

Special Issue

## Pathways to Educational Excellence: Understanding How Internal and External Factors Shape Academic Success

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the perspectives of teachers and EFL learners on the significance of internal and external factors in achieving academic success. Two scales, referred to as the IEAS (Internal and External Academic Success), were developed and validated in stages to address this. Due to the broad scope of internal and external factors, this research focused on key internal factors- such as intelligence, self-esteem, introversion, and extraversion- and external factors, including intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and socio-cultural status. These factors were selected based on influential frameworks by Dörnyei (2005), Ellis (1994), Horwitz (2000), and Segalowitz (1997), emphasizing those with the strongest correlation to language acquisition. The validated scales were then administered to 35 EFL students and 20 university instructors within their standard coursework. Results highlighted self-esteem and socio-cultural status as particularly impactful on academic success. Integrating these factors into language education may foster a more supportive learning environment, contributing to the broader goals of sustainable development education.

**Keywords:** Academic success, External factors, EFL learner, EFL teacher, Internal Factors

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### **Introduction**

English is spoken widely around the world and holds significant importance in fields such as business, academia, and international communication. It has become a leading global language,

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frequently serving as the main language for communication and information exchange in educational institutions and research facilities (Chen et al., 2023). Additionally, English is the preferred language for international business transactions, diplomacy, and numerous professional sectors (Kitao, 1996). Educational excellence refers to the highest teaching, learning, and academic achievement standards. It involves innovative teaching methods, well-structured curricula, dedicated educators, and motivated students. Excellence in education also includes fostering self-regulation, perfectionism, *critical thinking*, *creativity*, and *lifelong learning habits* (Movafah et al., 2025; Rajanathan et al., 2024). Learning a second or foreign language is challenging, involving more than just memorizing vocabulary and grammar. It requires understanding cultural and contextual nuances, social, psychological, and adopting a different mindset and behavioral approach (Barjesteh & Niknezhad, 2020). Mastering a foreign language is complex, demanding a deep comprehension of one's initial behavior and the desired goals to be achieved through a suitable methodology (Brown, 2000). Some individuals are naturally faster at learning new languages due to their determination, hard work, and perseverance (Ellis, 2008). Conversely, other learners may find it more difficult due to factors beyond their control that significantly affect their success (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Shirzad et al., 2022). Several factors (e.g. age, motivation, attitude, learning environment, culture, aptitude, learning style, background knowledge) can influence language learning, affecting how quickly and effectively a person can acquire a new language. They can be classified as cognitive, affective, psychological and learning factors. Such factors in the professional literature are divided into internal and external factors (Qiao, 2024).

Language acquisition is subject to both internal and external, that significantly impact the learning process. These factors play a crucial role in an individual's ability to acquire and master

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a new language (Ellis, 1994). Various internal and external factors can influence the efficacy of L2 learning. Such factors encompass personal attitudes, motivations, aptitude for learning, learning environment, and the influence of peers (Chen et al., 2023). Researchers (Cheng, 2020; Cohen, 2010; Kärchner et al., 2021; Oxford, 2017; Tang, 2022) in educational psychology have increasingly recognized the significant influence of learners' beliefs on their ability to acquire a second language (L2). Consequently, there has been a growing interest in comprehending external and internal factors such as learners' self-efficacy, epistemic beliefs, and their approach to language learning strategies factors that contribute to the positive outcomes of L2 learning (Barjesteh & Shirzad, 2022).

Several professional authorities in applied linguistics (e.g., Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998; Ellis, 2008; McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Oxford, 2017; Skehan, 1989; Williams & Burden, 1997) listed factors influencing and responsible for L2 learning. Considering all variables relating to second or foreign language learning would be extremely difficult. Thus, it sounds logical to classify these factors into two groups of internal (e.g., cognitive and meta-cognitive factors as intelligence, perception, self-esteem, learning style) and external (social and affective factors such as social class, first language, early start, L2 curriculum) which include elements of the same type. Initially Williams and Burden (1997) proposed a framework of L2 motivation. They classified motivation into internal and external factor. Williams and Burden proposed that internal factors are those associated with intrinsic interest of activity, perceived value of activity, sense of agency, self-efficacy, self-concept, attitudes, confidence, anxiety, fear developmental age and stage, and gender. Besides, they illustrate some factors as external factors such as parents, teachers, peers, mediated learning experiences, feedback, the learning environment, size of class and school, school ethos, cultural norms, societal expectations, and education system.

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Later, Brown (2007) distinguished such factors in L2 learning. Brown conceptualized internal factors as the elements that originate from within an individual. Such factors refer to the learner's characteristics and attributes which are determined by the students themselves, such as their motivation, attitude, personal practice, and study habits. The level of motivation an individual possesses greatly impacts their dedication, perseverance, and overall engagement in language learning activities. Motivation can be influenced by both intrinsic factors, such as personal interest and enjoyment, and extrinsic factors, including external rewards or societal expectations (Dörnyei, & Ushioda, 2021).

Another internal factor is aptitude. Aptitude refers to an individual's natural ability or talent for learning languages. While some individuals may have a higher aptitude for language learning, others may require additional effort and practice to achieve the same level of proficiency. However, it is essential to note that aptitude alone does not determine success in language learning; it merely influences the rate and ease of acquisition (Dörnyei, 2005). Cognitive abilities also play a significant role as internal factors. Memory, attention span, and problem-solving skills all contribute to language learning success. Individuals with strong cognitive abilities may find it easier to remember vocabulary, comprehend grammatical structures, and apply language rules effectively (Gibson, 1979). Each of these factors contributes to an individual's ability to acquire a foreign language, and they also interact with one another. Brown identified other internal factors that influence language learning experiences, including *self-esteem*, *perception*, and *intelligence*.

External factors, on the other hand, encompass the environmental and social aspects that impact language learning. Brown (2007) maintains that exposure to the target language is a crucial external factor. The more individuals are exposed to the language through immersive experiences, such as living in a foreign country or interacting with native speakers, the greater their potential

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for language acquisition. Exposure allows learners to better understand cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and contextual usage of the language (Ellis, 2008). The learning environment also significantly influences language acquisition. Supportive and conducive learning environments, such as well-designed language courses, experienced teachers, and access to learning resources, can enhance the learning experience and promote progress. Conversely, a negative or unsupportive learning environment may hinder language learning and discourage learners from actively engaging in the process (Tang, 2022).

Social factors, such as peer interaction and cultural integration, contribute to language learning outcomes. Communicating with peers who share a common interest in language learning can foster motivation, provide practice opportunities, and create a supportive learning community. Cultural integration, through interactions with individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds, aids in developing a deeper understanding and appreciation for the target language (Bandura, 2001). External factors may vary for each individual, but their common characteristic is that they depend solely on circumstances beyond the learner's control and influence. Brown classified external factors as motivation types, learning styles, strategies, and attitude towards language learning (Qiao, 2024).

More recent research sought to explain why some learners succeed more than others. Some authors (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 1994; Horwitz; 2000; Segalowitz, 1997) examine broad lists of factors influencing second language learning, but what has been lacking in the area of SLA is a framework for examining these factors. Skehan (1989) distinguishes two general approaches to examine such factors including the *hierarchical and concatenative approaches*. The hierarchical approach employs a theoretical framework that enables predictions regarding the impact of a specific instructional design on learning outcomes. On the other hand, the concatenative approach

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is both a research methodology and a theory that aims to recognize overarching research inquiries. Such approaches can contribute to theory development since they can substantiate the existence of relationships as these types of research are correlational, but cannot easily arbitrate what is cause and effect. Much of the research done in this area relied on quantitative data collection methods, but these techniques only permit how variables relate to each other. Thus, the limitation of the quantitative approach has led some researchers to qualitative data collection.

This study examines factors influencing academic success. Previous research (e.g., Chondrogianni & Marinis, 2011; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Steinberg et al., 2001) has predominantly focused on conducting quantitative analyses and primarily investigated the perspectives of individuals acquiring knowledge. However, there has been a recognized need to collect information from two separate categories of individuals: specifically, learners and educators. This approach aimed to enhance academic achievements and foster an environment conducive to success.

To fill this gap in the literature, the present study aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers and EFL learners regarding the influence of internal and external factors on academic achievement. Achieving academic success is a result of a complex combination of various internal and external factors. Recognizing these elements can help students, educators, and parents create a more effective learning environment that promotes success. This study introduces a novel, empirically validated measurement tool (IEAS) specifically designed to capture both internal and external factors influencing academic success in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Unlike previous research, which often examines these factors in isolation or relies on fragmented theoretical models, this study integrates key psychological and socio-cultural dimensions—including intelligence, self-esteem, personality traits (introversion/extraversion),

motivation types, and socio-cultural status—into a comprehensive, theory-driven framework grounded in the works of Dörnyei, Ellis, Horwitz, and Segalowitz. Furthermore, the study uniquely combines teacher and learner perspectives, offering a dual viewpoint rarely explored in language acquisition research. The identification of self-esteem and socio-cultural status as dominant predictors provides new empirical evidence for shaping language education policies aligned with the principles of sustainable development education. Accordingly, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: To what extent do EFL learners and teachers believe that internal factors enhance academic success?

RQ2: How do EFL learners and teachers perceive the impact of external factors on academic success?

## **Literature Review**

Academic success is a multifaceted concept influenced by various internal and external factors. Internal factors pertain to the characteristics inherent in the learner, such as cognitive abilities, motivation, and emotional stability. External factors encompass elements in the learning environment, including family support, school resources, and socio-economic status. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective educational strategies that can enhance student performance and well-being (Ellis, 2008). Looking through the lens of both teachers and learners, it is clear that a complex interplay of internal and external factors shapes academic success. Internal factors, such as cognitive abilities, motivation, and emotional intelligence, work with external factors, including family support, school resources, and socio-economic status. A holistic understanding of these factors and their interactions is essential for

developing effective educational strategies that enhance student learning outcomes. By fostering collaboration between teachers and learners and creating supportive, inclusive learning environments, educators can promote academic success and personal growth for every student (Steinberg, et al., 2001).

### **Internal Factors**

Language learning is a complex process influenced by numerous internal and external factors. While external factors like the learning environment and instructional methods play significant roles, the internal factors from the learner's perspective are often more critical in determining the ultimate success of language acquisition. These internal factors encompass a range of cognitive, affective, and motivational elements that shape how individuals perceive, process, and retain new linguistic information ( Ellis, 2015). What follows explores key internal factors highlighting their impact on language learning from the learner's perspective: (a) *Cognitive Abilities*: Learners bring varied cognitive abilities, such as memory, attention, and reasoning skills, which influence how they absorb and process information. High cognitive ability often correlates with better comprehension, retention, and application of knowledge. Learners who recognize their cognitive strengths and weaknesses can adopt strategies, such as mnemonic devices or mind maps, to improve their academic performance, (b) *Motivation and Attitudes*: From the learner's perspective, motivation—whether intrinsic or extrinsic—is a driving force behind their engagement with academic content. Intrinsic motivation, fueled by curiosity or personal interest in the subject, leads to sustained effort and deeper learning. In contrast, extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards like grades or recognition, may foster short-term gains. Learners who understand their motivational triggers can better align their study habits with their goals, leading to improved

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academic success (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009), (c) *Self-Regulation and Emotional Intelligence*: Self-regulation involves managing one's emotions, behaviors, and thoughts to achieve long-term goals. Emotionally intelligent learners can handle stress, maintain focus during challenging tasks, and use feedback constructively. These self-regulatory skills are critical for overcoming setbacks and persisting in the face of difficulties, thereby contributing to academic achievement, (d) *Learning Styles and Preferences*: Each learner has a preferred style of learning—be it visual, auditory, reading/writing, or kinesthetic. Understanding their own learning preferences allows students to tailor their study practices to enhance comprehension and retention (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990). For instance, visual learners might benefit from diagrams and charts, while auditory learners might find success in listening to lectures or discussions (Alexiou, 2009; Ellis, 2008; Chondrogianni & Marinis, 2011; McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

### **External Factor**

Language learning is shaped by various external factors that significantly influence the process and its outcomes. While internal factors such as motivation, cognitive abilities, and prior knowledge are critical, external factors provide the context and environment in which language acquisition occurs. These external elements include the learning environment, teaching methods, cultural exposure, social interactions, and technological tools. What follows explores some external factors from the learner's perspective and examines how they contribute to language learning success (Ellis, 2002). (a) *Learning Environment*: The learning environment encompasses both physical and psychological aspects, including the classroom setting, resources available, peer interactions, and the overall atmosphere. A well-equipped environment with access to various resources, such as language labs, multimedia tools, books, and other educational materials,

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enhances the language learning experience. Additionally, it is crucial to create an inclusive and positive atmosphere where learners feel safe to express themselves, make mistakes, and receive constructive feedback. A psychologically supportive environment encourages risk-taking, experimentation, and active participation, all of which are essential components of effective language learning, (b) *teaching methods and approaches*: The methods and approaches adopted by teachers significantly impact language learning outcomes. Effective teaching methods are those that are learner-centered, communicative, and interactive. Traditional approaches, such as grammar-translation or rote memorization, often fail to engage learners and may not develop the necessary skills for real-world language use, (C) *cultural exposure and immersion*: Exposure to the target language's culture is a significant external factor that can accelerate language learning. Cultural immersion allows learners to experience the language in its natural context, providing valuable insights into the social norms, customs, and values of native speakers. This exposure helps learners understand not only the language itself but also the cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and pragmatics that are often difficult to grasp through classroom instruction alone, (d) *social interactions and peer influence*: Social interactions play a pivotal role in language learning. Learners benefit from interacting with peers, teachers, and native speakers in formal and informal settings. Collaborative activities such as group discussions, language games, peer tutoring, and conversational practice provide opportunities for meaningful language use, negotiation of meaning, and immediate feedback, (e) *Technological Tools and Resources*: Technology has revolutionized language learning by providing access to a wealth of resources and interactive tools. Digital platforms, such as language learning apps, online courses, and virtual language exchange programs, offer learners flexibility and personalized learning experiences.

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These tools allow learners to practice language skills at their own pace, receive instant feedback, and engage with authentic materials, such as videos, podcasts, and news articles in the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 2000; McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). External factors such as the learning environment, teaching methods, cultural exposure, social interactions, technological tools, and institutional support significantly impact language learning from the learner's perspective. These factors provide the context in which language acquisition occurs and can either facilitate or hinder the learning process. Understanding the influence of these external factors allows educators and learners to create more effective and supportive learning experiences. By leveraging these factors, language learners can optimize their learning journey, leading to more successful and satisfying language acquisition outcomes (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009; Doughty & Mackey, 2021; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990).

### **The Interplay of Internal and External Factors**

From both the learner's and teacher's perspectives, internal and external factors do not function in isolation. They interact in complex ways to influence academic success. For instance, a motivated teacher (internal factor) with strong emotional intelligence can create a supportive classroom environment (external factor) that enhances student engagement and motivation. Similarly, a highly motivated student (internal factor) can excel even in a resource-limited school (external factor) through resilience and adaptive learning strategies.

Researchers (e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 2000; Ellis, 2008; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990) proposed several strategies such as *teacher-student collaboration, professional development and support for teachers, creating inclusive learning environments, and addressing socio-economic disparities* for enhancing academic success. (a) Teacher-Student Collaboration: Encouraging open

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communication and collaboration between teachers and students helps identify and address specific needs. Regular feedback, goal setting, and personalized learning plans can help bridge the gap between internal capabilities and external conditions. (b) Professional Development and Support for Teachers: Providing teachers with continuous professional development opportunities, emotional support, and access to resources enables them to adapt to diverse student needs and apply effective teaching strategies. (d) Creating Inclusive Learning Environments: Schools should focus on creating inclusive environments that accommodate different learning styles and needs. This includes differentiated instruction, flexible classroom layouts, and technology to support diverse learning preferences. (e) Addressing Socio-Economic Disparities: Implementing policies and programs that support students from low socio-economic backgrounds, such as tutoring, scholarships, and mentorship programs, can help level the playing field and promote academic success.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study included 20 university instructors and 35 EFL students from various English language institutes in Mazandaran province. Data was collected using a convenience sampling procedure. The sample comprised both male ( $n = 21$ ) and female ( $n = 34$ ) participants, ranging in age from 25 to 40 years ( $M = 27.06$ ;  $SD = 1.31$ ). All participants had 4 to 8 years of experience in English language learning and teaching at different institutions. Specifically, the student group included BA holders, with 16 males and 19 females. The second group consisted of 20 teachers from various English institutions, all with MA or PhD degrees. Both male and female teachers, aged 25 to 40, had at least four years of teaching experience. The table below provides detailed demographic information for the participant groups.

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Table 1

*Demographic information of the EFL Teachers and Learners*

Teachers		Students		Age range	Experience	Degree		
Male	Female	Male	Female			BA	MA	PhD
5	15	16	19	25-40	4-8	35	19	1
Total		20				55		

### Data collection Procedure

This study used an expo facto design to probe both teachers' and learners' perceptions of the role of internal and external factors in academic success. In so doing, teachers and learners IEAS were developed to collect data from the target subject pool. The study was conducted among Master of Arts students and graduates associated with various academic institutions, teaching at diverse language schools in Mazandaran Province. The scales were distributed among a subject pool of 90 participants. After a span of two months, several IEAS were gathered and examined to determine the eligible responses. In order to obtain accurate results, both teachers and learners IEAS were distributed among 90 participants, including 35 teachers and 55 students. This was necessary as some participants might be excluded from the sample due to attrition. After the data collection, all the responses were carefully examined to ensure their accuracy and truthfulness. As a result, a total of 15 teachers' IEAS (42%) and 20 learners' IEAS (36%) were deemed ineligible for analysis due to being incomplete or submitted after the deadline. However, it is worth noting that 20 teachers' IEAS and 34 learners' IEAS met the criteria for a valid response rate of 95%. After collecting valid responses, they were subjected to analysis using SPSS software.

### Instrumentation

To conduct the present study, two separate questionnaires (i.e., internal and external academic scale, hereafter IEAS) were developed and validated to screen both teachers and learners'

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perceptions. The IEAS was validated by six professional experts in the field, holding PhD in applied linguistics. They were also piloted as a prerequisite of quantitative instruments among 30 participants prior to the data collection procedure. The IEAS enjoyed the reliability index of .75 which shows the high consistency existing among the items. To ensure the study's objective remains undisclosed, refrain from disclosing the purpose. In so doing, the items were in an even/odd order in which even items were targeting at the external factors and odd ones targeting at the internal factors.

*Learners' IEAS*

Learners' IEAS comprised of a combination of internal and external elements that aimed to acquire additional knowledge regarding the topic being explored. Additionally, participants were requested to offer further elucidations for the majority of the items. Learners' IEAS comprised 22 items in 4 sections (I= Demographic information, II= Internal factors; III= external factors, IV= open ended question). The personal information sought learners' demographic information, their choice of English, proficiency level. This section included 13 items (e.g., *Do the Iranian social context affect negatively learning English? How do you prefer to learn English? Do you think available books at the level of our university libraries are sufficient for EFL learners?*) Section II comprised 3 items measure learners' internal factors (e.g., *Do you think highly intelligent students are good learners? How do you evaluate your self-esteem? How do you describe yourself as a learner?*). Each item followed by an open ended question. Section III included 6 items measure learners' external factors (e.g., *Do you think the use of authentic materials increase your motivation? What motivates you to learn English?*) They were asked to explain or justify for each

item. Finally, Section V included one open ended item inquired the learners to suggest other factors are important for learning English.

### *Teachers' IEAS*

*Teachers' IEAS* was conducted to gather more information about the EFL context. *Teachers' IEAS* included 15 items in four sections. The initial segment is labeled as "personal information" and serves the purpose of gathering basic details about teachers. This section consists of a combination of questions that allow for both open-ended and closed-ended responses. Section II included 5 general information aimed to probe teachers' perception regarding a number of issues such as their focus on teaching style. The third segment included 4 internal factors aiming to provide teachers with a platform to articulate their thoughts and perspectives regarding internal elements (e.g., *Do you think that a learner's high self-esteem impacts their academic achievement? How would you describe your students in general?*). The fourth segment is referred to as the *external factors* section, and its main purpose was to provide teachers with a platform to express their viewpoints and attitudes regarding external factors. In this section, teachers are offered a valuable opportunity to express their personal evaluation and suggestions regarding additional vital factors that contribute to the enhancement and success of the English learning experience.

### **Data Analysis**

The current study utilized an ex post facto design (i.e., causal-comparative design). It is a type of non-experimental research method used to explore potential cause-and-effect relationships by examining existing conditions instead of manipulating variables. This approach avoided any deliberate manipulation, focusing instead on revealing patterns of interaction among foreign

language learning variables from the respondents' viewpoints. To compare teachers' and learners' perceptions of internal and external factors contributing to academic success, descriptive statistics (such as frequency and percentage) and charts were used.

## **Results**

### **Analysis of the first research question**

In order to probe the first research question stating the extent to which internal factors promote EFL learners' academic success both teachers and students were asked to answer an open ended questionnaire. The questionnaire aimed to probe learners' internal factors. As a note of caution, the following internal factors were considered for the purpose of this study: intelligence, self-esteem, and introversion/extroversion. It should be noted here that the term "intelligence" used here refers to the Stenberg's' triarchic theory of intelligence (1985), which frees us from convincing of something fixed and statistic. After the participants fill in the questionnaire, data were collected. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the internal factors as far as the teachers and learners perspectives are concerned.

Table 2  
*Teachers' and learners' Perspective on Internal Factors*

<b>Internal factors</b>	<b>Teachers</b>		<b>Learners</b>	
	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Intelligence</b>	7	35%	17	78.5%
<b>Self-esteem</b>	19	95%	23	65.7%
<b>Introversion</b>	4	20%	16	45.7%
<b>Extroversion</b>	12	60%	19	54%

*Note:* F=Frequency; P= Percentage

As indicated in the table, of the 55 participants, seven (35%) of the teachers and 17 (78.5%) of the students believed that intelligence affect the process of learning and thus leads to success. Teachers maintained that highly intelligent students are successful ones due to the fact that they

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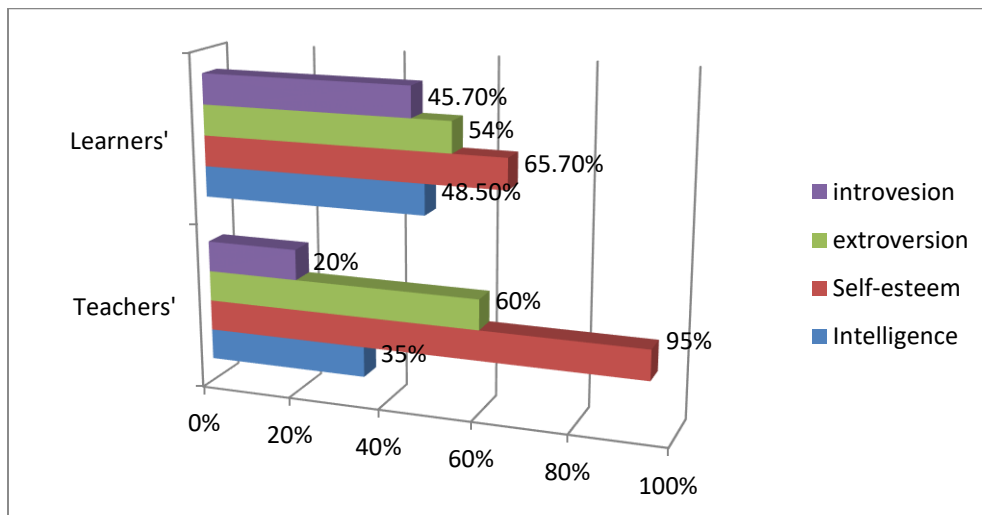
are prone to grasp teaching points faster. Similarly, learners believe that it can expedite the process of language learning. However, intelligent students are not necessarily better language learners. Nineteen (95%) teachers and 23 (67%) students considered the importance of self-esteem as an internal factor in language learning. They maintained that one's attitude toward oneself would affect the level of ambition and naturally on their academic success. They further noted that learners who benefit from a higher self-esteem are successful ones as they are not afraid of making mistakes. They are also more enthusiastic about learning and doing something new. Additionally, learners were asked to rank their self-esteem. Sixty seven (67%) of the participants ranked themselves as medium self-esteem. They regarded themselves to be more socially dominant within relationships. They added that self-esteem helps them to be more open toward discussions and public communication. People with high self-esteem, (31%), focus on growth and improvement, whereas low self-esteemed ones, (2.8 %) described themselves as trying not making mistakes in their life, they are relatively passive, they are said to be non-exploratory and inattentive in classroom discussions in particular and in their living lives in general.

Likewise, the two last internal factors, introversion and extroversion, were under investigation. Sixty (60%) percent of the teachers remarked that their students are extroverted. They have also asserted that there exists some introverted one in every class they have, but majority of their students are extroverted as they freely express their ideas, they ask questions while they have problems understanding a point, and that they feel free while presenting over the specified issue. Additionally, learners were asked whether they are amongst the extroverts or introverts. Nineteen (54%) of them advocated extrovert learners as they enjoyed group work and discussion, they learn best while they are in dynamic environments that put them in cooperative situations. They are assertive, risk-takers, problem solvers and said to have little worries in facing difficulties. In order

to have a better schematic representation, a comparative analysis of both teacher and learners are presented in figure1 below:

**Figure 1**

*Comparison of Teachers and Learners' Perception on Internal Factors*



### Analysis of the Second Research Question

In order to probe the second research question stating the extent to which external factors promote EFL learners' academic success both teachers and learners were asked to answer an open ended questionnaire. The questionnaire aimed to probe external factors. As a note of caution *motivation* and *socio-cultural status* were considered for the purpose of this study. After the participants filled the questionnaire, data were collected. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the external factors as far as teachers and learners perspective are concerned.

Table3

*Teachers' and Learners' Perspective on External Motivation*

Internal factors	Teachers		Learners	
	F	P	F	P
<b>Intrinsic Motivation</b>	10	50%	11	31.4%
<b>Extrinsic Motivation</b>	10	50%	25	68.5%
<b>Socio-cultural status</b>	18	80%	23	71.4%

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As the table illustrates, 10 (50%) of the teachers said to have intrinsically motivated learners; and 11 (31.4%) of the students believed to be intrinsically motivated. Intrinsically motivated learners are mainly adults who enroll English classes to achieve their set goals. They either want to study abroad or find a better job; therefore, they strive hard to gain their goals. The students of this type, as teachers said, engage in activities for the sake of learning and they like to give themselves an opportunity to learn a language for their personal purposes. Ten (50%) teachers and twenty-five (68.5%) students were reported to be extrinsically motivated as they think of this language as a prestigious one; they learn this language to obtain better job position, to have better income, to work for better companies and in general to have a better position in the society they are living in, they also enjoy positive feedback they receive.

Moreover, students' attitude toward motivation were asked through using different questions. First, they were asked what motivates them to learn English. They were provided with two items entitled as subject interest, fulfill ambitious. These terms represent two dimensions of motivation, integrative and instrumental motivation. Then, the very same question but with different wording were asked to check if students were mainly motivated integratively or instrumentally. And finally, they were asked the reason of their success in learning English. Nearly sixty-six percent (66%) of the learners learn this language to fulfill their desired ambitions. They set prior goals for their future job or academic success. They are eager and motivated to learn English as a foreign language to achieve their goals and to reach their desired future (instrumental/extrinsic motivation). The rest of the participants believed that the subject of the content is the main reason that motivates them to learn English (integrative/ intrinsic motivation).

The second question relating to motivation whether integrative or instrumental was "their attitude toward English". They had two options to choose whether they believed that this language

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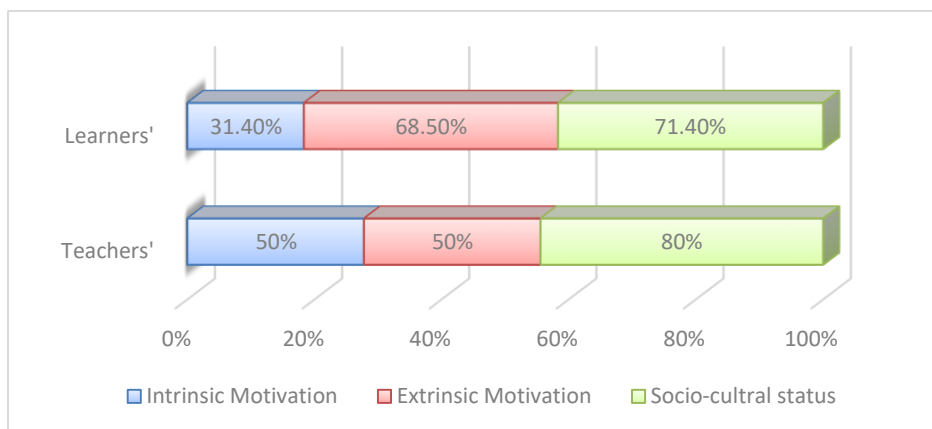
is a prestigious one or they learn it for the sake of learning. Considering students' attitude toward English, sixty-eight percent (68%) of them believed this is a prestigious language they are acquiring. They learn this language to obtain better job position, to have better income, to work for better companies and in general to have a better position in the society they are living in (instrumental motivation). Only Thirty-one percent (31%) of the learners learn this language because they loved learning foreign languages like English (integrative motivation). Even some percent of the participants who learned this language for the sake of learning it, wanted to promote their job positions or to change their job in future while they mastered this language.

Finally, socio-cultural status is the last factor under investigation in this study. The setting might influence L2 acquisition and it has an effect on learners' attitude. The attitude towards the target language, the target language speakers, target language culture, the social value of learning L2, the particular use of the target language and even the attitude towards learners themselves as members of their own culture. Thus in order to investigate the attitude towards English two different questions addressed teachers and learners. Teachers were asked if their students show openness to this language, learners were asked if the context they are living in affect negatively towards learning English. They are presented in details descriptively in the followings. Twenty-three (71.4%) of the learners were open-minded toward learning English and liked learning this language, as teachers noted. Being open-minded toward a language is basically related to the culture one is living in and has grown up in. Language is not a thing to be studied but a way of seeing, understanding and communicating about a world and each language user uses his or her language to overcome this process. There is a fundamental relationship between language and culture. All the students (100%) believed that Iranians' socio-cultural view point had never been negative toward learning a foreign language in general and English in particular. Reverse, most

families and the culture they have grown up in had always been extremely open toward learning a foreign language. In order to have a better schematic representation, a comparative analysis of both teachers and learners are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*Comparison of Teachers and Learners Perception on External Factors*



## Discussion

This study aims to explore the key elements of academic success to bridge under the scrutiny teachers' and learners' perception towards the role of internal and external factors in academic success. To this aim the first research question examined the extent to which internal factors affect EFL learners' academic success. The purpose of the second research question was to probe the extent to which external factors promote EFL learners' academic success.

According to the results of the descriptive study, the conclusion was reach that the importance of variables should not be judged on the basis of their nature but an extreme care must be taken in the balance of the existence of internal and external variables. That is, as learners enter a classroom they are with some internal factors which they may or may not be aware of and as they are sited

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in their classes, they are faced with some external sources both inside and outside of the class. A teacher, is expected to know all these factors and is expected to provide a situation for learners to become successful in the process of second language learning.

Comparing the justifications made by learners and teachers, both descriptively, provide us with the insight that these two groups of academics, with both their internal and external factors they have and are faced with, have almost a close attitude toward these two factors and specifically their sub-factors. Students pointed out that there exists some factors related to the process on learning and these factors significantly effect on their success. They argued that since learning English is of central importance in their future career, therefore they need to be aware of the factors having a role on their success and they need to employ some strategies to overcome this process successfully. In addition, majority of the students are with medium level of self-esteem which is considered as an important effective element in the process of educational achievement and it could be easily claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity could be carried out without some degree of self-esteem (Brown, 2007). Every class is made up of both introvert and extrovert learners and the point is to recognize each type in the class and provide them with appropriate task best suits their personal characteristic.

Teachers also argued that learners are open-minded and like the English language to fulfill their ambition which shows that the society and culture of the context of this study (Iran) is open towards target language learning and that learner set a prior goal before enrolling classes. In order to improve students' motivation, teachers need to set interesting course material and goals that are meaningful, realistic and achievable for students. They also have to create a dynamic and friendly learning environment and they believed that learners' best learn if the class atmosphere is cooperative and activities are done in a moving and doing way. They said that learners would not

enjoy the classes in which their teacher is mono talk. While there are many factors that have a role to lead success such as intelligence, self-esteem, learning styles and strategies, motivation and attitude toward the target language, students mainly said that their motivation is the reason of their success. These strategies generally in teaching/ learning process were found applicable and useful to reach learning goals easier and faster.

According to Falk (1978), it is thought that students who are most successful when learning a target language are those who like the people that speak the language, admire the culture and have a desire to become familiar with the society in which the language is used. Ellis (1994) noted that attitudes can reflect the particular social settings in which learners find themselves. In other words, learners with positive attitudes toward the target language they are learning will have these attitudes reinforced, whereas negative attitudes might lead to lack of success. Adi Badiozaman (2015) examined interrelated influence of internal and external factors of Malaysian Learners' self-concept in academic writing. The quantitative phase of the study identified that there were different self-concepts involved in the formulation of self-concept in academic writing (e.g., self-concept in English and self-concept as a writer). The study proposed that that there is a complementary relationship between multiple internal and/or external factors that are available to students, and that this may influence the nature of their actions in the academic writing class. Overall, this study demonstrated that an L2 learner's self-concept in academic writing is complex and multifaceted and that Malaysia's socio-historical setting tended to directly impact this academic self-concept.

Xinyan (2014) studied the analysis of internal and external factors in language learning strategies. Language learning strategies refer to techniques used by language learners to regulate their learning. After considering the different variables, he determined the variables that were related to internal and external factors. The internal factors (including learners' age, intelligence,

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personality, and cognitive style) and external factors (as teachers' teaching approaches and materials) that may influence the use of language learning strategies for EFL learners. The findings of this study are in line with Mahmoudi and Mahmoudi (2015) studied the effects of internal and external factors on learning English as a foreign language from Iranian EFL learners' points of view. Academic success is influenced by both internal (personal) and external (environmental) factors. These elements interact to shape a student's ability to perform well in educational settings.

Studies (e.g., Barjesteh & Shirzad, 2022; Cheng, 2020; Movafagh et al., 2025; Qiao, 2024) indicate that students with a growth mindset believe they can improve through effort, leading to higher persistence and achievement. Besides, intelligence, memory, and problem-solving skills significantly impact learning efficiency and academic performance. Students who believe in their abilities and can manage stress perform better academically. Encouraging peers and positive social interactions can boost motivation and academic engagement. Combining strong internal motivation and a supportive external environment leads to the best academic outcomes. Schools and families play a crucial role in reinforcing positive habits, while students need to develop resilience and adaptability.

This study makes several noteworthy contributions to the field of language education and academic success research. First, it introduces the IEAS (Internal and External Academic Success) scale, a newly developed and validated instrument designed to measure key psychological and socio-cultural factors influencing academic achievement in EFL contexts. Unlike previous research, this study integrates both learner and instructor perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how internal factors (such as self-esteem, intelligence, personality traits) and external factors (such as motivation and socio-cultural status) interact to shape academic outcomes. The findings provide empirical evidence that self-esteem and socio-

cultural status are particularly influential, highlighting their practical relevance for designing supportive, learner-centered language education environments. Additionally, by framing academic success within the broader goals of sustainable development education, this study extends the discussion beyond language learning, emphasizing the role of education in fostering equity, inclusion, and social well-being.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that both self-esteem was the most significant internal factor influencing the language learning process. Notably, learners with higher levels of self-esteem are reported to be more successful, as they exhibit greater willingness to learn and show less fear of making mistakes. The next factor, though less emphasized, is extroversion. Both groups of participants considered being extroverted an advantage, as these learners freely express their ideas, ask questions when they face difficulties, feel less stressed, and are more sociable. Extroverts are more eager to participate in group work and discussions, benefiting from dynamic learning environments. The third internal factor, introversion, indicates that such learners tend to allocate more time to process information. Introverts are also reported to be successful because they often spend more time reading and writing. Intelligence was the factor that received the least attention, aligned with Sternberg's tribrachic theory of intelligence. Participants believed that intelligence could be strengthened and that educational institutions could help enhance its outcomes.

Regarding external factors, socio-cultural status received the most attention. This factor is linked to the environment in which one lives, influencing attitudes toward learning a language. Attitudes play a crucial role in many aspects of language learning, including attitudes toward the target language, its speakers, its culture, the social value of learning a second language (L2), and

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even the attitudes learners hold toward themselves as members of society. The next external factor is extrinsic motivation. Learners are primarily extrinsically motivated when they perceive a language as prestigious, wish to study abroad, or need to communicate with foreigners for work or personal reasons. Even intrinsically motivated learners occasionally find extrinsic motivation, as they enjoy the positive feedback, seek better job positions, or desire promotions.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 35 EFL students and 20 university instructors. This limited number of participants may affect the generalizability of the findings to broader educational settings or different cultural contexts. Second, while the study focused on specific internal (e.g., intelligence, self-esteem, personality traits) and external (e.g., motivation, socio-cultural status) factors, other potentially influential variables, such as emotional regulation, learning strategies, or institutional support, were not examined. Third, the reliance on self-report questionnaires may introduce response biases, including social desirability or inaccurate self-perceptions among participants.

Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, limiting the ability to explore causal relationships or changes over time. Future studies should consider larger, more diverse samples, include additional variables, and adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to enhance the depth and applicability of the findings. To build upon the current findings, future studies should: (a) involve larger, more diverse samples across institutions and cultural contexts to enhance generalizability, (b) explore additional internal and external factors such as emotional intelligence, learning strategies, and institutional resources, (c) utilize longitudinal designs to examine changes and causal relationships over time, (d) apply mixed-methods approaches to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative insights, (e) conduct cross-

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cultural comparisons to investigate how socio-cultural factors influence academic success in varied settings.

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