

Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM)

www.mjltm.jahanelm.ac.ir

mjltm@jahanelm.com

This e-book is in copyright.
No reproduction may take place without
the express written permission of the
Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM)

No Unauthorized Copying

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means Electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the Modern Journal of Language Teaching Method.

Director:

Mohammad Shahbazi Rad

Editors - in - Chief:

Hamed Ghaemi

Hossein Khodabakhshzadeh

ISSN: 2251-6204

Director

Mohammad Shahbazi Rad, Dean of Jahan Elm Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Iran.

PhD candidate in English language and Literature, Yerevan State University, Armenia.

Editors-in-chief

Hamed Ghaemi, Islamic Azad University, Gonabad Branch, Iran

PhD candidate in TEFL, University of Tehran, Iran.

Hossein Khodabakhshzadeh, Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e-Heydareih Branch, Iran.

PhD candidate in TEFL, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran.

Managing Editor

Aqil Izady Sadr, Jahan Elm Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Iran.

Editorial Board

Abednia Arman, PhD in TEFL, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

Eghtesadi Ahmad Reza, PhD in TEFL, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

Elahi Shirvan Majid, PhD Candidate in TEFL, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

Grim Frédérique M. A., Associate Professor of French, Colorado State University, USA

Kargozari Hamid Reza, PhD Candidate in TEFL, Payame Noor University of Tehran, Iran

Kaviani Amir, Assistant Professor at Zayed University, UAE

Kirkpatrick Robert, Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Shinawatra International University, Thailand

Rezaei Saeed, PhD Candidate in TEFL, Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran

Shahbazirad Mohammad, PhD candidate in English language and Literature, Yerevan State University, Armenia

Weir Goerge R. S., PhD in Philosophy of Psychology, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

Zegarac Vladimir, PhD, University of Bedfordshire, UK

Table of Contents

1. Does the vehicle of presentation affect the listening comprehension of EFL learners? A case of Iranian learners.....4 <i>Mohammad Makki</i>	4
2. Communication apprehension among international undergraduates the impact on their communicative skills.....18 <i>Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh, Anne Rowena David and Julie Chuah Suan Choo</i>	18
3. Is Rasch model without drawback? A reanalysis of Rasch model limitations.....31 <i>Hamed Ghaemi</i>	31
4. On the effects of two models of cooperative learning on EFL reading comprehension and vocabulary learning.....39 <i>Abbas Ali Zarei, Jaafar Keshavarz,</i>	39
5. Mutual intelligibility or native-like proficiency? Iranian teachers' attitudes toward implementing a 12 pronunciation of English.....55 <i>Rezvan khazae</i>	55
6. The effect of academic study on grammar attitude, grammar motivation, and perception of grammar relevance.....66 <i>Hadi farjami,</i>	66
7. Evaluating the effectiveness of explicit and e-learning instruction on the development of critical thinking ability of Iranian students and teachers...82 <i>Mansoor Fahim, Houman Bijani</i>	82
8. The effect of EFL teachers' locus of control on EFL learners' reading achievement.....97 <i>Behzad Ghonsooly, Yasser Rezvani</i>	97
9. The Effect Of Metadiscourse On EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension.....112 <i>Mohammad Reza Hashemi, Hossein KhodabakhShzadeh, Majid Elahi Shiroan</i>	112

DOES THE VEHICLE OF PRESENTATION AFFECT THE LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF EFL LEARNERS? A CASE OF IRANIAN LEARNERS

Mohammad Makki

Department of foreign languages and linguistics,

Faculty of literature and humanities

Shiraz University

momaki1986@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of the vehicle of presentation (live human input versus canned input such as tape recording) on the listening comprehension of Iranian language learners. To achieve this end, ninety-two learners of intermediate proficiency levels in an established language institute in Shiraz, Iran were randomly chosen to take part in the study. They were the students of four intact classes. The researcher read the passage for the learners of the first two classes (n = 48) himself while he played a native speaker's recorded voice for the other two classes (n = 44). Then, they were administered a listening test. The results of the test showed no significant difference between the two groups. Moreover, the analysis of results revealed the students' overall weakness in listening comprehension. The interview of students, elicited after the study, proved that they did not have listening practice at all. Their listening activities are just restricted to the class time and no more.

KEYWORDS

Listening, comprehension, live human input, canned input, activities

1. Introduction

For many years, listening skills were neglected in language teaching. Teaching methods emphasized productive skills, and the relationship between receptive and productive skills was poorly understood. The first major approach which assigned a prominent role to the comprehension was James Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response. Similarly, the Natural Approach (see Krashen & Terrell, 1983) recommended a "silent period" during which students listen to a large amount of comprehensible input. These approaches were the result of a number of studies that showed the importance of input in second language acquisition.

Further pedagogical research refined the process of listening more. Rubin (1994) identified text, interlocutor, task, listener, and process characteristics as different contextual characteristics, which affect the speed and efficiency of processing aural language. For example, the listeners' proficiency, memory, attention, affect, age, gender, background schemata, and even disabilities in L1 are all among the factors affecting the process of listening (*ibid.*).

The process of listening is very complex and eluding. To date, researchers have identified three major processes: 1- bottom-up 2- top-down 3- interactive (see Brown, 2001; Nunan, 2002; Rost, 2001)

Another issue of concern to the experts in the field is how to teach listening. The teachers in the classroom usually test listening rather than teach it (Field, 2002). So, testing listening is much easier than teaching it. However, teaching listening is of no concern to us in this paper. For more information in this regard, interested readers can consult Nunan (2002); Field (2002); Lam (2002) to name just a few.

The issue of listening comprehension is more challenging to non-native learners. Non-native listeners recognize only part of what they hear (Field's research suggests a much smaller percentage than what we imagine), and have to make guesses that link pieces of texts together (Field, 2002). The input, which the listener receives, is one of the main components of Bachman's (1990) test method framework. This input can have different facets such as the format of the input and the nature of the language. The former, according to Bachman, consists of the channel of presentation (aural and visual), the mode of presentation (receptive), the form of presentation (language, non-language, both), the vehicle of presentation (live, canned, both), the language of presentation (native, target, both), the identification of problem (specific, general), and the degree of speededness.

The latter contains length, propositional content, organizational structure, and pragmatic characteristics. Each of these parts has some sub-parts, which are delineated in Bachman (1990). The vehicle of presentation as one of the formats of input is going to be investigated in this research. The researcher examines whether 'live' human input like a teacher or the researcher himself and 'canned' human input, as in a tape recording or computer recording have any impact on the performance of students in a listening comprehension test. Whether canned or live, successful listening comprehension as a receptive skill demands high working memory and attention on the part of the learners. Live and canned input data of this research study differ in some respects. For example, rate of delivery of input was different in the two vehicles. In fact, every language learner initially thinks that native speakers speak too fast. However, Richards (1983) points out that the number and length of pauses used by a speaker is more crucial to comprehension than sheer speed. In addition to the rate of delivery, reduced forms evident in the canned form might pose significant difficulty for classroom learners, who may have been exposed to full forms of the English language (Brown, 2001: 253).

1.1. Significance of the Study

The results of the research can be useful for any language teacher in the field. They can decide whether in the 21st century listening comprehension as one of the major skills is paid homage or not. Moreover, they can decide whether non-native EFL teachers in countries like Iran can substitute their voice in the classroom for a native speaker's voice, which is usually provided by tapes or computer systems as in recorded voices. It can also have consequences for future listening activities in the classrooms; that is, how to provide incentives for language learners to listen to their cassettes, CDs or everything possible while they are being provided with native like input.

Before exploring the issue in this study, it is worth mentioning some works done with regard to listening comprehension and testing listening comprehension in the field.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study examines the effect of the vehicle of presentation ("live" and "canned") on the EFL learners' listening comprehension. To achieve this end, four classes of EFL learners of intermediate level in an established English language institute took a listening test. They were all studying at the same level. Two classes listened to the researcher reading the material for them while the other two groups listened to the taped passage via a computer. The researcher wanted to find out if there is any difference in the performance of the two groups. That is, does the vehicle of presentation affect the EFL learners' listening performance?

2. Literature Review

Shohamy and Inbar (1991) investigated the effect of both texts and question types on participants' scores on listening comprehension tests. The researchers gave participants three text types, a news broadcast, a lecture, and a consultative dialogue varying in the degree of oral features they contained, to 150 EFL learners in their last year of secondary school. Test takers listened to two different versions about the two topics and answered identical questions to enable comparison of performance on the different text types. The results of the study indicated that different types of texts located at different points resulted in different test scores, so that the more "listenable" texts were easier.

In another study, Buck (1991) argued how listening tests work through the verbal report methodology. Six participants were asked to provide the researcher with their introspection on four main areas: 1- the influence of the short-answer test method on the measurement of listening comprehension 2- whether test items can measure higher level cognitive processes 3- whether test items can measure how well listeners monitor the appropriacy of their interpretation 4- how question preview influences comprehension and test performance. The analysis of reports indicated a serious dilemma for language testers in that listening comprehension involves far more than the application of linguistic knowledge to produce a propositional representation of a text; rather it is an inferential process in which listeners attempt to construct an interpretation, which was meaningful based on their own assessment of the situation, knowledge, and experience.

Chiang and Dunkel (1992) in their study investigated the listening comprehension of 388 high-intermediate listening proficiency (HILP) and low-intermediate listening proficiency (LILP) Chinese students of English as a foreign language. The students listened to a lecture in four formats, i.e. familiar-unmodified, familiar-modified, unfamiliar-unmodified, and unfamiliar-modified. After the lecture, the EFL subjects took a multiple-choice exam testing recognition of information presented in the lecture and general knowledge of familiar and unfamiliar topics. A significant interaction between speech modification (redundant vs. non-redundant speech) and listening proficiency (HILP vs. LILP) indicated that the HILP students benefited from speech modification, but the LILP students did not. A significant interaction between prior knowledge (familiar vs. unfamiliar topic) and test type (passage-independent vs. passage-dependent) was also found. For both the HILP and LILP participants, prior knowledge had a significant impact on subject's memory for information contained in the passage-independent test items on the comprehension test. The EFL subjects who listened to the familiar-topic lecture had higher passage-independent than passage-dependent scores.

Sherman (1997) inspected the effect of question preview in listening comprehension tests. In Sherman's study, 78 subjects took listening tests in four different versions, one with questions before, one with questions after, one with questions between the two hearings, and one with no questions. All participants also completed questionnaires designed to elicit reactions to each version and a week later, wrote a free recall of what they had heard. The results obtained from the recall were inconclusive, but in the tests the version with questions between the two hearings produced significantly more correct answers. The questionnaires supported that the aforementioned version facilitated comprehension the most, but also showed a strong affective attachment to previewed questions. It was concluded that previewed questions seemed more helpful than they really were.

Brindley (1998) in his review of research on assessment of L2 listening abilities looks at some testing issues and challenges (assessing higher-level skills, confounding of skills, assessing listening in oral interaction, authenticity), discusses assessment methods and techniques (test administration, item formats), and considers potential applications of new computers and video technology.

Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, and Balasubramanian (2002) in another study described the extent to which native English speaking and ESL listeners performed better on a test when the speaker shared their native language. Four groups of 100 listeners, whose native languages were Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, and standard American English, heard lectures presented in English by speakers with different native languages and answered questions based on the lectures. The results indicated that both native and non-native listeners scored lower significantly when they listened to non-native speakers of English; native speakers of Spanish got significantly higher scores when listening to Spanish-accented speech and native speakers of Chinese scored significantly lower when they were listening to speakers who shared their native language.

Derwing and Munro (2001) assessed the appropriateness of the speech rate of narratives read by native English speakers and Mandarin learners of English. The narratives were

played to listeners at their unmodified rates and at three computer-manipulated rates: all passages were adjusted to the Mean Mandarin rate, the Mean English rate, and a reduced rate, 10 percent slower than the Mean Mandarin rate. Generally speaking, the modifications did not result in improvements in the ratings. However, the listeners assigned better ratings to fast (compared with natural rate) productions from the slowest Mandarin speakers. The results reflected a difference in processing costs for familiar and unfamiliar accents. The findings of the study suggested a reproof for L2 learners to slow down is unlikely to be a broadly beneficial strategy.

Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, and Balasubramanian (2005) inspected whether listeners experience more difficulty with regional, ethnic, and international dialects of English than with standard American English. The results of the study demonstrated that the speaker dialect had a significant effect on both English as a second language (ESL) listeners ($n = 158$) and native English speaking listeners ($n = 58$). ESL listeners scored lower on the listening tests hearing ethnic and international dialects of English compared to standard American English; however, there were no significant differences between the scores of those hearing regional dialect and those hearing standard American English. The results of the study suggested that regional dialects be considered in listening comprehension tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language.

Elkhafaifi (2008) evaluated the effect of pre-listening activities and repeated listening exposure for listening comprehension scores of Arabic students. Participants completed a pre-listening activity (vocabulary preview, question preview, or a distracter activity), listened to an Arabic listening passage and took a listening comprehension test. Participants listened to the passage again and repeated the test. Students who completed one of the pre-listening activities scored higher than those who completed the distracter activity; students who received the question preview did better than those who received the vocabulary preview. The participants' scores improved after the second exposure to the listening passage. The findings of the study proposed that while certain pre-listening activities have a positive impact on students' scores in listening comprehension tests, repeated exposure to the passage is a better predictor of improved performance.

In Iran Sadighi and Zare (2006) explored the effect of background knowledge on listening comprehension. The participants of the study were the members of two TOEFL preparation classes. The experimental group received some treatment in the form of topic familiarity and their background knowledge was activated. When the treatment finished, a 50-item TOEFL test of listening comprehension was administered for both classes and control groups. The results proved that the students who had background knowledge performed better on the test.

So far the only study which has some similarities with that of us is Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, and Balasubramanian (2002). Moreover, no such study has been conducted in the context of Iran in general and in private language institutes in particular. As mentioned earlier, the "vehicle of presentation" (live, canned) is considered one of the sub-components of "format" in the "facets of the input" in Bachman's framework. His

framework consists of five major categories: 1- the testing environment; 2- the test rubric; 3- the nature of the input the test taker receives; 4- the nature of the expected response to that input; 5- the relationship between input and response. The third major category had two components; i.e., the format and the nature of language. One of the sub-components of the format of the input is the vehicle of presentation. By this term, he refers to aural channel of input in which data can be presented via "live" human input or "canned" human input as in a tape recording or the like.

According to Bachman (1990) himself, this framework of test method facets is "a guide for empirical research that I hope will lead to better understanding of the extent to which these facets affect performance on language tests" (p. 117).

2.1. English Language Institutes in Iran

Farzin-nia (1964, cited in Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006) mentioned that the first formal English language institute was established in Iran in 1925 and was named The Iranian-American society. After the Islamic revolution, the name of this institute changed to Iran Language Institute (ILI) and together with the name, the objectives, curricula, and management underwent some changes. Gradually, due to the limitations of English language teaching in Iranian schools such as limited facilities and outdated textbooks, different institutes under different titles were established over the country. In the recent years, English language institutes are mushrooming in different cities of Iran including Shiraz. "Today, there are more than 80 institutes for males and females in the four educational districts of Shiraz city alone. These institutes offer different courses for different age groups" (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006: 344). Razmjoo & Riazi also believe that learners' main objective for attending the institutes is improving their command of English proficiency. The main focus in these institutes are on oral skills, namely, listening and speaking. Learners listen to large amounts of English material every session of the class. All the dialogues, readings, pronunciation tips and the like are supposed to be played on a tape or any other similar facility.

Children are sent to these institutes by their parents to learn English as soon as they are six years old (Vaezi, 2008). All of the institutes are required to get a certificate or permission from the ministry of education in order to be able to offer educational service. Moreover, their tuition fees should be approved by the ministry of education. Interestingly, part of the tuition fees should go to this ministry.

In another study, Talebinezhad & SadeghiBeniss (2005) delineated the delicate differences between the English taught in the universities and the one taught in private institutes in Iran. They believe that learners, personally motivated, attend private institutes to learn the language; so they spend time and money to have those classes. They continue that based on the researches done at MA and PhD levels between 2000 and 2004 in three universities in Iran, about 91% of the participants belonged to universities, while only 9% of the studies counted private institute learners as the participants of their study. Rostamlu (2003) added that learners especially at intermediate and advanced levels in private institutes are highly

motivated. He believes that high motivation and seriousness of such participants give the project a considerable advantage.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Ninety-two Iranian EFL learners took part in the study. Forty-eight learners listened to a live passage read by the researcher and forty-four learners listened to the canned passage played on the computer. The participants were all male young adolescents and their ages ranged from 13 to 16. They were students of four intact classes in the same level of proficiency, namely, intermediate. The proficiency level of the learners was determined in accordance with the hierarchy chart of the English institute. According to that chart, elementary learners study different books based on their age; books such as *Let's Go* (Nakata, Frazier, Hoskins, and Graham, 2006), *True Colors* (Maurer & Schoenberg, 1999), *Connect* (Richards, Barbisan, and Sandy, 2004) and *Top Notch* (Saslow&Ascher, 2006). Intermediate learners studied *Top Notch* and *Take Off* (Abbs, Freebairn, Mariani, and Chapman, 2006) books while advanced learners studied both *Summit* (related to *Top Notch*) and *Gold* (Acklam& Burgess, 2001) books. During some informal interviews, they all expressed that they expected the teacher to focus on oral skills first. They desired to improve their speaking and listening first. They were told about the experiment prior to the listening test in order to ensure their full cooperation.

3.2. Instrument

The instrument used to gather the data for this study was a listening test. In fact, it was a listening passage geared to the proficiency level of the participants. To ensure such correspondence, a listening passage from the book *Take Off 3* was chosen. All the learners had covered that listening passage some months before. The time interval was enough in order to minimize the practice effect.

The true-false items together with the fill in-the-blanks and short answer questions that follow the listening comprised the items of the listening test. With regard to short answer questions and fill-in-the-blanks, acceptable-words method was applied and the researcher was not looking for just one correct response. If the learners showed that they understood the listening, they were given a score. For example, regarding one of the questions which was "Mandy Whiteman has a" all the responses including 1- pet 2- tarantula 3- strange pet were considered correct. The listening passage together with the following questions or the questions on which the learners were tested is shown in Appendix 1. For further information regarding the listening, interested readers can consult *Take Off 3*(p. 22).

3.3. Procedures

The researcher randomly chose four classes of the same level. He attended each class and explained in Persian what the students were expected to do. He attended the first class and distributed the test among all the students and then asked them to have a look at the questions before he started reading the material. Furthermore, he told them that they were going to answer the first six questions as true, false, or I don't know. Then, he explained the other six short answer questions and told them to answer the questions based on the

listening passage. He also delineated that he was not looking for a single correct answer, but every question can have different correct responses. He also told students that spelling does not matter for the researcher. Moreover, in order to lessen test anxiety, they were not required to write their names. The researcher ensured the students that this test would not affect their final scores. Having explained all these issues in Persian, he started to read the passage for the class. When the reading finished, they were given some time to answer the questions. Besides, there was no time constraint for them. However, the researcher answered no question while the students were answering the items. He read the passage once and did not repeat any word while reading. The researcher followed the same procedures for the second class while the vehicle of presentation changed for the third and the fourth class. All the procedures such as the explanations of teachers and the like were the same and in Persian. However, when it came to the passage, this time he turned on the computer and played the passage for them, which was recorded on the system. He had checked the quality of the instruments (computers and speakers) beforehand, and they all had high quality. Then, all the learners listened to the native speaker's canned voice, the computer, in this case. During the playing of the passage, students occasionally asked questions about "what he said", but the researcher did not answer them and asked them by gesture to be quite and listen to the rest of the passage. When the passage finished, they were asked to answer the questions on the listening passage. Not to mention, they were not pressed for time. In order to bar students from cheating, the questions were designed in four different formats. By different formats, I mean the order of the questions was different for two students sitting next to or behind each other. The students were informed about this tactic of the researcher before the distribution of the papers. When the learners answered the items, the researcher collected the papers and took them home to correct them. As mentioned before, more than one answer might have been correct for a single question. However, all the responses were assessed in accordance with the passage and not in a vacuum. If the answers were correct based on the passage, they would get a score. Finally, after the calculation of the scores from four classes, the researcher entered all the data into the SPSS. He inserted the students' scores, for whom the researcher himself read the material, into one column and all the learners' scores, for whom the computer file was played, into another column, and then ran *t*-test to see if there was any difference between these two groups.

4. Results and Discussions

Throughout the study one *t*-test was administered. We wanted to see if the results of the *t*-test showed significantly different performance in one vehicle of presentation rather than the other.

Table 1: The t-test for the performance of the two groups

Groups	Mean	SD	N	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Group 1	5.75	3.42	44		.91
Group 2	5.81	2.23	48		
Total			92	73.01	

$P > .05$

As the above results in Table 1 indicate, the significance value obtained is much larger than the critical value ($p < .05$). So, it shows no significant difference between the two groups taking the test. Furthermore, it can be seen that the mean or the average of group two, who listened to the researcher, was a little larger than that of group one, who listened to the canned listening passage. However, this very small difference is not significant at all. Moreover, standard deviation of the first group is larger than that of the second group. It means that the variance, distance from the mean, of scores in the first group, who listened to the canned passage by the native speaker, was larger. Their scores were more distributed.

As mentioned in the previous sections, the purpose of the current study was the analysis of the difference between two groups of learners who listened to a single passage, once read live by the researcher in the classroom and once played via a computer in a canned format. The recorded voice on the computer belonged to a native speaker. Comparing the two mean scores using *t* test, the research question was answered. The two groups did not score significantly different on the listening test. Hence, it can be concluded that the vehicle of presentation, whether be live or canned, does not affect students' performance significantly. It is somehow in contrast with a previous study (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, and Balasubramanian (2002) which proved that listening to a native speaker makes listeners perform better on a test. In our case, the canned version of the listening in the computer was produced by a native speaker and in a normal rate. Speech rate was not found to be a significant element in comprehension in previous studies such as Derwing and Munro (2001).

Now, we had better deal with some questions which were among the most error-provoking aspects in the test. Some of the answers were the results of the students' general world knowledge or their cursory attention to the listening passage. For example there was a question which asked about the life span of female tarantulas. It was a fill-in-the-blanks question. "Female tarantulas live The answer is "about twenty-five years", but many students named a region they heard in the passage, which was totally unrelated

to the question, or they said “jungles”, which can be a general term where might be the residence of any animal in the world.

Moreover, it can be added that students had more problems with inference type questions because the rate of correct answers in this type of questions was very low. Nevertheless, their performance with more direct questions was different. They performed better on questions the answers of which were provided directly in the passage. This performance held true with both true-false items and short answer items; however, the students outperformed on this type of questions. Also, almost no student left true false items unanswered, but it was not the case with short answer questions.

As mentioned before, the language required for answering short answer questions was kept in minimum, and there was no complex language needed to achieve that end. But in spite of this consideration, many students left short-answer and fill-in-the-blanks questions unanswered. In addition, another look at the students’ scores proves that they did not perform very well in either vehicles of presentation; neither student who listened to the researcher nor students who listened to the canned passage performed satisfactorily on the test. So, the results of the test somehow imply that Iranian students are not good at listening comprehension at all. Their performance was very weak in a listening passage which was familiar to them and was also covered before in previous terms. They should have obtained better scores because of familiarity with the topic (see Chiang and Dunkel 1992). It might have different reasons. The most prominent one, which was revealed during a follow up interview with the students, was their lack of exposure to the foreign language. They do not have enough listening practice at home or other places. According to the students themselves, they do not listen to their books’ CDs at home. Moreover, most of them confessed that they had not bought the CD at all. In fact, they did not pay any attention to the listening skill at all. They do not consider it as something compulsory in their course of learning. What mattered more to them was the ability to speak English. Another reason can be found in their lack of attention during a listening activity in the classroom. Whenever students are asked to listen to something in the classroom, they do not devote all their attention to the listening task. The problem is aggravated in the case of authentic listening tasks. As it is accepted, there are very few pure listening opportunities in the real world without the interference of some noise. So, it is recommended that teachers and material developers incorporate listening activities in which there is some degree of white noise. When we listen to something or someone in the real world, there are some other voices and sounds in the background. However, in the listening passage, which was played and read for the students, there was not such an inconvenience for the listeners. But again the results showed students’ weakness in the listening comprehension skill.

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, the aim of this paper was to examine the effect of the vehicle of presentation (live vs. canned such as a tape) on the listening comprehension of the young adolescent learners. In this study, the researcher focused on language learners in language institutes. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher chose two groups of language learners at the same level of proficiency. He read a passage for one group himself

while he exposed the other group to the canned version of the passage recorded on a computer. The computer version was the *Take Off* CD accompanied by the books. Then, he administered the same listening test to both groups. The results of the test proved no significant difference between the two groups of learners. This lack of difference suggests that the vehicle of presentation is not a determinant factor in students' listening comprehension. Moreover, the students' poor performance on the test stemmed from their lack of exposure to the listening practices revealed by students in the interview, which followed the test. In addition, the same interview indicated that students do not respect listening comprehension as a major skill in foreign language learning.

It should be also pointed out that this study has its own limitations. First and foremost, the researcher collected his sample of students from one language institute, namely, Navid English Institute. He might have fallen into the pitfall of biased sampling. In order to avoid it, he would have had better choose different learners from different institutes. Moreover, the test requires student to write some words. So, the skill of writing is at work to some extent. Although the researcher claims that it has been kept to the minimum, it cannot be concluded firmly whether the students' inability to answer the short-answer and fill-in-the-blanks questions was due to their listening or their writing incompetency. So, it is better to design a test which has no writing at all and only tests the candidates' listening comprehension. Last but not least, the students' proficiency level should have been verified by a standard proficiency test like Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 1992). Although students are all at the same level, it cannot be concluded firmly whether they are all really at the same proficiency level. Another suggestion for further research is to conduct the experiment with the same students. It would be better to read the passage for them once, and then after some weeks play them the same passage by a computer or a tape recorder. Also, the same test is administered twice to the students. The results of the test in the two administrations can be a reliable yardstick in determining the effect of the vehicle of presentation on students' listening comprehension.

References

- Abbs, B., Freebairn, I., Mariani, L., & Chapman, J. (2006). *Take off*. New York: Longman.
- Acklam, R., & Burgess, S. (2001). *Advanced Gold Coursebook*. New York: Longman.
- Allen, D. (1992). *Oxford placement test*. Oxford University Press.
- Asher, J. (1977). *Learning Another Language Through Actions: The Complete Teacher's Guidbook*. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oak Productions.
- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brindley, G. (1998). Assessing listening abilities. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 171-191.

Brown, D. H. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Buck, G. (1991). The test of listening comprehension: an introspective study. *Language Testing*, 8, 67-91.

Chiang, C., & Dunkel. (1992). The effect of speech modification, prior knowledge, and listening proficiency on EFL lecture learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26, 345-374.

Derwing, T., & Munro, M. J. (2001). What speaking rates do non-native listeners prefer? *Applied Linguistics*, 22, 324-337.

Elkhafaifi, H. (2008). The Effect of Prelistening Activities on Listening Comprehension in Arabic Learners. *Foreign Language Annals*, 38, 505 - 513.

Field, J. (2002). The Changing Face of Listening. In J. C. Richards, & W. Renandya, *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice* (pp. 242-247). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Krashen, S. D., & Terrell, T. D. (1983). *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Lam, W. Y. (2002). Raising Students' Awareness of the Features of Real-World Listening Input. In J. C. Richards, & W. Renandya, *Methodology in Practice: An Anthology of Current Practice* (pp. 248-253). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Major, R. C., Fitzmaurice, S. F., Bunta, F., & Balasubramanian, C. (2002). The Effects of Nonnative Accents on Listening Comprehension: Implications for ESL Assessment. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 173-190.

Major, R. C., Fitzmaurice, S. M., Bunta, F., & Balasubramanian, C. (2005). Testing the Effects of Regional, Ethnic, and International Dialects of English on Listening Comprehension. *Language Learning*, 55, 37-69.

Maurer, J., & Schoonenberg, I. E. (1999). *True Colors*. New York: Longman.

Nakata, F., Frazier, K., Hoskins, B., & Graham, C. (2006). *Let's go*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nunan, D. (2002). Listening in Language Learning. In J. C. Richards, & W. Renandya, *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice* (pp. 238-241). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Razmjoo, A., & Riazi, A. (2006). Do high schools or private institutes practice communicative language teaching? A case study of Shiraz teachers in high schools and institutes. *The Reading Matrix*, 6 (3), 340-363.

Richards, J. C. (1983). Listening comprehension: Approach, design, procedure. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17, 219-239.

Richards, J. C., Barbisan, C., & Sandy, C. (2004). *Connect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rost, M. (2001). Listening. In R. Carter, & D. Nunan, *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages* (pp.7-13). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rubin, J. (1994). A review of second language listening comprehension research. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 199-221.

Sadighi, F., & Zare, S. (2006). Is Listening Comprehension Influenced by the Background Knowledge of the Learners? A Case Study of Iranian EFL learners. *The Linguistics Journal*, 1 (3), retrieved from:
http://www.linguistics-journal.com/November_2006_fs&sz.php.

Saslow, J., & Ascher, A. (2006c). *Summit 2A*. New York: Longman.

Saslow, J., & Ascher, A. (2006b). *Top Notch: 2A*. New York: Longman.

Saslow, J., & Ascher, A. (2006a). *Top Notch: Fundamentals A*. New York: Longman.

Sherman, J. (1997). The effect of question preview in listening comprehension tests. *Language Testing*, 14, 185-213.

Shohamy, E., & Inbar, O. (1991). Validation of listening comprehension tests: the effect of text and question type. *Language Testing*, 8, 23-40.

Talebinezhad, M. R., & Sadeghi Beniss, A. R. (2005). Non-academic L2 Users: A Neglected Research Pool in ELT in Iran. *Linguistik online*, 25 (4).

Vaezi, Z. (2008). Language Learning Motivation among Iranian Undergraduate Students. (54-61, Ed.) *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 5 (1).

Appendix

Name: _____

Listening Test

- Answer (T) for "True," (F) for "False," or (?) for "I don't know."

1- Tammy lives in an aquarium.

2- Tammy eats cheese.

- 3- Mandy wants to get another spider.
- 4- Tammy is going to get much bigger.
- 5- Tammy can do tricks.
- 6- Tammy's poison is very strong.

- Complete the sentences.

- 1- Mandy Whiteman has a -----
- 2- Keeping a tarantula as quite expensive at first because -----
- 3- Tammy eats-----
- 4- She is still young so -----
- 5- A bite from an adult tarantula can be----- but -----
- 6- Female tarantulas live -----

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AMONG INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATES: THE IMPACT ON THEIR COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh, Anne Rowena David & Julie Chuah Suan Choo

Universiti Sains Malaysia

Malaysia

manjeet@usm.my,

rowena@usm.my

cscju@usm.my

ABSTRACT

Communication apprehension is a common phenomenon in ESL classes globally. This form of anxiety affects students' oral communication. The obstacles present in a student hinder successful language learning and communication among students. Effective communication is compulsory in a language classroom in order to perform better in classroom based language activities. This quantitative study highlights the importance of oral communication in an English language classroom and communication apprehension faced by international undergraduate students. For the purpose of this study, McCroskey's (1970) personal report of communication apprehension scale (PRCA) will be utilized to identify oral communication apprehension faced by this group of students. The results will be able to provide insights to language educators on the issue of communication apprehension among international undergraduate students and measures that can be taken to overcome the hurdles.

KEY WORDS

Communication apprehension, international undergraduate students, English language classroom

1. Introduction

McCroskey (1977) as cited in Holbrook (1987) defines communication apprehension (CA) as “an individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.” The causes of CA may be triggered by situational settings (for example, public speaking) and the individual’s personality traits (shyness, quietness and reticence). Students when requested to communicate orally at any level (primary, secondary or higher education) will definitely at one point of time in their life experience apprehension. A certain degree of CA is inevitable although it varies from person to person. CA plays an important role in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning as it can have positive or negative effects. In the context of English language classroom, CA is more prevalent as international undergraduate students have to demonstrate their proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening. With English being a second or foreign language for these students, it is bound to present hindrance or obstacles.

2. Problem statement

One of the main purposes of any English proficiency course is to enable its learners to master the basic skills in the language, namely reading, writing, listening or speaking. Weakness or poor mastery in any one of these skills may serve as a problem to the overall English language proficiency. Oral communication or the speaking skill is an important skill to hone in order to achieve a good grade in the context of this study. Inability to well communicate orally may lead to apprehension towards oral communication activities in class, especially when students are required to express their opinions in public speaking and group discussion tasks during their English lessons. Communication apprehension is evident in this situation and it might affect their grades as the speaking component is part of the coursework assessment. Moreover, the international undergraduates in this study have to deal with learning English in an EFL setting and most of them have insufficient background knowledge and contact with English language in their native country. This may indirectly contribute to the variety CA levels experienced by international undergraduates.

3. Purpose of study

This study aims to identify oral communication apprehension encountered by international undergraduates in English language classrooms in a local Malaysian university. This study employs McCroskey’s (1970) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) adapted scale to identify oral communication apprehension faced by this group of students. It is crucial and timely to investigate whether learning English in an intercultural setting affects learners’ CA. This paper will discuss the degree of the presence of CA in an intercultural milieu. The outcomes of this research will be able

to offer pertinent and valuable information and perceptions to ESL and EFL instructors on the issue of communication apprehension among international undergraduates and appropriate actions that can be implemented to reduce the occurrence of CA in the language classrooms.

4. Background

The current study is conducted in a language school in one of the public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Undergraduates from schools or faculties of various disciplines in this particular university are required sign up for language proficiency courses and pass with a minimum grade C (40 marks) in order to proceed to the next level and also meet the university's graduation requirement. The respondents in this study were enrolled in a 14 week Academic English proficiency course, which is a compulsory course. The students registered in this course consist of both local and international students who possess different levels of English proficiency. This course offers a variety of listening, reading, writing and speaking based activities, which target to improve students' overall English language proficiency. It is also structured in such a way that students are required to participate in class discussions, speak clearly and voluntarily, discuss and share ideas openly. The graded coursework assessments consist of oral group presentation, listening test and writing test. Students are tested on essay writing and reading comprehension during the final examination at the end of the course.

5. Literature review

Communication apprehension is a fear which to some extent surpasses the fear of heights, financial problems and even to the extreme of death. According to communication experts "...2 out of every 10 individuals experience some form of communication anxiety ..." (Watson, & Bossley 1995, p.111). These individuals experience a fear of some things they encounter daily, and whether it is in a formal or informal situation, CA is experienced by everyone. Four different types of CA exist: trait like, generalized-context, personal-group, and situational. Trait like can be described as "...a relatively enduring, personality-type orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety of contexts" (McCroskey, 1984, as cited in Everett, 1999, p.42). Secondly, generalized-context is similar to trait like; however, it may occur in one situation and not in another. Personal-group CA repeatedly occurs when an individual interacts with a certain person or group. Lastly, situational CA depends on a situation where one can be with the same individual or group, but the situation itself causes the apprehension (McCroskey, 1984, as cited in Everett, 1999).

A simple definition of CA is anxiety or fear of communicating in different situations. According to Berger, McCroskey & Baldwin (1984) it is "the way a *person feels* about

communication, not *how* they communicate". The fear or anxiety could be due to any of the following reasons: lack of proficiency in the target language, lack of practice, insecurity or any pre-programmed thought pattern. Even those who have high level of proficiency in a language can experience CA. Some people may be good at communicating through writing but they may have problems speaking in front of an audience. Some may be good at interpersonal communication, but may not feel comfortable making presentations and vice versa. According to Scovel (1991), anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening. Horwitz et al. (1986) argued that communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communication with people. According to this definition, there are many forms of CA and that fear of oral communication is not limited to a certain age or level of study. It is linked to interaction among people in different settings.

Thaher (2005) classified the factors that lead to CA inside an English language classroom, especially EFL classroom into three categories: (1) psychological factors, which include emotion, self-esteem, anxiety, attitude, fear and motivation; (2) instructional factors, which include goals, teacher, method, text, time, intensity and means of evaluation, and (3) sociocultural factors, which include acculturation, social distance, second versus foreign language learning and culturally accepted thought.

With regards to prior studies, Price (1991) investigated the causes of anxiety in foreign language classrooms. He argued that for EFL learners, speaking English in the classroom is the main cause of anxiety. On the other hand, according to Tunaboyle (1993), students' tendency to be silent listeners rather than active speakers in oral English classes is caused by many reasons. The most prominent of these reasons is psychological pressure of making mistakes in the presence of their classmates. The next would be poor count of vocabulary. So, CA is attributed to students' fear of poor communication and negative evaluation.

As for gender based CA, Johnson and Faunce (1973) indicated that females expressed greater anxiety about speaking in front of the class. However, Mukattash (1980) found in his study that the level of females' attitude and motivation toward English was significantly higher than those of males. Frantz, Marlow & Wathen (2005) found that there was significant statistical difference in the level of communication apprehension experienced by males and females. As for Aly and Islam (2005) gender, job status, grade point average and years of experience have an effect on CA. Women were found to experience a higher level of CA than men. On the other hand, Borzi and Mills (2001) found the male accounting majors have a higher level of CA than female accounting majors.

Fear of speaking English in class may occur in a person's native language or in a foreign language. McCroskey et al. (1999) examined levels of CA among Japanese students in native and second language (English). The results indicated that Japanese students have high CA in both languages. Lucas (1984) indicated that "...if international students are apprehensive about speaking their own languages, their fear of communicating in English must be tenfold".

In a cross-cultural study, a comparison was made among Chinese and American mainstream students' levels of communication apprehension. Zhang, Butler and Pryor (1996) found that as expected, Chinese students reported a significantly higher mean score for CA when compared to students from the United States. On the other hand, their findings contradict earlier findings by Klopff (1984), which found that Chinese students' reported levels of communication apprehension did not differ significantly from those of mainstream students in the United States. As an East Asian country, China would be expected to be higher on the communication scale because of its orientation toward collectivism and high power distance, i.e. acceptance of status differences as a social given (Hofstede, 1980). In addition to that, Klopff (1984) did not translate the scale used to measure communication apprehension, whereas, Zhang, Butler and Pryor (1996) translated the PRCA scale developed by McCroskey (1982).

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) found that communicative language situation can be influenced by evaluation that leads to uncertainty and anxiety. In the context of oral communication skills, which are essential in all study areas, CA has negative effects on classroom participation and academic success since teachers reward students who take part in classroom participation and demonstrate academic success with good marks (Thaher, 2005). Liu and Littlewood's (1997) two large scale surveys at the University of Hong Kong indicate liking for communicative work at school and a preference for university classes in which students do most of the talking.

Izzo (1981) indicated that learners are influenced by the setting in which they learn a language and by the teacher who teaches them. These situational variables influence their feelings and attitudes toward the foreign language and the extent to which they become proficient in it. She also indicated that time is an important factor in determining foreign language proficiency and achievement.

Aspects of individual's culture will drastically influence overall communicative English proficiency of many English learners. If they do not have freedom in the classroom because of the effect of their culture, they will be shy, quiet and reluctant to react positively in the class. As argued by Littlewood (1984) when we try to adopt new speech patterns, we are to some extent giving up markers of our identity in order to adopt those

of another cultural group and accepting another culture's ways of perceiving the world. If the students are in acceptance of this process, it can enrich the learning experience; if not, it can be a source of resentment and insecurity.

6. Methodology

This quantitative study attempts to describe communication apprehension among international undergraduates enrolled in an English language course at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia. For the purpose of this study, an adapted version of McCroskey's (1970) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) was utilized to measure communication apprehension among the respondents.

6.1 Instrument

McCroskey's version of the PRCA-24 consists of a questionnaire which encompasses twenty-four statements regarding the respondents' feelings about communicating with their peers in the following four communicative tasks: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. The questionnaire is used to gauge the respondents' communication apprehension in the above stated areas. The instrument was adapted for the purpose of this study and only a total of 18 statements pertaining to the three communicative areas (group discussion, interpersonal communication and public speaking) are included in the questionnaire. The instrument was administered at the tenth week of the course.

There are two parts to the questionnaire. The first part comprises demographic details. The respondents are required to provide personal background information such as gender, age, country of origin, nationality, highest English language qualification and so on. The second section comprises 18 statements from the PRCA-24 and based on the Likert scale from "Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; to Strongly Disagree = 1". The respondents are required to respond to the statements by writing down the corresponding number of the option that they felt the most suitable to express their opinions with regards to the communication tasks. In the original version of the PRCA, the overall scores vary from 24 to 120. On the other hand, in this study, the overall scores range from 18-90, with a low of 6 and a high of 30 for each communicative area. Any score above 18 in each sub-area shows some degree of apprehension. So a CA score of 54 indicates that a student has recorded CA in two or all three sub-areas.

6.2 Respondents

32 international undergraduates from various disciplines of study in Universiti Sains Malaysia were involved in this study. These respondents were randomly selected and are

between 19-24 years of age. Their country of origin is as follows: China (26), Thailand (2), Indonesia (1) and Saudi Arabia (3). From the overall total of 32 respondents, 22 of them are in their second year, and the remaining 10 are in their first year of studies.

Table 1. Number of Male and Female Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	18	56.25%
Female	14	43.75%
Total	32	100.00%

All the respondents in this study have had some prior experience with English either in their native country or after coming to Malaysia. 17 of these international undergraduates have completed the in-house Intensive English Programme, which is a non-graduating intensive English course offered by the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia. 10 of them have IELTS qualification with scores ranging from 5.0 to 5.5.

7. Findings and Discussion

Table 2 illustrates the overall communication apprehension scores of the 32 respondents who completed the questionnaire. Analysis of the data shows that 12 (37.5%) of the total respondents in this study displayed CA scores of 54 and above in two or all three communicative areas. The highest score attained was 70 and the lowest was 18.

It is found that a total of 7 (50%) of the female respondents recorded an overall score of 54 and above, thus indicating CA in two or all three communicative areas. Conversely, only 5 (27.8%) of the male respondents achieved an overall score of 54 and above in those same areas. Hence, the frequency of female respondents who achieved high overall CA scores is more than their male counterparts. The findings of this study match other similar research by Frantz, Marlow & Wathen (2005). In their study, it was discovered that both male and female respondents experienced considerably different levels of communication apprehension. It is also established by Johnson and Faunce, (1973) that females expressed higher levels of apprehension when speaking in front of an audience.

The data indicates that respondent number 7 (refer to Table 2), a female student from Indonesia, recorded the highest overall communication apprehension score, which is 70. It is evident that she has high communication apprehension level and this is further strengthened by the high scores she achieved in all three areas of communication: group discussion, interpersonal conversation and public speaking. This is attributed by the fact that this respondent did not receive any prior instruction in English in her native country. The respondent's only exposure to English in Malaysia is through the six months of language classes under the Intensive English Programme before registering for the degree

programme. Poor command of the English language and a basic level of vocabulary may have contributed to her anxiety and meagre communication skills. Izzo (1981) emphasized that foreign language proficiency and communication achievement are greatly influenced by the time factor or length of exposure in the target language. The anxiety of speaking in a foreign language may also contribute towards making mistakes during oral communication as stressed in Price (1991) and Tunaboylu (1993). In contrast, the person with the lowest CA score is respondent number 32 (refer to Table 2). This male respondent from China obtained an overall CA score of 18 and does not display CA in any of the three communicative areas. Prior to coming to study in Malaysia, he studied English in his country for 5 years and he has an IELTS score of 5.5.

Table 2 Analysis of respondents' Communication Apprehension

No. of Respondents	Gender	GD	IC	PS	PRCA
1	F	17	15	21	53
2	F	16	14	21	51
3	F	16	14	17	47
4	F	20	20	19	59
5	F	16	19	23	58
6	F	17	21	28	66
7	F	22	27	21	70
8	F	14	18	17	49
9	F	19	19	19	57
10	F	16	17	19	52
11	F	17	14	13	44
12	F	14	17	21	52
13	F	18	18	18	54
14	F	17	17	23	57
15	M	14	14	12	40
16	M	12	17	16	45
17	M	12	8	16	36
18	M	12	15	13	40
19	M	12	18	15	45
20	M	19	17	23	59
21	M	15	19	18	59
22	M	15	19	18	52
23	M	12	12	12	36
24	M	18	19	14	51
25	M	15	20	21	56
26	M	21	18	21	60
27	M	19	16	18	53
28	M	8	13	14	35

29	M	19	19	23	61
30	M	15	17	19	51
31	M	12	9	22	43
32	M	6	6	6	18

Legend: GD - Group Discussion, IC - Interpersonal Conversation, PS - Public Speaking

The analysis of the respondents' Communication Apprehension based on the three main communicative areas is shown in Table 3. CA was recorded high in public speaking. Almost 62.5% respondents experienced CA in this area with 28 being the highest score out of the total 30. From this number, 11 were female respondents. Therefore, 11 (78.6%) out of 14 female respondents or displayed high CA for public speaking. This phenomenon is clearly stated by Aly and Islam (2005), who found that women experienced higher levels of CA than their male counterparts. McCroskey et al. (1999) pointed out that the above occurrence is further aggravated because most students are afraid to speak in public especially in front of the class. They become very nervous and anxious, thus affecting their oral presentation. On the other hand, the CA score for the section on interpersonal conversation was 46.9% or 15 respondents who achieved high CA. The rate of CA in conversations is smaller because of its informal, casual and stress-free nature as compared to the demanding skills of public speaking. The lowest percentage of CA was documented in the area of Group Discussions with only 9 (28.1%) respondents who experienced high CA when involved in group discussions. This may be attributed by the larger number of participants engaged in group discussions. Moreover, students with higher CA are usually overwhelmed by those who exhibit lower CA in the group from the perspective of frequency of talk time. This indirectly discourages students with higher CA from attempting to communicate in the group.

Table 3 The Analysis of respondents' CA in three main communicative areas.

Communicative areas	Percentage of Communication Apprehension (%)
Group Discussion	28.1%
Interpersonal Conversation	46.9%
<i>Public speaking</i>	62.5%

8. Recommendations

It is a challenge to totally eradicate the occurrence of CA in the language classroom. However, practical proactive activities can be implemented to reduce the detrimental effects of CA.

A less threatening language classroom environment should be formed for the students in order to ease their anxiety towards oral communication activities. A variety of classroom activities such as individual oral presentation, oral pair work, oral group discussion, should be adopted to inspire students to be more involved and active in class. This would indirectly make them less anxious in articulating their viewpoints. Delucchi (2006) mentions that irrespective of the students' differences in their language proficiencies and personalities, they are somehow able to function more effectively in groups because they can exchange more opinions and ideas. This is because they will feel less anxious than when they work alone. Krashen (1988) has suggested that learning English in a less apprehensive environment can produce effective learning.

In the milieu of similar research conducted, a study by N. Osman, S. Nayan & et al (2010) established that students' spoken skills developed because of collaborative learning activities. It was found that students were more excited, conversed more with each other and involved in group discussion effectively. This clearly shows that CA can be lowered via collaborative learning activities. These shared learning activities are able to motivate students to produce more ideas, and students are less anxious to express themselves in the class. Indirectly, it is able to increase their confidence level in oral communication.

P'Rayan & Shetty (2008) proposed a few learner centred activities whereby the students can be encouraged to conduct self-reflection, group sharing and one to one sessions with their language instructor. For the group sharing activity, students are allocated groups and they share their communication anxiety or other issues pertaining to presenting in front of an audience and how they tried to overcome these challenges. Guidelines on how to monitor the group discussion can be provided for the students, in order to facilitate and ensure a smooth flowing discussion takes place. The teacher who plays the role of facilitator and also counsellor can invite students to slot in one to one sessions with the teacher so that they can help evaluate the student's ability to communicate effectively in different situations. Alternatively, students could be placed into groups based on their high CA scores in group discussion, interpersonal and public speaking. This learner centred guidance as proposed by P'Rayan & Shetty (2008) enables students, who have achieved high scores in specific areas, have the opportunity to actively improve on their weaknesses.

Finally, as teaching international students in an intercultural setting is an arduous task, teachers should be equipped with multicultural awareness, and they should be more knowledgeable on the educational, cultural and social issues affecting the learning processes of students who come from various parts of the world. With this background knowledge, teachers should be prepared to play a more effective and resourceful role in handling the diverse of learning styles of the students.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to investigate CA of international undergraduates in English language classrooms. The results of the study highlight the presence of CA among international undergraduates. It is the hope of the researchers, that the findings will inspire language teachers to measure their students' CA and employ the students' personal report of CA to assist them to overcome CA. Language teachers should persist to create a favourable environment that can help lessen CA for the students to warrant positive learning experiences.

References

- Aly,I., & Islam, M. (1995). Factors affecting oral communication apprehension among business students: An empirical study. *The Journal of American Academy of Business*, 2, 98-103.
- Berger, McCroskey & Baldwin (1984). Reducing Communication Apprehension: Is there a Better Way? *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 48, Spring. Retrieved August 10, 2010 from www.jamesmccroskey.com/publications/117.pdf
- Borzi, M. G., & Mills, T.H. (2001). Communication apprehension in upper-level accounting students: An assessment of skill development. *Journal of Education for Business*, 76(4), pp. 193-199.
- Delucchi, M. (Spring 2006).The efficacy of collaborative learning in an undergraduate statistics Course. *College Teaching*, Vol.54, No.2, pp.224-248.
- Everett, J.D. (1999). *The relationship between communication apprehension and community college student success*. Dissertation. University of Missouri-Columbia.
- Frantz, J., Marlow, A., & Wathen, J. (2005).Communication Apprehension and its Relationship to Gender and College Year. *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, MSU-Mankato, Vol. 5.

Hofstede, G. 1980. *Culture's Consequences*. CA: Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Holbrook, H.T. (1987). *Communication Apprehension: The Quiet Student in Your Classroom*. Eric Digest. Retrieved August 10, 2010, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-926/quiet.htm>.

Izzo, S. (1981). Second Language Learning: A Review of Related Studies. In Muna Thaher.(2005). *Communication Apprehension among An-Najah National University Students*. An-Najah Univ.J.Res. (H.Sc.), Vol. 19(2). Palestine.

Johnson, L., & Faunce, R.W. (1973). *Minneapolis Secondary School Students' Attitudes toward School by Achievement, Race, and Sex*. ERIC. Abs., (ED) 113391, 71-78.

Klopf, D. 1984. Cross-cultural communication apprehension research. In J. Daly & J. McCroskey (Eds), *Avoiding communication: shyness, reticence and communication apprehension*. pp. 157-169. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Krashen, S.(1988). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. UK: Prentice Hall International (UK) Ltd

Larsen-Freeman, D. & Long, M. (1991). *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*. Longman, Inc. New York.

Littlewood, W. (1984). *Foreign and Second Language Acquisition Research and Its Implications for the Classroom*. Cambridge University Press. U.K.

Liu, Ngar-Fun & Littlewood.W. (1997). Why Do Many Students Appear Reluctant to Participate in Classroom Learning Discourse? *System*, 25(3).

Lucas, J. (1984). Communication Apprehension in the ESL Classroom: Getting our students to talk. *Foreign Language Annals*. 17(1), 593-598.

McCroskey, J. (1970). Measures of Communication-bound Anxiety. *Speech Monographs*, (Vol. 37, pp. 269-277).

McCroskey, J. (1982). Oral communication apprehension: A reconceptualization. In M.Burgoon (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 6*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. Pp. 136-170.

McCroskey, J.C., Gudykunst, W.B., & Nishida, T. (1999). *Communication Apprehension among Japanese Students in Native and Second Language*. Department of Communication Studies, West Virginia University, U.S.

Mukattash, L. (1996). English Language Proficiency in Jordan. In R.M. Shakshir. *The Relationship between Students' Attitudes toward English and their Achievement Scores at the Secondary Stage in Nablus Schools*, M.A. Thesis, Nablus: An-Najah University.

N. Osman, S. Nayan & et al. (2010). Spoken Skills, Communication Apprehension and Collaborative Learning. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2010, pp.117-124. www.cscanada.net

P"Rayan & R.Shetty. (2008). Developing Engineering Students' Communication Skills by Reducing their Communication Apprehension. *English for Specific Purposes World*, Vol. 7, No 4 (20). Retrieved August 10, 2010 from www.esp-world.info.

Price, M.L. (1991). The Subjective Experience of Foreign Language Anxiety: Interviews with Highly Anxious Students. In E.K. Horwitz and D.J. Young. *Language Anxiety*. New Jersey : Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

Scovel, T. (1991). The Effect of Affect on Foreign Language Learning: A Review of the Anxiety Research. In E.K. Horwitz and D.J. Young, *Language Anxiety*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

Thaher, M. (2005). *Communication Apprehension among An-Najah National University Students*. Palestine : An-Najah Univ.J.Res. (H.Sc.), Vol. 19(2).

Tunaboylu, O. (1993). Speaking Through Association. *FORUM*, 31(2), 47-48.

Watson, A.K., & Bossley, J.R. (1995). Taking the sweat out of communication anxiety. *Personnel Journal*, Vol. 74, (4) pp. 111-117).

Zhang, X., Butler, J., Pryor, B.(1996). Comparison of apprehension about common communication in China and the United States. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 82, 1168 - 1170.

IS RASCH MODEL WITHOUT DRAWBACK? A REANALYSIS OF RASCH MODEL LIMITATIONS

Hamed Ghaemi,
Islamic Azad University, Gonabad Branch,
English Department,
Gonabad,
Iran.
hamedghaemi@ymail.com

ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the main limitations of Rasch Model as mentioned by many researchers both in the educational and psychological fields. The most frequently cited drawback of Rasch Model is that it requires some knowledge of and acquaintance with mathematics. Second, the Rasch model requires a great number of observations or replications that are needed to estimate the parameters of the model. Third, the Rasch model holds strong assumptions which are not easy to meet by the observations. The next problem with Rasch Model is that it does not have a guessing parameter. In order for the Rasch model to produce true interval results, it appears that the data set must be infinite, and the underlying assumptions must be perfectly met. The last, but not the least, limiting assumption with the usual Rasch model is that there is only one latent dimension underlying the items. Overall, the author of the paper recommends the psychometricians to employ the techniques and strategies of Rasch Model with more caution. Also, various investigations into the new ways of solving the Rasch Model are highly required.

KEYWORDS

Rasch Model, Item Response Model, Psychometric Tests

1. Overview of the Models

Classical test theory provides a way to calculate approximately the average error in test scores for a test and population. As the conventional measurement methods hold, a typical analysis involves estimating item difficulty and discrimination, as well as the reliability of test scores based on a random sample of examinees from the population. Modern measurement methods, commonly referred to as "Item Response Theory" (IRT), also

provide a way to estimate the average error and reliability of test scores. One of these models, the Rasch measurement model (Rasch, 1960), estimates the 'goodness of fit' between item difficulty and person ability. Unlike other IRT models, the Rasch model is unique in its capability to condition, or remove, the effects of person ability from test scores, which results in *sample-free* estimates of examinee performance; this advantage has far-reaching implications.

2. Limitations of Classical Test Theory

Several limitations of CTT have been mentioned in the literature of measurement; its chief weakness is that it does not promote sample-free estimates of population values (Kundiger-Schildkmp, 1976; Hambleton & Swamiinathan, 1985; Wright, Mead, and Draba, 1976), which means that item difficulty and discrimination, as well as reliability estimates are dependent upon test scores from beta samples. This is a significant cause for concern, since beta samples typically fail to represent the population of interest. As a result, item difficulty values tend to be positively bias for high ability samples and negatively bias for low ability samples. Moreover, indices of item discrimination will tend to be higher when estimated from a more heterogeneous group, and reliability estimates will tend to over- or underestimate examinees' true ability depending upon the variance in test scores (Hambleton et al., 1985).

A second limitation of CTT rests in its lack of control for developing strictly parallel test forms. Since sources of variance like, practice effects, influence test scores over repeated trials, examinees never test exactly the same on the second administration of an exam. In light of this, researchers must be satisfied with accepting reliability estimates for parallel forms that either over- or underestimate true ability. The Rasch model solves this dilemma by removing person variance, regardless of their true ability. A third limitation of CTT, according to Tucker (1946), suggests that the rules for item selection fail to represent the optimal selection of items. If item variance is greatest at $p=.50$, then the optimal choice of item difficulties for any exam would harbor around this value. If this is the case, then a test of any number of items would be no better than a test of only one item at $p = .50$.

3. Overview of the Rasch Model

The Rasch model seeks to answer three questions: (1) which items are biased and for whom, (2) which items define the trait to be measured, and (3) which persons are properly measured by the items that define the trait (Wright et al., 1976). The model assumes that a more able person always has a better chance of success on an item than a less able one, and that any person has a better chance of success on an easy item compared to a difficult one. In other words, a person's measure on any trait is a simple function of their *ability* and the item's *difficulty*. All of the information needed about a person's ability is contained in their simple and unweighted response count of the number of items answered correctly on any measure.

The basic mathematical foundation of the Rasch model specifies how to convert observed counts into linear (ratio) measures. Ability (β) and difficulty (δ) are combined by forming their difference (i.e., $\beta_v - \delta_j$). The difference is applied to the exponent of a 'logit' (the basic

unit of measurement in the Rasch model), which is used to compute the probability of a correct answer. Ultimately, the fit of the data is evaluated by calculating the residual after the data have been used to estimate ability and difficulty. Wright (1977) describes it this way:

“When person v has more of the latent ability than item I requires, then β_v [ability] is more than δ_I [difficulty], their difference is positive and person v 's probability of success on the item is greater than 0.5. The more person v 's ability surpasses the item's difficulty, the greater this positive difference and the higher the probability of success” (p. 98).

Consequently, the Rasch model allows for observations that conform to a ratio scale. An examinee with twice the ability of another examinee has twice the odds of success on that item. And, when one item is twice as easy as another item, an examinee has twice the odds of successfully answering the easier one (Hambleton et al., 1985).

4. Limitations of the Rasch Model

Limitations of the Rasch model typically usually lie in two issues (Licarce, 1996), an attack on the mathematical foundation, and attacks on its use as a *general* and *viable* solution for measurement problems.

The main disadvantage of Rasch Model is the fact that applying the Rasch model requires some knowledge of and acquaintance with mathematics. Mostly in our field of study, i.e. TEFL, students and even the faculties have many problems with understanding the complicated concepts of mathematics and statistics. Also, Rasch Model requires a high level of software understanding. That's why; most researchers in the field of language testing put all the problems of sophisticated statistics on the shoulder of mathematicians or statisticians to analyze their data.

Second, a disadvantage of the Rasch model is the great number of observations or replications that are needed to estimate the parameters of the model. In fact, doing Rasch model without doing large number of observations is impossible.

Third, the Rasch model holds strong assumptions, which are not easy to meet by the observations. [In fact, Rasch specifications can never be met perfectly, but are nearly always met usefully by thoughtfully collected data].

Use of the Rasch item response model in test construction makes equating especially easy. The Rasch model, however, does not have a guessing parameter, whereas most tests that require equating contain multiple-choice items subject to guessing. This limitation of the Rasch model has led many test developers to use a three-parameter model that accounts for guessing, though at the expense of increased difficulty in equating. Despite the Rasch model's limitations with respect to guessing, some test developers still use it in multiple-choice testing.

In order for the Rasch model to produce true interval results, it appears that the data set must be infinite and the underlying assumptions must be perfectly met (fit to logistic item

characteristic curves with common slopes, unidimensionality, local independence, and no guessing).

The two-parameter logistic (2PL) model in item response theory (IRT) appears to produce more accurate item difficulty estimates when even minor variations in discrimination are present (variable uniqueness components) and guessing is limited. The three-parameter logistic (3PL) model exhibits an advantage on item difficulty estimates when the data contains substantial guessing (as modeled with the 3PL model).

The Rasch approach to building a measurement instrument is consistent with the careful development of a theory or construct-linked instrument (Bunderson, 2000; Linacre & Wright, 1999; Worthen, White, Fan, & Sudweeks, 1999; Wright & Stone, 1979). With thoughtful efforts to refine items by maximizing the consistency of the item set with a single construct factor while maintaining the integrity of the construct, a reasonably reliable and valid instrument can be created (Bond & Fox, 2001).

While the creation of a set of construct-linked items that effectively load onto a single dimension seems plausible, the concurrent Rasch requirement that these items should have equal uniqueness components yielding parallel ICCs seems unlikely. If a practitioner were to engage in an overenthusiastic selection and refinement of items with a goal to create an item set that shares a common ICC form the resulting instrument might become very reliable, and have minimal error estimates, but it would likely be also much less valid with respect to the originally intended construct. If this process were taken to the extreme, the elimination of all misfits would lead to the elimination of all items (Linacre, 1995). When a more moderate approach is taken, and some misfit is accepted, then the accuracy of the estimates is compromised to some degree and thus the interval nature of the scale is questionable.

In response to the empirical reality of non-parallel ICCs in most large-scale tests, the 2PL and 3PL IRT models were developed (Birnbaum, 1968; Lord, 1970, 1980). The 2PL and 3PL models incorporate discrimination parameters that determine the central slope of the ICCs for individual items and ultimately characterize the uniqueness components for each item (McDonald, 1981; Pelton & Bunderson, 2002). The 3PL model also includes a pseudo-guessing parameter that defines a lower asymptote for the ICCs. With these additional parameters, more accurate fit to empirical observation is obviously possible. However, these models cannot claim to produce a perfectly interval scale estimates, rather they are intended to produce pragmatic approximations to interval scale values when the data set fits the more flexible underlying 2PL or 3PL ICCs (Baker, 1992; Bock, Thissen, & Zimowski, 1997; Hambleton, Swaminathan, & Rogers, 1991; Lord, 1980).

The 2PL and 3PL IRT approaches have detractors too. As with the Rasch model, some deny the potential of all IRT methods because of their imperfection (Cliff, 1996; Michell, 1999).

Rasch proponents typically dismiss the other IRT models suggesting that additional parameters are “blandishments” (p. 91) that destroy additivity, and that the crossing ICCs model “...destroys the variable’s criterion definition” (Wright, 1999 p. 95).

The 2PL and 3PL models also have computational limitations, in that they require prior distributions of parameters and artificial constraints in order to ensure efficient convergence (Mislevy & Bock, 1990). This limitation is directly related to the fact that there are no sufficient statistics that allow for conjoint estimation of item difficulties and person abilities and thus no ACM (although Lord does describe a sufficient statistic for person ability (Lord, 1980)).

Prior to the introduction of the Rasch and IRT models, various approaches were proposed and used that attempted to produce approximately linear scales within classical test theory (CTT) (Burke, 1953; Gulliksen, 1950; Thurstone, 1917, 1928, 1931; Wright, 1988b). The simplest of these approaches assumes that the distribution in question is approximately Normal and by estimating normal deviates the results can be transformed to an interval scale (Gulliksen, 1950). This approach is similar to the PROX algorithm used in the first iterations of Rasch analysis (Wright & Stone, 1979), and is the fourth model examined in this research.

The Rasch model is the same as parameter logistic (1PL) latent trait model. Other IRT models include 2 and 3 parameter logistic models (2PL, 3PL) and 1, 2, and 3 parameter normal ogive (1PN, 2PN, and 3PN) models. The normal ogive models follow from a simple model that involves response thresholds and normally distributed measurement error.

The logistic models are generally justified as close and computationally convenient approximations to the normal ogive model. The Rasch or 1PL model, however, can be viewed as deriving directly from a different theoretical model.

4.1. When do you use the Rasch model?

The Rasch model is fairly simple IRT model. That is an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantage is that such a simple model may not fit the data. The advantage is that, if you only have a small number of subjects, it may be better to use a simpler model with fewer parameters.

4.2. Are there limiting assumptions?

Another limiting assumption with the usual Rasch model is that there is only one latent dimension underlying the items; that is not a severe limitation, since one can easily eliminate items that appear to violate the assumption. Second, because it is a “one parameter” model, the Rasch model makes an assumption analogous to equal measurement error for each item.

The Next criticism of the Rasch model is that it is overly restrictive or prescriptive because it does not permit each item to have a different discrimination. A criticism specific to the

use of multiple choice items in educational assessment is that there is no provision in the model for guessing because the left asymptote always approaches a zero probability in the Rasch model. These variations are available in models such as the two and three parameter logistic models (Birnbaum, 1968). However, the specification of uniform discrimination and zero left asymptote are necessary properties of the model in order to sustain sufficiency of the simple, un-weighted raw score.

In the two-parameter logistic model (2PL-IRT; Lord & Novick, 1968) the weighted raw score is theoretically sufficient for person parameters, where the weights are given by model parameters referred to as discrimination parameters. Lord & Novick's one-parameter logistic model, 1PL, appears similar to the Rasch model in that it does not have discrimination parameters, but 1PL has different motivation and subtly different parameterization. The 1PL is a descriptive model which summarizes the sample as a normal distribution. The dichotomous Rasch model is a measurement model, which parameterizes each member of the sample individually.

The Rasch model for dichotomous data inherently entails a single discrimination parameter which, as noted by Rasch (1960/1980, p. 121), constitutes an arbitrary choice of the unit in terms of which magnitudes of the latent trait are expressed or estimated. However, the Rasch model requires that the discrimination is uniform across interactions between persons and items within a specified frame of reference (i.e. the assessment context given conditions for assessment).

Concluding Remarks

Modern measurement methods, frequently referred to as "Item Response Theory" (IRT), provide a method to estimate the average error and reliability of test scores. One of these models, the Rasch measurement model (Rasch, 1960), estimates the 'goodness of fit' between item difficulty and person ability. Like every traditional and modern method of measurement, Rasch Model is not without any pitfalls and drawbacks. As mentioned earlier, the most commonly quoted shortcoming of Rasch Model is that it requires some knowledge of and acquaintance with mathematics. Rasch model also requires a great number of observations or replications that are required to estimate the parameters of the model. In addition, Rasch model holds strong assumptions which are not easy to meet by the observations. Moreover, Rasch Model does not have a guessing parameter. The last, but not the least limiting assumption with the usual Rasch model is that there is only one latent dimension underlying the items. To sum up, the author of the present paper highly urges the researchers working in the field of Language Testing to scrutinize the drawbacks of Rasch Model with more concern. Also, Psychometricians are invited to investigate the new ways of solving the Rasch Model problems.

References

Alagumalai, S., Curtis, D.D. & Hungi, N. (2005). *Applied Rasch Measurement: A book of exemplars*. Springer-Kluwer.

- Andersen, E.B. (1977). Sufficient statistics and latent trait models, *Psychometrika*, 42, 69-81.
- Andrich, D. (1978a). A rating formulation for ordered response categories. *Psychometrika*, 43, 357- 74.
- Andrich, D. (1978b). Relationships between the Thurstone and Rasch approaches to item scaling. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 2, 449-460.
- Andrich, D. (1988). *Rasch models for measurement*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Andrich, D. (2004). Controversy and the Rasch model: a characteristic of incompatible paradigms? *Medical Care*, 42, 1-16.
- Baker, F. (2001). The Basics of Item Response Theory. ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. Available free with software included from IRT at Edres.org
- Birnbaum, A. (1968). Some latent trait models and their use in inferring an examinee's ability. In Lord, F.M. & Novick, M.R. (Eds.), *Statistical theories of mental test scores*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Bond, T.G. & Fox, C.M. (2007). *Applying the Rasch Model: Fundamental measurement in the human sciences*. 2nd Edn (includes Rasch software on CD-ROM). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fischer, G.H. & Molenaar, I.W. (1995). *Rasch models: foundations, recent developments and applications*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Goldstein H & [Blinkhorn.S](#) (1977). *Monitoring Educational Standards: an inappropriate model*. . Bull.Br.Psychol.Soc. 30 309-311
- Goldstein H & [Blinkhorn.S](#) (1982). *The Rasch Model Still Does Not Fit*. . BERJ 82 167-170.
- Hambleton RK, Jones RW. Comparison of classical test theory and item response Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice. 1993; 12(3):38-47. available in the ITEMS Series from the [National Council on Measurement in Education](#)
- Harris D. Comparison of 1-, 2-, and 3-parameter IRT models. Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice; 1989; 8: 35-41 available in the ITEMS Series from the [National Council on Measurement in Education](#).
- Kuhn, T.S. (1961). The function of measurement in modern physical science. *ISIS*, 52, 161-193. [JSTOR](#)
- Rasch, G. (1960/1980). *Probabilistic models for some intelligence and attainment tests*. (Copenhagen, Danish Institute for Educational Research), expanded edition (1980) with foreword and afterword by B.D. Wright. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Rasch, G. (1961). On general laws and the meaning of measurement in psychology, pp. 321-334 in *Proceedings of the Fourth Berkeley Symposium on Mathematical Statistics and Probability*, IV. Berkeley, California: University of California Press. Available free from [Project Euclid](#)

Verhelst, N.D. and Glas, C.A.W. (1995). *The one parameter logistic model*. In G.H. Fischer and I.W. Molenaar (Eds.), *Rasch Models: Foundations, recent developments, and applications* (pp. 215-238). New York: Springer Verlag.

Verhelst, N.D., Glas, C.A.W. and Verstralen, H.H.F.M. (1995). *One parameter logistic model (OPLM)*. Arnhem: CITO.

Von Davier, M., & Carstensen, C. H. (2007). *Multivariate and Mixture Distribution Rasch Models: Extensions and Applications*. New York: Springer.

Wright, B.D., & Stone, M.H. (1979). *Best Test Design*. Chicago, IL: MESA Press.

Wu, M. & Adams, R. (2007). *Applying the Rasch model to psycho-social measurement: A practical approach*. Melbourne, Australia: Educational Measurement Solutions. Available free from [Educational Measurement Solutions](#).

ON THE EFFECTS OF TWO MODELS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON EFL READING COMPREHENSION AND VOCABULARY LEARNING

Abbas Ali Zarei, (corresponding Author)

Assistant professor, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin
aazarei@ikiu.ac.ir

Jaafar Keshavarz, M.A., Islamic Azad University, Takestan
aazarei@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of the 'Student Teams-Achievement Divisions' (STAD) and 'Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition' (CIRC) cooperative learning models on reading achievement and vocabulary learning of Iranian learners of English. 132 female Language learners of EFL participated in the study at National Iran English Language (NIEL) institute in Takestan. The four experimental groups were taught in cooperative learning for one semester with methods of the 'Student Teams-Achievement Divisions' (STAD) and 'Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition' (CIRC), the control groups were taught in a non-cooperative method. Data collected through reading comprehension and vocabulary post-tests were analyzed using four one-way ANOVA procedures. The results indicated that the cooperative learning model CIRC had statistically significant effects on reading comprehension and vocabulary learning, particularly for elementary EFL learners.

KEY WORDS

Cooperative learning, reading comprehension, vocabulary learning, Student Teams-Achievement-Divisions (STAD), Cooperative Integrated-Reading-and-Composition (CIRC)

1. Introduction

It was not until the mid-1960s that modern cooperative learning methods were introduced. The application of cooperative learning to classroom teaching finds its root in the 1970s when the United States began to design and study cooperative learning models for

classroom context (Kessler, 1992 cited in Liang, 2002). Today, due to its rich history of theory, research and actual use in the classroom, cooperative learning is applied in almost all school content areas and, increasingly, in college and university contexts all over the world, and is claimed to be an effective teaching method in foreign/ second language education by scholars.

Cooperative learning group is totally different from group learning. It is commonly believed that when students are working in small groups, the teacher is using cooperative learning group. In this study, it is argued that merely putting students in a small group is not cooperative learning group. Cooperative learning refers to a set of highly structured, psychologically and sociologically based techniques that lead to learning and obtaining a learning goal (Oxford, 1997).

The application of cooperative learning to reading comprehension skill is not new. In fact, a review of literature in the area of cooperative learning supports its effectiveness in enhancing reading comprehension of learners. Yet, it seems that the application of cooperative learning to a particular component has not a long history.

Vocabulary as a component of the reading skill plays an important role in expanding the size and depth of comprehension. Lee (2003) investigated vocabulary learning in group work at a university in Vietnam and found that students learned new words in cooperative groups better than in traditional methods and that the group discussion helped them recall and remember English words better than control groups. In addition, Heydari and Gorjian (2009) investigated the effects of learners' awareness of vocabulary learning strategies on the reading comprehension of 120 intermediate EFL students and found that raising learners' awareness of vocabulary strategies has positive impact on reading comprehension. However, research on the prevalence of cooperative learning in EFL classrooms shows that this strategy is underused. In other words, cooperative learning does not have the place it deserves in EFL education. Perhaps, it is time to reduce the discrepancy between what research shows to be effective and what is practiced in our classrooms. In an attempt to do so, this study investigates the effects of two models of cooperative learning on the reading comprehension and vocabulary learning of Iranian elementary and advanced level EFL learners. It aims at finding answers to the following research questions:

1. Are there any significant differences among the effects of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD), and non-cooperative learning methods on the reading comprehension of elementary level EFL learners?
2. Are there any significant differences among the effects of CIRC, STAD, and non-cooperative learning methods on the reading comprehension of advanced level EFL learners?

3. Are there any significant differences among the effects of CIRC, STAD, and non-cooperative learning methods on the vocabulary learning of elementary level EFL learners?
4. Are there any significant differences among the effects of CIRC, STAD, and non-cooperative learning methods on the vocabulary learning of advanced level EFL learners?

2. Review of the related literature

2.1. A brief history of cooperative learning

According to Johnson and Johnson (2002), in the late 1700s, Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell used cooperative learning groups extensively in England, and then in New York City in 1806. Within the Common School Movement in the United States in the early 1800s, there was a strong emphasis on cooperative learning. In the last three decades of the 19th century, Colonel Francis Parker made it applicable. Following Parker, John Dewey used cooperative learning groups as part of his famous 'project method' in instruction. In the late 1930s, however, competitive learning methods began to be emphasized in schools and in the late 1960s, individualistic learning began to be used extensively. In the 1980s, schools once again began to use cooperative learning.

2.2. Elements and methods of cooperative Learning

An effective cooperative learning must meet a number of essential elements. For Sachs, Candlin, and Rose (2003), there are four elements including positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction. Johnson and Johnson (1994) posit five elements including positive interdependence, face to face promotive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing.

Based on the studies of Maddinabeita (2006), ten cooperative learning methods can be summarized as follows: 1) TGT: Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), 2) Group Investigation, 3) Jigsaw, 4) Team-Assisted individualization, 5) Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, 6) Cooperative Learning and Teaching Scripts, 7) Cooperative Learning Structures, 8) Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, 9) Learning Together, and 10) Complex Instruction. Of these, Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) and Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) are of particular concern here. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition was developed by Stevens, Madden, Slavin and Farnish in 1987. In this method, heterogeneous groups work with different reading levels, reading to each other, predicting, practicing spelling and vocabulary. CIRC is a school-based program that targets reading, writing, and language arts. The three principle program elements are direct instruction in reading comprehension, story-related activities, and integrated language arts/writing instruction. Each student works with another student. These learning teams work cooperatively on program-related activities (Madden, 2004). STAD was developed by researchers at Johns Hopkins University in 1994. In this method, students learn new materials in teams but take individual tests weekly to ensure individual accountability. After the teacher teaches a lesson, students work in

teams to make sure that everyone has mastered the new material. All students take quizzes, and the scores are compared to their previous test scores.

2.3. Benefits and Pitfalls

In Cooperative learning, students who are divided into small groups experience working together, and learn to cooperate rather than compete with each other. In classes conducted through cooperative learning, the teacher can find time to walk around and check the students' work. In this way, it is much easier for the teacher to work with one group while others are getting on with their own work. Cooperative learning can also establish positive interdependence among students in such a way that through structuring the goals, materials, and rules, gains for one person are associated with gains for others (Oxford, 1997). In a cooperative learning class, students with different strengths and weaknesses can work with each other. This can help teachers to solve the problem of heterogeneity in EFL classes.

Yet, cooperative learning has also attracted some criticism. Keyser (2000) asserts that cooperative learning strategies take much of the class time and need more advance planning. In cooperative learning classes, teachers may only do one or two exercises in a class period, and they do not find it easy to start with cooperative learning strategies. In addition, the noise level may be high and teachers may lose their power in the classroom. So, implementing cooperative learning needs to be started step by step and it is strongly recommended to use cooperative learning strategies with more flexible activities and exercises.

2.4. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Learning

2.4.1. Reading

Reading can be defined as the ability to get understanding from written text. L2 reading can best be understood as a combination of skills and abilities that individuals bring to bear as they begin to read (Grabe, 1991). According to Chang (2002), the 1980s was the shining decade in research on reading in a second language and efforts to improve SL reading instruction. In the mid to late 1960s, reading was considered as little more than reinforcement for oral language instruction. Reading was considered as a means to an end. The end was oral language instruction. In the late 1960s, reading and writing instruction got more emphasis. Through the early to mid-1970s, importance of reading was felt by a number of researchers and teacher trainers. An important development in theories about reading comprehension occurred in the 1970s. Reading comprehension was seen as an active process that engaged the reader. Reading comprehension was also seen as the construction of the meaning of a written text through an interaction between the reader and the text.

Just like teaching methodology, reading theories have had their twists and turns. Starting from the traditional view, which focused on the printed form of a text, and moving to the cognitive view that enhanced the role of background knowledge and ending in the meta-cognitive view, which is now in vogue.

Harmer (2007) states that effective reading comprehension needs six types of knowledge including semantic knowledge, morphological knowledge, general world knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge, topic knowledge, and genre knowledge.

Cooperative learning strategy is one of the useful strategies that learners can implement to increase their reading comprehension gain. There are seven instructional strategies that affect students' achievements. They are identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, questions, cues, and advance organizers. In this study, Cooperative Strategic Reading (CSR) was used as a cooperative learning strategy that is in line with Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC).

In a review of 203 studies dealing with text comprehension, the National Reading Panel (2000) identified six strategies that were more effective in improving the comprehension of readers: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic organizer, question-answer, story structure, and summarization. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) uses most of these strategies to improve the reading comprehension skill.

2.5. Vocabulary Learning

How vocabulary is acquired and what the most efficient means are to promote effective acquisition have been worthwhile lines of investigation in the field of second language acquisition (SLA).

There are mainly two approaches in vocabulary learning: implicit and explicit. A common view in vocabulary studies is that the majority of words that we know are more likely to be implicit (incidental). Incidental vocabulary is the by-product of implicit activity geared to vocabulary learning. Intentional learning needs focal attention to linguistic form, whereas incidental learning requires focal attention to meaning and peripheral attention to form. In explicit vocabulary learning, students engage in activities that focus attention on vocabulary. As Allen (1983) states, in the explicit approach, vocabulary and vocabulary learning strategies should be taught.

Research in learning vocabulary in a second/foreign language is well documented. However, only a few studies have investigated learning vocabulary in group work. Group work seems to encourage learners to negotiate the meanings of new words among themselves. It is the process by which students share their knowledge of word meanings and forms by helping to explain new words to each other. In the process of clarifying, elaboration, and explaining words, the students enrich their understanding of concepts.

2.6. Empirical Studies

Several studies have investigated the effects of cooperative learning on EFL learning. In a comprehensive study conducted by the National Institute of Education in Washington DC (1985), researchers found that cooperative learning improves the relationship between academically handicapped students and other students. They compared the effects of cooperative learning models (Jigsaw, STAD, and Group Investigation Model) on

multicultural awareness, cross-ethnic friendships, interpersonal relationships and pro-social behavior, and concluded that cooperative learning models produce greater interpersonal relationship and enhance self-esteem.

A synthesis of research on cooperative learning indicates that cooperative learning strategies improve the achievement of students and their interpersonal relationships. In 67 studies of the achievement effects of cooperative learning, 61% found significantly greater achievement in cooperative than in traditionally taught groups. Positive effects were found in all major subjects and all grade levels (Dutson, 2001). George (1994) compared the selected cooperative learning methods with traditional learning methods for 18 weeks with 61 students in undergraduate educational psychology classes and found that cooperative learning groups show significantly stronger performance than non-cooperative learning method groups. He also reported that cooperative learning creates more favorable attitudes toward classroom instruction. In a similar study, Ghokhale (1995) found that cooperative learning can be a best choice for teachers to increase the critical thinking skills in learners, help them to understand better and easily solve problems.

Chen (1998) examined and compared English achievement of junior college students through cooperative learning techniques and the traditional whole class method. The results showed that students in small cooperative groups achieved significantly better results on the overall test. Chen states that the achievement gains under cooperative learning are attributed to the methods' reward structures and carefully structured interaction.

Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) point out that cooperative learning strategies are widely used because they are based on theory, validated by research, and consistent with personal philosophies. In a meta-analysis of 158 studies, Johnson, Johnson and Stanne report that current research findings present evidence that cooperative learning methods are likely to produce positive achievement results.

In a comprehensive study by Dutson (2001) on the effect of the Kagan's method on learner's achievement, the results were found to be consistent with those of earlier studies comparing other cooperative learning methods against lecture/independent styles of instruction. He concludes that Kagan's cooperative learning model has significant impact on overall achievement.

In a wide variety of studies the potential of cooperative learning to increase student achievement has been consistently shown (Ghaith, 2003). Liang (2002) conducted a study on the effect of cooperative learning on EFL junior high school learners' language learning, motivation toward learning English and high and low achievers' academic achievements with five structures and models of cooperative learning. Liang found that the experimental group outperformed control groups who were taught in Grammar Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method.

Ghaith (2003) investigated the effects of cooperative learning on reading achievement, academic self-esteem, and feelings of school alienation. The participants were 56 high

school Lebanese EFL learners studying at a private school in Beirut. The result revealed that there were no significant differences between control and experimental groups regarding the dependent variables of academic self-esteem and feelings of school alienation. However, the results revealed that the reading achievement of EFL learners improved significantly as a result of implementing cooperative learning. Similarly, Jacobs and Hannah (2004), in integrating cooperative learning techniques with reading aloud, found that not only can they promote language learning, but they also promote active citizenship.

Almaguer (2005) studied the effects of cooperative learning on reading fluency and comprehension of 80 third grade English language learners in south Texas. Analysis of data through covariance revealed that peer assisted reading strategy improves reading achievement.

Apple (2006) holds that cooperative techniques make EFL learners to be more active in the language classroom. Cooperative learning allows them to use language in different ways. Cooperative learning creates more effective classroom climate in which collaboration towards a common goal plays an important role in emotional and linguistic development. In much the same vein, Faryadi (2007) compared the effect of cooperative learning with individual learning and concluded that cooperative learning enhances learners' emotional and social performance and improves their academic accomplishment dramatically. In addition, Adeyemi (2008) found that students exposed to cooperative learning strategies performed better than their counterparts in the other groups.

Mohammadi and Salimzadeh (2009) investigated the effects of cooperative learning strategy training on reading comprehension and motivation of 72 Iranian intermediate EFL learners and found statistically significant differences between control and experimental groups.

However, Abu and Flower (1997) found no significant difference between cooperative learning and competitive learning in home economic subject. In a similar study, Sachs et al, (1997) compared the cooperative learning method (STAD) with competitive learning to determine the effect of cooperative learning on academic achievement of content knowledge, retention and attitudes toward the teaching method and found no significant difference in students' attitude towards the teaching methods.

These studies have focused on a wide range of dependent variables, including achievement and productivity, motivation to achieve, intellectual conflict, social support, self-esteem, and psychological health. According to these studies, cooperative learning is a cost-effective instructional method and consistently contributes to higher achievement and retention, deeper-level understanding, higher-level reasoning, greater motivation to learn, and positive interpersonal relationships among students. From these studies, it is clearly understood that the more students work in cooperative learning groups, the better they will learn, the easier the retention of the material will be, and the better they will feel about themselves, the class, and their classmates. The aim of the present study is to see which of the two cooperative learning models identified in the above-mentioned studies is more

effective for elementary and advanced level Iranian learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary learning.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the present study were 132 female English language learners at the National Institute of English Language (NIEL) in Takestan, Iran. The sample included 72 participants at elementary level and 60 participants at advanced level. The age of the participants ranged from 15-25.

3.2. Instruments

In order to investigate the effects of two models of cooperative learning, namely STAD and CIRC, on reading comprehension and vocabulary learning at elementary and advanced levels, several instruments were used, including: (a) a Michigan English proficiency test, (b) instructional materials used during treatment, and (c) a post-test.

The first testing instrument was Examination for the Certificate of Competency in English (ECCE), 2009 Sample Test, University of Michigan. It contained 34 items of vocabulary and 3 reading comprehension passages containing a total of 30 items, all in a multiple-choice format. This test aimed at controlling the proficiency level of the participants.

The course book taught in the institute was the fifth edition of NIEL series by Horri (2000). For elementary level 'Book Four' and for advanced level 'Book Ten' were used.

The post-test was made up of a 34-item vocabulary section and three reading comprehension passages containing a total of 30 items, all in a multiple-choice format.

3.3. Procedures

A week prior to the treatment, the ECCE test was administered as a measure of homogeneity. After scoring the pre-test, students were ranked based on their performance and then cooperative groups were formed. In each class at advanced level, the five students who scored highest on the pre-test were identified as high achievers and the five students who scored lowest were considered as low-achievers; at the elementary level, six students were identified as high-achievers and six as low-achievers. The remaining students were identified as average-achievers. The students were assigned to groups using the following formula: one high-achiever was grouped with one low-achiever and two average-achievers. The rationale for this type of grouping was that it would provide opportunities for learners to peer-tutor and help each other to accomplish the learning goals. After grouping the students, in STAD and CIRC groups, the procedure was explained and three passages were read and modeled.

In STAD, students were assigned to four-member learning teams. The teacher presented a lesson, and then students worked within their teams to make sure that all team members had mastered the lesson. Finally, students took individual quizzes on the material in which they could not help one another. Students' quiz scores were compared to their own past averages, and points based on the degree to which students met or exceeded their

own earlier performance were awarded. These points were then summed to form team scores, and teams that met the assigned criteria were rewarded. Then, they sat for weekly quizzes, and their quiz performance was added to their final performance.

In the CIRC group, the participants were asked to follow the four phases of Cooperative Strategic Reading (CSR). And they were asked to write a summary for each passage and fill in the pre-reading and post-reading sheets. Each session included five steps for any strategy as Duffy (2009) used. They were (1) lesson introduction (2) modeling the thinking (3) scaffolded assistance, extensive teacher help, less teacher help, no teacher help (4) application in reading (5) application in writing.

Every session, learners were supposed to read and discuss a reading assignment. In the CIRC class, they were supposed to make sentences with new words and write a summary for each text. In both STAD and CIRC groups, the participants were supposed to interact with groupmates, share ideas with each other, and help each other to accomplish the common goal. They read each paragraph and did the four phases of Cooperative Strategic Reading (CSR). For new words in each text, they were asked to scan the paragraph for the new words, and to detect or guess the meaning from context. If students needed help, they were asked to look up the words in their monolingual dictionaries at advanced levels and bilingualized dictionaries at the elementary levels.

During the treatment sessions, while students worked in their groups, the teacher walked around to ensure that everyone did well. He provided assistance when it was needed while they were working together. At the end of the experimental period, the post-test was administered to all groups. To answer each of the research questions, a one-way ANOVA procedure was used.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Investigation of the First Question

The first research question sought to investigate the effects of 'CIRC', STAD and non-cooperative learning methods on the reading comprehension of elementary level Iranian learners. To do so, a one-way ANOVA procedure was used. Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for ANOVA on elementary learners' reading comprehension

Models	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Min	Max
CIRC	24	21.50	2.87	.58	16	27
STAD	24	20.91	3.34	.68	16	28
NON.CL	24	18.79	3.05	.62	14	25
Total	72	20.40	3.27	.38	14	28

A glance at Table 1 shows that the CIRC group has the highest mean, followed closely by STAD. The mean score of the non-cooperative learning method is noticeably lower than the other groups. To see whether or not the differences are statistically significant, the one-way ANOVA procedure was utilized, yielding the following results:

Table 2. ANOVA on elementary learners' reading comprehension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	97.52	2	48.76	5.08	.009
Within Groups	661.79	69	9.59		
Total	759.31	71			

Table 2 clearly indicates that the differences among the three groups are statistically significant. In order to locate the statistically significant differences between the means, a post-hoc comparisons of pairs of means (the scheffe test) was used. Results of the post hoc comparisons are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3. Multiple comparisons of means for elementary learners' reading comprehension

(I) model	(J) model	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
CIRC	STAD	.58	.89	.80
STAD	NON.CL	2.12	.89	.06
NON.CL	CIRC	-2.70*	.89	.01

***. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.**

As it can be seen from Table 3, there is only a significant difference between the CIRC and the non-cooperative groups, with the CIRC group being significantly better than the non-cooperative group.

4.2. Investigation of the Second Question

The aim of the second question was to investigate the effects of CIRC, STAD, and the non-cooperative methods on the reading comprehension of advanced level Iranian learners. To this end, another one-way ANOVA was used. Table 4 contains the descriptive statistics:

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA on the advanced Learners' reading comprehension

Model	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Min	Max

CIRC	20	20.65	1.98	.44	17	24
STAD	20	20.45	2.76	.61	16	26
NON.CL	20	19.80	2.39	.53	16	25
Total	60	20.30	2.38	.30	16	26

It can be seen from Table 4 that there are no substantial differences among the means of the three methods. Still, the ANOVA was utilized to see the extent to which the observed differences among the groups are statistically significant. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. ANOVA Results on the advanced Learners' reading comprehension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.90	2	3.95	.685	.50
Within Groups	328.70	57	5.76		
Total	336.60	59			

As it can be seen Table 5, the observed F value and the significance level are indicative of no significant differences among the groups.

4.3. Investigation of the Third Question

The third research question investigated the effects of the afore-mentioned three methods on the vocabulary learning of elementary level Iranian learners. To find the answer, another one-way ANOVA was used. Table 6 contains the descriptive statistics:

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for ANOVA on elementary learners' vocabulary learning

Model	N	Mean	Sd	Std. Error	Min	Max
CIRC	4	21.04	2.59	.52	17	27
STAD	4	20.79	3.17	.64	15	20
NON.CL	4	18.79	2.78	.56	15	24
Total	2	20.20	2.99	.35	15	27

A glance at Table 6 shows that the CIRC group has the highest mean, followed closely by the STAD group. The mean score of the non-cooperative learning method is noticeably lower than the other groups. To see whether or not the observed differences are statistically significant, the one-way ANOVA procedure was utilized, yielding the following results:

Table 7. Results of ANOVA on elementary Learners' vocabulary learning

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	73	2	36	4.5	.015
Within Groups	564	69	8		
Total	637	71			

Table 7 is indicative of significant differences among the means. The post-hoc comparisons of means helped locate the differences as shown in the following table:

Table 8. Multiple Comparisons of Means for the elementary Learners' vocabulary learning

(I) model	(J) model	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
CIRC	STAD	.25	.82	.955
STAD	NON-CL	2.00	.82	.060
NON-CL	CIRC	-2.25*	.82	.029

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As it can be seen from Table 8, the only significant difference is between the CIRC and the non-cooperative groups.

4.4. Investigation of the Fourth Question

The aim of the fourth question was to investigate the effects of CIRC, STAD, and non-cooperative methods on the vocabulary learning of advanced level Iranian learners. To this end, another one-way ANOVA was used. Table 9 contains the descriptive statistics:

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Min	Max
CIRC	20	20.45	2.99	.67	15	26
STAD	20	19.75	2.98	.66	14	25
NON.CL	20	18.45	2.76	.61	15	24
Total	60	19.55	2.98	.38	14	26

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for ANOVA on advanced Learners' vocabulary learning

To see whether or not the observed differences among the means are statistically significant, the one-way ANOVA procedure was utilized, yielding the following results:

Table 10. Results of the ANOVA on the advanced Learners' vocabulary learning

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	41.2	2	20.60	2.41	.09

Within Groups	485	57	8.52		
Total	526	59			

Table 10 indicates that there are no significant differences among the effects of the three methods on the vocabulary learning of advanced level Iranian learners.

These results lend partial support to previous claims for the efficacy of cooperative learning methods. As Dutson (2001), Goerge (1994), Ghokhale (1995), and Liang (2002) report, cooperative learning has positive impacts on the learners' achievement gains and is much better than traditional teaching methods. It seems that integrating reading and writing in CIRC model makes reading comprehension deeper and the classroom climate more friendly and enjoyable. Providing positive interdependence situation among elementary groups is the key point in making cooperative learning successful.

As to the second research question, results indicate that there are no significant differences among the effects of CIRC, STAD and non-cooperative learning methods on the reading comprehension of advanced level Iranian learners. This may be because students in advanced level often modify the participant pattern or social organization of the tasks set up by the teacher and this reduces the probability of success of cooperative learning implementation.

With regard to the third research question, it turned out that the elementary students receiving CIRC performed significantly better than the comparison group, non-cooperative learning, on their vocabulary post-test. These results lend support to previous claims for the efficacy of cooperative learning methods (Jacob et al, 1996 and Pica et al, 1996). The result of this study is consistent with the main findings of Lee (2003) that in cooperative learning classes, students learn more vocabulary than traditional one. This could be partially accounted for by the fact that CIRC requires the learners to write a summary or story about each reading, and this improves their reading comprehension and vocabulary.

While cooperative learning was not found to be more effective than non-cooperative learning with respect to advanced students' reading comprehension and vocabulary learning in this study, the literature suggests there may be additional reasons to use cooperative learning. Certainly, the ability to work with others within a group and to develop interpersonal skills may be justifications for using cooperative learning strategies.

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that cooperative learning models have positive effects on the learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary learning at elementary levels. The main reason possibly lies in meaning-focused output features of this model. However, it needs to be noted that cooperative learning in its many methods and forms is not the solution to all second language learning problems.

Although cooperative learning did not seem to reach its full potential in advanced level classes, this does not mean that cooperative learning cannot provide a rich environment

for second language acquisition. Cooperative learning is not a silver bullet; nor does it deserve to be one that is tossed out when it doesn't work. It is a potentially powerful instruction strategy that requires careful attention. In implementing cooperative learning contextual factors and cultural resistance should be taken into account.

In conclusion, cooperative learning is not fully explored and much more research needs to be done. Clearly, however, it can be a very useful instructional strategy when used effectively and in conjunction with other teaching methods.

The findings of the present study can have implications not only for teachers and learners, but also for syllabus designers. The selection and implementation of the appropriate kinds of pair and group work exercises can make cooperation easier. The knowledge of the nature of the effect of such material enables syllabus designers to prepare textbooks and to present materials in a way which can facilitate and improve the learners' receptive as well as productive knowledge.

References

- Abu, B. R., & Flower, J. (1997). The effects of cooperative learning methods on achievement, retention, and attitudes of home economics students in North Carolina. *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, 13 (2). Retrieved December 16, 2009, from scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JVTE/v13n2/Abu.html
- Adeyemi, A. B. (2008). Effects of cooperative learning and problem solving strategies on junio secondary school students' achievement in social studies. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 6(3), 691-708.
- Allen, F.V. (1983). *Techniques in teaching vocabulary*. Oxford: OUP.
- Almaguer, I. (2005). Effects of dyad reading instruction on the reading achievement of Hispanic third grade English language learners. *Bilingual Research*, 29 (3), 509-526.
- Apple, T. M. (2006). Language learning theories and cooperative learning techniques in the EFL classroom. *Doshisha Studies in Language and Culture*, 9 (2), 277 - 301.
- Chang, C. (2002). *The reader effect and text effect on first and second language reading comprehension and recall- what does research teach us?* (Report No. CS511 187). (ERIC Documented Reproduction Service No. ED465180).
- Chen, C. H. (1998). A comparison between cooperative learning and traditional, whole class learning- teaching English in a junior college. *Academic Journal of Kang- Ning*, 3, 69- 82.
- Datson, M. J. (2001). Cooperative learning structures can increase student achievement. Retrieved November 17, 2009, from www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/.../increase_achievement.php.

Faryadi, Q. (2007). Enlightening Advantages of Cooperative Learning. Retrieved November 21, 2009, from www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno

Ghaith, M. G. (2003). The relationship between cooperative learning, perception of social support, and academic achievement. *System*, 30, 263-273.

Gokhale, A. A. (1995). Collaborative learning enhances critical thinking. *Journal of Technology Education*, 7 (1), 22-30.

George, G. P. (1994). The effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies in multicultural university classrooms. *Excellence in College Teaching*, 5(1), 21-30.

Grabe, W. (1991). Current developments in second language reading research. *TESOL*, 25 (3), 375-406.

Harmer, J. (2007). *How to teach English*. England: Pearson Education Ltd.

Heydari, L. F., & Gorjian, B. (2009). The impact of Iranian learners' awareness of Vocabulary learning strategies on reading comprehension among pre-intermediate EFL learners. Paper presented at 7th international TELLSI, Yazd, Iran.

Jacob, E., Pottenberg, L., Patrick, S., & Wheeler, E. (1996). Cooperative learning: Context and opportunities for acquiring academic knowledge. *TESOL*, 30 (2), 253-264.

Jacobs, G., & Hannah, D. (2004). Combining cooperative learning with reading aloud by teachers. *International Journal of English Studies*, 4 (1), 97-117.

Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R. (2002). Cooperative Learning and Social Interdependence Theory. *Social Psychological Applications to Social Issues*, 4, 9-35.

Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R. (1994). An overview of cooperative learning. Retrieved October 23, 2009, from www.clearspecs.com/.../ClearSpecs69V01_Overview%20of%20Cooperative%20Learning.pdf

Keyser, W. M. (2000). Active learning and cooperative learning: understanding the difference and using both styles effectively. *Research Strategies*, 7, 35-44

Lee, H. S. (2003). ESL learners' vocabulary use in writing and the effects of explicit vocabulary instruction. *System*, 31, 537-561.

Liang, T. (2002). *Implementing cooperative learning in EFL teaching: Process and effects*. Unpublished PHD dissertation. National Taiwan Normal University. Retrieved September 19, 2009 from <http://www.Uefap.com/index.htm>.

Maddinabeita, C. S. (2006). Cooperative learning. *GRETA*, 14, 80-84.

Madden, N. (2004). Cooperative integrated reading and composition. Success for all Foundation 200 W. Towson town Blvd. Baltimore, MD 21204, (410) 616-2330. Retrieved September 19, 2009, from www.successforall.net.

Mohammadi, M., & Salimzadeh, R. (2009). The effect of cooperative learning strategy training on reading comprehension and motivation of EFL learners. Paper presented at 7th international conference TELLSI, Yazd, Iran.

National Reading Panel. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel – Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. Rockville, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Oxford, R. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning and interaction: Three communicative strands in the language classroom. *Modern Language*, 81(4), 443-456.

Pica, T., Porter, L. E., Paninos, D., & Linneil, J. (1996). Language learners' interaction: How does it address the input, output, and feedback needs of L2 learners? *TESOL*, 30 (1), 59-80.

Sachs, T. G., Candlin, N. C., & Rose, R. K. (2003). Learner Behaviour and Language Acquisition Project: Developing Cooperative Learning in the EFL/ESL Secondary Classroom. *RELC*, 34 (3), 338-369.

MUTUAL INTELLIGIBILITY OR NATIVE-LIKE PROFICIENCY? IRANIAN TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD IMPLEMENTING A L2 PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH

Rezvan Khazaee

M.A student of TEFL at Tarbiat Modares University

R.khazaee@live.com

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the growth of English as an International language and its impact on the speakers and learners of this language. Today, non-native speakers of English have outnumbered native speakers and the desire for native-like proficiency is at its weakest point, in addition, trends concentrating on non-native precision and mutual intelligibility are flourishing. Twelve Iranian teachers with diverse teaching experiences have participated in this study. They are interviewed about their current views regarding the localization of English pronunciation; the results, however, show contradictory consequences, the majority of the participants are against implementing a L2 pronunciation of English, in other words, Persian-English. Finally, explanations for such outlooks and implications for teaching are mentioned.

"Don't speak English, parlez Globish!"

Jean-Paul Nerriere; in his book "Globish, the World Over"

1. Introduction

English use has grown in the preceding decades. In 1985, Braj Kachru anticipated that there were between 320 and 380 million people speaking English as a first language and anywhere between 250 and 380 million speakers of English as a second language, but he had already foretold that this stability might change (Harmer, 2007). This is evident in the quote above by Nerriere, a retired vice-president of IBM in the United States, who coined the word "*Globish*" and constructed a simple, pragmatic form of English. It includes a vocabulary limited to 1,500 words, short sentences, basic syntax, an absence of idiomatic expressions and extensive hand gestures to get the point across (2009). This automatically degrades the use of native-like accent by non-native speakers of English. We can even consider Globish as a new version of English as a lingua franca. In accordance with Kachru, Graddol also predicted that the balance between native and non-native speakers of English has changed with L2 speakers overtaking L1 speakers (1999). Therefore, we

have reached a point in which non-native speakers of English have outperformed the native speakers of this language. McKay (2003) also stressed the fact that English has relatively turned out to be a lingua franca, and it has achieved this state not because of the growth of native speakers but rather because of an increase in the number of individuals who have learnt this language as their second or additional language.

Initially, migration was the main reason for the spread and development of English that resulted in the development of monolingual communities (McKay 2003); conversely, Brutt-Griffler (2002) argues that migration is no longer the main cause of language spread and mentions the fact that language spreads through macroacquisition. Learners of English have various goals for acquiring this language, which among them purposes such as trade, economic development, scientific advancement, and introducing their country and culture can be noted. The question arises here that how should English be taught to this vast developing L2 speaker of English?

Research is still not inclusive of whether the native or non-native teacher is a better choice for L2 learners of English; nevertheless it is apparent that native teachers cannot empathize with students in the learning process (Moussu & Llorca 2008). Regarding the teaching of pronunciation, the main issue of this paper, it is believed that now that English has become a global language, the tactic assumption is that we should focus on intelligibility. But to whom should they be intelligible? Most of the work done to date has assumed that intelligibility means intelligibility to a native speaker (Taylor 1991). However, as previously mentioned, the vast number of non-native speakers of English has falsified this statement to the circumstance that this assumption is no longer valid. Correct pronunciations, to some, is concealed within a native-like proficiency and successful imitations of native speakers regarding tone, pitch, and correct pronunciation of sounds; as for others, being comprehensible, in other words, "getting the message across" is regarded sufficient, even if correct pronunciation is not followed. This idea favors mutual intelligibility over native-like proficiency among non-native speakers of English. This paper will focus on different ways of teaching English pronunciation, the Iranian teacher's attitudes towards the global implementation of English pronunciation, and whether they believe English pronunciation should have mutual intelligibility or be closer to a native-like accent.

2. Literature Review

The vast majority of pronunciation research is concentrated on the premise that learners need to understand and be understood by native speakers of the language (Settler & Jenkins 2005). However, this is not always the case since the large majority of English speakers are non-natives of the language, and research has shown that there is more interaction between L2 speakers than there is with actual L1 speakers of English. Hence, Settler & Jenkins made a distinction between foreign language and international language. In foreign language, interaction takes place between a native speaker and a non-native speaker, whereas in the international language the interaction is more typically between the non-native speakers and the main goal of EIL (English as an international language) is

focused on the role of pronunciation in promoting and obstructing intelligibility. Below is a statement on teaching pronunciation by Leather (1983: p.198) cited in Taylor (1991).

It has been said that only spies need truly native-like accents, and only teachers of me need to be near to natives. For the majority of school and non-specialist adult learners, a reasonable goal is to be “comfortably intelligible” and to sound socially acceptable.

McKay (2003) also agrees on this and mentions that bilingual speakers of English have different purposes for using English than monolinguals, so it is unjustified to suppose bilingual speakers necessarily want or need to achieve a native-like competence. Sridhar and Sridhar (1994, p.45) cited in McKay (2003) believe that many varieties of English (e.g. Indian English, Nigerian English) clearly reject the native-like competence, which they regard as “distasteful and pedantic” or “affected or even snobbish”; furthermore, learners receive input that is poor in quality and amount; thus, they cannot build the necessary repertoire to acquire the language in its native-like manner. The question arises here that how do Iranian teachers react towards this native-like competence? Do they fully receive it or intentionally discard it? I will focus on this question in the following sections.

In accordance with the native-like proficiency, Canagarajah (1999) argues that the Chomsky’s “native speaker of a homogeneous speech community” is an unrealistic construct. He goes on by saying that “in the hybrid post-colonial age we live today, one has to develop the heteroglossic competence to cope with the realities of language diversity, contact and mixing” (p.79). Therefore imposing a native speaker fallacy on non-native speakers of the outer circle (see Kachru, 1987) is unconvincing; hence, we should put aside the native speaker fallacy and adopt a broader perspective in which non-native speakers of English are compared with their own group rather than with native speakers of English in which they have no intention of getting close to. McKay adds to this by indicating that an acceptance of a native speaker fallacy will underline a narrow definition of expertise and will grant a great deal of prestige to native-like pronunciation and intuition (2003), which then again apparently has no desired use for many non-natives.

As mentioned before, mutual intelligibility seems to be more vital in pronunciation than native-like competence. Jenkins (1998) conducted a research in which her aims were to discover exactly what features of British or American pronunciations are essential for intelligible pronunciation; in other words, she sought out to explore elements that made speech meaningful and above all comprehensible when perceived by native speakers. Among the results achieved from Jenkins’ study were the following:

- All the consonants are important except for 'th' sounds as in 'thin' and 'this'
- Consonant clusters are important at the beginning and in the middle of words. For example, the cluster in the word 'string' cannot be simplified to 'sting' or 'tring' and remain intelligible.
- The contrast between long and short vowels is important. For example, the difference between the vowel sounds in 'sit' and 'seat'

- Nuclear (or tonic) stress is also essential. This is the stress on the most important word (or syllable) in a group of words. For example, there is a difference in meaning between 'My son uses a COMPUTER', which is a neutral statement of fact and 'My SON has a computer', where there is an added meaning (such as that another person known to the speaker and listener does not use a computer).

All these things are said to be important for a native speaker listener either because they aid intelligibility, or because they are thought to make an accent more appropriate. In another case, more specifically focusing on Persian speakers; Sharifian (2010) describes the emerging variety of English in Iran into two distinctive groups. The first group is those who follow either a British Received Pronunciation (RP) or American English in terms of phonology and grammar depending on the variety, which the speaker was exposed to either at schools or institutions, they will try to imitate it. Another group consists of those whose pronunciation includes phonetic features that are quite similar to the sound system of the Persian language. For example, /d/ is likely to be pronounced as dental rather than alveolar. This dental /d/ may also be used to pronounce /ð/ sounds in English; and also there are many incorrect stress patterns imposed on wrong syllables.

Elaborating on Sharifian's dichotomy of Persian speakers, one group of Iranian speakers or better said teachers, for the purpose of our study, have a native-like accent or a very close resemblance of it. This may be because of their residence in foreign countries or their unique ability in speaking like British or American people. The other group, however, have a noticeable non-native accent, in other words their pronunciation "gives them away". This group can by itself be divided into two sub-groups. One group accepts their non-native accent and concentrates on other parts of their language ability such as language structure and vocabulary. This is the group which has perceived that a pronunciation should be mutually intelligent rather than following the norms of the native pronunciation (e.g. intonation, stress etc.) The other group, however, focuses on the demise that having correct pronunciation in terms of native-like accuracy is essential and fundamental. These are groups who engage in reading books and listening to pronunciation CDs and tapes that foster and teach the native pronunciation of sounds in words. It is believed that a very small number of these L2 learners will eventually succeed in acquiring native-like proficiency in English pronunciation. This can be due to various reasons such as environmental factors and the Critical Age Hypothesis (see: Lenenberg, 1967). In this regard Canagarajah notes:

Many periphery professionals feel compelled to spend undue time repairing their pronunciation or performing other *cosmetic* changes to sound native. Their predominant concern is in effect "How can I lose my accent?" rather than "How can I be a successful teacher?" The anxiety and inhibitions about their pronunciations can make them lose their grip on the instructional process or lack rapport with their students (1999, p. 84-5).

The question arises here that how should pronunciation be adapted in an Iranian educational context, and what are the views of teachers in implementing a global pronunciation of English that favors mutual intelligibility over native-like proficiency. In

order to reach an answer a research was conducted on 12 Iranian teachers focusing on their views regarding “Persian English.”

3. Participants

The participants of this study are 12 teachers of both genders teaching in all levels of English from beginners to advance. The average age and years of teaching experience of this group is 25 5, respectively. Almost all participants have teaching experiences and have taught in institutes and schools throughout Tehran or other cities of Iran. All participants have a degree in English, either teaching, literature or translation studies and they are students or holders of a Master’s degree in the mentioned fields. The participants are categorized from A to L, from “A” being less experienced to “L” having the most experience in English language teaching.

4. Instrumentation

I decided to pick an in-depth interview as my main source of data collection. I believe that I can enter the live experience of the person in a more emphatic way. The interview consisted of 4 general questions and 13 specific questions (see Appendix). General questions requested information regarding age, education, level and years of English teaching. Specific question more explicitly focused on questions regarding the subject matter and their opinions concerning English pronunciation. The exact time of each interview varied between 5 to 15 minutes depending on the participant’s desire to speak. Participants showed wide variation in terms of their knowledge of ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) or EIL (English as an International Language). Some were familiar with the terms while others were completely unknown to it. Regarding their prior knowledge of ELF or EIL, participants had different attitudes towards native and non-native accents and a willingness to teach ELF accents in practice. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded based on the participants teaching experiences; furthermore, they were categorized according to two larger themes that emerged as a result of the study (Table 1-next page).

Table 1. Interview Data Analysis Framework

<u>Accent attitudes</u>
➤ Attitude to own English accent
➤ Desire for native-like accent
➤ Perceived attitudes of others to participant’s accent/ L1 accent group
➤ Participant’s attitudes toward other NNS English accents (own group/ other groups)
➤ Beliefs about accent hierarchies and status
➤ Perceived effects of experiences (educational and social) on accent attitudes
<u>Teaching ELF/EIL or localized accents</u>
➤ Desire to teach their local regional L2 accent as the norm
➤ Perception of colleagues’ desire to teach local regional L2 accent as the norm
➤ Perception of effect of learning about EFL/EIL accents on teacher’s attitudes towards and desire to teach such accents

5. Findings

Accent Attitudes

All participants had different views regarding their own pronunciation and its degree of correctness. Some were not sure about their pronunciation and believed it is decent enough to be able to teach English. One participant responded quite negatively when asked how they liked their accent:

"I'm not satisfied with my pronunciation, I do my best, and my phonological system has become accustomed to pronounce words in its Persian way (B)"

Two other participants were completely satisfied with their pronunciation:

"I believe my accent is quite good actually, it is fluent and close to American English and above all my students love it! (J)"

"My accent may not be 100% appealing to native speakers, but it is proper English, at least communicative, and I'm happy with it (F)"

There were also contradictory responses considering how they would feel if they were detected as a non-native speaker of English at first sight. Some responded that did not mind while others felt humiliated and left out if perceived as a non-native. Below are some of the participant's responses regarding this matter:

"I don't want to be regarded as a native speaker; I see no good in it. I have my own language and English is only a means for me (H)"

"I hate it if I'm detected as a non-native speaker. It's better not to be as accent matters to me. It is a personal idea. I am borrowing a language, therefore, I have to be loyal to that language and I should pronounce it the 'right way' (E)"

"Absolutely! It is fine with me to be a non-native speaker. This is the truth I have never tried to contradict! (I)"

On the contrary it was asked how they would feel if others thought they were native speakers of English, below are interesting results:

"I am a nationalist. I would prefer to be known as a non-native speaker (F)"

"I'd be happy to be understood as a native speaker, this would mean a sense of accomplishment as a successful language learner (G)"

"I would feel like a million bucks! (L)"

"It is much better for English teachers to be natives and thought of as natives. This will give them confidence in their teaching (J)"

Participant (J) previously mentioned that she believed her accent was fluent and appealing; she also said that English teachers should at least have some experience of living abroad and carried on by wishing she too could have lived in America or England for a few years. She believed her slight Persian-English accent damaged her teaching abilities and reduced her self-esteem. This 23 year old teacher believed that a native accent would bring her greater success in her future career. This contradicts with another participant; (F) mentioned before that being comprehensive is sufficient and native-like proficiency is no merit for an English teacher. There are differing results regarding how the participants felt towards other varieties of English. Some said the varieties of English have a language system of their own (H); participant G added "personally, I prefer to have a native-like accent and try to follow correct pronunciation patterns, but for others, it's none of my business as far as I don't have problems understanding them" participant (I) also agreed on this statement and said as far as mutual intelligibility was respected he did not mind, and added by saying "I sometimes admire them more than I admire native speakers!" Participants (A) and (J) also agreed on this. However, (B) and (C) strictly degraded the diverse varieties of English. "I hate the varieties of English, especially Indian English, they change the words to their own benefit; it is entirely incomprehensible" (B); and "the stress patterns change with Indian English, so I cannot understand much of it; I would rather listen to a group of Africans speaking their local language!" (C). However, one should note that the principals of EIL value these miscellaneous systems of speech and they are rightfully confirmed as branches of English, but we can see here that not all Iranian teachers appeal to this.

Effects of perceived experiences are reflected in question 7 and 8. The participants were asked if they had ever encountered a bad experience in their teaching and blamed their accent for that error. Participant (C) who teaches children and lower intermediate learners assumed that children are not capable of distinguishing a correct English pronunciation, and there were times when she had pronounced a word incorrectly with no child realizing her error. Most participants recollected different experiences they have had in their classrooms. Below are two recalled pronunciation mistakes by participants (A, B, and L):

"I once had difficulty in pronouncing the name 'Malaysia' I was unaware of the /dʒ/ sound so I pronounced it /malezi/ exactly how we would say it in Persian. It was then when I realized I had serious pronunciation problems (A)."

"I was reading a passage from an English book when I encountered a name, which sounded very much like a taboo word in Persian. I had a hard time changing the pronunciation of that word for it to sound more appropriate for the context of the class (B)."

"I always had difficulty with pronouncing 'th' sounds. These sounds gave me anxiety. And when I did pronounce them, they would sound very odd. Believe it or not a pupil of mine pronounced these sounds perfectly and he encouraged me to practice, and practice made perfect! (L)"

Recalling an experience, especially after many years, would propose that such events have a great influence on the formation of pronunciation attitudes and the development of a correct accent (Jenkins, 2005). Question 8 focused on how participants were understood by their students and whether their students were happy about their pronunciation and accent. Almost everyone answered that they had not received any complaints regarding this matter.

Teaching Localized Accents

Asked whether they would teach their students a pronunciation model based on their local L2 accent, in other words, the Persian-English, most participants said they would not be happy to do so. However, two (F and J) favored localization; participant (F) believed that localizing the speaking contents is fine as long as it is intelligible and "I see no problem with it." (J) Also agreed with local accents in teaching and added "it's a trend nowadays, I approve it, and the majority of the teachers will accept it if it is presented well." However, the results of this study are contrary to this view. The majority of teachers, who participated in this study, were against the act of localization. Although three participants (C, K, and I) were not exact on their views of promoting a L2 pronunciation of English, participants (A, B, G, E, D, H, and L) however familiar with EFL were strongly against the idea. Below are some of their thoughts:

"My opinion is against this...it is better to speak in the native language, I mean they can act as models, then we can imitate from them. We don't have to speak exactly like them; they can function as models (A)."

"I agree with instances of *foreigner talk*, what they call it as *Farsi English* (sic), but only at times. Native speakers are our models, but I believe varieties of English should be taught once in a while (B)."

"We have to go with the native accent to end up with the so-called 'international accent' (E)."

"Such ideas are only theories, they are not applicable, and the results will be messy! (F)."

"It is impossible; I will not follow such an idea in my classrooms. I'm sure the students will want 'correct' pronunciations (L)."

Participant (C), who had a slightly neutral idea towards the problem in hand, believed that the outcome of the course is very important. If the main desire of the students is traveling abroad and foreign accommodation, then we should promote native-like proficiency, however, if our classes are only for internal use then a L2 accent will be sufficient. Accordingly, the majority of the teachers were against the insertion of L2 or ELF pronunciation; instead, they agreed upon the promotion of the native accent in their classrooms. Participant (E) made an interesting remark; he believed that nowadays in our institutes, we teach books that encourage American English, we teach students dialogs that are read by native Americans; therefore, we end up with the Persian-English accent that is at least a good result; but if we start teaching with the local accents, then "God knows

what the final product will be." What emerges from the participants points of view is the belief that localizing English pronunciations stands a little chance of being adopted even by teachers who understand the concept unless it becomes legitimized by the whole system of education and taught in teacher training courses. A number of participants believed that non-native speakers lack a sense of confidence in their speaking, especially among Iranian students and this may be an irresolvable issue in promoting a L2 pronunciation in English.

CONCLUSION

What was initially mentioned in this paper as mutual intelligibility and native-like proficiency and the incline toward mutual intelligibility was to some extent precluded in this study. The eleven participant of this study, who all benefited from high education, disregarded the matter of promoting a Persian-English pronunciation of English. In my initial interpretation, I supposed that those participants who had decent and errorless pronunciations and perfect accents will not favor a localized accent, apart from minor exceptions, this was true. The two participants who favored localization and the three who were not sure demanded to retain their L1 identity in their classrooms and were happy to be considered as non-natives within a native society; on the contrary, those who were against the idea, though many of them did not have a perfect or near perfect native-like proficiency in pronunciation, admired the native accent of what Bamgbose (1998, p.7) calls a "a love-hate relationship" with English: "admiration for the native accent, even by those who would rather not use it" (cited in Jenkins 2005). What they may have supposed is that a native accent would bring along prestige, confidence, and a sense of achievement, whilst a non-native accent would be degrading and corrupt. Deciding upon whether focusing either on mutual intelligibility or native-like proficiency in Iranian English classrooms would require more exploration. For now at least, we have allowed the participants of this study, though a very small majority of the overall teachers of Iran, to reflect on the roots of their uncertainty and contradictions regarding this issue.

There are a number of implications for English teaching in this study, among them learners should be given a choice to choose whether to focus on native accents or focus on more mutual pronunciations suitable for the international contexts. This would depend on their current conditions and the final outcome of their learning. Also teachers should allow more instances of local accents and additional varieties of English other than Persian-English in their classrooms. For EIL, this is much more important than having classroom exposure to native speaker accents. And finally teachers should attain an open perspective towards the Persian-English accent, we should remember that English is not our native language, therefore, Persian-English and mutual intelligibility should be credited in Iranian English classrooms.

References

Bamgbose, A. 1998. *Torn between the norms: Innovations in World Englishes*. World Englishes. 171-4

Brutt-Griffle, J. 2002. *World English: a study of its development*. Clevedon: Multilingual matters.

Canagarajah, A.S. 1999. Interrogating the 'native speaker fallacy': Non-linguistic roots, non-pedagogical results. In G. Braine (ed.) *Non-Native Educators in English Language Teaching*. 77-92. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Graddol, D. 1999. The decline of the native speaker. In D. Graddol and U. Meinhof (Eds.) *English in a changing world*. 57-68. United Kingdom: AILA Review.

Harmer, J. 2007. *The practice of English language teaching*. (4thed.). London: Longman.

Jenkins, J. 2002. *Global English and the teaching of pronunciation*. Retrieved July 29th 2011 from: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/global-english-teaching-pronunciation>

Jenkins, J. 2005. *Implementing an international approach to English pronunciation: The role of teacher attitudes and identity*. TESOL Quarterly 39(5) 535-543

Kachru, B.B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk and H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures*. 11-36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Leather, J. 1983. *Second language pronunciation and teaching*. Language Teaching. 16(3) 198-219

Lenneberg, E.H. 1967. *Biological Foundations of Language*. New York: Wiley

Mckay, S. 2003. *Toward an appropriate EIL pedagogy: re-examining common ELT assumptions*. International journal of applied linguistics. 13(1) 2-22

Moussu, L. & Llorca, E. 2008. *Non-native English speaking English language teachers, history and research: State-of-the-art article*. Language Teaching. 41(3) 315-348

Setter, J & Jenkins, J. 2005. *Teaching pronunciation: A state of the art review*. Language Teaching 17(1) 1-17

Sharifian, F. 2010. Semantic and pragmatic conceptualizations within an emerging variety, Persian English. In A. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes*. 442-459. New York: Routledge.

Sridhar, SN & K.K. Sridhar, 2004. Indigenized Englishes as second languages: toward a functional theory of second language acquisition in multilingual context. In R.K. Agnihotri & A. L. Khanna (Eds.) *Second language acquisition: socio-cultural and linguistic aspects of English in India*. London: Sage

Taylor, D. 1991. Who speaks English to whom? *The question of teaching English pronunciation for global communication*. System, 19(4) 425-435

Appendix

General Questions

1. Age.
2. Level of education/degree
3. Years of teaching experience
4. Level of English Teaching

Specific Questions:

- 1- Tell me a little about the languages you know and speak? Which of them have you learnt in your childhood?
- 2- What English accent would you say you have? What makes you think so?
- 3- Is it ok with you if people realize that you speak English with your NNS English?
- 4- How would you feel if somebody thought you were a Native speaker of English?
- 5- What do you think about other NNS of English? Do you approve their accent?
E.g. Indian English?
- 6- Have you ever been in a situation where you wished you were a native speaker rather than a non-native speaker?
- 7- Have you ever had bad experiences in English teaching and you blamed your accent?
- 8- Are your students happy with your pronunciation?
- 9- How do you feel if the goal of teaching English pronunciation would be the L2 pronunciation of English and not its native counterpart?
- 10- Do you have, if any, native speakers in your workplace? Or have you met any native speakers in particular?
- 11- Why do you think some teachers are against the idea of implementing a global pronunciation of English?

THE EFFECT OF ACADEMIC STUDY ON GRAMMAR ATTITUDE, GRAMMAR MOTIVATION, AND PERCEPTION OF GRAMMAR RELEVANCE

Hadi Farjami,
Department of English Language and Literature
Semnan University,
Semnan,
Iran.
zzmhadi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

EFL learners' beliefs and feelings about grammar study are hardly static. One source of change in them is arguably their academic experience, especially experience with content courses. This article reports on a study which compared the responses of 62 learners of English Language and Literature to a questionnaire about their grammar attitudes, beliefs, and their perception of the relevance of grammar learning to English skills before and after a substantial number of content courses. The comparison of pre- and post-experience results, and students' responses to a composite interview question showed positive motivational and attitudinal backwash for academic experience and content despite their general disillusionment with grammar teaching in their context. The majority of the learners disagreed with removing explicit grammar teaching from the curriculum. They were unchanging in the belief that grammar was key to language learning and content understanding; they also stayed motivated and stopped short of giving up their liking for grammar.

KEY WORD

Academic experience, attitude, content course, grammar teaching, learners' beliefs

1. Introduction

Grammar has been defined and conceptualized in different ways. Moreover, grammar instruction has taken different status ranging from a central role to staying in the

background all through. Related to its status, approaches, methods, and techniques used in teaching grammar have varied so vastly that the categories of form-focused, meaning-based, and integrative can throw only very dim light through the vast spectrum. However, regardless of conceptualization, degree of visibility in the language program, or treatment manner, many authorities would insist that formal grammar teaching should be an important component of language teaching (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Schmidt, 2001; Spada, 1997).

In spite of its centrality, formal grammar instruction has notoriously been the bane of language teaching. One may frequently find such words as *bemoan*, *drag*, *dull*, and *boring* used in the vicinity of the word *grammar* when students' involvement in learning is discussed. The ironical situation created by grammar gravity and a widely-supposed grammar grudge among students urged this researcher to think of the effect that exposure to reality and experiencing linguistic needs may have on the attitude and beliefs of learners toward the teaching and learning of English grammar. Moreover, he tried to probe the effect of academic experience on the perception of relevance of grammar learning.

2. Attitudes and beliefs in language learning

The shift from teacher directed instruction to learner-centered learning has led to numerous studies of language learning from learners' perspective. A big share of these studies relate to learners' beliefs about the nature of language and processes of language learning (e.g., Cotterall, 1999; Horwitz, 1988; Wenden, 1999; White, 1999). Beliefs according to Arnold (1999) "act as very strong filters of reality" and can be of enormous influence on the success of their learning (p. 256-257). Factors which shape thoughts and beliefs include past experiences, culture, context, and numerous personal factors (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005).

Another influential force in language teaching is the linguistic needs of learners. For all its detail and influence on subsequent needs analysis, Munby's Communicative Needs Processor (Munby, 1978) only produces an unordered list of linguistic features and, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out, does not consider target needs from different stand points. It makes no distinctions between necessities and wants. However, students have definite opinions about their abilities in the various skills and they are able to assess the importance of related sub-skills to their academic studies, future profession, and social life (Basturkmen 1998). When the syllabus is also based on their genuine and personally perceived needs, not just on externally imposed ones, it is likely to be motivating for learners, who see the obvious relevance of what they are studying (Basturkmen, 2006).

It is hard to overestimate the importance of attitude and genuine interest. If university teachers are asked what is the most important student characteristic associated with successful studies, they usually mention traits such as attitude, motivation and interest in learning (Berg 2005). Cotterall (1999) reviews the published studies of learners' beliefs and reemphasizes his previous assertion (Cotterall, 1995) that attitudes toward learning and the perceptions and beliefs which determine them have a profound influence on learning behavior. It seems that Chawhan and Oliver (2000) are largely justified to say that teacher's comprehensive knowledge of students' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of needs

contributes to a more propitious learning environment and to more effective learning. Many other researchers (e.g., Graham, 2006; Puchta, 1999) also suggest that teachers should take students' beliefs into consideration in spite of the difficulty of implementation. Wenden (1991) calls for attention to be given to person variables such as intentions, attributions, expectations, perceptions and beliefs about learning abilities, which learners bring to the classroom.

Moreover, Mantle-Bromley (1995) strongly recommends that "teachers design and implement lessons on the language learning process that incorporate attitude-change methods" (p.381). At that time, she cautioned, however, that "we do not yet know enough about the nature of incoming students' beliefs to design effective curricular intervention addressing those beliefs" (p. 377). Yet, about 15 years on, an established tradition of research on learners' beliefs has produced a database rich enough to give practitioners a strong footing. Attempts have indeed been made in different corner of the globe to put the suggestion of attitude change into practice. For example, Finch (2008) tried to implement change in Korean learners' attitudes toward language learning by giving them activities focusing on various issues of foreign language learning and teaching, and out-of-class individual reflection tasks. His comparison of pre- and post-experience questionnaire results suggested that raising learners' awareness of the learning process leads to positive modification of the affective factors which drive learning, hence promote effective, autonomous learning.

3. This Study

In view of the above considerations and in an effort to latch onto what Iranian English learners think of grammar learning, this researcher tried to get glimpses of the beliefs and attitudes of typical Iranian learners about the way grammar is taught in their context and find out how their experience of different content and skills courses affected those thoughts, beliefs and attitudes. This turns out to be of significance to language teaching practitioners in view of its relation to issues like motivation, learning strategies, learners' autonomy, and the feedback we need in order to develop the right language program and design the right materials. The need for information on how stable students' grammar "scripts" and attitudes were, how strong their propensity to take action was, and the way in which these might have changed justified addressing the following questions:

1. How do students perceive their need for grammar?
2. How does learners' attitude toward English grammar learning compare before and after exposure to English medium courses?
3. How does exposure to English medium courses affect learners' views about the necessity and relevance of learning English grammar?
4. What is the effect of academic experience on the learners' motivation for further grammar study?
5. How are learners' views of the way grammar is treated different after experiencing English-medium courses from before such courses?

The study was interested in the affective state of learners concerning classroom grammar learning before and after a period of serious exposure to English-medium content. In

attempting to answer the questions above, two snapshots of students' responses about grammar learning were obtained at two significantly different points of time in their academic life.

4. Methodological Notes

4.1. *Participants and their Context*

Surveying students from several colleges and universities in Iran would have given this research better grounds. However, due to practical constraints, coupled with the apparently true perception that students' educational backgrounds, their demographic profiles, the treatment they receive at university and the courses they do, are similar to a great extent across English departments in different universities in Iran, the researcher did the survey on students from the same department, English Language and Literature (ELL) Department in Semnan University. To add to the population size of the participants and increase the generalizability of the results, the study was conducted with two entree batches of ELL students, the earlier batch comprising 8 males and 27 females, the later batch comprising 20 female and 7 males, totaling 62 participants. The age range of the learners was 19-22 years at the beginning of the study.

ELL students in Iran enter university to do courses amounting to 134 credits. Of the 134 credits, 18 credits are earned by passing general non-English courses, which can be taken any time during their study, 42 are basic English skills courses, 24 are ELT, linguistics, and translation courses and 50 are literary courses. During the first two semesters, the students focus on language skills; then, they begin taking non-skill courses. In their fourth semester, they have passed almost all the skills courses and are fully engaged in non-skills courses. Few freshman students in Iran have experience in English-medium content study and studying texts for purposes other than English learning is a new experience for them.

Grammar is taught during the first two semester of their study in two modules, Grammar I and Grammar II. Teachers usually present a grammar point as it comes up in the textbook and try to engage the students in doing isolated exercises, practicing the grammar point. The job of the teacher during practice time is giving feedback and providing more illustrations if problems or uncertainties arise. Even if there are differences among the grammar textbooks used, the dominant traditional presentation styles of teachers override the creative or communicative aspects and skate over the differences. So, the impression that they create is not much different, as also understood from participants' responses in the interviews (see below). The course-books used by these two cohorts of students were *Modern English II* by M. Frank (1972), *Fundamentals of English Grammar* by B. S. Azar (2000), and *Communicate what you Mean* by C. W. Pollock (1982).

4.2. *Instruments*

A teacher-made questionnaire, which had been piloted for clarity with 10 English learners in an earlier semester and included 10 Likert-Type items, demanded information about the participants' attitude toward English language learning and the learning of English grammar, motivation for learning English grammar, the relevance of grammar learning to proficiency in language skills, and their endorsement of direct grammar teaching in their

academic context. The items were all in Persian, the participants' native tongue, to forestall any understanding barrier that deficiency in English proficiency might create, especially for freshmen. (See Appendix A for the English translation of the questionnaire).

In addition to the questionnaire, a broad composite question was posed to 8 randomly chosen participants to explore their states of mind and heart about grammar, its relevance, and what they thought of the grammar treatment they had received and how they compared their current feelings about grammar with their feelings at the beginning of their university study. The researcher, who had developed a good rapport with the learners, conducted the interview and made notes while responses were being provided. (See Appendix B for the English translation of the questions).

4. 3. *Procedures*

The questionnaire was administered to a group of 35 undergraduates during the first semester of their study, when they had just begun to experience university study, had braced up for skills and spadework courses and had established or were forming expectations about the way the courses were supposed to be presented. That was the time they were brewing up academic aspirations and ambitions. The same questionnaire was administered to another group of 27 freshman students in a similar circumstance in their first semester in the following academic year.

The questionnaire was separately re-administered to the 2 cohorts when they were working toward the end of their 6th semester and had passed a substantial number of literary and content courses. As most participants failed to identify themselves, the analysis was done on the pooled data obtained from the participants in both administrations, not on paired data for each respondent.

The interviews were conducted at the end of the 6th semester, subsequent to the administration of the post-experience questionnaire. It was conducted only once because the questions directly probed the possible attitudinal changes that might have occurred and there was no intention of juxtaposing pre- and post-experience responses.

4. 4. *Definition of key terms*

Grammar in this article is used in the educational sense usually used and received by teachers and learners of languages and envisioned when one thinks of grammar textbooks. A *content course* refers to a course whose immediate object of study is not language learning but "the acquisition of disciplinary information" (Kasper 1997). So, ELT methodology, linguistics, and literary criticism are considered substance of content courses. *Post-experience* and *pre-experience* are primarily used in this article to delimit the periods during which learners undertook content courses, but the experience can also refer to exposure to other academic courses such as language-skills courses. The prefixes *pre* and *post* are also used loosely as the questionnaire was given first when the participants had already started their academic studies and again when they still had more to study.

5. Results

The questionnaire's items were not arranged in sections but in a way that one item would not prime the respondents for another. For example, Item 2 in the questionnaire, which is about "grammar joy" is distanced from Item 9, which is about "liking" or "interest". However, in presenting the results below, for the sake of clarity of discussion, they are grouped into the categories of 1) liking and motivation (Table 1), 2) perception of relevance (Table 2), and 3) endorsement of grammar teaching (Table 3).

Both numbers and percentages are used to display pre-experience questionnaire results alongside post-experience data. The results for different degrees on Likert scales are not collapsed so that a richer picture of participants' beliefs, thoughts, and feelings is reflected. As some respondents ignored some items and there was a different count of responses for each item, the number of responses for each item is provided in the last column. It is noteworthy that, in most cases, an answer to a questionnaire item has implications for certain other items and issues and sends messages about them, too. For example, Item 1, which is about the *endorsement* of explicit teaching of grammar, can easily be related to its general *relevance*.

Table 1 includes responses to Items 2, 7, and 9 in the questionnaire, which concern respondents' liking for and interest in perceived grammar. These items were designed to probe the attitude and motivation of the learners in this respect. This table also displays information about respondents liking for learning English.

The responses to these items show that in general the majority of the learners agree they enjoyed and wanted to learn grammar. However, there is a decline in enjoyment and liking (Items 2 and 9) from pre-experience to post-experience administration of questionnaire, a drop from 79.03 % (14+35*) to 54.09 % (6+27) and 71.66 % (14+29) to 54.38 % (7+24) in agreement with "enjoyment" and "liking" items respectively and an increase from 20.96 % (11+2) to 45.90 % (22+6) and 28.33 % (15+2) to 45.61 % (25+ 1) in disagreement with them. Item 7 targeted motivation for learning grammar. The overall motivation the respondents disclosed did not suffer very much as a result of experience; but, its strength diminished in view of the fact that the number of those who had been intent to continue learning grammar reduced to half (22.58% "strong agreements" at pre-experience administration against 11.86% "strong agreements" at post-experience administration).

Table 1
Motivation to learn grammar and grammar study as a source of enjoyment before and after academic experience

Items	SA	SA	A	A	D	D	SD	SD	Total Responses
Item 2: I enjoy studying	14 22.58 %	6 9.83 %	35 56.45 %	27 44.26 %	11 17.74 %	22 35.06 %	2 3.22 %	6 9.83 %	pre ex: 62 Post ex:

grammar. (Attitude)									61
Item 7: I intend to continue learning grammar. (Motivatio n)	14 22.58 %	7 11.86 %	40 67.80 %	44 74.58 %	5 8.47%	8 13.56 %	0 0%	0 0%	pre ex: 59 post ex:59
Item 9: I like to learn English grammar. (Attitude)	14 23.333 %	7 12.28 %	29 48.33 %	24 42.10 %	15 25%	25 43.65 %	2 3.34 %	1 1.75 %	pre ex: 60 post ex: 57
Item 10: I like learning English.	43 74.13 %	35 58.33 %	12 20.69 %	20 33.33 %	2 3.45%	5 8.33 %	1 1.72 %	0 0%	pre ex: 58 post ex: 60

Notes: 1) the shaded columns show the numbers and percentages of responses to the questionnaire items at the beginning of ELL students' university studies. 2) SA: strongly agree; A: agree; D: disagree; SD: strongly disagree. 3) pre ex: pre-experience; post ex: post-experience.

Interestingly, their liking for learning English (Item 10) was still fairly strong after the experience, but the intensity of the strength had slightly fallen off when compared with the agreements at the beginning of the experience, i.e., at pre-experience administration of the questionnaire, 74.13% of the respondents liked English learning strongly; while this strong liking dropped to 58.35% after the experience.

Table 2 includes responses to 2 triangulating items concerning the respondents' perception of relevance of grammar to proficiency. At both pre-experience and post-experience administrations, the participants opposed the notion that grammar did not support language proficiency -- 90.32% (32+24) oppositions before content experience and 89.83% (40+13) oppositions after that. Moreover, they endorsed the statement that learning grammar is essential for the acquisition of the four language skills -- 83.60% (18+33) endorsements at pre-experience administration and 86.44% (14+37) endorsements at post-experience administration). One can also take this *cognitive* grammar support as evidence for positive *attitude* toward grammar or *motivation* to study it.

Table 2
Perception of relevance before and after academic experience

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Items	SA	SA	A	A	D	D	SD	SD	Total Responses
Item 3: Learning grammar rules does not improve proficiency.	1 1.61%	2 3.39%	5 8.06%	4 6.98%	32 51.61%	40 67.80%	24 38.71%	13 22.03%	pre ex: 62 post ex: 59
Item 6: Learning grammar is essential for all English skills.	18 29.51%	14 23.73%	33 54.1%	37 62.71%	10 16.39%	8 13.51%	0 0%	0 0%	pre ex: 61 post ex: 59

Table 3 portrays the way the participants wanted grammar to be treated in their particular setting. Responses to Item 4 show participant's ambivalence about the effectiveness of grammar teaching in universities at the beginning of university experience, when they had not seen very much of grammar teaching, yet. 50% of the students agreed that "English grammar teaching methods in Iranian universities are effective." This ambivalence was gone at the re-administration and 81.35% disagreed with that item. Item 1 checked on the reaction of the respondents to a hypothetical statement about the termination of explicit teaching of grammar rules in university curriculum. The majority of respondents opposed that idea either in the form of disagreements or strong disagreements, 86.66% altogether. This opposition was even stronger at post-experience stage (93.22%).

Table 3
Endorsement of grammar teaching before and after academic experience

Items	SA	SA	A	A	D	D	SD	SD	Total Responses
Item 1: I want direct grammar teaching dropped.	2 3.33%	2 3.38%	5 8.33%	3 5.08%	35 58.33%	38 64.41%	17 28.33%	17 28.81%	pre ex: 60 Post ex: 59

Item 4: I think English grammar teaching methods in Iranian universities are effective.	2 3.45%	0 0%	27 46.55%	11 18.64%	24 41.38%	38 64.41%	5 8.62%	10 16.95%	pre ex: 58 post ex: 59
Item 5: It is better to learn grammar in context.	17 27.67%	18 29.51%	16 26.23%	32 52.46%	21 34.43%	10 16.39%	7 11.47%	1 1.64%	pre ex : 61 post ex : 61
Item 8: Learning grammar rules directly is a waste of time.	3 4.92%	2 3.38%	9 14.75%	11 18.64%	34 55.74%	38 64.41%	15 24.60%	8 13.56%	pre ex: 61 Post ex :59

Item 5 checked on the grammar treatment they preferred. They showed fairly strong preference for contextualization of grammar in pre-experience administration of the questionnaire. This support strengthened after they were exposed to major course-stuff during about 6 semesters: 54.09% (17+16) agreements and 45.90% (21+7) disagreements in the first administration; 81.96% (18 +32) agreements and 18.03% (10+1) disagreements in the re-administration.

In spite of the preference for contextualization of grammar teaching, the majority of respondents did not consider explicit teaching of grammar rules a waste of time as can be understood from their responses to Item 8. Their negation of the proposition put forth by Item 8 did not change much during the intervening semesters between the two administrations of the questionnaire -- 19.67% agreements and 80.32% disagreements in the first administration; 22.03% agreements and 77.96% disagreements in the second administration. The fact that they still valued direct learning of grammar rules shows that their grammar sensibility was strong enough not to be overridden by negative experience during grammar courses and relevance was hard to be pushed aside by methodological issues. In other words, they did not suppress the whole issue because of the way it was handled in their particular setting. They saw the baby's worth, so they did not throw it out with the bath water.

5.1. Interview Results

A question about multiple grammar issues was posed to 8 interviewees in one go because the issues were overlapping in a large measure and piecemeal elicitation would have disrupted the natural supply of information by the respondents. The points most of them picked up and emphasized in their answers were: 1) The failure of the grammar courses they had taken (all the *eight* interviewees), 2) the need for contextualization and grammar teaching through holistic activities, particularly speaking and writing (*six*), 3) the necessity of grammar *teaching* for language learning (*six*), 4) their intention to continue grammar learning (*five*), 5) the strengthening of their motivation for grammar learning because of studying content courses and their plans for autonomous grammar learning (*four*).

6. Discussion

This research aimed to explore the effect exposure to content courses might have on learners' attitude toward grammar and on their motivation for studying grammar. Furthermore, it wanted to find out how doing academic courses in English affected their perception of the relevance of studying grammar. So, snapshots of their attitude, motivation, and perception of relevance at the start of their academic experience were juxtaposed with those obtained after a substantial amount of academic study in English. The study also investigated how learners evaluated university grammar instruction at the two junctures.

Although the issues of attitude, motivation, relevance, and general evaluation hugely overlap, in the following discussion they are treated separately for the sake of convenience and clarity. For example, Item 2 in the questionnaire is discussed in relation to attitude toward grammar, while it has implications for motivation and perception of relevance. Similarly, almost all other items have implications for the issue of attitude and could also be discussed in relation to it.

6.1. Attitude (Items: 2 and 9, Table 1)

Items 2 and 9 directly refer to taking pleasure in grammar learning, seeking to elicit attitudinal responses from learners. Against the researcher's expectation and widespread belief, few strong disagreements were expressed about grammar as a source of joy both before and after content-course experience and the percentages of agreements were greater than those for disagreements at both administrations. However, comparing the responses at the two junctures, we observe a sharp decline in agreements (from 79.03% to 54.09% for Item 2, from 71.36% to 54.38% for Item 9). A decrease in joy taken in grammar can be something very usual as, like most of the cases in life, when we experience something, it loses some of its interest for us and becomes mundane and ordinary (Wilson et al., 2005). This may be due to the lure of ambiguity, which exists at the beginning of academic study. Students just having left high school and entered the university have high expectations about studying English at university, grammar study included. It seems that contrary to the observation made by many social psychologists, who suggest that familiarity leads to greater liking (e.g., Zajonc, 2001), with repeated encounters with skills and grammar courses students' liking for grammar decreases.

However, this decrease does not breed contempt in a linear fashion, as claimed by Norton et al. (2007), who studied the effect of familiarity and more information on liking in the context of human relations. As the pattern of responses related to Items 2 and 9 shows, the decrease in grammatical interest leveled off before it falls off to an insignificant level. Moreover, although making fine-grained attributional remarks should be based on empirical study, it seems safe to say that the sources of attitudes before academic experience and subsequent to that experience were probably different. It is likely pre-experience attitudes were influenced by imagined ambitions, warmth toward teachers and university and a shallow understanding of grammar tasks, while post-experience attitudes might have been more strongly influenced by a deeper understanding of the nature of grammatical knowledge, language experience, experience with cases grammar helped solve language problems and the cases failure with content materials was attributed to grammar deficiency.

The decrease can also be accounted for by the fact that when learners in this university are well into their academic studies, they feel deeply disillusioned over skills and grammar courses as they see that those courses have not well enabled them to tackle their content courses— a fact that was emphasized by all the students who were interviewed. Nevertheless, there was still a strong residue of grammar interest (54.09% and 54.38%). These two points reveal that grammar learning has some intrinsic value for learners and their liking for it cannot be easily suppressed. The same can be said about liking for English in general (Item 10), in that, negative experience takes away some of the enthusiasm but cannot totally eradicate it.

In fact, exposure to academic content must have acted as a strong counterweight weakening the effect of the learners' negative evaluation of the efficiency of grammar teaching in their context. Arguably, without such exposure the substantial positive attitude shown at the re-administration of the questionnaire would have been much meager. It seems that English-medium exposure acts as a reality check and when linguistic content proves to be "grammar positive", the learners prepare to brace it up. The bottom line is that knowledge and awareness bring about consent and tend to strengthen the will of the students in spite of opposing forces like ineffective teachers, techniques, or materials. So, a touch of reality may go a long way in opening the eyes of learners to what should be done to reach a goal and sharpening their will to grammar.

6. 2. Motivation (Item 7, Table 1)

Steven McDonough (1999) defines motivation as "a psychological trait which leads people to some goal" (p. 219-220). Item 7 pertains to exploring the existence of this trait in the participants providing a drive for them to more grammar than they already know. As Table 1 shows, although some participants lost their earlier enthusiasm in the course of exposure to academic experience (14 strong agreements in the first administration of the questionnaire versus 7 in re-administration), motivation for learning grammar remained prevalent (51 agreements versus 8 disagreements at the re-administration). The fact that a large majority of the respondents reacted positively to item 7 shows that students had a good understanding of what language use involves and were ready to take it up. This

wising up can reasonably be attributed to exposure to academic experience and content materials. This is in reasonable harmony with cognitive explanations of motivation, such as expectancy-value theory and attribution theory, which link motivation to cognitive processes through evaluation, anticipation, and knowledge of results.

Teachers confronted with the task of grammar teaching can be suggested to provide language experience to boost students' motivation and positive attitude toward grammar learning. While familiarization is established practice for teachers and materials developers, the suggestion here is a strategic, large-scale familiarization period concerning the goals of the courses of study. As an example, once the author of this article postponed grammar and vocabulary teaching to after a preparatory course, in which pre-intermediate learners read or listened to high-interest materials for the announced purpose of English learning, secondary purpose of enjoyment, and the programmatic purpose of cognitive and affective preparation to receive grammar and vocabulary. That experience and the follow-up vocabulary and grammar course corroborated the author's hunch that foreign language learners needed a fairly extended period of acclimatization, as cognitive and affective infrastructure, before they were conscientiously receptive of vocabulary and grammar instruction.

6. 3. Relevance (Items 3 and 6, Table 2)

Perception of the relevance of grammar to language learning and use was probed by Items 3 and 7. In both pre- and post-experience administrations, most of the respondents rejected the idea of irrelevance of grammar learning to proficiency and agreed that it is essential for all language skills.

As with attitude and motivation, again a relatively high score for the perception of relevance at the two junctures may obscure a very important point: The source of perception of relevance at the beginning might have been short-lived and superficial feelings about grammar while at the later poll, their perception of relevance more likely stemmed from being more informed. The responses by 6 of the interviewees also lead us to the possibility that text experience wises learners up to the importance of grammar. One of them vehemently said, "It was during the course A Survey of English Literature that I realized how faster and better I could do the assignments if I had worked harder on grammar and vocabulary. Vocabulary takes time but it is foolish to be heedless of grammar" [author's translation]. This effect of academic study was implied by Chambers (1980), who said that asking learners without good knowledge and awareness of language about their language needs can be problematic.

6. 4. Endorsement of grammar teaching (Items 1, 4, 5, and 8, Table3)

Items 1, 4, 5 and 8 relate to students' endorsement of direct grammar teaching in universities. According to responses to Item 4 that students were not highly hopeful about the grammar courses they had started and when they looked back about 6 semesters later, they responded with more dissatisfaction. Furthermore, at the post-experience stage, even more learners demanded contextualized grammar teaching. However, this did not cause them to ask for the removal of direct grammar teaching or to consider direct grammar

learning a waste of time. It seems that at the post-experience stage they had a firmer belief in the necessity of grammar and were ready to replace it only with a better alternative – contextualized grammar teaching/learning. This shows the significant effect that exposure to English content and raising awareness had on the perception of needs. Students became grammar-conscious thanks to mere exposure to English-medium content. Would they not become even more grammar-prone if they were systematically shown that grammar is a vital component in language processing?

CONCLUSION

Like many other pieces of research and life itself, the data produced by this study and the discussion around it is kaleidoscopic, lacking a neat and spick and span pattern. Moreover, there have been many uncontrolled variables which may have influenced the results obtained. For one thing, the nature of the academic experience the participants in this study went through was not examined closely. So, ascribing change in their liking or dislike for grammar, or their motivation or demotivation, to any exact source will be problematic. However, taking a coarse-grained look at the exploration, one can say that academic experience in an EFL context, particularly engagement with content materials augments motivation for grammar learning, breeds positive attitude toward it and induces more realistic perception of need for grammar. The following translated excerpts from remarks made by a female interviewee reflect the ideas expressed by the majority of the other interviewees and are consistent with the questionnaire results in large measure.

“... It is so boring to study a certain grammar book. ... altogether grammar is an interesting subject if The [grammar] points should be used after presentation. Unfortunately they [teachers] stop after explaining them. The best way to practice is to write, to use it in writing. First I was not much interested.... Now I like it more because I think I depend on it. ... Without grammar you cannot even drink water in English [reference to a Persian simile for very easy tasks].”

The awareness-raising effect of academic experience has important implications for the practice of foreign language teaching. Teachers and material developers can inject certain doses linguistic reality in their stuff to raise learners' awareness of the nature of language and what its learning entails and in thus doing enhance learners' motivation and attitude. Such awareness will conceivably occasion healthy academic identity and autonomy, and ultimately sustainable foreign language learning. Such students will not be all-approving but critical thinkers who will usually judge carefully and evaluate course contents and procedures responsibly. Because their awareness is already raised and they are needs-conscious, they are expected not only to appreciate the *need* for the components of language but also possess a *liking* for them.

References

- Arnold, J. (Ed.) (1999). *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Basturkmen, H. (1998). Refining procedures: A needs-analysis project at Kuwait University. *English Teaching Forum*, 36(4), 2-9.

- Basturkmen, H. (2006). *Ideas and options in English for specific purposes*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Berg, C.A.R. (2005). Factors related to observed attitude change toward learning chemistry among university students. *Chemistry Education Research and Practice*, 6(1), 1-18.
- Bernat, E., and Gvozdenko, I. (2005). Beliefs about language learning: Current Knowledge, pedagogical implications and new research directions, *TESOL-EJ*, 9(1). Retrieved September 20, 2008. <http://tesl-ej.org/ej33/al.html>
- Chambers, F. (1980). A re-evaluation of needs analysis in ESP. *English for specific Purposes Journal*, 1(1), 25-33.
- Chawhan, L., and Oliver, R. (2000). What beliefs do ESL students hold about language learning? *TESOL in Context*, 10(1), 20-26.
- Cotterall, S. (1995). Readiness for autonomy: Investigating learner beliefs. *System*, 23(2), 195-205.
- Cotterall, S. (1999). Key variables in language learning: What do learners believe about them? *System* 27(4), 493-513.
- Ellis, R. (2005). *Instructed second language acquisition: A literature review*. Auckland: Ministry of Education.
- Finch, A. (2008). An attitudinal profile of EFL learners in Korea. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 5(2), 206-219. <http://www.e-flt.nus.edu.sg/v5n22008/finch.pdf>
- Graham, S. (2006). A study of students' metacognitive beliefs about foreign language study and their impact on learning. *Foreign language annals*, 39(2), 296-309.
- Horwitz, E.K. (1988). The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students. *Modern Language Journal*, 72 (3), 283-294.
- Hutchinson, T. and A. Waters. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kasper, L.F. (1997). The impact of content-based instructional programs on the academic progress of ESL students. *English for Specific Purposes*, 16(4), 309-320.
- McDonough, S. (1999). Motivation. In Johnson, K. and Johnson, H. (eds.): *Encyclopedic dictionary of applied linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995). Positive attitudes and realistic beliefs: Links to Proficiency, *Modern Language Journal*, 30(2), 449-472.

Munby, J. (1978). *Communicative syllabus design*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norton, M.I., Ariely, D. and Frost, J.H. (2007). Less is more: The lure of ambiguity, or why familiarity breeds contempt. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 92(1), 97-105.

Puchta, H. (1999). Creating a learning culture to which students want to belong: the application of Neuro-Linguistic Programming to language teaching. In Arnold, J. (Ed.): *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Schmidt, R. (2001). Attention, in Robinson, P. (ed.). *Cognition and second language instruction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spada, N. (1997). Form-focused instruction in second language acquisition: A review of classroom laboratory research. *Language Teaching Abstract*, 30(2), 73-87.

Wenden, A. (1991) *Learner strategies for learner autonomy*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall International

Wenden, A. (1999) An introduction to Metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning: beyond the basics. *System*, 27(4), 435-441.

White, C. (1999). Expectations and emergent beliefs of self-instructed language learners. *System* 27(4), 443-457.

Wilson, T.D., Centerbar, D.B., Kemer, D. A. and Gilbert, D. T. (2005). The pleasures of uncertainty: Prolonging positive moods in ways people do not anticipate. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88 (1), 5-21.

Zojanc, R.B. (2001). More exposure: A gateway to the subliminal. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(6), 224-228.

Appendix A: The Questionnaire

A Research Questionnaire

Dear student! You may agree, strongly agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements about learning/teaching English grammar. Please circle or underline the expression after each statement which corresponds to your degree of agreement with it.

1. I want direct grammar teaching dropped.

Strongly agree
disagree

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Strongly

2. I enjoy studying grammar.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

3. Learning grammar rules does not improve proficiency.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

4. I think English grammar teaching methods in Iranian universities are effective.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

5. It is better to learn grammar in context.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

6. Learning grammar is essential for all English skills.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

7. I intend to continue learning grammar.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

8. Learning grammar rules directly is a waste of time.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

9. I like to learn English grammar.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

10. I like to learn English.

Strongly agree disagree **Strongly disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly**

Thank You

Appendix B: The Interview Questions

It is about three years you are studying at university. Can you please tell me about how you think and feel about grammar courses you did at the beginning and about grammar study? Do you like grammar now? Have you changed your mind about its usefulness during the past semesters? Does it still have a place in your study plans?

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPLICIT AND E-LEARNING INSTRUCTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY OF IRANIAN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Mansoor Fahim (PhD)

Islamic Azad university, science and research branch, Tehran, Iran
Dr.mfahim@yahoo.com

Houman Bijani (PhD candidate)

Islamic Azad university, science and research branch, Tehran, Iran
Houman.bijani@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

It has been hypothesized for several years that critical thinking would make an important contribution to being an effective student and an effective teacher. However, in spite of the literature regarding the implications of critical thinking in the area of language education, little research has investigated the development of critical thinking skill on teachers through explicit instruction on the one hand and on students through explicit instruction on the one hand and on students through the usage of e-learning and use of technology in language education. In the first phase, 20 EFL teachers took the Cornell Critical Thinking Test (level X) before and after the explicit instruction on critical thinking. In the second phase, 120 EFL students were taught using the traditional and the e-learning language instruction in two groups and were tested by the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) to explore the effectiveness of either language instruction approach in the enhancement of critical thinking skills. The findings demonstrated that explicit instruction of critical thinking strategies helps teachers, especially male ones, develop thinking critically. Moreover, it was found that the application of e-learning and use of technology in language instruction enhances students', and more specifically male students', critical thinking judgment skills.

KEY WORDS

Critical thinking, explicit instruction, e-learning

1. Introduction*The Concept of critical thinking*

Critical thinking is referred to the thinking movement which was introduced based on the idea that schools should focus their attention on producing and developing knowledge and equipping students with critical competence rather than requiring them to memorize course contents. Encouraging students to develop critical thinking skills has become crucially important in higher education (Grafstein, 2007). A person who thinks critically asks appropriate questions, collects relevant information, reasons logically from this information and comes to reliable conclusions (Ghaemi & Taherian, 2011).

According to Dewey (1938) the primary purpose of education is learning to think. He further pointed out the main purpose of education to address the teaching of thinking rather than the only teaching of subject matter. Therefore, educators emphasize the importance of developing of thinking skills and further believe that thinking ability should be a primary goal of education (Pitcher & Soden, 2000). The development of thinking skills empowers students to generate new ideas and helps them provide reasoning and explanation of everyday events (Halonen, 1995).

According to Ennis (1989) students' reflective and thinking ability can be developed through critical thinking schemata. Chaffee (1988) defines critical thinking as "our active, purposeful, and organized efforts to make sense of our world by carefully examining our thinking, and the thinking of others, in order to clarify and improve our understanding" (p. 29). Education, for long, has required students to memorize course contents to give correct answers, complete their assignments, do well on tests and get good grades; yet, they are unable to think critically. However, according to Pitchers and Soden (2000), the current educational system focuses on both the learning of content information and the development of critical thinking skills on students. Being a critical thinker helps students to develop awareness and pay more attention to context in which their actions and ideas are generated. Critical thinking, being defined by Brunner (1986) as "thinking about thinking", enables us to view our actions through the eyes of others. Current trends in education focus more on students' critical thinking. Educators frequently emphasize the importance of developing thinking ability and thinking skills as the primary goal of education. Critical thinkers are actively engaged with life. They constantly question assumptions and appreciate creativity for being inventors (Young, 1980). Siegel (1988) states that "to be a critical thinker a person must have certain attitudes, dispositions, habits of mind, and character traits, which together may be labeled the *critical attitude* or *critical spirit*" (p. 39). Vygotsky (1978, cited in Feuerstein, 1999), in his study stressed the importance of a scientific outlook along with patterns of thought and logical reasoning for the development of students' understanding and perception skills. However, critical thinking is more than logical and rational-empirical thinking and argumentative skills. It requires the realization that there are specific subjective assumptions underlying belief systems, including religious, social, ethical, political and cultural aspects. It is crucially

vital for colleges and universities to develop critical thinking skills in the educational system. It has so far been assumed that students who attended university would develop critical thinking skills through attending classes, listening to lectures, taking part in class discussions and in general completing course assignments. However, in contrast to this assumption, Halpern (1998) indicated that the development of students' thinking and recognition requires the teaching of critical thinking skills more explicitly. Previous research indicated the necessity to teach critical thinking skills directly and to allow students to practice these skills with opportunities for feedback (Beyer, 1987).

Critical thinking and teacher education

Although the literature on critical thinking in teacher education is not very extensive (Williams, 2005), it is highly appreciated that critical thinking skills be promoted among teachers and teacher educators. Beineke (1985) believed that the use of critical thinking training programs within teacher education would result to teachers' better judgment of classroom and of course the world. In this respect, according to Bangert-Drowns and Bankert (1990), critical thinking skills instruction on teachers is best taught explicitly rather than implicitly. Teacher training on critical thinking enables teachers to prepare good scheme of lessons, select appropriate content, methodology, and instructional materials, organizing the class, respond to questions, teach critical thinking skills, etc. It promotes teachers effectiveness and efficacy in the educational system (Nassor & Vitikounen, 2009). Schafersman (1991) believes that critical thinking for teachers can be taught explicitly during lectures in teacher training programs.

Since promoting critical thinking is of utmost importance in teacher education, Halpern (1998) points out to the possibility of the enhancement of teachers' critical thinking skills through the requirement of teachers to use e-learning instruction for their students. Radhakrishnan (2009) stated that a critical thinking teacher has the following attributes:

- He asks pertinent questions to see whether his students have learned or not.
- He assesses statements and arguments.
- He is able to admit a lack of understanding or information.
- He has a sense of curiosity.
- He is interested in finding new solutions for becoming teaching problems.
- He is able to clearly define a set of criteria for analyzing ideas.
- He is willing to examine beliefs, assumptions, and opinions and weigh them against facts.
- He listens carefully to others and is able to give feedback.
- He sees that critical thinking is a lifelong process of self-assessment.
- He suspends judgment until all facts have been gathered and considered.
- He looks for evidence to support assumption and beliefs.
- He is able to adjust opinions when new facts are found.
- He looks for proof.
- He examines problems closely.
- He is able to reject information that is incorrect or irrelevant.

Critical thinking and e-learning instruction

One of the ways which can promote metacognitive thinking reflection is the use of modern technology (Gordon, 1995). In recent years, due to the vast application of modern technology in language teaching and language learning, e-learning has been paid considerable amount of attention in numerous educational institutions (Foray, 2004). Higher educational institutes are highly interested in adopting e-learning and use of technology in order to compensate for the shortcomings of traditional approaches to language teaching including time and place. Modern technological society requires the enhancement of individuals gaining access to critical thinking skills through modern tools. According to Mylonas, Tzouveli, and Stefanos (2004), thanks to the high flexibility and accessibility that e-learning has brought into the arena of language teaching, many language educators have considered it to be revolution in the process of teaching and learning. There are features of e-learning that are particularly suitable for promoting critical thinking. For example, Garrison and Anderson (2003) claim that the "collaborative yet reflective process of e-Learning has great potential for facilitating critical thinking as a core goal of education" (p.58).

The reasons for this increasing popularity of e-learning among language educators, according to Al-Fadhli and Khalfan (2009) could be outlined as: (1) e-learning decreases the high cost of conventional approaches to language teaching and learning to a considerable extent. (2) e-learning is more flexible in providing new opportunities for those learners who are interested in taking part-time language learning courses. (3) e-learning enables language institutes to provide more opportunities to respond the ever increasing demands of students for higher education. In addition to the promising pedagogical implications of e-learning on the development of language education, it has positive influences on the enhancement of critical thinking skills. According to Dinevski and Plenkovic (2003), the critical thinking ability of students can be fostered to a considerable extent through the use of e-learning instruction. Hosie, Schibeci, and Backhaus (2005) have identified e-learning as a suitable way for language pedagogy for the following reasons: (1) it makes learners actively engaged in the learning process, (2) it promotes context-based and work-based learning, (3) Being at the center of learning process encourages self and autonomous learning by learners, (4) it bridges the gap between what students know and what they need to know.

Critical thinking and gender

The effect of gender differences on critical thinking has been a topic of discussion for long. King and Kitchener (1994) conducted 17 studies investigating the influence of gender types on students' critical thinking ability. Of these 17 studies, 6 showed that males outperformed females regarding reflective thinking, whereas the rest demonstrated no difference between the two genders. Various findings of these studies could be attributed to different factors of these studies could be attributed to factors other than just gender such as aptitude and age. Baxter-Magolda (1992) in her study has found more similarities than differences in men's and women's way of thinking. It should be noted that gender differences in critical thinking is still a topic of debate among researchers.

Critical thinking assessment

Assessing students' critical thinking skills effectively is a major issue for higher education. According to Facione (1990), evaluating students' critical thinking skills enables educators to guide and motivate students to be better critical thinkers.

Assessment is a major concern in developing programs to enhance students' critical thinking skills. Ennis (1993) believes that the major goals of critical thinking assessment are diagnosing students' level of critical thinking, providing students with feedback about their critical thinking abilities, encouraging students to become better critical thinkers, informing teachers about their degree of success in teaching critical thinking, running research into the critical thinking instructional strategies and investigating whether the educational program is suitable enough to provide students with appropriate critical thinking skills. Researchers have come to this belief that critical thinking can be better taught and fostered through explicit instruction.

There are a number of approaches for the assessment of critical thinking ability. Three main approaches to assessing critical thinking are: (a) commercial general knowledge standardized tests, (b) researcher designed assessment tests directly related to the purpose of research project, (c) teaching students to assess their own critical thinking ability. Commercial general knowledge standardized tests (e.g. California Critical Thinking Skills Test, the Cornell Critical Thinking Tests, and the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal) test major aspects of critical thinking, including interpretation, analysis, inference, assumptions, credibility and reasoning. None of these tests have claimed to test all aspects of critical thinking. According to Facione (1986) the popularity of these instruments is due to the fact that their reliability and validity have been carefully developed, thus they are widely used to measure students' critical thinking ability. Due to the careful development, standardized scoring and general use of such critical thinking tests, they are suitable candidates for use in educational research studies.

The criteria representing whether people think critically or not are different. According to Meyers (1986) emotions are central to the critical thinking process. For some people the process of critical thinking seems to be internal, whereas for some others it manifests itself in their external actions. Research on teacher reflection supports the hypothesis that being a critical thinker is a major factor of being an effective teacher.

Despite discussions about the implications of critical thinking in the area of language education (Norris, 1985), there is little research with regard to teachers' perceptions of the critical thinking process and its effectiveness on the development of teachers recognition skills. Moreover, few studies have investigated the influence of e-learning technology in enhancing students' perceptions of critical thinking. Students, however, face a lot of challenges understanding how e-learning technologies can improve critical thinking ability. In addition to the previous shortcomings, little research has explored the process of critical thinking development using a pre- and post-instructional design. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of explicit critical thinking instruction on teachers understanding of critical thinking skills on the one hand and to explore the impact of the

application of e-learning technology in EFL instruction on improving students' critical thinking skills on the other hand. Moreover, the question of gender differences in critical thinking for both the students and teachers is still a topic of controversy among scholars and research findings haven't resolved this issue yet.

5. Research Questions

In order to investigate the potential impact of explicit training of critical thinking program on teachers and e-learning instruction on students regarding the above mentioned problems, the following research questions can be formulated.

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding critical thinking before and after the instructional program?
2. Do students display higher degree of critical thinking development using the e-learning and technological method of language teaching delivery?

6. Method

Design

The first research question was investigated by means of quantitative-quasi pre-post experimental research design and for the second by means of ex-post-facto design using experimental and control groups.

Participants

The research, on both the teachers and students, was conducted at the Iran Language institute (ILI) during the spring and summer 2011. As many as 20, 10 male and female, EFL teachers, and 120, 60 male and 60 female, EFL students studying at the same English language level participated in this study voluntarily. Two university professors majoring in TEFL and having high qualifications in teaching critical thinking strategies participated in this study as trainers. The trainers held seminar including several lectures, presentations and workshops on critical thinking so that to enhance teachers critical thinking ability and instruct them how to think critically using appropriate strategies. It is important to note that an EFL instructor held the e-learning class in order to be a moderator to guide students understand insights of the e-learning instruction.

Instruments

Two types of tests were used in this study. In the first phase of the study, to investigate the first research question, the Cornell Critical Thinking Test (Level X) (Ennis, Millman, Tokmo, 1985) was used. The Cornell Critical Thinking Test (Level X) is based on four major abilities which include: (1) inductive thinking (2) judging credibility of observation reports (3) deductive thinking and (4) assumption identification. Although critical thinking tests do not completely guarantee the true measurement of critical thinking ability, their validity as indicators of critical thinking dispositions and abilities are high. For the second phase of the study, to explore the second research question, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) was used. The California Critical Thinking Skills Test

(CCTST) is based on five abilities including: (1) analysis, (2) deduction, (3) evaluation, (4) induction, and (5) inference. The CCTST is a multiple-choice standardized assessment test designed to measure the critical thinking ability of students with regard to their attitudes, knowledge and skills. In the CCTST, the students are asked to critically evaluate and analyze reading passages that include problems, statements, arguments and interpretations.

Moreover, to better explore the second research question, which investigated the influence of e-learning on critical thinking development, modern language teaching technologies including CDs, cell-phone language teaching software, laptops, the internet, video-projectors, chat room discussions, audio/video conferencing and other multimedia devices were employed.

Procedure

The Cornell Critical Thinking Test (Level X) was administered to the 20 teachers before and after the critical thinking training program. Having administered the pre-test to the 20 teachers, a seminar on critical thinking was held. The seminar included several lectures, presentations and workshops on critical thinking. In these lectures, presentations and workshops, the ways and strategies to developing critical thinking was taught to the teachers, and it was stressed that thinking critically helps teachers to develop an awareness of actions and attitudes and guards them against stereotyped solutions and statements, and broadens their response to alternative and corrections along with modeling appropriate and logical reasoning. The post-test that followed the training program measured the effectiveness of the training program of critical thinking on teachers. In the second phase of the study, to investigate the second research question, 120 EFL students participated in two groups including 60 students in the experimental group and 60 students in the control group. In order to investigate the use of e-learning and technological methods of language teaching delivery in the development of critical thinking ability on students, the control group was instructed using the classical way of language teaching and the experimental group was instructed using modern language teaching technologies including CDs, cell-phone language teaching software, laptops, the internet, video-projectors, chat room discussions, audio/video conferencing and other multimedia devices. It is worth mentioning that prior to the instructional program; a pilot study was conducted to make sure that both groups are at the same level of language proficiency. Having finished the instructional program, the critical thinking ability of both groups was measured by the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST).

7. Results

RQ1: what are teachers' perceptions regarding critical thinking before and after the instructional program?

The means and standard deviations for the teachers both before and after the instructional program on critical thinking are given in Table 1.

Table 1: critical thinking mean score and standard deviation of CCTT (Level X) before and after training

Critical thinking category	Before training		After training	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Introduction	11.26	4.1	13.39	2.87
Credibility	10.43	3.45	13.63	2.09
Deduction	10.12	3.86	12.72	2.16
Assumption	6.68	3.19	8.14	1.93
Total score	25.11	6.54	31.29	3.57

Figure 1 presents teachers' mean score on each category of the CCTT (Level X) before and after the critical thinking training program graphically.

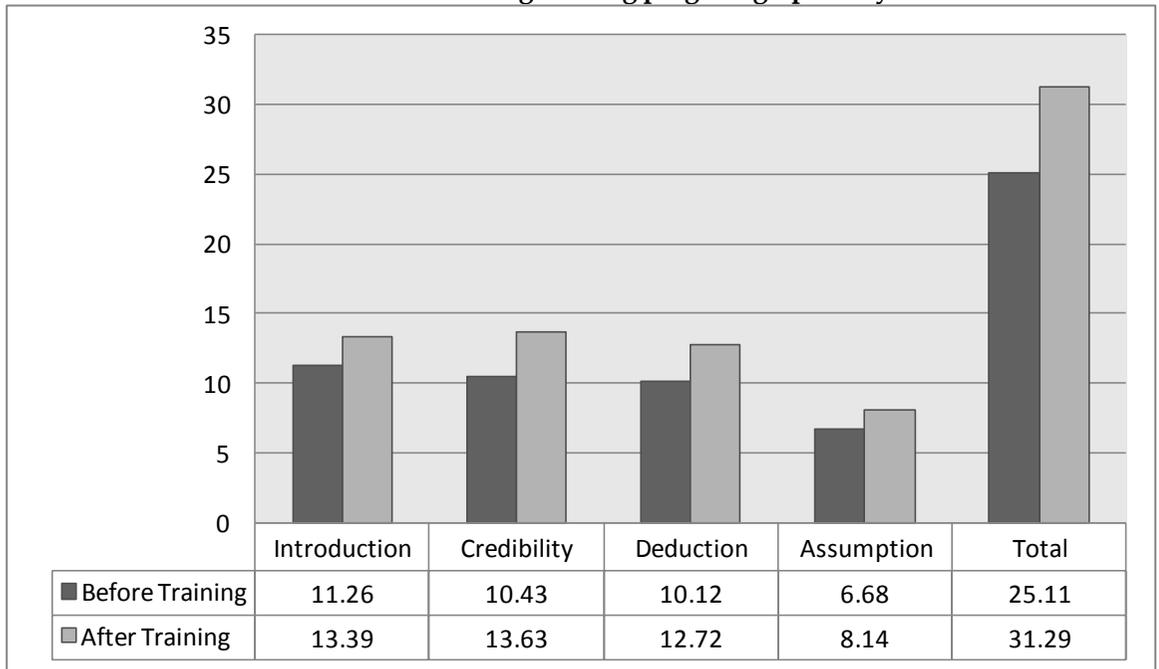


Figure 1. Critical thinking mean score of CCTT (Level X) before and after training

It is clear that for all the categories of critical thinking scores, including total test scores, there were explicitly substantial differences between the means and standard deviations at the post-training phase of the study compared to the pre-training phase. This finding suggests that the training program on critical thinking was effective enough to increase teachers' ability in thinking critically to a remarkable extent. To test whether the mean differences between the pre-training and the post-training phase of the study is significant or not, a paired t-test was run and the t-observed was; $t=2.8$, $df=18$, $p<0.05$

Moreover, the critical thinking mean scores of male and female teachers were measured to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program on gender types. Table 2 represents the mean score on the critical thinking test of the male and female teachers.

Table2. Critical thinking mean score of male and female teachers before and after training

Groups	Total mean score on pre-test	Total mean score on post-test
Female (N=10)	24.40	27.31
Male (N=10)	25.83	35.28

Based on the findings obtained from Table 2, it is clearly observable that the critical thinking training program was more effective for male teachers rather than the female ones. Although male teachers were a little better critical thinkers than female teachers prior to the training program, their critical thinking mean score increased much more noticeably than females' mean score at the post-training phase. This indicates that male teachers benefited more as a result of the critical thinking training program than female teachers.

RQ2: Do students display higher degree of critical thinking development using the e-learning and technological method of language teaching delivery?

The CCTST was conducted for both the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught by the use of e-learning and modern technology in language teaching and the control group was taught by using traditional way. Table 3 displays the mean score and standard deviation for both groups of students in each particular critical thinking skill of the CCTST.

Table 3. Mean score and standard deviation of the CCTST

Critical thinking category	Experimental group (e-learning) N=60		Control group (Traditional) N=60	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Analysis	5.27	1.03	4.32	1.57
Deduction	6.87	1.17	5.48	2.38
Evaluation	6.61	1.52	5.07	1.78
Induction	8.22	1.77	6.59	2.14
Inference	6.13	1.19	4.42	0.93
Total score	18.69	1.68	15.53	2.12

Figure 2 displays students' mean score on each category of the CCTST for the experimental (e-learning) and control (traditional) groups graphically.

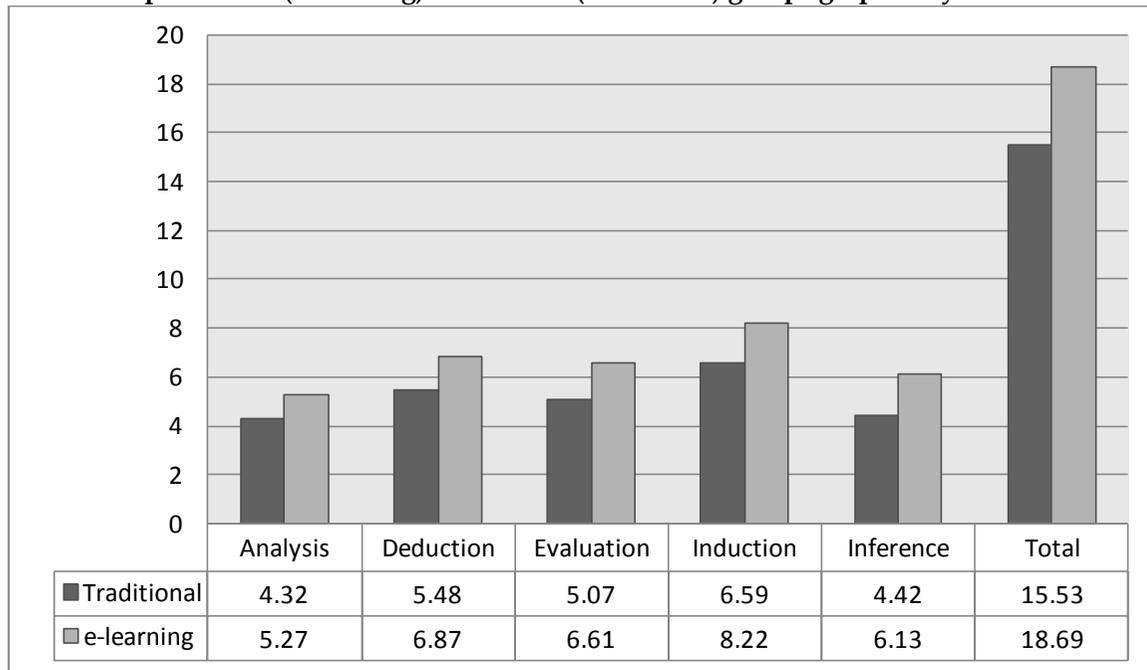


Figure 2. Critical thinking mean score of CCTST for the e-learning and the traditional groups

The obtained results vividly suggest that for all the categories of the CCTST the researcher observed a remarkable increase of the mean scores of the experimental group compared to those of the control group. The finding implies that the use of e-learning and modern technology in language teaching is effective in increasing the critical thinking ability of the students to a great extent.

To test whether the mean differences obtained from the experimental group and control group is significant or not, a paired t-test was run and t-observed was: $t=2.17, df=118, p<0.05$

In addition, the critical thinking mean scores of male and female students were measured separately to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of both the use of technology and e-learning in language teaching and the traditional method on students' gender types regarding the development of critical thinking skills. Table 4 represents the mean score on the CCTST of the male and female students.

Table 4. CCTST mean score of male and female students of both the experimental and control groups

Groups	Total mean score of the experimental group	Total mean score of the control group
--------	--	---------------------------------------

	(e-learning)	(traditional)
Female (N=60)	18.30	15.82
Male (N=60)	19.08	15.24

With 19.08, the experimental male group has the highest mean, whereas the male control group has the lowest mean with 15.24. It is noteworthy that male students outperformed female students in the e-learning and use of technology group, while female students were marginally better than male students in the traditional group. The difference between the mean score of the e-learning and use of technology male group and the traditional male group was 3.84; whereas, the difference between the mean score of the e-learning and use of technology female group and the traditional female group was 2.48. The findings show that although the e-learning and use of technology language teaching program was quite influential in boosting the critical thinking ability of both groups, male students benefited more as a result of it compared to female students.

8. Discussion

In order for teachers to gain mastery in language teaching, they should be able to reason why they should act in certain ways. Therefore, being an effective teacher depends highly on the development of critical thinking ability. The findings of the investigation of critical thinking instruction on teachers demonstrated that explicit instruction of critical thinking strategies helps them develop thinking critically. While it is assumed that in order to be an effective teacher, teachers need to gain mastery over the use of and application of language teaching methods, this study, in contrast Siegel's (1991) findings, demonstrated that in order to increase efficacy in language teaching, teachers need to achieve higher level of competencies in critical thinking. In other words, this study showed that any mastery by teachers over the use and application of instructional methods plays a subsidiary role in the enhancement of teachers' effectiveness.

Moreover, it is strongly recommended that teachers should be enabled to reason how and why they should act in particular situations. To this point, teaching effectively depends on the development of teachers' competencies in critical thinking abilities. Male teachers, although they were better critical thinkers before the training program, could get better use of it compared to female teachers which proves the better effectiveness of the critical thinking program on male teachers rather than female teachers.

In the second phase of the study, the comparison of the effectiveness of e-learning and use of modern technology in language teaching and the traditional approaches to language teaching resulted in the better development of students' critical thinking ability through the application of e-learning and modern technology in language teaching. This finding is in line with that of Bruner (1986) and Al-Fadhli and Khalfan (2009), who believe that using e-learning technology develops learners' intellectual ability. This study also demonstrated that e-discussions among students play a significant role in extending the critical thinking ability of the students to a remarkable extent; therefore, it can be introduced as a new approach to teaching critical thinking. The outcomes Support the results obtained by Feuerstein (1999) clarifying the contribution of an e-learning instructional program in

promoting cognitive skills of students. Students who received the e-learning instruction demonstrated greater achievement of critical thinking skills than those who didn't receive.

On the other hand, the findings demonstrated that although female students were identified be better critical thinkers in the traditional approach to language teaching; male students tended to display better development in their critical thinking skill compared to female students in the e-learning program. The results are also in line with the findings of Grafstein (2007) demonstrating that e-learning environment is an appropriate trend towards the development of critical thinking skills in language teaching.

CONCLUSION

Critical thinking, being central to one's professional development, should be included lifelong into teachers' developmental programs. The findings of this study, which is in line with the findings of Ennis (1989), showed that explicit critical thinking training programs are effective in helping teachers and teacher educators develop their critical thinking skills. The outcomes of this study further demonstrated that experience is not a determining factor in the enhancement of teachers' teaching performance (even teachers who were identified as novice achieved significant levels of critical thinking ability).

It could be implied from this study that it is fruitful for teachers and teacher educators to take courses and attend training program on thinking skills before commencing their professional carrier as teachers. Therefore, it is suggested that educating teachers and teacher educators to be critical thinkers should be formative and throughout years of language teaching development. It is hoped that encouraging teachers to be critical thinkers will increase their responsibility thus equipping prospect teachers with effective, independents self-reliant and critical decision making tools. It was also implied from the findings of this study that the use of e-learning and technology in language teaching has positive effects on the enhancement of students' critical thinking ability. Education along with the use of e-learning technology enhances the thinking ability of students. E-learning and the use of technology in language teaching encourages students to think reflectively through empowering them with the skill of analysis and evaluation. The findings of this study, moreover, supports the assumption that through the usage of e-learning and technology in language teaching, students will demonstrate a higher improvement in critical thinking over students who were taught based on the traditional approaches to language teaching.

9. Implications of the study

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for students, teachers and teacher educators.

Teachers need to be educated through training programs to enhance their critical thinking skills to gain new thinking command to impact the course methodology. critical thinking process should be included in teachers' in-service education so that to provide them with opportunities to deepen their understandings of strategies to promote critical thinking. Teachers require opportunities to think about philosophy of critical thinking and learn

what their own philosophy of thinking is. All students, regardless of their level of education, should be provided with opportunities to think critically. Teacher training programs should incorporate critical thinking courses for both students and teachers at the beginning of the education course. From the view point of teacher educators, training students to think critically through e-learning instruction empowers them with the ability to analyze complex issues generate solutions and develop standards for decision making. The findings assume that the more students gain experience in e-learning, the more capable they will be with regard to critical thinking skills. The provision of teacher education programs on critical thinking will build better societies by preparing future teachers to promote critical thinking skills for students.

Teachers should avoid making differentiations about which gender of students are most likely to benefit from the critical thinking e-learning instructional program. The outcomes indicated that both male and female students could increase their critical thinking ability as a result of the e-learning instructional program.

10. Suggestions for further research

Although the outcomes of this study provided evidence for the development of the students' critical thinking skills by the use of e-learning instruction, long-lasting effectiveness on students after being divorced from this instructional method requires further investigation.

References

- Al-Fadhli, S. and Khalfan, A. (2009). Developing critical thinking in e-learning environment: Kuwait University as a case study. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34(5), 529-536.
- Bangert-Drowns, R. L., and Bankert, E. (1990). Meta-analysis of effects of explicit instruction for critical thinking. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, MA.
- Baxter-Magolda, M. B. (1992). Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in students' intellectual development. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Beineke, J. A. (1985). Critical thinking, teacher education, and national reports. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 12(1), 80-85.
- Beyer, B. K. (1987). *Practical strategies for the teaching of thinking*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chaffee, J. (1988). *Thinking critically*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Macmillan.

Dinevski, D., and Plenkovi, M. (2003). Modern university and e-learning. *Media, Culture and Public Relations*, 2, 137-46.

Ennis, R., Millman, J. and Tomko, T. (1985). *Cornell critical thinking tests level X and level Z*. Pacific Grove, California: Midwest Publications.

Ennis, R. H. (1989). Critical thinking and subject specificity: Clarification and needed research. *Educational Research*, 19, 10-12.

Ennis, R. (1993). Critical thinking assessment. *Theory into Practice*, 32(3), 179-86.

Facione, P. A. (1986). Testing college-level critical thinking. *Liberal Education*, 72(3), 221-231.

Facione, P. A. (1990). *Critical thinking: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction*. Millbrae, CA: California Academic Press.

Feuerstein, M. (1999). Media literacy in support of critical thinking. *Learning Media and Technology*, 24(1), 43-54.

Garrison, D. and Anderson, T. (2003). *E-Learning in the 21st century: A framework for research and practice*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Ghaemi, H. and Taherian, R. (2011). The role of critical thinking in EFL teachers' teaching success. *MJAL*, 3(1), 8-22.

Grafstein, A. (2007). Information literacy and technology: An examination of some issues. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 7(3), 51-64.

Halonen, J. S. (1995). Demystifying critical thinking. *Teaching of Psychology*, 22, 75-81.

Halpern, D. F. (1998). Teaching critical thinking for transfer across domains. *American Psychologist*, 3, 449-55.

Hosie, P., Schibeci, R., and Backhaus, A. (2005). A framework and checklists for evaluating online learning in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30(3), 539-53.

King, P., and Kitchener, K. (1994). *Developing reflective judgment: Understanding and promoting intellectual growth and critical thinking in adolescents and adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mylonas, P., Tzouveli, P., and Stefanos, K. (2004). Towards a personalized e learning scheme for teachers. In *Proceedings of the 4th IEEE International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies*, 560-4. Joensuu: Finland.

- Meyers, C. (1986). *Teaching students to think critically*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Nassor, M. and Vitikounen, A. (2009). Philosophy in East Africa towards critical thinking, professional, and democracy. Retrieved July 8, 2011 from <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Current.Events/philtakz-cfp1109.html>
- Norris, S. P. (1985). Synthesis of research on critical thinking. *Educational Leadership*, 42, 40-45.
- Pithers, R.T., and Soden, R. (2000). Critical thinking in education: A review. *Educational Research*, 42(3), 237-49.
- Radhakrishnan, C. (2009). Critical Thinking & Practical Strategies to promote it in Classroom. Retrieved June 14, 2011 from <http://chettourhorizonsforteaching.blogspot.com/2009/03/critical-thinking-practicalstrategies.html>
- Schafersman, S.D. (1991). *An introduction to critical thinking*. Retrieved June 12, 2011 from <http://www.freeinquiry.com/criticalthinking.html>
- Siegel, H. (1991). The generalizability of critical thinking. In S.P. Norris (Ed.), *The generalizability of critical thinking*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Williams, R. L. (2005). Targeting critical thinking within teacher education: The potential impact on society. *The Teacher Educator*, 40(3), 163-187.
- Young, R. (1980). *Fostering critical thinking*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

THE EFFECT OF EFL TEACHERS' LOCUS OF CONTROL ON EFL LEARNERS' READING ACHIEVEMENT

Behzad Ghonsooly
Ferdowsi university of Mashhad
ghonsooly@um.ac.ir

Yasser Rezvani
Ferdowsi university of Mashhad
yasserrezvany@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Locus of control is a psychological factor heavily affecting one's motivation. People with an internal Locus of control orientation believe their success and failure depends on their efforts, while those with an external Locus of control orientation believe luck and fate play a big role. This study sought to explore the effect of EFL teacher's locus of control on EFL learners' reading achievement. Participants of the study include 100 EFL teachers teaching in Mashhad language institutes. Teacher locus of control questionnaire was administered to the participants of the study. The results of the statistical analysis reveal that teacher's locus of control significantly affects EFL learners' reading achievement.

Introduction

Post-method pedagogy in the realm of EFL/ESL has been characterized with the motto of theorizing what is practiced and practicing what is theorized. This motto summarizes one of the most important duties of an EFL/ESL teacher that is reflection. Teacher's reflection at the heart of post-method pedagogy refers to teachers' moments of reflecting upon their previous experiences in order to improve their teaching. The objective of this study is to investigate the possible relationship between teachers' reflection and teachers' success using two questionnaires as the main instruments of research.

The post-method era in language teaching is characterized with a movement away from fixed methodological packages for teaching language toward a concern with teachers' professional expertise, growth, wisdom, experience, learners' needs, the context of teaching, and the political conditions of the environment in which teaching takes place (Prabhu, 1990; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Richards, 2002).

This is an indication of the importance of teachers' professional development in recent years (Harmer, 2001, cited in Al-Hashmi, 2004). Also of importance is teachers' ability to go beyond existing norms and taken for granted habits and their ability to practice innovative ideas (Al-Jabri, 2009). One way for teachers to develop professionally is how they take control of the responsibility of their teaching in the classroom and to what they attribute their success or failure in their language teaching. (Calderhead & Gates, 1993).

Locus of Control (LOC) is an Individual Difference (ID) variable affecting the performance of language learners. IDs have been shown to be "consistent predictors of EFL success" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.6). Early studies on IDs were mainly focused on classifying learners as good and bad, intelligent and dull, motivated and unmotivated (Horwitz, 2000). These studies tried to investigate the potential of EFL learning in students by administering certain tests such as Modern Language Aptitude Battery (Carroll & Sapon, 1959) and predicting the potentially successful learners. For example, language motivation and language aptitude have been identified as important ID variables affecting EFL/ESL learners' success since the 1960s (Breen, 2001; Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; Cornwell & Robinson, 2000; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ehrman, 1996; Ellis, 2004; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993; Robinson, 2002).

One important area in the sub-field of ID variables is how EFL learners perceive themselves. This variable called Locus of Control (LOC) is rooted in Rotter's Social Learning Theory (1954). However, the concept was explicitly mentioned in Rotter's 1966 paper, which became the most cited article in the psychological and social science literature of the previous decades (with 4700 citations by the 1980's) (Rotter, 1990).

LOC as an ID variable refers to a person's belief about control over life events (Findley & Cooper, 1983). Considering LOC, there are two types of people; those who feel personally responsible for the things that happen to them (labeled internalizers) and those who feel what happens in their lives is determined by forces out of their control (labeled externalizers) (Findley & Cooper, 1983). Simply put, LOC is a concept referring to the extent to which people believe their life events are dependent on their own behaviors and controllable, or alternatively whether events are produced by uncontrollable factors such as luck and fate.

Locus of control

The concept of LOC developed from Rotter's (1954) Social Learning Theory (SLT). Dollard and Miller (1950, cited in Smith, 2003, p. 28) were among the first to use the term social learning. Generally, there are several social learning approaches (including Bandura, 1977; Mischel, 1973; Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972) all of which share the argument that learning happens in a social context and that it accounts for human behavior. In SLTs as well as most learning approaches the environment is viewed as the major factor in shaping behavior. If the environment is properly controlled, the learning process will account for the acquisition and modification of behavior (Phares, 1992, cited in Smith, 2003, p. 31). There may be restrictions imposed by heredity and biological factors, but the focus is on

flexibility allowed by learning rather than on restrictions imposed by biology or heredity (Phares, 1992, cited in Smith, 2003, p. 31).

Rotter's SLT focuses on the variables that account for any behavior (Phares, 1979; Rotter, 1954; Rotter, et al., 1972). He was actually interested in factors that account for the expression of learning once it is in the person's repertoire of behaviors rather than its actual process. Rotter (1966) claims that two main variables determine any given behavior: expectancy and reinforcement value. Expectancy is a subjectively held possibility that certain reinforcements will occur as the outcome of a given behavior. Reinforcement value is defined as the degree of preference for one goal over others (Phares, 1992, cited in Smith 2003, p.31).

Rotter (1954) began working on his SLT of Personality while he was at Ohio State, and his Social Learning and Clinical Psychology was published in 1954. He laid out the basics of his Social Learning Theory in this book. The main idea of the book is that personality is actually the result of interaction between a person and his or her environment. It does not reside within an individual independent of the environment he or she is in (Rotter, 1954).

In 1966, Rotter published a monograph entitled Generalized Expectancies for Internal versus External Control of Reinforcement (1966), in which he explored people's expectation of whether they can control the reinforcements they receive. At the one end, we see people who believe that reinforcements are a result of luck or fate. These people are said to have an external LOC. At the other end, there are those who believe that reinforcements are a result of one's own behavior. These people are said to have an internal LOC. Rotter's Internal- External Locus of Control Scale (1966), aimed at measuring difference of Locus of Control in individuals, has been widely employed and studied.

Rotter, Chance and Phares (1972) suggest that two major types of expectancy determine behavior: The expected outcome of a behavior and the value a person places on that outcome. In Applications of the SLT of Personality, Rotter et al. (1972) also described a general theory of personality in which variables were based on the ways that different individuals habitually think about their experiences. One of the important variables, I-E, distinguished "internalizers," who believe they control events, from "externalizers," who believe events are not within their control. Since then different studies have found direct relationships between I-E orientations and a range of behaviors from job performance to attitudes toward one's health (Rotter, et al, 1972).

Review of Literature

Research has revealed that having an internal LOC and higher academic achievement are correlated (Findley & Cooper, 1983). People with internal LOC try harder and get better results in school. They devote longer periods of time to homework and study more for exams. Bender (1995) maintains if a student tries hard at school tasks and yet continually fails to get good grades; this will lead to an external locus of control. A high external LOC, in turn, will cause a lack of motivation for education in general. People who have external LOC may feel that there is no point in working hard because their efforts will only bring

disappointment. Ultimately, they may think that they are doomed to fail. On the other hand, an external LOC leads to easy justification of poor performance without hurting the subject's self-esteem (Basgall & Snyder, 1988). Externalizers escape the potential personal damage that may result from attributing their failure to their flaws by attributing it to fate, chance, or to someone else's fault. This will allow us to dismiss our inadequacy, helping keep our self-esteem untouched. However, constant use of external excuses could cause us to lose our motivation to improve (Basgall & Snyder, 1988).

Rotter (1966, 1979) and others (e.g., Davis & Davis, 1972; Phares, 1979) building on this concept suggested that reporting external beliefs acts as a defensive function for some individuals. Phares (1979) held that failing and believing in internal control frequently leads to personal inadequacy. But failure and believing in external causes give the individual the chance to ignore personal responsibility, thus reducing some of the unpleasant feelings of failure (Phares, 1979).

Snyder, Higgins and Stucky (1983), in their presentation of a theoretical model of excuse-making process, have addressed the self-protective potential of externality. The model makes considerable use of the attribution-of-responsibility literature. It suggests that people try to ignore their responsibility for negative actions so as to maintain a positive image for oneself and others and to protect self-esteem. In support of this position, they noted that attribution studies have provided evidence that under conditions threatening self-esteem, people tend to take credit for success and project responsibility for failure (Snyder, Higgins and Stucky, 1983).

In the field of education, Anderman and Midgley (1997) found out that students who find their poor performance caused by factors out of their control are unlikely to hope for improvement. In contrast, students who attribute their poor performance to a lack of skills or poor study habits are more likely to try harder in the future. Students having an external locus of control are more likely to give up hope and not try any harder in the face of failure, while those with an internal locus of control may try harder to improve in the face of failure (Anderman and Midgley, 1997). If teachers can give their students a more hopeful attitude (develop an internal locus of control), their performance tends to improve (Noel, Forsyth, & Kelley, 1987).

LOC can also influence the way an individual responds to success. In one study (Kernis, 1984), subjects were led to make either internal or external attributions for their success at a certain task. Those who made internal attributions had a better performance on the same task than on a different task when tested again, whereas those who made an external attribution had a better performance on a different task than on the same task. Therefore, internalizers are more likely to continue performing a task that they have performed well, while externalizers may stop working on the successful task and focus their efforts on a different task (Kernis, 1984).

LOC also has a great impact on the student's motivation to continue education and to succeed in educational pursuits (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). In

education, educators, social service personnel, and others use the term “at risk” to refer to children who are highly likely to fail in school. There has been a great bulk of research on the relationship between different demographic and social variables associated with failing in school. The term “at risk” is generally used to describe a child or adolescent who is “at risk” of failing and/or eventually dropping out of school (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, (1989).

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) has estimated that one quarter of the adolescent population is at risk of academic failure, with another quarter considered “moderately” at risk, which could lead to school failure and unemployment or underemployment.

There have been studies investigating the relationship between LOC and adult basic education as well. Many learners drop out of Adult Basic Education (ABE) before gaining reading and writing skills. In some cases dropout rates of 60% have been reported over a 6 month period (Kent, 1973). LOC could also be related to course completion in this area because completion of educational programs seems to rely on personal commitment. Rotter (1966) maintains that the degree to which people recognize a relationship between their behaviors (actions) and the resulting reinforcements (outcomes) varies. Some people, externals, generally believe that reinforcements are under the influence of forces out of their control such as fate, chance, luck, or powerful others. Others, internals, generally believe that their own behaviors shape the primary factors leading to reinforcements. They believe that control is within the power of the individual. He further points out that LOC is in fact a result of the history of reinforcement patterns experienced by an individual.

Based on the type of life experiences many individuals in ABE programs have, it can be assured that many may find reinforcements to be a result of external forces. Therefore a direct relationship between completion of ABE programs and LOC is possible (Kent, 1973). Kent also mentions that there have been only few studies investigating this relationship.

Also, Biaggio (2004) examined the relationship between LOC and anxiety. He concluded that internalizers experienced more state-anxiety than externalizers in situations related to “luck” while externals showed more state-anxiety in “ability” situations than internalizers.

Moreover, Carden, Bryant, and Moss (2004) explored the relationship between LOC, procrastination, and, anxiety among 114 undergraduate students. They divided the participants of their study into two groups of internalizers and externalizers. They found that externalizers experience higher academic procrastination and test anxiety than internalizers.

Recently, Ghonsooly and Elahi (2010) investigated the effect of LOC on University students’ General English Achievement among university students of humanities, sciences, and engineering. In their study, they also validated the Persian version of Internal Control Index as a questionnaire to assess EFL learners’ achievement. They found that first there is a significant and positive relationship between university students’ LOC and their

general English achievement. Second, there are significant differences in General English achievements of the three groups of students. Finally, the LOC orientations of the three groups of students differ significantly from each other.

In another study Hosseini and Elahi (2010) explored the relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their reading achievement and also their use of language learning strategies. The findings of their study confirmed the relationship among the variables. They also found that metacognitive strategies were used more frequently by internalizers than externalizers.

Oxford and Ehrman (1993) mentioned that teachers should identify IDs among their learners and take them into consideration in order to create the most effective instructions. However, Williams and Burden (1997) despite the broad research conducted in the sub-discipline of IDs, observed some problems with regard to the research implications and methodology. Instead of indicating useful ways to help teachers explain how learners differ, how to assist them to take control of their own learning, and how to mediate their learning, the research has mainly covered the selection of particular learners' characteristics and measurement of such characteristics (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Furthermore, these constructs are mainly associated with their tests. Strengthening the validity of such tests may lead to a belief that such constructs are fixed (Williams & Burden, 1997). However, some of these constructs such as motivation, anxiety, and aptitude can be changed. Learners' high degree of motivation depends on a set of variables. Anxiety is also highly situation-based and is affected by a set of different factors (Horwitz & Yung, 1991). Moreover, the findings of research on aptitude, the ease with which learners learn a foreign language, may justify teachers' unsuccessful way of teaching some learners by referring to their lack of ability or aptitude for language learning (Dörnyei, 2005).

In general, major points regarding IDs research can be summarized as in the following:

1. Research in the IDs area is based on a theory of learning which considers individuals' behaviors as being affected by a set of traits or attributes, which are fixed.
2. The practical value of the findings has been limited because they do not give us information on how teachers can help learners become effective learners. (Williams & Burden, 1997, p.95)

Therefore, as Williams and Burden (1997) mentioned a new approach including the individuals' main contributions to the learning situation within the constructive approach is needed because:

1. Such a theory enables EFL teachers to highlight the uniqueness of individuals and help teachers to see what they have in common.
2. It helps EFL teachers to see how individuals change rather than how they stay the same.
3. It enables teachers to help learners take control of their own learning.

4. It concerns EFL learners' perceptions of themselves as learners.

So far, we have discussed learner's LOC, but the current study focuses on teacher's LOC, which is a relatively new avenue of research. In a constructivist approach such as the one proposed by Williams and Burden (1997), an individuals' understanding of the world is gradually reshaped as they adapt their knowledge to new information. The way in which EFL teachers perceive the world and themselves plays an important role in their professional success. Thus, it would be worthwhile to concentrate on how EFL teachers perceive themselves as language teachers and what influences their personal views on their teaching processes. One important area, which is related to how EFL teachers perceive themselves, is Locus of Control (LOC).

Therefore, the present study targets the effect of Iranian EFL teachers' locus of control on their learners' reading achievement.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of EFL teachers. 100 EFL teachers teaching adults in language institutes in Mashhad, Iran, were selected. They were both male and female and all had at least three years of experience.

Instruments

Teacher Locus of Control

The first instrument used in this study is Rose and Medway's (1981) *Teacher Locus of Control (TLC)*, which is a 28-item measure (see appendix A). In this measure, teachers are asked to assign responsibility for student successes or failures by choosing between two competing explanations for the situations described. Half the items on the *TLC* are based on situations of student success while the other half is based on student failure. For each success situation, there are two explanation, one explanation attributing the positive outcome internally to the teacher (I+) and the other attributing responsibility outside the teacher, usually to the students. Similarly, for each failure situation, one explanation gives an internal teacher attribution (I-) while the other blames external factors.

Scores on the *TLC* have been significantly related to the individual Rand items (GTE and PTE) as well as to the sum of the two Rand items (TE) with correlations generally ranging from .11 to .41 (Coladarci, 1992; Parkay, Greenwood, Olejnik, & Proller, 1988). Rose and Medway (1981) found that the *TLC* was a better predictor of teacher behavior than Rotter's Internal-External (I-E) scale, probably because it was more specific to a teaching context. For example, the *TLC* predicted teachers' willingness to implement new instructional techniques, whereas Rotter's I-E Scale did not. To further examine the *TLC* and the two Rand items, Greenwood, Olejnik, and Parkay (1990) dichotomized teachers' scores on the two Rand questions and cross-partitioned them into four efficacy patterns. They found that teachers with high efficacy on both measures (I can, teachers can) had more internally-oriented scores on the *TLC* for both student success and student failure than teachers who scored low on both (I can't, teachers can't).

Kay-cheng (1986) measured the validity of teacher locus of control (Teacher LOC) by an instrument adapted for this purpose. The construct refers to the individual's perception that changes in his or her environment result from internal or external factors. An adaptation of a scale developed by Rose and Medway (1981) was used to measure Teacher LOC. The first study investigated the reliability of the scale using data from 54 primary and secondary teachers (35 female and 19 male) in a course on classroom-based research. The external criterion was performance ratings of these teachers by their supervisors. Discriminant analysis of the instrument indicated its efficacy in differentiating internals from externals. The second study tested the hypothesis that more effective teachers would be more internal as compared with less effective colleagues. Thirty female and 10 male teachers from one secondary school completed the Teacher LOC instrument. They were separated into effective and less effective teachers by principals' ratings. Teachers rated as more effective were in fact more internal. To the extent that supervisors' evaluations are reliable and valid measures of teacher performance, locus of control can be considered to have predictive validity.

Kay-Cheng (1986) in another study investigated the validity and reliability of the Teacher Locus of Control Scale (TLCS) developed by Rose and Medway (1981) in a different cultural environment. Specifically, the study investigated the discriminability of the items and the relationships of the TLCS as a whole with relevant criterion measures such as stress, personality, and educational attitudes. A few words in two of the 20 TLCS items were changed to suit the local linguistic style. Two hundred teachers from technical colleges and high schools in Singapore responded to the scales at their convenience. The reliability of the TLCS was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha, and it turned out to be .84. And its validity was assessed through its correlation with the seven criterion measures. The majority of the items showed discrimination power. The study concluded that TLCS has substantially high reliability

Interview

An unstructured interview with 10 teachers of each group of high and low LOC was conducted to obtain information on the teachers' attitudes toward their success and failure attributions. The amount of time spent on each interview ranged between half an hour and forty-five minutes. The reason why this format was used for the interviews was to let the teachers convey what is on their mind easily in a relaxed atmosphere and with no constraints inflicted upon them by the research agenda (Dornyei, 2007). As Dornyei (2007) puts it, such types of interview are best for studies which focus on "the deep meaning of particular phenomena".

Data collection

The researchers first obtained permission from the language institutes participating in the study to provide them with a list of teachers who teach adults at the intermediate, higher intermediate, and advanced levels. Then after obtaining the consent of the teachers, the teacher locus of control scale was administered to the teachers in each institute. The participants were asked to answer the question "Would you also like to take part in an interview to contribute more?" on the questionnaire. Teachers were assured that the results would be confidential. The testing departments of all the English institutes were

requested to present a copy of the GPA (overall scores) of reading comprehension of every class participating in the study to the researchers at the end of the term.

Data Analysis

The independent T-test and correlation co-efficient formula were used to analyze the collected data. The mean score of teacher locus of control scale was used as the cut-off score for dividing teachers with high levels of LOC, internalizers, and those with lower levels of LOC, externalizers.

Results

As in any other empirical study, in this part, the basic descriptive statistics, namely, mean, standard deviation, range, minimum, and maximum scores are reported. The calculations have been performed for all the instruments as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.	Variance
	Statistics	Statistics	Statistics	Statistics	Statistics	Statistics
TLOC	100					
RA	100	72.00	92.20	81.85	5.20	27.04

The first research question was “Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers’ locus of control and their students’ reading achievement?” In order to investigate this relationship, the statistical technique of Pearson-product moment Correlation was used. Table 2 summarizes the correlation coefficient between the two variables.

Table 2. Correlation between TLOC and Learners’ RA

		LOC	RA
TLOC	Pearson Correlation	1	.76*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
	N		101
RA	Pearson Correlation	.76*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	N	101	

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.05level (2-tailed)**

As observed, the correlation coefficient was calculated to be 0.78, which is significant at P<0.05. This correlation is moderately high and positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that higher teachers’ locus of control leads to higher student reading achievement.

The second research question seeks answer to the question “Are there any significant differences between the achievement of the learners whose teachers are internalizers and

that of those whose teachers are externalizers?" Table 3 shows the mean scores of the two groups of learners.

Table 3.A comparison of RA mean scores of students with internalizer and externalizer teachers

	TLOC	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
RA	High	48		5.94	.214
	LOW	53		5.76	.205

As shown above, the mean score of learners whose teachers are internalizers is 86.20 and that of those whose teachers are externalizers is 77, 50. Table 4 demonstrates whether this difference in mean scores is significant or not.

Table 4.Determining the significance of the mean scores difference in achievement

		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
G E	Equal variances assumed	.166	.684	9.06	98	.000	2.7042	.29837	2.1148	3.2936
	Equal variances not assumed			9.10	96.9	.000	2.7042	.29689	2.1177	3.2907

The above table shows that the difference between the two mean scores is significant, $t(98) = 9.06$, $p < .05$, and learners with internalizer teachers have higher achievement scores than those with externalizer teachers.

Discussion and implications

As mentioned in the previous section, the results of this study reveal a significant relationship between teachers' locus of control and their students' reading achievement. Therefore, students of teachers with internally oriented LOC achieve more on the reading than students of teachers with externally oriented LOC. Figure 5.1 illustrates a continuum representing the relationship between teacher's LOC and learner reading achievement.

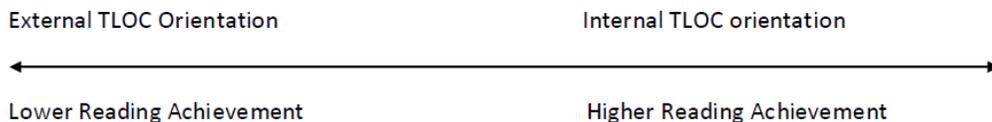


Figure 5.5

The

Teacher's LOC-Learner Reading Achievement Continuum

Interview sessions were also held with both internally and externally LOC oriented teachers. Each group comprised of 10 teacher participants. Subjects were asked to speak freely about their attitudes toward teacher's LOC. All participants including both internally and externally LOC oriented teachers acknowledged the importance of this factor. Those with an internal LOC did not hesitate to talk about their belief in the human being as the agent of what happens to him. They said that this view had helped them all throughout their career, boosting their motivation significantly. After a more thorough introduction of the concept of LOC by the interviewer, half of those with an external LOC (5 out of 10) admitted that internal LOC orientation can be helpful, but the rest believed that "you can only do so much" and luck and fate play significant roles.

Given the results obtained in this study, teachers should try to take control of their practice. LOC is a dynamic characteristic, which can be nurtured. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has been little if any research on teacher's locus of control in EFL studies. However, student's locus of control has been an active area of research for some time and most of the findings in this area can be extended to teacher's locus of control as well. Williams and Burden (1997) maintained that LOC's dynamic nature allows teachers to help learners take control of their learning. In the same token, teachers themselves can take control of their teaching. Craske (1988) and Hastings (1994) suggested reattribution training as the main application of attribution theory. So teachers can change their own attributions so that they will no longer view their failures as caused by stable or uncontrollable factors but factors within their reach. This will help them double their efforts in their professional development.

References

- Al-Jabri, S. (2009). *Post-basic teachers' attitudes towards reflection*. Leeds: School of education, University of Leeds.
- Anderman, L. H., & Midgley, C. (1997). Motivation and middle school students. In Judith L. Irvin (Eds.), *What current research says to the middle level practitioner* (pp.1-48). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Basgall, J. A., & Snyder, C. R. (1988). Excuses in waiting: External locus of control and reactions to success-failure feedback. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 656-662.

Bender, W. N. (1995). *Learning Disabilities: Characteristics, identification, and teaching strategies* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, Mass: Allyn & Bacon.

Biaggio, A. M. B. (2004). Relationships between state-trait anxiety and locus of control-experimental studies with adults and children. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 8(2), 153-166.

Breen, M. P. (2001). *Learner Contributions to language learning: New directions in research*. Harlow, England: Longman.

Calderhead, J., & Gates, P. (1993). *Conceptualizing reflection in teacher development*. London: Falmer Press.

Carden, R, Bryant, C., & Moss, R. (2004). Locus of control, test anxiety, academic procrastination and achievement among college -- students. *Psychological Reports*, 95(2), 581-582. doi: 10.5332/03000-4333.23.22.

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Carrol, J., & Sapon, S. (1959). *Modern language aptitude test-from A*. New York: The Psychological Corporation.

Cohen, A. D., & Dörnyei, Z. (2002). Focus on the language learner: Motivation, Styles, and Strategies. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 170-190). London: Arnold.

Coladarci, T. (1992). Teachers' sense of efficacy and commitment to teaching. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 60, 323-337.

Cornwell, S. & Robinson, P. (2000). *Individual differences in foreign language learning: Effects of aptitude, intelligence, and motivation*. Tokyo: Aoyama Gakuin University.

Craske, M. L. (1988). Learned helplessness, self-worth motivation and attribution re-training for primary school children. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 58, 152-64.

Davis, W. L., & Davis, D. E. (1972). Internal and external control and attribution of responsibility for success and failure. *Journal of Personality*, 40, 123-126.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Earlbaum.

- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Skehan, P. (2003). Individual differences in second language learning. In C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp.589-630). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ehrman, M. E. (1996). *Understanding second language difficulties*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ellis, R. (2004). Individual differences in second language learning. In A. Davies & C. Elder (Eds.), *The handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 525-551). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Findley, M. J. & Cooper H. M., (1983). Locus of control and academic achievement: A literature review. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44(2), 419 – 427.
- Ghonsooly, B. & Elahi, M. (2010). Validating Locus of Control Questionnaire and Examining its Relation to General English Achievement. *Journal of Teaching Language Skills*, 2(1), 145-163.
- Greenwood, G. E., Olejnik, S. F., & Parkay, F. W. (1990). Relationships between four teacher efficacy belief patterns and selected teacher characteristics. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 23(2), 102-106.
- Hastings, N. J. (1994). Enhancing motivation in the classroom: Strategies for intervention. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 11(2), 48-55.
- Horwitz, E. (2000). Teachers and students, students and teachers: an ever-evolving partnership. *The Modern Language Journal* 84, 523-535.
- Hosseini, A., & Elahi, M. (2010). On the Alleged Relationship between LOC, L2 Reading Achievement, and Use of Language Learning Strategies. *Ferdowsi Review*.1(1), 21-49.
- Horwitz, E., & Young, D. J. (1991). *Language anxiety: from theory and research to classroom implications*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall.
- Kay-Cheng, Soh (1986) *Teacher Locus of Control Scale: A Validity Study* Occasional Paper 28. Singapore, Singapore Institute of Education.
- Kent, W. (1973). *Executive summary of a longitudinal evaluation of adult education*. (ERIC Reproduction Service No.ED 085 418).
- Kernis, M. H. (1984). *Internal versus external attributions are important determinants of subsequent performance*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.ED 195 326).

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(4), 537-558.

Mischel, W. (1973). Toward a cognitive social learning reconceptualization of personality. *Psychological Review*, 80, 252-283.

Noel, J. G., Forsyth, D. R., & Kelly, K. N. (1987). Improving the performance of failing students by overcoming their self-serving attributional biases. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 8, 151-162.

Oxford, R., & Ehrman, M. (1993). Second Language Research on Individual Differences. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13, 188-205.

Parkay, F. W., Greenwood, G., Olejnik, S. & Proller, N. (1988). A study of the relationship among teacher efficacy, locus of control, and stress. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 21(4), 13-22.

Phares, E. J. (1979). Defensiveness and perceived control. In L. C. Perimeter & R. A. Monty. (Eds). *Choice and perceived control*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. 195-298.

Prabhu, N. S. (1990). There is no best method-why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 161- 176.

Richards, J. C. (2000). *Beyond training*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, P. (Ed.). (2002). *Individual differences and instructed language learning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Rose, J. S., & Medway, F. J., (1981). Measurement of teachers' beliefs in their control over student outcome. *Journal of Educational Research*, 74, 185-190.

Rotter, J. B. (1954). *Social learning and clinical psychology*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs*, 80 (Whole No. 609).

Rotter, J. B. (1990). Internal vs. external control of reinforcement: A case history of a variable. *American Psychologist*, 45, 489-493.

Rotter, J., Chance, J., & Phares, J., (1972). *Applications of a Social Learning Theory of Personality*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Smith, V. (2003). *Analysis of locus of control and educational level utilizing the internal control index*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Marshall University of Graduate College.

Snyder, C. R., Higgins, R. L., & Stucky, R. J. (1983). *Excuses: Masquerades in search of grave*. New York: Wiley.

Williams, M., & Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

THE EFFECT OF METADISCOURSE ON EFL LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION

Mohammad Reza Hashemi,
Associate Professor,
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.

Hossein Khodabakhshzadeh,
Islamic Azad University, Torbat-E-Heidarieh Branch, English Department,
Torbat-E-Heidarieh, Iran.
hkhodabakhshzade@gmail.com

Majid Elahi Shirvan,
PhD Candidate in TEFL,
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.
elahimajid58@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study is an aim to examine the effect of meta-discourse on reading comprehension of EFL intermediate and advanced students. 120 EFL students were assigned into four groups of 30. There were two groups of treatment and control both in intermediate and advanced levels. Two versions of texts with and without discourse markers were given to the control and treatment groups respectively. The result demonstrated a significant difference between groups in advanced and intermediate levels. However, there was no significant difference within the intermediate groups. Therefore, in order to find out the possible reasons a follow up unstructured interview was conducted. The results revealed that the intermediate students were not aware of the role of discourse markers in the texts. Thus, Researchers raised their consciousness about discourse markers, which helped the premise of the study, and the second administration of the versions of the texts to the intermediate groups led in a significant difference. The findings of this study clearly display the important role of meta-discourse and the degree of consciousness about them across different levels in reading comprehension of EFL students.

KEY WORDS

Metadiscourse, Reading Comprehension, Consciousness raising,
Discourse markers

Introduction

Fortunately, the significance of meta-discourse has recently been recognized as a pivotal feature in communication. Luckily, this important issue has been touched by academia and especially language teaching milieu and its facilitative role (Crismore, 1984, 1989; Hyland, 1998, 1999; Perez & Macia, 2002) has been acknowledged. Adding to this promising context is the shift from the traditional textual focus to more functionally oriented perspectives in the realm of meta-discourse. This new view according to Hyland (2005) considers meta-discourse as a phenomenon, which is distinct from propositional meaning and refers to the aspects of the text that embody writer-reader interactions and the relations, which are internal to the discourse.

The presence of meta-discourse has been investigated in written discourse (Hyland, 2005; Hyland, 2000, 2004; Carlson, 1998). The effect of the discourse markers has also been investigated in this field as well (Martinez, 2004; Simin and Tavangar, 2009; Cheng and Stefensen, 1996; Intraprawat, and Stefensen; 1995). Contrary to all these attempts in determining the role of discourse markers in written discourse, the crucial role of meta-discourse in spoken discourse seems to have been ignored.

Students of English as a foreign language are more required to listen to and comprehend great amounts of second language input (Eslami and Eslami, 2007). The importance of meta-discourse in listening comprehension has attracted the attention of some scholars (Chaudron and Richards, 1986; Flowerdew and Tauroza, 1995; Perez and Macia, 2002).

Despite these attempts to underscore the role of meta-discourse in written discourse, there has been little attention paid to the role of meta-discourse in reading comprehension. So this study is partially inspired by the few studies conducted recently and is hopeful to highlight the crucial role of discourse markers in EFL students reading comprehension.

Definition of reading

Reading can be seen as an "interactive" process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or (reading fluency). In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as s/he tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used: linguistic or systemic knowledge (through bottom-up processing) as well as schematic knowledge (through top-down processing). Since reading is a complex process, Grabe argues that "many researchers attempt to understand and explain the fluent reading process by analyzing the process into a set of component skills" (1991, p. 379 as cited in Alyousef, 2005) in reading; consequently researchers proposed at least six general component skills and knowledge areas: 1. Automatic recognition skills 2. Vocabulary and structural knowledge 3. Formal discourse structure knowledge 4. Content/world background knowledge 5. Synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies 6. Metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring (Alyousef, 2005, p. 144)

Reading to see what a text says may suffice when the goal is to learn specific information or to understand someone else's ideas. But we usually read with other purposes. We need to solve problems, build roads, write legislation, or design an advertising campaign.

Alyousef (2005) believes, "We must evaluate what we have read and integrate that understanding with our prior understanding of the world. We must decide what to accept as true and useful" (p. 144).

To assess the reliability of remarks within a text, we must go outside a text and bring to bear outside knowledge and standards. In other words, as we read more and hear more, we will gain knowledge and discover new contexts for our ideas. We will also come to think more critically. According to Lachini (2003), "As readers we want to accept a fact only when it is actually true. To evaluate a conclusion, we must evaluate the evidence upon which that conclusion is based. We do not want just any information; we want reliable information" (p. 1).

The situation with the written word is no different. A text does not contain a meaning. Readers construct meaning by what they take the words to mean and how they process sentences to find meaning. Readers draw on their knowledge of the language and of conventions of social communication. They also draw on other factors, such as knowledge of the author, the occasion, or the audience "They infer unstated meanings based on social conventions, shared knowledge, shared experience, or shared values. They make sense of remarks by recognizing implications and drawing conclusions" (Kurland, 2000).

Traditional approaches to reading

In the traditional teaching of reading comprehension, the teacher asks the class to turn to a certain page or announces that he is going to teach a certain unit. He then explains some of the more difficult vocabulary items. This is followed by silent reading on the part of the class. The teacher then reads part of the text and comments on what he feels is difficult for the students. S/he may sometimes ask a few questions, which are usually answered by a few bright students, or if s/he fails to get the necessary response, s/he answers them himself/herself and proceeds to the next sentence or paragraph. A question and answer session follows in which the teacher does the questioning and a selected number of students supply the answers, often by lifting a few sentences straight from the text. If there is sufficient time left, the teacher asks different students to read aloud. Finally, the class is asked to do the written exercises, which are often on vocabulary and structure.

Some of the weaknesses of the approach mentioned above or variations of it, according to Cheng (1985), are:

1. The teacher concentrates on teaching content rather than reading skills.

2. There is no attempt to establish a purpose in reading. In real life, one reads for a variety of reasons. In the classroom, students apparently read in order to answer comprehension questions, which is not what one usually does in real life.
3. While there is obviously a place for reading aloud in the language lesson, not every kind of text lends itself to this kind of practice. Drama and short stories containing a lot of dialogue naturally require reading aloud. Expository, argumentative and descriptive passages do not readily lend themselves to such vocal practice. In any case, the reading aloud attempted by students is all too often stultifying, undirected, and of little profit to the students who read and to those who listen.
4. The approach does not challenge students to really come to grips with the text. There is rarely any group discussion of the text. After the silent reading by the class, the teacher asks individual students to answer the questions in the book. If a student gives a correct answer, the teacher passes on to another question without bothering to find out if other students have worked out the correct answer on their own.
5. The reading text is often used as a vehicle for the teaching of vocabulary and structures. The textbook writer is partly responsible for this as the exercises following the text and comprehension questions are normally those dealing with lexis and grammar. There is a place for language exercises but these should not be looked upon as the main components of a reading lesson (pp. 55-56).

Based on the weaknesses mentioned by Cheng (1985), which are shared by many educators all around the world, paying attention to new features of teaching reading texts like meta-discourse markers in the process of reading comprehension was highlighted.

Meta-discourse

Meta-discourse is a widely used term in current discourse analysis and language education that involves speakers or writers not only in producing but an interaction between text producers, text and their audience (Hyland, 2005). In fact text producers try to anticipate their audience expectations, requirements and resources to affect their understanding to pave the way of an effective communication. Until recently there has been an overarching ideology quite limited to conveying the ideas by focusing on the grammatical patterns and rules. Today, however, new conceptualizations of meta-discourse have led to a shift towards the means that speakers or writers try to express their attitudes. Hyland (2005) argues that "meta-discourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goals or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating" (p. 3).

Halliday's (1994) functional, pragmatic approach to language is of great help in conceptualizing, understanding and classifying meta-discourse. He considers three major

functional systems for the language i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational level concerns with the propositions, the interpersonal layer is dealt with all those personal feelings, personality expressions as well as the social interplay along with different interactional forms. The textual layer is quite essential for understanding the ideational and interpersonal meaning. Following this functional view, metadiscourse can be classified into two broad categories i.e. the interpersonal and textual in which we can find other subcategories as well. Vande Kopple (1985) believes that textual metadiscourse reveals a discursal relationship between individual propositions that culminate in a cohesive and coherent text. This is what Lyons (1997) refers to as text reflexivity or “the capacity of natural language to refer to or describe itself” (p. 5)

Different scholars have investigated the role of metadiscourse instruction in different skills of the language (Dastjerdi and Shirzad, 2010; Jalalifar and Alipour, 2007; Martinez, 2004). The common result of these studies displays the positive effect of discourse markers instruction.

Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) investigated the effect of explicit teaching of meta-discourse markers on EFL learners’ writing ability at three levels of advanced, intermediate, and elementary. They found that explicit instruction of meta-discourse makers significantly increased EFL learners’ writing ability at three levels. Their findings also revealed that intermediate EFL learners took more benefits of familiarity with discourse markers than those at the other levels in their writing ability. In other words, intermediate EFL learners improved their writing more significantly than the other groups.

Meta-discourse and academic lectures as monologues

The lecture discourse has been analyzed by some scholars (Murphy and Candlin, 1979; Chaudron, 1988; Shing Chiang and Dunkel, 1992; Allison and Tauroza, 1995). They have in fact considered factors such as speech rate, cultural differences, note-taking practices, listening strategies and discourse organization. Listening to the lectures as monologues has always been one of the demanding jobs for foreign language learners. It has also been an important skill for university students (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992). Different scholars have considered lectures as monologues from different perspectives. Some have focused on the macro structure of lectures (Olsen and Huckin, 1990); others have paid attention to the interactional practices of lecture comprehension (Morell, 2004).

Method

Participants

The participants in this study included four groups of 30, two intermediate and two advanced, students taking IELTS training courses at Kishair English Institute, Mashhad. Iran. All the participants’ first language was Farsi and their age ranged from 22 to 43 with the mean of 33.

First a test of TOEFL derived from *Actual TOEFL tests* was given to 112 EFL students studying at Kish Air English institute. Then those whose scores ranged between 450 and 550 were considered as intermediate. Also, those whose scores ranged above 550 were

considered as advanced learners. Therefore, 65 of the test takers were labeled intermediate and 62 advanced. Other participants, whose scores were lower than 450 and did not serve a purpose for the study were excluded from them. For the sake of the purpose of the study, both groups of scores were ranked from the highest to the lowest. Then in each group the one with highest score was assigned to one group and the second highest score was assigned to another group and this process continued to the one with the lowest score. So the participants were randomly assigned into four groups. Moreover, to make the number of each group equal, the researchers included 30 students in each group. Finally, in order to make sure that the difference between the mean scores is not significant and the two intermediate and the two advanced groups are the same with regard to the construct tested, the researchers used an independent t-test.

Table 1. Independent samples t-test for the Intermediate Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance s		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
GE	Equal variances assumed	.141	.46	9.064	58	.71	2.40	.29837	2.2273	3.96362
	Equal variances not assumed			9.109	57.9	.71	2.40	.29689	2.3123	3.2079

Table 2. Independent samples t-test for the advanced Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance s		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

		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
GE	Equal variances assumed	.163	.46	9.064	58	.67	2.70	.29837	2.1148	3.2936
	Equal variances not assumed			9.109	57.9	.61	2.70	.29689	2.1177	3.2907

The results of this test revealed that the two groups at both levels, intermediate and advanced did not significantly differ from each other in terms of their performance on the T-test. It means that the participants of the two groups were equal with regards to their GE (General English) ability.

Materials

The material used for this study consisted of 5 texts based on section 4 of IELTS examinations. 5 of these monologues were derived directly from IELTS tests. Since such section consists of monologues, which are rich in meta-discourse (Hyland, 2005), they serve the purpose of the study very well. The other 5 monologues were based on the first group of monologues, but the meta-discourse was excluded.

Procedure

First, the researchers in the study selected five texts from the original IELTS exams. Then in order to organize the second group of texts, they excluded the meta-discourses from the original ones. Hyland’s model of interpersonal meta-discourse (2005) was determined for underlining the meta-discourse and their exclusion from the original texts. The learners in the experimental groups read the original texts, and those in the control groups read those with the meta-discourse excluded.

Results

The first research question was “Is there any difference in intermediate EFL learners’ reading comprehension with regard to the inclusion and exclusion of meta-discourses?” The following table shows the mean scores of the intimidate control and experimental groups.

Table 3. The mean scores of the intermediate experimental and control group reading scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Intermediate	Experimental	30	16.4313	1.93032	.26104
	Control	30	16.4313	1.93032	.26104

	Control	30	12.5284	1.46876	.24164
--	---------	----	---------	---------	--------

Table following table illustrates whether such difference in mean scores of the two groups is significant or not.

Table 4: Determining the significance of the mean scores between the two 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
GE	Equal variances assumed	.123	.49	9.064	58	.38	2.70	.29837	2.1448	3.2397
	Equal variances not assumed			9.109	57.9	.35	2.70	.29689	2.4128	3.2087

As table 4 shows the difference between the two groups is not significant. It means that the inclusion and exclusion of meta-discourses has no significant effect on intimidate EFL learners' reading comprehension.

The second research question was "Is there any difference in advanced EFL learners' reading comprehension with regard to inclusion and exclusion of Meta-discourses?" The following table demonstrates the mean scores of the advanced experimental and control groups.

Table 5. The mean scores of the advanced experimental and control group reading scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Advanced	30	18.0224	1.94330	.24264

	Experimental				
	Control	30	14.5331	1.76486	.27415

In order to see whether the difference in mean scores of the two groups is significant or not, the researchers used an independent t-test (Table 6).

Table 6: Determining the significance of the mean scores between the two groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		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
GE	Equal variances assumed	.128	.46	9.124	58	.000	2.35	.29364	2.2335	3.2435
	Equal variances not assumed			9.159	57.9	.000	2.53	.21628	2.2731	3.2604

As table 5 shows, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. It means that meta-discourses have a significant effect on advanced learners' reading comprehension.

Discussion

The results of the first research question showed that the exclusion of meta-discourses has no significant effect on intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension. Since that was not the case for the advanced ones, the researchers decided to conduct an unstructured interview with 5 learners of each group to gain further insights into the causes of such results. Therefore, 5 learners of each group were invited for a half hour interview with the researchers. In order to elicit reliable answers from the interviewees and to keep them motivated for the interview, the researchers paid each one 20, 000 Rials, around 20\$. The unstructured interview was used in this study because as Dörnyei (2007) words:

"It allows maximum flexibility to follow the interview in unpredictable directions, with only minimal interference from the research agenda. The intention is to create a relaxed atmosphere in

which the respondent may reveal more than he/she would in informal contexts, with the interviewer assuming a listening role.....This kind of interview is most appropriate when a study focuses on the deep meaning of particular phenomena (p.136).

Having conducted the interviews, the researchers found that almost all the intermediate interviewees, 9 out of 10, 5 in the control group and 4 in the experimental group, were not aware of the concept of meta-discourse. However, most of the advanced learners interviewed, 9 out of 10, 4 in the control group and 5 in the experimental one, were familiar with the concept of meta-discourse. Thus, based on the findings of the interviews, the researched decided to expand the study. They conducted a further study on the same intermediate control and experimental groups. But this time, both experimental and control groups were consciously familiarized with the concept of meta-discourse by the researchers. Then, both the control and experimental groups were given five texts different from the previous ones. However, the control group received the ones with the meta-discourses excluded. Next, the mean scores of both groups were observed. The following table demonstrates the mean scores of both groups.

Table 7. The mean scores of the intermediate experimental and control group reading scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Intermediate	Experimental	30	16.2043	1.94330	.21460
	Control	30	14.0521	1.76486	.20516

An independent t-test was used to see whether such difference in mean scores is significant or not (table 8)

Table 8: Determining the significance of the mean scores between the two 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 Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper

								erence		
GE	Equal variances assumed	.168	.46	9.062	58	.63	.000	.29837	2.1148	3.2936
	Equal variances not assumed			9.109	57.9	.63	.000	.29689	2.1177	3.2907

As table 8 shows, the difference in mean scores is significant at $P < 0.001$. It means that exclusion of meta-discourse can significantly influence intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension if they are already familiar with the concept of meta-discourse.

The findings of this study also corroborate those of Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010). As mentioned in the review of literature Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) found that explicit teaching of discourse markers can improve EFL learners' Writing ability. In this study the researchers found that meta-discourse play an important role in EFL learners' reading comprehension. Both studies highlight the significant role of meta-discourse on the EFL skills such as writing and reading comprehension.

Moreover, Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) indicated that intermediate EFL learners could improve their writing ability more significantly than those at the elementary and advanced levels when they learned the meta-discourse markers explicitly. In this study, the researchers found that if intermediate EFL learners become consciously aware of the role of meta-discourse makers in their reading comprehension, their performance can improve their reading ability more significantly than when they are not aware of them. Therefore, both studies emphasize the explicit teaching or awareness of meta-discourse-markers can help intermediate EFL learners to improve not only their writing ability, but also their reading comprehension ability.

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study indicate that the effect of meta-discourse on EFL reading comprehension should not be neglected by the teachers. Also, meta-discourse can play a more influencing role on reading comprehension if the consciousness of the EFL learners' is raised by their teachers, especially at the intermediate level.



Figure1. The plausible effect of meta-discourse on EFL learners' reading comprehension

Researchers interested in the field of meta-discourse can do more research on the role meta-discourse markers on the other skills and sub-skills of English Language such as reading comprehension and speaking ability.

References

Alison, D. & Tauroza, S. (1995). The effect of discourse organization on lecture comprehension. *English for Specific Purposes*, 14(2), 157-173.

Alyousef, H. S. (2005). Teaching reading comprehension ~ ESLIEFL learners. *The Reading Matrix* 5 (2): 143-152.

Carlson, S.B. (1988). Cultural differences in writing and reasoning skills. In A.C. Purves (Ed.), *Writing Across Languages and Cultures: Issues in contrastive rhetoric* (pp. 227-260). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Chaudron, C. & Richards, J. C. (1986). The effect of discourse markers on the comprehension of lectures. *Applied Linguistics*, 7, 113-127.

Chaudron, C. (1988). *Second language classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cheng, W. (1985). Teaching reading comprehension in the secondary ESL class: The challenge of new materials and methods. *CUHK Education Journal*, 13(1): 54-62.

Cheng, X and Stefensen, M. (1996). Metadiscourse: A technique in improving students writing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 30, 149-181.

Crismore, A. (1984). The rhetoric of social studies textbooks: Metadiscourse. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 16(3), 279-296.

Crismore, A. (1989). *Talking with readers: Metadiscourse as rhetorical act*. New York: Peter Lang.

Eslami, R. Z. & Eslami, R. A. (2007). Discourse markers in academic lectures. *Asian EFL Journal*. 9(1), 22-38.

Flowerdew, J., & Tauroza, S. (1995). The effect of discourse markers on second language lecture comprehension. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 17, 435-458.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar (2nd ed.)*. London: Edward Arnold.

Hyland, K. (1998). Persuasion and context: The pragmatics of academic metadiscourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 30 (4), 437-455.

- Hyland, K. (1999). Talking to students: Metadiscourse in introductory course books. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(1), 3-26.
- Hyland, K. (2004). Disciplinary interactions: Metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13, 133-151.
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Exploring interaction in writing*. London: Continuum.
- Intraprawat, P. & Stefensen, M. S. (1995). The use of metadiscourse in good and poor ESL essays. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 4(3), 253-272.
- Jalilifar, A. & Alipour, M. (2007). How explicit instruction makes a difference: Metadiscourse markers and EFL learners' reading comprehension skill. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 38(1), 127-148.
- Kurland, D. J. (2000). What is critical thinking? Retrieved: May 27, 2007 from <http://www.criticalreading.com>
- Lachini, K. (2003). Critical thinking and reading comprehension. Paper presented in the forth Linguistic Conference. Tehran: Allameh Tabatabaie University.
- Martinez, A. C. L. (2004). Discourse markers in the expository writing of Spanish university students. *IBERICA*, 8, 63-80.
- Morell, T. (2004). Interactive lecture discourse for university EFL students. *English for specific purposes*, 23, 325-338.
- Murphy, D.F. & Candlin, C.N. (1979). The engineering lecture discourse and listening comprehension. *Practical papers in English Language Education*, 2, 1-79.
- Olsen, L. A., & Hukin, T. N. (1990). Point-driven understanding in engineering lecture comprehension. *English for Specific Purposes*, 9, 33-47
- Perez, M. A. & Macia, I. A. (2002). Metadiscourse in lecture comprehension: Does it really help foreign language learners? *Allantis*, 14(2), 3-21.
- Perez, M.A. & Macia, I. A. (2002). Metadiscourse in lecture comprehension: Does it really help foreign language learners? *Allantis*, 14(2), 3-21.
- Shing Chiang, C. & Dunkel, P. (1992). The effect of speech modification, prior knowledge, and listening proficiency on EFL lecture learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26(2), 345-374.
- Simin, S. & Tavangar, M. (2009). Metadiscourse knowledge and use in Iranian EFL writing. *Asian EFL Journal*, 11, 230-255.

Vahid Dastjerdi, H., & Shirzad, M. (2010). The impact of explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on EFL learners' writing performance. *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills*, 2(2), 154-174.

Vande Kopple, W. (1985). Some exploratory discourse on metadiscourse. *College composition and communication*, 36, 82-93.