

# Journal of Language HORIZONS

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In the Name of God



# Journal of Language Horizons

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Lee, M-B. (2002). A closer look at language learning strategies and EFL performance. *Foreign Languages Education*, 10 (1), 115-132.

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[http://www.credoreference.com.library.muhlenberg.edu:80/entry/cupchilddev/developmental\\_genetics](http://www.credoreference.com.library.muhlenberg.edu:80/entry/cupchilddev/developmental_genetics)

## **Reference citation in text**

### **Direct citation 1**

She states, "the 'placebo effect' ... disappeared when behaviors were studied in this manner" (Miele, 1993, p. 276), but she did not clarify which behaviors were studied.

### **Direct citation 2: Fewer than forty words**

Lee (1999) found that "The EAP writing curriculum incorporate reading and analysis of major academic journal articles in the specific field to identify macro-level organization an obligatory 'moves' in conjunction with writing practice." (p. 21)

### **Direct citation 3: More than forty words**

Miele (1993) found the following:

The "placebo effect," which had been verified in previous studies, disappeared when behaviors were studied in this manner. Furthermore, the behaviors were never exhibited again, even when reed rings were administered. Earlier studies were clearly premature in attributing the results to a placebo effect. (p. 276)

### **One work by two authors**

- Smith and Takamoto (1997) argued that. ...

- In recent study of SLA (Smith & Takamoto, 1997) ...

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Previous research (Lass, 1992; Meyer & Sage, 1978, 1980; Nichols, 1987a, 1987b; Oats et al, 1973)...

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# EFL Learners' Written Lexical Retrieval Ability as Predicted by Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies of Self-regulation

Mahboobeh Morshedian\*<sup>1</sup>  
Maryam Meshkat<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examined whether metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation capability in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners can predict their written lexical retrieval ability in English. The participants were 93 intermediate Iranian EFL learners. Pintrich's self-regulated learning (SRL) model was adopted as a basis in this research. There are cognitive, metacognitive, affective, motivational, social, and environmental factors at play in this model. The data were collected through Written Productive Translation Task (WPTT) and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ); however, only its learning (metacognitive and cognitive) strategy use scale was analyzed. The results of multiple regres-

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English Translation, Tolou-e Mehr Non-profit Institute of Higher Education, Iran (corresponding author); m.morshedian@tolouemehr.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University, Lavizan, Tehran, Iran; meshkat@sru.ac.ir

sion analyses showed that both metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation could significantly predict the participants' ability to retrieve English written words, but the role of metacognitive strategies was larger. This can guide EFL teachers on how to promote lexical learning, retention and retrieval ability of their students through explicitly teaching them cognitive and particularly metacognitive strategies.

**Keywords:** Self-regulation, Self-regulated Learning Model (SRL), EFL Written Lexical Retrieval, Cognitive Strategies, Metacognitive Strategies.

## Introduction

In addition to orthographical, phonological, etc. networks, the lexicon is organized in the brain as a set of the semantic network of interconnected concepts (i.e., nodes) connected (Carroll, 2008). On the other hand, lexical retrieval is a sub-skill of and a crucial process in both written and oral language production and a significant dimension of fluency in second language (L2) learners (Snelings et al., 2004). According to the revised spreading activation model (Bock & Levelt, 1994), lexical retrieval entails the selection of lexical concepts that leads to lemmas representing and containing the syntactic and semantic features of a word and lexemes including the formal and morphological (i.e., orthographic or phonological) ones. In other words, the concepts are phonologically, morphologically, and phonetically encoded to be either written down or articulated (Levelt, 1989; Levelt et al., 1999; Roelofs, 2003). As for native speakers, these features are greatly integrated into a lexical entry if words are not specific to a discipline or of low frequency (Levelt, 1989). However, L2 learners, particularly in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context, usually do not receive enough contextualized language input; thus, they cannot extract, create, and integrate these features into a lexical entry (Jiang, 2000). According to Jiang, because learners have a semantic system in their first language (L1) and probably depend on this system when learning a new L2/EFL word, the integration process may be impeded; thus, L2/EFL lexical retrieval may face problems.

Considering the above discussion on the conscious and controlled process of L2/EFL lexical retrieval (e.g., Gulan & Valerjev, 2010; Jiang, 2000), learners might be able to enhance their L2/EFL lexical retrieval ability and cope with its problems through resorting to some learning strategies. Since self-regulation is considered as a broader construct than learning strategies (Oxford, 2011, as cited in Chamot, 2014), it seems warranted to assume that learners' use of self-regulatory strategies can contribute to their L2/EFL lexical retrieval ability as their self-regulation ability proved to enhance their L2/EFL vocabulary learning (e.g., Hardi, 2014; Mizumoto, 2010). Self-regulation means self-generated feelings, thoughts, actions, and behaviors that are pre-planned and then modified during the task performance in order to attain one's goals (Zimmerman, 2008). Accordingly, in *self-regulated learning* (SRL), learners set goals, plan strategically, select and use strategies, monitor their effectiveness and evaluate their performance (Zimmerman, 2008).

Cognitive (i.e., elaboration, rehearsal, and organizational) of self-regulation and metacognitive strategies (metacognitive self-regulatory strategies and critical thinking) and— as defined in Pintrich's (2000) model of SRL — are among self-regulatory strategies that can improve the chance of learning L2/EFL lexical items (Cubukcu, 2008; Dörnyei, 2005; Field, 2004; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Pavičić, 2008; Schmitt, 1997; Wolters et al., 2005), and they may do so later in retrieving them successfully. Cognitive strategies show the use of learning strategies to understand the material in any course (Pintrich, 2004; Schunk, 2005). Likewise, learners use metacognitive strategies to change or adapt their cognition (Wolters et al., 2005). In other words, its metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation might facilitate L2/EFL lexical retrieval as it has also been proved that self-regulation ability contributes to L2/EFL vocabulary learning (e.g., Hardi, 2014; Mizumoto, 2010).

The present article, therefore, seeks to investigate whether metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation in Pintrich's (2000) SRL model can predict EFL learners' written lexical retrieval ability. In other words, it aims to investigate this research question:

Is there any significant relationship between metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation ability in EFL learners and their English written lexical retrieval ability?

## Review of Literature

### Pintrich's (2000) SRL Model and L2/EFL Vocabulary Learning

There are different models of self-regulation, and all SRL models have the components of cognition, metacognition, and motivation (Zimmerman, 2008). In Pintrich's (2000) model, self-regulation entails the control of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, motivational, behavioral, social, and environmental factors (i.e., learning context) (Schunk, 2005). According to Pintrich (2004), areas of regulation consist of affect/motivation, cognition, behavior, and learning context, and the phases of regulation are: (1) planning, forethought, and activation, (2) monitoring, (3) control, and (4) reflection and reaction.

In the first phase, cognition contains background and metacognitive knowledge, and goals. During this phase, motivational elements such as one's understanding of learning ease or difficulty, self-efficacy, goal orientations, interest and task value are subject to self-regulation. Planning effort and time and planning for observing one's behavior are considered self-regulated behaviors. Contextual factors in this phase are learners' understanding of the task and its context. In the second phase, namely monitoring, learners try to pay attention to and be aware of their actions and their results. To Pintrich (2000), cognitive monitoring includes metacognitive awareness and judgments of one's learning. Monitoring motivation implies awareness of one's values, interests, self-efficacy, and anxieties as well as causes of the obtained results. Likewise, monitoring behaviors involves adjusting and managing time and effort. Contextual monitoring entails monitoring task conditions to find out whether they are

changing or not. During the control phase, learners try to control their cognition, behaviors, motivation, and context through their monitoring in order to improve learning. Cognitive control includes metacognitive and cognitive activities that aim to modify their cognition (Pintrich, 2000). Control of motivation consists of self-efficacy through talking to oneself positively. Control of behavior includes making efforts persistently and asking for help when necessary. Contextual control means strategies such as eliminating or reducing distractions to make the context lead to learning. Learners' reactions and reflections involve attribution of either success or failure to various causes, and evaluations of performance (Pintrich, 2000). Motivational reactions are attempts to improve motivation when it has been reduced. Behavioral reflection and reaction entail knowledge about one's actions, e.g., whether one has made enough effort or used time well (Schunk, 2005).

As mentioned above, to Pintrich (2000), self-regulation includes metacognitive self-regulatory, cognitive, and resource management strategies. The metacognitive and cognitive strategies, lying in the area of cognition in Pintrich's (2000) model, can play a part in L2/EFL vocabulary learning. In his model, cognition encompasses elaboration, rehearsal, and organizational, critical thinking, and metacognitive self-regulatory strategies (Pintrich, 2004). Rehearsal strategies entail; for example, repeating or reciting L2/EFL vocabulary items in a list when acquiring them; this is a kind of shallow processing (Gu & Johnson, 1996; Wolters et al., 2005). Elaboration strategies that form a deeper approach to learning also play a vital role in storing information; for instance, storing L2/EFL vocabulary items in long-term memory through generating internal links between them (Dörnyei, 2005; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Wolters et al., 2005). As recalling a learned vocabulary item needs deeper processing, elaboration will help the information (e.g., L2/EFL words) to enter the long-term memory and to be retrieved more easily later (Loftus & Loftus, 1976; Sperling, 1967). This is what is referred to by Field (2004, p. 167) as well, "The ease with which a memory is retrieved from LTM [long-term memory] is determined by how strongly encoded it is." Elaboration strategies include analogy-making; for example, when learning new L2/EFL words. According to analogy theory, "[W]ords are interpreted phonologically by analogy with others, perhaps mainly on the basis of their rhyme," (Field, 2004, p. 95). Using organizational strategies which also involve some deeper processing, learners choose proper information and organize whatever they have learned (Pintrich, 1999; Wolters et al., 2005). This can be extended to the acquisition and retrieval of lexical items which involve "analysis, classification, and interpretation of a stimulus" (Field, 2004, p. 224).

Metacognitive strategies of self-regulation in Pintrich's (2000) model of SRL – other strategies in its area of cognition– include critical thinking and metacognitive self-regulatory strategies (Pintrich, 2004). Critical thinking consists of knowing the source of information, pondering whether that information is compatible with their background knowledge, and judging the information critically (Linn, 2000). It is also noteworthy that self-regulation lies at the core of critical thinking (Facione, 1990), and according to American Philosophical Asso-

ciation Project, critical thinking is a kind of self-regulatory judgment that leads to evaluation, inference, analysis, and interpretation (Facione & Facione, 1996). Concerning how this definition of critical thinking can be related to L2/EFL vocabulary learning and subsequent retrieval, Pavičić (2008) maintains that through learning diary that is a vocabulary learning strategy, learners will undertake critical evaluation of their own activities. Metacognitive self-regulatory strategies reflect activities that help learners pre-plan, observe, and modify their learning process (Pintrich, 2004). To Gu and Johnson (1996), an example of metacognitive self-regulation in vocabulary learning is selective attention that is a psycholinguistic concept indicating “an ability to tune in to certain sources of input and exclude others,” (Field, 2004, p. 24). In the case of L2/EFL vocabulary learning, it involves strategies concerning how to select a word to be studied; for example, the L2/EFL language learners look up worthwhile words. In other words, learners who utilize metacognitive strategies know which words are essential for adequate comprehension of a passage, and metacognitive self-regulation includes strategies used to store vocabulary (e.g., taking notes, mental associations, and practice) and strategies utilized to retrieve already stored vocabulary (Gu & Johnson, 1996). On the whole, metacognitive self-regulatory strategies that enhance vocabulary development (Cubukcu, 2008; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Schmitt, 1997) entail awareness of and control over one’s cognition. They also involve having a plan for learning, monitoring it, and evaluating the obtained results (Pintrich et al., 2000). Overall, metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation, as defined by Pintrich (2000, 2004), could play a role in L2/EFL vocabulary development.

### **The Controlled and Conscious Process of L2/EFL Lexical Retrieval**

There are sound reasons for the claim that L2/EFL lexical retrieval is a controlled and conscious process (e.g., Abutalebi, 2008; Gulan & Valerjev, 2010; Jiang, 2000). First, Petrides (1998, as cited in Abutalebi, 2008, p. 473) stated that the “prefrontal cortex” of the brain is divided into two areas. In other words, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex performs “self-monitoring functions and sequential processing”, while the ventrolateral prefrontal areas carry out a lower-level function that involves organizing “response sequences” actively through retrieving information consciously and explicitly “from posterior cortical association systems.” Thus, “active-controlled (strategic) retrieval” which needs the involvement of “the inferior prefrontal cortex” is distinct from automatic retrieval that does not. During active retrieval, there is a conscious effort to retrieve specific information (e.g., generating a word) directed by either the participants’ plans and intention or the instructions given to them. The implication of this distinction between active-controlled and automatic retrieval is that producing words in a weak L2 may be ‘non-automatic’, whereas L1 processing is automatic. In other words, since L2/EFL is processed in a controlled way, only for L2/EFL processing the inferior prefrontal cortex is engaged (Abutalebi, 2008, p. 473).

Second, Dekeyser (2007) maintained that retrieval of linguistic knowledge is either procedural or declarative, while both types of knowledge are the goal of vocabulary learning (Meara, 1996). Declarative vocabulary knowledge that consists in knowing word meaning (Nation, 2001) includes “remembering and retrieving words by conscious and deliberate effort in much the same way as explicit knowledge” (Henriksen, 2008, as cited in Roohani & Khalilian, 2012, p. 99). In addition, the declarative knowledge of vocabulary has a “strong and significant relationship with higher levels of metacognitive awareness” which implies “the role of consciousness in developing declarative vocabulary knowledge” (Roohani & Khalilian, 2012, p. 99).

The third evidence for conscious vocabulary retrieval comes from Gulan and Valerjev (2010, p. 53), who claim that direct retrieval uses explicit memory, but priming depends on implicit memory and happens involuntarily and unconsciously. A L2/EFL speaker, through a conscious search mechanism, must retrieve the proper lemma that matches the activated concept. In other words, retrieving the proper lemma of the word matching the concept to be named needs conscious response selection, but selecting phonemes is an automatic process (Ferreira & Pashler, 2002, as cited in Declerck & Kormos, 2012). Fourth, according to Gardiner et al. (1998, as cited in Franklin et al., 2005), in recall tasks but not necessarily in recognition tasks, we are conscious of retrieved memories. Likewise, to Ebbinghaus (1885, as cited in Franklin et al., 2005), recall means retrieval to consciousness.

Last but not least, there are three developmental stages for integrating the linguistic features (i.e., syntactic, semantic, formal, and morphological) into lexical entries for L2 learners (Jiang, 2000). In the first stage which is called formal, a lexical entry only contains an L1 translation equivalent and formal features of the word. In the second stage (i.e., L1 lemma mediation), the employment of L2 words is intermediated by the lemmas of their L1 translation. In the third or integration stage which is attained late in the process of L2 vocabulary acquisition by advanced learners, syntactic, semantic, and morphological features of the L2 lexical item are incorporated into a lexical entry. The noteworthy point here is that in the first and second developmental stages of integration of the linguistic features into L2/EFL lexical entries (e.g., the stage the low-level FL learners move through), lexical retrieval is a controlled and conscious process.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 93 female Iranian EFL learners who were placed at the intermediate level based on a mock Preliminary English Test (PET; Hashemi & Thomas, 1996) given to them at the beginning of their program. In other words, they scored 70-84, i.e., B1 of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level. They were studying in four conversation classes with one teacher. The participants' age differed from 18 to 30 ( $M = 21.98$ ,  $SD = 6.22$ ).



## Instruments

### *Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)*

Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich et al., 1993) was used in this study to measure self-regulation as defined by Pintrich (2000) because it is theoretically based on this model and in line with areas for regulation in it (Pintrich, 2004). It is a seven-option Likert scale, containing 81 items in two parts: the motivation scale and the learning strategies scale. The motivation scale – in line with motivation/affect area – is composed of three sections: (a) a value section that consists of scales of extrinsic and intrinsic goal orientations, and task value, (b) an expectancy section that encompasses scales of self-efficacy for learning and performance and control of learning beliefs, and (c) an affective section that has a scale of test anxiety.

The learning strategies scale – in line with cognition area – has two sections: (a) metacognitive and cognitive strategies and (b) resource management strategies. The metacognitive and cognitive strategies section has sub-scales of metacognitive self-regulation, critical thinking, rehearsal, organization, and elaboration – the focus of this study. Resource management strategies section – in line with behavior and context areas – has sub-scales of help-seeking, study environment and time, peer learning, and effort regulation. (Pintrich, 2004). The motivation scales, the cognitive-metacognitive scales, and the resource management strategy scales are in conformity with the three components of Pintrich's (2000) definition of SRL: motivation, metacognition, and behavior (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005).

However, only the data from the metacognitive and cognitive strategies section of the learning strategy use scales (i.e., (a) above) were analyzed for the purpose of this study. According to Pintrich and De Groot (1990), the cognitive strategy use scale of MSLQ includes 14 items related to the following: rehearsal strategies (e.g., "I memorize key words to remind me of important concepts in this class"), elaboration strategies such as paraphrasing and summarizing (e.g., "When reading for this class, I try to relate the material to what I already know"), and organizational strategies (e.g., "I make simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help me organize course material"). There are also five items of critical thinking (e.g., "I treat the course material as a starting point and try to develop my own ideas about it") that can be considered metacognitive because self-regulation is at the core of critical thinking (Facione, 1990), and American Philosophical Association Project defined critical thinking as the self-regulatory judgment that leads to evaluation, inference, analysis, and interpretation (Facione & Facione, 1996). These five items plus 12 items of metacognitive self-regulatory strategies of MSLQ (e.g., "When I become confused about something I'm reading for this class, I go back and try to figure it out") make the metacognitive items to be 17 ones.

### ***Written Productive Translation Task (WPTT)***

In addition, a Written Productive Translation Task (WPTT) was implemented to gauge participants' written lexical retrieval ability (see Appendix A). In other words, the same words in WPTT which were validated by Snellings et al. (2004) and almost the same procedure as theirs were employed in the present study. According to Snellings et al. (2004), WPTT is a validated measure of written L2/EFL lexical retrieval based on the oral translation tasks utilized in psycholinguistic studies. Unlike Picture Naming tasks, the WPTT is not limited to concrete verbs and nouns that can be shown by pictures and can also assess word combinations. In addition, WPTT was proved to be a good scale of the written lexical retrieval construct, employing Messick's (1989) framework. Likewise, the relationships between the WPTT and a written Picture Naming task (i.e., a test of the same construct), as well as constructs such as orthographic encoding and lexical access, were established through a multiple regression approach. All this proved WPTT to be both a valid and reliable scale of written lexical retrieval. In WPTT, learners translate from their native language into L2/EFL language in written form; a lexical retrieval process that also involves orthography (Snellings et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, the most important reason why WPTT was used as a measure in this study is that when writing in L2, low-level learners mostly use different L1-based lexical and translation strategies involving mental equation of lexical and semantic categories across languages (Cumming, 1990), almost like what happens in WPTT. In other words, they first put and phrase their intended meaning into L1 in order to find its L2 equivalent (Qi, 1998; Smith, 1994), then retrieve the L1 word that expresses their intended meaning (Qi, 1998; Smith, 1994; Wang, 2003), and finally translate that L1 term into the L2 (Zimmermann, 1989).

### **Data collection**

First, the MSLQ (Pintrich et al., 1993) was given to the participants who had been told to read all items and circle the Likert option that fitted them. However, the metacognitive and cognitive strategies section which includes rehearsal, organization, and elaboration as well as metacognitive self-regulatory and critical thinking subscales were included in data analysis.

In order to administer WPTT to participants, the Persian equivalents of the words tested in the WPTT in Snellings et al. (2004) which were 55 items were presented to participants in a PowerPoint file (i.e., each word in one slide). The stimulus appeared and remained on the screen for 20 seconds; precisely the time when an automatic time-out message appeared in Snellings et al. (2004). The participants were asked to provide the written translation in their papers. In order to make sure about the accuracy of Persian equivalents, thus improving the validity of WPTT in Persian, before the study the first author herself – who is also a translator – had translated the English words of Snellings et al. (2004) into Persian and had asked another translator to translate them back

into English. Like in Snellings et al. (2004), all incorrect responses were considered missing values and received no mark.

## Results

The Cronbach's alpha was run to calculate the reliability of metacognitive and cognitive subscales in the questionnaire. They enjoyed reliability indexes of .96 and .91, respectively, which are acceptable. Then multiple regression analysis was utilized to see if metacognitive and cognitive strategies significantly would predict participants' English written lexical retrieval ability. For a regression model, five assumptions should be examined: sample size, multicollinearity and singularity, homoscedasticity, and linearity (Pallant, 2005).

According to Tabachnick and Fidell's (2001, as cited in Pallant, 2005) formula for calculating sample size requirements, the number of independent variables was taken into account:  $N > 50 + 8m$  ( $m$  = number of independent variables), i.e.,  $93 > 50 + 8*5 = 90$  in this study. Then the data set was examined for multicollinearity and the intercorrelations among the variables. As you can see in Table 1 below, the variance inflations factors (VIFs) of the predictors were found within an acceptable range ( $5.381 \sim 4.261 < 10$ ). These VIF values imply that no variables should be deleted from the regression model for multicollinearity consideration (Pallant, 2005).

**Table 1.**  
*Coefficients for the Regression Equation (Model) and Collinearity Statistics*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	part	Tolerance	VIF
1(constant)	7.817	5.729		1.364	.176	-3.565	19.199					
Cognitive	-.786	.205	-.723	3.833	.000	-1.194	-.379	.367	-.375	-.312	.186	5.381
metacognitive	10.22	.160	1.027	6.404	.000	.705	1.339	.555	.560	.512	.171	4.261

a. Dependent Variable: Retrieval

Another indication of no multicollinearity is the correlation between independent variables and dependent one (i.e.,  $r < .7$ ). As indicated in Table 2, both of the scales (i.e., cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies) correlate with EFL lexical retrieval ability,  $r(93) = .367$  and  $.555$  respectively,  $p < .01$ . Likewise, the Tolerance values for metacognitive and cognitive scales are  $.186$  and  $.171 > .1$  respectively, rejecting the possibility of multicollinearity.

**Table 2.**  
*Correlation between Metacognitive and Cognitive Strategies and EFL Lexical Retrieval*

	Retrieval	cognitive	metacognitive
Retrieval		.367	.555
cognitive			.902

Figure 1 below depicts the normality of the regression standardized residuals in which points lie in a straight line, and Figure 2 below shows the scatterplot of the standardized residuals of dependent and independent variables, in which residuals are approximately rectangularly distributed, with most of the scores fall in the center. Hence, the assumptions of homoscedasticity and linearity are met (Pallant, 2005).

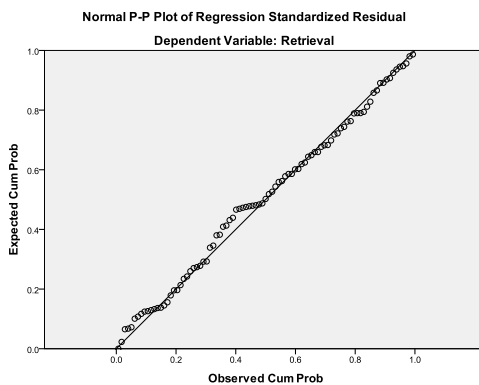


Figure 1. The Normality of the Regression Standardized Residuals

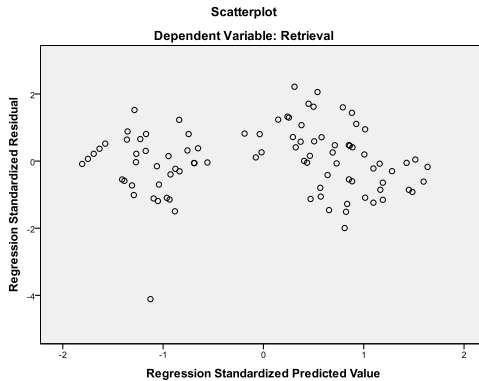


Figure 2. Scatterplot of the Standardized Residuals

As shown in Table 3 below, it was also found that metacognitive strategies ( $M = 70.88$ ,  $SD = 24.76$ ), as well as the cognitive ones ( $M = 61.87$ ,  $SD = 19.26$ ) predict 36% of the variance of the participants' ability to retrieve English written lexis ( $M = 31.62$ ,  $SD = 20.96$ );  $F(2, 90) = 30.688$ ,  $p < .05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .39$  and  $R^2 = .40$ . That is, metacognitive and cognitive strategies were positively related to EFL lexical retrieval, increasing by .723 and 1.207 for every point in EFL lexical retrieval, respectively. The metacognitive variable explained 27% of the variance in retrieval ability ( $\beta = 1.207$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Cognitive strategies, on the other hand, explained 9% of the variance in retrieval ability ( $\beta = .723$ ,  $p < .00$ ). The effect of metacognitive and cognitive strategies was significant,  $t(90) =$

3.83,  $p < 0.05$  and  $t(90) = 6.40$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , respectively. Likewise, as the size of standard error for the unstandardized beta (SE B) indicates, the numbers are not so much spread out from the regression line for the significance to be less likely (Pallant, 2005).

**Table 3.**  
*Summary of the Standard Multiple Regression Analysis*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
cognitive	.78*	.205	-.723*	-3.83	.00*
metacognitive	1.02*	.160	1.207*	6.40	.00*

\* $p < .05$ , Note:  $R^2 = .40$  Adjusted  $R^2 = .39$

## Discussion

This research was aimed at exploring whether metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation in Pintrich's (2000) model contribute to the improvement of EFL lexical retrieval ability. The results indicated that both metacognitive and cognitive strategies of self-regulation capability in EFL learners as measured by MSLQ could significantly predict their written lexical retrieval ability as measured by WPTT. In other words, in EFL learners who do not enjoy a high level of language proficiency, EFL retrieval is not automatic but controlled, and the above strategies of self-regulation can help them retrieve EFL lexical items more successfully.

The finding that cognitive strategies of self-regulation, i.e., elaboration, rehearsal, and organizational strategies could significantly predict EFL learners' written lexical retrieval chimes with what other researchers (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Field, 2004; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Wolters et al., 2005) maintain about the important role of cognitive strategies in vocabulary acquisition, storage and retrieval. Besides, taking rehearsal strategies into account, this obtained result is in line with a behavioral technique used to help L1 lexical retrieval in aphasics, i.e., repeating the vocabulary item while looking at its picture, called "Look, Listen, Repeat" (Savage et al., 2013, as cited in Croot, 2018, p. 247). Likewise, as far as elaboration strategies are concerned, this finding is aligned with another method to help L1 lexical retrieval in aphasics, i.e., the semantic features or associations of the target word (Savage et al., 2013; Suárez-González et al., 2016; as cited in Croot, 2018).

This research also provides experimental data to support the contribution of the metacognitive component of self-regulation to L2/EFL lexical ability as mentioned or found by other researchers. For example, according to Pavičić (2008), critical thinking – a subcomponent of metacognitive strategies – can predict L2/EFL vocabulary learning and retrieval. Similarly, some other researchers referred to the role of its other subcomponent, i.e., metacognitive self-regulation in L2/EFL vocabulary development (Cubukcu, 2008; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Pintrich et al., 2000; Schmitt, 1997).

Moreover, this study showed that cognitive strategies could predict 9% of written EFL lexical retrieval ability, and metacognitive ones 27%. In other words, the finding that the metacognitive component of self-regulation was a stronger predictor of the ability to retrieve EFL words than cognitive strategies can be justified in the lights of Nelson and Narens's (1990) ideas that metacognitive monitoring and control generally play a crucial part not only in the acquisition and the retention but also in the retrieval of to-be-learned information. Of course, there is also evidence for the use of cognitive strategies in lexical retrieval. Cyr and Germain (1998); for example, contended that elaboration which involves connecting new information to the concepts in the memory reorganizes knowledge in the long-term memory. Generally, as language learning strategies that include metacognitive and cognitive ones can facilitate not only the internalization and storage of the new language but also its retrieval or use (Oxford, 1990), the obtained results seem justified. Of course, as the time given for lexical retrieval and retrieval difficulty are interrelated (Abdel Rahman & Sommer, 2003; Abdel Rahman et al., 2003), one can conclude that better results might have been obtained, if the participants had been given more time.

The findings of this research can also be another representation of what Hudson (2000) suggested as the ways to retrieve an L2 word, i.e., the word's spelling, its rhyme, its initial sound, its other semantic features, its physical context of occurrence, its rough opposites, its part of speech, and its synonym. Of course, as the measure used in this study involves translation from Persian into English, the last three ways mentioned here (i.e., its rough opposites, its part of speech, and its synonym) seem to be the most likely ways employed by L2/EFL learners (i.e., like the ones in the present study) who mostly use translation in their lexical retrieval while writing (Cumming, 1990).

It is worth mentioning that there are many other psycholinguistic factors involved in lexical retrieval, and they may have affected the results of this research. For example, as this investigation has dealt with written EFL lexical retrieval, sometimes phonological and semantic aspects of lexical items are retrieved, but there is a problem with retrieving their orthographic aspect because English orthography is not transparent; without a one-to-one relationship between graphemes and phonemes (Field, 2004). More specifically, according to lexical search theory, there is an access file and an access code for orthographical, phonological, and semantic aspects of lexical items. The access code of the orthographic access file would be an aspect of the spelling of the word; for example, the first three letters (Field, 2004). Hence, in this study even if the semantic category and phonological properties of the target word were detected correctly, i.e. the access codes were compared with input stimulus, and a match was found in both semantic and phonological access files, there may have been a problem in finding an orthographic match in the orthographic access file.

Although this study supports the significant relationship between metacognitive strategies of self-regulation ability in participants and their written EFL lexical retrieval, it would be worthwhile to conduct more research to investi-

gate whether the whole construct of self-regulation, as explained by Pintrich (2000), can significantly predict retrieving L2/EFL lexical items. In addition, delving into self-regulation as defined by other researchers (e.g., Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009) and investigating its possible impact on EFL lexical retrieval seem warranted. Moreover, given the fact that some findings on the role gender plays in self-regulation have not been conclusive (Pintrich & Zusho, 2007), while others indicated that females mostly surpassed males in self-regulation (e.g., Bidjerano, 2005; Meece & Painter, 2008), further studies seem necessary to examine whether there would be any difference between men and women in their EFL written lexical retrieval ability as predicted by metacognitive and cognitive strategies and other components of self-regulation, as defined by Pintrich (2000). Likewise, considering the greater immediate gains in L1 lexical retrieval in aphasics with “Look, Listen, Repeat” treatment when incorporating written answers than when only requiring spoken answers (Croot, 2018) and the fact that the present study also involved written responses, further research can be conducted to assess oral EFL lexical retrieval as well. Last but not least, factors as the frequency, typicality, lexical ambiguity, morphological complexity, age of learning, and recency of usage (i.e., priming) of the target lexical items are said to play a role in lexical retrieval (Carroll, 2008), but these factors have not been taken into account in the present study, so these factors can be taken into consideration in the future studies.

## Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Considering the speed with which L1/Persian words were presented, it can be concluded from the above discussion that through self-regulation, EFL learners could retrieve EFL words successfully. This can be an incentive for EFL teachers to try to teach metacognitive and cognitive strategies to their students—besides providing them with rich contextualized input (Jiang, 2000)—with the aim of increasing and ensuring their success in learning, retaining and finally retrieving EFL words.

This explicit training can be carried out through the EFL teachers’ following Wolters et al.’s (2005) suggestions and their urging the students to repeat or recite new vocabulary items in a list when learning them in order to practice rehearsal strategies. Likewise, in order to implement elaboration strategies, the instructors – using the suggestions by Dörnyei (2005) and Field (2004) – can encourage learners to create internal connections between new vocabulary items and to make analogy when learning new words. Likewise, inspired by Cyr and Germain (1998), the teachers can help learners to find a word’s meaning in English by drawing analogies and spotting explicit links between its L1 equivalent and their knowledge. As for teaching organizational strategies, the teachers can follow Pintrich (1999), Wolters et al. (2005), and Field’s (2004) ideas and want learners to select, analyze, classify, organize, and interpret the new words.

Concerning how critical thinking can be explicitly taught to learners for better vocabulary learning and subsequent retrieval, the contentions of Linn



(2000) and Pavičić (2008) would be helpful to the teachers in order for them to train learners in keeping a learning diary of their vocabulary learning process. This leads to a critical evaluation of this process; for example, how the newly learned term is consistent with the previously known ones. Similarly, in order to self-regulate their vocabulary learning metacognitively, the students can be explicitly trained in how to select a word to be studied, to know which words are important for correct comprehension of a text, to take notes of the newly learned terms, to create mental associations of them, and to practice them; just as suggested by Gu and Johnson (1996), Pintrich, et al. (2000), and Cubukcu (2008).

Also, it should be noted that, first, bilingual lexical retrieval is a controlled search task entailing monitoring by controlled attention mechanisms because attentional resources are limited, and the brain needs to perform non-automatic retrieval (Prebianca, 2010). Second, after the critical period, L2/EFL lexical items are weak in the mental lexicon (Poulisse, 1997, as cited in Prebianca, 2010). Third, the manner in which we store lexical items is related to the ease of their retrieval (Carroll, 2008). Hence, it can be concluded that it is justifiable for L2/EFL language teachers to use elaboration strategies that can promote knowledge restructuring through; for example, the study of antonyms, synonyms, cognate words, homophones, and hyponyms and rehearsal strategies (i.e., repetition of EFL/L2 lexical items).

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## Appendix A

### Words tested in the Written Productive Translation Task (WPTT) (adopted from Snellings et al. (2004))

-table	-because, as	-is bigger than, is larger than
-safe	-before	-called for help, cried for help
-she	-thanked	-catch fish, catch fishes, catch a fish
-animal	-to work	-small fish, little fish, small fishes, little fishes
-broke	-something	-very grateful, really grateful, extremely grateful
-young	-fell off	-a heavy storm, a big storm
-dry	-a man	-were happy, were glad, were pleased
-is looking up	-then	-the other boys, the other guys
-while, when	-is proud	-so, hence, therefore
-to see	-told	-reads, is reading
-song	-just in time	-in fact, actually
-hot	-a restaurant	-again, yet again
-started	-even now	-a stone, a rock
-saw	-the owner	-hired, rented
-sold	-a bridge	-to rest, resting
-to rain	-the dog	-are sitting
-green	-decided to	-talks, speaks
-were eating	-caught	-began
-wanted to	-but, however	

# A Phenomenological Study of an Effective English Language Classroom from the Iranian EFL Learners' Perspectives at the Tertiary Level

Pooya Drood<sup>1</sup>

Masoud Zoghi\*<sup>2</sup>

Hanieh Davatghari Asl<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

Since little is known about how EFL learners experience and understand effective English language classroom, this study was an attempt to find out about the Iranian EFL learners' experiences of an effective English language classroom at the tertiary level. The design of the current research drew on a phenomenological study in which the lived experiences of EFL learners concerning the effective English language classroom were explored. The primary data collection method was in-depth interviewing

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, Department of ELT, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran; p.dorud@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of ELT, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran, (corresponding author); m-zoghi@iau-ahar.ac.ir

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of ELT, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran; hdavatgar@hmail.com

with seven Ph.D. candidates (two males and five females) who had been studying English for years and were selected through purposive sampling. The data were coded and explicated using Colaizzi's seven-step coding strategy. The three major resulting themes were a) Teacher characteristics, b) Classroom interaction, and c) Class performance. In addition, key findings from the study suggest that two elements of personal experiences and personal beliefs constitute effective English language classroom from the Iranian EFL learners' perspectives. Recommendations are provided for EFL researchers as the current study reveals.

**Keywords:** Language Classroom, Perspectives, Beliefs, Experience, Learners

## Introduction

Establishing effective English language classrooms has always been a major concern for the individuals involved in the field of ELT. It is obvious that a language classroom can't be defined if we want to take into account involving factors in isolation. Van Lier (1988) describes that a typical classroom is a place that different learners with different social backgrounds arrive and their class performance is based upon these ideas.

As Allwright (1992) properly mentions, English language classrooms are highly complicated settings in the sense that individuals, typically one instructor and a number of learners, come together for an educational reason. Allwright and Bailey (1990) perceive the classroom as the "crucible" - where teachers and students meet up and language learning, we trust, happens. Classrooms, as well as being locations for educational purposes, are social-based environments where lessons being taught carry the social aspects based on social relationships, together with social interactions (Allwright, 1989; Erikson, 1986). The classroom plays an important part in students' educational success (Habibie et al., 2016; Mukminin et al., 2015). Taken into consideration that the classroom environment influences students' academic achievements, the students' and learners' beliefs of the classroom environment are exceptionally vital. Each language classroom can be considered as a unique place because teachers' together with learners' beliefs and classroom practices are involved in the classroom. Personal theories teachers bring with them to the class influence classroom practices, what to teach, roles the teachers and learners take. Besides, because language learners come to class with different beliefs, their perceptions can play an essential role in numerous parts of education. Horwitz (1990) argues that existing mismatches among students' and teachers' teaching desires "can lead to a lack of student confidence in and satisfaction with the language class" (p. 25). Researchers observed that perspectives and perceptions play important roles in empowering learners to memorize successfully in the classroom (Hosseini & Pourmandnian, 2013). Classroom interaction hence gives us ready access to massive amounts of information on ELT learning forms. Wright (2005) observes that any activity in the classroom, by teachers or students, can inspire a variety of probable reactions, extending from the



normal to the unforeseen and these elements of classroom interaction are conducive to learning moments that teachers and learners can benefit from. Of studies into both teachers' and learners' belief systems have been conducted by researchers and teachers (Bell, 2005; Borg & Burns, 2008; Brown, 2009; Davis, 2003; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009; Matsuura et al., 2001; Peacock, 1999; Schulz, 1996, 2001; Vásquez & Harvey, 2010). Issues like the relationship between students' perceptions of the classroom learning environment and cognitive and emotional results have been examined (Fraser, 1998; Gür, 2006; Rakici, 2004; Schaper, 2008). Goksu (2015) inspected the contrasts among grades in the understanding of high school students in their genuine classroom learning environment in EFL classes. The results demonstrated that all participants had positive perceptions of their learning environment in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Studies are also devoted on different aspects of EFL classroom; Difference between teachers' and learners' understanding of favored language classroom (Gür, 2006), the relationship between learners' perception of classroom context and motivation (Wei & Elias, 2011), comparing the effects of one learning environment over another and achievement of various parts of language learning (Torti, 2006). The relationship between students' perceptions of the classroom environment and their inspiration in learning the English language was investigated by Wei and Elias (2011). The findings of the study showed that the larger part of the learners perceived their learning classroom as having affiliation and they were extrinsically persuaded. Gür (2006) also endeavored to discover the contrasts between teachers' and students' perceptions of their genuine and favored classroom learning environment at the college level. The results uncovered that there was a measurably critical distinction between the teachers' real and favored classroom settings. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that the students and teachers similarly favored a more positive environment, and teachers' real and favored scores were more positive than the students. As the related literature indicates, numerous classroom educators do not have the preparation and strategies necessary to successfully address the needs of the expanding ELL population (DaSilva- Iddings & Rose, 2012). Cho and Christenbury (2010) found that instructors are not familiar with how to alter their instruction, teaching materials, or scholarly tasks for their ELLs within the classroom. Non-native English teachers here even take the damaging side. EFL students are regularly set in standard classrooms with educators who are insufficiently prepared for meeting the language and proficiency needs of their ELLs (AACTE, 2002). However, evidence from the literature speaks to the lack of qualitative research that takes into account the ELLs' perspective about effective English language classrooms at the tertiary level. To consider this gap in scholarly literature, this study was devoted to exploring how students experience and understand effective English language classrooms. Using a phenomenological study, the researcher would be able to analyze EFL learners' experiences of an effective English language classroom. Consequently, a better picture of an effective English language classroom would be obtained. This study provides English language teachers with information as to what could constitute an effective language classroom. This research aims to add to the field of existing descriptive phenomenological studies

of qualitative research by providing a background for further investigation in the realm of Iranian EFL learners at the tertiary level. The results of this exploratory and descriptive phenomenological study can, also, be utilized as a beginning step to decide the profundity of information English language teachers should possess about teaching ELLs, and examine their actual instructional practices in their classrooms.

Considering the nature and objective of the study the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the lived experiences of EFL learners concerning an effective EFL classroom?
2. How does this experience of the effective EFL classroom inform the language-learning experience for EFL learners?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This descriptive phenomenological study focused on data that were obtained from a purposive sampling of Iranian English language learners studying at the Ph.D. level who had been studying English for years. Purposive sampling, recognized by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling, was used to identify the primary participants. Purposive sampling aims to look for those participants who are of interest, meet the criteria of the study, and who would best answer the research questions and objectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The researcher selected the sample using his judgment and the purpose of the research, looking for those who “have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988, p. 150). In this study, because the researcher knew that people would be able to participate in the general structure and because he aimed for general knowledge about the phenomenon, at first he didn’t know who they were. The question that the researcher had to ask himself was: Do people have the experience that I am looking for? In a sense then, the researcher’s task would be finding and selecting participants possessing specific experience(s) of the phenomenon. Because the focus of this phenomenological study was to describe the Iranian English language learners’ experiences of an effective language classroom, it was appropriate to gain information from diverse participants of EFL learners. The researcher preferred to gather data from active learners at the Ph.D. level. Participants of this kind could provide intended information because they had been studying issues in relation to English language learning for many years (10 years at least) and as the learners of a foreign language had the proficiency level of English in both general and technical terms (they passed the national wide university entrance exam which is a standardized testing instrument, and the one which is also a laborious one). So their experience in language classrooms could match the purpose of this study. The researcher identified Ph.D. groups in telegram whose members were studying English as a foreign language at the time, no matter what field they had been educating in. At first, the

researcher shared the topic of study with the group and emphasized that this group would be of great help because the knowledge and experience of the members were very similar to what the researcher was working on. Then the researcher asked them to inform him in case of any willingness to participate in the research. To this end, he sent his G-mail address. After sending their willingness to participate in research, the next step was to explain by making a reply to them. At this time, the researcher sent an informed consent form (see Appendix A) and asked them to read carefully and sign it if they had wished participation. The researcher requested that he or she complete the consent form and return it to him via e-mail. By their responding to the researcher they granted assent to use their responses as data source and analysis. At last, the participants willing to participate in this study numbered seven. In order to follow the ethical issue of the research, the researcher used informed consent by which participants were provided with the information about the purpose of the study, benefits of the research, method of the data collection, and what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees.

## **Research Design**

The qualitative approach that the researcher used for this study was the phenomenological methodology of exploring and describing Iranian EFL learners' lived experiences of an effective English language classroom. More specifically, this study used descriptive phenomenology which is based upon the philosophy of Husserl (1913, 1962). Its priority is to describe what is essential and meaningful in relation to the structure of experience.

### **The Researcher's Role and Bracketing**

In qualitative research "the researcher is the primary instrument for data analysis and collection" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). Considering the researcher himself as an instrument gives him the first-hand information he needs to make decisions. By trying to see the experience from the eyes of the experiencer, it provides a genuine view of what is occurring. This required the researcher to begin interviewing with an unbiased attitude, taking into account that each participant's narrative goes through her or his own perceptions. Bracketing, or holding one's thoughts in abeyance in phenomenological research, came from the numerical idea of [bracketing] in Husserl's (1913, 1962) theory and is basic to descriptive phenomenology to describe the essence and meaning of the phenomenon. According to Gearing (2004), the bracketing includes an orientation point of view which is composed of two components, specifically the researcher's epistemological position, and their ontological perspective. In this research, because the researcher chose the descriptive phenomenological methodology, bracketing has its base in an epistemological position ranging from post-positivism to relativism, with an ontological stance of being critical realism. It is post-positivism because the researcher in this research attempts to get the reality from the viewpoints of the subjects (participants), rather than that of the

observer. It is related to relativism because the researcher suspends (or brackets) his or her own biases (using reflexive journals in which the researcher writes down his natural attitude towards the phenomenon that is classroom) while attempting to understand the experiences of participants in their contexts (language classroom). The researcher takes the critical realism standpoint because the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (experience of an effective language classroom) are zeroed in on and these experiences cannot be independent of human (participants) perceptions. The research took into account the methodological theoretical framework of descriptive phenomenology in order to define the whole process in study design, like the researcher's epistemological position and ontological perspective. The researcher in this study extended the bracketing (preconceptions) to the stages of data analysis that is coding and developing themes. In discussing the findings, especially for research question number two, the researcher's interpretation of data was involved.

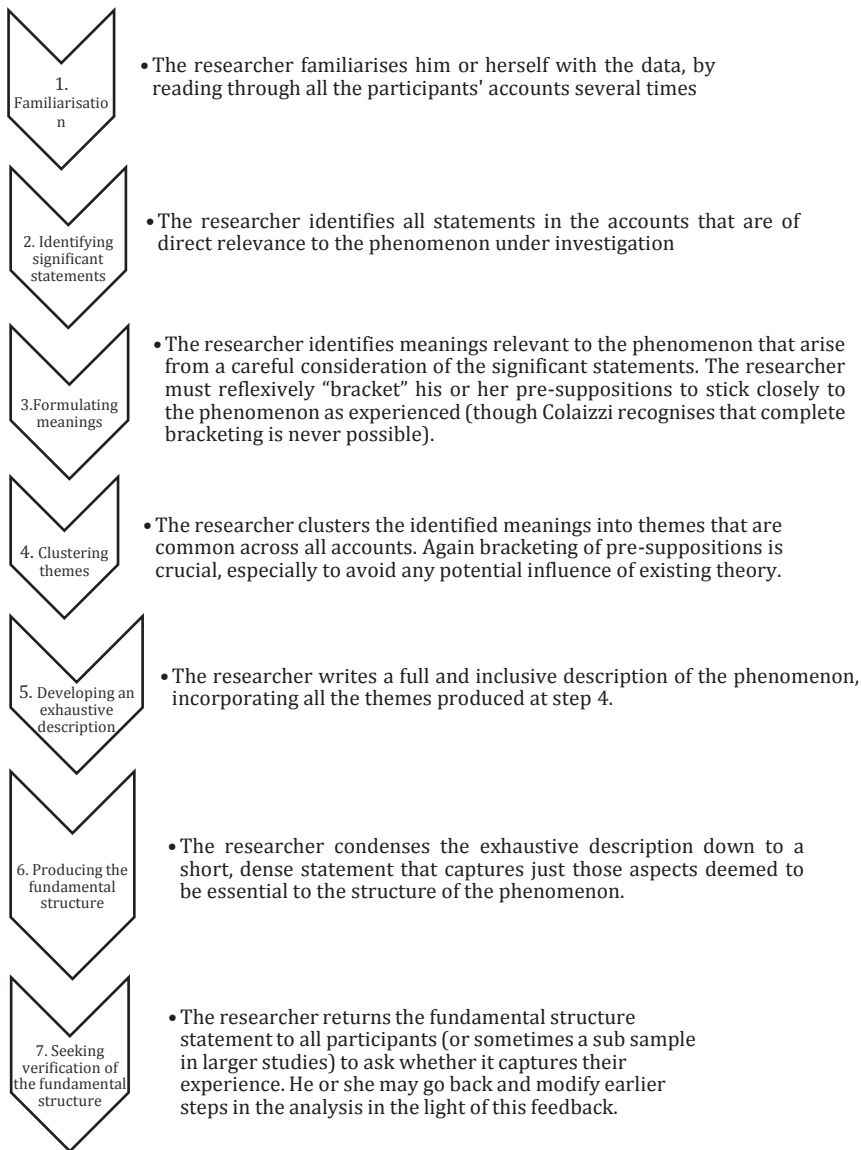
### **Semi-structured Interview Procedure**

The foremost way of data collection in phenomenological research is through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007). As a result, the primary data collection instrument in this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Based on the research questions in this study, the researcher developed an interview protocol (see Appendix B) in which questions were listed specifically. Some fixed general open-ended questions according to the phenomenon under investigation had been developed. Unlike a leading question, an open-ended question builds up the domain to be investigated, while providing the participant with any direction he or she wants. The interview protocol in this research comprised of general questions that played a role as to direct the participant into the phenomenon under investigation and some follow-up questions or probes which were based on the participants' responses for helping the researcher in clarifying and eliciting rich responses. In designing the interview protocol, the researcher utilized what Spradley (1979) calls the "grand tour" open-ended question in which the researcher requested that the participant remake a huge portion of the experience. In other words, the researcher asked the participant to reconstruct the points of interest of a more constrained time span or of experience. The questions also focused more on the subjective experience of the participant. In sum, based upon the participants' answers to the grand tour questions researcher-developed, while interviewing, some probing questions were formed. Throughout the interviewing process, the researcher moved back and forth through the questions based on the informant's responses. The researcher wanted the participants to describe the lived experience in a way as much free from a social background as possible. Besides, the researcher also used memos. Memoing is the demonstration of recording reflective notes about what the researcher is gaining from the information. Doing the research, the researcher kept memos in terms of his own ideas, beliefs, tendency, and past experience.

Individuals' behavior becomes meaningful, important and justifiable when setting in the unique context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Dolbeare and Schuman (see Schuman, 1982, for discussion) designed three interviews that characterize this approach and permits the interviewer and participant to dispatch the experience and to put it in the context. Based on this approach, the researcher conducted three interviewing structures with participants. The first part of interviewing began by contextualizing the participants' experience by asking him or her to tell about past experiences in relation to the topic. So, the researcher asked them to reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school, with friends, teachers, etc. The reason for the second part of the interviewing was to target the rich points of interest of the participants' present lived encounters within the area of the study. So, the researcher asked them to reconstruct these details. The researcher put away asking opinion-based questions and looked for the details of their experience, upon which their opinions may be built. In this second interview, then, the researcher's task was to strive to reconstruct the myriad details of participants' experience in the area he/she was studying. In the third part of interviewing, participants were requested to think about the meaning of their experience. This reflection talks to intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' experience and life. The blending of exploring the past to clarify the occasions that drove members to where they are right now, and portraying the wealthy points of their present involvement builds up conditions for reflecting upon what they are directly doing in their lives. Session numbers determined by the time it took for the participants to reach saturation in their responses to each question and probe. It took much time for some participants to respond and for some others, it did less. Some interviewees, due to being bored or tired, wanted to postpone the rest of the interviewing. For this reason, these sessions were set according to the participants' preferred convenient time. Participants were interviewed within a maximally period of a three- day interval.

### **Explicitaion of the Data**

The heading "data analysis" is not used here. Hycner explains that "analysis" has perilous intentions for phenomenology. The "term [analysis] usually means a 'breaking into parts' and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon... [whereas 'explicitation' implies an] ...investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole" (1999, p.161). In this research, the phenomenological explicitation of data was based on Colaizzi's strategy (1978). Figure 1 summarizes the steps suggested by Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method:



**Figure 1.** Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method

## The Trustworthiness of the Study Findings

To ensure that qualitative research findings are as trustworthy as possible, the following recommendations made by Creswell (2008) were taken into consid-

eration: (1) triangulation of data sources (analyst triangulation), (2) rich description of the method (participants, researcher's role and bracketing, data collection (instrument) as mentioned above), (3) Explication of data (coding process), and (4) member checking.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation refers to the process of “corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g., a principal and a student), types of data (e.g., observation field notes and interviews) or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (Creswell, 2008, p. 266). For this study, in-depth interviews were used as the primary data source. In this research study, analyst triangulation involved using another researcher who had expertise in qualitative research. Having coded the data, the main researcher provided the second person with the data to code. The second researcher stated that he had coded and formulated similar findings with slight differences. Because the different evaluators arrived at the same conclusion, then our confidence in the findings was heightened. The proportion of the exact match in the inter-rater agreement was used.

### ***Thick Description (Data Explication Process)***

To have a picture of each participant's description of their lived experience, the researcher initially read transcripts and written answers many times. Because it was vital to involve the participants at this stage of the explication process, the researcher sent them a copy of the transcript with a comment sheet to validate their experiences. Next, statements of importance and phrases that were considered to be related to the topic of the study and research questions were extracted from each transcript. In order to code the statements, transcripts were written in different sheets and each transcripts' page and line numbers were clarified. Each significant statement relating to the description and experience of participants was studied very carefully to determine a sense of its meaning. Meanings that were formulated were developed using preceding and following statements to ensure the contextual meaning maintenance. After having an understanding of all formulated meanings, the method of gathering all these defined meanings into categories that reflect a unique structure of clusters of themes was initiated. Each cluster of the themes was coded to incorporate all defined meanings related to that group of meanings. After that, groups of clusters of themes that reflect a specific issue were incorporated together to create a particular build of the theme. In relation to this research study, the description was used as a narrative account and contained the dimensions of the lived experience of participants. This was accomplished by joining the emergent themes, topic clusters, and defined meanings into the description to form its general structure, and guarantee that it contained the components of the experience. Finally, the researcher condensed the comprehensive description



down to a brief, thick statement that captured just those perspectives considered to be basic to the structure of the phenomenon.

### ***Member Checking (Last Phase in Colaizzi's Strategy)***

At this stage, the researcher looked for the validation of the study findings using the "member checking" technique. The member check may be a procedure most regularly utilized to optimize the validity of qualitative research findings. Research participants were asked to assess the following: whether (a) the researcher accurately delivered their experiences that were the target of study and (b) the researcher understood the meaning those experiences had for them. All identified themes were submitted to the participants for member checking to ensure that they agreed with the findings of the study. Eventually, all participants agreed that the results were completely matched to their intentions.

## **Findings of the Study**

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of EFL learners concerning an effective EFL classroom?

The researcher completed grouping the significant statements and developed meaning units and clustered these units of meaning into sub-themes and main themes. Based on the information gathered from the participants, three major themes of 1) Teacher characteristics, 2) Classroom interaction, and 3) Class performance were revealed. To show the participants' responses to interview questions, direct quotations of importance within participants' responses were used.

### **Theme One: Teacher Characteristics**

#### ***Sub-theme One: Teaching Method***

Some participants described their experience in relation to how teachers taught by telling that EFL teachers inclined to follow just the syllabus that they had been given and the teachers' responsibility was to present what was in the book and transfer the content of the book and no more. The lack of a defined secondary role for teachers caused teachers not to check the learners' learning and learners felt and experienced this during their learning. They believe teaching can be considered as an art that should be dealt with smoothly. Presenting only the contents of the books by teachers without any change in teaching way causes learners to feel that their learning is varied. The traditional way of teaching is common among EFL teachers.

Ali believes that EFL teachers play the role of the presenters and there is no obligation for teachers to check the learners' learning. He also emphasizes that

there is not a defined responsibility for the EFL teachers to feel accountable in class:

*As I said, teachers just were presenters. They were not there to check their learnings or things like that. I think it was because nobody had asked them to do that. There was no effort from teachers to overcome because nobody asked them or it seems it's not their duty or responsibility to do that.*

Other participant sees teaching as an “art” that English teachers should possess it. EFL teachers must act independently and being “creative” is of an important factor. Vahid says:

*Teaching is an art and it shouldn't be just based on some structures given to the teacher for teaching and teachers should be creative in class.*

In responses to the question “*If teachers were aware of being repetitive in class*”, Zahra mentions that:

*Yes, but they all had the same answer “we are only responsible for teaching what is in your books, you can have self-study and ask any question you have”.*

In relation to the question of “*What did your English teachers use to do most of the time in class?*”, Negin remarks that teachers utilized “traditional” ways of teaching:

*Their method was mostly traditional. They just transferred knowledge to students. There were no tapes or videos. They just taught the book.*

She also defines this transferring of knowledge as:

*I mean just teaching. .... Teaching was one-way from the teacher to the students.*

The translation is the method that EFL teachers bring to class and this confuses learners and affects their learning. Participants note the role “translating” has in their learning and their performance in class.

Ali doesn't see knowing the translation of the contents as the learning issues. He states that:

*... However, comprehension of the content in your mother tongue doesn't mean you have learned the target language. To pass the English courses I needed to learn English.*

Vahid considers translating as a barrier to learning by mentioning that:

*They just translated the passages into Farsi ..... And then we couldn't put what we learned into practice in class and then we couldn't learn.*

Rozhin when being asked that “*If the translation was of any use to her*” mentions that it affected some parts of the learning materials:

*What I remember clearly is that they gave the meaning of the new vocabulary of each lesson in our mother tongue and translated the text that you read. We did nothing extra.... I don't think so because maybe I just learned some new words.*

### ***Sub-theme Two: Teacher Behavior***

In relation to this sub-theme, participants described that the ways EFL teachers tried to face learner- related issues in the class were varied. Some participants mentioned that they were “surprised” by the way teachers reacted to their questions in class. Teacher personality was another factor that had been mentioned by the participants intervened in their learning. Learners explained that EFL teachers’ strategy to deal with learners’ questions made them feel that they were not well suited to teach English, and consequently, the results were not beneficial. According to them EFL teachers’ misbehavior towards learners affected their understanding and learning.

Negin talks about the behavior of her EFL teachers and the impact such behavior had on her:

*The second-year I had a teacher who was really beautiful and kind. I liked her very much. So her good behavior had a good impact on me. In the third year, our teacher was the same woman and the story was the same.*

She continues to talk about the other aspect of teacher that inspired her in later academic life:

*There was an English teacher who was very cute and energetic. She taught well. I got interested in her and the English language.... I decided to continue my studies in this field. I always enjoyed English classes.*

EFL teachers’ misbehavior towards learners raised tension even with those that were good learners. Ali explains this:

*Our teacher was trying to make some conversation with us to show that he knew something or he knew how to speak English. But actually, for other students, it was a disaster because they were not able to make a sentence.*

EFL teachers’ act in class affected learners’ feelings toward learning. This is apparent in the learners’ words. Zahra talks in this way:

*Whether I liked the teacher or not didn't change my mind about loving English, but I could see most of my classmates developed hating English just for the reason that the teacher didn't behave well.*

Zahra mentions that asking some types of questions seemed ridiculous for teachers:

*I hated it when I asked a question and the professor behaved in a way that showed my question was too easy and absurd. Especially, I couldn't bear it when he asked others to answer my question. That made me stop asking questions in class.*

Elham sees the “logical behavior” of the teacher in the following way:

*I mean the teacher was not behaving logically and correctly. The teacher had to pay attention to most of the students, not to one student.*

### ***Sub-theme Three: Teachers' Competence***

Based on the information gathered from participants, the qualities of being up-dated and knowledgeable English teachers are of great importance. Participants relate knowledge of their teachers to the long-term effect they have on participants. Teachers can play a role as the stress – lesseners. EFL teachers' negative act in class can have an effect on their learning.

One of the participants talks about being up-dated and knowledgeable teachers and the effect they have on learning. Ali says:

*It was really motivating to see other students that could speak in the classes and most of the teachers were educated and their knowledge was updated. They did know how to teach and were aware of updated methods and they were trying to use them in the classes.*

He sees knowledge as a factor that good teachers can have and it causes learners to get motivated:

*They [EFL teachers] were really knowledgeable and tried to motivate students to more games and learning more and new things.*

Vahid mentions that transferring the information is another issue that motivated him:

*Teachers were behaving well, teaching well, and you gradually became motivated.*

*For example, in our linguistics class, we had a teacher that was very successful in transferring the information we needed.*

Like the above-mentioned participant, one of the female participants mentions that teacher knowledge can have a long- term effect. Rozhin states:

*Some of them were really effective. I mean that their affection was life-long because they were really knowledgeable and they were so good. I can't really express how good they were.*

Nazanin talks about the role her EFL teacher played in raising the "self-confidence". She expresses this as:

*At first, I didn't pay attention to learning. I mean I didn't know what learning meant at the university. But there were some teachers that really helped me to gain my self-confidence.... When I asked my teacher to help me to understand the words and how to read, she told me that at first, you didn't need to know everything. Getting the whole point would be enough for this class.*

She also felt that the class was effective because the teacher removed and lessened the the stress she had in class:

*It was because the teacher removed factors that caused me to feel stressed by assuring me that learning is knowing why you don't know something.*

Elham sees effective language classroom is related to the teachers' knowledge. She states:

*... They were really effective. Again we had great and knowledgeable professors and I enjoyed their classes.*

Participants also describe their experience in relation to EFL teachers' negative aspects and action in class that made the class non-effective.

Vahid describes the unpleasant way of teaching of one of his teachers in university that made him think he was "incompetent" in teaching and affected the outcome by telling:

*It was as if this teacher hadn't been matched for this lesson. I never found him interesting, helpful, useful, nor did I find the teacher qualified for teaching because what we studied was the repetition of the same thing.*

Nazanin explains that she suffers from the gap in her knowledge because the teacher was not effective in teaching. She explains that:

*In one of the MA classes, the teacher didn't teach well and I was surprised at how he was qualified to teach at this level. He was exceeding showing us pictures. No clear way of teaching. No systematic one. Not a clear voice. There was no difference in the sessions of this class. We were just listeners like a lecture. Nowadays I also suffer from the gap of knowledge in this field.*

## **Theme Two: Classroom Interaction**

### ***Sub-theme One: Teacher and Learner Relationship***

According to participants, the relationship that exists between learners and EFL teachers varies in degrees based on the acts of both sides. Participants mentioned that their relationship with their EFL teachers is dependent upon teachers' actions in class. Both teachers and learners are responsible for this relation. EFL teachers' "expectation" of learners can be understood by the participants. A good relationship between learners and teachers can have positive results.

Ali mentions that the relation between his EFL teachers and his classmates varies:

*We had some relations or maybe some distant relationship with the English teacher in some conversations. But on the whole, there had been no relationship between me and the English teachers I had for three years.*

Vahid believes that it is the teacher himself that plays an important role in shaping the relation between teachers and learners and this affects learners' learning:

*I said that the only speaker was the teacher and students couldn't speak and engage in learning. Because of that, we had to be quiet and listen to the teacher. So for me, this was, at least, the reason that was conducive to a cold relationship with EFL teachers.*

Nazanin talks about the positive aspect of the teacher-learner relationship:

*Teachers tried, either directly or indirectly, to establish a friendly relationship with learners in different ways. For example, when we had a test our teacher was sure that students were ready to answer them or other times when she asked us to join in research about English...They were valuable for me because I became interested in studying and learning more.*

Elham feels satisfied with the relationship that they used to have with their EFL teacher and how this relation had positive consequences:

*My relationships with my English teachers were very good. In fact, seeing that my EFL teachers valued the learners by feeling closer to them to help motivated me. They were delightful because I learned lessons well.*

### **Sub-theme Two: Classroom Atmosphere**

The class atmosphere is another issue that participants assumed to get affected by teacher action. The teacher can make learners feel scared or humiliated in class. The relation of learners in class can be affected by the positive or negative class setting.

Vahid talks about the boring atmosphere of the class that he thinks the teachers create and consequently learning is affected by it. He states that:

*It's boring because .... in Iran, we don't have experienced English teachers or maybe because of the way that the teachers are teaching. The only speaker is the teacher and students can't speak or engage in learning. Just the teacher speaks.*

Rozhin strongly confirms that:

*The teacher didn't motivate nor did they provide an interesting classroom setting.*

Nazanin talks about the positive class setting:

*It was warm and friendly. You could easily talk with other students and the teacher.*

And in response to the question that "What happened that you thought it was warm and friendly she responded that:

*We shared our knowledge, we had competition.*

Zahra emphasizes that not having a "friendly" class setting causes negative emotional reactions' of the learners. She says:

*We are not so friendly and there are only a few classmates who accept to work in groups and help each other. Most of them see each other as rivals.*

Elham adds that because there was no question waiting to be answered by learners, classroom atmosphere was "relaxing":

*We felt relaxed because we knew that no question was waiting for us.*

## Theme Three: Class Performance

### *Sub-theme One: Autonomy*

Participants state that activities learners are assigned are a big help in making EFL class effective and emotionally affect the learners. If learners feel that they are satisfied with the class performance it means further development to them. Class effectiveness was defined in terms of helping learners to find their own ways of learning. Effective class for participants means transferring of information and self-reliance. Seeing the rationale behind the teaching is important for an effective EFL class.

Ali talks about the differences that he perceived exist comparing school and university classes. The nature of the class activities was the issue that explained by him:

*The methods used in those classes were really different. The students were trying to participate in class communication, speaking, and teaching. Some of the students were studying before the new material was presented and those students who were presenting those new contents to the other students. So it was totally different participation of students in learning.*

Vahid talks about the satisfaction that is directly related to the development in class. He states:

*It is your satisfaction with the class that decides further development.*

And he continues to talk about the non-effective features of a non-effective class:

*On the contrary in a non-effective class, you are wondering and asking questions like why am I studying this? What is it that I can use to compensate for my knowledge gap? In my opinion, my BA courses were neutral except for one or two classes.*

Zahra mentions the point that the classes were effective because it helped her to find her own strategy. She says:

*The remarkable part of the efficiency of the classes was developing our English language knowledge not only by studying what we were to but also by learning the strategies to learn, studying or researching in this field of study. In fact, we were trained to know how to find our own special strategy and mix it with new and the best methods so as to learn more.*

Rozhin talks about the differences in in-class activities that seemed different from school and made the class effective. She describes:

*We could negotiate, we could transfer our ideas, and we always wished to talk on every subject we liked ... we discussed English .....*

She also describes her Ph.D. courses as:

*Compared to MA classes, we have a big jump in the Ph.D. course. The first conspicuous issue is that we are self-dependent. We are teachers and learners at the same time. We can benefit from our interaction. The*

*class is a place for exchanging information and no matter how much it is accepted or not, we always discuss and argue.*

Nazanin sees the rationale behind an effective class for learning. She evaluates her achievements as follows:

*We didn't learn. We just memorized things like methods of teaching from the book Freeman. So why? Why should I memorize things that I won't use them...? Teachers followed similar patterns as BA teachers did. You only have to pass the class with good grades, which again is due to memorizing. Learning doesn't happen.*

Elham describes the ineffective EFL classes she had and talks about the role of the teachers in informing class quality and how this leads to change in their learning. She explains:

*We were just listeners and we tried to take notes while speaking. There was no aim in speaking and no rational thing in teaching. We were passive in class became disappointed in learning and then no motivation.*

### **Sub-theme Two: Effective Elements**

In this part, participants reflect upon their experience of an effective EFL classroom.

Some of the participants mentioned that effective class should be based on the learners' needs. In relation to this, Vahid states that:

*Due to the nature of the English language and its role in learning materials in our field, being meaningful means it is matched to the needs of the learners to show that EFL learners' needs are taken into account and based on these needs meaningful activities are exploited.*

Rozhin believes that "filling the gap" is of great importance:

*For me, an English language classroom should satisfy learners' needs. They are in class to meet needs and fill the gaps in their knowledge. So I expect this more than anything else. Everyone should benefit in this way.*

She also states that teachers should not "misuse" their power in class and "pay attention" to all learners. Furthermore, she explains that:

*Teachers should take responsibility for the learning of the learners. Never misuse the power of being a teacher .... Pay attention to all learners so it shows the dexterity of the teacher in teaching.*

Ali mentions that it is the nature of the classes that makes them effective:

*It should be project-based or discussion-based. I believe students will gain some background information, and they will study. Then they are going to participate in the classes and they are going to share their own ideas.....*

According to Nazanin, it is not the teachers' needs but the learners' needs should be taken into account. She states:



*Teaching materials should be guided towards the needs of learners, not teachers'. They are important because it is us that are influenced by these activities. And they may have long-term effects on us..... As well as previously mentioned ones such as not being confusing, it should be systematic in every step. Planned in a way that you are motivated. Enjoy every moment you are in class.*

She reflects on the “absorbing” factor of an effective class. She states:

*English classes should absorb learners and not repulse them. If this factor is taken into account, other factors of success are reachable.*

Having organized classes is another issue that was mentioned by the learners. Zahra explains an organized class as:

*Being organized in new lessons taught, or asking for the homework or exams, being fun and not letting the learners feel bored, doing various things and not working on only one skill...*

Elham believes that effective class is “memorable”:

*I believe an English class should be active, enjoyable, and useful. A class that you finish it you miss it.*

Negin explains that effective class should have an “enjoyable” setting:

*I personally prefer that an English language classroom to be enjoyable because you get eager to do more related things...*

### **Sub-theme Three: Intervening Factors**

According to the learners, the educational system we have is not appropriately matched to the goals of developing language for “communicative functions” in classes. Because EFL classes are teacher-centered in Iran, and because the needs of the learners are neglected it becomes useless in terms of education. They talked about the lack of motivation in-school experience to continue English as their major in university. Participants complained that they couldn't put into practice what they learned in school. Participants' internal motivation was at work when choosing English as their major in university.

Ali mentions that the English teaching system for classes is unproductive and the goals of communicative functions are not met. He states that:

*In Iran, everybody knows that the system we have and the books that are taught are not very suitable for communicative language teaching...If the goal is to get familiar with the structure or the meaning of the language that's ok and after some time learners forget about the meaning and grammar but if the aim is speaking or communicating, it was useless and wasn't very good at all.*

The needs of the language learners can't be satisfied by the current educational system. Vahid sees English teaching as a useless thing:

*You know I had lots of students that told me “I have been studying English for 4 years at school” but he/ she can’t say a sentence in English. It’s really bad... English teaching in classes is really a useless thing.....*

In response to the question that “*Were the English language classes of any use*”, Zahra puts it in this way:

*They were not helpful for my speaking at all. I used the grammar and words in my speaking but I didn’t learn how to use them in high school but in institute classes.*

Elham also confirms that high school English classes mean nothing when being asked that “*Was the English language class of any use to you in terms of the books and exercises?*”:

*It was not useful during high school but later I went to an institute....*

### **Producing the Fundamental Structure**

In this part the researcher attempted to state a comprehensive statement that involves those aspects considered to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon:

*Overall, Iranian EFL learners who participated in this research bring out into open some aspects of an effective EFL classroom, which are “personal experience of an effective English classroom” and the “personal beliefs” they have towards it. They consider an effective language classroom consisting of those factors that should/shouldn’t have been there or done and should be removed from the immediate situation. Consequently, based on these findings, classroom effective learning environment as a whole appears different to each individual and learning in such conditions is determined by experiences and beliefs of the EFL learners.*

RQ2: How does this experience of the effective EFL classroom inform the language-learning experience for EFL learners?

In relation to research question number two that asks for the effects of the experience on the learning of the EFL learners, participants mentioned the factors that are effective and have a belief-based nature. Teacher behavior in class, the formation of the relation between teacher and learner, teacher and learner responsibility, classroom interaction, the effectiveness of the educational system, teacher competence, and class performance. Participants of this study made various convictions, assumptions and biased thoughts of their own encounters and what they had been exposed to informal and casual teaching/learning circumstances. Considering that members have accumulated a great bargain of experience over the course of their instruction up to college, they are most likely to form certain beliefs around what constitutes successful or ineffective learning. Beliefs have much in common with concepts such as dispositions, certain hypotheses, previously established inclinations, attitudes, values, suppositions, judgments, points of view and indeed individual hypothe-

ses so in their attempt to learn a foreign language, participants try to form a sense of their own world and develop their beliefs on the premise of their own experience. In this way, all sorts of experiences are unique, within the sense that they are individual and basically subjective. In this study when participants were asked to give meaning to their experience and how this experience affects their learning, they mostly used verbs like *effective EFL classroom means, for me it is, I expect, it should be, because this... does that, or suggestive tone of words like, should do this, never do that, I believe, it needs to be*. These, as well as the above-discussed issues, contribute a clearer understanding of a process involved in the learning of language learners and this process is crucial in forming the beliefs of the learners. EFL learners have a kind of understanding of the current situation. They talk about their past experiences and factors involved in helping them to see better while looking back. When they tend to give their ideas towards what would it be like there are some quite different responses within the same system.

## Discussion

In response to research questions of Iranian EFL learners' lived experience of an effective language classroom and how this experience informs their language-learning in this study, it can be explained according to EFL learners' *personal experiences consisting of teachers' characteristics, classroom interaction, class performance, and personal beliefs that EFL learners have towards effective learning in English classroom environment, which form and give direction to their thinking*.

In the coming section emerging themes that were based on the past and present experience and reflection of the meaning of the EFL learners in relation to effective EFL classroom and how does this experience of the effective EFL classroom inform the language-learning experience of EFL learners will be discussed.

### Theme One: Teacher Characteristics

The first theme revealed in this study speaks to the ways EFL teachers' characteristics are perceived by the participants. EFL learners give their EFL teachers the role of the presenters of the books. Similar to the experiences of the participants of this study in relation to teachers being book dependent, Mathew (2012) asserts that there are a number of English teachers who primarily depend on books and leave other learning assets for the classroom. Making the use of books as the only resource of information impedes EFL learners' enhancement since it limits students learning span. So this supports the perception of the participants of this study that presenting only the content of the books by teachers without any change in teaching way or checking their learning causes learners to feel that their learning is varied. The results might suggest the problems EFL books carry with them. Teachers and learners face with

some potential difficulties caused by coursebooks. First, the lack of authenticity is one of the most crucial problems in many coursebooks. Richards (2014), for instance, argues that coursebooks are specifically written for classroom usage and do not represent the real language. However, based on the findings of this study, when participants talk about the way teachers teach from the book affects their learning in class more plausible explanation is EFL teachers' perceptions of course books. McGrath (2006) appropriately mentions that the way teachers understand the coursebooks has an influence on how they use them and consequently learners' learning will be affected. So understanding these attitudes seem very important. For this reason, the learning process is influenced by the teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards course books. Also, the results of this research contradict some other findings. For example, Khodabandeh and Mobini (2018) in their study showed that instructors and students were fascinated by the book in all criteria but social considerations. According to their study, there was no significant difference between Iranian teachers' and students' perceptions of the book. The participants of this study considered it as a tool by which teachers try to teach things without considering what is being taught or they are convenient materials relative to their needs. So, this study emphasizes that the evaluation of the English language learning books can be taken into account in terms of the learners' perspectives. It can be suggested that neither the teachers nor the books decide their learning, but rather it is learners using the books and teachers as the mediators that learners preferred.

According to participants, the perception of using translation as a method by the EFL teachers is damaging as well as somehow helpful in learning some parts. They feel "self- confident" or they learn some "new words" or it causes some "fake learning". Here participants use these terms to suggest that they have the personal judgment of their own learning. It is apparent that learners are aware of their learning using different methods. They derive their sense of self-esteem from the accumulation of experiences with the method (translation) which has either a positive or negative effect on their learning. When EFL teachers use translation in the classroom, learners use their metacognitive strategy in their learning process to think about their learning process. The information given by the participants of this study sheds light on such important an issue that translating can't always be useful for second or foreign language learners, regardless of having positive aspects.

Teachers' behavior in class causes the learners to feel their learning affected. A few participants specified that they were "surprised" by the way instructors responded to their inquiring questions in a lesson and for them being an EFL instructor implies having a variety of abilities. What can be drawn is that teachers in class have more than one role for the learners at the same time in the same place. Schulz (1996) argued that L2 students' satisfaction in the language class can adversely be affected by mismatches that exist between students' and teachers' expectations and this can possibly lead to the cessation of L2 study. The success of the learners demands the success of the teachers since when the teachers are successful in their teaching, their learners succeed in

their study. That's why, arguing in favor of a social constructivist approach to language learning, Williams and Burden (2015) considered the close relationship between beliefs and actions among both teachers and students. They claimed that teachers' beliefs can have an effect on their actions and asserted that their beliefs "will influence their actions in the classroom" (p. 48-49). It is argued that what is considered important within the social constructivist approach is to identify what teachers' beliefs are. For example, when being asked about the meaning of a word by an EFL learner, the EFL teacher responded a way that is an indicator of the belief she held "I am not a walking dictionary". All in all, this study, in relation to an EFL teacher's behavior in the classroom, suggests that learning of the language learners is affected by the experience the teacher forms in their mind. Given the experience and description of the behavior provided by the current research participants in relation to EFL teachers such as "skillful teacher", "motivating teacher", "personality of the teacher", an EFL teacher is formed in their mind as a model. This accentuates students' attitudes towards the immediate language learning context including the environment, teacher, tasks, materials. Participants showed that they are aware of this point of not being an effective language teacher which is afflicting their learning. What participants of this study mentioned according to EFL teachers' knowledge is that they perceive and experience them, for example, as "being up-dated and knowledgeable" or motivating "transferring the information". They also see EFL teachers as non-effective, not "qualified" teachers in their learning. For one reason, this contradictory perception can exist as Canagarajah (1999) mentions that it isn't vital to have full knowledge of a language in order to teach it well because most of the world's English instructors are non-English speakers.

### **Theme Two: Classroom Interaction**

The second revealed theme that was based on the learners' description of an effective EFL classroom was classroom interaction. As participants of this study emphasized the reciprocal relationship that exists between learners and EFL teachers changes in degrees based on the acts of both sides. As is parallel to what participants of this study described, developing more positive relations such as friendship is dependent on how comfortably students perceive the teacher and the environment. So they can create a better way to act within the social setting and improve their social skills (Larson, 2011). Participants of the study mainly emphasized that their relationship with their EFL teachers is conducive to positive relations and influence. This impact, or control, can altogether affect the learning environment, which, in turn, influences a student's accomplishment. The foremost capable weapon teachers have when attempting to cultivate a favorable learning climate could be a positive relationship with their understudies (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Student perception of a teacher-student relation plays an important role in the classroom environment. According to participants of this study, it is suggested the teacher-learner relation affects the learners' perception of an EFL classroom towards the positive or

negative side. When Students feel their teacher is not of any help they develop a sense of less interest in learning and are less engaged in the classroom. Therefore, the student's perception of the teacher's behavior impacts the relationship (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2012). Also, participants perceived their EFL classroom atmosphere as being "friendly", "learner afraid of teacher feeling", "boring atmosphere", and "relaxing". And such perception of classroom setting affects their ways of learning. This points to the importance of the classroom psychological aspect. To build inspiration and confidence among learners, and speed up the processes of teaching and learning, it is an important component of the classroom to help teachers and students to keep a good relationship. The classroom atmosphere can also be understood from sociocultural perspectives. The theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) is vital to a supportive classroom environment in the L2 classroom. Language learners' learning improves if being provided with support from the teacher and their peers. Scaffolding informed by ZPD is hence able to contribute to a positive learning climate, which in turn encourages language learning. Also, according to sociocultural points of view, the development of an ideal classroom atmosphere for learning does not only rest upon the teacher's effort to supply critical instruction but, moreover, requires the students to work out and take ownership of their own learning. By exercising learner choice and by asking the learners to actively participate in classroom activities a positive engaging classroom atmosphere with the teacher can be constructed.

### **Theme three: class performance**

This study's finding for effective language classrooms has gone so far as to say elicitation is a very viable strategy since one can bring information from students rather than giving it to them. It increases students' participation and bolsters learners' self-certain confidence during the lesson, too. English learner autonomy sheds light upon student-centeredness; namely, learners systematize their own learning. Such an understanding of autonomy has defined autonomy as an "educational endeavor" (Jiménez Raya & Vieira, 2015, p. 18). The information given by the participants of this study parallels Dams' saying that in "an autonomy-oriented classroom, the learners select their own strategies and exercises, feel obliged to keep a written record of their learning exercises and assess learning frequently" (as cited in Little, 2004, p.18). But what is more important here according to the findings of this study is that this autonomy is not just a mere factor for itself. It is experienced and perceived rather than being considered as a produced factor by learners. So, this confirms the requirement for learner inclusion and interest inside the FL instructing and learning and asking learners to learn to recognize and acknowledge full responsibility. Similarly, Macaro (2008) mentioned that learners have to hold responsibility for a process that empowers them to move from being helped by others to help themselves.

Relative to the second sub-theme of the third main theme in this study, past and present experiences of learning of the participants lead them towards the

state of the mind one which affects their interpretation and consequently, they see and perceive effective language classroom as a setting manipulated by the different elements which are called effective ones here. Nešić and Stojković (2017) have recently found evidence that can be obtained by diary studies proving that learning a foreign language is closely related to how learners experience the learning and this influences their attitudes and motivation for learning the language. The findings of this study relative to effective elements revealed that language learners consider effective items and issues in language learning and past experience something of having interpretive rather than reason-based nature. This makes the role of the teacher more and more critical. Corzo and Contreras (2011) have specified that specific lesson strategies make a great enhancement in learners' activities and learners' performances. Similarly, Manson (2012) claimed that a skillful teacher can link the new materials with previous information. Participants of this study emphasized the point that the educational system has a great role in their future planning and majoring either positively or negatively, along with their learning in those classes. The findings of this study suggest that the educational system effect is evident in the learning and motivating of the participants. This framework of influence has been so strong that it has penetrated into nearly all human exercises, deliberately or intuitively Blommaert (2009) also, argues that "language users have conceptions of language and language use: conceptions of 'quality', value, status, norms, functions, ownership, and so forth. These conceptions guide the communicative behavior of language users" (p. 241).

To create an important and interesting EFL classroom for both the instructor and the learners, it is crucial to have certain components. The problem with FL learners lies within the fact that they have little chance to use the target language in lifestyle hence, they have to depend completely on classroom exercises as for the larger part of them, the classroom is the only environment in which they can practice communicating within the target language. "So EFL instructors must bear it in mind that neither control nor teach but setting a fitting atmosphere for learning in their course is their most critical assignment for classroom management" (Yi, n.d. p.130).

## Implication

The most critical suggestion of this research is for teachers to become mindful of and recognize their students' beliefs about what constitutes an EFL language classroom. Attitudes and beliefs inferred from student perceptions can have a significant effect on the learner's affective state. Language teachers, researchers, and even students themselves should be aware that learning a foreign language in the classroom involves different factors and these in return can influence learners' performance in acquiring the target language. The learning process is not free of the individual, the past experiences and feelings. That is why learning which is based on experience puts emphasis on these and it is vital to include the total personality. To make language learning classrooms a successful setting for language learners to learn EFL teachers, instructors



should incorporate discussions around the nature of language learning as a normal portion of their instruction. As EFL learners' beliefs around language learning can be based on the restricted information and/or experience, the teacher's most viable course may be to go up against erroneous beliefs with new information. Any given FL learners will most assuredly have varying opinions from their instructors on a few striking issues in FL instructional method. This study brings to the surface some flawed considerations that teachers may make about language learners, namely, 1) learners believe that their instructor will choose those exercises that will most motivate language learning and are most fitting 2) learners concur with the teacher's educational choices within the classroom and will not question them, 3) learners don't have adequate capacity to understand fundamental SLA theory and how can this be put into practice. In fact, instructors may want to engage language learners in brief cursory discussions of SLA by first clarifying their method of reasoning behind certain activities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study includes only a limited number of Iranian EFL learners at the tertiary level (Ph.D.). There needs to be further research including other various perspectives, tertiary levels such as BA and MA. Using the same methodology utilized in this study can provide an opportunity for researchers to have a better understanding of the process and changes that can be occurred while learners move to the upper levels. Another further research this researcher can suggest is that because both male and female participants participated in this study, there would be a better picture of the male and female lived experiences if taken into account separately. This researcher recommends that other researchers investigate the particular branches of English language such as translation, literature, TEFL, currently being taught in universities. The differences and similarities that can be found are conducive to further understanding of the learners' state of the mind. Also, a longitudinal study of some samples could be done to see how the perception of the language learners change over time and what barriers or advantages learners encounter during their academic life. This study took the features of descriptive phenomenology into account, so the researcher intended to describe only the understanding of EFL learners. Others can take the interpretative phenomenology of this type to see "why is that what is there".

### **Conclusion**

One of the ways this study differed in relation to EFL learning in class was its use of methodology which has rarely been done in this field. Rather than trying to disarrange the environment, the researcher desired to describe what is happening naturally. So the descriptive methodology was chosen because its underlying philosophical roots matched the nature of this study. The other difference lies in the factors the researcher intended to describe. Here again, based on the



descriptive phenomenology's characteristics, learners' perspectives towards EFL learning class were taken into account not by referring to single elements, but by the whole picture they could have in their mind.

For one thing, what can be concluded from the themes surfaced by the information given by the participants of this study is that these EFL language learners are in a state of the mind that is "propositional attitudes", which is a category of mental state. In an effective EFL classroom, learners are in a state that is susceptible to change. There are some positive aspects for learners while others can lead to negative effects of language learning. They are always on the move towards forming beliefs and metacognitive knowledge. Learners give belief to their experience which consists of procedures towards learning that is a cognitive entity. EFL learners here have the realization of the facts (knowledge). Secondly, the classroom setting for them is not consensual. In other words, an effective EFL class for each learner appears differently. It means that for these participants the class features are interacting and this interaction causes to emerging of the complex system of the classroom. This researcher calls these language classrooms "positive messy". It is positive when you can benefit from every problem or challenge teachers face with and it is messy because the understanding of the cumulative issues of language teaching and learning, together with classroom management, would be a little bit confusing for teachers and practitioners.

### **Limitations and Delimitations and of the Study**

The first limitation that this researcher faced was the responses provided by the participants. The researcher can't tell that the responses of the participants exactly express their real feelings. Factors like anxiety, having the fear of offending, or avoiding giving some further explanation of their accounts are likely to interfere with the description of their experience.

Secondly, while the way the samples were chosen and the number of the participants (purposive sampling) limited its generalizability to a larger population, by assuring the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher can increase the validity nature of the research.

Thirdly, the research was conducted in a three-session long period each lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Here the researcher couldn't control the effect this time period may have had on the learners' responses. Further, such a time period wouldn't be enough for the researcher to ask and elicit much more information from participants.

The first delimitation was the choice of the problem itself. The language classroom is a complex and highly sensitive setting in which teachers, learners, materials of teaching come into contact. language classrooms' differing qualities, centralized, and situation-specific nature makes it troublesome to provide a settled definition of an effective classroom. lack of qualitative research that takes into account the ELLs' perspectives about effective English language

classrooms at the tertiary level evoked this researcher to undertake the study to explore factors contributing to an effective English language classroom from EFL learners' perspectives.

Secondly, it is the particularity of the qualitative investigation that although it creates profound, rich, and significant data gathered through triangulation of methods and steady reflexivity and acknowledgment/documentation of individual inclination and personal bias amid the exploration procedure of an investigation, it is less probable to generalize the findings to the population at large because it focuses on non-specific samples or substantial population grouping. A descriptive phenomenological methodology of the qualitative study was chosen as the technique for this study due to the gap within the academic literature addressing the research problem and in order to form an exploratory, a foundational system for broader, more centered, and possibly quantitative study in this under-addressed area in future examinations. Thirdly, all of the participants were not of the same field of studying university. Participants of this study came from three different fields of *TEFL*, *Translation*, and *Literature*. In this study because the researcher was looking for the participants that had the experience he was looking for, the researcher's task was to find and select participants possessing specific experience(s) of the phenomenon.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place in spring of 2018. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is:

- to gain insight into an effective English language classroom

The benefits of the research will be:

- To better understand the lived experience of English language learners at tertiary level
- To identify significant components that could help in development of planning for English language classroom

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

- One-on-one interviews
- Recording and transcribing gathered data

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at any time at the g-mail address or telephone number.

Our discussion will be audio recorded to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including voice) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

Insights gathered by you and other participants will be used in writing a qualitative research report, which will be read by my professor.

Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous. (in case of being asked).

By signing this consent form I certify that I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to (Print full name here) the terms of this agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix B

### Semi-structured Interview Protocol

1. Talk to me as much as possible about your English lesson times in classes when you were in the Junior and high School. (What can you tell me about your experience?)

Probes if not mentioned by the participants.

- a. Describe the English class the first time you began studying English at junior school? (if possible)
- b. Talk about the atmosphere of the classes.
- c. Explain the relationship you had with your English teachers and classmates.
- d. What did your English teachers use to do most of the time in class? *Why?*
- e. Did you use to talk with your parents about issues happening in English classroom? (*Why?*)
- f. Was the English language class of any use to you in terms of the books and exercises?

Explain more.

Points of interest that suddenly are being expressed by the participants but can't be asked immediately.

2. How did you come to choose English as your field of studying at university after finishing high school?

Probes if not mentioned by the participants.

- a. Did you have any consultation exercise?
  - b. Given the information before, what was the help you used as your experience in English language classroom in selection of the English language as your field of studying at university (BA, MA)?
3. In what ways were BA & MA English classes effective? *Why?* What impact did they have?

Points of interest that suddenly are being expressed by the participants but can't be asked immediately.

4. As a student, what do you expect of an English language classroom? *Why* do you have that belief?
5. What are the current details of your present classroom in terms of being effective? That is, what are some examples?
6. Given what you have said or mentioned, what are important characteristics for an English language classroom to have? *Why* are these important to you?

# The Impact of an Online Professional Development Course on EFL Teachers' TPACK

Naghmeh Nazari<sup>1</sup>  
Zohreh Nafissi\*<sup>2</sup>  
Masoomeh Estaji<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is a theory for teacher knowledge for effective and creative teaching which has created opportunities for research on teachers' professional development. This sequential explanatory mixed methods study sought to investigate the impact of a TPACK-focused online professional development course on EFL teachers' TPACK through employing TPACK theory and explored their views on their experiences of attending the course. Regarding the quantitative stage, 30 EFL teachers (15 novice and 15 experienced) attended the course through volunteer sampling. Prior to course initiation and after its completion, the TPACK-EFL survey was administered and re-administered as pre-test and post-tests, respectively. Concerning the qualitative phase, 12 EFL teacher participants voluntarily attended a

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate of TEFL, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran; n.nazari@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran (corresponding author); z.nafisi@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran; estaji@atu.ac.ir



semi-structured interview. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and paired sample t-test results suggested that the online course had significantly affected EFL teachers concerning their TPACK except in PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) of the novice group and CK (Content Knowledge) of both groups. Experienced teachers could benefit more from the course in terms of TPACK and PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge). Regarding the qualitative results, it was revealed that all interviewees expressed positive attitudes toward the course. Also, themes related to distinctive features of the course, challenges they encountered and aspects of TPACK they had improved emerged in their responses. The results of the study offer precious educational implications for TTC educators, education course developers, EFL teachers, administrators, supervisors, policy makers, and stakeholders.

**Keywords:** TPACK, Online Teacher Professional Development, Technology Integration, Educational Technology, Engineering Education

## Introduction

Professional development is a practical solution to improve the supply of high quality teachers (Hartono, 2016). It is crucial in keeping teachers apprised of the shifts in student achievements levels, making them cognizant of new teaching methodologies in the content areas, learning how to benefit from pedagogical use of technological tools for instruction and learning, and tailoring their pedagogy to variable school settings and a progressively heterogeneous student population (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007).

Considering the growing emphasis being placed on teacher professional development (TPD) programs for EFL teachers, TPD training practices are valuable components of any such professional development (PD) program. TPD requires a lot of planning and attempt on teachers' existing hectic schedules. Even though teachers' capacity for development needs to be increased, it is important to ensure that planning, endeavor, and limited sources are spent only on effective programs that focus on the best methods (Dede et al., 2009). The necessity for PD that fits with teachers' overburdened timetables, that benefits effective means often not accessible regionally, and creates a developmental route for offering online, continued, work-integrated assistance has provoked the evolution of online Teacher Professional Development (oTPD) programs. A large number of teachers in Iran are required to attend PD courses. However, owing to distance, time, funding, and/or personal requirements, they cannot access the courses (Boehm et al., 2012). Hence, online TPD creates opportunities for larger accessibility of teachers (Bustamante, 2019).

Recently, the application of technology for TPD has been highlighted in teacher education development (Gu et al., 2012). Teachers' competence in incorporating technology in various pedagogical methods has become indispensable in view of the accelerating growth of technology in the twenty-first century (Tanak, 2018). In addition, the significance of improving teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) for incorporating technology in

TPD programs has been accentuated in recent literature (see e.g., Elliott, 2018; Koh, 2019; Pareto & Willermark, 2019). Technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) which is expanded from Shulman's (1986) Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), is a theoretical model of teacher knowledge presented by Mishra and Koehler (2006). This model of teacher knowledge explains teachers' competence to incorporate technology in the syllabus. TPACK is the knowledge of embedding technology in teaching the content using specific pedagogical methods. The TPACK framework indicates that good teaching calls for improving a fine awareness of the complicated bonds among technology, content, and pedagogy, and applying this awareness to promote pertinent, context-dependent approaches and representations. Incorporating technology effectively in instruction requires to take into account all three bodies of knowledge together within the intricate links in the system explained by the three key bodies of knowledge (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Teaching experience can be also considered as a key contributor accounting for the development of teachers' TPACK (Jang & Chang, 2016).

Admittedly, one can collect data from novice teachers independently of experienced teachers and vice versa. However, evaluating both sets of teachers together in the same study enables one to compare them on highly particular points and discover more explicitly their differences or similarities. Likewise, Pelgrum and Law (2003) argue that teacher education in general, and initial teacher education in particular, need to go through changes to educate and prepare teachers for the challenges of the information age. Since its introduction in 2006, TPACK has become one of the leading frameworks concerning technology integration in education. According to Doering et al., (2009) TPD for online and blended education ought to consider the TPACK framework. Although some studies have been undertaken in content-specific TPACK in various fields such as mathematics and science (see e.g. Jang & Tsai, 2012; Young et al., 2019), there was a need for conducting research in the EFL context of Iran as well. Additionally, the application of technology has been found to be quite inconsistent among Iranian novice and experienced EFL teachers. Moreover, knowing how these teachers perceive TPACK was a gap in the literature. Furthermore, most TPACK research has evaluated novice and experienced teachers separately (Dong et al., 2015).

However, few attempts have been made in the context of Iran for novice and experienced EFL instructors to enhance their technological knowledge within the framework of TPACK. Therefore, there seemed to be a need for novice and experienced EFL educators to be trained for technology as part of the TPACK-focused online PD course. The results of this study could enable EFL teachers, teacher trainers, TPD program planners, syllabus designers and observers to recognize the significance of TPACK in TPD and its application in teaching. Despite an enormous amount of research on TPD (e.g. Elliott, 2017; Parsons, et al., 2019; Prestridge, 2017) and teachers' TPACK and PD (e.g. Nazari et al., 2019; Pareto & Willermark, 2019) in addition to TPACK and oTPD (e.g. Bustamante, 2019; Hafiz & Kwong, 2019), there was a paucity of research specifically linking the impact of training of Iranian novice and experienced EFL instructors

through an online professional development course on TPACK, focusing predominantly on knowledge of technology and knowledge of pedagogy as a second priority.

The theoretical framework underpinning this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was TPACK model. This study was undertaken to determine the effect of a TPACK-focused online PD course on novice and experienced EFL teachers' perceived TPACK. It also intended to explore their views on their experiences attending the course. The TPACK framework was utilized to account for how EFL teachers with different teaching experiences could learn from the course to incorporate technology, pedagogy, and content more effectively contributing to their PD and ultimately leading to student improvement. It also evaluated the experiences of EFL teachers concerning how their TPACK and PD had developed following participation in TPACK-focused online PD course. This study intended to answer the following research questions:

1. Does a TPACK-focused online PD course significantly affect novice and experienced EFL teachers concerning their perceived TPACK?
2. How does a TPACK-focused online PD course contribute to EFL teachers' PD?

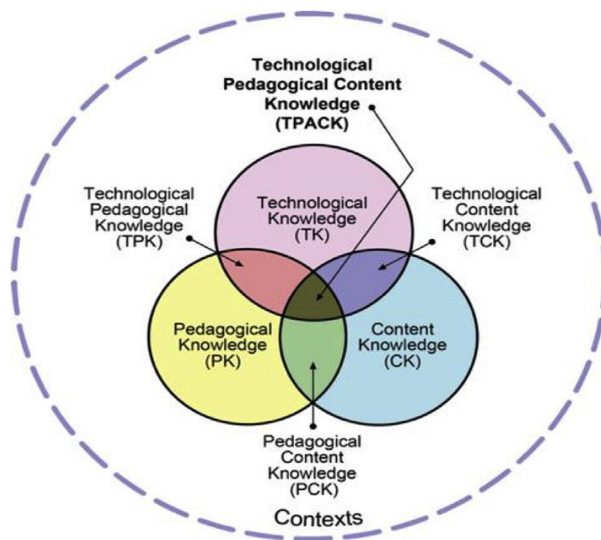
## Literature Review

Teachers are required to develop lessons for the students that will integrate the best of pedagogy, content, and technology (Matherson et al., 2014). According to Shulman (1986), it is incumbent upon competent instructors to specialize in both content and pedagogical knowledge and the convergence of both, i.e. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). Mishra and Koehler (2006) developed Shulman's (1986) model of PCK and added the construct of technology knowledge to his model for teacher knowledge. Hence, they proposed the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. TPACK is a theoretical model for teacher knowledge for effective and creative teaching which has created opportunities for research on TPD. TPACK is a theoretical framework for exhaustively delineating how teachers can implement technology to support learning (Dong et al., 2015).

The TPACK framework explains in what way instructors teach content by applying certain pedagogical methods with particular technology in specific contexts (Tseng, 2018). TPACK suggests that effectual teaching with technology ought to highlight the interplays and associations among content, pedagogy, and technology. Presumably, instructors having strong TPACK design lessons that effectively incorporate technology into the teaching of content (Chai et al., 2011). Concerning the integration of three bodies of knowledge, i.e. Technological Knowledge (TK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Content Knowledge (CK), four further areas of knowledge are identified: Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Technological Content Knowledge (TCK), Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK), and Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The definitions of the seven

knowledge constructs of the TPACK model have been explained by Mishra and Koehler in that CK refers to knowledge of content of instruction, PK refers to knowledge of teaching methodologies and techniques, TK refers to knowledge of applying technological tools and resources, TCK refers to knowledge of representing target language content with technology, TPK refers to knowledge of how to apply technology to change teaching practices, PCK refers to knowledge of implementing pertinent teaching practices to teach content, and TPACK refers to knowledge of promoting students' learning of a particular content through relevant pedagogy and technology.

The TPACK framework is illustrated in Figure 1. As explained by Mishra and Koehler (2006), all three domains of knowledge are essential in instruction in addition to the intersection of each of these knowledge domains and the heart of the diagram which is TPACK. However, they emphasize the significance of utilizing the developing technological resources. TPACK refers to the integrated knowledge that highlights teachers' actions for incorporating technology creatively (Tseng, 2018). Since the TPACK model was proposed, researchers have been evaluating TPACK in subject-specific contexts, examining TPACK development in different teacher development contexts, and analyzing the TPACK construct (e.g. Baser et al., 2015; Chai et al., 2010).



**Figure 1.** TPACK Framework (Adapted from [www.tpack.org](http://www.tpack.org))

Applying the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content in a TPACK framework is complex for EFL teachers without PD. The concurrent integration of these components into PD could contribute to an effective technology incorporation in the EFL classroom (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Bustamante, 2019). According to Malik et al., (2019) TPACK can contribute to student achievement,

assist students and parents, make classes more pleasurable and relevant for each student, and can promote TPD.

The term “professional development” is described by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) as “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement, and may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p.4). As Richards and Farrell (2005) maintain, many things involving English teachers are changing. Hence, it is a *sine qua non* for English teachers to develop professionally.

Presently, numerous initiatives are taken in oTPD assisting a great number of teachers. These programs are, by and large, accessible to instructors as desired and can offer just-in-time service. Moreover, they usually provide schools with access to specialists and archival resources that monetary and organizational restrictions would otherwise limit. Additionally, online PD programs are virtually more flexible than those that rely merely on local capacities and face-to-face communications (Dede et al., 2009). An abundance of these programs are operating to realize other possible advantages of online communities of practice among teachers. An example would be the opportunities for reflection provided by asynchronous interaction. Asynchronous online communication does not demand the simultaneous participation of teacher and students, which can be facilitated through tools including e-mails, discussion boards, blogs, wikis, or video/audio recordings. (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999; Bonk & King, 1998; Duffy et al., 1998, as cited in Hsiao, 2012).

Edmodo website is a free and protected instructional platform for educators and is accessible at ([www.edmodo.com](http://www.edmodo.com)). It is a private platform since it only permits teachers to create groups for their classes and manage accounts; only those students obtaining a group code and register in the group can access and join the group. Teachers can post files, videos and links, share content, and post alerts, assignments, quizzes, polls, and grades on the group page. Among the special features of the platform, Edmodo can function as a platform to provide personal or on-demand global PD (Hammonds et al., 2013). The rationale for selecting Edmodo by the researchers was that it is free, allows users to set up monthly calendars in advance showing assignments and upcoming events, and provides unlimited library storage and asynchronous discussion forums for participant collaboration, and is user-friendly.

Teaching EFL by a non-native English-speaking teacher who is also a language learner, leads to a paucity of exposure to authentic language learning environment which is considered a limitation. By means of technological tools and resources for effective communication (particularly for listening and speaking), TPACK is considered a significant part of EFL teachers’ PD (Liu et al., 2014). Various studies have examined TPACK in teacher education and TPD (e.g., Kwangsawad, 2016; Voogt & McKenney, 2017). As a case in point, in a study conducted on assessing Iranian EFL teachers’ TPACK from their students’ perspectives, Fathi and Yousefifard (2019) found out most EFL learners per-

ceived that EFL teachers were competent in TK, PK, CK, and PCK and less competent in TCK, TPK, and TPACK.

There have been a number of studies on online TPD (e.g. Collins & Liang, 2015; Dede et al., 2009; Powell & Bodur, 2019; Smith & Sivo, 2012) and Edmodo (Hammonds et al., 2013; Trust, 2012). As a case in point, Parsons et al. (2019) conducted a study on US teachers' perceived online PD by seeking to discover the teachers' prior experiences with online PD and their perceptions of various models for online PD through survey methods. It transpired that most respondents found online PD experiences beneficial. Likewise, respondents who were required to join online PD found it less advantageous than those who voluntarily participated. A study conducted by Hodge (2015) examined the effect of an Edmodo-based PD workshop on teachers' views of an online social network as a pedagogical platform. The findings offered relevant information on adopting a learner-centered approach to pedagogy together with an example for administrators looking for a platform supporting a professional learning community.

TPACK and online TPD have been researched from some perspectives (e.g. Benson, & Ward, 2013; Doering et al., 2009; Niess et al., 2010). For instance, in a study conducted by Bustamante (2019) on TPACK-based PD on web 2.0 for Spanish instructors, the results of the case study basically suggested favorable learning experiences in three areas - technology, pedagogy, and content - together with technology integration. According to the aforementioned studies and the literature reviewed, findings are scarce concerning the impact of an oTPD course on novice and experienced EFL teachers perceived TPACK. To fill this gap, this study aimed to investigate the impact of a TPACK-focused oTPD course on EFL teachers' TPACK in terms of years of teaching experience and their views concerning their experiences of attending the oTPD course, which was based on Farrell's (2000) bottom-up model of professional development.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Research Context**

This sequential explanatory mixed methods study was primarily conducted with 46 novice and experienced EFL teachers selected through volunteer sampling restricted to Tehran English language academies, out of whom, due to participant attrition, only 37 teachers remained. For comparative purposes, only the data of 30 EFL teachers with 15 teachers as novice and 15 teachers as experienced were analyzed. The participants comprised both male (23%) and female (77%) novice and experienced teachers. Novice teachers are those having little experience (less than two years) whereas experienced teachers have many years of teaching, i.e. at least four to five years in various studies (Gatbonton, 2008). Hence, novice teachers had less than 2 years and experienced teachers beyond 5 years of experience. Table 1 demonstrates the characteristics of participants in terms of experience, education, and gender.

**Table 1.**  
*Experience, Education, and Gender of Participants in the Online Class*

Demographic Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	23	77%
	Male	7	23%
Degree	BA	15	50%
	MA	9	30%
	PhD	1	3%
	Other Degrees	5	17%
	Novice	15	50%
Teaching Experience in EFL	Experienced	15	50%
Total		30	100%

Note: BA=Bachelor of Arts, MA=Master of Arts, PhD=Doctor of Philosophy

Participants' age ranged between 23-45. None of the participants had previously joined an online course or any course on TPACK or educational technology. Additionally, the novice teachers' teaching level ranged from elementary to intermediate whereas the experienced teaching level ranged from intermediate to advanced. Prior to research initiation, informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Following the completion of the course, 12 EFL teachers volunteered to attend the interview.

## Instruments and Materials

### *TPACK-EFL Survey*

To examine the responses to the quantitative research question, a questionnaire on participants' demographic characteristics including participants' age, educational background, years of teaching experience, gender, and their experiences concerning online classes, TPACK, or educational technology was completed by participants. Regarding the assessment of TPACK, a 39-item instrument designed specifically for the context of EFL was administered to the participants. The TPACK-EFL survey (Baser et al., 2015) is a 9-point Likert scale ranging from "nothing/none" (1) to "very little" (3) to "some" (5) to "quite a bit" (7) to "a great deal" (9). Concerning validity, the instrument was developed and validated by Baser et al.. The instrument measures seven TPACK factors. In their study, the seven factors were labeled in accordance with the TPACK framework. The final TPACK-EFL survey contained 39 items altogether: 9 TK items, 5 CK items, 6 PK items, 5 PCK items, 3 TCK items, 7 TPK items, and 4 TPACK items. The reliability indices of this instrument were computed in this study whose results are as follow:

**Table 2.**  
*Reliability Indices of TPACK-EFL Survey*

SubScale	Cronbach's Alpha
TK	.78
PK	.83
CK	.86
TPK	.93
PCK	.82
TCK	.81
TPACK	.94
Total.TPACK	.91



As expressed in Table 2, the alpha's range is between .78 and .94, which is evidence of the existence of high internal consistency reliability.

### ***Online PD Course Materials***

The PD course in this study was titled "A TPACK-focused online Professional Development course for EFL Teachers". The course was run in an online environment on the Edmodo website ([www.Edmodo.com](http://www.Edmodo.com)). The online course syllabus was developed by the researchers through reviewing the related literature. The themes of the course revolved around an introduction to TPACK, the integration of technology in English teaching, the pedagogical strategies focusing on nonverbal immediacy behaviors, and how to reflect for PD. The focus of this course was mainly on the technological aspect of TPACK and the pedagogical aspect was considered as the secondary priority as these are the two important means to teach any content in English language classrooms.

In view of the purpose of the course, content knowledge was not explicitly addressed in the syllabus as EFL teachers are believed to possess appropriate CK. The purpose of the intervention was to promote the understanding of novice and experienced EFL teachers on TPACK framework and technology integration in English classes. It focused, by and large, on technology integration and its combination with other forms of teacher knowledge. In addition, as a second priority, it concentrated on the pedagogical aspect of TPACK only through including nonverbal immediacy behaviors and reflective teaching techniques. The online course provided teachers with innovative ideas and effective techniques for integrating technologies into classroom pedagogy with an eye toward promoting TPD such as using various technological resources and tools to teach sub-skills, technological games, applying reflection techniques, using nonverbal immediacy behaviors as one strategy in their pedagogical knowledge, establishing a blog or website, networking via social media, and how to integrate technology with pedagogy for effective teaching.

The ideas of digital literacy and digital etiquette and how to teach integrated language skills through technology were presented. In addition, various online tools such as screen casts, blogs, wikis, e-portfolios, WebQuests, RSS feeds, and podcasts were also presented. Moreover, online courses such as Udemy, Coursear, Lynda, EdX, and so on were introduced. Furthermore, Massive Online Open Course (MOOCs), Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), flipped classroom model, creating online quizzes, the importance of online collaboration and social presence were also presented. Concerning the pedagogical knowledge, reflective teaching techniques and nonverbal immediacy behaviors were introduced to teachers who were supposed to provide the instructor with their teaching reflection journals in the assignment section of Edmodo after watching or reading the materials of each session and having an EFL teaching class. Therefore, the course centered on TK and PK as two important means to teach any content in EFL classrooms.



Likewise, online materials for teaching the skills and sub-skills of English through technology were also included in the syllabus. The materials of the course were either in the form of You-Tube videos, links or some readings and images to explain a topic. Prior to running the course, all the selected materials were saved in the Edmodo library with unlimited storage space. The materials were, by and large, selected from educational You-Tube videos, or some websites. The rationale for designing such a syllabus was practicality and not the mere explanation of theories so that teachers could implement what they had learned more conveniently and effectively. The integration of multimedia content would add variety to the course materials. Moreover, the teachers were supposed to collaborate with each other on the course materials via sending messages in the Edmodo classroom and share their experiences and ideas on the materials.

### ***Follow-up Interview***

Following the completion of the online course, a semi-structured interview was held with 12 volunteer teachers, aiming to explore EFL teachers' views on their experiences of attending the online PD course. The interview items were developed by the researchers through reviewing the literature and items were modified, checked, and confirmed by three TEFL professors.

### **Procedure**

To begin with, the researchers requested the supervisors of some of Tehran English language institutes to identify volunteer participants for attending the online course by clarifying the study objectives and the guidelines for attending the course. In the spring of 2019, 46 participants volunteered to attend the course out of whom the data of 30 were analyzed for comparative purposes. Prior to course initiation, a TPACK-EFL survey was administered to EFL teachers both in printed and electronic versions and the questionnaires were returned either to the institution secretary, supervisor, or the researchers. The TPACK-EFL survey was submitted to EFL teachers, either in person or by email. The participants were required to leave their phone numbers and emails at the end of the demographic section of the questionnaire for more information on the course. Following questionnaires collection, a small-scale pilot study was undertaken on the data of 30 participants to confirm the reliability of the results. Participants' responses to the questionnaire in the quantitative phase were considered as a pretest.

Afterwards, the researcher called every teacher individually and informed them about the TPACK-focused online PD course and how to sign up to the Edmodo website and provided all the necessary information about the asynchronous online class of Edmodo and emailed the syllabus to teachers. The 14-session asynchronous online course started in May 2019 and lasted for five weeks. The teachers were supposed to complete the course by the end of the

fifth week and submit 14 teaching reflections (at least 100-120 words each) after watching and/or reading the materials of each session. They were also required to collaborate with each other on Edomondo's discussion forum. Regular reminders were sent to them about submitting their teaching reflections to make sure they participated in each session. Prior to course initiation and after its completion, the TPACK-EFL survey was administered and readministered as pre- and post-tests, respectively. Finally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 12 volunteer participants on their experiences of attending the course.

## Data Analysis

Concerning the quantitative data, after feeding the data into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 24, both total scores and subscale scores of the dependent variable were compared. For all the analyses, the normality of the data was checked and accordingly, parametric and non-parametric statistics were run. Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Depending on the skewness ratios, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test and paired samples *t*-test were run. Likewise, ANCOVA (Analysis of covariate) was run to control for the effect of covariate. Since the TPACK was multiple total and multiple subscales, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was run to include all the dependent variables. Finally, repeated measures ANOVA was run to compare the subscales' achievement scores.

Regarding the qualitative phase, the interview data were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis to discover possible themes and sub-themes. To this end, primarily, all the interviews were transcribed, summarized, categorized, and reviewed by the researchers. Next, predominant themes were identified in teachers' responses. Afterwards, the emerging themes and sub-themes in the transcriptions were grouped according to their frequency of occurrence. Finally, the themes were placed into a thematic table according to the interview questions along with a report on the qualitative results comprising the themes, subthemes, and interviewees' quotes.

## Results and Discussion

### Quantitative Data

The first research question focused on answering if the TPACK-focused online PD course significantly affected novice and experienced EFL teachers concerning their perceived TPACK. The results are as follows:

#### *TPACK Change from Pretest to Posttest*

To have separate comparisons of novice and experienced teachers in terms of their TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) change from pretest to



In addition, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test and *t*-test results for novice and experienced teachers showed both groups had significantly improved in their TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) from pretest to posttest ( $p < .05$ ) except that in the novice group, no significant change had happened in PCK, and in both experience groups no significant change had happened in CK ( $p > .05$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis on TPACK was rejected. That is, TPACK-focused online PD course significantly increased novice and experienced EFL teachers' TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) except in PCK of novice group and CK of both groups.

### ***Comparison of Novice and Experienced EFL Teachers Concerning their TPACK***

Despite the above finding, the researchers wanted to figure out which group of teachers (i.e. novice and experienced) showed more improvement from pretest to posttest in terms of TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) after completing the course. To do so, it was necessary to compare the posttest TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) mean scores of novice and experienced EFL teachers; however, since it was not clear whether the two groups had equal means on the pretests, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was run to control for the effect of covariate (i.e. pretest initial differences).

Moreover, since the dependent variable was multiple total and subscales, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was run to include all the dependent variables (i.e. total TPACK and subscales' scores) in one analysis. In so doing, after computing the descriptives of the novice and experienced EFL teachers in terms of TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) (Table 3), normality of the data was checked by calculating skewness and kurtosis ratios. Since the majority of the ratios were within  $\pm 1.96$ , the data were all in all considered as meeting normality assumption.

Table 4 presents the multivariate comparison of posttests, showing when all the dependent variables are taken into consideration, no significant increase has happened from pretest to posttest concerning their TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 4.**  
*Multivariate Tests<sup>a</sup>*

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	
Experience	Pillai's Trace	.37	1.50 <sup>b</sup>	6.00	15.00	.24	.37
	Wilks' Lambda	.62	1.50 <sup>b</sup>	6.00	15.00	.24	.37
	Hotelling's Trace	.60	1.50 <sup>b</sup>	6.00	15.00	.24	.37
	Roy's Largest Root	.60	1.50 <sup>b</sup>	6.00	15.00	.24	.37

a. Design: Intercept + TK.Pretest + CK.Pretest + PK.Pretest + PCK.Pretest + TCK.Pretest + TPK.Pretest + TPACK.Pretest + Total.TPACK.Pretest + Experience

b. Exact statistic

The next step in MANCOVA is checking whether significant increase has happened from pretest to posttest in terms of TPACK total and subscales considered separately. To do so, for each dependent variable (i.e. total TPACK and subscales' means), one separate ANCOVA was run (i.e. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects as presented in Table 5). An assumption of ANCOVA is the homogeneity of variances, checked by running the Levene's test, where results revealed that this assumption was met ( $p > .05$ ) for all the dependent variables except PCK scores ( $p > .05$ ); therefore, a stricter  $p$  value was considered in the main ANCOVA results in Table 6 to avoid Type I Error in rejecting the null hypothesis.

Table 5 presents the results of posttest comparisons (i.e. main ANCOVA results) in terms of TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores). As is indicated in Table 5, only the TPACK total scores and PCK subscale score means on the posttest of novice and experienced EFL teachers are significantly different ( $p < .05$ ). As the adjusted TPACK (both total TPACK and subscales' scores) means in Table 6 indicate, the experienced EFL teachers have higher TPACK total scores and PCK subscale score means than the novice group. This result shows that experienced teachers can benefit more from the online PD course than novice teachers in terms of their TPACK total and PCK.

**Table 5.**  
*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	d f	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Experi- ence	TK.Posttest	.076	1	.076	2.208	.153	.09
	CK.Posttest	.000	1	.000	.	.	.
	PK.Posttest	.127	1	.127	2.614	.122	.11
	PCK.Posttest	.341	1	.341	8.017	.010	.28
	TCK.Posttest	3.979E-006	1	3.979E-006	.000	.996	.00
	TPK.Posttest	1.599E-006	1	1.599E-006	.000	.996	.00
	TPACK.Posttest	.031	1	.031	.381	.544	.01
	Total.TPACK.Posttest	67.738	1	67.738	8.323	.009	.29

a. R Squared = .502 (Adjusted R Squared = .278)

b. R Squared = . (Adjusted R Squared = .)

c. R Squared = .922 (Adjusted R Squared = .887)

d. R Squared = .901 (Adjusted R Squared = .857)

e. R Squared = .231 (Adjusted R Squared = -.115)

f. R Squared = .282 (Adjusted R Squared = -.041)

g. R Squared = .428 (Adjusted R Squared = .171)

h. R Squared = .857 (Adjusted R Squared = .792)

**Table 6.**  
*Adjusted TPACK (both total TPACK and Subscales' Scores) Means after Controlling Covariate*

Dependent Variable	Experience	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
TK.Posttest	N	8.12 <sup>a</sup>	.10	7.91	8.34
	E	8.41 <sup>a</sup>	.10	8.20	8.62
CK.Posttest	N	9.00 <sup>a</sup>	.00	9.00	9.00
	E	9.00 <sup>a</sup>	.00	9.00	9.00
PK.Posttest	N	8.18 <sup>a</sup>	.12	7.93	8.44
	E	8.55 <sup>a</sup>	.12	8.30	8.80
PCK.Posttest	N	8.15 <sup>a</sup>	.11	7.91	8.38
	E	8.75 <sup>a</sup>	.11	8.51	8.98
TCK.Posttest	N	8.41 <sup>a</sup>	.20	7.98	8.84
	E	8.41 <sup>a</sup>	.20	7.98	8.84
TPK.Posttest	N	8.37 <sup>a</sup>	.14	8.06	8.67
	E	8.37 <sup>a</sup>	.14	8.06	8.67
TPACK.Posttest	N	8.42 <sup>a</sup>	.15	8.10	8.75
	E	8.60 <sup>a</sup>	.15	8.28	8.93
Total.TPACK.Posttest	N	325.59 <sup>a</sup>	1.55	322.35	328.84
	E	334.06 <sup>a</sup>	1.55	330.81	337.31

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: TK.Pretest = 6.4574, CK.Pretest = 8.9933, PK.Pretest = 7.8889, PCK.Pretest = 8.2933, TCK.Pretest = 3.7333, TPK.Pretest = 3.0095, TPACK.Pretest = 1.8250, Total.TPACK.Pretest = 231.3000.  
N=Novice, E=Experienced

### ***Comparison of TPACK Subscales from Pretest to Posttest***

A further analysis which was deemed necessary at this point was which TPACK subscale(s) showed more increase from pretest to posttest under the effect of intervention. Evidently, for such comparisons, first the posttest scores were subtracted from pretest scores (for each subscale) to come up with achievement scores in terms of each TPACK subscale. Then, Repeated Measures ANOVA was run to compare the subscales' achievement scores.

### ***Comparison of TPACK Subscales Achievement Scores across the Experience Level***

To begin Repeated Measures ANOVA for each experience level, first the descriptives of TPACK achievement scores were computed for each experience level separately (Table 7). Since most of the skewness and kurtosis ratios were within  $\pm 1.96$ , the data was all in all considered meeting the normality assumption to allow Repeated Measures ANOVA as a parametric test.

**Table 7.**  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Experience		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis		
								Std.	Std.	
								Error	Error	
Novice	TK.ACH	15	.44	1.78	1.06	.45	.11	.58	-1.29	1.12
	CK.ACH	15	.00	.00	.00	.00	.	.	.	.
	PK.ACH	15	.00	2.00	.75	.62	.69	.58	-.41	1.121
	PCK.ACH	15	-.40	.60	.04	.28	.96	.58	.58	1.121
	TCK.ACH	15	2.67	5.00	4.42	.70	-1.70	.58	2.46	1.121
	TPK.ACH	15	4.00	5.71	5.15	.44	-1.41	.58	2.45	1.121
	TPACK.ACH	15	5.50	7.75	6.51	.60	-.09	.58	.21	1.121
	Valid N (listwise)	15								
Experienced	TK.ACH	15	1.78	3.72	2.55	.64	1.00	.58	-.28	1.12
	CK.ACH	15	.00	.20	.01	.05	3.87	.58	15.00	1.12
	PK.ACH	15	-.17	.67	.21	.23	.00	.58	-.08	1.12
	PCK.ACH	15	.00	.80	.28	.28	.77	.58	-.44	1.12
	TCK.ACH	15	4.00	6.00	4.93	.56	.35	.58	-.59	1.12
	TPK.ACH	15	4.43	6.43	5.57	.55	-.56	.58	-.38	1.12
	TPACK.ACH	15	6.00	7.75	6.86	.49	-.06	.58	-.70	1.12
	Valid N (listwise)	15								

Additionally, the results of the sphericity assumption test indicated this assumption was not met ( $p < .05$ ); therefore, sphericity was not assumed in Table 8 of the main Repeated Measures ANOVA results.

According to Table 8 of the Repeated Measures ANOVA results, there is significant difference among the TPACK subscales means ( $p < .05$ ) in both experience levels; therefore, to locate the difference, post hoc pairwise comparisons were run but not adjusting for the multiple comparisons since there were too many comparisons involved among 7 subscales, which would result in Type II Error.

**Table 8.**  
*Tests of Within-Subjects Effects*  
*Measure: MEASURE\_1*

Expe- pe- rien- ce	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squar e	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squar ed
Novice	Sphericity Assumed	663.50	6	110.58	428.66	.00	.96
	Scale						
	Greenhouse- Geisser	663.50	3.34	198.36	428.66	.00	.96
	Huynh-Feldt	663.50	4.52	146.75	428.66	.00	.96
Experienced	Lower-bound	663.50	1.00	663.50	428.66	.00	.96
	Sphericity Assumed	743.19	6	123.86	608.69	.00	.97
	Scale						
	Greenhouse- Geisser	743.19	2.59	286.60	608.69	.00	.97
	Huynh-Feldt	743.19	3.23	229.76	608.69	.00	.97
Lower-bound	743.19	1.00	743.19	608.69	.00	.97	

According to the Table of pairwise comparisons in the Appendix and regarding the descriptives in Table 7:

- In the novice group:
  - The subscales with the highest to the lowest achievements are as follows: TPACK (Maximum Achievement), TPK, TCK, TK, PK, PCK, CK (minimum Achievement).
  - TK and PK do not differ significantly ( $p > .05$ )
  - PCK and CK do not differ significantly ( $p > .05$ )
- In the experienced group:
  - The subscales with the highest to the lowest achievements are as follow: TPACK (Maximum Achievement), TPK, TCK, TK, PCK, PK, CK (minimum Achievement).
  - PCK and PK do not differ significantly ( $p > .05$ )

## Qualitative Data

The second question focused on exploring how the TPACK-focused online PD course contributed to EFL teachers' PD. The interview questions were focused on examining the teachers' attitudes toward the course, the distinctive features and challenges they encountered, and the aspects they have improved both in their TPACK and their PD.

All the teachers who attended the interview expressed positive attitudes toward the online PD course and were interested in the materials of the course. As one of the teachers (Teacher 3, experienced) noted:

*Well, at first it was kind of stressful to go online and watch or read the materials. I thought I cannot accomplish the course. However, thanks to all the materials of the first session which were really comprehensive that I figured out what I was going to do each and every session. You know, it was amazing to attend such a wonderful course. All the things I had been looking for were included in the course. Also since it was my first experience of attending an online course, I did learn a lot of new things concerning technology integration in my classes.*

Table 9 below expresses themes concerning the distinctive features of the course, the challenges they encountered, aspects of TPACK they had improved after attending the course and aspects of TPACK which have influenced TPD.



**Table 9.**  
*Extracted Themes from EFL Teachers' Interviews Regarding the Online Course*

Themes	EFL teachers' views
	Sub themes
<b>Distinctive features of the course</b>	Multimedia integration Study anytime anywhere Availability of course instructor Time flexibility of asynchronous environment Learning technology skills Self-paced learning Community building and peer collaboration Teacher empowerment Sustained technology support Asking for and receiving peer feedback Reflective practice
<b>Challenges teachers encountered</b>	Technical problems Lack of access to You-Tube without VPN Feedback to questions were not always prompt
<b>Aspects of TPACK improvement</b>	Improvement of novice teachers in TPACK, TPK, TCK, TK, PK and PCK. Improvement of experienced teachers in TPACK, TK, TPK, and TCK

As expressed in Table 9, among the distinctive features of the course, multimedia integration of materials was mentioned by the interviewees. As one of the teachers (teacher 2, experienced) noted:

*Actually, the integration of a wide range of multimedia content was very interesting to me. To me, they were highly engaging and every time I went online I was very curious about going to the online class and watching or reading the rest of the materials. I learned a lot of new things through those different types of multimedia content.*

Another positive characteristic of the course was considered learning from outside of the classroom and studying anytime anywhere without any restrictions. In addition, self-paced learning was another distinctive feature of the course pointed out by teacher participants. They mentioned they could watch the videos as many times as desired or read the materials at their own pace. Moreover, community building and peer collaboration were among the emerged themes. Teachers maintained they were very satisfied with the course and the element of community building helped them collaborate with their novice or experienced colleagues and learn from each other which, in turn, contributed to their PD.

Moreover, teacher empowerment also emerged as one of the themes. According to one of the interviewees (teacher 10, experienced):

*Before attending this professional development course, I never knew I could learn this much regarding technology and TPACK. Now I feel*

*more confident and I guess I have developed professionally, I have become much more independent in using technology and I can make the right decisions as to how to teach a specific content through the best technological pedagogical practices.*

Similarly, themes of sustained technology support, and asking for and receiving peer feedback were regarded as its distinctive features by the interviewees. Concerning the challenges EFL teachers encountered, four themes emerged out of which technical problems were the most frequent ones. As one of the teachers (teacher 7, novice) noted:

*Well, one of the challenges I encountered was troubleshooting internet connection problems. Sometimes it would take a video forever to be streamed. It was really frustrating. Of course it is not the course's fault, but the fact that online courses are dependent on the internet can sometimes cause problems for class members.*

Furthermore, all novice and experienced teachers mentioned that they had improved in their TPACK the most after the completion of the course. With regard to novice teachers' development in TPACK aspects, it was explored that they had improved more in their TPK, TCK, TK, PK, and PCK. Likewise, concerning experienced teachers' development in TPACK aspects, it was revealed they had improved more in their TK, TPK, and TCK. Last but not least, all of the teachers confirmed that those improved TPACK aspects had influenced their PD in that they were more satisfied with their teaching experiences and their students' motivation and learning had also increased.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the study on the TPACK change from pretest to post test, the findings demonstrated that both groups showed significant improvement in their TPACK (both TPACK and its subscales' scores) from pre-test to post-test except that there was no significant difference in PCK of the novice group and CK of both groups. The reason behind this finding is that the focus of the syllabus was, by and large, on technology and its combination with other forms of teacher knowledge. In addition, as a second priority, it focused on the pedagogical aspect of TPACK only through including nonverbal immediacy behaviors and reflective teaching techniques. The component of CK was not addressed due to the focus of the study. When EFL teachers learn about useful technology tools and pedagogical strategies for effective teaching, they can teach any content. Likewise, they are already English teachers. Therefore, they possess the content knowledge. However, in order to develop their TPACK as a way to promote their PD, EFL teachers need to acquire the knowledge of technology in addition to some less attended strategies of pedagogical knowledge.

Regarding the comparison of novice and experienced EFL teachers concerning their TPACK, it was found that experienced EFL teachers had higher TPACK

scores and PCK subscale score means compared with the novice group. This result showed that experienced teachers could benefit more from the online course compared to novice teachers regarding TPACK and PCK. This finding concerning higher PCK is in agreement with those of Cheng (2017), Jang and Chang (2016), and Jang and Tsai (2012) in that experienced teachers had higher PCK. Similarly, it is in harmony with that of Nilsson (2008) in that it was stated an experienced teacher is different from a novice since the experienced one is more capable of implementing different teaching models and techniques and is more skilled in facilitating classroom interaction. However, in a recent study by Ozudogru and Ozudogru (2019), teaching experience was not found to have a crucial effect on the teachers' TPACK.

In view of comparison of TPACK subscales achievement scores across the experience level, it transpired that in the novice group, the subscales with the highest to the lowest achievements were as follows: TPACK (maximum achievement), TPK, TCK, TK, PK, PCK, CK (minimum achievement). In addition, in the experienced group, the subscales with the highest to the lowest achievements were as follows: TPACK (maximum achievement), TPK, TCK, TK, PCK, PK, CK (minimum achievement).

With regard to the above findings, one explanation might be the purpose of the course which was focused on TPACK and technology integration in general and the pedagogical knowledge domain in terms of nonverbal immediacy and reflectivity in particular. In fact, a strong TPACK is fundamentally important in EFL teaching (Liu et al., 2014; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The aforementioned finding on the development of TPACK after an online course for teachers is in accordance with that of Doering et al. (2009), in that the teachers gained meta-cognitive awareness of TPACK for their PD.

The second research question focused on exploring teachers' views on the experience of participating in the online course which, in turn, promoted their PD. All the teachers who attended the course had positive attitudes toward the course. This is consistent with that of Le and Song (2018) in that teachers had positive ideas about TPACK in a CALL course. As technology has been incorporated in all aspects of their pedagogical practices, it is regarded as their immediate and crucial need. It also resonates with the findings of Cahyono et al., (2016) in that the professional development of EFL instructors benefited from the TPACK-based course. Additionally, it is in line with that of Ansyari (2015) in that EFL teachers had positive experiences with the teacher PD program for technology integration.

As the distinctive features of the course, multimedia integration, study anytime anywhere, availability of course instructor, time flexibility of asynchronous environment, and self-paced learning were among the most frequent ones. Additionally, the finding on community building and peer collaboration is partly in agreement with that of Yang (2009) in that EFL teachers regarded technology a practical platform for reflective communication with each other. This finding and the findings on peer collaboration is also in line with those of Liu and Kleinsasser's study (2014) on fostering online PD for EFL pre-service and

in-service teachers in that the course afforded reflective practice and collaborative interaction. Moreover, teacher empowerment through developing TPACK is in compliance with that of Doering et al. (2009). The finding on technical issues as one of the challenges is in harmony with that of Song et al. (2004). Regarding the challenges, the finding on technical issues is commensurate with that of Valtonen et al. (2020) in that technical problems and the ability to solve them was discovered among the challenges concerning TK in teachers' views.

Concerning the improved TPACK aspects, given that not all aspects were addressed equally in the class, the teachers had not improved in all aspects of TPACK equally. One explanation could be the function of context which is quite inevitable and the requirements of class level and lesson themes. This finding is commensurate with that of Doering et al. (2009) in that teachers did not apply all three knowledge domains equally depending on the context of a situation and the different levels of knowledge a teacher possesses. All things considered, it appears that the goals of this study were achieved. It intended to make contributions to the current literature by investigating the effect of an online PD course on novice and experienced EFL teachers' perceived TPACK. Furthermore, it was successful in exploring EFL teachers' views on the online course experience.

## Conclusion and Implications

With respect to EFL teachers' views on the experience of attending the TPACK-focused online PD course, it was observed that they had very positive views towards the course. In addition, multimedia integration studying anytime anywhere, availability of course instructor, time flexibility of asynchronous environment, learning technology skills, self-paced learning, community building and peer collaboration, teacher empowerment, sustained technology support, asking for and receiving peer feedback in Edmodo were mentioned as the distinctive features of the course.

Concerning the challenges they encountered, technical problems, lack of access to You-Tube without VPNs, and delayed feedback to questions were mentioned by the interviewees. In addition, novice and experienced EFL teachers improved in different aspects of TPACK, i.e. novice teachers generally developed more in TPACK (maximum achievement), TPK, TCK, TK, PK, and PCK (minimum achievement). Moreover, experienced teachers, by and large, developed more in TPACK (maximum achievement), TK, TPK, and TCK in their views. In view of the fact that novice and experienced EFL teachers had different levels of TPACK prior to attending the course and through intervention, they developed in the required aspects of TPACK for their PD, it could be concluded that TPACK is both a function of context as well as teaching experience and its levels vary across teaching experiences and contexts.

This research will serve as a base for future studies providing precious pedagogical implications for Teacher Training Course (TTC) trainers, education course developers, supervisors, EFL teachers, administrators and supervisors,

policy makers and stakeholders. Firstly, the findings could help TTC educators to recognize the significance of technology-embedded instruction in foreign language classes, teach teachers many instructional technological capabilities, and inform them about the substantial role of possessing a strong TPACK and its significance in teaching with technology creatively contributing to their PD. Equally important, it is recommended that TTC trainers create tailor-made online PD communities of practice for both groups of teachers and facilitate peer collaboration taking the variable of experience into account to gain the professional knowledge of pedagogy and content in combination with other bodies of core knowledge in TPACK.

Secondly, it is crucial that teacher education course developers to integrate technology into the syllabus for promoting teaching and learning and to design different bottom-up, needs-based TTC courses considering the needs of both groups of EFL teachers to support their PD. Next, there appears to be a need for supervisors to feed back EFL teachers of varying teaching experience on their TPACK levels. Additionally, the results of this study would assist interested EFL teachers to create lesson plans incorporating all TPACK levels for successful teaching. Moreover, administrators and supervisors ought to provide EFL teachers (novice and experienced) with tailor-made PD courses on TPACK to incorporate the three TPACK knowledge domains in the appropriate context contributing to their PD. Finally, the findings could inform policy makers and stakeholders as to the importance of teacher TPACK and how this concept can be included in evaluative measures for EFL teachers' PD.

The results of this research must be interpreted with caution and a number of limitations should be borne in mind. One of the limitations of this study lies in the generalizability scope of the study due to its small scope and volunteer sampling. The researchers also could not control the age, gender, and educational background of the participants. Additionally, since self-report data assess perception, some instructors might have made socially acceptable responses. Likewise, the lack of a control group is considered another limitation which might weaken the findings.

This research has brought forth many questions requiring further investigation. Further research will have to address the impact of contextual knowledge as the most important element of TPACK in an oTPD course. Likewise, qualitative studies could be conducted through having observation techniques and stimulated recall protocols, and focused group interviews for the analysis of TPACK application by EFL teachers. Furthermore, a qualitative study could be conducted through creating communities of practice for novice and experienced EFL teachers aimed at designing lesson plans for different contexts of teaching and allowing them to share their lesson plans to add to their levels of TPACK. Likewise, a further study applying criterion sampling and selecting an equal number of female and male teachers with specific years of teaching experience for attending an online PD course on TPACK would contribute to a clearer picture of EFL teachers' levels of TPACK development.

Further research is suggested to advance investigating various manifestations of the elements of EFL teachers' TPACK by means of collecting data from teachers' lesson plans, observational methods, stimulated verbal/written reports, reflective journals, and focus group discussions. It would also be worthwhile to evaluate university lecturers' or school teachers' responses to instruments as well. Although this study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, other forms of mixed methods or triangulation such as using observations, field notes, and focus group interviews could be applied to gain better results as to EFL teachers' levels of TPACK leading to their PD.

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## Appendix

### List of Tables

**Table 1.**  
Pairwise Comparisons  
Measure: MEASURE\_1

Ex- pe- rien ce	(I) Scale	(J) Scale	Mean Differ- ence (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence In- terval for Differ- ence <sup>b</sup>	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Novice	1	2	1.067*	.118	.000	.813	1.320
		3	.311	.162	.075	-.036	.659
		4	1.027*	.137	.000	.733	1.320
		5	-3.356*	.247	.000	-3.886	-2.825
		6	-4.086*	.153	.000	-4.414	-3.757
		7	-5.450*	.170	.000	-5.815	-5.085
		1	-1.067*	.118	.000	-1.320	-.813
	2	3	-.756*	.163	.000	-1.104	-.407
		4	-.040	.074	.595	-.198	.118
		5	-4.422*	.182	.000	-4.814	-4.031
		6	-5.152*	.115	.000	-5.400	-4.905
		7	-6.517*	.155	.000	-6.850	-6.184
		1	-.311	.162	.075	-.659	.036
		2	.756*	.163	.000	.407	1.104
	3	4	.716*	.169	.001	.353	1.078
		5	-3.667*	.290	.000	-4.289	-3.045
		6	-4.397*	.219	.000	-4.866	-3.928
		7	-5.761*	.217	.000	-6.227	-5.295
		1	-1.027*	.137	.000	-1.320	-.733
		2	.040	.074	.595	-.118	.198
		3	-.716*	.169	.001	-1.078	-.353
	4	5	-4.382*	.209	.000	-4.830	-3.934
		6	-5.112*	.145	.000	-5.423	-4.802
		7	-6.477*	.183	.000	-6.869	-6.085
		1	3.356*	.247	.000	2.825	3.886
		2	4.422*	.182	.000	4.031	4.814
		3	3.667*	.290	.000	3.045	4.289
		4	4.382*	.209	.000	3.934	4.830
	5	6	-.730*	.242	.009	-1.249	-.211
		7	-2.094*	.251	.000	-2.633	-1.555
		1	4.086*	.153	.000	3.757	4.414
		2	5.152*	.115	.000	4.905	5.400
		3	4.397*	.219	.000	3.928	4.866
		4	5.112*	.145	.000	4.802	5.423
		5	.730*	.242	.009	.211	1.249
	6	7	-1.364*	.142	.000	-1.668	-1.060
		1	5.450*	.170	.000	5.085	5.815
		2	6.517*	.155	.000	6.184	6.850
		3	5.761*	.217	.000	5.295	6.227
		4	6.477*	.183	.000	6.085	6.869
		5	2.094*	.251	.000	1.555	2.633
		6	1.364*	.142	.000	1.060	1.668

		2	2.546*	.170	.000	2.182	2.910
Experienced	1	3	2.348*	.144	.000	2.038	2.658
		4	2.279*	.187	.000	1.879	2.680
		5	-2.374*	.208	.000	-2.819	-1.929
		6	-3.012*	.292	.000	-3.638	-2.386
		7	-4.307*	.228	.000	-4.796	-3.819
	2	1	-2.546*	.170	.000	-2.910	-2.182
		3	-.198*	.064	.008	-.336	-.060
		4	-.267*	.075	.003	-.427	-.106
		5	-4.920*	.149	.000	-5.239	-4.601
		6	-5.558*	.143	.000	-5.865	-5.251
	3	7	-6.853*	.132	.000	-7.137	-6.570
		1	-2.348*	.144	.000	-2.658	-2.038
		2	.198*	.064	.008	.060	.336
		4	-.069	.086	.437	-.254	.116
		5	-4.722*	.142	.000	-5.028	-4.417
	4	6	-5.360*	.176	.000	-5.738	-4.983
		7	-6.656*	.140	.000	-6.957	-6.355
		1	-2.279*	.187	.000	-2.680	-1.879
		2	.267*	.075	.003	.106	.427
		3	.069	.086	.437	-.116	.254
	5	5	-4.653*	.135	.000	-4.943	-4.364
		6	-5.291*	.138	.000	-5.588	-4.995
		7	-6.587*	.132	.000	-6.870	-6.303
		1	2.374*	.208	.000	1.929	2.819
		2	4.920*	.149	.000	4.601	5.239
	6	3	4.722*	.142	.000	4.417	5.028
		4	4.653*	.135	.000	4.364	4.943
		6	-.638*	.210	.009	-1.089	-1.187
7		-1.933*	.184	.000	-2.327	-1.540	
1		3.012*	.292	.000	2.386	3.638	
7	2	5.558*	.143	.000	5.251	5.865	
	3	5.360*	.176	.000	4.983	5.738	
	4	5.291*	.138	.000	4.995	5.588	
	5	.638*	.210	.009	.187	1.089	
	7	-1.295*	.156	.000	-1.629	-.961	
	1	4.307*	.228	.000	3.819	4.796	
	2	6.853*	.132	.000	6.570	7.137	
	3	6.656*	.140	.000	6.355	6.957	
	4	6.587*	.132	.000	6.303	6.870	
	5	1.933*	.184	.000	1.540	2.327	
	6	1.295*	.156	.000	.961	1.629	

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

# Exploring the impact of Self-efficacy and Learning Styles on Iranian EFL Learners' Achievement Scores

Shokouh Rashvand Semiyari\*<sup>1</sup>  
Sareh Jahani<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

Although all human beings share the same bio-psychological features in the learning process, their preferences concerning the ways of giving meaning and acquiring information may vary considerably. In fact, these are the individual-specific differences which play key roles in learning process. The more we know about these differences, the better we can analyze the learning process. To determine whether those who are academically more successful, favor a particular learning style and/or have necessarily high degree of self-efficacy, among the various individual-specific differences, the learning styles and self-efficacy have been addressed in this study. A number of 110 advanced Iranian EFL learners studying English at a Language Institute in Tehran took part in this study. The homogenized sample of the study was selected with respect to their scores on the Oxford placement test (OPT). Then, the Kolb's (1984) learning styles inventory, the general self-efficacy scale designed by Schwarzer

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English Language Teaching, East Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran, (corresponding author); Sh.Rashvand@iauet.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> M.A. Graduate, Department of English Language Teaching, West Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; sarehjahani@gmail.com

and Jerusalem (1995), and the achievement test were administered to the participants. The results of the study showed that there was a significant relationship between learners' self-efficacy and their achievement test scores. There was not a significant relationship between learners' vocabulary scores and their self-efficacy though. The results of the regression analyses showed that 15% of variability in reading comprehension score and 27% of variability in grammar score were predicted by Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy. The results of ANOVA omnibus test of different groups of learning style revealed that there was no statistically significant correlation between Iranian EFL learners' learning styles and their achievement test scores. In the end, implications and suggestions for further research were proposed.

**Keywords:** Learning styles, Self-efficacy, Learners' achievement, EFL Learners, Individual differences.

## Introduction

Knowing the way learners think and learn is quite critical while designing and managing any educational system, as it may lead to desired outcomes in most of cases. Individual differences and their different ways of learning have been long debated by cognitive psychologists according to Liu and Reed (1994). To clarify the point, Chevrier et al. (2000) presented three classifications considering predispositions or priorities concerning teaching/learning settings; information processing; and personality aspects. As Kraus et al. (2001) state, learning style is a way any individual adopts to acquire information. It seems there is no determined way to learn in a particular context. Learners have their own learning styles that may change from context to context. Due to the variation of learning theories and styles, one can select flexibly different styles in various situations so as to use the most influential one. Another key personal feature playing a significant role in learning is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence about their abilities/skills adopted to control motivation, stress, etc. which are essential for a successful performance under particular circumstances (Bandura, 1997). It is a motivational part of instruction that has been presented to stimulate students' choice of tasks, goal levels, durability, and performance in different contexts (Zhao et al., 2005). Accordingly, the theory of self-efficacy is a vital component of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which recommends high interrelatedness between learners' behaviors, environment and cognitive elements. To Bandura (1986), self-regulation extremely relies on self-efficacy beliefs. Perceived self-efficacy affects the level of goal challenge that learners set for themselves, the degree of endeavor they deploy and their durability in the face of problematic areas. Recognized self-efficacy is assumed to affect learners' performance both directly and indirectly via its impacts on self-set goals (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Different sources of variations have been already elaborated in the ways learners acquire information, yet the most contributing factor might be the inappropriate educational system which puts emphasis on what rather than how in dealing with different learning matters. A great amount of literature has addressed the issue of learn-

ing a language and interaction of individual differences so far (Alptekin & Atkan, 1990; Dörnyei, 2005; Jamieson, 1992). Keefe and Ferrell (1990) believe that difficulties learners experience are related to both the subject matters they study and types/levels of cognitive process they adopt in most of cases. Poor instructional methods, for example, have been blamed for such low academic achievements. Furthermore, although all human beings share the same biopsychological features, their priorities in learning and making sense of objects, knowledge, and surrounding environment might change considerably. In fact, these are the individual-specific differences which play key roles in learning process. The more we know about these differences, the better we can analyze the learning process. Meanwhile to overcome the existing gap whether those who are academically more successful favoring a particular learning style and/or having necessarily high degree of self-efficacy, among the various individual-specific differences, the learning styles and self-efficacy have been addressed in this study. It has been done especially due to the fact that few -if none- studies have been done in this area to the researchers' knowledge in an Iranian context. This study thus sought to explore the effect of learning styles/self-efficacy on achievement test scores of learners in an Iranian context.

## **Literature Review**

### **Learning Styles**

Individual differences may present themselves in life styles and even in personality types (Zhang & Sternberg, 2005). Learning styles are the constant methods learners adopt in comprehending and transferring knowledge according to Kolb (1984). Keefe (1987) considers learning styles as cognitive/affective and psychological features that work constantly all through the learning process. Students would rather instinctively particular forms of data/procedures while learning (Vainionpää, 2006). Knowledge about learning styles might be utilized to enhance learners' awareness about their strong/weak points (Coffield et al., 2004). Many learners are unaware of their own learning styles and if they are exposed to such tests, they would probably begin learning in new ways (Merrill, 2000). Coffield (2004) noticed that for those who are uncertain about their learning styles, it might be encouraging to explore novel methods to explain and discover their ways.

### ***Learning Style Theories and Models***

In the field of learning styles, many theories and models have been developed over time by different scholars. Various learning style theories have been used in studies and their inventories have been tested for the internal consistency and reliability by Coffield et al. (2004). The most well-known researchers covered different issues such as learning styles' tools of measurement (Dunn & Griggs, 2003), tests (Honey & Mumfords, 2000), and inventories (Kolb, 1984). Thus, Fleming's (2001) Visual/ Auditory/ Kinesthetic (VAK) Theory could not sufficiently depict the whole issue. Among these, several models can be extract-

ed from the same origin and are thus able to evaluate the same aspects (Felder & Soloman, 2004; Pask, 1972). Capretz (2006) believes each learning style has its own advantages/disadvantages. Most of the written studies dealing with learning styles are allocated to define learning styles (Lovelace, 2005; Pashler et al., 2009). Some sources consider particular approaches through recognizing classification schemes and stating the connection of such for education (Collinson, 2000; Denig, 2004; Young, 2002). Other sources provide an overview of different models, trying to provide a combined view of different approaches (Felder, 1996; Felder & Brent, 2005; Hall & Moseley, 2005). Not surprisingly, the plurality of learning style models is paralleled by wealth of assessment tools by which they may be recognized (Dunn et al., 1981; Kolb, 1976). However, a review of the important models must include learning modalities, multiple intelligences, and Dunn and Dunn learning styles model.

### ***Learning Style Types***

Fleming (2008) VARK learning style model deals with the way learners receive, interpret and transfer information. It addresses four modes of learning including visual, aural/auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. Visual learners would rather collaborative learning settings, auditory learners feel at ease to work with audio/video materials (Pamela, 2011). Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing/experiencing. Reading/writing learners would rather written/spoken materials and prefer printed texts.

### ***Learning Styles and Academic Achievements***

Many studies have been done, mainly in Western and Asian countries, to find out the correlation between individuals' learning styles and their academic achievements. Kopsovich (2001) investigated the correlation between learners' learning styles and their math results. The analyses revealed that students' learning styles affected their math scores significantly. Gender and ethnicity were contributing factors as well. The study showed that there was a significant correlation between the research variables.

Rezaeinejada et al. (2015) made an attempt to investigate the correlation between high school students' learning styles and their achievement scores. To that end, 3958 students were chosen. The results displayed a meaningful correlation between students' learning styles and their mean scores. In humanities subject field, there was no correlation between students' learning styles and their mean scores though. The analysis of the data showed a substantial difference between mean scores of humanities and mathematics students.

### ***Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy as a trait-like component is manifested in three recognizable ways in relation to learners, instructors, and institutions. The perception of self-

efficacy has a main part in the improvement of learners' self-regulatory skills. In essence, self-efficacy deals with the individuals' views about their own abilities to do an activity successfully (Pajares, 2002). Self-efficacy identifies the way people think, perceive, and finally behave. Self-efficacy deals primarily with cognitive judgments of individuals' own capabilities considering mastery criteria (Bang & Clark as cited in Çubukçu, 2008). Bandura's (1996) main principle considering self-efficacy is that it refers to individuals' affective states. None of these systems are more influential than personal efficacy views (Rahimpour & Nariman-Jahan, 2010). Niemivirta and Tapola (2007) asserted that self-efficacy influences types/levels of learners' objectives to some degree. Therefore, as Schunk (1991) showed, learners' self-efficacy was extracted from their beliefs and ideas under particular settings.

### ***Types and Sources of Self-efficacy***

After the emergence of self-efficacy, great number of categories came into existence. In one of these categories, Barone (2004) presented three kinds of self-efficacy including *self-regulatory* self-efficacy that is the ability to resist pair stress and keep away from demanding tasks, *social* self-efficacy which is the ability to create and keep relationships and be assertive involved in leisure time tasks, and *academic* self-efficacy that is the ability to do course work, organize learning tasks and meet expectations. In another categorization, Bandura (1994) presented four sources of efficacy on which efficacy beliefs are based: *mastery experience* that is past performance of learners and deals with the most influential method for creating a powerful sense of efficacy. The vital and necessary premise in mastery experience is the role of success in building a view in learners' personal efficacy and failures in weakening it. Indeed, learners' successful performance enhance their self-efficacy beliefs and their unsuccessful performance reduce their self-efficacy beliefs. The second way of generating and strengthening self-beliefs of efficacy that is *vicarious experience*. It deals with individuals' desire to pursue some attitudes, ideas, or terms of actions by verbal and/or symbolic means. Self-efficacy leads individuals to attempt strongly to succeed. As a result, they increase individuals' skills and physiological states in a sense the individuals depend on their emotions to some degree.

### ***Self-efficacy and Academic Achievements***

The concept is connected to the beliefs that learners are interested to use their capabilities to do different activities. Thus, decisions about self-efficacy resulted from different experience modeled by others, from past experiences/accomplishments, encouragements, etc. In a study carried out by Bates and Khasawneh (2007), they made attempts to explore the effect of self-efficacy perception on online learning. They found self-efficacy is affected by four elements under such circumstances.



In academic settings, self-efficacy revolves around two major areas (Pajares, 1996). The first area is the connection between efficacy beliefs and college major and career selections, specifically in the areas of mathematics and sciences (Farmer et al., 1995; Lent et al., 1984; Lent & Hackett, 1987). The second area examined the relationship between students' self-efficacy, motivation, and their achievement scores.

It should be mentioned that Pajares (1997) distinguished the self-efficacy for achievement purposes from that for the learning purposes. The study carried out by Rogers (1985) indicated the advantages that adult learners can improve when they find themselves accountable for it. In a study, Goulão (2014) aimed at evaluating the correlation between students' self-efficacy and their achievements. The analysis of the collected data from 63 learners both males/females with the age range of 42 revealed that the participants' levels of self-efficacy were high and there was a meaningful correlation between learners' self-efficacy and their academic achievements. Solheim (2011) examined the effect of self-efficacy on reading comprehension scores of the students. He studied fifth grade students to realize if the students' self-efficacy can predict their reading comprehension scores. He found self-efficacy was a strong predictor of students' reading comprehension scores.

The main purpose of the current research was exploring the effect of learning styles and self-efficacy on Iranian EFL learners' achievement test scores through answering the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Does students' self-efficacy predict their achievement test scores?

**Sub.RQ1.** Does students' self-efficacy predict their vocabulary scores?

**Sub.RQ2.** Does students' self-efficacy predict their reading comprehension scores?

**Sub.RQ3.** Does students' self-efficacy predict their grammar scores?

**RQ2:** Does students' learning style predict their achievement test scores?

**Sub.RQ1.** Does students' learning style predict their vocabulary scores?

**Sub.RQ2.** Does students' learning style predict their reading comprehension scores?

**Sub.RQ3.** Does students' learning style predict their grammar scores?

## Methodology

### Participants

This study included 110 male and female advanced EFL learners. The age range of these students was between 16 ~ 22. They were studying English as a foreign language in an institute in Tehran. They were selected based on their results on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). All the participants spoke Persian as their L1 and none of them had been in English spoken countries before.

### Instruments

To meet the objectives of the research, the researchers used some instruments as follows:

***Oxford Placement Test (OPT)***

In order to form a homogenized sample, a number of 110 advance EFL learners completed an OPT (version 1). This test is often used by researchers as the language proficiency test in which participants' scores according to the test norms are ranked in 6 levels from beginners to advanced levels. The OPT consists of two parts with 60 multiple-choice/cloze test items. The first part consists of 40 questions measuring learners' grammar knowledge and the second part consists of 20 questions assessing learners' vocabulary knowledge. Participants had 60 minutes to complete this part.

***General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE)***

Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) self-efficacy inventory was utilized in the study. Internal reliability and validity for GSE have been already confirmed in various studies to-date. Responses were made based upon a four-point Likert scale and the total score was between 10 and 40. Those who obtained higher scores were assumed to have more self-efficacy.

***Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory***

Kolb's learning styles inventory (1984) indicates the participants' preference for a learning style. This inventory shows the mode in which learners learn best. These modes include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. For example, while a learner may prefer an 'active' learning style, s/he may use that style best in the form of a kinesthetic mode, i.e., learning through doing. This scale consists of 36 statements in three sections, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, 12 statements in each section. Responses were made based upon a five-point Likert scale and the total score was between 36 and 180. Any part the participants get the highest mark represents their favorite learning style.

***Achievement Test***

This test was designed to assess the approximate levels of students' attainments at the end of their terms. It consisted of structure, word expression, and comprehension check items. The grammar part included 30 multiple-choice items; the vocabulary part consisted of 10 multiple-choice items and the reading part consisted of 4 different passages along with 10 multiple-choice items. The total number was 40.

**Design of the Study, Data Collection, and Data Analysis Procedures**

The design of the study was the descriptive correlational design. The researchers of this study applied this method to explore the relationships between three

research variables; learners' self-efficacy and learning styles as independent variables and their achievement test scores as dependent variables. Before starting the experiment, the OPT was administered to all participants to ensure their homogeneity. In the beginning of the term, the Kolb's (1984) learning styles inventory was administered to the sample of the study. The participants were asked to read each statement carefully. To the left of each statement, they had to write the number that best described how each statement applied to them. They were asked to answer honestly as there were no correct or incorrect answers. It was best if they did not think about each question too long, as this could lead them to the wrong conclusions. When the participants completed all 36 statements, 12 statements in each section of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, the researchers put their scores in the spaces provided. It should be mentioned that the scores of the participants in each section and all three parts were calculated separately. Afterwards, Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) self-efficacy scale was administered to the participants. The respondents were asked to read 10 items and choose one item of the 4-point Likert scale. At the end of the semester, the achievement test was administered to the participants. They were asked to choose the correct answers among alternatives. The scores obtained from this test were used as learners' achievement scores. The researchers put the data in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Then various regression analyses were carried out to analyze, interpret, and report the findings. These analyses were performed between achievement scores as the criterion variables (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018) and self-efficacy and learning styles as the predictor ones.

## Results

### First Research Question Analysis Report

Before conducting the regression all its statistical assumptions were checked. First, the assumptions of normality were examined. As can be seen in Table 1, skewness and kurtosis measures were between -2 and +2, so according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the data met the assumption of normality. Second, as it was also displayed in Table 1, the Durbin-Watson test of autocorrelation of residuals showed their independence (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018).

**Table 1.**

*The Descriptive Statistics of Predictor and Criterion Variables in Regression Equation (N = 110)*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
GSE	110	31.35	5.94	-0.38	0.23	-0.78	0.46
Total	110	73.94	12.88	0.08	0.23	0.34	0.46

Note : GSE = General Self-Efficacy

The unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), R,  $R^2$ , and adjusted  $R^2$  were shown in Table 2. According to Table 2, Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy ( $B = 1.91$ ,  $S.E = .10$ ,  $\beta = .88$ ,  $t = 19.31$ ,  $p = .00$ ) did significantly predict their achievement scores.

**Table 2.**  
*Regression Coefficients of Regression Analysis*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.08	3.15		4.46	0.00
	GSE	1.91	0.10	0.88	19.31	0.00

*Test of Significance of Regression Equation*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	14013.57	1.00	14013.57	373.05	.00
Residual	4056.98	108.00	37.56		
Total	18070.55	109.00			

*R,  $R^2$ , adjusted  $R^2$ , and Test of Independence of Residuals of Simple Regression Analysis*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.88	0.78	0.77	6.13	1.54

As it can be seen in Table 2, R for regression was meaningfully different from zero,  $F(1, 108) = 373.05$ ,  $p = .00$ , with  $R^2$  at .78, suggesting the significance of this regression model. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of .77 indicated that 77% of variability in total scores was predicted by participants' self-efficacy. In conclusion, the answer to the first question was positive.

***First Sub-Research Question Analysis Report***

To answer the first sub-research question, another simple linear regression was carried out. It was implemented between vocabulary scores as the criterion variables and self-efficacy as the predictor one. The unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), R,  $R^2$ , and adjusted  $R^2$  were shown in Table 3. According to Table 3, participants' self-efficacy ( $B = .25$ ,  $S.E. = .12$ ,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = .18$ ,  $p = .06$ ) did not significantly predict their vocabulary scores.

**Table 3.**  
*Regression Coefficients of Regression Analysis with Vocabulary Scores as a Criterion Variables*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	14.08	3.15		4.46	0.00
GSE	0.25	0.12	0.18	0.18	0.06

*Test of Significance of Regression Equation*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	240.10	1.00	240.102	3.75	.06
Residual	6932.16	108.00	64.18		
Total	7172.28	109.00			

*R, R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, and Test of Independence of Residuals of Simple Regression Analysis*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.18	0.03	0.02	8.01	1.32

As can be seen in Table 3, R for regression was not meaningfully different from zero,  $F(1, 108) = 3.75$ ,  $p = .06$ , with  $R^2$  at .03, signifying the non-significance of this regression model. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of .02 indicated that only 2% of variability in vocabulary scores was predicted by participants' self-efficacy. In sum, the answer to the first sub-research question was negative.

**Second Sub-Research Question Analysis Report**

To answer the second sub-research question, another simple linear regression was conducted. It was run between reading comprehension scores as the criterion variables (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018) and self-efficacy as the predictor one. The unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), R,  $R^2$ , and adjusted  $R^2$  were shown in Table 4. According to Table 4, Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy ( $B = .72$ ,  $S.E. = .15$ ,  $\beta = .40$ ,  $t = 4.60$ ,  $p = .00$ ) did significantly predict their reading comprehension scores.

**Table 4.**  
*Regression Coefficients of Regression Analysis with Reading Comprehension Scores as the Criterion Variables*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.75	5.04		0.08	0.00
GSE	0.72	0.15	0.40	4.60	0.00

*Test of Significance of Regression Equation*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2034.62	1.00	2034.92	21.20	,00
Residual	10361.63	108.00	95.94		
Total	12396.55	109.00			

*R, R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, and Test of Independence of Residuals of Simple Regression Analysis*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.40	0.16	0.15	9.13	1.25

As can be seen in Table 4, R for regression was meaningfully different from zero,  $F(1, 108) = 21.20$ ,  $p = .00$ , with  $R^2$  at .16, representing the significance of this regression model. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of .15 indicated that 15% of variability in reading comprehension scores was predicted by participants' self-efficacy. Consequently, the answer to the second sub-research question was positive.

**Third Sub-Research Question Analysis Report**

To answer the third sub-research question, the last single linear regression was utilized. It was conducted between grammar scores as the criterion variables (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018) and self-efficacy as the predictor one. The unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), R,  $R^2$ , and adjusted  $R^2$  were shown in Table 5. According to Table 5, Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy ( $B = .69$ ,  $S.E. = .10$ ,  $\beta = .53$ ,  $t = 6.51$ ,  $p = .00$ ) did significantly predict their grammar scores.

**Table 5.***Regression Coefficients of Regression Analysis with Grammar Scores as the Criterion Variables*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.29	3.39		0.38	0.00
GSE	0.69	0.10	0.53	6.51	0.00

*Test of Significance of Regression Equation*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1842.61	1.00	1842.61	42.45	,00
Residual	4687.38	108.00	43.40		
Total	6530.00	109.00			

*R, R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, and Test of Independence of Residuals of Simple Regression Analysis*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.53	0.28	0.27	6.58	1.31

As can be seen in Table 5,  $R$  for regression was meaningfully different from zero,  $F(1, 108) = 42.45$ ,  $p = .00$ , with  $R^2$  at .28, demonstrating the significance of this regression model. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of .27 indicated that 27% of variability in grammar scores was predicted by participants' self-efficacy. As a result, the answer to the third sub-research question was positive.

## Second Research Question Analysis Report

To answer the second research question, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was exploited to explore any significant differences among different learning style groups on their total achievement scores. Prior to its implementation, all the statistical requirements of ANOVA including skewness and kurtosis measures (that is, all the groups' skewness and kurtosis measures were between -2 and +2) and homogeneity of variance (that is, the non-significance of Test of Homogeneity of Variances) were probed in Table 6.

**Table 6.**  
*The Descriptive Statistics of Different Groups of Learning Style (N = 110)*

Learning Strategy	N	Mean	Std. D	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Visual	41	73.46	12.44	.03	.37	-.86	.72
Auditory	41	75.54	13.02	-.05	.37	-1.59	.72
Kinesthetic	28	72.29	13.48	.33	.44	-1.56	.86

**Table 7.**  
*Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance*

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.725	2	107	.487

ANOVA omnibus test revealed that there was no statistically meaningful difference across different learning style groups on their total achievement scores,  $F(2, 107) = .57$ ,  $p = .56$  (see Table 8), signposting this fact that there was no statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' learning styles and their achievement scores, something which was lucid when looking at descriptive statistics results which was inferentially tested as well. To sum up, it can be said that there was no statistically significant association between participants' learning styles and their achievement scores and the answer to the second research question was negative.

**Table 8.**  
*ANOVA of Different Groups of Learning Style (N = 110)*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	190.45	2.00	95.23	.570	.567
Within Groups	17880.10	107.00	167.10		
Total	18070.55	109.00			

## Discussion

The outcomes of regression analysis concerning first research question and its sub- research questions showed there was a meaningful correlation between participants' self-efficacy and their achievement test scores. Indeed, 77% of variability in achievement test total scores was predicted by learners' self-efficacy. Such result was supported by the findings reported by Rogers (1985), Bates and Khasawneh (2007), Solheim (2011), and Goulão (2014). The results also showed that only 2% of variability in vocabulary scores was predicted by learners' self-efficacy. It means that there was not a significant relationship between learners' vocabulary scores and their self-efficacy. These findings were in line with those reported by the research carried out by Magogwe and Oliver (2007). The results were not consistent with those reported by Zaki and Ellis (1999), Rasekh and Ranjbary (2003), Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), and Mizumoto (2013) though. The statistical analyses also confirmed that 15% of variability in reading comprehension scores was predicted by Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy. These findings were in agreement with those reported by Sani and Zain (2001), Tercanlioglu (2003), Ghonsooly and Ellahi (2011), and Ghabdian and Ghafournia (2016). The analyses also displayed that 27% of variability in grammar scores was predicted by Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy. It means that learners' self-efficacy significantly predicted their grammar scores. The outcomes of this research are in agreement with those found by Collins and Bissell (2004). They also found a poor correlation between students' self-efficacy and their grammar scores.

To test the second research question, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was run. The results of ANOVA omnibus test of different groups of learning style showed that there was not any statistically meaningful difference across different learning style groups on their total achievement scores. It signposts that there was not any statistically meaningful correlation between participants' learning styles and their achievement test scores, something which was lucid when looking at descriptive statistics results which was inferentially tested as well. To summarize, there was no statistically significant correlation between Iranian EFL learners' learning styles and their achievement scores. The results of this study support those findings reported by Yilmaz-Soylu and Akoyunlu (2002) and Daniel et al. (2002). They found that the type of the learning styles was not significantly influential in learners' achievements in different learning environments. The results are also similar to those results reported by Emamipour and Esfandabad (2007) which showed that there was not any correlation between students' learning styles and educational achievements. However, the findings contradict to those found/reported by Abidin et al. (2011). They found a positive correlation between students' learning styles and their academic achievements. The results of this study were not in agreement with the results of the studies carried out by Izadi and Mohammadzadeh (2007), and Najafi et al., (2010) which indicated relationship between learning styles and learners' educational advancement. They revealed that in examining the relationship between learning styles by Meyers-Brigs and learners' educational advancement, there was relationship between sensational-intuitive dimension



and educational advancement. The results also were not in agreement with the findings of Dunn and Dunn (1986). Their results showed that multi-style students mostly achieved more and scored better than students with one or two learning styles.

The outcomes of this research revealed that the learning styles had no impact on participants' achievement scores. It is due to the fact that it is either impossible to consider all learning styles/priorities or implausible to demonstrate how each student learns best in a stable way. The reason behind that is learning style is only one out of numerous features contributing to students' learning in most of cases. The findings revealed that self-efficacy could predict the learners' achievement scores to some degree. These findings prove that it is necessary for teachers to combine learning styles with other individual differences and bio-psychological features such as learners' motivation, personality traits, language aptitude, etc.

## Conclusions

In educational settings, in most cases, very successful students learn in variety of ways (Dunn & Dunn, 1986). It can be concluded that, when teachers determine using the appropriate way of teaching their learners, it would help them to choose the most suitable teaching strategies/styles. The current research results did not show statistically meaningful correlation between participants' learning styles and their attainment test scores. Considering the self-efficacy dimension of the current study, the findings showed that participants' self-efficacy did well predict their achievement scores; it means that there was a strong correlation between learners' self-efficacy and their attainment scores. To achieve success in EFL setting, it is essential to pay attention to all features of the pedagogical process from learners' self-efficacy to language skills and elements. The findings of this study implicitly indicated that learners' self-efficacy had a contributing impact on participants' attainment in an Iranian context.

The outcomes of this research present pedagogical implications and recommendations for instructors to promote the qualities of materials, syllabi, etc. as these might enable students to achieve good commands of English in instructed settings. Learners need to use their knowledge, different learning styles and self-efficacy to achieve good status in language skills. As for the limitations of the study, it took a limited number of participants from one educational context into account. Further research is thus required to be carried out with a larger number of participants. The scope of the study was limited to the descriptive data obtained from the GSE (1995), Kolb's LSI (1984) and learners' achievement test scores. Further study is required to uncover the existence of various learning styles and a variety of major and minor learning styles among EFL students. Further research with more variables seems necessary in the context of Iran. Examining other variables such as motivation, socioeconomic status or students' personality types would be also suggested for further stud-

ies. Determining classroom interactions between teacher/learners and/or learners/peers is also recommended for future research as they might increase self-efficacy among learners. The effect of gender and cultural variables could be also taken into account in future.

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# Pragmalinguistic Variation in L2 Learners' E-Requests to Faculty: Looking at Degree of Imposition

Mahmood Hashemian\*<sup>1</sup>  
Maryam Farhang-Ju<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

Politeness plays an important role in initiated e-mail requests sent from students to faculty. One such feature of requests susceptible to politeness is the degree of imposition, which is one of the important variables in speech act production. Although the literature on requests is abundant, there are few studies on low- and high-imposition requests, in general, and on Iranian L2 learners' low- and high-imposition requests, in particular. Through analyzing L2 learners' requests, this study was an attempt to explore the distribution of pragmalinguistic means when writing English e-mail requests with low- and high degrees of imposition. For the purpose of this study, a corpus of 208 e-mail requests was collected for a rigorous qualitative analysis. The e-requests were classified into 4 categories: information, validation, feedback, and action. They were, then,

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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, Associate Professor, English Department, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran, (corresponding author); hashemian-m@sku.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> M.A. in TEFL, English Department, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran; farhang.mariam@gmail.com

coded and analyzed. It appeared that, though similar in many ways, the distribution of request type, openings, head act strategies, and internal and external modifiers were relatively conditioned by the degree of imposition. The findings can have valuable resources for future studies of potential interlanguage pragmatics studies, which are concerned with L2 learners' performance and pragmatic competence in L2 learning.

**Keywords:** Degree of Imposition, E-requests, Internal and External Modifiers, Pragmalinguistics, Speech Acts.

## Introduction

Pragmatic competence refers to “the ability to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any sociocultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended” (Fraser, 2010, p. 16). According to Bachman (1990), pragmatic competence consists of two illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences. Bachman defines illocutionary competence as the knowledge of the pragmatic rules to carry out appropriate communicative functions, and sociolinguistic competence as the knowledge of sociolinguistic rules of appropriateness in a given context.

Traditional pragmatic theories (e.g., Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1977) consider meaning as fixed linguistic forms (e.g., *would you, I was wondering if*), used to indicate politeness. In recent years, some second/foreign (L2) researchers' perceptions of pragmatic competence have changed (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Locher & Watts, 2005). It is now believed that meaning is context-dependent. According to this view, politeness is created by interlocutors, which is fundamentally different from traditional views (Locher & Watts, 2005). However, when communicating with others, pragmatic failure may occur if interlocutors are not able to use appropriate functions (Thomas, 1983).

Speech acts, as the main parts of pragmatic competence, are widely used in daily communication. Among different types of speech acts, requests have been the focus of L2 pragmatics research (e.g., Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Chejnová, 2014; Hashemian & Farhang-Ju, 2017; Savic, 2018). Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that three variables can influence the weight of the face-threatening act of requests: power, social distance, and degree of imposition. The degree of imposition, as an important variable, has been overlooked. The degree of imposition, as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), is the “degree to which they are considered to interfere with an agent's wants of self-determination or of approval (negative and positive face wants)” (p. 77).

Félix-Brasdefer (2012) suggests that the degree of mitigation and politeness expressed in request e-mails is often determined by the type of request. Requests for action, with the highest degree of imposition, are requests by which the interlocutors ask the addressee to perform an action for them (e.g., *Will you please send me a sample of proposal?*). The second highly imposed request type is the request for feedback (e.g., *Can you please explain this section?*). In this type of request, interlocutors “seek advice, ask general questions about home-



work, and/or final papers” (Félix-Brasdefer, 2012, p. 97). Requests for validation are the third request type with a low degree of imposition. As for requests for validation, these requests seek confirmation or verification of information already provided in the discourse (e.g., *We should give a presentation next week, right?*). Finally, the requests with the lowest degree of imposition are requests for information (e.g., *When can I meet you?*), in which the speaker seeks information that has not been already provided in the previous discourse (Félix-Brasdefer, 2012). Félix-Brasdefer argues that requests for information and validation are among requests with lower degrees of imposition because such request types are related to the faculty member’s duties. Consequently, they are less face-threatening than requests for feedback and action.

As e-mail has become the most convenient way for communication among L2 learners and faculty members in academic contexts, it is important to see if L2 learners are able to mitigate their requests politely in e-requests with varying degrees of imposition. This is especially important because most L2 learners are not sufficiently aware of the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic norms of e-mail writing (Najeeb et al., 2012). Therefore, the current study was conducted to see if Iranian L2 learners are able to modify their low- and -high imposition e-requests.

The goal of the current study was to examine the different elements (i.e., opening, head act, and internal and external modification) of low- and high-imposition e-requests (i.e., request for information, request for validation, request for feedback, and request for action) used by Iranian university-level students when writing English e-mail requests to faculty.

## Literature Review

### Request Components

Based on the cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP), requests consist of alerters, head acts, and supportive moves. A head act is considered the core of the request. CCSARP classified nine substrategies or variations in the (in)directness levels of the head act: (1) mood derivable, (2) explicit performative, (3) hedged performative, (4) locution derivable, (5) want statement, (6) suggestory formula, (7) query preparatory, (8) strong hint, and (9) mild hint.

The opening elements preceding the actual requests include alerters (i.e., address terms, greetings, and phatic communication). The other elements of requests are internal and external modifiers. Internal modifiers act as downgrades (i.e., syntactic and lexical downgraders) to make requests less forceful. The CCSARP coding manual identifies seven types of syntactic downgraders used to alleviate the illocutionary force of requests: (1) interrogative, (2) negation of a preparatory condition, (3) subjunctive, (4) conditional, (5) aspect, (6) past tense, and (7) conditional clause. Further, lexical downgraders are distinguished into the followings: (1) politeness markers, (2) consultative devices, (3) hedges, (4) understaters, (5) downtoners, (6) committers, (7) forewarning,



(8) hesitators, (9) scope-starters, and (10) agent avoiders. The supportive moves are another part of requests that modify the head act externally. The CCSARP coding manual identifies grounder, imposition, preparatory, promise, disarmer, and getting a precommitment as mitigating supportive moves (see Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

## E-Mail Requests

E-mail is one of the popular means by which university learners and faculty members communicate. High speed, availability, and low cost are among the merits of communication via e-mail. Furthermore, "e-mail constitutes a unique, hybrid type of text, and this hybridity also allows its users to display a wide range of discourse styles in e-mail when used in different contexts and for various communicative purposes" (Chen, 2001, p. 1).

However, misinterpretations may happen when communicating via e-mail among interlocutors. For example, the absence of face-to-face communication features (i.e., body language or nonverbal cues) may lead to misunderstanding or miscommunication (Chen, 2006). The lack of instruction for e-mail communication between L2 learners and faculty members could be another reason. Higher education does not provide sufficient guidelines regarding the form and style of e-mail (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006). In fact, little explicit instruction is included in university syllabuses regarding e-mail writing in Iran. Hence, it may be difficult for L2 learners who use instant messaging applications to change the content of their messages while addressing faculty members. They are not aware that the format and content of e-mails can influence their academic achievements (Jessmer & Anderson, 2001).

Another reason that could lead to misinterpretation is the asynchronous nature of this medium that leads to delayed communication. This may result in further misconstruction of messages. Also, distance and lack of face-threatening context of direct communication may lead L2 learners to overcome inhibitions and ignore politeness conventions characteristic of face-to-face interaction (Lewandowski & Harrington, 2006).

A number of pragmatic studies (e.g., Chang, 2006; Eslami & Mirzaei, 2014; Yuan, 2001) have focused on the differences between oral and written discourse in the L2, whereas the focus of other studies (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Chen, 2006; Eslami, 2013; Mohammadi, 2016) has been on how (non)native speakers mitigate their requests in L2 via e-mail. Chen (2001) examined Taiwanese and American students' e-mails to faculty. The results indicated that both the (non)native speakers used query preparatory strategies and want statements; however, they used lexical and syntactic modifications differently. In fact, the native-speaker participants used lexicosyntactic modification that resulted in their requests to become more indirect and polite.

In 2002, Bloch examined L2 students' e-requests to faculty. He analyzed 120 e-requests written by Chinese, Turkish, Korean, Indonesian, and Taiwanese

students. His findings indicated that some L2 students' request strategies were not appropriate because they had ignored the degree of power in their e-mails to the faculty members.

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) examined L2 learners' e-requests to faculty. She analyzed different parts of Greek learners' e-mails. Her findings indicated that the learners had used direct strategies in their e-requests to faculty. Absence of lexical downgraders, omission of greetings and closings, and inappropriate or unacceptable forms of address were the other findings of this study.

Zarei and Mohammadi (2012) examined the requests produced by Iranian L2 learners. They reported that the L2 learners' e-mails were typically characterized by frequent use of directness and absence of greetings and closings. Furthermore, lexical downgraders were marginal and different address terms were utilized. Mohammadi (2016) examined 100 requestive e-mails to faculty produced by Iranian and American students. She categorized the e-mails' salutations into 12 salutation strategies categories. The chi-square results showed that the salutation strategies used by the Iranian students were significantly different from the American students in that the Americans included various salutation strategies in their e-mail requests to their professors and had flexibility in their salutations.

Eslami (2013) examined the opening strategies of 300 e-requests composed by Iranian and American graduate students. Her findings illustrated that the Iranian students' e-requests contained a higher number of small talk compared to the American graduate students.

Moreover, Chejnová (2014) analyzed forms of address, opening and closing formulas, degrees of directness, and amounts of syntactic, lexical, and external modification used in the e-requests of Czech students to faculty. It was observed that the learners had used both direct and conventionally indirect strategies, a great deal of syntactic modification, and elaborate external modification. Opening and closing sequences occurred in all the e-mails. More than half of the students avoided deferential forms of address and used only greetings that could be interpreted as equalizing the power asymmetry between interlocutors.

A new area of research interest on e-mail requests that has expanded in recent years is the impact of degree of imposition. Several studies (e.g., Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006; Félix-Brasdefer, 2012) have focused on the request type and level of imposition expressed by L2 learners in student-initiated requests to faculty. Biesenbach-Lucas (2006) examined the degree of directness and politeness features of (non)native speakers' e-mails to faculty. She examined 296 e-requests written by American students and 117 e-requests written by Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Thai students. Her results indicated that the native speakers had used combinations of internal modifiers in requests with high imposition, whereas the nonnative speakers had utilized past tense, downtoners, and the polite marker *please*. Interestingly, the native speakers had not used many internal modifications. This might indicate "that in the e-mail medi-

um, a minimum amount of internal modification may be considered sufficient for realizing students' requests of faculty, as long as basic politeness features are present" (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, p. 101).

In another study, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) tried to illustrate how (non)native speakers of English formulated their low- and high-imposition requests to faculty. She analyzed 151 e-requests composed by Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Thai students and 382 e-request written by American native speakers. Regarding request for modification, the results indicated that both the (non)native speakers had modified half of their requests by adding syntactic politeness features and that the students had relied more heavily on the use of syntactic rather than lexical modification to soften the force of their e-requests. More specifically, the presence of lexical modifiers did not increase with the increased imposition level.

Félix-Brasdefer (2012) examined the American students' requests with low- and high degrees of imposition. She analyzed 240 L1 English and L2 Spanish e-mail requests composed by American students. The results indicated strong preference for direct questions when writing a request to a faculty member. Also, the analysis of the data showed that the distribution of the e-requests was conditioned by the level of the imposition of the request. Lexical and syntactic modifiers were more frequent in the L1 English group. Although lexical and syntactic modifiers were found across the level of imposition continuum with different degrees of frequency, they were mainly used in situations with a relatively high level of imposition, namely request for feedback and request for action; in these situations, higher levels of politeness and formality are often required.

Finally, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2018) investigated the relationship between degrees of imposition with forms of address and degree of directness. She analyzed 200 authentic high- and low-imposition requests written by Greek Cypriot students in English. The results indicated the learners mostly preferred formal forms of address and high requestive directness.

As the above review suggests, few systemic attempts have been made to identify if degree of imposition has any effect on L2 learners' pragmatic production of requests. Besides, most previous studies have ignored the key role gender plays in pragmatics research, as the e-requests analyzed in previous research were written by fe(male) L2 learners. Hence, in the current study, such a variable was controlled. Furthermore, external modifications of a request that make it to be perceived as polite in low- and high-imposition e-requests has not been investigated in previous research. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study was an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of the different types of e-requests to faculty?
2. What forms of openings (i.e., address terms, greeting, and phatic communication) do Iranian university students employ in their e-mails to faculty in low- and high-imposition e-requests?

3. What are the request strategies modifications employed in low- and high-imposition e-requests by Iranian university students?
4. What are the internal and external modifications employed in low- and high-imposition e-requests by Iranian university students?

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 32 Iranian female students at one state-run university majoring in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Iran and were taking M.A. courses in TEFL or writing their M.A. theses. They were chosen based on convenience sampling. Their ages ranged from 23 to 35. The students were originally from the central, southern, and southwestern provinces of the country, and their L1 was Persian. They were all born and educated in the Persian society and culture. In pragmatics studies, ethnicity is “important in order to avoid influences from other cultures and languages” (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, p. 88). None of the participants had previously lived in or visited English-speaking countries. Following ethical issues, the senders of those e-mails completed an online consent form that explained that their e-mails would be used for research purposes, and their personal information would be kept confidential. Demographic information about the participants (i.e., age and L1) was collected employing an online questionnaire.

The participants had passed many courses in General English (e.g., Advanced Reading, Advanced Writing, and English Literature) during their B.A. and M.A. studies. Furthermore, they had to pass the M.A. National Entrance Exam to be admitted to high-ranking universities. On average, they had studied English between 14-16 years, mainly through formal education in Iran and were at the same level proficiency. Based on their academic performance (i.e., speaking, writing, reading, and listening) during their M.A. program and their scores on the General English section of the M.A. National Entrance Exam, the English language proficiency of the participants ranged B2-C2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

### Instruments and Procedure

Following several L2 researchers (Félix-Brasdefer, 2012; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2013; Merrison et al., 2012), natural data were used for this study. A corpus of e-mail requests written by 32 M.A. students at one state-run university in Iran was used. As highlighted by Merrison et al. (2012), natural data are more likely to mirror the differences among L2 learners. Collecting natural data and accounting for all the elements found in a given message is considered prominent, as they show what L2 students would have done in real-life situations. Hence, natural data may provide a more valid and comprehensive picture of nonnative speakers’ pragmatic competence (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2013).

The e-mail corpus consisted of 208 authentic request e-mails written in English to a faculty member over a period of 12 months (2014-2015). It is worth mentioning that only e-requests were the focus of the current study and e-mails with other purposes (e.g., apologies and appreciation) were excluded. The recipient of e-mails was a male member of full-time teaching faculty at a state-run university in Iran. He was a nonnative speaker of English and in his forties at the time of data collection. He was teaching B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. courses in English methodology, discourse analysis, and academic writing, as well as supervising M. A. theses. His relationship with the L2 students was formal, and the L2 students were in contact with him during class and office hours and e-mailed him when they needed assistance.

It should be noted that the confidential e-mails were removed from the study. The topics of participants' e-requests to their instructor were: (1) ask the instructor, (2) to explain an ambiguous part, (3) extend the deadline of an assignment, (4) send a paper or sample of proposal/thesis, (5) grade their exams again, and (6) make an appointment for a consultation.

Following Félix-Brasdefer (2012), the request e-mails were classified into four categories: (1) request for information, (2) request for validation, (3) request for feedback, and (4) request for action. Out of the 208 request e-mails, 51 (24.5%) were classified as requests for information, 30 (14.5%) as requests for validation, 42 (20.3%) as requests for feedback, 85 (40.7%) as requests for action. The followings are examples of the L2 learners' requests:

- Extract # 1 (requests for action)
  - F1: *I will buy the books that you introduced. but could you please send their e-books to me??*
- Extract # 2 (requests for feedback)
  - F2: *Would u plz be kind enough and tell me if i'm doing it correctly?*
- Extract # 3 (requests for information)
  - F3: *I would appreciate it if you let me know when I can meet you.*
- Extract # 4 (requests for validation)
  - F4: *I should send my writing assignments by next week. I wonder if that is the deadline.*

In the present study, based on the CCSARP manual (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), the aforementioned parts of requests (i.e., alerters, head act, internal and external modifiers) were examined. Below is an example of the participants' e-mails:

- Extract # 5 (requests for action)
  - F4: ***Dear Dr. X, [address term]***  
***I hope you are doing well [phatic communion]. May I ask for a favor? [external modification, perpetrator]. I am writing to you regarding your recently published paper entitled X. Unfortunately, I failed to download it. I am truly eager to read the paper [external modification, grounder]. Would it be possible for you to***

**mail me a copy** [*head act, conventional indirect*]? **I appreciate your consideration** [*preclosing thanks*].

**Best Regards**, [*closing*]

*Student's Name*

The data were coded by two experts in the field of pragmatics. In cases where they disagreed in the analysis, the coders discussed the coding and arrived at an agreement. Overall, the intercoder reliability was found to be 93%. Once the data were coded, the frequency of each pragmalinguistic means of each subcategory (i.e., openings, closings, etc.) was counted.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of the e-mails included the following: (a) frequency of openings (i.e., address terms, greetings, and phatic communication), (b) degree of the directness of head acts, (c) and external and internal modifications. The following sections provide the detailed analyses of each.

### First Research Question

This study aimed to investigate the L2 learners' requests to faculty with high and low degrees of imposition. In order to answer the first research question, the frequency of e-mail type was calculated. As shown in Table 1, the most frequently e-mail type occurring in the data was request for action (40.7%):

**Table 1.**  
*Frequency of Different Types of Requests in the Corpus*

Request	Requests for Information	Requests for Validation	Requests for Feedback	Requests for Action
Frequency	51 (24.5%)	30 (14.5%)	42 (20.3%)	85 (40.7%)

The results of the frequency of the request types in the present study were similar to previous research (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018). For example, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2018) examined e-mail requests sent from L2 students to one faculty member and found that the majority of the requests were requests for action. In the current study, the students specifically had initiated requests for action significantly. Such results might be explained by learners' perceptions of lecturers' duty. The Iranian learners might have believed the lecturer would respond favorably to the requests because they might instinctively consider lecturers as individuals who have to fulfill their social duties. Hence, they constantly mitigated requests for action.

However, the results do not support previous research that found a preference for requests for information (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2012). These differences might be due to the differences of the recipient of the e-requests. In the study by Félix-Brasdefer (2012), the e-mails were sent to both (fe)male faculty members, with different ages, whereas the recipient of the e-mails was a male faculty member in this study. So, gender and age might have led to the different results. One reason for the lower percentage of requests for feedback in comparison with Félix-Brasdefer's (2012) study is that asking for feedback implies exposing themselves as inferior, and this exposure threatens their self-esteem (Karabenick & Gonida, 2018; Sánchez Rosas & Pérez, 2015). Therefore, L2 learners might avoid seeking feedback, as it is a sign of weakness in their view.

### Second Research Question

In order to answer the second research question, the data were coded and analyzed qualitatively. Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the occurrence of the different address terms. The results indicated the dominance of formal address terms. Overall, 10 types of address terms occurred in the corpus. The majority of the e-mail requests began with an address term (90.38%). A few number (9.62%) of the e-mails did not contain any address terms at all. The most frequently used address term was *Dear Dr. X* (32.21%) with low- and high degrees of imposition. The second frequently employed address term was *Dear Professor X* (18.26%):

**Table 2.**  
*Frequency of Address Terms in the Corpus*

Address Terms	Request for Information	Request for Action	Request for Feedback	Request for Validation	Total
<i>Doctor</i>	0 (0%)	1 (1.17%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	4 (1.92%)
<i>Dear Dr. X</i>	8 (15.69%)	28 (32.94%)	22 (52.39%)	9 (30%)	67 (32.21%)
<i>Dear Professor X</i>	20 (39.22%)	12 (14.12%)	0 (0%)	6 (20%)	38 (18.26%)
<i>Dear Dr.</i>	0 (0%)	1 (1.17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.47%)
<i>Dear Professor</i>	10 (19.60%)	9 (10.6%)	8 (19.04%)	3 (10%)	30 (14.42%)
<i>Dear Sir</i>	1 (1.96%)	8 (9.42%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (4.39%)
<i>Dear Instructor</i>	0 (0%)	1 (1.17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.47%)
<i>Professor</i>	0 (0%)	1 (1.17%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	4 (1.92%)
<i>My Dear Ostad</i>	0 (0%)	2 (2.35%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (.96%)
<i>Dr. X</i>	7 (13.73%)	12 (14.12%)	10 (23.81%)	3 (10%)	32 (15.37%)
Zero Address Term	5 (9.8%)	10 (11.77%)	2 (4.76%)	3 (10%)	20 (9.62%)
Total	51 (100%)	85 (100%)	42 (100%)	30 (100%)	208 (100%)

Table 3 summarizes the results of the analyses of the greetings (e.g., *Hi* and *Hello*) and phatic communion (e.g., *How are you?* and *Hope you are doing fine.*). The analysis indicated that half of the e-mails included greetings; however, phatic communion (31.73%) did not appear significantly in the corpus. As illustrated in Table 3, greetings and phatic communication occurred most frequently in requests for validation:

**Table 3.**  
*Frequency of Greetings and Phatic Communion in the Corpus*

	Request for Information	Request for Action	Request for Feedback	Request for Validation	Total
Greetings	17 (33.3%)	51 (60%)	24 (57.14%)	21 (70%)	117 (56.25%)
Zero Greetings	34 (66.7%)	34 (40%)	18 (42.86%)	9 (30%)	91 (43.75%)
Phatic Communion	16 (31.38%)	25 (29.42%)	10 (23.81%)	15 (50%)	66 (31.73%)
Zero Phatic Communion	35 (68.62%)	60 (70.58%)	32 (76.19%)	15 (50%)	142 (68.27%)

The results, in line with (Mohammadi, 2016), indicated that the learners tended to use formal address terms in the e-requests with high and low degrees of imposition. Interestingly, *Dear Dr. X* occurred more frequently with the e-requests with request for action request for and feedback. Furthermore, some of the e-requests contained inappropriate forms of address (e.g., *Professor* and *Dr. + X*). According to Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011), such address terms are considered as a grammatically unacceptable construction in English. However, the frequency of the occurrence of such address terms was similar in the requests with low- and high degrees of imposition, and such address terms occurred more frequently in the requests high degrees of imposition.

As mentioned above, 9.62% of the e-requests did not contain any address term. However, the learners started their e-mails via greetings. This might have given them the idea that they should not use any address term:

- Extract # 6 (requests for information)
  - F5: *Hello. According to your email, I called you, but you did not answer my call. As we were talked before about my thesis, now would u plz kindly tell what to do?*  
*Regards*
- Extract # 7 (requests for feedback)
  - F1: *Hi*  
*I hope all is well with you.*  
*Thanks for checking my article, i revised it base on your comments. Could you please check it? i'm grateful to you*



The results of this study are in line with Eslami (2013) in that the opening of the e-mails included greetings and phatic communication. However, in contrast with Eslami (2013), self-introduction did not appear in the data, probably because the learners and the faculty member were familiar with each other in this study. The findings, further, indicated that phatic communication did not significantly occur in the data.

In the data, 142 (68.27%) of the e-requests did not include any phatic communication. These findings lend support to Mohammadi's (2016) study that greetings and phatic communication did not occur significantly in the corpus. Greetings and phatic communion are considered among positive politeness strategies that "presupposes/asserts common ground" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 117). Hence, greetings and phatic communion may alleviate the illocutionary force of a request. Based on this, it seems that most of the participants had ignored the importance of greetings and phatic communion. This low tendency towards using greetings and phatic communication may be rooted in the fact the learners had not been aware of the function of small talk. They might have considered it as an informal form to include in their e-requests.

### Third Research Question

In order to answer the third research question, the request head acts were analyzed and coded. Overall, four types of head act occurred in the corpus: query preparatory, want statement, need statement, and mood derivable. The negative polite strategies (i.e., conventionally indirect strategies, 78.85%) predominated in the e-request corpus, whereas the distribution of direct strategies (21.15%) was marginal. Interestingly, the participants had used query preparatory to mitigate their requests, irrespective of the degree of imposition. In fact, the requests realized by means of a query preparatory strategy occurred frequently with the low- and high-imposition requests (see Table 4). In all the four requests with different levels of imposition, that is, request for information (92.1%), request for validation (60%), request for feedback (71.42%), and request for action (81.18%), query preparatory was the mostly employed head act strategy. However, query preparatory frequently occurred for request for information and request for action, respectively.

Want statement (4.8%), imperatives (15.87%), and need statement (1.48%) did not frequently occur in the corpus. Want statement (14.29%) was the second most frequent strategy type for request for feedback. This strategy type occurred marginally in request for action (4.7%). Imperatives were the other strategy used in the participants' e-mail request. Imperatives (40%) occurred more frequently in request for validation. In fact, direct strategies were the second most frequent strategies (40%) used with requests for validation and request for feedback (30.95%):

**Table 4.**  
Degree of Directness of Requests in the Corpus

Strategies		Request for Information	Request for Action	Request for Feed-back	Request for Validation	Total
Direct	Mood Derivable	4 (7.84%)	11 (12.94%)	6 (14.29%)	12 (40%)	33 (15.87%)
	Want Statement	0 (0%)	4 (4.7%)	6 (14.29%)	0 (0%)	10 (4.80%)
	Need Statement	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.37%)	0 (0%)	1 (.48%)
Conventionally Indirect	Query Preparatory	47 (92.16%)	69 (81.18%)	29 (69.05%)	18 (60%)	164 (78.85%)

The examples below are instances of the e-mail requests by the students to the faculty member:

- Extract # 8 (imperatives)
  - F6: *Please find my proposal in the attachment and take a look at it.*
- Extract # 9 (want statement)
  - F8: *I wanted to know you accept this topic or not?*
- Extract # 10 (need statement)
  - F6: *I just need your comments.*
- Extract # 11 (query preparatory)
  - F9: *Would you please let me know if you receive this e-mail?*

Four different types of head acts were found in the corpus (i.e., imperatives, wants, needs, and query); however, conventionally indirect requests (i.e., query preparatory) dominated in the corpus. This finding is in line with previous research (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006; Chen, 2001, 2006) whose results were indicative of preponderance of conventionally indirect strategies. This finding shows that when L2 learners write e-requests to a faculty member, they rely on previously learned knowledge of appropriate speech acts to sound pragmatically appropriate in L2 use situations (see Extract # 12):

- Extract # 10 (requests for action)
  - F6: *Dear Dr. X*  
***Would you please send me one or more thesis from your previous students? I read the sample you sent me, but I like to become familiar with others' language, too.***  
*thank you, in advance, for your help.*  
*sincerely,*  
*Student's name*

In the majority of the L2 requests in this study, the learners relied on query preparatory, when initiating request for action and request for feedback. As for request for information, the participants frequently replied on the strategy of conventional indirectness (92.16%). The query preparatory strategy occurred frequently with the requests for action (81.18%). This finding reflects an appropriate level of e-politeness and formality expressed in the e-mail request head act. The findings add support to Brown and Levinson's claim (1987), sug-

gesting in e-requests with high degrees of imposition, the greater the degree of indirectness is employed by L2 learners.

One probable reason for the level of e-politeness and formality in the e-mail request head act is that the L2 learners had belonged to the academic discourse community for a relatively long period. As each discourse community shares detailed knowledge and appreciation of the trends in that community (Abdi et al., 2010), it can be claimed that the L2 learners had been relatively familiar with appropriate language functions to mitigate their e-quests appropriately.

The findings of the current study, unlike those of Zarei and Mohammadi's (2012), indicated direct request strategies occurred less frequently with requests for information. Such differences could be due to differences in the methodology employed. For example, natural data were used in the current study, whereas the participants in Zarei and Mohammadi's (2012) study were asked to write a sample e-mail in each situation.

Besides, it is important to note the finding that direct requests occurred more in the requests (i.e., request for validation):

- Extract # 13 (requests for validation)
  - F11: *Hi dear Professor, hope you're doing well. I've downloaded 30 articles that you mentioned. Plz let me know whether they're okay. Thanks in advance.*

One possible explanation might be that the learners had considered requests for validation as less face-threatening, probably because they had considered requests for validation as the only request type that had not been cognitively and/or physically demanding for the addressee and could be resolved without much effort. Hence, they might have utilized direct strategies more frequently in requests for validation, as they had perceived compliance might be easily guaranteed.

Similar to Economidou-Kogetsidis (2018), the findings indicated that direct strategies were among the frequently occurred strategies in requests for feedback (28.58%). The results can be taken as evidence to further support Eslami's (1993) claim that the degree of the directness of requests is strongly correlated with the expectation of rights between interlocutors. As argued by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2018), it is surmised that the expectation of the right and obligations of the faculty members has changed. Therefore, the learners of this study might have considered the degree of imposition of requesting for feedback as low. Below is an example of requests for feedback in the corpus:

- Extract # 14 (requests for feedback)
  - F12: *Dear professor I have a question about my thesis subject, "X", I think it is a good idea to substitute Y for Z. Please, let me know your idea. thank you in advance*

## Fourth Research Question

The distribution of internal modifiers (i.e., lexical and syntactic modifier) were measured to answer the fourth research question (see Tables 5 and 6). Ten elements of internal modifiers occurred in the data. Of the four types of main syntactic modifiers that appeared in the learners' e-requests, interrogative (17.27%) and conditional clause (11.51%) were the most frequent ones. However, both lexical and syntactic modifiers were found in the corpus, and lexical modifiers (61.87%) were more frequent in the data. The requests in the corpus were mainly modified using three lexical modifiers: politeness marker (23.98%), downtoner (17.75%), and consultative device (16.31%). Committer (1.68%), understater (.72%), and forewarning (1.42%) were the least frequent lexical modifiers in the request corpus:

**Table 5.**  
*Internal Modification in the Students' E-Mails*

	Internal Modifiers	Request for Information	Request for Action	Request for Feedback	Request for Validation	Total
	Interrogative	13 (15.29%)	35 (18.6%)	18 (16.82%)	6 (16.22%)	72 (17.27%)
	Past	1 (1.18%)	3 (1.6%)	6 (5.6%)	3 (8.1%)	13 (3.12%)
<b>Syntactic</b>	Progressive	4 (4.7%)	1 (.53%)	21 (19.62%)	0 (0%)	26 (6.24%)
	Conditional Clause	11 (12.93%)	22 (11.70%)	6 (5.6%)	9 (24.32%)	48 (11.51%)
	Politeness Marker	15 (17.64%)	55 (29.3%)	18 (16.82%)	12 (32.44%)	100 (23.98%)
	Understaters	3 (3.53%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (.72%)
	Consultative	11 (12.94%)	40 (21.27%)	14 (13.08%)	3 (8.10%)	68 (16.31%)
	Downtoner	20 (23.53%)	28 (14.9%)	22 (20.56%)	4 (10.82%)	74 (17.75%)
	Committer	6 (7.06%)	1 (.53%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (1.68%)
<b>Lexical</b>	Forewarning	1 (1.18%)	3 (1.6%)	2 (1.86%)	0 (0%)	6 (1.42%)
	Total	85 (100%)	188 (100%)	107 (100%)	37 (100%)	517 (100%)
<b>Zero Internal Modifiers</b>		24 (47.05%)	22 (25.88%)	14 (33.33%)	3 (10%)	63 (30.28%)

Overall, although lexical and syntactic modifiers were found across the level of imposition continuum with different degrees of frequency, they were mainly used in situations with a relatively high level of imposition, namely request for feedback and request for action; in these situations, higher levels of politeness and formality are often required. The results indicated that the requests with syntactic modifiers were used more frequently in the e-mails with requests for action and requests for feedback; 29.32% and 24.51%, respectively). The analysis of the lexical modifiers also indicated that the participants had used lexical modifiers more frequently to modify their requests in requests with high degrees of imposition: requests for action (61.05%) and feedback (26.92%). However, around 30.28% of the requests did not contain any internal modifier. The distribution of zero internal modifiers was relatively equal for the e-

requests of low and high imposition. Examples of lexical and syntactic modifiers in the e-requests are shown below (lexical modifiers are underlined and syntactic modifiers are in bold in the following examples):

- Extract # 15 (requests for feedback)
  - F7: **Could you** please explain it to me?
- Extract # 16 (requests for validation)
  - F3: **I wonder** whether it is possible to hand my PPT in after exams.
- Extract # 17 (requests for action)
  - F13: I just **wanted** to remind u to send me the samples.
- Extract # 18 (requests for information)
  - F14: **Can I** ask some questions linked with feedback?

The findings of the present study indicate that the students had used lexical and syntactic modifiers in their e-mail requests. The analysis indicated that the degree of imposition of the request had influenced the occurrence of lexical and syntactic modifiers. In line with Biesenbach-Lucas (2007), the results of the present study indicate that in e-mail requests to faculty, L2 students employ more lexical modifiers than syntactic modifiers to modify their requests.

The results of this study indicated that the students had used internal modifiers more frequently in the high-imposition requests like requests for action. As explained by Félix-Brasdefer (2012), this finding implies that those learners who had employed these modifiers in their requests possessed a relatively advanced level of sociopragmatic knowledge that allowed them to use lexical and syntactic modifiers more frequently in their high-imposition requests, where appropriate levels of politeness and formality are required:

- Extract # 19 (requests for action)
  - F15: Dear Dr. X,  
Hi. I hope you are having great classes with excellent students.  
**Would you** mind if I asked you to fill the attached form for me?  
I appreciate your help.  
Sincerely yours  
Student's name

Furthermore, such e-mail requests contained formal address terms such as *Dear Dr. X* or *Dear Professor X*, which eventually led to acknowledging the faculty member's social status (the relationship between L2 students and faculty members in Iran is asymmetric).

Conditional clause occurred most frequently with the requests for validation, which might be due to the fact that direct strategies were followed by *if* (e.g., *plz let me know if*). Interrogatives occurred frequently with the high-imposition requests (35.42%). Besides, the most frequent lexical device with the requests for feedback (23.53%) and the requests for information (20.56%) was downtoner. The frequently lexical device that occurred with the requests for actions was *please*:

- Extract # 20 (requests for action)

- F16: *Hi dear professor,  
Would you please send me the thesis file that I'm supposed to present  
it next week?  
with special thanks  
your sincerely*

The politeness marker *please* most frequently occurred with the requests for validation. This is probably because the learners had employed imperatives more frequently for this type of request. Hence, the learners had employed it to lessen the degree of imposition in such direct requests. The underuse of *please* in the requests for feedback and information might be attributed to the fact most of the learners had employed negative polite strategies (e.g., *would you* or *may I*) for these types of requests. They might have perceived that negative polite strategies are inherently polite. Hence, they had not included *please* frequently in their indirect requests.

The rigorous analysis of the request supportive moves indicated that the participants mainly had used grounder (24.80%) to elaborate the request head act externally. This modifier signifies the reasons and explanations for the request. The second most frequent external modifier was preparator (15.12%). The least common external modifiers used by the participants was disarmer (see Table 6):

**Table 6.**  
*External Modification in the Students' E-Mails*

	External Modifiers	Request for Information	Request for Action	Request for Feedback	Request for Validation	Total
External Modifiers	Grounder	20 (30.77%)	19 (17.43%)	16 (33.34%)	9 (25%)	64 (24.80%)
	Disarmer	0 (0%)	4 (3.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (1.55%)
	Getting a Pre-commitment	0 (0%)	8 (7.33%)	4 (8.33%)	3 (8.3%)	15 (5.82%)
	Imposition Minimizer	5 (7.69%)	10 (9.16%)	4 (8.33%)	0 (0%)	19 (7.36%)
	Preparator	14 (21.54%)	19 (17.43%)	0 (0%)	6 (16.7%)	39 (15.12%)
	Preclosing Thanks	26 (40%)	49 (44.95%)	24 (50%)	18 (50%)	117 (45.35%)
	Total	65 (100%)	109 (100%)	48 (100%)	36 (100%)	258 (100%)
	E-Mail Closing	33 (54.7%)	60 (70.58%)	26 (61.90%)	15 (50%)	134 (64.42%)
	Zero External Modifiers	11 (21.56%)	10 (4.80%)	6 (14.25%)	6 (20%)	33 (15.86%)

As shown in Table 6, external modifiers were used in a higher percentage with request for action (42.24%), followed by request for information (25.19%), and request for feedback (18.60%). The results indicated that 41.56% of the requests with low degrees of imposition did not include any ex-

ternal modifier. The analysis, further, indicated that closing occurred most frequently with the e-mails with high degrees of imposition: requests for action (70.58%) and requests for feedback (61.90%). In fact, the distribution of e-mail closing was conditioned by the degree of imposition. The examples below are instances of external modifiers (the **bold** section):

- Extract # 21 (requests for feedback)
  - F17: **Could you please do me a favor?** [getting a precommitment]  
*Can you please send me the paper?*
- Extract # 22 (requests for feedback)
  - F3: **I know you are so busy but I have a great favor to ask** [preparator], *Is it possible for you to take a look at the passages? I appreciate it* [preclosing thanks].

The results, further, indicated that the learners had alleviated their requests more frequently with preclosing *thanks* in the requests for feedback (50%). However, as can be seen in Extract # 23, instances of inappropriate closing such as *Me* were found in the corpus. Furthermore, use of abbreviations and lower-case words frequently appeared in the data. This is probably because the L2 learners were used to instant messaging, which might have led the students to use abbreviated language in their e-mail requests.

- Extract # 23 (requests for action)
  - F1: *Dear Dr. X,*  
*Hi*  
*Could you please send me the answers of (the grammar book for TOEFL)??*  
**If u don't have time now, send when u have time** [imposition minimizer]  
*Yours sincerely*  
*With the best wishes,* [closing]  
*Me*

Besides, attempt to provide reasons through explicating their explanation most frequently happened in the requests for feedback (33.34%). Request for feedback is among the request with high degrees of imposition. By means of grounders, the learners had tried to alleviate the illocutionary force of e-requests:

- Extract # 24 (requests for feedback)
  - F6: *Dear Professor X,*  
*Hope you are doing well. I wonder if you mind reading my paragraphs so as to detect where I come in strong and where I need more assistance to cover my weakness. I have been trying to improve my writing in recent months, but I am not sure if I have improved. I know you are really busy, but as we fall short of time in class, I thought I can mail my paragraphs so that you kindly provide me with some feedback. I will really appreciate any help you offer.*  
*Sincerely Yours,*  
*student's name*

For example, in the above e-request, the student explains she needs assistance to improve her writing. By relying on grounders, the learner had tried to modify the e-requests. Such a learner is pragmatically competent as she had been aware that providing an additional explanation would probably result in approval of her request. According to Hashemian and Farhang-Ju (2019), providing sufficient information to prove or justify the request is crucially important for the Iranian faculty members.

The results further show that around 50% of the e-mails had not contained any preclosing (e.g., *thank you*). 36% of the e-mails in the corpus did not end with a closing. It could be argued that such e-mail structure increases the directness and possibly coerciveness of the message—something which can render these e-mails abrupt and inappropriate:

- Extract # 25 (requests for feedback)
  - F18: *Hi Dr. X*  
*This is what I worked on it, previous term. I'll be so thankful if you read it and have some comments on it.* [no phatic communion, no preclosing, and no closing]

Overall, the results indicated that with the requests with high degrees of imposition (i.e., requests for action) on a hearer of superior status (i.e., the lecturer), the L2 learners would assess contextual conditions and linguistic forms of an expression to alleviate the illocutionary force of their e-requests.

## Conclusion and Implications

This study focused on investigating L2 learners' e-mail requests to see if the degree of imposition had any effect on L2 learners' choice of strategies and modifiers. The findings showed that the distribution of type of request and external modifiers were relatively conditioned based on the degree of imposition. Further, the head act strategy type and internal modifiers were relatively based on the degree of imposition involved in each request. However, it seems some participants had failed to mitigate their requests based on the degree of imposition. This is probably because such L2 learners were not completely aware of the importance of pragmalinguistic means.

The findings of this study can have valuable resources for future studies of potential interlanguage pragmatics studies, which are concerned with L2 learners' performance and pragmatic competence in L2 learning. The results of this study provide insights into the relationship between the degree of imposition and pragmatic production of Iranian L2 learners. For example, the results help L2 learners to become familiar with appropriate ways of mitigating their e-requests to faculty.

This study focused on e-mails written by female students. Future research can give more insights into this issue by comparing male and female learners' e-requests. Specifically, if a larger corpus of e-mail messages is used, statistical tests could be utilized to examine (possible) significant differences between the



two genders. Further, a larger corpus of e-mails can be used to gain detailed insights. A larger corpus provides an opportunity to run statistical analysis and offer further evidence to support the findings. Furthermore, as the corpus will be more diverse, it will allow us to discover features of language use among a larger number of L2 students.

Moreover, a triangulation will provide the means to probe pragmalinguistic features of L2 learners' low- and high-imposition e-requests in details. This study did not focus on the role of the proficiency level of the participants. It is supposed that L2 learners' proficiency level may have a determining role in pragmatic competence. Hence, future research might also find it useful to investigate whether language proficiency has any effects on L2 learners' low- and high-imposition e-requests. It is probable that L2 students' developmental patterns of their e-requests over several semesters improve. This might indicate whether familiarity with a faculty member and how to write e-mails influences e-mail messages. As pointed out by the blind reviewers, sometimes the pattern of correspondences with a particular professor becomes similar based on the language or the communication pattern he or she demands. Therefore, further research can focus on e-requests sent by L2 learners to different L2 lecturers to examine if only one recipient could limit the variety of the requests.

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# The Effects of Horizontal and Vertical Axes on Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning Regarding the Cognitive Domain Levels

Maryam Ghandi<sup>1</sup>  
Mojtaba Maghsoudi\*<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

Vocabulary learning is and indeed has always been one of the major concerns in foreign language teaching and learning. Among different aspects related to vocabulary learning and teaching, the sense relations play an important role. These relations can be found in two dimensions as the horizontal axis represents syntagmatic relations-like collocations, fixed expressions and idioms, while the vertical axis represents paradigmatic relations-such as synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms. The present study was an attempt to investigate the effects of horizontal and vertical axes on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning regarding the cognitive domain levels. To this aim, 84 Iranian high school students (second grade) were chosen through a PET as the homogeneity test. These participants were also pretested through a researchers-made vocabulary test and

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<sup>1</sup> EFL Teacher, Ministry of Education, Arak, Iran; s.m.gandi2013@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Farhangian University, Tehran Iran, (corresponding author); maghsudi@cfu.ac.ir

were divided into three homogeneous groups to represent the horizontal axis group (HAG), vertical axis group (VAG), and control group. The participants went through the processes of pretesting, treatment, and post-testing. The results of data analysis (MANOVA and Independent T-test) indicated that the horizontal group significantly outperformed the vertical group on the posttest of vocabulary, while both VAG and HAG outperformed the control group. It was also revealed that the components of cognitive domain; i.e. comprehension, application, synthesis, and evaluation, except knowledge, were significantly impacted by the horizontal training method. Therefore, syntagmatic relations or horizontal axis can be considered successful in helping EFL learners improve their vocabulary. The findings are fruitful for EFL teachers and syllabus designers to develop efficient vocabulary teaching procedures.

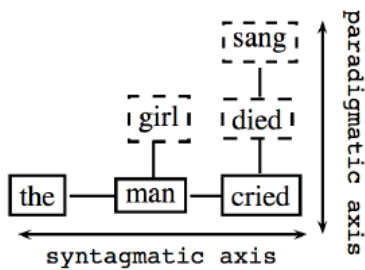
**Keywords:** Cognitive Domain, EFL Learners, Horizontal Axis, Vertical Axis, Vocabulary Learning.

## Introduction

The reason underlying the importance of vocabulary learning is very straightforward: "the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, function, notions, or some other unit of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, word and word combination" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 132). It is thus no wonder then that the ELT literature is simply overwhelmed by an ever-growing array of studies on vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Avila & Sadoski, 1996; De la Fuente, 2002; Genç, 2004; Gu, 2018; Knight, 1994; McKeown & Curtis, 2014; Naeimi & Foo, 2013). Vocabulary knowledge is considered as one of the language skills crucial for fluent language use (Nation, 1994) and vocabulary size is an indicator of how well L2 learners can perform all the four language skills of speaking, reading, listening, and writing (Bear et al., 2012; Naeimi & Foo, 2013).

Syntactic categories which represent groups of words have been investigated in descriptive linguistics (Croft, 1991) and later in cognitive linguistics in terms of researching cases and semantic categories (Schlesinger, 2006). It is argued that syntactic categories can be replaced for one another without changing the grammaticality of a sentence (Yatbaz et al., 2012). Linguists identify syntactic categories based on semantic, syntactic, and morphological properties of words. It was also found out that children use prosodic and phonological features to bootstrap syntactic category acquisition (Ambridge & Lieven, 2011). "Relationships between linguistic units can be classified into two types: syntagmatic (concerning positioning), and paradigmatic (concerning substitution)" (Haruki, 2006, p. 76). Syntagmatic relations determine which units can combine to create larger groups and paradigmatic relations determine which units can be replaced for one another. The paradigmatic vs. syntagmatic axes for words in a simple sentence and their possible substitutes are illustrated in Figure 1. Similarly, according to De Waard (2010), the relationship between vocabulary and syntax can be found in two dimensions which is usually named "axes". "Horizontal axis represents syntagmatic relations-like collocations, fixed ex-

pressions and idioms” (p. 41). In fact, horizontal axis equals “syntagmatic relations which define combinatory possibilities; the relations between elements that might combine in a sequence” (Haruki, 2006, p. 79). In contrast, vertical axis represents “paradigmatic relations—such as synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms” (De Waard, 2010, p. 41). As Haruki (ibid) mentions, vertical axis represents paradigmatic relations which are the oppositions between elements that can replace one another “(p. 79).



**Figure 1.** Syntagmatic vs. Paradigmatic Axes for Words in a Simple Sentence (Chandler, 2007)

The concept of learning syntactic categories using paradigmatic representations of word context has already been discussed in the literature (Chandler, 2007; Schutze & Pedersen, 1993; Yatbaz et al., 2012). One of the most important components in language learning is vocabulary, as it forms the biggest part of language communication. Some vocabulary items and word combinations such as phrasal verbs, collocations, idioms, and expressions create complexity for EFL and ESL students, partly because there are so many of them, but also because word combinations seem so often completely random (Eren & Metin, 2018). The way in which L2 words are presented in course books or the way through which teachers telling students that they should acquire them by heart can increase these complexities (Grogan et al., 2018). However, if one looks carefully at the particle, patterns start to develop which suggest that the combinations are not so random after all (Gu, 2018).

Due to the importance and complexity of vocabulary learning, theorizers and practitioners in the field of language pedagogy have always tried to find the best ways of grasping vocabulary knowledge. In other words, “there is a big dilemma in the selection of an effective approach for vocabulary instruction” (Grogan et al., 2018, p. 2). On the other hand, the learning and teaching of foreign language vocabulary has not been receiving enough attention in Iranian schools. The bulk of theoretical discussions had already been focused on the teaching of syntactic structures and reading comprehension and currently, the communicative competence is regarded as the key to all success in foreign language acquisition in this context. Vocabulary learning is most often treated as a problem marginal to other language learning activities since it is the matter of

common belief that the acquisition of foreign lexicon is a by-product of having the learner participate in these other activities.

Because of the aforementioned problems, among different aspects related to vocabulary learning and teaching, the present researchers intend to focus on the sense relations that exist among words. The horizontal axis represents syntagmatic relations-like collocations, fixed expressions and idioms, while the vertical axis represents paradigmatic relations-such as synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms (Yatbaz et al., 2012).

On the other hand, based on Bloom (1965), the cognitive domain involves knowledge and development of intellectual abilities and skills. There are six levels of complexity: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The higher the level, the presumably more complex mental operation is required (Goyal & Rajalakshmi, 2018). Such a perspective has not been taken into consideration in teaching L2 vocabulary to the EFL learners in the Iranian context. Thus, it is necessary to determine with the help of which vocabulary teaching technique (horizontal or vertical axis), students' vocabulary knowledge moves up into higher levels of cognitive domain (Boers, 2013). In line with what has been discussed so far, this study sought to investigate the effect of horizontal (syntagmatic) (i.e., collocations, fixed expressions and idioms) and vertical (paradigmatic) (synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms) axes on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning regarding the cognitive domain. Therefore, the central aim of this thesis was to bring awareness toward syntagmatic and paradigmatic word relations to the EFL classroom.

## Literature Review

Words are building blocks in a language. Knowledge of target language can start developing through learning the lexical items. Experiences of being a language learner have brought us no hesitation in recognizing the importance of vocabulary in language learning. Due to its importance, several techniques exist to offer new words in a course such as "physical demonstration, verbal explanation, providing the students with synonyms and antonyms, translation, using visual aids, exemplification, presenting words in contexts and chunks" (Nash & Snowling, 2006, p. 56). Since learners are not usually capable to utilize the offered vocabularies communicatively, however, it seems obvious that some of the mentioned techniques are not accompanied with a great deal of vocabulary retention (Rahimi & Momeni, 2012).

Mashhady et al. (2012) found that presenting homonym word pairs facilitated word retrieval in short-term memory by decreasing the cognitive demands. If presented together, homonym pairs can be retrieved faster because their lexical forms are similar. The second part of their study revealed that when learning is measured by semantic representations, synonyms can facilitate word learning by decreasing cognitive demands as the meanings of the words are identical for synonym pairs.

Ansari and Khojasteh (2013) compared the influence of three useful techniques to carry a meaning as: synonyms, dictionary definitions, and context-on acquisition (effectiveness of the method). Immediate and delayed post-tests indicated that the context group outperformed the definition and the synonyms groups. Hoshino (2010) investigated the relative effectiveness of five types of word lists (synonyms, antonyms, categorical, thematic, and arbitrary) in facilitating L2 vocabulary learning in a classroom setting. Comparing the effectiveness of the type of word lists on learners, he concluded that "Within a classroom setting, this study makes it clear that presenting new vocabulary in categorical lists promotes vocabulary learning" (p.310). Higa (1963, as cited in Webb, 2007) found that learning two distinct words are far easier than learning two synonyms simultaneously, and it seems worth mention that synonym has been considered as a factor that can make words more difficult to learn.

Webb's (2007) research indicated that synonym may facilitate word acquisition. The students' scores for words with known synonyms were significantly higher than those without. The productive tests of paradigmatic association and syntagmatic association were accompanied with higher scores. Nattinger and Decarrico (1992), found that teaching words in chunks can largely improve the range of the words one can apply in the process of meaning negotiation. In line with this finding, Willis and Willis (2006) expressed that native speakers' fluency is related to the fact that their vocabulary is a part of phrases and larger chunks, which can be retrieved from memory as a whole and reducing processing difficulties. It is not stored only as isolated words. Thus, learners who only learn individual words will need a lot more time and effort to express themselves (Rahimi & Momeni, 2012).

The development of EFL learners' communicative abilities can be affected by a good command of collocation use (Ellis, 1997; Nation, 2001; Nattinger & Decarrico, 1992; Schmitt, 2000; Shooshtari & Karami, 2013). This means that language learners are required to develop their knowledge base of word combinations. That is, to know which words are used together and in what patterning. Faghih and Sharafi (2006) in their studies investigating the role of collocation on Iranian EFL learners' interlanguage found that most of errors committed by the learners in their productions were deep-rooted in their lack of proficiency in collocations. They arrived at this conclusion that it is not the grammatical or lexical knowledge of learners which result in their difficulty in spoken and written product but it is their lack of knowledge of the words, in particular collocation knowledge, that usually makes this problem. Koosha and Jafarpoor (2006) claimed that mastery over collocations can affect EFL learners' fluency as well as accuracy in productive skills. They further added that there is a good correlation between the use of lexical collocations and language proficiency in Iranian EFL learners.

Assessments development through which the higher and lower level of cognitive skills is measures can be affected by Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Since it is important to assess how well students gain the information within the levels of the taxonomy, this study sought to investigate the



effect of horizontal and vertical axes on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning regarding the cognitive domain levels. As the present researchers will discuss in details in coming sections, this domain is grouped under six subsequent thinking levels: as "knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation" (Koksal & Ulum, 2018, p. 104). "The first three levels which refer to the lower order thinking skills include remembering, understanding, and applying, while the next three levels refer to the higher-order thinking skills that contain analyzing, evaluating, and creating" (Orey, 2010, p. 35). Bloom's taxonomy is graded. That is, each step is presented at the upper steps as well. For instance, if someone is performing in the analysis level can also function in lower order steps as comprehension or application (Assaly & Smadi, 2016).

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research question was formulated:

How different are the horizontal and vertical axes in Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning regarding the components of cognitive domain levels?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The main participants of the present study were 83 Iranian high school homogeneous students, selected out of initial 100 students based on their performance on a piloted version of Preliminary English Test (PET). The researchers piloted the test prior to final administration for its reliability index with a group of 30 Iranian EFL learners similar to the main study participants in term of age, background knowledge and the proficiency level. Finally, the test was administered to 100 intermediate EFL learners and 83 participants whose scores fell within one standard deviation below and above the mean were selected as the main study participants. It is worth mentioning that all the participants were within the age range of 15 to 18. The participants of the study were randomly divided into three homogenous groups as horizontal axis group (HAG) (n=28), vertical axis group (VAG) (n=24), and the control group (CG) (31).

### **Materials and Instruments**

To fulfill the purpose of the current study, a Preliminary English Test (PET) and the researchers-made vocabulary test (pretest and a vocabulary posttest were used.

#### ***Preliminary English Test (PET)***

The PET test was piloted on a group of 30 students in order to probe the reliability of the sub-sets of the test. The results of the Pearson correlation (Table 1)

indicated that there was significant agreement between the two raters who rated the subjects on the writing ( $r(28) = .81, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size) sections of the PET.

**Table 1.**  
*Inter-Rater Reliability of Writing Sub-Sets of PET*

		WRR2
WRR1	Pearson Correlation	.818**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

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

Also, the KR-21 reliability indices for the listening and reading sections of the piloting PET were .68 and .73, respectively (see Table 2). The construct validity of the test has been already reported by the Cambridge University Press (<https://www.ef.com/wwen/english-tests/cambridge-exams/pet/>). The study participants answered the test in 100 minutes.

**Table 2.**  
*Reliability Indices; Listening and Reading Sections of Piloting PET*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	KR-21
RC	30	25.13	3.471	12.051	.68
LC	30	16.03	3.222	10.378	.73
Valid N (listwise)	30				

### ***Test of Vocabulary***

The researchers-made test of vocabulary which was administered as both pre-test and posttest in the present study included multiple-choice items, matching, production items, recognition forms, true/false items, and sentence completion and was developed by the researchers based on the target words which were taught during the treatment.

In the present study, vocabulary achievement was determined by the scores of the participants of this study on the piloted teacher-made vocabulary test based on Bloom's (1965) taxonomy. Prior to the administration of this instrument, it was pilot tested for the purposes of clarity, simplicity, time allotment, and estimating its reliability. However, the test was piloted on a group of 30 students similar to the main participants of the study and six faulty items were removed after item analysis leaving 40 items in the test. The results of piloting process revealed that the mean was 20.80, standard deviation equaled ( $SD=8.99$ ) and the reliability index based on Kuder-Richardson 21 equaled ( $KR-21=.89$ ). The allotted time to answer this test was 45 minutes.

The piloted sample PET was utilized to choose a homogenous sample of participants based on their level of proficiency prior to the study, while a validated researchers-made test of vocabulary was administered as both pretest and posttest in the present study. Based on Bachman (2002, p. 454) "in case the interval between two administrations of a test is four weeks or so, the practicing effect is highly minimized". This test which included multiple-choice items, matching, production items, recognition forms, true/false items, and sentence completion was developed by the researchers based on the words in the target words which were taught during the cognitive treatment which will be discussed in details in procedure section.

It is worth mentioning that to predict the efficacy of this instrument and to make sure that it covers the content that was supposed to measure, four TEFL professors were requested to judge this instrument. As a result, they acknowledged this test for this purpose. It is also worth mentioning that the test items covered the areas of Bloom's (1965) domain levels including knowledge (students remember previously learned information), comprehension (students demonstrate an understanding of the facts), application (students apply knowledge to actual situations), analysis (students break down objects or idea into simpler parts and find evidence to support generalizations), evaluation (students compile component ideas into anew whole or propose alternative solutions), and synthesis (students make and defend judgments based on internal evidence or external criteria). In this study, vocabulary achievement was determined by the scores of the participants of this study on the piloted researchers-made vocabulary test based on Bloom's (1965) taxonomy as previously described.

**Table 3.**  
*Descriptive Statistics for the Pre/Posttest*

	N	N of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	KR-21
Vocabulary Test	30	40	20.80	8.995	80.905	.89

## Procedure

Once the three groups (Horizontal, Vertical Axes, and the Control group) were divided as described above and the vocabulary pretest was administered, the treatment commenced. It seems worth mention that before starting the treatment, through a pilot test, 30 out of 60 words were chosen as the appropriate and unknown words to the participants of this study. All three groups were taught by the same teachers (the researchers), and they used the same course book (Iranian High school book, vision 2). Moreover, they received the same hours of treatment (six weeks, five words each week) and teaching aids in the same physical environment; therefore, the most significant point of departure in the three groups in the present study was the form of training and vocabulary teaching techniques presented in the classroom. That is, the processes of

treatment, types of examples and the type of questions in all three above-mentioned groups were to some extent different. For the horizontal group, the new words were taught through the techniques or strategies recommended by horizontal axes as collocations, fixed expressions and idioms, for the vertical group, the participants were provided with the new words through synonyms, antonyms and etc. The control group went through learning the items by means of definitions or Persian equivalents.

Before focusing on what was presented in the classroom, a brief review of the syntagmatic vs. paradigmatic axes for word combinations and vocabulary development (Chandler, 2007) which was followed in the study seems necessary. In the horizontal (syntagmatic) axis group, the learners were firstly familiarized with the concept of syntagmatic relations-like *collocations*, *fixed expressions* and *idioms* and they were trained to develop English vocabularies with the focus on such word combinations. Then they were encouraged to look the target words of each session in the dictionary and find the collocations each vocabulary item taught can make. Also, the students in the horizontal (syntagmatic) axis group were asked to find specific expressions, phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, and even the proverbs related to each specific word item taught. Hence, the focus of the classroom session in the 20 minutes devoted to the experiment in each session was on the practice of such syntagmatic segments. Subsequently, they were asked to say how much they were ready for the coming steps and procedures. They were also asked to practice the new expressions and idioms they had found at the end of each session of the classroom and see how well they had learned the vocabularies taught. Of course, they received relative feedback by the teacher, something which was decreased as the learners increased in the quality of their development. Various quizzes and classroom discussions were presented in the intervention sessions. An example might clarify the issue:

The first topic in the first lesson was taking about food passions, make an excuse to decline food, discuss lifestyle, describe local dishes and the covered vocabularies were nutrition terminology, food passions, excuses for not eating something and food descriptions. Also, the students were to cover a text about giving advice and find the collocations, idioms, and expression used in the text. The group participants were very interested in this issue, so the researchers decided to use it for a conversation topic. Furthermore, each student wrote a letter to their friends and received responses. They were supposed to use as many idioms, expressions, collocations, phrasal verbs and proverbs as possible. In this regard the students used the sentences of their book and similar ones form the Longman Dictionary and sometimes from the net.

In the vertical (paradigmatic) axis group, the teacher informed the learners of the role they had to play in the classroom, almost every session, to facilitate their vocabulary development. The students were trained to focus on “paradigmatic relations-such as synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms” (De Waard, 2010, p. 41). The learners were trained to develop word lists for the word items they learned and were asked to find the synonyms, antonyms, and lexemes

(word families) for each new vocabulary they encountered with. Just like the horizontal group, the first topic in the first lesson was taking about food passions, make an excuse to decline food, discuss lifestyle, discuss life style changes you have made, describe local dishes and the covered vocabularies were nutrition terminology, food passions, excuses for not eating something and food descriptions. Also, the students were to cover a short text about giving advice. These students were also very interested in this issue. The learners were divided into small groups of four to six and each group worked together in the instruction phase. Each group of students wrote a letter to their friends and received responses; they cooperated with each other and provided each other with synonyms, anonyms, and word lexemes.

In the control group (CG), the learners went through the process of instruction with no emphasis on vertical or horizontal factors. Meanwhile, they followed the conventional learning system followed by the mentioned course book which was communicating based language teaching (CBLT).

It is worth mentioning that in all the three groups, the teacher herself provided the feedback and assessed the students' process of learning. In the first intervention sessions, the students were encouraged to take part in the class discussions and they were informed that the teacher would assess them almost every session and in case they felt they had been weak one session, they could compensate for that weakness in the coming sessions. Throughout the instruction process, the teacher monitored the students' progress and provided feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.

The researchers in this study provided the same hints for all learners and gave feedback from the most implicit to the most direct and explicit based on the needs of the learners in each of the three groups. Moreover, the researchers assessed the learners' vocabulary through the quizzes that were taken every other session to enable them to be aware of their process. At the end of the treatment all the groups took the same vocabulary test as the posttest.

## **Data Analysis**

Based on the normality of data, homogeneity of variances of groups and homogeneity of covariance matrices, to answer the mentioned research questions, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) as a procedure for comparing multivariate sample means and independent t- test, as an inferential statistical test that determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups were of great help in this study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

As assumptions of normality were retained, the parametric analysis was taken into consideration. MANOVA assumes. Based on the results displayed in Table

4, the assumption of normality was retained. The absolute values of the ratios of skewness and kurtosis were lower than 1.96.

**Table 4.**  
*Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality of Data*

Group	N	Skewness			Kurtosis			
		Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	
Horizontal	Knowledge	28	.329	.441	0.75	-.333	.858	-0.39
	Comprehension	28	-.463	.441	-1.05	-.907	.858	-1.06
	Application	28	-.801	.441	-1.82	.043	.858	0.05
	Analysis	28	.371	.441	0.84	-.618	.858	-0.72
	Synthesis	28	-.802	.441	-1.82	-.056	.858	-0.07
	Evaluation	28	-.316	.441	-0.72	-.503	.858	-0.59
Vertical	Knowledge	24	.671	.472	1.42	-.640	.918	-0.70
	Comprehension	24	.347	.472	0.74	-.273	.918	-0.30
	Application	24	.352	.472	0.75	-.270	.918	-0.29
	Analysis	24	-.404	.472	-0.86	-.757	.918	-0.82
	Synthesis	24	-.830	.472	-1.76	-.416	.918	-0.45
	Evaluation	24	.276	.472	0.58	-1.350	.918	-1.47
Control	Knowledge	31	.273	.421	0.65	-.408	.821	-0.50
	Comprehension	31	.473	.421	1.12	-.183	.821	-0.22
	Application	31	.387	.421	0.92	-.778	.821	-0.95
	Analysis	31	-.311	.421	-0.74	1.206	.821	1.47
	Synthesis	31	-.037	.421	-0.09	-.912	.821	-1.11
	Evaluation	31	.555	.421	1.32	.108	.821	0.13

Table 5 displays the results of the Levene's test of homogeneity of variances. The non-significant results of the tests indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met on six cognitive domains. That is, knowledge ( $F = .994, p > .05$ ), understanding ( $F = .686, p > .05$ ), application ( $F = .856, p > .05$ ), analysis ( $F = 2.12, p > .05$ ), synthesis ( $F = 1.38, p > .05$ ) and evaluation ( $F = 1.31, p > .05$ ).

**Table 5.**  
*Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances*

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Knowledge	Based on Mean	1.143	2	80	.324
	Based on Median	.994	2	80	.375
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.994	2	78.255	.375
	Based on trimmed mean	1.093	2	80	.340
Comprehension	Based on Mean	1.070	2	80	.348
	Based on Median	.686	2	80	.506
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.686	2	76.664	.506
	Based on trimmed mean	1.064	2	80	.350
Application	Based on Mean	1.461	2	80	.238
	Based on Median	.856	2	80	.429
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.856	2	59.033	.430
	Based on trimmed mean	1.298	2	80	.279
Analysis	Based on Mean	2.705	2	80	.073
	Based on Median	2.126	2	80	.126
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.126	2	77.068	.126
	Based on trimmed mean	2.583	2	80	.082
Synthesis	Based on Mean	1.825	2	80	.168
	Based on Median	1.387	2	80	.256
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.387	2	71.086	.256
	Based on trimmed mean	1.748	2	80	.181
Evaluation	Based on Mean	1.840	2	80	.165
	Based on Median	1.313	2	80	.275
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.313	2	67.288	.276
	Based on trimmed mean	1.834	2	80	.166

Finally, the results displayed in Table 6 (Box's M = 58.45,  $p > .05$ ) indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of covariance matrices was met.

**Table 6.**  
*Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices*

Box's M	58.453
F	1.239
df1	42
df2	17420.221
Sig.	.138

Table 7 displays the results of MANOVA used to analyze the data to answer the research question of the study. Based on these results ( $F(12, 152) = 5.61$ ,  $p \leq .05$ , partial eta squared = .307 representing a large effect size) indicated that there were significant differences between the horizontal, vertical and control groups' means on cognitive domains. Thus, the null-hypothesis as "there is no significant difference between the effect of horizontal and vertical axes on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning regarding the components of cognitive domain", was rejected.

**Table 7.**  
*Multivariate Tests; Cognitive Domains by Groups*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.956	272.8416		75	.000	.956
	Wilks' Lambda	.044	272.8416		75	.000	.956
	Hotelling's Trace	21.827	272.8416		75	.000	.956
	Roy's Largest Root	21.827	272.8416		75	.000	.956
Group	Pillai's Trace	.614	5.611	12	152	.000	.307
	Wilks' Lambda	.448	6.169	12	150	.000	.330
	Hotelling's Trace	1.092	6.732	12	148	.000	.353
	Roy's Largest Root	.945	11.965	6	76	.000	.486

As displayed in Table 8, horizontal group had the highest means on comprehension, application, synthesis and evaluation; however, the vertical group had the highest mean on knowledge, while there were not any significant differences between the three groups' means on analysis.

**Table 8.**  
*Descriptive Statistics; Cognitive Domains by Groups*

	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
Horizontal	3.714	4.098	4.080	3.036	7.911	2.777
Vertical	4.125	2.021	1.990	2.927	4.740	1.677
Control	3.250	2.194	2.024	2.774	5.121	1.484

Table 9 displays the results of the Between-Subjects Effects. Based on these results, it can be concluded that there were significant differences between the three groups' means on; knowledge ( $F(2, 80) = 4.78$ ,  $p \leq .05$ , partial eta squared = .107 representing a moderate effect size), comprehension ( $F(2, 80) = 22.97$ ,  $p \leq .05$ , partial eta squared = .365 representing a large effect size), application ( $F(2, 80) = 15.94$ ,  $p \leq .05$ , partial eta squared = .285 representing a large effect size), synthesis ( $F(2, 80) = 19.37$ ,  $p \leq .05$ , partial eta squared = .322 representing a large effect size) and evaluation ( $F(2, 80) = 14.39$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ,



partial eta squared = .265 representing a large effect size). However, there were not any significant differences between the three groups' means on analysis ( $F(2, 80) = .361, p > .05$ , partial eta squared = .009 representing a weak effect size).

**Table 9.**  
*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects; Cognitive Domains by Groups*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Group	Knowledge	10.483	2	5.242	4.781	.011	.107	
	Understanding	73.146	2	36.573	22.971	.000	.365	
	Application	79.616	2	39.808	15.944	.000	.285	
	Analysis	1.020	2	.510	.361	.698	.009	
	Synthesis	164.112	2	82.056	19.037	.000	.322	
	Evaluation	27.608	2	13.804	14.394	.000	.265	

Table 10 displays the results of the post-hoc comparison tests: The results indicated that;

1. \*The vertical group ( $M = 4.12$ ) had a significantly higher mean than the control group ( $M = 3.25$ ) on knowledge ( $MD = .875, p \leq .05$ ).
2. The horizontal group ( $M = 4.09$ ) had a significantly higher mean than the vertical group ( $M = 2.02$ ) on comprehension ( $MD = 2.07, p \leq .05$ ).
3. The horizontal group ( $M = 4.09$ ) had a significantly higher mean than the control group ( $M = 2.19$ ) on comprehension ( $MD = 1.90, p \leq .05$ ).

**Table 10.**  
*Pairwise Comparisons; Cognitive Domains by Groups\**

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Knowledge	Vertical	Control	.875*	.285	.003308	1.442	
		Horizontal	2.077*	.351	.0001379	2.776	
Comprehension	Horizontal	Vertical	1.905*	.329	.0001250	2.559	
		Control	2.091*	.440	.0001216	2.965	
Application	Horizontal	Vertical	2.056*	.412	.0001236	2.876	
		Control	3.171*	.578	.0002022	4.320	
Synthesis	Horizontal	Vertical	2.790*	.541	.0001713	3.867	
		Control	1.100*	.272	.000558	1.642	
Evaluation	Horizontal	Vertical	1.293*	.255	.000785	1.801	
		Control					

\*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

1. The horizontal group ( $M = 4.08$ ) had a significantly higher mean than the vertical group ( $M = 1.99$ ) on application ( $MD = 2.09, p \leq .05$ ).

2. The horizontal group (M = 4.08) had a significantly higher mean than the control group (M = 2.02) on application (MD = 2.05,  $p \leq .05$ ).
3. The horizontal group (M = 7.91) had a significantly higher mean than the vertical group (M = 4.74) on synthesis (MD = 3.17,  $p \leq .05$ ).
4. The horizontal group (M = 7.91) had a significantly higher mean than the control group (M = 5.12) on synthesis (MD = 2.79,  $p \leq .05$ ).
5. The horizontal group (M = 2.77) had a significantly higher mean than the vertical group (M = 1.67) on evaluation (MD = 1.10,  $p \leq .05$ ).
6. The horizontal group (M = 2.77) had a significantly higher mean than the control group (M = 1.48) on evaluation (MD = 1.29,  $p \leq .05$ ).

It can be concluded that in terms of the cognitive domain components, horizontal training of foreign language vocabulary was more significant than the vertical one and there was no significant difference between the vertical training method and the conventional one introduced to the control group.

An independent t-test was also run to compare the horizontal and vertical groups' means on the posttest of vocabulary in order to probe the null-hypothesis in general, without the focus on the components. Based on the results displayed in Table 11 it was claimed that the horizontal group (M = 26.30, SD = 3.93) had a higher mean than the vertical group (M = 22.37, SD = 4.22) on the posttest.

**Table 11.**  
*Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Vocabulary by Groups*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Horizontal	28	26.30	3.932	.718
	Vertical	24	22.37	4.226	.813

The results of the independent t-test ( $t(50) = 3.67, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.76, 6.09], r = .444$  representing a moderate to large effect size) (Table 12) indicated that the horizontal group significantly outperformed the vertical group on the posttest of vocabulary.

**Table 12.**  
*Independent Samples t-test; Posttest of Vocabulary by Groups*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.026	.872	3.637	50	.001	3.930	1.081	1.764	6.095
Equal variances not assumed			3.623	53.293	.001	3.930	1.085	1.754	6.105

\*It should also be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's  $F = .026, p > .05$ ). That is why the first row of Table 12, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

## Discussion

The results of data analysis indicated that there was a significant difference between the effects of horizontal and vertical axes on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning regarding the components of cognitive domain. Likewise, the horizontal group significantly outperformed the vertical and control groups in vocabulary reading regarding steps of cognitive domain including understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The only exception was knowledge in which vertical group slightly outperformed the other two groups. As the knowledge level is the lowest level in the cognitive domain and the difference was not significant, this notion can be ignored at the cost of huge and significant differences between the effects of horizontal and vertical axes on the vocabulary learning of EFL learners taking part in this study. This finding is in line with the results of previous research studies which have studied syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of lexical items such as Schutze and Pedersen (1993) who studied a vector model for syntagmatic and paradigmatic relatedness, found that syntagmatic (horizontal) axis of words in combination "could restrict the right neighbors of verbs that are counted in the matrix to their arguments" (p.104). This, in turn helps the software produce a good number of utterances while using restricted number of word combinations. This signifies the fact that idioms, collocations, and phrasal verbs which are frequently used in the daily conversations are enriched through horizontal relations which, linguistically speaking, are supported by syntagmatic issues of descriptive linguistics (Chandler, 2007).

Likewise, the present finding is in line with Jacquemin's (1999) study on syntagmatic and paradigmatic representations of term variation, which found that "there are as many types of morphological relations as pairs of syntactic categories of content words" (p. 343). Since the syntactic categories of content words are noun (N), verb (V), adjective (A), and adverb (Adv.), there are potentially sixteen different pairs of morphological links. Hence, associations of identical categories must be taken into consideration. For example, "Noun-Noun associations correspond to morphological links between substantive nouns such as agent/process: promoter/promotion" (Jacquemin, 1999, p. 343.)

The priority of horizontal axis of words to the vertical axis, as found in the present study, can also take support from Haruki's (2006) study on principles of representation in Japanese, asserting that syntagmatic relations facilitate the development of vocabularies in the agglutinative languages which not only are synthetic in nature, but also they are enriched with morphology that primarily uses agglutination. In this respect, as "words may contain different morphemes to determine their meanings, but all of these morphemes (including stems and affixes) remain, in every aspect, unchanged after their unions" (Dhanalakshmi et al., 2009, p. 433). Horizontal word relations are significant as they deal with morphological analysis and this analysis type "is concerned with retrieving the structure, the syntactic and morphological properties or the meaning of a morphologically complex word" (Dhanalakshmi et al., *ibid*).

The present study finding can also take support from De Waard's (2010) study on a syntagmatic/paradigmatic analysis of scientific text, which revealed that in scientific texts, "there is no *story grammar* defined" (p. 42). Instead, it seems that a syntagmatic analysis of scientific text is quite straightforward. This feature also might lie in the fact that in the scientific texts the passive structures support the jargons and scientific collocations.

The present finding takes support from Abbassi et al.'s (2018) study on the effect of teaching memory strategies on Iranian EFL learner's vocabulary retention in terms of learners' multiple intelligences. As they reported "memorizing new vocabularies revealed that word list as a kind of rehearsal strategy could not succeed in enhancing the retention of learners' vocabulary knowledge" (p. 8). It signifies that vertical or paradigmatic relations stressing synonyms, lexemes, and word lists are not enough to support the retention of L2 vocabulary in the learners' mentality. Another feature of the present study which is worth mentioning is the presence of Bloom's (1965) taxonomy in the vocabulary test. It seems that both paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations have helped the development of foreign language vocabularies tested in different levels of the aforementioned taxonomy. As such, the descriptive linguistics giving value to the syntagmatic/paradigmatic relations gains priority and attention in terms of foreign language vocabulary development. This conviction can take support from Faber and Uson's (2012) study on constructing a lexicon of English verbs which found that higher levels of cognitive thought require implication of more complex word combinations and syntactic variations.

## Conclusion and Implications

### Conclusion

The results of data analysis firstly indicated that there was a significant difference between the effects of horizontal and vertical axes on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning regarding the cognitive domain. In fact, the horizontal group significantly outperformed the vertical and control groups on the post-test of vocabulary. Secondly, it was revealed that all the components of cognitive domain except knowledge were significantly impacted by the horizontal training method. Likewise, vertical training method was more effective than the conventional method employed in the control group, though this effect was partially significant. Therefore, syntagmatic relations or horizontal axis can be considered successful in helping learners improve their vocabulary knowledge in the second language. Based on the literature on morpho-semantic theory in descriptive linguistics (Juilland & Roceric, 2019) and its applications (Croft, 1991; De Waard, 2010; Haruki, 2006; Schlesinger, 2006; Schutze & Pedersen, 1993; Yatbaz, et al., 2012), employing syntagmatic axis, as a successful technique, could promote second language development in general, and vocabulary development, in particular.

It also could be concluded that syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes techniques of L2 vocabulary training both can help the learning of L2 vocabularies

considering Bloom's (1965) taxonomy of cognitive domain including remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. However, the syntagmatic relation takes the lion's share in this regard.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

The present study demonstrated that both vertical and horizontal axes can influence the EFL learners' vocabulary development concerning the cognitive domain. For a native like performance, EFL learners are advised to know native like vocabularies, syntactic structures and dictions. Therefore, according to the results of the present study, some implications for teaching and learning lexical items through syntagmatic and paradigmatic vocabulary relations within the cognitive domain can be suggested:

Language teachers should employ syntagmatic relations to raise the learners' awareness of what they are dealing with and learners must be recommended to pay attention to the features of input they are exposed to and notice the difference between the target like forms and the current state of their linguistic knowledge. A kind of cognitive comparison which has been seen as one of the crucial processes in language acquisition can be of great help in this regard (Vlaar et al., 2017).

English teachers and learners could employ vertical and horizontal word relations to familiarize their learners with meaningful function of L2 vocabulary. They can help them develop specific collocations, expressions, phrasal verbs, and idioms within the syntagmatic axis, while make them ready to learn synonyms, word families, lexemes, and polysomic words. Therefore, the classroom interactions could be improved and would help the learners go further in terms of vocabulary learning and retention.

The findings of the present study can be fruitful to material developers in the ELT domain and also those who present tasks in which learners' awareness toward learning is enhanced. Such tasks may help the learners benefit from syntagmatic word relations, text analysis, autonomy, and meaningful learning.

The central aim of this research was to bring awareness toward syntagmatic and paradigmatic word relations to the EFL classroom. The researchers hope that the results of the present study could shed lights into blurred issue of this area, and teachers would hopefully apply what has been discussed and confirmed here to their own situations in order to improve the L2 vocabulary development of their students.

## **Limitation of the Study**

Since the larger the sample size, the more precise the results will be, therefore, it should be confessed that the present study suffers from insufficient sample

size for statistical measurement, research result validation and generalization of the results to the larger population.

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# Problem-based Learning and its Impact on EFL Learn- ers' Engagement and Reading Comprehension

Sepideh Berenji<sup>1</sup>  
Mahnaz Saeidi\*<sup>2</sup>  
Nasser Ghafoori<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

Problem-based learning (PBL) has recently gained prominence because of its potential to engage learners in learning process and to encourage deep meaningful knowledge construction. This quasi-experimental research, hence, aimed at implementing PBL in an EFL context to investigate its impact on participants' engagement and reading comprehension. Two groups of elementary level students, one as experimental group (N = 40) and one as control group (N = 40) whose homogeneity in language proficiency was examined by Key English Test (KET) were selected. The experimental group received PBL and the control group received lecture-based method. The two groups completed pre- and posttests of PETALS engagement instrument (PEI) and reading comprehension. The results,

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran; stu.berenji@iaut.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran, (corresponding author); m\_saeidi@iaut.ac.ir

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran; Ghafoori@iaut.ac.ir

based on multivariate analysis of covariance and one-way analysis of covariance, indicated that the PBL group had higher engagement and more enhanced reading comprehension ability. To have highly engaged successful learners in reading comprehension classes, practitioners in EFL context should pay special attention to student-centered methods like PBL.

**Keywords:** Engagement, Problem-based Learning, Reading Comprehension, self-directed learning, collaboration

## Introduction

In modern educational settings, the goal of education must be the facilitation of change and learning; this goal goes beyond cognitive education (Stentoft, 2017) and is in line with an experiential learning which has meaning and involves learners' active participation in knowledge construction (Lin, 2015). Unlike meaningless rote-learning which runs in a rigid way as it is only limited to the knowledge transfer process and students' recall of the transferred knowledge, experiential learning leads to deep meaningful learning, learners' high engagement level and facilitates the use of acquired knowledge in different contexts and situations (Renol et al., 2017).

Looking at academic contexts, the mostly heard complaint in academic contexts nowadays is students' disengagement (Lin, 2017a). There is decline in motivation among students and they try to get by with as little effort as possible. Learners' engagement, then, should be the essence of teaching methods since it encourages success in learning (Wynn Sr et al., 2014). Savin-Baden (2016) defines student engagement as student association with the learning context, peers, and tutors that enable transition of knowledge in learning; the notion of engagement also includes students' degree of desire, interest and attention during the learning process.

Deep meaningful learning is considered another key factor to success in academic settings that can be encouraged through active engagement (MacKenzie, 2015). One of the language skills that requires active engagement on the part of learners to achieve in-depth comprehension and meaningful learning for the purpose of performing cognitive and procedural tasks such as taking a test, writing a paper, giving a speech and also acquiring professional knowledge in educational fields is reading comprehension (Lin, 2017b). However, the main impediment in acquiring deep meaningful knowledge in reading is that teaching comprehension is mostly based on lecture-based methods in most traditional academic contexts (Lin, 2015) which prevents learners to actively participate in the learning process (MacKenzie, 2015).

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an educational method which is based on constructivist theory of learning because learning and understanding in this method is derived from interaction with real problems and the learning environment (Tan, 2003). PBL has been designed to promote deep understanding along with enhancing higher-order thinking skill; This instructional method

centered on the learners (Aryanti & Artini, 2017) and engages the learners as knowledge seekers; persuade them to frequently take a part in questioning, analyzing and interpreting the information and also applying the gained new information in new contexts. PBL, thus, is in accord with modern educational requirements that leads to meaningful life-long learning through interaction and active engagement (Yew & Goh, 2016).

Considering Iranian EFL contexts, it becomes evident that although reading constitutes the major part of the course, most students do not have the required comprehension ability; they are passive and they do not actively engage in learning activities (Weisi, 2012). These problems might stem from imperfect educational system, heavily loaded with traditional methods and little attention paid to meaningful development of knowledge. Reading comprehension courses need to develop learners' active participation to assist them acquire new knowledge easily. Overemphasis on decoding and lack of sufficient exposure to authentic language use might be the major sources of poor engagement and low achievement (Lin, 2017b). As Kohonen et al. (2014) assert, there is a demand for an effective teaching method to create engaging educational context to develop deep meaningful learning. Accordingly, PBL, as an instructional method anchored in constructivism, which encompasses indicators of active engagement (Lin, 2017a) might offer a good solution for the stated problems.

Although a large number of studies have illuminated the role of PBL in different disciplines (e.g., Abu-aisheh et al., 2016; Garnjost & Brown, 2018; Rovers et al., 2018), there is a lacuna of such research focusing on language learning and learners' active engagement in the EFL context. The scarcity of the research endeavors into the possible role of PBL in language learning particularly reading comprehension and also its possible impact on learners' engagement level which is considered the main factor in deep meaningful learning (Rashid & Asghar, 2016) calls for further studies to investigate these issues. Thus, the present research attempted to bridge the gap by probing the instructional effectiveness of PBL, first, on EFL learners' engagement level during the learning process and second, on their reading comprehension ability.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Problem-based Learning**

Traditional educational settings are teacher oriented which transfer only static and fixed information; students have only the role to memorize what the teacher has transmitted to them. The students contribute nothing to the process of learning and consequently, cannot enhance the professional qualities in accord with requirements of modern life (Lin, 2017a). Obviously such content-oriented decontextualized teaching results in surface shallow learning rather than deep meaningful learning (Stentoft, 2017) and doesn't develop learners into good problem solvers to deal with challenges of today's world (Cho et al., 2015). If academic settings continue teaching content to learners without paying attention to the fact that how quickly such content knowledge becomes ir-

relevant, education would fail; teachers would also fail if they focus on learning processes that do not focus on life-long learning (Stentoft, 2017).

According to Farrell and Jacobs (2010), learners need to be able to feel responsible for their own learning and for the learning of those with whom they interact. In other words, as Tan (2003) states, the goal of education must be the facilitation of change and learning; this goal goes beyond cognitive education and includes the education of the whole person; it involves personal growth and the development of self-directed learning.

According to Tan (2003), learners should act as pupil-researchers; they should continuously generate questions, formulate hypothesis and make their best effort to investigate and construct knowledge for themselves. Being self-directed learners requires that individuals identify the knowledge areas they need, develop a plan to find the solution to the problems by searching varieties of resources and also be able to evaluate the results (Stentoft, 2017). Generally speaking, teachers must create an experiential learning environment based on investigation and discovery; a new student-centered method of learning and teaching is required to promote students' team working, problem solving and responsibility for learning (Cho et al., 2015).

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a method of teaching anchored in constructivism. In PBL, understanding is gradually constructed through learners' attempt in pursuing goals, doing research, solving educational problems and reflecting (Lin, 2017a). PBL, according to O'Grady et al. (2012) and Stentoft (2017), is beneficial in dealing with modern academic requirements.

PBL aims at preparing students for real-life settings by requiring them to solve authentic problems. The problems as the starting point to activate the course are considered the centerpiece during the learning process. The more problems the students learn to solve, the more they will be able to apply their knowledge (Lin, 2017b). PBL involves learners with a range of conceptual ideas in problems through self-directed learning and collaboration; this challenges their current knowledge and assists them in identifying and solving their learning needs implementing prior knowledge and knowledge from different sources (Hmelo-Silver, 2013). PBL also encourages reflection which is an important indicator of learning (Hung, 2013).

In PBL, scaffolds are broadly implemented as guides to bring about high level of meaningful learning and to help students achieve their academic ends (Haruehansawasin & Kiattikomol, 2018). Scaffolding can take different forms including group working in class, teacher's social and cognitive congruence and the supports that are developed in advance by teachers like paper-based cognitive tools (Schmidt et al., 2011).

## **Engagement**

Engagement is defined as students' degree of interest and attention during the learning process and their association with the learning context that enables

knowledge transition (Rahmanpanah & Mohseni, 2017; Savin-Baden, 2016) and consequently encourages academic success (Liu et al., 2018).

Engagement comprises three components including cognitive, students' effort to do more than expected and implement strategies to enhance learning, affective, students' feelings toward the learning process, and behavioral, the learners' involvement in tasks, (Zaff et al., 2011).

Students are successful that have high engagement; the higher the engagement, the more the learning will occur; the effectiveness of any educational method depends on its ability to increase engagement (Akbari et al., 2016). By encouraging active personal construction of knowledge, PBL is targeted to inspire highly engaged learning in this research.

## **Reading Comprehension**

Learning to comprehend texts is an important skill to use materials and to acquire professional knowledge in different subject fields (Lin, 2017b). Comprehension is a meaning construction process (Paris & Hamilton, 2009) that necessitates implementing coordinate cognitive processes during which the reader gets textual information and then relates it to his/her background knowledge to understand the text (Arjuna & Jufri, 2016).

In most EFL settings, teaching reading comprehension follows lecture-based method with a focus on direct instruction (Weisi, 2012). Such an instruction suffers from decontextualization which prevents learners to gain a deep meaningful learning (Lin, 2017b). Due to the inefficiency of the lecture-based method to enhance comprehension, PBL may be a good solution by actively engaging learners in personal knowledge construction.

## **The Related Experimental Studies**

PBL has been widely investigated in many different fields of studies. Many of these available studies have reported the positive perceptions of the learners toward PBL, positive impact of PBL on learners' engagement level and also its facilitative role in learning process. For example, Wosinski et al., (2018) aimed at investigating the perspectives of undergraduate nursing students to identify and synthesize the best available evidence on their success in PBL. This study implemented a qualitative systematic review of the literature according to meta-aggregative methodology. The results of the study showed that clinical reasoning, leadership skills and interaction between the learners in PBL were key elements that led to the success of nursing students.

Another study that emphasizes the positive role of PBL in learning process is a study done by Abu-aisheh et al. (2016). This research implemented PBL to foster engineering students' engagement in the class. Portfolios were used as means of data gathering instrument. The analysis of portfolios indicated that

PBL enhanced the learners' level of interaction, encouraged active learning and consequently increased their engagement in class. Focusing on students' level of engagement, Savin-Baden (2016) draws on a number of studies over the last 15 years. Savin-Baden argues that conceptually and practically, student engagement in PBL can be troublesome, however, by acknowledging four trans-disciplinary threshold concepts including liminality, scaffolding, pedagogical content knowledge, and pedagogical stance, facilitators will be able to enhance student engagement and participation to a high extent in PBL.

In contrast to studies which have focused on positive impact of PBL during learning process, in a research, Garnjost and Brown (2018) concluded that there was no significant difference in students' perceptions between faculty centric pedagogy and PBL. This research compared undergraduate business students' perception toward the effectiveness of faculty centric pedagogy and PBL. Using rubrics and scales, the students' perspectives were measured on problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, knowledge acquisition, and self-directed learning (SDL).

PBL, however, is a new teaching method in humanities, especially in teaching languages. Although little research has been done in EFL contexts to the best knowledge of the researchers, beneficial impacts of PBL have been emphasized. For example, Lin (2015) implemented PBL in an English course to investigate its effect on elementary students' vocabulary learning. The PBL group learned vocabulary through learner-centered activities, while the control group used lecture-based method. Participants completed pre- and posttests and wrote a topic-based composition and a self-report. The findings indicated that the control group could only acquire vocabulary at the basic 2000-word level and mastered receptive knowledge, while the PBL group could learn vocabulary beyond 2000-word level and mastered productive knowledge.

Caswell (2017) conducted an exploratory, evaluative case study which incorporated PBL within MA TESOL program in teacher education. The results of this mix methods study indicated the facilitative role of PBL in achieving professional development by provision of new roles for teachers and students including lead instructors, collaborating instructors and students as peer-teachers.

Kumar and Refaei (2017) selected one intermediate writing course to investigate how PBL improves students' critical thinking in writing. To create the most appropriate text, the students were supposed to identify the audience of their writing and anticipate their needs. In these activities, students needed to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information. These processes were indicators of critical thinking. Using rubrics, the writings were analyzed and the results indicated that PBL promoted students' critical thinking.

Sulistyo (2017) investigated how effective PBL could be to promote EFL learners' argumentative writing with regard to content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics in a quasi-experimental study by involving intermediate-level students as the experimental and control groups. Based on the

results, the PBL group could improve argumentative writing and its components to a large extent in comparison to the guided-writing instruction group.

Aryanti and Artini (2017) investigated the effect of PBL on EFL students' productive skills and their attitudes toward language learning in a mixed-methods research. Pretest, posttest, close-ended questionnaire, open-ended questionnaire, observation checklist and interview were used as data-gathering instruments. Results showed that PBL enhanced learners' ability in productive skills and had positive impacts on their attitude.

Baresh et al. (2019) implemented Hybrid PBL (HPBL) method in an English speaking course to investigate the impact of PBL on EFL learners' speaking ability. The participants of the study were a class of 30 first-year undergraduate students in a public university in Libya. Semi structured interviews and observations were used as data-gathering instruments. The results showed HPBL's effectiveness by making students involved in learning to speak English fluently and enabling them to work more autonomously.

Bashith and Amin (2017) examined the impact of PBL on EFL students' critical thinking skill and learning outcomes through a quasi-experimental method with non-equivalent control group design. Pre and post essay tests were used as instruments to gather data on learning outcomes. The critical thinking skill data were from the test scores of each class. The findings of the study indicated that PBL enhanced EFL learners' critical thinking skill and b about positive learning outcomes in comparison to the control group.

Lin (2017a) incorporated PBL in one web-based English reading course to investigate its impact on learners' comprehension ability and their perceptions. Two classes of intermediate university students were randomly assigned into the PBL and Non-PBL groups. Comprehension pretest and posttest, an instructional questionnaire and self-reports were implemented to gather data. The results indicated that PBL learners enhanced their comprehension in comparison to the control group. The questionnaire and self-reports analysis revealed that PBL increased active learning and synthesized cognitive processing.

Another study by Lin (2017b) investigated whether implementing PBL in English reading course can foster EFL learners' comprehension ability, strategy use and their active learning. Two reading classes were randomly assigned into the PBL and Non-PBL groups. Comprehension pre- and posttests and English active learning questionnaire were used to gather data. The results indicated high positive impacts of PBL on learners' comprehension and strategy use. The analysis of questionnaires also showed that PBL participants had more active learning attitude.

Lee et al. (2019) implemented PBL in an EFL class. Sophomore English majors were participants of the study. They engaged in recursive reading and writing practices. They took part in considering the collected multimodal resources and writing a multimodal text so as to make the target audience interested. Corpus and qualitative analyses revealed that students developed their ability in vocabulary use, sentential complexity, and overall expressive fluency.



As the research literature indicates, some research has been carried out on PBL in EFL contexts (e.g., Aryanti & Artini, 2017; Kumar & Refaei, 2017; Lin, 2015), but only a few limited studies, to the researchers' knowledge, have been conducted on the impact of PBL on reading comprehension (Lin, 2017 a & b). These studies indicated positive impact of PBL on EFL learners' comprehension ability. What is lacked in these studies is the investigation of the undeniable and indispensable role of scaffolding in PBL. To bring sufficient empirical evidence to support superiority of PBL (Lin, 2015), especially in EFL contexts, more research studies are needed to investigate PBL by focusing on scaffolding. In addition, the learners in these two studies were not homogenized which prevents generalizability of the findings. More research is needed to homogenize the learners in proficiency so that more reliable results can be achieved. In addition, in accord with the research literature in EFL, although the notion of engagement has received lots of attention in educational settings (Rashid & Asghar, 2016), almost no research has been done to investigate students' engagement level using PBL. As learners' active participation during learning can foster deep meaningful learning (Liu, et al, 2018), more research is needed to investigate its role in learning in PBL.

To understand the instructional effectiveness of PBL and to fill the gap in the research literature, this study, thus, intends to investigate the effect PBL may have on EFL learners' engagement and comprehension ability in a General English class and aims at comparing this PBL class with another EFL class following a lecture-based method. It is expected that PBL as the constructivist method could solve EFL learners' disengagement problem which can be considered one of the most important impediments in learning and could involve learners in active knowledge construction to encourage deep meaningful learning in reading. For this purpose, the following research questions and null hypotheses were posed:

#### Research Questions

1. Does PBL have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL students' engagement level?
2. Does PBL have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL students' reading comprehension ability?

## Method

### Design

This study followed a quasi-experimental design with pretest-posttest, control group. There were two groups, experimental, and control. The independent variable was PBL and the dependent variables were EFL learners' engagement and comprehension ability.

### Participants

Both male and female undergraduate junior students (N = 118) with age range of 19-27 comprising three General English classes were initial participants in

this study. They were majoring in different engineering courses including electronic and computer engineering. In these classes, 102 met the criterion of one standard deviation ( $SD = 12.05$ ) above and below the mean ( $M = 29.30$ ), based on the results of Key English Test (KET). After assigning one group as the pilot group ( $N = 22$ ), one experimental group ( $N = 40$ ) and one control group ( $N = 40$ ) were selected. Convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling technique was used in this study. The experimental group received PBL and the control group received lecture-based method. Their English proficiency was limited to restricted hours of EFL instruction at high school based on the interview in class.

## **Instruments**

### ***The Key English Test (KET)***

KET was used in the PBL and control groups to test students' homogeneity level in proficiency. It is a Cambridge ESOL exam including four sections of reading, listening, speaking and writing. This test is suitable for elementary-level learners. Due to practicality problems in this research, the listening and speaking sections were not utilized and only the reading and writing sections were implemented. The Reading and Writing paper has nine parts. There are 60 possible marks in reading and writing sections. Through Kuder-Richardson' formula, its reliability was calculated to be .73, which was acceptable. The content validity of this test was also ensured by consulting three experienced EFL teachers teaching at the university.

### ***The PETALS Engagement Instrument (PEI)***

PEI was used to investigate the learners' engagement level in both the PBL and control groups (Appendix A). This questionnaire has been designed by Ministry of Education, Singapore (2009). The learners' survey contains eight scales altogether; Pedagogy (P), Experience of Learning (E), Tone of Environment (T), Assessment (A) Learning Content (L) as five dimensions of engaged learning and Affective Engagement (GA), Behavioral Engagement (GB) and Cognitive Engagement (GC) as three types of engagement. Each of the eight scales consists of 5 items. There are 40 items in all. For all the items, the learners are required to rate the extent to which each statement describe the lessons that they have gone through based on the given 10 Point-Likert type scale. However, in this study, the questionnaire was adapted to be better suited for using in the class by highlighting comprehension in all questions. The scale was also modified into 5-point Likert scale type and eight reverse questions were added to increase the validity of the questionnaire. The content validity of PEI was ensured by consulting two experienced EFL teachers at the university. The items were rated for readability, clarity and comprehensiveness. The questionnaire was translated into Persian and validated with regard to content consulting experienced EFL teachers at the university and then the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated through Cronbach's alpha formula to be .91.

### ***Reading Comprehension Pre- and Posttest***

Learners' comprehension was measured by pre- and posttests at the beginning and end of the study. Based on learners' proficiency level specified by the test of KET to be at the elementary level, "Select Readings: Teacher-Approved Readings for Today's Students" (Lee, 2011), an elementary level textbook of General English courses at the university, was implemented as the source in these tests as well as the instruction. Both pretest and posttest included 57 questions to assess learners' comprehension. The total score was 20. Through Kuder-Richardson' formula, its reliability was calculated to be 0.97 which was acceptable. The content validity of pre- and posttest was also ensured by consulting two experienced EFL teachers at the university.

### ***Scaffolds***

As the means of scaffolds, Problem Definition Template (PDT) and worksheets were used in the PBL group. PDT, with three columns of "what they know", "what they do not know", and "what they need to know" was used as a cognitive template to help students to make their prior knowledge and learning issues explicit in reading and propose an action plan to solve the problems (Appendix B). Worksheets were implemented to engage learners in doing different tasks to solve comprehension problems (Appendix C).

### **Procedure**

At first step and before the treatment, the results in KET were used to check the students' homogeneity in three general English courses in the first session. After that and before the main research, a pilot study (n = 22) was done in four sessions to calculate PEI and the pre-and posttest' reliability, to understand what type of problems students have (using PDT and the worksheets), and to facilitate the treatment procedure in the main study, especially in terms of PBL stages and time requirements. After the pilot study, the researchers made some changes in comprehension questions to make them more understandable.

After the pilot study, the main research was conducted. First, comprehension and PEI pretests were administered to both groups. Next, for two sessions in the PBL group, the teacher explained and modeled PBL to the students (i.e., training sessions). After the treatment, reading comprehension and PEI posttests were administered in both groups. PDT and worksheets were used as scaffolds to assist students during the learning process in PBL. The treatment and administering tests lasted 16 sessions. Every session was 90 minutes. Totally six lessons were covered and each lesson was taught in two sessions. Teaching was conducted by one of the researchers in this study.

### ***Treatment in the PBL group***

The learners were divided into groups and went through phases:

**Problem Presentation.** An authentic problem was presented to students in every reading text. Students needed to solve the problem, reading the textbook. An example was like what follows:

“Oil, one natural resource that most countries use will finish one day. Are there any other natural resources? Can countries build cities that use other resources?”

**Pre-reading and Reading.** The problem was read and discussed by the students in groups to understand it. To specify learning needs taking the stated problem into account, PDT was given to the students. They completed the first column based on their background knowledge writing what they knew regarding the problem. They wrote what they did not know in the second column. Students, here, were asked to discuss their problems and state them in words. They wrote what they needed to know in the last column. The assigned text was, then, given to each group. To solve the stated problem, students were required to read the text and discuss the problems that impede comprehension. They were asked to complete PDT again considering their comprehension problems. This phase helped learners to contextualize reading problems from their own points of views. The teacher encouraged learners to propose an action plan by prioritizing the problems and deciding the ways they can use to solve problems. The main goal at this stage is specifying learning needs. Phases one and two lasted about 45 to 60 minutes.

**Self-directed Studying.** The teacher as facilitator guided students toward self-directed studying at home by introducing different resources (Grammar in Use, vocabulary books, Internet, Oxford and Thesaurus dictionaries). To organize their thought, learners were required to study PDT at home. To pace their learning (O’Grady et al., 2012) and to facilitate their job, a worksheet was given to be completed at home. Worksheets smoothly moved learners to identify and solve their problems by asking appropriate questions and providing the necessary cues. Students were required to take PDT and worksheet to the class to discuss the findings.

**In-class Presentation and Discussion.** In this phase, learners, first, discussed solutions to the problems collaboratively. A summary of major findings was, then, provided and presented to the class. The teacher assisted learners in presenting the solutions, and gave extra explanation when needed.

**The Learning Process Evaluation.** Learners reviewed and evaluated their learning process by means of self- and peer-evaluation reports.

### ***Instruction in the Control Group***

Lecture-based method was implemented in the control group. First, the learners were asked to look at the topic of reading to guess the meaning of topic and predict what the text can be about. After asking and answering some textual and contextual questions involving the ones related to pictures, headings and subheadings, the learners could get general idea of what the text was about.

The teacher, then, started teaching the main text by reading the text line by line and translating it. The teacher also emphasized the right pronunciation of words and asked the learners to repeat the words to learn the correct pronunciations. In addition, the teacher also provided all other essential explanations important in comprehending the text including grammatical points like the verb tenses. After finishing reading, the teacher required learners to ask any questions they have with regard to the text. Reading and understanding the text approximately took 70 minutes. The teacher, then, asked the learners to devote the rest of the class time to answer comprehension questions. After checking the answers, the teacher told the students to do all the other follow-up reading tasks including vocabulary exercises and grammatical questions at home. The next session, the learners were required to read and answer all the exercises in the class and ask their problems and questions. The teacher also provided the learners with the necessary explanations.

## Results

### Proficiency Test of KET

To determine the homogeneity of the participants in pilot, control and PBL groups, first, One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov was conducted to consider normality of scores' distribution in KET (Table 1).

**Table 1.**  
*One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test in KET*

	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Sig.
Pilot	22	.13	.20
PBL	40	.13	.07
Control	40	.13	.08

As Table 1 indicates, the test revealed normal distribution of scores in three groups ( $p > .05$ ). Then, descriptive statistics were calculated as Table 2 indicates.

**Table 2.**  
*Descriptive Statistics in KET*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pilot	22	29.50	5.93	1.26
PBL	40	31.5	7.07	1.11
Control	40	29.22	6.05	.95
Total	102	30.00	6.44	.63

According to Table 2, the mean scores in the pilot, PBL and control groups are close to one another. To see whether the differences in mean scores are significant, one-way analysis of variance was conducted (Table 3).

**Table 3.**  
*One-Way ANOVA Results in KET*

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size a
Between groups	73.62	2	36.81	.88	.41	.01
Within groups	4120.37	99	41.62			
Total	4194.00	101				

a Eta Squared

As Table 3 displays, one-way analysis of variance indicated that the difference in language proficiency level is not meaningful,  $F(2, 99) = .88$ ,  $P = .41 > 0.05$ , indicating that the three groups were homogeneous.

### Research Question 1

Regarding the first research question, first the distributions of scores in PEI pretest and posttest in the control and PBL groups were taken into account with regard to normality by means of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (Table 4).

**Table 4.**  
*One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test in PEI Pretest and Posttest in the PBL and Control Groups*

Variables	Group	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Sig.
PEI Pretest	Control	40	.75	.60
	PBL	40	.76	.62
PEI Posttest	Control	40	1.00	.26
	PBL	40	.65	.77
Pedagogy pretest	Control	40	1.29	.07
	PBL	40	1.28	.07
Pedagogy posttest	Control	40	1.23	.09
	PBL	40	.67	.75
Experience of Learning Pretest	Control	40	1.63	.06
	PBL	40	1.53	.06
Experience of Learning Posttest	Control	40	.95	.31
	PBL	40	.57	.89
Tone of Environment Pretest	Control	40	1.16	.13
	PBL	40	1.16	.13
Tone of Environment Posttest	Control	40	1.27	.07
	PBL	40	.67	.75
Assessment Pretest	Control	40	1.13	.14
	PBL	40	1.05	.21
	Control	40	1.59	.05

Assessment Posttest				
	PBL	40	.92	.36
	Control	40	1.45	.05
Learning Content Pretest				
	PBL	40	1.50	.07
	Control	40	1.60	.06
Learning Content Posttest				
	PBL	40	.85	.45
	Control	40	1.55	.05
Affective Engagement Pretest				
	PBL	40	1.41	.07
	Control	40	1.67	.05
Affective Engagement Posttest				
	PBL	40	.94	.33
	Control	40	1.50	.05
Behavioral Engagement Pretest				
	PBL	40	1.80	.05
	Control	40	1.70	.05
Behavioral Engagement Posttest				
	PBL	40	.94	.33
	Control	40	2.14	.05
Cognitive Engagement Pretest				
	PBL	40	2.32	.05
	Control	40	2.06	.05
Cognitive Engagement posttest				
	PBL	40	.98	.28

According to Table 4, the results showed that the score in PEI pre- and post-test and its subscales in the control and PBL groups have normal distribution ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the significance values in all score distributions indicates that parametric tests used for all variables are acceptable.

At the second step, learners' scores in eight scales and also their total scores in PEI were calculated in two groups. There were six questions in each scale. Therefore, the scores in eight scales ranged from 6 to 30. The lowest mark in total score was 48 and the highest mark was 240. After conducting linearity and normality tests and ensuring that there is no deviation, the equality of variance-covariance matrix was taken into account. It indicated that as  $F = 2.15$ ,  $P = .002 > .001$ , covariance matrices of the dependent variable are equal across groups. To test the equality of error variances, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was also conducted. The results indicated that as  $p > .01$ , there is equality of error variances for dependent variables across groups. To investigate the effect of PBL on students' engagement level, Mancova was used (Table 5).

**Table 5.**

*Multivariate Test Box: Mean Difference between the PBL and Control Groups*

	Value	Sig.	F
Wilks' Lambda	0.02	0.000	261.42

As Table 5 indicates,  $F = 261.42$ ,  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$  and Wilks'  $L = 0.02$  in multivariate analysis of covariance yielded a significant and meaningful difference

in engagement level in both groups. To investigate the significance of difference in learners' engagement level in eight sub-scales in PEI, F test was used as Table 6 indicates.

**Table 6.**  
*F Test to Compare Engagement Level in the PBL and Lecture-Based Groups*

Scales	F	df	Sig.
Pedagogy	1407.78	1	0.000
Experience of learning	1561.69	1	0.000
Tone of environment	1621.65	1	0.000
Assessment	1297.99	1	0.000
Learning content	2393.64	1	0.000
Affective engagement	2744.09	1	0.000
Behavioral engagement	2355.5	1	0.000
Cognitive engagement	4634.21	1	0.000

As Table 6 presents, there is a meaningful and significant difference between the PBL and lecture-based groups in eight scales taking significant values ( $P < 0.05$ ) into account. To compare the PBL and lecture-based groups' engagement level, descriptive statistics in engagement subscales have been indicated in Table 7.

**Table 7.**  
*Means and Standard Deviation of Scores in the PBL and Control Groups*

Dependent Variable	Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
P Posttest	PBL	20.28a	.43	19.41	21.15
	Lecture-based	11.54a	.43	10.66	12.41
E posttest	PBL	19.96a	.57	18.82	21.10
	Lecture-based	10.75a	.57	9.61	11.89
T Posttest	PBL	20.35a	.57	19.21	21.49
	Lecture-based	10.96a	.57	9.83	12.10
A posttest	PBL	18.91a	.45	18.01	19.80
	Lecture-based	10.51 a	.45	9.61	11.41
L posttest	PBL	19.53a	.56	18.41	20.66
	Lecture-based	8.13a	.56	7.00	9.26



GA posttest	PBL	21.66a	.45	20.75	22.57
	Lecture-based	9.45a	.45	8.54	10.36
GB posttest	PBL	21.84a	.66	20.52	23.15
	Lecture-based	10.53a	.66	9.21	11.84
GC posttest	PBL	23.29a	.40	22.48	24.10
	Lecture-based	7.42	.40	6.61	8.24

A Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: pedagogy-pre= 8.1250, experience of learning-

Pre= 7.2500, tone of environment-pre= 8.1875, assessment-pre = 9.2750, learning content-pre= 6.850, affective engagement-pre= 9.6250, behavioral engagement-pre= 10.6000, cognitive engagement-pre=7.1125

Taking the mean scores in all eight subscales into account (Table 7), it became evident that the learners had high engagement level in the PBL group in comparison to the learners in the lecture-based group. Therefore, the first null hypothesis indicating that PBL will not have statistically significant effect on EFL learners' engagement level was rejected.

## Research Question 2

Regarding the second research question, the distributions of scores in comprehension pre- and posttests in both groups were taken into account with regard to normality by means of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (Table 8).

**Table 8.**  
*One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test in Comprehension Pretest and Posttest in the PBL and Control Groups*

Variables	Group	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Sig.
Comprehension Pretest	Control	40	.93	.34
	PBL	40	.82	.50
Comprehension Posttest	Control	40	.84	.46
	PBL	40	.94	.34

According to Table 8, the significant values ( $P > .05$ ) in test results indicated that the scores in comprehension pretest and posttest in both groups had normal distribution. At the second step, learners' total scores in comprehension pre- and posttest in both groups were calculated out of 20. After conducting linearity and normality tests and ensuring that there is no deviation, the equality of variance-covariance matrix was taken into account. It indicated that as  $F = 1.51$ ,  $P = .17 > .001$ , covariance matrices of the dependent variable are equal across groups. To test the equality of error variances, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was also conducted. The results indicated that as  $F = 1.76$ ,  $p$

> .05, there is equality of error variances of dependent variables across groups. To measure the effect PBL had on learners' comprehension ability, Ancova was conducted (Table 9).

**Table 9.**  
*Analysis of Covariance between the PBL and Lecture-Based Groups*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Eta					
Pre	132.98	1	132.98	27.97	0.000
.26					
Group	433.91	1	433.91	91.28	0.000
.54					
Error	366.01	77	4.75		

As Table 9 indicates, statistically controlling the impact of comprehension pretest scores (covariates) in both groups,  $F = 91.28$ ,  $P = .000 < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .54$  in on-way analysis of covariance indicates a significant and meaningful difference in learners' comprehension ability in both groups in posttest. After statistically controlling the covariates, the descriptive statistics in comprehension posttest in both groups were calculated according to Table 10.

**Table 10.**  
*Dependent variable: Posttest*

Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PBL	16.02	0.34	15.34	16.71
Control	11.37	0.34	10.68	12.05

Table 10 clearly shows the mean scores in comprehension posttest in the PBL and control groups indicating that there is significant difference between both groups considering comprehension ability. The PBL group could improve their reading comprehension ability to a high extent. Therefore, the second null hypothesis indicating that PBL will not have statistically significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability was rejected.

## Discussion

The present study was an endeavor to investigate the impact PBL had on EFL learners' engagement and reading comprehension ability. The results for the first research question indicated that the PBL group had high active engagement during the learning process in comparison to the lecture-based group. This finding is in line with the results of the studies which report that PBL increases engagement in learning (Abu-aisheh et al., 2016; Savin-Baden, 2016; Wynn Sr. et al., 2014). The results for the second research question also indicated that in comparison to the control group, the PBL group enhanced their

comprehension ability to a high extent. This result is consistent with prior findings which indicated that PBL enhances comprehension ability (Lin, 2017a, b). The findings in this study can be justified based on the PBL theory which states that engagement and learning are enhanced by encouraging learners to solve authentic problems through self-directed studying, acquiring and implementing knowledge collaboratively, and also reflecting on learning (Hung, 2013). As Rahmanpanah and Mohseni (2017) state, meaningful learning is best accomplished when students actively engage in knowledge construction.

Active engagement and high comprehension ability in the PBL group can be explained by supreme position of PBL as a constructivist teaching method which emphasizes learning through experience; the focus is on application of acquired knowledge through reflective and experiential learning rather than transmission and memorization of knowledge (Keegan et al., 2017). The experiential learning process initiated by presenting the authentic problems and continues by setting and perusing learning goals through collaboration and self-directed studying leads to progression of knowledge which in turn enhances students' autonomy, engagement and deep learning (Abu-aisheh et al., 2016). In this study, presentation of authentic problems supplied realistic goals for the PBL group to pursue. Using prior knowledge and the scaffolds, students were smoothly moved toward identifying their reading impediments. To gain the required knowledge, particular PBL tasks were assigned. Using the textual information, they, then, could easily solve the stated problem. In simple terms, efforts to gain more knowledge independently, and more self-determination increased students' engagement and assisted them to improve their comprehension.

Group working can be considered as the first contributing factor in PBL. Collaboration is a motivational tool that decreases stress especially for elementary learners, help them to easily construct knowledge and increases engagement (Michaelsen et al., 2014). In the PBL group, collaboration as a motivational factor decreased the stress associated with students' proficiency and increased their engagement. This assisted them to share their learning needs, discuss solutions, and try to acquire knowledge from their friends. This is congruent with Zhang et al. (2017) who mentioned group working as the most efficient factor in PBL which assists learners to increase their effort and helps them to easily acquire knowledge.

Scaffolding is the second contributing factor. PBL should present learners with right kind of scaffolds to enhance deep and meaningful learning and also to increase engagement in tasks that would otherwise be beyond their current abilities (Belland et al., 2013). In this research, scaffolding assisted learners in class systematically and encouraged them to work independently during self-directed learning. PDT helped learners to specify their learning needs, recognize the importance of background knowledge, and encouraged them to develop an action plan to solve reading problems. Worksheets also provided learners a smooth pathway to identify and solve comprehension problems. Implementing scaffolding, thus, increased their active involvement and as a result, im-

proved their comprehension. This achievement could be impossible without scaffolding as learners' prior knowledge could not suffice to help them move forward in comprehension. This is in line with Haruehansawasin and Kiattikomol (2018) who stated that in classes with many low-achievers, scaffolds are considered the needed help; requiring students to be active in class without preparation prevents teacher's facilitation to be effective. The results also confirm the findings by Hmelo-Sliver (2013) who confirmed that success of PBL depends on scaffolding.

Self-directed learning as the third contributing factor assisted students to become independent. An autonomy-supported context assists learners to think and act independently and helps them to control their learning process and as a result enhances their engagement and meaningful learning (Fukuda et al., 2017; Rashid & Asghar, 2016). In this research, scaffolding and introducing different sources by the facilitator persuaded students to control their learning and enhanced their involvement in tasks during self-directed studying and made it easy for them to acquire the required knowledge. This is in accord with Hamed et al. (2015) who found that self-directed studying maximizes learning by engaging students in deep active learning.

Reflection as the last stage in PBL assisted students to find out their points of weakness and strength and helped them to assess their progress and in this way, increased their engagement in reading tasks to enhance their comprehension. This confirms Reid et al. (2017) who stated that reflection enhances meta-comprehension which positively affects engagement and as a result, regulates and enhances learning.

The low engagement and less enhanced comprehension ability in the control group can be attributed to lecture-based method in which there was no problem to be solved collaboratively and no scaffolding and self and peer-evaluation existed. In this method, knowledge is imparted through giving lecture; this makes learners passive and prevents their deep active learning (Weisi, 2012). In this research, the control group followed lecture-based method which was based on listening to the instructor's initiated questions and her transfer of knowledge. Students didn't have any role in determining learning needs and didn't have any chance of constructing knowledge; this had negative impact on their engagement and comprehension ability. This affirms JaleniuskienL: (2016) who concluded that the students can enhance their deep-learning that actively construct knowledge for themselves rather than receiving knowledge passively.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides support for implementing PBL in EFL classes to improve the learners' level of engagement and their deep meaningful learning in comprehension. The significance of this study lies in the fact that, due to the lack of enough empirical evidence, it explored PBL in a General English class to demonstrate its effectiveness and drew attention to the notion of disengage-

ment which is considered an important problem in educational settings and forms the basis for academic achievement as Akbari et al. (2016) indicates.

Teachers can make use of the findings of this study in helping EFL learners improve their level of engagement and comprehension abilities which are considered two important factors for success in language learning through experiential learning. To meet the threshold level of proficiency in classes with many low-achievers, teachers should implement the right kinds of scaffolding in EFL settings. It is also important for teachers, teacher trainers and curriculum developers to pay attention to student-centered methods of teaching like PBL if they want to bring about life-long learners.

While it is found that PBL is very useful in the EFL context of Iran, the limitation of the study should not be overlooked. First, although having one teacher ensures the procedures which have been implemented carefully, it makes difficult to generalize the findings due to the bias the teacher, as one of the researchers, might have with the efficacy of PBL. Second, the results should be generalized to the population with caution due to the small sample size. Third, the participants in this research were non-English majors; thus, the findings cannot be generalized to learners with an EFL major.

This study has presented some useful recommendations to open some potential new areas of research. Future research are recommended to investigate PBL in classes with EFL majors. Because of the efficacy of hard scaffolds in classes with large number of low-achievers (Haruehansawasin & Kiattikomol, 2018), soft scaffolds were not taken into account in this study. To shed light on efficacy of different types of scaffolding in PBL, it is suggested to be a comparison between hard and soft scaffolds in future studies.

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## Appendix A

### PETALS Reading Engagement Instrument

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1	I learn through reading activities in class.					
Q2	I study alone when I want to learn more.					
Q3	I actively participate in the reading class.					
Q4	I learn from the examples that my teacher presents based on reading texts.					
Q5	What I learn in texts and activities can be found in the real world.					
Q6	Learning how to comprehend texts easily is exciting.					
Q7	I follow classroom instructions for comprehension.					
Q8	I am willing to do hard activities.					
Q9	I don't use different materials to understand texts.					
Q10	I learn through group-working.					
Q11	Comprehension increases when I ask 'why' questions					
Q12	I feel belonged to the class.					
Q13	I know how much more I've learnt from the beginning.					
Q14	I cannot learn independently.					
Q15	I learn to work well collaboratively.					
Q16	I enjoy doing the comprehension activities that my teacher gives.					
Q17	I follow class rules.					
Q18	I come up with different ideas when I do my work.					
Q19	I understand texts better when my teacher teaches in different ways.					
Q20	What I've learnt in one text helps me understand other texts.					
Q21	My classmates and I help one another in all comprehension activities.					
Q22	I know how I can improve my comprehension.					
Q23	I learned to tell my classmates about my ideas.					
Q24	I like working with reading texts.					
Q25	I listen carefully to my					

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
	teacher during comprehension activities.					
Q26	Following classroom instructions is difficult.					
Q27	I think about what I learned after the lesson.					
Q28	I use different materials to understand texts better.					
Q29	I discuss with my classmates what I've learnt.					
Q30	I don't know how I can improve my comprehension.					
Q31	I do comprehension activities even if they are hard.					
Q32	I like to participate in different comprehension activities.					
Q33	I know it is important to increase our ability in comprehension.					
Q34	I can use what I've learnt in different activities.					
Q35	I cannot use What I've learnt in other contexts.					
Q36	I help to check my friends' works.					
Q37	I like to know how to increase my comprehension.					
Q38	I continue to learn independently and increase my knowledge in comprehension after class.					
Q39	I think about how I can learn more about texts.					
Q40	For me learning how to comprehend texts is not important.					
Q41	The teacher uses my prior knowledge to help me understand texts.					
Q42	I offer my ideas during comprehension activities.					
Q43	I want to learn more about reading texts.					
Q44	I don't like to do hard reading activities.					
Q45	What I learn in texts makes sense to me.					
Q46	I pay attention to my work in class.					
Q47	I am not interested to increase my knowledge in comprehension.					
Q48	I check my own work in comprehension activities.					

## Appendix B

### Problem definition Template (PDT)

What do We know?	What do we not know?	What do we need to know?
To discover prior knowledge on - problem scenario - language	To discover - Unknown aspects of problem scenario - Unknown language	To enable students to propose an 'action plan', by asking them to list and prioritize reading problems.

Adopted from O'Grady et al. (eds.), One-Day, One-Problem: An Approach to Problem-based Learning (2012)

## Appendix C

### A Sample Worksheet

<p><b>A.</b> Look at the reading text and then complete the followings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading Title</li> <li>- People and places</li> <li>- Key words (words that appear more than one time)</li> <li>- Does this information help you in comprehension? How?</li> </ul> <p><b>B.</b> The followings are sentences from the text. Write Synonyms for underlined words and antonyms for bold words.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People have <b>different</b> ideas.</li> <li>2. People want a house with every <u>convenience</u>.</li> <li>3. Mukesh Ambani is the owner of the most <b>expensive</b> house.</li> <li>4. The house has <u>room</u> for everything his family wants.</li> <li>5. His house is in the <u>woods</u> near the lake.</li> <li>6. He became a <b>famous</b> basketball player.</li> </ol> <p><b>C.</b> Write different forms of the following words.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. own</li> <li>2. beauty</li> </ol> <p>Use the above words in the following sentences.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. She ----- a big house.</li> <li>2. The ----- of the factory is rich.</li> <li>3. My friend's girl is -----.</li> <li>4. You see the ----- in nature.</li> </ol> <p><b>D.</b> Which of the following is accurate? Explain the problem with wrong sentences.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The boy eats an apple.</li> <li>2. Eats the boy an apple.</li> <li>3. An apple the boy eats.</li> </ol> <p><b>E.</b> Fill in the missing parts. A professional basketball ----- built a very ----- type of home (different - player). He ----- to be a doctor but instead he became a ----- basketball player (wanted - famous).</p> <p><b>F.</b> Can you understand the following text without the first sentence? ----- . Some people dream of a simple house in a special place. Some want a large house with every convenience and some prefer a wooden small house in jungle.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Find the first sentence from the text and complete it. What is the role of the first and other sentences?</li> <li>2. The paragraph shows a particular text structure? What is it? Talk about its signal words.</li> <li>3. Search the text and find paragraphs with similar text structure.</li> </ol>
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# Exploring the Relationship between Teacher Burnout, Personality Traits, and Psychological Distress among Iranian EFL Teachers: A Mixed-Methods Study

Sasan Baleghizadeh\*<sup>1</sup>  
Leyli Amiri Shayesteh<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the relationship between burnout, personality traits, and psychological distress among Iranian EFL teachers. Moreover, it was an attempt to examine the effectiveness of five personality factors in predicting burnout aspects among EFL teachers. To this end, a sequential mixed-methods design was utilized. Maslach Burnout Inventory, Personality Traits Scale, and Psychological Distress Scale were the instruments administered to 110 Iranian EFL teachers working in private English language institutes in Tehran. Additionally, a semi-

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Letters & Human Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University, (corresponding author); s\_baleghizadeh@sbu.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> PhD Candidate of TEFL, Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Letters & Human Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University; l\_amirishayesteh@sbu.ac.ir

structured interview was conducted to delve into the teachers' opinions regarding the reasons and repercussions of teachers' burnout. The results of the study revealed that teachers' burnout aspects were associated with both psychological distress and personality traits. The results also found a significant negative correlation between the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aspects of burnout and the four personality traits involving openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. Finally, the results of the study indicated that the rise in neuroticism led to an increase in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aspects of burnout. The results of independent-samples t-test revealed that teaching experience contributed to teachers experiencing less burnout. The results of the study can enlighten teachers as to what extent teachers' burn out can be predicted by psychological distress, and personality traits, which, in turn can encourage teacher training programs to concern themselves with the mental health and preparedness of trainees to teach.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Personality Traits, Psychological Distress, Teaching Experience, EFL Teachers.

## Introduction

Teaching has been ranked as an exceedingly stressful career. The related literature has consistently characterized teaching as a highly stressful career involving higher emotional tension (Borg et al., 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Travers & Cooper, 1996). Teaching is not limited to dealing with the academic states of students, but at the same time it involves managing the emotional states of students as well. Cokluk (2000) indicates that teachers generally experience more stress in comparison to the average stress level of those who work in other careers. This condition enhances the probability of experiencing burnout for teachers. Burnout is prevalent in teaching and school administration professions involving intense and emotionally-charged human relationships (Kalker, 1984; Maslach, 1986; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Burnout is a negative affective reaction provoked against the chronic occupation stress which occurs mainly in interpersonally oriented occupations such as the teaching profession (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Identifying the roots and strategies to cope with tense situations and prevent the occurrence of burnout is thus of crucial significance (Hiver, 2015). The psychosocial distress for teachers originates from the interplay between individual, organizational, and social factors. Among the factors exerting influence on burnout, personal characteristics play a crucial role. Individuals' personality properties denote to characteristics that may lead or enhance the likelihood of burnout or may diminish burnout and its consequences. Gender, education, age, years of teaching experience, marital status, personality, social support and expectations are some of the social and personal variables influencing burnout (Saglam-Ari & Cina-Bal, 2008). To compensate for this problem and to contribute to the existing literature, the current study aimed to investigate the possible correlation among personality traits, psychological distress, and burnout among Iranian EFL teachers.

## Literature Review

### Burnout

Burnout is considered to be a psychological construct that has received considerable attention in recent literature. Freudenberger (1974) coined the term burnout to delineate the demotivation and emotional exhaustion he observed in volunteers engaged in a free health clinic. Freudenberger witnessed that by passage of time, demotivation and emotional exhaustion increased and were accompanied by diverse psychological and physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, irritability, insomnia, and exasperation (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Maslach (1976) also noticed that individuals working in human service professions are not only emotionally exhausted, but they also develop negative orientations towards their customers.

Maslach (1982) provided a definition of burnout as "a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people-work' of some kind (p. 2). More specifically, Maslach (1993) described burnout as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to depletion of emotional resources and the state of being emotionally burdened/overstrained. Depersonalization is defined as negative, uncaring, or extremely disconnected reaction to other people, who are generally the receivers of one's services or care. Reduced personal accomplishment denotes "a person's negative self-evaluation in connection to his or her job performance" (Schaufeli et al., 1993, p. 17).

Teacher burnout is considered to be a grave problem in education environment (Shen et al., 2009). Teachers' burnout has been documented (e.g., Carson et al., 2011; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Maslach et al., 2001) to adversely influence teaching effectiveness and decrease their quality of life. Feelings of burnout also play a cardinal role in teachers' regular absence from work and job turnover (Whipp et al., 2007).

A large number of research studies have explored the impact of the characteristics of teachers on burnout (e.g., Byrne, 1991; Jackson et al., 1986; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982), and there sometimes exists disagreement in the findings. For instance, some studies have indicated that teachers with less experience are typically vulnerable to higher degrees of burnout (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Fisher, 2011); nevertheless, at times, there happens to be different results (Friedman, 1991; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Conversely, teacher age has had an influence on burnout in a consistent manner. Previous research has revealed that young teachers are susceptible to experiencing higher degrees of emotional exhaustion compared to their older co-workers. (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Schwab et al., 1986). Moreover, a correlation exists between teacher burnout and the grade level that teachers teach, in a way that secondary school teachers tend to undergo higher degrees of depersonalization and decreased personal accomplishment than elementary school teachers (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982).

In the context of Iran, Vaezi and Fallah (2011) carried out a study with group of 104 Iranian EFL teachers to ascertain the correlation between burnout and their emotional intelligence. The participants were presented with EI and Burnout questionnaires. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was utilized in order to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed a negative correlation between burnout and emotional intelligence.

## Personality Traits

Personality traits are defined as individual differences, which are relatively stable patterns of behavior (Matsumoto, 2009). According to Soto et al. (2016), personality traits are associated with an idiosyncratic facet of an individual's affect, behavior or cognition, that is inclined to be steady over time and unchanging across related circumstances. A number of scholars (e.g., Kennedy, 2012; Rose et al., 2014; Thornton et al., 2005) support not just the investigation of the correlation between the performance of teachers and their personality traits, but recommend that personality traits potentially should be explicitly reflected upon during the selection of teachers and the process of their recruitment as well.

The bulk of the recent investigations on personality traits has been basically associated with the Five Factor Model (Soto et al., 2016) which categorizes personality traits into five inclusive dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience (Soto et al., 2016). These five dimensions effectively tap into a broad spectrum of individual variations in personality, and as a result the FFM is the most broadly utilized structural model in measuring personality and enquiries.

Extraversion is generally considered the degree to which an individual is garrulous and gregarious in social circumstances (Soto et al., 2016). Its essential facets involve sociability (vs. shyness), assertiveness (vs. submissiveness), and activity (vs. lack of energy). In terms of behavior, extroverts have the inclination to be talkative, assume responsibility in group situations, and show positive emotions, while introverts have the tendency to be uneasy in social situations, and do not reveal what they think or feel.

Agreeableness is a significant facet of social conduct. It deals with the degree to which someone treats pro-socially in relation to others and keeps amiable, congenial interpersonal relations (Soto et al., 2016). Central aspects of agreeableness embrace compassion (vs. lack of concern for others), politeness (vs. antagonism), and trust (vs. suspicion of others). Individuals who enjoy high levels of Agreeableness appear to be more eager to assist and condone others, and behave respectively towards other people; those who possess low levels of Agreeableness are apt to treat others with contempt, begin controversies, and feel resentful.

Conscientiousness refers to the ability of an individual to arrange things, finish tasks, and put effort in accomplishing long-term purposes (Soto et al.,

2016). Its core aspects include orderliness (vs. disorganization), self-discipline (vs. inefficiency), and reliability (vs. inconsistency). Those with high conscientiousness opt for order and structure, are fertile workers, are inclined to abide by regulations and standards, and are more capable of postponing gratification, whereas those with low levels of Conscientiousness have problem handling their desires and temptations and their attentions are easily diverted from tasks.

Neuroticism (sometimes called by its socially favorable pole, Emotional Stability) is concerned with the degree to which an individual is vulnerable to experience negative feelings and spirits (Soto et al., 2016). Its key aspects encompass anxiety (vs. calmness), depression (vs. contentment), and emotional volatility (vs. stability). Those with high levels of neuroticism more frequently undergo keen negative emotions, such as fright, grief, and exasperation, and experience frequent changes of mood. Those who are less neurotic, keep relaxed and sanguine, yet in tough circumstances, and can more easily control their emotions.

Openness to Experience is related to the all-around depth and breadth of an individual's artistic, intellectual, and experiential life (Soto et al., 2016). Significant aspects of Openness involve aesthetic sensitivity (vs. insensitivity), imagination (vs. lack of creativity), and intellect (vs. lack of intellectual curiosity). Individuals who are highly open, tend to possess a wide range of interests, and take pleasure in learning and trying novel things. On the contrary, those with low levels of Openness are inclined to have limited interests, and opt for routine and familiarity over diversity and innovation.

## **Psychological Distress**

According to Guazzaroni (2018), psychological distress is a general term used to depict disagreeable feelings or emotions that influence your level of functioning. In other words, it is a psychological uneasiness that affects your activities of daily living negatively. Psychological distress can lead to negative views of the environment, others, and the self. Sadness, anxiety, disturbance, and symptoms of mental illness are demonstrations of psychological distress. Psychological distress is associated with an emotional problem by related symptoms of both depression and at times anxiety. The symptoms of psychological distress are realized in the form of physical problem (Darcy & Siddique. 1984). Many studies confirmed a negative significant correlation between psychological distress and health-related quality (Paul, 2009; Prochkska & Diclemente, 1999; Selye, 1976).

Among teachers, very high levels of psychological distress have been observed and recorded. For example, Punch and Tuettman (1990) found that secondary teachers experienced psychological distress twice more than that of the general population. In a similar study, Johnson et al. (2005) made a comparison among the psychological health of 26 different professions, and discovered that teaching is one of the six most stressful jobs. Comparative studies have also been conducted on the differences between psychological health of male and



female teachers. Kovess-Masfety et al. (2007), for instance, found that female teachers consistently scored higher on psychological distress than their male colleagues. Utilizing the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSC), they spotted the biggest differences in the secondary school sector, where male teachers gained lower scores (so they were healthier) and female teachers obtained higher scores (so they were less healthy) than teachers elsewhere. In another study, Punch and Tuettmann (1990) found that whereas work-related stress factors just comprised a small amount of variance in psychological distress, these factors accounted for much more variance among female teachers than among their male counterparts. As Punch and Tuettmann have argued, this might have been due to their previous investment in teaching and thus placing themselves in higher danger. Punch and Tuettmann recommended that environmental facets of teaching are more significant in engendering and alleviating psychological distress among female than male teachers and urged researchers to further investigate these discrepancies.

### **The Five Factor Model, Psychological Distress, and Burnout**

Personality can be explained with regard to five fundamental factors, often labeled as the Big Five. The current labels for the bipolar factors are a) Extraversion versus Introversion, b) Agreeableness versus Hostility, c) Conscientiousness versus Lack of Conscientiousness, d) Neuroticism versus Emotional Stability, and e) Openness to Experience versus Closedness to Experience.

Extroverts' generally cheerful temperament (Watson & Clark, 1992) might result in them concentrating on the pleasant and positive aspect of their experiences. Furthermore, extraversion is essentially connected with the utilization of rational, problem-solving coping strategies and with seeking of social support and positive reassessment (Dorn & Matthews, 1992; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). Therefore, it is not startling that some research has indicated a negative correlation between burnout and extraversion. More precisely, Francis et al. (2004), Michielsen et al. (2004), and Piedmont (1993) have observed that extraversion has a negative correlation with emotional exhaustion. Kim et al. (2019) also revealed that extraversion was in negative correlation with burnout. The inclination of extroverts to search for interactions with other individuals may also neutralize depersonalization processes. In fact, Lingard (2003) found that social extraversion and action extraversion are negatively correlated with cynicism among civil engineers.

Agreeableness is characterized by altruism, caring, and nurturance in contrast to hostility, self-centeredness, indifference to others, and noncompliance. There appears to be some evidence for a mild correlation between agreeableness and social support (Hooker et al., 1994; Vickers et al., 1989; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). The stereotypical picture of an ideal nurse, a sort of Florence Nightingale, may possess a high level of agreeableness. The findings of the few studies that dealt with the association between burnout and agreeableness are in accord with this idea. For instance, Piedmont's (1993) first study indicated

that agreeableness is in a negative correlation with emotional exhaustion and in a positive correlation with personal accomplishment. In a second study, Piedmont (1993) revealed that, in filling a 7-month follow-up questionnaire, therapists who received high scores on agreeableness were less prone to experience emotional exhaustion and negative attitudes toward their clients. In the same vein, Deary, et al. (1996) stated that depersonalization and agreeableness are negatively correlated. Nevertheless, they found no association between agreeableness on the one hand and personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion on the other. Zellars et al. (2000) came up with analogous findings and discovered a weak negative correlation between depersonalization and agreeableness and no correlation between agreeableness and the two other burnout variables.

Researchers (e.g., Watson & Hubbard, 1996) have consistently attributed conscientiousness to problem-solving coping strategies, presumably due to the tenacity attribute of individuals enjoying high levels of this construct. Additionally, Costa et al. (1991) and McCrae and Costa (1986) have related conscientiousness to self-discipline, competence, dutifulness, and achievement striving. The conscientious individual's tenacity and self-discipline will perhaps assist him or her in completing tasks and accomplishing things as well. In fact, the studies conducted by Piedmont (1993), Deary et al. (1996), and Deary et al. (2003) have indicated that personal accomplishment and conscientiousness correlate positively. Kim et al. (2019) maintained that conscientiousness negatively correlated with burn out. Deary et al.'s (2003) longitudinal analysis of burnout in nursing students revealed that there is a positive correlation between depersonalization and conscientiousness.

What characterizes neuroticism includes a tendency to experience negative, disturbing emotions and to have related cognitive and behavioral traits. Among the traits that categorize this aspect are irritability, fearfulness, social anxiety, low self-esteem, and helplessness (Costa & McCrae, 1987). Generally, people who suffer from high neuroticism have a propensity for setting extremely high purposes for themselves and are inclined to undervalue their own performance (Eysenck, 1947). Bolger (1990) and Heppner et al. (1995) have made an association between neuroticism with the use of inefficient coping strategies. It seems that avoiding and distracting coping strategies (e.g., denying and self-criticism) are more frequently used by individuals with high levels of neuroticism compared to more approaching strategies like problem solving and proactive behavior (Bolger, 1990; Costa & McCrae, 1987). Furthermore, neuroticism appears to be connected with intense emotional reactions to anxiety-provoking situations, ultimately resulting in physical illness (Van Heck, 1997), with a higher risk of developing psychopathology (Widiger & Trull, 1992).

A number of scholars (e.g., Deary et al., 1996; Hills & Norvell, 1991; LePine et al., 2004; Lingard, 2003; Zellars et al., 2000) conducted a study on the correlation between burnout and neuroticism. The findings of their studies have generally indicated that those who suffer from high neuroticism are more prone to experience feelings of emotional exhaustion, and lower degrees of

personal achievement. Working with a sample of Spanish special education and elementary school teachers, Cano-Garcia et al. (2005) discovered that teachers high in neuroticism and introversion attained the highest scores in burnout.

Finally, the intelligence and curiosity that are connected with the fifth factor, intellect/autonomy, might be related to an inclination to attempt to learn something worthwhile from demanding experiences with regards to, for instance, personal growth or other positive outcomes (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1993). Intellect is not related to coping but seems to manifest a more flexible, imaginative, and intellectually curious approach in coping with situations that induce stress (Watson & Hubbard, 1996).

Kokkinos (2007) made a study with the purpose of investigating the relationship between burnout, job stressors and personality characteristics in primary school teachers from Cyprus. The results of the research demonstrated that both work-related stressors and personality were correlated with the three dimensions of burnout. Neuroticism was a common predictor of all dimensions of burnout. It was concluded that individual characteristics of teachers along with job related stressors should be taken into consideration when inquiring into the burnout phenomenon.

In a similar study, Pishghadam and Sahebjam (2012) made an attempt to conduct an investigation into the correlation between teachers' personality types, burnout and emotional intelligence among 147 teachers in the city of Mashhad. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), AND Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study demonstrated a significant association between personality types and emotional intelligence and the three dimensions of burnout. Moreover, it was revealed that extraversion and neuroticism were the best predictors for emotional exhaustion; intrapersonal scale of emotional intelligence and agreeableness were the best predictors for depersonalization, and so were interpersonal scale and conscientiousness for personal accomplishment.

Yilmaz (2014) carried out a study aiming to examine the relationship between personality characteristics and burnout levels. The results of the study indicated that the participants displayed maximum participation concerning personality characteristics respectively in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience, extraversion, and emotional stability dimensions. The levels of emotional exhaustion of participants were at the medium level, whereas depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment levels were low. Moreover, there was no significant correlation between teachers' personal traits and burnout levels. Therefore, it was concluded that increasing the positive views of teachers about personal characteristics can lead to a decrease in their burnout levels.

Bakker et al. (2006) conducted a study aimed at examining the correlation between the 5 basic personality traits and burnout as measured by Maslach Burnout Inventory among 80 volunteer counselors. The three separate step-wise multiple regression analyses were carried out to analyze the data. The

results of the study revealed that emotional exhaustion was anticipated by emotional stability; depersonalization was predicted by extraversion, emotional stability, and intellect/autonomy; and personal accomplishment was anticipated by extraversion and emotional stability. Moreover, a number of the fundamental personality factors moderated the correlation between the relative number of negative experiences and burnout, implying that personality might contribute to protection against dangers of fostering burnout in voluntary human service work.

## **The Present Study**

This study was an attempt to investigate the possible correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' burnout, personality traits, and psychological distress. Moreover, it explored the predictive power of personality traits, psychological distress in teachers' burnout. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' personality traits, psychological distress, and burnout levels?
2. Among personality traits and psychological distress which one is a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout?
3. To what extent do the components of teacher personality traits predict their burnout levels?
4. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' years of teaching experience and burnout levels?
5. From teachers' perspectives, what are the reasons behind teachers' burnout?
6. From teachers' perspectives, what are the consequences of teachers' burnout?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The participants for the present study were 110 Iranian EFL teachers teaching English in different private language institutes in Tehran. The sampling strategy for selection was convenience sampling procedure. The participants had at least five years of teaching experience and were considered as expert teachers based on Berliner's (1994) five-stage model of teacher development (cited in Andrews, 2007). The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 50 years old. The participants had mostly majored in different branches of English: English literature, English teaching, and English translation.

### ***Instrumentation***

This study employed three questionnaires and a semi-structured interview to collect the necessary data. The participants were given Maslach Burnout Inventory, Personality Traits Scale, and Psychological Distress Scale.

**Maslach Burnout Inventory.** The participants completed Maslach Burnout Inventory developed and validated by Maslach and Jackson (1986) in order to determine their burnout level. By virtue of its popularity, the MBI has been surveyed by a good number of researchers concerning its validity and reliability; a large number of findings demonstrated its validity and reliability to enjoy a high value and be strong (Maslach et al., 1996; Schaufeli et al., 1993). This questionnaire consists of 22 statements where the respondents identify their feelings at a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 'never' to 'always'. The three components of professional burnout assessed by this tool are emotional exhaustion (9 items;  $\alpha = 0.84$ ), depersonalization (5 items;  $\alpha = 0.67$ ), and reduced personal accomplishment (3 items;  $\alpha = 0.78$ ). Scoring is carried out separately for each factor. Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization dimensions consist of negative items while Reduced Personal Accomplishment dimension comprise positive items which were scored inversely. The reliability of the instrument in this study was estimated to be .77 which was quite acceptable.

**Personality Traits Scale.** The second questionnaire was Five Factor Model of Personality (FFM) questionnaire, often referred to as the Big Five, developed by Soto et al. which consists of 100 statements where the respondents reacted at a four-point Likert- scale ranging from 'very inaccurate' to 'very accurate'. It is divided into five sub-scales statements: Openness to experience (20 items), Conscientiousness (20 items), Extraversion (20 items), Agreeableness (20 items), and Neuroticism (20 items). Measures of the Big Five have displayed remarkable reliability and inter-rater agreement, and could be utilized to predict a variety of significant social, occupational, psychological, and health outcomes (Soto et al., 2015). In this study, the Conbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was .92.

**Psychological Distress Scale.** The third questionnaire was Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10, Kessler, 1996) which consists of 10 statements where the respondents need to generally identify their feeling at a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'None of the time' to 'All of the time'. For all items, the respondent chooses the answer that seems to be truest for them in the past four weeks. Scores are then extracted with the maximum score of 50 which shows severe distress, and the minimum score of 10 showing no distress. The Conbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of this instrument in this study was .92.

**Semi-structured Interview.** In the second phase of the study, a semi-structured interview delving into teachers' opinions about the reasons and consequences of teachers' burnout was developed by the researcher (Mackey & Gass, 2005). As put forward by Mackey and Gass, "interviews can allow researcher to investigate phenomenon that are not directly observable, such as learners' self-reported perception or attitudes" (p. 173). Ten participants were randomly employed to take part in the interview.

## Design

This study followed sequential mixed-methods research design (Creswell, 2009) with the purpose of complementarity to investigate the relationship between EFL Teacher's personality traits, psychological distress, and their level of burnout as well as the reasons and consequences of teachers' burnout. The justification for pursuing a mixed methods approach is that both quantitative and qualitative research methods by themselves cannot be adequate for demonstrating and explaining the complexity of language studies (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The researcher launched the study by collecting the quantitative data using the related questionnaires. Having collected and analyzed the required quantitative data, a sub-sample of the participants were randomly asked to be interviewed to clarify the reasons and consequences of teachers' burnout.

## Procedure

To collect the quantitative data, the researcher used the three questionnaires (Maslach Burnout Inventory, Personality Traits Scale, and Psychological Distress Scale). The questionnaires were collected online. To obtain the qualitative data, interviews were conducted with 10 English teachers who were recruited randomly. The interviews were held via Telegram application. Each interview lasted between 25 to 35 minutes. We used a social networking platform for conducting interview, since, teachers preferred to use this social networks because of the convenient access to this networking platform in which teachers could freely voice their opinions rather than hold in person interview. The interview questions revolved around the prevalence of burnout among EFL teachers, the reasons resulting in burnout, and the repercussions of burnout. The personal and educational factors the reasons which may give rise to burnout among EFL teachers were delved into.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out on the basis of the data obtained from both questionnaires and interviews. First, the Cronbach's alpha of each questionnaire was calculated to estimate the internal consistency. To provide an appropriate answer to each research question of this study, other statistical methods were applied. For quantitative research questions, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, Multiple Regression, and Independent Samples t-test were run.

To answer the qualitative research questions exploring teachers' opinions about the reasons behind teachers' level of burnout and the consequences of burnout, their responses to interview questions were transcribed verbatim. The researcher read interview transcripts to search the themes in their opinions. Then, teachers' responses were sorted into broad categories representing the overarching themes common across interviews. Through thematic analysis,

teachers' responses to interview questions were categorized in order to extract major recurrent themes supplied by teachers regarding the reasons behind teachers' level of burnout and the consequences of burnout. Thematic analysis is defined as a useful method for recognizing, analyzing, and presenting patterns or themes in the data, organizing and presenting a description of the data set in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is frequently applied in qualitative research and focuses on extracting main recurrent themes within data (Daly et al., 1997). Then, frequency analyses were applied to discover the most frequent answers provided by teacher to interview questions.

## Results

### Quantitative Results

To answer the first research question exploring the relationship between EFL teachers' five factors of personality traits, psychological distress, and their three dimensions of burnout, Pearson correlation was run. The following table summarizes the results of descriptive statistics of five personality traits and three dimensions of burnout.

**Table 1.**

*Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Five Personality Traits and Three Dimensions of Burnout*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Emotional exhaustion	30.1727	5.84016	110
Depersonalization	16.7545	3.50409	110
Personal accomplishment	21.7818	4.44824	110
Openness to experience	43.3909	9.28459	110
Conscientiousness	51.5545	7.22456	110
Extraversion	47.4364	8.06115	110
Agreeableness	47.6000	7.36867	110
Neuroticism	51.1364	6.52937	110

**Table 2.**

*Correlation between Teachers' Five Personality Traits and Three Dimensions of Burnout*

		Openness to experience	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Emotional exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	-.44**	-.43**	-.63**	-.48**	.29**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	110	110	110	110	110
Depersonalization	Pearson Correlation	-.53**	-.415**	-.699**	-.55**	.19**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	110	110	110	110	110
Personal accomplishment	Pearson Correlation	.92**	.59**	.69**	.73**	-.38**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.97	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	110	110	110	110	110

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

The results indicated a significant negative correlation between the four personality traits including openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional exhaustion. In addition, the same four personality traits were in significant negative relationship with depersonalization. However, they were in significant positive correlation with personal accomplishment. On the other hand, neuroticism was in significant positive correlation with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while it was in significant negative correlation with personal achievement.

To explore the possible correlation between psychological distress and burnout, again Pearson correlation was calculated.

**Table 3.**  
*Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Psychological Distress and Three Dimensions of Burnout*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Emotional exhaustion	30.1727	5.84016	110
Depersonalization	16.7545	3.50409	110
Personal accomplishment	21.7818	4.44824	110
Psychological distress	26.1000	5.83245	110

**Table 4.**  
*Correlation between Teachers' Psychological Distress and Three Dimensions of Burnout*

		Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal accomplishment
Psychological distress	Pearson Correlation	.973**	.810**	-.535**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	110	110	110

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

The results revealed that there was a significantly positive correlation between psychological distress and emotional exhaustion on the one hand and psychological distress and depersonalization on the other, while there was a significantly negative correlation between psychological distress and personal accomplishment.

In order to address the second research question investigating among personality traits and psychological distress which one was a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout, multiple regression was run.

**Table 5.**  
*Model Summary for Teachers' Personality Traits and Psychological Distress in Predicting Teachers' Burnout*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.876 <sup>a</sup>	.767	.763	3.63536	.000 <sup>b</sup>

a. Predictors: (Constant), personality traits, psychological distress



The results revealed that total variance explained by the model was .76 implying that 76% of the variance in teachers' burnout was explained by personality traits and psychological distress (Adjusted R Square = .76).

**Table 6.**  
*Regression Analysis for Teachers' Burnout in terms of their Personality Traits and Psychological Distress*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	8.925	5.248		1.701	.092	-1.479	19.329
1 Psychological distress	1.325	.073	1.035	18.14	.000	1.180	1.469
Personality traits	.105	.016	.369	6.461	.000	.072	.137

a. Dependent Variable: burnout

Table 6 shows that personality traits and psychological distress were significant predictors of teachers' burnout. However, psychological distress was a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout (Beta: 1.03)

As an attempt to answer the third research question exploring to what extent teachers' five personality traits predicted teachers' burnout multiple - regression was run. The first regression analysis was conducted with five personality traits as predictors and emotional exhaustion as the criterion variable.

**Table 7.**  
*Model Summary for Teachers' Five Personality Traits in Predicting Teachers' Emotional Exhaustion*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.667 <sup>a</sup>	.445	.418	4.45	.000 <sup>b</sup>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Openness to experience, agreeableness, Conscientiousness, extraversion

As shown in Table 7, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 41. In another word, 41 per cent of the variance in teachers' emotional exhaustion can be explained by the independent variables, including extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and emotional exhaustion (Adjusted R Square = .41).

**Table 8.**  
*Regression Analysis for Teachers' Emotional Exhaustion in terms of their Five Personality Traits*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	42.156	5.780		7.29	.000	30.693	53.618
Openness to experience	-.091	.064	-.145	-1.43	.155	-.218	.035
Conscientiousness	.123	.098	.152	1.25	.212	-.071	.318
1 Extraversion	-.580	.103	-.801	-5.61	.000	-.785	-.375
Agreeableness	.162	.116	.205	1.39	.165	-.068	.393
Neuroticism	.106	.071	.118	1.49	.138	-.035	.246

a. Dependent Variable: emotional exhaustion

As indicated in the Table 8, extraversion was significant predictor of teachers' emotional exhaustion (Beta:  $-.80$ ). The second regression analysis was performed utilizing the five personality factors as predictors and depersonalization as the criterion variable.

**Table 9.**  
*Model Summary for Teachers' Five Personality Traits in Predicting Teachers' Depersonalization*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.74 <sup>a</sup>	.56	.54	2.37	.000 <sup>b</sup>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Openness to experience, agreeableness, Conscientiousness, extraversion

The results revealed that the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 54, indicating that 54 per cent of the variance in teachers' depersonalization is accounted for by the independent variables, including extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and emotional exhaustion (Adjusted R Square =  $.54$ ).

**Table 10.**  
*Regression Analysis for Teachers' Depersonalization in terms of their Five Personality Traits*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	29.008	3.084		9.405	.000	22.891	35.124
Openness to experience	-.101	.034	-.267	-2.967	.004	-.168	-.033
Conscientiousness	.167	.052	.345	3.192	.002	.063	.271
Extraversion	-.384	.055	-.884	-6.972	.000	-.494	-.275
Agreeableness	.045	.062	.096	.733	.465	-.078	.168
Neuroticism	-.008	.038	-.016	-.222	.825	-.083	.067

a. Dependent Variable: Depersonalization

Table 10 shows that openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion were significant predictors of teachers' depersonalization. However, extraversion was a stronger predictor of teachers' burnout (Beta:  $-.88$ ). The next multiple-regression was run with the five personality factors as predictors and personal accomplishment as the criterion variable.

**Table 11.**  
*Model Summary for Teachers' Five Personality Traits in Predicting Teachers' Personal Accomplishment*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
1	.947 <sup>a</sup>	.897	.892	1.4593	.000 <sup>b</sup>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Openness to experience, agreeableness, Conscientiousness, extraversion

The results illustrate that the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 89 suggesting that 89 per cent of the variance in teachers' personal accomplishment can be explained by the independent variables, including extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and emotional exhaustion (Adjusted R Square =  $.89$ ).

**Table 12.**  
*Regression Analysis for Teachers' Personal Accomplishment in terms of their Five Personality Traits*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	3.669	1.894		1.937	.055	-.087	7.424
1							
Openness to experience	.377	.021	.786	18.046	.000	.335	.418
Conscientiousness	-.082	.032	-.133	-2.544	.012	-.146	-.018
Extraversion	.114	.034	.206	3.357	.001	.046	.181
Agreeableness	.064	.038	.106	1.684	.095	-.011	.140
Neuroticism	-.048	.023	-.070	-2.064	.041	-.094	-.002

a. Dependent Variable: Personal accomplishment

Table 12 shows that openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion were significant predictor of teachers' personal accomplishment. However, openness to experience was a stronger predictor of teachers' personal accomplishment (Beta: .78).

To investigate the fourth research question investigating the influence of years of teaching experience on teachers' burnout, independent samples t-test was run.

**Table 13.**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Less and More Experienced Teachers' Burnout Level*

	Teaching experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Burnout	Less than 15 years	75	71.06	7.65177	.88355
	15 and above 15 years	35	63.657	3.57230	.60383

**Table 14.**  
*Independent Samples t-test Comparing Less and More Experienced Teachers' Level of Burnout*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.367	.022	-5.44	108	.000	-7.409	1.359	-10.10	-4.713
Equal variances not assumed			-6.92	107.9	.000	-7.40	1.070	-9.530	-5.288

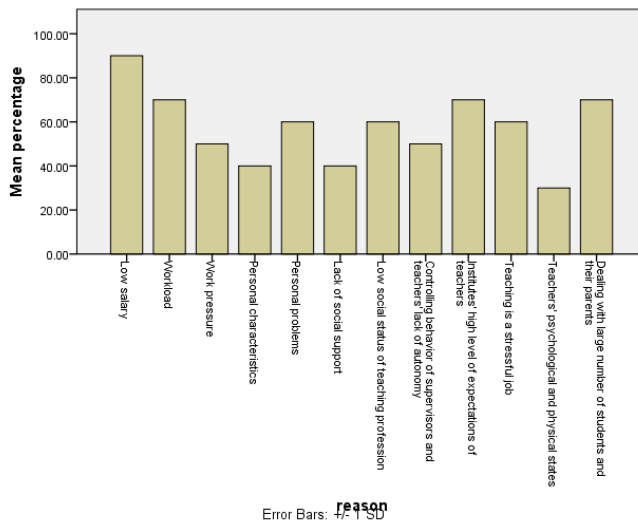
The result of t-test shows that there was statistically significant difference between less experienced ( $M = 71.06$ ,  $SD = 7.65$ , two-tailed) and more experienced teachers ( $M = 63.65$ ,  $SD = 3.57$ ;  $t(108) = -5.44$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with respect to their burnout level.

## Qualitative Results

To answer the fifth research question which sought teachers' opinion about the reasons behind their burnout, their responses to interview question were content analyzed and showed that teachers attributed burnout to a host of reasons related to teachers' working conditions, and society. In the following, firstly, the percentages of each reason behind teachers' burnout are presented. Secondly, these reasons are illustrated on the graph. Finally, some samples of teachers' excerpts on each reason for burnout have been presented.

**Table 15.**  
*EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Reasons behind Burnout*

EFL teachers' most frequent answers	Percentage
Low salary	90
Workload	70
Work pressure	50
Personal characteristics	40
Personal problems	60
Lack of social support	40
Low social status of teaching profession	60
Controlling behavior of supervisors and teachers' lack of autonomy	50
Institutes' high level of expectations of teachers	70
Teaching is a stressful job	60
Teachers' psychological and physical states	30
Dealing with large number of students and their parents	70



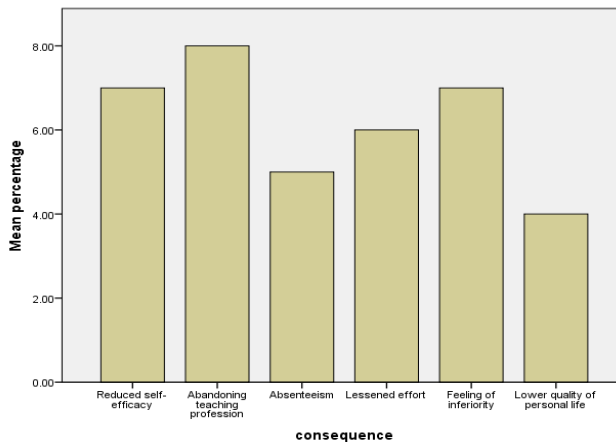
**Figure 1.** *EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Reasons behind Burnout*

The most frequently mentioned reason leading to burnout was low salary of teaching. EFL teachers also believed that workload, high level of expectations set out on them, and dealing with large number of students and their parents were among the reasons which caused teachers' burnout. They indicated that teachers' personal problems, the stress and tension integrated in teaching, and low social status of teaching profession were also contributing to teachers' burnout. Work pressure and domineering behavior of supervisors which restrict teachers' autonomy were also two reasons which resulted in teachers' burnout. Other reasons teachers referred to were personal characteristics, lack of social support, teachers' psychological and physical states which lead to burnout

The content analyses of teachers' responses to the last research question examining teacher' opinions with respect to the consequences of burnout are summarized in the following table and displayed on the following graph.

**Table 16.**  
*EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Consequences of Burnout*

EFL teachers' most frequent answers	Percentage
Reduced self-efficacy	70
Abandoning the teaching profession	80
Absenteeism	50
Lessened effort	60
Feeling of inferiority	70
Lower quality of personal life	40



**Figure 2.** *EFL Teachers' Extracted Themes Regarding the Consequences of Burnout*

EFL teachers indicated that burnout mainly may lead to abandoning teaching profession, feeling of inferiority, and reduction of teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Other consequences of burnout according to them were lessened effort, absenteeism, and lower quality of personal life.

## Discussion

This study delved into empirically investigating the link between teachers' personality traits, psychological distress, and burnout in a representative sample of Iranian EFL teachers. Furthermore, this study examined the relative contribution of five personality factors in predicting burnout dimensions among EFL teachers. The findings determined that both personality trait and psychological distress were related to teachers' burnout dimensions. The results revealed that there was a significant negative correlation between the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout and the four personality traits including openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. However, these two dimensions of burnout were in significant positive correlation with neuroticism, suggesting that a high level of neuroticism is likely to increase both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

People who suffer from high neuroticism may manifest more emotional reactions whenever they are faced up to tough and worrying situations (Van Heck, 1997). They are apt to articulate more negative emotions, emotional variability and stress reaction, and hence they become more prone to burnout and to increased psychopathology (Watson et al., 1994). Furthermore, they appear to employ strategies such as self-criticism, and wishful thinking, which are intrinsically avoiding and distracting coping strategies, rather than strategies which tend to be more approaching (Bolger, 1990; Heppner et al., 1995). Futile and inefficacious dealing with stressful and worrying situations in the work environment cause people with a high level of neuroticism to be more susceptible to the symptoms generally connected with burnout.

The psychological traits of openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness were found to be negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and had a positive relationship with the feelings of increased personal accomplishment. Specifically, teachers who scored higher in these four personality traits and lower in neuroticism were more prone to undergo feelings of increased personal accomplishment, and hence low burnout inasmuch as feelings of decreased personal accomplishment indicate burnout. Conscientiousness is a facet associated with involvement and persistence and therefore is a manifestation of a person's need for achievement. It is also connected with traits of punctuality and organization considered to be important work attributes; therefore, gaining high scores on conscientiousness, is a predictor of success at work (Hogan et al., 1996). From another perspective, extraversion is associated with sociability, high interpersonal relationships, and the level of expectancy motivation. Teachers enjoying high conscientiousness and extraversion, but suffering from low neuroticism, are highly encouraged to accomplish and hence improve performance. All these facets are highly pertinent and contribute to goal achievement to a great extent and controlling stressors. Results of the current study revealed that low levels of openness anticipated more feelings of depersonalization, while those high levels of this personality trait were found to experience more feelings of personal accomplishment.

## Conclusion

The results of the present study suggest that specific personality features may increase or impede the probability of burnout among teachers. It is well-recorded that specific personality traits would prompt people to behave in specific ways when they are faced with adversity; as a result, one could easily detect probable ways in tackling burnout among teachers by examining what coping responses they utilize to deal with work-related stress. In this way, it could be assumed that by raising teachers' level of consciousness on the process of burning out and presenting them with opportunities to reflect on personal variables such as coping resources it would be possible to lower the use of maladaptive or dysfunctional coping.

To sum up, the findings of the present study contribute to the wider literature on psychological distress, personality traits, and burnout among EFL teachers and accentuate to what degree teachers' burnout can be predicted by personality traits and psychological distress. The results recommend that teacher training programs should concern themselves with the mental health and preparedness of trainees to teach. According to Friedman (2000), there is ample evidence to show that professional development, either before entering the teaching profession or while teaching, appears to play a significant role in combating burn out. Familiarity with effective classroom management strategies intended to overcome stress and burnout resulting from disorder, disorganization and overload has also been proved to be a beneficial skill.

Additional research is required to explore the association between psychological distress, personality traits, and burnout. Considering that most burnout research has made use of cross-sectional designs (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), future studies can utilize longitudinal data. These studies would not only give rise to more robust tests of causal relationships, not often feasible with cross-sectional data, but they would also permit researchers to delve into how personality anticipates changes in burnout through time. More studies are also needed to explore contextual factors in that personality may be more strongly associated with burnout in some, but not in all, contexts.

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# **Sculpting English Language Teaching Materials: A Narrative Self-Study of a Practicing Materials Developer**

**Seyyede Fahimeh Parsaiyan<sup>\*1</sup>**  
**Sue-san Ghahremani Ghajar<sup>2</sup>**  
**Mahsa Sohrabi<sup>3</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The present qualitative study narrates the challenges and identity changes experienced by an Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher taking her initial steps in developing second language reading materials through recreating the anecdotes of a Persian classic poet. Her descriptive and analytic field notes while designing the materials, feedbacks received from two advisors and six language teachers, and various drafts of the developed materials as documents formed the data for this self-study. Meticulous analysis of the data revealed the ways by which the practicing

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University, (Corresponding Author); f.parsa@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University; s.ghahremani@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>3</sup> M.A. in TEFL, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University; Mahsasohrabi0076@gmail.com

materials developer revisited a number of normative assumptions which had permeated her cognition; started to see materials development as art; and practiced self-reliance, creativity, respect, and ownership. Given the paucity of narrative enquiries focusing on materials developers' identity (re)-construction, the present study is hoped to provide a richer understanding of the processes involved in generating classroom materials.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching, Identity (Re)-construction, Materials Development, Narrative Enquiry, Self-study.

## Introduction

Over the past three decades or so, narrative enquiry has gained increased visibility and legitimacy in the field of applied linguistics research, standing out as a potential tool for disseminating the formerly-unheeded stories of those involved in language teaching and learning (Barkhuizen, 2013; Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Mendieta & Barkhuizen, 2019; Nunan & Choi, 2010; Pavlenko, 2007; Tsui, 2007; Yazan, 2019). Despite a long call and a fairly large bulk of studies focusing on language learners', teachers', teacher educators', and, to a lesser degree, researchers' narratives, there are comparatively fewer enquiries depicting the challenges and changes experienced by beginner teacher-materials developers experiencing their foray into developing their own classroom materials (Bouckaert, 2017& 2019; Brandão, 2018). In other words, the journey experienced by novice materials developers has not been duly explored, written about or animated and their "private realities" including their cognition and emotions have not been "brought into the public sphere" (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 490). The majority of the scholarly books and publications on materials development either focus on evaluating and analyzing existing materials or "are 'how to' books, with advice for teachers" (Garton & Graves, 2014, p. 655). The studies concerned with local, "home-made" or "in-house" teacher-generated materials also chiefly concentrate on the process of developing the materials and their impacts (Al-Busaidi & Tindle, 2010; Johnson, 2003; Timmis, 2014) and hence focus less on the lived experiences of the materials designers and "the interplay between...teachers' experiences of...designing and implementing their own materials and their identity (re)construction" (Brandão, 2018, p. 254). Similarly, Bouckaert (2017, p. 11) argues that "although continuing professional development has been identified as one of its benefits, ... the concrete effects of the creation of classroom materials on the teacher have remained largely under-researched". Acknowledging the existing gap, Wyatt (2011, p. 4) also asserts that "there is a lack of longitudinal research into the processes through which expertise in materials design develops."

The ways by which teachers design classroom materials seem significant not only because they unveil how teachers think, plan, and act as designers, but also how such undertakings raise their reflections about what and how to teach (Augusto-Navarro, 2015; Bouckaert, 2019, Johnson, 2003; Kerr, 1981). In other words, "developing materials gives teachers the possibility to reflect, innovate,

create better teaching and learning settings, grow as individuals and professionals” (Núñez & Téllez, 2015, p. 58); strengthen “their sense of ownership and agency” (Bouckaert, 2019, p. 4); and experience more career satisfaction (Shawer, 2010).

In an era in which reliance on ready-made, “routine, run-of-the-mill materials” (Maley & Kiss, 2018, p. 227) or following them “as scripts” (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 29) is highly discouraged and language teachers, now considered as reflective practitioners, are recommended to build confidence in generating their own socio-culturally relevant contents and learning activities or even fancy themselves as coursebook writers (Block, 1991; Connelly & Graves, 1988; Jolly & Bolitho, 2011; McGrath, 2013; Shawer, 2010; Tomlinson, 2013), the paucity of these real-life narratives could vividly be felt.

Building on this purpose, in this article, an Iranian Master’s degree graduate of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) narrates her lived experiences of designing reading materials targeted at adolescent English learners at pre-intermediate level of proficiency, based on the anecdotes of a renowned Persian classic poet, Sa’di<sup>1</sup> (1210-1290 AD). The challenges and changes experienced by the language teacher in her initial practice of becoming a materials designer have been explored in this enquiry. It is proposed that the challenges of recreating the anecdotes as reading materials, designing cognitively-engaging activities, and self-creating visuals, as experienced by the teacher throughout her year-long journey of coming to be a materials developer, made her refine a number of normative assumptions which had intensely permeated her cognition. Such challenges made her practice self-reliance, creativity, respect, and ownership.

## Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Over the past three decades, applied linguistics research, similar to many other academic disciplines, has experienced a narrative turn; an enquiry area in which individuals’ stories are valued as “research data” and “storytelling” is acknowledged “as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings” (Barkhuizen, et al., 2014, p. 3). As argued, “the main strength of narrative enquiry lies in its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of enquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them” (Barkhuizen, et al., 2014, p. 2). Since then, various strands of narrative research have been constituted deploying (auto)biographical reflective narratives (Nunan & Choi, 2010), visual, multimodal narratives (Brandão, 2018), critical (auto)ethnographic narratives (Yazan, 2019), and more recently duoethnography (Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Shaikh Muslihu-D-Di Sa’di Shirazi is one of the celebrated Iranian poets of the medieval period (thirteenth-century AD) whose two classic literary works, *Rose Garden* and *Orchard*, enjoy worldwide fame and recognition and have left tremendous impact on Persian and non-Persian writers.



Besides language learning narratives, investigating ELT teachers' personal and professional lives through narrative enquiry has been the focus of numerous studies (Canagarajah, 2012; Leigh, 2019; Mendieta & Barkhuizen, 2019; Nunan & Choi, 2010; Parsaiyan et al., 2016; Pavlenko, 2007; Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018; Tsui, 2007; Yazan, 2019). Tsui's (2007) exploration of identity formation of a Chinese language teacher through collecting his narratives; Canagarajah's (2012) auto-ethnography of his "journey of professionalization" containing the struggles he had as a Sri Lankan periphery language teacher in developing multiple professional identities; Parsayian et al.'s (2016) study of epiphanies experienced by an Iranian English teacher and materials developer; Shelley et al.'s (2013) and Mendieta and Barkhuizen's (2019) investigation of the cognitive and emotional challenges narrated by language teachers in their changeover from conventional face-to-face teaching to distance and blended teaching contexts are empirical examples of this strand of enquiry.

Another strand of such narratives is drawn from second language teacher educators sharing the narratives of (re)-constructing new identities along with prospective, pre-service or in-service student teachers or mentees. More specifically, they narrate how through self and other examination and critical reflection, they moved themselves and their student-teachers towards more theoretically and pedagogically sound instructional practices and greater levels of professional expertise (Atai et al., 2017; Johnson & Golombek, 2013 & 2016; Park, 2014).

Besides teachers' and teacher educators' narratives, the identity construction of applied linguistics' researchers has been the focus of several studies (Norton & Early, 2011; Rahimi et al., 2019; Xu, 2014; Yuan, 2017); examples of which are Norton and Early's (2011) self-study of their researcher identity construction while making trips to some African regions for teaching digital literacy, and Rahimi et al.'s (2019) exploration of the driving forces which shaped the professional identity of a newly-recruited Iranian university instructor and two higher education students of applied linguistics.

Whereas many previous studies have focused on narratives of language teachers, teacher educators and, to a lesser degree, researchers, there are comparatively fewer studies focusing on language teachers' narratives of being and becoming materials developers.

Generally speaking, the literature on materials development chiefly focuses on a number of topics including the principles of materials development; frameworks for evaluating and analyzing materials, reports on textbooks' analyses and evaluations, particularly critical appraisals of globally-distributed commercial coursebooks; and practical tips for adapting, adopting or designing materials for different skills, levels, users, and purposes (Mishan & Timmis 2015; Tomlinson, 2011, 2013; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). With the heightened attention to the development of local materials and the role of ESL/EFL teachers as curriculum makers and materials developers, reports have also been published with respect to the impacts of "home-made" or teacher-generated materials (Al-Busaidi & Tindle, 2010; Troncoso, 2010). For instance,

Al-Busaidi and Tindle (2010) focused on evaluating the impact of in-house materials produced for improving writing skills of Arab university students at Sultan Qaboos University. They outlined their writing and evaluation process which staged from setting principled criteria for the development of the materials by the writing team, piloting the materials, and evaluating them retrospectively through soliciting teachers' and students' opinions and doing textual analysis on the students' writing scripts.

A much smaller share of publications belongs to reflective reports by materials writers themselves or from their perspectives on the process of writing materials and publishing them (Augusto-Navarro, 2015; Bouckaert, 2017; Hadfield, 2014; Jolly & Bolitho, 2011; Núñez & Téllez, 2015; Prowse, 2011, Timmis, 2014; Wyatt, 2011). In an oft-cited study, Prowse (2011) sought the perspectives of the writers of well-famed ELT coursebooks in 1994 and 15 years later. The writers shared their views with regard to the advantages and drawbacks of team-writing and pair-writing as well as their writing procedure which commonly included steps like setting course objectives, searching input materials from different sources, deciding about the nature and sequence of activities, revising the drafts based on the feedbacks received from publishers and making coordination with designers and editors; though in an unordered fashion. Timmis (2014), drawing upon one of his own collaborative materials writing experiences, also displayed how contradictions between the writing team and publishers, also called "intermediators", intervened the writing process and hence impacted the final product. In another self-report, Hadfield (2014) examined her own process of writing an academic resource book through documenting the "stages" and "sub-and-micro-processes" of generating ideas for activities, justifying their rationales, and writing instructions for each. Besides suggesting teachers' "tacit" knowledge in designing materials, she concludes that "textbook writing is a highly recursive and circuitous activity which cannot be reduced to a linear progression through checklists of concerns, but which demands flexibility and responsiveness to particular activities and contexts" (p. 320).

Close to the present enquiry, there are also process-oriented studies which focus on identity development or professional growth of ELT teachers while developing their own materials. For instance, Brandão (2018), using visual narrative enquiry, investigated the way a Brazilian pre-service EFL teacher collaborating on a project of designing classroom materials (re)-constructed her teaching identity. While in her initial visual drawings she depicted herself as an ineffective, "invisible" or "chaperone" teacher who relied heavily on ready-made pedagogical sources, she gradually gained more visibility through designing self-made classroom materials. However, given her lack of confidence and expertise, her early designed materials were not engagingly productive as she focused "too much on grammar rules and selected mechanical exercises from the Internet" (p. 263). Over time, as she practiced designing activities that demanded more cooperation of the students, she started to feel "like a present teacher" (p. 264). In another longitudinal qualitative research, Wyatt (2011) traced the development of an Omani English teacher's "practical knowledge in

materials design” over a three-year TESOL program. Through observing his classes and conducting interviews with him, Wyatt demonstrated that the teacher’s strong motivation, his prior and present experience in teaching young language learners, and the theoretical and practical trainings he had received during the program increased his confidence and autonomy in analyzing the coursebooks and their deficiencies, making justified and creative adaptations to the assigned materials, designing his own lessons, and helping his colleagues; though there were contextual and technical challenges that made him “dependent” at times.

In line with the preceding empirical research on teachers’ growth through materials development, the present study attempts to depict the interplay between teachers’ professional growth and developing materials through narrating the challenges and changes experienced by an Iranian language teacher in her initial practice of designing teaching materials; using “I” pronoun henceforth.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The present qualitative study, lasting over a year (from March 2018 to February 2019), could be considered a self-study narrative enquiry; a research methodology in which the researcher positioned as the inquirer “has a private vested interest in coming to understand the practice” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 12) and hence attempts to deepen his/her understanding of the relationships and interactions with others “in the immediate present or in the reconstructed memory of interactions” (p.13). Pinnegar and Hamilton (p.105) mention “provocation, exploration, refinement, [and] identify focus” as components of self-study.

Taking a turn inward in this self-study, I, an Iranian female teacher in mid-twenties with over five years of teaching English at language institutes, got engaged in the practice of developing ELT materials for the first time in my life. To examine the procedure in depth, I used three sources of data collection, namely, field notes, dialogues with critical friends, and various drafts of the developing materials.

In my field notes, I chronicled in minute details descriptions of the occurring events, decisions made, and steps taken in each phase. Besides detailed descriptions, I kept records of my personal feelings and perspectives plus preliminary interpretation and analyses of the events. Such field notes exceeding over 50 pages enabled me to capture my own voice and my new understandings.

Furthermore, on frequent occasions I discussed my plans with my two ELT advisors and sent them various drafts of the materials. They wrote their comments in the margin of the files, made suggestions for improvement of the work, asked me to omit some parts, or rewrite it altogether. This happened for all the prepared materials (five anecdotes as a whole) and their activities and

visuals. Besides, upon the completion of the work, six conveniently selected language teachers (ranging from 25 to 30 in age, MA graduates or PhD candidates of TEFL, with four to eight years of teaching experience at English language institutes) were invited to appraise the designed materials and share their comments with regard to the contents, activities, and the visuals in an oral semi-structured interview. Six language learners (roughly at pre-intermediate level of English language proficiency), who were my former students, were also requested to self-study the materials and complete the activities.

In addition, since the practice demanded constant writing, revising, and editing, I kept copies of various drafts of the five recreated anecdotes and activities as documents of trajectory of change to my performance. Such drafts, together with my reflexive field notes, advisors' comments, teachers' interviews, and learners' responses, formed the data for the study.

Data analysis for this self-study was conducted recursively from the outset of the study with a desire to make sense of the unfolding events. Following Maxwell's (2013) guidelines for analyzing qualitative data, I started with immersing myself in the collected data by reading and re-reading my reflexive field notes, the oral and written comments I had received from my advisors, the teachers' interview transcriptions, students' responses, as well as my various drafts of designed materials. Coding and re-coding the data excerpts and constantly checking them with my advisors gradually led to emergence of a number of sub-themes with respect to changes experienced by me throughout this year-long journey. At the next stage, existing literature was re-consulted to interpret the findings and to compare them with those of other relevant studies. In the final stage, I was advised to use a chronicled narrative, preluded with a backstory, to aid readers audit the trail of decisions, rationales, and actions, on the one hand, and to demonstrate how the findings were reached, on the other hand. Besides thick description of the events, attempts were also made to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings through being involved in the practice for an extended period of time, triangulating different sources of data (reflexive field notes, dialogues with advisors, interviews, artefacts), taking a self-critical stance, and requesting the advisors to re-analyze the data and check the validity of the findings (Maxwell, 2013).

## **Procedure**

### ***Backstory***

As a young English teacher, who ventured into the complicated field of ELT materials development, every single step that I took to design reading materials based on Persian classic literature was like walking in a long journey; a journey replete with rays of fright and courage; trepidation and relief; disappointment and hope. Experiencing all these ups and downs was such a turning point in my teaching life that had a great impact on my views, feelings, ideas, and knowledge. As a journeyer, I took record of the unfolding events, from the beginning to the end, as thoroughly as possible.

Prior to my acceptance to TEFL MA program in a state-run university, I had the experience of teaching English for four years at different private institutes. During these years, wherever I worked, I had to teach according to the institute's pre-determined curriculum and teach the materials designated by them. Sometimes, I felt like a robot in my classes whose duty was to follow the textbooks' contents, which I largely considered trivial and infantilizing. Moreover, as an Iranian Muslim teacher, the world depicted in the textbooks always made me feel alienated from our lived experiences, Iranian-Islamic lifestyle, beliefs, identity, and cultural heritage. Dissatisfied with the existing shortcomings in the mainstream materials, I felt intrigued to prepare and take home-grown materials instead of foreign products to my classes. However, obstacles like lack of pedagogically-appropriate materials and the fear of being rejected by the institutes' authorities disheartened me from taking the issue seriously. Above all, the idea of being a materials developer was almost beyond my wildest dreams at that time.

It was not until the third semester of MA program, as I was taking a Materials Development course that the idea reinvigorated once more. In that course, we read scholarly publications on materials developments, reviewed the views of critical analysts who criticize the commercially imported materials for their "inflexibility, shallowness, and lack of local relevance" (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p.3) as well as their carrying hidden curricula which promote and legitimize Western, capitalist, neoliberalist, materialistic, and individualistic values. We also vehemently discussed how creating locally-appropriate materials rooted in our Islamic-Iranian heritage could be significantly worthwhile in the Iranian context of English teaching.

Though options abounded, my prior familiarity as well as avid enthusiasm for Persian Literature, particularly classic one, and seeing its deep connections with Islamic-Iranian identity and culture inspired me to explore how classic Persian literary anecdotes could be recreated as reading materials for EFL classes; an issue which has comparatively received undue attention within the Iranian foreign language teaching context due to various reasons like the hegemony, supposed legitimacy, and salience of Native American and British literary products (Azizi, 2014; Kachru & Smith, 2008; Talib, 1992), and occasional scarcity of decent English translations of Persian literary works. To use Pinnegar and Hamilton's (2009) words, this was a "provocation" phase of this self-study in which "we recognize not only that we have interest but also that others have questions, taken opposing views, or have thought very little, if at all, about the idea that provokes us" (p.105).

The "provocation" was followed by an "exploration" phase (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) during which I took time consulting existing literature on materials development (Mishan & Timmis 2015; Tomlinson 2011, 2013), designing home-made materials (Jolly & Bolitho, 2011); applications of literature in language teaching (Amer, 2003; Domínguez Romero et al., 2019; Hullah, 2018; Van, 2009), non-native literature (Kachru, 1999), as well as argumentative and research-based studies on using translated local and national literature in EFL

classes as language teaching materials (Boroomand et al., 2014; Florentino, 2014; Mohideen & Mohideen, 2009; Parsaiyan, et al., 2015; Raquitico, 2014; Safari, 2019; Vethamani, 1996).

It was when I felt a “refinement” and “identity focus” occurring in which I started to “bring together background and experience to decide what is worthy of study” and “consider how this study might contribute to our own work, to the work of others, and to the larger research literature” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p.105). Under the tutelage of such backdrop and inspired by a couple of studies on using Persian literature as materials for language classes, I took on a journey for recreating Persian classic literature as reading materials, targeted at Iranian adolescent EFL learners at pre-intermediate level of English language proficiency. My objective was to aid language learners experience reading Persian stories in English in an amusing way and make connections between them and their own current lives. This was preceded by consulting experts for choosing the classic poet whose works could be taken to language classes, selecting a number of anecdotes based on a number of criteria, and juxtaposing different English translations of the selected anecdotes for further acquaintance with how the texts had been rendered into English. The most challenging stage was recreating the selected anecdotes as synoptic stories, designing meaningful activities for each, and designing illustrations and layouts. Not unlike any other immature performer, there were worries in the outset of the journey which made me hesitate. As an ordinary teacher, socialized into mainstream system of language education, and as the one with almost zero experience in developing classroom materials, it was so challenging to me to manage the process; part of such challenges will be narrated in the next part via employing *sculpting* metaphors. As suggested by Bouckaert (2019, p. 10), “teachers-as-materials-developers could resort to the use of imagery, like similes and metaphors” as they “can offer insights into teachers’ perceptions of their profession, their materials, and the principles underpinning their teaching practice”.

### ***Selecting the Sculpting Clay***

*Creation* has always been a charming word to me. Ever since I was a child, the idea of creating things with my own hands has been with me. I was about seven when I started to learn sculpting. To make a clay sculpture, I commonly went through a number of stages including choosing the original object to sculpt or making sketches of it; preparing tools including the most suitable clay and modeling tools; kneading, rolling, modeling, and trimming the material to create the desired shape; baking the sculpture or allowing it to dry; and eventually painting and decorating the sculpture. Throughout this journey, as I was engaged in designing classroom materials out of Persian classic literature, I could draw analogies between the *art* of materials development and the art of sculpting as I went through fairly similar stages.

Quite like choosing the original object, I started with choosing a proper Persian classic literary work. I made a list of some popular works, including *Book of*

*the Marzban* by Sa'ad ad-Din Varavini, *Mirror of Princes* by Keikavus and *The Rose Garden* by Sa'di Shirazi, and ran through them. Upon consulting a Persian Literature specialist, I eventually selected *The Rose Garden*; a renowned collection of short yet thought-provoking metrically and non-metrically-structured anecdotes written in 1258 CE. The collection has long been cherished in all parts of the Muslim and non-Muslim world for its literary elegance, satirical language, delicate and entertaining spiritual maxims, ethical teachings, and practical wisdom (Alavi, 2010; Zolfaghari & Panbezari, 2012).

I commenced a new process of going through the whole book; page by page, anecdote by anecdote. While reading each anecdote, I took time musing over its potentials to be recreated as EFL materials. To select appropriate anecdotes, I took into consideration a number of criteria including attraction of the anecdotes or their appeal to adolescent learners; richness of the content of the anecdotes including their underlying themes; relevance to contemporary life issues; linguistic features of the anecdotes like deployments of certain lexical items and grammatical structures; the inherent potentials of the anecdotes to be expanded and rewritten through adding new settings, imaginary characters, linguistic elements, inter alia (Carter & Long, 1991).

As there are about 287 anecdotes in *The Rose Garden* of Sa'di, I had to act selectively choosing a few of them to be recreated. This was a challenging stage; as Gray (2005) states, if first language literature "is not prudently chosen, and the students are not familiar with it or the translation is not appropriate, using it could mean lost pedagogical opportunities" (p. 4). Bearing this in mind, I tried to prepare a list of anecdotes I had found worthy of consideration. Through various consultations with a Persian Literature expert and my ELT advisors, I eventually selected five anecdotes to be recreated. In the next stage, I compared the original text of the selected stories with their different English translations so as to have a general understanding of how different translators had gone through rendering the anecdotes. It was the time when I felt the sculpture base had been prepared waiting for me to practice my artistry.

### ***Kneading, Modeling and Trimming the Material to Create the Desired Shape***

While prior to the outset of the research, I assumed the work to be an easy one, I soon realized the challenges involved in recreating the anecdotes. Not being able to go much beyond the stories and their frameworks, my first drafts were more like "translated" or "simplified" versions of the original anecdotes; lacking senses of "creativity" or "artistry". This was particularly evident in my first attempts to recreate "Liberal Cypress" anecdote (*The Rose Garden*, Maxim 81). In this anecdote, someone asks a wise person about the reasons why among all other trees cypress is called liberal (azadeh). The wise man replies that "Every tree has its appropriate season of fruit, so that it is sometimes flourishing therewith, and looks sometimes withered by its absence; with the cypress, however, neither is the case, it being fresh at all times". He then adds that "and this is the quality of those who are free" (Rehatsek, 2010, p.226). I rationalized



that the meaningful content of the story (being liberal like the cypress) could provide language learners with the chance to ponder over the concept of freedom and being liberal, share their different interpretations, and possibly come to a new understanding of the term. I also thought that the context of the story could be a site for introducing certain linguistic elements like names of various trees, fruits, and colors.

With these in mind, I commenced my very first experience of recreating the story. I thought that I just had to read the story, imagine the scenes and the dialogues between the two main characters, and try to rewrite them in my own words. Below is an excerpt from the first draft of the story sent to my advisors.

- What is the reason for planting these cypress trees there, man? They have no outcome.
- Among all the trees that God has created, the only tree that is called liberal is the "cypress tree".
- It's strange. What is the reason?
- Other trees have fruit and shade in summer, and their leaves fall off in fall. They blossom in spring and dry in winter; but the Cypress tree is green throughout the year. Not being changed thorough the time is an attribute of liberals.

The comments I received from one of my advisors baffled me. She told me that the prepared draft was more like "a translated piece of work" than a "recreated story", was not "appealing enough to adolescent readers", and seemed "too didactic in tone and too direct in conveying its message". She told me that I had to "be more careful in selecting the lexical and grammatical structures as well as deployment of a lively language".

The consternation I felt led me to contemplate what could be done otherwise. Bearing the shortcomings in mind, in my second attempt, I endeavored to act more creatively by delineating the setting of the story (a large farm visited by a stranger); the scenes, smells and senses involved (aroma of peach blossoms filling the air, fresh apricots which could be seen on the walls); and more detailed conversations between the characters. Below is an excerpt.

- Once upon a time there was a stranger passing through a village. The people of the village were calm and kind. They owned large farms. ... Aroma of peach blossoms were smelled from the alleys and fresh apricots could be seen over the walls. The man's patience was exhausted. He picked some ripe apricots and ate them. Few steps ahead, he saw the owner of the garden and he whispered that it would be better to apologize because of eating those apricots without his permission... .
- Dear uncle, please accept my apologies. The fruits of your garden are as sweat as honey ... I picked a few of them without your permission.
- Bon appetite. The fruits which come out of the garden are the share of the passerby.
- You have a very fertile farm. Why didn't you plant other fruit trees instead of these cypresses which don't have any fruits?



However, while “seeing some improvements”, my advisors told me that the language was not “appropriate for the target audience”. They recommended that I read more on “story writing techniques” and act more “creatively” through inclusion of “expositions, epilogues, or introductory parts to the main story”; “imaginary characters”; “stretches of dialogues among characters”; “soliloquies or internal dialogues”; and “dramatic tensions or deliberate suspension of events”; among others.

Taking these comments into consideration and reading more on story writing techniques, I kept rewriting the story over and over; like a clay sculptor who is kneading and pressing the sculpting clay with her palms repeatedly to make it more pliable, and then pinching different parts of it with her fingers to create a desirable shape. With my fingers moving rapidly across the keyboard, and my words filling the screen, I changed the scenarios, settings, the characters and the dialogues exchanged among them numerous times and added fresh descriptions. I kept asking myself an array of questions: How does a certain character make the story interesting? Is he/she going to be liked by the adolescent readers? What should he/she look like? What could his/her personality be like? How believable is he/she? How could he/she be representative of Iranian and Islamic culture and lifestyle? Does the plot dull rather than pique the readers’ interest? Just to mention some.

Concerning the Liberal Cypress story, I thought that since the subject of the conversation revolved around a tree, the location of the story could be somewhere full of different trees. I imagined the story could be located in a garden in one of the villages near Zagros Mountains, a long mountain range in Iran. Then, I tried to describe the setting in details to make readers imagine where it is located. Concurrently, based on the theme and location of the story, I added the names of different trees, fruits, and colors to the story. Regarding the effects of colors on grabbing attention and retrieving words, I made some changes to the color of words (like using the color of fruits) and highlighted some certain structures (like “want to”) in bold type. Such manipulations of the typographical features of the text, technically called “input flooding” and “textual enhancement” (Sharwood Smith, 1993), were chiefly done for the sake of increasing “noticeability” and “salience” of certain linguistic features or items. As suggested by Schmidt (1995, as cited in Bao, 2018, p. 160), “target language forms will not be acquired unless they are noticed and one important way...is by increasing the salience of target language forms in input so that they are more likely to be noticed by learners”.

Besides, to be more descriptive; make the language sound more natural; and to provide language learners with an opportunity to examine noun-adjective collocations, I used various combinations of words like “tall thick trees”, “fertile fields”, “green grapes”, “white mulberry”, “purple figs”, “yellow apricots”, and “crimson cherries” throughout the text. In addition, while in the original version of the story there were only two characters, an anonymous question asker and a wise man, I thought that the conversation could take place between two members of a family who typically have a warm relationship like a wise grand-

father and his curious grandson; displaying the importance of “family” in the Iranian culture. I continued the story describing the way the young boy speaks to his grandfather, the kind of questions he asks about the trees in the garden, the fruits they bear and their benefits and how he eventually poses questions about the cypress tree. Here, to provide learners with opportunities for multiple exposures and hence retention of certain lexical items, I deliberately repeated certain vocabularies like the names of the trees throughout the story. Below is an excerpt:

- Dear grandpa, what is the name of this very tall tree with small white fruits?
- This is mulberry tree. We can eat fresh mulberries in the summer and dried ones in the winter. When you are angry or nervous, eating these sweet mulberries makes you feel relaxed.
- I think these are peach trees. I like unripe peaches more than ripe ones.
- Eating unripe fruits makes you have a stomachache. But ripe peach keeps the skin healthy. It is also good for eyesight.
- What about those tall green trees grandpa?
- They are cypress trees. They have no fruits but they are called “free” (Azadeh).
- How odd! They have no fruits but they are called “free”. Why?
- The grandfather thinks and then says: “Let me ask some questions”.

I then thought that the grandfather instead of revealing the answer quickly could ask several questions from his grandson. This “suspense” besides exposing learners to certain structures, like *“Does the...tree have green leaves in the winter?”*, could probably make them more eager to follow the story or even examine their own hunches.

- Does the apple tree have green leaves in the winter?
- No it doesn't.
- Tell me about the peach tree. Does the peach tree have green leaves in the winter?
- Surely not.
- Think about mulberry tree. Does the mulberry tree have green leaves in the winter?
- As much as I know, it doesn't.
- You see. Other trees have fruit and shade in summer, and their leaves fall off in fall. They blossom in spring and dry in winter; but look at the cypress tree. It is always green at all seasons and all days.

Bringing all these structures together was a strenuous task. I also realized that rewriting a story is more difficult than writing a new one since in addition to all the issues that had to be considered, such as attraction of the plot, age and interests of the target learners, pedagogic objectives, appropriate selection of vocabularies and grammatical structures, to mention some, I had to remain faithful to the original text too. Every word that I wrote, I asked myself if it was really what this story was meant to mean!

### ***Baking the Sculpture***

Another highly challenging phase was designing meaningful activities for the story. This may liken that of baking a wet clay sculpture in a kiln or household oven. Cautions should be taken as the clay could be prone to cracking. As a teacher who was used to dealing with mechanical, repetitive exercises such as true or false, fill in the blanks, and comprehension-check questions, my first drafts of activities resembled the kinds of activities I had seen in conventional textbooks. For example, considering the recreated text for the Liberal Cypress anecdote, “Wh” question forms with knee-jerk responses—which required learners to scan the text to find the “correct” answer—permeated my initial drafts. Below are examples of the exercises I initially prepared for Cypress Tree story:

- What kinds of tree are there in the grandfather’s garden?
- What fruits are there in the grandfather’s garden? What colors are they?
- Please rewrite the story in your own words and change it in the way that you like.
- Complete the following sentences:
  - a) I like to/don’t like to live in village with lots of trees because...
  - b) The most important thing I learned from my grandfather/grandmother is...

The first time I sent my activity part to my advisors, they crossed out all; writing a big “So what?” next to each. They both were emphatic that I had to take time preparing creative and mentally-challenging activities (Mishan & Timmis 2015; Tomlinson, 2011, 2013; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018) which provided learners with the opportunities to think, search, and express their ideas. My next drafts of activities for the Liberal Cypress anecdote, revised several times, contained more thought-provoking questions like the followings:

- Let’s think about the last line of the story: “One of the signs of being free (Azadeh) is being evergreen at all seasons and all days”. Does it make sense to you?
- How do you think people are like cypress trees?

Furthermore, searching more about the cypress tree, I found out that cypress is the oldest alive creature in Iran. Reading about the popularity of this tree among Iranian people from the past up to the now, I could see the footprints of this tree in the works of different Iranian authors, poets and artists; in their books, poems, paintings, carpets, handicrafts, religious symbols, historical monuments, and the like. Enthused by the ideas, I tried to add more enquiry-based questions; below are two:



**Figure 1.** *The Photo of an “Alam” Taken by me*

- We can see the symbol of cypress tree on this “Alam” that Shias use in the Mourning of Muharram and the day of Ashura. Do you know the reasons?



**Figure 2.** *The Cypress Trees Carved into a Stone Wall at Persepolis*

- Look at the following image. Why do we see cypress trees on the walls of Persepolis?

Later on, as I gave the prepared drafts to a number of my former students to self-study, I was surprised at the thoughtful answers provided by them. In their

symbolic interpretations, the students had commented that the fact that cypress has “good drought tolerance” and “is resistant to hurricanes... is a good example for Iranians who surrendered against the onslaught of an aggressive tribe but have not abandoned their essence”. They had written that cypress tree is “symbol of perseverance”; “strong people who try not to change in different situations”; and those “people of society who don’t change in the passing of time and adhere to their principles and their values and also they are legal [sic] to their homeland”. Referring to “Iranian soldiers who fought [sic] bravely in war in order to prevent other countries to enter our country”, one of the student had written that “Iranian soldiers in the holy defense are holy in Iranian culture...They are azadeh”.

As a language teacher, such a symbolic thinking and patriotic language produced by the students were at odds with the mundane language channeled by the conventional marketed coursebooks! As suggested by Safari (2019, p. 297), this kind of language learning and knowledge construction may be hoped to pave “a route through which each student can travel to reach a full understanding of their culture, self, and identities which opposes to trivial issues encountered in American/British English textbooks”.

### ***Painting and Decorating the Sculpture***

After rewriting the stories and designing the activities, or molding and baking the clay structures, it was time to prepare illustrations to make the stories and the activities more meaningful and interesting. To act more tactfully, I consulted the literature on materials’ visuals, layout and design (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018) and analyzed the visual elements of a number of English and Persian storybooks for teenagers; particularly the simplified versions of classic literary short stories rewritten by contemporary Iranian writers. Accordingly, I prepared a list of criteria that I could take into consideration while preparing or selecting the illustrations including their congruity with our Islamic-Iranian cultural values and Persian traditional artwork; their appeal to the target audience (adolescent learners); their meaningfulness and interpretability; inter alia.

Since each story demanded different illustrations, based on its contents and underlying themes, I had to decide about what to illustrate and how to illustrate; both of which required lots of thinking. For one story, I decided to have the pictures of its characters, for another one to illustrate the names of different groups of words mentioned in the story or the locations where the story was taking place. To depict what I had in mind, I had to imagine the characters’ physical features, costumes, facial expressions, actions, the settings, as well as the colors which could be used. Besides hand-drawn images, upon my advisors’ recommendations for using more realistic, meaningful, and purposeful illustrations, I decided to use real photos. I went to different places such as bazaar and tried to take photos by my personal camera. I felt like a sculptor who was choosing and mixing the paints in her palette and then brushing them onto the sculpture with various strokes.



However, as an immature graphic designer, it was arduous to me to work with graphic software like Paint and Photoshop. Initially, it took me plenty of time to do very little things like cutting and cropping pictures, putting them together, placing the illustrations inside the text, arranging the visual elements, positioning them aligned with the text or in the background to prepare the final illustrated draft of the stories. In addition to illustrations, I also had to decide about the page layouts which preferably had roots in Iranian art, as well as colors for the backgrounds. Nonetheless, it was not the end of the story. I remember that I once handed in the illustrated stories to one of my advisors and she made me aware of some points I had not noticed. For example, I had forgotten to resize all the pages so some of the pages had low resolutions and the hardcopies looked faded and poor in quality. This made me edit all the pages individually; which took me plenty of time. Figure 3 shows a sample of illustrated texts.

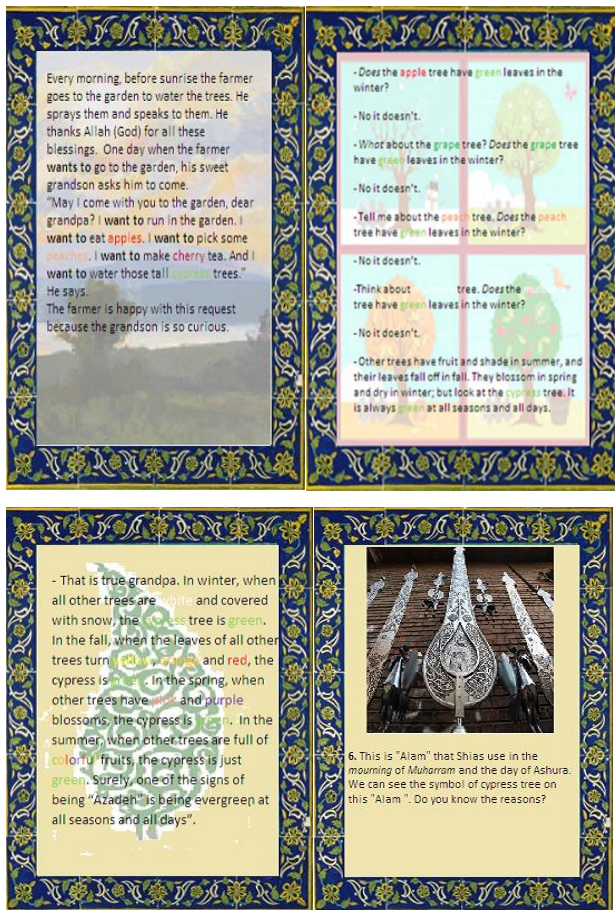


Figure 3. Samples of Illustrated Texts

Such challenges of designing materials by thinking outside the box, exerting imaginations, making informed decisions, and seeking ways to implement them made me constantly filled with senses of exhaustion and disappointments, on the one hand, and joy, pride, hope, and encouragement, on the other hand. Through such efforts in developing my own materials, there was nothing more challenging than convincing myself. As a product of mainstream, test-driven, transmission-based system of language education, appraising and discarding the traditional teaching and learning beliefs— which were strongly rooted in my cognition—and replacing them with some alternative views, like providing learners with spaces to critique issues and express their true selves, were extremely difficult. To me, it was like deconstructing a building and reconstructing a new one; I began breaking myself and the barriers inside and building a new version of me. Accordingly, I could see a number of changes occurring to me and my viewpoints as a result of being involved in this journey; some of which are discussed below.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Practicing Artistry**

Struggling with normative assumptions I had been socialized with was a big challenge I had to deal with. Throughout my years of learning English and teaching it, language was nothing beyond a means of communication enclosed in acquiring a number of vocabularies and grammatical structures and their functions. As frequently cited from Borg (2003, p. 88), “teachers’ prior language learning experiences establish cognitions about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualization of L2 teaching during teacher education, and which may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives”. Arguing that the footsteps of teachers’ tacit knowledge could be detected in the materials created by them, Bouckaert (2017, p. 18) states that “classroom materials as objects crafted by a teacher... may reveal the teacher’s underlying ideas about what the role and function of materials are or should be”. However, through rewriting the stories, obsessively selecting words, thinking about the meanings and power behind them, their sounds and resonances, and seeing how words could be put together creatively, I started seeing language as “art” (Núñez & Téllez, 2015; Prowse, 2011, Timmis, 2014; Wyatt, 2011). In tandem with that, as I endeavored to go beyond my limits by creating imaginary characters and settings, inventing dialogues and activities, thinking about costumes, drawing illustrations and putting all these together, I practiced actualizing the creativity and artistry inside. Actually, creativity is not all what we are born with; it is rather reinforced by practice. Likewise, while at the beginning of the process, my ideas were limited, the more I stretched my imaginations, consulted various sources, and drew inspiration from the events, the more resourceful I became, and fresher ideas found ways to my work.

Such instances of growth in self-artistry bear resemblance to Núñez and Téllez’s (2015) study in which the teachers attending a materials development seminar in Bogotá (Colombia) reported on their personal and professional

growth including fostering their “creativity”, “self-confidence”, and “self-esteem” as well as enhancing their expertise and knowledge in materials development. Self-citing themselves, Núñez and Téllez (2009) state that “materials development contributes directly to teachers’ professional growth insofar as it betters their knowledge, skills and creativity, raises their consciousness as regards teaching and learning procedures, and allows them to act as agents of permanent change” (p. 184). In addition, such a perspective-change bears resemblance to what a novice teacher-materials developer in Brandão’s (2018) study experienced. Likewise, materials design provided me “with opportunities of learning more about English” and “imprinting identity on language activities” (p. 263). This also concurs with Shawer’s (2010) study in which those EFL teachers engaged in developing and making classroom-level curriculum expressed more “job satisfaction, a sense of development, self-respect and creativity” in comparison to “curriculum-transmitters” who lamented “job dissatisfaction, routine work, dependency and lack of confidence” (p. 614).

### **Practicing Respect**

This journey took me somewhere that made me aware of the significance of some issues I was unaware of before. Mentioning one of them, I can point to the importance of “respect”. Respect is not only a feeling of admiring someone or what they do, but also appreciating what they think and have in their minds. I could see that through preparing mechanical and infantilizing activities like simple information-checking questions and tasks with predetermined answers which required minimal students’ cognitive and affective engagement or generated little or no worthwhile responses from them, I was depriving them of higher-order thinking *disrespectfully*. My advisors’ comments on the designed activities made me aware of the importance of respecting and appreciating the variety of thoughts and views held by learners. With such constant reminders, I gradually shifted from preparing controlled tasks to posing more genuine, thought-provoking, and open-ended queries which fostered greater student involvement and hopefully increased opportunities for not only language learning but also pondering over issues related to past and immediate life.

### **Practicing Self-reliance**

Self-reliance was another lesson I learnt and practiced throughout the work. To me an outstanding incident of self-reliance occurred when the two illustrators who had initially agreed to help me in illustrating the stories informed that they could not cooperate. For someone inexperienced in the field of graphic design and the related software such as Paint and Photoshop, it was such a fiasco. As sympathized by Thurairaj and Roy (2012), “many of the teachers are not gifted graphic designers nor do they have the flexibility to spend more time creating a visually appealing layout for their materials [and] even if they have the design skill various constraints influenced their decision” (p. 232). Nonetheless, despite my lack of experience, I made up my mind not to surrender. My advisors



had a key role in aiding me to control my feelings and not lose heart. At that time, I realized that *I* was the only person who could help me. I started drawing sketches, taking photos by my camera, learning how to work with graphic software, editing images, inserting them in the texts all by myself. All these made me feel confident and exercise my own powers.

Nonetheless, it is worth confessing that such self-reliance was frequently accompanied by senses of self-doubt, uncertainty, confusion, and even at times frustrations. Besides moments of confusion and wrestling I experienced while rewriting the anecdotes, designing the activities, and self-creating the visuals, I kept wondering whether the students, parents, teachers and administrators would react positively to such teacher-generated materials, or they would assume them as “ragged”, “tatty”, or “unprofessional” and still prefer “slickly produced commercial course books to materials made by teachers themselves” (Block, 1991, p. 212). However, as put by Kerr (1981, p. 370) a couple of decades ago, “[T]he senses of uncertainty and frustration...may actually be necessary prerequisites in the process of design. They may indicate that the designer is wrestling internally with various ideas of how to proceed, attempting to express thoughts still only partially formed”.

## Practicing Ownership

Prior to this experience, I saw myself as a consumer using the products prepared by others; mainly foreign publishers. The journey provided me with the opportunity to truly experience the pleasant feeling of making something by my hands and the unique sense of “ownership”. As was also stated by Parsayian et al., this “decision to become a composer, rather than a mere spectator, pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me face the challenges of becoming someone I had never been before” (2016, p. 202). I truly felt “the teacher’s great feeling of satisfaction to present something created by himself/herself” (Salas, 2004, p. 6) when I asked a group of six language teachers to evaluate the designed stories and the activities. They were surprised at the way the stories had been recreated. The sequence of events, dialogues, illustrations, and activities all were the points that attracted the attention of the teachers. Appreciating the endeavor, the teachers commented that “it is not easy at all...for sure you have lots of thoughts behind all these” and “word by word of these stories demand hours of thinking”. One of the teachers thought that one of the advantages of such materials is that “concept especially the cultural concepts in this story are usually familiar for the students and this helps them to understand the linguistic part too”. Agreeing with her, another teacher stated that “when we read the stories, they brush up what we have already heard and make us think deeply”. With a focus on the activity part, one of the teachers mentioned that “the questions that make students think and make their thoughts tangible by using language is very important without them something is missing”. The teachers also spoke about their own possible development through teaching by stating that “while students are growing and learning some important things about their own life and lifestyle, their teacher is also experiencing something and learning

something about his/her life, too". These nice comments, along with their constructive criticisms, made me sense a feeling of ownership and self-trust which was in contrast with the consumption sense perpetuated by top-down curricula (Parsaiyan, et al., 2016; Safari, 2019).

### **Practicing Roots-returning**

When I decided to recreate the Persian stories, one of my aims was to preserve Iranian-Islamic cultural identity. While initially I assumed that simply by recreating Persian classic literary works, inserting Persian words (like characters' proper names, Iranian foods and untranslatable concepts) I was taking a counter-hegemonic stance towards Western products and I was doing a large part of my duty towards resisting against "the traces of knowledge colonization, ideological domination, and mind suppression smothering the local knowledge, interests, values" (Safari, 2019, p. 296), later, I realized that Iranian-Islamic heritage cannot be epitomized in just some words, but in the mindset which is brought to the fore. My viewpoint was broadened throughout the time in a way that whatever I thought about such as words, characters, costumes, dialogues, illustrations, and layouts, I inquired into the ways they could be representative of our Iranian-Islamic roots. This made me search more about the concepts and topics of the stories and try to make students think about and challenge them; examples of which were asking learners to search about cypress tree in Iranian culture or introducing some Iranian good eating habits that are being forgotten. This practice of returning to roots was a turning point in my professional life.

In consort to the above themes, what stands out in my personal and professional change is the crucial role of "expert mediation" provided by my ELT advisors (Golombek & Johnson, 2017; Johnson & Golombek, 2016). Our oral dialogic interactions, the comments in the margins of the various drafts of the stories, and the "so what" questions posed by them provided me with space to ponder over and "externalize" my rationales concerning the contents' and activities' pedagogical values and relevance. As stated by Golombek and Johnson (2017), "expert mediation can be identified as harnessing the transformative power of both written and oral narrative activity in ways that promote the development of teacher/teaching expertise" (p. 26).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Given the paucity of narrative enquiries focusing on materials developers' identity (re)-construction, the present study was an attempt to story the challenges and identity changes experienced by a language teacher venturing into developing English language learning materials. For her, the provocation phase occurred when she attended a materials development course whose instructor encouraged her to prepare her own class materials based on Iranian literary heritage. Vexed by lack of concerted efforts with this regard, she started consulting and exploring the pertinent literature until she eventually refined and

focused her attention on recreating five anecdotes from Sa'di's *The Rose Garden*. Like a sculptor making clay structures, she went through the challenging stages of recreating the stories in an entertaining yet pedagogically-informed ways (kneading and modeling the material to create the desired shape); designing cognitively-demanding activities (hardening the sculpture by allowing it to dry); and creating visuals (painting and decorating the sculpture). All these challenges made her revisit a number of normative assumptions (like relying heavily on mechanical, infantilizing exercises and considering more intellectually-demanding ones) and practice self-arts, self-reliance, respect, ownership, and roots-returning in developing materials.

The findings of this narrative enquiry could be enlightening for English teachers, teacher educators, curriculum developers, materials writers, and policy-makers who are interested in creating locally-appropriate materials and learning about the challenges experienced by materials writers. This may also encourage administrators and teacher educators to open spaces for language teacher to practice developing their own class materials and explore their trajectory of change. Further narrative enquiries could also aid to see if the findings of this study are supported in other contexts and how teachers' varied lived experiences and social and contextual factors may impact the results.

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# The Meaning-Making of the Children's Drawings as a Manifestation of their Visual Literacy Competence

Marzieh Souzandehfar\*<sup>1</sup>

Seyyed Mohammad Ali Soozandehfar<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

Following an ethnographic approach, this study was intended to investigate how children transfer meaning in their drawings, as a manifestation of their visual literacy competence. To this end, 32 six- and seven-year-old Iranian male children were observed for six class sessions as they engaged in learning activities that involved drawing. Building upon Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) theoretical framework of Visual Grammar, children's drawings were analyzed. Field notes were also used to describe experiences and observations the researcher made while participating in the class. Furthermore, children's descriptions of their own drawings were used as complementary evidence to the analysis. The results of the analyses revealed that drawing upon a variety of visual resources, such as talks, written texts, gestures, and objects, children made ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings in their drawings. Furthermore, although

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor of TEFL, Department of Translation Studies, Jahrom University, Jahrom, Fars, Iran, (corresponding author); souzandeh@jahromu.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of TEFL, Department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), University of Hormozgan, Bandar Abbas, Iran; soozandehfar@hormozgan.ac.ir



each drawing was uniquely created by different types of interests and provided the specific context for the visual structures and forms, some features such as use of space and line framings, diagonal lines, curved/bent figures, profile form, and tilted body position were shared by most children in their meaning-making act. The findings can help educators and practitioners promote children's visual literacy, and propose pedagogical and practical implications.

**Keywords:** Visual Literacy, Drawing, Meaning-making, Visual Grammar, Textual Meaning

## Introduction

The growing influences of multimedia technologies have produced a shift in what counts as texts and what it means to be literate (Jewitt, 2005; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Visual literacy is gaining prominence as a result of the ubiquitous presence of images and visual media which have totally changed our world in the twenty first century (Baker & Watt, 2008). Visual literacy is defined as a set of skills which enable an individual to understand and use visuals for intentionally communicating with others (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978; Jamshidzadeh & Jam, 2017). Based on this definition, there are two principles basic to the idea of visual literacy. The first one is that visuals are a language; that is, "like verbal language, they have vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. For example, in a picture, elements such as color, light and shade, line and placement of individual items serve as the vocabulary which combine to form the entire visual message" (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978, p. 1). Second, a visually literate person should be able to read and write visual language; that is, according to Ausburn and Ausburn, "if one thinks of reading and writing in the broad sense as decoding and encoding messages, then the visual analogues of verbal literacy and language usage are quite easily grasped." (p. 1). In this sense, reading visual language is a matter of being able to interpret the visual messages, such as gestures or pictures, produced by others, and writing it entails being able to compose meaningful visual messages oneself (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978). It is even possible to speak visual language through the expressive use of the face and body.

Older definitions of visual literacy, like that of Ausburn and Ausburn (1978), seem to have used the terms skill and competence (competency) interchangeably (Avgerinou, 2001). However, more recent visual literacy definitions evolve around the term 'ability'. Avgerinou (2003) and Avgerinou and Pettersson (2011) define the visual literacy ability as one's competence to read, decode, interpret visual statements, on the one hand, and to write, encode, and create visual statements on the other. They also introduce a third visual literacy ability, i.e. to think visually.

According to development theory and research, children must master visual skills before they can even begin to develop verbal skills (Arizpe & Styles, 2003). Some theorists even claim that visual skills are a necessary foundation for later speech and reading skills (Anning & Ring, 2004; Jodairi Pineh, 2017;

Kist, 2000; Kress, 2003; Luke & Elkins, 1998). In fact, teaching visual literacy helps children interpret art and visual media that they encounter every day. Furthermore, visual literacy allows a deeper interaction with texts of all kinds, and introduces the process of analytical and critical thinking about representations and meanings (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011). As a result, children can be more skeptical and informed viewers of all visual media, including advertising.

Drawing, as a symbol system for meaning making and representing at children's disposal, is a crucial element of visual literacy (Dyson, 1993). As Dyson (1989) argues, drawing can create a bridge between the linguistic and semiotic mode of the image. Recently, children's drawings, as an alternative means of communicating and representing knowledge and understandings, have become the focus of researchers' interest. To take an example, Pahl (1999; 2002) has illustrated the features of children's multimodal drawings. In fact, it was observed that besides drawing, children created multi-layered narratives through representing and re-representing versions of stories in their socio-dramatic play. Also a fluid quality was observed in the way children used objects. In another study, Anning and Ring (2004) revealed that multi-modality is core to children's preferred ways of representing and communicating their growing understanding of the world and their roles as active members of communities. Pantaleo (2005) and Rabey (2003) demonstrated children's meaning-making skills both of and with visual resources, as their drawing responses to picture books were analyzed. Coates and Coates (2006) studied the relationship between children's narrative and their drawing process. They found that what children want to do is to talk to themselves in pictures, thereby weaving stories around the marks being made as a parallel to active fantasy play.

Within teacher-initiated drawing sessions, Hopperstad (2008) observed five- and six-year-old children as they engaged in drawing-related play. From a semiotic point of view, the author investigated the quality of the children's play and demonstrated how it can be considered as a possible learning context for drawing. She argued that drawing and play can be used to promote children's competence to convey meaning and interpret the visual mode. In fact, she considers drawing and play in the same prominent position as images in contemporary texts.

In their interesting study, Reiss et al. (2007) revealed a tension between pupils' diverse conceptions and monolithic science lessons through pupil's visual representations. The drawings revealed multiple ways of portraying the natural environment, concluding that there is scientific worth in this diversity. In addition, the authors argued that due to pupils' lack of interest in a single, solid depiction of the world in their science lessons, schools need to take account of this diversity.

Drawing has also been considered as an alternative way of understanding young children's constructions of literacy. Using young children's drawings about reading and writing, Kendrick and McKay (2004) proposed an innovative way of examining children's understandings and perceptions of literacy in various contexts of their lives. The study criticizes common classroom practices

that give priority to language-dependent modes of representation compared to other modes. In primary-level classrooms, Ranker's (2012) study also revealed that students' drawings served as visual resources for their literacy processes. Drawing upon a social semiotic framework, Ranker explored the ways in which pupils can use visual semiotic resources while composing texts in literacy classroom contexts. The study defined and developed the concept of a visual composing resource, and qualified the range, scope, and type of visual resources that were available to the students while they engaged in literacy processes in various classroom settings. The author also illustrated how the students brought these sets of visual composing resources into a complex interaction with the semiotic assemblages that they were producing in each context, revealing important aspects of early literacy processes that incorporate visuality.

Most of the studies reveal that children can use drawings to convey meaning and express ideas and understandings in ways which is not possible through verbal language. Building upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) framework, the present study aimed to analyze meaning in the drawings of six- to seven-year-old children and to demonstrate the pedagogical potential of drawing to support and promote children's visual literacy skills.

More specifically, this study was intended to encourage teachers to consider children's ways of constructing meaning through drawings, and to pay attention to the value of drawing for visual literacy education. In particular, this study tried to answer the following questions:

1. How do children convey ideational meaning in their drawings using visual literacy competence?
2. How do children convey interpersonal meaning in their drawings using visual literacy competence?
3. How do children convey textual meaning in their drawings using visual literacy competence?
4. What are the similarities in children's interests and types of meaning-making?
5. What are the variations in children's interests and types of meaning-making?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study included 32 six- and seven-year-old Iranian male children in the first grade of an elementary school in Shiraz. There were five first-grade classes in this elementary school, one of which was selected randomly for this study. Furthermore, there was a teacher particularly assigned for the drawing class, while for other subjects, the class had another teacher. The drawing class was held three sessions a week.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Utilizing an ethnographic research method, the study investigated children's learning activities that included drawing over time. The researchers used an ethnographic approach in order to be a participant observer to experience the context surrounding the drawings and the accompanied talk and actions during the drawing processes.

The class was observed for a period of six sessions, i.e. two weeks. During the first sessions, one of the researchers spent enough time to get to know the children and make them feel secure about her presence.

The children were organized in groups of four when working in class. Field notes were used to describe experiences and observations the researcher made while participating in the class. The focus was on activities which involved drawing and which were initiated by the teacher. The drawing sessions were categorized according to two major sources of inspiration, topics and experiences outside school. In the first category, drawings inspired by topics, the children made drawings relating to the topics, such as 'seasons of the year', 'a hobby', 'a behavior', which were introduced by the teacher herself. In the second category, drawing inspired by experiences outside school, the teacher asked the children to talk and draw about their holiday experiences or about occasional sightseeing they had gone together with their classmates.

The drawing tasks were widely formulated. The teacher walked among the children and took seat frequently to talk about their drawings in progress. The researcher also tried to walk among the groups and take notes of what they were doing and saying, in addition to their behaviors during the drawing process. The researcher tried not to interrupt the children while they were drawing. However, she provided them with support and feedback whenever they asked a question during the process.

### **Data Analysis**

A total of 92 drawings were collected at the end of the fifth session. Using purposive sampling, from each child's set of drawings, the researcher selected the most representative ones for analysis. As a result, 32 drawings were analyzed from among the whole 92 drawings. In the last session, each child was supposed to come to the front of the class and describe his selected drawing. In fact, the children's descriptions in the last session and the observation field notes, which had been collected during the drawing process, were used as complementary evidence to the researcher's analysis of the drawings based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) analytical framework.

In 1996, Kress and van Leeuwen built upon Halliday's (1994) theory to developed their theory of visual 'grammar' to analyze images representing three basic types of meaning; i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational meaning refers to what an image 'says' or represents about a particular phenomenon. Here, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) differentiate between classifi-

cational, analytical, and narrative visual structures. The second type of meaning, that is interpersonal meaning, considers the way an image addresses its audience and potential viewers. This, in turn, results in two groups of images; that is, those in which characters are looking directly at us and those which do not have this direct gaze. The first category 'demands' interaction, while the second is an interpersonal 'offer' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 119). The third type of meaning is concerned with the ways images work as compositions or make textual meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen identify these visual features as framing and classify them into relative size, elements, and uses of color.

Furthermore, Kress (1997) argues that, like any other meaning-making activity, drawing is a motivated process used by children to situate them in the world. This means that children's meaning making is stimulated by an underlying interest. As a result, any drawing can be considered as a creative response to the experiences of its maker.

Finally, Kress (2003) states that the visual mode is mostly used to depict what the world consists of rather than to tell about actions and movements. He believes that children can make use of multimodal meaning-making to overcome the limitation. Building on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) analytical framework, this study analyzed children's drawings, how they are read as complicated statements, and the ways they interact with us as viewers.

## Results and Discussion

### Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual Meaning

To answer the first three questions of the study and to see how children convey **ideational**, **interpersonal**, and **textual** meaning in their drawings, the researcher studied the drawings and field notes related to the drawing process and children's descriptions on their own drawings. As a type of triangulation, children's descriptions, in the form of field notes, helped the researcher to get a more comprehensive understanding of different types of meaning in the drawings. In the following sections, meaning types and their observed realizations are presented.

#### *Ideational Meaning in the Drawings*

In the analysis of drawings which conveyed ideational meaning, three major groups of drawings emerged. Two of them were related to the functions, according to which the drawings were distinguished as analytical and narrative (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), and the third group was drawings with multimodal representations, in which children had combined semiotic resources.

**Analytical Drawings.** Analytical drawings or representations emphasize the constant structure of an object or system, for example the constituent parts of a whole, by focusing on the relationships between the depicted elements in terms of part-whole structure (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The

meaning of an analytical image corresponds to linguistic expressions such as “this is” or “this consists of”.

The first drawing is a typical example of an analytical drawing. Ashkan’s drawing (Figure 1) was inspired by an experience outside school, a visit to Hafez tomb which is the tomb of the great Iranian poet in Shiraz. In this analytical drawing, Ashkan has depicted different parts of the tomb area. In the drawing one can see the tomb itself in the center. To the left of the tomb is a tree with a lawn and a small pool of water at its foot. And to the right of the tomb, there is a larger lawn, a bigger pool of water and two red shapes which Ashkan described as two flowers. On top of the page is a piece of cloud which is raining and a sun shining to the right of the cloud. It seems that Ashkan has drawn the essential objects the tomb area consists of (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). More interesting is Ashkan’s detailed representation or analysis of the structure of the tomb itself. One can see that he has paid attention to the essential characteristics of the tomb: Ashkan has drawn the pillars which hold the dome above the grave stone; pillars, according to Ashkan’s explanations, are so strong that he has continued drawing them under the ground. While observing the way he explained his drawing, it became clear to the researcher that Ashkan was enjoying as he was making his detailed analysis. While talking about the pillars, Ashkan used his body language and gestures to show the strength of the pillars.



**Figure 1.** *Hafez Tomb*

Another example of an analytical drawing is Nima’s drawing related to the topic ‘four seasons of a year’ (Figure 2). As Nima himself described, the drawing shows one year in the shape of a circle with twelve lines each of which repre-

sents one month of a year. Around the circle and in each corner of the paper one season is depicted in a square-shaped frame. Above the circle are the pictures of fall and winter, and below the circle, spring and summer are drawn. Based on Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) definition of analytical drawings, Nima has illustrated the four basic constituents of a year, i.e. the four seasons. Furthermore, in each season its features and properties are also shown quite delicately and accurately. Spring is depicted with two trees with pink blossoms on their braches, and the sun which is shining, along with a piece of cloud next to the sun. Summer is represented with a big tree full of fruits, and a big sun which is larger in size compared to the suns in other seasons. Nima himself emphasized that the big sun shows the hot weather in the summer. The picture of fall shows a tree with yellow leaves some of which are falling on to the ground. As Nima explained, hail is also visible in the sky of this season. Finally, winter is represented with a dry tree, snow which is everywhere, and also a snowman next to the tree.



Figure 2. *Seasons of A Year*

**Narrative Drawings.** According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), narrative representations depict events, or processes of change evolving in time and/or space. They involve one or more vectors, i.e. distinct lines indicating the direction of evolution (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In the present study, the researcher found that the children made use of vectors as diagonal lines to signify movement and direction.





**Figure 3.** *Dinosaur Being Trapped*

For example, Hamid made a drawing inspired by a movie in which a helicopter is throwing a large net on a dinosaur to entrap the animal (Figure 3). The out stretched, bent lines by which the net is depicted shows the falling movement of the net on the head of the big dinosaur. Furthermore, the tilted body position of the dinosaur and its open mouth, which according to Hamid shows the fact that the dinosaur is trying to bite and tear the net, can add to the narrative function of the drawing. In fact, Hamid has demonstrated his narrative meaning as an interaction between the helicopter and the dinosaur (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Hamid also used gestures to show the way the animal was trying to tear the net and avoid being trapped.



**Figure 4.** *Man Catching Fish on A Sailing Boat*



Next is Hossein's summer break-inspired drawing (Figure 4). He drew a man in a sailing boat in the sea as he is catching a large fish. There is some bait at the end of the hook toward which the big fish has bent its body to catch it. The curved body of the fish trying to eat the bait and the tilted body position of the man who is, according to Hossein's explanations which were accompanied with gestures, making an attempt to pull the fish out of water signify the narrative nature of the drawing.

**Multimodal Representations.** According to (Gee, 2003, 2004), multimodal discourses integrate different representational resources such as colors, visual images, sounds, movements, gestures, and language for communication.

Different studies of children's meaning-making (Anning & Ring, 2004; Coates & Coates, 2006; Dyson, 1989; Hopperstad, 2008; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Pahl, 1999) have observed multimodal representations. Armin's written caption in figure 5 is one example. The drawing shows a man who has pushed another man from above a stair-case and the second man is fallen onto the ground with his head bleeding. The written caption (He was a bad man) "آن مرد بد بود" was used by Armin to make the situation clearer. In this case, according to Pantaleo (2005), the drawing provides more information than the written words by extending the texts. In the same line, Barthes (1977) argues that most pictures are capable of several interpretations until anchored to one by a caption.



Figure 5. *Bad Man*

The balloon form, which is taken from comic strips, was used by a few children in their drawings to represent the thoughts or speech of persons. This can be seen in Ryan's drawing (Figure 6) in which a boy, Ryan, as he himself explained, is holding his friend in his arms while saying "دوست من" (My friend).



Figure 6. *My Friend*

Furthermore, some children combined drawing, talking and gesturing to depict movements. This was visible in Ashkan's (Figure 1), Hamid's (Figure 3), and Hossein's (Figure 4) drawings explained above. While talking about the pillars, Ashkan used his body language and gestures to show the strength of the pillars. Hamid also used gestures along with speech to show the way the dinosaur was trying to tear the net and avoid being trapped. Finally, Hossein's explanations were accompanied with gestures when he was talking about the man making an attempt to pull the fish out of water. As Kress (1997) argued, this multimodal strategy makes the representation of movements more 'real' as it allows children to 'enter' the drawings. Similarly, in this study, the combinations of gestures, drawing, and talk promoted the children's engagement with the dynamicity of the topics, texts and experiences of which they made their drawings.

### ***Interpersonal Meaning in the Drawings***

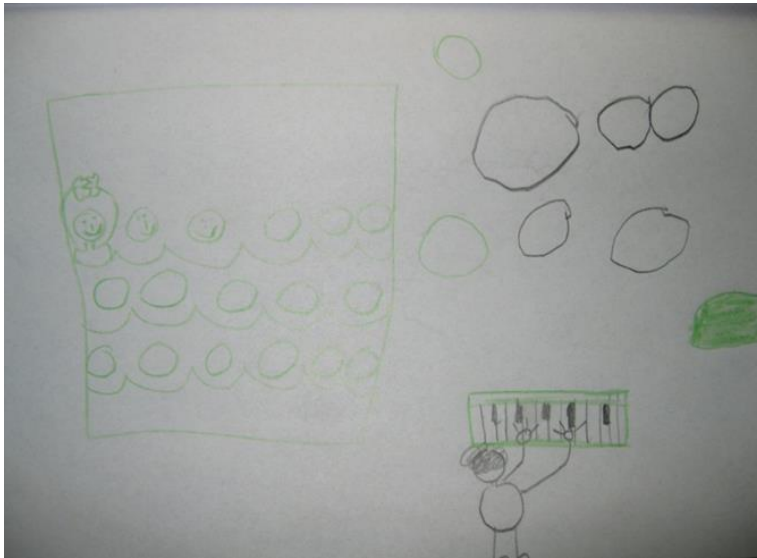
Building upon Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar, it was observed that some drawings are 'offering' interaction while others are 'demanding' interaction. In fact, such drawings appear to address the audience and influence their involvement with the content of the drawings.

**Drawings 'Demanding' Interaction.** Most of the drawings depicted the persons, animals or other animate figures in frontal view in such a way that the drawn characters looked directly at us. They also smiled in most cases. This

observation can be related to Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) description of images that demand engagement and interaction from the viewers. In fact, the direct gaze invites the audience to engage with the content. This can be observed in Ryan's drawing (Figure 6) in which a boy, i.e. Ryan himself, is holding his friend in his hands while saying "دوست من" (My friend). The direct gaze of Ryan in the drawing, along with his wide smile, demand that we pay attention to and recognize his friend.

**Drawings 'Offering' Interaction.** In some of the narrative drawings, the characters are depicted from behind or in profile. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) describe interaction as an offer, such drawings communicate with us more openly, offering us the opportunity to think about the phenomenon which is illustrated.

For example, Amir's drawing (Figure 7), which was inspired by his summer-break experience, shows a man from behind who is playing the piano on the beach for those who are swimming in the sea. According to Amir's explanations, those in the sea are enjoying from the music that is playing. Perhaps the act of playing the piano and making the people happy in the sea is more important to Amir than the man's facial details. In fact, Amir's explanation about the happiness of the people supports this interpretation.



**Figure 7.** *Man Playing the Piano on the Beach*

### ***Textual Meaning in the Drawings***

Children utilized some visual features to create visual texts. Based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) framework, the following realizations of textual meaning

in the material will be described: (1) framing of drawn elements, (2) signals of salience and (3) reading paths.

**Framing of Drawn Elements.** The best example of framing of drawn elements is Nima's drawing (Figure 2) related to the topic 'four seasons of a year'. In this drawing, as it was explained above, the months of a year are depicted as twelve lines framed in a circle. Furthermore, every season is framed within square-like shapes. In fact, the frames were used to disconnect each season from the others and also from the year. In fact, the drawing demands us to scrutinize each element carefully. The use of framing for drawn elements was visible in several of the analytical drawings.

**Signals of Salience.** As Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) argue, the use of colors in some drawings can be considered as a tool which signals the importance of a specific element. For example, in Figure 1, Ashkan explained that he used dark blue to color the water in the small pools on either side of Hafez tomb in order to emphasize the cleanliness and clearness of the water inside.

Furthermore, in some of the drawings, children placed some elements on top of the page which, according to Kress (1997), can imply background information, compared to those elements which are drawn towards the bottom of the page, indicating foreground information. This can be observed in Amir's drawing (Figure 7) where the man playing the piano is drawn at the bottom of the page and the sea and the people in it are higher toward the top of the page. In fact, the man's position attracts our attention and makes him and his action the salient elements, standing out from the rest of the drawing.

In addition, in some other drawings size has been used to indicate the relative significance of the element. For example, in Figure 1, the tomb itself is the larger element. In Ryan's drawing (Figure 6), the big heart can be considered as a sign of significance which invites us to pay more attention to. As Ryan himself explained, the heart is the signal of love between the two friends. Furthermore, the red color of the heart adds to this salience.

**Reading Paths.** Pictures and visuals are cultural products shared by individuals (Moriarty & Rohe, 1992); as such, they are understood within individual people's frames of reference (Singer, 2010). Language and cultural differences may impact the effectiveness of visuals (Kovalik, 2004). As a result, the elements in drawings might be arranged according to patterns of written texts (e.g., left-right, right-left) revealing some cultural norms. In some other drawings, elements are organized in a more non-linear fashion. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue that when an element is placed in the center of an image, it can signify its importance, compared to when it is placed in the margin.

For example, Mehdi's drawing (Figure 8), inspired by topics, depicts a big map of Iran in the center which has occupied most of the page. This is surrounded by the flags of other neighbor countries in the margin. As Mehdi himself explained, He put Iran in the center to show that it is the most important country among all the other ones in the area.



Figure 8. Map of Iran

### *Similarities, Variations, and Interests*

Regarding the last two research questions, a comparison of the drawings revealed a set of similarities and variations in the types of meaning that were made and their realizations. With respect to the similarities, in some of the analytical drawings (e.g. Figure 2), space and line framings were used to make distinctions between drawn elements. This shows that children consider the drawings as compositions. Diagonal lines, curved/bent figures, profile form, and tilted body position were features constituting visual vectors in drawings which represented narrative meanings (Figures 3 & 4). Furthermore, the multimodal quality of some of the children's drawing practices (Figures 1, 3 & 4) can be considered as a type of similarity in the children's act of meaning-making. They used talking, writing, and gesturing, and sometimes objects for meaning making and representing their thoughts. This is in line with different studies (Anning & Ring, 2004; Coates & Coates, 2006; Dyson, 1989, 1993; Hopperstad, 2008; Pantaleo, 2005; Pahl, 1999, 2002; Rabey, 2003) which revealed children's skills to make meaning, using a variety of visual resources. These similarities reveal that the children have common access to the necessary skills used for meaning-making forms and structures that were shared by them. They also show the visual literacy children bring with them to school. Another justification for the similarities could be the fact that the children, when sitting together to draw, may have copied from each other. In fact, children can easily look at each other's drawings and pick up visual structures in such an intimate situation at the table. In the same line, Pahl (1999) stated that there is a rich possibility for

children to copy each other as they are engaged in group activities. This is also true for ideas which can spread among children as they are working together. However, Kress (1997) challenges this argument that children only copy. In fact, he believes that copying is itself one type of 'new making' (p. 37) because meaning-making is always a transformative process.

Coming to the variations among the drawings, it is noticed that although the children in the present study may have copied other children's visual forms and structures, each drawing was uniquely created by different types of interests and provided the specific context for the visual structures and forms. Kress (1997, 2003) argues that children's interests are reflected in their drawings. As a result, one needs to look for those interests in order to understand how children make unique meanings in their drawings. In the present study, traces of aesthetic interest, interest in facts, and interest in events were visible.

According to Rabey (2003) and regarding an interest in facts, the children tended to represent figures and objects that originated from the topics or their experiences out of school. That is, since the children's drawings were built upon their interests in facts, they hadn't provided much setting details, and consequently, the represented elements could easily be scrutinized (e.g. Figures 3, 5, 6 and 8). Furthermore, some of the drawings reflected an interest in the dynamic aspect of the world; that is, events. The dinosaur drawing (Figure 3) and the man catching the big fish (Figure 4) are examples. In other drawings, the children represented emotional dimensions (Figures 6 & 7). Finally, an aesthetic interest was particularly illustrated by using colors. The dark blue color of the small pools on either side of Hafez tomb (Figure 1), which emphasized the clean and clear water inside, and the red color the heart in Figure 6 are examples. It is also worth mentioning that the interest in aesthetics can affect interest in events and facts, which depicts the artistic pleasure children may take from visual meaning-making.

However, the interests which were described above are not exhaustive at all; that is, according to Kress (1997, 2003), there are many other factors that can influence children's interests and not all sources of interests can be tracked. For example, as Hopperstad (2008) states, different factors in the setting, peer conversations, interactions, and also out-of-school drawing experiences, can determine children's decision what and how to draw. Furthermore, according to Hopperstad, the interests are dynamic phenomena which cannot be separated from the drawing process itself. That is, as the child is drawing, new and different interests may emerge. Similarly, Pahl (1999) argues that only through close observation one can detect the complex meanings and shifting interests represented in children's drawings. This change of interest was observed in the drawing process of some children in the present study when they crumpled their incomplete drawing and tried to make a new one.

Another important issue regarding interest is children's growing control over visual resources. Thibault (1997) asserts that children's interests may be so complex that children are not able to depict them visually. For example, lack of a visual vector in a drawing does not necessarily mean child's lack of interest

in the dynamic aspect of the texts. One justification is the fact that the child does not have control over signifying the action which has affected their decisions of what to draw. Another explanation is the presence of peers in the drawing process. In the present study children could simply pick up from each other, ask questions and comment as they were in small groups. A negative remark from a peer can make a child to quit their drawing and start a new one. This can result in an unsecure feeling because as Pahl (1999) argues, full engage in drawing requires a safe feeling. Finally, the sources of inspiration and the way the drawing tasks were presented to the children in class may also have influenced the children's interest in drawing. The sources of inspiration were defined by the teacher. While it is encouraging and helpful for some children to follow their own interests, some others may feel anxious and insecure as they need to fulfill the teacher's expectation (Anning & Ring, 2004). Furthermore, different sources of inspiration may not cause the same degree of encouragement for different children. In the drawing sessions, when the sources of inspiration were defined by the teacher, some children became cheerful while some others felt stressful and unsafe. In fact, due to sufficient data in the present study, one cannot say anything specific about this and further research is recommended in this respect.

## Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that most of the children's drawing practices have a multimodal quality; that is, they draw upon a variety of visual resources, such as talks, written texts, gestures, and objects in their drawing processes to convey ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. In fact, the results of the present study promoted teachers' awareness regarding children's visual literacy they bring to school. According to Anning and Ring (2004), unfortunately, school children usually think of drawing as a temporary mode. However, students need to learn that visual mode, like any other semiotic modes, has a grammar with its own rules and principles. That is, teachers should pay attention to different sources that encourage visual meaning-making in children, and instruct them to make meaning through drawing. Furthermore, as Coates (2002) argues, drawing should be introduced as a free-choice activity because other parts of the children's visual literacy may be activated this way. Some of the children in the present study created multimodal texts, including drawing, talking, writing, and gesturing. As a result, teachers can make children aware of the potentials of multiple modes and encourage their combination. Teachers can also explain to children about the purposes and ways in which different modes are useful for them.

In addition, teachers can foster children's visual literacy by reading and talking about the meaning of drawings. In fact, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) analytical framework could be utilized as a means of understanding and talking about meaning in drawings. According to Hopperstad (2008), this approach can help peer-learning processes and promote children's confidence in their own drawing style.



Also, a comparison of the drawings revealed a set of similarities and variations in the types of meaning that were made and their realizations. The similarities reveal that the children have similar access to the necessary skills used for meaning-making forms and structures that were shared by them. Furthermore, when sitting together to draw, the children may have learned ideas from each other.

With respect to the variations among the drawings, it was noticed that although the children in the present study may have copied other children's visual forms and structures, each drawing is a different context for the visual forms and structures that are copied. This variation can be derived from the children's differing interests reflected in their drawings (Kress, 1997, 2003). In the present study, the children seemed to have been driven by an aesthetic interest, an interest in facts, and an interest in events.

In fact, as Pahl (1999) argues, the things children find interesting will often differ from our adult perspective. Consequently, the teachers should to be pay special attention to each child's meaning-making issues and consider the children's various meaning-making interests as valuable.

Finally, children's safe feeling during drawing and the way sources of inspiration and drawing tasks are presented to them should be taken into account in the interpretation of children's meaning-making processes.

One significant question to be answered is how teachers can create a safe and secure condition for children to follow their drawing preferences and meaning-making interests. This is an important issue because it can provide the researchers with more valid interpretations and inferences when analyzing children's drawings. An unsafe situation can deteriorate a child's drawing ability and interest. In addition, regarding the fact that different sources of inspiration have different stimulating power for different children, studies can be carried out to see how the introduction of sources of inspiration and drawing tasks can affect children's meaning-making activities in school. Finally, longitudinal studies can be carried out to see how children's drawings in class can promote their visual literacy in out-of-class situations in the future.

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# Iranian EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Regarding Written Corrective Feedback with a Focus on Teaching Experience

Farhad Golpour<sup>1</sup>  
Touran Ahour\*<sup>2</sup>  
Saeideh Ahangari<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find the Iranian less and more experienced EFL teachers' beliefs in marking students' errors in writing, their preferred types of written corrective feedback, the most useful kind of teachers' written error correction feedback, and the differences between what they believe and what they actually do in giving feedback. The study was done by the cooperation of 120 available university teachers (53 less

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate in TEFL, Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran;

golpourf@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of TEFL, Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran, (Corresponding Author); ahour@iaut.ac.ir; touranahour@yahoo.com

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor of TEFL, Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

ahangari@iaut.ac.ir

experienced and 67 more experienced) teaching writing to EFL learners at different universities in Iran. A written feedback questionnaire was employed in this descriptive survey in which both quantitative (closed-ended questions and paper investigation) and qualitative (open-ended questions) ways of data collection were used. Descriptive statistics including frequency and percentage were estimated in the quantitative data analysis. The results revealed that in error marking and in finding the most useful kind of error correction, less and more experienced teachers had different preferences; and for pointing out the errors, they also had different ideas. The reviewing of the open-ended questions for the qualitative data showed no belief discrepancies in teachers' responses to the closed-ended items and open-ended questions of the questionnaire. However, the investigation of teachers' error correction on learners' actual papers indicated that both groups' beliefs were different from their actual paper correction. The implications of the study are for teachers, policymakers, and decision-makers in educational settings.

**Keywords:** Belief, Written Corrective Feedback, Experience, Practice, Teachers

## Introduction

In all educational systems, some factors such as educational content, teachers and students are very important. Before 1980s, the focus of education was on reforming educational content and the content was evaluated by investigating the amount students learned. The role of teachers in learning opportunities was totally ignored (Bauersfeld, 1979). Teachers' beliefs influence their consciousness, teaching attitude, teaching methods and teaching policy. Teachers' beliefs also strongly influence their teaching behavior and, learner development, i.e. their beliefs guide their decision-making, behavior, and interactions with students and, in turn, create an objective reality in the classroom, the things that students experience as real and true. (Heather & Andrzejewski, 2009). It was argued that teachers' beliefs have an essential role in their own teaching and their beliefs influence their teaching (Grossman et al., 1989). Later, it is also mentioned that teachers are active decision-makers and that by integrating thought, knowledge and beliefs, which are context-based, practice-oriented and personalized, can make educational decisions (Borg, 2003). Erkmen (2014) states that it is difficult for teachers to change their personal beliefs since they are implicit. However, it has been suggested that beliefs can be transformed through pedagogical practice and subsequent reflection about one's own professional experience (Blázquez & Tagle, 2010).

In this case, Skott (2009) declared that teachers' beliefs are considered as an explicatory principle for practice. Based on this view, in teaching writing, which is the concern of this study, teachers' beliefs regarding how to improve learners' writing performance through different ways of giving feedback requires investigation and that whether their beliefs are reflected in their actual practices when correcting their students' writings.

During the period of teaching English as a second language, different views have been presented about teaching various skills and the ways of treating the errors and error correction. For instance, in Audio-lingual Method from 1970s to 1980s, learners were asked to produce language accurately and errors had to be avoided totally. In the 1970s, process-oriented writing model was common and one important way to improve learners' writing was teachers' comments on students' writings, that is, the corrective feedback that teachers provided for learners. Still, many teachers and students believe that feedback is very helpful in improving learners' writing. Studies conducted by Banan's (2003), Mike (2008), and Shelley and Jill (2010) indicated that giving corrective feedback can improve learners' writing accuracy.

Moreover, some studies done in Iran approve the influence of corrective feedback on writing such as Rahimi (2009), Azizian and Rouhi (2015) and Talatifard (2016). In contrast, Fazio (2001), Truscott (2004), and some other studies done in Iran such as Pakbaz (2014) found that after giving feedback there was no significant improvement in students' writings. This shows that there is no agreement on the effective role of written corrective feedback. This may refer to different views or beliefs among teachers regarding the kind of corrective feedback and also the kind of feedback they actually give to the learners' writings. In addition, some studies investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice in giving feedback to learners' errors. In Some studies, such as Lee's (2003, 2004, 2009) and Rafiei and Salehi's (2016), mismatches were found between teachers' beliefs and actual practice in giving feedback and some studies such as Akbari et al.'s (2008) found adjustment between teachers' beliefs and actual practice. It is also believed that experience of teachers can affect their beliefs and preferences in choosing the type of feedback they provide to the learners' errors (Brown, 2012, 2014; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Norouzian, 2015; Yero, 2002).

To the knowledge of the researchers, and based on their experiences and consultation with writing teachers in the EFL context of Iran, many teachers suppose that giving feedback and paper correction take their time and if they give feedback, it is not clear whether it will be effective in improving learners' writing or not, or whether learners will read their comments or not. Some teachers express that when they correct learners' writings, they correct structural and mechanical errors and ignore other kinds of errors while some teachers claim that they pay more attention to the major errors or the ones that threaten communication and not just the grammatical ones. However, many teachers just correct structural errors and do not consider those that may hinder the communication of meaning. The consequence is that our students cannot convey their messages through writing. Their focus is on meeting the teachers' expectations and producing a correct paper regarding the structure (Birjandi & Malmir, 2009). To overcome these kinds of problems, there is a strong need to know the beliefs of writing teachers about useful ways of improving the students' writing performances and to find the ways to adjust their beliefs with their actions and practices in real classrooms. Therefore, this study aimed to find out the Iranian less and more experienced EFL university teach-

ers' beliefs in marking students' errors in writing, their preferred types of written corrective feedback, the most useful kind of written error correction feedback, and the differences between what they believe and what they actually do in giving feedback to their students' writings. This kind of study has not been, yet, conducted in the university setting of Iran. In this regard, knowing the kinds of teachers' feedback and their beliefs in marking students' errors would help the other teachers to decide on the type of feedback and error correction that best suits their own students.

## **Literature Review**

### **Teachers' Beliefs**

Belief construct has different definitions in different educational contexts. Yero (2002) called belief as generalizations about things, it means the ideas and evaluations that we make about ourselves, world around us and others and it is external reality of internal representation. Richardson (2003) defined belief as "psychologically held understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (p. 2). Borg (2001) presented the definition of the teachers' belief as "a term usually used to refer to teacher's pedagogical beliefs, or those beliefs of relevance to an individual teaching" (p. 187). Beliefs are judgments and evaluations that we make about ourselves, others, and the world around us. They are personal ideas based on observation or rational thinking (Khader, 2012). Some researchers (Bruning et al., 1999; Yero, 2002) proposed that beliefs are unconscious and they are some implicit ideas about the world, therefore, people's behaviors are conducted by their beliefs automatically. Even beliefs can influence an individual's perception and focus. According to Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012), a belief is any premise that starts with the term "I believe that." Beliefs that are related to other beliefs are regarded as "core" or "central beliefs." If a belief is associated with other beliefs, it will have more outcomes to them. According to Poulson et al. (2001), the selection of teaching methods is under the influence of teachers' belief system. Whereas teachers' beliefs cannot be observed, it should be inferred from their action, intention and speech. Even in the form of educational decision, some evidence of belief can be found. However, Fang (1996) discovered that in some studies the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actions is negative and it can be attributed to the social issues and classroom life.

### **Written Corrective Feedback**

Feedback was defined differently by different scholars. Hattie and Timperley (2007) stated that "feedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (p. 85). Ellis (2009) stated that the theoretical support for corrective feedback is taken from the claim that second language learning needs both positive and negative evidence. It means that we must tell learners what is not correct and tell them what is correct. According

to Ellis (2009), there are six kinds of corrective feedback including direct corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback, and metalinguistic corrective feedback, focused versus unfocused corrective feedback, electronic feedback, and reformulation.

In this regard, written corrective feedback refers to teachers' reflection on learners' papers. Brown (2003) stated that from the 1970s to 1980s the prominent theory was the behaviorists' one. Based on this theory, if the error was not corrected immediately, it would lead to fossilization. In contrast, within the next decades, process-writing gained great deal of attention, and focus was placed on the writing process rather than the final product of learners. This is why; giving feedback of various kinds to improve learners' writing performance gained much importance in the writing classes. In terms of learnability discussion, the comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) is not enough for language acquisition. For this reason, some scholars such as White (1989) believe that if second language learners want to gain native-like proficiency, negative evidence or what is ungrammatical is required for effectiveness of corrective feedback in language learning.

According to Long (1996), when learners make hypothesis based on their native language structures, positive evidence is not sufficient, negative evidence is also necessary. Since negative evidence is provided for learners' erroneous production, it can be in the form of corrective feedback that occurs in the classroom interactions. Error correction in writing has encountered great changes over the recent years. Based on the findings of Ellis (2009) and Bitche-ner (2008), explicit corrective feedback provides learners with direct information as to what has gone wrong, especially if learners are not proficient enough to find the solution for their errors. Explicit CF has also proved to enhance acquisition of certain grammatical structures (Sheen, 2007). Sheen et al. (2009) support direct and indirect CF and their contributions to writing development by stating that "...corrective feedback may enhance learning by helping learners to (1) notice their errors in their written work, (2) engage in hypotheses testing in a systematic way and (3) monitor the accuracy of their writing by tapping into their existing explicit grammatical knowledge" (p. 567).

### **Empirical Studies**

One of the most common forms of teachers' responses to students' composition is error correction. Lee (2004) found that learners consider error correction essential and urgent for quality of their writing. Ferris (2002) believed that since learners are in the process of learning and acquiring the syntactic and morphological system and lexicons, giving feedback helps them to overcome their deficits and learn some strategies for correcting and avoiding errors. However, Ferris (2002) intensifies that the focus of error correction should be "on patterns of error, Ferris's suggestion about selecting error correction based on patterns has been considered by many researchers as an appropriate way to decrease the negative results of error correction (Ellis et al., 2008; Ferris, 2002; Sheen et al., 2008).



However, some studies are against error correction, for example, Truscott (1996) proposed that teachers should not correct learners' grammatical mistakes in second language writing classes. Because he believed that paying attention to grammar not only is not helpful but it also wastes the time and energy of learners and diverts their attention from the useful aspects of writing instruction. Truscott (2004) also stated that error correction encourages students to write shorter essays because they do not like to commit too many mistakes that lead to avoidance behavior in learners. Ferris (1995) suggested that by focusing on content and the way of writing, accurate use of language gradually emerges like what happens in first language acquisition.

There are also some studies on the effect of written corrective feedback. For example, Ferris (2003) indicated that indirect error correction such as highlighting can improve learners' writing better than direct one, however, in some cases direct correction is more beneficial than indirect one, for instance, when teaching beginning-level learners, when errors are permanent and when drawing learners' attention to some errors is necessary. Gobert (2010) in an action research discovered that in correcting grammatical errors, learners like their errors to be corrected regarding content and organization. Moreover, he found that self-correcting and peer-review can be helpful for learners' writing development.

In a study conducted by Rahimi (2009) about the effects of feedback on accurate writing of Iranian English major students, by selecting two groups, the results indicated that both groups' writing accuracy got better but feedback group's progress was more than that of other one. Azizian and Rouhi (2015) examined the effect of peer corrective feedback on feedback givers and receivers in L2 writing with 45 learners of English in three writing classes which served as the feedback givers, receivers, and the control group. The results imply that learners' involvement in peer writing correction can result in significant L2 writing accuracy.

The effects of direct and indirect corrective feedback on intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing were investigated by Talatifard (2016) in Iran. The result of the study indicated that participants in indirect corrective feedback significantly outperformed those in control and direct groups in narrative writing. However, some studies such as Pakbaz (2014) who investigated the effect of giving explicit or implicit written corrective feedback on L2 learners' ability to write in English in the EFL context of Iran found no significant differences between giving feedback and writing. The results of the study revealed no statistically significant differences between the implicit and explicit group on their correct use of the specified structures.

In this regard, Khanlarzadeh and Nemati (2016) aimed to find out the effect of direct unfocused written corrective feedback (WCF) on the grammatical accuracy of elementary students in the EFL context of Iran. To this end, the researchers selected two intact classes and assigned them to a direct feedback group and a control group. Within the three months of the study, the students produced eight pieces of writing through a pretest, three writing tasks along

with their revisions, and a posttest. Then, the grammatical accuracy of their writings was checked. The results revealed the outperformance of the experimental group in the revision of the three writing tasks. However, there was no significant difference in their posttest after a one month of interval when they produced a new piece of writing. The researchers conclude that although unfocused WCF improved their writing accuracy during the revision process, the improvement was not noticed in their posttest, implying that the effect was not extended to the EFL learners' future writing when there was no feedback. Unlike Khanlarzadeh and Nemati (2016), Taheri and Mashhadi Heidar (2019) explored the effect of focused written corrective feedback on the paragraph writing ability of 60 undergraduate university students who were high/low self-regulated learners. The students were assigned into the experimental group (which were then assigned into the high and low self-regulated groups through a self-regulated learning scale) and control group. In the control group, the learners received conventional types of feedback, while, those in the experimental group received focused WCF in some areas of grammar. The results revealed a significant improvement in the writing ability of the experimental group that received WCF. It was also found that WCF was more beneficial for the high self-regulated learners.

Some scholars have conducted studies on teachers' beliefs and their real practice in giving feedback. In his study on corrective feedback, Ellis (2009) demonstrated some conflicts between teachers' beliefs and their real practice in terms of feedback provision. Moreover, studies done on secondary school teachers in Hong Kong by Lee (2003, 2004, 2009) revealed that there are some mismatches between beliefs and practices in terms of paying attention to linguistic forms, utilizing complete or selective error correction and providing of error codes on learners' text. Lee's findings show that teachers' beliefs and practice are not consistent due to lots of influential factors.

Rafiei and Salehi (2016) also studied the written feedback practices as well as the TOEFL/IELTS Iranian writing teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards written feedback and the actual feedback in their writing classes. The analyses revealed that although most of them believe that teachers must give feedback to the language, organization and content of students' essays, but most of the written feedback was given to the language.

In a study, Khanlarzadeh and Taheri (2017) surveyed L2 writing teachers' perception about different aspects of written corrective feedback (WCF) and their problems while they put their perceptions into practice. They randomly selected 47 TEFL-degree holders and 39 non-TEFL-degree holders from Tehran ELT institutes and asked them to fill out a questionnaire to elicit their perceptions of different aspects of written error correction. In addition, as a follow up, they interviewed 10 of the teachers in each group. The results revealed that degree-holder teachers preferred more selective and indirect kinds of WCF and inclined to use different types of error correction techniques. Both groups complained about the time constrains that affected the type and amount of their given feedback. It was also found that a majority of teachers when giving WCF did not use a marking code because it is baffling to the language learners.

As the literature shows there have been some inconsistencies between teachers' actual practices and their beliefs. Although in the previous studies differences between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices were found, Katia (2011) conducted a cross-sectional study by using mixed methods in Brazil which showed that Brazilian teachers believe in form-focused correction as an instructional approach and in their classes they did this model of the correction. Moreover, Akbari et al. (2008) studied Iranian English teachers' beliefs about teaching writing. The beliefs of teachers and the reflection of these beliefs on writing were examined. The results of the study revealed no discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice in giving written corrective feedback.

Some studies show the effects of teachers' experiences on the error correction and corrective feedback and teachers' beliefs (Brown, 2012, 2014; Ferris et al., 2011; Lee, 2011). These studies found that teaching experience can influence the way of error correction, such as amount and manner of feedback provisions by teachers. Norouzian (2015) analyzed the data gathered from 15 Iranian teachers teaching writing course to find the impact of teaching experience on the teachers' perception towards type (indirect and direct) and amount (selective and comprehensive) of their written corrective feedback. The findings showed that teaching experience has a significant effect on direct manner of feedback provision by highly experienced teachers. Moreover, the qualitative findings revealed that highly experienced teachers provide more precise correction in comparison to less experienced ones.

As the literature showed, there were controversies in the results of studies related to the teachers' beliefs and their actual practices. There are few studies conducted in this area in the EFL context of Iran and almost no study on corrective feedback was carried out among the university teachers. For this reason, in order to fill the gap and contribute more to the field of writing, this study aimed to find out the more and less experienced EFL university teachers' beliefs in marking students' writing errors, type of corrective feedback and its matches and mismatches with their actual practice. In this regard, the following specific questions were posed:

1. What are the less and more experienced teachers' beliefs in marking (e.g., mark all errors, mark major errors, etc.) students' errors in writing?
2. What is the most useful type of error correction feedback (e.g., clues or direction on how to fix, error identification, correction with comments, error correction by the teacher, commentary, no feedback on an error, personal comments on the content) based on the less and more experienced teachers' beliefs?
3. What kind of error (organization, content or ideas, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary) is more useful to point out in students' writings based on the less and more experienced teachers' beliefs?
4. What kind of corrective feedback do teachers actually give to their students' writings?

## Methodology

### Participants

The study was done by the cooperation of accessible teachers teaching writing to EFL learners at different universities in Iran such as Tabriz, Gilan, Shiraz, Ahvaz, Isfahan and Tehran universities and some Islamic Azad university branches including Rasht, Tabriz, Lahijan and Zanjan. Teachers were selected based on convenience sampling (Best & Kahn, 2006). They were male and female teachers with different academic degrees (MA and PhD) and various years of teaching experiences. In this study, teachers with less than five years, as indicated by Rivkin et al. (2005), Rice (2010), and Fernandez-Garcia et al. (2019), were considered as less experienced ones and those with five and above were considered as experienced ones. In this regard, 120 available university teachers (53 less experienced and 67 more experienced) participated in the study.

## Instruments and Materials

### *Instruments*

By means of a written feedback questionnaire (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010), teachers' opinions about correcting different kinds of errors were found. Amrhein and Nassaji validated the items of the questionnaire in a pilot study (in Canada) with six English teachers and made the necessary modification to satisfy its content validity. In addition, they indicated that the items of the questionnaire had been taken from the previous studies for the similar research questions (e.g., Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Saito, 1994), which adds to its validity. We also searched for more validation indicators in more recent studies and found the implementation of similar questionnaire items in the study of Chen et al. (2016) in China and Moslemi and Dastgoshadeh (2017) in Iran. In spite of this, we also submitted the questionnaire to four experienced English teachers in different universities to check for the clarity of the items and they considered them as clear and comprehensible. In this regard, we used the questionnaire as a validated one in this study.

Regarding its reliability, Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) did not estimate its reliability for the reason that "the items were a combination of closed- and open-ended items that did not comprise a scale" and also "there is no standard way for calculating the reliability of such questionnaire items" (p. 118). They considered this point as a limitation of their study. However, in our study, we estimated the reliability of 18 close-ended items (part one = 6 items; part two = 7 items; and part three = 5 items) of the questionnaire through Cronbach's Alpha and the reliability of about .84 was obtained for the average reliability values of part one ( $\alpha = .83$ ), part two ( $\alpha = .81$ ), and part three ( $\alpha = .87$ ) of the questionnaire, which shows a high internal consistency.

As it was mentioned, the written feedback questionnaire consists of three parts (see Appendix). In **part one**, participant teachers were asked if they encounter many errors in their students' writings, how they would correct them.

They were asked to select their preferences out of the six suggested ways including (1) Mark all errors; (2) Mark major errors but not minor ones; (3) Mark most of the major errors but not necessarily all of them; (4) Mark only a few of the major errors; (5) Mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas; and (6) Mark no error and responds only to the ideas and content, and indicate which one(s) they consider to be the most useful way for correcting EFL students' writings. They were also asked to give their reasons for their selection(s) in the form of open-ended questions. In **part two**, one sentence with an error was provided. For this sentence, seven ways of giving feedback (i.e., Clues or direction on how to fix an error; Error identification; Correction with the comments; Error correction; Commentary; No feedback on an error; Personal comments on the contents) by a teacher were presented. Below the sentence and the given feedback, the explanation of the feedback was also provided. The participant teachers were asked to read the sentence and the given feedbacks then select the number that best describes the usefulness of each feedback for the EFL students (i.e., 1 = not useful at all, 2 = not useful, 3 = does not matter, 4 = quite useful, and 5 = very useful). They were also asked to give their reasons for each selection. In **part three**, there were five items asking the teachers' opinions about the usefulness of five types of errors (i.e., organization errors; content or idea errors; punctuation error; spelling errors; and vocabulary errors). They were asked to indicate how useful it is to point out each type of error in EFL students' written work and express their opinion by selecting the number 1-5 (i.e., 1 = not useful at all, 2 = not useful, 3 = does not matter, 4 = quite useful, and 5 = very useful). They were also required to give the reasons for their choices.

### **Materials**

Students' writings were used as the materials to investigate the type of error correction and feedback the less and more experienced teachers actually give on their errors. In this respect, out of the participant teachers, 15 more experienced and 15 less experienced ones showed their willingness to give their students' actual writings to the researchers in order to analyze them for the type of feedback and correction the teachers gave on them.

### **Procedure**

The Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) questionnaire was sent to 250 teachers by email, and out of these teachers, 80 ones responded and returned. To make it more convenient for respondents, the questionnaire was changed into the digital type in the net. Then it was sent to 150 other teachers and among them 70 teachers filled it out and returned. After checking, those that were not done completely were removed and finally 120 questionnaires were selected for the analysis. To provide accurate data and compare teachers' beliefs on the items of the questionnaires and their actual error correction practice on learners' papers, the researchers asked the volunteer teachers to give their students' cor-

rected papers for the analysis. In this regard, only 30 teachers among them (15 less experienced and 15 more experienced), who were also accessible to the researchers, accepted to give their students' writing samples to the researchers. The papers were investigated by the researchers to find the kinds of errors corrected and the ways comments were given. Then this investigation was put into analysis to determine the pattern of feedback among the less and more experienced teachers.

## Design and Data Analysis

A descriptive survey was used in this study with the variables of teachers' beliefs, teachers' actual practices, written corrective feedback, and experience. In this regard, quantitative and qualitative ways of data collection and analysis was used. In other words, triangulation method consisting of a questionnaire, paper investigation (quantitative methods), and open-ended questions (qualitative method) were utilized. The quantitative data were entered into the SPSS 20 and analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency and percentage. The qualitative data were explained qualitatively using the responses of the teachers to the open-ended questions to verify or reject the quantitative results.

## Results

### First Research Question

In order to answer the first research question and find the less and more experienced teachers' beliefs in marking the students' errors in writing, the frequency and percentage of the selected items were obtained. These teachers were requested to select those type(s) of marking that they thought is/are more/the most useful to do. In this case, because the teachers were allowed to select more than one choice, the sum of the frequencies is not equal to the total number of the less and more experienced teachers as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Less and More Experienced Teachers' Beliefs in Marking Students' Errors in Writing*

Experience		1. mark all errors	2. Mark major errors but not minor ones	3. Mark most of the major errors but not necessarily all of them.	4. Mark only a few of the major errors	5. Mark only the errors that interfere with communicating the ideas	6. Mark no error and respond only to the ideas and content	N
Less experienced	Frequency	17	19	8	5	20	1	53
	Percent	32	34	15	9.4	37	1.9	
more experienced	Frequency	11	27	8	11	16	3	67
	Percent	17	40	15	16.4	23	3.7	

As Table 1 indicates, a high percentage (37%) of the less experienced teachers believe that when students make many errors, it is better to “mark only the errors that interfere with communicating the ideas= item 5”. It is while, a high percentage (40%) of the more experienced teachers believe that it is better to “mark major errors not the minor ones = item 2”. For the less experienced teachers, item 2 (34%) and item 1(32%) and for the more experienced teachers, item 5 (23%) and item 1 (17%) are also considered useful ways of marking errors. The item 6 has not attracted the teachers' attention since it has the lowest frequency between both less experienced and more experienced teachers. In general, among six items, the second item, that is, marking just major errors not minor ones, has been selected by many teachers both less and more experienced ones. It shows that teachers prefer to correct major errors and ignore minor ones.

The reasons that the teachers gave for their choices verified their beliefs in marking the writing errors. For example, some of the more experienced teachers' said as follows:

*T1: “I don't want to discourage my students. I highlight the major problems, especially during the first sessions”.*

*T2: I think major errors are debilitating communication. So, they should be corrected but the minor errors or any pitfalls which are not that much problematic and manipulating then would hinder communication and learner's involvement should be avoided.*

*T3: I think number 2 is a more useful way, because for intermediate or advanced students it is not acceptable to make major mistakes and they must be made aware of their mistakes to do their best to eliminate them in their future writing assignments.*

In this regard, less experienced teachers indicated that errors that cause interference in communication should be corrected. Below are some of their responses:

*T1: I think number 5 is more useful way because marking major errors calls students attention to the most problematic parts of their writing which may cause misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what is written.*

*T2: I think number5 is more useful way, because correcting errors that interfere in communication make learners motivated and encouraged.*

*T3: In my opinion, correcting all errors will make learners discouraged and demotivated.*

However, through observing their actual practices, it was revealed that in actual paper correction, a majority of less and more experienced teachers marked all errors, which was in contrast to what they believe according to the results of the questionnaire.

## Second Research Question

In order to answer the second research question and know less or more experienced teachers' opinion on the most useful type of error correction feedback, the frequency and percentage of their responses were calculated. These teachers were requested to select those type(s) of error correction that they thought is/are more/the most useful to do. In this case, because the teachers were allowed to select more than one choice, the sum of the frequencies is not equal to the total number of the less and more experienced teachers as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
*Less and More Experienced Teachers' Beliefs Regarding the Type of Error Correction in Students' Writing*

		(Error Correction Feedback)						
		1. Clues or direction on how to fix an error	2.- Error identification	3. Correction with the comments	4. Error correction (teacher corrects error)	5. commentary ( teacher gives feedback by making comments about error but not errors are corrected)	6. No feedback on an error	7. Personal comments on the contents
Frequency (percent)		f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
less experienced	NOT useful at all	3(5.7)	1(1.9)	2(3.8)	11(20.8)	4(7.5)	18(34)	21(39.6)
	not useful	6(11.3)	4(7.5)	23(43.4)	19(35.8)	5(9.4)	11(20.8)	5(9.4)
	does not matter	12(22.9)	11(20.8)	7(13.2)	9(17)	11(20.8)	12(22.6)	9(17)
	quite useful	17(32.1)	34(64.2)	13(24.5)	12(22.6)	26(49.1)	10(18.9)	16(30.2)
	very useful	15(28.3)	3(5.7)	8(15.1)	2 (3.8)	7(13.2)	2(3.8)	2(3.8)
	Total	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
more experienced	NOT useful at all	4(6)	4(6)	2(3)	9(16.7)	0(0)	28(41.8)	16(23.9)
	not useful	8(11.9)	8(11.9)	14(20.9)	13(19.4)	9(13.4)	14(20.9)	14(20.9)
	does not matter	8(11.9)	11(16.4)	17(25.4)	11(19.4)	8(11.9)	8(11.9)	12(17.9)
	quite useful	22(32.8)	32(47.8)	19(28.4)	20(29.9)	38(56.7)	12(17.9)	22(32.8)
	very useful	24(35.8)	11(16.4)	14(20.9)	5(7.5)	12(17.9)	5(7.5)	3(4.5)
	Total	67	67	67	67	67	67	67



As Table 2 indicates, a high percentage (64.2%) of the less experienced teachers believe that when teachers are correcting learners' errors, the most useful type of error correction feedback is to "identify errors = item 2". It is while, a high percentage (56.7%) of the more experienced teachers believe that the most useful one is "commentary = item 5". For the less experienced teachers, item 1 (32% quite useful and 28.2% very useful) and item 5 (49%) and for the more experienced teachers, item 1 (28% quite useful and 35.8% very useful), item 2 (47.2%), item 4 (29%) and item 7 (32%) are also considered useful ways of correcting errors. However, for the less experienced teachers, item 3 (43%), item 4 (35%), item 6 (34%) and item 7 (39%) and for the more experienced teachers item 6 (41%) were considered as not useful.

Through investigating the open-ended questions, it was revealed that more experienced teachers' views on questionnaire corresponded to their answers to the open-ended questions. Teachers believed that it will help students to reread the sentences and correct the errors themselves, and then this noticing will help recurrence of the same error in the future to be prevented. For example, three more experienced teachers indicated that:

*T1: "It helps the student to think and discover the mistakes".*

*T2: "This can be an awareness-raising activity".*

*T3: "Since the type of error is indicated and there are only two choices, the teacher may hope that the student easily can identify and correct it. It provides the opportunity for students to check the grammatical rule and learn it appropriately".*

After investigating the students' actual papers, it was revealed that more experienced teachers corrected learners' errors.

The less experienced teachers found error identification as the most useful item with the highest selection. In their open-ended questions, they mentioned that it is better the position of the errors to be determined at the beginning sessions so that the students would be more cautious about their upcoming writings. They indicated that the identification of the errors can raise the students' awareness and self-consciousness and make them autonomous learners. For instance, they mentioned that:

*T1: "This helps the learner reread the sentence, and find the best way to correct the sentence".*

*T2: "Quite useful since it focuses on the specific error".*

*T3: "This comment is useful since the exact mistake is pointed out and the student can now work on what type of error has been made and how it can be corrected".*

After paper investigation, it was revealed that less experienced teachers, similar to the more experienced teachers, corrected learners' errors.

### Third Research Question

In order to answer the third research question and discover which kind of error is considered more useful to be pointed out in students' writings by more and less experienced teachers, the frequency and percentage of the selected items were obtained. These teachers were requested to select those type(s) of error correction that they thought is/are more/the most useful to be pointed out. In this case, because the teachers were allowed to select more than one choice, the sum of the frequencies is not equal to the total number of the less and more experienced teachers as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.**  
*Less and More Experienced Teachers' Beliefs Regarding the Type of Errors to be Pointed out in Students' Writing*

		1.organi zation errors	2.content or idea errors	3.punctu ation errors	4.spellin g errors	5.vocabulary errors
Frequen- cy(percent)		f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
less experi- enced	NOT useful at all	0	0	0	1(1.9)	0
	not useful	2(3.8)	3(5.2)	4(7.5)	7(13.2)	3(5.7)
	does not matter	4(7.5)	9(17)	13(24.5)	13(24.5)	4(7.5)
	quite useful	34(64)	27(50)	23(43.4)	17(32.1)	30(56.6)
	very useful	13(24.5)	14(26.4)	13(24.5)	15(28.3)	16(30.2)
	Total	53	53	53	53	53
More experi- enced	NOT useful at all	0	0	1(1.5)	2(3)	0(0)
	not useful	7(10.4)	3(4.5)	4(6)	6(9)	2(3)
	does not matter	6(9)	12(17.9)	10(14.9)	14(20)	10(14.9)
	quite useful	35(52)	34(50.7)	30(44.8)	34(50.7)	41(61.2)
	very useful	19(28)	18(26.9)	22(32.8)	11.(16.4)	14(20.9)
	Total	67	67	67	67	67

As Table 3 indicates, a high percentage (64 %) of the less experienced teachers believe that learners' "organizational errors = item 1" is the most useful type of error to be pointed out. For these teachers, items 2 (50%), 3 (43.4%), 4(32.1%), and 5(56.6%) are also considered useful to be pointed out. Based on their responses to the open-ended questions, less experienced teachers' ideas are close to what they have said on the questionnaire. For example:

T1: *"the learners should be ready to look at the writing task as a task communicating ideas and also to be conscious of the errors interfering with accomplishing that task".*

T2: *"the decisions originate from the nature of each notion and the extent to which each affects the real communication".*

It is while, a high percentage (61.2%) of the more experienced teachers believe that "vocabulary errors=item 5" is the most useful type to be pointed out. They also consider items1 (52%), 2 (50.7%), 3 (44.8%), and 4 (50.7%) as useful ways of correcting errors. Based on the responses to the open-ended ques-

tions, more experienced teachers' ideas are close to what they have said on the questionnaire. For instance:

T1: *"you should observe all errors in both macro and micro structural levels"*.

T2: *"teaching all the features of writing correctly can be beneficial for the students"*.

In actual paper correction, teachers corrected not only organization errors but also learners' punctuation and spelling errors. Therefore, teachers believe that conveying meaning and communicating the intended meaning is very important. And those errors that interfere with communication are very important to be pointed out. However, in giving feedback to the students' actual writing, both groups had also corrected other errors, even they corrected the punctuation errors.

#### Fourth Research Question

In order to answer the fourth research question and find less or more experienced teachers' actual practices regarding written corrective feedback, the frequency and percentage of the selected items were obtained. These teachers' corrected papers were investigated to find type(s) of errors corrected by them. Both teachers' beliefs and their actual practice are illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Less and More Experienced Teachers' Actual Practice and Belief Regarding the Type of the Corrected Errors in Students' Writings*

Experience		1.organization errors		2.content or idea errors		3.punctuation errors		4.spelling errors		5.vocabulary and grammar errors		N
		belief	practice	Belief	practice	belief	practice	belief	practice	belief	practice	
Less experienced	frequency	10	13	7	12	6	12	5	14	8	11	15
	Percent	66	86	46	80	40	80	33	93	53	73	
More experienced	frequency	8	11	8	13	5	10	8	13	11	14	15
	Percent	53	73	53	86	33	66	53	86	73	93	

As Table 4 indicates, a high percentage (66 %) of the less experienced teachers believe that when they are correcting errors, the "organization errors= item 1" is the most useful type of error to be corrected, however, in actual paper correction the high percentage (93%) dedicated to the spelling errors. It is while, a high percentage (73%) of the more experienced teachers believe that

“vocabulary errors=item 5” is the most useful to be corrected, which reflects the high percentage (93%) of their actual paper correction. As the table shows, compared to their beliefs, out of 15 selected teachers, 11-14 of the less experienced teachers and 10-14 of the more experienced teachers have almost used all types of correction in their actual practice. It shows that teachers’ beliefs do not adjust to their actual performances on papers.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find the less and more experienced teachers’ beliefs in marking students’ errors in writing; the most useful type of error correction feedback, the kind of error that is more useful to point out in students’ writings, and their actual practices regarding written corrective feedback. To answer the question about the less and more experienced teachers’ beliefs in marking students’ errors in writing, “mark major errors but not minor ones” had the highest frequency among the high experienced teachers in comparison with less experienced teachers which “mark only the errors that interfere with communicating the ideas” had the highest frequency. It can be explained that because the major errors may cause misunderstanding of the intended message and prevent the meaning and purpose of the writer to be conveyed, it is essential to be corrected. Moreover, correcting all the errors especially minor ones may discourage learners. However, since the expression of meaning is important and minor or major errors may cause interference in communication, they should be corrected as the less experienced teachers emphasized. These findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers (e.g., Brown, 2012, 2014; Ferris et al., 2011; Lee, 2011; Norouzian, 2015), which emphasized the role of teaching experience in the manner and amount of errors. Moreover, the results revealed a correspondence between the teachers’ responses to the questionnaire items and the open-ended questions, which indicated their preferences for marking major errors or those that interfere with the communication of the message, while in actual paper correction a majority of less and more experienced teachers marked all errors. This non-adjustment in beliefs and actual error correction by teachers is in line with the finding of Lee (2003, 2009). It can be explained by sociocultural and environmental factors that if they do not correct all the errors, they may be criticized by parents, learners and their masters.

The purpose of the second question was to find the most useful type of error correction feedback based on less and more experienced teachers’ beliefs. It was found that more and less experienced teachers had different beliefs in this regard. More experienced teachers preferred “commentary”, whereas, less experienced teachers opted for “error identification”. It can be explained that the less experienced teachers’ focus is on identification of the error to let the learners themselves correct their own errors, which would help them to think about the errors they have made and try not to repeat them in their next writings. On the other hand, more experienced teachers indicated that giving comments on the errors will suffice, and learners can correct their errors just through receiv-

ing comments. In this regard, a majority of the earlier studies of error correction recommend pushing learners in their output rather than simply providing them with the correct form (Allwright, 1975, as cited in Tatawy, 2006; Hendrickson, 1978). The difference in the views of more and less experienced teachers is in giving comments by more experienced teachers. In this respect, the study is in line with the findings of Norouzian (2015). By reviewing teachers' views on open ended questions, there were no discrepancies between teachers' views on the questionnaire items and the open-ended questions. But in the learners' papers less experienced teachers did not provide any clue to help learners to correct themselves or did not determine the place of error occurrences, they only corrected learners' errors. Commentary was the popular item in more experienced teachers' beliefs (according to questionnaire), because they stated that giving comments suffices and correcting errors is not needed (according to their answers to open-ended questions); while, in reality (paper investigation), most of the more experienced teachers had given comments on learners' papers and also corrected their errors.

To determine what kind of error is considered the most useful one by the teachers to point out in students' writings is related to the third question. The results showed that less experienced teachers considered the vocabulary errors as the most useful errors to be pointed out in the learners' papers, while, more experienced teachers considered organization errors as the most useful errors to be pointed out. It can be explained if organization errors are pointed out, learners will be able to correct other errors themselves. Their answers to the open-ended questions corresponded to their beliefs on questionnaire items but in actual paper correction they corrected all errors, which put their beliefs under the question. In actual paper correction both groups corrected other kinds of errors, even punctuation and spelling errors which may not interfere with the expression of meaning so much. This finding is in line with the finding of Banan's (2003) study that indicated the reason for correcting all kinds of errors may be explained by theory of fossilization, that is, if they do not correct all the errors, they may be repeated in their forthcoming writings and would be internalized gradually. This view is evident in some of the answers to the open-ended questions.

The purpose of the forth research question was to know the less or more experienced teachers' actual practices regarding written corrective feedback. As it was pointed out above, less and more experienced teachers believe differently in marking learners errors but in actual paper correction the majority of less and more experienced teachers marked not only the errors that they had mentioned as important errors to be corrected but also corrected other errors that is in contrast with what they believed according to the questionnaire and open-ended questions. Moreover, some differences were observed in the most useful type of error correction between the more and less experienced teachers but in actual paper investigation no differences among them were noticed, in other words, both groups corrected almost all errors. This reflects inconsistencies between what they said or believed and what they actually did. This finding is in line with the findings of studies conducted by Lee (2003, 2009) in Hong

Kong which found that teachers' beliefs and their actual practices did not match, In the same vein, Icy (2003) reached the same results and found discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and their actual given feedback on learners' writings. Moreover, Rafiei and Salehi's (2016) study on the written feedback practices as well as the Iranian writing teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards written feedback in their writing classes revealed that although the most of them believe that teachers must give feedback to the language, organization and content of students' essays, most of the written feedback was given to the language. Therefore, a discrepancy was discovered between their perceptions and practices. However, the studies of Katia (2011) in Brazil and Akbari et al. (2008) in Iran showed no discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their actual written corrective feedback. As the results showed, there were differences between Iranian teachers' beliefs and their actual paper correction. Such mismatches between belief and practice might be under the influence of some contextual and sociocultural factors. In the educational settings in Iran, students want their errors to be corrected and if teachers do not correct learners' errors, they may be blamed by parents.

## Conclusion

In this study, the less and more experienced teachers' beliefs in marking students' errors in writing; the most useful type of error correction feedback, the kind of error that is more useful to point out in students' writings, and their actual practices regarding written corrective feedback were investigated. This study was conducted due to the importance of teachers' beliefs on written corrective feedback, the influence of the beliefs on language acquisition (Pajares, 1992), and lack of studies related to teachers' beliefs and writing activities at university level. Based on the results, some differences in all four variables between less and more experienced and also some discrepancies in teachers' beliefs and their actual performance in correcting writing errors were observed. The results verified the findings of some studies on teachers' beliefs and written corrective feedback (Akbari et al, 2008; Icy, 2003; Katia, 2011; Rafiei & Salehi, 2016).

It can be said that because of discrepancy between what teachers believe and what they do, and lack of awareness about new writing activities among university teachers, in spite of all of the developments in the teaching of writing in different EFL contexts, the traditional approach, that is, product approach, is still used in teaching writing to learners in Iranian universities and colleges (Birjandi & Malmir, 2009). In addition, teachers' beliefs on written corrective feedback are important and its main function is to inform learners about their mistakes and help learners improve their writing by receiving advice and reaction (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Thus, it is essential for teachers to be aware of beliefs on corrective feedback and what they actually do in their classes.

The study has some implications for those who are involved in education including university policy makers and decision makers to provide conditions for

teachers to put their beliefs into practice. Teachers must also pay more attention to their own beliefs regarding written corrective feedback and explain their purpose of giving such feedbacks to the learners and their parents (if needed). Moreover, providing some gatherings and workshops for sharing teachers' opinions about correction and applying the best methods of written corrective feedback would be very helpful to teachers.

This study examined the beliefs of university ELT teachers regarding written corrective feedback based on their experience, further research can be conducted to compare male and female teachers' opinions in this regard. The participants of this study were university English teachers, future research can employ both teacher and student participants to find the matches and mismatches between their opinions concerning written corrective feedback. It would also be interesting to investigate the opinion of teachers for oral corrective feedback considering their teaching experience and gender.

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## Appendix

### Teacher's Belief on Error Correction Feedback Questionnaire

#### Dear respondent,

The following questionnaire aims at exploring the university instructors' beliefs and practices in writing. Your responses will be of great value to the results of this survey and they will be treated as confidential. Your participation is highly appreciated.

Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Years of teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part one

If there are many errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL students' writing, out of the followings which do you think is most useful to do. Please check all that apply.

1. Mark all errors
2. Mark major errors but not minor ones
3. Mark most of the major errors but not necessarily all of them.
4. Mark only a few of the major errors
5. Mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas
6. Mark no error and responds only to the ideas and content

#### Please explain the reasons for your choice(s), too.

I think number(s) is/are more useful way(s) because

.....  
.....

#### Part two

The following sentences all have the same error and a teacher has given a different type of feedback for each. For each sentence, circle the number that best describes the usefulness of the feedback for EFL students. For example, if you think feedback is a very good way to point out an error then circle number 5, if you think the feedback is a very bad way to point out an error then circle number 1.

1. Not useful at all    2. Not useful    3. Does not matter    4. Quite useful    5. Very useful

#### A. Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely (look at the sentence it is grammatically weak)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5

- Clues or direction on how to fix an error (the teacher leaves choices or clue conducive on how a student can correct his or her work)

Please explain your reasons for your choice.

.....  
.....

#### B. Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely

1, 2, 3, 4, 5

- Error identification (The teacher points out where the errors occurred but they are not corrected)

Please explain your reasons for your choice

.....  
.....

#### C. Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely (have been /wrong tense)    1, 2, 3, 4, 5

- Correction with the comments (the teacher corrects the error and make comments)

Please explain the reasons for your choice

.....  
.....

#### D. Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely (have been)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5

- Error correction (the teacher corrects error)

Please explain the reasons for your choice

.....  
.....

**E. Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely (wrong tense) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5**  
**- Commentary (the teacher gives feedback by making comments about error but not errors are corrected)**

Please explain the reasons for your choice

.....  
.....

**F. Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely 1, 2, 3, 4, 5**  
**- No feedback on an error**

Please explain the reasons for your choice

.....  
.....

**G. I am very lonely since I arrived in Victoria. (I'm sorry to hear that) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5**  
**- Personal comments on the contents (the teacher gives feedback by making comments on all the ideas or content but they are not corrected)**

Please explain the reasons for your choice

.....  
.....

### Part three

For each of the following questions, circle the number that best describes its usefulness for EFL students.

**1. Not useful at all (useless) 2. Not useful 3. Does not matter 4. Quite useful 5. Very useful**

1. How useful is to point out the **organization errors** in an intermediate to advanced EFL learners written work? 1 2 3 4 5

2. How useful is to point out the **content or idea errors** in an intermediate to advanced EFL learners written work? 1 2 3 4 5

3. How useful is to point out the **punctuation errors** in an intermediate to advanced EFL learners written work? 1 2 3 4 5

4. How useful is to point out the **spelling errors** in an intermediate to advanced EFL learners written work? 1 2 3 4 5

5. How useful is to point out the **vocabulary errors** in an intermediate to advanced EFL learners written work? 1 2 3 4 5

Please explain the reasons for your choices

.....  
.....

**Thanks for your participation**



# The Effect of Bloom-based ILP Instruction on Iranian EFL learners' Use of External and Internal Modification Strategies in the Speech Act of Request

Shiva Kaivanpanah\*<sup>1</sup>  
Seyyed Mohammad Alavi<sup>2</sup>  
Mostafa Taghizadeh Langari<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

The way people perform a speech act differs across cultures. People from different cultures may have different perceptions of similar social factors and interpret them differentially. These differences can lead to cross-cultural miscommunications when language users perform a given speech act such as request. Based on the request analysis categories introduced by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989b) and Schauer (2009), the present

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran, (corresponding author); shkaivan@ut.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup> Professor, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran; smalavi@ut.ac.ir

<sup>3</sup> Ph.D. candidate in TEFL, English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran, Tehran, IRAN. m.taghizadeh@ut.ac.ir

study examined Iranian EFL learners' deviations in utilizing internal and external modifications from native speakers' norms and explored how Bloom-based instruction can contribute to the acquisition of internal and external modifications.

To this end, a researcher-developed Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) was utilized to collect data from 61 participants: a. treatment group (20), b. control group (23), and c. native speakers (18). The data were categorized based on a framework adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989b) and Schauer's (2009) coding schemes for internal and external modifications. The results suggested that, in the pretest, Iranian EFL learners' use of request modification strategies differed significantly from native speakers' norms. It was found that that after the Bloom-based ILP instruction, the treatment group progressed towards native speakers' norms in the application of several modification strategies. These findings imply that the employment of Bloom's Taxonomy, with specific focus on high order thinking skills in the development of pragmatics tasks and activities can help EFL learners approach native speakers' norms.

**Keywords:** Bloom's Taxonomy, External Modification Strategies, Interlanguage Pragmatics, Internal Modification Strategies, Speech Act of Request.

## Introduction

Since the introduction of the communicative approaches in the 1990s, grammar-based methods in language teaching have been gradually replaced with the communicative ones. With the employment of the communicative approaches in language teaching, more focus has been placed on the mastery of functional language abilities. Consequently, various models have been proposed in an attempt to account for different dimensions of communicative competence which is at the heart of communicative approaches to language teaching (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1982; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006).

Canale (1983) asserts that pragmatics is a significant aspect of communicative competence which should be noticed by language learners and teachers. However, in EFL contexts the crucial role of pragmatic ability has been ignored (Barron, 2016; Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2014; Hassan, 2018; Rose, 1999), resulting in the development of poor communicative competence among EFL learners. In such contexts, even the performance of advanced language learners lags far behind that of native speakers (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Research shows that even learners with advanced grammar and vocabulary knowledge may face conversation breakdowns if they are not equipped with pragmatic knowledge (Wolfson, 1989).

Over the years, the development of interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) has attracted the attention of EFL/ESL researchers (e.g., Ajabshir, 2019; Derakhshan & Eslami, 2019; Kondo, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2017; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Rose, 1994, 2005; Taguchi, 2018; Taguchi, 2019). Different studies (e.g., Ajab-

shir, 2019; Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; Moradian et al., 2019; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Rafieyan, 2016; Rose, 2005) have demonstrated that the inclusion of pragmatic-based classroom activities in the curriculum can positively impact language learners' pragmatic competence. The two main models frequently employed in ILP studies are Schmidt's (1990, 1993) noticing hypothesis and Bialystok's (1991) cognitive two-dimensional information processing model.

According to noticing hypothesis, input needs to be noticed in order to become intake (Schmidt, 2012). Schmidt (1990, 1993) contends that pragmatic information, like other aspects of language, needs to be noticed before further processing. Bialystok's (1991) cognitive two-dimensional information processing model rejects the existence of universal pragmatic knowledge and states L2 learners must create new pragmatic representations and acquire control over them if they aim at automatic use of the language. Bialystok (1991) states that L2 learners' failure in pragmatic performance stems from their inability to access their pragmatic knowledge and their lack of control over their newly developed pragmatic representations.

The emphasis of the two models on noticing and gaining high levels of control over the acquired materials, can be achieved through Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956), a cognitive model frequently employed in different educational domains. Bloom's Taxonomy advocates utilization of various awareness raising tasks and activities which can help learners gain control over their newly developed knowledge (Díaz, 2013). Bloom's Taxonomy which was introduced in 1956 has undergone some minute changes through time (Darwazeh & Branch, 2015). In the new version, Anderson et al. (2001) renamed some of the levels and used verbs rather than nouns (as cited in Krathwohl, 2002). In the new version, the synthesis level is replaced by the evaluating level and the creating level which tops all the levels is added to the taxonomy. Table 1 displays the original and the revised versions of Bloom's Taxonomy.

**Table 1.**  
*Original and New Version of Bloom's Taxonomy*

<b>Original</b>	<b>Revised</b>
Evaluation	Creating
Synthesis	Evaluating
Analysis	Analyzing
Application	Applying
Comprehension	Understanding
Knowledge	Remembering

The higher order skills such as evaluating and creating require raising learners' consciousness and increasing their control over newly learnt material (Díaz, 2013). As mentioned before, these functions are also emphasized in Schmidt's (1990, 1993) noticing hypothesis and Bialystok's (1991) cognitive two-dimensional information processing model. Given the characteristics of each level of Bloom's Taxonomy, it can be stated that employing teaching mate-



rials developed based on this taxonomy will not only raise learners' consciousness but also increase their control over what they have been taught.

The speech act of request is frequently utilized by EFL learners (Alemi & Khanlarzadeh, 2017; Trosborg, 2011). A request utterance consists of three elements: (a) address term(s); (b) head act; (c) modification devices (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986). Despite address terms and modification devices (adjuncts), head acts are the obligatory parts of a request and can accomplish the function of the speech act by themselves. Modification devices which are optional can follow or precede the head act and are divided into internal and external modifications. Figure 1 represents the different components of a request utterance.

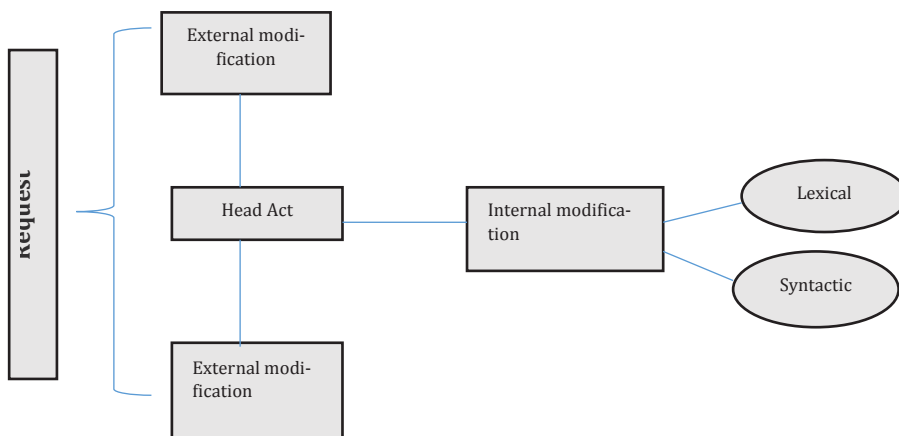


Figure 1. Components of a Request Utterance.

Performing a request is a function of various contextual factors intertwined within the linguistic elements we use (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989b). Since in performing a request, the requester infringes on the requestee's freedom from imposition, requests are considered face-threatening acts influenced by various socio cultural factors (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (p. 61) define face as the "public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". These authors distinguish between positive and negative face and assert that a person's face may be threatened or enhanced during a conversation. *Negative face* refers to a person's freedom of action and freedom from imposition while *positive face* refers to one's desire that his/her goals and achievements be appreciated and approved by at least some other people (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speakers use politeness strategies to protect hearers' self-image or face. Face-threatening acts (FTA) which can damage a person's self-esteem must be avoided or performed with caution since they are offensive. As a case in point, the direct request of "could you pass me the spoon" sounds a normal request in negative-oriented western cultures. While the same request

can show low solidarity and intimacy in positive-oriented cultures like Iran. Apart from different levels of directness which can affect the degree of politeness of a request, external and internal modifications can also be used to manipulate a request's degree of politeness. These modifications cannot affect the propositional content of the request, but are mainly utilized to redress the illocutionary force of an utterance. Internal modifications are used along with the head act in a single sentence while external modifications, also called supportive moves, are used before or after the sentence which carries the head act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989b). Internal modifications are further subdivided into downgraders (lexical and syntactic), used to decrease a request's degree of imposition, and upgraders, used to intensify the illocutionary force of a request (Table 1).

**Table 2.**  
*Classification of Internal and External Modifications* (adapted from Blum-Kulka et al., 1989b; Schauer, 2009)

Internal modifications		External modifications		
Strategy	Example	Strategy	Example	
Syntactic downgraders	Play-down	Could you pass me the salt shaker?	Alerter	Excuse me; hello; John
	Interrogative form	Will you help me	Preparator	Hey, you had this management class, right?
	Past tense	I was hoping you could....	Grounder	I wasn't in class the other day because I was sick
	Conditional	"... if you have time."	Promise of Reward	I'll buy you dinner
	Politeness marker	Can I please have an extension on this paper?	Imposition Minimizer	I will return them in an orderly fashion
	Embedding	It'd be great if you could put this on the door	Sweetener	Today's class was great.
	Understater	Can you speak up a little, please?	Disarmer	I know this is short notice
Lexical downgraders	Downtoner	Is there any way I could possibly get an extension?	Appreciation	I would appreciate it
	Consultative Device	Would you mind lending me a hand?	Getting a pre-commitment	Could you do me a favor?
	Adverbial intensifier	I would be most grateful if you could let me use your article.	Apology	I'm sorry I can't give you the lesson on Monday

The way EFL learners acquire and use requests and other speech acts have been widely explored (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2017; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989b; Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Garcia, 1989;

Hassall, 2003; Li & Jiang, 2019; Panahzadeh & Asadi, 2018). EFL learners' use of these mitigation devices to modulate their request strategies and how these mitigation devices deviate from native speakers' norms have also been of great interest to EFL researchers (e.g., Borovina, 2017; Cunningham, 2016; Hassall, 2001; Kanchina & Deepadung, 2019). As for the importance of mitigation devices such as internal and external modifications, Blum-Kulka (as cited in Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2008) states that mitigation can be interpreted as an index of politeness regardless of directness level. Blum-Kulka (1991) also argues that the way people make a request is regarded as an index of their culture. Since native speakers take pragmatic deviations more seriously than syntactic errors, EFL learners' deviations from native speakers' norms and appropriate interventions to address these deviations warrants close explorations (Thomas, 1983; Wolfson, 1989).

Although research has shown that pragmatics instruction influences EFL learners' pragmatic competence (e.g., Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Rajabi & Farahian, 2013; Sa'd & Gholami, 2017; Shirazi et al., 2016), ILP instruction has almost no place in the Iranian EFL textbooks developed by the ministry of education. Although several studies (e.g., Malaz et al., 2011; Tajeddin & Tayebipour, 2012; Yeganeh, 2016) have explored how instruction can influence Iranian EFL learners' use of request utterances, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, only one study (Tajeddin & Hosseinpour, 2014) has examined how ILP instruction might affect Iranian EFL learners' use of internal and external modifications. The findings of Tajeddin and Hosseinpour's study showed that the consciousness-raising (CR) tasks used in their study did not contribute equally to all aspects of request modifications, especially syntactic internal modifiers. Given the importance of internal and external modifications in the appropriate performance of speech acts, it is crucial to investigate new pedagogical interventions which can enhance EFL learners' ability in employing these modifiers. Given the characteristics of Bloom's Taxonomy, Ishihara (2010) contends that this taxonomy can be effective in ILP instruction. Therefore, in the present study an attempt is made to examine how Bloom-based intervention can affect Iranian EFL learners' use of internal and external modifications. To this end, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Can Bloom-based instruction enhance Iranian EFL learners' use of internal and external modifications in the speech act of request?
2. Is there any difference between Iranian EFL learners and native speakers' use of internal and external modifications in the speech act of request?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The sample of this study comprised of three groups: the experimental group (20), the control group (23), and the comparison group (18). The participants in the experimental and treatment groups were selected from four pre-

university classes. Initially these classes consisted of 74 students. Running Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), the researchers selected 43 participants whose scores ranged one standard deviation around the mean. Since it was not possible to randomly assign the participants to different groups, the qualified students in two of the classes served as the control group and those in the other two classes formed the experimental group. The treatment and control group participants' age ranged from 16 to 18. The comparison group consisted of 18 native English speakers, mostly from Britain. Some of these participants were studying Farsi in Dekhoda language institute and some were tourists traveling to Iran.

Prior to the treatment, the experimental and control groups sat for a language proficiency test to ensure that they are comparable in terms of language proficiency. The descriptive statistics for the performance of the two groups on OQPT are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
*Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Performance on OQPT*

Group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Treatment	20	37	51	43.65	3.64
Control	23	38	51	44.08	3.90

An independent samples t-test checked whether there was any statistically significant difference between the OQPT scores of the participants. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the participants regarding general language proficiency,  $t_{(41)} = -.37$ ,  $p = .70$ . Levene's test of equality of variances also revealed that the assumption of equality of variances was satisfied,  $p = .72$ .

## Instruments

### **Oxford Quick Placement Test**

One of the instruments used in this study was the Oxford Quick Placement Test. OQPT which is a universally validated test and has met the requirements of Cambridge ESOL quality check (Geranpayeh, 2006) consists of 60 multiple choice questions and takes about 75 minutes to complete. This test was piloted on 18 students whose language proficiency was similar to that of the participants of this study in order to check the reliability of the test for the purpose of this study ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ). This placement test was employed in the selection of the participants to make sure the treatment and control group were homogeneous in terms of language proficiency.

### **Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT)**

As a widely used instrument in ILP studies, WDCT elicits examinees' responses by describing a given situation (Mackey & Gass, 2015). The WDCT developed

and used in this study consisted of twelve items in which the contextual variables of social distance (the relationship between the speaker and the hearer), power relation (the burden that the speaker put on the hearer), and degree of imposition (the burden put on the hearer), were taken into consideration. The items used in the WDCT passed through exemplar generation, likelihood investigation and metapragmatic assessment to ensure their authenticity and validity.

**Exemplar generation:** Here, the purpose is to generate as many situations as needed. To this end, the researchers asked 15 pre-university EFL learners to describe 10 situations which are highly likely to require the use of request speech act. This exemplar generation resulted in 150 situations most of which overlapped each other in terms of power, social distance and degree of imposition. Based on the situations described by the learners, the researchers selected 24 request situations from previous studies (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1989; Hudson et al., 1995; Rose, 1994; Takahashi, 2001; Woodfield, 2008) which were similar to the 24 situations described by the learners.

**Likelihood investigation:** In this stage, 20 EFL learners, similar to the participants of the main study in terms of language proficiency, rated the likelihood of the occurrence of these 24 situations in real life on a 5-point Likert scale in order to confirm the naturalness of the situations.

**Metapragmatic assessment:** Finally, the items which passed through the two previous stages were subjected to metapragmatic assessment to ensure various combinations of the three sociolinguistic variables are represented in the final WDCT. This stage involved examining the remaining items in terms of power, social distance, and degree of imposition. Care was taken to select those items which represented different combinations of the sociolinguistic variables of power, distance, and degree of imposition. That is, attempt was made to include items in the WDCT from the hierarchical politeness system (formal), the deferential politeness system (semiformal), and the solidarity politeness system (informal). As a result, 12 situations which were balanced according to the three sociolinguistic variables were selected for the purpose of this study. Table 3 displays the distribution of the three sociolinguistic variables. In this table, the symbol “+” suggests the superiority of the speaker in terms of the examined social variable, while the symbol “-” indicates the opposite. And the symbol “=” suggests the equality of the speaker and the listener in terms of the variables.

**Table 3.**  
*Distribution of the Sociolinguistic Variables in the 12 Items of the WDCT*

Contextual variables	Situations											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Power	+	+	+	+	=	=	=	=	-	-	-	-
Distance	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Imposition	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+

Prior to administration, the WDCT was piloted on 15 participants who were similar to the participants of the main study in terms of language proficiency, and some modifications in terms of linguistic level and content were made to situations on the basis of participants' feedback. Cronbach alpha analysis revealed that the developed instrument enjoyed a rather high reliability ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ). All the situations utilized in the WDCT were extracted from previously validated studies (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1989; Hudson et al., 1995; Rose, 1994; Takahashi, 2001; Woodfield, 2008) and passed through exemplar generation, likelihood investigation and metapragmatic assessment. To further ensure the validity of the task, three EFL experts confirmed that the task enjoys an acceptable level of content and face validity and fits the purpose of study.

## Procedures

First, the OQPT was administered in order to select a homogenous sample of participants for the experimental and control groups. Following that, in the pre-test phase of the study, these two groups sat for the WDCT. One week after the pretest, the experimental group received Bloom-based ILP instructions for six thirty-minute sessions. They were instructed on the basis of a lesson plan incorporating a series of tasks designed on the basis of the requirements of each layer of Bloom's Taxonomy. Table 4 displays the type of activities utilized in each level of Bloom's Taxonomy.

**Table 4.**  
*Bloom-based Tasks Employed in this Study*

Levels	Type of activities	Examples
Remembering	Recalling, listing, organizing, and the like.	recalling the speech act used
Understanding	Describing in one's own words, re-telling or summarizing something, summarize, and the like.	Matching a speech act with a specific situation
Applying	Predicting, employing some given information innovatively, and the like.	Predicting the outcome of a scenario
Analyzing	Inferencing, unscrambling, and the like.	Unscrambling the scrambles sentences
Evaluating	Making value judgments, exploring the appropriateness of something, and the like.	examining the appropriateness of an speech act used in a situation
Creating	Creating something new.	Creating a dialogue or scenario with the speech act taught

Before the treatment, a video-clip related to the focus of each session was displayed and Bloom-based activities for that session were developed based on the video-clip. The treatment in each session began with remembering activities, the lowest level thinking skill, and eventuated in creation activities, the highest level in Bloom's Taxonomy. Most of the activities were CR activities ad-

vocated by Schmidt (1993). The use of these activities for developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence is supported by EFL researchers. By enabling learners to “make connections between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, their occurrence in different social contexts, and their cultural meanings” such CR activities are believed to enhance EFL learners' pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge (Bouton, 1996). Endorsing this view on the effect of CR activities, Diaz (2013) argues that learners' consciousness level can be raised and their learning enhanced through the higher order thinking activities offered on the basis of Bloom's Taxonomy.

The participants in the control group only watched the video-clips related to the speech act of request. The activities following the video-clips were neither designed on the basis of Bloom's Taxonomy nor focused on pragmatics points. The participants were provided with some vocabulary exercises and comprehension questions. As for the posttest, the same WDCT administered in the pretest was utilized. The participants in the comparison group also received the WDCT to provide a criterion to be compared with the performance of the experimental and control groups.

## Results and Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to contribute to SLA research by exploring whether Bloom-based instruction can develop Iranian EFL learners' use of internal and external modifications. The data were tabulated based on a coding scheme adapted from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989b) and Schauer (2009). Modification strategies such as tag questions which were not observed in our data were excluded from the coding scheme used in this study. Table 5 displays the frequency of the external modifications used by the English NSs and Iranian EFL learners before and after the treatment.

**Table 5.**  
*Frequency and Percentage of the External Modifications*

Strategy types	Frequency of external Modification strategies				
	Experimental group (N=20)		Control group (N=23)		Native speakers (N=18)
	Pretest	posttest	Pretest	posttest	
Alerter	68	49	79	75	38
Preparator	46	42	58	56	43
Getting a pre-commitment	6	16	7	10	20
Grounder (reason)	132	101	147	141	89
Sweetener	23	12	28	26	10
Disarmer	20	39	26	31	48
imposition minimizer	23	41	31	35	43
Appreciation	61	41	66	71	23
Apology	49	35	58	57	16
Reward	0	1	0	0	6
Total	461	399	542	537	344

External modifications, also referred to as supportive moves can either precede or follow the head act (Blum-Kulka, et al. 1989a). External modifications redress requests' illocutionary force to make them seem more polite or minimize their degree of imposition. As Table 6 displays, compared to English NSs, both groups of Iranian EFL learners used more external modifications before the treatment and were not different in terms of the use of external modifications before the treatment ( $X^2 = 0.148, P = 0.701, P > 0.05$ ). The Chi-square results also showed that performance of both the treatment group ( $X^2 = 8.265, P = 0.004, P < 0.05$ ) and the control group ( $X^2 = 11.085, P = 0.001, P < 0.05$ ) differed significantly from that of NSs in the pretest. Iranian EFL learners' overused external modifications mainly due to EFL learners' tendency to use long utterances to show their language proficiency (Hassall, 2001). Similar findings are reported in studies on request strategy (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Rose, 2000; Trosborg, 2011).

Table 6 shows that Iranian EFL learners underused getting a precommitment, reward, imposition minimizer, and disarmer strategies compared to NSs. They also used more alerter, grounder, appreciation, apology, and sweetener strategies. Overall, the pretest data revealed that Iranian EFL learners utilized more external modifications than NSs did.

Among most frequently used strategies by participants were alerters (e.g., "excuse me" or "hello") and grounders (e.g., "Judith, I missed class yesterday, could I borrow your notes?"). The Chi-square revealed that in the pretest both control ( $X^2 = 8.13, P = 0.004, P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 6.28, P = 0.012, P < 0.05$ ) utilized alerters significantly more often than NSs did. The analyses also demonstrated that the control ( $X^2 = 7.058, P = 0.008, P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 8.66, P = 0.003, P < 0.05$ ) utilized grounders significantly more frequently than NSs did. Previous studies (House & Kasper, 1987; Schauer, 2009; Warga, 2004) have pointed to the frequent use of alerters and grounders by EFL learners before the treatment. Warga (2004) found that even at early stages of language learning, language learners frequently make use of alerters when making a request. The high frequency of the use of grounders is also reported in several other studies (e.g., Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987). Hassall (2001) argued that in all languages grounders are among the main external modifications used; similarly, Faerch and Kasper (1989) reported that grounders are the most frequently used external modifier by EFL learners. It can be reasoned that since alerters and grounders constitute the core parts of a request utterance, they are used more frequently. Alerters are utilized to attract the hearers' attention and grounders are employed to provide a reason or an explanation for the request (Schauer, 2009). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), giving a reason for the request makes the request more polite by conveying either positive or negative politeness. The analysis of the posttest data showed that after instruction, the treatment group approached NSs' norms in using alerters ( $X^2 = 0.587, P = 0.443, P > 0.05$ ) and grounders ( $X^2 = 0.036, P = 0.849, P > 0.05$ ); however, the difference between the performance of the control group and that of NSs regarding the use of



alerters ( $X^2 = 7.35, P = 0.007, P < 0.05$ ) and grounders ( $X^2 = 4.75, P = 0.029, P < 0.05$ ) was still significant.

Both NSs and EFL learners used preparators (e. g., *"I'd like to ask you something ..."*) frequently. Although compared to NSs, the control ( $X^2 = 0.091, P = 0.763, P > 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 0.040, P = 0.842, P > 0.05$ ) overused this strategy, the difference between their performances was not significant. This overuse, as Tajeddin and Hosseinpour (2014) contend, could be the result of transfer from L1 which causes Iranians to employ lengthy explanations for their requests on many occasions. Posttest performances of both the treatment ( $X^2 = 0.434, P = 0.510, P > 0.05$ ) and the control group ( $X^2 = 0.011, P = 0.916, P > 0.05$ ) was close to NSs' norms.

NSs employed imposition minimizers (e.g., *"Would you give me a lift, but only if you're going my way"*) and disarmers (e. g., *"I know you don't like lending out your notes, but could ..."*) more frequently than control group and treatment groups did before the treatment. Chi-square analysis revealed that the differences between the performance of both treatment and control groups and that of native speakers was statistically significant for minimizers and disarmers ( $p < 0.05$ ). Given their negative-politeness oriented culture, English native speakers frequently utilize imposition minimizers and disarmers to reduce the imposition and threat to a persons' negative face. In such cultures, members of the community attempt to decrease the imposition of an utterance so as not to infringe on the interlocutors' freedom by using strategies such as imposition minimizers and disarmers. Conversely, Iranians' orientation towards positive-politeness which values solidarity and intimacy, justifies their infrequent use of disarmers and imposition minimizers. As Reiter (2000) states, disarmers are utilized when the requester wants to give reasons to disarm or prevent the requestee from the possibility of refusing his/her request. Therefore, it can be reasoned that the infrequent use of disarmers and imposition minimizers in the request utterances of Iranians stems from their culture. Chi-square results comparing the posttest performance of the control and treatment groups with that of NSs showed that the use of imposition minimizers ( $X^2 = 0.603, P = 0.437, P > 0.05$ ) and disarmers ( $X^2 = 2.626, P = 0.105, P > 0.05$ ) by the participants in the treatment group approached NSs' norms after the treatment. The deviations from NSs' norms for both imposition minimizers ( $X^2 = 4.743, P = 0.029, P < 0.05$ ) and disarmers ( $X^2 = 10.859, P = 0.001, P < 0.05$ ) were still significant in the posttest of the control group.

Similar to imposition minimizers and disarmers, getting a pre-commitment (e. g., *"Could you do me a favor? ..."*) is used to reduce the threat to a persons' negative face. As expected, compared to NSs both treatment ( $X^2 = 9.660, P = 0.002, P < 0.05$ ) and control groups ( $X^2 = 10.559, P = 0.001, P < 0.05$ ) significantly underused this strategy in the pretest. The analysis of posttest data indicated that after the instruction, no significant difference was observed between NSs' use of getting a pre-commitment and that of treatment group participants ( $X^2 = 1.051, P = 0.305, P > 0.05$ ). The analyses of the posttest data also suggested that the participants in the control group still lagged significantly behind NSs

with regard to the use of getting a pre-commitment ( $X^2 = 6.722$ ,  $P = 0.010$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

Sweeteners (e.g., *"Today's class was great."*) and promises of reward (e.g., *"Could you give me a lift home? We'll use my car tomorrow."*) were the least preferred modifiers by NSs. Sweeteners contribute to the enhancement of sense of solidarity between interlocutors. These strategies are defined as gentle strokes on the positive face of the interlocutor (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Compared to NSs, the control ( $X^2 = 5.172$ ,  $P = 0.023$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 4.156$ ,  $P = 0.041$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) significantly overused sweeteners before the treatment. After the treatment no significant difference was observed in the use of sweeteners ( $X^2 = 0.034$ ,  $P = 0.854$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) between the participants in the treatment group and NSs. Moreover, no significant improvement was observed in the control group's use of sweeteners, since the difference between their posttest performance and that of NSs was still significant ( $X^2 = 4.013$ ,  $P = 0.045$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). It can be argued that since Iranians live in a positive-politeness oriented society, they employ sweeteners more often than English NSs whose orientation is towards negative politeness. In positive-politeness oriented cultures, these strokes are often used to enhance social ties and sense of solidarity. As Eslami-Rasekh (1993) contends "The use of positive politeness strategies in Persian stems from the value of group orientedness in Iranian culture" (p. 97). Brown and Levinson (1987) classify these strategies as positive politeness strategies since they suggest cooperation between the requester and the requestee. The analyses showed that promise of reward was the least frequently used modification by the three groups. It was found that before the treatment the external modification "promise of reward" was only utilized by the NSs and did not occur in the EFL learners' data. Given the fact that Iranian EFL learners have grown up in a positive-politeness oriented culture, it was expected that they utilize more promises of reward which are positive-politeness strategies. A similar finding is reported by Najafabadi and Paramasivam (2012) who found that low and intermediate Iranian EFL learners did not use promises of reward in their requests. The low frequency of promises of reward in NSs' data is justifiable in light of the fact that positive politeness strategies are not favored by negative-politeness oriented communities. The analysis of the participants' posttest performance did not detect any instance of the promise of reward modifier in the control group's data. As for the treatment group, only one instance of the promise of reward modifier was observed. Chi-square analysis revealed that even after the treatment, the treatment group's performance significantly deviated from that of NSs ( $X^2 = 4.193$ ,  $P = 0.041$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). It can be argued that since this modifier is so infrequent in NSs' data, EFL learners are rarely exposed to these modifiers; hence lack of exposure to promise of reward can be the reason behind EFL learners' low use of promises of rewards.

Compared to NSs, EFL learners in both control ( $X^2 = 14.389$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 16.500$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) significantly overused appreciation strategy (e.g., *"I would appreciate it."*) in the pretest. The overuse of this strategy, a positive politeness strategy, by Iranian EFL learners can be due to the influence of L1 transfer, which favors positive politeness

strategies. The participants in the treatment group used appreciation strategy less frequently on the posttest; however, the difference between NSs' and treatment group's use of appreciation strategy was still significant ( $X^2 = 3.902$ ,  $P = 0.048$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). There was also a significant difference between, the performance of the control group and NS norms in the post test regarding the use of appreciation modifiers ( $X^2 = 17.820$ ,  $P = 0.00$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

Given that apology (e.g., "*I'm sorry. I can't give you the lesson on Monday.*") is mainly a negative-politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), it was expected that NSs who belonged to negative-politeness oriented cultures overuse this strategy. However, compared to NSs both treatment ( $X^2 = 15.741$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and control ( $X^2 = 17.557$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) groups significantly overused this modification strategy before the treatment. While proposing the universality of the notion of face, Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that "in any particular society we would expect [face] to be the subject of much cultural elaboration" (p. 13). In the same line, Holmes (1995) stated that apology is a bifunctional speech act which can serve as both positive and negative-politeness strategy. The statements made by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holmes (1995) can explain why contrary to our expectation apology is frequently used by Iranian EFL learners. The analyses of apology strategies revealed that the performance of both control ( $X^2 = 16.822$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 19.25893$ ,  $P = 0.015$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) deviated significantly from NSs' norms in the posttest. Although apologies are expected to occur more frequently in negative-politeness oriented cultures, Brown and Levinson's (1987) idea of the uniqueness of each society and also Holmes' (1995) statement on the functionality of apologies can justify the overuse of this strategy by Iranian EFL learners.

The analyses of the posttest data demonstrated that the treatment group's overall use of external modification strategies approached NSs' performance ( $X^2 = 0.400$ ,  $P = 0.527$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). The participants in the treatment group developed remarkably towards NSs' norms with regards to several external modifications. However, the frequency of appreciation, promise of reward and apology modifiers employed by the treatment group on the posttest significantly differed from that of NSs. Although the control group used more external modifications in the posttest, the Chi-square test showed that the difference between the use of external modifiers by the control group and NSs was still statistically significant ( $X^2 = 10.075$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

The frequency of internal modification strategies were also analyzed to examine whether EFL learners have improved in their use of these strategies. Table 7 illustrates the frequency and percentage of different types of internal modification strategies used in this study.

**Table 7.**  
Frequency and Percentage of the Internal Modifications

Modification strategies	Group	Frequency of Internal Modification strategies				
		Experimental group (20)		Control group (23)		Native speakers(18)
		pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	
Syntactic Downgraders	Interrogative	26	16	28	31	11
	Negation	0	2	0	0	3
	Past Tense	29	26	27	23	25
	Conditional clause	22	14	23	25	8
	Play-down	7	41	8	14	53
	Embedded "if" clause	13	7	16	15	4
	Total	97	106	102	108	104
Lexical Down-graders	Consultative devices	21	42	18	24	49
	Understater	27	19	28	23	21
	Downtoner	16	32	14	16	40
	Politeness device	51	44	50	49	46
	Total	115	137	110	112	156
Upgrader	Adverbial intensifier	0	5	0	2	9
	Total	230	279	220	226	321
Overall		327	385	322	334	425

The Chi-square test pointed to a difference in the frequency of the use of internal modifications by NSs and the control ( $\chi^2 = 58.611, P = 0.000, P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $\chi^2 = 29.261, P = 0.000, P < 0.05$ ) in the pretest. Similar to Najafabadi and Paramasivam's (2012), this study revealed that Iranian EFL learners used less internal modifications than English NSs did. The microgenetic analysis of the moves revealed that EFL learners utilized some internal modifications more frequently than NSs did. Compared to NSs, the two EFL groups underused negation, play-down, downtoner, consultative device and adverbial intensifier modifications in the pretest. Interrogatives, understaters, conditional clause, and embedding were overused by EFL learners.

The findings regarding the frequency of some of the modifiers are in line with the literature (e.g., Hill, 1997, Schauer, 2009; Schmidt, 1983; Tajeddin & Hosseinpour, 2014; Trosborg, 2011). The Chi-square test showed that compared to NSs, both control ( $\chi^2 = 22.421, P = 0.000, P < 0.05$ ) and the treatment group ( $\chi^2 = 14.824, P = 0.000, P < 0.05$ ) employed downtoners (e.g., "Is there any way I could get an extension?") significantly less frequently in the pretest. As for downtoners, the findings are similar to Faerch and Kasper (1989), Trosborg (2011) and Hill (1997) who showed that EFL learners utilized downtoners less frequently than NSs did. This deviation from NSs' norms suggests that Iranian EFL learners differ from English NSs with regard to the impositive force they impose on their interlocutors. Living in a positive politeness oriented culture, Iranian EFL learners were expected to utilize more downtoners to tone down the requestive force of the utterance. The comparison of posttest performance

of NSs with the treatment group revealed that the treatment group utilized downtoners with a frequency close to that of NSs ( $X^2 = 2.299, P = 0.129, P > 0.05$ ). The analysis also showed that the control group's posttest performance still departed significantly from NSs' norms ( $X^2 = 19.441, P = 0.001, P < 0.05$ ).

As Table 7 shows, EFL learners in both treatment and control groups employed politeness markers (e.g., "Can I *please* have an extension on this paper?") and past tense (e.g., "I was *hoping* you could...") more frequently than other modification strategies in both pretest and posttest. Chi-square test revealed no significant difference between pretest and posttest performance of the control and treatment group and that of NSs regarding the frequency with which they utilized these two strategies ( $p > 0.05$ ). Such a finding echoes the findings of several other studies (e.g., Schauer, 2009; Schmidt, 1983; Tajeddin & Hosseinpour, 2014) which have demonstrated that politeness markers and past tense are easily acquired and frequently employed from the beginning stages of pragmatics development. The frequent use of politeness markers which are used to soften a request's degree of imposition may be an attempt by L2 learners to appear more polite in L2 contexts. Faerch and Kasper (1989) contend that the overuse of the marker "please" can be due to its bifunctionality as both illocutionary force indicator and transparent mitigator. Adhering to Grice's maxim of clarity, EFL learners use the marker "please" to be explicit and transparent (Faerch & Kasper, 1989). It can also be reasoned that learners' frequent use of the politeness marker "please" is because this marker is acquired in the early stages of language learning and is easily incorporated in a sentence (Schauer, 2009). The overuse of politeness markers by language users has also been reported by other researchers (e.g. Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987).

The analyses of conditional constructions (e.g., ". . . *if you have time.*") demonstrated that participants in the treatment ( $X^2 = 5.520, P = 0.019, P < 0.05$ ) and control groups ( $X^2 = 4.399, P = 0.036, P < 0.05$ ) used significantly more conditional constructions than NSs did before the treatment. As conditional constructions make the request more polite by decreasing the expectations to the fulfillment of the request (Trosborg, 2011), it is likely that Iranian EFL learners use these constructions to appear politer in L2 contexts. Najafabadi and Paramasivam (2012) also showed that Intermediate Iranian EFL learners used more conditionals than NSs did. Conditional forms are frequently used in Persian and Iranian EFL learners' overuse of these forms can be the result of transfer from L1. The analysis of conditional forms revealed that after the instruction, the participants in the treatment group employed less conditional forms ( $X^2 = 1.123, P = 0.289, P > 0.05$ ). However, the control group significantly overused these forms on the posttest ( $X^2 = 5.551, P = 0.018, P < 0.05$ ).

As for the embedded structures (e.g., "*It'd be great* if you could put this on the door."), compared to NSs, Iranian EFL learners in both control ( $X^2 = 4.836, P = 0.028, P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 4.025, P = 0.045, P < 0.05$ ) significantly overused these structures in the pretest. This overuse could be due to the fact that in grammar-based EFL settings embedding structures such as "I

wonder if you ..." are acquired in a mechanical and formulaic form and are frequently used by EFL learners. Unlike the participants in the treatment group who used less embedded structures in the posttest ( $X^2 = 0.548, P = 0.459, P > 0.05$ ) and approached NSs' norms, the participants in the control group did not show any significant improvement towards NSs' norms ( $X^2 = 4.190, P = 0.041, P < 0.05$ ).

Regarding negation (e.g., "You *can't* speak a bit louder?"), no instance of its occurrence was observed in EFL learners pretest data. In line with Trosborg's (2011) study, the results of this study revealed that negation was employed infrequently by English NSs. Although the occurrence of negation in NSs' data could be expected based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of negative politeness, it can be reasoned that since negation in requests is optional (Koike, 1994) it is not used as frequently as other negative politeness strategies by NSs. Moreover, this study documented that negation was not employed by Iranian EFL learners at all. This finding is supported by other studies (e.g., Göy et al., 2012; Tajeddin & Hosseinpour, 2014) which found no instance of negation in the output of EFL learners. As Barron (2003) and Schauer (2009) argue, the low occurrence of negation in EFL learners' data can be due to its complex nature which makes it difficult and time-taking to acquire. Contrary to Tajeddin and Hosseinpour's (2014) who reported that after instruction Iranian EFL learners made no progress with regard to the acquisition of negation, the progress of treatment group towards NSs' norms ( $X^2 = 0.324, P = 0.569, P > 0.05$ ) revealed that Bloom-based instruction can contribute to the acquisition of this strategy. Similar to their performance in the pretest, the control group did not utilize any negation modification strategy on the posttest.

Although the basic use of questions or interrogative structures is to ask for information, these structures are employed to get people do things through requests. English NSs frequently use interrogatives to mitigate the threat of requests to the requestees' face (Ogiermann, 2009). The analyses showed that interrogatives (e.g., "Will you help me?") were among the most common strategies employed by EFL learners and NSs. It was also found that prior to the treatment the use of interrogatives by the control ( $X^2 = 4.238, P = 0.040, P < 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 5.025, P = 0.025, P < 0.05$ ) was significantly more than that of NSs. Indirect request strategies, such as interrogatives, are not quite welcome in Iranian culture (Eslami-Rasekh, 1993). Thus, the infrequent use of interrogatives by EFL learners could be attributed to culture transfer (Rass, 2011). The analyses of the posttest data showed that the participants in the treatment group performed almost similar to NSs ( $X^2 = 0.506, P = 0.477, P > 0.05$ ). However, for the control group participants, the deviation from NS norms was still significant ( $X^2 = 5.849, P = 0.016, P < 0.05$ ).

As negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), consultative devices reduce the illocutionary force of an utterance by asking the hearers' opinion. Consultative devices (e.g., "Would you mind lending me a hand?") were the most frequently used phrasal downgrader employed by NSs representing a negative-politeness culture. Iranian EFL learners in both treatment ( $X^2 =$



16.989,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and control groups ( $X^2 = 26.911$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) employed this strategy significantly less frequently than NSs prior to the treatment. Despite individualist cultures in which consultative devices are conventionalized, Iranian culture is a collectivist one which places more emphasis on social relations and cordiality (Ghorbani et al., 2003) than consultative devices (Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987). Woodfield (2008) and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2008) argue that the sparing or frequent use of consultative devices is related to positive and negative politeness, respectively. After Bloom-based instruction the use of consultative devices in the treatment group's approached NSs' norms ( $X^2 = 1.913$ ,  $P = 0.167$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The comparison of the posttest responses of the control group with NSs' responses revealed a significant difference with regard to consultative devices ( $X^2 = 18.767$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

In contrast to downgraders, which are used to reduce the force of request utterances, upgraders strengthen the force of such utterances. The only upgrader which appeared in the data was adverbial intensifier (e.g., "*I would be most grateful if ....*"). As for the upgraders, the results showed that these strategies are used infrequently by NSs. It was also observed that EFL learners did not use this modifier in pretest. Such a finding with regard to upgraders has been observed in other ILP studies (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989b; Trosborg, 2011). The analysis of posttest data showed that after the intervention, the treatment group used upgraders similar to native speakers ( $X^2 = 1.658$ ,  $P = 0.198$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). It was found that although the use of intensifiers in the posttest by the control group also progressed towards NS norms, the deviation from NS norms was still significant ( $X^2 = 6.568$ ,  $P = 0.010$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

Contrary to upgraders, understaters (e.g., "*Can you speak up a little?*") were overused, by both control ( $X^2 = 0.024$ ,  $P = 0.877$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 0.287$ ,  $P = 0.592$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) in the pretest. This lower force which EFL learners prefer to impose on their requests can be due to cultural unfamiliarity and the fact that some EFL learners consider themselves outsiders when speaking in target language situations. The analysis of the posttests suggested that after Bloom-based instruction both control ( $X^2 = 0.148$ ,  $P = 0.700$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) and treatment groups ( $X^2 = 0.463$ ,  $P = 0.496$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) moved towards NSs' norms.

Both groups utilized more lexical than syntactic downgraders. Given the inherent complexity of syntactic downgraders, EFL learners are also likely to avoid these structures in performing requests. This might indicate that lexical downgraders are easier to acquire than syntactic ones (Schauer, 2009). Similarly, it might imply that nonnative speakers prefer lexical modifiers over syntactic ones in modifying their requests (Biesenbach-Lucas (2007).

Comparisons also suggested that Iranian EFL learners employed less internal modifications than external modifications. This supports the existence of waffle phenomenon which refers to EFL learners' higher use of external modifications compared to internal modifications (Edmondson & House, 1991).

In summary, the findings suggest that Iranian EFL learners' use of modification strategies deviated from native speakers' norms. The deviations observed in the performance of EFL learners can be attributed to EFL learners' lack of familiarity with the target culture, insufficient real-life language use experiences, and issues such as pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer (Aliakbari & Gheitasi, 2014). The differences found between Iranian EFL learners and NSs' use of modification strategies could be well predicted since Iranians belong to a collectivist culture in which positive politeness, interpersonal relations and solidarity are more welcome than western cultures which, as Oyserman (2006) states, are individualistic and concentrate on negative politeness. The findings suggested that the Bloom-based treatment contributes to the development of EFL learners' ability in using internal and external modifications and approaching native speakers' norms. The findings regarding the effect of ILP instruction are supported by Ellis (1992), Doughty (2008), Jernigan (2012), Kasper and Roever (2005), Norris and Ortega (2000), and Zangoei and Derakhshan (2014) who assert that attending to EFL learners' pragmatics needs will help them acquire NSs' norms. In line with the findings of several studies (e.g., Athanassiou et al., 2003; Crowe et al., 2007; Thompson, 2008), the findings of the present study demonstrated that Bloom-based ILP instruction can improve EFL learners' ILP ability. Such an improvement can be the effect of Blooms' high order thinking tasks which can enhance the learning process by raising learners' consciousness (Diaz, 2013). As Smidth's (1993) noticing hypothesis and Smith's (1980) conscious-raising hypothesis state, the employment of consciousness raising activities, which are also emphasized in Bloom's Taxonomy, can contribute to learning.

## Conclusion

To acquire a language, one needs to acquire the social and cultural norms of the target language. An indispensable aspect of language acquisition which is highly intertwined with cultural and social norms of a speech community, but widely ignored in language teaching is ILP instruction. Since 1990, there has been a surge in the number of studies which have examined different interventions for ILP instruction, such as the video-based approaches (e.g., Martínez Flor & Alcón, 2007), corpus-based methods (e.g., Schauer & Adolphs, 2006), tellectolaboration programs (e.g., Vyatkina & Belz, 2006) and consciousness raising techniques (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005).

This study examined Iranian EFL learners' use of supportive moves in making requests and compared it with that of native speakers. The present study added to the literature by showing how Bloom-based ILP instruction can contribute to the promotion of EFL learners' ILP competence. The findings of this study offer pedagogical implications for curriculum designers and textbook writers in EFL contexts. Although some modifications seem to be cross-culturally shared, EFL learners' awareness of how their requests differ from those of NSs can improve their cross-cultural interactions and help them achieve their communicative goals by minimizing the potentials for misunder-



standing. Since research has demonstrated that in naturalistic settings the development of pragmatic acquisition occurs slowly (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993), teachers, curriculum developers, and education authorities should not cease the search to find and implement an approach or method which provides EFL learners with effective ILP techniques, such as the ones employed in this study. The findings of this study regarding the frequency of the occurrence of modification strategies may imply the acquisition sequence or difficulty of pragmatic features. Language teachers and curriculum designers can make use of such findings in ILP instruction and development of EFL materials.

Given the small number of the participants of this study, this study is limited to be generalized to other contexts. It is suggested that future studies focus on larger number of participants, including both genders, to provide evidence from other contexts. The researchers of the present study have some other recommendations for future Bloom-based ILP studies which are as follows: examining the prosodic features of the requests used by NSs and EFL learners, employing other data collection instruments such as role plays and observations which may provide the researcher with more naturalistic data, and examining the role of gender in performing a request. This study only focused on the speech act of request, future studies can examine whether Bloom-based instruction can help EFL learners with the acquisition of other speech acts.

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**Abstracts  
of Papers  
in Persian**



## پیش‌بینی توانایی بازیابی نوشتاری واژگان از طریق راهبردهای شناختی و فراشناختی خودنظم‌بخشی در فراگیران زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی

محبوبه مرشدیان<sup>۱\*</sup>

مریم مشکوة<sup>۲</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۰۶/۱۳ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۰۹/۲۳ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۸/۱۰/۲۸

### چکیده

هدف این پژوهش پاسخ به این سوال است که آیا راهبردهای شناختی و فراشناختی خودنظم‌بخشی می‌تواند توانایی بازیابی نوشتاری واژگان را در زبان‌آموزان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی پیش‌بینی کند یا خیر. شرکت‌کنندگان در این پژوهش، ۹۳ زبان‌آموز ایرانی با سطح زبانی متوسط بودند و این مطالعه بر مبنای مدل یادگیری خودنظم‌یافته پینتریچ انجام شد. در این مدل، خودنظم‌بخشی شامل عوامل شناختی، فراشناختی، انگیزشی، عاطفی، محیطی و اجتماعی است. داده‌ها از طریق تمرین ترجمه تولیدی-نوشتاری واژگان (WPTT) و پرسش‌نامه خودنظم‌بخشی (MSLQ) جمع‌آوری شد. با این حال، صرفاً داده‌های حاصل از مقیاس کاربرد راهبرد یادگیری (شناختی و فراشناختی) آن مورد تحلیل قرار گرفت. تحلیل رگرسیون چندگانه نشان داد که هر دو راهبرد شناختی و فراشناختی خودنظم‌بخشی می‌توانند به‌طور معناداری توانایی شرکت‌کنندگان را در بازیابی نوشتاری واژگان انگلیسی پیش‌بینی کنند، هرچند نقش راهبردهای فراشناختی بیشتر بود. این یافته‌ها می‌تواند به مدرسان زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی کمک کند از طریق آموزش صریح راهبردهای شناختی و به‌ویژه فراشناختی به زبان‌آموزان خود، یادگیری، حفظ و بازیابی واژگان را در آنها تقویت کنند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** خودنظم‌بخشی، مدل یادگیری خودنظم‌یافته، بازیابی نوشتاری واژگان زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی، راهبردهای شناختی، راهبردهای فراشناختی.

<sup>۱</sup> استادیار گروه مترجمی زبان انگلیسی، موسسه آموزش عالی طلوع مهر، قم، ایران (نویسنده مسئول):  
m.morshedian@tolouemehr.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> دانشیار گروه زبان انگلیسی، دانشگاه تربیت دبیر شهید رجایی، meshkat@sru.ac.ir

## مطالعه پدیدارشناختی کلاس زبان انگلیسی موثر از دیدگاه زبان آموزان ایرانی در سطح دانشگاهی

پویا درود<sup>۱</sup>

مسعود ذوقی\*<sup>۲</sup>

هانیه دواتگری اصل<sup>۳</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۰۶/۱۶ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۱۰/۱۲ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۸/۱۲/۱۴

### چکیده

از آنجا که اطلاعات کمی در مورد تجربه و درک فراگیران از کلاس‌های موثر زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی وجود دارد، این مطالعه با هدف آگاهی از تجربه زبان آموزان ایرانی از کلاس زبان موثر در سطح دانشگاهی انجام شد. پژوهش حاضر به شکل یک مطالعه پدیدارشناختی طراحی گردید و در آن تجربه زیسته فراگیران زبان انگلیسی در ارتباط با کلاس زبان موثر مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. داده‌های اولیه از طریق مصاحبه عمیق با هفت شرکت کننده (دو زن و پنج مرد) که با نمونه‌گیری هدفمند انتخاب شده بودند، جمع‌آوری شد. هر هفت نفر دانشجوی مقطع دکتری با تجربه چندین ساله یادگیری زبان انگلیسی بودند. داده‌ها با استفاده از راهبرد کدگذاری هفت مرحله‌ای کولایتسی کدگذاری گردید و مورد تحلیل قرار گرفت. سه موضوع اصلی به دست آمده عبارت بودند از: الف) ویژگی‌های مدرس، ب) تعامل در کلاس، و ج) عملکرد در کلاس. علاوه بر این، یافته‌های کلیدی این تحقیق نشان داد که از دیدگاه زبان آموزان ایرانی، تجربه و باورهای شخصی فراگیران، دو عنصر تشکیل دهنده یک کلاس زبان موثر است. در پایان، براساس یافته‌های این پژوهش پیشنهادهایی برای پژوهشگران ارائه شده است.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** کلاس زبان، دیدگاه‌ها، باورها، تجربه، فراگیران.

<sup>۱</sup> دانشجوی دکتری آموزش زبان انگلیسی، گروه آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، واحد اهر، اهر، ایران؛ p.dorud@gmail.com

<sup>۲</sup> استادیار گروه آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، واحد اهر، اهر، ایران (نویسنده مسئول)؛ m-zoghi@iau-ahar.ac.ir

<sup>۳</sup> استادیار گروه آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، واحد اهر، اهر، ایران؛ hdavatgar@hmail.com

# تأثیر یک دوره آموزشی برخط (آنلاین) پیشرفت حرفه‌ای بر دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه معلمان زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی

نغمه نظری<sup>۱</sup>

زهرة نفیسی\*<sup>۲</sup>

معصومه استاجی<sup>۳</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۱۰/۲۸ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۱۱/۱۲ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۸/۱۲/۱۴

## چکیده

دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه (TPACK) نظریه‌ای است در باب دانش مدرسان برای تدریس مؤثر و خلاق که فرصت‌هایی برای پژوهش در زمینه توسعه حرفه‌ای مدرسان پدید آورده است. این پژوهش با رویکرد ترکیبی توصیفی متوالی و بهره‌گیری از نظریه مورد اشاره، با هدف بررسی تأثیر یک دوره توسعه حرفه‌ای برخط (آنلاین) با محوریت دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه مدرسان زبان انگلیسی انجام شد و در آن نظر شرکت‌کنندگان در مورد تجربه شرکت در این دوره مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. در مرحله کمی پژوهش، ۳۰ مدرس زبان انگلیسی (۱۵ نفر تازه‌کار و ۱۵ نفر باتجربه) از طریق نمونه‌گیری داوطلبی انتخاب و در دوره شرکت کردند. شرکت‌کنندگان پیش از شروع دوره و پس از پایان آن پرسش‌نامه دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی را به‌عنوان پیش‌آزمون و پس‌آزمون پاسخ دادند. در مرحله کیفی پژوهش، ۱۲ نفر از شرکت‌کنندگان به‌طور داوطلبانه در مصاحبه نیمه‌ساختاریافته شرکت کردند. نتایج آزمون ویلکاکسون و تی زوجی نشان داد دوره برخط، به جز دانش محتوایی آموزشی (PCK) گروه تازه‌کار و دانش محتوایی (PK) هر

<sup>۱</sup> دانشجوی دکتری آموزش زبان انگلیسی، گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی؛ دانشکده ادبیات، دانشگاه الزهرا (س)، تهران، ایران؛ n.nazari@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> استادیار گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی؛ دانشکده ادبیات، دانشگاه الزهرا (س)، تهران، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول)؛ z.nafisi@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>۳</sup> دانشیار گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات فارسی و زبان‌های خارجی، دانشگاه علامه طباطبائی، تهران، ایران؛ estaji@atu.ac.ir

دو گروه تازه کار و باتجربه، تأثیر قابل توجهی بر دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه مدرسان زبان انگلیسی دارد. از نظر دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه و دانش محتوایی آموزشی، مدرسان باتجربه توانستند بیش از سایر مدرسان از این دوره بهره‌مند شوند. با توجه به نتایج کیفی مشخص شد کلیه مصاحبه‌شوندگان نسبت به دوره نگرش مثبت داشتند. همچنین این افراد در پاسخ‌های خود به مواردی از جمله، ویژگی‌های متمایزکننده این دوره، چالش‌هایی که با آن روبه‌رو بودند و جنبه‌هایی از دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه‌شان که طی این دوره ارتقا یافت اشاره کردند. نتایج این مطالعه برای مربیان دوره‌های تربیت مدرس، طراحان دوره‌های آموزشی، مدرسان زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی، مدیران، سرپرستان، سیاست‌گذاران و ذینفعان پیامدهای ارزشمند آموزشی دربردارد.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناورانه، توسعه حرفه‌ای برخط مدرس، ادغام فناوری، فناوری آموزشی، مهندسی آموزش.

## بررسی تأثیر خودکارآمدی و سبک یادگیری بر نمرات پیشرفت تحصیلی زبان آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی

شکوه رشوند سمیاری<sup>۱\*</sup>

ساره جهانی<sup>۲</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۰۴/۳۱ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۱۰/۱۳ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۸/۱۲/۲۰

### چکیده

گرچه تمام انسان‌ها ویژگی‌های زیستی و روان‌شناختی یکسانی در فرایند یادگیری دارند، الویت‌های آنها در معنادادن به اشیا و کسب اطلاعات به طور قابل ملاحظه‌ای متفاوت است. هرچقدر بیشتر این تفاوت‌ها را بشناسیم، بهتر می‌توانیم فرایند یادگیری را تحلیل کنیم. به منظور تعیین این امر که آیا افرادی که به لحاظ دانشگاهی موفق تر هستند، از سبک یادگیری ویژه‌ای بهره برده و یا خودکارآمدی بالایی داشته‌اند یا خیر، از بین تمام ویژگی‌های فردی، سبک یادگیری و خودکارآمدی در این پژوهش به بررسی گذاشته شد. تعداد ۱۱۰ زبان‌آموز سطح پیشرفته که زبان انگلیسی را به عنوان زبان خارجی در یک موسسه زبان انگلیسی در شهر تهران فرامی‌گرفتند در این تحقیق شرکت کردند. شرکت‌کنندگان براساس نتایج آزمون تعیین سطح آکسفورد انتخاب شدند. سپس از آنها خواسته شد پرسش‌نامه سبک یادگیری گلب (۱۹۸۴) و خودکارآمدی شوارزرز و جروسلم (۱۹۹۵) را تکمیل و سپس در آزمون پیشرفت تحصیلی شرکت کنند. نتایج تحقیق نشان داد همبستگی معناداری بین خودکارآمدی و نمره آزمون پیشرفت فراگیران وجود دارد. با این وجود، هیچ ارتباط معناداری بین نمره واژگان و خودکارآمدی زبان‌آموزان به دست نیامد. نتایج تحلیل رگرسیون نشان داد ۱۵ درصد خطا در نمرات خواندن و درک

<sup>۱</sup> استادیار گروه آموزش زبان انگلیسی، واحد تهران شرق، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تهران، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول)؛

Sh.Rashvand@iauet.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> دانش‌آموخته کارشناسی ارشد، گروه آموزش زبان انگلیسی، واحد تهران غرب، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تهران، ایران؛

sarehjahani@gmail.com

مطلب و ۲۷ درصد خطا در نمرات گرامر توسط خودکارآمدی زبان آموزان قابل پیش بینی بود. نتایج تحلیل واریانس (ANOVA) نشان داد هیچ ارتباطی بین سبک یادگیری و نمره آزمون پیشرفت زبان آموزان وجود ندارد. در پایان، کاربرد این پژوهش و پیشنهادهایی برای مطالعات آینده نیز ارائه گردیده است.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** سبک یادگیری، خودکارآمدی، پیشرفت تحصیلی، فراگیران زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی، تفاوت های فردی.

## تنوع کاربردشناختی زبان در درخواست‌های الکترونیکی فراگیران زبان دوم به استادان: نگاهی به درجهٔ تحمیل

محمود هاشمیان<sup>۱\*</sup>

مریم فرهنگ‌جو<sup>۲</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۱۱/۲۸ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۹/۰۱/۰۵ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۱/۱۴

### چکیده

ادب نقش بسزایی در درخواست‌های الکترونیکی ارسالی از سوی دانشجویان به دانشگاه ایفا می‌کند. یکی از ویژگی‌های درخواست‌ها که بر ادب تأثیرگذار است، درجهٔ تحمیل است که از متغیرهای مهم در تولید کنش گفتاری است. اگرچه پژوهش‌های مربوط به درخواست فراوان است، به‌طورکلی، مطالعات کمی در رابطه با درخواست‌های با درجهٔ تحمیل کم و زیاد و به‌ویژه، در مورد درخواست‌های فراگیران ایرانی زبان دوم با درجهٔ تحمیل متفاوت انجام شده است. در این مطالعه با تحلیل درخواست‌های زبان‌آموزان تلاش شده تا توزیع ابزارهای کاربردشناختی زبان در نوشتار درخواست‌های الکترونیکی انگلیسی با درجهٔ تحمیل کم و زیاد مورد بررسی قرار گیرد. بدین منظور، ۲۰۸ درخواست الکترونیکی برای تحلیل دقیق کیفی جمع‌آوری شد. این درخواست‌ها به چهار دستهٔ اطلاع، تأیید، بازخورد و انجام کار طبقه‌بندی و سپس کدگذاری و تحلیل شدند. به نظر می‌رسد اگرچه درخواست‌ها از بسیاری جهات مشابه بودند، توزیع نوع درخواست، بخش اول، راهبردهای کنش اصلی و تعدیل‌کننده‌های داخلی و خارجی رابطهٔ نسبتاً مستقیمی با درجهٔ تحمیل داشته باشند. یافته‌های این مطالعه می‌تواند منبع ارزشمندی برای مطالعات کاربردشناختی بین‌زبانی آینده باشد که عملکرد و توانش فراگیران انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان دوم را مدنظر دارند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** درجهٔ تحمیل، درخواست‌های الکترونیکی، تعدیل‌کننده‌های داخلی و خارجی، کاربردشناسی زبان، کنش‌های گفتاری.

<sup>۱</sup> دانشیار دانشکدهٔ ادبیات و علوم انسانی، دانشگاه شهرکرد، (نویسنده مسئول): hashemian-m@sku.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> کارشناس ارشد آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشکدهٔ ادبیات و علوم انسانی، دانشگاه شهرکرد: farhang.mariam@gmail.com

# تأثیر محورهای افقی و عمودی بر یادگیری واژگان در زبان آموزان ایرانی با در نظر گرفتن سطوح حوزه شناختی

مریم قندی<sup>۱</sup>

مجتبی مقصودی\*<sup>۲</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۱۰/۱۷ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۱۲/۱۱ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۱/۱۶

## چکیده

یادگیری واژگان همواره یکی از مهم‌ترین دغدغه‌های آموزش و یادگیری زبان خارجی بوده است. در بین جنبه‌های مختلف یادگیری و آموزش واژگان، روابط معنایی نقش مهمی ایفا می‌کنند. این روابط را می‌توان در دو بعد یافت، چنان‌که محور افقی نمایانگر روابط هم‌نشینی است، مانند کلمات هم‌ایند، عبارت‌ها و اصطلاحات و محور عمودی نشانگر روابط جانیشینی است، مانند هم‌معنایی، تضاد و شمول معنایی. پژوهش حاضر نتیجه تلاشی است که برای مشخص کردن تأثیر محورهای افقی و عمودی بر یادگیری واژه در میان زبان آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی با در نظر گرفتن سطوح حوزه شناختی صورت گرفت. به این منظور، ۸۴ زبان آموز سال دوم دبیرستان از طریق آزمون توانش زبانی (PET) انتخاب شدند و با پیش‌آزمون واژگان که توسط پژوهشگر تدوین شده بود، به سه گروه همگن به نام‌های محور افقی (HAG)، عمودی (VAG) و کنترل تقسیم شدند. سپس، مراحل آموزش و پس‌آزمون یکی پس از دیگری به اجرا درآمد. نتیجه تحلیل آماری (تحلیل واریانس چند طرفه و آزمون تی مستقل) نشان داد که گروه افقی به طور چشمگیری، در مرحله پس‌آزمون واژگان از گروه عمودی و هر دو گروه از گروه کنترل پیشی گرفتند. همچنین مشخص شد سطوح مختلف شناختی از قبیل، سطوح درک، کاربرد، تحلیل و ارزیابی به طور قابل توجهی از شیوه آموزش افقی تأثیر می‌پذیرند، بنابراین، محور هم‌نشینی یا افقی

<sup>۱</sup> دبیر آموزش و پرورش، استان مرکزی؛ s.m.ghandi2013@gmail.com

<sup>۲</sup> استادیار گروه زبان انگلیسی، دانشگاه فرهنگیان، تهران، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول)؛ maghsudi@cfu.ac.ir



را می‌توان در کمک به بهبود دانش واژگانی زبان آموزان موفق دانست. یافته‌های این پژوهش می‌تواند همچون چراغی فراروی مدرسان زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی و طراحان برنامه‌های آموزشی به منظور تدوین روال‌های کارآمد برای آموزش واژگان قرارگیرد.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** حوزه شناختی، زبان آموزان، محور افقی، محور عمودی، یادگیری واژگان.

# یادگیری به روش حل مسأله و تأثیر آن بر میزان درگیری تحصیلی و خواندن و درک مطلب زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی

سپیده برنجی<sup>۱</sup>

مهناز سعیدی\*<sup>۲</sup>

ناصر غفوری<sup>۳</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۰۹/۰۱ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۱۲/۱۲ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۲/۰۷

## چکیده

یادگیری مبتنی بر حل مسأله اخیراً به دلیل توانایی درگیر کردن فراگیران در فرایند یادگیری و ترغیب به یادگیری عمیق و معنادار اهمیت فراوانی یافته است. این تحقیق شبه‌آزمایشی، با هدف به کارگیری روش حل مسأله در یک کلاس آموزش زبان انگلیسی عمومی انجام شد تا تأثیر این روش را بر میزان درگیری تحصیلی و توانایی خواندن و درک مطلب فراگیران بررسی کند. یک گروه آزمایش و یک گروه کنترل، هرکدام متشکل از ۴۰ نفر که دانش زبانی آنها با توجه به آزمون کت (KET) در سطح ابتدایی تعیین شده بود در این تحقیق شرکت کردند. در گروه آزمایش، روش حل مسأله و در گروه کنترل، روش سخنرانی به کار گرفته شد. برای پیش و پس آزمون، از هر دو گروه، آزمون درگیری پتالز (PETALS) و خواندن و درک مطلب به عمل آمد. نتایج تحلیل چند متغیره و نیز یک طرفه کوواریانس نشان داد که میزان درگیری و توانایی خواندن و درک مطلب در گروه آزمایش بالاتر از گروه کنترل بود. برای داشتن فراگیرانی فعال و موفق در کلاس‌های خواندن و درک مطلب، فعالان حوزه آموزش

<sup>۱</sup> دانشجوی دکتری آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات و زبان‌های خارجی، واحد تبریز، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تبریز، ایران؛

stu.berenji@iaut.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> دانشیار دانشکده ادبیات و زبان‌های خارجی، واحد تبریز، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تبریز، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول)؛

m\_saeidi@iaut.ac.ir

<sup>۳</sup> استادیار دانشکده ادبیات و زبان‌های خارجی، واحد تبریز، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تبریز، ایران؛ Ghafoori@iaut.ac.ir

زبان باید به شیوه‌های تدریس دانش‌آموز-محور، مانند روش حل مسأله توجه خاصی داشته باشند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** درگیری تحصیلی، یادگیری به روش حل مسأله، خواندن و درک مطلب، یادگیری خود-محور، همکاری.

## بررسی رابطه میان فرسودگی شغلی، ویژگی‌های شخصیتی و پریشانی روان‌شناختی در میان مدرسان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی: پژوهشی ترکیبی

ساسان بالغی‌زاده<sup>۱\*</sup>

لیلی امیری شایسته<sup>۲</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۱۱/۱۳ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۹/۰۱/۰۶ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۲/۰۷

### چکیده

پژوهش حاضر با هدف بررسی رابطه میان فرسودگی شغلی، ویژگی‌های شخصی و پریشانی روان‌شناختی در میان مدرسان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی انجام گرفت. علاوه بر آن، سعی بر این بود تا اثرگذاری پنج عامل شخصیتی معلم در پیش‌بینی ابعاد فرسودگی شغلی مدرسان زبان انگلیسی بررسی گردد. برای رسیدن به این منظور، از روش پژوهش ترکیبی متوالی استفاده شد. ابزار مورد استفاده در این پژوهش، شامل پرسش‌نامه‌های فرسودگی شغلی ماسلاک، مقیاس ویژگی‌های شخصیتی و مقیاس پریشانی روان‌شناختی بود که در اختیار ۱۱۰ مدرس در آموزشگاه‌های خصوصی زبان انگلیسی در شهر تهران قرار گرفت. علاوه بر آن، مصاحبه نیمه‌ساختاریافته‌ای نیز با تعدادی از مدرسان انجام شد تا نظر آنان در مورد دلایل و پیامدهای فرسودگی معلم مشخص شود. یافته‌های پژوهش نشان داد ابعاد مختلف فرسودگی معلم با پریشانی روان‌شناختی و ویژگی‌های شخصی معلم همبسته است. نتایج همچنین حاکی از آن بود که میان خستگی عاطفی و مسخ شخصیت از عوامل فرسودگی و چهار ویژگی شخصی شامل پذیرش تجربیات جدید، برون‌گرایی، وظیفه‌شناسی و توافق‌پذیری رابطه همبستگی منفی و معناداری وجود دارد. همچنین مشخص شد افزایش روان‌رنجوری موجب افزایش دو

<sup>۱</sup> دانشیار گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی، دانشگاه شهید بهشتی، تهران، ایران؛

نویسنده مسئول)؛ s\_baleghizadeh@sbu.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> دانشجوی دوره دکتری آموزش زبان انگلیسی، گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی،

دانشگاه شهید بهشتی، تهران، ایران؛ L\_amirishayesteh@sbu.ac.ir

بعد از فرسودگی، یعنی خستگی عاطفی و مسخ شخصیت می‌گردد. نتایج آزمون‌تی نمونه‌های مستقل نیز نشان داد که میزان تجربه تدریس موجب کاهش فرسودگی معلم می‌شود. نتایج این پژوهش می‌تواند از این نظر برای مدرسان آگاهی‌بخش باشد که پریشانی روان‌شناختی و ویژگی‌های شخصیتی معلم تا چه اندازه می‌تواند میزان فرسودگی معلم را پیش‌بینی کند و از این رهگذار می‌توان برنامه‌های تربیت معلم را به سوی توجه بیشتر به سلامت ذهن و آمادگی کارورزان تدریس سوق داد.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** فرسودگی شغلی، ویژگی‌های شخصیتی، پریشانی روان‌شناختی، تجربه تدریس، مدرسان زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی.

## تندیگری مواد آموزشی زبان انگلیسی: خودپژوهی روایی یک طراح مواد آموزشی

سیده فهیمه پارسائیان<sup>۱</sup>\*

سوسن قهرمانی قاجار<sup>۲</sup>

مهسا سهرابی<sup>۳</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۱۰/۱۹ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۹/۰۱/۲۴ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۲/۰۸

### چکیده

پژوهش کیفی پیش رو به نقل چالش‌ها و تغییرات هویتی یک مدرس ایرانی زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی پرداخته که نخستین گام‌های خود را در تهیه و تدوین متون خواندن زبان دوم از طریق بازآفرینی داستان‌های یک شاعر کلاسیک فارسی برداشته است. یادداشت‌های توصیفی و تحلیلی در مراحل طراحی متون درسی، بازخوردهای دریافتی از دو مشاور و شش معلم زبان انگلیسی و پیش‌نویس‌های متعدد مواد آموزشی در دست تهیه، اسنادی بودند که داده‌های این خودپژوهی را تشکیل دادند. بررسی موشکافانه داده‌ها نشان داد که مدرس همگام با کسب نگاهی نو به تهیه و تدوین مطالب درسی همچون یک هنر و تمرین خودکفایی، خلاقیت، احترام و مالکیت، به بازنگری برخی از مفروضات ذهنی نهادینه‌شده خود پرداخت. نظر به کمبود پژوهش‌های روایی با محور ساخت و بازساخت هویت تهیه‌کنندگان مطالب درسی، امید می‌رود پژوهش کنونی به درک عمیق‌تر فرایند خلق مواد آموزشی یاری رساند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** آموزش زبان انگلیسی، (باز) ساخت هویت، تدوین مطالب درسی، پژوهش روایی، خودپژوهی.

<sup>۱</sup> استادیار گروه زبان انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات، دانشگاه الزهراء (س)، تهران، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول)؛

f.parsa@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> دانشیار گروه زبان انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات، دانشگاه الزهراء (س)، تهران، ایران؛ s.ghahremani@alzahra.ac.ir

<sup>۳</sup> کارشناس ارشد آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات، دانشگاه الزهراء (س)، تهران، ایران؛

mahasohrabi0076@gmail.com

## معناسازی در نقاشی کودکان به‌عنوان جلوه‌ای از توانش سواد دیداری ایشان

مرضیه سوزنده‌فر<sup>۱</sup>\*

سید محمد علی سوزنده‌فر<sup>۲</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۰۴/۱۸ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۹/۰۱/۱۷ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۲/۱۴

### چکیده

این پژوهش با هدف بررسی چگونگی انتقال معنا توسط کودکان از طریق توانش سواد دیداری با رویکرد قوم‌نگاری انجام شد. به این منظور ۳۲ کودک پسر ایرانی ۶ و ۷ ساله، طی شش جلسه کلاسی و حین فعالیت‌های یادگیری‌شان که شامل نقاشی بود، مورد مشاهده قرار گرفتند. نقاشی‌های کودکان براساس چارچوب نظری دستور دیداری کرس و ون لیوون (۱۹۹۶) مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. به منظور توصیف تجربیات و مشاهدات پژوهشگر هنگام شرکت در کلاس‌ها، یادداشت‌های میدانی او مورد استفاده قرار گرفت. علاوه بر آن، از توصیف کودکان از نقاشی‌های خودشان به‌عنوان مدارک تکمیلی در تحلیل استفاده شد. نتیجه بررسی‌ها نشان داد کودکان با استفاده از انواع منابع دیداری مانند گفتگو، متون نوشتاری، ژست‌ها و اشیاء، به خلق معنی اندیشگانی، بینافردی و متنی پرداختند. علاوه بر این، هرچند هر نقاشی به گونه‌ای منحصر به فرد و براساس علایق گوناگون خلق شده بود و بافت خاصی را برای ساختارها و فرم‌های دیداری فراهم آورده بود، برخی ویژگی‌ها از جمله استفاده از فضا و قاب‌بندی خطی، خط‌های مورب، شکل‌های منحنی، فرم‌نمایه و وضعیت مایل بدن، در معناسازی اکثر کودکان قابل مشاهده بود. یافته‌های این پژوهش ضمن آنکه کاربرد آموزشی و عملی دارد، می‌تواند معلمان و کارورزان را در جهت ارتقای سواد دیداری کودکان یاری کند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** سواد دیداری، نقاشی، معناسازی، دستور دیداری، معنای بافتی

<sup>۱</sup> استادیار آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی، دانشگاه جهرم، جهرم، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول)؛  
mzsouzandeh@gmail.com, souzandeh@jahromu.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> استادیار آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی، دانشگاه هرمزگان، بندرعباس، ایران؛  
soozandehfar@yahoo.com

# باورها و شیوه‌های مدرسان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی در مورد بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری با تمرکز بر تجربه آموزشی

فرهاد گلپور<sup>۱</sup>

توران آهور\*<sup>۲</sup>

سعیده آهنگری<sup>۳</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۰۶/۲۱ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۱۰/۲۱ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۲/۲۲

## چکیده

این پژوهش با هدف پی بردن به باور مدرسان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی با تجربه کم و زیاد در تصحیح خطاهای نوشتاری زبان آموزان، انواع بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری ترجیحی‌شان، مفیدترین نوع بازخورد اصلاحی خطاهای نوشتاری و نیز تفاوت بین آنچه که بدان باور دارند و آنچه که عملاً انجام می‌دهند به اجرا درآمد. صدویست مدرس زبان انگلیسی در دسترس، متشکل از ۵۳ نفر با تجربه کمتر و ۶۷ نفر با تجربه بیشتر که در دانشگاه‌های مختلف ایران درس نگارش تدریس می‌کردند، در این پژوهش شرکت نمودند. در این مطالعه توصیفی از روش‌های جمع‌آوری اطلاعات به صورت کمی (سوال‌های بسته و بررسی نوشتار) و کیفی (سوال‌های باز) در پرسش‌نامه بازخورد نوشتاری استفاده گردید. برای تحلیل اطلاعات کمی، از آمار توصیفی، شامل فراوانی و درصد استفاده شد. نتایج نشان داد که مدرسان با تجربه و کم‌تجربه در اصلاح خطاها و یافتن مفیدترین نوع اصلاح خطا و همچنین برای اشاره به اشتباهات، الویت‌ها و نظرات متفاوتی دارند. در مورد داده‌های کیفی، در بررسی سوال‌های باز هیچ تفاوتی در باور معلمان در پاسخ‌گویی به سوال‌های باز و بسته پرسش‌نامه مشاهده نشد. با وجود این، بررسی تصحیح نوشتار واقعی

<sup>۱</sup> دانشجوی دکتری آموزش زبان انگلیسی، واحد تبریز، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تبریز، ایران؛ golpourf@gmail.com

<sup>۲</sup> استادیار گروه آموزش زبان انگلیسی، واحد تبریز، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تبریز، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول)؛

touranahour@yahoo.com; ahour@iaut.ac.ir

<sup>۳</sup> استادیار گروه آموزش زبان انگلیسی، واحد تبریز، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تبریز، ایران؛ ahangari@iaut.ac.ir



زبان آموزان توسط مدرسان نشان داد که باور هر دو گروه باتجربه و کم تجربه با شیوه واقعی که در تصحیح به کار می گیرند متفاوت است. این پژوهش کاربردهای آموزشی برای معلمان، سیاست گذاران و تصمیم گیرندگان آموزشی دارد.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** باورها، بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری، تجربه، شیوه، مدرسان.

# تأثیر آموزش مبتنی بر طبقه‌بندی بلوم بر عملکرد فراگیران ایرانی زبان انگلیسی در استفاده از تعدیل‌های درونی و بیرونی در کنش گفتاری درخواست

شیوا کیوان پناه\*<sup>۱</sup>

سید محمد علوی<sup>۲</sup>

مصطفی تقی‌زاده لنگری<sup>۳</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۸/۱۱/۰۲ | تاریخ ویرایش: ۹۸/۱۲/۱۲ | تاریخ تصویب: ۹۹/۰۲/۳۱

## چکیده

نحوه بیان کنش‌های گفتاری در فرهنگ‌های مختلف متفاوت است. در هر فرهنگ، افراد ممکن است درک و برداشت متفاوتی از مؤلفه‌های اجتماعی یکسان داشته باشند. چنین تفاوت‌هایی می‌تواند هنگام بیان کنش‌های گفتاری مانند درخواست، باعث سوء برداشت‌های بین فرهنگی شود. پژوهش حاضر با استفاده از طبقه‌بندی تحلیل درخواست بلوم-کالکا و همکاران (۱۹۸۹ب) و شاور (۲۰۰۹)، به بررسی میزان انحراف زبان‌آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی از هنجارهای انگلیسی‌زبانان در استفاده از تعدیل‌های (درونی و بیرونی) کنش گفتاری درخواست و تأثیر آموزش مبتنی بر طبقه‌بندی بلوم بر فراگیری این تعدیل‌های درونی و بیرونی پرداخته است. در این راستا، برای جمع‌آوری داده‌ها از آزمون نوشتاری تکمیل گفتمان (WDCT) که پژوهشگران طراحی کرده بودند، استفاده شد. شصت و یک شرکت‌کننده در این پژوهش شرکت کردند: گروه کنترل (۲۳ نفر)، گروه آزمایشی (۲۰ نفر) و گروه انگلیسی‌زبان (۱۸ نفر). تمامی داده‌ها براساس چهارچوب اقتباسی از بلوم-کالکا و همکاران (۱۹۸۹ب) و شیوه‌کدگذاری تعدیل‌های درونی و بیرونی شاور (۲۰۰۹) طبقه‌بندی شدند. نتایج پیش‌آزمون نشان داد بین استفاده زبان‌آموزان از

<sup>۱</sup> دانشیار دانشکده زبان‌ها و ادبیات خارجی، دانشگاه تهران، تهران، ایران، (نویسنده مسئول): shkaivan@ut.ac.ir

<sup>۲</sup> استاد دانشکده زبان‌ها و ادبیات خارجی، دانشگاه تهران، تهران، ایران: smalavi@ut.ac.ir

<sup>۳</sup> دانشجوی دکتری آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشکده زبان‌ها و ادبیات خارجی، دانشگاه تهران، تهران، ایران: m.taghizadeh@ut.ac.ir

راهبردهای تعدیل کنش گفتاری درخواست با هنجارهای انگلیسی‌زبانان، تفاوت معنی‌داری وجود دارد. همچنین مشخص شد پس از آموزش مبتنی بر طبقه‌بندی بلوم، گروه آزمایشی در به‌کارگیری بسیاری از راهبردهای تعدیل درونی و بیرونی به سمت هنجارهای انگلیسی‌زبانان پیشرفت کرد. یافته‌های این پژوهش نشان می‌دهد استفاده از طبقه‌بندی بلوم با تمرکز ویژه بر مهارت‌های فکری سطح بالا در طراحی فعالیت‌های کاربردشناختی می‌تواند به زبان‌آموزان در فراگیری هنجارهای انگلیسی‌زبانان کمک کند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** طبقه‌بندی بلوم، تعدیل‌های بیرونی، کاربردشناسی بین‌زبانی، تعدیل‌های درونی، کنش گفتاری درخواست.



## فهرست مطالب

پیش‌بینی توانایی بازیابی نوشتاری واژگان از طریق راهبردهای شناختی و فراشناختی خودنظم‌بخشی در فراگیران زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی محبوبه مرشدیان، مریم مشکوة	۹-۲۶
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تندیسگری مواد آموزشی زبان انگلیسی: خودپژوهی روایی یک طراح مواد آموزشی سیده فهیمه پارسائیان، سوسن قهرمانی قاجار، مهسا سهرابی	۲۰۱-۲۲۵
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تأثیر آموزش مبتنی بر طبقه‌بندی بلوم بر عملکرد فراگیران ایرانی زبان انگلیسی در استفاده از تعدیل‌های درونی و بیرونی در کنش گفتاری درخواست شیوا کیوان‌پناه، سید محمد علوی، مصطفی تقی‌زاده لنگری	۲۷۳-۲۹۷
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دوفصلنامه علمی

## مجله افق های زبان دانشگاه الزهراء (س)

سال چهارم، شماره اول، بهار و تابستان ۱۳۹۹ (دوفصلنامه - پیاپی ۷)

صاحب امتیاز: دانشگاه الزهراء (س)

مدیر مسئول: دکتر اعظم سازور

سرمدبیر: دکتر الهه ستوده نما

ویراستار زبان انگلیسی: شهره تیمورنژاد

ویراستار زبان فارسی: حمیده پشتوان

مدیر اجرایی: مریم شیردل پور

### اعضای هیئت تحریریه

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دانشیار، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی دانشگاه شهید بهشتی
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استاد، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی دانشگاه فردوسی مشهد
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استاد، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان شناسی دانشگاه الزهراء (س)
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استاد زبان شناسی کاربردی، دانشگاه کانتربری انگلستان
- **پرویز مفتون سمنانی**  
دانشیار، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد علوم و تحقیقات
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دانشیار، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی دانشگاه الزهراء (س)
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دانشیار، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی دانشگاه شهید بهشتی
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دانشیار، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان شناسی دانشگاه الزهراء (س)
- **فرزاد شریفیان**  
استاد زبان شناسی کاربردی دانشگاه موناش استرالیا
- **الهه ستوده نما**  
استاد، عضو هیئت علمی گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی دانشگاه الزهراء (س)

کلیه حقوق برای دانشگاه الزهراء (س) محفوظ است.

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پست الکترونیکی: lghorizons@alzahra.ac.ir

شاپا: ۲۵۸۸-۳۵۰X

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| ۵۹-۸۶   | تأثیر یک دوره آموزشی بر خط (آنلاین)، پیشرفت حرفه ای بر دانش محتوایی آموزشی فناوریانه معلمان زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی نغمه نظری، زهره نقیسی، معصومه استاجی | ۲۲۷-۲۴۵ | معناسازی در نقاشی کودکان به عنوان جلوه ای از توانش سواد دیداری ایشان مرضیه سورنده فر، سید محمد علی سورنده فر   |
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| ۱۲۷-۱۴۷ | تأثیر محورهای افقی و عمودی بر یادگیری واژگان در زبان آموزان ایرانی با در نظر گرفتن سطوح حوزه شناختی مریم فتدی، مجتبی مقصدی  | ۳۰۰-۳۱۸ | چکیده مقالات به فارسی  |
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