

Research Article

A Qualitative Study of Students' Perspectives on the Effects of Internet Filtering on English Language

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fundamental roles of internet and digital apps in shaping learners' achievement in learning English, to date it appears that little research has been carried out on students' perceptions and feelings regarding internet filtering (restriction) qualitatively as main stakeholders in an Iranian context. Therefore, the main purposes of present study were to disclose participants' perspectives regarding the possible effects of some restrictions on English language. To achieve the goals, a total of 9 students took part in a semi-structured interview through convenience and snowball samplings. The data of the interviews were analyzed by MAXQDA 18. The analyses of qualitative data confirmed the presence of seven subscales including internet usage, motivation, learning autonomy, language learning, general feeling, extra expenses, and social justice. The findings also showed that participants elaborated repetitively on two concepts including the effects of such agenda on language learning and general feelings more than others during their interview. These findings are supposed to be of use for English teachers, policy makers, materials' developers, test developers and some other possible stakeholders.

Introduction

English language, with approximately two billion both native and non-native speakers is served as an effective communication tool via

eradicating boundaries among learners from diverse countries and building an authentic virtual environment for them (Ethnologue, 2019). One major result of globalization is the



expanded spread and interconnecting of languages, particularly the English language (Crystal, 2000). It is known that English is becoming more and more popular around the world and many aspects of society including language learning and teaching have been affected and will be continued to be more effected by globalization (Steger, 2003). Globalization can be defined as “the interconnections of global economic, sociopolitical, cultural and environmental processes that continually transform present conditions” (Steger, 2013, p.7-8). The term globalization of languages is also defined by Steger (2003) as “the process of the spread of some languages that are used as international languages, and the disappearance of other languages that lack speakers” (p. 82). In Iran, the increasing demand for learning English as a result of globalization has stressed the crucial need for ELT planning but it seems that futures of English language education in Iran in the era of globalization is not promising due to restrictions (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017; Ardavani & Durrant, 2015). In other words, learners’ online informal language experience is of abundant value for language growth in the age of technology and digital tools and the majority of language learners have always accentuated the advantages of learning English through different digital tools and online sources (Chik, 2018).

Apart from these issues, fairness has been defined as “marked by impartiality and honesty: free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2022). Likewise, the term is defined as “the quality of treating people equally or in a way that is right or reasonable” (Cambridge Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, 2013). According to Willingham

and Cole (1997), educational access, financial access, geographical access, personal access and conditions or equipment access are main qualities of fairness. With considering access, internet filtering is considered as a controversial issue implemented by some states throughout the world and this type of practice can cause limitations on specific contents along with users (Schell, 2014; Ververis, Marguel, & Fabian, 2019; Zittrain et al., 2017). Although the extent and methods of filtering vary from one country to another considering sociopolitical, cultural, and technological factors, content restrictions are not inherently linked to the concept of fairness among countries (Deibert et al., 2008; Stoycheff et al., 2018). A series of research projects such as Akbari and Gabdulhakov, 2019, Anderson, 2013, Aryan et al., 2013; Deibert et al., 2008 along with Michaelsen, 2017 have been conducted to evaluate the issue in Iran. Based on their findings, Iran’s filtering (restriction) holds four main thematic areas including sociopolitical content, social content, conflict- and security-related content, and internet tools and applications. Furthermore, it seems some other important factors such as motivation and learners’ autonomy have been extremely influenced by restrictions too. In keeping with, Dörnyei (2005) also notes that motivation can provide the essential movement to start second language learning and accordingly the influential force to maintain the lengthy and boring learning procedures. Additionally, learner autonomy is viewed as “the philosophy that students should have a large amount to say about what, how, and how fast they learn” (Bailey (1999, p, 41). Littlewood also (1996, p. 427) defines autonomy as “learners’ ability and willingness to make choices

independently". According to Cotterall (1995), the distinctive features of autonomy as an approach to learning is that "students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction. Learners who are autonomous might take responsibility by setting their own goals, planning practice opportunities, or assessing their progress" (p. 219). For Bailey (1999), "learner autonomy refers to the philosophy that students should have a large amount to say about what, how, and how fast they learn" (p. 41). Qi (2012) states that autonomy has achieved impetus under the influence of three educational theories including cognitive learning theories, humanistic psychology as well as constructivist theories of learning. Robinson and Ellis (2008) also believed that motivation and autonomy are interconnected so autonomous learners enter into learning with higher motivation. Humanistic approach also promotes a learner-centered curriculum that emphasizes helping learners become empowered and autonomous (Huitt, 2001). Duffy and Jonassen (1992) declare that knowledge and truth are constructed by the learners while actively participating in the learning process and do not exist outside of their minds. Consequently, constructivist instructional developers value learner autonomy, cooperation, reflectivity as well as active engagement, just to name a few. Meanwhile, there is an obvious correlation between poverty and low academic achievement (Berliner, 2006). Undeniably, socioeconomic status can have enormous impacts on each individual student's performance, and their stress and anxiety levels (Watson et al., 2014).

In spite of the undeniable importance of online language learning, it appears that published research on Iranian students' perceptions and their experiences is not sufficient and these issues have not been addressed in the published literature in much detail. Furthermore, previous studies of language learning have not dealt with students' perceptions on the effects of internet filtering and their self-directed learning empirically. No previous study has fully attempted to explore the role of internet filtering in restricting Iranian users' access to the internet and its possible effects above-mentioned niches qualitatively. It looks that the voice of students, as one of the main stakeholders, cannot be heard. Thus, this paper seeks to address these issues by critically examining the students' perceptions and consequently analyzing the related literature in order to find out how internet filtering as a macro level policy has influenced English language pedagogy. This study also makes effort to give voice to students as one of the most influential agents by presenting their ideas qualitatively. Moreover, individuals especially policy makers, teachers, test developers, material developers, and learners may benefit from practical knowledge as the current study possibly leads to new policies about internet filtering through enhancing the main shareholders' awareness of its consequences. The present research might have a number of persuasive implications since it can have influence on social justice in a new way by listening to students' voices in language learning. Methodologically, applying an MAXQDA18 software might be effective for exploring some chief factors and possible consequences of internet filtering on its users' educational and

daily life. In order to achieve the goals, the present study seeks to answer the following specific research questions qualitatively:

1. What are Iranian English students' general feelings on the effects of internet filtering?
2. How do Iranian English students use internet to learn English?
3. What are Iranian English Students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on learning English?
4. What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on extra expenses?
5. What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on social justice?

6. What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on learning motivation?
7. What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on learning autonomy?

Method

Participants

With regard to the exploratory nature of the study, 9 English learners as the focal participants took part based on convenience and snowball sampling in a semi-structured interview to achieve data saturation after running a pilot study. They included 6 females and 3 males with various socio-economic status.

Table 1

Distribution of Participants by Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	3	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Female	6	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	9	100.0	100.0	

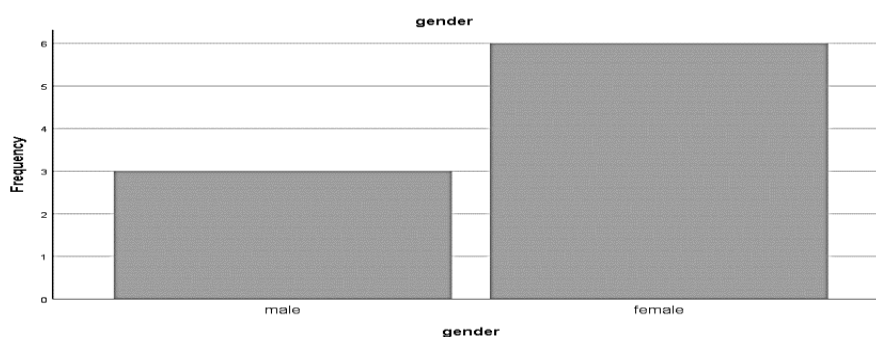


Figure 1

Distribution of Participants by Gender

Table 2

Distribution of Participants by Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 20	2	22.2	22.2	22.2
	21-24	4	44.4	44.4	66.7

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
25-27	2	22.2	22.2	88.9
More than 30	1	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	9	100.0	100.0	

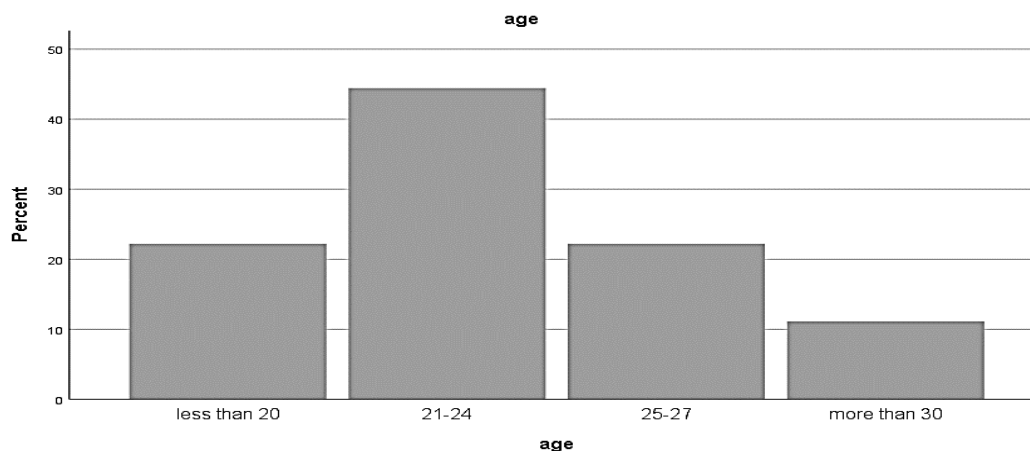


Figure 2

Distribution of Participants by Age

Instrumentation

Semi-Structured Interview

Although the semi-structured interview is a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, the format is open-ended and the interviewees are encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner. Interviews were conducted in Persian so that the participants felt more at ease and more willingly express their feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Considering the semi-structure approach of the study, 9 one-to-one interviews were conducted to explore particular themes or responses further and all of them were recorded for possible further analysis.

2.3 Procedure

As specified by Dörnyei (2007, pp. 137-143), several stages were involved in developing and conducting including:

- Interview guide/schedule/protocol

- Piloting the interview guide
- Constructing the final interview guide
- Conducting the interviews

An interview guideline or interview protocol is an outline of the questions that are to be asked from participants. Dörnyei (2007, p. 137) asserts that an interview guide helps the researchers make sure about his or her interviews in a number of different ways including:

“Everything is covered and nothing is missed out by accident

Appropriate question wordings

List of probing questions

A template for opening statements

Comments to be considered”

Piloting the interview helped us to make sure everything had been covered, nothing had been missed out unintentionally in the interview, question wordings, as well as a list of probing questions were appropriate and unambiguous; moreover, some comments by interviewees

were taken into consideration for constructing and conducting the final scale. Creswell and Miller (2000) argue that, validity is one of the main strength of qualitative research and is founded on determining whether the findings are correct from the researchers, the participants, or the readers' standpoint. Validity has been addressed by different terms in the qualitative literature, for instance, trustworthiness, authenticity, as well as credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The following ways were used to ensure the credibility of qualitative research:

Firstly, triangulation of data sources was considered as the first strategy to enhance the credibility through the review of the related literature, semi-structured interviews and qualitative text analyses by MAXQDA. As Creswell (2014) and Starks-Yoble (2014) put, triangulation is a process of confirming evidence from diverse sources to ensure that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes. Member checking was utilized as the second strategy to increase the credibility of qualitative research via interviewees' consent and feedback. In this strategy, the researchers found out the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the ultimate report, major findings, particular descriptions or themes back to participants under study to identifying whether they felt that the qualitative findings were accurate or not. This process can be done by conducting some follow-up interviews and providing an opportunity for participants to discuss and comment on the findings (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010). Regarding checking the reliability or consistency of qualitative research, a number of

qualitative reliability procedures were employed as:

The texts were checked to ensure that they did not include apparent mistakes made during transcription. The researchers were ensured that there was not shift in the definition of codes, or a change in the meaning of the codes in the process of coding. This was achieved by continuously comparing information with the codes and through writing notes about the codes and their definitions (Gibbs, 2007, p. 98).

Intra-rater reliability was another way to ensure reliability in the qualitative phase. As Shohamy Gordon, and Kraemer (2008, p. 28) affirm, "the intra-rater reliability addresses the question of the degree to which the same rater is stable in his or her ratings over time". It is typically reported using "the Kappa Coefficient of Cohen" (Gwet, 2008, p. 1). For the present research, three randomly selected interviews which had been rated by the researchers were re-rated after an interval of one week. Online Cohen's kappa calculator displayed 85% percent of coefficient; that was considered as almost substantial agreement and consistency in coding. Subsequently, the interview data or transcripts were analyzed and documented by MAXQDA, version 18, as a coding tool.

Interviews Data Analysis

To analyze qualitative data, we got involved in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach as follows:

“Data management: Preparing and organizing the data

Data exploration: Reading and memoing

Data reduction: Describing, classifying and coding, condensing the data

Data interpretation: Representing and visualizing the data” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 180-187).

Ethical Practices Throughout the Research Process

All of the researchers need to engage in ethical practices in all steps of their research process, "practicing ethics" is a multifaceted matter that entails much more than purely following a set of fixed guidelines (Creswell, 2003, p. 23). Hesse-Biber and Levy (2006) also affirm that ethical issues ought to be a principal consideration and it should be at the front of all of the researcher's agenda.

Ethical Issues in Data Collection

In keeping with considering ethical issues in data collection, we tried to be aware of our impact to lessen our possible disruption of the physical setting through viewing themselves as guests or via gaining permission prior to entering the research sites. We tried to get involved with the participants collaboratively in the research to provide companionship and avoid collecting detrimental information. We also did not pressure them to sign consent forms that might create power inequality.

Ethical Issues in Data Analyzing, Reporting and Sharing

As affirmed by Creswell (2003; 2013) and Allmark, et al. (2009), the researchers need to demonstrate their respect to their audiences who both read and employ information from studies. Thus, we made our efforts to report the data honestly, without changing the findings to satisfy or interest certain groups. In fact, the researchers should avoid disclosing merely positive outcomes and they must report the full range of findings, including findings that may be

contrary to the themes since a feature of high-quality qualitative research is to report a variety of perspectives regarding the topic. Additionally, we did our best to respect the confidentiality of participants by using pseudonyms for them. As the next method to practice ethical issues in the interpretation phase, we kept away from disclosing information that might harm participants in the society and some strategies were taken into consideration such as sharing a copy of published studies extracted from the dissertation to participants or providing them with the journal websites in which they could read the results of the research.

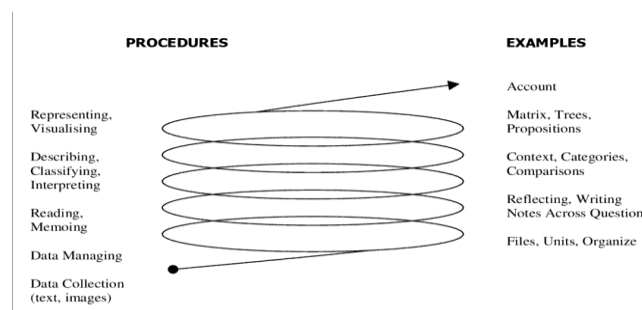


Figure 3

The data analysis spiral. Adopted from "Data analysis and representation," by J.W. Creswell, 2007, Qualitative inquiry & research design, choosing among five approaches, p. 151.

Results

Research Question One

What are Iranian English students' general feelings on the effects of internet filtering? Some of the participants highlighted that internet filtering has had psychologically negative effects on them and it gives them extremely bad feelings. Namely:

Fatimeh said:

"I do not have any good feelings at all about filtering because it is extremely time-consuming

and annoying. I have to spend a lot of time to download a short video or files for learning”.

Zahra also noted that:

“I have a very negative feeling and experiences about internet filtering.... you know... it is very tiring, time-consuming and nerve-wrecking for us, we spend a lot of time to download an educational file or clip, or an English movie and series ...unfortunately, we are not 100 percent sure whether it will be done at the end or not”.

Aryan was another interviewee and said that:

“I have an extremely negative feeling about filtering since it bothers me a lot and it is tedious and time-consuming.... Well...we live at the age of high-speed internet and technology...why internet should be like this...?! It is insulting!”

Research Questions Two

How Iranian English students use internet to learn English?

The interviews' findings revealed that the participants used internet for various purposes such as learning grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening, pronunciation, watching English movies, chatting and learning teaching methodology for some of them who were English teachers as well. For instance, Atefeh noted that:

“I use the internet for about 4 hours for various tasks such as checking and learning grammar, downloading educational videos and chatting in some social media with some friends and communicating with some natives and English teachers abroad”.

Soror also maintained that:

“I use the internet around 7 hours a day for downloading, sharing and receiving files, watching English movies and serials, listening to music and podcasts, chatting with my relatives

and friends and playing as a hobby in my free time and so many more”.

The other interviewee named Mina noted:

“I make use of the internet for about 3-4 hours, of course, it depends on whether I am at work or at home. Mostly, I use the internet to download videos on pronunciation, to improve listening and to learn new vocabulary...Well...sometimes I use it for fun and chatting with my friends and family”.

Sorosh expressed that:

“I use the internet for about 7-8 hours a day. I think I'm internet-addicted (laughing...) especially I spend a lot of time on YouTube to improve my English proficiency.”

Research Questions Three

What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on learning English?

Zahra noted that:

“Internet filtering has affected all skills, but in my opinion, it has influenced listening more....um...because we don't live in an English-speaking environment... well...we used these sources like YouTube, Instagram...telegram channels... podcasts, live radios...and so on to improve our English.... Well, they are now almost very limited or very difficult and time-consuming to connect. Well, using these resources, especially YouTube, helped us a lot. Now it takes so much time to learn, and in fact, the efficiency has decreased because it is disconnected and reconnected a lot. Well... now we have to read books more In my opinion, there is nothing positive about it. And everything has been negative. It has actually had a lot of negative effects on language training and

even online training and online language classes as well...”.

Soror answered to the question in this way:

“I think that internet filtering has affected all skills in various ways. You know, language skills are inseparable. I cannot see any positive effects, points or benefits in it....! Just it is good for parents sometimes to limit and control their little kids. That’s all...! All of things that I said earlier are extremely negative and depressing. For example, motivation, English proficiency, costs, social justice, time and so many other factors are negatively impacted by filtering. Sometimes the children are not motivated at all anymore, even after that educational material, we used to use YouTube a lot to strengthen listening, and we also used a lot of sites for actually speaking, and I used my Instagram a lot, which is now greatly reduced, of course, the use of these resources can help children learn a lot, but now the children are bored and cannot send files or even receive files. In fact, they hardly connect to the Internet”.

Atefeh asserted that:

“The use of YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and telegram channels had a great impact on my listening ... vocabulary and speaking. We don't really learn slang in books, or in institutions and universities.... well...the internet was a good source for learning everyday language, in my opinion, filtering did not have a positive effect at all. We have to turn off the VPN to use internal and national ...this process is very time-consuming, tiring, frustrating and confusing you know...sometimes we do not connect to VPN again at all so I give it up!”

Fatimeh noted that:

“YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and telegram channels are very useful for our learning since we are not in an English-speaking environment...they can provide us with a platform to learn English outside the classrooms, and keep in touch with natives outside the classroom environment. In my opinion, there is no positive aspect at all and all aspects are negative. Definitely, it is time consuming and nerve-racking....and we have to pay extra expenses...”

Similarly, Aryan said that:

“learning all of the skills are affected by the use of online sources, more importantly, listening, speaking and even writing, but in my opinion, it has affected listening much more...well, I used to use YouTube, now the internet is very weak, I can't use it for learning. It has had a lot of negative effects on me, even can't use it for entertainment.... now we live in the era of communication and definitely having easy access to high speed internet can improve our progress. In my opinion, there is no positive aspect at all... maybe controlling young children is its only advantage. Destruction of motivation is another one of the negative effects of filtering, as I said before, the learning environment is very important and when the outside and online or virtual environment is limited, our learning will be dramatically influenced ...”

Research Question Four

What are Iranian English students’ perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on extra expenses?

Atefe put that:

“It has been expensive for me, I have to buy a VPN every month, sometimes VPNs don't work and I have to pay for a new VPN again, and it has affected a lot of online trainings, workshops as well”.

Sorosh uttered that:

“Well... filtering puts us under the pressure financially to buy or download various VPNs every month and even every week ...actually...some of them are free of charge but they do not work for a long time so we have to buy some licensed ones...”.

In the same vein, Mina accentuated extra expenses as below:

Actually, I myself try to download free versions but my family and friends spend money to buy a licensed one every month since they are faster. By the way, we have to buy books since sometimes it is hard and impossible to find and download the needed books in pdf format!

Research Questions Five

What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on social justice?

Ali emphasized the internet filtering on social justice by saying:

“Of course it is unfair since some learners who live in deprived areas do not have easy access to the internet and they cannot install VPNs on their phones at all so they lag behind of others who live in better areas or live in a well-to do family”.

Another participant named Zahra posited:

“Actually, it is unfair since some learners who live in deprived areas do not have easy access to the internet and they cannot install any VPN on their phones at all so they lag behind of others who live in better areas or live in a well-paid family”.

Mina also said that:

“To me, it is unfair since many learners cannot afford the costs of VPNs and some of them have a simple mobile so VPNs cannot be installed. Moreover, learners who live in deprived areas do not have easy access to the internet so they lag behind of others and they feel embarrassed and unmotivated most of the time.”

Research Questions Six

What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering on motivation?

Interestingly, the majority of the participants expressed that they get demotivated and unmotivated to use online sources to improve their English due to internet filtering. As an example:

Sorosh stated clearly that:

“Before restrictions, I was able to give some assignments to our peers outside of the classroom I could compile my required materials, to share many files, videos with my friends ... but now with this situation I cannot do any of these things, and this has caused their motivation to drop drastically. My students used to learn a lot of things outside of the class and they were very ready and energetic and had a very high motivation because they came to the class ready, but now it is actually very difficult to reach what they need and want and they have to

spend a lot of time so their motivation is very low to continue...!!”

Amir adopted a similar stance and asserted that:

“I myself becomes extremely unmotivated when I spend a lot of time for downloading, watching or listening to a short clip, movie or a piece of music for improving my English...I put it aside after making a lot of efforts and becomes furious most of the time.”

Research Question Seven

What are Iranian English students' perspectives on the effects of internet filtering (restriction) on learning autonomy?

Fatimeh put that:

“I used to study outside the classroom by myselfI had lots of listening, watching movies, educational clips...I took part in online workshops and so many things... but now accessibility has decreased markedly these days due to filtering (restriction) and low-speed internet for us.”

Ali also noted that:

“Self-directed learning has been extremely affected by restrictions in my country...and it has had some great negative impacts on me as a language learner. Before, I could easily check everything myself without asking the teacher or

referring to anyone, but now we cannot...you know... sometimes I get really tired of searching the internet for a small thing but eventually, I am not able to find answer to my questions due to frequent disconnections.”

Similarly, Zahra explained that:

“I am more dependent to my teachers and friends who are good at English because connecting is very time-consuming I would rather ask another person to help me so I have to wait to see them and solve my educational problems. The amount of my self-study has been negatively affected by filtering! (restriction)”

Examples of MAXQDA Visual Analyses

The subsequent figure shows the document portraits derived from Fatimeh's document in which different colors (green= learning English, black= internet usage, orange= general feelings, purple= learning autonomy, blue=motivation, red=social justice, pink=extra expenses) manifested that Fatimeh elaborated on learning English more than other factors. Her Word Cloud also visualizes the most frequently used codes by her throughout the interview. The larger the word in the visual the more common the word was in the document(s).

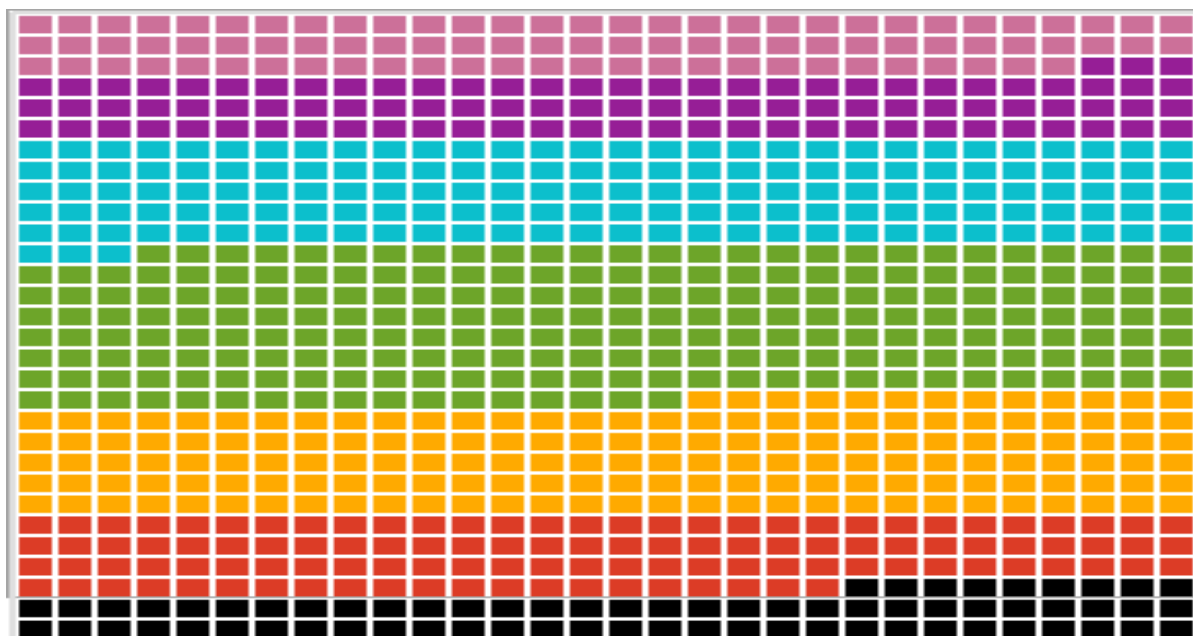


Figure 4
Fatimeh's Document Portrait



Likewise, Zahra's document portraits showed that she talked about learning English more than other factors. Her Word Cloud also illustrates

the most repeatedly used codes by her during the interview.

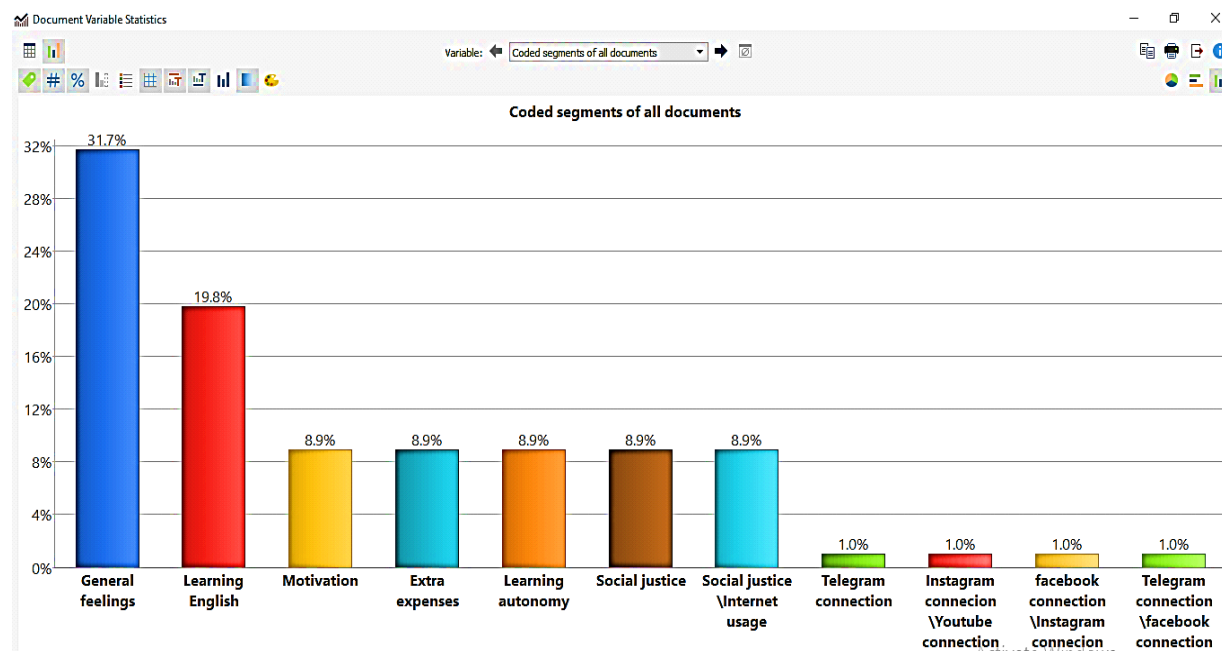


Figure 7
Coded Segments of All Documents

Table 3
Coded Segments of all Documents

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage (valid)
General feelings	32	31.7	31.7
Learning English	20	19.8	19.8
Motivation	9	8.9	8.9
Extra expenses	9	8.9	8.9
Learning autonomy	9	8.9	8.9
Social justice	9	8.9	8.9
Social justice \Internet usage	9	8.9	8.9
Telegram connection	1	1.0	1.0
Instagram connection \Youtu...	1	1.0	1.0
facebook connection \Instag...	1	1.0	1.0
Telegram connection \facebo...	1	1.0	1.0
TOTAL (valid)	101	100.0	100.0
Missing	0	0.0	
TOTAL	101	100.0	

The size and color of the symbols in the matrix show how many segments of a code have been assigned to each document, document group,

document set, or focus group speaker. The larger the symbol, the more segments were assigned for this code.

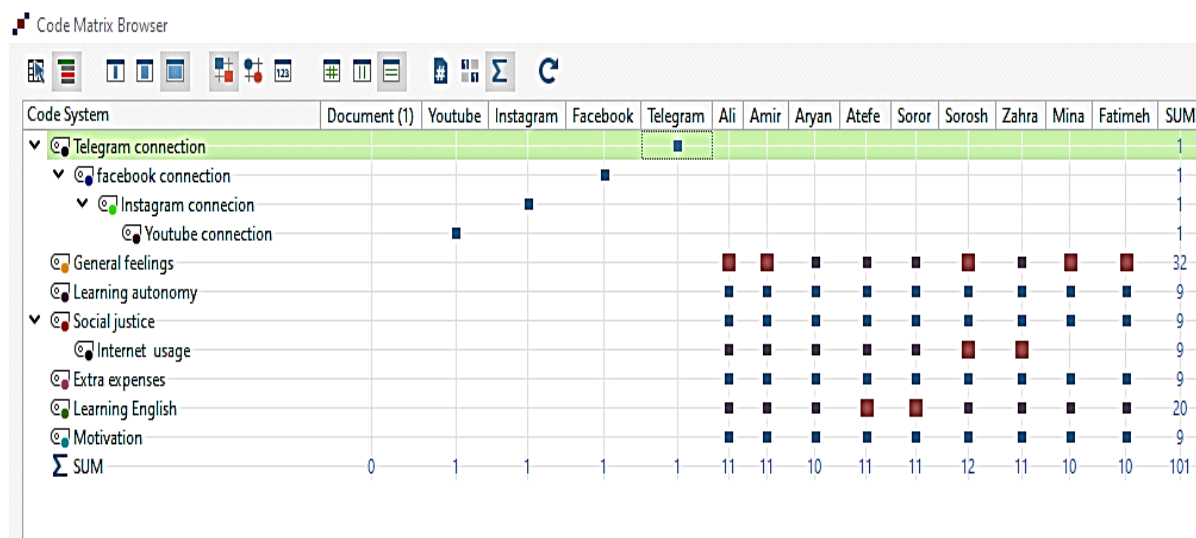


Figure 8
Code Matrix Browser

More importantly, the image derived from document browser vividly manifests the internet filtering (restriction) in Instagram. Similarly, YouTube, Telegram, and Facebook are filtered as the main learning English sources in Iran.

The table below illustrates the word frequencies of social media used by the participants in which You tube hits the first place by frequency of 12 as follows:

Table 4
Word Frequencies of Social Media

Social Media	Frequency
YouTube	12
Instagram	5
Telegram	4
Facebook	1

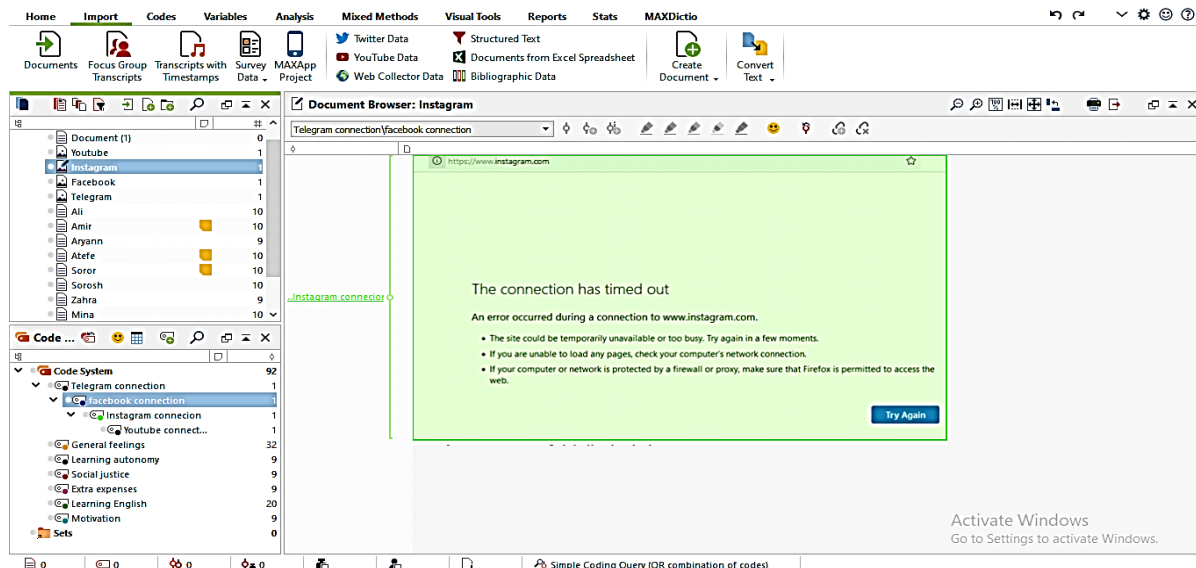


Figure 9
Instagram Connectivity

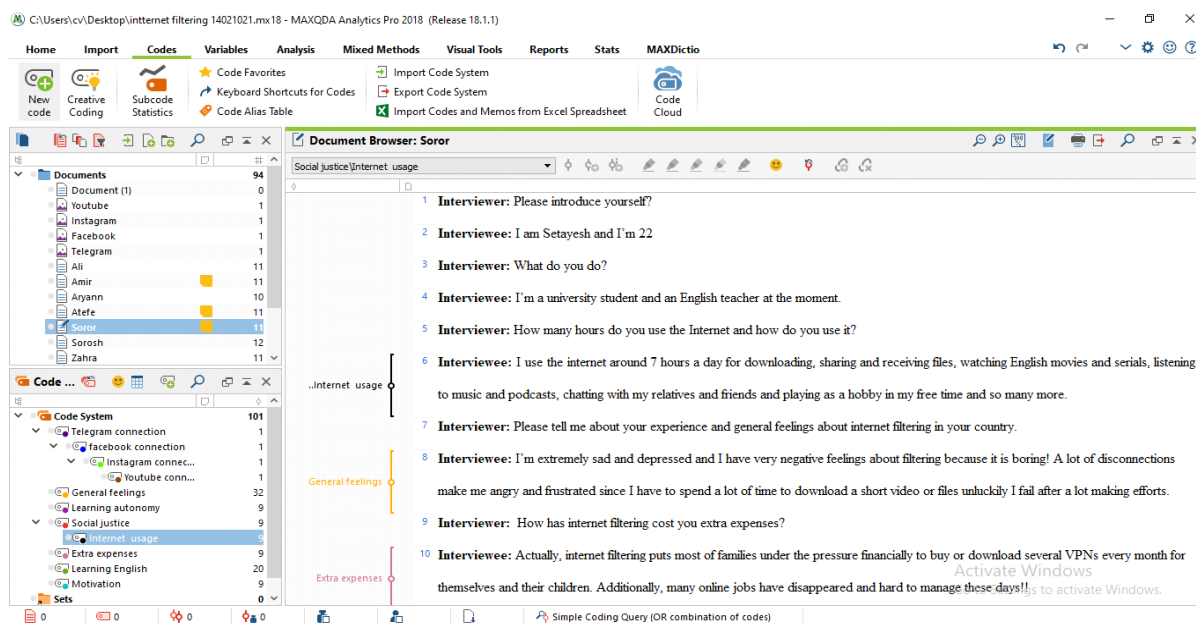


Figure 10
A Sample of a Coding Scheme

Discussion and Conclusion

As a matter of fact, the fundamental role of English cannot be overlooked in the era of globalization since learning English is becoming

dramatically prevalent throughout the world. Consequently, effective English language planning, learning and teaching should be taken into consideration. The objectives of the present research were to uncover English students’

perspectives qualitatively on the effects of internet filtering (restriction) on their motivation, learning autonomy, leaning English, social justice, general feeling, internet usage and extra expenses. The results of the qualitative phase of the study showed that internet filtering (restriction) got them demotivated and unmotivated to continue learning English as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) notes, motivation is responsible for individuals' decisions, their willingness to continue, and their determination to pursue the activity. The findings of the qualitative phase also revealed that most of the participants emphasized that internet filtering (restriction) has had psychologically destructive effects on them and made them frustrated and tired of learning. Regarding internet usage, the interviewees noted that they used internet for several goals for instance; learning grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening, speaking, pronunciation, watching English movies and teaching methodology, thus, they strongly believed that internet filtering(restriction) had limited their precious learning and teaching English sources. According to Benson (2011), high proficiency of English language success and achievement greatly depends on students' out-of-class engagement regardless of their in-class engagement. Interestingly, all the participants talked frequently about the negative effects of internet filtering (restriction) on their learning since they were regularly disconnected and even were not able to take part in some online workshops, conferences, and classes effortlessly and the worst thing was that internet filtering (restriction) damaged some online jobs and some English teachers lost some part of their income. In the case of expenses, almost all noted that restriction led to some extra expenses

from buying several VPNs and changing their old smartphones. As discussed earlier, educational access, financial access, geographical access, personal access and conditions or equipment access are considered as chief qualities of fairness (Willingham & Cole, 1997). Based on the participants' perspectives, social justice was under question critically because students lived in deprived areas or those from economically impoverished families did not have easy access to the internet and they were not able to install VPNs on their phones. Therefore, they became embarrassed in front of other classmates who had better socioeconomic condition due to the fact that they lagged behind them and could not enter constructive educational competition in learning English and even doing their assignments as expected. Lastly, the interviews' findings proved that learning autonomy was seriously and directly affected by internet filtering (restriction). Undoubtedly, autonomy is connected with more effective and real learning. As stated by Wang and Peverly (1986) autonomous students have more capacity for being dynamic, self-regulating and independent in their learning process since they are able to detect and create their aims, and can alternate them in order to meet their learning needs as well as interests. Meanwhile, autonomous learners are able to apply learning strategies to monitor their own learning. With considering self-determination theory (SDT), the more autonomously motivated students are, the better they will participate and engage in an activity (Alamer & Al Khateeb, 2021). Based on some research conducted by Dincer and Dariyemez, 2020, Lai, 2017, and Richards, 2015, learners benefited considerably from using social media, online

websites, online dictionaries, online games, Instagram, YouTube, and so many other smartphone apps. As noted by Kemp (2020) and Moshin (2020), millennials and generation Z are the chief users of social media these days. In conclusion, the role of technology cannot be ignored by teachers, researchers, policy makers, administrators and even materials' developers and test designers since it is unquestionably an essential part of learning English. Furthermore, with regards to the significance and position of English in this globalized world, it would be essential for all of the stakeholders to know what goes on outside the formal classrooms and educational settings in order to meet the constant needs of today's digital generation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study carry important implications for educational policy and practice. First, internet filtering (restriction) policies should be re-evaluated to ensure that they do not unintentionally hinder access to legitimate educational resources. Policymakers must distinguish between harmful content and pedagogically useful platforms to avoid impeding language learning and digital literacy development.

Second, educational institutions and language programs should consider the digital divide when designing curricula and assigning online tasks. Providing alternative offline materials or ensuring equitable access to technology can help mitigate the negative effects of filtering (restriction) on marginalized learners.

Third, teachers and curriculum designers should integrate digital tools more intentionally

into language instruction. Given that learners are increasingly reliant on online resources, educators must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to guide students in using these tools effectively and responsibly.

Finally, financial support and technical assistance should be made available to learners from low-income families to help them access necessary digital tools. This includes subsidies for internet services, device loans, and training on how to use educational technology.

Directions for Future Research

While this study focused on the qualitative perspectives of English learners, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach to quantify the extent of these impacts across different regions and educational levels. Comparative studies between filtered and non-filtered environments could also provide valuable insights into the long-term effects on language proficiency and learner motivation.

Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how changes in internet access policies affect student outcomes over time. Researchers might also investigate the role of teacher mediation in helping students navigate internet restrictions and maintain motivation and autonomy in learning.

Another promising avenue for future research is the development of alternative learning platforms that are less affected by filtering (restriction) or that can operate within restricted digital environments. Such innovations could help bridge the gap between policy and practice in digitally constrained contexts.

Lastly, exploring the psychological and emotional impacts of internet filtering (restriction) in greater depth could contribute to a more holistic understanding of its effects on learners' well-being and academic performance.

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