The Iranian EFL Journal   December 2016   Volume 12 Issue 4

Iranian EFL Journal

Table of Contents:

Iranian EFL Journal

December 2016 Foreword

By Paul Robertson and Rouhollah Askari Bigdeli

The current issue of the Iranian EFL Journal is composed of five studies which have addressed such issues as listening comprehension, communicative language teaching, reading achievement in an EAP setting, students' emotional intelligence and self-regulation, and learners' experience of answering L2 research questionnaires. In the first study which was carried out in Salahaddin and Soran Public Universities in Iraqi-Kurdistan Region, Saadallah Yaseen Rajab and Vahid Nimehchisalem studied listening comprehension problems and strategies usage among Kurdish EFL undergraduates. Also, the researchers were interested to find out whether there was any relationship between the learners' listening problems and strategy usage. 165 English learners were asked to take part in a survey. The results obtained from the study revealed that the learners suffered from input and context listening comprehension problems. Meta-cognitive strategy was the major listening strategy used. Additionally, the relationship between listening problems and strategy usage among the learners was significantly negative and negligible, r= -.186, p < .05. In the second study in which the use was made of a mixed-method design, Iman Taebi, Zadmehr Torabi, and Mohammad Amini Farsani addressed the status of communicative language teaching in English institutes in Iran. In particular, the researchers explored the teachers' attitudes along with learners' perceptions and attitudes. One hundred and twenty EFL teachers and 120 learners participated in the study. The instruments included two questionnaires and the semi-structured interview. The findings showed that the majority of teachers and learners took positive and favorable attitudes toward communicative-based instruction. However, the results suggested an inconsistency between learners' needs and preferences and their reported experience of classroom instruction. The third study, carried out by Zahra Zohoorian and Ali Rahimi, was concerned with reading achievement in an EAP setting. 60 Iranian tertiary level sophomores majoring in engineering were involved in the study. The researchers employed a mixed-method design and collected the data through pre and post-tests,

focused group interviews and diaries. The results indicated that the students in the authentic context outperformed the traditional context in reading achievement. Thus, it was concluded that the authentic context had positive effects on reading achievement. In the fourth study, Mohammad Aliakbari and Mahdi Najar examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and self-regulation (SR) of Iranian EFL university students. 100 English language students were chosen to participate in the study. Two questionnaires were used to collect the data. The results indicated that there was statistically strong relationship between EI and SR ($r = 0.55$, $p \geq 0.01$). Furthermore, it was found that there was a significant difference between the respondents' SR and their gender, while no significant difference between the participants' EI and their gender was observed. The last study of the current issue focused on how language learners perceive and respond to questionnaires items in research studies. Mehdi B. Mehrani and Nasrin Omidva studied challenges learners experienced while answering questionnaire items. They also attempted to propose the potential strategies that can be employed to address those challenges. 31 language learners were included in the study and the data were collected through conducting a series of focus group discussions. The study revealed such challenges as norming items, complicated and technical wordings of items, ambiguous items, extreme options, midpoints in Likert scales, lack of attention to labels, and treating issues as static. The researchers discussed potential strategies to address the challenges.

Listening Comprehension Problems and Strategies among Kurdish EFL Learners

Saadallah Yaseen Rajab and Vahid Nimehchisalem[1]

Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Biodata

Saadallah Yaseen Rajab holds an MA in Applied Linguistics from the Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages, Universiti Putra Malaysia. He is English teacher in a preparatory school in Iraqi-Kurdistan Region. Email: saadullah_rekani@yahoo.com

Vahid Nimehchisalem, the corresponding author, holds a PhD in Teaching English as a Second Language. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages, Universiti Putra Malaysia. His main research area is assessing ESL writing, but he has published on a variety of topics from English language teachers' professional development to vocabulary learning strategies. He is chief editor of *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies,* an editorial team member of *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *Journal of Modern Languages*, and *Voices in Asia Journal;* and is a regular reviewer of articles submitted to *Pertanika JSSH.* Email: vahid@upm.edu.my

---

1 Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract

This quantitative research investigated listening comprehension problems and strategies usage among Kurdish EFL undergraduates. Additionally, it tested the relationship between the learners' listening problems and strategy usage. More specifically, the listening problems included input, context, process, affect and task problems while the listening strategies consisted of cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies. Through a survey, a questionnaire was used to elicit data from 165 randomly selected undergraduates in Iraqi-Kurdistan universities. The findings showed that the learners suffered from input and context listening comprehension problems. Meta-cognitive strategy was the major listening strategy used. The relationship between listening problems and strategy usage among the learners was significantly negative and negligible, r= -.186, p < .05. The findings generally imply that it is important for instructors of a second language to take note of the different listening problems that exist among listeners so as to enable them to apply the appropriate strategies.

Keywords: Comprehension problems, Listening strategies, Cognitive strategies, Meta-cognitive strategies, Socio-affective strategies.

1. Introduction

In second language learning, listening skills are considered very important because they are fundamental to acquire a language. Learners obtain language input through listening. Acquisition takes place only when learners obtain sufficient comprehensible input (Krashen, Terrell, Ehrman, & Herzog, 1984). Listening plays an important role in language classrooms as it provides input for hearers (Rost, 1994). Human beings attain language through understanding the linguistic information they encounter (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, language is acquired chiefly through receiving comprehensible input and listening capacity is the critical constituent in accomplishing understandable language input. Any kind of learning including language learning simply cannot occur without understanding inputs and comprehending. Thus listening is a fundamental language skill, and as such it merits a critical importance among the other language skill areas for L2 learners. Hasan (2000) asserted that "listening comprehension delivers the right conditions for language achievement and development of other language skills" (p.138). Therefore, listening is critical and essential not only as a receptive language skill but also as a tool required for the development of spoken language ability.

Despite the rapidly growing body of research on the various aspects of L2 listening, few studies have focused on identifying listening problems among the foreign language learners (e.g. Chen, 2013; Hamouda, 2012). Most schools, as claimed by Hamouda (2012), focus on grammar and vocabulary rather than listening. Furthermore, these studies investigated listening problems from one perspective, that is, as a problem. However, this study goes one step further by attempting to investigate listening problems in relation to listening strategies. In addition, there is little known about the relationship between these variables among Kurdish EFL learners.

1.1. Significance of the Study

The knowledge obtained from this research has implications for language teachers, materials developers, and other experts in the area of language learning and assessment. Having a full understanding of the difficulties learners encounter during the three phrases of comprehension (Anderson, 1985) and the ways in which they transcend them can help instructors tailor their instruction to the particular needs of their learners or adapt materials in ways that facilitate input processing in order to enhance comprehension.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of the study is to investigate listening comprehension problems and strategies among Kurdish EFL undergraduates. An additional objective of the study is to examine differences in listening problems among three language proficiency groups. Investigating the relationship between listening problems and strategy usage among Kurdish EFL learners is the final objective of the current study.

2. Literature Review

Studies on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) listening skills usually focus on teaching listening strategies to language learners to solve their listening problems (Goh, 2000; Liu, 2002). However, it should be noted that before we teach strategies to learners, we should understand their specific areas of difficulty. We should also be aware of the strategies that they are already aware of. Unfortunately, research on the tertiary level students' listening comprehension problems and strategies is limited. As a result, only a few instruments are available in the literature to support researchers in investigating these students' listening difficulties and strategies.

Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian, and Nimehchisalem (2015) studied one hundred EFL students on their listening problems. Three groups of listening comprehension problems namely, parsing, utilization, and perceptions were found that students experienced moderate to high levels of difficulty. Similarly, a study was done on Chinese international students in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) on their English listening comprehension problems by Juan and Abidin (2013). The lack of prior knowledge of English vocabulary was the prime difficulty that Chinese students encountered and this made them decrease their understanding in listening process. Another difficulty that Chinese students faced was native speakers' accent which made them fail in their understanding of the listening content.

In the context of EFL learning, Nowrouzi, Tam, Nimehchisalem, and Zareian (2014) conducted a study on 100 Iranian learners, who were at tertiary level. A questionnaire designed by Nowrouzi, et al. (2014) was used as an instrument for data collection. The instrument, which is called Listening Strategy Use Questionnaire (LSUQ), divides listening strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective categories. Nowrouzi et al. (2014) found that on average the respondents reported low levels of self-perceived use of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies. This study displays that there is a gap in employing effective strategies in learning or teaching listening.

The effect of metacognitive listening strategy training on the listening performance has been investigated by Coşkun (2010) on a group of beginner preparatory school students at a university in Turkey. The sampling of the study was formed by forty (40) students, who were equally divided into an experimental group and control group. Metacognitive strategy training embedded for two weeks was given to the experimental group, but the control group did not receive any training. The findings of the research displayed that between the groups the experimental group performed statistically better in the test. The findings of the study indicate that using metacognitive listening strategy is effective in teaching or learning listening. The current study addressed three research questions:

1. What are the listening problems of Kurdish EFL learners?
2. Is there a significant difference between the listening problems of the Kurdish EFL learners from different language proficiency levels?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the listening problems and strategy usage of Kurdish EFL learners?

3. Method

3.1. Context of the Study and Participants

A quantitative method was adopted for this study. A cross-sectional survey design was used in order to describe the characteristics that exist within the study group. The study was carried out in Salahaddin and Soran Public Universities in Iraqi-Kurdistan Region. The respondents (n = 165) were randomly selected. They were all native speakers of Kurdish who learn English as a foreign language. They were mostly (60.6%) female students. As for their age, the respondents ranged between 18, 20 and above. A majority of them (58.2%) were older than 20 years old, followed by those aged 20 (20.6%). Regarding their faculties, 57.2% of the students studied at the faculty of art and 42.2% at the faculty of Language. Most of the respondents, 32.7%, were junior, 28.5% were senior students whereas the lowest frequency was observed for freshman students (16.4%).

3.2. Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained questions which conformed with the objectives of the research while providing answers to the research questions. The questionnaire was developed basically using measures that have been used and validated by other empirical studies.

The first section of the instrument was a Questionnaire of Beliefs on English Language Listening Comprehension Problems (Q-BELLP) (Lotfi, 2012), which was developed to identify listening comprehension problems among Iranian EFL learners. The reliability of the item survey was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability gained was .82, which shows an acceptable internal consistency. The second instrument was Listening Strategies Use Questionnaire (LSUQ) by Noroozi et al. (2014), which was developed to identify listening comprehension strategies among Iranian EFL learners. The Cronbach's alpha value of internal reliability of the instrument was 0.87. The last instrument was a Listening Comprehension Proficiency Level Questionnaire by Padilla, Sung, and Aninao (1997), which was used to identify learners' proficiency level by self-rating.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected by administrating the questionnaires to the students after completing the ethical clearance procedure which included requesting permission from the students'

institution and the students' written consent. On average it took 11 minutes for the respondents to complete the questionnaires. After the questionnaires had been collected, they were coded before data entry to SPSS (Version 20), which was used to analyse the data using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. For the first research question, descriptive statistical methods, such as mean, frequency and percentage were used to investigate the problems that Kurdish EFL learners have in listening comprehension. One way ANOVA test was conducted to investigate the differences in listening problems and language proficiency level among Kurdish EFL learners while Pearson correlation coefficient test was conducted to investigate relationship between listening problems and listening strategy use scores.

4. Results

The results have been presented in this section following the order of the research questions.

4.1. Respondents' Proficiency Levels

The results of the frequency distribution for the level of listening comprehension among respondents indicated that the highest frequency belonged to moderate level 66.7% followed by high level with 18.8%. Only 24 respondents (14.5%) had a low level of listening comprehension. So the level of listening comprehension among Kurdish L2 learners is moderate as seen in table 1 below.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Proficiency Levels (N=165)

Level	Frequency	Percent
Low	24	14.5
Moderate	110	66.7
High	31	18.8

4.2. Beliefs on English Language Listening Comprehension

To answer "What are the listening problems of Kurdish EFL learners?" The mean and standard deviation for all items and also for the whole subscales were calculated.

This section is aimed at identifying the status of the Beliefs on English Language Listening Comprehension among students. This scale includes six sub-dimension named process, input, listener, task, affect and context problems. It must be noted that the respondents' levels for all

these subscales were studied in terms of 5 Likert scales ranging from never to always. Table 2 shows that the overall means related to input and context subscales (*M*=3.01) were higher than the means of others.

Among the items related to process problems the highest mean value was observed for *"I find it challenging to focus on the text when I have trouble understanding."* (*M*=3.03, *SD*=1.084) followed by *"While listening, I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words."* (M=3.006, *SD*=1.068) and the lowest mean was observed for *"I have difficulty in finding out what the main purpose of the listening task I am going to do is"* with *M*= 2.70, *SD*=0.964 (Table 2). So from this, it can be said that the main challenge encountered when learning a new language is focusing on a text when there is trouble in understanding the given text.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Related Items to Process Subscales (N=165)

No	Item	*Mean*	*SD*	Level
1	Before listening, it is difficult for me to predict from the visuals what I will hear.	2.770	0.992	moderate
2	It is difficult for me to relate what I hear with something from an earlier part of the listening text.	2.806	0.962	moderate
3	While listening, I have problems making meaningful personal associations with the new information.	2.897	1.022	moderate
4	During listening, I have difficulty checking whether I correctly understand the meaning of the whole chunks of the listening text.	2.727	1.044	moderate
5	I have difficulty with finding out what the main purpose of the listening task I am going to do is.	2.703	0.964	moderate
6	When I listen to texts in English, I experience difficulty with listening for the main idea of the text.	2.788	1.103	moderate
7	I find it challenging to focus on the text when I have trouble understanding.	3.030	1.084	moderate
8	While listening, I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words.	3.006	1.068	moderate
9	I find it difficult to make a mental summary of information gained through listening.	2.824	1.018	moderate

10	While listening, I have difficulty to check my understanding of the text based on what I already know about the topic.	2.721	1.051	moderate
11	I find it difficult to use the context to guess those parts of a listening text that I cannot hear clearly.	3.000	1.018	moderate
12	After listening, I find it difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension.	2.867	1.021	moderate
	Total	2.845		Moderate

*Mean values 1-2.4 (low), 2.5-3.4 (moderate); and 3.5-5 (high) levels

4.3. Listening Comprehension Problems

Almost all items for the listener problem (Table 3) had a value less than moderate level with the overall mean of *M*= 2.85 and the highest mean in the listener Problems subscale belongs to *"I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text"* (*M*=3.07, *SD*=1.00) followed by *"During listening, although some words sound familiar, it is difficult for me to recall their meaning immediately."* (*M*=2.96, *SD*=1.00). The result showed that learners find it difficult remembering the meaning of a long listening text.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Related Items to Listener Problems Subscales (N=165)

No	Item	*Mean*	*SD*	Level
22	When thinking about meaning of unfamiliar words, I neglect the next part of the listening text.	2.76	1.05	Moderate
23	I am slow to recall the meaning of words that sound familiar.	2.88	0.89	Moderate
24	I find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases I have just heard.	2.85	1.03	Moderate
25	During listening, although some words sound familiar, it is difficult for me to recall their meaning immediately.	2.96	1.00	Moderate
26	When I hear the new words, I forget the content which was mentioned before.	2.74	1.06	Moderate
27	I lose the flow of speech because I concentrate very hard on understanding every word or phrase I hear.	2.87	0.95	Moderate
28	I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text.	3.07	1.00	Moderate

No	Item	Mean	SD	Level
29	I find it difficult to really concentrate on listening.	2.84	0.88	Moderate
30	I have difficulty comprehending the listening text because I don't know which strategy to use while listening.	2.78	1.00	Moderate
31	I have difficulty understanding a listening text because I cannot understand every single word I hear.	2.78	1.12	Moderate
	Total	2.85		Moderate

*Mean values 1-2.4 (low), 2.5-3.4 (moderate); and 3.5-5 (high) levels

In the Task problem sub-dimension (Table 4), the most important item was *"I find it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which I need to draw on specific information from the text."* because it has the highest mean (*M*=2.92, *SD*=0.92) and the lowest mean belongs to *"I find it difficult to answer "Wh-"questions in a listening task."* (*M*=2.65, *SD*=1.10).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Related Items to Task Subscale (N=165)

No	Item	*Mean*	*SD*	Level
32	I find it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which I need to draw on specific information from the text.	2.92	0.92	Moderate
33	I find it difficult to do listening tasks for which I need to combine information to make generalization while listening to the text.	2.87	1.03	Moderate
34	I find it difficult to answer "Wh" questions in a listening task.	2.65	1.10	Moderate
	Total	2.81		Moderate

*Mean values 1-2.4 (low), 2.5-3.4 (moderate); and 3.5-5 (high) levels

Among the items related to affect (Table 5), all the items had a mean close to 2.8; the highest mean value was observed for *"I find it difficult to reduce my anxiety before doing the listening task"* (M=2.85, S.D=0.99) and the lowest mean was observed for both *"I stop listening when I have problems in understanding a listening text."* and *"If I don't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed."* with M= 2.80. This indicates that L2 learners find it difficult to reduce their anxiety before doing the listening task and this results in their inability to comprehend a listening comprehension.

14

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Related Items to Affect Problems Subscale (N=165)

No	Item	Mean	SD	Level
35	I stop listening when I have problems in understanding a listening text.	2.80	1.12	Moderate
36	If I don't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed.	2.80	1.21	Moderate
37	I find it difficult to reduce my anxiety before doing the listening task.	2.85	0.99	Moderate
38	Before doing listening comprehension tasks, I fear that I cannot understand what I will hear.	2.84	1.03	Moderate
	Total	2.82		Moderate

*Mean values 1-2.4 (low), 2.5-3.4 (moderate); and 3.5-5 (high) levels

The last subscale of listening comprehension problem investigated in this study is context problems which include two items (Table 6), and both items had a mean of almost 3 which shows that the level of this subscale among respondents is moderate. The most encountered context problem as seen in Table 6 is unclear sounds which interfere with listening comprehension

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Related Items to Context Problems Subscales (N=165)

No	Item	Mean	SD	Level
39	Unclear sounds resulting from a poor-quality CD-player interfere with my listening comprehension.	3.02	1.06	Moderate
40	Unclear sounds resulting from poor acoustic conditions of the classroom interfere with my listening comprehension.	2.99	0.97	Moderate
	Total	3.01		Moderate

*Mean values 1-2.4 (low), 2.5-3.4 (moderate); and 3.5-5 (high) level

4.4. Listening Comprehension Strategies

In listening comprehension strategies there are 32 questions that the respondents were asked to respond to based on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1= "strongly agree " to 5=

"strongly disagree"). These indicators measure three dimensions namely cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. The highest overall mean belongs to meta-cognitive strategies (M=3.26) followed by socio-affective strategies (M=3.24) and the last and overall mean related to cognitive strategies (M=3.13). Findings of the study indicated that the most used listening strategy by Kurdish L2 learners is meta-cognitive strategies.

Table 7

A Summary of EFL Learners' Levels of Listening Strategy Use

Strategies	Mean	Level
Cognitive Strategies	3.13	Moderate
Meta-Cognitive Strategies	3.26	Moderate
Socio-affective Strategies	3.24	Moderate

*Mean values 1-2.4 (low), 2.5-3.4 (moderate); and 3.5-5 (high) levels

4.5. Listening Problems among Three Language Proficiency Groups

To investigate the differences among three levels of English proficiency for respondent's beliefs on English language listening comprehension a one-way analysis of variance was conducted. The results of Levene's test indicated that all variables except affect met the homogeneity test; therefore for affect Welch test was used instead of ANOVA.

The analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in all subscales of listening problems except for affect and context among three groups (Table 8)

Table 8

Results of One Way ANOVA /Welch Test

Variables	Mean Square	F	p
Process mean	3.111	17.826	<0.001
Input mean	2.487	8.965	<0.001
Listener mean	2.742	14.1	<0.001
Task mean	3.203	9.068	<0.001
Affect mean	3.499	0.545*	0.583
Context mean	0.454	0.752	0.473
Total mean	4.272	12.695*	<0.001

*Based on Welch test

Post Hoc test was used for pairwise comparison of all subscale and total score. According to these results, it can be concluded that respondents with a high level of English proficiency had a significantly lower listening problems compare to moderate and low level.

Table 9 and Figure 1 show the results of comparison between the low, moderate, and high proficiency level students regarding the six categories of listening problems, namely process, input, listener, task, affect, and context problems.

Table 9

Results of Post-Hoc Tests for Mean Comparison among Groups

Listening Problem Categories	Proficiency Levels		
	Low	Moderate	High
Process Problems	3.21±0.39*a	2.85±0.41b	2.54±0.47c**
Input Problems	3.3±0.51a	3.04±0.51a	2.7±0.59b
Listener Problems	3.13±0.46a	2.89±0.41b	2.52±0.54c
Task Problems	3.07±0.61a	2.86±0.57a	2.43±0.65b
Affect Problems	3.13±0.59a	2.86±0.55a	2.46±0.79b
Context Problems	3.04±0.75a	3.05±0.73a	2.85±0.94a
Mean of Problems	3.15±0.35a	2.92±0.33a	2.58±0.47b

*Results reported as Mean±Standard Deviation

**Means with different letters in each row are significantly different at 0.05 level
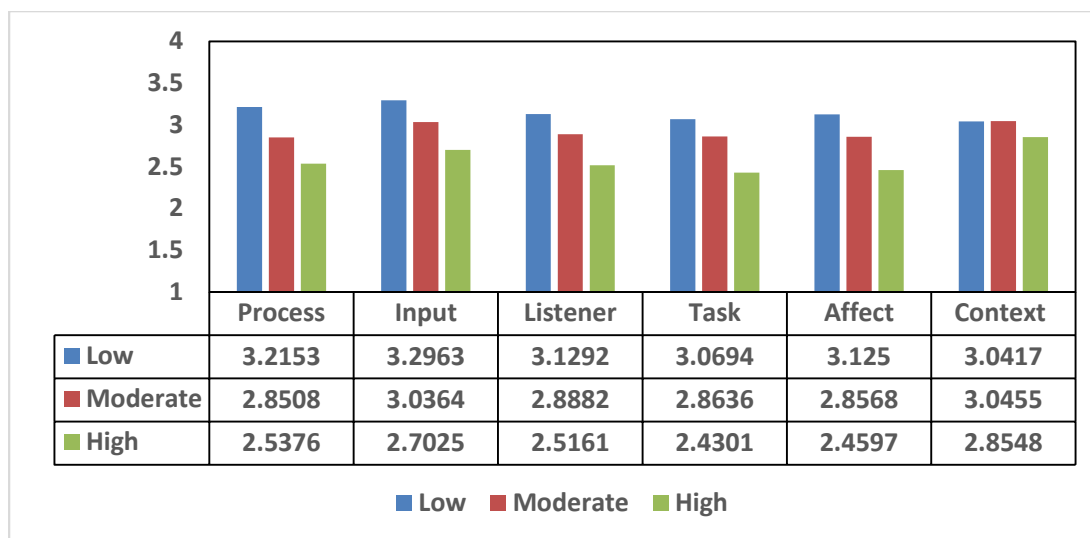
Figure1. Mean Comparison of Listening Problem Categories, in Terms of Proficiency Level

The results of the pairwise comparison (Table 9 and Figure 1) showed that for process problems the highest mean (M=3.21, SD=0.39) belonged to the respondents with the low level of proficiency which was significantly more than two other groups. The respondents with a moderate level of proficiency also significantly had higher process problems (M=2.85, SD=0.41) than the respondents with a high level of proficiency (M=2.54, SD=0.47). Input problem findings of the pairwise comparison presented that the highest mean (M=3.3, SD=0.51) was that of the low proficiency level group which was almost the same as that of the moderate level (M=3.04, SD=0.51), but significantly higher than that of the high proficiency group (M=2.7, SD=0.59). The difference between the moderate and high proficiency level groups was also significant. The results of listener problems displayed that also the highest mean belonged to the respondents with the low level of proficiency (M=3.13, SD=0.46) which was significantly more than the two other moderate and high proficiency groups (M=2.89, SD=0.41) and (M=2.52, SD=0.54) respectively. The difference between the moderate and high proficiency level groups was statistically significant. The findings of task problems showed that the low proficiency level respondents had significantly the highest mean among the three groups (M=3.07, SD=0.61). Moderate proficiency level respondents significantly had higher task problem means (M=2.86, SD=0.57) than the high level proficiency group (M=2.43, SD=0.65). The results of affect problems indicated that the low proficiency level had significantly the highest mean scores (M=3.13, SD=0.59) than moderate (M=2.86, SD=0.55) and high (M=2.46, SD=0.79) proficiency level groups. Context problem mean score of the low proficiency level respondents was

negligibly higher (M=3.04, SD=0.75) than that of the moderate proficiency level (M=3.05, SD=0.73), both of which were significantly higher than that of the high proficiency level group (M=2.85, SD=0.94). It is evident from the results that the respondents with lower proficiency level had the highest mean problems in all the categories of listening problems excluding the context problems. Additionally, moderate proficiency level group had higher mean problems in all six categories than high proficiency respondents. Overall, the high proficiency group respondents had lower problem mean scores (M=2.58, SD=0.47) in all six categories than those of low (M=3.15, SD=0.35) and moderate (M=2.92, SD=0.33) proficiency levels.

4.6. Relationship between Listening Strategies and Problems

To investigate the strength of the relationship between listening problems and usage of listening strategies, Pearson correlation coefficient was applied (Table 10).

Table 10

Relationship between Listening Strategies and Listening Problems

	Strategies		
	Cognitive	Meta-Cognitive	Socio-affective
Process Problems	-.186*	-0.1	0.068
Input Problems	0.046	0.125	0.111
Listener Problems	-0.137	-0.133	-0.013
Task Problems	-0.076	-0.144	-0.087
Affect Problems	-.180*	-0.132	-0.083
Context Problems	-0.044	-0.01	0.134
Mean of Problems	-0.135	-0.093	0.035

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

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

The results of Pearson correlation test showed both positive and negative relationships between listening problems and listening strategies. Based on Guilford's (1973) rule of thumb, correlation coefficients ranging between zero and 0.20 are regarded as negligible. Therefore, all the coefficients indicated negligible relationships. Only process and affect problems were significantly correlated with the cognitive strategy. These relationships were negative negligible. These results indicated that by increasing the cognitive strategies process and affect problems would only negligibly decrease. According to Rubin (1994) process and affect have direct connected relationship with cognitive strategy.

5. Discussion

Listening is central to educational and academic development for students at any level of education (Coakley & Wolvin, 1991. It has been stated by scholars that among the four language skills, listening is the most regularly used language ability in the classroom (Ferris, 1998; Vogely, 1998). Both teachers (Ferris & Tagg, 1996) and learners (Ferris, 1998) acknowledged the importance of listening comprehension for academic success in educational settings. According to Rost (1994) listening plays an important role in second language teaching for several reasons. Even though scholars (Coakley & Wolvin, 1991 Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Rost, 1994; Vogely, 1998) posit that listening plays a central role in communication as well as in learning and comprehension, it is important to understand the problems learners of a new language encounter while listening. It is based on this need that this research was conducted. It investigates the listening problems encountered by Kurdish EFL Learners.

The findings of the study show that there are a number of problems which listeners face that interfere with listening comprehension. These problems will be discussed in this part of the work. The study revealed that the most frequent problem encountered by learners of a new language is related to input problem; the respondents of this study revealed that the major input problems they encounter is related to the speaker's accent, the manner in which words are pronounced, text length and the speaker's speech speed.

Firstly, findings of the survey showed that learners of a foreign language face the challenge of understanding the speaker's accent as the respondents of this study find it difficult to understand speakers who speak in unfamiliar accents. This finding supports the findings of Juan and Abidin (2013) who explored the English listening comprehension problems of international university

students from China in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). They revealed that the accent of native speakers prohibited the proper understanding of the listening content by the learners. It can be said from this finding that accent plays a vital role in the listening comprehension of learners of a new language.

Secondly, the manner in which words are pronounced is also one of the problems which learners of a foreign language encounter. The result of this research revealed that learners of a foreign language often find it difficult to understand the meaning of vocabularies which are not correctly pronounced. The respondents of this study agreed that this is one of the major problems they face while learning a foreign language. This finding concurred with the findings of a study which was conducted by Hassan (2000) in an EFL context through a questionnaire to determine students' self-perceived listening problems. One of the problems identified by Hassan (2000) was problems resulting from unclear pronunciation of words.

Another major listening problem of learners of a foreign language is speech rate. This was revealed by the results of research as the respondents of this study agreed that they find it difficult to understand a listening text when the speaker speaks fast without pausing long enough to allow them digest and comprehend what they have listened to; the respondents said that this problem alongside very long text amounts to inability to comprehend the text. The findings of this research confirm those of Goh (1999) as well as Flowerdew and Miller, (1992) which also illustrated that speech rate is also considered a major problem for L2 learners. Almost all of Flowerdew and Miller's (1992) and Goh's (1999) study, 78% of the participants and participants in both diaries and interviews reported that their essential problem was the fast English speech rate.

The last input problem identified in this study is the problem of text length. The respondents of this study agreed that they find it difficult to understand long texts when learning a new language especially when the long text contains a lot of unfamiliar words.

Generally, it can be said that the major input problems encountered by learners are speech rate, text length, unfamiliar accent and improper pronunciation of words.

The next major problem faced by the learners of a new language is related to context. This problem had the second highest mean score. This research revealed that the learners of a new language experienced problems with the context; this problem, according to the respondents, impedes their learning of a foreign language. Respondents disclosed that unclear sounds

resulting from a poor-quality CD-player interfere with their listening comprehension; this means that learners of a foreign language find it difficult to comprehend the new language when the sounds are unclear. The respondents further described this problem by saying that unclear sounds resulting from poor acoustic conditions of the classroom interfere with their listening comprehension.

Problems related to affect and task were also identified in this study as some of the listening problems encountered by learners of a new language. Though these problems had the lowest mean scores, they could not be overlooked as the respondents of this study revealed that they found it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which they needed to draw on specific information from the text. The respondents of the present study agreed that such a task gives them anxiety and this anxiety they cannot reduce before engaging in the task. The implication of this is that the students can hardly comprehend because they are in an unstable state of mind which will not permit comprehension of the listening text; so it can be said the state of mind of the learner plays a role in the comprehension of a listening text.

It can be noted from the result of this study that all the problems discussed above affect the processing of a foreign language by learners as the respondents of this study agreed that they find it challenging to focus on the text when they have trouble understanding the text. In addition it can be concluded from the result of this study that while listening, learners of a foreign language find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words, this also leads the learners to neglect the next part of the listening text because they are often occupied with thinking about the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Due to the listening problems experienced by learners of a foreign language, it can be seen that these learners opt for strategies which they believe can enhance a better comprehension of the listening text; these strategies include cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies. In this study, findings showed that the most frequently used strategy among the respondents of the study which were Kurdish English language learners is the meta-cognitive strategies which had the highest mean score among the three strategies measured. These learners state that while learning a new language they listen to keywords and use their experience and previous knowledge to understand the listening text. Furthermore, the respondents here agree that they try to paraphrase the words for easy understanding of the listening text. This finding contradicts the finding of Nowrouzi et al. (2014) who found that on

average the respondents of their study reported low levels of self-perceived use of metacognitive strategies. Their study display that there is a gap in employing effective strategies in learning or teaching listening. The socio-affective strategy was seen to be the second kind of listening strategy used by the respondents of this study to enhance understanding of a new language. Results show that the learners encourage themselves to listen more even when they are afraid of problems in understanding and they also make efforts attend out-of-class events like conferences where the new language is spoken so as to enable the comprehension of the new language. The least frequently used strategy was cognitive strategy; the respondents agree that in order to strengthen their comprehension of the new language; they engage in learning activities such as watching movies in the target language, watching English programs on TV, and practicing sounds in the target language that are very different from sounds in their own language so that they can become comfortable with them.

It can be concluded from this finding on the use of learning strategies that the usage of learning strategies by learners in this study is commendable as the level of usage for each of the strategies is moderate. This also means that there is still room for improvement on the use of these strategies to promote better understanding of a new language as scholars in this field (Karami & Bagheri; Rahimirad & Zare-ee, 2015; Vandergrift, 2003) have revealed that these learning strategies have a significant positive effect on the learning of a new language.

The result for second objective of the study which aimed at examining the difference in listening problems among three language proficiency revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in all listening problems among the three proficiency groups (low, moderate and high level) except for affect and context. The result of the post-hoc test revealed that respondents with a high level of English proficiency experienced significantly lower listening problems compared to respondents with moderate and low-level proficiency. Findings further indicate that the predominant listening problems experienced by English language learners in this study were input and context problems; these two problems were significantly higher than the other problems within the six subscales measured. Using Pearson correlation coefficient test to determine the relationship between strategies and listening problems among Kurdish EFL learners, the result indicated that only process and affect problems were significantly correlated with cognitive strategy. Results further illustrated that the relationships

were negative and not too strong. This implies that by increasing the cognitive strategies, process and affect problems will be decreased and therefore listening comprehension will improve.

On a general note, the findings of this research revealed that the major listening comprehension problems faced by Kurdish EFL learners are:

(i) Input problem, (speaker's accent, the manner in which words are pronounced, text length and the speaker's speech speed).

(ii) Context problem; (unclear sounds resulting from a poor acoustic condition)

It is based on these learning comprehension problems that the learners in this study decided to employ the use of some learning strategies, with meta-cognitive strategies, as the most frequent type, followed by socio-affective and cognitive strategies to boost listening comprehension.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that all the listening comprehension problems examined in this study influence the comprehension of a foreign language by learners especially input and context as realized in this research. However, if these factors are carefully put into consideration by instructors when teaching a foreign language, there is a higher possibility that the level of listening comprehension of any given new language will be greatly increased.

In addition, based on the findings of this study it can be said that the use of listening strategies by learners can help improve listening comprehension among learners of a new language and as such the instructors have a role to play in teaching the learners the different strategies tailored to enhance a more effective learning process according to the listening problems identified among the learners.

Conclusively, for a language to be learnt certain listening skills are required because listening is a basic language skill, and as such all efforts must be intensified towards developing the important listening skills in learners of a second language. These listening skills should be acquired by learners because listening is critical and essential not only as a receptive language skill but also as a tool required for the development of spoken language ability.

6.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, two recommendations can be proposed:

1. As for practice, teachers of a second language should focus more on teaching the learners the important strategies that can enhance a more effective listening comprehension. The teaching of

such strategies should be the first step taken in the teaching of the second language so as to adequately equip the learners before they begin the language learning process.

2. More awareness should be created on effective ways of approaching learning tasks. Wenden (1986) posits that unsuccessful learners are generally less aware of effective ways of approaching the learning tasks. Learners and teachers would get benefit from awareness of effective listening strategies.

6.2. Suggestion for Further Studies

1. Future research should be conducted using qualitative research method or a mixed-method so as to gain in-depth understanding of the subject matter.

2. In future studies, larger sample sizes from wider populations can enhance the generalizability of the results.

3. Studies can also be conducted on the relationship between speaking problems and strategy use among learners of a second language.

4. Factors that determine the use of particular listening comprehension strategies among learners of a second language can also be investigated.

References

Anderson, J. R. (1985). *Cognitive psychology and its implications*. (2nd ed.). New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Chen, A. H. (2013). EFL listeners' strategy development and listening problems: A process-based study. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, *10*(3), 81-101.

Coşkun, A. (2010). The effect of metacognitive strategy training on the listening performance of beginner students. *Research on Youth and Language, 4,* 35-50.

Ferris, D. (1998). Students' views of academic aural/oral skills: A comparative needs analysis. *TESOL Quarterly, 32*, 289-318.

Ferris, D., & Tagg, T. (1996). Academic listening/speaking tasks for ESL students: Problems, suggestions, and implications. *TESOL Quarterly, 30*, 297-320.

Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (1992). Student perceptions, problems and strategies in second language lecture comprehension. *RELC journal*, *23*(2), 60-80.

Goh, C. C. M. (1999). How much do learners know about the factors that influence their listening comprehension? *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics, 4*(1), 17-41.

Goh, C. C. M. (2000). A cognitive perspective on language learners' listening comprehension problems. *System, 28*(1), 55-75.

Guilford, J. P. (1973). *Fundamental statistics in psychology and education* (5th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hamouda, A. (2012). Listening comprehension problems – Voices from the classroom 2. *The Language in India, 12*(2), 1-49

Hasan, A. (2000). Learners' perceptions of listening comprehension problems. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 13*(2), 137-153.

Juan, W. X., & Abidin, M. J. Z. (2013). English listening comprehension problems of students from China learning English in Malaysia. *Language in India*, *13*(4) 14009-14022.

Karami, S., & Bagheri, M. (2014). Opertionalizing teachers' emotional attitudes towards their students, colleagues and workplace: Result from an EFL context. *Journal of Language & Literature (20780303)*, *5*(1), 140-149.

Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd.

Krashen, S. D., Terrell, T. D., Ehrman, M. E., & Herzog, M. (1984). A theoretical basis for teaching the receptive skills. *Foreign Language Annals*, *17*(4), 261-275.

Liu, N. F. (2002). *Processing problems in L2 listening comprehension of university students in Hong Kong*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3074191)

Lotfi, G. (2012). A questionnaire of beliefs on English language listening comprehension problems: Development and validation. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, *16*(4), 508-515.

Noroozi, S., Sim, T. S., Nimehchisalem, V., & Zareian, G. (2014). Developing an instrument for Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension problems and listening strategies. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *5*(3), 63-69.

Nowrouzi, S., Tam, S. S., Zareian, G., & Nimehchisalem, V. (2015). Iranian EFL students' listening comprehension problems. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 5*(2), 263-269.

Padilla, A. M., Sung, H., & Aninao, J. (1997). *Less-commonly taught languages in selected elementary and secondary schools in California*. Final report. Foreign Language

Assistance Act Program Evaluation Project. California State Department of Education.(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 404871).

Rahimirad, M., & Zare-ee, A. (2015). Metacognitive Strategy Instruction as a Means to Improve Listening Self-Efficacy among Iranian Undergraduate Learners of English. *International Journal of Instruction*, *8*(1), 117-132.

Rost, M. (1994). *Introducing listening*. London: Penguin.

Rubin, J. (1994). A review of second language listening comprehension research. *The Modern Language Journal*, *78*(2), 199-221

Vandergrift, L**.** (2003). Orchestrating strategy use: Toward a model of the skilled second language listener. *Language Learning, 53*(3), 463-496.

Vogely, A. J. (1998). Listening comprehension anxiety: Students' reported sources and solutions. *Foreign Language Annals*, *31*(1), 67-80.

Wenden, A. (1986). What do second language learners know about their language learning? A second look at retrospective account. *Applied Linguistics* 7(2), 186-205.

Wolvin, A., Coakley, C. (1991). *A Survey of the Status of Listening Training in Some Fortune 500 Corporations*. Communication Education, USA.

Depicting EFL Learners' and Teachers' Perceptions toward Communicative Language Teaching: Voices from Iran

Iman Taebi[1]

University of Tehran

Zadmehr Torabi[2]

University of Sistan & Balouchetan

Mohammad Amini Farsani[3]

Kharazmi University

Biodata

Iman Taebi has been working as an EFL teacher and researcher in Iran since 2011. He holds a TPK certificate from ETS and National Geographic. He is currently studying MA in TEFL at University of Tehran (UT) and wishes to pursue his studies. He also speaks Spanish and holds a DELE certificate as well. His main interests are creative pedagogy, teaching grammar, online tutoring, TBLT, teacher education, and flipped teaching. He is currently doing his Cambridge CELTA along with three Cambridge TKT certificates. Emial: iman.taebi@ut.ac.ir

Zadmehr Torabi is an assistant Professor. He received his B.A. and M.A. in English language and literature from Tehran University in 1999 and 2002 and his Ph. D. from Shiraz U. in the same fields in 2015. Since 2003 he has been lecturing in English Literature and Language in the University of Sistan and Baluchestan. His interest in the affinities between French and English literature arise from the fact that throughout his career, he has studied French as well and he has always been an avid reader of fiction in French as well as in English. Another area in which he is

---

1University of Tehran, Enghelab Sq, Azar St, District 16, Tehran, Iran
2 University of Sistan & Balouchetan, Daneshgah Boulevard, Zahedan, Iran
3 Kharazmi University 49, Mofateh Street, Tehran 15614, Iran

interested is Language teaching methodology. As well as his short stories, his postmodern fiction Amerrycountry is also written in a unique style of English language and surprises readers with its groundbreaking new portmanteau words. Emial: zadmehrtorabi@lihu.usb.ac.ir

Mohammad Amini Farsani, the corresponding author, is a PhD student in TEFL at Kharazmi University. His main areas of research are argumentative writing, research engagement in Applied Linguistics, and Classroom-based assessment. Email: Mohammad_farsani@yahoo.com

Abstract

Learners and teachers of foreign languages may or may not share similar perceptions toward communicative pedagogy. Views adopted by these two camps, in the aggregate, lead to consequences for the dynamics of language classroom. The present study enquired into teachers' attitudes toward communicative language teaching (CLT) in English institutes in Iran. In a similar vein, it investigated learners' perceptions and attitudes with respect to classroom practices. One hundred and twenty EFL teachers and 120 learners were thus asked to respond to the respective version of questionnaires: version A, developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996), to tap into the teachers' perceptions of CLT, and version B, developed by Savignon and Wang (2003), to identify Iranian EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions with regard to classroom practices. Instrumentation also included a semi-instructed interview. Quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that the majority of the respondents, both teachers and learners, take positive and favorable attitudes toward communicative-based instruction. However, the results suggest an inconsistency between learner needs and preferences and their reported experience of classroom instruction. The article concludes by discussing the pedagogical implications that implementation of communicative language teaching may carry in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Communicative language teaching; Teachers' perceptions; Learners' perceptions; English institutes

1. Introduction

In recent years, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been popularly regarded as favorable to many an EFL teacher and learner in innumerable English Language Teaching (ELT) programs worldwide (Manghubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Bae Son, 2005; Savignon & Wang,

2003). The approach was a response in order to help learners develop their ability to use English in different contexts in an appropriate and meaningful fashion and to advocate instructional practices to develop learners' communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Littlewood, 2007). Communicative competence, as Hymes (1972) noted, consists of the knowledge the users of language have internalized and which enables them to understand and produce messages in the language. The search for an approach that is apt to communicative aims is more learner-centered which elicits meaningful learner engagement to convey meaning more appropriately and authentically (Littlewood, 2007; Nunan, 1993). This is also partly reflected in the recent increase in EFL teachers' dissatisfaction of the previously-held approaches to language teaching, i.e. Grammar-Translation Method, Audio-lingual Method, and Situational Language Teaching to name but a few.

Notwithstanding, there have also been serious obstacles to implementation of CLT in educational settings. These include inconsistency between teachers' understanding of the tenets of CLT and their implementing these principles in the classroom; resistance toward this new approach by both teachers and their learners, the complexity of implementing a meaning-based CLT program, teachers' unwillingness to practice CLT instructional objectives, and learners' unawareness of this teaching method (Anderson, 1993; Bhatia, 2003; Li, 1998; Savignon &Wang, 2003; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999;) which, together with other factors, may result in an inadequate and poorly designed communicative-based English program. As such, addressing the sources of these challenges in different EFL contexts is warranted. In the same vein, a discrepancy between teachers' perception of their instructional behavior and learners' perception of their own learning might be considered, as Nunan (1993) suggests, as a source of difficulty.

The recent mounting concern among educational researchers about CLT is mirrored in studies which address the issue of 'perception', viz learners' perceptions of CLT in an EFL context (Savignon & Wang, 2003), teachers' and researchers' perception of CLT (Mangubhai et al., 2007), learners' attitudes and perceived implementation of CLT (Asassfeh, Khwaileh, Al-Shaboul & Alshaboul, 2012), CLT implementation in public schools and private English institutes (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006), educational context, teacher perceptions of CLT and his/her implementation (Kleinsasser, 1993), EFL teachers' attitudes toward CLT in Taiwanese educational context (Chang, 2011), student teachers' perceptions of CLT (Miller & Aldred, 2000), and the investigation of how different kinds of CLT have been situated in academic

contexts (Littlewood, 2007). As can be seen from the above-mentioned lines of research, the appropriateness of CLT in different EFL settings has been based mainly on teachers' perceptions and instructional behaviors.

Despite their prevalence and importance, CLT studies have attracted surprisingly little attention from the research in the field of ELT. The picture is even bleaker where the scope for CLT learner attitudes and beliefs has been narrowed (e.g. Savignon & Wang, 2003). Thus, as regards today's pedagogy and since perceptions govern individuals' behavior (Puchta, 1999), more attention needs to be paid to human factor, i.e. teachers' and learners' perceptions of CLT tenets.

In the Iranian educational context, English teachers are now encouraged to implement the tenets of CLT in their classrooms (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006), and it is thus accordingly important to describe how learners and teachers who are habituated to traditional teaching approaches perceive communicative language teaching. The present study took place in the setting of private English institutes in Iran with the major aims of 1) examining the way EFL teachers and learners perceive the CLT tenets; and 2) comparing these perceptions. More specifically, the following research questions prompted this study:

1. What are the perceptions of Iranian English teachers toward CLT?
2. What are the perceptions of Iranian English learners toward CLT?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on the Perceptions of Teachers toward CLT

In the last few decades, an extensive body of research in the field of ELT has been accumulated to deal with learner and teacher perceptions of different dimensions of language learning and teaching (Bell, 2005; Brown, 2009; Brosh, 1996; Levine, 2003; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer, Siebenhar, & Plageman, 2004 to name but a few). However, relatively few studies have specifically addressed teachers' and learners' perceptions of CLT. That is, these studies have revealed the two main strands of research on CLT: one set of studies has given particular attention to the perceptions of teachers and researchers (e.g. Chang, 2011; Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, & Son, 2005 ; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Savignon, 2002; Spada & Frolich, 1995) while the

second set has sought to consider learners' and learner teachers' perceptions (e.g. Asassfeh et al., 2012; McClintock, 2011; Miller & Aldred, 2000; Savignon, 1997; Savignon & Wang, 2003).

The first set of studies concerned teachers' understandings and beliefs about CLT. Mangubhai, Dashwood, Berthold, Flores and Dale (1998) attempted to probe the perceptions of 39 language teachers about CLT. Their mixed-method study revealed that teachers' perceptions of CLT differed from those appearing in the literature on CLT. Likewise, studying the perceptions of 10 Japanese teachers about CLT, Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) reported four conceptions of CLT held by Japanese teachers: Some viewed CLT as learning to communicate in the second language whereas others reported it as involving mainly speaking and listening to Japanese learners; yet, while there were those who viewed CLT as an approach that involved little instruction in grammar, the fourth group saw CLT as involving the use of activities that were time consuming. With the use of observational techniques, they found out that teachers tended to use a didactic approach in which grammar instruction played a vital role, a feature which is discordant with the tenets of CLT. These two studies point to the discrepancy between teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching and their actual in-class behavior.

The recent studies on the attitudes and behaviors of teachers toward CLT have highlighted the varying conceptualizations of CLT in EFL contexts. Mangubhai et al. (2003) explored teachers' and researchers' perceptions of CLT. Using data obtained from a questionnaire, an observation checklist, and a semi-structured interview, they reported that teachers internalized many features of CLT differently, with five of the six teachers holding abstract understandings of CLT approaches that were quite similar to those of the researchers'. Chang (2011) investigated the perceptions of Taiwanese college teachers toward CLT and the reasons behind the attitudes they held toward it. They concluded that the teachers perceived CLT program as highly effective and useful for improving their instructional behavior and held favorable attitudes toward principles and features of CLT. In a similar study, Karim (2004) examined the attitudes of EFL teachers toward CLT in Bangladesh reporting that the teachers perceived CLT as an essential and beneficial dimension of their programs and that they were well aware of the features of CLT corresponding to their actual in-class behavior. Hawkey (2006), too, examined teachers' perceptions toward CLT using a survey and interviews. He reported that CLT benefited language learners in diverse ways including enhancing their motivation, interest, and communication skills while requiring more pair work activities in the learning process. The above studies underscore

the positive attitudes teachers hold toward CLT and show that their tendency seems to have shifted toward a communicative paradigm (Wang, 2011).

In Iran, research into teachers' language behaviors arisen from their perceptions towards CLT is limited. There appears to be few studies on teachers' perceptions of CLT which feature Iranian participants. In one study, Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) investigated EFL teachers' beliefs toward CLT and their practice in the classroom. They concluded that teachers held positive attitudes toward CLT and welcomed the practice of CLT in their classrooms. Similarly, the teachers held positive attitudes toward grammar role and teacher role. The scanty literature on Iranian teachers' attitudes toward CLT indicates that very little is known about the application of CLT principles in the classroom atmosphere.

2.2. Studies on the Perceptions of Learners toward CLT

There is a solid body of research that uses different instruments to probe learner attitudes and beliefs about language learning in general (e.g. Bell, 2005; Brown, 2009; Horwitz, 1990; Levine, 2003; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Sparks et al., 2004 to name a few). In one instance, Brown (2009) examined and compared the overall perceptions of teachers and learners as to the ideals of effective teacher behaviors. He concluded that whereas the sample of learners showed favor to a grammar-based approach, the teachers had a preference for a more communicative-oriented approach. Similarly, Brosh (1996) identified the characteristics of an effective language teacher as perceived by both learners and teachers. Different characteristics were reported by both camps including "teacher's command of the target language; his/her ability to organize, explain, and clarify; and his/her ability to arouse and sustain interest and motivation" (p.125). McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007), too, examined teachers' and learners' reactions to a task-based course in an EFL context. Concerning the reacting of the two groups, the authors identified task evaluations, learning notebooks, observations, course evaluations, and interviews. The findings also indicated that the course promoted more learner autonomy and independence. These studies, as it can therefore be inferred, look at the perceptions of learners about language learning in general.

As mentioned earlier, teachers' perceptions toward CLT are receiving more attention in the literature. Recently, researchers have indicated that learners' beliefs and perceptions toward CLT might be central and useful to effective language instruction (e.g., Savignon, 1997; Savignon & Wang, 2003; Schulz, 2001). In a ground-breaking study on the perceptions of learners toward

CLT, Savignon and Wang (2003) examined EFL learners' perceptions toward CLT with respect to actual in-class behavior concluding that learners held a positive attitude towards CLT. However, the findings indicated a discrepancy between learner needs and preferences, and their reported experience of instructional activities in the classroom. Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004), on the other hand, investigated the perceptions of Thai practitioners and learners toward CLT. The findings revealed that although Thai practitioners held positive attitudes toward principles of CLT, they all struggled with their implementation. Moreover, many of the students showed a tendency to learning styles which were not basically consistent with CLT tenets.

More recently, Asassfeh et al. (2012) examined how Jordanian EFL school learners perceived traditional form-focused instruction and communicative meaning-oriented instruction of English. The learners, they concluded, exhibited stronger preferences in meaning-oriented instruction to its form-focused alternative. However, the findings also revealed that CLT classrooms did not exactly reflect the learners' preferences. In Korea, McClintock's (2011) examination of the perceptions of university students toward CLT also resulted in the sample's holding a positive attitude towards CLT tenets. Notwithstanding, teachers' and learners' perceptions toward CLT approach showed a mismatch of attitudes. Altogether, it can be inferred from the instances above that the majority of learners hold a positive attitude towards CLT approach which, according to Williams and Burden (1997), may have the greatest influence on their achievement. That said, L2 teachers and their students might have different notions of and attitudes toward CLT. This inconsistency between teachers' and learners' perceptions, as Kern (1995) and Schulz (2001) asserted, can negatively influence L2 learners' satisfaction with actual in-class behavior and may even result in discontinuation of L2 study.

Several studies also confirm that communicative-oriented approaches can provide a positive learning experience in EFL educational settings. For instance, Anderson (1993) revealed that although teachers and learners held a positive attitude toward the implementation of communicative language teaching approach, many constraints and difficulties might hinder new approaches. In like manner, Nunan (1993) pointed to the vital role learners have played in meaning-making process during their learning experiences.

In summation, very few serious studies in the existing literature deal with learners' and teachers' perceptions toward CLT in EFL contexts in general and in Iran in particular. Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) maintain that in the Iranian context, English language teachers have relatively

recently been encouraged to practice tenets of CLT in their actual classrooms. In addition, with the main focus of the literature being on the investigation of the perceptions of language teachers in their actual classroom behaviors, learners' perceptions toward CLT approach have often been neglected (Savignon & Wang, 2003). This is while Nunan (1993) argues "teachers should find out what their students think and feel about what they want to learn and how they want to learn" (p.4). Therefore, through understanding both learners' and teachers' perceptions of CLT, policy makers and curriculum developers can help course designers, teachers, and learners to practice the tenets of CLT in their instructional settings. This study, hence, was accordingly conducted in hopes of serving this very purpose in the Iranian EFL context.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A samples of teachers (n=150) and another of learners (n=120) were asked to complete either of the two versions of questionnaires designed for each group and for the purposes of this study. Selection of the participants from the high-ranking private English institutes (n=5) in Karaj ensured that the samples were as highly representative. The criteria based on which institutes were selected consisted of the institute's rank-order based on the experience and qualifications of the teaching staff as well as the range of educational facilities on offer.

The sample of learners comprised of 70 males and 50 females aged 18-27 who had enrolled in English courses in different private English institutes located in various educational districts of Karaj, Iran. The estimated proficiency level of the language learners, as reported by the institutes, was intermediate and upper-intermediate or advanced.

The teachers, practicing in the same schools as the learners, aged 22-35 with teaching experiences ranging from 3-10 years. The criteria required that teachers hold a minimum of an undergraduate university degree in an English-related subject. The make-up of the sample, thus, was as follows: thirty-five teachers held a BA degree; 40 teachers were doing their MA in either TESOL or English Literature; thirty had completed their MA; and the other 15 were doing their Ph.D. studies in either Linguistics or TESOL. The instructors in these institutes agreed to cooperate and get the consent of their students to participate in the study.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments utilized in this study comprised two questionnaires concerning teacher/learner attitudes towards major principles of communicative language teaching (i.e. teacher and learner roles, pair work activities, error correction, and the role of grammar). The first questionnaire, originally developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996), was used by to elicit information on the degree of the teachers' perceptions toward CLT. After explaining the purpose of the study, the first section of the questionnaire began with eliciting background information on the participant's age, gender, qualifications, and experience. Developed on the basis of the subcategories of CLT highlighted by Karavas-Doukas (1996), part two of the questionnaire consisted of 24 items each tapping into the participant's perception of grammar role, group work activities, error correction treatment, and learner and teacher roles. The calculated Cronbach Alpha with a value of 0.84 showed a high degree of internal consistency. As one of the well-researched tools for the assessment of the respondents' perceptions of the English language classroom instruction developed by Savignon and Wang (2003), the second questionnaire included 29 items querying the respondents' perceptions toward the classroom practices they reportedly had experienced in the institutes. To further complement the survey findings, 20 out of the sample of 150 teachers were singled out to be interviewed. An equal number of the teachers, i.e. a group of five teachers including both male and female from each academic educational stratum (i.e. BA, MA students, MA holders, PhD students), were interviewed.

3.3. Procedure

To observe research ethics, the teachers and learners were first asked for their full, informed consent to take part in the study. The teachers were briefed on the purpose of the study and the data collection procedure. The participants were also reassured that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that all the data collected remained confidential and were used for research purposes only. The teachers were then asked to briefly describe the purpose and design of the questionnaires before giving them directions as to how they should respond to the questions. Each of the questionnaires required an estimate of 20 minutes to complete. A uniform data collection procedure was followed in all the institutes.

The learners were required to answer the questions taking into account the classroom practices they had experienced and observed so that they could respond to each items more confidently. In order for the respondents (i.e. teachers and learners) to better understand the

questionnaire and its items, the researcher translated both questionnaires into Persian (Farsi). Also, a pilot study was initially conducted to "fine-tune" and validate the instruments prior to the final administration. To obtain more information on the teachers' perceptions of CLT as well as any other information that might be missing in the questionnaire, semi-instructed interviews were conducted after collection of questionnaire data. We adopted a maximum variation sampling strategy to weave common patterns emerged from the diverse range of ideas. We maximized the respondents' variation by taking on dimensions such as, age, gender, and years of experience. We met each respondent for approximately 30 minutes, and all the sessions were audio-recorded and notes were taken. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967) was used to analyze the qualitative data.

4. Results

Quantitative and qualitatively analyses of the data obtained from each side delivered the following results.

4.1. Teachers' Perceptions toward CLT

The perceptions of the teachers toward CLT were analyzed as per the Karavas-Doukas' method (possible score: 24-120; neutral point: 72). On the basis of this analysis, the respondents' score ranged from 73-113, with a mean of 81.6 and a standard deviation of 6.71. Consequently, the teachers hold a positive and favorable attitude toward CLT as a whole. In order for the findings to provide a better, more detailed picture of the teachers' perceptions, the items of the questionnaire are grouped under the five principles of CLT.

As depicted in Table 1, the teachers showed a rather consistent pattern of perceptions towards the role of grammar. More specifically, the respondents concur in grammatical correctness "as one of the criteria to judge the learner's performance" (Teachers=81%), grammar "as a means not an end" (Teachers=93%), insufficiency of "knowledge of the rules" (Teachers=83%), inadequacy of "mastering the rules of grammar" (Teachers=87%), and inessentiality of "direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar" for effective communication (Teachers=52%) The findings from the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted to cross-check the perceptions of the teachers toward the role and place of grammar in their teaching, generally supported the results of the questionnaire. Put simply, the Iranian EFL

teachers had consensus on the necessity and importance of grammatical rules and their contribution to teachers' instructional behavior.

> "*I think grammar teaching is absolutely necessary, but it is not everything and it is not an end in itself. Teaching should not start with grammar, but should end with some grammar explanation.*" *(Male interviewee, Participant A, hereafter 1MI)*

> "*I think grammar is very important for students because they can understand how language is formed. But grammar should be along with many examples because they should fully learn the grammatical point that is taught. The main focus of the classroom should not be grammar because learners might not be able to speak the language at the end though they know all grammatical rules.*"*(Female interviewee, Participant B, hereafter 2FI)*

> "*I strongly believe in teaching grammar, specifically when it comes to EFL settings since grammar plays a very important role as a very helpful instrument to decipher the patterns of a foreign language. I should, of course, take into account the age and level of the students. The younger the learners, the less abstract grammatical structure should be taught.*" *(Male interviewee, Participant C, hereafter 3MI).*

According to both quantitative and qualitative findings, the teachers reported how CLT pays attention to both form and function and that grammar served as a basis for effective communication.

As can be seen from Table 1, a consistent pattern of perceptions towards the importance of pair work in the classroom was also identifiable. That is, the teachers agreed not only on the necessity of group work (Teachers=90%) as a source for exploring the problems (Teachers=88%), but also on the practicality of group work activities (Teacher=82%) and their replacement with whole class instruction (Teachers=64%). The teachers also agreed that group work provides them with an opportunity to better monitor their students' performance (Teachers=96%). These findings were backed up by the interviews with both male and female participants with any number of years of experience:

> "*I do believe in pair work or group work and I think it is one of the most important methods that helps students to learn English. But the problem is that we*

do not have any control over the things the students are doing in the groups. So, they may use wrong language, but nobody is there to help them." (Female interviewee, Participant C, hereafter 3 FI).

"The purpose of language teaching is enabling students to talk. So, that is something which will be definitely achieved by creating opportunities for the learners to use what they have learned as much as possible. That opportunity is reached by setting the students into pairs/groups where they have the chance of putting their knowledge into test with someone who is like them so it is a stress-free situation." (Male interviewee, Participant D, hereafter 4 MI)

"I totally believe in undeniable effect of pair and group work activities on the learners' both language and social maturity." (Male interviewee, Participant E, hereafter 5 MI)

The quantitative and qualitative finings, therefore, imply that pair or group work activities help learners to freely interact with one another while at the same time save a lot of time in class, especially when the number of the students is quite high.

The perceptions of the teachers towards teacher feedback and error correction is another point worth consideration in Table 1. More specifically, the respondents agree that "the teachers' feedback must be focused on appropriateness" (Teachers=73%) and that errors are natural to language learning (Teachers=90%). They also agree that "much correction is wasteful of time," (Teachers=63%) and that "CLT learners are fluent and accurate" (Teachers=47%). The results of the qualitative analyses also indicate that the teachers support the practice of error correction:

"I think errors should be corrected in a way so that will not hurt learners' feeling. It is better to let learners' classmates to correct errors and teacher correction be postponed until no one knows the answer." (Male interviewee, Participant E, hereafter 7MI)

"I think teacher should take the main responsibility of correcting errors because they are the source of knowledge. Errors can be corrected by direct and indirect correction, which of course I believe in the latter one. For example, I usually try to correct my students by shaking head, facial expression, body language, repetition of their incorrect sentence, etc." (Female interviewee, Participant G, hereafter 8FI)

"Although they say errors are natural part of learning, their existence without being corrected might lead to fossilization which might cause harmful effects to language ability of the learners. On the one hand, correcting every error produced by the learners is frustrating. On the other hand, letting errors go unnoticed might lead to permanent existence of the errors in learners' knowledge which will be difficult to wipe it out." (Male interviewee, Participant H, hereafter 9MI)

It can hence be inferred that most of the teachers were tolerant of errors. They indicated that errors should be corrected if they are viewed as leading to a communication breakdown. However, they also believed that care must be taken as unnoticed errors might result in their fossilization.

As shown in Table 1, the teachers perceived the role of learners to be that of offering the content of lesson (65%). They also believed that learners should take responsibility for their own learning (89%) by being responsible stakeholders (87%). And while they believed that students' needs should be considered (88%), they said "organizing the teaching so as to suit the needs of all is impossible in a large class" (83%). They also perceived of learners to consider that language is effective in doing errands (87%).

"Learner-centeredness is very important in the English class because there should be a difference between traditional classes and today's classes, English classes and other classes. Learners should be pushed to develop their own learning. But learner-centeredness does not mean that the teacher will not have any control over what is going on in the classroom." (Male interviewee, Participant K, hereafter 10MI)

"I think learners play a central role in leading the class because the teacher knows English pretty well and it is learners who need to learn English. This can be done by asking their ideas quite often to get to know how they feel about the way teaching is done during the class time. Again, we should always keep in mind that learners are amateur individuals who do not know too much about teaching and learning though their ideas are worth taking into account." (Female interviewee, Participant L, hereafter 11FI)

"I think major decisions about the syllabus and curriculum are made by authorities; some decisions like how the material is presented and how much is allocated to each part is made by the teacher. Then it is the responsibility of the students to determine their group, to decide on the topics that they want to discuss in their group, and to decide who should report to the class, what topics good are for lectures or discussions. For example, in one of my classes, I put the responsibility of choosing story book for the class on students' shoulders." (Male interviewee, Participant M, hereafter 12MI)

"Learner cannot have any contribution about very serious matters because they are not at the stage of making such decisions, but the freedom given to them in the classroom open the doors of opportunities for them and lead little by little to having a learner-centered classroom." (Female interviewee, Participant N, hereafter 13FI)

Quantitatively and qualitatively, results provide ample support for the notion that teachers encourage learners to take charge of their own learning and that learners need to be oriented to that responsibility.

Table 1 is also representative of how teachers conceive their own role in the classroom. The sample of teachers were of the consistent perception that "the teacher is no longer an 'authority' and 'instructor'" (63%). They also saw eye to eye on the following: "the teacher has many different roles while teaching," (86%); "activities such as explanations, writing and examples are not the only role of the teachers," (86%); and "the teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks,"(84%). These findings are further corroborated through the interviews:

"Teacher is the source of information, a very helpful guide who always tries to show them the right way of learning a new language. Teachers must be so patient with students' questions and consider their questions as signs of learning. Teachers must not bound students to do what is told; rather they should provide situations that the learners can choose among different options." (Male interviewee, Participant O, hereafter 14MI)

"Beside presenting new materials, being the source of knowledge and classroom management, teacher should observe what is going on with each student and make sure that learning happens. Teachers are responsible to create

an interactional atmosphere in the class where each student considers their classmate their comrade who wants to help them learn better." (Male interviewee, Participant P, hereafter 15MI)

Teacher should present the materials in the most suitable way so every student who has paid attention has realized the lesson. Then they should give enough practice so and finally check their understanding and make some comments about their progress. The teacher should be a good friend of every student." (Female interviewee, Participant Q, hereafter 16FI)

From the results of this part of the study, it can be deduced that the main role of the teacher is to give feedback, motivate learners, and create a safe atmosphere for every single student in the classroom. Put another way, the role of the teacher is, in a sense, to ease the process of learning a new language.

Table 1

Questionnaire Results for the Perceptions of the Teachers toward CLT

Items	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
1. Grammatical correctness is one of the criteria to judge the learner's performance.	.8	3.3	7.4	68	19
2. Group work activities are essential.	0	0	5.7	62.3	30.3
3. Grammar is as a means not an end.	4.9	0	9	62.3	22.1
4. Learners can suggest the content of the lesson.	0	22.1	11.5	47.5	17.2
5. Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning.	3.3	2.5	5	63.3	25.4
6. The teachers' feedback must be focused on appropriateness.	.8	9.2	6.7	65	18.3
7. The teacher is no longer an "authority" and "instructor".	.8	20.8	14.2	40.8	23
8. The learner-centered approach to LT encourages responsibility.	0	3.3	8.2	60.7	26.2
9. Group work allows students to explore problems.	0	3.3	7.5	52.5	36.7
10. Errors are a natural part of learning language.	5.8	.8	2.5	56.7	34.2
11. Organizing the teaching so as to suit the needs of all is impossible in a large class.	0	8.2	7.4	68.9	13.9
12. Knowledge of the rules of a language is not sufficient.	0	3.3	11.5	48.4	35.2
13. Group work activities are practical.	0	.8	16.7	53.3	28.3
14. Much correction is wasteful of time.	6.7	16.7	13.3	49.2	14.2
15. CLT learners are fluent and accurate.	1.7	21.7	29.2	36.7	10.8
16. The teacher has many different roles while	1.7	3.3	9.2	47.5	38.3

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
teaching.					
17. Mastering the rules of grammar is not enough.	.8	5.8	5.8	61.7	25.8
18. Language is effective as a vehicle for doing something.	8.	5.8	5.8	61.7	25.8
19. Activities such as explanations, writing and examples are not the only role of the teachers.	.8	2.5	10.8	54.2	31.7
20. Tasks and activities should be based on the students' needs.	0	1.7	10.8	53.3	34.2
21. Small group work can replace whole class and formal instruction.	3.3	15.8	16.7	45	19.2
22. Through group work the teacher can monitor the students' performance.	0	0	4.2	75.8	20
23. To communicate effectively, direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is NOT essential.	8.	24.2	23.3	35	16.7
24. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks.	.8	0	15.8	69.2	15

4.2. Learners' Perceptions of the Instructional and Classroom Practice

4.2.1. Learners' Attitudes toward the Instructional Practice

Table 2 displays the learners' perceptions of the English language classroom instruction that they had previously experienced in private English institutes. In the questionnaire developed by Savignon and Wang (2003), the items relating to learner perceptions toward instructional practice are grouped into three subscales: grammar/focus on form (items 1-5), communication and communicative-based activities (items 6-10), and error correction (item 11). As shown in Table 2, most learners took liking for communicative- (Total M=5.426, SD=1.9356) rather than grammar-based instruction (Total M=3.166; SD=2.0176). More specifically, language learners agreed that they liked "communication-based English teaching," (70.6%) as well as activities involving communication (76%). They also had liking for a focus on communication, "with grammar explained when necessary" (61%). They favored trial-and-error (90%) and liked their English teachers to create an atmosphere that heartened them to use English (90%). Clearly enough, the majority of these learners felt that the classroom instruction and practices in their English language classrooms were primarily meaning-based, as opposed to form-focused.

Table 2

Questionnaire Results for the Perceptions of the Language Learners toward Their Instructional Practice

Items	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
1. I liked grammar-focused English teaching in my	30.8	12.5	13.3	14.2	29.2

English classroom.					
2. I liked sentence drilling and repeating sentences after my teachers in my English class.	16.7	20	15.7	20.9	26.7
3. I liked the language used in the classroom by my English teachers in the English class to be mostly Persian.	52.5	29.2	8.3	11.3	5.8
4. I liked much of the time in the classroom to be spent in explaining and practicing grammar rules.	27.5	25.8	16.7	12.3	17.5
5. I liked an English class in which I did not need to open my mouth.	74.2	8.3	7.5	26.6	50
6. I liked communication-based English teaching.	7.5	8.3	7.5	26.6	50
7. I liked communicative activities so that we could interact in English with peers	9.2	8.3	6.7	22.5	53.3
8. I liked my English class to be focused on communication, with grammar explained when necessary.	15	19.1	11.7	19.2	35
9. I liked English teachers in my class to allow us to make trial-and-error attempts to communicate in English.	4.2	13.1	21.7	19.1	41.7
10. I liked my English teachers to create an atmosphere that encouraged us to use English in class.	6.7	.8	2.5	24.2	65.8
11. I liked my errors in speaking to be corrected by my teachers.	5	3.1	4.2	17.3	60
12. English teaching in my institute was grammar-focused.	16.7	10.8	20	20.8	31.7
13. My English teachers in institute often asked us to do sentence drilling and repeat sentences after them.	24.2	15	14.2	21.7	25
14. The language used in the classroom by my teachers was mostly Persian.	26.7	12.3	6.7	18.3	35.8
15. English teaching in my institute was mainly explaining and practicing grammar rules.	11.7	10.8	15.8	22.5	39.2
16. I seldom needed to open my mouth in the classroom.	30	9.2	11.7	18.3	30.8
17. English teaching in my institute was communication-based.	30	23.1	10	16.6	20
18. My teachers often designed activities to have us interact in English with peers.	40	21	4.2	9.2	16.7
19. Our focus in class was communication, but the teacher would explain grammar when necessary.	33.3	26.6	9.2	10.9	20
20. English teachers allowed us trial-and-error attempts to communicate in English.	28.3	25	10	14.2	22.5
21. My English teachers often created an atmosphere for us to use English.	26.7	23.1	9.2	14.2	27.5
22. My English teachers often corrected my errors in class.	9.2	16.7	16.7	22.3	35

4.2.2. Learners' Attitudes toward the Classroom Practice

Table 2 illustrates the participants' perceptions toward the classroom practices they had reportedly experienced (items 12-22). The results indicated that the respondents' experiences were more of grammar-based practices (Total M=4.462, SD=2.322) rather than meaning-based

instruction (Total M=3.508, SD=2.331). More specifically, grammatical rules and explanations (61%), use of L1 (i.e. Persian) during classroom instruction (54%), and sentence drilling and repetition (47%) were reported to be typical. However, communication and meaning-based instruction were reported as less frequent than form-focused instruction.

5. Discussion

The present study attempted to explore how Iranian EFL teachers conceive CLT. It also essayed to gain insights into Iranian EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions of classroom practices and instruction. The results were the indication that Iranian EFL teachers, as a whole, adopt a positive and favorable attitude toward CLT, unanimously considering CLT tenets as essential and helpful in their classroom practices. Also, the teachers maintained that applying CLT confers some benefits including increasing learner autonomy and responsibility in the learning process, creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, and developing the learners' ability to use language more effectively. These findings accord with previous empirical literature (Chang, 2011; Hawkey 2006; Karim, 2004; Mangubhai et al., 2003; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006).

More specifically, teachers arrive at a consensus on the role of grammar and the necessity and significance but also contribution of grammatical rules to their instructional behavior. That is, they perceived grammar instruction as a basis for communication to take place efficiently (Chang, 2011). It can be surmised that the Iranian EFL teachers agreed that drills and grammatical activities could increase learners' proficiency in English. According to this finding, teachers' support of CLT is based on the premise that it is helpful to develop communicative competence in the learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2002) and as such, teachers could not overlook grammar instruction. In other words, the learners need to possess knowledge of linguistic forms and functions to perform communicative activities efficiently. The teachers in this study appeared to value CLT principles of grammar instruction, stating grammar should be taught as a means to achieve goals rather than an end in itself. The teachers also felt strongly that CLT does not mean the exclusion of teaching grammar rules (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006).

The findings confirmed consistent patterns of the teachers' perceptions concerning the importance of pair and group work activities in their classrooms. That is, they agreed on the necessity and practicality of group work and its being a replacement for whole-class instruction. On the side of the learners, the respondents maintained that communicative activities such as pair

and group work, according to the findings, enabled them to explore problems and helped them cooperate with their peers to achieve the intended knowledge efficiently. This is in line with Cheng (2011) who argues that group and pair activities are developed to enhance communicative atmosphere in the classrooms and that these activities, in turn, can create authentic situations in which communication takes place. Further, as Berardo (2006, p. 63) notes, "the concept of authenticity is central to CLT."

Moreover, with respect to their perceptions of error correction and teacher feedback, it seems that the Iranian EFL teachers were guided by what the literature at large might consider appropriate for communicative classrooms. For example, most teachers viewed errors tolerantly and indicated that errors should be corrected if they might cause a communication breakdown. That is, the respondents in the current study conceived of the cardinal importance of error correction in language teaching and learning. Although errors are a natural part of language learning, their existence without being corrected, the teachers asserted, might lead to fossilization which, in turn, might exert harmful effects upon the language ability of the learners (Han, 2002). It is noteworthy, however, that the Iranian teachers' view of how to approach errors in the classroom is "ideal" of the communicative classrooms. The respondents agree that "the teachers' feedback must be focused on appropriateness," and that errors are natural to learning a language." They further agree that "much correction is wasteful of time," and that "CLT learners are fluent and accurate." Unfortunately, however, "in many cases, the participating teachers' perceptions of this ideal communicative classroom did not parallel their students' perceptions," (Brown, 2009, p. 54).

Concerning the teachers' perceptions of their role in the English classroom, the majority of the participants agreed that "the teacher is no longer an 'authority' and 'instructor,'" and s/he "has many different roles while teaching," the findings being generally consistent with the teachers' comments elicited from the interviews. According to the findings, the role of the teachers is giving feedback, motivating learners, and creating a safe atmosphere for every single student in the classroom in order to ease the process of learning a new language. What these findings seem to reveal is that, as the Iranian EFL teachers argued, it is necessary to expose the learners to the target language in order for them to acquire it (Cheng, 2011). They were also of the view that learners should be trained to take the responsibility for their own learning. In a CLT classroom, the findings suggest, the teachers are expected to introduce learners to different

learner strategies and help them to be more responsible and act more independently. It is assumed that the more help the learners receive, the less they will do for themselves.

In addition, students' voices as offering the content of the lesson and their responsibility for their own learning have been assented to by the teachers. The results revealed that the teachers ought to generate interest and motivation and encourage learners to use language communicatively. In so doing, learner-centered instruction, in which the needs and goals of the learners and their involvement in creating language are taken into full account, should not be neglected. The findings suggest that the Iranian EFL teachers are more enthusiastic about having the students frequently use L2 in the classroom. Moreover, they somewhat unanimously assert that having learners independently and autonomously accomplish communicative language tasks proved useful. Nonetheless, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) warn that "encouraging learners to have greater independence may lead to acquire inaccurate and inappropriate language forms" (p. 124).

All in all, according to the findings, the teachers held positive and favorable attitudes toward the CLT tenets in their classrooms. However, as Savignon (2002) notes, theory and practice are not always parallel for a number of reasons. Applied to the Iranian context, it might be concluded that classroom practices have not necessarily mirrored teachers' perceptions about teaching and learning in general and CLT in particular. This finding revealed that the main obstacles are not " at the level of individual resistance, but originated in an institutionalized culture'' (Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003, p. 46). Nonetheless, it also be partly attributed to the educational culture in a context like Iran in which the mainstream mode of instruction is product-based (Abdollahzadeh, 2010)

Furthermore, foreign language learners may have very similar or disparate notions of the English classroom instruction they have experienced. With regard to the perceptions and attitudes of the language learners toward classroom instruction, the results of the current study depict an inconsistency between the needs and preferences of English language learners in Iranian private institutes and their perceptions of actual in-class behavior. More specifically, the language learners' attitude toward instructional behavior was mostly communicative-based. The respondents' perceptions of the English classroom instruction they had experienced in institutes, on the contrary, were grammar- rather than meaning-based instruction. The findings, therefore,

are in line with the previous empirical studies (Asassfeh et al., 2012; Du-Babcock & Du-Babcock, 1987; Huang, 1998; McClintock, 2011; Savignon &Wang, 2003).

Our analysis of the learners' attitudes toward the instructional practice revealed that the learners generally held positive attitudes toward meaning-based instruction. More specifically, the language learners agreed that they took a liking for communication-based English teaching and the many activities which involve communication. They preferred their classes to be focused on communication, with grammar explained if need arises. They also liked their English teachers to create an atmosphere that was conducive to English being used in the class. The message echoed, based on the results of the current study, is that there is a marked tendency among the Iranian language learners towards developing communicative competence. This trend may reflect the increasing awareness among Iranian students that they need to understand and communicate in English effectively so as to ready themselves for different aspects of international competition forced by globalization (Yarmohammadi, 2000). The nature of CLT, Savignon (2002) asserts, is the engagement of learners in communication in order to allow them to develop their communicative competence. The results, therefore, encourage the English teachers to provide a non-threatening, lively classroom atmosphere that enhances English use and allows learners to make trial-and-error attempts to develop their communicative abilities.

With regard to the perceptions of the Iranian language learners toward the English classroom instruction they had experienced in English institutes, the participants perceived their classroom activates as grammar-based rather than meaning-based. This indicates that classroom instruction does not necessarily mirror learners' and teachers' attitudes toward language learning and teaching. This further supports Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) and Savignon and Wang (2003) who argued that classroom instruction is not necessarily parallel to teachers' beliefs, let alone those of the learners'. Consequently, when there is a mismatch between learners' attitudes toward classroom practices and their perceptions, teachers may convey their own ideologies and beliefs as to the needs and goals of language learning (Nunan, 1993). This can negatively influence the students' satisfaction with the language class.

6. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The present study aimed at investigating the attitudes of the learners and teachers toward instructional practices in the Iranian English institutes. The findings indicate that EFL teachers

and learners maintain a positive and favorable attitude toward CLT and communicative-based instruction in the classroom. Yet, there is a mismatch between both teachers' and learners' perceptions and their expectations. The findings might suggest that EFL instruction in the context of Iranian English institutes has not gone insofar that it can meet language learners' and teachers' expectations, preferences and needs. Nevertheless, since the results indicated that tenets of CLT are much subscribed to, these stakeholders will require support when transitioning from traditional L2 teaching methods to CLT.

The findings of the current study revealed that both teachers and learners also cultivate positive and favorable attitudes toward meaning-based instruction. This may be sending out a positive signal to those interested in practicing CLT in the Iranian contexts as it shows that those core concepts as learner-centeredness and autonomy in CLT have a reasonably good level of acceptance by both camps. This translates into the fact that not only learners and teachers, but also policy makers, course co-ordinators, material developers, and syllabus designers can largely benefit from this increased understanding of the tenets of CLT in a foreign language context,.

Given the product-based approach to language teaching in Iran (Kiany & Movahedian, 2012), this line of research should help teachers to better understand the needs and wants of their learners; the extent to which certain types of individuals are successful in some language activities but not in others; why some show certain language behaviors but not others; and why some produce certain kinds of language content but not others. Moreover, learners' awareness of their needs and preferences might result in the development of their natural strengths and predisposition to the instructional classroom, enabling teachers to help enhance learners' autonomy and responsibility in instructional activities.

The major limitation of this study was reliance on self-reported data. The results of this study should be complemented by other studies which elicit data from other sources. These could include introspective data, learner logs, journal writing, etc. A further suggestion for research is to replicate the same methodology on EFL learners at specific study or proficiency levels, e.g. students at their elementary levels of English, or still freshmen, sophomores, juniors, graduate students, and so forth. Because of the limited scope of this study, the researchers were not able to study all effective variables in the instructional practices. Therefore, to further validate the results of the current study and to probe other factors influencing the learners' and teachers' ideology toward actual classroom behavior in different EFL contexts, further research is needed.

References

Abdollahzadeh, E. (2010). Undergraduate Iranian EFL learner's use of writing strategies. *Writing and Pedagogy, 2*(1), 65-90.

Anderson, J. (1993). Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in China? Pros and cons. *System, 21*(4), 471-480.

Asassfeh, S., Khwaileh, F., Al-Shaboul, Y., & Alshaboul, S. (2012). Communicative language teaching in an EFL context: Learners' attitudes and perceived implementation. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *3*(3), 525-535.

Bell, T. (2005). Behaviors and attitudes of effective foreign language teachers: Results of a questionnaire study. *Foreign Language Annals*, *29*,125-138.

Berardo, S. A. (2006), The Use of authentic materials in the teaching of reading. *The Reading Matrix Journal*, 6(2), 60-69.

Brosh, H. (1996). Perceived characteristics of the effective language teacher. *Foreign Language Annals*, *29*, 125-138.

Brown, A. V. (2009). Students' and teachers' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching: A comparison of ideals. *The Modern Language Journal*, *93*, 146-60.

Chang, M. (2011). EFL teachers' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in Taiwanese college. *Asian EFL Journal*, *53*, 17-34.

Du-Babcock, B., & Du-Babcock, R. (1987). An analysis of English language education and its impact on business practice in Taiwan. *ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.* 274-672.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of ground theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Adline.

Han, Z-H. (2002). A study of the impact of recasts on tense consistency in L2 output. *TESOL Quarterly,* 36(4), 543-72.

Hawkey, R. (2006). Teacher and learner perception of language learning activity. *ELT Journal*, *60*(3), 242-252.

Hemsley-Brown, J., & Sharp, C. (2003).The use of research to improve professional practice: A systematic review of the literature. *Oxford Review of Education, 29*(4), 449-470.

Horwitz, E. K. (1990). Attending to the affective domain in the foreign language classroom. In S.Magnan (Ed.), *shifting the instructional focus to the learner* (pp.15-33). Middlebury, VT: Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Huang, S. (1998). Senior high school students' EFL learning beliefs: A site study. *In the proceedings of the seventh international symposium on English teaching, 477-485. Taipei,Taiwan: Crane.*

Hymes, D. H. (1972). *On communicative competence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Jarvis, H., & Atsilarat, S. (2004). Shifting paradigms: from a communicative to a context-based approach. *Asian EFL Journal*, 6(4). Available at www.asian-efl journal.com/Dec_04_HJ&SA. pdf.

Karavas-Doukas, E. (1996). Using attitude scales to investigate teachers 'attitudes to the communicative approach. *ELT Journal*, *50*(3), 187-198.

Karim, K. M. R. (2004).*Teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations about communicative language teaching (CLT) in post-secondary education in Bangladesh*. Unpublished master thesis, University of Victoria

Kern, R. (1995). Students and teachers' beliefs about language learning. *Foreign language Annals*, *28*, 71-92.

Kleinsasser, R. C. (1993). A tale of two technical cultures: Foreign language teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 9*, 373-383.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). Techniques and principles in language teaching. In R. N. Campbell, & W. E. Rutherford (Eds.), *Teaching techniques in English as a second language* (pp.1-189). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levine, G. S. (2003). Student and instructor beliefs and attitudes about target language use, first language use, and anxiety: Report of a questionnaire study. *Modern language Journal*, *87*, 343-364.

Li, D. (1998). "It's always more difficult than you plan &imagine": Teachers 'perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, *32*(4), 677-703.

Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative language teaching: as expanding concept for a changing world. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in language learning and teaching* (pp. 541-557). New York: Routledge.

Littlewood, W. (2011). Communicative language teaching: An expanding concept for a changing world. In E. Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*, (pp. 541–557).Volume II. New York: Routledge

Mangubhai, F., Dashwood, A., Berthold, M., Flores, M., & Dale, J. (1998). *Primary LOTE teachers' understandings and beliefs about communicative language teaching: Report on the first phase of the project*. Toowoomba: Centre for Research into Language Teaching Methodologies/ National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

Mangubhai, F., Marland, P., Dashwood, A., & Son, J. (2005). Similarities and differences in teachers' and researchers' conceptions of communicative language teaching: Does the use of an educational model cast a better light? *Language Teaching Research*, 9(1), 31–66.

Mangubhai, F., Marland, P., Dashwood, A., & Son, J. B. (2005). Similarities and differences in teachers' and researchers' conceptions of communicative language teaching: Does the use of an educational model cast a better light? *Language Teaching Research*, *9*(1), 31-36.

Mangubhai, F., Marland, P., Dashwood, A., Son, J.-B. (2007). Framing communicative language teaching for better teacher understanding. *Issues In Educational Research*, 17(1), 85-106.

McClintock, K. (2011). Korean university students 'perceptions of communicative language teaching. *Journal of Language Studies*, *21*(2), 145-158.

McDonough, K., & Chaikitmongkol, W. (2007). Teachers' and learners' reactions to a task-based EFL course in Thailand. *TESOL Quarterly*, *41*(1), 107-132.

Miller, L., & Aldred, D. (2000). Student teachers' perceptions about communicative language teaching methods. *RELC Journal*, *31*(1), 1-22.

Nunan, D. (1993). From learning-centeredness to learner-centeredness. *Applied LanguageLearning, 4*, 1-18.

Puchta, H. (1999). *Beyond materials, techniques and linguistic analyses: The role of motivation, beliefs and identity*. Plenary session at the LATEFL: 33rd International Annual Conference, Edinburgh, 64-72.

Razmjoo, S. 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), 330-339.

Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). The nature of approaches and methods in language teaching. In J. C. Richards & T. S. Rodgers (Eds.), *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed., pp. 18-35). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sato, Kazuyoshi, and Robert C. Kleinsasser (1999). Communicative language teaching (CLT): Practical understandings. *The Modern Language Journal, 83*, 494-517.

Savignon, S. J. (1997). *Communicative competence: Theory and classroom practice. Texts and contexts in second language learning*. New York McGraw-Hill.

Savignon, S. J. (2002). *Communicative competence: Theory and classroom practice* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Savignon, S. J., & Wang, C. (2003). Communicative language teaching in EFL contexts: Learner attitudes and perceptions. IRAL, *44*(3), 223-250.

Schulz, R. A. (2001). Cultural differences in student and teacher perceptions concerning the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback: USA-Colombia. *The Modern Language Journal, 85*(2), 244-258.

Spada, N., & Frohlich, M. (1995). *COLT communicative orientation of language teaching observation scheme coding conventions and applications*. Sydney: national center for English language teaching and research (NCELTR).

Sparks, R. L., Ganschew, L., Artzer, M. A., Siebenhar, D., & Plageman, M.(2004). Foreign language teachers' perceptions of students' academic skills, affective characteristics, and proficiency: Replication and follow-up studies. *Foreign Language Annals, 37*(2), 263-278.

Wang, P. J. (2009). A study of teacher and student perceptions concerning grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching. *Nanya Journal*, 28, 135-152.

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

Yarmohammadi, L. (2000). Reflections on the treatment and contextualization of pronunciation practices and language functions in the pre-university textbooks in Iran. *Journal of Teaching Languages*, 1(3), 1-21.

English Reading Achievement: Authentic and Traditional Contexts in an EAP Setting

Zahra Zohoorian[1]

English Department, Mashhad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran

Ali Rahimi[2]

School of Humanities and Tourism Management, Bangkok University, Thailand

Biodata

Zahra Zohoorian is an assistant professor and a full-time faculty member at the English department, Islamic Azad University, Iran. She received her PhD in Applied Linguistics. She has co-authored several textbooks for EAP courses. Also, she has published papers and presented in conferences with an emphasis on language skills, EAP, ESP, and learner factors. Email: marjan.zohoorian@yahoo.com

Ali Rahimi is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Bangkok University. He has also published extensively in various reputable international journals and has presented his articles at national and international conferences. He has worked with Croatian Public Relations Association (CPRA), Bulgarian ELT, and teachers' professional development and research at BAU in Istanbul, Turkey. He has also collaborated with the South Korean Educational Development Organization and KJEP. He is a guest editor of Elsevier, Social and Behavioral Sciences (2014 and 2015). He has been a keynote speaker at a number of international conferences. Email: ali.r@bu.ac.th

---

1 English Department, Islamic Azad University, Ostad Yusofi, St. 91781-Mashahd, Iran

2 119 Rama 4 Road, klong Toei, Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Abstract

English is identified as a "library language" for most of the students in settings where it is neither spoken as a second language nor used as a medium of instruction. Being the language of technology and science, English reading success is one of the main requirements of many students who need to read English materials related to their specialist subjects. The present study presents the difference observed in English reading achievement of an authentic and a traditional context where English is regarded as a foreign language. Having triangulated the quantitative and the qualitative data, the researchers found out that the students in the authentic context outperformed the traditional context in reading achievement. Thus, it was concluded that the authentic context had positive effects on reading achievement. Moreover, relying on the analysis of data gathered from the diaries, the students' general views of the two contexts were clarified.

Keywords: Authenticity, Authentic tasks, Authentic texts, Reading achievement

1. Introduction

There has been a consensus among the EAP teachers in Iran on the inefficiency of the EAP courses which mainly focus on practicing the reading skill (Akbari & Tahririan, 2009; Amirian & Tavakoli, 2009; Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011; Eslami-Rasekh, 2010; Hashemi, Lamir, & Namjoo, 2011; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008). Several reasons were proposed in the first national EAP conference held in 2005 in Iran. These included the similarity of the textbook materials to other general English teaching textbooks (Sadeghian, 2005), the ignorance of a learner-centred and a communicative approach in teaching the courses (Hassaskhah, 2005; Rahimian, 2005), the use of out-dated materials (Mahdavi-Zafarghandi, 2005), the exclusion of reading strategies and task variety in designing the content (Soleimani, 2005), learning transfer in English for general academic purposes writing (Zarei & Rahimi, 2014) and disregarding the recent linguistic developments and communicative paradigms (Shokouhi, 2005).

While these students are known as demotivated and reluctant to take the EAP courses (Amirian & Tavakoli, 2009; Hassaskhah, 2005; Sayfouri, 2005), their achievement is not facilitated through the materials in their EAP course books. Thus, reading comprehension level is lower than what is expected of them to act proficiently in academic settings (Ahmadi & Bajelani, 2012; Atai & Nazari, 2011; Atai & Shoja, 2011; Hashemi, Lamir, & Namjoo, 2011; Jafari & Shokrpour, 2012; Jalilifar, 2010; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008).

However, apart from other strategies to improve reading achievement, several Iranian EAP scholars (Askari, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Khonsari, 2005; Shokouhi, 2005; Riazi, 2005; Sahragard, Rahimi, & Shams, 2009) or other world researchers (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Martens, 2005; Lin, 2004; Little, Devitt, & Singleton, 1988; Peacock, 1997; Thanajaro, 2000) connect higher levels of performance and achievement to the use of authentic materials and authentic learning situations.

Hence, the present study proposes the assimilation of authenticity into the context of EAP courses in Iran through the integration of authentic texts and tasks to explore their effects on the Iranian EAP learners' reading achievement.

1.1. Authenticity of Text and Task

Definitions provided during 1970s mainly focused on originality with reference to having been produced by native speakers. However, those definitions are questioned by Taylor (1994) because authenticity is not only attributed to texts themselves but as the feature of a text in particular context. Therefore, it is believed that a text out of its original context is not considered authentic anymore and its appropriateness for learning purposes turns out to be questionable.

The quintessence of later definitions is the purpose inherent in the text and authentic text is considered as any material which has not been specifically produced for the purposes of language teaching but for a real communicative purpose (see Harmer, 1991; Jordan, 1997; Lee, 1995; Nunan, 1989). In line with this view, Shomoossi and Ketabi (2007) emphasize the situation, the sources of the materials, and the purpose of the users of the language which have to be authentic while focusing on the authenticity of the text.

Furthermore, MacDonald Badger, and Dasli (2006) believe that the principal characteristics of authentic text are the correspondence between the texts used in the classroom and types of texts used outside the classroom. Due to the advent of communicative language teaching approaches, the definitions for authentic materials are tailored to the "primacy of communicativeness" (Mishan, 2005). Thus, based on the common points in defining authentic materials and texts, it may be concluded that an authentic text is the one produced for communicative purposes rather than language teaching purposes and which is not only genuine but also corresponds to its essence in the real world. Likewise, it may be concluded that authentic texts are no more the essence of authenticity and what is of prime importance is what learners DO with them.

Moreover, the explanation of task itself proceeds the authentic tasks. Task is defined as a goal- oriented activity pursuing a clear purpose while reflecting real-life and focusing on meaning (Bastola, 2006). As the sources of authentic learning experiences, authentic tasks related to the students' daily and professional lives hereby stimulate students to develop the related competencies (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Martens, 2005).

According to Brophy (2010), authentic tasks are intrinsically motivating and their inclusion in the curriculum is justified because of having real-life applications. Mentioning that it is not continuously conceivable to involve students in real life applications, he encourages teachers to involve learners in realistic simulations by engaging them in authentic tasks.

Making a distinction between communicative real-world tasks and communicative pedagogic tasks, Nunan (1989) illustrates that different rationales are behind these two tasks and they have clearly different references (see figure 1). The rationale behind a real world task is rehearsing and its reference is the needs of the learners; whereas, a pedagogical task's rationale is psycholinguistic and its reference is language acquisition theory or research.
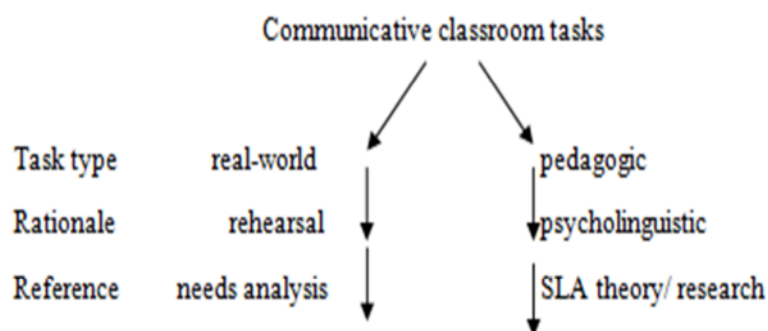
Figure 1 *Communicative Real-World Tasks vs. Communicative Pedagogic Tasks*

Therefore, tasks with a real-world rationale try to approximate learners' behaviour to the types of activities they are required to accomplish in the world outside the classroom while pedagogic tasks require the students to do things which are not likely to take place in the real-world. In an ESP/EAP setting, Alibakhshi, Kiani, and Akbari (2010) refer to an authentic task as a representative of the language situation in which language will be used or similar to the tasks which are going to be performed. To ensure task authenticity, there are a number of factors that need close consideration on the part of the task designer. Thus, a task to be authentic must:

- reflect the "original communicative purpose" of the text
- be suitable for the text

- stimulate response and engagement with the text
- simulate real-life tasks
- motivate learners' present knowledge
- comprise "purposeful communication" among learners
  (Mishan, 2005).

As discussed above, tasks are used as models which approximate authenticity in pedagogical contexts. Authentic tasks simulate real world in language teaching contexts and authenticate the use of authentic materials including text. Among the different types of authentic tasks which are proposed by scholars as mentioned above, tasks which are used for practicing reading skill such as summarizing, listing, fact-finding, following instructions in completing figures or tables, sharing, and skimming and scanning can be implemented in the contexts where the main language skill of focus is reading.

1.2. Authentic Context

Authentic texts are effective in bringing context into language teaching (Shrum & Glisan 2000). Nevertheless, authentic texts unaccompanied by some authentic action or task may not provide an authentic context (Anderson, 1999; Breen, 1985; Guariento & Morley, 2001; MacDonald et al., 2006; Velazquez & Redmond, 2007). Also, tasks must include the integration of learners' past and new knowledge through communicative and cognitive procedures. Moreover, a "reciprocal" relationship is assumed between the teacher and the learners. Learning strategies have to be improved. And finally, the learning environment must encourage the sharing of ideas and taking risks while there is an attempt to improve social values and awareness of the cultural issues.

Hence, the central point of departure in providing an authentic context is not only to bring the authentic materials into the classroom context but also to prepare the tasks that simulate the real-life conditions. Moreover, the teacher and student roles in an authentic context are different compared to normal teaching contexts as the students work more autonomously and the teacher's role changes to a facilitator rather than a lecturer or presenter of knowledge.

2. Method

The present study as a mixed-methods research included both qualitative and quantitative approaches in data collection. Moreover, due to the unfeasibility of random assignment of the

students, the study formed a quasi-experiment. The design for the present quasi-experimental study was pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group.

2.1. Research Procedure

The present study was conducted having one control and one experimental group. The groups were selected randomly from the 15 available EAP classes at Azad University for the first academic semester. The two groups were randomly assigned as the experimental and control groups before the treatment. The study was conducted over a period of 8 weeks for three hours per week (one session per week) while the group size and membership was kept constant. The control group was taught through the traditional teaching methodology and the texts provided in the conventional EAP book (SAMT publication) accompanied with different exercises without any intervention. The students in the experimental group were taught using the syllabus developed by the researchers including the authentic texts and tasks. For the experimental group, the authentic texts were accompanied by authentic tasks and an authentic context.

To measure reading achievement, the data were collected using a reading test as pre-test and post-test which included the materials closely related to both groups' syllabus contents. The former was administered before the intervention started and the latter after the intervention (8 weeks).

The following Table (1) is an explanation of the groups involved in the study and the related treatment employed for the experimental group. The tasks and activity types and the materials that were included are also presented. The same assessment tools and techniques and questionnaires were used for both groups while the treatment, tasks, and texts were different.

Table 1 Summary of the procedure plan for the control and experimental groups

Group	Treatment	Tasks/ Activities	Materials	Questionnaires/ Assessment
The Control Group (Traditional) context	Traditional: * teacher-centred *lectures *synonym/antonym *paraphrase *exercises * translation	Non-Authentic *fill-in *multiple choice *reading comprehension * true/false	SAMT book	*Reading achievement *focus group interview *diary writing

The experimental Group (Authentic context)	Authentic: *Student-cantered *Group work *teacher/facilitator *discussions *peer-correction *reading skills *cooperative learning	Authentic *warm-up *brainstorming *summarizing *decision-making *skimming/*scanning *info/experience sharing * treasure hunt * dictionary use * completing charts and figures * discussions * group work	Authentic texts & Authentic tasks	*Reading achievement *focus group interview *diary writing

2.2. Participants

The sample for this experiment comprised 60 Iranian tertiary level sophomores majoring in engineering who had enrolled in English for Academic Purposes courses at the Islamic Azad University. The students' age ranged from 19 to 35 and both female and male students were in both groups. While true random sampling was not feasible, the researchers implemented cluster random sampling. The sample was chosen based on the following criteria. First, the EAP students majoring in engineering were not exceptions regarding the problems mentioned before about the EAP courses. Second, they had passed the Basic English course the previous semester which introduced them to basic grammar points and general vocabulary. Third, since authentic materials have been many times criticized for being instructed to beginners (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Martinez, 2002) and EAP students had had different courses during their guidance and high school and also 2 credit units of Basic English course prior to the EAP course, they were not considered as beginners and their groups were suitable for the purpose of the present study. There were 30 students in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. Thus, Table 2 illustrates the number of male and female students in each group.

Table2

The Number of Male and Female Students in Each Group

1	Control group	Male 24 + Female 6 =30
2	Experimental group	Male 21 + Female 9 =30

2.3. Lesson Plan

The lesson plan for the present study is based on an interactive approach to reading. An interactive approach to reading suggests the exploitation of reading materials in terms of the three stages of pre, while, and post reading (Rivas, 1999). The pre-reading stage aims at the activation of the schema that is relevant. It is a method of activating learners' motivation before the actual reading takes place (Berrill, Verhulst, & Doucet, 2006; Haller, 2000, cited in Alyousef, 2006; Wallace, 1992). The while-reading stage is meant to develop the learners' ability through developing linguistic and schematic knowledge (Haller, 2000, Cited in Alyousef, 2006). During-reading activities help learners in understanding the text and dealing efficiently with the parts of the text that they do not understand (Berrill, Verhulst, & Doucet, 2006). The final phase, post-reading, has the purpose of helping the students build up what they have read. Additionally, it is targeted at relating the reading materials to the learners' opinions, experiences, and knowledge. Some of the post-reading activities are answering questions, writing descriptions, answering direct reference questions, writing summaries, writing advertisements, writing stories, and discussions (Rivas, 1999). Generally, although some activities and tasks may seem to be just a remote simulation of what the students are expected to do in the real world, since they practice the skills, the use of such tasks and activities is justifiable (Nunan, 1989). Thus, the lesson plan for the present study includes the three stages of modern reading tasks and some of the proposed activities for each stage will be integrated into the syllabus. The lesson plan and also the layout of the units for the two groups are explained in the following sections.

2.3.1. Layouts

2.3.1.1 Control Group Material Layout

The layout for the materials presented in the control group was as follows and each unit included the following format.

Pre-reading: This section was called the word study where the students were presented with the synonyms for some of the words in the text.

• Word study: definitions or synonyms

Reading: This section included the main text.

• Reading for comprehension

Post reading: this section involved the different exercises.

• Read and decide if the statement is true or false.

• Circle the best item (multiple choice comprehension questions).

• Answer the following questions (reading comprehension questions to be provided in statement form)

2.3.1.2. Experimental Group Material Layout

The layout for the experimental group included the tasks which followed the texts. To be authentic, the original text must not be changed and even the layout and presentation must be maintained (Grellet, 1981). Also, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) mention that if the learners' motivation is going to be enhanced through an emphasis on the real world applications of the language, text authenticity or at least keeping the authentic appearance of the texts is a paramount factor. Therefore, the texts were directly printed from the internet without any modifications or simplifications. The lesson plan for the experimental group was mainly based on Cubillo and Brenes's 2009 lesson plan proposal. This lesson plan included a warm-up section to prompt the students' background knowledge. At the pre-reading section there was brainstorming related to the topic of the text. During the reading stage the vocabulary of the text were introduced to the students and they were encouraged to do scanning. In the post reading section, which included practicing, the students answered comprehension questions while emphasizing reading skills such as scanning and skimming. Some other tasks included evaluating the text, writing a summary or a report, filling in tables or charts, summarizing the text, finding technical words and listing them, writing the main idea, drawing figures, etc.

According to Melvin and Stout (1987) when using authentic materials, the sequence of the activities is from comprehension to production. In this regard, comprehension is not the end result; but, it is a means to an end which is production. Thus, the focus of the tasks was mainly on comprehension followed by production. Moreover, due to the employment of tasks, the task components were specified for each unit. The task components took account of the goals, input, activities, teacher roles, learner roles, and the settings (Nunan, 1989). The task components are composed of:

Purpose: As academic texts have an informational nature, the communicative purpose is transmission of information (Mishan, 2005).

Goals: to familiarize the students with articles in English focusing on technical terms

Input: different authentic materials including info books, web homepages, and articles

Activities: answering brainstorming questions, finding technical words and abbreviations, skimming the text, answering questions, using dictionary, silent reading, cooperating in their groups, discussing, writing a summary, deciding, drawing figures, etc.

Teacher role: facilitator, contributor, provider of meanings if needed, monitoring.

Student role: following instructions, focusing on understanding, peer correction, finding word meanings in dictionary, asking the teacher for help for meanings, participating actively in learning.

Setting: EAP class, group work

Thus, based on the interactive problem-solving approach mentioned in Nunan (1989), the units for the experimental group included the application of different reading skills such as skimming, scanning, finding the main idea, and using context clues while firstly the focus was on comprehension and later the students were asked to produce through summarizing or reporting the decisions they made or the problems they had solved.

2.3.2. Content and Teaching Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the control group was taught using the EAP textbook published by SAMT and the methodology was the same as the conventional lecturing methodology. The methodology consisted of paraphrasing the texts and providing students with synonyms and/or antonyms and this was closely similar to grammar-translation method.

On the other hand, since an authentic text must follow an authentic task to create an authentic learning/teaching situation (Breen, 1985), in the experimental group, the researchers provided an authentic learning context. To do so, the students were exposed to texts as they were in the real world and authentic tasks followed. Consequently, the students were assigned to groups of four (six groups of 4 and two groups of 3) and they were given instruction on doing the tasks. There were totally 8 groups. Cooperative learning was implemented and the teacher's role was minimized to a facilitator, As Maxim (2000) and Caldwell (2008) maintain, a language classroom with peer readers who collaborate and a teacher who facilitates can be a critical resource when students work through an authentic text. As is mentioned by Alderman (2002) one

of the principles of effective instruction for text comprehension is cooperative learning when students work in groups or pairs and carry out authentic comprehension tasks. The teacher's facilitating role was to help for the creation of meaning while the students were using their academic language and they were involved in tangible language experiences. Thus, in an authentic context, the teacher takes a monitoring role by checking the students' progress and a supporting role by providing them with instructions (Parsons & Ward, 2011). As a result, the students in the experimental group experienced a totally different approach in their learning from the students in the control group.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments and Qualitative Measures

The data collection instrument for the present study was a reading test developed by the researchers. Also, two qualitative measures of focus group interview and diary writing were implemented.

2.4.1. Reading Achievement Test

The data collection instrument to measure reading achievement was the researchers-designed test. The reading test which was administered as pre-test and post-test consisted of the materials closely related to the syllabus based on either the topics covered during the course or the texts that quite closely related to the course topics and content of the units. There were totally eight texts and each was followed by five comprehension questions. The texts were extracted from different websites and were not modified or simplified to maintain their authenticity.

The items on the reading comprehension test were of different types including inferential, literal and evaluative in the form of multiple choice. Totally, there were forty multiple choice items in the reading test and thus the maximum score on the reading test was 40. Multiple choice questions are widely used for testing the reading skill and many standardized tests such as TOEFL also include multiple choice questions (Aebersold & Field, 1997). Multiple choice questions demonstrate the learners' ability in reading and they have high levels of reliability (Ekbatani, 2011).

In order to ensure the tests' face and content validity, a panel of English language teaching professors evaluated the reading comprehension test. They evaluated the test for the difficulty level of the texts and their relation to the course content and the suitability of the texts for the reading test concerning the students' level and course content. During the pilot study the test was

administered to a group of similar students and the KR-21 reliability index was calculated as 0.88 which is considered as acceptable for teacher-made tests (Rudner & Schafer, 2002).

2.4.2. Focus Group Interview

The main qualitative data collection technique for this study was the focus group interview. Having considered several points in preparing the focus group interview session such as the appropriate questions (Patton, 2002; Richard & Casey, 2000; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996), the researchers prepared two main and some prompt conversational questions to provide an informal situation, excluding the professional language and words from the questions which were clear, easy, open-ended, and one-dimensional. Also, prompt questions and interview schedule (Appendix B) were prepared to keep the interview session dynamic.

As far as the sampling for the focus group was concerned, the selection of the participants had to be based on including the whole range of the population of the study; thus, the focus group for the present study consisted of high and low achievers from both control and experimental groups to decrease any chance of achievement scores working as a source of decrease or increase in the students' motivation; so that the researchers would ensure that the students with different reading abilities participated in the focus group interview. The researchers selected 8 students from each group to participate in the focus group interview. The following tables demonstrate the interviewees' demographic data in the experimental and control groups.

Table 3

Demographic Data of the Interviewees and Their Related Scores in the Control Group

Name (data set code)	gender	Age	Pre-test of reading
Mohammad	M	19	10
Jalal	M	24	12
Hamed	M	17	11
Amin	M	21	8
Milad	M	28	9
Ali	M	17	11
Pardis	F	22	14
Mona	F	20	11

Table 4

Demographic Data of the Interviewees and Their Related Scores in the Experimental Group

Name (data set code)	gender	Age	Pre-test of reading
Ali	M	18	14
Shahram	M	20	6
Mohammad	M	19	11
Minoo	F	18	10
Omid	M	19	12
Reza	M	25	8
Maryam	F	20	13
Amir	M	21	11

Based on the research question, two questions (Appendix A) were posed which were raised during the interview sessions about the participants' reading achievement. The sessions were tape recorded and the data were transcribed for analysis purposes. The researchers then gathered the conversations and related them to the study variable by finding the main recurrent themes.

2.4.2.1. Analysis of the Interview Data

To analyse the interview, two codes were prepared as positive and negative because the researchers looked for the participants' views on the improvement in reading achievement. Thus, the researchers sought to find out if the interviewees stated their reading achievement had improved or not.

Statements which implied a development in reading achievement were coded as positive or high; alternatively, the statements which implied no development in reading achievement were coded as negative or low. The following Table (5) illustrates the coding system for the interview findings. Thus, for example if the interviewee's response was negative for reading achievement, it was coded as LRA (Low Reading Achievement).

Table 5

Positive and Negative Codes for Motivation Level, Reading Motivation, and Reading Achievement

Based on the interviewees' statements the researchers decided if the improvement has been positive or if no improvement had taken place.

	High	Positive	HRA
Reading achievement	Low	Negative	LRA

2.4.3. Diary

In order to find out the students' general views of the course and to gather supplementary data on the students' learning experiences during the intervention, they were encouraged to keep diaries. The data analysis model and design on which this study is based is the explanation of "between-person differences" which is embedded in the aggregation of data over time.

To collect data using the diaries, the students were provided with diary slips (Appendix, C). The diaries were written by the students during the treatment period and collected after 8 sessions when the intervention completed. The data of the diaries were analysed based on the analysis guide which mainly sought to find information about the learners' general views towards the course content and tasks or activities based on the group they were participating in. Then, the common themes and points were distinguished based on the students' experiences of problems, barriers, positive/negative points, successes, failures, requirements, contexts, texts, as well as tasks.

2.4.3.1. Analysis of the Diary Data

Based on the inductive data analysis method and by implementing the "emergent" category model of coding, the researchers analysed the data for recurrent themes in the diary entries.

Based on the objectives of the study which were to find out the reading achievement of the learners, the researchers analysed the diaries for the emergent themes which were mentioned by the participants about the context of the course, the texts, the tasks, the students' roles, the teacher's role, their improvement in reading the academic English texts and other related activities by sifting through their diaries in order to find the students' general views of the two contexts. In order to do coding at the first level, the researchers looked for any recurrent themes. Then looking for open codes, the researchers developed them into axial codes and finally into selective codes. For instance, for the following two entries the researchers developed the same code as "group work".

- *"I liked the group work"*
- *"I think working in groups is really interesting"*

Similarly, classifying phrases or words found in the diary entries such as "*I didn't enjoy much*", "*It was a waste of time*", "*I was bored*", "*the class was boring today*", etc. the researchers

formed them into one selective code and theme as "boring activities". On the other hand, having found such words and phrases like "*I enjoyed the session*", "I *didn't notice when the class finished as I was immersed in doing the activity*", "*a satisfying class time*", "*I liked the activities for today's class*", etc. the researchers formed another theme as "satisfying".

3. Result

An independent t-test was run to compare the Authentic and Traditional groups' means on the pre-test of reading achievement in order to verify that the two groups had the same level of reading ability prior to the main study. The results of independent t-test (t (58) = .72, P > .05, r = .095 it represents a weak effect size) (Table 6) indicate that there was not any significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the pre-test of reading achievement. Thus, it can be concluded that they had almost the same level of reading ability prior to the main study.

Table 6

Independent T-Test; Pre-Test of Reading Achievement by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.064	.801	.725	58	.471	.400	.552	-.705	1.505
Equal variances not assumed			.725	57.603	.471	.400	.552	-.705	1.505

It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's F = .064, P > .05). That is why the first row of Table 5, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics for the Authentic (M = 10.87, SD = 2.22) and Traditional (M = 10.47, SD = 2.04) groups.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics Pre-Test of Reading Achievement by Groups

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test of	Authentic	30	10.87	2.224	.406
reading	Traditional	30	10.47	2.047	.374

The following Graph (Figure 2) represents the means for the two groups for the pre-test of reading achievement. As is illustrated, the mean for the authentic group was 10.87 while for the traditional group it was 10.47. Thus, it suggests that the students in both groups had almost the same level of ability in reading prior to the intervention.
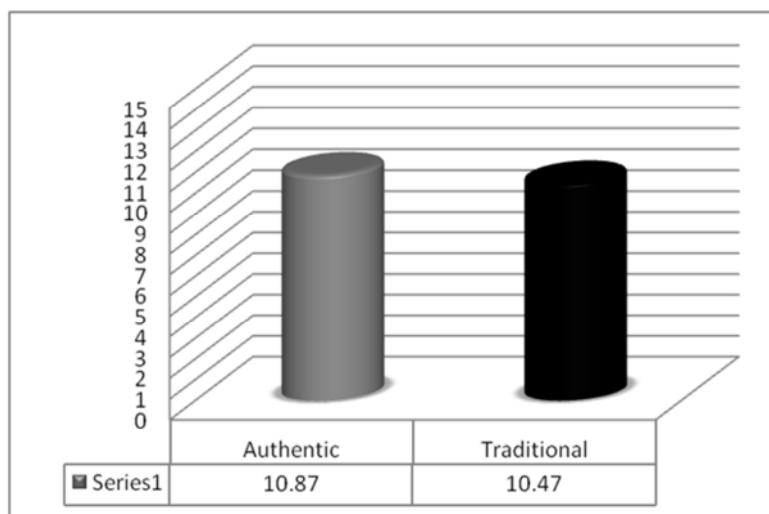
Figure 2. *Graph for Pre-Test of Reading Achievement by Groups*

An independent *t*-test was run to compare the Authentic and Traditional groups' reading achievement in order to probe the effect of type of context (authentic and traditional) on the reading achievement among Iranian EAP learners. The results of the independent *t*-test (t (58) = 2.67, P < .05, r = .33 it represents a moderate effect size) (Table 8) indicate that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the reading achievement for the post-test. Thus, the null-hypothesis (H_{01}) as "the traditional and authentic contexts do not affect the reading achievement among Iranian EAP students" was rejected.

Table 8

Independent T-Test; Reading Achievement by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.330	.568	2.671	58	.010	2.333	.874	.585	4.082
Equal variances not assumed			2.671	57.043	.010	2.333	.874	.584	4.083

It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's F = .330, P > .05). That is why the first row of table 8, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported. As is displayed in table 9, the Authentic group (M = 13.37, SD = 3.15) outperformed the Traditional group (M = 11.03, SD = 3.59) on reading achievement.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics Reading Achievement by Groups

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading	Authentic	30	13.37	3.157	.576
Achievement	Traditional	30	11.03	3.596	.657

The following graph (figure 3) represents the means for the two groups for the reading achievement. As is illustrated, the mean for the authentic group was 13.37; while, for the traditional group it was 11.03. Thus, it suggests that the students in the authentic group (experimental group) had higher reading achievement scores than the students in the traditional group (control group) and outperformed the control group.
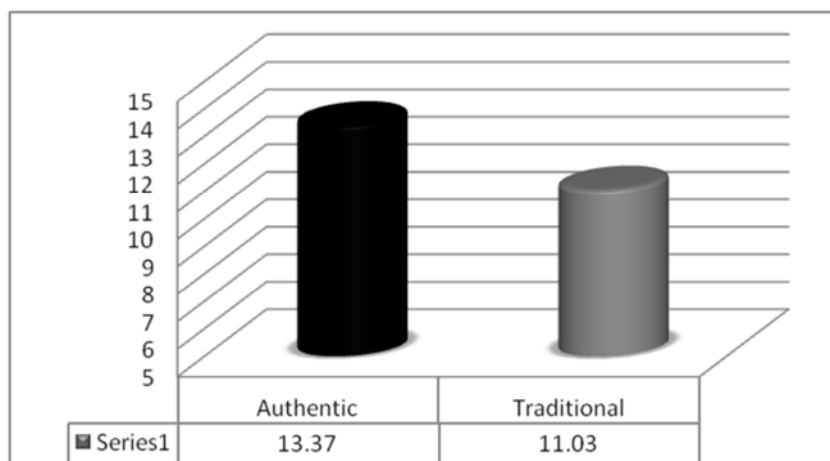
Figure 3. *Graph for Reading Achievement by Groups*

Therefore, the results of the quantitative data determined that while the control and experimental groups' mean scores on the pre-test of reading achievement were not significantly different (control group mean= 10.46 and experimental group mean= 10.87, a weak effect size r = .095), their means on the post-test were significantly different (control group mean= 11.03 and experimental group mean= 13.37, a moderate effect size r = .33). Thus, the conclusion is drawn that the experimental group (authentic context) outperformed the control group (traditional context). However, since the researchers controlled for validity and reliability issues, it is possible to attribute the improvement of the experimental group to the intervention which was providing an authentic context through authentic texts and tasks.

In order to triangulate the quantitative findings of the study with the qualitative findings, the participants were supposed to answer two questions (Appendix A) during the focus group interview session.

The frequency of the positive and negative responses was calculated. The following table (4.20) includes the number of positive and negative codes based on the interviewees' responses to the interview questions.

Table 10

Positive and Negative Codes for Reading Achievement in the Two Groups

	Reading Achievement	
Group	Positive	Negative
	HRA	LRA

71

Control (traditional)	5	3
Experimental (authentic)	6	2

As is illustrated in the table, out of the 8 interviewees, 6 students in the experimental group (authentic context) stated that their reading achievement had improved. On the other hand, five students from the control group (traditional context) expressed that their reading achievement had increased.

Having analysed and triangulated both quantitative and qualitative data, the researchers found out that the findings of the quantitative section of the study are supported by the qualitative findings of the interview. Therefore, the researchers conclude that the authentic context was more effective in increasing the students' reading motivation for reading English texts.

Moreover, having employed the between-person differences in data aggregation for time-based diaries for the present quasi-experimental study, the researchers sought to find and compare the intervention outcome levels in the control and experimental groups. Thus, the diary entries were analysed to find the most recurrent themes in the two groups. The researchers classified the themes based on appearance in the diaries of both contexts and also each context exclusively. As is illustrated in table 11 the following themes recurrently appeared in both groups' diaries.

Table 11

The Frequency of Common Themes (Selective Codes) in both Traditional and Authentic Contexts

Theme	Group	
	Traditional	Authentic
Boring activities	15	4
Relevance of topics	2	12
Vocabulary learning	12	10
Need teacher's support	10	9
Exam-oriented	9	3
Insufficient background knowledge	7	4
Satisfying	5	20

Thus, it was revealed that half (15 out of 30) of the students in the control group (traditional context) believed that the class activities were boring; whereas, only 4 students in the experimental group (authentic context) referred to activities as boring. Furthermore, while the same topics were presented to both groups, 12 students in the authentic group mentioned the relatedness of the topics to them and 2 students in the traditional group had this view. Also, it was found out that 20 students in the authentic group stated that the sessions were satisfying and this number reduced to 5 in the traditional group.

As shown in the following table (Table 12), half of the students in the traditional context expressed their need for practice and referred to the texts as outdated and irrelevant.

Table 12

Common Themes (Selective Codes) for the Control Group (Traditional Context)

Recurrent theme	Frequency
Outdated texts	15
Need practice	15
Teacher's explanation	12
Boring session	10
Difficult text	9
irrelevant Texts	14

As was specifically related to the most recurrent themes of the experimental group (authentic context) table 13 demonstrates the themes as follows:

Table 13

Common Themes (Selective Codes) for the Experimental Group (Authentic Context)

Recurrent theme	Frequency
Interest in the teaching method	19
Group work	18
Handle the reading text and task	17
Up-to-date materials	15
Motivating reading practice	15
Dictionary use	15
Improved in reading	14

Active sessions	12
Interesting materials	11
Cooperative learning	9
Exciting classes	8
Purposeful course	8
High-level course	7

Accordingly, it is concluded that the majority of the students (19 out of 30) were satisfied with the course and believed it was interesting. Besides, many students (18) expressed their appeal to the group work tasks. About half of the students in this context (17) stated that they could handle reading and doing the exercises. Similarly, half of the students had written that the materials were up-to-date, the reading practices were motivating, and dictionary use was beneficial. And, more importantly, 14 students referred to their improvement in reading.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the analysis of the reading scores for the post-test suggest that the students who underwent the treatment including the authentic context in the experimental group had higher reading achievement scores compared to the students in the control group. On the other hand, based on the analysis of the qualitative data of the focus group interview it was revealed that out of the 8 students in the authentic group, 6 of the students stated their improvement in reading; whereas, in the traditional group the number reduced to 5 out of 8.

Moreover, the qualitative data from the diary entries revealed that 14 students from the authentic group pointed to their improvement in reading directly; while, this view was not expressed directly in the control group students' diaries and they expressed their reading improvement in terms of learning vocabulary.

In general, the results of the present study were consistent with results of similar studies in the Iranian context with different subjects such as those conducted by Karimi (2004), Askari (2004), Mahbudi (2005), Khalili and Daneshvar (2010), or other contexts such as the studies conducted by Lin (2004), Cho Ahn, and Krashen (2005), and Guo (2012). In all the above-mentioned studies the reading achievement or comprehension ability was significantly higher in the group which had the authenticity of content as the complementary material to the course. Nonetheless,

these studies did not include authentic tasks to provide an authentic context. Moreover, the authentic texts and materials were not used as the main content of the courses. Among the studies that were reviewed, the results of the present study were in contradiction with Maxim's 2000 study. In Maxim's study both the control and the experimental group performed equally in learning vocabulary. However, in Maxim's study the higher level of performance related to fast reading and processing of reading; while, in the present study the focus of reading was on comprehension.

The findings of the present study confirmed that the use of an authentic context can have positive effects on the students' reading achievement. Thus, based on the pedagogical implications of the study explained previously as well as the lesson plan for the study, the following pedagogical framework summarizes the findings of the study related to the authentic texts and authentic tasks (Figure 4).

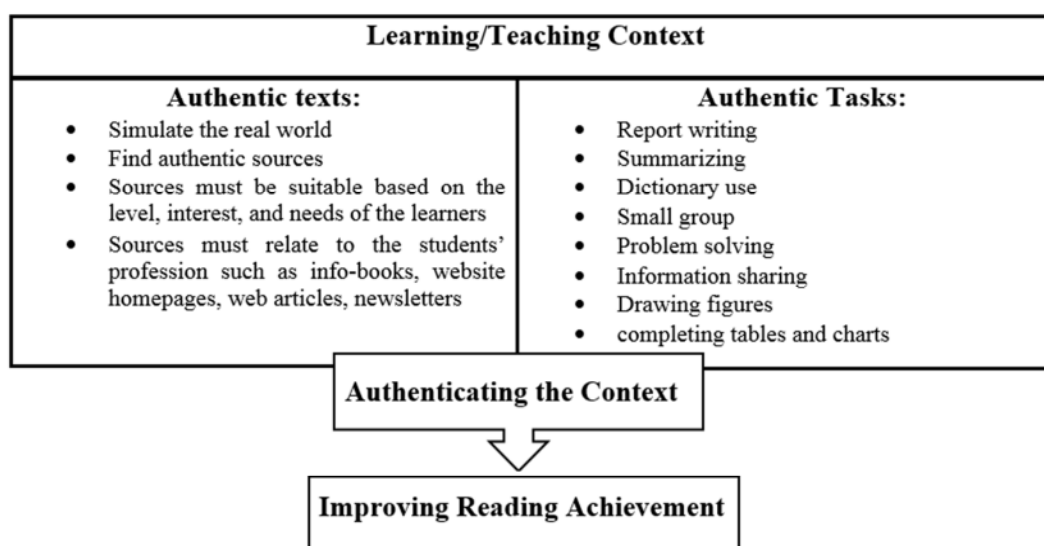Figure 4. *Pedagogical Framework*

References

Aebersold, J. A., & Field, M. L. (1997). *From reader to reading teacher: Issues and strategies for second language classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ahmadi, A., & Bajelani, M. R. (2012). Barriers to English for specific purposes learning among Iranian university students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *47*, 792-796.

Akbari, Z., & Tahririan, M. H. (2009). Vocabulary learning strategies in an ESP context: The case of para/medical English in Iran. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, *11*(1), 39-61.

Alderman, D. E. (2002). Reading in discipline/content materials. In M. L., Kamil, J. B. Manning, J. Herbert, & H. J. Walberg, (Eds.), *Successful reading instruction* (pp. 119-136). USA: Information Age Publishing.

Alibakhshi, G., Kiani, G. R., & Akbari, R. (2010). Authenticity in ESP/EAP selection tests administered at Iranian universities. *Asian ESP Journal*, *6*(2), 65-93.

Alyousef, H. S. (2006). Teaching reading comprehension to ESL/EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Learning*, *5*(1), 63-73.

Amirian, Z., & Tavakoli, M. (2009). Reassessing the ESP courses offered to engineering students in Iran. *English for Specific Purposes World*, *8*(23), 1-13.

Amiryousefi, M., & Ketabi, S. (2011). Anti-textbook arguments revisited: A case study from Iran. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *15*, 215-220.

Anderson, N. J. (1999). *Exploring second language reading: Issues and strategies*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle.

Askari. A. J. (2004). Internet-based medical articles in EMP. *English for specific purposes world*, 28 (3). Retrieved from http://www.esp-world.info/Articles_8/Medical_A%20.htm

Atai, M. R., & Nazari, O. (2011). Exploring reading comprehension needs of Iranian EAP students of health information management (HIM): A triangulated approach. *System*, *39*(1), 30-43.

Atai, M. R., & Shoja, L. (2011). A triangulated study of academic language needs of Iranian students of computer engineering: Are the courses on track. *RELC Journal*, *42*(3), 305-323.

Bastola, P. (2006). Task-based learning in language class. *Journal of NELTA*, *11*(1-2), 130-132.

Berrill, D. P., Verhulst, D. J., & Doucet, L. (2006). *Tutoring adolescent readers*. Canada: Pembroke Publishers.

Breen, M. P. (1985). Authenticity in the language classroom. *Applied Linguistics*, *6*, 60-70.

Brophy, J. E. (2010). *Motivating students to learn*. New York: Routledge.

Caldwell, J. S. (2008). *Reading assessment: A primer for teachers and coaches*. New York: Guilford Press.

Cho, K., Ahn, K., & Krashen, S. (2005). The effects of narrow reading of authentic texts on interest and reading ability in English as a foreign language. *Reading Improvement*, *42*(1), 58-65.

Cubillo, P. C., & Brenes, C. N. (2009). Using task-based instruction in an ESP course in the computer center at the University of Costa Rica. *Actualidades Investigativas en Educación*, *9*(1), 1-25.

Ekbatani, G. (2011). *Measurement and evaluation in post-secondary ESL*. NY: Routledge.

Eslami-Rasekh, Z. (2005). The relevance and sociocultural significance of pragmatics for ESAP. In G. R. Kiany & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.). *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference* (1). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp.57-80). Tehran: SAMT.

Eslami-Rasekh, Z. (2010). Teachers' voice vs. students' voice: A needs analysis approach to English for academic purposes (EAP) in Iran. *English Language Teaching*, *3*(1), 3-12.

Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing reading skills: A practical guide to reading comprehension exercises*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guariento, W., & Morley, J. (2001). Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom. *ELT Journal*, *55*(4), 347-353.

Gulikers, J. T. M., Bastiaens, T. J., & Martens, R. L. (2005). The surplus value of an authentic learning environment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *21*(3), 509-521.

Guo, S. (2012). Using authentic materials for extensive reading to promote English proficiency. *English Language Teaching*, *5*(8), 196-205.

Harmer, J. (1991). *The practice of English language teaching*. London: Longman.

Hashemi, M. R., Lamir, A., & Namjoo, F. (2011). English for B.Sc. students of physical education in Iran: A study of perception of English needs and effectiveness of ESP textbooks. *English Language and Literature Studies*, *1*(2), 14-24.

Hassaskhah, J. (2005). From theory to practice: where is the missing link? In G.R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.). *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (1). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 13-34). Tehran: SAMT.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jalilifar, A. (2010). The effect of cooperative learning techniques on college students" reading comprehension. *System*, *38*, 96-108.

Jafari, M. S., & Shokrpour, N. (2012). EAP students' reading motivation of English academic expository texts: A mixed methods design. *International Journal of Linguistics*, *4*(4), 372-392.

Jordan, R. R. (1997). *English for academic purposes: A guide and resource for teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Karimi, A. k. (2004). *The impact of authentic texts in Iranian EFL learners' motivation*. (Unpublished MA thesis). Al-Zahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Khalili, S. M., & Daneshvar, I. (2010). The impact of ESP materials on medical students' reading proficiency. *English for Specific Purposes World*, *29*(9), 1-12.

Khonsari, S. (2005). Reading English for science and technology. In G.R. Kiany & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.). *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (2). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 115-133). Tehran: SAMT.

Lee, W. (1995). Authenticity revisited: Text authenticity and learner authenticity. *ELT journal*, *49*(4), 323-328.

Lin, Y. (2004). *The effect of authentic materials on motivation and reading achievement of EFL learners in Taiwan*. (Unpublished PhD dissertation). La Sierra University, California, United States.

Little, D., Devitt, S., & Singleton, D. (1988). *Authentic texts in foreign language teaching: theory and practice*. Dublin: Authentik.

MacDonald, M. N., Badger, R., & Dasli, M. (2006). Authenticity, culture and language learning. *Language and intercultural communication*, *6*(3&4), 250-26.

Mahbudi, A. (2005). ESP or General English. In G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.). *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (1). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 202- 218).Tehran: SAMT.

Mahdavi-Zafarghandi, A. (2005). Failure of meeting EST objectives. In G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.). *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (2). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 144-153).Tehran: SAMT.

Martinez, A. (2002). *Authentic materials: An overview*. *Karen's Linguistic Issues*. Retrieved Sep, 2012 from http://www3.telus.net/linguistics issues/authentic materials.html.

Maxim, H. H. (2000). Integrating language learning and cultural inquiry in the beginning foreign language classroom. *ADFL Bulletin*, *32*(1), 12-17.

Mazdayasna, G., & Tahririan, M. H. (2008). Developing a profile of the ESP needs of Iranian students: The case of students of nursing and midwifery. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *7*, 277-289.

Melvin, B. S., & Stout, D. F. (1987). Motivating language learners thought authentic material. In W. M. Rivers (Ed.), *Interactive language teaching* (pp. 44-56). Cambridge: Cambridge, University Press.

Mishan, F. (2005). *Designing authenticity into language learning materials*. Bristol: Intellect.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parsons, S. A., & Ward, A. E. (2011). The case for authentic tasks in content literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, *64*(6), 462-465.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. UK: SAGE.

Peacock, M. (1997). The effect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners. *English Language Teaching Journal*, *51*(2), 144-155.

Rahimian, M. (2005). Developing communicative syllabus in ESP/EAP classes and how to deal with it in EFL situations. In G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (2). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 86-98). Tehran: SAMT.

Riazi, A. (2005). Features of quality EAP textbook: Insights from literature and book reviews. In G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the First National ESP/EAP Conference*, (1). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 35-44).Tehran: SAMT.

Richard, A. K., & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. CA: SAGE Publications.

Rivas, R. M. M. (1999). Reading in recent ELT course books. *ELT journal*, *53*(1), 12-21.

Rudner, L. M., & Schafer, W. D. (2002) (Eds.). *What teachers need to know about assessment*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Sadeghian, J. B. (2005). Developing bilingual professionals: Does a rose by any other name smell as sweet? In G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the first national*

ESP/EAP conference, (1). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 1-12). Tehran: SAMT.

Sahragard, R., Rahimi, A. & Shams, M. (2009). A comparative study of L2 learners' performances on general purpose and academic purpose texts. *ESP World*, *1*(8), 1-17.

Sayfouri, N. (2005). Interactive activities and EMP textbooks in Iran. In G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (3). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 281-289). Tehran: SAMT.

Shokouhi, H. (2005). A new discourse plan for the Iranian university ESP textbooks. In, G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (3). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 33-44). Tehran: SAMT.

Shomoossi, N., & Ketabi, S. (2007). A critical look at the concept of authenticity. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *4*(1), 149-155.

Shrum, J. L., & Glisan, E. W. (2000). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Soleimani, H. (2005). EAP in Iran: drawbacks of SAMT EAP textbooks. In, G. R. Kiany, & M. Khayyamdar, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*, (3). Paper presented at the First National ESP/EAP Conference, Iran (pp. 216-229). Tehran: SAMT.

Taylor, D. (1994). Inauthentic Authenticity or Authentic Inauthenticity? *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, *1*(2), 1-11.

Thanajaro, M. (2000). *Using authentic materials to develop listening comprehension in the English as a second language classroom*. (Unpublished PhD dissertation): Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA. Retrieved Sep, 2012 from http://tewilson.wikispaces.com/ file/view/9974216.pdf.

Vaughn, S., Schumm, J. S., & Sinagub, J. (1996). *Focus group interviews in education and psychology*. CA: SAGE publication.

Velazquez, A. C., & Redmond, M. L. (2007). The use of authentic texts in the K-12 Spanish program. In L. P. McCoy, (Ed.), *Studies in teaching 2007 research digest*. *Research projects presented at annual research forum* (pp. 133-138). NC, Winston-Salem.

Wallace, C. (1992). *Reading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zarei, G., & Rahimi, A. (2014). Learning transfer in English for general academic purposes writing. *Sage Open, 1-12.*

Appendix A

Focus group Main Interview Questions

How much has this course impacted your English reading ability?

How much do you think you have improved in reading English texts?

Appendix B

Student focus group interview schedule

Location: Engineering Department, Islamic Azad University, Iran

Date: January 2013 (the end of the first academic semester)

Introduction

The major interest related to this study is knowing your views of how your English reading ability has changed having participated in this course having used the materials given to you, having followed the teacher's methodology, having worked on the materials presented to you, and having completed the tasks required of you.

Q1. How much has this course impacted your English reading ability?

Prompt: How has your English reading ability changed?

Prompt: Did this course have any positive effects on your English reading ability? How?

Q2.How much do you think you have improved in reading English texts?

Prompt: Did this course have a positive effect on your reading ability in English?

Prompt: For example do you see this capability in yourself to try understanding a text related to your filed which is in English?

Appendix C

Diary slip instructions

Your diary of the English course

Session ....

Please write mainly about the reading texts, tasks, materials, activities, and practices presented to you this session. Write about your improvement on reading English, too. How much do you think your reading ability has changed? What do you think of this session? How satisfying did you find this session?

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

The Relationship between Iranian EFL University Students' Emotional Intelligence and Self-regulation

Mohammad Aliakbari[1] and Mahdi Najar

Department of English Language and Literature, Ilam University, Ilam, Iran

Biodata

Mohammad Aliakbari, the corresponding author, is a full professor at Ilam University in Iran. He obtained his PhD in Applied Linguistics from Esfahan University. His current research focus is on critical pedagogy, sociolinguistics, metaphor analysis, and EAP on which he has published and presented a number of articles and books in international journals and conferences. He has taught at both graduate and postgraduates levels in Iran. Email: maliakbari@hotmail.com

Mahdi Najar got his M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from Ilam University. His research interests include discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, teacher education, and interdisciplinary issues. In addition, he is currently teaching English in upper-intermediate and advanced levels at Iran Language House (ILH) in Gorgan, Iran. Email: Mahdi_Najar@ymail.com

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Self-regulation (SR) of Iranian EFL university students. In so doing, a sample of 100 (m = 38 and f = 62) were selected randomly from Iranian English related major students. To collect the data, the respondents were requested to answer the contextualized Persian versions of "Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (BEQ-I)" and "Academic Self-Regulated Learning Scale (A-SRL-S)". The results indicated that there was statistically strong relationship between EI and SR ($r =$

---

1 Ilam University. Pajuhesh Blvd. P.O. Box 69315-516, Ilam, Iran

0.55, $p \geq 0.01$). In addition, independent sample t-tests showed that there was a significant difference between the respondents' SR and their gender, while no significant difference between the participants' EI and their gender was observed. These findings have important implications for teachers and educational administrators to take necessary steps in developing EI and SR of learners to assist them in their language learning process.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; Self-regulation; Iranian university students; EFL

1. Introduction

Nowadays, as English is regarded as an international language, the importance and benefits of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL)/ English as a Second Language (ESL) is evident all over the world. However, learning English is usually considered to be difficult by Iranian EFL learners. Thereupon, teachers and parents typically have been worried about their students' success or failure in language learning. Quite possibly, one of the keys to the lack of language learners' success has something to do with personality variables. In essence, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the importance of examining the personality factors in second language acquisition.

According to Arnold (1999), personality factors, attitudes, state of mind, the ambience of the classroom, or the quality of classroom interaction may help or hinder learning. In considering the emotional side of human behavior in the second language learning process, many factors are implied (Brown, 2007). One of these important factors is the learners' Emotional Intelligence (EI). Indeed, the significant role of EI on academic achievement has been stated in several studies (e.g. Abisamra, 2000; Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Marquez, Gil-Olarte, & Brackett, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004; Pishghadam, 2009).

Another important factor is the learners' Self-Regulation (SR) competence due to the fact that it is impossible for a language instructor to teach a foreign language completely on account of the dynamism of language. Zimmerman (1989) points out that self-regulation theories consider that learning is not something that happens to students but it occurs by them. Correspondingly, Zimmerman and Schunk (2001) add that self-regulatory skills are associated with motivation to achieve educational aims and learning success.

Despite several studies have been investigated these two concepts separately in association with various issues, lack of studies considering the relationship between Iranian EFL University

Students' EI and SR is obvious, to the best knowledge of the authors. Thus, the present research intends to extend literature in this realm through undertaking an empirical research.

2. Review of the literature
2.1. Emotional Intelligence

One element which has been regarded to have a crucial role in language learning is EFL learners' intelligence. Having a look at the primary emergence of Emotional Intelligence (EI), its main roots can be traced back to the presentation of "social intelligence" concept by Thorndike in 1920. However, his views did not attract considerable attention until several decades subsequently. In 1980, Thorndike's thought was revived in Howard Gardner's works (Goleman, 1998).

Gardner proposed Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory in the early 1980s and he pointed out that "the traditional notion of intelligence as measured by I.Q testing is far too limited, and there are not just two ways to be intelligent, but many ways" (Gardner, 1983, p.51). Among the eight types of intelligences in MI theory, the personal intelligence provides the initiation of EI's progression. Eventually, Mayer and Salovey (1997), according to Gardner's stress on the importance of individual differences, recommend their in-depth model of EI.

Goleman (1995), in his book under the title of Emotional Intelligence, defines EI as having determination and motivation in dealing with frustration, to resist one's impulses and to postpone contentment, to control moods and to stay out of troubles to prevent one's judgment, to have hope and to be persistent. He adds that EI is an important element at home, in the workplace, and in educational performance at school (Goleman, 1998). In addition, Bar-On (2004) stated that EI is "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures (p.111)."

In any case, although research on EI is not a new attempt in educational context, few studies have concentrated on the all-embracing effects of EI on Foreign Language (FL) or Second Language (SL) learning. Further, several studies have explored the relationship between Emotional Quotient (EQ) and second language success (e.g., Chao, 2003; Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1994; Nelson & Low, 1999; Ogundokun & Adeyemo, 2010; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004; Pishghadam, 2009). For instance, in the study conducted by Parker et al. (2004), they found that the academic success was strongly related to several components of emotional intelligence, comparing highly successful students versus relatively unsuccessful

students. In another study, Pishghadam (2009) observed similar finding that there was a strong association between the successful vs. unsuccessful students with different levels of academic success and their emotional intelligence. Moreover, Ogundokun and Adeyemo (2010) have also found that emotional intelligence, age, and academic motivation were strongly associated with academic achievement.

Considering the related studies to EI conducted in EFL context, Fahim and Pishghadam (2007) found an association between EQ and SL success among 528 Iranian students in Tehran University. According to their findings, it was revealed that the students' EI grades were positively correlated with their Grade Point Average (GPA) and their scores on final exams in listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

In another study, Moafian and Ghanizadeh (2009) observed a significant relationship between the teachers' emotional intelligence and their self-efficacy. The results showed that some of the subscales of EI, emotional self-awareness, interpersonal-relationship, and problem solving, were good predictors of teacher self-efficacy. Further, Song et al. (2010) reported that the academic performance of the students can be predicted by EI and general mental ability.

Furthermore, Alavi and Rahimi (2011) explored the relationship between EI and learning English vocabulary. It was found that there was a low and negative correlation between the students' EI and vocabulary knowledge. Also, gender variations of students influenced by some components of EI showed the different development of male and female students' emotional capacity.

Recently, Aliakbari and Abol-Nejadian (2015) examined EI and learning styles in relation to different factors in academic setting. The findings indicated that the Iranian EFL students received the best grades in Optimism/Mood Regulation sub-scale of the Farsi version of Emotional Intelligence Scale (FEIS-41). Besides, gender did not play a role in participants' EI and learning styles preferences and Sensing, Feeling, Judging and Extrovert, four dimensions of Paragon Learning Styles Inventory (PLSI), were their preferred learning styles. Moreover, a correlation between EI and learning styles preferences of Iranian EAP learners were found.

2.2. Self-Regulation

In response to the question that how learners manage their learning procedure, the concept and research field of self-Regulated learning has been developed since the mid-1980th (Zimmerman, 2001). That is to say, one major factor that has recently drawn researchers'

attention is the investigation of academic Self-Regulation (SR) within the area of educational psychology.

A general definition of SR recommended by Zimmerman (2000) is the extent to which learners are "Meta-cognitively, motivationally, behaviorally active on their learning" and in achieving their goals. To put it differently, SR refers to self-generated ideas and actions of the learner which are in the direction of accomplishing educational aims and necessitate learner's active participation in the process of learning (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

In a number of previous studies, it has been reported that SR is strongly associated with academic achievement. As an example, in the study conducted by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) on SR, they reached to the conclusion that SR had a significant role in more than 90 percent of the participants' achievements (i.e. 93% of variances, r = 0.96). In addition, Bouffard, Boisvert, Vezeau, and Larouche (1995) showed that there is systematic relations between learning goal, self-regulation and academic achievement for both genders of males and females. Besides, it was indicated that female participants reported more self-regulatory strategies and better academic performance than male ones did.

Likewise, Ee, Moore, and Atputhasamy (2003) concluded that high achieving learners consider and employ self-regulatory strategies better than low achieving learners which were definitely related to their achievement. Moreover, Mezei (2008) investigated SR and motivation of adult learners with various English proficiency levels. It was demonstrated that upper intermediate learners are more conscious of their language learning processes and more capable in handling their learning than the pre-intermediate ones.

Also, Turan and Demirel (2010) identified that when the participants' SR learning skills develop, their learning and self-efficacy will improve too. In fact, the results of this study indicated a relationship between self-regulated learning skills and achievement. According to the aforementioned, there exists consistencies among the findings of previous research studies in ESL contexts that SR and educational achievement are related to each other (Bouffard et al., 1995; Ee, et al., 2003; Mezei, 2008; Turan & Demirel, 2010; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986).

It seems that investigating the other part of the literature, EFL contexts, will give a more comprehensive review of SR studies. For instance, Alsamadi (2010) undertook a research on the linkage of Saudi Arabian EFL learners' writing competence and their Arabic writing proficiency.

It was discussed about the relationship between Saudi Arabian EFL students' First Language (L1) and Second Language (L2) writing skill and their SR. The results of this research indicated that the learners who had high regulation abilities showed high L1/ L2 writing proficiency.

In the context of Iran, also, the relationship between SR and other variables have been studied. In this vein, Ghanizadeh and Mirzaee (2012) found a significant correlation between SR and critical thinking of Iranian EFL learners ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$). In another study, Bajgiran (2013) investigated the influence of Iranian EFL learners' SR capacity on reading comprehension skill. He indicated that there existed a positive relationship between SR of the language learners and their reading comprehension.

In addition, the association between SR and educational achievement of high school students of Rasht (a city in north of Iran) was investigated by Khalatbari and Khalatbari Mohseni (2013). Based on the results of their study, a positive relation between self-regulation and the students' age, parental education, and the student's educational achievements were discovered.

Considering more recent related studies to SR in Iranian EFL context, Mahjoob (2015) illustrated that there is a weak correlation between Iranian EFL learners' SR and their speaking proficiency. In another paper, Meidani and Sharifi (2015) found that the individuals possessing inner control and positive self-imagination have better control on learning facts and their outcomes. Besides, these subjects have more efficient role in the process of self-regulatory.

2.3. Statement of the Problem

Although a couple of studies (e.g., Lashkariana & Sayadian, 2015; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Mesri, 2012; Yang, 1999) have undertaken the role of some personality factors of the EFL learners, they have been restricted to specific areas such as management, anxiety, strategy use, or motivation only. Besides, research on EI in education is relatively new and few studies have been conducted regarding the correlation between EI and SR. So far, however, there has been little discussion about foreign language situation in which EI of Iranian EFL university students and their SR were studied. Thus, this paper seeks to address the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL university students' Emotional Intelligence and their Self-regulation?
2. Is there any significant difference between male and female students with regard to emotional intelligence?

3. Is there any significant difference between male and female students with regard to self-regulation?

3. Methods
3.1. Participants
The sample included 100 English language students between the ages of 19 and 37 years (M = 24.42, SD = 3.97). All of the subjects were native speakers of Persian and they were randomly chosen from B.A. and M.A. students majoring in English Language and Literature (ELL), and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The participants were selected from the state university of Ilam (in west of Iran). Almost more than one third of the respondents were male (38%) and the others were female (62%).

3.2. Instruments
3.2.1. Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (BEQ-I)
BEQ-I was used to evaluate Iranian EFL university students' EI. The BEQ-I was an instrument which provided an estimate of emotional-social intelligence (Bar-On, 1997). The original version of the questionnaire included 133 items, but it was reduced to 117 questions through subsequent attempts by Bar-On. Owing to the fact that some questions were found irrelevant to Iranian context, Samouei (2003) modified and translated the questionnaire to a more appropriate version which encompassed only 90 questions.

Besides, this instrument measured five main parts and 15 subparts. These main parts and subparts were: 1) Intrapersonal skills (consisting subparts of Self-regard, Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Independence, and Self-Actualization); 2) Interpersonal skills (consisting subparts of Empathy, Social Responsibility, and Interpersonal Relationship); 3) Adaptability (consisting subparts of Reality-Testing, Flexibility, and Problem Solving); 4) Stress Management (consisting subparts of Stress Tolerance and Impulse Control); 5) General Mood (consisting subparts of Optimism and Happiness).

In addition, the items were based on a 5-point Likert scale with the response format ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" that ensured adequate variation among the item scores. "The EQ-i takes nearly 40 minutes to complete. Scores are computer-generated. Raw scores are automatically tabulated and converted into standard scores based on a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15" (Bar-On, 2006, p. 4).

This inventory and its subscales have reliability and validity in Iranian culture (Dehshiri, 2003). As he reported, employing the adopted version in Iran, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was

found to be 0.76, and generally this survey has good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity. To ensure that using the Persian version of this scale is reliable in Iran, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated one more time and it was discovered to be 0.90 in this study.

3.2.2. Academic Self-regulated Learning Scale (A-SRL-S)

To investigate the Self-Regulation (SR) of participants, Academic Self-regulated learning scale (A-SRL-S) was employed. This is a recently developed scale for measuring SR in academic context (Magno, 2010). The items of A-SRL-S were categorized under seven aspects of SR, namely, Memory strategy (14 items), goal setting (5 items), self-evaluation (12 items), seeking assistance (7 items), environmental structuring (5 items), learning responsibility (5 items), and planning and organizing (6 items).

All items of A-SRL-S were based on a 4-point Likert scale with the values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). According to Magno (2009) the scale of A-SRL-S was confirmed in a seven factor model with good fit (RMR = 0.2, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.91). Besides, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, high internal consistency was observed among the items.

In order to provide an instrument having clear items for the Iranian respondents of the current study, the Persian version of A-SRL-S which was developed by Ghorbandordinejad, Saleh Sedghpoor, and Emamjomeh (2011) was used. In this version of questionnaire, some items were excluded which could influence the result of the research as they were culturally biased. The reliability of this scale in the present study was calculated with Cronbach's Alpha Test as 0.93.

3.3. Procedure and Data analysis

After administering the two questionnaires of Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (BEQ-I) and Academic Self-regulated learning scale (A-SRL-S), the respondents were asked to answer the multiple choice items of each questionnaire by choosing the best answer that is closer to their individual personality and learning habits. Further, Persian versions of the scales were used for collecting the required information from the participants in order to prevent possible misunderstandings of the questions in the context of Iran.

Data management and analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 20. Besides, to determine the possible relationships among the study's variables, Pearson-Product Moment Correlation and independent sample t-tests were computed.

4. Results

The relationship between Iranian EFL university students' Emotional Intelligence (as measured by BEQ-I) and their Self-regulation (as measured by A-SRL-S) was investigated adopting Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. As shown in table 1, there was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables of the study ($r = .55$, $p \geq 0.01$). To put it differently, the students who have higher emotional intelligence are likely more self-regulated, and the learners who have lower level of emotional intelligence are probably less self-regulated.

Table 1

The Relationship between Students' Emotional Intelligence and Their Self-Regulation

		Correlations	
		Emotional intelligence	Self-regulation
Emotional intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.552[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Self-regulation	Pearson Correlation	.552[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

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

Considering the second research question, an independent sample t-test was carried out to compare the EI scores of male and female Iranian EFL learners. As table 2 presents, the sig value for Levene's Test is 0.13, which is larger than 0.05, the equal variances assumed should be analyzed.

According to table 2, there is no significant difference between the two groups of males ($M = 387.7895$, $SD = 20.01372$) and females ($M = 387.5806$, $SD = 24.53205$, $t (98) = .04$, $p = .97$, two-tailed). In other words, the gender type of Iranian EFL university students did not have to do with their level of EI.

Table 2

Independent Sample T-Test of Gender and Emotional Intelligence

	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
EI total	Equal variances assumed	2.38	.12	.04	98	.96	.20	4.72	-9.16	9.58
	Equal variances not assumed			.046	90.15	.96	.20	4.49	-8.73	9.14

With regard to the third research question, we have conducted an independent sample t-test to compare the SR scores for male and female Iranian EFL learners participated in the present study. As table 3 illustrates, the sig value for Levene's Test was 0.88, which was larger than 0.05, the equal variances assumed should be investigated.

As shown in table 3, there was a significant difference between the scores of males (M = 144.6316, SD = 27.07389) and females (M = 156.5806, SD = 25.17190, t (98) = -2.24, p = 0.03, two-tailed). In other words, the gender type of Iranian EFL university students was relatively important to determine their level of SR. Indeed, the female students were more self-regulated than the male ones.

Table 3
Independent Sample T-Test of Gender and Self-Regulation

		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
SR total	Equal variances assumed	.02	.88	-2.23	98	.027	-11.94	5.33	-22.54	-1.35
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.20	73.99	.031	-11.94	5.43	-22.77	-1.12

5. Discussion

As it was mentioned earlier, this study aimed to investigate whether there is a correlation between Iranian EFL university students' Emotional Intelligence (EI) and their Self-Regulation (SR) which are two important personality factors for learners' academic achievement. The results of the study showed that the correlation between the students' EI and SR was positively significant.

In fact, the observed correlation between EI and SR might be explained in the way that the more the students are emotionally intelligent, the more they are self-regulated. Further, this finding corroborates the idea of Gates (2000), who pointed out that dealing with emotions in the classroom pave the way for both student and teacher to manage feelings and presents useful methods to cope with difficulties that could better success. Indeed, it indirectly refers that emotionally intelligent students are not only capable of managing their feelings but also they are able to manage their learning procedure, which shows their self-regulation skill according to Zimmerman (2001), and eventually they can be more successful.

In other words, the learners who are more emotionally intelligent and self-regulated can benefit from this association between these variables of the study in their language learning achievement. To some extent, this finding is in line with previous studies conducted in the EFL context of Iran such as Pishghadam (2009) that an individual's EI influence their English language learning success. More related to the results of the current study, the findings of Sharifi and Ahangary (2015) revealed that there is a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' SR capacity, self-efficacy, and their EI.

Considering the second and third research questions, very little attention has been found in the literature on investigating the possible relationships among university students' gender, EI and their SR. In other words, one of the distinguishing features of this research is studying the extent to which Iranian EFL university students' gender may be related to the level of their EI and SR. However, the following studies can be discussed in relation to these research questions and in comparison with the findings of the study.

With regard to the second research question, there was not any significant difference between the scores of male and female groups of participants' EI based on our present results. In other words, this finding of the current study contrasts sharply with earlier findings of Alavi and

Rahimi (2011) in which they reported that gender differences of students affected on some aspects of EI which indicated the different development of male and female students' emotional capacity. This difference may exists because of the different times, contexts, etc. of carrying out the two studies. Additionally, it seems that the findings of the current research can be more reliable as it is done lately in EFL context of Iran. However, our finding is in line with the recent study conducted by Aliakbari and Abol-Nejadian (2015) that examined EI and learning styles in relation to different factors in academic setting. The results of their research demonstrated that gender did not play a role in Iranian EFL students' EI. This parallel of the results between the current study and the research done by Aliakbari and Abol-Nejadian (2015) can be due to the similarity of researchers, the near times of carrying out the studies, and the same contexts.

In the same line with the findings of the present study, Kumar and Muniandy (2012) investigated the influence of demographic variables on EI of polytechnic lecturers in Malaysia. Similar to the findings of the study, they found that there were no significant differences in scores between genders of the participants and their EI; however, the individuals' EI was improved with age, grade, teaching experience, and education.

With regard to the third question, the type of gender of Iranian EFL university students had a principal role in identifying their level of SR. This finding is in agreement with the research carried out by Bouffard et al. (1995) which indicated that the female college students were more self-regulated than the male ones. In light of this point, the girls achieved higher academic performance than boys did.

In another context with different participants from the present study, Matthews, Ponitz, and Morrison (2009) found similar results in their investigation of early gender differences in SR and academic achievement. It was indicated that girls were more successful than boys in both assessments. Further, it was revealed that there was a clear gender differences in SR while no significant gender differences were observed on academic achievement of the individuals.

Moreover, in an interpretive study, Haron, Mustafa and Alias (2010) explored the gender differences in SR of academicians in Malaysia. It was revealed that the type of gender is correlated with SR and the female individuals had a higher level of SR than the male ones. To put it differently, the abovementioned results can be considered as another supporting evidence for the findings of the present study.

Although this result of the current study confirms the findings of many previous studies, as mentioned above, it does not support the research conducted by Kurman (2004). In the research done by Kurman (2004), the gender differences in relations between self-enhancement and self-regulation in two subjects, English and math, among Israeli high school students was investigated. It was found that the male and female students did not differ on their self-regulation in English. However, in math, the boys showed significantly higher self-regulation than girls did.

6. Conclusion

This research investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL university students' Emotional Intelligence (EI) and their Self-Regulation (SR), the difference between their gender and EI, and the difference between their gender and SR. In a nutshell, the findings of this study showed that there existed a significant correlation between EI and SR of EFL university students of Iran. In addition, the second major finding showed that there was not any strong difference between the participants' EI and their gender. Moreover, the third evidence obtained from this study recommended that there was a significant difference between the respondents' SR and their gender.

The current study presented supportive evidence with respect to two crucial personality factors, EI and SR, which have substantial role in the success of Iranian EFL university students' language learning. Besides, it seems that the findings of this study can help teachers and educational administrators to become aware of these determining factors which can facilitate language learning in the EFL context. In this vein, practical steps should be taken by teachers (and other related individuals) for developing EI and SR of students for promoting their language learning.

However, it seems that these findings need to be treated with caution because of some limitations we encountered with in the current study. As an example, the sample was representative of EFL university students in the context of Iran but would tend to miss individuals from other EFL contexts. Another caveat needs to be taken into account is the fact that the participants of this study were restricted to university students in B.A. and M.A. levels. Hence, the generalizability of the findings of the current study to all EFL learners is not reasonable.

Accordingly, more investigations are required to be conducted in the future to remove the limitations of this research. It is offered that researchers replicate this study considering other samples of EFL students and pedagogical situations (e.g. high schools, language institutes, etc.) with differing ages, levels of education, etc. Additionally, it is recommended to study and compare the relationships between the subscales of EI and SR in more detail in order to see which components of these two scales are more interacted with each other among the EFL students. Taken together, it should be attempted to observe that whether similar results to the present study can be find or not.

References

Abisamra, N. S. (2000). *The relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement in eleventh graders*. Retrieved July 10, 2016 from http://www.nadasisland.com

Alavi, M., & Rahimi, Z. (2011). On the relationship between emotional intelligence and vocabulary learning among Iranian pre-university EFL learners. *Journal of English Studies*, *1*(3), 17-25.

Aliakbari, M., & Abol-Nejadian, R. (2015). Trait emotional intelligence and learning styles: The case of Iranian English for academic purposes learners. *Educational Psychology*, *35*(7), 779-793.

Alsamadi, H. A. (2010). The relationship between Saudi EFL students' writing competence, L1 writing proficiency, and self-regulation. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, *16*, 53-63.

Arnold, J. (1999). *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Bajgiran, H. E. (2013). The relationship between Iranian EFL learners' goal-oriented and self-regulated learning and their reading comprehension. *Iranian EFL journal*, *9*(6), 94-113.

Bar-On, R. (2004). The Bar-On emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i): Rationale, description and psychometric properties. In G. Geher (Ed.), *Measuring emotional intelligence: Common ground and controversy* (pp. 111-142). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.

Bar-On, R. (2006). The Bar-On model of emotional-social intelligence (ESI). *Psicothema*, *18*, 13-25.

Bar-On, R. (1997). *The emotional quotient inventory (EQ-I): technical manual*. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems.

Bouffard, T., Boisvert, J., Vezeau, C., & Larouche, C. (1995). The impact of goal orientation on self-regulation and performance among college students. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *65*(3), 317-329.

Brackett, M. A., & Salovey, P. (2006). Measuring emotional intelligence with the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso emotional intelligence test (MSCEIT). *Psicothema*, *18*(1), 34-41.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

Chao, C. (2003). *Foreign language anxiety and emotional intelligence: A study of EFL students in Taiwan*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Texas A&M University-Kingsville, USA.

Clement, R., Dornyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1994). Motivation, self-confidence, and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. *Language Learning*, *44*(3), 417-448.

Dehshiri, R. (2003). *The reliability and validity of EQ-I in Iran's context*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Allame Tabatabaee University, Tehran, Iran.

Ee, J., Moore, P. J., & Atputhasamy, L. (2003). High-achieving students: their motivational goals, self-regulation and achievement and relationships to their teachers' goals and strategy-based instruction. *High Ability Studies*, *14*(1), 23-39.

Fahim, M., & Pishghadam, R. (2007). On the role of emotional, psychometric, and verbal intelligences in the academic achievement of university students majoring in English language. *Asian EFL Journal*, *9*, 240-253.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frame of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.

Gates, G. S. (2000). The socialization of feelings in undergraduate education: A study of emotional management. *College Student Journal*, *34*(4), 485-504.

Ghanizadeh, A., & Mirzaee, S. (2012). EFL learners' self-regulation, critical thinking and language achievement. *International Journal of Linguistics*, *4*(3), 451-468.

Ghorbandordinejad, F., Saleh Sedghpoor, B., & Emamjomeh, M. R. (2011). *Reconstruction of academic self-regulation questionnaire*. An unpublished research project at Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University. Tehran, Iran.

Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

Haron, H., Mustafa, S. M. S., & Alias, R. A. (2010). Gender influences on emotional self-regulation among Malaysian academicians. *International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology*, *1*(1), 20-24.

Khalatbari, J., & Khalatbari Mohseni, A. (2013). The relation between self-regulation and educational achievement in high school students of Rasht province in the period of 2012-2013. *Journal of Social Issues & Humanities*, *1*(4), 148-152.

Kumar, J. A., & Muniandy, B. (2012). The influence of demographic profiles on emotional intelligence: A study on polytechnic lecturers in Malaysia. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, *4*(1), 62-70.

Kurman, J. (2004). Gender, self-enhancement, and self-regulation of learning behaviors in junior high school. *Sex Roles*, *50*(9), 725-735.

Lashkariana, A., & Sayadian, S. (2015). The effect of neuro linguistic programming (NLP) techniques on young Iranian EFL learners' motivation, learning improvement, and on teacher's success. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 199*, 510-516.

Lee, K. R., & Oxford, R. (2008). Understanding EFL learners' strategy use and strategy awareness. *The Asian EFL Journal*, *10*(1), 7-32.

Magno, C. (2009). Developing and assessing self-regulated learning. *The Assessment Handbook: Continuing Education Program*, *1*, 26-42.

Magno, C. (2010). Assessing academic self-regulated learning among Filipino college students: The factor structure and item fit. *The International Journal of Educational and Psychological Assessment*, *5*(1), 61-78.

Magogwe, M. J., & Oliver, R. (2007). The relationship between language learning strategies, proficiency, age and self-efficacy beliefs: A study of language learners in Botswana. *System*, *35*(3), 338-352.

Mahjoob, E. (2015). Self-regulation and speaking proficiency in Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Language, Linguistics and Literature*, *1*(6), 182-188.

Marquez, P., Gil-Olarte M. R. P., Brackett, M. A. (2006). Relating emotional intelligence to social competence and academic achievement in high school students. *Psicothema*. *18*(1), 118-123.

Matthews, J. S., Ponitz, C. C., & Morrison, F. J. (2009). Early gender differences in self-regulation and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *101*(3), 689–704.

Mayer J. D., Salovey P., & Caruso D. (2004). Emotional intelligence: Theory, findings and implications. *Psychological Inquiry*, *15*(3), 197-215.

Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Educational implications* (pp. 3-31). New York: Basic Books.

Meidani, Z., & Sharifi, M., (2015). Structure relationship between self-imaginary and meta-cognition beliefs with self-regulatory learning in pre-university girl students in Rasht city. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 185, 365-373.

Mesri, F. (2012). The relationship between gender and Iranian EFL learners' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *2*(6), 147-156.

Mezei, G. (2008). Motivation and self-regulated learning: A case study of a pre-intermediate and an upper-intermediate adult student. *WoPaLP*, *2*, 79-104.

Moafian, F., & Ghanizadeh, A. (2009). The relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' emotional intelligence and their self-efficacy in Language Institutes. *System*, *37*, 708-718.

Nelson, D., & Low, G. (1999). *Exploring and developing emotional intelligence skills*. Kingsville, TX: EI Learning Systems.

Ogundokun, M. O., & Adeyemo, D. A. (2010). Emotional intelligence and academic achievement: The moderating influence of age, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *The African Symposium: An online Journal of the African Educational Research Network*, *10*, 127-141.

Parker, J. D. A., Summerfeldt, L. J., Hogan, M. J., & Majeski, S. A. (2004). Emotional intelligence and academic success: examining the transition from high school to university. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *36*(1), 163-172.

Pishghadam, R. (2009). A quantitative analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language learning. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. *6*(1), 31-41.

Samouei, R. (2003). *Azmoune houshe hayajani (Bar-On's EQ-i).* Tehran: Moasseseye Tahghighatie Olume Raftarie Sina.

Sharifi, M., & Ahangary, S. (2015). On the correlation between Iranian EFL learners' self-regulation capacity and their self-efficacy. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, *5*(1), 342-350.

Song, L. J., Huang, G., Peng, K. Z., Law, K. S., Wong, C., & Chen, Z. (2010). The differential effects of general mental ability and emotional intelligence on academic performance and social interactions. *Intelligence*, *38*, 137-143.

Thorndike, R. K. (1920). Intelligence and its uses. *Harper's Magazine*, *140*, 227-335.

Turan, S., & Demirel, Ö. (2010). The relationship between self-regulated learning skills and achievement: A Case from Hacettepe University Medical School. H. U. *Journal of Education*, *38*, 279-291.

Yang, N. D. (1999). The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and learning strategy use. *System*, *27*(4), 515-535.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *81*(3), 329-339.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P., R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13-39). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2001). Theories of self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview and analysis. In B. J. Zimmerman & D. H. Schunk (Eds.), *Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: Theoretical Perspectives* (2nd ed. pp. 1-38). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Zimmerman, B. J., & Bandura, A. (1994). Impact of self-regulatory influences on writing course attainment. *American Educational Research Journal*, *31*(4), 845-862.

Zimmerman, B. J., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1986). Development of a structured interview for assessing student use of self-regulated learning strategies. *American Educational Research Journal*, *23*(4), 614-628.

Zimmerman, B. J., & Schunk, D. (2001). Reflections on theories of self-regulated learning and academic achievement. In B. Zimmerman and D. Schunk (Eds.), *Self-Regulated Learning*

and Academic Achievement: Theoretical Perspectives (2nd Ed.) (pp. 289-307). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Language Learners' Experience of Answering L2 Research Questionnaires: Challenges and Potential Solutions

Mehdi B. Mehrani[1]

University of Neyshabur, Neyshabur, Iran

Nasrin Omidvar

Neyshabur Branch, Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur, Iran

Biodata

Mehdi B. Mehrani, the corresponding author, is an assistant professor of applied linguistics and the Head of English Department at the University of Neyshabur. His research activities include three main strands of inquiries: psycholinguistics, language teacher education, and research-practice integration in applied linguistics. Email address: mehrani@neyshabur.ac.ir

Nasrin Omidvar received her M.A. in TEFL from Khorasan e Razavi Science and Research Branch of Islamic Azad university. Her current research interests include the relationship between research and practice in applied linguistics, and qualitative/quantitative data collection methods in applied linguistics research. Email: omidvar.iaun@gmail.com

Abstract

Examination of the literature on the use of questionnaires in applied linguistics and language teaching research suggests that language learners' opinions are largely excluded from empirical studies on designing, developing and administering questionnaires. To provide an exploratory account of learners' experience, the present study focused on how language learners perceive and

---

1 English Department, University of Neyshabur, Adib Boulevard, Neyshabur, Iran

respond to questionnaires items in research studies. More specifically, the study explored what challenges learners experience when answering questionnaire items and the potential strategies that can be employed to address those challenges. In doing so, four groups of language learners (N=31) were asked to answer four commonly-used questionnaires. Then they were invited to explain their experiences in eight rounds of focus group discussions. Thematic analysis of the discussions showed seven major challenges that learners encountered in answering questionnaires. The challenges included issues related to norming items, complicated and technical wordings of items, ambiguous items, extreme options, midpoints in Likert scales, lack of attention to labels, and treating issues as static. In light of learners' experiences a few potential strategies to address the challenges are discussed.

Keywords: Focus group discussion, Language learners, Research questionnaires, Respondents' experiences

1. Introduction

Questionnaires form an integral part of research in various fields of social sciences (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). They are commonly used by researchers to collect quantitative data for a variety of purposes such as evaluating the quality of instruction (Eley & Stecher, 1997; Robertson, 2004; Roszkowski & Soven, 2010), exploring learners' beliefs (Sakui & Gaies, 1999), obtaining feedback from students (Huxham et al., 2008), investigating learners' strategies (Gao, 2004) and so on. In applied linguistics and language teaching questionnaires are also believed to be the most frequently used data collection instrument (Dörnyei, 2007). We surveyed all research studies published between 2005 and 2009 in *System* and found that 44% of the studies used questionnaires of various types as data collection instruments, suggesting that questionnaires play a major role in applied linguistic research (Mehrani, forthcoming).

The frequent use of questionnaires in applied linguistic research is partly due to the ease of administration which allows a substantial amount of data to be collected efficiently, economically, and in a standardized manner (Babbie, 1990). In addition, the flexible nature of questionnaires in the senses that they can be used in different situations, and can potentially elicit data for wide range of research purposes, contributes to its popularity in language teaching research (Alderson, 1992; Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010; Gao, 2004). There is also a widespread (though questionable) assumption that completing a questionnaire is what most

educated people are familiar with, thus minimizing the need for the physical presence of the researcher. These factors, coupled with the existence of so many ready-made questionnaires in various research areas have contributed to the growing use of this data collection instrument in research.

Despite the extensive use of questionnaires, little is known about the cognitive procedures of responding to questionnaire items. Influential commentators such as Block and Dörnyei have variously articulated that our current knowledge of the processes that the respondents go through when answering questionnaire items is restricted (Block, 1998; Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). In fact, an investigation of the literature shows that empirical studies on the use of questionnaires are scant. In this respect, Block (1998) argues that the literature is replete with "lists of dos and don'ts" (p. 403) and it lacks rigorous theoretical studies. Evidence regarding this issue is important to researchers because questionnaires constitute one of the primary data-collection tools, and much of our knowledge about language learning and teaching derives from the use of this instrument. Understanding how respondents answer questionnaire items can help us form a theoretical foundation for designing, developing and administering questionnaires (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Failure to do so may lead to misinterpretation of research participants' responses and unwarranted acceptance or rejection of research hypotheses.

The present study focused on how language learners perceive and respond to some commonly used questionnaires. More specifically, the study explored the limitations of various questionnaires by prompting participants with questionnaire items and inviting them to talk about their experiences. We chose to focus on language learners' experiences because currently, due to the scarcity of investigations, inadequacies of questionnaires are often identified through researchers' senses and intuition rather than through empirical investigations systematic studies. Thus, exploration of respondents' viewpoint is both necessary and advisable (DeMaio, Rothgeb, & Hess, 1998). In addition, we believe that such an exploration helps to gain theoretical insights into the use of questionnaires and it bears important implications for designing, developing and administering questionnaires. On this basis, we also attempted to explore the implications of language learners' experiences in relation to the process of developing questionnaires.

2. Review of the literature

The relevant literature that informed this study includes three main bodies of research. The first are those studies that have proposed, advocated and criticized the procedures used to ensure validity and reliability of questionnaires. For instance, some researchers (e.g., Sakui & Gaies, 1999) have advocated the use of various quantitative methods such as test-retest, split-ballot, and factor analysis for reliability and validity checking purposes. However, researchers' lack of rigorous knowledge of these qualitative methods raises serious doubts about their application. As Alderson (1992) argues much of our awareness of these methods is related to language testing and, thus, drawing on the fact that tests and questionnaires are essentially different, especially in terms of purposes, a direct application of these methods for developing questionnaires may lead to ill-designed instruments and consequently to faulty research findings. There are also various accounts that illuminate the potential value of qualitative explorations in determining reliability and validity of questionnaires. In the same way, researchers such as Alderson (1992) and Petric´ and Cza´rl (2003) emphasize that discovering the issues affecting reliability and validity through introspective, qualitative methods is of utmost importance for investigators and questionnaire developers because they can provide us with insights that otherwise would remain unexplored. It should be noted, however, that these potential benefits of qualitative examinations of questionnaires remain largely unconfirmed by strong empirical research and thus, engender further investigations.

The second source of literature includes a number of studies that have examined the use of hedges, intensifiers and modifiers in writing questionnaire items. In one such study, Roszkowski and Soven (2010) found out that respondents do not attend to the negative words embedded in questionnaire items. These authors contended that respondents' lack of attendance to particular words might be anchored in their low language proficiency which is more serious in the case of English language learners (ELLs). However, Low (1995) found that ELLs do attend to various intensifiers (e.g. very, strongly) but in most cases, possibly due to their low language proficiency, they transfer and attach them to the words other than those intended in questionnaire items. In a subsequent study, Low (1996), examined respondents' reactions to various intensifiers (e.g. extremely, consistently) and hedges (e.g. seem, tend), and found that intensifiers are often more salient to respondents and the effect of hedges is not often as strong as anticipated

by questionnaire designers. However, Low (1996) maintained that respondents' attending to a term does not guarantee that they use it in choosing the response option.

Further contributions in the literature come from studies that have focused on socio-cultural differences that can influence individuals' responses to questionnaires. Highlighting the effects of culture on thinking habits of people, Pishghadam (2014) maintains that researchers' choice of data collection instruments should be informed by examination of participants' cultural backgrounds. He specifically warns that the prevalence of various norms in some eastern cultures (e.g. indirectness in Iranian culture) may prevent respondents from expressing their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs directly through questionnaires. Cultural differences among respondents may also lead to varying interpretations of the same item. Thus, in designing questionnaire items researchers should be wary that even very commonly used "words such as 'you,' 'children,' and 'work,' are" subject to different interpretations (Martin, 2006, p. 3). For instance, in an empirical study, Block (1998) found high degrees of variance in students' interpretations of the items of an end-of-course evaluation form. In addition, participants in his study appeared to multifariously invest in the numbers on a 1-5 rating scale, resulting in considerably divergent interpretations. Although one would never expect a group of individuals to interpret questionnaire items in exactly the same way (Block, 1998), in designing questionnaires attempts should be made to eliminate or minimize ambiguous items so as to collect consistent and reliable data (Martin, 2006).

Varying interpretations of questionnaire items can also be indicative of the socio-cultural differences between English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts (Gao, 2004). Granted that the most commonly used questionnaires in applied linguistics and ELT research are formulated by native speakers and piloted with ESL learners, opportunities for errors are likely to be observed when such instruments are used with EFL research participants. This is due to the fact that ESL populations possess significantly different cultural and language backgrounds and their leaning purposes are often considered to be totally different from those of EFL learners. Reid's retrospective investigation (1990) into the process of developing and norming one such questionnaire revealed that misinterpretation of results and several cases of inconsistencies of the responses are very likely when a normed instrument for a ESL population is used in an EFL context.

As the above review shows, literature on the use of questionnaires in TESOL is restricted to a few strands of inquiry. As Block (1998) argues, existing research on questionnaire design only provides insights into limited number of issues such as item wordings and construction, leaving almost no room for respondents' concerns. In fact, our searches for the purpose of this study failed to identify any empirical accounts exclusively exploring respondents' experiences of filling in questionnaires. This suggests that, so far respondents' opinions are largely excluded from the literature on the use of questionnaire, and it engenders systematic investigations of how language learners perceive and respond to questionnaire items. Examinations of this type are critical to the understanding that is required for the widespread use of questionnaires, and would illustrate the benefits of a meta-analysis on the most popular research instrument in applied linguistics. Thus, the following research question was formulated to guide the process of research.

What challenges do language learners experience when answering questionnaire items? Answering the above research question helps us illuminate some of the problems that language learners encounter while filling in questionnaires. The answer to the above question also helps us discuss the implications of learners' experiences, and the strategies that can be employed in order to minimize such problems. Thus, we attempted to discuss these implications and strategies by answering the following question too.

What measures can be taken in developing questionnaires to address those challenges?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

Because the purpose of this study was to understand language learners' experiences while answering questionnaire items a phenomenological research approach was chosen. The intent of a phenomenology is "to focus on the phenomenon or 'thing' in order to generate understanding from within" (Richards, 2003, p. 18). Phenomenology is characterized by presenting a micro-analytic picture of individuals' experiences that relate to a particular situation, and reflecting a holistic account of the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2012). It is therefore, particularly suited to this study because it can reflect the process of filling out questionnaires as experienced by language learners, while also allowing the researcher to interweave individuals' experiences into a coherent whole.

3.2. Participants

From a large pool of potential participants in a language learning institute, a total of 31 language learners (14 males and 17 females), who expressed willingness to participate in this study, were recruited. In terms of age, the sample included a wide range of students, varying from 14 to 26 years old, though the majority were around 18 years old. A total of 73% of the participants were high school students and 27% were university and college students. Their language proficiency ranged from upper-intermediate to advanced levels.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through conducting a series of focus group discussions. A focus group discussion is defined as "a way of collecting qualitative data, which essentially involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), 'focused' around a particular topic or set of issues" (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 177). Depending on whether the researcher intends to collect data *within* individual groups or *between* sets of groups, two approaches toward focus group discussions are possible (Morgan, 2007; Morgan, Fellows, & Guevara, 2008).

To enhance the quality of our investigation, we used both within and between approaches to collect data. In doing so, relying on various factors, including level of language proficiency, gender and learning experiences, we first divided the participants into four groups. The process of grouping was guided by the principle of "within-group homogeneity and intergroup heterogeneity" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 145). This principle refers to a common practice in forming focus group discussions and it basically holds that participants in each group should share homogeneous characteristics or experiences (Hennink, 2008), while attempts should be made to form groups that are maximally different from each other (Dörnyei, 2007).

Prior to focus group discussions, the participants in each group were informed of the purpose and the procedure of the study and were notified that their participation in the research would be voluntary. Then, in an attempt to provide the participants with an actual experience of completing a questionnaire, each group received a language-related questionnaire to answer. These questionnaires served as prompts for the participants to experience what it means to answer a questionnaire before taking part in focus group discussions. Thus, the participants' responses to the questionnaires were not meant for any kind of analysis. Rather their experiences which were taken into focus in subsequent discussions comprised the data for this study.

The choice of questionnaires was mainly informed by how frequently they are used in language learning research studies, and how widely they are recognized in different parts of the world. In this study, four questionnaires were used. 1) The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), developed by Oxford (1990). According to Anderson (2005), SILL is the most extensively used inventory for second language strategy research. 2) The mini Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (mini-AMTB), developed by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993). Mini-AMTB has also been commonly used by researchers in various contexts (e.g. Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Eslami & Ahn, 2014; Jodai, Zafarghandi, & Tous, 2013; Masgoret, Bernaus, & Gardner, 2001). 3) Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) devised by Vandergrift, Goh, and Mareschal (2006). MALQ has been frequently used in recent studies on listening comprehension strategies (e.g., Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011; Go & Hu, 2013; Li, 2013; Movahed, 2014; O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2009). 4) The Learning Style Survey (LSS) developed by Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2002). This questionnaire is considered an influential a diagnostic tool for language learners (Cohen, 2010; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

3.4. Procedure

Data for this study were collected through eight sessions of focus group discussions in two consecutive rounds. In the first round, each group of participants was randomly given one of the four questionnaires. They were asked to answer the questionnaires and were then invited to participate in a focus group discussion, where they were supposed to elaborate on their experiences of completing the questionnaires and to explain about the difficulties and the shortcomings they encountered. Following the guidelines suggested by Krueger and Casey (2000), discussions were conducted in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Throughout the discussions attempts were made to encourage the participants to share their views and explain about their experiences. When conflicts of ideas and disagreements emerged, participants were asked to elaborate on the ideas they express and to respond to challenges posed by others. Each discussion session, which approximately lasted two hours, was led by the second author and was audio-recorded.

After a few days, the participants in each group were invited for a second round of focus group discussion. The procedure followed for the second round was similar to that of the first round, except for the questionnaires that the participants were given to answer prior to the focus group discussions. For instance, the participants in group A who were prompted with LSS

questionnaire in the first round of data collection, were given a different questionnaire, (i.e. MALQ) in the second round. The purpose of this procedural modification was to ensure that the ideas that the participants raised in discussions were not necessarily attributed to a particular questionnaire. In addition, this modification provided further experiences of answering questionnaires for the participants, resulting in a thicker body of data collected for analysis. Table 1 schematically shows the procedure of data collection along with the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1

The Procedure of the Study, and the Participants' Demographic Information

Group discussions		Participants	Proficiency level	Questionnaires
Round 1	Session 1	Group A, N = 7 (female, 14-18-year-olds)	Advanced	LSS
	Session 2	Group B, N = 6 (female, 13- 24-year-olds)	Upper intermediate	SILL
	Session 3	Group C, N = 8 (male & female, 15- 26-year-olds)	advanced	MALQ
	Session 4	Group D, N = 10 (male, 14-17-year-olds)	intermediate	Mini-AMTB
Round 2	Session 5	Group A, N = 7 (female, 14-18-year-olds)	Advanced	MALQ
	Session 6	Group B, N = 6 (female, 13-24-year-olds)	Upper intermediate	Mini-AMTB
	Session 7	Group C, N = 8 (male & female, 15-26-year-olds)	Advanced	LSS
	Session 8	Group D, N = 10 (male, 14-17-year-olds)	intermediate	SILL

3.5. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, the recorded sessions were initially transcribed verbatim. Then, several passes were made through the transcribed datasets in order to develop an overall understanding about the data. Then, the data were coded and organized in order to extract any emerging themes and main points (Creswell, 2012). The coding procedure involved highlighting the extracts of the data which were related to the respondents' experiences and insights. Both within-group and between-group comparisons were made on the obtained data in order to gain a more in-depth and holistic perspective on the data. In coding the data, an inductive logic fashion, applying no predefined classification or division, was implemented. That is, we worked "back and forth between the themes and the database until" a comprehensive set of themes were established (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). In doing so, we employed an iterative process (Dörnyei,

2007) in the analysis of the data. This strategy entails reviewing and reconstructing the categories, in conjunction with the relevant themes, several times and in a cyclical manner. Accordingly, five rounds of thematic analysis were conducted on the collected data, each time refining and revising the developed categories, in an attempt to devise polished and sound categories. Furthermore, the data were scrutinized for accuracy and compatibility.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the results yielded seven major themes that are presented under rubrics that attempt to name the challenges experienced by language learners. In the following, attempts are made to elaborate on these themes, with direct points quoted from the respondents to facilitate communication of their concerns. Thus, the findings that are presented in the following section reflect our interpretations derived from the participants' experiences. Subsequently, the implications of each item for the investigators and those who devise questionnaires are discussed.

4.1. Norming Questionnaires Based on Local Norms

Some of the comments made by the participants raised concerns about the assumptions behind designing questionnaire items. As an example, some of the participants expressed that they have never left their country, yet they are asked to explain how they communicate with foreigners when they travel abroad.

> *I have never traveled to English-speaking countries and I do not have an idea of the communication strategies I would use there. As far as I know, most of my classmates have not had this experience either.*

While the above statement basically reflects the geographical location of the participants, and their lack of possibility for communication with native English speakers, the majority of the participants were of the opinion that in designing questionnaire items, some of the socio-cultural norms of western societies are assumed to apply universally. As an example, one participant expressed his reservations about listening to foreign music and watching English movies in the following way.

> *You asked me [through a questionnaire item] about my language learning experiences when I listen to foreign music or when I watch foreign movies. I really have no idea how I can answer these questions. We almost never do such things.*

The above assertion would make sense once one knows that in most of the traditional Middle Eastern societies people are recommended by their religious leaders to avoid listening to Western music. In these contexts, movies are also sometimes banned due to various reasons, including not being sufficiently Islamic. Thus, while listening to music and watching films may comprise normal parts of the daily activities of people in most European and American countries, they may invoke religious sentiments in some other contexts. This finding suggests that, prior to administering questionnaires, researchers should consider the socio-cultural norms of their research population, and in case of any potential source of bias, questionnaire items must be carefully redressed so as to ensure that they comply with local norms and conventions.

4.2. Complicated Item Wordings

The participants also made some comments about the wordings and structures used in questionnaires. In particular, they questioned the complex structures and technical words that are used in formulating some of the items. Despite their high levels of language proficiency, some of the participants expressed that they had to "struggle over 30% to 40% of the questionnaire items", to understand their meanings. When prompted by the moderator to provide any specific examples, one student referred to item 28 in the first part of LSS (manipulating objects helps me to remember what someone says) and explained that

> *I know the meaning of the word 'manipulate' as well as 'object'; but I could not understand the author's intention by putting the words together. My understanding was just based rash conjectures.*

A few participants discussed that focusing on the meaning of items reduced their concentration and scattered their thoughts. Some others contended that they were not sure if their responses were correct because they could not ensure if they understood the questions properly. This concurs with Martin's statement that respondents' answers are not necessarily based on the true value of the questions but based on what they "infer to be the intended meaning" (Martin, 2006, p. 2). Thus, researchers should be considerate of whether respondents can understand the meaning of questionnaire items, particularly when they have lower levels of language proficiency.

In line with the above statements, some of the participants suggested that researchers ask individuals to fill in questionnaires in a one-at-the-time fashion, so as to avoid any case of uncertainty or misunderstanding on the part of respondents. Although in certain circumstances

this suggestion might be practical, generally it poses a great challenge for researchers' attempts to collect substantial amounts of data efficiently and within certain time limitations. A further potential way to address this problem is to translate questionnaire items into respondents' mother tongue, though it requires great efforts.

4.3. Ambiguous Item Stems

Another issue that was raised by the participants was related to the ambiguity of some of the questionnaire items. In particular, they contended that in answering questionnaires they found some of the items confusing. For instance, one of the participants referred to item 5 in part 7 of LSS (I ignore distinctions that would make what I say more accurate in the given context) and discussed that it is "too general and ambiguous". Another participant argued that she was not quite sure what is meant by "in different ways" in item 13 of SILL (I use the SL words I know in different ways).

A further related issue was the challenges that the participants had in answering "double barreled" items (an item that asks questions about two issues). Some researchers such as Long (2005) and Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) have variously warned against the use of these statements in designing questionnaires. The informants in this study also challenged these items. In particular one participant referred to item 2 in part 9 of LSS (when I produce an oral or written message in the target language, I make sure that all the grammatical structures are in agreement with each other) and discussed the challenges he encountered in the following way.

> *I check, and usually double-check, the grammar I use in my written assignments, but this is not the case in speaking. In fact, I do not have the skill to check my own grammar when I am speaking. Due to this fact, when I wanted to answer* "when I produce an oral or written message in the target language, I make sure that all the grammatical structures are in agreement with each other" *I did not really know how I am supposed to answer this question: based on my speaking or writing activities?*

This finding demonstrates that, when designing questionnaires, attempts should be made to avoid designing questions that lend themselves to various interpretations, because such items can result in respondents' answers being distorted.

4.4. Midpoints in Likert Scales

Participants also criticized some of the questionnaires for lacking any neutral options. They argued that lack of middle points on a scale continuum is "an obvious shortcoming" because it

leads to "inaccurate responses". One participant particularly pointed out that the six-point Likert-type scale employed in MALQ forced them "to mark one of the choices that they [the researcher] wanted, not the one that I meant". Some others also maintained that the responses that they provided for some of the items did not necessarily reflect their intentions.

The controversy over the exclusion/inclusion of a midpoint option in Likert scale has been discussed in the literature. For instance, Garland (1991) postulated that midpoints should be abandoned in order to counteract the respondents' inclination toward pleasing the researchers and thereby choosing the midpoints. On the other hand, a number of other researchers (e.g., Broca, 2015; Salimi, Moradi, & Soofi, 2008) advocated the use of midpoints for the responses to embrace all the attitudes. The findings of this study are congruent with those recommending the use of midpoints. In fact, our cross examination of data showed that the majority of participants in different rounds of discussions felt uncomfortable with the Likert scale questionnaires lacking a midpoints.

4.5. Items with Extreme Options

A further relevant point which was brought into focus in discussion groups concerned the extreme options in Likert scales. Some of the informants expressed reservations about the use of such items because they thought extreme options are not chosen by respondents because they often represent a radical choice. Mehrani (2011) discusses that in question-answer situations, respondents, particularly those with inadequate language competence, often tend to acquiesce with questioners by answering in the direction implied in questions. On this basis, respondents may avoid choosing extreme options because they are not assumed to comply with researchers' expectations. Similarly Busch (1993) found that, when answering questions that comprise uncharted topic areas, respondents with university degrees are less likely to choose extreme response options. Participants in this study also argued that extreme options such as 'strongly agree', 'never', 'very high' "are not safe, because they don't appear to be always the case".

In addition, they argued that respondents' personalities might be influential in this regard. One of the participants expressed that

> *Insecure participants are far more likely to remove the extreme options. They think that the extreme responses are not essentially appropriate for them and avoid choosing them although they might show their real experience or attitude.*

Of course, respondents' compliance tendency in terms of preferring midpoints and avoiding extreme options might be a culturally dependent phenomenon, a communication norm that is socially acquired (Mehrani, 2011). Such norms are to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of members of a given speech community. We tend to perceive communication norms within the context of our own culture, norms that we have established and, therefore, not necessarily standards that are empirically defined (Wardhaugh, 1986). Thus, we suggest that future researchers investigate this phenomenon in a range of cultural contexts to see if similar results would be obtained.

4.6. Meager Attention to Labels

In our discussions we found that when filling in questionnaires, some of the respondents had paid little attention to the labels of the response options. Some of them asserted that they had answered the questionnaire items based on their own "mental schema of scales". In fact, a few respondents could not remember that the labels change for each item in mini-AMTB. When they were prompted "how did you answer the items, then?" one of participants said

> *Perhaps based on the labels I had in my mind. I know those in the left often bear negative meanings and the right-sided ones are positive.*

In a similar vein, some of the participants, discussed that, assigning agree-disagree labels to all types of questions would help to reduce potential problems for the respondents because the labels of items scarcely receive much attention and scrutiny. In spite of Low's exhortation (1996) to assign "verbal labels" to the response scales in order to increase the reliability of instruments, this finding suggests that respondents may not pay careful attention to subtle changes in questionnaire wordings. To the contrary, their mental images and prior experiences might appear to be stronger driving forces in the way they rate scales.

4.7. Treating Issues as Static

Participants emphasized that most issues related to their experiences concerning language learning are very dynamic and continuously change across time and context, yet in some questionnaires they are considered static and fixed.

> *For example, [in SILL questionnaire] you asked us about the strategies that we use for learning a language. For me, I may use one [strategy] today, another tomorrow… They are by no means fixed… And this caused confusion for me. I really don't know how to answer them.*

Parallel to this criticism, Gao (2004) questioned the commonly used instruments in language learning strategy research due to overlooking the "multidimensionality" of the strategy use among learners. This finding together with the Gao's (2004) argument suggests that in designing questionnaire items the dynamic, and flexible nature of language learning should be taken into account.

5. Conclusion

In this admittedly limited study, we attempted to shed light on respondents' experiences of answering some closed-ended questionnaires, focusing on how they perceive the process of filling in research questionnaires, and what challenges they encounter in doing so. The study provides important insights into the use of questionnaires in research studies. It verifies most previous studies on midpoint and extreme options in Likert scales. In the case of midpoint options, this study demonstrated that respondents believe that the inclusion of such items allows them to express their opinions more effectively. This agrees with the ideas of Broca (2015) and Salimi et al. (2008) who support the use of midpoints so as to ensure that various attitudes are reflected in Likert scales. The study also revealed that respondents might show reluctance for choosing extreme options. This finding concurs both with the results of Busch's study (1993) and Mehrani's (2011) compliance tendency hypothesis which holds that individuals tend to comply with questioners' expectations by responding in the direction implied in questions. However, our findings challenged Low's (1996) recommendation for assigning verbal labels to response scales. We found that respondents often answer items not by carefully reading the item labels, but based on their mental schema and prior experiences. In line with Martin's (2006) findings, our study showed that, due to their inadequate language proficiency, language learners' responses to questionnaire items may not reflect their genuine intention. Thus, researchers need to find a way to ascertain that their research population can fully understand questionnaire items. We also found that ambiguous and double-barreled items may mislead respondents and distort research data. Therefore, in developing questionnaires, these questions should be avoided. Finally, our findings suggest that prior to administering questionnaires researchers should consider the socio-cultural norms of their research population and redress their questionnaire items accordingly.

References

Alderson, J. C. (1992). Validating questionnaires. *CRILE Working Papers 15, Lancaster: LAMEL, Lancaster University*.

Anderson, N. J. (2005). L2 learning strategies. In E. Hinkel (Eds.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 757-771). London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Babbie, E. (1990). *Survey research methods* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Baleghizadeh, S., & Rahimi, A. (2011). The relationship among listening performance, metacognitive strategy use and motivation from a self-determination theory perspective. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 1*(1), 61-67.

Bernaus, M., & Gardner, R. C. (2008). Teacher motivation strategies, student perceptions, student motivation, and English achievement. *The Modern Language Journal, 92*(3), 387-401.

Block, D. (1998). Exploring interpretations of questionnaire items. *System, 26*(3), 403-425.

Broca, A. (2015). Questionnaires on L2 learning and teaching practices: Rating responses on frequency and opinions. *TESOL Quarterly, 49*(2), 429-440.

Busch, M. (1993). Using Likert scales in L2 research. *TESOL Quarterly, 27*(4), 733-736.

Cohen, A. D. (2010). Focus on the language learner: Styles, strategies and motivation. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 161-178). London: Hodder Education.

Cohen, A. D., Oxford, R. L., & Chi, J. C. (2002). *Learning style survey: Assessing your own learning styles.* Minneapolis: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* London: Sage Publication.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Boston: Pearson.

DeMaio, T. J., Rothgeb, J., & Hess, J. (1998). Improving survey quality through pretesting. *Proceedings of the Survey Research Methods Section, American Statistical Association* .

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in Applied Linguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2010). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Eley, M. G., & Stecher, E. J. (1997). A Comparison of two response scale formats used in teaching evaluation questionnaires. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 22*(1), 65-79.

Eslami, Z. R., & Ahn, S. (2014). Motivation, amount of interaction, length of residence, and ESL learners' pragmatic competence. *Applied Research on English Language, 3*(5), 9-28.

Gao, X. (2004). A critical review of questionnaire use in learner strategy research. *Prospect, 19*(3), 3-14.

Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1993). On the measurement of affective variables in second language learning. *Language Learning, 43*(2), 157-194.

Garland , R. (1991). The mid-point on a rating scale: Is it desirable? *Marketing Bulletin, 2*, 66-70.

Go, C. C., & Hu, G. (2013). Exploring the relationship between metacognitive awareness and listening performance with questionnaire data. *Language Awareness, 23*(3), 255-274.

Hennink, M. M. (2008). Emergent issues in international focus group discussions. In S. N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp. 207-220). New York: The Guilford Press.

Huxham, M., Laybourn, P., Cairncross, S., Gray, M., Brown, N., Goldfinch, J., & Earl, S. (2008). Collecting student feedback: A comparison of questionnaire and other methods. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 33*(6), 675-686.

Jodai, H., Zafarghandi, A. V., & Tous, M. D. (2013). Motivation, integrativeness, organizational Influence, anxiety, and English achievement. *International Journal of Theoretical Linguistics, 4*(2), 3-25.

Krueger, R., & Casey, M. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Li, W. (2013). A study of metacognitive awareness of non-English majors in L2 listening. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*(3), 504-510.

Long, M. H. (2005). A rationale for needs analysis and needs analysis research . In M. H. Long (Ed.), *Second language needs analysis* (pp. 1-16). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Low, G. D. (1995). 'Hallelujah, very!' responding to 'very' in questionnaire items. *Evaluation and Research in Education, 9*(1), 15-27.

Low, G. D. (1996). Intensifiers and hedges in questionnaire items and the lexical invisibility hypothesis. *Applied Linguistics, 17*(1), 1-37.

Martin, E. (2006). Survey questionnaire construction. *Research Report Series*, 1-12.

Masgoret, A. M., Bernaus, M., & Gardner, R. C. (2001). Examining the role of attitudes and motivation outside of the formal classroom: A test of the mini-AMTB for children. In Z. Dörnyei, & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and second language acquisition* (pp. 281-295). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Mehrani, M. B. (2011). What is biased: Children's strategies or the structure of yes/no questions? *First Language, 31,* 214-231.

Mehrani, M. B. (forthcoming). Analysis of methodological features of ELT-related journals. *Reseach in Applied Linguistics.*

Morgan, L. D. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implication of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 48-67.

Morgan, D., Fellows, C., & Guevara, H. (2008). Emergent approaches to focus group research. In S. N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp. 189-205). New York: The Guilford Press.

Movahed, R. (2014). The effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on listening performance, metacognitive awareness and listening anxiety of beginner Iranian EFL students. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 4*(2), 88-99.

O'Bryan, A., & Hegelheimer , V. (2009). Using a mixed methods approach to explore strategies, metacognitive awareness and the effects of task design on listening development. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 12*(1), 9-37.

Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know.* New York: Newbury House/Harper Collins.

Petric´, B., & Cza´rl, B. (2003). Validating a writing strategy questionnaire. *System, 31*(2), 187-215.

Pishghadam, R. (2014). An investigation into data collection methods in language studies: A movement towards localizing research in Iran. *Language Related Research, 5*(2), 55-70.

Reid, J. (1990). The dirty laundry of ESL survey research. *TESOL Quarterly, 24*(2), 323-338.

Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Robertson, I. S. (2004). Student perceptions of student perception of module questionnaires: questionnaire completion as problem solving. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 29*(6), 663-679.

Roszkowski, M. J., & Soven, M. (2010). Shifting gears: Consequences of including two negatively worded items in the middle of a positively worded questionnaire. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35*(1), 113-130.

Sakui, K., & Gaies, S. J. (1999). Investigating Japanese learners' beliefs about language learning. *System, 27*(4), 473-492.

Salimi, M., Moradi, S. S., & Soofi, J. B. (2008). A managerial research approach toward designing the sum of scores scale (Likert). *Management Knowledge, 21*(3), 41-60.

Vandergrift , L., Goh, C. C., & Mareschal, C. J. (2006). The metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire: Development and validation. *Language Learning, 56*(3), 431-462.

Wardhaugh, R. (1986). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

Wilkinson, S. (2004). Focus group research. In D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (pp. 177-199). London: Sage Publication.