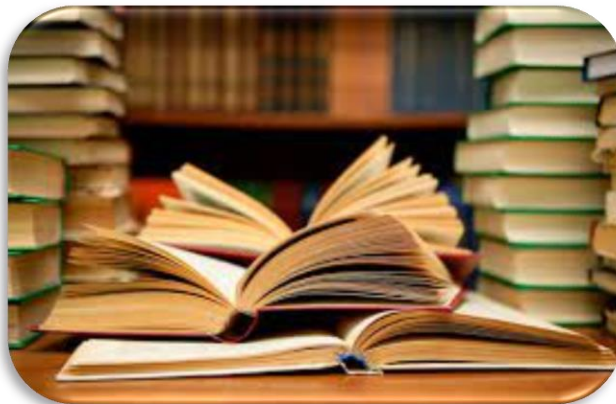




## Research Paper



## Analyzing Iranian Learners' English Language Quality Through Validating the Model of Criteria

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### ABSTRACT

The present study investigated Iranian English language quality through validating the model of criteria. More specifically, the study analyzed the most and the least important criteria for evaluating the English language quality of EFL learners. Also, the differences among males and females with regard to the English language quality were investigated. In doing so, a total number of 100 English teachers of different levels of proficiency were chosen. The researchers-made questionnaire was distributed among participants via Google. The process of analyzing the data obtained from the questionnaire was performed in two software, SPSS 21 and pls. In the quantitative part of descriptive statistics, numbers, percentages, central indicators, and dispersion indicators were used. In inferential statistics, a factor analysis test was done to confirm and validate the questionnaire and structural equation model. Findings of the present study revealed the most important criteria for analyzing the EFL students' language quality which are individual characteristics, learning strategy, and learning dynamics. The results also indicated that educational technology and content regulation as background conditions, are effective in assessing the English language quality of Iranian learners. Moreover, no significant difference found among Iranian males and females with regard to the English language quality. It should be noted that the implementation of this approach requires the necessary professional potentials and competencies.

**Keywords:** Model validation, Language Quality, Iranian EFL Learner

### تحلیل کیفیت زبان انگلیسی زبان آموزان ایرانی از طریق اعتبارسنجی مدل معیارها

پژوهش حاضر به بررسی کیفیت زبان انگلیسی زبان آموزان ایرانی از طریق اعتبارسنجی مدل معیارها پرداخته است. به طور خاص، این تحقیق بیشترین و کمترین معیارها را برای ارزیابی کیفیت زبان انگلیسی این زبان آموزان بررسی کرده است. همچنین، تفاوت های بین زن و مرد از نظر کیفیت زبان انگلیسی بررسی شده است. برای انجام این پژوهش، تعداد ۱۰۰ معلم انگلیسی از سطوح مختلف مهارت انتخاب شدند. پرسشنامه که توسط محققین ساخته شده از طریق گوگل بین شرکت کنندگان توزیع شد. فرآیند تجزیه و تحلیل داده های به دست آمده از پرسشنامه در دو نرم افزار SPSS 21 و pls انجام شد. در بخش کمی آمار توصیفی از اعداد، درصدها، شاخص های مرکزی و شاخص های پراکندگی استفاده شد. در آمار استنباطی، آزمون تحلیل عاملی برای تایید و اعتبارسنجی پرسشنامه و مدل معادلات ساختاری انجام شد. یافته های پژوهش حاضر مهم ترین معیارها را برای تحلیل کیفیت زبان آموزان زبان انگلیسی نشان داد که ویژگی های فردی، استراتژی یادگیری، و پویایی یادگیری بودند. همچنین نتایج نشان داد که فناوری آموزشی و تنظیم محتوا به عنوان شرایط زمینه، در ارزیابی کیفیت زبان انگلیسی زبان آموزان ایرانی مؤثر است. همچنین بین زن و مرد ایرانی از نظر کیفیت زبان انگلیسی تفاوت معناداری مشاهده نشد. شایان ذکر است که اجرای این رویکرد نیازمند پتانسیل ها و شایستگی های حرفه ای لازم است.

**کلمات کلیدی:** اعتبار مدل، کیفیت زبان انگلیسی، زبان آموز ایرانی

## INTRODUCTION

Quality in education is an evaluation of the process of educating which enhances the need to achieve and develop the talents of the customers of the process, and at the same time meets the accountability standards set by the clients who pay for the process or the outputs from the process of educating and quality in education is clearly linked to the purpose (Hoy et al., 2000, p. 10). The Oxford English dictionary defines “quality” as “the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something.” In language testing the “something” is a language product, which may be a sample of talk or writing. This is “measured” against similar products that have independently assessed as being appropriate for a particular communicative purpose.

The use of criteria external to the assessment context has been central to the evaluation of language quality from the start. It is important to remember that the “criteria” of “criterion-referenced” assessment are not abstract levels that today are frequently referred to as “standards.” Rather, the term “criterion” and “standard” were used interchangeably to refer to real-world behaviors that a test taker would be expected to achieve in a non-test environment (Glaser, 2003; Fulcher, 2012). The ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning is the collaborative outcome of eight foreign language teaching associations in the U.S., and the Standards have been used and discussed in many studies. The central ideas in the ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning are consistent with Vygotsky's (1986) Sociocultural Theory (Saville-Troike, 2006), which suggests that language learning should not be separated from the general processes of human interaction; that is, communication with others in the target language is a key element during the learning process.

According to the ACTFL, learning the target language does not mean simply achieving linguistic competence, but also building communicative competence, and therefore the integration of language skills, language areas, and the ideas presented here are essential in current SLA practices. The four language skills are reading, writing, listening, and speaking, while the major language areas involve knowledge regarding pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and culture (Levy, 2009). At first glance, language skills and language areas seem to be connected with only linguistic rather than communicative competence. Nevertheless, the former goes hand in hand with the latter, and it seems fair to assume that language skills and language areas also have an impact on communicative competence. In addition, even if some specific guidelines are developed, they often fail to comprehensively cover all the four language skills and the major language study areas, and it is thus obvious that an integrated set of criteria is required (Yang & Chan, 2008).

These important issues turn out to be more attention-demanding if one explores the literature on English language quality of Iranian English language learners to surprisingly notice that how designing and validating a model of criteria can pave the path for Iranian talented students. Therefore, the present work made an effort to investigate the model of criteria for evaluating the English language quality of Iranian EFL learners through the following research questions:

*What are the most and the least important criteria for evaluating the English language quality of Iranian EFL learners?*

*Are there any statistically significant differences among Iranian males and females with regard to the English language quality?*



## LITRATURE REVIEW

Jeong (2006) in his study on teachers' qualification, emphasized that the role of teachers in EFL settings is more crucial than ever before because teachers are able to motivate students and try to create language learning environments which are nonthreatening, meaningful and affectively supportive by using Web technology. If language teachers have a variety of positive teaching and learning experiences in using computers, they are likely to be more confident and skillful in implementing CALL in their own classrooms. Therefore, teacher development programs should be provided for language teachers to deal with issues of using computers and gain competent skills in managing computer-based tasks and activities in the classroom. Also, Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor (2007) examined teachers' qualifications and student achievement, and reported that teachers' qualifications can systematically affect student achievement. Considering school as a small social setting and learning as a social process, different members of this small organization such as teachers, peers and their families play a significant role in students' learning. Social and emotional factors have a great impact on students' achievements, schools must attach great importance to these aspects so that they can help students to learn more effectively (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Moreover, various factors such as different incomes, risk, and sociocultural contexts have an impact on children's development of emotional self-regulation (Raver, 2004).

Herppich et al.'s (2018) conducted a study and noted that any teacher needs to provide a reliable and valid judgment about each and every individual's achievement, performance, and characteristics. That is, competent teachers have to take into account the common judgment biases if they want to have a valid and reliable judgment. Furthermore, an important point to be careful about in having at least somehow adequate judgment is to consider assessment steps and decision points that help the examiner to recognize the necessary knowledge needed in performing these steps. In another study, Salimi and Farsi (2020) worked on two groups of EFL native and non-native English teachers' viewpoint about classroom assessment literacy. At the end of their research, they found out that there is a considerable difference between the two groups' perspective towards the classroom assessment literacy. However, such a difference was not observed between male and female teachers. That is, no difference whether a teacher is a man or a woman, their standpoints are not very much different.

Gunawardena (2019) who believes in "developing effective pedagogical frameworks for scaffolding thinking" calls upon the teachers to be aware of the scaffolds themselves and then try to help learners to develop their own critical creative thinking skills. Scaffolding was seen as an integral part of teachers' professional development programs. A study conducted in the context of SWOT quadrant (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) to evaluate the development of ELT teachers' professionalism by reflecting on their roles as scaffolders laid stress upon "reflective training in the company and guidance of experts" till the time they become autonomous in visualizing and implementing appropriate scaffolds (Rachmajanti, Sulistyono & Suharyadi, 2019). Hence, there appears to be a clear gap for exploring the EFL teachers' attitude and perceptions exclusively for scaffolding and its implementation in the teaching process. A recent study has been carried out by Kim, Chapman, Kondo, and Wilmes (2020) who tried to examine the assessment literacy educators which need to be able to interpret score reports. Although a questionnaire consisting of just 15 items was used in the first phase of this research to gather data from



the teachers, the items are merely focused on the teachers' perception of the usefulness and meaningfulness of the scores. It means it did not take the four components under study in the present research into consideration when collecting data about the way teachers assign the scores.

## METHODOLOGY

In terms of the method of conducting research, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used. Therefore, this research was done in a combined or qualitative and quantitative form. In doing this study, a total number of 100 English language teachers took part in this survey. It can guarantee the heterogeneity of participants. Because there is an equal chance for different genders and different ages and also their proficiency level of their teaching experiences. In the next step, the interviews were conducted and after extracting the components and indicators obtained from the analysis of some interviews, a questionnaire was designed to assess the quality of English language learners from the target community in the field. The validity of the questionnaire was assessed by the supervisors and three professors of the department in terms of content. To check the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher passes it through the process of a pilot study which is administered to 20 experienced teachers working in Safir Language Institute, Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan, Iran. After gathering the questionnaires, in Cronbach's alpha method was used. The coefficient obtained from the questionnaires indicates high and acceptable reliability for all components of the applicative questionnaire.

**Table 1**

*Results of the Reliability Test of the Research Questionnaire*

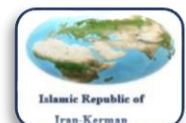
Concealed variables	Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Alpha > 0.7)	Combined reliability coefficient (CR > 0.7)
Strategy	0/750	0/857
Underlying conditions	0/809	0/887
Intervention conditions	0/722	0/797
Causal factors	0/720	0/816
Consequences	0/798	0/880

After recognizing and reviewing the English language quality evaluation criteria of Iranian students, in order to evaluate the proposed model of structural equation technique, SPSS, and PLS software for factor analysis and determining how the relationship between the main categories and structures of the research has been used. To examine the criteria of quality, the questionnaire has been given to a statistical population of 100 people. Table 2 lists the characteristics of this statistical population, including gender, age, and education of some language learners.

**Table 2**

*Characteristics of The Statistical Population of the Research*

Gender	Male	Female		
Frequency value	59	40		
Frequency percent	/40	/40		
Age category	Less than 30	30 to 40 years	40 to 50 years	More than 50 years
Frequency value	40	49	8	2



<b>Frequency percent</b>	/40	/49	/8	/2
<b>Education</b>	<b>A. D.</b>	<b>B. sc.</b>	<b>M. Sc.</b>	<b>Ph. D. and above</b>
<b>Frequency value</b>	43	47	10	0
<b>Frequency percent</b>	/43	/47	/10	0

## RESULTS

### Determination of sample adequacy by KMO and Bartlett test

In studies and researches based on factor analysis, determining the sample size and the existence of appropriate correlations between variables are of particular importance. The two KMO and Bartlett tests in factor analysis allow researchers to make sure about the sufficiency of sample size and the existence of sphericity in the variables before performing the factor analysis. Then, the factor analysis has been applied. The results of the KMO index size and Bartlett test in the present study are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Sample Adequacy Measurement*

Test	Amareh	
<b>KMO</b>	Sample adequacy measurement	0/722
<b>Bartlett</b>	Chi-square approximation	2547/529
	Degree of freedom	435
	Significance (sig)	0/000

Since the acceptable value for the KMO test is always between 0 and 1 and according to Table 3 the value of the KMO index is 0.722, it can be concluded that the correlations between the data will be suitable for factor analysis. Also, the value of the Bartlett test is less than 0.05, which indicates the appropriateness of the correlations between the data for factor analysis and the adequacy of sampling, so factor analysis can be performed.

### Fit the proposed model

After extracting the interview data and extracting the criteria affecting the English language quality assessment of Iranian students, a self-made questionnaire was prepared and was given to 100 students who wished to complete the questionnaire. Their opinions in terms of importance were identified, from low to high. For this purpose, it was necessary to measure the validity and reliability of the proposed model to continue the analysis and review. According to Table 4, these steps are marked with an acceptable value.

**Table 4**  
*Model Fit*

		Index	Acceptable amount
<b>Reliability</b>	Internal reliability	Cronbach's alpha	More than 0.7
		Combined reliability (CR)	More than 0.7
	Convergence validity	Average extracted variance (AVE)	More than 0.5



<b>Validity</b>		Factor loads	More than 0.5
	Diagnostic validity	Fornell & Larcker criteria	The values of the original diameter are greater than the corresponding rows and columns

One of the things used to measure the reliability of the structural equation method is the internal stability of the measurement model. From Cronbach's alpha, it can understand the correlation between a structure and related indicators. Table 5 shows the Cronbach's alpha value of the research categories. and since the acceptable value is more than 0.7, all variables have obtained an acceptable value and the internal reliability is confirmed.

**Table 5**  
*The Cronbach's alpha Values for Research Categories*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>
Individual characteristics	.866
Learning strategy	.842
Learning dynamics	.862
Educational technology	.852
Content regulation	.925
Anxiety and low self-esteem	.911
Weaknesses in learning	.754
Positive assessment	.941
Negative assessment	.936
Assessment of knowledge and skills	.941
Individual consequences	.954
Social consequences	.877
Cultural implications	.748
Economic consequences	.857
Political consequences	.774

**Combined reliability (CR)**

Combined reliability can be calculated based on the degree of compatibility of the questions related to the measurement of each factor. Some researchers also introduce a measure of the combined reliability with Rho. As Chin (1998) believes that the Rho coefficient is more reliable than Cronbach's alpha, according to Table 4, this coefficient should be greater than 0.7, which Table 6 shows.

**Table 6**  
*Combined Reliability Values of Research Categories*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Combined reliability value (CR)</b>
Individual characteristics	.741
Learning strategy	.874
Learning dynamics	.893



<b>Educational technology</b>	.745
<b>Content regulation</b>	.732
<b>Anxiety and low self-esteem</b>	.894
<b>Weaknesses in learning</b>	.851
<b>Positive assessment</b>	.785
<b>Negative assessment</b>	.863
<b>Assessment of knowledge and skills</b>	.812
<b>Individual consequences</b>	.911
<b>Social consequences</b>	.781
<b>Cultural implications</b>	.731
<b>Economic consequences</b>	.875
<b>Political consequences</b>	.748

### Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is the second criterion used to fit measurement models in PLS software. It is measured by the average of the extracted variance (AVE). According to Table 4, the acceptable value should be above 0.5 to show the desired convergence validity. According to Table 7, the value of extracted variance is greater than the acceptable value of 0.5, and as a result, the proposed model has a proportional validity.

**Table 7**

*Variance Extracted Values of Research Categories*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Average of extracted variance (AVE)</b>
<b>Individual characteristics</b>	.794
<b>Learning strategy</b>	.596
<b>Learning dynamics</b>	.666
<b>Educational technology</b>	.656
<b>Content regulation</b>	.813
<b>Anxiety and low self-esteem</b>	.905
<b>Weaknesses in learning</b>	.823
<b>Positive assessment</b>	.889
<b>Negative assessment</b>	.903
<b>Assessment of knowledge and skills</b>	.891
<b>Individual consequences</b>	.795
<b>Social consequences</b>	.768
<b>Cultural implications</b>	.892
<b>Economic consequences</b>	.758
<b>Political consequences</b>	.839

### Amounts of Factor Loads

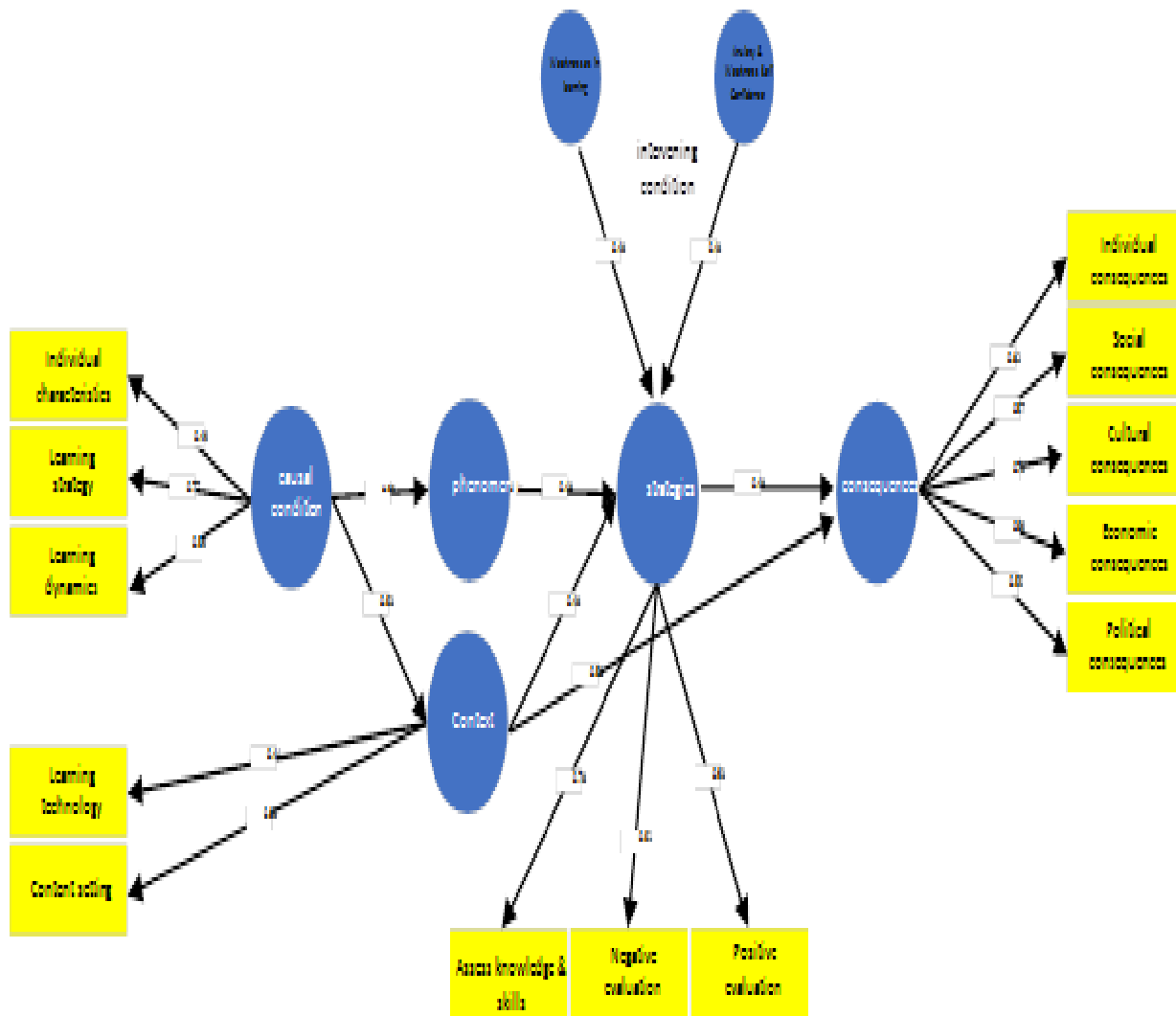
Factor analysis is used to confirm each of the variables as well as the items related to each of them. In fact, confirmatory factor analysis is used to determine the appropriateness of the measurement model.



Based on Table 4, the findings of factor analysis showed that all factor loads were significant and had good fit indices.

**Figure 1**

*Factor loads of research variables*



### Fornell and Larcker Criteria

Fornell & Larcker criterion or divergent validity is another important criterion that shows the degree of relationship between a structure and its indices in comparison with that structure with other structures. Thus, the acceptable divergent validity of a model indicates that one structure in the model has more interaction with its indicators than other structures. Divergent validity is acceptable when the amount of AVE for each structure is greater than the common variance between that structure and other structures (i.e., the square of the value of correlation coefficients between structures) in the model.



**Table 8**  
Fornell and Larcker Criterion Values

Individual characteristics	Individual characteristics	Individual characteristics	Individual characteristics	Individual characteristics	Individual characteristics	Individual characteristics
Individual characteristics	.891	.772	.816	.809	.901	.951
Learning strategy		.638	.722	.612	.737	.746
Learning dynamics.			.603	.639	.694	.833
Educational technology				.736	.802	.716
Content regulation.					.733	.689
Anxiety and low self-esteem.						.741
Weaknesses in learning.						.631
						.795

Positive evaluation.	Negative evaluation.	knowledge and skills evaluation.	Individual consequences.	Social consequences.	Cultural consequences.	Economic consequences.	Political consequences
.798	.613	.744	.629	.715	.687	.609	.622
.627	.695	.697	.733	.637	.725	.707	.771
.730	.771	.730	.619	.790	.706	.709	.655
.744	.593	.866	.769	.745	.638	.734	.744
.630	.766	.791	.716	.693	.609	.732	.722
.713	.675	.749	.656	.713	.700	.701	.688
.821	.688	.639	.772	.692	.802	.870	.555
.942	.950	.943	.891	.876	.944	.681	

## DISCUSSION

According to the research results, positive assessment, negative assessment, and assessment of knowledge and skills can be a strategy to improve the quality of English in Iranian language learners. Considering the many effects of the language knowledge assessment system on determining the teaching



method of teachers and students' learning, especially in Iran, making this test mandatory is a great help to language teaching in schools. Since all the methods used to evaluate teaching have both positive and negative aspects, and none of them alone can provide a true image of the teacher's performance. In assessment, the teacher pays attention to how to organize learning, the quality of collaboration with classmates, and how to use available resources. Assessment is based on the student's performance and what has been produced, according to the criteria agreed upon by the teacher and the students. Ecological studies of language teaching indicate that in order to properly understand the developmental process of the child in different dimensions, it is necessary to penetrate and study different layers of language teaching. Moreover, language learning experiences (or, in other words, attitudes towards the immediate language learning environment) have the strongest relationship with English language learning skills. Therefore, the mechanism of training language teachers should be in a way that maximizes the attractiveness and interest in the learning environment. Inspired by the findings of this study, language teachers can produce and apply content and teaching methods that lead to a positive attitude according to the needs of learners.

Based on the results of the study, assessing the English language quality of Iranian learners in order to improve it, can have individual consequences (test preparation, self-confidence, language development, reducing anxiety, creating a sense of hope for success, reducing self-reliance, dissatisfaction with the heterogeneity of learners' level, inner dissatisfaction with the real level of language knowledge after the courses, intensification of feelings of despair in case of failure after the courses), social consequences (prevalence of participatory learning, possibility of benefiting from other people's experiences, attention to social responsibility, the prevalence of superficial learning by teaching testing techniques, the prevalence of scientific anomalies), cultural consequences (promotion of group research culture, promotion of learning culture, specialized meetings, communication with international centers), economic consequences (prevalence of unrealistic advertisements and expansion of business view of language learning, expansion of printing of various test sources, reduction of test participation costs, imposition of course participation costs, commercialization of courses, wasting costs in scientific research in English language, the misguidance of organizations about the language level due to judging based on test scores) and international consequences (decrease in the trust of scientific centers about the real level of language knowledge, intensification of underdevelopment due to poor performance in scientific research in English, promotion scientific level at the level of world standards). It can be stated that at the theoretical level, socio-economic status shows its impact through the type of goals of learners, the motivational power of selected goals, and consequently the amount of effort spent on language learning. In addition, socioeconomic status is influential through parents' expectations, their role modeling influence (Bo et al., 2015; Comoros & Sizer, 2008; Dornie & Ryan, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Findings of this study revealed that the most important evaluating criteria for English language quality of Iranian EFL Learners are learning strategy, individual characteristics, learning dynamics, educational technology, content setting, low self-esteem, positive and negative evaluation, assess knowledge and skills, economic consequences, individual consequences and cultural implications. English language



teaching has become a global priority due to the development of information, technology, and communication. The teacher, as the facilitator of the language teaching curriculum, can always eliminate the shortcomings and deficiencies of the curriculum design stage, which will not happen unless he can use active and participatory teaching approaches in the implementation of the English language teaching curriculum. Of course, the implementation of this approach also requires the necessary professional potentials and competencies. Overall, it can be said that English language books play an important role in a learner's success. These books reflect the goals of language learning and address the learner's needs, goals, methods, and values of language learning. Having better quality schools, a more attractive learning environment, more experienced teachers and instructors can lead to a more positive attitude and thus higher performance in learning English. On the other hand, the quality of the schools where the students are present, such as busy classrooms, poor quality teachers, and lack of required resources, may reduce the motivation level of learners. It is suggested that, if possible, tools other than questionnaires (such as interviews and observations) should be used to assess the level of English language learning of Iranian language learners.

Students can hope to change the educational culture that affects other elements of the curriculum. Therefore, in designing the curriculum, it is necessary to pay special attention to the limiting and influential factors that are in the field of management and control of the educational system. Regarding the use of educational technology, what is important and desirable to consider is that the use of educational technology is not an educational goal, but it is one of the important factors affecting the speed of learning and academic achievement. Proper use of educational technology, on the one hand, increases the efficiency and power of teacher education and, on the other hand, makes the learning environment more diverse and appropriate, in which case, academic progress will be significant.

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### Biodata

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