Jahedizadeh *et al. Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education* (2016) 1:16
DOI 10.1186/s40862-016-0021-8

Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education

ORIGINAL ARTICLE Open Access

The role of EFL learners' demotivation, perceptions of classroom activities, and mastery goal in predicting their language achievement and burnout

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Abstract

The present study aims at delving into English as foreign language students' demotivation, burnout, mastery goal orientation, and perceptions of classroom activities. This is accomplished by building a causal structural model through which the associations among the constructs are estimated. The Persian version of the 'de-motivation scale' designed by Sakai and Kichuki (System 37:57-69, 2009) is used to assess demotivation. It measures six constructs: teachers, characteristics of classes, experiences of failure, class environment, class materials, and lack of interest. To gauge burnout, student version of 'Maslach Burnout Inventory' (Schaufeli et al., Psychology, 33(5):464-481, 2002) is employed. It measures three dimensions of burnout, namely, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and academic inefficacy. The Persian version of the 'Students Perceptions of Classroom Activities' scale designed by Gentry and Gable (My class activities: A survey instrument to assess students' perceptions of interest, challenge, choice, and enjoyment in their classrooms, 2001) is utilized in determining student perceptions of their classes. The scale assesses four perceptions: *interest, challenge, choice,* and *joy*. Students' goal orientation is measured by the translated version of *'Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory'* designed by Midgley et al. (Contemporary Educational Psychology, 23 (2):113-31, 1998). The results display a good overall fit of the proposed model with the empirical data. In particular, demotivators positively and significantly predict student burnout and the two internal demotivators namely, 'lack of interest' and 'experiences of failure' negatively and significantly impact on student mastery goal orientation. The results also indicate that student burnout negatively and significantly predict student mastery goal orientation and positive perceptions of classroom activities. Student perceptions of interest and joy, on the other hand, positively and significantly play an important role in mastery goal orientation. Student perceptions and mastery goal orientation have positive effects on student achievement.

Keywords: Demotivation, Perceptions of classroom activities, Mastery goal, Burnout, Language achievement, SEM

Introduction

As a theoretical construct, the concept of motivation is used to explain a process which initiates, guides, and maintains goal oriented treatments. Dörnyei (2001) defined motivation as a highly complex and multifaceted issue shaping one of the most crucial human characteristics. Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) referred to motivation as a changing arousal in an individual that instigates, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive processes in which primary desires and wishes can be prioritized and acted out (successfully or unsuccessfully). The flip side of motivation known as demotivation has recently attracted the attention of educationalists (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a, d; Jahedizadeh & Ghanizadeh, 2015; Zhang, 2007; Molavi & Biria, 2013). According to Dörnyei (2001), de-motivation reduces the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an on-going action. In the domain of education and specifically in the field of foreign language learning (EFL), students may face various obstacles such as, learning conditions, teachers' methodologies and behaviors, inappropriate materials, or lack of learning facilities or equipment. Consequently, tracing the antecedents of demotivation should be a focal issue for both teachers and researchers who are inspired to provide EFL students with the most suitable learning conditions. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) identified six demotivators in EFL contexts, including teachers, characteristics of classes, and experiences of failure, class environment, class materials, and lack of interest. Each of these demotivators can diminish learners' desire and motivation towards learning.

The empirical demotivation-related studies encompass many dimensions in terms of the most significant factors leading to student demotivation. These studies have demonstrated that learners perceived motivation as a student-owned state, while grasping de-motivation as a teacher-owned problem (e.g., Chambers, 1999; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Ushioda, 1998;). Rudnai (1996) reported that lack of a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere, skilled teachers, and choice, as well as not being placed in the appropriate group of proficiency are the most important demotivators. Gorham and Millette (1997) also conducted a study with the same purpose and have found three categories including teachers' behaviours, context, and format/ structure. Classroom activities, teachers and students' conflicts, teachers' attitudes and behaviours were among important factors which diminished students' demotivation (Oxford, 1998). In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2001) demonstrated that characteristics of the course book, L2 community, teacher's methodology and personality, learning facilities, and interference of another language are among the crucial demotivators among students. In another study, demotivating factors were identified as follows: peers' negative attitudes toward learning, feeling of inferiority regarding one's ability, exam-oriented classes, lack of choice and control over the material being learned, and distrust in teachers' abilities (Ikeno, 2002).

Hasegawa (2004) found a significant relationship between inappropriate teachers' behaviors and students' de-motivation. Arai (2004) noted that monotonous classroom atmosphere and teachers' behavior are the most important demotivators. In line with the previous studies, Zhang (2007) identifies teachers' incompetence and indifference to the course and students, as well as unfair testing and boring presentations as significant demotivation factors. Other studies were carried out to find the relationship between student demotivation and some demographic variables such

as age (e.g., Falout et al. 2009), gender, or proficiency level (e.g., Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Falout & Maruyama, 2004).

Despite the bulk of research exploring the most critical demotivators, the notion seems to be remained an unchartered territory among EFL learners. Only recently have EFL educationalists paid attention to the concept of student demotivation in relation to some other factors such as goal-orientation or contextual factors (e.g., Allahdadi et al. 2016; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2016). In consideration of what was noted about the contributing role of student demotivation in learning process, the present study aims at exploring EFL students' demotivation by examining its association with learners' perceptions, mastery goal orientation, burnout, and achievement.

Perception, as one of the key factors studied in the present research, is defined as the process by which one receives and interprets information from the environment. Perceptions reflect one's emotions, expectations, and needs. In the domain of education, student perceptions of classroom activities comprising four main components namely; interest, challenge, choice, and joy (Gentry et al. 2002) have been identified as significant determinants of academic achievement (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a; Mucherah & Frazier, 2013) as well as student goal orientations (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015c). In other words, if students perceive the environment as supportive, their motivation will be enhanced. On the other hand, if students perceive the classroom environment as obstructive or feel marginalized, their motivation will be eroded (Jahedizadeh, Ghonsooly, Ghanizadeh, & Akbari, 2015). Previous studies were carried out to find the relationship between student perception and some demographic variables such as gender and grade-level (e.g., Gentry et al. 2002), the subject area (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995), cognitive strategy use (Young, 1997), teachers' interpersonal behavior (Brok et al. 2004; Hardré & Sullivan, 2007), epistemological beliefs and learning approaches (Ozkal et al. 2008), teacher support and involvement (Lee et al. 2009), and self-regulating learning and motivational beliefs (Kharrazi & Kareshki, 2010).

Mastery goal orientation, as one of the components of the achievement goal orientation, is another factor studied in the present research. Generally speaking, goal orientation theory revolves around the ways students think about themselves, their performance on the tasks in the immediate learning situation and focuses on the central role of student perception of educational goals. A two factor model of achievement goals comprises two components, mastery and performance goal orientations in which the former is related to the standpoint where students are concerned with mastering their competence and the latter represents the state in which learners are concerned with merely displaying their competence relative to others (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Another model, however, added a third component to the previous pattern, i.e., avoidance goal orientation in which the main concern is hiding one's lack of ability relative to others (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Consequently, a tripartite model of achievement goal-orientation was proposed consisting of three dimensions. The first component (i.e., mastery goal) can represent the most ideal approach towards attaining academic objectives. Mastery goal-orientated learners face challenges, persevere in difficulties (Dweck, 2000), utilize elaboration strategies, and attain high levels of performance due to their intrinsic motivation (Elliott & Dweck 1988).

A plethora of studies has been conducted to find the associations between student goal orientations in diverse educational contexts (e.g., Ghanizadeh et al. 2016) as well

as some cognitive, affective, and psychological factors. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Pintrich & DeGroot 1990) Cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Pintrich & DeGroot 1990), perceptions of classroom and school environment and motivation (Dickinson, 1995), self-efficacy and self-confidence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), students' perception of classroom environment performance and intrinsic motivation (Church et al. 2001), self-efficacy (Jackson, 2002; Pajares, 2003), self-efficacy and metacognition components (Zafarmand et al. 2014), interest (Hulleman et al. 2010), achievement emotions (Huang, 2011), and demotivation (Jahedizadeh et al. 2015) were found to be significantly associated with student goal orientation.

Burnout as another factor pertained to the present study can be defined as a syndrome resulting from forms of chronic stress associated with frequent interactions and direct contact with others. The notion of burnout was first proposed by Freudenberger (1974) to refer to fixed job-related stress. According to the three dimensional model proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1986), there are three dimensions of burnout namely; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The first dimension of burnout can be characterized as the loss of energy, debilitation, fatigue, and wearing out. The second dimension of burnout (i.e., depersonalization) is the state of becoming indifferent to the people and ignoring the service recipients in order to put distance between themselves and oneself (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Reduced personal accomplishment as the third component of burnout is related to academic inefficacy when one feels exhausted or indifferent.

Although the notion of burnout was proposed with reference to working people in their work environment (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015b; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2016), it can be generalizable to students as well (Pottage & Huxley, 1996). Gender and educational level (Jahedizadeh, et al. 2015), lack of engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2002), personal lives, financial strain, difficult course content, and difficulty in balancing school and work (Darling et al. 2007), avoiding coping strategies (Gibbons, 2010), low spirituality (Wachholtz & Rogoff, 2013), and extrinsic motivation and neuroticism (Reichl et al. 2014), attributions and self-regulatory strategies (Ghanizadeh & Ghonsooly, 2014) were found to be the most important antecedents of student burnout.

Taken together, the role of the above-discussed constructs in effective learning has conclusively been demonstrated by educational researchers. Nevertheless, these constructs have been studied in parallel, and to the researchers' best knowledge, no empirical study to date has examined these variables within a single framework. Accordingly, it appears that there is a clear need for research in this area to probe how these factors interact in accounting for effective learning and emotional well-being.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to delve into EFL students' demotivation by investigating its effect on other attributes including, student burnout, mastery goal orientation, perceptions of classroom activities, and their achievement. Viewed from a broader perspective, it seeks to examine and interpret the hypothesized relationships among these variables within a single framework. The findings are expected to pave the way to proposing a model for EFL learning and academic effectiveness.

As education scholars have posited, demotivators as detrimental factors leading to diminishing motivational basis of an on-going action or behavioral intention have significant effects on eradicating both teacher and student effectiveness (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001). It is also contended that de-motivation is not a permanent issue which implies demotivated learners can rehabilitate their motivation, a phenomenon known as re-motivation (Falout, 2012; Ushioda, 1998;). Consequently, studying such deleterious factors should be a compelling priority for educationalists given that they are critical in students' perceptions of their classroom and burnout (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2016), as well as their goal orientation and achievement (Allahdadi, et al., 2016). In line with this, a number of prominent scholars in the domain of student demotivation have maintained that this concept is pivotal to the student motivation in that exploring the causes of de-motivation can help researchers with theories of the positive side, i.e., motivation (e.g., Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

Figure 1 represents our hypothesized model proposed based on the theoretical contentions discussed earlier. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was selected to study the involved causal relationships. In the proposed model, demotivators constitute the core of the study and their direct and indirect roles in the other four variables are investigated. The demotivators measured in this study are as follows: (1) TEA: teachers; (2) COC: characteristics of classes; (3) CEN: classroom environment; (4) CMA: classroom materials; (5) LOI: lack of interest, and (6) EOF: experiences of failure. These demotivators were set as the independent variables; the first four variables are considered as external demotivators and the last two factors are internal ones. The influence of each of these demotivators on student burnout was examined. Moreover, the effect of two internal demotivators on student mastery goal orientation was explored. The effect of student burnout on mastery goal orientation, as well as student perceptions, in line with the effect of student perceptions on mastery goal orientation were hypothesized. Also, the influence of student perceptions of classroom activities on student achievement was estimated. As it will be discussed in the next section, student

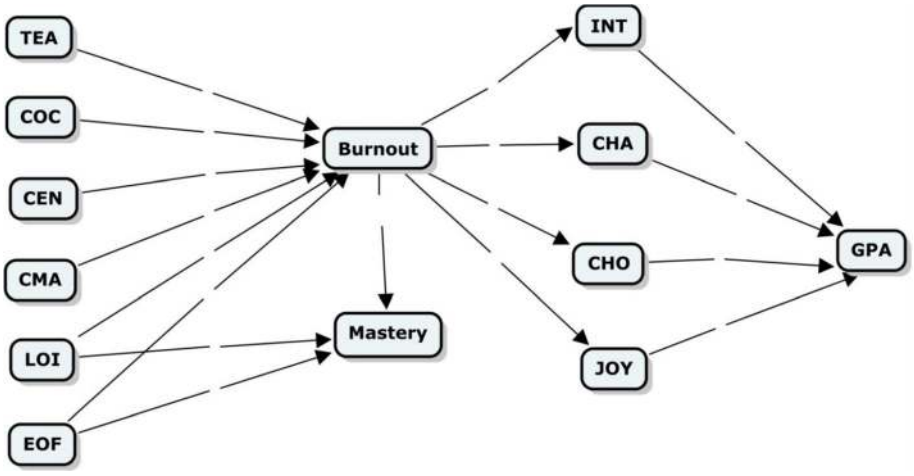

Fig. 1 Hypothetical model of student demotivation, burnout, mastery goal orientation, perceptions, and achievement. Note (1) TEA: teachers; COC: characteristics of classes; CEN: classroom environment; CMA: classroom materials; LOI: lack of interest; EOF: experiences of failure; INT: interest; CHA: challenge; CHO: choice; and JOY: joy

perceptions of classroom activities as measured in the present study comprise four subscales: (1) INT: interest; (2) CHA: challenge; (3) CHO: choice, and (4) JOY: enjoyment. The arrows depict the direction of the relationship among these variables.

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study comprised 250 EFL students selected according to convenience sampling among EFL learners studying English in language institutes and universities in Mashhad, a city in Iran. After a brief explanation of the purpose of the research, all the participants received the student demotivation scale, student burnout inventory, achievement goal orientation inventory, and student perceptions of classroom activities questionnaire and then completed them. In order to obtain reliable data, the researchers explained the purpose of completing the questionnaires and assured the participants that their responses would be kept confidential by asking them not to write their names. They were only required to provide demographic information such as gender, age, and education level; however, writing their GPA was obligatory to receive student achievement. The four scales contained about 87 items and it took about 20 min to answer all the items. The accessibility of the questionnaires in the respondents' native language (Persian) added to speed with which they responded to the items. To get more reliable and accessible responses, the questionnaires were given together in a single session.

The profile of the students is as follows. Out of 250 students 125 of them were studying English in language institutes and 125 participants were university students. Their age varied from 19 to 32 years old (*mean* = 24, *standard deviation* = 3.78). Out of 250 students, 32 students held a diploma, 184 had a bachelor of arts (BA), 34 held a master of arts (MA). Female participates were 161, while 89 were male.

Instrumentation

A battery of four questionnaires was utilized in the present study as follows.

Demotivation scale

To determine student demotivation, the study employed the Persian version of 'demotivation scale' designed and validated by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) and translated to Persian by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2016). The de-motivation questionnaire consists of 35 statements gauging six demotivators: teachers (6 items), characteristics of classes (7 items), class environment (7 items), class materials (6 items), lack of interest (4 items), and experiences of failure (5 items). The scale measures the six constructs via a 5-point Likert-type response format (not true, to some extent not true, not either true or untrue, to some extent true and true).

The Persian version of the questionnaire translated and validated by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2016) enjoyed acceptable validity and reliability estimates. The validity indices computed via CFA were as follows: the chi-square/df ratio = 2.1, the RMSEA = .062, NFI = .90, GFI = .89, and CFI = .91. The Cronbach's alpha estimate for all six de-motivators was found to be .95 regarding 35 items. The reliability of the subscales ranged from .72 to .87 (teachers = .87, characteristics of classes = .72, experiences of failure = .84, class environment = .72, class materials = .82, and lack of interest = .87).

Burnout inventory

The Persian version of Maslach Burnout Inventory Student-Survey (MBI-SS) designed and validated by Schaufeli et al. (2002) was used to determine EFL student burnout. The scale comprises 15 items evaluating three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (5 items), cynicism (4 items), and academic efficacy (6 items). The scale measures the three constructs via a 5-point Likert-type response format (never, seldom, sometimes, often, and always). The Persian version of the scale – translated and validated by Rostami, Abedi, and Schaufeli (2012) – demonstrated acceptable reliability indices in which Coefficient Cronbach's alpha for emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and academic efficacy were 0.88, 0.90, and 0.84 respectively.

Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory (AGOI)

Students' mastery goal orientation was measured by the translated version of Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory designed by Midgley et al. (1998). The inventory comprises three subscales, 6 items for each goal orientation and a total of 18 items, and allows responses ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me). Table 1 represents three possible goal orientations.

The Persian version of the scale–translated and validated by Rezaee and Kareshki (2012)–depicted acceptable reliability indices (.81, .89, .83, respectively). The results of CFA confirmed the validity of the translated version (GFI = .92, AGFI = .88, RMSEA = .07). In the present study, the reliability indices computed via Cronbach's alpha were found to be as follows: mastery = .75, performance = .72, and avoidance = .71.

Students' perceptions of classroom activities

To determine student perceptions of classroom activities, Persian version of 'Students Perceptions of Classroom Activities' scale designed and validated by Gentry and Gable (2001) and translated to Persian by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015a) was utilized.

The 'Students Perceptions of Classroom Activities' instrument contains 31 statements evaluating four dimensions (interest, challenge, choice, and enjoyment). The scale measures the four dimensions via a 5-point Likert-type response format (never, seldom, sometimes, often, always). As reported by Gentry et al. (2002), the instrument was piloted and a confirmatory study was undertaken for a national sample. Validity evidence for construct interpretation was investigated through CFA. A GFI of .95 and a RMSEA of .04 were indicative model fit. Item response theory was used to examine the adequacy of the definition of each construct including how well the 5-point frequency response scale worked for the items and respondents. The Persian version of the scale was also indicative model fit. A GFI of .78 and a RMSEA of .062 were obtained.

Sample items for *'interest'* dimension included: 1) The teacher involves me in interesting learning activities, and 2) What I do in my class gives me interesting and new

Table 1 Subscales of the AGOI along with the corresponding descriptions

Subscale	Definition	Alpha	Items
Mastery-approach	Attaining task-based or intrapersonal competence	.85	1–6
Performance-approach	Attaining normative competence	.89	7–12
Performance-avoidance	Avoiding normative incompetence	.74	13–18

ideas. Sample items for *'challenge'* dimension are: 1) I have to think to solve problems in my class, and 2) What we do in class fits my abilities. Sample items include in *'choice'* dimension are: 1) When we work together, I can choose my partners, and 2) When there are many jobs, I can choose the ones that suit me. Sample items for *'joy'* dimension are :1) The teacher makes learning fun, and 2) I like what I do in my class.

Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of demotivators. Throughout this study, TEA stands for teachers, COC stands for characteristics of classes, EOF for experience of failure, CEN for classroom environment, CMA for characteristics of materials, and LOI for lack of interest. As the table indicates, COC receives the highest mean (M = 23.87, SD = 4.34) followed by CEN (M = 23.40, SD = 5.03).

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of perceptions of classroom activities. Here, INT represents interest, CHA stands for challenge, CHO for choice, and Joy for enjoyment. According to the table, CHA obtains the highest mean (M = 31.12, SD = 4.14) and CHO the lowest mean score (M = 23.21, SD = 3.43).

Descriptive statistics of perceptions of burnout, mastery, and language achievement (as measured by GPA) are represented in Table 3. As the table displays, mean score of burnout is 43.03, for mastery, it is 22.42, and for GPA, it is 16.83.

The reliability estimates of each variable computed via Cronbach's alpha are as follows: TEA (α = .74), COC (α = .71), EOF (α = .69), CEN (α = .65), CMA (α = .67), LOI (α = .69), INT (α = .71), CHA (α = .70), CHO (α = .62), JOY (α = .75), Burnout (α = .81), Mastery (α = .66), and GPA (α = .73).

To examine the structural relations, the proposed model was tested using the LISREL 8.50 statistical package**.** A number of fit indices were examined to evaluate the model fit: the chi-square magnitude which shouldn't be significant, Chi-square/*df* ratio which should be lower than 2 or 3, the normed fit index (NFI), the good fit index (GFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI) with the cut value greater than .90**,** and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of about .06 or .07 (Schreiber, et al., 2006).

As demonstrated by Fig. 2, the fit indices are slightly below those thresholds: GFI (.89) RMSEA (.89) and the chi-square/*df* ratio (5.58). This implies that the model had a moderate fit with the empirical data.

To reach a better model fit, a post-hoc modification was then conducted. In so doing, a path coefficient from mastery to GPA and covariances between mastery perceptions were inserted in the model. This resulted in an overall fit

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of demotivators

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
TEA	250	6.00	26.00	17.7560	5.69581
COC	250	11.00	33.00	23.8720	4.34640
EOF	250	5.00	22.00	15.3120	4.45038
CEN	250	8.00	32.00	23.4040	5.03888
CMA	250	6.00	27.00	18.6040	4.80954
LOI	250	2.00	10.00	5.5360	2.18995
Valid N (listwise)	250				

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of perceptions of classroom activities

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
INT	250	18.00	40.00	29.1480	4.00478
CHA	250	19.00	41.00	31.1200	4.14613
CHO	250	14.00	33.00	24.2120	3.43720
JOY	250	14.00	35.00	25.4840	3.90368
Valid N (listwise)	250				

improvement: chi-square = 65.12, the chi-square/*df* ratio (3), RMSEA=. 66, GFI = .92, NFI = .90, CFI = .90. Figure 3 represents the model.

To check the strengths of the causal relationships among the variables, the *t*-values and standardized estimates were examined. As indicated in Fig. 2, two estimates were displayed on the paths. The first one is the standardized coefficient (*β)* which explains the predictive power of the independent variable and presents an easily grasped picture of effect size. The closer the magnitude to 1.0, the higher the correlation and the greater the predictive power of the variable is. The second measure is the *t*-value (t); if $t > 2$ or $t < -2$, we call the result statistically significant.

The results demonstrated that among the demotivators, all had positive significant impact on burnout except COC ($\beta = .14$, $t = 1.93$). The highest influence was exerted by CMA ($\beta = .38$, $t = 5.48$), followed by LOI ($\beta = .36$, $t = 5.40$). EOF influenced mastery negatively ($\beta = .46$, $t = -2.28$). Burnout also had a negative impact on mastery ($\beta = -.43$, $t = -3.45$). Two perceptions were negatively predicted by burnout: INT ($\beta = -.40$, $t = -6.83$) and JOY ($\beta = -.45$, $t = -7.84$). All four perceptions positively predicted GPA with INT and JOY having the highest impacts: INT ($\beta = .38$, $t = 5.55$), JOY ($\beta = .33$, $t = 5.05$), CHA ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.11$), and CHO ($\beta = .46$, $t = 6.83$). Mastery was also a positive predictor of GPA ($\beta = .23$, $t = 3.01$). Tw perceptions, namely INT and JOY, exerted a positive and significant impact on mastery: INT ($\beta = .33$, $t = 5.23$) and JOY ($\beta = .21$, $t = 3.14$).

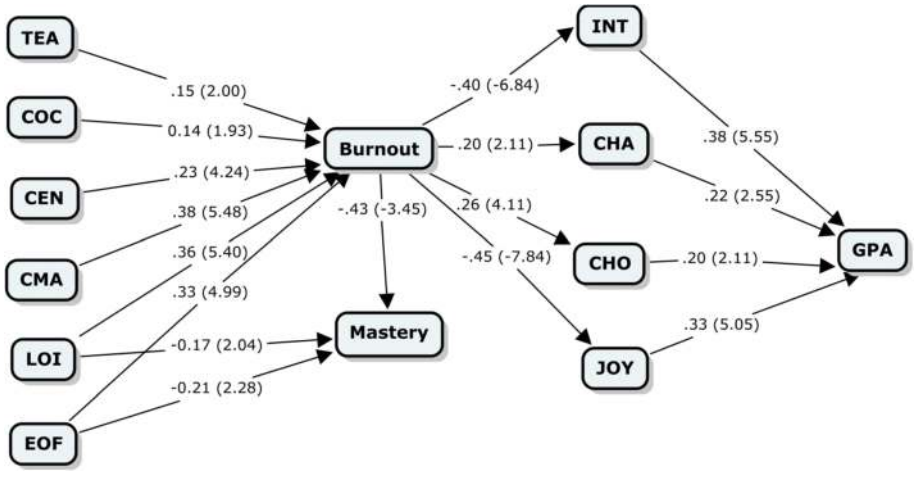

Fig. 2 The schematic representation of the relationships among the variables in questions. Note: For ease of presentation, observed variables are not included and only latent variables are presented. $\chi 2 = 95.25$, $df = 17$, $RMSEA = .089$, $GFI = .88$

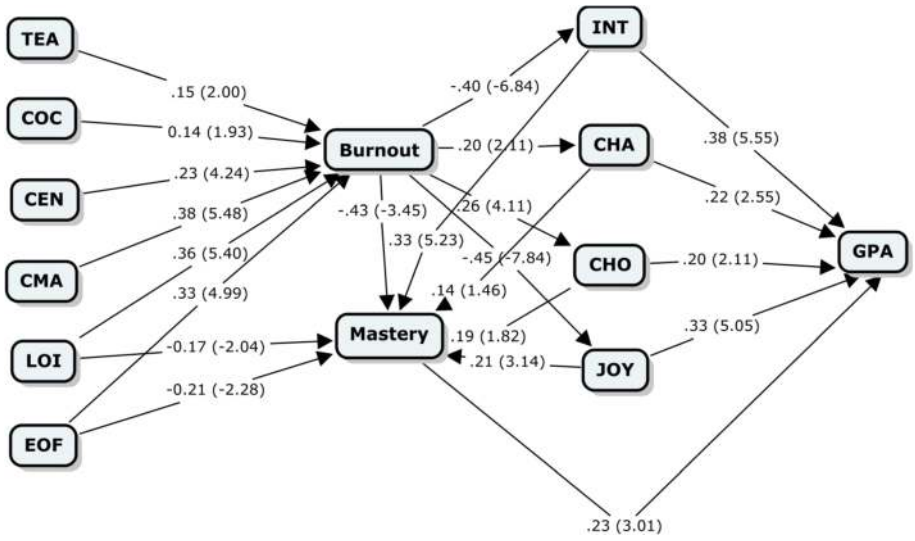

Fig. 3 The final model representing the relationships among the variables in questions. Note: For ease of presentation, observed variables are not included and only latent variables are presented. $\chi 2 = 45.02$, $df = 15$, $RMSEA = .066$, $GFI = .92$, $NFI = .90$, $CFI = .90$

The correlation coefficients among the variables in question are presented in Table 4. As it can be seen, the highest correlations were observed between demotivators and burnout: CEN ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.05$), LOI ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$), EOF ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.05$), and TEA ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.05$). Concerning the nexus between demotoivators and perceptions, mixed results were obtained. Significant negative correlations were found between demotivators and perceptions of INT and JOY with the highest associations between LOI and INT ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.05$), and between LOI and JOY ($r = -0.63$, $p < 0.05$). GPA had the highest correlations with TEA ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.05$), INT ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.05$), and mastery ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating the direct and indirect role of student demotivation in student burnout, student mastery goal orientation, student perceptions of classroom activities, and student achievement. In effect, this study sought to find the effects of demotivators on student burnout, two internal demotivators and student burnout on student mastery goal orientation, student burnout on student perceptions of classroom activities, student perceptions on mastery goal orientation, and student perceptions and mastery goal orientation on student achievement.

As it is illustrated in Table 5 the results indicated that five out of six demotivators predicted student burnout positively and significantly. In particular, class materials, lack

Table 4 Descriptive statistics of burnout, mastery, and language achievement

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Burnout	250	15.00	63.00	43.0360	8.33358
Mastery	250	8.00	30.00	22.4240	3.92861
GPA	250	12.80	20.00	16.8389	1.57517
Valid N (listwise)	250				

Table 5 The correlation coefficients among demotivators, perceptions, language achievement, mastery, and burnout

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. TEA	1.00												
2. COC	.69 [a]	1.00											
3. EOF	.75 [a]	.68 [a]	1.00										
4. CEN	.55 [a]	.57 [a]	.50 [a]	1.00									
5. CMA	.74 [a]	.63 [a]	.72 [a]	.51 [a]	1.00								
6. LOI	.66 [a]	.62 [a]	.73 [a]	.51 [a]	.65 [a]	1.00							
7. INT	-.31 [a]	-.32 [a]	-.29 [a]	-.41 [a]	-.39 [a]	-.72 [a]	1.00						
8. CHA	.40 [a]	.38 [a]	.42 [a]	.13	.41 [a]	.35 [a]	.43 [a]	1.00					
9. CHO	.24 [a]	.25 [a]	.24 [a]	.18	.27 [a]	.25 [a]	.48 [a]	.57 [a]	1.00				
10. JOY	-.36 [a]	-.31 [a]	-.29 [a]	-.45 [a]	-.28 [a]	-.63 [a]	.80 [a]	.32 [a]	.505 [a]	1.00			
11. GPA	-.54 [a]	-.45 [a]	-.39 [a]	-.47 [a]	-.32 [a]	-.48 [a]	.51 [a]	.28 [a]	.31 [a]	.46 [a]	1.00		
12. MAS	-.28 [a]	-.21 [a]	-.31 [a]	-.32 [a]	-.29 [a]	-.33 [a]	.56 [a]	.30 [a]	.36 [a]	.53 [a]	.49 [a]	1.00	
13. BR	.60 [a]	.48 [a]	.63 [a]	.67 [a]	.51 [a]	.64 [a]	-.40 [a]	.26 [a]	.15	-.45 [a]	-.39 [a]	-.31 [a]	1.00

[a] Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

of interest, experiences of failure, classroom environment, and teachers influenced burnout in a positive and significant direction. No significant relationship, nevertheless, was found between characteristics of classes and student burnout. Class materials as the most important demotivator influencing student burnout consist of various references which are used to teach students, such as; textbook, hand-outs, etc. If the materials are not interesting, up to dated, or in accordance with the needs of students, it will lower learners' motivation and consequently causes burnout, given that one the most important determinants of educational burnout is the loss of affective attachment with the classroom setting and the subsequent decline in engagement on the part of students. Too many hand-outs or reference books, for instance, can be characterized as demotivators in terms of class materials (Arai, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Millette, 1997; Kojima, 2004).

Lack of interest as the second important demotivator affecting student burnout is related to the sense that English used in the learning environment is not necessary and practical. This negative attitude leads to little admiration towards English speaking people (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Ikeno, 2002; Tsuchiya 2004a, b, 2006a, b). If students are not interested in the language they are learning or the environment in which they are studying a new language, it will result in burnout development. In other words, burnout is manifested through behavioral reactions including poor performance, tardiness, absenteeism, and lack of interest. The third significant demotivator in burnout development, according to this study, is student experiences of failure which can be defined in terms of disappointment caused by low test scores, lack of acceptance by teachers, and inability to memorize idioms or vocabularies (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997; Tsuchiya 2004a, b, 2006a, b;). The association between this demotivator and student burnout can also be found in other studies in harmony with the current research (e.g., Linden et al. 2005). Classroom environment as the fourth factor of demotivation influencing student burnout is characterized by friends'

and classmates' attitudes, compulsory nature of the course, passive classes, inadequate school facilities, and inappropriate level of the lessons (Falout & Maruyama, 2004). Undoubtedly, such conditions aid to the development of student burnout, especially the emotional side of the syndrome (Dorman, 2003). The last important demotivator which was significantly associated with student burnout was found to be teachers which comprisesmany factors attributed to teachers such as; teachers' language proficiency, personality, methodology, teaching style, attitude, and competence (Arai, 2004; Ikeno, 2002; Zhang, 2007). If teacher attributed features are not in harmony with student expectations and desires, students will feel degrees of burnout which is not necessarily intentional or conscious and maybe due to teacher burnout. Accordingly, when emotionally exhausted teachers are not actively and enthusiastically involved in organizing classroom time and in devising tasks and activities, and when they do not invest energy and creativity in their endeavors, this mood would normally be reflected in the classroom and depreciate students' efforts, attitudes, and motivation. Furthermore, when teachers develop impersonal perception of students they do not normally pay enough attention to their students' concerns and attitudes thereby impinging on learners' sense of attachment to the classroom, as well as their motivation to learn. Consistent with this contention, Ghanizadeh and Royaei (2015) found that if teachers do not pay enough attention to their students' concerns, learners will lose their motivation and consequently feel burnout by preferring loneness rather than interacting with others and passing the tests instead of learning language to use it communicatively.

The only demotivator which appeared to be unrelated to student burnout was the 'characteristics of classes' which is related to exam focused lessons and emphasizes on memorization of language (Gorham & Millette, 1997; Zhang, 2007). The finding can be related to the nature of EFL learning situations and expectations which students are required to achieve. In other words, the focus of teachers and educational system in most academic institutions (from primary schools to higher education) in Iran is on students' grades, and learners normally get accustomed to this learning approach. Consequently, they prefer focusing on exams and grades as their motivational basis and are satisfied with the situation (Nowell, 2007).

The results also indicated that the two internal demotivators namely; experiences of failure and lack of interest affect student mastery goal orientation negatively and significantly. In other words, if students face some failure regarding EFL learning or are not interested in their learning experience, they won't adapt mastery approach as their goal orientation which is learning the language for mastering one's competence. The findings can be justified in accordance with previous studies demonstrating negative associations between student mastery goal orientation and student anxiety and negative attitudes – as the common ramifications of student demotivation (e.g., Cury et al. 2002; Elliot & McGregor, 1999; Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006; McGregor & Elliot, 2002; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Pajares & Cheong, 2003; Sideridis, 2005a; Skaalvik, 1997;). A recent study among EFL learners also reported the same finding by indicating a positive relationship between student avoidance goal orientation – as opposed to mastery approach – and student demotivation (Allahdadi et al. 2016).

The findings also demonstrated a negative relationship between student burnout and student mastery goal orientation. In other words, if students experience burnout syndrome, they are likely to avoid adapting mastery approach as their goal of EFL learning. This finding substantiates other studies (e.g., Erfani & Maleki, 2015; Mousavi & Ghafelehbashi 2015; Shan & Jiang, 2012; Zahed et al. 2014;). Moreover, a positive effect of student mastery goal orientation on student GPA was observed. According to this finding, students who adapt mastery approach towards their learning get high scores which are the indicators of academic achievement. A plethora of studies has conclusively corroborated this finding (e.g., Fatima & Salma, 2012; Leondari & Gonida, 2008; Mattern, 2005; Yildirim, 2004; Zafarmand et al. 2014).

As another finding of the present study, it was also shown that student burnout has a negative influence on all the constructs of student perceptions of classroom activities, namely; joy, interest, choice, and challenge, respectively. In other words, if students undergo burnout, they no longer perceive their classroom activities as enjoyable, interesting, varied, and challenging. This is indeed detrimental to the learning situation, since students would not enjoy the experience, even though their class activities are suitably selected and organized. In effect, the experiences of burnout can be described in terms of helplessness, hopelessness, somatic complaints, and negative self-concept as well as negative perceptions towards the community and environment (Belcastro 1982; Maslach 1976; Pines & Kafry 1978;). Accordingly, low burnout score of an individual is the indicator of more positive attitudes and perceptions whereas high level of burnout is the predictor of unfavourable attitudes (Astrom, 1990). Consistent with this standpoint, Rostami et al. (2012) found a negative association between student burnout and interest. In another study, Kuittinen, and Meriläinen (2014) investigated the frequency of study-related burnout with respect to student motivation and students' perceptions regarding learning environment. The findings revealed drastic deterioration of students' perceptions due to their burnout.

The SEM analysis also revealed the significant role of students' perceptions of interest and joy on their mastery goal orientation. In other words, students with higher interest and joy towards their classroom activities are more inclined for adapting mastery goal orientation. The fact that being interested in a topic dramatically contributes to better achievement and performance is undeniable (Hidi, 1990). Interest and joy towards some particular issue – classroom activities, for instance – promote attention, recall, effort, and achievement (Ainley et al. 2002; Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Consequently, if students perceive their learning environment as supportive and feel included, their motivation will be enhanced and mastery goal orientation will be adapted. The aforementioned finding corresponds with the previous empirical studies (e.g., Dickinson, 1995; Church et al. 2001; McGregor & Elliot, 2002; Harackiewicz et al. 2002; Flum & Kaplan, 2006; Shen et al. 2007; Pekrun et al. 2009; Hulleman et al. 2010; Huang, 2011; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a).

Finally, it was found that students' perceptions of interest and joy positively and significantly predicted students' achievement. It implies if learners perceive their classroom activities as interesting and joyful, their GPA as the indicator of learners' success and achievement will be enhanced as well. The results are in line with previous studies (e.g., Dickinson, 1995; Lizzio et al. 2002; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a).

Conclusions

Taken together, the findings of this study put forward the prospect of developing a multidimensional understanding of student demotivation and its effect on four constructs including; student burnout, student mastery goal orientation, student perceptions of classroom activities, and student achievement. As Dörnyei (2001) contended, demotivators as the specific external forces can reduce or diminish motivational basis of a behavioural intention, as well as an ongoing action.

Our proposed model highlighted the direct and indirect role of demotivators in giving rise to student burnout and inhibiting student mastery goal orientation, positive perceptions of classroom activities, and student achievement. This finding in turn can have crucial implications for SLA research, in general, and EFL student learning, in particular. It should, in the first place, inform both teachers and students of debilitative sources of student demotivation and help them in ameliorating learning process. Teachers are responsible for identifying students' interests and adapting methodologies, materials, and learning environment according to students' needs and preferences leading to positive perceptions of classroom activities which in turn affect student goal orientation and academic achievement. In addition, students should know that adapting a realistic goal for their learning can be influenced by many factors among which burnout and perceptions play vital roles.

The present study is limited in a number of ways. First, the participants were chosen according to convenience sampling due to feasibility considerations. Second, the participants of the present study comprised EFL students in universities. Thus, the study should be replicated with samples from private language institutes and schools in different parts of the country which implies a higher degree of randomization and generalizability. Third, in this research, the proposed variables in question were assessed via questionnaires and no qualitative approach such as interviews, case study, or observation was used.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author SJ (author 1) collected the data, wrote the first draft of the manuscript, participated in its design, and implemented the revisions. AG (author 2) supervised the work, decided upon and provided the sources, performed the statistical analyses, and revised and edited the first draft. Author BG (author 3) revised the first draft and advised on the procedure. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Received: 27 April 2016 Accepted: 27 October 2016
Published online: 08 November 2016

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