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ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

**FACTORS IMPEDING THE LEARNING OF A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE IN THE AFGHAN SCHOOL SYSTEM**

PH.D. THESIS

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NOVEMBER, 2023

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APPROVAL PAGE

DECLARATION

I hereby declare with respect that the study "Factors Impedıng The Learnıng Of A Foreıgn Language In The Afghan School System", which I submitted as a PH.D. thesis, is written without any assistance in violation of scientific ethics and traditions in all the processes from the Project phase to the conclusion of the thesis and that the works I have benefited are from those shown in the Reference. (.../.../20...)

Mohammad Shah ZAKİ

FOREWORD

FACTORS IMPEDING THE LEARNING OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE AFGHAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

ABSTRACT

The process of language learning is considered one of the greatest challenges for both language teachers and language learners. This study attempted to discover the hidden secrets of language learning. This research aimed to identify the hidden factors and challenges that impede and obscure the language learning process at high schools in Afghanistan. In this study, 200 twelfth-grade students from high schools (both female and male) from Mazar City, Balkh Province participated. Additionally, the school principal, head of departments, and class teachers were part of this research, and interviews were conducted to enrich the scope of challenges and obtain practical feedback for better solutions. The participants (students) were asked to answer the questionnaires and the administrative staff were interviewed. Although the results of the current study revealed no significant difference between male and female language learners in factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety, a minor difference between male and female students has been seen in the standard deviation. Language teachers mostly focused on speaking and reading skills but not listening and writing. Most importantly, the lack of audio and visual equipment directly affected language learning at schools. The researcher used special software, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and Microsoft Office to analyze the data.

Keywords: twelfth-grade, interview, self-esteem, motivation, anxiety, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Microsoft Office.

AFGAN OKUL SİSTEMİNDE YABANCI DİL ÖĞRENİLMESİNİ ENGELLEYEN FAKTÖRLER

ÖZET

Dil öğrenme süreci her iki dil için de en büyük zorluklardan biri olarak kabul edilir. öğretmenler ve dil öğrenenler. Bu çalışma dilin gizli sırlarını keşfetmeye çalıştı öğrenme. Bu araştırma, engel olan gizli faktörleri ve zorlukları belirlemeyi amaçladı. Afganistan'daki liselerde dil öğrenme sürecini gölgede bırakıyor. Bu çalışmada 200 onikinci- Belh Eyaleti, Mazar Şehrinden liselerdeki (hem kız hem de erkek) sınıf öğrencileri katıldı. Ayrıca okul müdürü, bölüm başkanları ve sınıf öğretmenleri de katıldı. Bu araştırmanın zorluklarının kapsamını zenginleştirmek ve elde etmek için görüşmeler yapıldı. Daha iyi çözümler için pratik geri bildirim. Katılımcılardan (öğrencilerden) aşağıdaki soruyu cevaplamaları istendi: anketler ve idari personel ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Her ne kadar mevcut sonuçlar Çalışma, erkek ve kadın dil öğrenenleri arasında faktörler açısından anlamlı bir fark olmadığını ortaya çıkardı. özgüven, motivasyon ve kaygı gibi, erkek ve kadın arasında küçük bir fark öğrencilerin standart sapması görülmüştür. Dil öğretmenleri çoğunlukla konuşmaya odaklandı ve okuma becerileri, ancak dinleme ve yazma değil. En önemlisi ses ve görüntü eksikliği Ekipmanlar okullarda dil öğrenimini doğrudan etkiledi. Araştırmacı özel bir yazılım kullanmıştır. Verileri analiz etmek için Sosyal Bilimler İstatistik Paketi (SPSS) ve Microsoft Office.

Anahtar Kelimeler: on ikinci sınıf, görüşme, özsaygı, motivasyon, kaygı, Sosyal Bilimler İstatistik Paketi (SPSS), Microsoft Office.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI : Artificial Intelligence

ELT : English Language Teaching

L2 : Second Language

EFL : English as a Foreign Language

FLA : Foreign Language Anxiety

M : Mean

SD : Standard Deviation

T-TEST : A statistical test that is used to compare the means of two groups

P : Probability and measures how likely it is that any observed

difference between groups is due to chance. Being a probability,

 P can take any value between 0 and 1

LIST OF TABLES

I.   INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most significant tools in human life. This is discussable to think of thoughts, understand others' speech and interaction, and participate in social activities without it. Recently, most people want to learn another language besides their mother tongue to strengthen their connection with the rest of the world. There are some influential languages in the world, but among them, English is the language that most people around the world would like to learn as a second or foreign language. Excellent command of the English language is now more of a necessity than a choice. Globalization, rapid technological progress, more demanding research and education standards, rising labor markets, and fast communication standards all make English literacy a must-have in every area. When our Afghan high school seniors graduate, they must be prepared to handle all of these problems. However, they are unable to perform in English at all. The importance of language in teaching/learning cannot be overstated. For instance, Campbell, A., and M. Qorro (1997, as cited in Mosha, 2014, p. 64) acknowledged that education is mostly conducted through the medium of language, emphasizing the importance of language in the educational process. Furthermore, according to ADEA (2005, as cited in Mosha, 2014), "language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education" (p. 5).

Furthermore, the usage of the first language in the English classroom has been and will continue to be a contentious topic on which everyone has an opinion, whether pros or cons. Various studies have shown that a student's first language is important in their learning of the target language (Lightbown and Spada, 2013; Rivers, 2011, as cited in Asif, Bashir, and Zafar, 2018, p. 67). But another school of thought believes that massive exposure to the target language is necessary to maximize the learner's learning process. In Afghanistan, students from the fourth to twelfth grades study English for three hours (forty minutes) a week as one of the compulsory subjects at schools. Although students study English for nine years, they still have problems with basic skills. Students and teachers in English language

classrooms, in Afghanistan, tend to stick to their native tongue, and they are frequently observed speaking Persian, Pashto, and Uzbeki, even in English language classrooms. Most studies on the first language usage in English classrooms either neglect or focus solely on the teachers' opinions.

It is worth noting that speaking in one's mother tongue in English classes is not the only impediment and challenge for language learners; many other factors challenge language learning, such as teaching methodology, textbooks, language teachers' expertise level, non-standard curriculum, and learning facilities, and so on. As a result, we have a clear picture of how our schools are preparing students for this global demand; we must understand why our high schools' new graduates from public schools are not reaching the appropriate level of command of the English language; and that we are prepared to address the problem.

Narayanan, Rajasekaran, and Lyyappan (2008, as cited in Loza and Ivonne, 2013) investigated the effects of motivation, attitude, and language anxiety on English acquisition and the link between gender and each of these components. These factors can have a negative impact on English language learning/acquisition; minimizing their impact should increase student motivation. To encourage the learning process, the study recommended focusing on creating a friendly and helpful environment in the classroom. The investigators also discovered that female students performed better than male students in this study. Compared to their male peers, female students had a more positive attitude toward the English language and had lower levels of fear. As a result, female students performed better on English proficiency examinations.

Hamada (2011, as cited in Loza and Ivonne, 2013) conducted a study on several demotivators in junior, and high school students and concluded that the major goal of the learning process should be to acquire language from the standpoint of communication. He found that the most significant demotivators among students were instructional styles, teachers, tests, low self-confidence, and textbooks. Hamada points out that his research focused on what demotivates learners rather than how to prevent it; he acknowledges that this may be viewed as a flaw in his study and proposes more examination.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and multi-language country, and there are three big families of languages such as Persian/Dari, Pashto, and Uzbaki, respectively.

There are many minor language families as well. As a result, Persian/Dari has served as a Lingua Franca throughout Afghanistan's history, and all ethnic groups no matter how minor or major, have had to learn this language to solve their problems. Generally, the Persian/Dari language is a bridge between speakers of other languages, and they acquire this language in an informal context, not at schools. From the fourth to twelfth grades, English is the only foreign language that is required for students to learn in a formal setting. Almost five to six years ago, I and one of my university students did a pilot study about English speaking challenges in a high school called Sultan Razia and found out there are many other factors that challenge language learning. Since then, I have been interested in focusing deeply on impediment factors and challenges conducted students at schools in Afghanistan. Thus, this study looks into factors impeding the language learning process. Several factors impede and challenge language learning, and it is crucial to understand which ones they are and how they affect the process in our society.

This research should be useful to policymakers, educators, and the Afghan government. Officials from the Ministry of Education who want to change education laws and procedures should pay close attention to this study because it may provide some insight into the current state of the English learning/teaching process in our public high schools; as it will be demonstrated, immediate action is required. Teachers will gain a lot from this research regarding understanding how they may develop as educators by introducing new strategies and using English all the time in their classrooms, as well as by pushing their students to learn the language through real-life examples.

A. The Aim of the Study

Even though English is a compulsory subject for Afghan students from the fourth to twelfth grades, the majority of students still lack language skills after completing the courses. To my knowledge, no study focuses on the factors of language learning to reveal the challenges and then develop practical solutions. This study aims to fill this gap and provide a guide for both language teachers and language learners in general.

B. The Importance of the Study

In Afghanistan, students used to study two national languages (Dari/Persian and Pashto) and rarely focused on international languages in the past. Because almost all the people in Afghanistan are Muslims, people wanted to recite the Holy Quran and learn Arabic in mosques. In recent decades, people from other second and third-world countries, as well as Afghans, have begun to learn at least one international language. For two decades, the Afghan younger generation has focused on learning a language in addition to their mother tongue, such as English, German, Turkish, etc. From the fourth to twelfth grades, English is the only language that students study at school for three hours (forty minutes) a week as a compulsory subject. When students graduate from high school, they face a slew of difficulties in understanding the English language. This study focuses on the factors and challenges that hinder language learning, and it will be a great help to both language teachers and language learners. This study aims to discover all the challenges and obstacles that impede language learning, present solutions to those factors, and give practical advice.

C. Research Questions

This Ph.D. dissertation, under the title "Factors Impeding the Learning of a Foreign Language in the Afghanistan School System," investigates and answers the following questions: The target participants are administrators, teachers, and twelve-grade male and female students of high schools.

1. How do the administrators and the teachers in Afghanistan view the teaching of English as a foreign language?

2. Do Afghan students view self-esteem as a barrier while learning English?

3. Do Afghan students view motivation as a barrier while learning English?

4. Do Afghan students view anxiety as a barrier while learning English?

5. Does gender affect Afghan students' views in relation to language learning barriers?

In order to answer the above-mentioned questions, the researcher interviews the administrators and English language teachers of two high schools (one male and one female), as well as distributes questionnaires to twelve-grade male and female

students of the aforementioned schools.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the globalization of the world economy and the spread of the Internet, people trade and interact with each other or in groups in today's lingua franca, English in addition to face-to-face interaction. This brings about the necessary improvement in learning four skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Many researchers in the field of English language teaching (hereafter ELT) have studied how to develop these skills in foreign/second language learners (hereafter L2) and suggested techniques for teachers. Language researchers have conducted several studies on second language learning in different contexts, especially in Asian and even Western countries. They have aimed to find out the factors that hinder or impede second language learning and then propose solutions to those factors. Afghanistan is one of the countries where the majority of the students like to learn English as a foreign language in a formal context either at schools or in private courses. Schools' subjects are mandatory for students; they do not have any choice but to add one or remove the other. Afghan language learners face several factors and challenges in learning English that hinder them. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the factors that impede second language learning in the Afghan school system in order to remove the obstacles along the way.

A. Teaching Techniques and Materials

The first and most important issue in language learning is teaching techniques and materials. First of all, many people's first thought when they hear the word 'English' is, unfortunately, grammar. Grammar, on the other hand, has been misunderstood and reflected as a language-learning medium. The current consensus is that learners should be exposed to comprehensible input when learning grammar (Cullen, 2012). In contrast, based on other research conducted by Hedge (2000, as cited in Aqel, 2013, p. 2470), teaching English grammar gives an explicit framework for ensuring correct structure production and speeds up the learning process. As a result, teaching grammar should be a top priority in any second language learning

process. Researchers and teachers in the field of English as a Second Language should look at the best technique for students to understand the rules and deliver accurate forms. Schaffner (2002) lists the following benefits of the grammar-translation method: "(a) improve verbal ability, (b) expand the students' vocabulary in L2, (c) develop their style, (d) improve their understanding of how languages work, (e) consolidate L2 structures for active use, and (f) monitor and improve the comprehension of L2" (p. 125).

On the other hand, according to Underwood's (2012) study, many teachers find it helpful to combine grammar instruction with communication-oriented activities. While many people consider grammar as the most important aspect of language learning, vocabulary is one of the most important aspects to be addressed first. Moreover, most researchers consider it the most important component (Coady, 1997). Language cannot be imagined without vocabulary, and healthy communication is impossible without vocabulary. It is worth mentioning that accurate communication skills require comprehensive grammar knowledge and a range of vocabulary to facilitate interaction between people.

In line with the foregoing, Aslan (2016) emphasizes the importance of vocabulary as one of the most important and necessary components of a language and points out that expanding one's vocabulary removes a significant barrier to learning another language. In addition, Zhang and Yin (2009), found that "among many other factors, phonetics is the most significant, as it largely weakens learners' confidence in both speaking and listening" (p.143). In addition, Abedi and Davidson (2012, as cited in Nguyen, Warren, and Fehring, 2014) found in another study that students are willing to learn vocabulary using visuals and the use of visuals improves students' ability and opportunity to use language to convey their thoughts and feelings. Although the majority of teachers and students believe that visual materials such as maps, diagrams, and real objects help students learn the language efficiently, Abebe and Davidson (2012, as cited in Nguyen, Warren, and Fehring, 2014) found that teachers rarely use them in the classroom. Furthermore, Aduwa-Ogiegbean and Iyamu (2006, as cited in Nguyen, Warren, and Fehring, 2014) found that textbooks, workbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, and posters are the most commonly used modern media in the English language classroom, while audio, video, programmed texts, language labs, flashcards, computers, magazines, and newspapers are rarely

used. Although language learning needs a variety of techniques and materials to reach students with different backgrounds and learning styles, language teachers do not consider the importance of visuals and extracurricular materials in teaching English.

B.   The Linguistic Barriers

In addition to other language learning challenges, linguistic differences among language learners is one of the most debatable topic of language learning. So, the existence of the intrinsic structure of the language learners' first language or native language, which they have been exposed to since the first day, is the most prevalent cause of challenges confronted by learners of English as the second language. For example, the Persian language structure is (subject + object + verb), whereas the English language structure is (subject + verb + object). Furthermore, in Persian, the adjective comes after the noun, as in "girl beautiful", whereas in English, the adjective comes before the noun, as in "beautiful girl". When linguistic differences between languages are visible, students face challenges and obstacles while learning a new language. The challenges stated above are a few of the many that students confront, but they are the most significant. In this instance, the most difficult task for a teacher is to develop a new structure of English grammar while avoiding dismantling the current language structure of their native tongue. A study conducted by the (Nguyen, 2011) on the challenges of learning English in Australia for students coming from selected Southeast Asian countries: Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia, research participants replied that linguistic differences are a factor causing difficulty for Southeast Asian students learning English, particularly in terms of pronunciation. It is not entirely appropriate to defend students who have difficulty pronouncing owing to linguistic differences. However, it is worth mentioning that several factors such as tone, intonation, and stress patterns of the language might have a negative impact on English pronunciation. It is for language teachers to enable their students to communicate fluently in both languages. Even with experienced professors, enough materials, and exposure to native English speakers, each ESL learner will face several issues. There are various methods that learners can take to improve their English language skills if they want to absorb foreign knowledge. To illustrate, learners must be cautious about selecting materials advised

by reputable English teachers, and they should obtain audio materials so that they can hear the odd phrases pronounced clearly and correctly (Oybekova, 2020).

C. Barriers Regarding the Language Learning/Teaching Materials

Not only the above-mentioned issues but also the challenges of language learning in front of language learners and the language learning and teaching materials that are used by language teachers could be another barrier. Items that aid in the learning process are referred to as "materials" when learning a new language. Books are necessary materials, but they are not sufficient in and of themselves. Teaching materials are crucial in encouraging students to use language communicatively. Text-based, task-based, and realia-based teaching resources are the three types of materials available. Textbooks, games, role plays, simulations, and task-based communication exercises are all examples of materials that can be used to promote communicative language education. From language-based realia like signs, periodicals, and newspapers to graphic and visual sources like maps, photographs, symbols, graphs, and charts, a communicative language education class can use various authentic items to assist communicative activities (Richard, 2001).

Moreover, the focus of foreign language teaching materials should be on both the language and communication skills of learners such as listening, speaking, writing and reading skills. These skills should be developed through foreign language teaching materials. Consequently, teaching materials play a crucial role in language teaching and learning. Since age-related characteristics play a crucial role in both young and older learners' learning of a foreign language, there are some debates on how to make language learners learn a foreign language with enthusiasm and a positive attitude. Teaching materials are also at the forefront of foreign language programs as they influence teachers' teaching methods and goals. Teaching materials should be tailored to the educational situation to meet the needs of your students. To some extent, new teaching materials place more emphasis on the language skills of young learners so that they can enjoy and have fun learning a foreign language. This will affect the way teachers teach young learners in the classroom (Hu, 2016).

According to Wilkins (1974, as cited in Getie, 2020), resources are not an add-on but an essential element of the learning scenario, and therefore low resources

hinder language development. The presence or absence of resources such as textbooks, workbooks, writing paper, pens, chalk, blackboard, wall charts, audio tapes, tape recorders, television, radio, reading materials, and a library affects the learners' attitude and the learning situation. In addition, Tomlinson (2012) stated that resources should take into account learners' different affective attitudes and good feelings towards the target language, and teachers and learning materials should enhance the learning situation. Learners practice activities that naturally arouse their curiosity and desire for understanding by embedding their interest and willingness in the materials (Wlodkowski, 1993, as cited in Getie, 2020). According to Wilkins (1974, as cited in Getie, 2020), creating resources in a second or foreign language that meet learners' needs can arouse learners' intrinsic interest in communicative skills as well as their motivation to succeed.

The importance of audio materials cannot be overstated. How can a learner know how to pronounce a sound sign if he or she encounters it in a book, as mentioned above? The truth is that most English language students will never hear a native speaker pronounce a word correctly. Students also study in an unplanned manner. They have books to read, but they have no idea how to pronounce some words (Oybekovna, 2020). Therefore, it is very helpful for language students to hear the correct pronunciation from their teacher or a native English speaker. Movies function as one of the most important sources of language learning, but because they often use inappropriate idioms and dialects, which are opposite to the standard forms of communication in many ways, they impede the learning process. Learning resources are the most important help for learners. They allow teachers to choose the most appropriate materials for the learner's level and learning style. Although different teachers may give different information about their students' learning problems each learner has his or her unique concerns and learning styles (Oybekovna, 2020).

D. The Instructional Barriers in Teaching English

In addition to other barriers, there are also some instructional barriers to teaching English. Not all challenges are linguistic in nature. A teacher can be one of the most important aspects of a student's ability to acquire a language. In educational institutions, a teacher who keeps abreast of current issues should be preferred.

Otherwise, difficulties caused by teachers, methods, and procedures used in the classroom will prevent good language learning (Kocaman, 2017). According to (Patricia, Julie, and Anne, 2005), qualified teachers, a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, teachers' educational background, their level of qualification, and their experience, make a difference in students' achievement.

In addition to the above, an issue lies in the education system itself as the teacher's goal is to "prepare" their students for the exam rather than teaching them how to use the language they are learning (Subramanian, 1985, as cited in Akbari, 2015). As a result, students try to achieve the required grade and have no intrinsic incentive to learn English for other goals, and they enter higher grades with varying levels of English proficiency if not none at all. According to Khaniya (1990, as cited in Ghorbani, 2009), "many teachers help students cope with exams in order to maintain their reputation as good teachers" (p. 51). Teachers' fear of poor results due to their students' performance in public examinations, as well as the associated stigma, shame, or embarrassment, may lead them to teach English only for examination purposes (Alderson and Wall, 1993, as cited in Akbari, 2015). Unfortunately, most teachers today do not value all four language skills equally, and speaking is the most undervalued of the four talents in foreign language teaching (Akbari, 2015).

In relation to the aforementioned issue, teachers have recently discovered the necessity of using a student-centered approach to language teaching. According to Lochana and Deb (2006), where teachers may help students acquire the target language in context and use it in real-life circumstances, both within and outside the language classroom. Richards (2001) defines collaborative or cooperative learning as a student-centered approach in which learners express their viewpoints and opinions through cooperative activities such as pair work or group work; share their ideas, information, and experience, and discuss and debate with one another. When employing cooperative learning activities in language classrooms, Jacobs and Hall (2002) recommend that instructor talk be minimized and student discourse be raised, with a focus on meaning negotiation and a greater amount of intelligible input. Additionally, a welcoming classroom environment and a desire to learn should be encouraged. Collaborative learning strives to provide learners with engaging tasks that will aid in developing communicative skills (Richards, 2001).

When implementing collaborative activities involving pair work and group work for students in language classrooms, teachers perform five major responsibilities, according to Brown (2007b). Teachers should assist students in developing sufficient classroom language so that they can grasp the teacher's instructions, select acceptable group tactics for students, schedule group work, monitor tasks, and assist students in debriefing before beginning the activity. While students are engaged in communicative activities such as pair work or group work, Littlewood (1981) recommends that teachers act as observers who walk around the class to give students guidance on how to begin their discussions, give students advice when needed, and assist them in resolving disagreements within pairs or groups. However, before engaging in learner-centered activities, teachers should ensure that all students understand the tasks and instructions so that they can begin to work independently and confidently.

Instead of interacting with teachers, students are urged to interact with one another (Richards, 2001). Students must have confidence, great drive, and a good attitude toward their studies to develop this capacity (Liu and Zhang, 2007). As a result, learner autonomy and motivation are critical components of effective teaching and learning. Many students want to communicate their opinions orally, suggest discussion topics, and share their experiences with the class during classroom communication exercises (Tomlinson and Dat, 2004).

E. The Affective Factors (anxiety, attitude, motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem)

Kocaman (2017) found that other factors such as anxiety, attitude, motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem make learning English difficult. The abovementioned factors are student-oriented.

1. Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural quality that affects every human being from the moment of birth. Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension, nervousness, perplexity, and/or excitement in a scenario that has the potential to push them to the brink. Mayer (2008, as cited in Sari, 2017) said that "anxiety is defined as a state of intense arousal, anticipation, tension, and fear that arises from a real or perceived threat of

imminent danger" (p179). Excessive anxiety, on the other hand, can render a person helpless. Excessive anxiety in the foreign language classroom can make students feel that they are not capable of learning English, especially in terms of speaking skills. Unsystematic teaching and learning in the classroom, which leaves little time for students to speak directly, is one of the reasons why students may suffer from extreme anxiety when they are asked to speak English orally. In addition, the lack of opportunities teachers provides for students to practice speaking contributes to them becoming anxious when asked to do so. Anxiety can have a negative impact on a student's motivation and ability to communicate in English in class. Low-motivated students may have low competence and therefore be more nervous in language classes. (Yamashiro and Mclaughlin, 2001, as cited in Sari, 2017).

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) identified three elements that influence student performance anxiety: Communication phobia, test anxiety, and fear of poor evaluation/acceptance. They believe that classroom anxiety is related to other academic and social factors. English classroom anxiety was included in the list of anxiety factors by (Na, 2007). Communication anxiety, the first anxiety element, is a type of shyness defined by a fear of or worry about communicating with others (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). EFL students in English classes are often plagued by nervousness. They are embarrassed to speak English in front of the teacher and/or their classmates. These students believe that someone is watching them and waiting for them to make a grammatical mistake, which makes them nervous when they are asked to speak English. These students believe that their English skills are inferior to those of their peers.

Test anxiety, on the other hand, is a form of performance anxiety based on fear of failure (Gordon and Sarson, 1955, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986). This often occurs when students have to take an English test, especially an oral test. In this environment, students feel pressured and uncomfortable. Even students who have meticulously prepared for an oral English test may make mistakes on the day of the test. Students make unusual mistakes and seem unsure of what they are supposed to perform on the exam. According to Yamashiro and Mclaughlin (2001, as cited in Sari, 2017), "test anxiety is a form of anxiety that acts like a motivating factor for studying harder and performing better" (p. 182). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) found that students who are confident they know the answer before they read the

material typically suffer amnesia due to their nervousness, which causes them to lose their memory and give the wrong answer on a test.

There is also the fear of negative evaluation, which manifests itself in worrying about being evaluated by others, avoiding evaluation situations, and assuming that others will judge one negatively (Watson and Friend, 1969, as cited in Horwitz, et al., 1986). This aspect leads students to be afraid of demonstrating their skills directly in English because they believe that their peers will criticize their performance. Students are often anxious when their teacher corrects them because it lowers their self-esteem in front of their peers (Sari, 2017). Even if the students' answers are wrong, the teacher's feedback on their answers must have an element of positive reinforcement that can drive them. Teachers should compliment students on their correct answers to remind them of what they have learned (Rivers, 1986). Positive reinforcement and compliments are very influential in reducing students' anxiety and stress when they take part in classroom activities and discussions. Therefore, it is argued that teachers should praise students' classroom participation to develop their self-esteem and reduce anxiety.

In addition, Harmer considers anxiety as a barrier to learning (2014). Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a type of anxiety that occurs when people learn a new language. For example, when students are frequently anxious, they react negatively to foreign language learning (FLL), because their anxiety negatively affects their performance. Although all components of FLL can cause anxiety, the language skills of listening and speaking are often considered the most anxiety-provoking. Communication anxiety is a common anxiety that students have when communicating in English. Besides, fear of negative evaluation is a typical phobia resulting from learners' feelings about how others evaluate their language competence and the fear of appearing ignorant. Foreign language anxiety is believed to be scenario-specific anxiety triggered by a particular situation (Harmer, 2014).

Although one-third of the students admitted to having some foreign language anxiety, a significant percentage reported that they were able to overcome it when speaking in class and felt relaxed and comfortable. In general, students who have high levels of anxiety find it difficult to improve their communication skills (Harmer, 2014). In support of the above points, anxiety is not a very serious obstacle for language learners if they believe in themselves and struggle to overcome it. Students

should be given time and the opportunity to express themselves in front of the class, and positive feedback and comments should support them.

Anxiety is the greatest effective obstacle to language learning. It is associated with unpleasant emotional experiences, including tension, melancholy, and anxiety. Anxiety in language acquisition refers to students' worries and fears when they are expected to express themselves in a foreign language. Language anxiety is inversely related to language acquisition: the less anxious you are, the more you will learn; the more anxious you are, the less you will learn. Moreover, anxiety is inversely related to academic achievement, self-esteem, oral and written competence, and self-confidence (Bao and Liu, 2021).

2. Attitude and Motivation

In addition to anxiety, an attitude is a long-term collection of ideas about an object or situation that causes one to react in a certain way. Since an attitude is learned and can be unlearned, it is quite long-lived. It can be taught because it has been learned. It is possible to learn to enjoy a foreign language. There is no student to whom it is innate to like or dislike a language. If the student comes to the classroom with a neutral or even positive attitude towards the language and a personality structure that allows him to be open and ready to perceive and respond to something, his attitude towards the language and language learning will be strongly influenced by the scenario. Attitudes develop within a frame of reference. Since attitudes are situational, they can be generalized. Language, teachers, classes, books, and assignments are all part of the learning process and educational environment. A student who dislikes learning, school, teachers, and assignments can easily generalize his dislike of a foreign language class. Consequently, positive attitudes and feelings are needed to improve students' efficiency in language learning (Ekiz and Kulmetov, 2016). Therefore, the learning environment, teaching materials, and people surrounding the learner, such as students and teachers, affect the learning process. If the student dislikes them for any reason, the language learning process confronts obstacles and demotivates students to learn languages.

At this point, it is important to make two distinctions: the literature on attitudes and motivation, which can be confusing at times. Therefore, we need to understand how the concepts of attitude and motivation differ. A collection of beliefs

is an attitude, and motivation is a reason to do something. It is easy to confuse this because a set of beliefs can be a motivation to do something. For example, your motivation to learn English might come from your attitude toward English culture or toward your teacher. It is a common misconception that if you do not like your English teacher, you will not learn English. However, there is little evidence that learners can tell the difference between the messenger and the message. The second distinction is often made in motivational literature. It involves a choice between integrative and instrumental motivation. The first is motivated by the desire to learn more about a culture, its language, and its people in order to better integrate into the society of the target language. The second is about achieving other goals. So if you are learning English because you can get a better job if you speak the language, your motivation is critical. According to motivation research, people who are instrumentally motivated are more likely to learn a second language (Sabuncuoglu, 2018).

The external driving factor is called motivation. In psychology, motivation refers to the internal process by which people feel compelled to perform certain activities in order to fulfill certain requirements. In language learning, motivation refers to the desire and inclination of learners to learn the language, which gives them power and drive. Motivation can also be defined in different ways. Motivation is defined as the expectation of a reward from the standpoint of behavior, while constructivist motivation emphasizes social context as well as individual personal choices (Bao and Liu, 2021).

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are the two types of motivation identified by (Arnold and Douglas, 2000). The desire to receive prizes or avoid punishment is an example of extrinsic motivation. It comes from outside and has to do with money, rewards, prizes, grades, and evaluations. Because of the importance of extrinsic motivation, some teachers or parents commit to giving prizes to their students or children. To give an example from the author's life: when it was time to take an extremely important exam in China, namely the college entrance exam (also called Gaokao), the author's parents gave her a new laptop and phone to motivate her to study for the exam, and it did motivate her to some extent. This is the case all over the world (Bao and Liu, 2021).

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is defined as an effort "for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself....and not because it leads to an extrinsic reward" (Deci, 1975, as cited in Bao and Liu, 2021, p. 465). Intrinsic motivation is related to people's internal desires or internal satisfying outcomes, such as feelings of accomplishment, competence, and self-determination. Maslow (1943, as cited in Bao and Liu, 2021) believes that intrinsic motivation is more important than extrinsic motivation because, in his opinion, human needs are arranged in a certain order: basic physical needs, community, security, identity, self-esteem, and finally self-actualization. Physical needs are at the bottom of this pyramidal hierarchy of needs, while self-actualization is at the top. People naturally push themselves to achieve higher levels of achievement (Bao and Liu, 2021).

Motivation is one of the most important affective elements that determines the success or failure of a complex task. It has the ability to steer learners in the right direction. But which is more important? Is it better to be motivated by external factors or by internal factors? Extrinsic motivation is beneficial for learning, but intrinsic motivation is more important than extrinsic motivation for language learning in the long run. Extrinsically motivated students, for example, may place too much emphasis on the benefits rather than the activity itself. Whereas children who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to focus on completing the task, which is beneficial for learning new things, especially languages. They are more persistent and perseverant and are more determined to complete the task at hand (Sabuncuoglu, 2018).

By learning English, their self-confidence is boosted, which is evidenced by the fact that more than two-thirds of the students surveyed felt that speaking English would boost their self-esteem. However, a small percentage of them expressed their displeasure. Although 18% of the students stated that they were not worried about making mistakes, more than one-third of the students stated that the risk of making mistakes was a regular cause of anxiety for them. Although half of the respondents indicated that they would be able to learn English, 15% believed that they would find it difficult to do so. This suggests that while some students are pessimistic about their chances of learning English, the majority are hopeful (Sabuncuoglu, 2018).

In short, students not only need to reduce their anxiety to learn languages efficiently, but they also need to have motivation and a positive view about learning

a language. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors affect the language learning process. It was determined that extrinsic motivation has a higher percentage of positive influence in learning languages.

3. Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

Self-confidence, also known as the concept of "I can do it," is the learner's belief in his or her ability to accomplish a task, as Brown (2014) explains. According to Krashen (2009), self-confidence increases the learner's receptivity and leads to a low filter. Using easier procedures at the beginning of classroom activities boosts students' confidence because the feeling of having accomplished something will help them master the next, more difficult task (Brown, 2014). Self-efficacy, self-esteem, risk-taking, and carefree are all attributes of self-confidence that are also associated with learning a second or foreign language. Ehrman (1996) refers to self-efficacy as a factor in learning as it indicates how confident a learner is in his or her ability to cope and succeed in a given scenario. In contrast, increased self-efficacy or the expectation of excellent results tends to promote motivation, a positive attitude, and a willingness to take learning risks (Skehan, 2014).

Moreover, language learning problems can greatly affect learners' self-esteem, which in turn affects their attitude and language achievement (Ehrman, 1996). Learners may believe that learning the target language is difficult or that there is a proper technique to learn the language. As a result, such beliefs, negative assumptions, and self-expectations alter learners' perceptions and attitudes about their ability to acquire the language (Ehrman, 1996).

F. Barriers Caused by Parental Factors

Wigfield et al. (2006, as cited in Ekiz and Kulmetov, 2016) discovered the following four significant parental factors that influence children's outcomes such as academic achievement and motivation:

1. Parental, family, and neighborhood characteristics (including key socioeconomic indicators such as household income, parental education, and parental occupation).

2. Parental actions (parental involvement in their child's education and

schooling, teaching methods, values education, etc.).

3. Parental attitudes and practices (parenting styles, values about academic achievement, beliefs about efficacy, etc.).

4. Child-specific beliefs of parents (perception of their child's competencies, expectations of success, etc.) (Ekiz and Kulmetov, 2016).

According to this approach, child outcomes are influenced by these four parental influences as well as by the child's characteristics. All of these factors, including child outcomes, are thought to influence each other, either directly or indirectly. There are also cultural differences in how these components are linked (Butler, 2015, as cited in Ekiz and Kulmetov, 2016).

In addition, results have shown that the above parameters have a relative influence (Salameh, 2012). Students look for valuable resources such as text/course books, dictionaries, materials, or any technical support to gain important knowledge for their second language growth besides the family aspect. In this light, Khan (2011, as cited in Kocaman, 2017) stated that "in the context of modern teaching, strategies based on novel and sophisticated software or conceptual strategies are always needed to deal with the everyday teaching/learning situations where learners encounter difficulties and may not be able to achieve the goal without some strategies" (p. 580).

It is still difficult for many schools and institutes to create a worthy classroom environment with quality technology. The presence of technology in the classroom is often associated with the growth of English language proficiency (Nunez, 2018). According to Baron and Bruillard (1997, as cited in Nunez, 2018), the difficulty of using information technology (IT) in traditional classrooms is a significant barrier. Teachers do not use IT frequently and are not convinced of the need to show IT to trainees during the preparation period. Many public schools have difficulty integrating electronic objects into their learning environments. According to (Baron and Bruillard 997, as cited in Nunez, 2018), technology is not included in teacher training, so new teachers enter the classroom with minimal knowledge of how to integrate technology into instruction.

G. Other Factors that Affect Language Learning

In addition to the parental factors which were mentioned above, there are some other factors such as resources, materials, and technological support that are directly related to language learning. When learning a second language, students often seek support. Learners who do not receive support, on the other hand, face challenges that hinder their progress in learning a second language. Family or family background is an important component to consider when learning a second language. Khan (2011) refers to countries such as Saudi Arabia where the population is poorly educated and lacks a proper educational foundation. Moreover, the money of these families is inadequate, so they are not interested in providing their children with a good education. Salameh (2012) describes the family and school as two important social environments in which a child matures in this framework. Consequently, these social contextual factors have a significant impact on the socio-psychological perspective of a learner. The research was conducted in EFL classrooms in public secondary schools in Dubai to determine the effects of "parents' education, financial status, and occupation" on children's English language proficiency (Kocaman, 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher explains the research methodology, such as the participants of the study, the research instruments, and the research procedures. In addition, this chapter explains the data collection tools, data analysis, and limitations of the research.

A. Participants

In this study, the researcher considers qualitative and quantitative data collection using close-ended and open-ended questions to reveal the factors that hinder the learning of a second language in the Afghan school system. For this purpose, the researcher randomly selected participants from two different high schools, namely Sultan Razia Female High School, twelfth grade, and Bakhtar Male High School, twelfth grade. There were 200 students from these two high schools (100 female and 100 male). The age range of the participants was between 17 and 23 years. The participants had English classes at school for nine years, from fourth to twelfth grade. They learned three hours of English (forty minutes per hour) per week. Afghanistan is home to different ethnic groups that are completely mixed. In one school, students of different ethnicities learn in one classroom, for example, Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, Uzbek, and so on. The diversity of classes is not only based on their ethnicity but also based on their education and social and economic background. Since Mazar City is the center of the northern part of Afghanistan and many well-known and experienced teachers teach at schools, students commute from the suburbs, surrounding districts and even other cities in the region. Moreover, this city has a large number of facilities compared to the surrounding cities and districts. For this reason, people from different backgrounds flock to this city to study here. As a result, one can observe and experience great diversity in the schools of this city. In order to take into account all these dynamics, the researcher decided to conduct this study to find out what factors hinder English language learning in the Afghan school system.

Secondly, fifteen administrative staff members (six male and nine female) from those two schools participated in an interview questionnaire related to this research. They had work experience ranging from ten to thirty years in the administrative field, either as a principal, director, or manager of their respected schools.

Thirdly, seventeen English language teachers were also research participants in this study. Among them, five of them were male, and twelve of the rest were female teachers. The teachers were from those two schools and had teaching experience ranging from five to forty years in their respected schools.

B. Instruments

To collect the targeted data, the researcher focused on three groups of participants, such as administrators, English language teachers, and male and female students. The researcher interviewed the administrative staff (school principal, heads of departments) to get deeper knowledge about the challenges and factors affecting English language learning, and the interview questions are in Appendix A. In addition to the above-mentioned points, the researcher used a questionnaire for English language teachers by referring to articles to discover what challenges and obstacles they had faced during their teaching journeys (Safi., 2014; R, Cwikla, and Kienzle, 2015; Ekiz and Kulmetov, 2016). The questionnaires are in Appendix B. Moreover, the researcher used a multiple-choice questionnaire by (Basco, L. M., and Han, S. H., 2016) about self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety for two hundred students (one hundred male and one hundred female) in high schools in Mazar City, Afghanistan, and the questionnaires are in Appendix C. The stated instruments were first reviewed by the respected advisor, and after that, they were referred to the university committee for approval.

C. Data Collection Procedures

Before conducting the study on the target subjects, the researcher first obtained permission from the person in charge (headmaster) and then spoke to the teachers concerned to obtain their consent and to plan the time for conducting the study. The purpose of the study and the instructions for completing the

questionnaires were explained to the respondents before the questionnaires were distributed. First, the participants were asked to complete the consent form; then the researcher distributed the questionnaires to collect the required data. The personal information of the participants as well as their responses will be kept confidential. The information will not be shared with anyone except the research director and the research committee if necessary. The questionnaires consisted of three sections. First, there were multiple-choice questions where respondents (students) could select only one option. Second, there were open-ended questions where participants could express their opinions. In the third section, participants (administrative staff) were interviewed to collect the research data. The researcher gave the respondents enough time to answer each question carefully and accurately.

D. Data Analysis

SPSS 26.0 was utilized to conduct data analyses of the study. Skewness and kurtosis scores were examined to confirm that parametric tests could be carried out. Table 1 presents the skewness and kurtosis levels in detail. As the values were within the ±2 range, the normality assumption was satisfied, allowing researchers to conduct parametric tests (George and Mallery, 2010).

Table 1: Skewness and kurtosis values of the dependent variables

Variable	Group	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Male	-.74	.26
	Female	-.89	1.99
Self-esteem	Total	-.97	1.24
	Male	-1.18	.77
Motivation	Female	-.79	.85
	Total	-1.04	.91
	Male	.32	-.68
Anxiety	Female	.12	-.94
	Total	.20	-.84

Initially, a MANOVA test was designated to assess the differences between male and female students in terms of anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation. While checking the multivariate normality assumption, four participants (i.e., 3 males and 1 female) were found to have extreme Mahalanobis distance values. Upon further inspection, it was detected that they almost only answered the questions as "Strongly

disagree". It was deduced that they did so that they could finish the questionnaires as quickly as possible. Thus, their data were removed from all the analyses of the present study. Nevertheless, the dependent variables were highly correlated (Table 9), exceeding the critical value of .9 (Field, 2013). Therefore, a series of independent sample t-tests with Bonferroni correction was conducted instead of MANOVA.

Table 2: Pearson's correlation coefficient values indicate the strength of the relationship between the research variables

	1	2	3
1. Self-esteem	—		
2. Motivation	.95**	—	
3. Anxiety	.92**	.89**	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01

Then, a series of one-tailed, one-sample t-tests were performed to see if students scored lower than the average score (i.e., 3) on anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem in English scales, which indicated whether they viewed those variables as barriers to learning English. Similar to the previous analyses, the Bonferroni correction was implemented to reduce the risk of Type 1 error.

E. Limitation

In this study, there were some unavoidable limitations, yet the researcher successfully achieved his objectives. Some of the prominent research limitations were mentioned here. The first limitation was how to reach all those two hundred participants (male and female students) from two high schools at once. Therefore, the research was scheduled separately for boys' and girls' schools. Another limitation was that participants could not answer the questionnaires online as they did not have internet access and language labs to do them easily. That's why the researcher provided them with hard copies of questionnaires to answer. Thirdly, this study was conducted in Mazar City, which is located in the northern part of Afghanistan; therefore, it cannot be generalized that all the English language learners might have the same problem. It was another limitation of the study. Although the aforementioned issues were the limitations of this study, the researcher, with the help of the administrative staff of those two schools, smoothed the process and collected the targeted data on time.

After collecting the targeted data from two hundred male and female twelve-grade high school' students, the researcher entered it in an Excel sheet. The researcher used an Excel sheet to code the collected data and make it ready for further analysis.

IV. THE ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the current research in three subtitles: the first subtitle presents the interview results of the administrative staff of the two high schools, and the second subtitle presents the results of the questionnaires from the English language teachers. The third subtitle shows the findings of the questionnaires of two hundred students (100 males and 100 females) from two different schools. It presents the demographical information of the participants, self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety questionnaires' results.

A. Opinions of Administrative Staff about Foreign Language Learning System

The study was conducted under the title "Factors Impeding the Learning of a Foreign Language in Afghanistan School System". Fifteen administrative staff members from two Afghan high schools (male and female) participated and answered questions regarding their schools' educational issues in an interview. This research was implemented during a very critical period in Afghanistan, as the previous government had been overthrown by the Taliban. For the time being, everything was going on as it was before, especially in terms of implementing the schools' curriculum. The Taliban may bring some changes to the schools' curricula, but for now, everything remains the same as usual. The interview focused on three main issues: instruction and student achievement, the school improvement process, and staff abilities, dynamics, and evaluation. In each section, the interviewer asked questions in (appendix B) and the interviewees answered them. In the following subtitles and paragraphs, the researcher wrote the administrative staff's opinions about foreign language learning in Afghanistan school systems.

B. Instruction and Students Achievement

The second on the instruction and students' achievement contained six questions one of which was multiple choice and the rest were open-ended. For example, "How do you evaluate language teaching at your school?" Nine of the

interviewees stated that their schools had an excellent language teaching system. As Omery, Jamei, Wahida, and Shanaz stated, they had expert language teachers who had participated in different teaching methodologies, workshops, and seminars and used the latest versions of materials and teaching systems. In contrast, six of the interviewees acknowledged that they had a good language teaching system that was neither excellent nor poor. They claimed that, after the Taliban occupied the country, some of the schoolteachers left the country and immigrated to different countries around the world. This resulted in a reduction in the number of qualified teachers at schools.

Another issue that interviewees raised during the interview was the lack of updated materials and up-to-date teaching methods, workshops, and conferences. According to Khan there were a limited number of seats for teachers to participate in workshops or conferences, and it was competitive, which is why there are still a number of teachers who have not participated. Moreover, some well-known schools receive much greater benefits, such as up-to-date materials and training, in comparison to schools in the rural areas. None of the interview participants from both male and female schools selected the option "poor."

For the second interview question about "What elements should be included in a total instructional program?", all the interviewees agreed that in order to have a well-designed instructional program, we should have a standardized and approved educational system that meet all the requirements of the current situation. Additionally, Hasinah, Shelah, Shakilah, and Mastora (2022) acknowledged that an appropriate learning environment, student-centered learning, and providing theoretical and practical learning facilities are the main key issues to include in an instructional program.

Regarding the third question, "What school-wide ideas have you implemented in the area of the curriculum?", the interviewees acknowledged that the most suitable thing to do is to appoint expert and professional teachers, motivate and encourage students to participate in the lesson, and be present in the class at all times. Moreover, Khan (2022) highlighted the role of students' parents in this regard and said there should be a constant connection with parents to get feedback about the usefulness of school educational activities and curriculum. Another issue that the interviewees mentioned was holding seminars for teachers and having an association;

these two also have a direct effect on the issue. According to Omery, Jamei, Wahida, and Shanaz (2022), "holding seminars relating to language teaching enhances and develops teachers' performance in the class." Besides, they stated that "associations where the school authorities discuss the issues directly influence the aforementioned issues."

Since the interviewees were the administrative staff, and they supervised the teaching and learning process at school and had close eyes on everything, they were able to explain their answer to the question, "How do they help teachers improve their practice?" After reviewing the teaching plan and teaching system, we (administrative staff) noted the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers and gave them useful advice and feedback. Moreover, the school authorities asked teachers to motivate (intrinsic and extrinsic) students to participate actively in the lessons. (Maleka, 2022), the school principal mentioned that the school provided facilities for teachers to update their teaching methodologies and implement them in the classes. Students also filled out evaluation questionnaires about the subject(s) and teacher(s) to see whether the teaching system was beneficial or not. The school principals and responsible authorities provided supportive feedback for teachers and, if necessary, held a short workshop on the specific problematic issues. She asserted that the school authorities attempt to provide educational and training facilities for teachers to improve and enhance their subject knowledge to meet today's needs.

Regarding the fifth interview question relating to the increase of students' achievement, the interviewees mentioned that the schools provided useful educational programs and created a suitable educational environment. For instance, based on the curriculum, principals asked teachers to provide some extracurricular activities for the students to enhance their knowledge and assist them in learning independently. So, teachers gave them projects, assignments, and field studies in relation to their school subjects. Jamei (2022) reported that, in addition to teaching the school subjects and following the regulations accurately, teachers are also responsible for talking about the importance of education in students' future lives and careers to encourage them to be more active. He stated that extracurricular activities broaden students' vision about their school subjects as well as help them discover their hidden talents.

It is obvious that students face challenges and problems during their studies at school, and it is up to the authorities to solve them in a better way. In response to the interviewer's question about the steps to follow if a student is struggling in the school, the authorities pointed out that they are responsible for following up on every single issue in order to solve the problems and challenges on the spot. In addition to that, they state that they talk individually and listen carefully to their concerns to find out the solution. In the case of a serious issue, the school asks the parents and raises the issue with them. In this way, both the authorities and parents look forward to overcoming the problems.

C. School Improvement Process

The second key issues that the interviewer raised during the interview with administrative staff of both male and female schools was about the school improvement process. This section contained three open-ended questions.

Regarding the key elements of an effective school improvement plan/process, the interviewees responded that every educational institution (school, college, and university) has its own manual of educational policies and, based on that, they implement their progressive plan accurately and give a chance students and teachers to share their ideas about school improvement policies. Schools have weekly, monthly, and quarterly meetings to discuss educational and administrative issues in order to find solutions. They (administrative staff) also share the progress report of their school periodically with the education directorate of the city (Mazar City).

For the second interview question about their experiences and skills in promoting school-wide efforts to improve instruction, the school's administration acknowledged that they are responsible for providing facilities for both teachers and students to enhance their theoretical and practical educational skills. To promote school instruction, they (principals) hold workshops, seminars, and short-term courses to exchange ideas and findings in order to develop the educational capacities of teachers. Additionally, the government encourages teachers to provide educational training for multiple schools in the capital city (Kabul).

In relation to the interviewer's question regarding their contribution to the improvement of instruction for all staff members, they mentioned that there are

plenty of ways to do so. However, the most important thing that a school could do is to hold seminars, workshops, and run short-term programs for the staff. In addition to this, well-organized coordination between administrative sections and teachers could play an important role in the improvement of instruction for all staff members. Most importantly, holding workshops on educational leadership and using modern technology in their daily work can certainly be a big help for them.

D. Staff Abilities, Dynamics, and Evaluation

The third main issue interviewer raised during the interview with the administrative staff of both male and female schools was about their abilities, dynamics, and evaluation. The administrative staff responded to the four open-ended questions in this part, as follows.

The first question asked of the interviewees was about the qualities of a good teacher. The administrative staff mentioned that, of course, every school prefers to hire expert, professional, punctual, and hardworking teachers and administrators. Furthermore, the staff must have strong communication skills and be logical and articulate. Teachers, for instance, must be honest, punctual, and strict while teaching and evaluating students' progress. Lastly, a good teacher must have both an excellent academic background in the subject and a good personality.

Secondly, the interviewer asked, "How do you observe a teacher's ability to connect with students?" and "What are the key skills you look for?" The interviewees mentioned that teachers should have leadership skills to control students, and practical and theoretical knowledge of the subject(s) in order to connect the lesson(s) with students' real-life conditions. When the teacher connects the context with real-life conditions surrounding students, the percentage of forgetting the lesson is very low. Furthermore, being punctual, patient, and adhering to school regulations are all important factors in developing a bond between teachers and students.

Thirdly, the interviewer asked what key skills or strategies would the administrators employ to supervise and evaluate teachers? The administrative staff stated that first the school authorities check if teachers have a clear and understandable teaching plan to meet students' expectations. Once the teachers have

a well-organized teaching plan, the school observes if they are implementing it accurately enough to fill all the gaps. This kind of supervision and evaluation is usually done at the beginning and middle of the semester. However, the school also looks to see the teaching outcome at the end of the semester and does a post-evaluation and supervision by collecting data indirectly through random interviews of students or preparing a questionnaire for students whose average score is seventy percent or above.

In relation to the demonstration of advocacy for all students, as the interviewer asked the administrative staff, they pointed out that school principals and authorities feel responsible for supporting both teachers and students during their teaching and learning process at school or even outside of the school environment. More specifically, Hasinah, Shelah, Shakilah, and Mastora (2022) mentioned that schools encourage and motivate students to participate in classroom activities by highlighting the importance of education in their personal and academic lives. Also, authorities listen to their thoughts, ideas, and concerns about their education process and attempt to solve them all. On the one hand, the school tries to provide as many facilities as possible for its students; on the other hand, it requires students to follow school regulations and policies. It is worth mentioning that the school not only respects students' views, ideas, and thoughts but also supports and utilizes their valuable ideas to improve the school's reputation, among others.

E. English Teachers' Opinion about Language Learning

Language learning has become a highly debated topic around the world. In recent decades, people have been immigrating to different places in search of a better life, job, and a stable environment in which to educate their children. Due to the desire to fit into a new environment with diverse points of view, cultures, and lifestyles, people have been focusing on learning an additional language. The researcher conducted research under the title "Factors Impeding the Learning of a Foreign Language in Afghanistan School System" and sought to uncover the challenges of language learning, particularly in formal contexts such as educational institutions. The researcher distributed questionnaires to English teachers of two high schools (male and female) in Mazar City, Afghanistan, to identify the impeding factors affecting language learning.

Table 3: Teachers' demographical information

	N	%
Gender		
Male	5	29.4
Female	12	70.6
Teaching experience		
5-9 years	8	47.1
10-19 years	5	29.4
20 or more years	4	23.5
Mother tongue		
Dari/Persian	17	100
Second language		
English	16	94.1
Uzbeki	1	5.9
Whom to teach		
Boys	9	52.9
Girls	8	47.1
Teaching techniques		
Q&A/Discussion/Group Work	10	58.8
Only Q&A	7	41.2
Teaching focus		
Speaking	10	58.8
Reading	7	41.2
Students having access to English books		
Few	10	58.8
Some	7	41.2
Use of electronics in the class		
Never	10	58.8
Weekly	4	23.5
Monthly	3	17.7
Explanations in mother tongue		
Sometimes	10	58.8
Always	7	41.2
Student participation		
Active	7	41.2
Passive	10	58.8
Participation in teaching methods seminars/workshops		
Yes	10	58.8
No	7	41.2
Total	17	100

In this study, seventeen English language teachers (five male and twelve female) from two different high schools participated. They all had a bachelor's degree (BA) in English language. Relating to the teachers' teaching experiences in high schools, the results showed that their experiences were varied. Forty-seven-point one (47.1%) percent of the participants had teaching experience between five to nine years, and twenty-nine-point four (29.4%) percent of the others had teaching experience between ten to nineteen years. Twenty-three-point five (23.5%) percent

of the teachers had twenty or more than twenty years of teaching experience. It was inferred that the language teachers were not newly appointed, but rather had enough teaching experience to teach.

Related with the second question about participants' "mother tongue", all of them (100%) selected the option "Dari/Persian"; however, they did not choose the other options such as Pushto and Uzbaki. For the third question, "What other language(s) do you speak?", ninety-four point one (94.1%) of the study participants stated that they could communicate in daily conversation in the English language. Additionally, five-point nine (5.9%) percent of the other research participants could interact in Uzbeki, which is the third-biggest language family in Afghanistan. This language is widely spoken by people in the north and northeast, but not in other parts of the country. Furthermore, the research raised the question of whether teachers "teach girls, boys, or mixed classes." It is obvious that in Afghanistan, there are no mixed classes at schools, neither in big cities nor in suburbs or small villages. Fifty-two-point nine (52.9%) percent of the teachers stated they teach in boys' classes, however, forty-seven-point one (47.1%) percent of the remaining mentioned that they teach in girls' classes. Recently, everything has been changed and Taliban did not allow female teachers to teach in boys' classes.

The research also raised the question of whether or not teachers use some "teaching techniques" and which technique is the most prominent among others. Fifty-eight-point eight (58.8%) percent of the participants (teachers) acknowledged that they used the "question and answer", "discussion", and "group work" in their classes. Besides, forty-one-point two (41.2%) percent of the remaining participants (teachers) only used "question and answer" teaching techniques while teaching the English language. However, the research participants did not use any other language teaching techniques out of those above-mentioned ones.

In addition to the above issue, the researcher questioned "Which of the following skills do they mostly focus on in language teaching." Fifty-eight-point eight (58.8%) percent of the study participants claimed that teachers focus more on "speaking skills" than other skills while teaching a language. The second most focused language skill was "reading skills." Forty-one-point two (41.2%) percent of the research participants stressed "reading skills" because students must read the text and then go through each question individually. Surprisingly, all the participants

reported that they neither focused on "listening skills" nor on "writing". They did not give the researcher a specific reason for that, but they talked about the lack of listening equipment and a language lab. It is very costly to prepare the required language lab for every school; however, there are a limited number of competitive lab centers in the city.

The other question that the researcher asked the participants (teachers) was whether they had any accessibility issues with English books or English materials. Fifty-eight-point eight (58.8%) percent of the participants selected the option "few"; however, the remaining respondents (41.2%) selected the option "some". None of the research participants selected the options "all" and "none", surprisingly. It showed that the percentage of language learning materials' accessibility was lower among language learners. Lack of accessibility for authentic materials also affects the language teaching and learning process at schools.

Additionally, the researcher asked the participants "How often do you use electronic devices?", it does not matter which kinds of electronic devices they use in their classes. The majority of the participants fifty-eight-point eight (58.8%) percent selected the option "never." In addition to that, twenty-three-point five (23.5%) percent of the other respondents (teachers) went to the "weekly" option, and the remaining seventeen-point seven (17.7%) percent headed to the "monthly' option, respectively. Surprisingly, none of the study participants chose the option "daily" for this issue. Although almost all educational centers and institutes around the world widely use technological devices such as computers, projectors, and e-books, they are still new and are rarely used in the Afghan school system.

In relation to the question "How often do you explain your lesson in the native language of your students", most of the study participants (teachers) fifty-eight-point eight (58.8%) percent chose the option "sometimes." Forty-one-point two (41.2%) percent of the remaining participants selected the option "always" for the above-mentioned question. Lastly, none of the participants chose the option "never." It was determined that language teachers widely used their native language to teach and explain English lessons in the class. It was inferred that the usage of a native language, not the target language (English), in language classes might be the reason for impeding the language learning process among students.

The researcher questioned participants about the main activities they focused

on during the teaching or "student participation" in the class. The study respondents (teachers) acknowledged that forty-one-point two (41.2%) percent of the students actively participated in the lessons. It means that teachers used some of the teaching activities such as "you read and students listen", ask few students to read in pieces", and "ask students to read individually and silently." However, fifty-eight-point eight (58.8%) percent of the study respondents stated that students do not participate in the class actively. It means that teachers only used one specific language teaching technique, which is "you read and students listen." That's why students did not actively do anything in the class. It was concluded that teachers did not use group work, pair work, or other teaching strategies to engage students actively in the learning process.

In addition to that, the researcher questioned "teachers' participation in teaching methods, seminars and workshops." Fifty-eight-point eight (58.8%) percent of the research participants (teachers) selected the option "yes" to show that they participated in the seminars and workshops held by international organizations such as the British Council, ELTA, and so on. Participants in these workshops and seminars were given participation certificates, too. Of the remaining forty-one-point two (41.2%) percent of the participants selected the option "no" and hoped to attend such kinds of programs in the future to enhance their knowledge. It was declared that almost half of the participants (teachers) did not receive any extra training to enhance their language teaching methods and strategies. The use of traditional teaching methods and strategies keeps students away from the learning process and makes the class environment boring for them.

The findings showed that besides the factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety in language learning, there are other issues and factors that affect the language learning process of the learners. The most highlighted ones are not focusing equally on language learning skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as implementing updated language teaching strategies like communicative teaching methods and student-centered learning. Lack of authentic materials, language labs, and the usage of electronic devices like projectors and computers are other factors. Although more than half of the teachers participated in educational workshops and conferences, it is not enough for them to cope with today's language teaching and learning strategies.

F. Students' Demographical Information

Language learning is one of the most common fields of study among nations around the world. Students either study a commonly used foreign language or languages at governmental educational institutes or private language institutes. Along with technological developments, the education system, especially language learning, has changed a lot. In order to learn and implement those changes in language learning classes, research is needed, and based on the findings, a teaching and learning policy should be designed. The researcher implemented a study on factors affecting language learning in male and female high schools in Mazar City, Afghanistan, respectively.

Table 4: Students' demographical information

	N	%
Gender		
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
Mother tongue		
Dari/Persian	173	86.5
Pushto	16	8
Uzbeki	11	5.5
Second language		
Turkish	10	5
English	93	46.5
Urdo	9	4.5
Pashto	12	6
None	76	38
Father's occupation		
Businessman	103	51.5
Shopkeeper	46	23
Teacher	51	25.5
Mother's occupation		
Teacher	23	11.5
Housewife	177	88.5
Father's degree		
Primary	22	11
Secondary	35	17.5
High school	57	28.5
University	41	20.5
None	45	22.5
Mother's degree		
Primary	28	14
Secondary	28	14
High school	40	20
University	30	15
None	74	37
Total	200	100

Two hundred students (one hundred males and one hundred females) from two different high schools, Sultan Razia Female and Bakhtar Male, took part in this study. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 23 years old and were all in grade twelve. Furthermore, the participants were mostly from the country's north, which is known as a multinational zone. Besides their mother tongue, which was either Persian, Pushto, or Uzbeki, the research participants were able to speak other foreign languages such as English, Urdu (Indian), and Turkish. They stated some of the reasons why they spoke or learned them. First, the northern part has every ethnicity such as Uzbek and Turkmen, which are branches of the modern Turkish language that are spoken in Turkey. Second, people had been watching Indian movies for a long time, and it was very easy to travel either to Pakistan or India. These two countries speak Urdu with some differences. Third, because English is one of the most spoken languages in the world and the language of science, technology, politics, etc., people were eager to learn it. Afghans were not an exception and, based on the above reasons, they generally knew these three languages.

Regarding the "mother tongue of participants (students)", eighty-six-point five (86.5%) percent stated that their mother tongue is "Dari/Persian.". In addition to that, eight (8%) percent of the other respondents mentioned that they speak in "Pushto" language which is the second most spoken language in Afghanistan. Also, this language is the national language of people besides Dari/Persian. Thirdly, five-point five (5.5%) percent of the study participants (students) chose the "Uzbeki" as their mother tongue. It is clear that most Uzbek people live in the northern part of the country not in the south or other parts. In contrast, none of the participants stated another language such as "Turkmani", a language spoken by Turkmen people in the northern part of the country.

Additionally, Afghan people generally speak in another language than mother tongue or simply learn or speak in a second language as well. They learn some of those languages in formal settings like schools and private language institutions, or they acquire them through communication in the environment. Five percent of the study participants speak "Turkish" as a second foreign; four point five (4.5%) of the other respondents speak "Urdo" and six percent of the remaining ones speak "Pushto" as a second language. Surprisingly, almost half of the participants (students) (46.5%) speak in "English" plus their mother tongue. Thirty-eight (38%)

percent of the study respondents, which is quite a high percentage after the English language, selected the option "none" to express that they do not speak another language. It was concluded that most of the people in Afghanistan learn English as their foreign language even more than other languages which are spoken there.

Regarding students' "father's occupation", fifty-one-point five (51.5%) percent of the respondents (students) chose the option "businessman." It showed that more than half of the participants' parents were busy doing business, either small or big ones. Secondly, twenty-five point five (25.5%) of the other respondents stated that their parents are teachers and run their families from the salary they receive from the government. Thirdly, twenty-three (23%) percent of the remaining participants acknowledged that their parents are shopkeepers. It was inferred that students' parents (fathers) had a good source of income to run their families, and in general, students had a middle-level lifestyle.

The participants also answer the question relating to their "mother' occupation." Eighty-eight-point five (88.5%) percent of the participants (students) selected the option "housewife" to clarify that their mother did not work outside. Secondly, eleven-point five (11.5%) percent of the remaining participants chose the option "teacher" for the aforementioned issue. It was concluded that in general females did not work in governmental offices and other businesses; however, they preferred to be a teacher in either governmental or private institutions.

In relation to the educational level of "students' fathers", twenty-eight-point five (28.5%) percent of the participants (students) selected the option "high school", and twenty-point five (20.5%) percent of the others chose the option "university" to express their fathers' educational level. Additionally, seventeen-point five (17.5%) percent of the study respondents focused on the option "secondary", and eleven (11%) percent of the remaining participants stated that their fathers only studied primary school not more than that. Amazingly, twenty-two-point five (22.5%) percent of the respondents did not select any of the previously mentioned options; however, they chose the option "none" to clarify that their fathers did not study school at all. Although the majority of the students' fathers had an educational background from primary level to university, still there were non-educated ones.

Regarding "mothers' educational level", 20% of the study participants (students) selected the option "high school", and 15% of the other respondents stated

that their mothers' had "a university" degree. In addition to that, 14% of the participants acknowledged that their mothers studied up to secondary school, and 14% of the remaining said that their mothers completed only primary school. Surprisingly, 37% of the study participants, which is the highest percentage among others, stated that their mothers did not go to school and chose the option "none" for the previously mentioned issue. In short, although 63% of the students' mothers were educated, some to a higher level and some to a lower level, 37%, which is quite a high percentage, did not go to school at all.

G. Students' (male and female participants) perspectives about Language Learning

In addition to the points asserted above, two open-ended questions were used to collect the targeted data from the research participants. Both male and female participants in this study focused on certain points relating to the question, "What do you like the most about the English language?" Generally, participants acknowledged that they liked speaking English and traveling abroad in order to communicate easily with people, especially since they mentioned traveling to the United States of America or any other English-speaking countries. The second thing they specified was "reading English stories and novels." They believed that there were different kinds of books available, such as short stories and novels, either on the internet or in libraries, so they could easily access and enjoy reading them when they learned the English language. Thirdly, research participants stated that the best thing about the English language was "grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills." They thought that, in order to learn a language efficiently, one should focus on the target language's structure, vocabulary, and communication skills. Otherwise, it would be far more difficult to interact efficiently if one did not understand the language structure and faced a shortage of vocabulary. The role of vocabulary was seen as crucial to learning a language and solving problems with native speakers as well. Finally, respondents highlighted that writing skills were one of the best parts of language learning. Many of the participants would like to develop their writing capacity by writing academic paragraphs in the short term, and in the long term, they would like to start writing short stories and novels.

In relation to the question "How do you learn English best? Or what should you do to learn English best?" The research participants acknowledged that there are many ways a language learner could use to learn a language. The first and most important point was "reading and vocabulary." Participants mentioned and suggested that reading books, novels, and short stories are some examples of how students could learn the language better. They also stated that reading develops reading comprehension capacities and improves vocabulary and general knowledge. In addition to that, respondents highlighted the importance of memorizing vocabulary when learning a language. Vocabulary is a critical component of language structure; if one does not have enough vocabulary, they will be unable to interact efficiently. That is why vocabulary plays an important role in learning and comprehending language while interaction happens.

According to the students who participated in this study, the second important factor in language learning is "listening". Participants mentioned that listening and becoming familiar with target language speakers' pronunciation, accent, stress, and intonation play an important role in learning a language. They suggested that listening to songs, short videos, and daily conversations based on learners' knowledge could facilitate language learning in a better way.

Besides listening, participants asserted that "watching short videos" and "having daily conversations" are other sources of learning a language. While watching videos, language learners can imitate the way native speakers pronounce or utter words, practice speaking, and learn the usage of certain expressions and structures of the language in a real context. Moreover, watching videos of the target language enhances the cultural knowledge and social interaction of the learners.

The participants also focused on the "syntax" of a language and the "translation" of the target language into its native language and vice versa. They believed that learners could not communicate accurately unless they learned the syntactic structure of a language, since languages differ in one way or another, either in sentence structure or usage of sentence chunks. Therefore, learning the grammar of a language is a must for students. Additionally, respondents were taught that translation plays an important role in language learning; through translation, learners learn to improve their vocabulary, sentence structures, and the linear order of the languages.

In addition to the language learning factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety, the results showed that students highlighted many other issues in learning the English language well. They pointed to language structure (grammar and syntax), vocabulary, translation, and language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They asserted that each of the above-mentioned points has its own influence on learning a language, and no one can ignore any of them. Students also stated that watching short videos, listening to songs, and interacting with people in the target language develop language learning capacity.

H.   Factors that may be related to the success of Language Learning

Two hundred students (one hundred male and one hundred female) from Sultan Razia Female and Bakhtar Male High Schools, participated in this study. This study was conducted at high schools in the northern part of Afghanistan, Balkh province, Mazar City. The study participants (students) answered questionnaires about the effects of self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety on English language learning. The findings of these factors of language learning are thoroughly presented in the following paragraphs, both in written form and in tables.

1.   A one-tailed, Bonferroni-corrected one-sample t-test was performed to evaluate if the Afghan students' self-esteem in English created a barrier to learning English, in comparison to the average self-esteem score (i.e., 3 out of 5) in the self-esteem in English scale (Table 5). The students' mean self-esteem ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .69$) was not significantly lower than average, $t(195) = 24.59$, $p = .00$. According to the participants, the study results show that self-esteem in English was not a barrier for Afghan students to improve their English.

2.   Another one-tailed, Bonferroni-adjusted one-sample t-test was carried out to check if the Afghan students' motivation in English built a barrier to learning English, compared to the average motivation score (i.e., 3 out of 5) in the motivation in English scale (Table 5). The students' average motivation score ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .81$) was not significantly less than average, $t(195) = 19.04$, $p = .00$. The results indicate that motivation in English was not an obstacle for Afghan students to get better at English.

3. The last one-sample t-test with Bonferroni correction was conducted to test whether the students' anxiety levels erected a barrier to their progress in English, compared to the mean score (i.e., 3 out of 5) of the anxiety in English scale (Table 5). Participants' mean score on anxiety ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.09$) was not significantly below the average, which was 3, t (195) = -.57, $p = .29$. This outcome signifies that students' level of anxiety in English does not impede their progress in learning English.

Table 5: The results of the one-sample t-tests comparing Afghan students' self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety about learning English to the average scores on each scale

	M	SD	t	p
Self-esteem	4.22	.69	24.59	**.00**
Motivation	4.11	.81	19.04	**.00**
Anxiety	2.96	1.09	-.57	.29

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, $p < .016$, one-tailed.

5. To test whether gender influenced self-esteem in English, an independent samples t-test with Bonferroni correction was performed (Table 6). Results indicated that the self-esteem scores of male ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .81$) and female students ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .54$) did not significantly differ from each other, t (194) = -2.24, $p = .03$. This signifies that there is no gender difference among students in terms of self-esteem in English.

Table 6: Bonferroni-corrected independent samples t-test statistics comparing male and female students' self-esteem in English

	M	SD	t	P
Male	4.11	.81		
Female	4.33	.54	-2.24	.03

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, $p < .016$, two-tailed.

To test if gender made a difference in motivation in English, an independent samples t-test with Bonferroni adjustment was carried out (Table 7). Findings indicated that the motivation ratings of male ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .92$) and female students ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .70$) were not significantly different from each other, t (194) = .54, $p = .59$. Therefore, it can be concluded that gender difference is non-existent among students in relation to motivation in English.

Table 7: Bonferroni-corrected independent samples t-test statistics contrasting male and female students' motivation in English

	M	SD	t	P
Male	4.14	.92		
Female	4.08	.70	.54	.59

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, $p < .016$, two-tailed.

The last independent samples t-test with Bonferroni adjustment was performed to check if male and female students had significantly different English learning anxiety levels or not (Table 8). Test results indicated that the anxiety levels of male ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.09$) and female students ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.07$) were not significantly different from each other, $t (194) = -1.90$, $p = .06$. Henceforth, no gender difference was observed between male and female students regarding anxiety in English.

Table 8: Bonferroni-corrected independent samples t-test statistics comparing genders in terms of anxiety in English

	M	SD	t	P
Male	2.81	1.09		
Female	3.10	1.07	-1.90	.06

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, $p < .016$, two-tailed.

As a conclusion, in this study, two hundred students (male and female) from two high schools participated in answering the questionnaires. The findings of this study regarding language learning factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety were presented in detail both in written form and in tables. Although the findings revealed that there were minor differences between male and female students regarding language learning factors; it might be because of some environmental issues or divergence of language learning facilities. The result of the test showed that showed that there were no significant differences in each factor between male and female students.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The final chapter presents the discussion and conclusion of the study as well as recommendations for future research. In the discussion part, the researcher compares the findings of the current study with those of similar previous studies. In the recommendations for future research, the researcher suggests further studies of the issues and other issues relating to this field. In conclusion, the researcher summarizes the key and important findings about language learning factors.

A. Discussion

To answer the research questions of this study, the researcher collected the data by interviewing administrators of the schools, distributing questionnaires for English language teachers, and distributing questionnaires on language learning factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety for two hundred students (one hundred male and one hundred female) in two different high schools in Mazar City, Afghanistan. The following paragraphs present their findings.

The administrative staff highlighted the role of implementing workshops and conferences to enhance teaching procedures; however, they pointed to their limited seating and the lack of adequate materials. They asserted that an appropriate learning environment, student-centered learning, and providing theoretical and practical learning facilities are too important. The interviewees mentioned that having experts and professional teachers, teaching plans and teaching systems, and short-term teaching methodological workshops impact positively the teaching and learning process. Additionally, administrative staff stated that the school prefers punctual, hardworking, strong communication skills, and logical and articulate teachers on its team. In support of the current study, a study which was conducted by (Patricia, Julie, and Anne, 2005) clarified that qualified teachers, a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, teachers' educational background, their level of qualification, and their experience, make a difference in students' achievement. Also, administrative staff mentioned that evaluation plays an important role in filling

the gaps and directing students to be better; that's why school authorities conduct a survey at the middle and end of the semester. They use the findings to improve the teaching and learning system as well as fulfill other shortages in the school administrative process.

The second group of targeted participants in this study were English language teachers. English language teachers claimed that they used a combination of the current and temporary teaching approaches and strategies despite not being fully prepared with them. Although language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking are very important for language teachers to consider seriously, they mostly neglected the two skills, such as listening and writing, in favor of reading and speaking. As they mentioned, it was due to the language lab's lack of listening tools and inadequate equipment. Unlike the current study, which was conducted in two high schools in Afghanistan, according to Akbari (2015), most teachers today do not value all four language skills equally, and speaking is the most undervalued of the four talents in foreign language teaching. On top of that, teachers used traditional teaching methods like questioning students, reading texts, and providing answers to questions less frequently than they used pair work, group work, classroom discussions, class projects, group studies, etc.

In addition to the above-mentioned targeted group of participants (administrators and English language teachers of two high schools) in the current study, the researcher set out to look at factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety that influence language learning. Although the findings revealed that there were minor differences between male and female students regarding language learning factors, it might be because of some environmental issues or divergence of language learning facilities. The result of the test showed that there were no significant differences in each factor between male and female students.

The difference between male and female participants' levels of self-esteem in language learning was not very significant. Further evidence that female students were more driven to learn a language than male students came from the stark contrast in the alternatives available for the motivating aspect of language learning. In addition to performing slightly differences on those two measures, female students also experienced less anxiety than male students. This minor difference between male and female students in language learning factors such as self-esteem,

motivation, and anxiety might have a relation to social and environmental issues because in Afghanistan, males have more chances to attend different outdoor activities compared to females. Therefore, maybe female students focus more on their lessons than male students. Narayanan, Rajasekaran, and Lyyappan (2008, as cited in Loza and Ivonne, 2023) investigated the effects of motivation, attitude, and language anxiety on English acquisition and the link between gender and each of the components and discovered that female students performed better than male students in this study compared to the male peers, female students had a more positive attitude toward the English language and had a lower level of fear. The current study on language learning factors somehow supports the previous research regarding language learning factors. Although the current study did not reveal a wide range of differences between male and female students in language learning factors, it concluded that there was no significant difference between male and female students. The reason behind the minor difference between them might be because of some environmental factors, such as the fact that females have more free time to attend private language learning centers or other outdoor activities such as going to public libraries or joining short-term programmers.

Although the findings of this study showed no significant difference between male and female students in terms of affecting factors, it is somehow in line with previous research that showed female students were better at language learning than male students. Moreover, the current study clarified that language learners' biggest challenge was not impeding factors; students were eager to learn and actively participated in class. However, there were many other reasons, for instance, language labs, audio and visual equipment, updated material, and most importantly, peace of mind during the study period. Although the school authorities have been attempting to provide enough facilities for students and teachers, such as extracurricular activities, periodical assessments, workshops, conferences, etc. Since the country does not have political and security stability, lots of shortages were widely visible in language teaching in schools, such as equipped classes, labs, libraries, well-trained teachers, and, importantly, a lack of using modern technologies for remote and hybrid classes. A line with this study, the previous study which was conducted by Aduwa-Ogiegbean and Iyamu (2006, as cited in Nguyen, Warren, and Fehring, 2014) found that textbooks, workbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, and posters were the

most used modern media in the English language classroom, while audio, video, programmed texts, language labs, flashcards, computer, magazines, and newspapers were rarely used. The good points that attracted the researcher were preferring expert, professional, hardworking, punctual, and committed teachers. Besides, distributing survey questionnaires for students to collect their ideas about materials, teaching systems, school facilities, and many other related points. This way, they wanted to overcome their problems and provide enough facilities for both teachers and students. Lastly, the school had a parents' and teachers' association to solve students' problems.

Like many other studies, this one experienced limitation; however, the researchers overcame them with the help of school authorities. First, the students had no access to a computer or the internet to open the link for this study and answer the questions. Secondly, gathering one hundred male and one hundred female students in one place at one time was somehow impossible to do, so the researcher divided them into small groups. Thirdly, this study was conducted in Mazar City, which is in the north part of the country; therefore, it is way more difficult to generalize the results all over the country. In short, the process was smooth, and the researcher did not experience any unsolved obstacles during the data collection process.

This study only focused on a specific part of language learning; however, there are many other things that impede language learning for students, such as methodologies, materials, audio and visual equipment, the selection process, and so on. I strongly recommend future researchers narrow down the research topics as I stated above and conduct research on one of them. Of course, many studies have been done on those topics in developed countries, but conducting the study in third-world countries like Afghanistan will be more beneficial for both teachers and students there. Such research will be a big help to educational institutes in general and for language teachers in particular; therefore, I strongly recommend other researchers focus on the issues.

B.   Recommendation for Future Research

Learning a foreign language and acquiring a second language have become two of the most debatable topics in English language Teaching (ELT) because of globalization, rapidly expansion of technology, and artificial intelligence (AI).

People have been attempting to learn a widely used language to solve communication problems, especially people who prefer to learn the English language. In this study, the researcher focused on factors affecting language learning, for instance, self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety; however, there are many other issues to be addressed. It is recommended that future studies should be conducted on other issues related to the language learning field. Moreover, future research could be improved by involving larger sampling groups that are balanced in gender and age orientation. In addition, the scope of this research could be enlarged to investigate other factors, for instance, curricula, textbooks, and teaching methodologies, to provide insights and present practical solutions for the problem. Most importantly, the upcoming research should include more schools in a pilot study and then focus on the specific issue of language learning.

C. Conclusion

English is one of the compulsory subjects among others for Afghan students in schools from the fourth to the twelfth grades. Although they studied this subject for nine years at school, they still have problems and face challenges after completing the courses. To my knowledge, no study focuses on the factors of language learning to reveal those problems and challenges and then develop practical solutions. This study aims to fill this gap and provide a guide for both language teachers and language learners in general. The findings of this research relating to language learning factors are explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

The finings of the study regarding language learning factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety did not reveal any significant differences between male and female students in those two targeted schools in Mazar City, Afghanistan. Although the results showed no significant differences between male and female students in self-esteem based on statistical criteria, female students still have more self-esteem than male ones. It might be because of some social and environmental issues or because females are better at language learning and social studies than males. The current study findings are somehow in line with previous research that showed female students were better at language learning than male students.

The second factor that was focused on in this study was the motivation factor in language learning. Similar to self-esteem, the motivation factor was not a language

learning challenge for both male and female students. The findings showed that both male and female students had motivation in language learning, and they did not show any significant difference between these two genders in this factor. However, the statistical analysis showed a slight or minor difference between male and female students. This minor difference between them might have some social or environmental reasons. Previous studies regarding these factors revealed that female students were more motivated to learn languages than male students. The current study somehow revealed a slight difference between female and male students in motivational factors in language learning.

Concerning the anxiety factor of language learning, the findings showed the same result as they did for other factors such as self-esteem and motivation. The findings revealed that there are no significant differences between male and female students, and anxiety is not a factor that impedes language learning for them. However, the statistical analysis in the tables revealed a minor difference between these two genders in this factor. Not only have other studies proven that female students were better language learners, but the current study uncovered a minor difference between them. Some external factors might cause this slight or minor difference in anxiety factor between male and female students.

English language teachers in high schools where the current research was implemented used different teaching strategies and methods to teach the English language. To illustrate, they mostly used "question and answer" strategies in their class, as well as group work and classroom discussion, but not role play. Additionally, teachers mostly focused on two skills somehow equally, such as speaking and reading; however, they did not focus on two others, such as listening and writing. Teachers did not practice listening and writing skills because they did not have an equipped language lab to do so. Although these two skills play very important roles in developing language learning capacity, most of the schools do not have listening facilities.

Not only those mentioned above but a lack of access to the teacher's guidebook and to extra English materials were other issues that respondents acknowledged. Moreover, respondents claimed that they mostly did not use visual and audio devices in their classes, such as projectors and tape recorders. Thus, one of the impeding factors in language learning was the lack of visual and audio equipment

in language teaching. The participants also mentioned that they used both traditional and updated teaching strategies; for instance, one student reads others listen, students read the text in pieces individually and silently pair work and group work. It was because many English teachers in these two schools got language teaching training and tried to implement those teaching strategies in their classes.

The administrative staff of two high schools evaluated their teaching system very well, yet they insisted on improving it by having extra workshops and conferences. Similar to language teachers, they mentioned a lack of up-to-date material and limited seats for teachers in conferences and workshops. Regarding the instructional program, administrative staff acknowledged that an appropriate learning environment, student-centered learning, and providing theoretical and practical learning facilities were the main issues to include in an instructional program.

The interviewees mentioned that for implementing the curriculum, the most suitable approach was to appoint experts and professional teachers, motivate and encourage students to participate in the lesson, and be present in the class all the time. Moreover, holding seminars for teachers and having an association directly affects the issue. School authorities review teachers' teaching plans and teaching systems and then provide them with supportive feedback and advice to help them. Additionally, they provide short-term teaching methodology workshops for teachers to meet up-to-date requirements.

Principals also insist that teachers add extracurricular activities to their teaching plans to enhance students' knowledge and achievements, for instance, by giving projects and assignments for students to do in pairs or groups. If students do not follow the regulation, the school authorities feel responsible for talking with them individually and listening carefully to find a solution. If this does not work, ask their parents and raise the issue with them.

In relation to the school improvement process, the principals highlighted that staff meetings (teachers and administrators) to discuss current issues deeply in weekly, monthly, and quarterly meetings and look forward to finding practical solutions. Besides, holding workshops, seminars, and short-term courses to exchange ideas was beneficial to developing the educational capacity of teachers. Interviewees pointed out that the staff (teachers and administrative) selection process was very critical. The schools prefer expert, professional, punctual, and hardworking teachers

and staff. They should have strong communication skills and be logical and articulate. On top of that, teachers should control the class, have practical and theoretical knowledge of the course, be punctual and patient, and adhere to the school's regulations. Lastly, school authorities stressed the importance of the evaluation of teachers and related school issues by students at the middle and end of the semester. It is worth mentioning that students who got 70 points or over could join in this evaluation process. The authorities used the findings to improve the teaching and learning system as well as fulfilled other shortages in the school administrative process.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Administrative Staff Interview Questionnaires

Appendix B: Questionnaires for English Language Teachers

Appendix C: Questionnaires for Students

Appendix D: Ethical Approval Form

Appendix A: Administrative Staff Interview Questionnaires

As part of my Ph.D. requirements, I must perform this research to write my final-year dissertation. The goal of this study is to identify the factors affecting language learning in Afghanistan's high schools. Your contributions will only be used for research reasons, I guarantee you.

Please accept my sincere gratitude in advance.

Instruction and Student Achievement

1.   How do you evaluate language teaching at your school?

A, excellent   B, good   C, poor

2.   What elements should be included in a total instructional program?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

…………What school-wide ideas have you implemented in the area of curriculum?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

…………As the person responsible for the supervision of teaching and learning in your school, how would you help teachers to improve their practice?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

…………What would you do to increase student achievement?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

…………What steps would you (principal) follow if a student was struggling in your school?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

School improvement process

1.   Describe key elements of an effective school improvement plan/process.

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

2. Describe your experiences and skill in promoting school-wide efforts to improve instruction.

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

3. How can you contribute to the improvement of instruction for all staff members?

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

Staff abilities, dynamics and evaluation

1. What qualities (both academic and personal) do you look for in a good teacher?

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

2. How do you observe a teacher's ability to connect with students? What are key skills you look for?

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

3. In supervising and evaluating teachers, what are key skills or strategies you would employ?

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

How have you demonstrated advocacy for all students?

………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix B: Questionnaires for English Language Teachers

1. Sex: male   female

2. Teaching experience at school: ………………………. years.

3. What is your mother tongue?

A, Dari/Persian   B, Pashto   C, Uzbeki   D,

others………..

4.   What other language/s do you speak? ……………………

5.   Teaching to class:

A, boys   B, girls

6.   Which technique/s do you use most in your class?

A, group work   B, role play   C, discussion   D,   question   and
        answer   F,   other?   Please
        specify………………………………………………………………….

7.   Which of the following skills do you mostly focus on in language teaching?

A, speaking   B, reading   C, listening   D, writing

8.   How many students have access to English books?

A, all   B, most of them   C, some of them   D, few   E,
        none

9.   Is there a separate teacher guide for you to teach?

A, yes   B, Not

10.   How often do you use electronic devices (tape recorder, video recorder, etc)
        in your classroom? A, daily   B, weekly   C, monthly
              D, never

11.   How often do you explain your lesson in the native language of your
        students?

A, always   B, sometimes   C, never

12.   What are the main activities you focus on in your teaching?

A, you read and students listen

B, ask a student to read first all the text

C, ask few students to read in pieces

D, highlight the new words and explain them first

E, ask students to highlight the new words

F, ask students to read individually and silently

13. Have you ever participated in any methodical seminars or workshops? Select No or Yes. If yes, mention briefly that………………………………………………………………

Appendix C: Questionnaires for Students

Student's background

1. Sex: Male…………………. Female……………..

2. Age: …………………… years

3. Education: I am in grade…………………………

4. What is your mother tongue?

A, Dari/Persian   B, Pashto   C, Uzbeki   D,   other? Specify………………

5. What other language/s do you speak? ……………………………………..

6. Father's occupation:

A, businessman   B, shopkeeper   C, teacher   D, other……………………..

7. Mother's occupation:

A, teacher   B, businesswoman   C, house wife   D, other……………………..

8. Father's education level:

A, primary   B, secondary   C, High school,   D, university (BA, MA, PhD)

E, Islamic education   G, none

9. Mother's education level:

A, primary   B, secondary   C, High school,   D, university (BA, MA, PhD)

E, Islamic education   G, none

10. What do you like the most about English language?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

11.   Could you explain how you learn best English language? Or what should
       you   do   to   learn   best?

       …………………………………………………………………………………

       …………………………………………………………………………………

       …………………………………………………………………………………

Self-esteem

1.   I feel confident about my English ability

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly
       disagree

2.   I am doing the best in everything that I do.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly
       disagree

3.   I take a positive attitude toward myself and my studies.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly
       disagree

4.   I can handle well any problem that comes my way.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly
       disagree

5.   I feel smart like anyone else in the class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly
       disagree

6.   I am able to do things even the difficult ones.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly
       disagree

7.   I can easily compose English sentences.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

8.   I believe that I can learn more if I will push myself.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

9.   I feel good when I am praised for a good performance.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

10.   I believe that learning English language is important.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

11.   I welcome corrections for my mistakes so I will learn more.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

12.   I do not easily give up whenever I experience difficulties in life.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

13.   I always expect more from myself.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

Motivation

1.   I am excited to attend an English class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

2.   I always participate in English activities.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

3. I enjoy reading English books, articles, or stories.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

4. I am doing my English assignments ahead of the deadline.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

5. I look forward to new English lessons and activities.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

6. I study English so I could be easily hired for the job.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

7. I would like to develop my English listening skills.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

8. I would like to develop my English speaking skills.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

9. I would like to develop my English reading skills.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

10. I would like to develop my English writing skills.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

11. I would like to develop my English grammar skills.

A, strongly agree, B, agree, C. neutral, D, disagree, E, strongly disagree

12. I study hard in English to get the highest grade possible.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

13.   I encourage my classmates and friends to learn English.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

14.   I ask the professor whenever I cannot understand the lesson.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

15.   I try to learn English words on my own.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

16.   I practice my English by talking to other people in English.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

17.   I like to listen to English songs or watch English movies to enhance my English learning.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

Anxiety

1.   I am not sure if I am correct whenever I speak in class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

2.   I feel nervous when my professor asks me to speak in class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

3.   I am worried that I will make mistakes in my English class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

4.   I find it difficult to express my ideas in English.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

5.   I am embarrassed when my professor corrects my mistakes.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

6.   I panic whenever I can't understand what my professor is saying.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

7.   I am fearful to be laughed at in my English class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

8.   I am afraid to ask questions to my English professor.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

9.   I feel anxious when it is time for my English class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

10.   I am tense whenever we have group activity in English class.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

11.   I am upset when the professor gives me a lot of homework.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

12.   I am very sad if my grade in English is low.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

13.   I am afraid to volunteer to answer the questions of my English professor.

A, strongly agree,   B, agree,   C. neutral,   D, disagree,   E,   strongly disagree

Appendix D: Ethical Approval Form

T.C.
İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü Müdürlüğü

Sayı : E-88083623-020-80902   13.03.2023
Konu : Etik Onayı Hk.

Sayın MOHAMMAD SHAH ZAKI

Tez çalışmanızda kullanmak üzere yapmayı talep ettiğiniz anketiniz İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi Etik Komisyonu'nun 02.03.2023 tarihli ve 2023/02 sayılı kararıyla uygun bulunmuştur. Bilgilerinize rica ederim.

Dr.Öğr.Üyesi Mehmet Sencer GİRGİN
Müdür Yardımcısı

RESUME

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2001-2007 Anadolu University-English Language and Teaching Department

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Work Experience:

2005-2007 Polat Renaissance Hotel Erzurum-General Manager Asisstant

2009-2013-Bayburt University-Faculty of Education-Lecturer

2014-…. –Bülent Ecevit University-Ereğli Vocational School-Lecturer

Languages:

-Turkish: Native Language

-English: Advanced

-German: Intermediate

Skills:

-Communication, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Flexibility, Creativity

- Computer skills (Microsoft Office) and others