

# Investigating Predictors of High School Students' Negative Attitudes Towards Learning English by Developing, Validating, and Running a Questionnaire<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the predictors of negative attitudes towards learning English from L2 learners' points of view. A mixed methods research approach was adopted with a sequential exploratory design, followed by an endorsement phase. Eighteen high school students in Fars province (Iran) were interviewed on the sources of negative attitudes towards learning English. Based on the interviews, a questionnaire was developed and pilot-tested. Results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed 6 latent variables: materials, difficulty of learning English, affective factors, teaching methodology, school policy, and learning environment. Questionnaire was administered to 980 high school students. Through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and simple linear regression, we found that the variable materials was the best predictor of negative attitudes. Then, came the variable affective factors that predicted negative attitudes better than the variables teaching methodology and learning environment, and the least predicting variable was difficulty of learning English.

**Keywords:** Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA); Learning English; Mixed Methods Approach; Negative Attitudes

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## 1. Introduction

Attitudes, according to Allport (1935), can be defined as “a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situations with which it is related,” (p. 810). Because attitude is an evaluative reaction to objects or environmental factors it can be affirmative or negative (Bogardus, 1931; Gardner, 1985). Attitudes towards a language reflect the perception about the linguistic ease or difficulty of that particular language and, thus, contributes to the simplicity or difficulty of learning (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992). L2 students’ attitudes can be an obstacle if they believe that they are unable to learn the L2 successfully (Lennartsson, 2008). In L2 learning, attitude can be of two different types: educational and social. Educational attitudes refer to a set of beliefs L2 learners hold towards the teachers, the course, materials, learning the language, and so on. The second type involves attitudes towards the L2 community, the social aspect, and the cultural implication of SLA (Gardner, 1985). As research in the first area has shown more correlation with achievement than the latter, the present study concerned itself with the first type.

Negative attitudes do not form by accident, “but have some reasons for emergence” (Ata, 2015, p. 65). There are various factors that can affect L2 learners’ attitudes towards learning an L2 (Baker, 1985). These factors and their relationship to learning EFL have been studied by many scholars. However, to the best knowledge of the authors, almost no studies have sought EFL learners’ own points of view regarding the sources of their negative attitudes towards learning English. Hence, the present study was an attempt in this respect. In other words, the main objective of the study was to explore sources that make the Iranian EFL learners hold negative attitudes towards learning English, though they have been reported to have high degrees of instrumental motivation and are aware of the role of English as a useful, practical, and international language (Aliakbari & Monfared, 2014; Mehrpour & Vojdani, 2012; Rahimi & Hasani, 2012; Rashidi, Rahimi, & Alimorad, 2014; Vaezi, 2008). A second objective of the present study was to develop a questionnaire on the sources of negative attitudes towards learning English based on the qualitative exploration into the learners’ perceptions and the endorsement of the newly developed questionnaire with a large sample to study the predictors of negative attitudes towards learning English.

## 2. Literature Review

Gardner and Lambert (1972) were the first to investigate the effect of attitudinal and motivational variables on the SLA process and suggested that learning an L2 depends on affective variables and the learners’ intellectual capacity. Also, they proposed a causal relationship between attitudinal variables and language learning

outcome. It was proposed that unsuccessful learning achievement promotes negative attitudes and negative attitudes cause lower achievement; further, this causal relationship was supported by some empirical studies (Burstall, 1975; Hermann, 1980; Smith, 1971; Watson & Clark, 1984). Language attitudes have been the center of attention in L2 studies throughout the years and researchers have tried to investigate attitudes from different aspects. Numerous researchers have investigated the influence of attitudes on language learning and found attitudes and motivation as crucial factors in successful language learning (Bagheri & Andi, 2015; Fakeye, 2010; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Lightbown & Spada, 1993; Petrides, 2006). Additionally, many studies have revealed that attitudes are related strongly to motivation, so L2 learners with negative attitudes towards the L2 may not be motivated L2 learners (Burden, 2004; Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Katz, 1960; Wilhelm, 1999). A large body of research has targeted the relationship between attitudes and other variables, revealing that attitudes towards L2 study are significantly related to world-mindedness and social distance (Sakuragi, 2006), and there is a positive relationship between L2 learners' beliefs about language learning and their attitudes towards their teachers (Tavassoli & Kasraeean, 2014); however, a low correlation between achievement and instrumental motivation was reported by Genc and Aydin (2017), arguing that there was not a significant correlation between the learners' attitudes and achievement variables, even though almost all the participants indicated a positive attitude towards learning the English language; they suggested that the factors that affected the learners' attitudes in the processes of language learning should be taken into account.

Concerning the factors causing formation of negative or positive attitudes, Breer and Locke (1965) introduced several factors, such as individuals' specific past experience, sources of anxiety, education, age, gender, aptitudes, intelligence, likes, dislikes, economic and social situation, media, peers' influence, job, religion, and so on. Furthermore, Gardner (1985) emphasized that attitudes towards learning an L2 are more relevant to factors in the classroom than those related to people speaking that language. Ahmed (2015) proposed that L2 learners' attitudes towards English language learning and using the language in different domains of usage can be extremely positive, but they hold negative feelings in regard to classroom instructions during language learning process and that L2 learners' success or failure affect their motivational drive. However, exploring the sources of negative attitudes towards learning an L2 from the learners' points of view, as the most important participants in the process of learning EFL, has been ignored, although numerous studies have been accomplished on language attitudes and other variables (Bonyadi & Zeinalpur, 2014; Chang, 2010; Chen, Chen, & Chen, 2015; FamarzZadeh, 2016; Gorjian & Aghvami, 2017; Jannati & Marzban, 2015; Torshizi & Torshizi, 2016). Furthermore, while investigating attitudes towards learning English, researchers (e.g., Genc &

Aydin, 2017; Henter, 2014; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013; Tahainei & Dana, 2013; Zaire & Elakaei, 2012) have mostly relied on ready-made questionnaires that may not include many context-specific sources of negative attitudes. Therefore, there is a need to develop questionnaires based on L2 learners' perceptions in order to explore factors contributing to negative attitudes towards learning English.

### **3. Methodology**

This study was a mixed methods approach with a sequential exploratory design in which qualitative data collection and analysis was followed by an instrument development and endorsement phase.

#### ***3.1. Qualitative Phase***

The aim of this phase of the study was to explore the sources of negative attitudes towards learning English held by high schoolers of Fars province as an EFL setting.

##### ***3.1.1. Instrument***

The main data collection instrument applied in this stage of the study was unstructured interview. Based on the nature of this method of data collection, neither the questions nor the answer categories were predetermined (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). The interviews started with an open-ended question and other questions were made spontaneously.

##### ***3.1.2. Participants***

Some high school students from some regions of Fars province (Shiraz, Zarghan, and Marvdasht) took part in the study. The regions were selected based on convenient sampling, but in each region, the high schools and students were selected randomly. They were from public schools including both girls and boys, with the age span of 15 to 18. They were in grades 9-12, with different English proficiency levels, but they all studied the same series of English textbooks for 2 hr a week from grade 7 onwards.

##### ***3.1.3. Data collection***

The participants were interviewed on the sources of negative attitudes towards learning the English language up to data saturation. It should be noted that 39 students (i.e., 23 girls & 16 boys) were interviewed, but some were too shy to talk openly about the subject of the interview and some had positive attitudes towards learning English; therefore, from among 39 students who were randomly selected, 18 had negative attitudes and talked openly about the subject. The interviews were conducted in Persian for better communication. The interviewees' narrations were

recorded with the participants' permission. They were ensured about the confidentiality of their identity and anonymity of the gathered information. In order to interview the participants, the parents' permission was assured by the high school principals.

#### ***3.1.4. Data analysis***

The first step in the data analysis was to transcribe the interviews. Once this was done, an inductive coding system was employed (Ary, Jacob, & Sorensen, 2010) to extract any sources for negative attitudes. Then, the related codes were categorized and some themes were identified.

### ***3.2. Quantitative Phase***

The quantitative phase was conducted in two stages: the pilot and main studies. In the following sections, the full description of these phases is presented.

#### ***3.2.1. Pilot study***

Based on the emerging themes in the qualitative phase, which was itself based on a review of the literature, a pool of items was developed, including items related to each theme. Then, this newly made questionnaire was piloted before being applied in the main phase. It was carried out with 417 high school students (61% female & 39% male) in Shiraz, Borazjan, and Bushehr. The participants were from public high schools, with an age range of 15 to 18. They were in grades 9-12, studying the same series of English textbooks since grade 7 for 2 hr per week.

The data from the questionnaire administration were analyzed in SPSS (version) 21. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability and it was found to be 0.844 that is an acceptable index (Pallant, 2007). To confirm that the developed questionnaire has construct-related validity and reflects the theory behind the psychological construct being measured, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the scale was carried out (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). First, the suitability of the data was checked that included sample size, strength of the relationship among the items, Bartlett's test of Sphericity, and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy (Pallant, 2007). The number of respondents we needed was, at least, 10 times the number of the items (Pallant, 2007). As there were 40 items in the questionnaire, the number of 410 participants was considered to be reasonable. Also, KMO measure was calculated and found to be 0.883, much higher than 0.60, which pointed to the adequacy of the sample. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of Sphericity was run and revealed a significance level of .000 (see Table 1):

Table 1. *KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.88
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3833.3
	<i>df</i>	465
	<i>Sig.</i>	.00

In order to extract the items that shared low amount of variance with other variables, the results of communalities were considered. The minimum requirement for loading, a value of 0.3, was considered (Yamini & Rahimi, 2007). Consequently, 9 items were deleted due to their low loading factors (see Table 2):

Table 2. *Communalities*

Items	Extraction	Items	Extraction	Items	Extraction
Q1	.574	Q15	.151	Q29	.198
Q2	.508	Q16	.167	Q30	.525
Q3	.411	Q17	.442	Q31	.430
Q4	.493	Q18	.488	Q32	.388
Q5	.496	Q19	.222	Q33	.332
Q6	.369	Q20	.365	Q34	.535
Q7	.300	Q21	.531	Q35	.568
Q8	.288	Q22	.352	Q36	.401
Q9	.408	Q23	.249	Q37	.391
Q10	.510	Q24	.487	Q38	.411
Q11	.363	Q25	.240	Q39	.411
Q12	.644	Q26	.410	Q40	.303
Q13	.429	Q27	.529	Q41	.459
Q14	.186	Q28	.203	Q42	.403

The scree plots, as the most common approach to decide the number of factors, were generated (Jain & Shandliya, 2013) and, finally, six factors or latent constructs were extracted: (1) affective factors (items # 35, 34, 24, & 36); (2) teaching methodology (items # 1, 2, 5, & 3); (3) school policy (items # 41, 42, 39, 40, & 20); (4) learning environment (items # 22, 32, 38, & 37); (5) materials (items # 31, 30, 33, 9, 10, 18, 13, 21, & 17); and (6) difficulty of learning English (items # 6, 12, 7, 27, & 4). The results of the rotated component matrix are presented Appendix A. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*), 2 (*Disagree*), 3 (*Undecided*), 4 (*Agree*), to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Each factor was assessed for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (see Table 3). Rotated component matrix was run to estimate the correlations between the variables and the components (see Appendix B for the questionnaire). More explanation about the concept of each factor is provided in the Results section:

Table 3. *Reliability Indices*

	<i>N</i> of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Affective Factors	4	.74
Teaching Methodology	4	.71
School Policy	5	.62
Learning Environment	4	.56
Materials	9	.85
Difficulty of Learning English	5	.68

### 3.2.2. *Main study*

After establishing the validity and reliability of the newly made questionnaire, it was administered in the main phase of the study.

#### 3.2.2.1. *Instrument*

The validated questionnaire was applied as the instrument of this phase of the study with 31 Likert-type items. It was in Persian so that its administration to the Iranian students at different levels of language proficiency would be easier.

#### 3.2.2.2. *Participants*

The sample comprised 980 high school students (59.8% females & 40.2% males), ranging in age from 15 to 18. From different regions of Fars province, five regions including Shiraz, Zarghan, Marvdasht, Lar, and Darb were selected based on convenient sampling, but the state high schools in each region and the classes at each high school were selected at random. The participants' age, gender, background, and location were not considered in the data analysis, so they were assumed as a homogenous group with regard to their age, textbooks, English teaching methodology, and types of schools.

#### 3.2.2.3. *Data collection*

To gather the data, the students received enough explanation about the nature and purpose of the study and were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously in order to increase accuracy in collecting the data. No time limit was considered to give the participants enough time to reflect on the questions.

#### 3.2.2.4. *Data analysis*

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used as a statistical technique to determine the extent to which the six latent factor structures achieved in EFA were supported by the new sample data. When the factor structure was secured in the new data set, correlational analysis was applied in order to measure the degree of relationship between the learners' attitudes and factors causing negative attitudes towards learning English (learners' scores from the developed questionnaire

represent their attitudes towards learning English). Then, simple linear regression was applied to find out the weighting of those factors that significantly predict negative attitudes towards learning English

#### 4. Results

The qualitative phase of the study yielded a pool of items reflecting the causes of negative attitudes. Piloting the items, six latent variables were determined through EFA: materials, affective factors, school policy, learning environment, teaching methodology, and difficulty of learning English. The variable materials refers to the course books the students study at high schools in Iran; the variable affective factors reflects the learners' feeling to the teachers, classmates, and class environment (Ripple, 1965); the variable school policy refers to the principles and procedures adopted by high schools in the process of teaching and learning English (ET 2020 Working Group Schools, 2018); the variable learning environment is physical, psychological, and instructional atmosphere (learning environment in the classroom: Definition, impact, & importance.), but physical atmosphere was not considered in the current study; the variable teaching methodology refers to the procedures of teaching as well as the principles underlying them (Richards & Schmidt, 2002); and the variable difficulty of learning English reflects the challenges the Iranian students face due to the nature of the English language.

The descriptive statistics of the participants' scores from the questionnaire administration in the main study is presented in Table 4:

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Scores From the New Questionnaire*

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grades	980	42.00	150.00	90.10	18.84

##### 4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In order to perform CFA, Lisrel 8.8 was utilized. The factor structures from EFA including the observed variables and unobserved constructs were tested by sets of specific indexes (criteria) to determine model fitting. Chi-squared test ( $\chi^2$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness-of-fit statistic (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and incremental fit indices (IFI) were considered to determine the fitness between the proposed model with 31 items and the gathered data. As the chi-square value represents the difference between the observed covariance matrix and the model covariance matrix (Moss, 2016), the higher it is (from zero), the worse it will be.

Relative chi-square is applied to reduce the sensitivity of the model chi-square to sample size, NC equals the chi-square divided by the degrees of freedom ( $X^2M/df$ ; Kline, 2011). The criterion to accept *t* relative chi-square varies across



researchers, ranging from less than 2 (Ullman, 2001, as cited in Moss, 2016) to less than 5 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). CFI greater than or equal to .90 and an RMSEA less than or equal to .06 are indicative of a good-fitting model (Bentler & Hu, 1999, as cited in Huber, 2011). The results indicate that the model with six factors and 31 items fit the data, as the chi-square/*df* value (1218.21/413) is 2.94, less than 3,  $p < 0.001$ , with the fit indices of NFI = .96, CFI = .97, and RMSEA = .04. Table 5 provides a summary of the estimated fit indices of the mode:

Table 5. *Good-of-Fit Indices for the Model*

Fit Indices	Values	Criteria
Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	1218.21	-
<i>df</i>	413	-
$\chi^2/df$	2.94	< 5
( <i>p</i> -Value)	0.00	< 0.001
RMSEA	0.04	< 0.06
Goodness Fit Index (GFI)	0.94	$\geq 0.90$
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.97	$\geq 0.90$
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.98	$\geq 0.90$

When a model has acceptable fit, the next criterion is “the significance of individual parameters for the paths in the model, which are critical values computed by dividing the parameter estimates by their respective standard errors. This is referred to as a *t* value or a critical value” (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016, p. 81). “If the critical value exceeds the expected value at a specified a level (e.g., 1.96 for a 2-tailed test at the .05 level), then that parameter is significantly different from zero” (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004, p. 70). Figure 1 presents critical values outside the range of  $\pm 1.96$  for individual parameters for the paths in the model. Therefore, it can be concluded that all the variables represent a significant predictor and indicator of the latent variables:

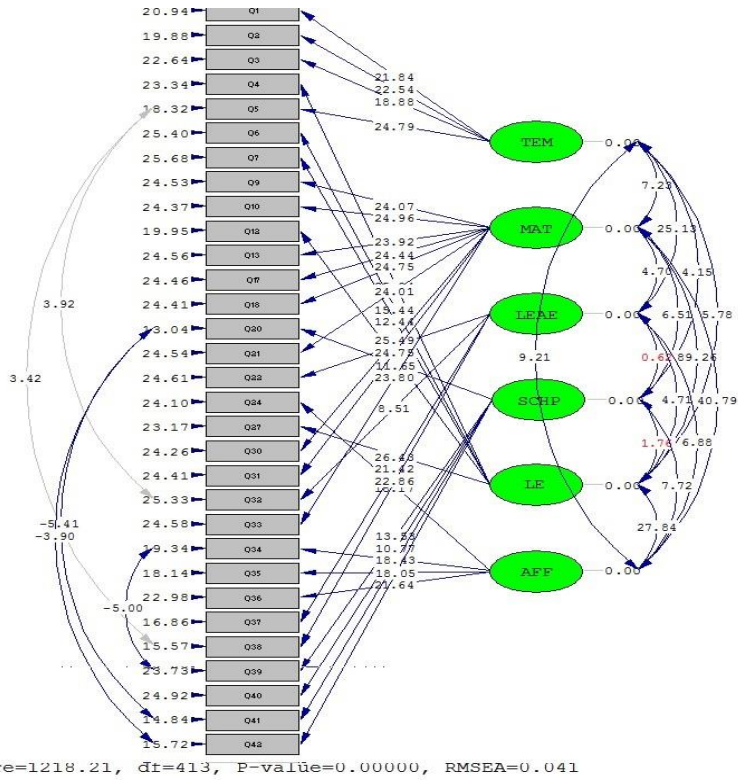


Figure 1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): *t* Values

Note. TEM= Teaching Methodology, MAT= Materials, LEAE = Learning Environment, SCHP = School Policy, LE = Difficulty of Learning English, AFF= Affective Factors

#### 4.2. Correlation and Regression Analyses

Because the aim of the data analyses in this section was to find out how the latent variables predict negative attitudes towards learning English, we decided to separate the participants holding negative attitudes from the ones with positive attitudes with respect to their scores on the questionnaire. To this end, the median of the scores was considered as the measure of central tendency; the scores higher than the median were considered to reflect positive attitudes and the ones lower than the median were taken to be indicative of negative attitudes. Accordingly, 483 students had negative attitudes, 476 students held positive attitudes, and the learners with scores equal to the median were regarded as neutral (see Table 6). So, the correlational and regression analyses were performed for 476 students:

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Scores From Questionnaire Representing Attitudes

Attitudes	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Negative Attitudes	483	42.00	89.00	74.77	10.66
Positive Attitudes	476	91.00	150.00	105.67	11.59
Neutral	21	90.00	90.00	90.00	00.00

To determine the degree of the going-togetherness of the total score and the factors causing negative attitudes towards learning English, correlational analyses were run. Table 7 reveals the results of the correlational analyses:

Table 7. *Correlation Between Learners' Total Scores and Factors Causing Negative Attitudes*

	Mat.	Diff. Lear. Eng.	Aff. Factors	Teach. Meth.	School policy	Lear. Envi.
Pearson Correlation	.67**	.57**	.55**	.37**	.22**	.38**
Grade Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
N	483	483	483	48	483	483

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note. Mat. = Materials, Diff. Lear. Eng. = Difficulty of Learning English, Aff. Factors = Affective Factors, Teach. Meth= Teaching Methodology, Lear. Envi.= Learning Environment

To interpret the results of the correlational analyses, Cohn's conventions (Pallant, 2007) were considered. Based on the result of the correlational analysis (see Table 7), the variable school policy had a low correlation with the total score, so it was not entered into the regression analysis. The coefficients of regression analysis are presented in Table 8. The *Sig.* column tells which independent variable (i.e., materials, teaching methodology, difficulty of learning English, learning environment, and affective factors) can predict the variance in the dependent variance (i.e., negative attitudes). Beta value indicates weighting of the variables in predicting the variance (Yamini & Rahimi, 2007) in negative attitudes. Accordingly, the best predictor of negative attitudes is the variable materials, the variable affective factors predict negative attitudes better than the variables teaching methodology and learning environment, and the last variable is difficulty of learning English:

Table 8. *Coefficients in Regression Analysis in Predicting Negative Attitude From Six Factors as Its Sources*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta	
Material	1.02	.03	.50	33.00

Difficulty of Learning English	0.82	.04	.30	19.93	.00
Affective Factors Learning Environment	1.14	.04	.34	25.87	.00
Teaching Methodology	0.97	.04	.30	21.61	.00
	0.97	.05	.30	21.30	.00

a. Dependent Variable: Grades

## 5. Discussion

To explore the causes of negative attitudes towards learning English, a questionnaire was developed quantifying negative attitudes towards learning English. It had already been reported that the Iranian students were well motivated to learn English (Aliakbari & Monfared, 2014; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Mehrpour & Vojdani, 2012; Rahimi & Hasani, 2012; Rashidi, Rahimi, & Alimorad, 2014; Vaezi, 2008), and that in Iran English has been receiving increasing attention as a language of communication, technology, and science (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016; Zarrabi & Brown, 2015). Therefore, the developed questionnaire was specifically based on the factors causing negative attitudes in the process of learning English in Iran, disregarding motivational or social factors. This aspect together with the fact that the questionnaire was exclusively based on the learners' perceptions may distinguish the developed questionnaire from other similar questionnaires that did not include context-specific sources of negative attitudes.

Based on the EFA results, six factors of materials, affective factors, teaching methodology, difficulty of learning English, learning environment, and school policy were found as the sources of negative attitudes in the process of language learning. Some of these factors have been pointed out by other studies as the sources of attitudes towards learning English (Kashef, Khorasani, & Zahabic, 2014; Khosroshahi, 2013; Tsuda, 2003).

Based on the results of the regression analysis, the variables materials, affective factors, teaching methodology, learning environment, and difficulty of learning English predicted negative attitudes differently; however, the variable materials was found as the best predictor of negative attitudes that can be considered as the most practical and key finding of the present study. In the process of learning and teaching, materials are so crucial that Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989, as cited in Kitao & Kitao, 1997) regard them as having a latent curriculum inducing attitudes towards teaching and learning, attitudes towards learners' and teachers' relationship, and so on. Materials include an approach, a specific method, and content that are chosen based on the developers' beliefs about the language and how it should be taught. Materials developers may believe in a kind of approach and, then, choose activities and materials accordingly. So, it can be concluded that materials may affect

many other factors during the process of teaching and learning; they may force a teaching method and cause inappropriate learning environment and, consequently, negative affective factors.

Regarding the importance of materials, Rahimi and Hassani (2012) state that students' ideas towards their EFL textbooks are mostly ignored, even though they are the final users of the materials. These researchers claimed that the Iranian high school learners in Iran believe that in developing EFL materials, their goals and needs are not taken into account. Similarly, Khosroshahi (2013) confirmed that EFL textbooks are the predictors of attitudes towards learning English.

The second factor recognized by the participants as the predictor of negative attitudes was the variable affective factors. As mentioned earlier, by affective factors, we mean L2 learners' feeling to the teachers, classmates, and class environment while learning the L2. Many researchers have emphasized the importance of L2 learners' feeling and its association with attitude and L2 learning (Baker, 1988; Gardner, 1985; Stern, 1983). Aragão (2011) claims that L2 learners' beliefs about their performance, teachers, and classmates influence their feelings of shyness and embarrassment that affect their behavior in the classroom. Pekrun (2000) argues that feelings and emotions are the result of L2 learners' evaluation of particular situations in the process of learning. Gardner, Clément, Smythe, and Smythe (1979) developed some items to estimate class anxiety as part of their test battery on attitudes and motivation. Therefore, it can be concluded that L2 learners' feeling while learning the L2 influence their attitudes. Furthermore, Stern (1983) highlighted the importance of affective factors when he said that affect and cognition have an equal position in the process of L2 learning.

The variables learning environment and teaching methodology that were found in this study as the sources of negative attitudes have also been reported by other researchers. Kashef, Khorasani, and Zahabi (2014) have confirmed the effect of instruction on L2 students' attitudes towards English. Gardner (1985) believes that if teachers are skilled and the teaching method is informative and interesting, this can awaken positive attitudes, regardless of the learner's initial attitudes, positive or negative. Moreover, Cook (1996) argues that the way L2 students are treated, the language used by the teachers, the materials, methods, and the environment where the language is used all affect L2 learners' attitudes towards a particular language. Tsuda (2003) emphasizes that it is crucial to offer L2 learners a less painful environment where teachers and students share a place to apply English for communication and ease L2 learners' mind from making mistakes.

The last factor in predicting negative attitudes identified by the participants was difficulty of learning English. There are some reasons showing that learning

English can be difficult for the Iranian students. Schwarz and Terrill (2000) state that if English language learners' written language is non-Latin alphabet, learners face some challenges due to lack of similarity of the language to English in sound, symbols, and phonological/orthographic structure, so the learners cannot learn the word-sound paired-associations rapidly and it decreases their ability to decode and encode word/sound pairs and causes failure in the initial stages of learning (Krug, Shafer, Dardick, Magalis, & Parent, 2002; Wold, 2006). Furthermore, many researchers have confirmed that a fast decoding ability has a positive and significant relationship with comprehension skills (Bowey, 2004; Kendeou, Broek, White, & Lynch, 2009; Perfetti & Hogaboam, 1975). English and Persian are different in many areas of syntax, posing challenges to Iranian students, as well. Consequently, the variable difficulty of learning English causes some Iranian learners experience failure that induces negative attitudes (Burstall, 1975; Hermann, 1980; Wold, 2006).

L2 learning is a complex process. It is difficult and time-consuming to change attitudes; therefore, it is preferred to form a positive attitude towards L2s as early as possible (Henter, 2014). Factors inducing negative attitudes can be considered by English teachers, materials developers, and school managers to provide the learners with an appropriate environment to learn English efficiently, but detecting the most inhibiting factors during the process of language learning in each context can be more practical for educational planners, policymakers, and syllabus designers to make vital decisions in promoting positive attitudes towards learning English.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring the sources of negative attitudes towards learning English among a group of high school students in an EFL context. Based on the obtained results, six variables of materials, affective factors, teaching methodology, difficulty of learning English, learning environment, and school policy were distinguished. Further investigation into the factors based on their predicting power revealed the variable materials to be the best predictor of negative attitudes. Although studies on attitudes and motivation have been carried out since the late 1950s and a lot of research has been conducted on the affective domain, negative attitudes towards learning English still continue to be an attractive topic for researchers. The results of the current study showed that about 50% of the participants had negative attitudes towards learning English. However, they were aware of the importance of learning English as an international language and were conscious of inhibiting factors that negatively affect their learning. Detecting the most inhibiting factor in the process of language learning can be more practical to make vital decisions in trying to promote positive attitudes towards learning English. It is

suggested that future studies be carried out to investigate the sources of negative attitudes in different contexts (e.g., private language institutes, different socioeconomic districts, etc.) in Iran because the results of the present study may not be generalizable to other contexts. Also, interested researchers can investigate the relationship and/or effects of the identified sources of negative attitudes with other individual and contextual variables.

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**Appendix A**  
**Rotated Component Matrix of the Questionnaire**

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
12- Learning English is difficult for me.	.766				

	4- I do not understand the meaning of English sentences that is why I do not learn English language grammar.	.702
	10- I could not pronounce English words correctly, consequently I could not ask my questions with ease in English classes, and I did not learn English.	.701
	30-The Grammar of school English Language books is very difficult.	.689
	18- Despite knowing the meaning of English words and grammar, I do not understand the concept of sentences.	.653
	17- Learning the meaning of English words is difficult for me.	.643
	13- I cannot identify verbs, subjects and objects... in an English sentence.	.636
	21-The English language class is stressful for me.	.593
	27- I was interested in learning English at first, but over time due to lack of learning, I lost my interest.	.569
	9- In school English books, the lessons get really difficult immediately after teaching letters and sounds, consequently it caused me not to learn English well.	.568
	7- I can make progress in learning English by studying School English books (reversed).	.519
	31- The concept of School English books is vague, so I have problem in learning English.	.496
	33- The Materials of School English books is too much, there is not enough time to review, so I did not learn English.	.485
	6- I like Arabic language more than English language.	.482
	<hr/>	
	35- English language teachers compared me to higher level students in English language and it was annoying to me.	.741
Affective Factors	34-Because my English teachers blamed me for my mistakes, I hated the English language.	.694
	24-when I answered an English exercise incorrectly, and the teacher asked the students who were at higher levels in English to explain the correct answer; I felt humiliated.	.652
	36-The speed of teaching English was synchronized with the students' speed of learning who were at a higher level in English, and it did not lead to learning.	.580
	<hr/>	
Teaching	1- Teaching English alphabet letters and sounds are well done at Iranian schools.(Reversed)	.764
	2- At schools great emphasis is put on reading English words and texts correctly .(Reversed)	.751
	5-Th methodology of teaching English at schools is very good and it is conducive to learning.(Reversed)	.682
	3-The English exam level coordinated with the Materials taught, so better learning was conducted at schools.(Reversed)	.580

	41- If more attention were paid to conversation in teaching the English language at schools, I would be more interested in the English language.	.693
	42- If, images, films or poetry were used to present English language lessons, I would be more interested in English language.	.676
School policy	39-If teaching the English language began from elementary schools, the intensity of Materials would be reduced (during each course) and I learnt English language better.	.629
	40-If English language teachers explained the Materials in English, it would help me a lot learn English better.	.587
	20- If English language teachers reviewed the Materials continuously, I learned the English language better.	.404
Learning environment	22-Students' English language level is the same at schools, so better learning takes place. (Reversed)	.644
	32-Examples of English grammar are insufficient in school textbooks to learn languages.	.612
	38- English teachers in schools in terms of knowledge and the correct pronunciation of words are in a very good level, so it has increased my motivation in learning English.	.602
	37-Our teachers had a lot of enthusiasm and passion for teaching, that's why I am eager to learn it more. (Reversed)	.564

## Appendix B

### Rotated Component Matrix of the First Factor to Find Subfactors

		1	2
Materials	31- The concept of School English books is vague, so I have problem in learning it.	.724	
	30-The Grammar of school English Language books is very difficult.	.722	
	33- Because the Materials of School English books were too much, there was not enough time to review them, that's why I have never learned English.	.664	
	9- In School English books, after teaching alphabet and words, the Materials getting hard, so it caused me not to learn the English language well.	.644	
	10- I could not translate English words correctly, so I could not ask my questions with ease in English classes that is why I did not learn English language.	.586	
	18- Despite knowing the meaning of English words and grammar, I do not understand the concept of sentences.	.578	
	13- I cannot identify verbs, subjects and objects... in an English sentence.	.569	
	21- The English language class is stressful for me.	.513	

	17- Learning the meaning of English words is difficult for me.	.495
<b>Difficulty of Learning English</b>	6- I like Arabic language more than English language.	.722
	12- Learning English is difficult for me.	.632
	7-- I can make progress in learning English by studying School English books. (reversed)	.609
	27- I was interested in learning English at first, but over time due to lack of learning I lost my interest.	.575
	4- I do not understand the meaning of English sentences that is why I do not learn English.	.573