based on the realities they perceive about the benefits of knowing English and its application in their future life in the country (Azarnoosh, 2011).

The results of the regression analysis for students' ought-to L2 self (Table 4) confirmed the findings of Papi and Teimouri (2012), in which family influence and instrumentality-prevention, two preventional regulatory focus variables, were significant predictors of this aspect of students' L2 motivational self-system. In this study, to a lesser extent, BA/BSc students' intended effort and instrumentality-promotion were also significant predictors of ought-to L2 self. This finding can be supported with the unexpected relationship of ought-to L2 self and instrumentality-promotion in Taguchi *et al.*'s (2009) study. In this study, preventional focus variables declined with age; similarly, in Papi and Teimouri's (2012) study, ought-to L2 self, family influence and instrumentality prevention decreased. This can be due to the socio-cultural context in Iran and how younger learners respect parents, teachers

and significant others. As students grow older and gain more independence they are less under the pressure of others. The results of the regression analysis (Table 3) also showed that family influence and instrumentality prevention were the predictors of school students and undergraduates' ought-to L2 self. Family influence was the only predictor for the MA level ought-to L2 self, indicating that in an Asian context, the higher educational level in itself brings about more responsibility towards significant others in fulfilling their expectations in education, career and life in general (Taguchi *et al.*, 2009). In fact, the encouragement and pressure from culture at large, peers and significant others within one's social circle partly lead to the growth and change of one's identity and motivational dispositions (Brophy, 2009).

The predictors of English learning experience, the third constituent of the L2 motivational self-system, for learners of educational levels included their intended effort and attitudes to L2 community and culture. Similarly, attitudes to L2 community and culture was a strong predictor for school and university groups in Papi and Teimouri's (2012). The findings indicate that classroom factors (e.g. the learning context, teacher, materials, activities etc.) are very influential in motivating students due to their leading impact on students' attitude and learning experiences that affect the extent to which learners are ready to invest in language learning (Csizér & Kormos, 2009). Attitudes towards the English culture and community had a

stronger predictive power than intended effort for MA students' English learning experience. This seems to be the result of growing older and possessing a deeper understanding and concern for global issues as well as establishing more contact with L2 speakers, which influence one's language learning experience.

In addition, the two types of instrumentality were the only predictors of high school students learning experience. Kiany *et al.* (2012) also found instrumentality as the strongest type of motivation for high school students. This indicates the importance of pragmatic benefits in language learning for these students to succeed in future. However, the negative effect of instrumentality prevention can be attributed to the compulsory language learning context in Iran in which students have to pass the English course whether they like it or not.

With regard to student's intended effort, attitudes towards learning English was the top predictor for all educational groups. Instrumentality promotion and ideal L2 self, as promotional regulatory factors, were predictors for school and undergraduate levels, which together confirmed Papi and Teimouri's (2012) findings. Ought-to L2 self was a predictor only for the high school and MA levels showing that these two groups are more concerned with the many expectations of others as they are considered to be seniors in their own educational levels (e.g. entering a prestigious university for high school students and finding a

suitable and relevant job matching one's major or starting a PhD programme for MA students). Attitudes towards the L2 community and culture had a negative impact on school and undergraduate level learners' intended effort perhaps due to the need to establish international contacts and to know more about global culture (Arnett, 2002), which may not be easily gained in a foreign language context like Iran. Moreover, confusion may reign due to the conflict between students' local and global identities expected from them, which may lead to temporary unwillingness to learn English (Lamb, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to investigate the dynamic nature of motivation by considering the motivational fluctuations among four educational/ age groups in a context where English language learning is compulsory at school and university levels. Moreover, the study compared the levels in terms of predictors of the three constituents of L2 motivational self-system and intended effort. Similar to other studies (e.g. Lamb, 2007; Kormos & Csizér, 2008) age-related decline was observed but only for four factors, that is two of the three constituents of L2 motivational self-system (i.e. ideal and ought-to L2 selves) and two preventional regulatory factors of family influence and instrumentality prevention. However, MA students' motivation did not differ from that of others in terms of their ideal and ought-to L2 self. For school students,

the age-related decline was also observed for attitudes towards learning English, instrumentality promotion, intended effort and attitudes to L2 community and culture. In line with other studies (e.g. Henry, 2009; Lamb, 2007), these findings could be attributed to the compulsory nature of language learning in Iran as well as its socio-cultural context.

With regard to predictive factors of the L2 motivational self-system constituents, parts of the findings supported previous studies. As expected, the predictive factors of students' ideal L2 self mostly had a promotional regulatory focus, among which instrumentality promotion had the strongest power for school and graduate levels. In addition, some preventive regulatory focus factors (i.e. ought-to L2 self, family influence and instrumentality prevention) were also found to be predictive of students ideal L2 self, which can be attributed to the compulsory language learning and socio-cultural context of Iran. Family influence and instrumentality prevention were found to be predictors of ought-to L2 self with the former as the strongest for all levels and as the only one for MA students. Concerning students' English learning experience, intended effort and attitudes to L2 community and culture were predictors for all levels with intended effort as the strongest. In addition, as expected, English learning experience was the strongest predictor of all learners' intended effort indicating the importance of the immediate environment and how determining it can be in investing in language learning.

In short, it can be concluded that junior high and high school students are more motivated by family influence, ought-to L2 self and instrumentality-prevention. BA/BSc students are more motivated by instrumentality-promotion and attitudes to community and culture, and MA students by attitudes to learning English and intended effort. Moreover, ideal L2 self, attitudes to learning English and instrumentality-promotion are predictors of students' motivated effort and learning behaviour at all educational levels with attitudes to learning English as the strongest predictor. Although students of all levels have positive motivational dispositions, students at high school level have the lowest motivational disposition. For sure, boosting all students' motivational disposition and improving the language learning situation in Iran requires the students' willingness and the concern and attention of many other stakeholders.

For further studies, considering methodological issues, a longitudinal study might be beneficial in discerning the changes across time providing deeper insights on the evolution of motivation. An experimental study may also be helpful in scrutinising the effects of visualisation training and imagery techniques in enhancing learners' motivation and actual leaning. With regard to instruments, in addition to administering questionnaires, it is suggested to include observation sessions and interviews to track salient changes in learners' motivational learning. Since all graduate participants in this study were majoring in the humanities, the dynamicity of motivation should also be investigated across other fields of study; even English and non-English fields of study can be considered in future studies. Instead of studying motivational changes across levels, it is recommended to explore changes within each educational level. Moreover, a comparative study may be conducted to discover the differences in motivational dispositions of students who join private language institutes besides learning English at school or university as a compulsory subject. Finally, employing motivational strategies in teaching is another possibility to depict the actual efforts and motivational state of students in learning English.

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