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# The Impact of High School Exit Exams on ESL Learners in British Columbia

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## Abstract

This essay explores the validity of including ELL students in British Columbia provincial high school exit exams. Data and a sample exam from the BC Ministry of education are used to scrutinize the practice of using BC provincial exams for high school exit decisions regarding ELLs. A comparison of failure rates of ELLs and mainstream students provides evidence for the inappropriateness of the BC provincial exams for ELLs. Ministry statistics reveal ELL failure rates ranging from twice to four times those of all students. An analysis of a sample exam found on the ministry website reveals confounding of content and language in the exam such that it is impossible to determine whether the exam is measuring language proficiency or content area knowledge. This exam shortcoming casts serious doubt on the legitimacy of using the provincial exam as an assessment for ELL learners. Possible negative consequences of including ELLs in these exams such as increased likelihood of school disappearance are discussed. Suggestions including providing alternative forms of assessment for ELLs are provided to facilitate managing the challenge of assessing ELLs attempting to obtain a high school diploma in BC.

**Keywords:** high school exit exams, high-stakes tests, consequential validity, English language learners

## 1. Introduction

North American schools are becoming increasingly diverse (Goldenberg, 2006) which means that policy makers ignore at their peril the challenges that diverse learners face as they learn to cope with our educational systems. These demographic patterns are the same here in Canada. In fact, Statistics Canada reports that, by 2031, one quarter of Canadians will be immigrants from another country (Statistics Canada, 2010).

Commenting on the American context, Menken (2008) makes a strong case that the era of No Child Left Behind and increased accountability has caused English language learners disproportionate academic hardship. In particular, she focuses on the devastating consequences that including ELL students in high-stakes standardized tests have had across the United States. She concluded that the cultural assumptions, linguistic complexity of these tests and the lack of sufficient accommodations explain why English language learners usually do not perform as well as native speakers (p. 96). The British Columbia high school provincial exams are unfair for English language learners (ELLs) because they were not constructed to assess ELLs yet high stakes decisions for ELLs are being made based on these exams.

### 1.1 Background of High School Provincial Exams in BC

Standardized testing is not a new phenomenon in British Columbia. Steffenhagen, (2008) reports that, according to Jerry Mussio, (formerly of the Ministry of Education and Canada's representative to PISA), provincial exams have a very long history in BC. In fact, provincial examinations of reading, writing and math were first introduced in 1876 and were regularly administered from 1925 until 1973. At that point, then Education Minister Eileen Daily cancelled standardized testing due to worries over the use of the tests. As part of Socred government's efforts to "restore confidence" in public schools, Grade 12 exams were re-introduced in 1984. And they have remained in place ever since (Steffenhagen, 2008). At present, the debate in the province over the fairness and validity of these tests continues.

In recent decades, debates over the appropriate uses of standardized test results have intensified as conceptions of test validity have changed quite dramatically. Messick's (1989) introduction of the notion of consequential validity and the realization that validity is not an inherent trait of a test (Koretz, 2008) have compelled scholars

and test designers to rethink previously unquestioned assumptions about testing. Based on some of these insights, the issue to be addressed here becomes not about the validity of BC provincial exams per se but rather the validity of their use with ESL students and their possibly deleterious impact on these learners' school trajectories.

To earn a "Dogwood" diploma in British Columbia, all students must take provincial examinations that presumably cover the curriculum of grade 10 English, Science, and Math. They must also write grade 11 Social Studies (or BC First Nations Studies 12) and grade 12 English. The exam requirement as a prerequisite to earning a high school diploma makes them potentially high-stakes tests. That is, if students cannot pass these required tests, they will jeopardize their chances of obtaining the valued "dogwood" diploma.

In addition to containing content and language that ELLs could not realistically be expected to know, these exams do not attempt to allow ELLs to display what they actually do know. Essentially these learners are bringing funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, & Neff, 1992) that are being ignored and undervalued by these tests. Corson (1998) points out "often culturally different children come to school knowing very different kinds of things from other children. When they meet the assessment methods that teachers use, they are sometimes asked to display knowledge about 'x, y' when what they really know about is 'y, z'" (p. 169). That is, they are being punished for ignorance of things that they would not ordinarily be expected to know in their own cultural context. Shohamy (2000) notes that, in the past, test takers did not really have any rights.

It was understood that there was specific knowledge that the test taker should have, but that the body of knowledge was defined by those who wrote the tests and that the test taker was expected to comply with their decision (p. 154).

Based on the foregoing discussion, it could be argued that for these ELL BC provincial exam test takers not a lot has changed. One indicator of the inappropriateness of these tests for ESL students, they are only mentioned in the handbook of administration procedures to explicitly disallow them from using translating dictionaries. This reference to ELLs reveals two policies for testing these students. They are included in the exam yet they receive no accommodations (e.g., first-language versions or bilingual dictionaries) that might allow them to perform at their optimal level.

Some might argue that it is appropriate to include ELLs in the provincial exams because they would question whether in fact these high school exit exams could be classified as high-stakes tests. Mathison (2004) defines high-stakes as "tests that have serious consequences attached to the results – these consequences may be for students, teachers, principals, schools and even states" (p. 122). This definition would seem to be appropriate for the BC provincial exams because if test takers do not pass the tests, they will jeopardize their chances of receiving their high school diploma.

### *1.2 Previous Research into the Consequences of High School Exit Exams for ELL Learners*

The social costs of testing have received increasing attention from the scholarly community. Researchers are becoming progressively more aware of the negative social impact large-scale high-stakes tests can have on the lives of learners – particularly those who are most vulnerable – when the results of these tests are used to make decisions that unfairly limit the life choices of these learners. Shohamy (2007) asserts that "[w]e need to examine the ramifications of tests, their uses, misuses, ethicality, power, biases, and the discrimination and language realities they create for certain groups and for nations, and we need to use a *critical language testing* perspective [emphasis in original]" (p. 144-145). This is especially true with a test that serves to identify a learner as a high school graduate or not.

Research into the use of high school exit exams with minority learners has accumulated some surprising findings which have led to some pessimistic conclusions. Darling-Hammond (2010) surveyed the research into high-stakes tests and minority students. She noticed a disturbing relationship between grade 9 retention rates and levels of performance on the grade 10 standardized tests. She reported that "many of the steepest increases in test scores occurred in schools with the highest retention and dropout rates" (p. 94). She cited a study by Wheelock which found that "some schools improved their scores and reaped [state] rewards by keeping students out of the testing pool or out of school entirely" (p. 94-95). Thus, it appears that schools raised their test scores but removing the weakest learners from the testing pool. This issue will be revisited in the discussion of test consequences for BC ELLs.

Those in favor of continued testing of ELLs with the provincial exam might protest that the case of the BC provincial exam is somewhat different than many of the high-stakes state exams in the US. They might point out that BC test takers' fate do not entirely depend on the results of the exam. In fact, in British Columbia, exam performance and grades in related class are weighted at 20% exam/ 80% course grade for those in grades 10-11

and 40% exam/ 60% course grade for those in grade 12. On the surface, this appears to be fairer for test takers except for the fact that those groups who fail the test at a higher rate than the mainstream population still stand a greater chance of not graduating, even if their grades are comparable. This potential disparity in results calls to mind Mathison's (2004) observations that "the danger is that standardized test results will be weighed more heavily than they ought to be, that decisions once made cannot or will not be reversed, and that other compelling information may be ignored" (p. 122). In the case of BC, the provincial exams are not the only factor taken into account when deciding whether or not a student qualifies to graduate but this "snapshot" of ELL performance using a tool not designed for that purpose can have serious consequences for those who perform well enough in their coursework but do not pass the exam. This is particularly the case for the grade 12 Language Arts exam.

## 2. Examination of Failure Rates and Exam Content

### 2.1 ELL Failure Rates on British Columbia Provincial Exams over the Past 5 Years

Shohamy (2000) was one early observer to raise the alarm about the effect that unfair testing practices could have on disadvantaged and vulnerable learners. She investigated the implementation of tests of Arabic and English in the Israeli context and concluded that "...test takers are the true victims of tests. They suffer badly from tests in this unequal power relationship between the test as an organization and the demands put on test takers" (p. 154). Similar patterns of the particularly damaging effects of using high-stakes tests with minority or disadvantaged learners have been reported in the American context as well. In her review of related research Mathison (2004) noted that:

*...there are clear patterns illustrating who is most likely to be subjected to these tests. High-stakes testing is disproportionately found in states with higher percentages of people of color and living in poverty...of the eighteen states that require passing a standardized test to graduate, eleven are in the south, that is, states with substantial minority populations (Mathison, 2004, p. 122).*

The issue here is the fairness of using the BC provincial exams to decide whether ELLs can graduate from high school in British Columbia. Two appropriate pieces of evidence to determine the validity of this practice would appear to be ELL test takers' performance on the exams relative to their peers and the language and content of tests themselves. The following chart, taken from the BC Ministry of Education website, illustrates ELL performance for the examinable subjects over the past five years.

Table 1. Percentages of Provincial Exam Failures for all Students and ESL Students\*

Exam	2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009		2009/ 2010		2010/2011	
	% of All Failing Students	% of ESL Failing Students	% of All Failing Students	% of ESL Failing Students	% of All Failing Students	% of ESL Failing Students	% of All Failing Students	% of ESL Failing Students	% of All Failing Students	% of ESL Failing Students
English 10	7 (N = 3728)	21 (N = 512)	8 (N = 4078)	22 (N = 575)	8 (N = 4166)	22 (N = 575)	9 (N = 4515)	20 (N = 528)	10 (N = 5098)	26 (N = 673)
Essentials of Math 10**	18 (N = 787)	33 (N = 16)	19 (N = 889)	43 (N = 26)	19 (N = 862)	29 (N = 16)	21 (N = 969)	49 (N = 29)	35 (N = 67)	MSK
Science 10	24 (N = 12244)	28 (N = 717)	12 (N = 6292)	13 (N = 343)	6 (N = 2818)	9 (N = 237)	5 (N = 2380)	9 (N = 254)	10 (N = 4910)	15 (N = 397)
Social studies 11	7 (N = 3160)	16 (N = 215)	4 (N = 1924)	8 (N = 130)	8 (N = 3812)	19 (N = 318)	6 (N = 2936)	12 (N = 200)	9 (N = 4451)	17 (N = 294)
English 12	7 (N = 3230)	32 (N = 240)	7 (N = 2889)	26 (N = 200)	10 (N = 4506)	40 (N = 300)	9 (N = 4181)	39 (N = 277)	7 (N = 3357)	28 (N = 214)

Note:

\* Data obtained from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/exams/req/prov.pdf>

\*\* This is considered to be the intermediate level between "Applications of Math" which is geared more toward college and trades preparation and "Principles of Math" which is aimed toward preparing students for university-level study of math.

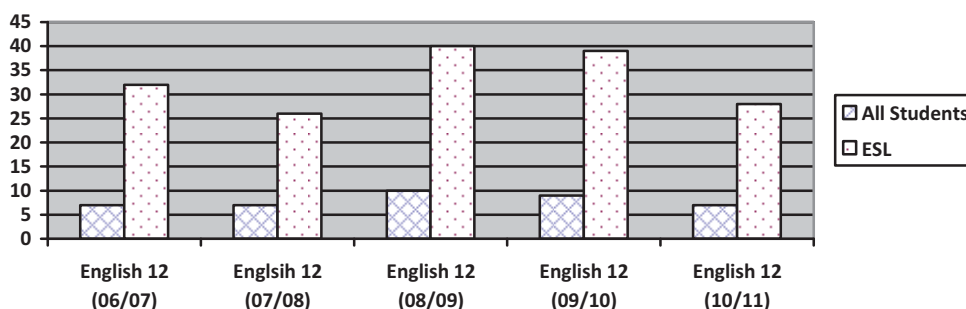


Figure 1. Comparison of percentage of failures on English 12 exam during 2006 through 2011

Table 1 demonstrates that over the past five years across all required subject areas examined by BC provincial exams, ELL students have consistently had failure rates that are approximately double those of all students. These numbers in table 1 were calculated by subtracting the number of students who were reported to have passed the exam from the total number of students who took the exam during each academic year. The results for grade 12 English are a particularly dramatic example of the discrepancy in test scores (see figure 1). From the year 2006/2007 through to 2010/2011, ELL student failure rates were four times those of all students. Even for mathematics, a subject that is thought to require less English proficiency than others, ELL failure rates are approximately double those of all students. These statistics indicate that the practice of including ESL students in these exams must be called into question.

Either ELL students are systematically receiving drastically inferior instruction or the test is not a valid measurement of their abilities. If it were, their failure rates would be equivalent to those designated as non-ELL. Given that ELL students consistently have almost double the number of failures (and almost quadruple in English 12) on average, one has to question the fairness of ELL students' inclusion in these assessments.

### 2.2 Bias as an Explanation for Discrepancies in BC Provincial Exam Failure Rates

One possible explanation for the large discrepancies in failure rates is test bias. At present, there are no published results of DIF analyses for the provincial exams that examine the performance of ELLs as compared with English speakers. Therefore, currently, the only option for identifying possibly biased items or content is to analyze exams to discover any content that might potentially cause ESL learners to perform differently than other test takers.

An analysis of a sample grade 12 English exam provided on the Ministry of Education website demonstrated several specific test features that reveal the potential for these exams to be unsuitable for ESL learners for at least two reasons. First, the exams assume a great deal of cultural knowledge that ELLs could not be expected to have. The four year limit on an ESL designation in BC seems insufficient to acquire the nuanced and sophisticated cultural knowledge assumed by these exams. The grade 12 English (not literature, which is optional) exam found on the ministry website provides an illustration of the complex cultural knowledge required to perform well on the exam. One question worth 17% contains a reading passage about Andy Warhol's first visit to Canada. To answer the questions, ELL learners must know about who Andy is and why it is ironic that Andy's sculptures were considered taxable goods by Canadian customs officials. A second difficulty with the passage is that it is filled with colloquial words and expressions like "nada," "deadpan comedy," "a total dud" and "drop 80 works" among numerous others. Certainly the native speakers for whom test was designed should know these expressions but it is questionable whether designated ESL learners who were in the country for four years or less should.

These test features demonstrate that these tests do not attempt to separate the confounded factors of content knowledge and language proficiency for ELL learners. However, for these tests to be a considered the valid measure of content knowledge for ELL students that they purport to be – otherwise they should not be used with these learners – separating language and content knowledge is exactly what the exam must do (Solano-Flores & Trumbull, 2003).

McNamara and Roever (2006) make an excellent point that traditional psychometric approaches to test validation have serious limitations in terms of their ability to comment on the social dimensions and



consequences of language tests. They note that "...researchers need to go beyond the test booklet to understand fairness and bias in its social context. After all, DIF analyses only detect bias, but the factors that cause advantages and disadvantages for groups of test takers and bias their educational opportunities lie in the larger social context" (p. 128). The ironic fact is that the social dimension of tests is what really matters the most. Tests treating learners differently is worthy of attention but tests that forever alter the course of test takers' lives demand close scrutiny.

### 3. Consequences of Failure for ELLs in British Columbia

At this stage it is difficult to ascertain what the direct consequences of failing these exams are for ELLs in British Columbia. However, based on some relevant indicators some speculations can be made. Looking at the consequences of failure of exit exams in other contexts might provide some insight into what may be happening here.

Heubert and Hauser (1999) observe that "ELLs are particularly vulnerable to high-stakes decisions based on test results; [for instance] tests used to determine high school graduation..." (cited in Menken, 2008, p. 97). Menken (2008) also highlights that

*[w]hile passing the Regents is challenging for anyone learning the English language, it is particularly so for older students who arrive in the United States during high school and students with limited literacy skills either in their native language or in English (p. 112).*

This situation is similar to what many ELLs in BC face. Older students come during their secondary years and they are unable to learn enough of the requisite academic language to pass the exams in the short time frame they have. As a result, they do not perform well on exams and their graduation status is placed in jeopardy.

The most drastic consequence of high stakes tests noted by several scholars was the increased risk of students dropping out of school due to failure of a high-stakes high school exit exam. Indeed, it has been found that "...graduation tests...are having substantial impact on the numbers of students who are dropping out of school" (Mathison, 2004, p. 124). Darling-Hammond (2010) reported on the results of a large-scale summary of research conducted by The National Research Council. She noted their conclusion

*...that low-performing students who are held back because of their test scores do less well academically and are far likelier to drop out than comparably achieving students who are moved ahead in school with grade retention increasing the odds of dropping out by as much as 250%" (p. 76).*

This statistic certainly gives cause for alarm. It is even more disturbing that schools may even be encouraging low-performing students to leave. Menken (2008) mentions her great concern "that because of the challenges that Regent exams pose for ELLs and their high-stakes consequences, the exams act to push these students to leave school, either of their own volition or with their school's encouragement" (p. 108). Certainly the original aim of these tests was to compel teachers to do more for at-risk students, but the outcome in some cases seems to be compelling them to do less.

This relationship between failure of high-stakes and dropout rates in other contexts may also exist here in BC. The disappearance rates of English-as-an-additional-language (EAL) learners from schools across Canada (Toronto, 53%) (Radwanski, 1987), (Calgary, 73%) (Watt & Roessingh, 2001) and in the Lower Mainland (60%, Gunderson & Murphy Odo, 2009) are disturbingly high especially when they are compared to the official provincial high school dropout rate of 6.2% (StatsCan, 2010). Of particular relevance here is the data from the Lower Mainland of BC. Gunderson (2007) conducted a large-scale study of immigrant students in the Vancouver area and observed a dramatic "disappearance" rate of ESL 54% of students from the district who could not be accounted for. It does not seem unreasonable to ask whether students might be disappearing from BC schools for similar reasons.

Mathison (2004) made a startling observation that "students who have by other indicators done reasonably well in school are disproportionately influenced by poor test scores to drop out of school" (p. 127). That is, the students who often show the most promise at school are those who are the most negatively affected by these tests. At this stage, it is difficult to determine whether this pattern is repeated in Canada. Gunderson's (2007) investigation of ELL student achievement in Vancouver-area schools revealed that between grades 8 and 12, Canadian students had an average GPA of between 2 and 2.5. Likewise, ELL learners had an average GPA of between 2 and 2.5 though their GPA in 11 and 12 dipped below 2 in English and social studies. This gives some indication that, in terms of class grades in the examinable subjects, ESL students are not performing considerably differently than Canadian students. If that is the case, their failure rates on the provincial exams being twice as high as Canadians coupled with the high disappearance rates should be some cause for concern.

The potential connection between dropout rates and exit exams is disquieting but there are other more insidious consequences as well. Other examples of the deleterious effects that high-stakes tests have been found to have on ESL students include "... ELLs attending high school for more years, attending more classes per day, and attending more after-school and tutoring programs than native English speakers" (Menken, 2008, p. 105-106). Thus, it appears that in their struggle to persevere ELLs are having to work much harder than their mainstream peers. These observations overlook the fact that after-school tutoring is the luxury of those who are not occupied with part-time jobs to help the family make ends meet. In this way, those ELLs who are disadvantaged in terms of social and economic capital arguably suffer even more disproportionately when compared to ELLs who have access to more resources.

Of course the struggles that ELL students face with these tests are complex. They are compounded by the fact that the label ELL itself, though at times useful, can also mask the widely diverse needs and access to economic and social capital that its members have. On the one hand, many ELLs struggle to acquire the language they need to do well at school but there are often vast differences in the amount and kinds of support to which they have access. In his study of ELLs in the Vancouver area, Gunderson (2007) noted that while many ELLs struggled in school there were also those from affluent backgrounds who were able to manage with these exams because they are able to hire after-school tutors to help them. This phenomenon underscores the wide diversity within the ESL label.

A final potentially dangerous effect of these high-stakes tests is on ELLs' identities. The core of who they are. Foucault argues that tests can shape our identity in powerful ways. Tests have the power to tell us who we are and we often believe them. McNamara and Roever (2006) contend that "...tests become technologies of subjectivity. They act as mechanisms both for the definition of subject positions and for the recognition of subjects. Tests create the identities they measure" (p. 196). This observation is particularly important when considering high school exit tests. If tests create the identities they measure then failing a test that purports to measure the identity of high school educated English user sends the message that the test taker is not suited for secondary – or post-secondary – education. When ESL learners are defined, and come to define themselves, as deficient there must certainly be negative psychological effects. Based on the confluence of findings in her research, Menken (2008) reported that there are. She states "a primary theme that repeatedly emerges in interview data with administrators, teachers and students is that high-stakes tests place tremendous pressure on ELLs and failing the exams negatively impacts their self esteem" (p. 113-114). This crippling stress and lowered self esteem are very likely the main contributors to many ELLs' decision to leave school without completing.

#### **4. Addressing These Issues with BC Provincial Exams**

Opponents might attempt to argue that if the system is so unfair it is the responsibility of the test takers or their advocates to do something to change it. However, as Shohamy (2000) explains, speaking out against flawed and unfair testing practices

*...requires a lot of courage on the part of test takers to battle powerful testing organizations, especially in a high-stake test where results are so detrimental. This explains why individual test takers rarely appeal. There is a feeling on the part of individuals that there is just too much to lose (p. 155).*

Additionally, many immigrants are not knowledgeable of the North American education system so they do not know how or where to go to express their displeasure about the current situation (Louie, 2001). Similarly, they may also lack the social or political capital to actually effect some change if they do complain (Louie, 2001).

At present, the best hope appears to be for concerned stakeholders and community members to engage in public debate about the fairness of these assessments for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. Solutions have been proposed to solve similar problems in other contexts. Reviewing some of these ideas may provide useful guidance for how these issues might be addressed locally.

Probably the most practicable adjustment to make these tests more valid for ESL learners is to not include ELL learners in this assessment and to design a separate test that more accurately reflects their abilities (Solano-Flores and Truball, 2003). This more resource intensive option could also be an adaptation to the existing test to better meet the needs of ESL students. Possible test versions could be a locally-developed assessment that takes ESL learners' culture and language into account or a dual-language test. Of course, the feasibility of this practice is questionable because, to be equitable, developers would need dual-language assessments for all language groups. If those responsible for using the tests lack resources to design exams that accurately measure ELL students' capabilities, they should be prepared to conduct research to identify appropriate accommodations (e.g., the use of dictionaries or more time) to ensure as fair an assessment as possible. Access to suitable accommodations may

help ELLs better demonstrate their knowledge while allowing the testing process to remain economically feasible.

Another option would be to rely on alternative assessments. These might be based on some type of portfolio assessment that allows students to demonstrate their areas of strength. A final option might be to weight the results of provincial exams and class grades differently for ESL or other potentially-disadvantaged groups. As was noted above, it appears that ESL students do not necessarily achieve vastly differently than their mainstream peers in terms of the grades that they receive in their classes. Providing a greater weighting for their class grade may give students who do poorly on the test a chance to offset their test score with their better class grade. This would allow them to pass and graduate.

More research into the consequences of these tests for these learners is needed. In particular, the ultimate fate of ESL learners who have difficulty passing these tests needs to be learned to ensure that they are not falling through the cracks and that the promise of the better life they came to Canada to pursue does not turn out to be empty. Policymakers may cling to the misguided notion that including everyone in these tests is somehow fair. However, we should all bear in mind the old adage that fairness is not treating everyone the same, it is giving everyone what they need to thrive. We need to learn what these students need to thrive and give them that.

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# Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms

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## Abstract

This paper explores the philosophical underpinnings of three major educational research paradigms: scientific, interpretive, and critical. The aim was to outline and explore the interrelationships between each paradigm's ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. This paper reveals and then discusses some of the underlying assumptions of educational research. Consequently, this paper is relevant to every English language teacher who is a reader of research.

**Keywords:** critical paradigm, epistemology, interpretive paradigm, ontology, positivism, scientific paradigm

## 1. Introduction

What knowledge is, and the ways of discovering it, are subjective. This paper explores the subjectivity of educational research. It is important for English language teachers to understand the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions behind each piece of research that they read. Teachers need to be able to recognize how these assumptions relate to the researcher's chosen methodology and methods, and how these assumptions connect to the findings which are presented in journal articles. This understanding will enable improved: comprehension of research, application of theory to classroom practice, engagement in academic debate, and presentation of their own research findings. This paper gives an overview of what a paradigm consists of, and then explores and discusses the assumptions behind the scientific, interpretive, and critical paradigms.

## 2. What Is a Paradigm?

A paradigm consists of the following components: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and, methods. Each component is explained, and then the relationships between them are explored.

Ontology is the study of being (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words *what is*. Researchers need to take a position regarding their perceptions of how things really are and how things really work.

Epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7). Epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words *what it means to know*. Guba and Lincon (1994, p. 108) explain that epistemology asks the question, what is the nature of the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known?

Every paradigm is based upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions. Since all assumptions are conjecture, the philosophical underpinnings of each paradigm can never be empirically proven or disproven. Different paradigms inherently contain differing ontological and epistemological views; therefore, they have differing assumptions of reality and knowledge which underpin their particular research approach. This is reflected in their methodology and methods.

Methodology is the strategy or plan of action which lies behind the choice and use of particular methods (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Thus, methodology is concerned with why, what, from where, when and how data is collected and analyzed. Guba and Lincon (1994, p. 108) explain that methodology asks the question: how can the inquirer go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?

Methods are the specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyze data (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The

data collected will either be qualitative or quantitative. All paradigms can use both quantitative and qualitative data.

Research methods can be traced back, through methodology and epistemology, to an ontological position. It is impossible to engage in any form of research without committing (often implicitly) to ontological and epistemological positions. Researchers' differing ontological and epistemological positions often lead to different research approaches towards the same phenomenon (Grix, 2004, p. 64). This will become evident as the scientific, interpretive, and critical paradigms are explored.

### 3. Explanation of the Scientific Paradigm

The scientific paradigm rose to prominence during the Enlightenment. Comte popularized the term positivism (Crotty, 1998, p. 19) when he sought to apply the scientific paradigm, which originated studying the natural world, to the social world (Cohen et al., p. 9).

The ontological position of positivism is one of realism. Realism is the view that objects have an existence independent of the knower (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7). Thus, a discoverable reality exists independently of the researcher (Pring, 2000a, p. 59). Most positivists assume that reality is not mediated by our senses. Language fulfills a representational role as it is connected to the world by some designative function; consequently, words owe their meaning to the objects which they name or designate (Frowe, 2001, p. 176).

The positivist epistemology is one of objectivism. Positivists go forth into the world impartially, discovering absolute knowledge about an objective reality. The researcher and the researched are independent entities. Meaning solely resides in objects, not in the conscience of the researcher, and it is the aim of the researcher to obtain this meaning. Crotty (1998, p. 8) elaborates,

*"A tree in the forest is a tree, regardless of whether anyone is aware of whether anyone is aware of its existence or not. As an object of that kind, it carries the intrinsic meaning of treeness. When human beings recognize it as a tree, they are simply discovering a meaning that has been lying in wait for them all along."*

Thus, phenomena have an independent existence which can be discovered via research. Positivistic statements are descriptive and factual. The scientific paradigm is foundational as scientific propositions are founded on data and facts (House, 1991, p. 2). This discoverable knowledge is considered to be absolute and value free; it is not situated in a political or historic context.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, post-positivism emerged from positivism. Post-positivism has similar ontological and epistemological beliefs as positivism; however, it differs in several ways. Firstly, the truth produced by the scientific paradigm is simply our belief in the truth of current tested hypotheses (Popper, 1959, p. 415-9). Secondly, the principle of falsification argues that scientific theories can never be proven true (Ernest, 1994, p. 22). Only when all attempts to refute them fail can they tentatively be accepted. Thus, "every scientific statement must remain tentative forever" (Popper, 1959, p. 280). Finally, in order to understand some scientific theories more than empirical data is needed. For example, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that it is impossible to know both the exact position and velocity of a subatomic particle at the same time (Crotty, 1998, p. 29). Post-positivism claims that post-positivistic knowledge is more certain and objective than knowledge which originated from other paradigms.

Positivist methodology is directed at explaining relationships. Positivists attempt to identify causes which influence outcomes (Creswell, 2009, p. 7). Their aim is to formulate laws, thus yielding a basis for prediction and generalization. A deductive approach is undertaken. Correlation and experimentation are used to reduce complex interactions their constituent parts. Verifiable evidence sought via direct experience and observation; this often involves empirical testing, random samples, controlled variables (independent, dependent and moderator) and control groups. True-experiments are preferred over quasi-experiments. Cohen et al. (2007, p. 8) identifies that an approach which is characterized by procedure and methods which are designed to discover general laws is nomothetic. Positivists view their methodology as value neutral, thus the knowledge generated is value neutral.

Similarly, post-positivists seek to understand causal relationships; thus, experimentation and correlational studies are used. However more than sense-data is collected, participants' perspectives are often sought. Furthermore, as knowledge is tentative, hypotheses are not proved but simply not rejected (Creswell, 2009, p. 7).

The scientific paradigm seeks predictions and generalizations; thus, methods often generate quantitative data. Examples include: standardized tests, closed ended questionnaires and descriptions of phenomena using standardized observation tools (Pring, 2000a, p. 34). Analysis involves descriptive and inferential statistics. Inferential statistics allow sample results to be generalized to populations.

Research is deemed good if its results are due to the independent variable (internal validity), can be generalized/transferred to other populations or situations (external validity), and different researchers can record the same data in the same way and arrive at the same conclusions (replicable and reliable). Additionally, research needs to be as objective as possible and robust to empirical refutation.

#### 4. Discussion of the Scientific Paradigm

Since methods developed to understand the natural world are not always directly transferable to the social world, positivism has limitations.

Although positivism attempts to reduce the complex to the simple by simplifying and controlling variables, this is extremely difficult to do in educational research. Often context limits methodology; isolating variables can be difficult. For example, project 'Follow Through' (Abt Associates, 1977) investigated 20 teaching models and involved 20,000 children. Many of the null hypotheses in this study could not be rejected because many of the treatments did not consider all contextual variables (Kennedy, 1978, p. 8-9).

Some variables may be hidden from the researcher and only become known when their effects are evident (House, 1991, p. 6). Examples of fluctuating individual factors include: ordinary life events (headaches) and attitudes (enthusiasm). Therefore, predictions could be correct due to random reasons (Shank & Brown, 2007, p. 28). No scientific explanation of human behavior is ever complete (Berliner, 2002, p. 20).

Inferential statistical tests are often misused and their results are often misinterpreted. Researchers may select an incorrect statistical test. For example, if data is not distributed normally, then a non-parametric test is required. Furthermore, the interpretation of P-values is dependent on whether you are hypothesis testing or significance testing, and the results of tests of statistical significance are dependent upon sample size (Blume & Peipert, 2003, p. 2-4). Thus, the results of inferential statistical tests cannot be taken at face-value.

Deduction from empirical generalization is rarely explanatory (Scriven, 1970, p. 100-101). Positivistic generalizations ignore the intentionality of the individual, thus actions are not fully understood. Two students who may appear to be doing the same thing could be doing different things. For example, two students write the answer to  $2 \times 7$ . Student A memorized the answer, student B added seven together twice. Actions need to be understood from the participants' perspectives, including both process and agency.

Positivists self-delude themselves into thinking that their research is value free. Firstly, throughout the research process researchers make value-laden judgments, for example: selection of variables, actions to be observed, and interpretation of findings (Salomon, 1991, p. 10-18). Secondly, knowledge production is political. Refusing to consider the political connections of produced knowledge is in itself political.

Positivists have contributed to understanding philosophy, adopted high standards of rigor and attempted to formulate methods which yield commonly accepted results (Ashby, 1964, p. 508). Verified observation statements, which are of use to policy makers, have been produced, for example evidence about the long-term positive effects of small class size. Although certainty is elusive, aspects of positivism belong in educational research.

#### 5. Explanation of the Interpretive Paradigm

The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism. Relativism is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Our realities are mediated by our senses. Without consciousness the world is meaningless. Reality emerges when consciousness engages with objects which are already pregnant with meaning (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Reality is individually constructed; there are as many realities as individuals. Language does not passively label objects but actively shapes and moulds reality (Frowe, 2001, p. 185). Thus, reality is constructed through the interaction between language and aspects of an independent world.

The interpretive epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena. The world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it (Grix, 2004, p. 83). Regarding trees, Crotty (1998, p. 43) elaborates,

*"We need to remind ourselves here that it is human beings who have constructed it as a tree, given it the name, and attributed to it the associations we make with trees."*

A tree is not a tree without someone to call it a tree. Meaning is not discovered; it is constructed through the interaction between consciousness and the world. Consciousness is always consciousness of something (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). To experience a world is to participate in it, simultaneously molding and encountering it (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 3). Intentionality refers to the interaction between consciousness and phenomena.

Regarding the same phenomenon, different people may construct meaning in different ways (Crotty, 1998, p. 9) but truth is a consensus formed by co-constructors (Pring, 2000b, p. 251). Therefore, knowledge has the trait of being culturally derived and historically situated. The interpretive paradigm does not question ideologies; it accepts them.

Knowledge and meaningful reality are constructed in and out of interaction between humans and their world and are developed and transmitted in a social context (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Therefore, the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of individuals who are participating in it (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). Interpretivism aims to bring into consciousness hidden social forces and structures.

Interpretive methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual's perspective, investigating interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Examples of methodology include: *case studies* (in-depth study of events or processes over a prolonged period), *phenomenology* (the study of direct experience without allowing the interference of existing preconceptions), *hermeneutics* (deriving hidden meaning from language), and *ethnography* (the study of cultural groups over a prolonged period).

Individual constructs are elicited and understood through interaction between researchers and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111) with participants being relied on as much as possible (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Events are not reduced to simplistic interpretations; new layers of understanding are uncovered as phenomena are thickly described. Interpretive theory is usually grounded (inductive), being generated from the data, not preceding it (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 22). Thus, research questions are broad. Cohen et al. (2007, p. 8) identify that an approach characterized by its emphasis on an individual case, in which a relativistic social world is embedded, is idiographic. Interpretivists acknowledge that value free knowledge is not possible. For example, researchers assert their beliefs when they choose what to research, how to research and how to interpret their data (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 336).

Interpretive methods yield insight and understandings of behavior, explain actions from the participant's perspective, and do not dominate the participants. Examples include: open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, open-ended observations, think aloud protocol and role-playing. These methods usually generate qualitative data. Analyses are the researchers' interpretations; consequently, researchers need to make their agenda and value- system explicit from the outset.

Research is deemed good if it: provides rich evidence and offers credible and justifiable accounts (internal validity/credibility), can be made use of by someone in another situation (external validity/transferability), and the research process and findings can be replicated (reliability/dependability) (Richie & Lewis, 2003, p. 263-286; Cohen et al, 2007, p. 133-149).

## 6. Discussion of the Interpretive Paradigm

Although the interpretive paradigm is sensitive to individual meanings that can become buried within broader generalizations (Samdahl, 1999, p. 119), it has shortcomings.

Interpretive research rejects a foundational base to knowledge, bringing into question its validity. Interpretive research cannot be judged using the same criteria as the scientific paradigm. Legitimacy and trustworthiness need to be achieved without claiming uncontested certainty. However, reaching a consensus is problematic. If reality is subjective and differs from person to person, then research participants cannot be expected to arrive at exactly the same interpretations as researchers (Rolfe, 2006, p. 305). Therefore, validity adding criteria such as triangulation, member checking and peer review are ineffective as they assume an underlying objective reality which can be converged upon (Angen, 2000, p. 384).

Knowledge produced by the interpretive paradigm has limited transferability as it is usually fragmented and not unified into a coherent body. Generalizations which are deemed useful to policy makers are often absent because its research usually produces highly contextualized qualitative data, and interpretations of this data involve subjective individual constructions. Consequently, policy makers are often reluctant to fund interpretive research, for example, the US No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 predominately promoted research based on the scientific paradigm (Berliner, 2002, p. 18-20).

Participants' autonomy and privacy can be compromised as the methods of interpretive research are more intimate and open-ended than scientific research. Intimacy and open-endedness may facilitate the unintended discovery of secrets, lies and oppressive relationships (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 40). Researchers may have to decide if they have an ethical responsibility to reveal their participants or intervene in their lives, for example, protecting students from abusive teachers. Additionally the more information that researchers give when



constructing a thick description, the greater the risk of participant exposure. Researchers may have to tone-down their contextualization in order to protect participants' identities.

Participants have limited control and are vulnerable to researchers imposing their own subjective interpretations upon them. Interpretive researchers produce theorized accounts that represent participant's sociological understandings (Danby & Farrell, 2004, p. 41). This raises issues of: who owns the data, how will the data be used and how much control over the findings do participants have? Even though participants are often given a voice, it is usually the researcher who decides on: the direction that the research takes, the final interpretation of the data, and which information is made public.

The pre-existing meaning making system which we are born into distorts our understanding of phenomena and we are unaware of this. Interpretive research often neglects external structural forces which influence behavior (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 26). Understandings are "structured historically in the traditions, prejudices and institutional practices that come down to us" (Taylor, 1993, p. 59). Therefore, participants might not be aware of invisible ideology which guides their actions. As participants might not fully understand the forces which are acting on their agency, their explanations of phenomena are incomplete.

### 7. Explanation of the Critical Paradigm

The ontological position of the critical paradigm is historical realism. Historical realism is the view that reality has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; reality that was once deemed plastic has become crystallized (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Realities are socially constructed entities that are under constant internal influence.

Language does not passively label objects but actively shapes and moulds reality (Frowe, 2001, p. 185). Reality is constructed through the interaction between language and aspects of an independent world. However, the critical paradigm takes the view that language contains power relations so it is used to empower or weaken.

Critical epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena and linked with societal ideology. Knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society. Cohen et al. (2009, p. 27) explain that, "what counts as knowledge is determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge." Regarding knowledge on trees, different organizations have differing beliefs. For example, the World Wildlife Fund and logging companies have differing agendas; therefore, they often dispute what constitutes an endangered tree.

Social constructionism argues that we are born into a world in which meaning has already been made; we are born into culture. "We come to inhabit a pre-existing system and to be inhabited by it," (Crotty, 1998, p. 53). This pre-existing system consists of consensus about knowledge that have already been reached and are still being reached. Furthermore, it is stratified and marked with inequality. Research interests are influenced by culture, race, gender and location (Siegel, 2006, p. 5). Academic and scientific communities, which validate and legitimize knowledge claims, unwittingly contribute to systems of oppression. For example, much of the social and psychological theory which underpins the scientific paradigm was developed by white, able-bodied males (Mertens, 2005, p. 17). As knowledge claims are always embedded in regimes of truth, consideration should be given to domination, exclusion, privilege and marginalization (Ceci et al., 2002, p. 714).

The critical paradigm is anti-foundational; it attacks this reality. People are not only *in* the world but also *with* it (Crotty, 1998, p. 149). Reality is alterable by human action. The critical paradigm seeks to address issues of social justice and marginalism. The emancipatory function of knowledge is embraced. Different theoretical perspectives of critical inquiry include: Marxism, queer theory and feminism.

As it is culturally derived, historically situated and influenced by political ideology, knowledge is not value free. The critical paradigm asks the axiological question: what is intrinsically worthwhile? Thus, the critical paradigm is normative; it considers how things ought to be; it judges reality. The utopian aspirations of the critical paradigm may never be realized but a more democratic society may materialize.

Critical methodology is directed at interrogating values and assumptions, exposing hegemony and injustice, challenging conventional social structures and engaging in social action (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). Inquiry is inseparable from politics. Its aim is to emancipate the disempowered. Researchers embrace their ideology as they recognize that "no research methodology is value free" (Pring, 2000b, p. 250). Therefore, the starting point of a critical researcher is often preconceived. Finding out is the means, change is the underlying aim. This involves making people critically aware of their situation (conscientization), then realizing change through a praxis, which is repeated action informed by reflection (Freire, 1970, p. 48). Thus, there is an emergent, recursive relationship between theory, data, research questions and interpretation (Talmy, 2010, p. 130).

Participants and researchers are both subjects in the dialectical task of unveiling reality, critically analyzing it, and recreating that knowledge (Freire, 1970, p. 51). Researchers do not carry out transformation *for* participants but with *them* (Freire, 1970, p. 49). Consequently, participants are involved in the research process, for example designing questions, collecting data, analyzing information and benefiting from research (Creswell, 2009, p. 9). Critical methodologies include: *critical discourse analysis* (examines how social and political domination is realized in text and talk), *critical ethnography* (an ideologically sensitive orientation to the study of culture (Canagarajah, 1993, p. 605)), *action research* (a cyclical process of investigation, action and evaluation which results in a change in practice), and *ideology critique* (exposes hidden ideology by revealing participants' places in systems which empower or disempower them.)

Critical methods enable realities to be critically examined from a cultural, historical and political stance. Examples include: open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, open-ended observations, and journals. These methods usually generate qualitative data. Similar to interpretivism, analysis often involves thematic interpretation of data; however, explicit values are now placed on these interpretations.

Critical research should fully acknowledge its context (culturally, historically and politically) and promote dialogical relations of equality between the researchers and participants. Additionally, research must create an agenda for change or reform, enhancing the lives of the participants. It must have catalytic validity (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 139).

### 8. Discussion of the Critical Paradigm

The critical paradigm exposes how political ideology is inextricably interwoven with knowledge, but problems exist.

Critical research has an agenda of change; therefore, it is often not supported by existing regimes. Giroux (Giroux, 2011) argues that neoliberal and neoconservative forces are currently transforming American universities into anti-democratic public spheres; consequently, the right of faculty to work in an autonomous and critical fashion is under attack. One way to control research is through funding, for example the US No Child Left Behind Act (Berliner, 2002, p. 18-20). Knowledge production is influenced by politics. Often the critical paradigm is not favored by existing policy makers.

A dialogue of equals is virtually impossible as power differentials between researchers and participants exist. For example, action research carried out in secondary schools might encounter the following problems. Teachers control the research agenda, thus participants may not be involved in the research design. A high degree of obligation will exist for students to participate; it would be difficult for a student to refuse a teacher on whom they are dependent for grades and access to resources (Nolen & Putten, 2007, p. 402). If participants try to please the researcher, the data given may not be accurate and the research findings may not be credible. Consequently, issues of collaboration, consent, coerciveness, and autonomy must be considered.

Emancipation is not guaranteed. The change in the participants' lives may be negligible or non-existent. Does the majority of action research make an emancipatory difference? There is little evidence to suggest so. Furthermore, once participants become critically aware of their situation, change may not be possible. Despondency may ensue as blissful ignorance is shattered. Alternatively, some participants' lives may be changed for the worst. For example, Rushton, a Canadian psychologist, attempted rationalize racist policy by linking race to intelligence and moral behavior (Howe, 2009, p. 436).

The critical paradigm stereotypes participants in two ways. Firstly, it often labels participants as belonging to a particular marginalized group; therefore, homogeneous notions of identity are superimposed. Secondly, the critical paradigm does not acknowledge that different participants enter the research with varying levels of conscientization. It naively assumes that populations blindly do the bidding of powerful regimes, further enslaving themselves in the process.

Most of the leading authors in the critical paradigm have been male, prompting feminists to criticize the critical paradigm as excluding the voices and concerns of marginalized groups (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Ironically, the critical pedagogy can be accused of maintaining societal status-quo.

### 9. Conclusion

What knowledge is, and ways of discovering it, are subjective. Regarding educational research, the scientific paradigm seeks to generalize, the interpretive paradigm seeks to understand, and the critical paradigm seeks to emancipate. Each paradigm has its own ways of realizing its aims. Understanding the philosophical assumptions that underpin each paradigm and how these assumptions manifest themselves within methodology and methods will enable English language teachers to better comprehend, question, and apply the research that they read.

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# The Impact of Task Type and Cognitive Style on Vocabulary Learning

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## Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge influences the learners' performance so remarkably that success in all language skills is closely related to it. This vital role necessitates studies focusing on the most effective programs of teaching vocabulary. In this study, we aimed to explore the impact of static versus dynamic task type and the possible interaction with field dependence/independence cognitive style on learning English vocabulary among intermediate EFL learners. Eighty four female EFL learners studying at the BS level at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences aged 19-25 were randomly selected and given a Cognitive Style Test and a Nelson Proficiency Test (2000 A) to be assigned to either of the control and experimental groups matched for their vocabulary knowledge and cognitive style. Although the two groups were exposed to identical reading passages during classes held twice a week in the four-month treatment period, the control group received vocabulary instruction through static task type technique based on the traditional approach to teaching vocabulary while the experimental group underwent dynamic task type technique. The Nelson Proficiency Test was once more used as the post-test to show the differences in vocabulary gain in the two groups. The collected data were analyzed through ANOVA, using SPSS software. The results showed that vocabulary instruction led to favorable results among field-dependent learners taught by the dynamic task type technique and poorest performance in field-dependent students exposed to the static task type technique while field-independent learners better performed through the static task-type technique. Task type significantly influences vocabulary learning and may marginally affect reading comprehension performance.

**Keywords:** task-type, static task, dynamic task, task-based instruction, field dependence/independence

## 1. Introduction

After decades of neglect, in the past two or three decades L2 vocabulary learning and teaching has become an object of considerable interest among researchers, teachers, and materials developers (Carter, 1988; Coady & Huckin, 1997; Nation, 1990; Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). According to Schmitt (1997), a vocabulary learning strategy is any strategy that results in the learning of vocabulary. This particularly covers vocabulary teaching strategies as well because they are also meant to lead to vocabulary learning. Nowadays, it is generally accepted that vocabulary teaching should be part of the syllabus, and taught in a well-planned and regular basis. Some authors, following Lewis (1993), argue that vocabulary should be at the centre of language teaching, because 'language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalised grammar'. Read's review of the field (2004) has revealed a lack of research on issues concerning classroom-teaching of vocabulary. Meanwhile, there is nothing more than "good advice" on how to teach words offered by Nation (1990, 2001) and Lewis (1993). Therefore, vocabulary teaching, using an effective technique, needs to be established as an area of research.

Regarding research strategies in dealing with teaching vocabulary, this area must fit into a greater and broader framework of a language course. Seeing a language course as consisting of any of the following four strands is one way of ensuring that there is a balanced range of learning opportunities:

- A. Learning from meaning-focused input- learning through listening and reading
- B. Deliberate language-focused learning- learning from being taught sounds, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse (sometimes called form-focused instruction, language-focused learning)
- C. Learning from meaning-focused out-put- learning by having to produce language in speaking and writing

(main attention in this strand is on communicating messages)

D. Developing fluency- becoming quick and confident at listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Vocabulary must not only be known, but also readily available for use. This strand aims at helping learners make the best use of what they already know. Fluency relates to each of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing).

Distinguishing these strands means that there is a balance of deliberate learning and incidental learning, of learning from input and output, of learning through oral and written skills, and of learning and fluency development. Regarding the above strands, many researchers in this field believe that learners do not first acquire language as a structural system and then learn how to use this system in communication, but rather actually discover the system itself in the process of learning how to communicate and that teaching vocabulary for active use will be effective if the students are actively involved in the communicative cognitive process of vocabulary teaching/learning at all stages of it (Yagcioglu, 2009 & Maghsoudi, 2007). De La Fuente (2006) maintains that task-based lessons with a built-in, planned focus on form seem to be more effective than traditional lessons, due to the fewer opportunities for targeted output production and retrieval that traditional techniques offer and also owing to their inability to effectively focus students' attention on targeted forms. According to De La Fuente, task-based lessons designed this way can provide more opportunities for negotiation of meaning and output production.

A simple mapping of the two mentioned task types and the above strands clearly shows that the static task type enjoys the advantages of strands B and C while the dynamic task type benefits from strands A, C, and D. Communicative language teaching approach became popular among second language acquisition (SLA) researchers (Skehan, 2003) in the 1970s. During 1980s, "task" replaced the term "communicative activity" and the task-based language teaching (TBLT) became a new teaching method that has been broadly adopted in language classroom across the globe. Depending on the perspective that language researchers took into classroom practice, tasks were classified in different ways aiming at analyzing and finding a way to understand the learning process and the interaction related to different task types.

One classic dichotomy of task types is static versus dynamic technique (Ellis, 2003). The static type pays more attention to form and transfers information in a linear sequence through the prescribed language and the material is learned consciously while the dynamic task type describes a situation or an action and narrates something. In the latter approach, the speakers are involved in two-way conversations without any prescribed language content, and the material is learned unconsciously. The static task type gives more control to the learner, while the dynamic type emphasizes free uncontrolled production. As the definitions show, the static type provides more linguistic context whereas the dynamic type offers more extra-linguistic context to the learner. Studies have suggested that static tasks are in general easier than dynamic ones (Ellis, 2003).

Field in/dependence is a type of cognitive style introduced by Witkin, et al. (1977) to resemble "the degree to which one perceives analytically or globally" (Hadley, 2003). The ability of a person to extract the 'message' or 'signal' from the 'noise' or irrelevant information or the cognitive restructuring ability is associated with field independent characteristics. Field independence is concerned with the ability to break a complex stimulus into separate elements and to give it a different structure or organization based on previous experiences or restructure it in their own way. If it is difficult to do such a thing, the person is referred to as field dependent (Mancy & Reid, 2004).

On a language learning level, the learners have to understand language items in their context and to extract them and use them in new contexts (Stern, 1983). For instance, the learner may encounter situations in which s/he has to understand the meaning of an ambiguous sentence or to understand the meaning of a word in its context and use it in other contexts. S/he may be exposed to ill-structured sentences in the process of language learning. In such circumstances, the field in/dependent cognitive style will bear influences on language learning. In other words, field dependency is defined as "the tendency to depend on the field so that the parts embedded within the field are not easily perceived, though that total field is perceived more easily as a unified whole" while field independency is "the ability to perceive a particular relevant item or factor in a field of distracting items" (Brown, 2000).

Field independent learners are analytic, independent, and socially insensitive, while field dependent ones tend to be holistic, dependent, and socially aware (Wyss, 2002). Since field independent learners have greater restructuring skills (Musser, 1998), they are able to extract an embedded simple figure in a field or a complex figure. Research suggests that field in/dependency is under the influence of a lot of factors such as age, sex, hemisphere lateralization, child rearing, and socioeconomic status (Musser, 1998). Although some studies have tried to show that field independence is correlated with more language success especially second language

learning (Chapelle 1995; Chapelle and Green, 1992; Alptekin and Atakan, 1990), researchers insist that both field dependent and field independent styles may enhance second language learning in their own ways (Tianjero & Paramo, 1998) so that field independent learners excel at classroom learning which requires analysis and attention to details, and field dependent ones excel at learning the communicative aspects of language learning (Brown, 2000 & Town, 2003).

As mentioned above, numerous studies have been done on vocabulary learning, field in/dependence, and task-type, each in isolation, but, to the best of our knowledge, no research has been done to explore the possible interactions among these three areas when it comes to actual classroom instruction. Our study aims to see how learning vocabulary is affected by task-type mediated by cognitive style while previous studies have focused on the relationship between either cognitive style and vocabulary learning or task-type and vocabulary learning. Nevertheless, we assume that there must be a close link between students' performance on different task types and their cognitive styles. Therefore, the results of this study will shed light on the learning of vocabulary from an information processing perspective, perhaps creating a shift from a uni-dimensional look at learning vocabulary to a multi-faceted understanding.

## 2. Materials and Method

### 2.1 Participants

In this randomized controlled study, 84 intermediate learners of English aged 19-25 at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences participated in a four-month treatment. The participants were randomly selected from among a total number of 230 B.Sc. students enrolled for General English courses. Informed consent forms adopted from the sample consent forms given in *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education* by Fraenkel and Wallen (2003: 86) were signed by the students to participate in the study.

### 2.2 Instruments

The subjects of the study were then given a Nelson Proficiency Test (2000A) and also the standard Group Embedded Figures Test to assess field dependency. They were matched to form two homogeneous groups based on their vocabulary performance and cognitive style type. Thirty-two reading passages were selected from *Academic Encounters* as the teaching material of the course for both groups. The same instructor (i.e. the researcher) taught both the experimental and control groups twice a week for a period of four months.

### 2.3 Procedure

The control group experienced the static task-type technique which is the traditional approach to vocabulary instruction, whereby special attention was given to form and the material was to be learned consciously. However, the instructor in the experimental group normally described a situation or an action and narrated something or a situation, and the material was to be learned unconsciously. Following the treatment, the Nelson Test was administered to both groups to find vocabulary gains in the groups and subgroups of the study. ANOVA was used to find if there are any significant differences between and within groups. Furthermore, a test of Homogeneity of Variances was used to ensure about the homogeneity of the two experimental and control groups in terms of their vocabulary performance on the pre-test.

## 3. Results

The results of the test of Homogeneity of Variances are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Test of Homogeneity of Variances (pre-test)

Levene Statistic	df 1	df 2	Sig.
.938	3	80	.473

As shown in Table 1, the significance level confirms the homogeneity of variances in the following subgroups of the study; there was no significant difference between the two groups. The characteristics of each group are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The characteristics of the subjects participating in each group

Experimental group: (42 subjects)		2) control group: (42 subjects)	
18	24	23	19
Field-dependent	Field-independent	Field-dependent	Field-independent

One-way ANOVA was run to find the possible differences among the four subgroups of the study. Table 3 summarizes the results.

Table 3. The comparison of both groups in the post-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	912.023	3	298.76	19.319	.000
Within Groups	1398.430	80	15.361		
Total	2402.481	83			

The results of ANOVA for the post-test, as shown in Table 3, reject the equality of means in the post-test. To locate the exact differences, the Tukey Test was used. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The result of post-test in field independent subjects

Group	mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewedness	Kurtosis	min	max
dynamic	27.6899	2.89289	8.369	-.775	.021	21.00	39.00
static	28.2647	5.66287	32.088	-.391	-1.260	16.00	37.00

According to the data in Tables 4 and 5, it can be observed that the experimental (dynamic) group with a mean of 28.735 performed better than the control (static) group with a mean of 26.600. Table 6 also shows the significance of this superiority. Furthermore, field-independent learners with a mean of 27.977 performed only marginally better than field-dependent subjects with a mean of 27.357.

Table 5. The result of post-test in field dependent subjects

Group	mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewedness	Kurtosis	min	max
dynamic	29.7801	2.619643	6.898	-.569	-.843	23.00	37.00
static	24.9354	4.148985	17.302	.947	.765	20.00	31.00

As observed in Tables 4 and 5, the largest and smallest means belong to the FD Dynamic group with a mean of 29.7801 and FD Static group with a mean of 24.9354, respectively while the differences within the FI group (static versus dynamic) are small and not significant. On the other hand, FI students with a mean of 27.9773 have performed marginally better than FD students with a mean of 27.35775.

Table 6 displays detailed differences among the subgroups of the study.

Table 6. Turkey HSD comparison of means in the post-test

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FI - Dynamic	FD - Dynamic	-3.94100*	1.18018	.002	-7.4320	-1.23789
	FI - Static	-1.66053	1.26028	.564	-4.8925	1.64654
	FD - Static	3.93462*	1.17024	.007	.8693	7.00122
FD - Dynamic	FI - Dynamic	4.42130*	1.18019	.003	1.3380	7.4320
	FI - Static	1.672147	1.19741	.128	-.4674	5.80654
	FD - Static	8.26562*	1.10193	.0005	.3776	11.15675
FI - Static	FI - Dynamic	2.68053	1.26027	.558	-1.6414	4.9665
	FD - Dynamic	-2.674537	1.19730	.133	-5.8064	.4677
	FD - Static	6.591516*	1.18733	.0002	.4944	8.70576
FD - Static	FI - Dynamic	-3.8752*	1.17104	.007	-7.0011	-.8692
	FD - Dynamic	-7.36982*	1.10194	.000	-12.1518	-5.37964
	FI - Static	-4.62314*	1.18731	.000	-8.6059	-2.4954



The significant level of  $.564 > 0.05$  for the differences between FI Dynamic and FI Static groups in the first row shows that intra-group differences among FI students are small and insignificant no matter whether they belong to the Static or the Dynamic groups. In the same row, the significance levels of  $.002$  and  $.007 < 0.05$  show that FD dynamic students performed significantly better than FI dynamic students, who, in turn, performed significantly better than FD Static students.

Meanwhile, the second row of Table 6 shows a significance level of  $.003 < .05$  for the differences between FD Dynamic and FI Dynamic students where the former performed significantly better. In the same row, a significance level much smaller than  $.05$  shows that FD Dynamic students had a performance better than FD Static ones. The Table, therefore, shows that there are significant differences within the Dynamic group (FI versus FD learners who were taught through the dynamic task-type technique,  $p = .002$ ) and within the Static group (FI versus FD learners who were taught through the static task-type technique,  $p = .000$ ) as well as within the FD group (FD learners taught through the static versus dynamic task-type techniques,  $p = .000$ ). However, as shown in the Table, there were no significant differences in the performance of the FI group (FI learners taught through the static versus dynamic task-type techniques,  $p = .558$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

There was an attempt in this study to determine the possible effects that task type and the cognitive style field dependence/independence have on learners' vocabulary gains in a course of study. The results can be classified into two main groups. Firstly, attention should be focused on intergroup differences. On the one hand, we had the experimental group (Dynamic task type) versus the control group (Static task type). As mentioned in the results section, the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group. According to Ellis (2003) and based on the procedures of the study, the dynamic task type comprises description, narration, extra-linguistic contextualization, two-way conversation, and more uncontrolled speech production. By contrast, the static task type focuses more on form, linear sequencing, prescribed language, and conscious learning. The results of the study showed that instruction through the former was more successful than that through the latter. On the other hand, we had the field-dependent group versus the field-independent group. These two groups performed statistically similar although field-independent students performed marginally better.

On the second level of comparison, the intra-group differences were taken into account. In the experimental/dynamic group, field-dependent and field-independent learners performed statistically similar. In other words, the dynamic task type did not cause significant differences in performance between the two cognitive styles. In comparison, the field-dependent and field-independent students in the control/static group produced significantly different results so that the latter outperformed the former. All in all, it was noticed that field-dependent learners were more sensitive to task-type than field-independent learners. In other words, it does not matter much to field-independent learners whether they are taught through the static or the dynamic task-type, whereas it does to the field-dependent learners, who show the best performance among all subgroups when they are taught by the dynamic task-type and the worst of all when they are taught through the static task-type. Meanwhile, regarding field-independent learners, although their performance does not significantly differ, whether in the static or the dynamic group, they show a trend of better performance with static task-type. Based on previous studies (Nation and Carter, 1989; Brown, 2000 & Town, 2003), the potential sources of difference between the performance of field dependent and field independent students may be attributable to the difference between the two groups in the kind of reasoning, the restructuring ability and the use of strategies in processing information. Yet, it is important to know that these cognitive differences are mediated by task-type so that a specific task-type may create a bias against one of the two groups.

#### 5. Conclusion

It seems that materials developers, course designers, and test constructors should pay special attention to a balanced recipe in which neither of the two cognitive styles is placed at a disadvantage. It is recommended that they make a balance between deliberate learning and incidental learning, between learning from meaning-focused input/output and form-focused instruction, between cognitive restructuring demands and global understanding (Mancy and Reid, 2004), between controlled and free production, and between socially insensitive and socially aware situations (Wyss, 2002). In line with Town (2003), it is also recommended that despite the traditional myth that field-independence is correlated with more language learning success (Chapelle, 1995; Chapelle and Green, 1992; Alptekin and Atakan, 1990), field dependent and field independent styles each enhances language learning in its own way. Other research studies also support this suggestion (Salamian, 2002 & Salmani, 2006).

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# A Corpus-based Lexical Study of Sermons in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Religious sermons play a very significant role in a pluralist setting like Nigeria, as organs of social, political and moral education. The fulfilment of these functions is partly contingent on the effective use of language. If the sermon-giver and his audience draw from the same pool of lexis, communication in the genre will not only be enhanced but its teaching and practice will also align, thereby bridging the gap between the two. It is to this end that this study attempts to identify the words most associated with Christian sermons in English, in Nigeria. To carry out this study, a corpus of present-day sermons in Nigeria was constructed and compared to a reference corpus of sermons from other parts of the world, in order to find out those lexical items which are characteristic of sermons, whether in terms of types, frequency or usage. The study reveals the role of textual context to be the definition of thematic focus because, although the sermon words in the two contexts manifest high similarity, their degrees of significance in the contexts differ substantially. Additionally, the findings reveal diversity, both in lexical choice and the discourse structure of sermons. However, in both contexts, the sermons demonstrate similarity in semantic grouping. So, for the teacher of English for religious purposes (ERP) and the user of English in church contexts, this work offers insights into the lexical world of sermons in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** sermons, lexis, teaching, practice, context, textual, lexical choice, discourse structure, semantic grouping

## 1. Introduction

Studies of English for Special Purposes (ESP) define it as the language used for a utilitarian purpose, whether occupational, vocational, academic or professional. In this context ESP elevates English to the status of an instrument of specialized communication. A number of approaches to English language teaching (ELT) have emerged, including English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). According to Mackay & Mountford (1978) and Swales (1990), all the variants of ESP have a singular aim: communication efficiency above and beyond pedagogic effectiveness. Concerning the justification for ESP, Long and Richards, in the preface to Swales (1990, p. vii), write that:

*the discourse communities such as academic groupings (also professional and occupational) of various kinds are recognized by the specific genres that they employ [...]. The work that the members of the discourse communities engage in involves the processing of tasks which reflect specific linguistic, discursual and rhetoric skills.*

In relation to the present study, the church constitutes the discourse community while the use of language by ministers – including sermons – represents a genre, in other words a discourse type. Restating the importance of ESP studies, Swales (1990, p. 3) himself observes that ESP-type analyses have become narrower and deeper. This narrowing, he says,

*is compensated for by an interest in providing a deeper or multi-layered textual account. As a result, there is growing interest in assessing rhetorical purposes, in unpacking information structures and in accounting for syntactic and lexical choices. Moreover, the resulting findings are no longer viewed simply in terms of stylistic appropriacy but, increasingly, in terms of the contributions they may or may not make to communicative effectiveness.*

This work is clearly situated amongst ESP analyses and, like others, aims at a narrow but deep description of English for Religious Purposes (ERP) and, more specifically, English for sermons.

## 2. Christianity in Nigeria: A Very Brief History

It is important to create a background to this study by providing, albeit, a brief history of the Christian religion in

Nigeria to give insight to its tradition and language while paving the way for a better understanding of the entire discourse.

The first Christian contact in Nigeria occurred in the fifteenth century when the Portuguese - Augustinian and Capuchin Monks - introduced Roman Catholicism. However, it was until the Roman Catholic missionaries came in the 1800s that sustainable Catholic Church growth occurred, mainly in the south-eastern parts of Nigeria. Then, in 1842 the first Protestant missionaries - Henry Townsend and Samuel Ajayi Crowther - came to Nigeria, now to the south west; these were Wesleyan Methodists. Soon after, other protestant groups followed. Today, there is a proliferation of churches in Nigeria; some maintain the tradition of their founding missionaries and some are totally locally founded. Whatever the mission and their tradition, each has planted large and vibrant churches whose congregations are numbered in millions.

[http://www.ecwaeangel.org/living\\_in\\_nigeria/HistoryOfChristianity](http://www.ecwaeangel.org/living_in_nigeria/HistoryOfChristianity)

The growth of Christianity in Africa [Nigeria] has been very spectacular and it is adjudged the continent with the fastest Christian growth in the world (Ezeogu 2000). But, as Ezeogu observes, Christian tradition did not come into a traditionally [even linguistically] vacuous society in Nigeria. Rather, it met a multiplicity of cultures, traditions and languages which expectedly impacted it and are impacted by it. Ezeogu examines the intriguing relationship of African cultures and the Christian tradition and finds that there are two contending Bible-culture relationships in African Christianity: the dialectic model and the dialogic model. In the dialectic model, the Bible and culture are seen as irreconcilable while in the dialogic model the Bible and culture are considered compatible. However, in truth, culture and Christianity may not be so polarised. While Ezeogu was interested in the intriguing relationship between Christianity and culture, the interest of this paper is to see how the English language is able to carry the weights of both traditions in sermons. The major focus is to examine how meaning is created through sermon words by investigating the underlying contextual and cultural factors which determine them.

### **3. Religion and Language**

In Nigeria a rich literature exists on the use and role of language in religion, and in sermons in particular. Some of those works are discussed here to show the direction of past research and to affirm the need for the present work.

Hackett (1988) observes that Nigeria is a pluralist country in which religion is a major fact of life which cannot be ignored. Williams (1997) also affirms this and argues that there has been enough religious unrest in Nigeria to suggest that religion has become a major factor in the country's contemporary body politic. Similarly, Oguntola-Laguda (2008) notes that, in a religiously homogeneous society, the aftermath of the interaction between religion and politics is political stability, but that is not the case with pluralistic societies like Nigeria where heterogeneity is a cause of religious and political crises. But, as he argues, we must recognize the symbiosis between religion and politics in Nigeria and how polity stands to benefit from it. This is where the role of language comes in. Krolick (2010) notes its role and power in crises management. Ker (2007) echoes these points by showing how religious songs and messages are often coloured by this world's concerns, thereby addressing societies' socio-political and economic issues, such as corruption, peace, stability, integration and development. Meanwhile Taiwo (2007) examines the social role of preacher relative to listeners, how the speaker makes linguistic choices in order to achieve persuasion and is in total control as the knower or expert, and assumes his audience are non-knowers, so his messages are characterized by information and directives.

In none of these attempts is the character of religious language observed from as extensive a population as the corpus of sermons this work covers by investigating the keywords of sermons and examining their characteristics.

### **4. Theoretical Orientation**

The study is based on the lexical theory of J. R. Firth (1934-1951), who observed that the collocations of established 'key' or 'pivotal' words, when supported by reference to contexts of situation, may constitute material for syntactic analysis. Firth consistently argued that words in company may be said to have physiognomy, because words change their manners when changing locale. He believed words and their structural relations must be studied in context, because a word's meaning is conditioned by others in its vicinity, providing a new way to describe language. These ideas have been propagated and expanded by notable linguists including Halliday (1966, 1991), Sinclair (1987, 1991) and Leech (1981, 1991); all support a theory of language in which meaning is dispersed at different levels and contexts of language. Sinclair harnessed these ideas into a model for lexical description, as adopted in this study.

Sinclair (2004) proposes an alternative model of the lexicon which projects lexical items as a higher rank of lexical structure, above words. The model – extended units of meaning – presents five categories of description for any lexical item, two compulsory, three optional. The obligatory components are the core and semantic prosody. The optional categories serve to fine-tune the meaning and cohesion of a text: collocation, colligation and semantic preference. In describing the lexis of sermons, this study focuses on the major category: the core – the node word, the invariable occurrence of a lexical item. The aim is to identify lexical items peculiar to sermons in Nigeria, be they in terms of type, frequency or usage, in order to enhance communication in the genre and determine how much influence the context has on language.

## 5. Methodology: Corpus and Keywords

### 5.1 The Corpus Method

Two specialized corpora were designed for this work. A corpus of Nigerian sermons in English, consisting of 4,816 running words, was constructed for this research. This was compared to joint reference corpora of sermons from the UK and America comprising approximately 15,000 words. These dual reference corpora facilitate validation of the key lexis of sermons in Nigeria. The investigation entailed examination of keywords obtained through frequency analysis of Nigerian versus British and American sermons. Thus we can see what lexical choices are determined by the Nigerian context and any symmetries or asymmetries. The Nigerian sermons were sourced from the published works of pastors; the British and American sermons were located via the Internet. For precision in analysis and the reliability of findings, and to facilitate the handling of copious data, the study uses WordSmith 5 analytical software, with the keyword tool used to determine those words demonstrating lexical salience in each context.

### 5.2 The Keyword Method

The notion of keywords, originated by Firth (1957), was substantially developed by William (1976, 1983) and Scott (1997, 2000). Firth described the importance of pivotal or focal words in language, while William spoke of significant binding words in texts, using the term keyword to describe this. Both of them used the term to refer to basic words in culture and society. But Scott (1997, 2000, 2006) modified the term keyword to stand for words which are particularly common or uncommon in a text or group of texts in relation to certain norms. Hence the notion becomes extremely powerful in giving insights into the content and style of texts (Johansson 2007). Sinclair (2003) (in relation to Scott & Tribble 2006: *Textual Patterns*) describes keywords as a powerful tool for assessing and understanding texts, while Scott (1997, p. 4) states that “a keyword may be defined as a word which occurs with unusual frequency in a given text. This does not mean high frequency but unusual frequency, by comparison with a reference corpus of some kind”. The advantage of comparing a corpus's word frequency list with that of another corpus is that those words common to both are filtered out in the process, leaving only words that make corpus A distinctive from corpus B, and vice versa (Archer 2009, pp. 3-4). As Archer (1) notes, “the frequency with which particular words are used in a text can tell us something meaningful about that text and its author [...] because their choices of words are seldom random”. Baker (2009, p. 136) affirms this by highlighting keywords as a useful tool for identifying significant lexical differences between texts, though he cautions that attention be paid to differences in word usage and/ or similarities between texts.

In this study, the identification of sermon keywords is a crucial starting point, prior to taking other essential steps to establish the lexical behaviour of sermon words in context. Those words which are statistically significant in terms of their frequency of occurrence are obtained via WordSmith 5, by sorting the word frequency list according to the resulting log likelihood values (LL). This puts the largest LL values at the top of the list, representing those words having the most significant relative frequency differences between the two corpora. Thus we observe the words that are most indicative (or characteristic) of one corpus, as compared to another, heading the list (Rayson *et al.* 2004). These are keywords, and are identified using Log Likelihood Statistic set at a value of 15.13 (pco.0001) with 1 d.f. The log-likelihood test represents the frequency deviation from the normative/reference corpus – the higher the figure, the greater the deviation. The keyword list produced portrays both positive and negative keywords, frequent and infrequent words. Positive keywords represent those words associated with the language of sermons in Nigeria, while negative keywords represent sermon keywords in British and American contexts.

## 6. Analysis and Results

In this study, two types of analyses were required to identify the words more likely to occur in sermons in Nigeria than chance would suggest. The first level of analyses entailed comparison of the word frequency lists of the main corpus of Nigerian sermons (henceforth corpus 1) with the overall reference corpus tagged non-Nigerian sermons (henceforth corpus 2). Corpus 1 was then matched with corpus 2, the normative corpus, to

discover what words are key in context vis-à-vis non-Nigerian contexts. This second level of keyword analysis reveals any symmetries and asymmetries of language behaviour in context. To do this, cut-off points were set using word frequency ratings depending on the size of each corpus, and the log likelihood scores. In the case of corpus 1, only words with a frequency of 5 and above were considered; but for corpus 2, treble the size of corpus 1, a cut-off point was set at a frequency of 10 and above. Then, the threshold for LL was uniformly set at 15.13. These enquiries produced the results shown in Tables 1-3, below.

Table 1. Word types in Nigerian sermons relative to non-Nigerian sermons

Nigerian sermons wordlist			Non-Nigerian sermons wordlist		
WORD TYPE			WORD TYPE		
CORPUS 1	FREQ.	%	CORPUS 2	FREQ.	%
THE	3,771	5.8152	THE	36,044	6.1965
TO	2,026	3.1243	OF	20,668	3.5532
OF	1,997	3.0796	TO	15,665	2.6931
YOU	1,840	2.8374	AND	15,211	2.615
AND	1,757	2.7095	IS	12,119	2.0835
IN	1,319	2.034	IN	11,517	1.98
GOD	943	1.4542	HE	7,096	1.2199
HE	800	1.2337	IT	6,418	1.1034
HIS	572	0.8821	GOD	5,266	0.9053
LIFE	445	0.6862	YOU	4,769	0.8199
WORD	406	0.6261	FOR	4,650	0.7994
JESUS	351	0.5413	WITH	3,702	0.6364
I	350	0.5397	THEY	3,681	0.6328
AS	332	0.512	CHRIST	3,340	0.5742
ALL	330	0.5089	LORD	3,030	0.5209
BUT	324	0.4996	BUT	2,985	0.5132
DO	258	0.3979	JESUS	2,485	0.4272
GOD'S	256	0.3948	LOVE	2,388	0.4105
FROM	241	0.3716	WORD	2,081	0.3578
HAS	231	0.3562	FROM	1,974	0.3394
CHRIST	218	0.3362	WHICH	1,934	0.3325
LORD	218	0.3362	THEM	1,921	0.3303
SPIRIT	215	0.3315	SO	1,908	0.328
SO	213	0.3285	SEE	1,822	0.3132
CAN	193	0.2976	MAN	1,734	0.2981
FAITH	186	0.2868	OR	1,651	0.2838
PEOPLE	184	0.2837	SAYS	1,648	0.2833
SAYS	182	0.2807	YE	1,642	0.2823
OUR	157	0.2421	FATHER	1,389	0.2388
WORLD	154	0.2375	SPIRIT	1,379	0.2371
ABOUT	153	0.2359	ME	1,368	0.2352
MAN	148	0.2282	SIN	1,361	0.234
BIBLE	147	0.2267	HAS	1,339	0.2302
EVERY	126	0.1943	FAITH	1,114	0.1915
INTO	124	0.1912	SON	1,110	0.1908
HOLY	120	0.1851	NOW	1,076	0.185
WISDOM	119	0.1835	HEART	1,056	0.1815
TODAY	116	0.1789	LIFE	1,007	0.1731

Table 1 above displays some words from corpus 1 relative to words from corpus 2. Both lists are sorted on a frequency basis with the most frequent words occurring at the top of the list. Column 1 contains some of the words found in the Nigeria sermons. Columns 2 and 3 contain other information about the sermon words: their

frequencies and relative frequencies, i.e. proportional percentages when raw frequencies are compared to the size of the corpus. Similarly, columns 4, 5 and 6 present selected words from corpus 2, their raw frequency ratings and proportional percentage scores. It can be seen from columns 1 and 4 that no clear differences can be posited because both lists presents word types in common usage: articles, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, main verbs and nouns, with function words having the highest frequencies, as expected.

It is generally accepted that texts cannot be differentiated on the basis of raw frequencies alone. It seems therefore that sermon words cannot be differentiated on the basis of word types alone since both texts manifest the same thematic preoccupations at the macro level. However, we can investigate to what extent the handling of themes differs in terms of emphasis or focus. Our aim is to show that although sermons select words from a common pool – the Bible – to address specific issues of relevance, their degrees of significance varies according to the focus of the sermon-giver, which in turn is determined by the needs of the congregation. Here, a keyword analysis will reveal which words are given prominence in sermon contexts, thereby revealing their thematic preoccupations.

As already indicated, keywords perform an ‘aboutness’ function in texts, they tell us what they are about. Both Archer (2009) and Scott (1998), and many others in the ‘keyword research school’, have consistently argued that we learn something about texts from the frequency with which authors use words because their choice of words is seldom random. We shall see in Table 2 below whether and to what extent this assertion is supported by sermon words.

Table 2. Word frequencies in Nigerian sermons relative to non-Nigerian sermons

<b>Keywords Corpus 1</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Keyness</b>	<b>Keywords Corpus 2</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Keyness</b>
YOU	1,840	1,677	WE	8,972	767
YOUR	980	1,648	OUR	4,889	358
GOD	943	162	CHRIST	3,340	69
LIFE	445	471	LORD	3,030	44
WORD	406	94	LOVE	2,388	117
GOD’S	256	202	SIN	1,361	142
PEOPLE	184	70	SON	1,110	59
BIBLE	147	267	SATAN	753	107
WISDOM	119	246	AUTHORITY	719	31
DEVIL	65	26	HUSBAND	647	87
LIVING	52	40	WOMAN	638	48
PRAY	49	44	WIFE	598	60
CHRISTIANS	46	46	SOUL	467	47
HALLELUJAH	44	202	SINS	466	25
PRESENCE	37	47	HEARTS	414	45
SEED	35	26	SUBMISSION	413	71
HEALING	32	72	OBEDIENCE	402	46
ANOINTING	31	111	FRIENDS	397	38
PROSPERITY	30	67	SAVIOUR	341	39
GHOST	29	24	SUBJECTION	394	83
POVERTY	27	64	COMMAND	351	23
PRAYING	27	52	REBELLION	333	61
HEALTH	26	74	COMMANDMENT	300	48
VICTORY	24	38	AMOUR	298	48
PRIEST	23	43	REGENERATION	256	54
PASTOR	20	33	REPENTANCE	242	42
PROMOTION	19	74	SINNERS	223	33
CHALLENGES	18	75	HARMONY	219	46
WEALTH	18	46	WRATH	217	32
CONFESSION	18	31	JUSTIFICATION	167	35
LORDSHIP	15	61	REVERENCE	167	35
SUPERNATURAL	15	50	HONOR	166	35
TONGUES	15	33	COMPASSION	155	25
WATCHMAN	8	36	ATONEMENT	139	29
SEEDTIME	7	32	BISHOP	126	26



In this table, for each corpus a list of words which were found to be key in the texts is shown. Here also, the keywords are organized according to their frequencies and thus salience. The keyness ratings in the columns adjacent to the keywords indicate their levels of significance in context by representing the extent of deviation from the normative texts – the greater the deviation, the higher the LL scores (keyness value). It should be noted at the outset that almost all the words found in one corpus were also found in the other, with the exception of a very few cases which we attribute to differences in corpus size. Nonetheless, the words found to be key in one corpus differ significantly from those found to be key in the other, and this is the interest of this study, to find those words which are key in each context and to posit the reasons why.

The first observation to be made from Table 2 is the striking divergence in the keyword lists for the two corpora. This points to differences in lexical choices and, as such, differences in thematic foci. The second observation is that the words in each corpus reveal that some semantic fields are identifiable because the words seem to have some linking threads, such that they could constitute loose hyponyms. We find that, in both corpora, there are, for instance, words referring to humanity, divinity, themes, proper names, action-target words/tools, and words of reference (pronouns). However, this categorization is not water-tight as an item can fit into more than one category. The semantic structure of the sermon words is tabulated and shown graphically in Table 3 and Figure 1 below.

Table 3. Semantic relations of words in the sermons

<b>SUPERORDINATE TERM</b>	<b>HYPONYMS – CORPUS 1</b>	<b>HYPONYMS – CORPUS 2</b>
HUMANITY	life, people, you, living, Christians.	husband, wife, son, woman, friends, hearts, we, our.
DIVINITY/ SPIRITUAL	God, word, Ghost, Devil, Supernatural, anointing, Bible, tongues, Hallelujah, watchman, presence	Christ, Lord, sin, Satan, soul, Saviour, reverence
THEMES	prosperity, healing, poverty, victory, wealth, promotion, challenges	authority, submission, obedience, rebellion, regeneration, repentance, justification, sin-wrath, atonement, compassion, harmony
TOOLS/TARGET ACTION	wisdom, seed, praying, confession, anointing, tongues, word.	amour, obedience, submission, reverence.
PROPER NAMES	God, Devil, pastor, priest, Bible, Christians	Christ, Satan, Lord, bishop
REFERENCE WORDS	you, your	we, our

Obviously, this table presents the discourse structure of sermons as a special type of communicative event whose aim is to establish a symbiotic relationship between God – the maker of mankind – and man. The sermon-giver's extended aim is to portray God as the solution to man's problems. Therefore, the sermons are structured to achieve this: the preacher addresses man, discusses his needs/problems by presenting them as sermon themes, then he situates God as the solution, and points man towards the actions to be taken to get God's attention. Every sermon seems to have this circular structure: Humanity → Theme → Divinity → Action. Then, as is common in most communications, proper names and reference words are used as discourse devices. Below is a graphical representation of these semantic relationships.

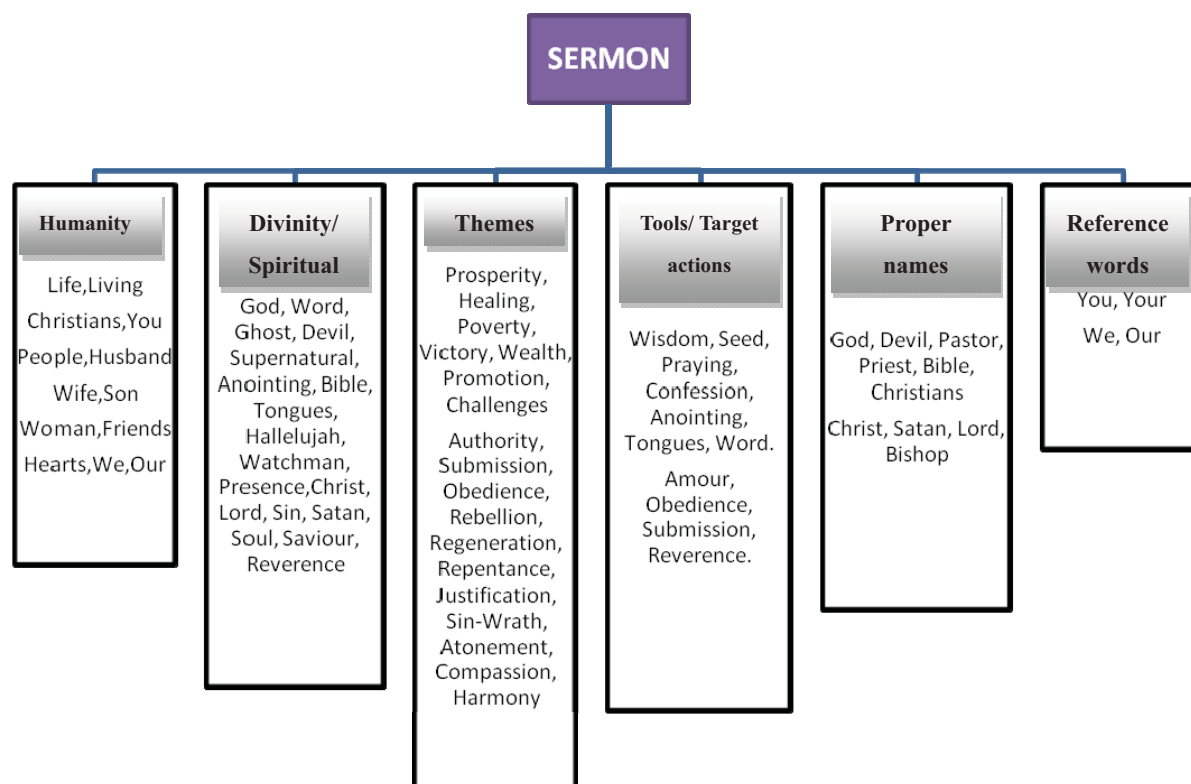


Figure 1. Semantic groupings of sermon keywords

Although all the words in the six fields identified above together present the lexis of sermons, it is useful to investigate why some of them deserve greater mention in one context more than another. Why, for instance, do we have ‘living’ as an item of humanity in corpus 1 and ‘heart’ as an item of humanity in corpus 2? Or why do we have ‘praying’ as a target action in corpus 1 and submission in corpus 2? Are these merely stylistic choices or does their use transcend style? The answers are found when we closely examine the themes’ fields which indicate the foci of the sermons. We find that, aside from a determination of what the texts are about, the thematic keywords also co-select other keywords to expatiate their topics. For example, in corpus 1, we see that the focus of the sermons is the quality of people’s lives; for this reason, such words as prosperity, poverty, healing, victory, wealth and challenges make up the list of themes. The aim of the sermonist in such cases is to point the people towards how to overcome or handle those issues of life. Therefore, in the humanity list, as expected, we see such keywords as you, people, life and living; and in the target action group, there are words which suggest how to obtain the desired change, e.g. through the Word, praying, confession, seed and the like. The same pattern is visible in the keywords found in corpus 2. The point is that the choices of these words are not random but are rather organized around the sermons’ themes. So the textual salience of a word is definitely a function of its frequency.

And the role of context in word frequency seems to depend on thematic relevance, such that sermonists in Nigeria emphasize issues of concern to society, while those elsewhere base their sermons on areas of need in society. Little wonder then that there is great diversity in the thematic preoccupations in the sermons analysed. In corpus 1, for example, topping the themes list are issues of living conditions, while in corpus 2 issues of family are given priority to mirror the needs of society. This confirms that sermons are organs of education, whether social or moral. It is important to point out that some lexical choices revealed stylistic appropriacy over and beyond thematic considerations; the use of devil (corpus 1) as opposed to Satan (corpus 2) and the use of God (corpus 1) instead of Lord (corpus 2) are examples.

Before concluding this treatise, it is worth highlighting the implications of variations in reference-making in both corpora. In both corpora, the pronouns ‘you’, ‘your’, ‘we’ and ‘our’, were not only found to be overused, but greatly so. In each corpus, these reference words emerge as the first two most significant words: ‘you’ and ‘your’ in corpus 1 and ‘we’ and ‘our’ in corpus 2. With frequency and keyness values of fq.1840/k.1677, fq.980/k.1648, fq.8972/k.767 and fq.4889/k.358, respectively, each occupies the most salient position in each corpus. But what

is the significance of their unusually high frequencies, given that they are not noun words and, as such, cannot bear thematic relevance? Clearly, their importance stems from the fact that they embody the discourse structure of sermons. Whereas, in the Nigerian sermons, there is a gap between the sermon-giver who occupies the position of knower and sees his audience as non-knowers and, as such, sermons in the context are characterized by density of information and instruction, in the non-Nigerian sermons, the sermon-giver does not put any distance between himself and his audience, rather he identifies with them by use of the inclusive 'we' and 'our'; hence sermons in the context are less dense.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

Sermons are a special discourse event, having their own lexis and discourse structure. As such, for effectiveness of communication, communicants must necessarily adopt certain lexis and follow its pattern of discourse for a specific purpose to be achieved. As the study demonstrates, the type and usage of words in sermons are indexical of their contexts, since each context selects its lexis in accordance with the needs of the discourse community. And this, in turn, is determined by the unusually high frequencies of words in context. As Alderson (2007) affirms, knowledge of words and their meanings is a crucial component of language proficiency, both for first language acquisition and for second and foreign language learning; and word frequency is a crucial variable in text comprehension. Thus, it is clear that high-frequency words in sermons, as in other texts, need to be identified to help comprehend sermon texts in their various contexts.

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# Estimating the Effectiveness and Feasibility of a Game-based Project for Early Foreign Language Learning

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## Abstract

This paper outlines the rationale for and the purpose of designing and implementing a project aiming to make very young EFL learners develop their language skills through their involvement in interactive psychomotor activities. The project, which is a part of a broader longitudinal project having introduced EFL in the first primary school grade, was implemented in two 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Greek classrooms with a total of 44 seven year old children. Multisensory teaching was followed through the use of a combination of activities: classroom creative activities included memory and word games, drawings, constructions, role-play games, pantomime as well as songs. In the gym, children participated in physical activities such as races, chases and hopscotch as well as dance and music activities, with the aim to improve their oral communicative skills and creativity. In order to examine the effectiveness and feasibility of the project, an evaluation study was conducted by using a pre- and post- language test and journals kept by the teachers. It was evident that the project had a positive effect on developing very young learners' language skills, and on enhancing their motivation to participate in psychomotor activities.

**Keywords:** English language, physical activities, early EFL learning

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Foreign Language Learning from a Very Early Age*

The policy of early introduction of foreign languages (FLs) in primary education has been established in Europe over the last two decades. Documentation of the European Commission records the teaching of modern languages to young learners and recommends foreign language (FL) teaching to be provided at the first primary school grades or even from kindergarten in order to allow for foreign languages to be developed at the secondary school level (Commission of the European Communities, 1995). Learning languages contributes to the development of students' multilingual and multicultural awareness (Griva & Chostelidou, 2011), which enables them to communicate across countries, helps them acquire a wider sense of active citizenship in modern multilingual societies as well as to the development of lifelong positive attitudes to other languages and develop an understanding of their rights and responsibilities as mobile citizens across European countries (Griva, Chostelidou & Tsakiridou, 2011). Due to the fact that the Council of Europe language policy documents recommend two foreign languages with the aim to allow students to study another language along with English, some early programs have been conducted in a number of languages (Euridyce, 2005). However, the proportion of English compared to other languages has been dynamically dominant worldwide. In many instances, the first foreign language – which is English – is compulsory, and the second one is optional. It is note worthy that in some countries the first foreign language is compulsory from the first grade of primary school or even from pre-school, for example in Luxemburg, Malta, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain and Austria.

A number of studies, which focus on international comparisons of early FL programs designed for young learners (Edelenbos et al, 2006; Nikolov & Curtain, 2000), revealed important issues in relation to the beneficial aspects of early language instruction practices all over the world. In most studies, experimental programs have produced effective results (e.g. Griva & Sivropoulou, 2009; Griva, Semoglou & Geladari, 2010; Moon & Nikolov, 2000). Students' personal characteristics such as age, motivation, affective factors (Bongaerts, 1999; Singleton, 1989), learning context as well as certain teaching methods and techniques (Ioup, 1995) have proved to have an important impact on language learning. However, the age at which a child should be initially exposed to a second/foreign language has been one of the issues most researched (Singleton, 2003).

Recent researchers have indicated that the earlier a child is exposed to a second language, in an environment rich in language input and interaction, the better the outcome can be (e.g. Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Flege, 1999). It has been showed that there is a maturational limit around puberty; beyond this limit, more effort is required for learning a second language (Scovel, 2000). It should be noted that children who are adequately exposed to two languages at an early age experience certain gains compared to monolingual ones, such as communicative flexibility, creativity and high levels of cognitive ability (Curtain & Pesola, 1988). There is a body of research which revealed various positive advantages of very young FL learners, such as better pronunciation and language performance, as well as school attainment (Krashen & Terrell 1983; Singleton, 1989). They can also have advantages with respect to their academic achievement, and the development of positive attitudes towards the target language and culture (Dominguez & Pessoa, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Lightbown & Spada, 2008).

In addition, very young learners have been recorded to present more positive attitudes towards learning foreign languages and be more motivated due to their general positive attitude towards learning and their curiosity, openness and enthusiasm to new experience (Cameron, 2001; Donato et al, 2000; Hurrell & Satchwell, 1996; Nikolov, 1999; Pinter, 2006). Nevertheless, according to other studies, older learners are thought to be better in some other language areas, such as the use of grammar and metacognitive skills (see Van Patten, 2003).

### *1.2 Early Foreign Language Teaching in a Game Based Context*

An early start does not itself guarantee effectiveness, unless certain teaching conditions are created and proper teaching techniques are employed (Blondin et al, 1998). Since learning is perceived as a cognitive, psycho-dynamic and social process (Illeris, 2002), children should be encouraged to learn through collaborative groups that allow for interaction and active engagement. Young children are not aware of the need for learning a FL, however they are more open towards learning languages than adolescents (Brown, 2000). Therefore, the need to communicate in a FL can be created through participation in games and physical activities. It has been revealed that they learn languages more quickly and with less effort and they learn a FL best in a low-anxiety environment. Thus, a meaningful and playful context is necessary for effective language learning, where children can involve many senses.

Thus, a task-based approach should be adopted, where children can learn the target language by interacting communicatively and purposefully, while getting engaged in child oriented tasks. Current studies on language learning follows the premise that children learn best through discovery and experimentation, as well as when they are enjoying themselves (Scott & Ytreberg, 1994). Activities and tasks should create conditions for exploitation from the part of the children, teacher- student interaction and provision of comprehensible input and processes for engaging that input (Candlin, 2009). Authentic input can provide for the type of environment that is conducive to learning; games, stories and drama tend to be attractive activities for children to participate in without feeling much stress, while being engaged in a natural environment (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). Children's language acquisition should be a natural process related to all aspects of children's lives (Sawyer & Sawyer, 1993), since children at this age like routines, familiar situations, repeating rhymes and songs. For this purpose, the selected tasks should be meaningful and help children to make sense of new experiences and construct new input by relating them to what they already know. In addition, children need to get involved in contextualized and comprehensible language experience and acquire deep and multidimensional processing of the target language (Krashen, 1999; Masuhara, 2005; Tomlinson, 2000).

It is widely accepted that interactivity, fantasy, curiosity, challenge and risk are the basic aspects of the physical activities and games. In this vein, learning through playing is the best way to learn a language because it creates emotional attachments and it focuses on children's participation and enjoyment in a non-threatening and relaxed situation (Dryden & Vos, 1997). Physical games are highly motivating, entertaining and give shy learners an extra opportunity to express themselves (Tuan, Luu Trong & Nguyen Thi Minh Doan, 2010). Play can a) give children an opportunity for listening and speaking in a meaningful and challenging context (Wright et al, 1984), particularly children with limited language repertoires, by encouraging them to use non verbal communication (Desiatova, 2009). b) stimulate children to listen to game instructions and rules and interact with other peers in a pleasurable low risk context (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). Furthermore, role play games are activities that provide children with opportunities to practice various language aspects assuming a role, which they may encounter outside the language classroom and draw on whatever resources are available to them (Aldavero, 2008; Livingstone, 1983).

Teaching very young learners should also be supported by using pictures and sounds, as well as rhythm and movement in a relaxed, challenging and multi-sensory context, where children are exposed to a rich, meaningful, and comprehensible input (Dryden & Vos, 1997; Krashen, 1999; Pavlenko, 2005). The children at this age learn

better when they feel secure and relaxed, since they need to be engaged both affectively and cognitively in the language experience (Arnold, 1999; Masuhara, 2005; Tomlinson, 2000).

## **2. Implementation of EFL Learning Project Based on Physical Activities**

### *2.1 Objectives of the Project*

The potential for foreign language learning through physical activities has not thoroughly been explored by researchers or practitioners in the Greek educational system. Having considered the body of research data on the benefits of early FL learning and the advantages of physical games on children's cognitive, linguistic and affective development, a project was designed and implemented with the aim to develop very young children's EFL (English as a Foreign Language) skills through their involvement in interactive physical activities. The main objectives of the project were the following: a) developing children's basic communicative/oral skills in English language; b) enhancing their involvement in learning through their senses by making provision for multi sensory learning.

### *2.2 Rationale and Design of the Project*

The project was implemented in two 2nd grade classrooms of a Greek experimental primary school. Twenty two (22) students (mean age=7.41 y.o) were assigned to the experimental group and twenty two 22 students (mean age=7.56 y.o) to the control group. Both groups were randomly selected and taught English three hours per week, for a period of sixteen weeks. Common topics related to children's everyday routine were used both in the experimental and control class. However, different approaches were employed and implemented in diverse teaching contexts: the control group were taught English in the convention PPP (Presentation- Practice- Production) context.

On the other hand, the experimental group received English language teaching in a playful context through children's participating in physical activities. Activities were performed in the classroom (one hour per week) and in the school gym (two hours per week). An attempt was made to allow children experience EFL through a variety of physical activities and games in a relaxed and interesting atmosphere, which motivates them to interact with their peers (Paz, 1997). The activities were designed taking into account: a) children's interests, cognitive skills and prior knowledge. b) certain criteria for "good" language learning tasks, such as drawing objectives from learners' communicative needs, allowing for different solutions depending on learners' skills, involving learners' contribution and affect, being challenging but not threatening, involving language use in the 'solution' of a 'problem', providing opportunities for language practice (Candlin, 2009). This EFL game-based project considered the specific characteristics and needs of the target group at cognitive, psychomotor and social level. It also took into consideration the fact that children could develop their language skills through exercising motor skills in a 'non-threatening' environment that lowers affective filter, and makes them feel motivated, secure and successful (Brown, 2000). A wide variety of print and other symbolic forms were employed in order to increase the amount of labelling in the environment; the use of flashcards, pictures and objects were adopted by the teachers to support explanations and describe games, events and actions. It is believed that when children are exposed in such a context, they respond both physically and verbally in a meaningful learning context. In some cases, demonstrations were used to help children understand the game and follow its rules.

Physical activities and role play games can contribute to children's psychomotor development, foster cooperation and problem solving as well as contribute to creative thinking. Through the specific programme an attempt was made to help children build on their own creativity and enthusiasm in order to develop a positive attitude towards physical activity and learning a second language. Moreover, since learning is holistic and related to particular experiences in children's lives, the project aimed at offering them relevant learning experiences in a communicative context with topics and language functions being related to their everyday lives and routines.

## **3. Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Feasibility of the Game-based Project**

In order to examine the effectiveness and feasibility of the project and its impact on children's oral skills development, an evaluation study was designed and conducted with the purpose to answer the following questions:

- a. Could children's listening and speaking skills be developed in a game-based supportive classroom environment?
- b. What was the instructional context and what was children's participation in physical activities and role play games?

### *3.1 Instruments*

A combination of the following quantitative and qualitative methods was employed for the evaluation of the

project:

1) pre- and post-test measurements of foreign language achievement, which used the same components, were administered to the children individually. The measurements referred to the same skills, so that we could have the best possible information about the influence and the effectiveness of the project. The pre-test was administered after the completion of the first, 'warm-up', phase to determine children's oral language skills before the basic intervention; the post-test was administered after the intervention had terminated.

The component parts of the test were the following:

(a) *Word production*. The children were presented with a poster, including various events; then, they were encouraged to recall and pronounce as many words included in the poster, as possible.

(b) *Understanding simple events and pointing them to the poster*. This part of the test consisted of ten (10) items including the description of simple events. While the researcher described some simple events, the children had to locate these events in the poster. Two (2) points were scored to the children being able to locate an event by themselves, one (1) point was scored to the children being able to locate an event with the researcher's help and zero (0) when they couldn't locate an event.

(c) *Producing a word within a sentential context*. This part of the test included five items; the score of each item ranged from zero to two points, as in part (b). The researcher initiated a simple phrase, by pointing to a certain place in the poster, and the children had to complete the phrase by using the correct target word or phrase.

(d) *Understanding language functions and performing*. This part of the test consisted of ten items; the score of each item ranged from zero to two points, as in parts (b) and (c). The researcher gave children directions to perform certain movements (e.g., 'jump', 'run', 'go to ...', 'come here') and the children had to carry out these actions.

2) Journals were kept by the teachers once a week in order to reflect on learning and teaching issues in relation to the game-based context. Writing about teaching in a journal can help them organize thoughts into more systematic reflections on their work (see Farrell, 2004). When used by teachers/researchers as a means for data collection, journals allow them to come closer and critically investigate their work (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). According to some other researchers (Holly, 1989; Mackey & Gass, 2005) journals have been proved to be a flexible tool for documenting classroom events and teaching episodes and self-evaluation.

The 'reflective journal' was used in the present study as an instrument of 'on-going' evaluation of the feasibility and effectiveness of the EFL game-based project. It was designed and applied with the purpose to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation and monitoring of the project, since it was regarded as a means of generating questions about teaching and learning processes during the project. Thus, the focus was not only on reporting data of the intervention process, but on reflecting on students' behavior, motivation and stances developed throughout the implementation of the project.

A total of sixteen (16) journal entries, based on a list of reflection questions, were kept by the teachers during the project. The structure of the journal was based on the "reflection questions to guide journal entries" provided by Richards and Lockhart (1994). The following reflective processes have an important role to play: a) describing events and procedures, b) articulating and rationalizing concerns, c) exploring solutions, d) deciding on actions and e) describing and evaluating progress.

The questions included in the journal were divided into two main axes a) questions related to teacher including lesson planning, techniques and materials used, problems encountered and suggestions for possible changes. b) questions related to children's behavior during the project.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Results of the Pre and Post-test Measurements

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS (ver. 18.0). Reliability analysis was performed with Cronbach's  $\alpha=0,7496$ . The dependent variables were tested for normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and were found to be normally distributed ( $p>.05$ ). A 2X2 repeated measures ANOVA with factor 'time' (pre – post) and factor 'group' (control – experimental) was performed for each of four dependent variables a) Word Production, b) Understanding Simple Events and Pointing to the Right Place in the Poster, c) Producing a Word within a Sentential Context and d) Understanding language Functions and Perform.

The mean scores of children's performance in the pre and post test measurements suggested a strong effect of a) the game-based intervention on the experimental group and b) the PPP intervention on the control group, since both groups considerable progress and performed significantly better in the post test in every variable. However,



it was revealed that the children of the experimental group scored higher than those of the control group (Table 1).

Table 1. Mean scores (and standard deviations) of children's performance in the pre- and post-test measurements

group	pre – test		post – test	
	experimental	control	experimental	control
	11.05	10.68	23.95	21.86
<i>Word Production</i>	(6.08)	(5.19)	(6.15)	(7.02)
<i>Understanding Simple Events and Pointing to the Right Place</i>	9.09	9.41	13.55	12.77
	(3.07)	(3.66)	(3.20)	(3.75)
<i>Producing a Word within a Sentential Context</i>	1.32	1.32	4.09	4.04
	(1.56)	(1.70)	(1.95)	(1.91)
<i>Understand language Functions and Perform</i>	3.18	2.91	7.54	6.09
	(2.36)	(2.02)	(1.84)	(2.72)

a) *Word Production*: The analysis indicated that there was a significant main effect for factor 'time' [ $F(1,42)=160,645$ ,  $p<.005$ ]. However, there was no significant interaction between the two factors ('time' – 'group'). More specifically, the mean score in the pre-test was 11.05 words ( $sd=6.08$ ) for the experimental group and 10.68 ( $sd=5.19$ ) for the control group. In the post-test, the mean score of the words pronounced correctly by the children of the experimental group was 23.95 ( $sd=6.15$ ) and 21.86 for the children of the control group ( $sd=7.02$ ) (Figure 1).

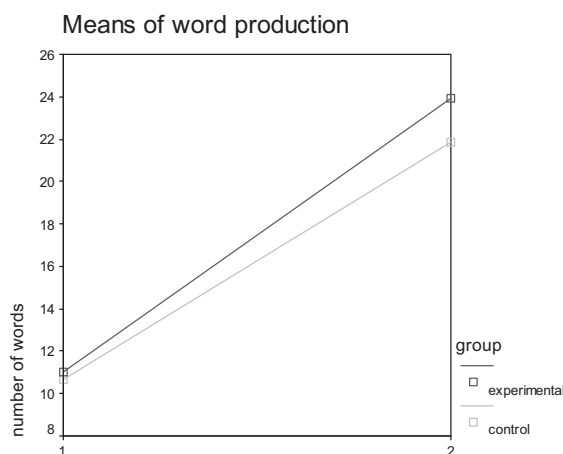


Figure 1. The mean scores of word production in the first part of pre- and post-test

b) *Understanding Simple Events and Pointing to the Right Place in the Poster*. The results of the ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for factor 'time' [ $F(1,42)=336.182$ ,  $p<.005$ ], and no significant interaction between the two factors. The total effect of the intervention on children's performance was obvious, as during the pre-test none of the children could locate all the events in the poster by themselves. On the contrary, during the post-test the majority of the children were able to locate the events in the poster by themselves (74%) or with the researcher's help (26%). The mean score for the children of the experimental group was 9.09 ( $sd=3.07$ ) in the pre test and 13.55 ( $sd=3.20$ ) in the post test. Also, the children of control group scored statistically better in the post test ( $m=12.77$ ,  $sd=3.75$ ) than in the pre-test ( $m=9.41$ ,  $sd=3.66$ ) (Figure 2).

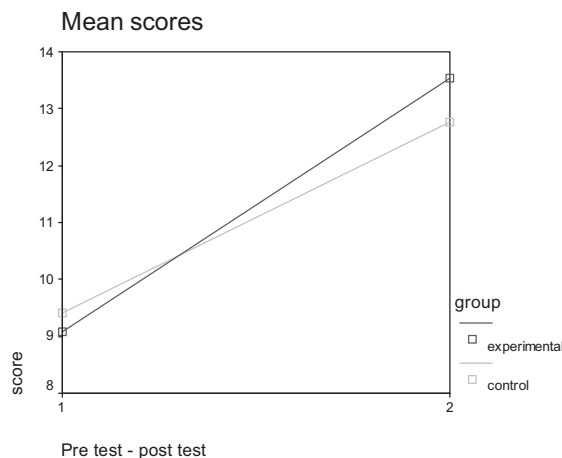


Figure 2. The mean scores of the second part of pre- and post-test

c) *Producing a Word within a Sentential Context*. In this part of the test the researcher initiated a simple phrase, by pointing to a certain place in the poster, and the children had to complete the phrase by using the correct target word or phrase. The results of the ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for factor ‘time’ [ $F(1,42)=137.500$ ,  $p<.005$ ], and no significant interaction between the two factors. The mean score for the children of the experimental group was 1.32 ( $sd=1.56$ ) in the pre test and 4.09 ( $sd=1.95$ ) in the post test. Also, the children of control group scored statistically better in the post test ( $m=4.04$ ,  $sd=1.91$ ) than in the pre-test ( $m=1.32$ ,  $sd=1.70$ ) (Figure 3). More precisely, during the pre-test only 15 children (34.1%) of both groups were able to continue more than one of phrases by using the correct word and pointing to the right place of the poster. On the contrary, the results of the post-test indicated that all children of both groups were able to complete most of the phrases by using the correct target word or phrase. It is note worthy that although 10 children (22.7%) scored zero in the pre-test, they responded correctly in the post-test.

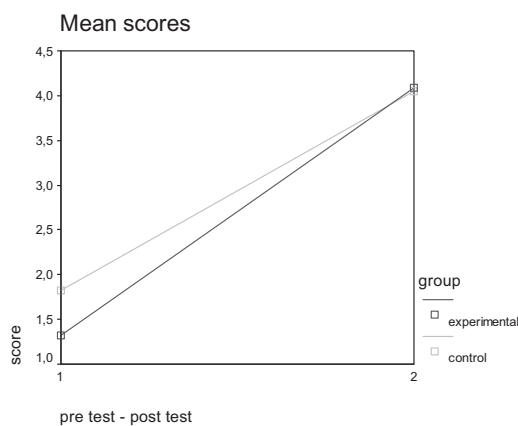


Figure 3. The mean scores of the third part of pre- and post-test

d) *Understanding language Functions and Performing*. The ANOVA analysis for this variable indicated a significant main effect for factor ‘time’ [ $F(1,42)=313.136$ ,  $p<.005$ ], and no significant interaction between the two factors. The mean score for the children of the experimental group was 3.18 ( $sd=2.36$ ) in the pre test, and 2.91 ( $sd=2.02$ ) in the post test. Also the children of the control group scored statistically better in the post test ( $m=7.54$ ,  $sd=1.84$ ) than in the pre-test ( $m=6.09$ ,  $sd=2.72$ ) (Figure 4). It is worth mentioning that 7 (15.9%) of the total number of the children answered incorrectly in the pre-test when the researcher gave them directions to perform certain movements (e.g., ‘jump’, ‘run’, ‘go to ...’, ‘come here’). Furthermore, 28 (63.6%) children of both groups answered correctly after the researcher’s help. On the other hand, only one child from the control group (2.3%) responded incorrectly in every item in the post-test, while all the children from the experimental group were able to perform correctly all movements by themselves or with the researcher’s help.

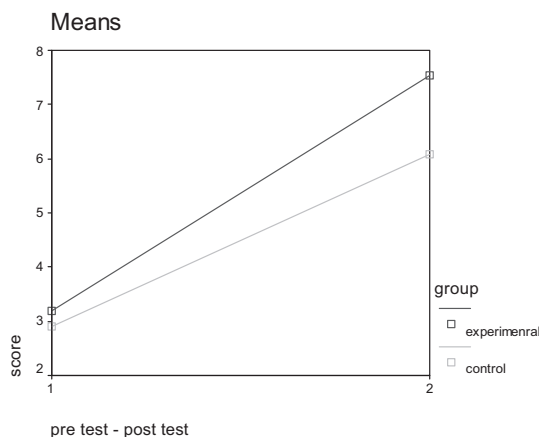


Figure 4. The mean scores of the fourth part of pre- and post-test

4.2 Results of Journals

Concerning the analysis of the journals, basic typologies emerged, so as to classify similar categories and subcategories, giving further meanings and understanding of the content of the field notes (Bailey, 1994).

From the analysis of the extracts, four basic typologies emerged so as to classify similar categories and sub-categories: a) teaching procedure, b) teacher’s role, c) student’s behavior and d) problems encountered. The classification scheme used in this research depended upon what the researchers thought it was meaningful in the setting (Bailey 1994) (Table 2).

Table 2. Typologies, categories and subcategories of Journal entries

Categories	Subcategories	
<b>Teaching procedure</b>	1. <i>Techniques</i>	A. Physical activities B. Question and answer technique C. Dramatization-role play D. Games E. Multisensory learning
	2. <i>Materials and aids</i>	A. Flashcards and posters B. Realia C. Constructions, puzzles and Drawings D. Computer
	3. <i>Communication</i>	A. Use of target language B. Use of mother tongue C. Non-verbal communication D. Interaction within group E. Interaction between groups F. Teacher-student interaction
	4. <i>Forms of work</i>	A. Teacher-classroom B. Pair work C. Group work D. Movement and play
	5. <i>Learning Outcome</i>	A. Understanding rules B. Enjoyment and amusement C. Learning new words while playing D. Recalling and use of new words/phrases E. Verbal-nonverbal communication F. Spontaneous language experience G. Creativity

<b>Teacher's Role</b>	1. <i>Encouragement</i>	A. Encouraging children to use their full potential B. Encouraging children to get involved in role play C. Encouraging children to participate in motor activities D. Encouraging interaction E. Encouraging creativity
	2. <i>Prompting/ reinforcement</i>	A. Challenging them to participate actively B. Challenging them to communicate in the target language C. Reinforcing them to participate in dramatization D. Reinforcing them to take risks E. Children's drawings F. Stimulate children's affective and cognitive engagement
	3. <i>Guidance</i>	A. Clear directions B. Guiding them to practice certain words/phrases C. Guiding them to work in groups D. Guiding them to cooperate with peers E. Supportive, non threatening environment
<b>Children's Behaviour</b>	1. <i>Interest</i>	A. Interaction within group B. Interaction in role play C. Showing commitment D. Interest in movement activities
	2. <i>Participation</i>	A. Spontaneous participation in interactive activities B. Spontaneous participation in movement activities C. Spontaneous participation in dramatization D. Helping each other during constructions E. Participation in card games
	3. <i>Positive attitudes</i>	A. Active role B. Participation and cooperation C. Reduction of anxiety D. General enthusiasm and excitement E. Enjoying physical activities F. Enjoying dramatizing
<b>Problems encountered</b>	1. <i>Teacher</i>	A. Classroom management B. Teacher's anxiety C. Time management D. Need for substitution of certain activities
	3. <i>Student</i>	A. Difficulties in understanding new rules B. Difficulties in recalling and using words/phrases C. Difficulties in understanding new vocabulary D. Overreliance on gestures

#### 4.2.1 Teaching Procedure

Multisensory learning was attempted in a supportive classroom context, where a variety of physical activities, question and answer technique, role play games, constructions and drawings were included. The children were offered the opportunity to familiarize themselves and work with a great variety of materials such as pictures, realia, drawings, photocopied pictures, puzzles, either individually or by the whole class.

In the first stage of every teaching session, the teacher worked with the whole class, pointing at the words written under the flashcards to integrate reading and help students "*understand conventions of written language*". Moreover, through the use of 'question and answer' technique children were offered the opportunity to practice a certain range of vocabulary, as well as wh-questions and answer patterns. By pantomiming words or phrases, the teacher tried to familiarize students with the meaning of the words they were going to use in various physical activities. In the main stage of the teaching session, physical activities were the basic technique performed in a natural, non-threatening environment where the children experienced FL spontaneously.

The target language was mostly used by the teacher in order to provide children with ample opportunities for practice. Furthermore, non-verbal communication was used as a means of facilitating understanding of difficult parts of the game/physical activity. As far as the use of mother tongue is concerned, it was recorded to be the main form of communication among children, during group and pair work, acting as a mediation activity that helped them to clarify any difficult parts of the games.

#### 4.2.2 Teacher's Role

During the implementation of the project, the teacher assumed a flexible and encouraging role by acting as a coordinator *'trying to provide specific instructions regarding the procedure students should follow'*, and helping students understand the purpose of the activities. Children were constantly encouraged to participate and ask questions, while emphasis was placed on the creation of a supportive and interactive environment.

In a prompting and playful classroom environment, the children were encouraged to use their full potential while working in pairs and groups, play with words and communicate in simple phrases and words. It was also recorded that flashcards, posters, puzzles and constructions were used in every session, offering children the chance to deal with concepts by exploring and working with a variety of materials. During this process, the teacher circulated among groups, asked them questions and encouraged them to give an answer. There was a remarkable attempt to a) motivate children to cooperate, b) practice certain words or phrases and c) make them be zealous for performing a game or a group activity. In the course of the project, it was recorded that teacher's guidance was on gradual 'decrease', since the children were more flexible, communicative and willing to participate.

At the end of each teaching session, certain suggestions on the improvement of the teaching procedure were made. Emphasis was placed on teacher's flexible role in order to foresee *'unpredictable situations'* or improve the management of the activities designed. Moreover, the modification of the 5<sup>th</sup> lesson plan was suggested so as to *'follow students' linguistic level'*, while a change in the lesson plan of the 9<sup>th</sup> lesson was considered to be necessary. Finally, suggestions were made regarding classroom management, which were proven to be valuable and allowed teacher to understand and prevent problems and reflect on her role.

#### 4.2.3 Students' Behavior

The children were particularly interested in participating in most activities and managed to overcome anxiety problems, since the degree of communication among them was considered to be satisfying mainly because of the content and topics of the activities. In the course of the intervention, the children showed interest in activities related with exploring and working with familiar classroom equipment and materials, flashcards and puzzles in a variety of ways in order to develop concepts and to learn certain vocabulary. Creative 'word' play was promoted and, as the sessions proceeded, children experienced growth in pronouncing words and understanding word meanings. Concerning their attitude towards activities, they exhibited excitement when gathering to enact a role play activity or to participate in a physical activity. It was evident that the children rarely lost focus or interest in these activities and they greatly enjoyed the hands-on and movement activities. Role play activities provided motivation in language learning and permitted shy children to overcome their inhibition in situations which were not 'threatening' (Table 2).

In relation to verbal communication, the children listened to the teacher, with increasing attention, they understood simple oral phrases and enjoyed listening to and responding to the other peers. They were able to comprehend certain phrases and responded in single words or brief phrases to some questions, especially 'what' and 'where' questions. In addition, they used simple phrases to play and pretend, with increasing ease, during games. A steady increase in understanding, producing and communicating in the target language was recorded.

#### 4.2.4 Problems Encountered

However, in the course of the intervention both the teacher and the children experienced some problems and encountered some difficulties. Regarding the teacher, she faced some problems related to classroom management, time management and redesign of some activities. Concerning the children, they encountered problems in understanding and using new words, in understanding the rules and answering questions about the content of the story. Participation was reported to be low during the first teaching session and there was a problem in understanding the fifth lesson, as *'it was too difficult for their level, including much information'*.

In addition, some children experienced certain oral language difficulties: they encountered more difficulties in recalling and using the right word in order to produce spoken language rather than comprehension problems. That is, they encountered problems with producing language in social contexts rather than understanding. In some cases, overreliance on gestures to communicate was observed and recorded because of the inadequacy in using specific vocabulary. It is worth mentioning that three children faced difficulties in interactive play with some peers.

### 5. Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to present a game-based framework of teaching EFL, which was designed to meet the needs of a specific group of seven year old Greek students. Drawing from the findings of the study, it could be concluded that the project proved to be effective for the enhancement of young children's oral skills in the

target language. The activities proved to be an appealing teaching 'tool' which promotes cooperation, collaboration, and contributed to the development of FL skills, as well as emotional and social skills. They provided children with a rich experience of language in use through their having to listen to instructions and rules of the games and interacting with their classmates. It was revealed that both 'in' and 'out' of the classroom games created a non-threatening and interactive environment and encouraged active participation; these findings are in vein with a number of other studies reported in the literature (Deesri, 2002; Gaudart 1999; Shie, 2003).

Specifically, in relation to the pre and post test measurements, the mean scores of children's performance suggested a strong effect of the game-based intervention on the experimental group, since the children showed considerable progress and performed significantly better in the post test in every variable. In addition, it was revealed that the children of the experimental group scored higher than those of the control group.

Based on the experimental students' responses to the questionnaire, enthusiasm and interest in communicating in EFL through their participation in interactive and movement activities were recorded. Also, their eagerness to participate in such a project was showed and their willingness to be taught the target language in a game-based context was expressed. Comparably, findings from the journals indicated that almost all children responded positively and got involved actively in all stages of the intervention sessions. In a context with three basic characteristics - physical movement, simulation and creativity- FL learning was an active and spontaneous experience, where children showed a tendency to play with and practice target language elements. It was recorded that the emphasis on holistic learning and multi-sensory inputs fostered and sustained children's motivation. They were encouraged to listen carefully, understand simple instructions, play games in a stimulating context, take part in a short conversations using familiar language, integrate verbal and non verbal aspects of communication and have some understanding of how language works. In such a context, the focus was on children's developing receptive and productive skills, rather than focusing on learning particular words or phases in the target language.

## 6. Conclusion

The project had a positive effect on classroom dynamics, thus facilitating cooperation within and between groups, where students had the opportunity to use language to express various emotions, to solve problems, to make decisions and to socialize (Blatner, 2009). Through playing with peers, children learned to share, cooperate, and control aggression by helping each other to problem solving. Communication among young learners was fostered and a variety of opportunities was provided to children to use the target language in 'real' situations. More precisely, participating in physical activities and role play games provided a real reason for children to use the target language, since they were engaged in the pragmatic and functional use of FL for meaningful communicative purposes. Children were encouraged to practice the realistic use of language to communicate in a more relaxed, contextualized and creative framework. It is also worth mentioning that, since physical games did not require only a verbal response, the children with limited language, as well as the shy and less confident children, were encouraged to participate, express themselves and communicate, even using non verbal communication (body movement and facial expression) (Desiatova, 2009).

This game-based project was revealed to be workable to the specific group of very young learners. The overall positive effects of the use of physical activities and role play games in EFL could have implications for teachers and curricula designers. As the sample size of the present intervention was small, it should be replicated with a larger sample size, to a greater number of primary school classrooms, and also with young learners of different demographic characteristics in order to increase the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, in order to achieve highly valued advantages of an early start in EFL learning there is the need to create a supportive environment and establish continuity from one year to the other. For this reason, an extension of the programme with the same children in the second grade would guarantee continuity and lead to gaining a more complete picture of the effectiveness of the game-based project.

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# The Effect of Instruction Based on Multiple Intelligences Theory on the Attitude and Learning of General English

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## Abstract

The purpose of the present study is investigating the effect of instruction based on Multiple intelligence (MI) theory on attitude and learning of General English course among students of Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah Branch in the second semester of educational year of 2010-2011. 61 male and female students in two different classes participated in the present study that were assigned to experimental (32 students) and control (29 students) groups based on random cluster sampling. A quasi experimental method of research with a pre- and post test was used. The experimental group was taught according to the theory of MI and the control group was instructed based on the traditional method of teaching General English in eight weeks time. In order to determine the effect of MI-based instruction compared with traditional method, a researcher constructed test including 30 items were utilized. In order to assess the attitude of the learners toward English, a 15 items scale of attitude toward English Language was also employed. For analyzing data we used ANCOVA and independent sample t-test. The results of the study indicated that there was a significant difference between improving in General English course between experimental and control groups. In other words, students taught based on MI theory exceeded the traditionally instructed students both in general and in each sub-skill of learning English (vocabulary, reading comprehension, and structure). The results also indicated that attitude of students towards learning English in experimental group improved significantly.

**Keywords:** multiple intelligence-based instruction, attitude towards English, improvement in learning English

## 1. Introduction

The theory of Multiple intelligence was proposed by Howard Gardner in 1980's. This theory has important implications for teaching in general and for language learning in particular. (Armstrong 2007; Azar 2006; Buchen 2006; Campbell & Dickinson 2004; Christian 2004; Fogarty & Stoehr 2007; Tracy & Richery 2007; Viens & Kallenback 2004; Barrington 2004; Chan 2006; Christian & Kennedy 2004; Hall 2004). Gardner defines intelligence as "the ability to process information that is activated in a cultural context for problem solving or creating products which are worthy in a culture". (Gardner 1999, p. 33)

Gardner introduces 8 distinct intelligences which include verbal linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. (Gardner 1999; Armstrong 2000; Ormrod 2006; Peariso 2008)

After the introduction of MI theory, changes have been made in curriculum and teaching methodology of schools. Many government and private institutions based their curriculum on MI theory after the publication of *Frames of Mind* by Gardner in 1983. Recently MI theory has been considered in language teaching. Language teacher started to relate MI model with learning styles and to consider the benefits of using MI theory to enhance learner's abilities individual needs. According to Snider (2001) MI theory-related materials have the strong potential to improve foreign language (FL) instruction because theory engage learner's innate abilities. (p. 6)

By applying MI theory EFL/ESL teachers can address the great diversity in learner, develop learner's intelligences and "create an individualized learning environment". (Christison, 1996. p. 10)

Richard and Rodgers (2001) define MI theory as a way that not only have been attended to in public instruction but also in teaching English and its application in teaching English is recent and new. (p. 117). Nowadays one of the problems of education is lack of interest and motivation and difficulty of students in special course including

English whose main consequence is weak educational performance in the related course.

However, many learners have difficulty in using English correction and independently in reading, writing, speaking, and meaningful communication (Bell, Ziegler, & McCallum, 2004; Curtin, 2005). Several factors can be mentioned as the reason for this lack of interest and weak performance among which, lack of cognitive approaches in teaching can be mentioned (Klinger, Artiles, and Mendez Barletla, 2006). The current strategies in teaching English are mainly on memorizing grammatical rules.

Memorizing strategy would lead to negative consequences in fluency and social skills which learners need during the process of learning English for development (Harris and Grenfell, 2004). This problem would be intensified without providing teaching strategies for language learning programs (Barrington, 2004; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Lombardi, 2008; Lujan, 2008).

MI theory can be a new and effective method for presenting different strategies of teaching and can help students achievements ameliorated. (Barrington 2004; Kornhaber, Fierros, and Veenema 2004; Cohen & Weaver 2004; Curtin 2005; Mitchel & Myles 2006; Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim 2004; Oxford & lee 2008).

While previous researches have investigated the effect of MI on learning language, more studies are needed for explaining the application of MI theory in improving language learning particularly in higher education. In spite of emphasizing language skills, examination results are indicative of decreasing language learning (Chan 2008). Detecting language learning problems need presenting solutions such as using MI theory as an instructional plan (Armstrong 2007; Fugarti & Stoehr 2007). Therefore, the present study is going to investigate the effect of such an approach on learning improvement and attitudes towards general English course. As a result, the problem is whether there is a difference between MI-based instruction and traditionally based teaching which emphasize just verbal-linguistic intelligence on learning and attitude towards English course among the students. In other to answer this problem the following question were posed.

1. Is there any difference between MI-based teaching and traditional way of instruction among students in improving structure in general English course?
2. Is there any difference between MI-based teaching and traditional way of instruction among students in improving vocabulary in general English course?
3. Is there any difference between MI-based teaching and traditional way of instruction in improving reading comprehension ability of students' in general English course?
4. Is there any difference between MI-based teaching and traditional way of teaching in students' attitude towards learning English?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Population

The population of this study are all students in Islamic Azad University of Kermanshah who had taken general English as one of the courses of that semester.

### 2.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study include 61 students. 29 students were assigned as the control group and 32 of them to experimental group according to random cluster sampling. From among the classes which had general English, two were selected to work for experimental and control groups.

### 2.3 Design

Due to the fact that in the present study the effectiveness of teaching based on MI theory on learning and attitudes towards general English compared with the traditional way of teaching English is investigated, quasi-experimental method of research was used which is considered an applied method of research. The design of the study is a two heterogeneous groups with pre and post test. In this kind of design the groups will set up in advance. The participants took part in a pre-test. (see table 1)

Table 1. Design of the study

Group	Pre-test	Experiment treatment	Post test
Experimental group	T1	X	T1
Control group	T2	-	T2

### 2.4 Instruments

The instruments for this study consisted of:

1. An achievement test of learning English: This was an achievement teacher made test which was composed of 30 items that tested structure, vocabulary and reading comprehension. Thereliability and validity of the test were measuredand validated by experts of education and psychometrics. The reliability coefficient was measured through Cronbach alpha. It was calculated to be 0.71 which is an acceptable amount.

2. An attitude test towards English course: This researcher made instrument was consisted of 15 items. Each item was answered based on the 5 level Likert scale form *completely disagrees to completely agree*. These options were scored from1-5. Content validity of this test was also approved by educational and psychometric experts. The reliability of the test was also calculated through Cronbach alpha and the amount was calculated to be .76.

### 2.5 Procedure

In order to determine the effectiveness of MI-based instruction of general English to students, two classes were chosen and randomly assigned as experimental and control groups.

As the pre-test, two teacher made tests was administered: 1. A teacher-made achievement test was used for measuring the amount of learning which had the sub-test of structure (10 items), vocabulary (10-items) and reading comprehensive (10-items) and 2. A test of attitude towards English.

The experimental group were taught by the instructor (researcher) who was familiar with the principles of MI-based teaching. The researcher had provided lesson plans related to general English prepared according to the MI principles and procedures.The control group were taught based on the traditional way of teaching English.At the end of the semester a post- test was given to both groups who had been taughtthe same contents by the same instructor.

### 2.6 Data Analysis

Some descriptive statistics, (frequencies, mean, standard deviation and standard error) and inferential statistics (analysis of variance, analysis of covariance, and independent sample t-test) were used to analyze the data gathered from pre- test and post –test of experimental and control groups in order to compare the effect of instruction based on MI with traditional way of teaching on achievement and attitude towards learning English in the sub-skill of structure,vocabulary and reading comprehension. The reason for using this test is statistical control of the first differences of participants and removing the effects of unpredictable variables in order to test experiment. The reason of using pre-test here was controlling and removing these differences.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptives in table 2 indicates that in general the scores of the experimental group in post- test are higher than the scores of the control group.As it can also be observed we see the scores of experimental group are higher in the sub-tests of vocabulary, reading comprehension and structure. (see table 2)

Table 2. Frequency, distribution, mean and standard deviation of the participants taken part in pre-test and post-test of general English in different sub-skills

Test –type	Group	No	mean	SD	Std. error
Pretest, Total	Experimental	32	6.1	2.115	0.347
	Control	20	407	2.31	0.42
Post, Total	experimental	32	11.2	4.146	0.73
	Control	20	8.5	3.64	0.67
Pretest, Vocabulary	experimental	32	5.35	2.25	039
	Control	29	3.5	2.06	0.38
Post-test, vocabulary	experimental	32	8.1	3.19	0.56
	Control	29	4.5	2.70	0.50
Pretest ;Reading Comprehension	experimental	32	2.5	1.05	0.18
	Control	29	1.90	1.19	0.22
Post-test; Reading Comprehension	experimental	32	3.37	1.25	0.22
	Control	29	1.90	1.14	0.21
Pretest ; structure	experimental	32	0.17	0.38	0.6
	Control	29	0.3	0.12	0.02
Post-test; structure	experimental	32	1.05	0.63	0.11
	Control	29	0.43	043	0.86

The results in table 3 indicates that scores of the experimental group in the attitude test are higher compared with control group. As it is seen the scores of the experimental group in the attitude test in the pre- test is 62 while in

post-test it has increased two 66.43 while in the control group this difference is from 52.03 pre-test to 52.43 in post-test. (see table 3)

Table 3. Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation of participants score in pretest and post-test of attitudes toward English

	groups	NO	Mean	SD	Std. error
pretest	experimental	32	62	2.16	12.3
	control	20	52.03	12.60	2.34
Post test	experimental	32	66.43	2.05	11.64
	control	29	52.93	13.08	2.43

### 3.2 Findings Related to Research Question

The results of table 4 show that the pre-test variable significantly correlated with the dependent variable. Therefore, for adjusting the effect of covariate variable, we used analysis of covariance, the result of which indicates that the effect of independent variable after adjusting the effect of dependent variable is significant so that the calculated  $F$  with the amount 29.23 with  $df$  of 58 and 1 is larger than the critical amount which is 8.34. As a result at the .01 level of significance it can be claimed that instruction based on Multiple intelligence theory and procedures has had a significant effect on the learning of general English among students.

Table 4. Covariance analysis for achievement in learning English for the experimental and control groups

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	
Covariates (pretest)	342.67	1	342.67	64.45	.000
Group	155.40	1	155.40	29.23	.000
Residual (Error)	308.39	58	5.32		
Total	7107.52	61			

The results of analyzed data for the sub-test of structure, vocabulary and reading comprehension are shown in tables 5, 6, and 7 respectively.

Table 5. Analysis of covariance for comparing experimental and control groups on the sub-test of structure

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Covariates (pretest)	63.81	1	63.81	170.47	.000
Group	26.83	1	26.83	71.68	.000
Error	21.709	58	.374		
Total	555.615	61			

Table 6. Analysis of covariance for comparing experimental and control groups in the sub-skill of vocabulary

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Covariates (pretest)	281.72	1	281.72	68.44	.000
Group	41.053	1	41.053	9.97	.000
Residual (Error)	238.735	58	4.12		
Total	325.625	61			

Table 7. Independent sample t-test for comparing the experimental and control groups in the sub-skill test of reading comprehension

Group	N	Mean	Std. division	Std. error	Mean difference	T	df	sig
experimental	32	.86	.72	.13				
Control	29	.41	.488	.91	.465	2.95	55	.004

Table 5 indicates that the covariate variable (pre-test) has a meaningful relationship with dependent variable. Therefore, a covariance test was used for adjusting the effect of covariate variable and as the results show the

effect of the independent variable after adjusting the effect of covariate variable is significant. As it is also seen in table 4 the amount of calculated  $F$  which is 71.68 with the df of 1 and 58 is larger than the critical amount which is 8.34. Therefore, at the .01 level of significance it can be said that teaching structure of general English to students based on Multiple intelligence theory and procedures has had a meaningful effect. The adjusted means are also observed in table 6.

The results for comparing experimental and control groups in vocabulary sub-skill test indicated in table 6 show that the effect of covariate variable is significant. As it is observed the calculated  $F$  which is 9.97 with adf of 1 and 58 is larger than the critical  $F$  which is 8.34. Therefore, it can be said that there is a significant difference between Multiple Intelligence based-teaching and traditional way of teaching at the .01 level of significance. Since the assumption of analysis of covariance is assuming the two assumptions of the homogeneity of regression curve and variances, this assumptions was not obtained. Therefore, an independent sample t-test was applied in order to compare the experimental and control groups. Table 7 indicates independent sample t-test for comparing experimental and control groups in the sub-skill test of reading comprehension.

As it can be seen in table 7, there is a significant difference in the scores of experimental and control groups in the sub-skill test of reading comprehension. The t-observed which is 2.95 with the df of 55 is larger than the critical amount which is 2.16. Therefore, with a 99% confidence it can be claimed that the research hypothesis claiming the existence of difference between MI-based instruction of reading comprehension compared with the traditional ways of teaching is accepted at the P value of .01.

The observed results in table 8 indicate a significant relationship between independent and the dependent variables. Therefore, analysis of covariance was used for adjusting the effect of dependent variable. The results are also indicative of a signification effect of independent variable after adjusting the effect of covariate variable. It is seen that the  $F$  calculated (13.41) with a df of 1 and 58 is larger than 8.34. Therefore, again at the .01 level of significance it can be claimed that Multiple Intelligence-based instruction has a meaningful effect on the attitudes of students towards learning English.

Table 8. Analysis of covariance for comparing experimental and control groups in the attitudes towards English course.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Covariates (pretest)	8032.179	1	8032.179	481.48	.000
Group	223.74	1	223.74	13.41	.000
Residual (Error)	967.558	58	16.7		
Total	231.495	61			

### 3. Discussion & Results

The purpose of the present study is investigation and comparison of the effect of teaching general English course based on Multiple intelligence and traditional way of teaching on achievement in learning English and attitudes towards English course. Based on this, the problem which was posed was whether there is a difference between MI-based instruction and achievement and attitudes towards English course among students. Analysis of the statistical results indicates that there is statistical difference between mean scores of the experimental and control groups in pre-test and post-test. Consequently it can be said that generally there is a meaningful difference between Multiple Intelligence based teaching and traditional-based teaching in achievement of English course in students. In other words, instruction based on Multiple intelligence in comparison with traditional way of teaching has been more effective. Moreover in each of the three sub-skills of vocabulary, structure and reading comprehension there is a significant difference between post-tests of experimental and control groups. Therefore we can say that there is a significant difference in teaching based on Multiple intelligence and traditional ways of teaching in learning English in students in the sub-skills of vocabulary, structure and reading comprehension. The results of this study is consistent with the results of other studies done in this area. Farjami (2002) has investigated the effect of utilization of Multiple intelligence activities and content instructional passages on general English of university learners. He has pointed out that students performances have approved the hypotheses that using content passages in line with MI activities have improved general English performance in students compared with using general passages and traditional activities. It can be inferred that one of the reasons for effectiveness of this program on achievement in English is the fact that in this method learning activities are in line with each of the Multiple intelligence. Thus all learners will have the opportunity of learning

the content. In this study there have been attempts to involve language learning activities which are more consistent with verbal-linguistic intelligence beside other kinds of intelligences. Consequently opportunities for learning were available for all learners. Saricaoglu & Arikan (2009) have reported a negative relationship between achievement in structure and physical kinesthetic, spatial, and intrapersonal intelligences while they report a positive and meaningful relationship between reading comprehension and musical intelligence. Motallebzadeh and Manoochehri (2008) also tried to determine the amount of relationship between MI and reading comprehension in international IELTS in Iranian participants. They came to this understanding that for Iranian participants the only kind of significant relationship observed was between logical mathematical and reading comprehension from among the intelligences. The reason for this relationship is supposed to be the common nature of this kind of intelligence and the required activities involved in reading comprehension in second language. Bass and Byhan (2010) also have revealed that those students taught based on MI have gained more in achievement and are reported to be more motivated compared with those who have been instructed based on traditional ways of teaching. Moreover Abdolkader and Gundogdu (2009) have indicated the effectiveness of the MI-based programs on reading comprehension and vocabulary of students. Shearer (2004) in a research regarding the application of Multiple intelligence theory in English as a second language classrooms for university levels came to this conclusion that blending language courses with multiple intelligence caused autonomy in English learning for learner. Concerning the role of multiple intelligence approach in memorizing vocabulary Anderson (1998) indicated that the subjects' scores improved in vocabulary tests which were administered every other week. Moreover, both teacher and students awareness of learning styles and vocabulary memorization skills increased. Palmberg (2002) also showed how teachers engaging learners' multiple intelligence can satisfy their students' need with different intelligence abilities during the language instruction period (cited in Pishgadam and Moafian 2007). The results of the present study is also consistent with the studies of Akbari and Hosseini (2007), Barington (2004), Kornhaber, Fierros and Veenema (2004), Cohen and Weaver (2004), Curtin (2005), Mitchell and Myles (2006), Oxford, Cho, Leung and Kim (2004), Oxford and Lee (2008), Barrington (2004), Chan (2006), Christosen and Kennedy (2004), Christosen (1999, 2004), Hall (2004), Haj Hosseinnzhad and Baleghizadeh (2003) which have confirmed the effectiveness of instruction based on MI on achievement in English learning. To elaborate on the above findings, it can be said that making students aware of their intelligences and guiding them of the ways they would be more successful in learning paves the way for learners to learn study skills that consider their strengths and compensate their weaknesses. For example by nature-related mnemonics one can develop vocabulary knowledge of learners (Arnold and Fonesca, 2004). To elaborate on why MI is an effective method of instruction and is able to solve instructional problem Moran, Kornhaber, and Gardner (2006) have given the following example: "Think about Lego building blocks. If we have only one Lego, we can build just a limited structure of Lego. However, if we have different types and shapes of Lego, we would be able to build a network of connected structures. These structures make up various patterns and finally we can build complete plans. Multiple intelligence do the same in practice". (p. 26)

To support the above case Nolen (2003, p. 119) also suggests that regarding the fact that the intelligences are potentially available in every learner, offering an instructional material for a foreign language should consist all or most of the multiple intelligence.

Results gained from the effect of multiple intelligence-based teaching on the attitude towards English course among students show that there is a significant difference between the mean score of experimental group and that of the control group in the post test. To put it in another way, it can be said that multiple intelligence-based teaching has been more effective than traditional way of teaching in the students' attitude toward learning English. Hall's research (2004) shows that teachers who have utilized multiple intelligence-based instruction in second or foreign language classrooms have observed students been more satisfied and had more positive attitudes towards learning English in experimental than the control group. Emig (1997) has simulated multiple intelligence-based teaching to a miracle due to its advantages for the students and teachers, because the students feel comfortable and qualified in the classes. In this vein, Hall (2004) found out that multiple intelligence-based classrooms increases students educational progress in learning English and have positive effects on the attitude toward learning languages in students. To clarify this finding, one can say that in multiple intelligence-based teaching, learners learn because of their abilities and they are allowed to learn the way they have been taught themselves, learning would be pleasant to them. When there are various approaches and methods for obtaining educational aims and the learners find the content containing interesting activities, they learn it and experience less anxiety in addressing learning problems. Because students don't have to feel they don't know something in a multiple intelligence-based classroom, there would be a change in their attitude that removes the boundaries in learning effectively. Multiple intelligence framework help the learners gain better self-awareness about learning abilities in different intelligences areas. Goodnough in a case study (2001) reports that 85% of students have

declared that multiple intelligence-based teaching help them enjoy the lesson and learning. According to Billy (1999) utilizing multiple intelligence in classrooms can help teachers provide encouraging environment. (cited in Abdi, 2011) Generally, one can conclude that multiple intelligence-based teaching is more effective in learning and causes having a positive attitude towards English course. Therefore, it is suggested that seminars and courses be held for improving the use of multiple intelligence-based teaching so teachers can be aware of the effects of using this strategy in educational achievements and improving a positive attitude towards learning consequently they would be able to utilize this method in their classes.

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# Contribution to Language Teaching and Learning: A Review of Emotional Intelligence

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to introduce the importance of emotional intelligence and the extent to which emotional intelligence can be implemented and used to improve language teaching and learning. Since emotional intelligence is perceived to play a crucial part in every aspect of people's lives, it can be extended to language teaching and learning. Language teaching and learning typically includes communication; therefore, emotional intelligence is beneficial. Emotional intelligence is still not widely known, used, or studied in the world of language teaching and learning, although increased efforts to popularise this term have occurred in the past two decades. For this to be achievable in language teaching and learning, scholars and researchers need to pay attention to emotional intelligence. Therefore, both language teachers and students should be aware of and cooperate together to improve emotional intelligence and to create a more effective learning atmosphere for language teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, language teaching, teachers, students, language learning

## 1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is not a new notion and has actually been around since 1990 in the theory and research of different forms of psychology. Prior to 1970, research interests focused solely on cognition and intelligence testing, since psychologists analysed intelligence as a measurable ability to solve cognitive problems (Hedlund & Sternberg, 2000). However, in the twentieth century, theorists like Thorndike (1920), Wechsler (1972), and Gardner (1983), have challenged these purely cognitive approaches. Thorndike presented the idea of social intelligence, which he presented as a separate form of intelligence from mechanical and abstract. Thorndike suggested that social ability was an important factor of intelligence and that it is through the ability to understand, influence, and manage other people. A half a century later, Wechsler (1972) also examined this idea further and suggested additional forms of intelligence that complemented cognitive forms: (a) emotional, (b) personal, and (c) social. Gardner (1983) also viewed non-cognitive forms of intelligence as being important. These forms include intrapersonal intelligence, the ability to understand one's own emotions, and interpersonal intelligence, the ability to have a good relationship with others (Hedlund & Sternberg, 2000). This concept of non-intellective aspects of general intelligence was thus introduced an essential direction to the definition of emotional intelligence (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004; Mayer & Cobb, 2000).

Combining both intelligence and emotion, Mayer and Salovey (1990) were the first to use the phrase emotional intelligence and defined it as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's feelings and actions" (p. 189). However, in 1997, Mayer and Salovey reconstructed their model and described four hierarchical types of abilities: (a) the ability to access or generate feeling so as to facilitate thought, (b) the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, (c) the ability to regulate emotions, and (d) the ability to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Mayer and Salovey (1997) considered emotional intelligence a factor of measuring people's intelligence.

There are also different views as to how emotional intelligence can be described. Goleman (1995), who popularised emotional intelligence with the public, claimed emotional intelligence as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathise and to hope. Goleman's perspective on

emotional intelligence included factors that concerned (a) self-awareness, (b) self-regulation, (c) motivation, (d) empathy, and (e) social skills. Self-awareness is described as recognising one's own feelings and knowing how to factor feelings into decision-making in a highly effective way. Self-regulation implies the ability to be emotionally stable and to manage one's feelings in a positive manner. Motivation allows for the recognition of wants and channels that in a desired direction. Empathy allows for the sensing of other people's feelings, to understand their desires and needs, and to act accordingly. Social skills are the ability to handle interrelationships and have excellent leadership skills. These definitions clearly show emotional intelligence to have two relations of self, intrapersonal and interpersonal. This can be simply put as (a) a relation with one's inner self (internal relation) and (b) a relation with others (external relation). Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1995) have differing opinions about emotional intelligence. It is described as having the ability to adapt to an environment successfully, socially, physically and mentally. Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1995) similarly described five key elements. Bar-On alternatively described emotional intelligence and stressed (a) intrapersonal ability, (b) interpersonal ability, (c) adaptability, (d) stress management, and (e) general mood. In Bar-On's model (1997), intrapersonal ability is described as emotional self-awareness, confidence, a clear vision of oneself, self-actualisation, and the ability to be independent. Interpersonal ability was described as one's ability to empathise and to maintain relationships and social responsibilities. Adaptation was the ability find solutions and to be flexible. Stress management emphasised balance and control of one's feelings. Finally, general mood was the ability to recognise feelings and to be positive.

Theorists and scholars view emotional intelligence with slight variation, although it is usually agreed upon that emotional intelligence is the ability to intelligently control ones emotions as well as work with the emotions of others. Positive results derive from the ability to ethically and intelligently know, control and encourage oneself, to be able to feel empathy for others while interpreting and understanding their feelings, and to achieve one's goals. That is similar to Ciarrochi, Chan, and Cuputi (2000) commented in a review of the emotional intelligence literature that "while the definitions of emotional intelligence are often varied for different researchers, they nevertheless tend to be complementary rather than contradictory" (p. 540).

## **2. Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Learning Languages**

With the media attention, a high level of interest across language teaching and learning also developed, as there are some research studies conducted to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and language performance (see Sucaromana, 2004). The extent to which emotional intelligence can be implemented and used to improve language teaching and learning needs consideration. One question that can be asked is, are intelligent people more successful at learning languages? When learning languages, the interaction between the teacher and learner is important for both communication and the physiological aspects between the two. An important factor in learning languages is the ability to be emotionally intelligent by showing the capacity to recognise, employ, comprehend, and manage emotions. These characteristics are much more important than simply being intelligent. Every genius is not guaranteed to become successful in life, and vice versa; the possession of a high IQ rating is not the sole indicator when it comes to being successful in all fields (Goleman, 1995). It is even claimed that emotional intelligence is a more important key to success, and not cognitive intelligence, more accurately predicts success in school.

The importance of emotional intelligence, especially, is often ignored. However, students learning a second/foreign language look for and need emotional intelligence, between the teacher and themselves and whether in the classroom or at a more personal level. Beginners need and ask for tolerance and patience as well as an understanding from their teachers and fellow classmates. Sometimes, the views of the teacher can make a student behave badly in the classroom, a behaviour that was created by the teacher's own doing. In the world of teaching English as a second/foreign language, emotional intelligence is still not widely known, used, or studied although increased efforts to popularise this term have occurred in the past two decade.

As previously stated, emotional intelligence involves the innate ability of a person and can be improved by external factors such as the environment and experience. As area of study, emotion and intelligence are tied together because emotion is viewed to contribute to the ability to think intelligently. Therefore, the capacity for empathy and the consideration of other peoples' emotions would be the components of a balanced and emotionally intelligent person. People who are lacking in these skills will be at a disadvantage and will suffer socially and emotionally. It can be said that emotional intelligence will help well-being, creativity, and for people to be better students (Goleman, 1995).

Mayer and Salovey suggested the following ideas for using emotional intelligence with education in the classroom: (a) express feelings instead of ordering the students to stop when they misbehave, (b) take

responsibility for feelings instead of imposing them one-sidedly on your students, (c) be much more aware of feelings than the feelings of the students, (d) try to understand the reasons behind students' behaviour before forming an opinion about them, (e) find ways of voluntary cooperation instead of making demands of students, and (f) help students to express themselves openly and to solve any problems they may have.

For second/ foreign language teaching and other educational fields that usually include interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence is beneficial. Since language classes are based on communication, it should be recognised that empathy is an important basic element of effective communication. It seems as though developing emotional intelligence in education systems would be beneficial, because emotional intelligence can increase effective communication and learning in the classroom. It is also necessary that both second/ foreign language teachers and students cooperate to improve emotional intelligence and to create a more effective learning atmosphere; the sharing of cultures and ideologies can then happen successfully. Increasing abilities in second/ foreign language teaching can be through the creation of an atmosphere of communication and personal sharing.

### **3. Emotional Intelligence and Students**

Emotional intelligence and achievement in second/ foreign language learning has some direct and indirect links with support for the direct link. For instance, it is thought that emotions can either increase or suppress attention, which has an effect on the learning and retaining of information (Sylwester, 1998). Thus, it can be said that emotions can affect one's learning either positively or negatively. It was observed that negativity tended to be a hindrance in students' thoughts while writing (Kearney 1998), while Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) noted that the positive thinking and emotions greatly improved the retention of new information and learning by keeping attention during the task.

Elliot (2003) mentioned with strong evidence that when interpersonal skills are gained, learning can be enhanced. Gardner (1983) and Bar-On (2000) also mentioned interpersonal skills as being a part of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has positive effects on students because they can manage their emotions and have more positive communication and confidence in themselves, other classmates, and teachers.

Emotional intelligence will promote good study behaviour, and make the learning experience more effective. Moreover, the attitudes of an educational place can motivate everyone involved, with positive thinking causing positive results (Ellis, 1985). Elliot (2003) suggested that encouragement was a factor in the outcome and study habits of students. Positive encouragement would therefore show good results in the student, and those who were engaged would develop positive attitudes toward learning. Emotional intelligence can be quite practical in the classroom. Where students are underperforming, teachers can find a way to promote emotionally intelligent practices. Teachers can assess the students based on their emotional intelligence prior to a class or course, as well as afterward. The students' second/ foreign language achievements will be enhanced, as they will be able to improve on their intrapersonal and interpersonal relations and skills.

Emotional intelligence is among one of the variables that further shapes a student's language learning context, although academic achievement is also a matter of cognitive ability. Emotional intelligence also creates effective family encouragement, study atmosphere, and English achievement. Emotional intelligence seems like a concept worth investing in. Those with high emotional intelligence are at a great advantage. Evidence shows that underlying emotional capabilities are the roots of ethical stances in life (Goleman, 1995). Goleman feels that a new vision or perception of education would be to educate the student wholly, both in mind and heart. Sucaramana (2004) looked at the relationship between different variables that could affect English achievement in Thai students. The findings showed that emotional intelligence had a direct effect through study habits, participation, effort, and encouragement by family and peers. It seems as though most of the literature focuses on the emotional intelligence of the student, but what about the teacher? Is it not equally important that the teacher have developed emotional intelligence?

### **4. Emotional Intelligence and Teachers**

It would be beneficial if teachers were aware of their own emotions and emotional intelligence in addition to that of the students. Emotional intelligence stimulates learning in many ways and improves language retention. Also, it is suggested that emotional intelligence can fill in the missing parts when acquiring a language, where students have difficulty using or applying the learned language, so that teaching can be conducted in a more efficient way.

It would be ideal that teachers have emotional intelligence so that they could not only facilitate a positive atmosphere in the classroom but also influence students to enhance their own emotional intelligence. Teachers have to handle emotions in a social setting and adjust their own mannerisms and actions accordingly to be as

effective as possible. People have emotional intelligence naturally, but if the teacher has low emotional intelligence, the development of student emotional intelligence would be minimal.

An emotionally intelligent teacher is necessary to have an emotionally intelligent classroom atmosphere. A teacher with low emotional intelligence will not radiate emotional intelligence to the students or influence them to raise their own emotional intelligence. Is it possible for a teacher to give sound advice and to control a classroom with bad behaviour if the teacher has not developed emotional intelligence and cannot control his/her own feelings?

Not only should students be aware of this ability, but so should teachers. The roles of teachers' emotional intelligence in increasing language teaching abilities can be achieved. On the other hand, the role of students' emotional intelligence is that students who have emotional intelligence will learn languages better than students who do not. Learning different languages helps to serve an individual's ability to communicate with others. Due to this, people with higher emotional intelligence levels are seen to be more successful when learning a language.

Taking care of the emotional intelligence of the student is equally important for the teacher. It is important for language teachers to not only be trained in their subject matter but to also be able to read the emotional signs and body language of the students in order to make their learning experience as positive as possible. A teacher should also know how to effectively handle troublesome students using emotional intelligence, while keeping in touch with his/her own mood and temper. To improve the students' behaviour, the teacher should express feelings about the bad behaviour instead of giving orders.

## 5. Conclusions

Education is a reciprocal relationship and the techniques that are learned will be passed on to students who in turn will pass along the knowledge further. A teacher who does not have much emotional intelligence, such as empathy, cooperation, management of emotions and respect, will not likely enhance the emotional intelligence of the students. How can a teacher expect high quality students without being of high quality him/herself? How can the teacher expect respect and motivation without being motivated or respectful him/herself?

The development and implementation of emotional intelligence in teachers should be promoted so students can learn better. Emotional skill management should be emphasised more in the curriculums; components such as self-management, problem solving, reciprocal learning, and a need to focus on goals should also be added. Students can make remarkable progress if their teachers can understand and relate to students who may be shy, violent, lazy, or negative, especially if teachers are able to empathise with them and consider that there may be a root cause for these behaviours. Through emotional intelligence in the student and the teacher, learning can be achieved at a greater scale.

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# Experimenting with Dogme in a Mainstream ESL Context

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## Abstract

This article explores the use of Dogme with postsecondary ESL students in a mainstream educational institution. By means of a small-scale action research study it was found that in spite of its reputation for being somewhat unconventional, Dogme can also be incorporated in an exam preparation course and allow students to benefit not only from the interaction that acts as a motor for the entire lesson but also from the emphasis put on emergent language. This article discusses how this materials-light and learner-centred teaching approach has the potential to empower the teacher to capitalise on students' contributions and help them engage with language in a meaningful manner.

**Keywords:** Dogme, ELT, postsecondary, emergent language, ESL, learner centred

## 1. Introduction

Dogme revolves around the idea that a successful lesson need not necessarily be materials-driven but can actually be based on 'the 'raw materials' provided by the people in the room' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 7). Scott Thornbury launched Dogme in 2000 and his inspiration for this pedagogy was the Dogme 95 film movement, which championed a minimalist approach to filmmaking.

### 1.1 Pre-Dogme

I first became acquainted with Dogme after attending a symposium convened by Scott Thornbury at an international ELT conference in Brighton. Subsequently I followed an intensive teacher training diploma course in Barcelona and Dogme was one of the approaches I was encouraged to try out, albeit all too briefly. I had already been teaching English for seven years by then, mostly in secondary and postsecondary schools in Malta, but had never been sufficiently adventurous to stray from the safe methods by means of which I myself had been taught English as a student. These methods entailed the use of a transmissive assessment-driven approach to language teaching in which writing and reading skills were given exclusive priority and grammar was taught in a deductive manner. The years I had spent in mainstream education had shown me that most teachers and students rarely engage in activities associated with deep-end CLT and that the language learning experience was entirely governed by an impersonal syllabus and summative assessment. Teacher talk seemed to prevail over any other interaction pattern and whenever students made a contribution it was often because they were prodded by the teacher's questions.

Hence I decided that the best way in which I could enhance my teaching knowledge and skills and examine my attitudes and beliefs as a teacher was by embarking on a course leading to a diploma in ELT, what is perhaps considered to be one of the most challenging and rewarding qualifications in the field. Having already completed a PGCE and a number of other postgraduate qualifications, I did not strictly speaking need such a diploma in order to improve my job prospects. However, deep down I knew I needed to re-evaluate who I was as a teacher and what effect my beliefs and practices were having on my students. I was disillusioned with successive groups of students who gradually developed a satisfactory competence in reading and writing at an advanced level but who faltered or got tongue-tied when asked to express an opinion. Luckily, the main examination board in Malta decided that speaking skills were to start being assessed in the near future and the washback effect of this was that I (together with a number of colleagues I spoke to) realised that perpetuating a situation in which students were there to listen while the teacher talked was no longer tenable. I say 'luckily' but at the same time I am all too aware of the irony of seeking to effect change as a result of new examination demands.

### 1.2 Professional Interest

I chose to adopt Dogme as an approach with my students because even though I had heard a lot about its pedagogical tenets I had never actually mustered the courage to use it during my lessons. Its main attraction for me was the challenge of ‘a pedagogy of bare essentials, that is, a pedagogy grounded in the local and relevant concerns of the people in the room’ (Thornbury, 2006, p. 70). Prior to discovering Dogme I had always based my teaching on a surfeit of materials, which resulted in lessons during which I felt rushed and under pressure to use all the material I had incorporated in my plan. I gradually realised that by teaching in this way I did not have enough time in which to adequately respond to students’ problems and to effectively deal with their language production. Moreover, my teaching was materials-driven and not learner-centred and this meant that I was failing to capitalise on my students as valid contributors to the learning experience.

As a non-native speaker of English I became interested in Dogme because it ‘seeks to subvert...the idea that language teaching is about the transmission of perfect models of expression’ (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 84) of which only native speakers are capable. Dogme appreciates the role of non-native teachers who are capable of ‘exploring and extending the learner’s existing language capacity’ because they possess the ‘ability to see the target language through the learners’ eyes’ (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 84).

In addition, I realised that Dogme could be highly useful for me as someone who typically teaches examination classes, especially because ‘a more conversational, exploratory and hands-on approach to the exam syllabus can reap its own rewards’ (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 94). I became interested in the idea of using Dogme during some of my lessons because of the growing conviction that it can ‘help to maintain engagement and enjoyment through what can be a stressful and somewhat monotonous time’ (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 95). In order to test the above notions I decided to engage in an experiment that would allow me not only to employ a different pedagogical approach to the one I was used to but also to reflect on my own development as a teacher.

## 2. Theory and Practice

Dogme ELT is based on three fundamental principles: it is conversation-driven, materials-light, and focuses on emergent language.

### 2.1 Conversation-driven

Thornbury (2000) suggests that ‘Teaching should be done using only the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom – i.e. themselves – and whatever happens to be in the classroom’ (p. 2). This means that Dogme highlights the centrality of communication and dialogue and the need for teachers to respond to the fluctuations of the learning process within every lesson. It opposes the knowledge transfer model of education and does not view students as possessing a tabula rasa that the teacher is responsible for filling with learning. For Dogme practitioners ‘Learning is a social and *dialogic* process, where knowledge is co-constructed’ and ‘mediated through talk’ (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 8).

Classroom interaction is what allows language to emerge given that when learners engage in conversation they are making use of language. This ties in with Hatch’s (1978) idea that ‘language learning evolves *out of* learning how to carry on conversations’ (p. 404). Given that conversation is discourse, language teaching should underscore the importance of learning situations in which students are equipped for real-life language use by means of communicative activities. Dogme seeks to do this by foregrounding the idea that ‘when learners are communicating, communication should, first and foremost, be ‘about themselves’ (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 10). Moreover, conversation scaffolds learning and promotes socialisation and in this sense it acts as a means to an end not an end in itself.

### 2.2 Materials-light

Dogme is renowned for advocating a materials-light kind of teaching that frees the teacher from a sense of dependence on coursebooks and technology. Dogme is centred on the idea that students and teachers collaboratively construct learning but it is not entirely against the use of materials. However, by means of a materials-light approach ‘the teacher frees the learning space for the kind of interactive, talk-mediated learning opportunities that are so crucial for language development’ (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 12). Dogme values the learners as texts and this manifests the influence of Freire’s (1993) idea that ‘The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach’ (p. 80). Hence the act of using very little or no materials whatsoever is empowering for both teachers and students.

A materials-light approach foregrounds classroom interaction and gives learners a voice. According to



Ashton-Warner (1963) 'the more material there is for a child, the less pull there is on his own resources' (p. 118). Getting rid of unnecessary materials makes the learning experience 'so much simpler and clearer as a result. There's much more time for conversation...communication' (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 119). Thornbury (2005) contends that 'Materials-mediated teaching is the 'scenic' route to learning, but the direct route is located in the interactivity between teachers and learners, and between the learners themselves' (p. 3). The reason for which Dogme is critical of materials is because 'more often than not, they simply get in the way. They are a barrier. They inhibit dialogue' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2003). Teachers who free themselves of a dependence on coursebooks probably believe that 'language is an emergent phenomenon, and that the learning of it is a jointly constructed and socially motivated process, contingent on the concerns, interests, desires, and needs of the user' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2001). Such a view of language allows teachers to adopt a different view of their role in the classroom.

### 2.3 Emergent Language Focus

Dogme shares many of its conceptions regarding language learning with Communicative Language Teaching, whose most famous tenet is probably the one arguing that 'If the language teacher's management activities are directed exclusively at involving the learners in solving communication problems in the target language, then language learning will take care of itself' (Allwright, 1979, p. 170). Dogme underscores the notion that language learning is not really a question of acquisition but rather one of emergence. According to Thornbury (2005) 'it is an organic process that occurs given the right conditions' (p. 3).

The teacher's job is to direct the students' attention to the emergent language and in so doing help students to activate their interlanguage and enable it to develop. For this to happen 'the language focus should emerge from, and not determine, the communicative needs of the learners' (Thornbury, 2005, p. 4). Hence Dogme is very much in favour of a focus on form approach and reactive teaching rather than pre-emptive teaching. Long (1991) explains that a focus on form 'overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication' (pp. 45-46). This means that teaching is responsive to the language generated during the lesson and that students' errors are seen as an opportunity for learning to take place. A focus on form is important because it helps learners 'to improve their accuracy, develop their fluency and extend their repertoire' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 60).

### 3. Action Research

After reflecting on my beliefs and practices as a teacher I devised a schedule of lessons that would provide me with the opportunity of experimenting with Dogme while not overdoing it. I planned to do a Dogme lesson at least once a month over the length of a scholastic year and to do the same lesson with two different classes of students aged 16-18. The lessons were delivered as part of a two-year postsecondary English course that students follow before enrolling at university. In order to gauge the effects of my Dogme lessons I decided to keep a journal in which I reflected on my teaching, the strengths and weaknesses of each lesson, and its outcomes. I also collected data from the students via feedback sheets and unstructured interviews.

### 4. A Typical Lesson

In order to highlight some of the results of my experiment with Dogme it would perhaps be sound to provide a concrete demonstration of how I sought to put its tenets into action and what typically emerged at the end of most lessons. One of the first Dogme lessons I did with my students was based on the idea of students expressing wishes about themselves, their families and friends, their school, their neighbourhood or town, and the world. It was adapted from Meddings and Thornbury (2009) and it served as a platform for successive Dogme lessons.

#### 4.1 Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

In all my Dogme lessons I sought to achieve the following objectives:

- Use no materials and thus capitalise on my students' contributions;
- Distance myself from the transmission model of pedagogy;
- Make my lesson entirely learner-centred;
- Maximise interactivity between the learners and me, and between the learners themselves;
- Focus on emergent language;
- Provide students with sufficient wait time and processing time.

While planning my lessons I hoped that Dogme would ideally allow the learners to achieve the following:

- Contribute as fully as possible by conversing with their peers and me;

- Feel that the lesson has allowed them to make a personal contribution;
- Feel that they are at the heart of the lesson;
- Learn the language that emerges during the course of the lesson.

Consequently, with regards to the lesson described hereunder for illustrative purposes, I envisaged its main aim to be that of enabling students to practise their speaking skills and, to a much lesser extent, their writing skills. By the end of the lesson they would have had an opportunity of describing different wishes by means of spoken (and written) language and to master any language that emerged during the lesson's activities. In communicative terms, the lesson aimed to allow students to talk about different wishes they had and to ask each other about these. By the end of the lesson students would have discussed a number of wishes with their peers and argued in favour and against certain wishes in order for the class to finally reach a consensus.

#### 4.2 Assumptions

I expected the students to be familiar with the topic of wishes and to have the necessary vocabulary in order for them to discuss this topic with their peers. I also expected them to have mastered a number of expressions used when expressing wishes but if need be the model sentences I would be using during the first activity would allow weaker students to produce 'a high turnover of chunk-type language' (Thornbury, 1999, p. 102) during the subsequent activities. As part of this lesson's activities I expected the students to be able to share their personal opinion with their peers, find differences and similarities in opinion, and reach a consensus.

#### 4.3 Problems and Solutions

During the planning stage I anticipated a number of problems concerning different aspects of the language learning experience and for each one I tried to come up with a possible solution.

Meaning: Some students might find it difficult to find the right vocabulary in order to express different wishes. If need be I would ask them to indicate any words that they required during the writing stage in order for them to be able to use them when expressing their wishes orally.

Form: They might find it difficult to understand how to form sentences by means of which they could express different wishes. Before actually asking them to do it on their own, I would model how to write sentences expressing personal wishes. These sentences would be left on the board for the duration of the writing activity so as to scaffold the students' own sentences.

Communication: During the main speaking activity some students might rely too heavily on the written sentences and thus fail to discuss their experiences in detail. In case students were to fail to elaborate on their wishes during the main speaking activities, I would encourage individual students to do so by asking them questions and indicating that they should address the rest of their group.

Different abilities: Some students might finish the writing activity more quickly than others. Hence early finishers would be asked to come up with other wishes they could think of, especially in relation to the two circles for which they had not yet expressed any wishes.

Procedure: The main speaking activities might not run as successfully as planned because students might not be finding differences and similarities or trying to reach a consensus about the most important wish. In this case I would ask them questions about this and lead them towards a consensus.

#### 4.4 Procedure

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Focus</u>	<u>Procedure</u>	<u>Aim</u>
Speaking	5	T-s	Draw five large concentric circles on the board. In the inner circle, write <i>Me</i> , then <i>My family and friends</i> , then <i>My school</i> , then <i>My city/neighbourhood</i> , and in the outermost circle, <i>The world</i> . Write a wish for each circle and share with the class. Encourage them to ask you questions.	To introduce students to the topic and to provide them with a model.
Writing	10	s	Ask students to copy the diagram and to write down a wish for three of the circles. Check draft statements and	To enable students to write the wishes they would like to share with

			help with language whenever necessary.	their peers.
Speaking	20	s-s	Ask students to form groups and share their wishes as well as respond to other people's wishes. Encourage them to ask each other questions and to elaborate on the reasons for each wish. Encourage them to find differences and similarities.	To enable students to discuss their wishes with their peers and to learn about those of others.
Speaking	10	s-s	Ask different students to report back to the class and ask them to talk about reasons, similarities and differences.	To allow the class to discuss the wishes of individual students, reasons, similarities and differences.
Speaking	5	s-s	Encourage students to adopt a single wish for their city. They discuss this in groups and have to reach a consensus.	To encourage students to discuss one specific wish and reach a consensus.
Speaking	10	T-s-s	Ask the different groups to report back to the class and write each wish on the board. Encourage the class to discuss these wishes, each group arguing for their own wish or else agreeing with the others. The class has to reach an agreement as to which wish is the most important.	To allow the class to discuss each group's wish and argue in favour or against these wishes.

#### 4.5 Lesson Evaluation

The above lesson was on the whole quite successful because I managed to achieve my objectives and provide students with a satisfactory learning experience. The lesson was highly learner-centred and it bolstered my faith in Dogme as a pedagogical approach with the potential of enabling teachers to distance themselves from transmissive teacher-centred methods.

##### 4.5.1 Strengths

From the very start the lesson was impelled by the idea that 'learners bring the lesson with them – in the 'rough form' of their language and lives – and the teacher helps them to shape it into a learning experience' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 24). I wanted the students to share their wishes with the rest of the class and hence I started by personalising the first activity and talking about some of my wishes. In this manner I managed to spark interest in the students and set a model for their own personalisation of language in subsequent stages. Gerngross, Puchta and Thornbury (2006) advise teachers that 'language is only memorable when it has been 'owned'' (p. 8) but for this to work successfully it is better for the teacher to start with a personal example.

The first activity also allowed me to model some of the language that I wanted the students to produce during the writing activity. Even though whilst monitoring the latter I had to provide students with the necessary assistance in relation to lexis and grammar, this did not undermine the essential emphasis on interactivity at the heart of the lesson. The writing stage (and the subsequent activities) allowed me to react to emergent language and thus to adopt a focus on form approach without getting bogged down in lengthy grammar explanations. This kind of practice ties in with the idea that one of the teacher's roles during a Dogme lesson is 'to optimise language learning affordances, by...directing attention at features of the emergent language' (Thornbury, 2005, p. 3). The students' feedback indicated that they felt they had gained something concrete from the lesson in terms of language learning and this is probably a result of the kind of methods I used when focusing their attention on emergent language.

The speaking activities that followed gave students plenty of opportunities for contributing as fully as possible by discussing the lesson's topic with their peers and myself. In this sense my lesson fit in nicely with the idea that 'Allowing learners to express themselves, encouraging them to do this to the best of their ability, and showing them how they can do it more effectively, is the essential work of the unplugged teacher' (Meddings &

Thornbury, 2009, p. 24). Maximising interactivity was one of my key objectives and I tried hard to achieve this because I have convinced myself that nothing 'should interfere with, or inhibit, the free flow of participant-driven input, output and feedback' (Thornbury, 2000, p. 2). Hence during the open class discussions forming part of this lesson I tried as much as possible to step back and allow the students to lead the discussion. The students' feedback indicated that they found this lesson particularly interesting because they could interact with one another and learn new things about each other.

Whenever I asked questions I made sure to give students enough wait time; to remind myself that students require plenty of time to process my questions and formulate an answer I even mentally counted the seconds before reformulating my question if no answer was forthcoming. I did this because of the idea that 'increasing wait time enhances cognitive processing' (Ormrod, 2005, p. 110), especially with students who have limited English proficiency.

Moreover, I sought as far as possible to encourage students to ask each other questions and genuinely agree and disagree with one another's views. This on the whole was quite successful because even though students initially tried to explain why their wish was more significant than that of the other groups they ultimately did reach some kind of consensus. By means of eye contact I encouraged students to respond to one another and I feel that this was a means by which I distanced myself from unnecessary teacher talk.

#### 4.5.2 Weaknesses

One of the main weaknesses of this lesson was the fact that I probably planned too many activities and hence ended up not being able to do the last activity as satisfactorily as possible. Given that the students seemed to be enjoying the open class discussion of each groups' similarities and differences I chose not to curtail this activity and move on to the last one. I made this decision based on the idea that the students should be the ones to dictate the pace of the lesson and not the teacher.

Another weakness was that I could probably have done more with the emergent language produced by the students. Even though the students did benefit from the focus on form approach I adopted during the different activities, I could have perhaps put up more language on the board for us to discuss.

### 5. Outcomes

The above lesson illustrates how my use of Dogme with postsecondary students yielded a number of benefits that are in line with the three principles on which this pedagogical approach is based. By reflecting on my lessons I came to realise that they were truly conversation-driven. Even though at first it was somewhat of a struggle for me to take a backseat and avoid interrupting the flow of conversation, gradually I realised that the students were developing the confidence to forge ahead without my constant guidance. A number of students commented on this when interviewed. Nick, for example, mentioned that he found it 'amusing that it's so easy to have a conversation with someone I don't know that well but still have a common topic to talk about'. Alison claimed that she 'liked the fact that it actively challenged me to maintain a conversation with a complete or almost complete stranger'. I deemed this to be such a rewarding experience that I was impelled to reposition myself in the classroom, from being a controller to someone who could switch between a variety of roles that for the most part foregrounded the students' contribution.

The act of sustaining a conversation for a number of minutes initially seemed like a daunting task for some students and this is probably because they had never really been asked to take the lead and use the L2 for longer than a brief answer to the teacher's questions. Sarah explained that 'It felt a bit strange for me since I rarely speak English when I engage in conversation' while Donovan 'found it interesting and exciting as I have never really done an activity like this before. We barely talk at school'. For students like Neil the Dogme lessons helped them to overcome their inhibitions about using the L2: 'I believe that as an activity it was perfect because it broke down the walls that were put up by us because we were scared of talking in English to others, afraid of what they would think'. On the other hand, someone like Paul felt that these lessons confirmed what he believed about his proficiency in speaking the target language: 'I enjoyed it because it showed me how fluent I am when speaking English'. For a number of students the Dogme activities came to be seen as necessary because whilst conversing with their classmates they realised how rusty some of them were when it came to spoken proficiency. Daphne remarked that 'This lesson is important because it showed me how to have conversations in English, something which the majority of us need training in'. Elvin concurred by pointing out that 'Clearly some students need more of this kind of thing as their speaking is not that good'.

Quite a number of students appreciated the fact that the Dogme activities provided them with an opportunity for learning more about their classmates. Sarah, for instance, said that she felt 'more comfortable within the group

now that I found we share similar opinions'. This sentiment was echoed both by Carmen, who was pleased 'that there are other people who have the same wishes as I do', and by Karl, who 'was surprised by what some of the others said. I never thought they'd have such wishes'. The pleasure of finding more about one's peers was usually seen as interconnected with the need for conversation-driven activities, as seen in this comment by Bradley: 'I found this activity quite useful because it helped me build a conversation with more confidence and I also learnt a lot more about my classmates'.

## 6. Conclusion

Despite the fact that my language teaching is essentially geared towards the needs of prospective examination candidates, after experimenting with Dogme I came to embrace the idea of using it as a means of counterbalancing my existing assessment-focused pedagogy. Even though the act of preparing students for examinations usually entails strict adherence to the syllabus and the use of past examination papers in the classroom, Dogme allows me to 'elicit, teach and practise the *kind of structures* that the exam will test, but to retain the immediacy and engagement of *real content*' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 95). This includes capitalising on the learners' own lives during my lessons and merging the syllabus with a focus on form approach. Most importantly, even when I am not be able to engage in a Dogme approach my teaching is still directed by an awareness of the three axiomatic principles discussed above. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) express the hope that 'by experimenting with [Dogme] in ways that are sensitive to your teaching context, you start to experience another way of being a language teacher' (p. 21). After experimenting with Dogme I can confidently claim that this is true in my case.

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# Computer Assisted Language Testing: On the Efficacy of Web-based Approach in the Instruction of Elementary Learners of English

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## Abstract

In this study the effectiveness and efficacy of e-learning was evaluated through a web based approach. Two classes of elementary learners of English were selected for this study, one class received a six month instruction through the typical twice a week classes and the other one was instructed through internet, in other words, the first class did not use any web based materials such as chat rooms, emails, etc ,however, the second class did not attend classes at all except for monthly meetings with the instructor in order to unravel some loopholes they encountered in dealing with internet and e-learning. They simply interacted with their instructor through internet by emails and chat rooms, this group was taught simply by internet, for example, they mailed their writings to their teacher once a week and the instructor gave feedback through e-mail, they also were assigned to chat every night with their classmates or native speakers and report the result to their instructor and so on. The final results revealed that the web based class outperformed the traditional class in writing, and reading comprehension, but the results were in favor of the traditional group regarding speaking performance and structural knowledge.

**Keywords:** web-based instruction, elementary learners, reading, writing, speaking, structure

## 1. Introduction

As Lee (2000) points out, web presents a venue replete with authentic daily materials apt for instruction, it also gives itself well into communicative language teaching premises and principles in as much as web is inundated with authentic, genuine, and communicative real-life materials conducive to the 21<sup>st</sup> century communicative language teaching and learning objectives. Beltz, (2003) and Thorne (2003) believe that language teachers can use internet for cultural awareness purposes in classroom, therefore, it helps learners get exposed to language and culture simultaneously. Wilson (1995) maintains that teachers utilize internet in order to access libraries all over the world, to share lesson plans, to communicate with students' parents, and to download current information beneficial for classroom use. In this study, it is attempted to compare the differential effects of two approaches, namely, web based and traditional in the instruction of elementary learners of English.

## 2. Literature Review

As put by Uzunboylu (2005), W.W.W Is a novel technology utilized as the facilitator of communication and instruction, the universities concomitantly took the advantage of this technology immediately and embarked on using web as the medium of instruction regardless of distance and time (Isman & Dabaj, 2005). The advantage of using multimedia according to Zimmer (2003) is to relate information efficiently to all students and to keep them intrigued. Many universities and institutions throughout the world are bending over backward trying to integrate web based instruction into their courses and curriculum designs. A multitude of colleges and language institutes, too, have amalgamated web based instruction as a regular part of their course objectives and broad curriculum goals.

Tanyeli (2009) showed that law students were better at web based learning compared to the traditional control group. Delfino and Manca (2006) investigated how the participants of a learning environment used written language in a creative way through the spontaneous use of figurative language, their results divulged that participants were more inclined to use figurative language when critical or meaningful events happened. Web

based instruction has also been used to assess library use by students and to investigate how it may ameliorate library use by learners. Meer (2000) explored the creative ways libraries used web for instruction and to support faculty use of web for teaching. Remote use of libraries according to his results increased resulting in increased use of libraries off-site. In a study by Emurian (2004) seventeen graduate students in two classes participated in a web based programmed instruction tutoring system, the results revealed that programmed instruction can produce problem solving skills and can foster student confidence. A great number of researches have been conducted in order to simulate the classroom experiences in real-time two way interactions between teacher and students (Shi et al., 2003).

Use of Web based instruction has been on the rise compared to traditional approaches in a plethora of studies (Eskenazi, 1999; Nelson & Oliver, 1999; O'Dowd, 2003; Toyoda & Harrison, 2002; and Warner, 2004). The majority of studies on web-based instruction have revealed the efficacy of this approach in learning and teaching students compared to traditional classes. Web based instruction is also interesting and motivating and it is more in harmony with the growing body of internet based education which is on rapid rise throughout the world.

In this study, there is an attempt to elucidate the efficacy of web based instruction on assisting the elementary learners' acquisition of English structures, reading comprehension, writing, and speaking. This study will leave no stone unturned in attempting to explore the role of internet and web in facilitating and ameliorating language instruction. A distinct feature of the present study is its attempt to investigate the role of web in learning components of language, that is, structure, reading, writing, and speaking.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants of this study comprised 40 elementary learners of English in a language institute. There were 20 participants in the experimental group and 20 in the control group. The average age for experimental group was 15 and for the control group was 16. The learners had not attended any English classes before and they were all given a placement test by the institute, therefore, they were all in almost the same competency level, however, a pre-test was given to these learners in order to make sure that the participants were all at the same competency level.

#### 3.2 Materials

The materials used in this study were 1) the learners' textbook which they covered in 3 terms, 2) a pre-test which was taken out of the text book they were supposed to cover during the terms, 3) a post-test which was also a parallel form of the pretest which was a form of achievement test given to these learners.

#### 3.3 Procedure

The experimental group received instruction for six months only through emails and chatting with the teacher or fellow learners or native speakers, they were instructed on how to use chat rooms and email in order to communicate with their teacher, fellow learners and foreigners especially native speakers. The participants were supposed to report every session what they had done through web and teacher gave feedback in order to improve the participants' use of web for learning purposes. The control group, on the other hand, received the same instruction for the text book during 6 months, with the only difference being that the participants in this group only received instruction through typical traditional classes, in other words, there was no web based material or instruction as to how to use web. To put it in a nut shell, the only difference between experimental and the control group was web-based instruction for the experimental group.

### 4. Results

The descriptive statistics of gained-scores of two teaching types (web-based and traditional) for reading, writing, speaking, and structure are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of web-based and traditional types for reading, writing, speaking, and structure

groups	number	mean	Std. Deviation	Std. error mean
Reading(web-based)	20	28.20	8.52	1.9
Reading(traditional)	20	17.90	6.12	1.3
Writing(web-based)	20	31.10	7.29	1.6
Writing(traditional)	20	16.95	3.90	0.8
Speaking(web-based)	20	16.35	7.45	1.6
Speaking(traditional)	20	34.40	5.69	1.2
Structure(web-based)	20	9.60	5.80	1.2
Structure(traditional)	20	35.75	6.47	1.4

Table 2. Comparison of web-based and traditional types of teaching reading

reading	Levene's test for equality of variance		t-test for equality of means		
	f	sig	t	df	Sig.(2 tailed)
Equal variance assumed	1.35	.252	4.39**	38	.05

$P \leq .05$ ,  $df = 38$

In table 2, the results of the *t*-test in comparison between two types of teaching reading (web-based and traditional) are reported. The result of the *t*-test indicates that there is a significant difference ( $M_{\text{web-based}} = 28.20$ ,  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 17.90$ ) between students in web-based group and in traditional group ( $t(df=38) = 4.39$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ).

Successively in table 3 the results indicate that students in web-based group outperform ( $M_{\text{web-based}} = 31.10$ ,  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 16.95$ ) learners in traditional ones ( $t(38) = 7.64$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ).

Table 3. Comparison of web-based and traditional types of teaching writing

writing	Levene's test for equality of variance		t-test for equality of means		
	f	sig	t	df	Sig.(2 tailed)
Equal variance assumed	6.77	.013	7.64**	38	.05

$p \leq .05$   $df = 38$

In similar vein, table 4 shows the findings of the two groups in teaching structure, traditionally taught learners made significant gains on post-test ( $M_{\text{web-based}} = 9.6$ ,  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 35.75$ ,  $t(38) = -13.44$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Table 4. Comparison of web-based and traditional types of teaching structure

structure	Levene's test for equality of variance		t-test for equality of means		
	f	sig	t	df	Sig.(2 tailed)
Equal variance assumed	.21	.64	-13.44**	38	.05

$p \leq .05$   $df = 38$

Comparisons of gained score results of speaking tests in table 5 indicated the superiority of traditional way of teaching of this skill ( $M_{\text{web-based}} = 16.35$ ,  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 34.40$ ,  $t(38) = -8.60$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Table 5. Comparison of web-based and traditional types of teaching speaking

speaking	Levene's test for equality of variance		t-test for equality of means		
	f	sig	t	df	Sig.(2 tailed)
Equal variance assumed	2.71	.10	-8.60**	38	.05

$p \leq .05$   $df = 38$

## 5. Discussion

As was perspicuous in the results section, the traditional group outperformed the web based group in speaking and structural knowledge, however, in case of reading and writing skills, the web based group performed far better.



Delfino and Manca (2006) showed that participants used figurative language in a creative way in their writings, in this study too, participants of the web based group revealed a better performance in writing compared to the traditional group. Regarding reading comprehension, too, the participants of the web based group outperformed the traditional group. These findings might be explicable in the light of the fact that web based classes were mostly taught through reading passages that the teacher sent to participants through e-mail, and the other passages were taken from internet. The majority of the activities in the web based group were reading and writing activities since the interaction between the teacher and the learners mostly occurred through reading and writing, for instance, the participants wrote passages and mailed to the teacher. The teacher corrected the passages and sent back the papers to the learners. Learners were also assigned some reading passages about which they were supposed to write a summary and mail to the teacher which were in time corrected and resent to the participants.

The question that is a little evasive and difficult to answer is why traditional group outperformed the web based group in terms of structures and speaking performance. One explanation might be that since in the traditional class learners attended the class twice a week and each class was held for 90 minutes, the participants had enough time to talk and this free discussion itself stimulated the emergence of speaking ability. However, in the web based group the participants had little opportunity to communicate and there was meager learner-learner or teacher-learner interaction. Concerning the structural knowledge in which web based group did not excel the traditional group, some points should be taken into consideration. In the traditional class which was a typical language class, there was some attention to forms, sometimes as post speaking or reading activities, sometimes as direct grammatical explanations by the teacher and so forth. But in the web based group learners received feedback on their grammatical accuracy only through feedback given on their writings, and the point to consider is that this feedback was not in direct interactional form like inside class feedback which is face to face. This might explain why traditional group outperformed the web based group in structural knowledge.

The results of the present study point out the fact that web based language teaching and learning is not necessarily the best approach to teach foreign languages and as the famous saying goes, whatever is new is not necessarily better. This should not be interpreted as the uselessness of web based approaches or a criticism against these approaches. What this piece of research shows is that web based approaches might not be as useful for the teaching and learning of all components and sub components of language. What this research recommends is that the best and most expedient way might be an amalgamation of both web based and traditional approaches to the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

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## Use of Other Languages in English Language Teaching at Tertiary Level: A Case Study on Bangladesh

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### Abstract

There has been a continuous debate over a long period over the issue of using the learner's mother tongue in teaching the second language. We have two schools in this regard – monolingual approach and bilingual approach. Those advocating the monolingual approach have claimed that learning is determined by the quantity of exposure to the target language. On the other hand, bilingual approach focuses on the fact that learners are facilitated by the use of their mother tongue. The primary concern of this study is to find out whether Bangla is used in teaching English at tertiary level in Bangladesh and if used, in which situation and to what extent. This study has been done in a private university situated in Dhaka. The researchers have used various techniques to collect the data, the analysis of which reveals that teachers of tertiary level use Bangla in English language teaching classes in some specific situations such as explaining difficult grammatical rules, presenting new vocabulary, giving instructions, etc. and they do so in accordance to the proficiency level of the learners.

**Keywords:** English, Bengali, Bangladesh, teaching, private university, tertiary level

### 1. Introduction

There have been many theoretical arguments for and against the use of learners' mother tongue or first language (L1) in teaching the second or foreign language (L2). According to some researchers (e.g. Mahadeo, 2006; Tsao 2001) the use of L1 is a barrier to learning L2. Some other researcher (e.g. Baily, 2005) think that it is difficult to use L1 in a multilingual class while Atkinson (1987), Harbord (1992) and Nation (2003) have found out that it is natural and beneficial to use L1 in a monolingual class.

In this regard, Bangladesh is a monolingual country with 95% of her people using Bangla as their L1 (Bangladesh, 1998). After the country became independent in 1971, the new nationalist government made Bangla the only official language and the sole medium of instruction at all levels of education (Haque, 1989). However, in 1974, English was introduced in the sixth year to be taught up to the twelfth year of education. In 1996, Compulsory English language foundation course was introduced in the state university undergraduate classes. And now English is taught as a compulsory subject from class I to class XII in all governmental and private institutions (Bangla medium).

This paper aims to examine whether the teachers of tertiary level in Bangladesh use Bangla in their English language teaching class which consists only of students speaking Bangla as their L1.

### 2. The Historical Background of the Issue

The attitude towards the use of learner's L1 has undergone periodical but regular changes. Several hundred years ago 'bilingual teaching' namely, Grammar-Translation method was the 'norm'. This method advocates translation into and from the target language. The medium of instruction is the learners' mother tongue. Reading and writing are the major focuses whereas speaking and listening are paid almost no attention (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

In the late 19th century, grammar-translation method was seriously challenged by the rise of Direct Method (Harbord, 1992; Harmer, 2001). The method advocates the use of the target language in the class and translation

to be avoided at all costs (Thornbury, 2006). This method gives a lot of importance to speaking and listening in L2. Direct method gained popularity because of mass migration, spread of world trade and commerce, and in particular, the emergence of United States as a world power (Harmer, 2001). Besides, political agendas, the growing trend of taking ELT as a casual career by the young people visiting Europe contributed to strengthening the English-only policy (Harbord, 1992).

But the criticism against the Direct Method and taking ELT as a career by many non-native people have brought L1 back into the class. When the non-native teachers try to implement the 'all English class' strategy, they face students' incomprehension and resentment. So they start using the mother tongue, which is very natural.

### 3. Literature Review

Before starting the study, it is important to look at some studies related to this issue. We will look at these studies from two perspectives: supports for the monolingual approach and support for the bilingual approach (Note 1).

#### 3.1 Support for Monolingual Approach

There are many who support the use of L2 in the class as the sole medium of instruction and communication. They believe that using only L2 in the class, though challenging to implement, ultimately results in increasing confidence in speaking and listening skills, creating more realistic environment for the learners.

Cook (2001) has identified three fundamental principles of the monolingual approach (though he is not a supporter of the approach):

- a) The learning of L2 should model the learning of L1 (through maximum exposure to the L2).
- b) Successful learning involves the separation and distinction between L1 and L2.
- c) Learners should be shown the importance of L2 through its continual use.

But, promoting English language as a medium of instruction in educational institutions has got two kinds of responses. At one extreme is the nationalistic response which advocates centering of the national language. At the other extreme is the functionalistic response which emphasizes the inevitability and usefulness of English (Mahadeo, 2006). As an example of the latter, Mahadeo refers to Singapore where English is not the L1. His research shows that an institution with high infrastructural resources, instructional equipment, language learning materials, and professional competences along with the use of English in instruction can produce learners with high proficiency level in English. On the other hand, Tsao (2001) has found out that because of the prevalent Grammar Translation method the school leaving Taiwanese students cannot read and comprehend any English article although they are taught English in their elementary as well as secondary level of education.

Turnbull (2001) also opines that it is important for teachers to use as much L2 as possible in a situation where the students spend only a short period of time in the class on daily basis.

In a multilingual class, the monolingual approach is more applicable unless the teacher can speak all the L1s: it is no good using any particular L1. A lot of teachers also believe that L1 should not be used in EFL/ESL context because it creates over dependency on L1. It may also mislead learning because of the differences between L1 and L2.

Thus there are some specific reasons why L1 should not be used in the class. However, Phillipson (1992) and Aurbach (1993) have challenged these assumptions. They think that these are impractical in global contexts and lack in pedagogical evidence. They have also highlighted the fact that monolingual principles are rooted in a particular ideological perspective which serves to reinforce inequities in the boarder society.

#### 3.2 Support for Bilingual Approach

During the past 15 years, monolingual orthodoxy has lost much of its appeal. It has been argued that it is degrading to exclude L1 and it has harmful psychological effects on the learners (Nation in Tang, 2002). Monolingual teaching can also create tension and a barrier between the students and the teachers. Besides, there are many situations where it is inappropriate and impossible to exclude L1.

Monolingual approach claims that native speakers are the ideal teachers. But the phrase 'native speaker' is problematic. It is because there are many versions of English and it is a matter of debate what makes an authentic native English speaker (Phillipson, 1992). Besides, as bilingual teachers are proficient in two languages, they have a higher level of metalinguistic proficiency and awareness that enable them to teach better (Mora, 2009).

Atkinson (1987) has identified three reasons why a limited amount of L1 should be allowed in the class in EFL context: it is a learner-preferred strategy, a humanistic approach and an efficient time saver. Harmer (2001) has found out five similar reasons:

- a) L1 is required by the activity in the class.
- b) It is entirely natural to translate from and into L2.
- c) Learners like using L1.
- d) Teachers use learners' L1 because they like it.
- e) The amount of L1 use depends on the learner's styles and abilities.

Cianflone (2009) also opines that using L1 is a learner preferred strategy and teachers subscribe to the judicious use of L1. And whereas Cole (1998) thinks that L1 can be used at lower levels in a monolingual context to show the differences between L1 and L2 and to teach tenses, Cianflone states that at the tertiary level, where language proficiency is higher, using L1 can be an important device in language learning as it can save time and increase learners' motivation.

The findings of Harboard (1992) and Gill (2005) demonstrate that the idea of excluding L1 from the class is too stressful for many learners. Harboard also claims that the use of L1 facilitates communication, teacher-student relationship and the learning of L2.

Nation (2003) has identified the following strands through which a learner can learn L2:

- a) Meaning focused input - learning through listening and reading
- b) Meaning focused output - learning through speaking and writing
- c) Language focused learning - learning through deliberate attention to language features
- d) Fluency development - learning through working with known material across the four skills at a higher than usual level of performance

Nation believes that the opportunity to use L1 while discussing before performance helps the learners to reach a higher level of L2 performance. There are various ways of teaching new L2 words, but L1 translation is the most effective (Lado, Baldwin, and Lobo in Nation, 2003). The use of L1 can also be a very useful tool of teaching grammatical structures. Finally, Nation states that using L1 in English language class is showing respect to the learners' mother tongue. In the same way Bailey (2005) has found out that banning L1 from the class can make the learners uncomfortable while it might be very frustrating for lower-level adult learners as they cannot express themselves in L2.

While arguing for L1 use in the class, most researchers have cautioned against its over use because it can create an over dependency on L1 and can over simplify the differences between L1 and L2. It can encourage laziness among learners and minimize the use of L2 (Atkinson, 1987). Thus, using L1 is not the ultimate tool of L2 learning; rather using a justified amount of L1 facilitates the learning of L2. It is necessary in certain situations such as motivating learners, creating a tension-free learning environment, raising awareness, etc.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

##### *4.1 Research Objectives*

The class in Bangladesh is the best place to use and practise English because the students hardly get any exposure to the language outside. But for the same reason, the students' English proficiency level is very low and the necessity of using the justified amount of Bangla in English language teaching emerges. The objective of the research is to find out if Bangla is used in the English language teaching class. If used, to what extent and in which situation is it used? The study also wants to discover whether the use of Bangla facilitates the learning of English in the context of Bangladesh.

##### *4.2 Participants*

The participants (N) of this research were sixty students (male and female) from three departments - BBA, Pharmacy and Computer Engineering Department - of an English medium private university established at Dhaka in 2003. They were in their first semester doing a fundamental English course called Foundation Course (including reading, writing and grammar). They were from Bangla medium educational background (learnt English as a compulsory subject from class I to XII) and share the same L1, i.e. Bangla.

Besides, the data providing teachers whose classes were observed were all male and moderately proficient in conducting the class in English. One of them was working at the university for six years while the other two were for two years.

##### *4.3 Tools of Data Collection*

The data were collected by class observation, unstructured interviews and administering a questionnaire. While

observing the classes, the researchers sat at the back of the class so as not to disturb the normal atmosphere of the class by their presence. The students had been briefed about them and their work. The researchers interviewed the teachers immediately after observing the classes. During the interview, they asked the teachers about what they had observed in the class. A questionnaire in English was administered during the normal class time. The objectives and methods of the study, including the questionnaire were first explained thoroughly to the learners. No time limit was set, but most respondents responded in 20 to 25 minutes.

#### 4.4 Limitations of the Study

The study has some limitations. Firstly, the institution where the research was carried out was situated in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. Secondly, the data were collected only from the students and teachers of one private university. Finally, minor discrepancies may exist concerning the occasions when L1 should be used due to different level of learners' proficiency.

### 5. Data Collection and Findings

In this part we will at first present the data and then go on to analyze them. Finally we will state the findings.

#### 5.1 Students' Questionnaire

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the responses to the questionnaire.

Table 1. Teachers' Language

Question 1	only English		only Bangla		both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Which language does your teacher use in the class	05	8.33%	00	0%	55	91.7%

As we see in Table 1, 91.7% of the participants have said that their teacher uses English and Bangla together in teaching English. No teacher uses Bangla alone although about 8% of the participants have said that their teacher uses only English in the class.

Table 2. Learners' Attitude Towards L1

Question 2	not at all		a little		sometimes		a lot	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Do you like your teacher to use Bangla in the class?	01	1.67%	11	18.33%	43	71.67%	05	8.33%

Table 2 shows that almost all the participants (excepting 1.67%) like their teacher to use Bangla in the class. This huge student support for L1 makes it necessary for the teacher to use L1 while teaching L2.

Table 3. Learners' opinion about using L1

Question 3	yes		no	
	N	%	N	%
Should Bangla be used in the class?	39	65%	21	35

As Table 3 shows and as it can be concluded from the discussion for question 2, most of the learners (65%) think that Bangla should be used in the class. And it is humane to act in the way which majority of the students support.

Table 4. Learners' opinion about the frequency of using L1

Question 4	never		Rarely		sometimes		quite often	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
How often do you think Bangla should be used in the class?	04	6.7%	08	13.33%	44	73.33%	4	6.67%

As we see in Table 4, most of the learners (73.33%) think that the teacher should 'sometimes' use L1 in the class.

On the other hand, only 6.7% of the learners think that L1 should ‘never’ be used in the class.

Table 5. Learners’ opinion about the role of L1

Question 5	No		a little		fairly much		a lot	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Do you think the use of Bangla in the class helps you learn English?	04	6.67%	13	21.67%	22	36.67%	21	35%

As Table 5 presents, while 36.67% of the participants think that using L1 helps them ‘fairly much’, 35% of them think that it helps them ‘fairly much’ or ‘a lot’. Thus about 72% of the learners in total think very positively about the effectiveness of L1 use in ELT classes. On the other hand, 6.67% of the participants believe that the use of L1 does not help them to learn English.

Table 6. Different reasons for using L1

Question 6	explaining difficult grammatical rules		new vocabulary items		abstract ideas & concepts		giving instructions		giving suggestions	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
When do you think it is more necessary to use Bangla in an English class?	18	30%	13	21.67%	14	23.33%	06	15%	09	10%

The data in Table 6 confirm the findings of the studies (Atkinson, 1987; Harmer, 2001, etc.) implying the idea that in some specific cases using L1 is profitable. There are at least five specific situations in which, the learners think, using Bangla is worthwhile. And it is important to comply with the learners’ opinions because, according to Krashen (1985), if the input is not comprehensible, the affective filter will be high. The learners will block out L2 if they are tensed, embarrassed, upset or angry.

### 5.2 Class Observation

From the class observation it was found out that the teachers often use L1 in the class especially to discuss difficult grammatical items, to explain the meanings of unknown words, and to give instructions. In a class the students were asked to take part in different activities based on a selected English passage. Before the students did the exercises, the teacher explained the passage with some translation. He also gave the Bangla equivalent of some difficult words and phrases. The use of both L1 and L2 seemed to be quite effective judging from the students’ responses. In giving instructions, the teachers first used English and then Bangla. Another teacher first attempted to explain the words, grammar points and meanings of complex ideas in English, but reverted to Bangla when he found the students unable to understand his English explanations. The other teacher used L1 only to give instructions such as to follow him and not to make noise. Among the three observed teachers, one teacher used Bangla a lot (about 60% of the limited time) because he thought that the learners would not understand if he conducted the class in English. One of the teachers opined that in some cases using Bangla saved time. The observations indicate that Bangla is used when English fails to work.

### 5.3 Teachers’ Unstructured Interviews

The purpose of the teachers’ interview that followed each class observation was to find out their beliefs regarding the use of L1 in ELT classes. From the interview, it was discovered that they use Bangla to explain difficult English words because this saves the learners from being confused. One of the teachers believes that if he conducted the whole class in English, the students would feel that English has been imposed upon them. The teachers also use L1 to save the class time. One of the teachers uses Bangla to give instructions which are difficult for the learners to understand. And most importantly, all the teachers think that how much English is to be used depends largely on the proficiency level of the students.

### 5.4 Findings

From the questionnaire, class observation and teachers’ interview, it is evident that teachers of tertiary level in

Bangladesh use Bangla in teaching English. The data seem to show that the judicious use of Bangla based on the situation does not hinder learning; rather it assists the learners in overcoming the problems, dilemmas and confusions generated by the extensive use of L2. Most of the learners think that in some specific situations Bangla can be used (See Table 4 & 5). It is beneficial to discussing difficult grammar, presenting new vocabulary items, explaining abstract ideas and concepts. Sometimes the teachers use L1 to give instructions. But they use L1 in accordance with the proficiency level of the learners.

## 6. Data Analysis and Discussion

It has already been stated that teachers of the tertiary level in Bangladesh use Bangla in some specific situations for some specific purposes. The use of L1 is beneficial to presenting new vocabulary items, explaining difficult grammar and abstract ideas, and giving instructions as well as suggestions. This finding supports the findings of Nation (2003). But the teachers should be aware of its over use because Atkinson's (1987) study shows that only a 'judicious' use of L1 is beneficial. To determine the judicious amount, it is important to identify the necessary situations. The data show that understanding difficult grammatical rules is one of the major areas of struggle for the learners (See Table 6). In this situation teachers can help the learners by showing the differences between L1 and L2.

During the interviews the teachers claimed that they use Bangla to save time, to make learners understand the difficult things, etc. One of them said that he uses Bangla because his students do not understand English very well. But researchers have cautioned against the over use of L1 because it can create laziness (Atkinson, 1987). Another teacher claimed that he uses Bangla to draw the attention of the learners. But giving instructions is one of the most realistic and meaningful opportunities of exposing the learners to L2. It must be remembered that meaningful and realistic use of L2 is an underlying principle of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

### 6.1 Implications for ELT

On the whole, the results of the study show that Bangla has an important role to play in teaching English. The use of L1 provides the learners with a tension-free environment, lowers their affective filters and thus helps them to anchor the L2 concepts. But L1 is to be used only to supply a scaffold for the learners. The learners should be encouraged to use as much L2 as possible. Besides, they need to be very clear about the purpose of learning L2. Discussing the value of L2 with the learners can be very effective. As the frequency of using L1 largely depends on the teachers, the teachers should decide how frequently they will use L1. To do it, the teacher has to design the lesson plans and tasks very carefully in accordance with the objectives of the lesson and the proficiency level of the learners. They should use L1 only as a facilitating device, not as a medium of instruction. It is because the language of the teachers directly affects the learners (Cook, 1996).

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this research assert that using a justified amount of L1 in some specific situations does not hinder the learning of English; rather it works as a facilitator. This is in harmony with Krashan's (1998) findings that properly organized bilingual programs provide more comprehensible input in English. On the other hand, over use of L1 or improperly designed bilingual programs hinder comprehensible input and thus impedes learning. Moreover, over use of L1 may create a dependency on it.

Considering these the researchers suggest some ways of overcoming the obstacles:

- To tell the learners why they need to learn L2
- To discuss with the learners the value of using L2 in the class
- To design the tasks according to the proficiency level of the students
- To determine how much and how often L1 should be used
- To plan the lesson in such a way so that the learners get enough exposure to L2
- To involve the learners in the tasks through warm-up activities
- To use aiding materials so that the learners feel secured and less stressed
- To encourage the learners to use L2 while engaged in group or pair work

However, this list may vary and grow according to the level, need, attitude and situation of the learners. The findings of this research will indeed acknowledge other researchers to find out the role of mother tongue in second language teaching and learning.



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## Note

Note 1. The proponents of English-only policy are collectively known as the Monolingual Approach while those advocating the use of L1 in the class are known as the Bilingual Approach.

# The Effect of Learner Constructed, Fill in the Map Concept Map Technique, and Summarizing Strategy on Iranian Pre-university Students' Reading Comprehension

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## Abstract

Concept maps (CM) are powerful tools which have different uses in educational contexts; however, this study limited its extension and explored its impact on the reading comprehension skill of Iranian EFL students. To this purpose, a proficiency test was employed and 90 intermediate pre-university students were chosen and divided into three groups: learner constructed CM group, fill in the map CM group, and summarizing strategy group. The whole study was conducted within three months. At the beginning of the study, a reading comprehension test (as a pre test) was administered to measure the comprehension ability of the subjects. During the five-session treatment period, the assigned strategies were taught and practiced in each group. Then, another reading comprehension test (as a post test) was employed to compare the effect of treatment on the comprehension skill. The results of the study showed that despite the efficacy of all three strategies, the fill in the map version of CM was the most influencing one. It suggested that in general, CM technique might be regarded as an alternative or even as an effective replacement of the summarizing strategy for reading comprehension skill.

**Keywords:** reading comprehension strategies, learner-constructed Concept Map, fill in the Map Concept Map, summarizing strategy

## 1. Introduction

In the educating context, based on the idea of learning how to learn and investigating the process of students' learning, the idea of concept map (CM) was emerged. It is defined as "graphical tool for organizing and representing relationships between concepts indicated by a connecting line linking two concepts" (Novak & Canas, 2007, p. 1). In another definition Novak (2010) described it as a new model for education (Novak, 2010). The technique of CM was developed by Joseph D. Novak and his research team at Cornell University in the 1970s as a means of representing the emerging science knowledge of students. In his study, Novak and his team sought to follow and understand changes in children's knowledge of science. It has subsequently been used as a tool to increase meaningful learning in the sciences and other subjects as well as to represent the expert knowledge of individuals and teams in education, government and business.

As Novak demonstrates, the technique of CM is rooted in Ausubel's Assimilation Theory. The fundamental idea in Ausubel's assimilation theory is that "learning takes place by the assimilation of new concepts and propositions into existing concept propositional frameworks held by the learner" (Novak & Cañas, 2008, p. 2). Three distinctive features can be assigned to CMs which include hierarchical structure, cross links and specific examples. The most important and a basic feature of a CM is the hierarchical structure. In the process of creating a concept map, the broadest, most inclusive concept should be first determined and written either in the top or in the middle part of the map while detailed concepts will be positioned below the top or around the central concept (as a node). Other concepts which are less important will be deleted or moved away from the map. The other important feature is cross links between separated concept nodes. In drawing a concept map, different kinds of arrows will be used to show the relationship between different concepts. Providing specific examples is the last feature of CM. According to Mintzes, Wandersee, and Novak (2000) the purpose of providing examples is to clarify the meaning of a given concept (Mintzes, Wandersee, & Novak 2000). Additionally, there are different versions of CM which includes expert- constructed concept map, learner – constructed concept map, fill in the

map concept map and cooperative concept map.

Reviewing the literature reveal that CMs are powerful tools which have different uses in educational contexts such as learning or comprehending tools, evaluation tools, study skills, advance organizer, recalling, and facilitator of learners who have language difficulty to mention some. On the other hand, as studies indicate the ability to read and comprehend is considered as one of the most important and basic skill for a person to learn and educate. More specifically and to my knowledge, Iran can be considered as one of those countries in which for its most users English has the role of library language; in other words, among the all other skills, reading comprehension is considered as the most important and basic skill; hence, in the present study, the researchers limited CM's extension and explored the possibility of CM to be influential on reading comprehension. Based on the fact that students' comprehension ability could be enhanced as their teachers provide appropriate strategies that match their learning styles; it is sought to explore whether introducing this novel and flexible tool will enable them to tackle the challenging texts with greater independence.

A wealth of studies has been conducted to investigate the impact of CM on education; however, a brief review of its impact on reading comprehension is mentioned to support the claim for the implementation of this study. In the English reading field, CM technique is beneficial for students in terms of reading comprehension, recalling and organization. In one study, Chang, Sung and Chen (2001) compared the two versions of computer-based concept mapping: 'construct-on-scaffold' and 'construct-by-self' on student learning. Construct-on-scaffold' is the same as 'fill in the blank version' of concept map in which an incomplete framework of an expert concept map with some blanks are provided as a scaffold for the students. Students had to fill in the blanks to complete the framework. And in the 'construct-by-self', students were provided with the opportunity of constructing their concept maps freely and without scaffolding aid. The result indicated that concept mapping with scaffolding instruction provided a more positive effect on student learning (Chang, Sung & Chen, 2001).

Interestingly, in another study (2002) they investigated the effect of concept-mapping strategies (map correction, scaffold fading, and map generation) on students' text comprehension and summarization abilities. Results indicated that the map correction method enhanced text comprehension and summarization, and the scaffold-fading method facilitated summarization. The findings also suggested that combining a spatial learning strategy with a correction method or scaffolding instruction might be a potential approach for optimizing the effects of concept-mapping (Chang, Sung & Chen, 2002).

Dolehanty (2008) studied the effect of concept mapping technique on the students reading comprehension. In this study, students who participated in concept mapping instruction completed a survey both prior to and at the completion of the instruction period. Furthermore they practiced concept map on six chapters of their books and then participated on a reading comprehension test. The result indicated that concept mapping had no significant impact on the students' reading comprehension. However; most of the students reported that they had positive attitudes about the concept map (Dolehanty, 2008).

Lambiotte and Dansereau (1992) proposed that students with low prior knowledge benefit more from concept maps than those with high prior knowledge (as cited in Nesbit, Adesope, 2006). The process of creating concept map for a domain helps learners to gain insight into how they learn (Canas et al., 2003). In addition, concept mapping promoted reflection, a self-regulatory process related to motivation, self-control, and self-efficacy (Coulthard, 2005).

Liu (2009) investigated the effectiveness of the concept mapping learning strategy on learners' English reading comprehension. The result indicated that the concept mapping learning strategy was more effective for the low-level group than for the high-level group, in terms of their performance on reading comprehension (Liu, 2009). In the same vein, Dias (2010) examined the effect of strategy of concept map on the second language learners' reading comprehension. Results showed that the construction of meaning by the creation of concept maps could be an effective reading strategy in English as an L2 (Dias, 2010).

O'Donnell, Dansereau, and Hall (2002) believed that the property of concept maps in comparison with prose-form summaries is that they are reviewed more quickly. In this respect concept maps may be similar to other concise summary formats such as lists and indented outlines (as cited in Nesbit & Adesope, 2006). Nesbit and Adesope (2006) also proposed that concept map is particularly helpful for acquiring main ideas, but poor for acquiring detailed, nuance-laden knowledge (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006).

Concept mapping has been used widely in "hard" science fields such as physics, chemistry, and biology. Several researches have demonstrated that the use of concept mapping technique is an effective tool for aiding student's comprehension and retention of science material. Furthermore they illustrated that students using concept maps have better performance than students receiving more traditional types of instruction. For instance, Patrick (2011)

in one study examined the use of concept mapping as study skill on students' achievement in biology. The result indicated that there was no significant difference in immediate Post achievement test scores between students who used concept mapping as a study skill and those who reviewed and summarized in their studies. However, in respect to retention a significant difference was found between students who used concept mapping as study skill and those who summarized after review; in other words, using concept mapping technique helped learners to retain knowledge for a longer period of time. In addition he believed that by the help of concept map students can enhance their achievement tests scores (Patrick, 2011). BouJaoude and Attieh (2007) also conducted a study in which the effect of concept maps as study tools on achievement in chemistry was investigated. Finding of a study revealed that although there were no significant differences on the achievement total score, there were significant differences favoring the experimental group for scores on the knowledge level questions (BouJaoude & Attieh, 2007).

As mentioned above, there is a rich body of researches showing that CM enhance learning by encouraging students to think both deeply and critically, as well as by improving comprehension (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006). However, there is still a lack of research regarding the use of CM in L2 in general and in L2 reading comprehension in particular (Jiang & Grabe, as cited in Rosenberg et al., 2010). Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that reading comprehension and CM are similar in that both stress the importance of assimilating new information with previously learned information. Being familiar with this technique and feeling it's necessitate in our (Iranian) educational context stimulated me to explore it in the current study.

In general, several reasons may be the source of students' difficulty in reading comprehension. Factors such as lack of appropriate reading strategies, lack of background knowledge related to the topic of the target language or lack of attitudes toward reading are examples of source of that difficulty. Moreover, there are few teachers who are familiar with the recent strategies to provide some effective opportunities for their students. According to my own knowledge and on the basis of what actually occurs in most Iranian classrooms, the strategy which is frequently applied by most Iranian teachers and students is the summarizing strategy. Regarding the vast improvements in the domain of reading comprehension strategies in the world, it seems there is a need to call for those new strategies to provide some improvement in this domain. In an attempt to achieve this goal, the impact of two versions of the concept mapping technique i.e. fill in the map and learner-constructed concept mapping were compared with summarizing strategy to determine if CM could be regarded as a effective alternative or even replacement of the summarizing strategy. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold: to investigate whether concept map is effective and has advantages on the summarizing strategy and if it has advantages, which version of concept map is more appropriate; learner constructed or fill in map. So to meet the requirements of the study, the following research question was addressed:

**Research Question:** Is there any significant difference between the reading comprehension of the students who use concept map techniques and summarizing strategies?

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no significant difference between the reading comprehension of those students who use fill in the map, learner-constructed concept maps, and summarizing strategies.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study were selected from among 125 high school students from five classes of three schools in Babol. All of them were pre-university students and all were majoring in science. All of them were girls and their age range was about 17 -18 years old. Since only intermediate students were required for the purpose of the study, a standard proficiency test was administered and 90 students were selected as the subjects of the study. Then they were divided into three intact groups each consisting of 30 subjects. When they were interviewed about their process of learning English, almost all of them mentioned that they had experience of learning English as a foreign language in language institutes.

### 2.2 Materials

#### 2.2.1 Data Collection Tools

To conduct the present study different kinds of tools were administered to collect the required data in different steps.

##### 2.2.1.1 Placement Test

A standardized language proficiency test named as Oxford Solution Proficiency Test by Linda Edwards (Oxford University Press 2007) was employed for the purpose of choosing students with intermediate level and ensuring

their homogeneity.

#### 2.2.1.2 Reading Comprehension Pretest

A reading comprehension test as pretest was administered to measure the comprehension ability of the students before applying the treatment. The pretest involved three passages of comparable length (average of 600 words) with the same readability level along with the total of 30 multiple choice questions. Topics of pretest's passages were Biospheres in Space, Ecotourism and You Can Be a World Memory Champion respectively. The reliability coefficient of the pre test based on Alpha Cronbach was .90. All passages that were used in this study including the reading comprehension pre test were selected from two best selling reading comprehension books entitled *Reading and Vocabulary Development 3 Causes and Effect* by Ackert and Lee (2004) and *Active Skills for Reading: Book 3* by Anderson (2009).

#### 2.2.1.3 Teaching Passages

As mentioned above the passages that were used to teach and test in this study were selected from two best selling reading comprehension books entitled *Reading and Vocabulary Development 3 Causes and Effect* by Ackert and Lee (2004) and *Active Skills for Reading: Book 3* by Anderson (2009). The rationale for choosing the passages from these books were that since only students in the intermediate level were subjects of this study, books with series of levels were more suitable to select passages from them. In such books the passages are graded according to the CEF levels (The Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment), so allow the users to choose those books which are at the required language level. Hence, there was a verification that the selected passages were at the intermediate level, i.e. at the same level of the students. Five passages from these two books were selected to practice in the classroom, which were the same for all groups and contain an average of 550 words for each passage. Topics of the passages were the Dangers of Dieting, Headaches, the Garbage Project, Homeschooling, and Afraid to Fly.

#### 2.2.1.4 Reading Comprehension Posttest

A parallel reading comprehension test similar to pretest was used as a post test to assess the efficacy of the treatment on the students. It also contained three passages of comparable length (average of 600 words) with the same readability level and with the total of 30 multiple choice questions. Topics of posttest's passages were Photovoltaic Cells: Energy Source of the Future, Endangered Animal Success Stories, and Skyscrapers respectively. These passages were also selected from the same book as used for the pretest and the teaching passages. The reliability coefficient of the post test based on Alpha Cronbach was .69.

#### 2.2.1.5 Cmap Tools

In order to create the blank CMs for the subjects in the fill in the map group, the CmapTools software, a free software developed at the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition (IHMC at <http://cmap.ihmc.us/conceptmap.html>) was used. This software offers a style which allows mappers to shape their maps with colors, shadows, background images, different types of lines and arrowheads for indicating directions, different types of sizes and fonts, and text alignments.

### 2.3 Procedure

#### 2.3.1 Placement and Pre test Administration

By applying a standard proficiency test students with intermediate level were selected as the subjects of the study. Then to determine the reading comprehension ability of the subjects before conducting the treatment, the mentioned pretest was administered to the all three groups. Subjects were supposed to answer to the all questions in 36 minutes. The procedure used in administering the pretest was exactly the same for all three groups.

#### 2.3.2 Treatment

The whole study was conducted within three months. Two versions of CM including learner-constructed CM and fill in the map CM and a traditional reading comprehension strategy (i.e. summarizing strategy) were the selected strategies which were applied in the experimental groups 1 to 3 respectively. Once the pre test was administered to the three groups, a treatment procedure involving five-session instruction and practice of the particular strategy with a period of 20 minutes for each session was assigned to each group.

##### 2.3.2.1 Experimental Group 1: Concept Map Drawing Instruction and Feedback Provision

In this group, subjects were supposed to learn how to draw CMs for the five passages which were taught to them. The first step in CM training was to introduce subjects with the ideas of CM and its advantages and uses. Subjects were provided with handouts that included the definition of CM and its uses and applications, the

procedure of drawing a CM by Novak and Gowin (1984) and a passage with a drawn CM as a model. The strategy was taught explicitly following Novak and Gowin's (1984) step-by-step procedure then students were taught the reading passages and were asked to draw CM of their own at home and submit them to teacher. One point which is worth to mention is the familiarity of one subject of this group with the issue of CM; this opportunity provided a helpful condition for the researchers in the process of instruction. In every five sessions the subjects' drawn CMs were collected and read and some feedback were provided for them. The purpose of the evaluating of CM and provision of feedback was helping students learn how to create a good CM progressively up to the last session. Having the scoring system of Novak and Gowin (1984) in their mind, the researchers used a holistic method of scoring with a scale of good, fair, and weak to assess students' concept map and provide feedback to them. At the end of the course, they received a complete feedback report including reviewing important points.

#### 2.3.2.2 Experimental Group 2: Fill in the Map Concept Map Instruction and Feedback Provision

Instead of creating a concept map, subjects in this group were provided with the drawn CMs of their passages in which some concepts or linking lines had been left out and students were asked to fill in the maps based on the passages they were taught. Students of this group were also provided with the same handouts about CM as the first group. The difference was in the way they had to do their assignments as mentioned above. A holistic method of scoring with a scale of good, fair and weak was applied to assess students' process of filling of CMs and to provide appropriate feedback. In each of the five sessions, students had to submit their assignments and one of the researchers prepared some useful comments and feedback based on students filled maps and provided them orally to the all students.

#### 2.3.2.3 Experimental Group 3: Summarization Instruction and Feedback Provision

Subjects of this group were asked to summarize the passages that were taught. To this purpose, handouts including information about the definition of summarization strategy and its applications on the reading comprehension were provided for them. After explicit instruction of the strategy based on Brown and Day (1983) general rules of summarization; the reading passages were taught in each session and subjects were asked to summarize the passages at home and submit their works to the teacher. Like the other groups, a holistic method, including scales of good, fair and weak was selected to assess their summarization. In each session based on the subjects' summaries and their questions and problems, the researchers prepared some comments and feedback and provided them orally to all of them.

#### 2.3.3 Posttest Administration

At the end of the treatment, the post test was administered to the all groups. Based on the property of this study, there was a difference between the administration of the pretest and posttest. The difference between the pretest and the posttest was that on the pretest all groups answered reading comprehension questions without employing the strategies while on the posttest they employed the strategies that they learned and then answered the reading comprehension question in the multiple choice form. Because of limitation in the school time and for the purpose of handling the exhaustion of subjects, the posttest administration took place in two sessions for each group. To take them under control, the subjects were asked to submit the papers in which they applied their strategies; in this way the researchers were sure they had employed the required strategy to answer the reading comprehension questions.

### 3. Results

Before analyzing the results, it seems necessary to mention the findings collected from the applying of teaching strategies on the subjects and teachers:

Both teachers and subjects were more willing toward reading when they learned that there are different kinds of strategies they can use into their reading comprehension. Regarding concept map (CM) technique, the focus of the present study and a new and interesting technique to them, it was found that participating teachers and subjects were mostly motivated to learn this strategy and apply it into their lessons. In other words, after teaching for a while, the researchers realized that almost all subjects of CM groups were motivated to use the strategy even for their other courses especially the fill in the map CM group where their task was easier and faster to do.

To provide the statistical analysis of the data, first a normality test was employed to evaluate the normality of the collected data. According to Soleimani (2009), the first step to decide upon the application of an appropriate statistical test is to numerically test the normality of the collected data. Since the data of the reading comprehension post test was normal, parametric statistic tests were applied to analyze the results. An analysis of variance (*ANOVA*) was applied between the three groups' posttest to explore whether there was a significant difference between them.

Table 1. Results of *ANOVA* of Reading Comprehension Post Test

Source of changes	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	57.15	2	28.57	5.41	.006
Within Groups	459.16	87	5.27		
Total	516.32	89			

Note: Sig < .05 is significant

As Table 1 indicates, there was significant difference between the performance of the three groups (Sig= .006). In other words, the null hypothesis that "there is no significant difference between the reading comprehension of three groups" was rejected. To do the further analysis of the data, the pair wise comparison had been done in order to figure out whether there was significant difference between reading comprehension of each pair groups. Table 2 also presents the results.

Table 2. Post Hoc Result for Multiple Comparison of Post Test

group(I)	group(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
1	2	-1.20	.135
	3	.73	.469
2	1	1.20	.135
	3	1.93*	.007
3	1	-.73333	.469
	2	-1.93*	.007

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

Delving into the details of the use of the mentioned strategies on reading comprehension, it could be noticed that only in the case of the comparison of group two and three, the difference was significant ( $MD=1.93$ ;  $Sig=.007$ ). In other words, the fill in the map CM group performed significantly better than the summarizing group. As the first line (row) of Table 2 shows, the mean difference (MD) of groups one and two was -1.20 which revealed that group two was better than group one, however the difference was not significant (Sig=.135). Additionally when groups one and three were compared the result showed that despite the better performance of group one than group three (MD=.73), again the difference was not significant (Sig. =.469). Overall, the finding of this study was in favor of CM technique on summarizing strategy with regard to reading comprehension skill. It further verified that the fill in the map version of CM was the most influencing strategy amongst all three strategies.

#### 4. Secondary Findings

In addition to these results, the present study also revealed another aspect of the study which the researchers felt it was worth to mention. The purpose of this section is to report the effect of mentioned strategies on the reading comprehension of the three groups. Since this study was in pre- post test design, considering the effects of the treatment on the reading comprehension of each group could provide additional interesting findings. To achieve this goal, the *ANOVA* test was employed to determine whether there was any significant difference between the mean scores of the three groups. Although it was assumed that the three groups were homogenous according to the standard proficiency test, the result of *ANOVA* confirmed it. In other words, it revealed that there was no significant difference between the three groups (Sig=.69). Table 3 presents the result of *ANOVA* of the pretest.

Table 3. Results of *ANOVA* for Reading Comprehension Pre Test

Source of changes	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	3.09	2	1.54	.369	.692
Within Groups	364.03	87	4.18		
Total	367.12	89			

Furthermore to determine the impact of each group's treatment on the students' reading comprehension, the "t" test was computed. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4. Result of Paired- t test between Groups (Effects of Treatment)

Groups	N	Mean (MD)	Differences (SD)	t	df	Sig.
Group 1	30	3.30	1.84	9.62	29	.001
Group 2	30	4.06	2.04	10.86	29	.001
Group 3	30	2.23	.29	7.58	29	.007

As Table 4 displays in all three groups there was significant difference between the performance of the subjects in reading comprehension pre and post tests of each group ( $sig_1=.001$ ,  $sig_2=.001$  and  $sig_3=.007$ ). In other words all strategies (learner constructed and fill in the map CM technique and summarizing strategy) had positive effect on subjects' reading comprehension.

## 5. Discussion

As it was revealed in the data, there was relationship between the degree of reading comprehension ability and applying of the mentioned strategies. In other words subjects' comprehension ability improved when they used the required strategy in comprehending the texts. Another point of interest is that in general, CM performed better than the traditional reading comprehension strategy (i.e. summarizing strategy) and put it into more details the fill in the map version of CM had advantages over the learner constructed one.

For years, and more recently, summarizing strategy has been called as an important tool in reading comprehension but as indicated in this study there are other strategies which is worth to put emphasize on them. Although CM and summarizing strategy are similar in a way in which both play the role of taking notes; they are different in some fundamental aspects. One reason for the difference in comprehension could be due to the way they approach the texts. CM technique allows learners to get use of their visual intelligence while summarizing strategy does little in this case. This graphical tool has shown that are helpful because in addition of paying attention on sequential structure of the text, its visual representation also allows them to get a holistic understanding of the text. Moreover it allows them to visualize a certain knowledge structure in a graphic form which helps them to take in all the data from an image simultaneously and recall the information easier and faster. Interestingly it is also helpful in a sense in which it reminds learners that they are equipped with multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and visual intelligence is one of those intelligences which is highlighted by CM. So, the advantages of CM over summarizing strategy could be justified by referring to the opportunity of letting learners to get help of the visual ability as well as other abilities. Hence, consistence with this study one of the obvious reason of the superiority of CM groups over the summarizing strategy group would be its role in encouraging learners to get help of their visual intelligence.

To view it in another aspect, creativity can be considered as another advantage of CM over the summarizing strategy. As Novak and Gowin (2003) believe the act of mapping requires a creative activity in which the learners should exert to clarify the meaning of the text and finds the relationships between concepts. They believed that concept mapping is an excellent exercise for the promotion of creative thinking and identification of new problem-solving methods. It seems that encouraging creativity is another important feature of CM compared with summarizing strategy and as it is revealed in this study the CM groups benefited most from this opportunity.

Another reason for CM advantages is its provision of Meaningful learning. Several studies have showed that CM technique involves the activation of the prior knowledge and reorganization of the relationships between concepts. CM has the important role of activating learners' prior knowledge which is an effective stage for meaningful learning. Hierarchical organization (framework) of CM can also be effective for the retention of the knowledge. Novak believes that one of the reasons concept mapping is so powerful for the facilitation of meaningful learning is that it serves as a kind of template to help to organize knowledge and to structure it. Considering this point in this study, subjects in the CM groups first had to find a general and known concept of the text and relate their prior knowledge with the concept of the text and organize them in a hierarchical form to have a more clear understanding of the text while subjects in the summarizing group put much emphasize on the sequential information of the text. Hence, as finding of this study revealed the process of creating CM seems to be more beneficial than the process of applying summarizing strategy.

The findings of the research question are also in line with previous research in terms of the effectiveness of CM



on reading comprehension. In a study conducted by Liu, Chen and Chang (2009) the effects of a computer-assisted concept mapping learning strategy on EFL college learners' English reading comprehension was investigated. They found that the computer-assisted concept mapping learning strategy had greater reading benefit for the low-level group than for the high-level group. Dias (2010), also, carried out a research on the effect of CM to enhance students' reading comprehension in English as L2. He found that creation of a visual representation of a text can enable students to follow how authors organize and bring together their arguments around a specific topic in the texts they write and as a result can be an effective reading strategy. In another study conducted by Patrick (2011), the purpose of the study was to determine if the use of concept mapping as study skill can influence students' achievement in biology. Significant difference was found in estimated retention between students who used concept mapping as study skill and those who summarized after review, and all the students interviewed agreed that concept maps helped them to determine relationships among concepts, sharpened their understandings and increased their critical thinking. It was concluded that concept mapping could serve as an appropriate alternative for studying biology since what is learned through it can be retained for a longer time.

Another important point to be mentioned is that when the two versions of CMs are compared the fill in the map CM has advantages on the learner constructed CM. There may be several reasons why the fill in the map CM is the best group. To provide further discussion, first it's better to explain more about the completion strategy (Van Merriënboer, 1990). This strategy is based on a sequence of instructional procedures from fully worked out examples with complete task solutions to conventional problems. Provision of partial solutions of tasks or questions is the rationale behind this strategy. There are several studies which supported the rationale of completion strategy and indicated that novice learners learn more from studying worked examples and as is revealed in this study, the fill in the map CM group members whose designed work was based on this strategy, performed better than the other groups. Furthermore concerning the findings, it can also be argued that since the skeleton blank map is provided for the students it was very helpful for them to have a holistic understanding of texts and as Chang et al (2001) have found because of the reduced workload on the students' mind, they were more ready to encounter with the texts and understand them better. As a result, this study demonstrated the importance of scaffolding instruction on the comprehension ability of the students. It has shown that students need to be helped by their teachers to improve their understanding and learn better. Another important reason of their success may be explained by referring to the fact that provision of blank map may help learners to get a general picture of what the text was about. And this opportunity helps them to implicitly be aware of the general organization of the text. Having a general picture of the text, not only help them to understand the text better but also make them to be more motivated and eager to read and their motivation may be indicated as one factor of their success.

This Finding is consistent with previous research in terms of the effect of two versions of fill in the map and learner constructed CM on comprehension ability of the students. Research has revealed that comparing the two version of CM, the fill in the map CM has advantages on the learner constructed one. Chang, Sung and Chen (2001), for instance conducted two similar studies and the findings suggested that combining a spatial learning strategy with a correction method or scaffolding instruction is a potential approach for optimizing the effects of concept-mapping. In one study they compared the effectiveness of the 'construct-by-self', 'construct-on-scaffold', and 'construct by paper-and pencil' concept mapping on students' biology learning. They found that the 'construct-on-scaffold' (which is the same as fill in the map CM) had better effect for learning on biology. Based on the Paas's idea of completion strategy; they suggested that concept mapping with scaffold fading instruction may be optimized to be more adaptable and efficient learning. They argued that the reduced workload of the scaffold aid will be the reason of the effectiveness of construct-on-scaffold CM.

In another study they designed three concept-mapping approaches—map correction, scaffold fading, and map generation—to determine their effects on students' text comprehension and summarization abilities. They found that the map correction method is the best method for reading comprehension. They believed that by asking a learner to correct concepts and links in the partially incorrect expert map, the researchers forced them (a) to fully "encode" and understand the concepts and the connections between them from the entire map and (b) to use critical and analytical thinking to detect the improper relationships between concepts. In this study, the students using the 'construct-on scaffold' version outperformed the students using the 'construct-by-self' version, yet the 'construct-by-self' version evoked the highest percentage of students who wanted to use concept mapping in their future studies.

At the end it should be noted that as Novak stressed in creating a concept map it is the process which is important not just the final product and it is this property which is very fruitful for learners and educators in the language learning domain. Generally, the results of the present study indicated that comprehension skills can be improved by getting help of appropriate strategy. Strategy instruction would help learners to think thoroughly

about the strategies they could use to improve their reading comprehension and become better reader.

## 6. Conclusion

As discussed previously, the core interest of this study was to compare the effect of the two versions of CMs; fill in the map and learner constructed CM technique; and summarizing strategy on reading comprehension. As the result showed this study put emphasize on the importance of visual tools in the education. To shed more light in this respect it is worth to consider the general properties of teaching context. In traditional teaching context all learners are viewed as sequential learners and Concepts are introduced in a step-by-step fashion and practiced with drill and repetition, while in the recent teaching methods all learning styles including the visual special style, should be considered to provide a thorough context for teaching. CM technique is most in favor of visual special learners since they comprehend concepts quickly when they are presented within a context and related to other concepts. Conducting a study, Spanish researchers (2002) have found that substantial percentage of school population would learn better when they use the visual- special learning methods. In their study, they found that one third of the school population emerged as strongly visual-special, 30% has shown a slight preference for the visual-special style and only 23% were strongly auditory-sequential (Silverman & Freed 2002). Having these points in our mind, this study suggests that there is a need to provide a method of teaching in which it is in favor of all learners; in other words all learners' styles and intelligences should be take into account in order to have the best method for teaching.

Furthermore this study also supported the importance of students' meaningful learning. In fact as Novak (2010) believes "the central purpose of education is to empower learners to take charge of their own meaning making" and Visual representations such as concept maps are powerful tools to serve such requirement. The last point which is worth to mention is that provision of feedback is an important stage for the students to create CMs. In fact practice and explanation of the technique are not enough and students need to be provided with appropriate feedback to ensure their understanding.

## 7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Owing to the practical limitation regarding doing assignments, the present study focused on a small sample of female participants. However, another study can be conducted with a larger sample and with both sexes to examine whether such possibilities will provide different results. Furthermore, it should be interesting if future research focus on the two other versions of CM which are expert constructed and cooperative CM. Additionally it might be better if the future studies investigate CM on the other contexts such as in ESP (English for specific purposes) contexts in which learners have severe problems with comprehending texts written in L2. Moreover this research topic can also be practical in L1 contexts for comprehending of different scientific and academic texts. More specifically since there is the probability that CM might be more practical on some special types of texts, further researches can be designed to investigate the effect of CM on comprehension of different types and structures of texts. However, in spite of these limitations, the present study offered revealing information about the effect of CM technique and summarizing strategy on reading comprehension.

## Key Points

It seems to be fruitful to provide the key points at the end of the study:

1. This study stressed the importance of meaningful learning and creative thinking in the realm of reading comprehension.
2. Emphasizing the importance of individuals' differences and their various styles for learning, this study encouraged teachers to provide opportunities for learners to be introduced with various strategies and help them to match their styles with the appropriate strategy.
3. It also revealed that visual representation tools such as CM could be regarded as an effective method for teaching and learning on reading comprehension.
4. It suggested that providing scaffolding learning condition and provision of feedback are the central components of every educational context particularly in the reading comprehension domain.

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# CLIL European-led Projects and Their Implications for Iranian EFL Context

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## Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the European-led projects in the field of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and their potential applicability in the Iranian EFL context. This paper tries to introduce various dimensions of CLIL and examine the compatibility of its component with the Iranian context.

**Keywords:** Content and Language Integrated Learning, CLIL, Iranian EFL context

## 1. Introduction

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is an educational approach within which non-language school or curriculum subjects are introduced through a foreign/second language instruction and communication context.

Scholars in the field of CLIL have offered various definitions for CLIL. The following are some of them:

*'CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language'.* (Marsh, 1994)

*'CLIL is a generic term and refers to any educational situation in which an additional language, and therefore not the most widely used language of the environment, is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself'.* (Marsh & Lange, 2000)

*'CLIL is an educational approach in which non-language subjects are taught through a foreign, second or other additional language'.* (Marsh et al, 2001)

*'The use of languages learnt in the learning of other subjects'.* (Lang, 2002)

*'Integrating language with non-language content, in a dual-focused learning environment'.* (Marsh, 2002)

According to Marsh & Lange (2000) successful language learning takes place when people receive instruction (i.e. are taught) and at the same have the opportunity of using and experiencing language in authentic and real-life situations.

According to Marsh & Lange (2000), though language classroom as an environment within which instruction is provided, is an essential part of the language learning process, in most cases based on the confinements of the classroom either in terms of time and resources, the teachers are not able to go beyond the classroom limits and manage to provide situations in which students really use language.

*"What CLIL can offer to youngsters of any age, is a more natural situation for language development which builds on other forms of learning. This natural use of language can boost a youngster's motivation and hunger towards learning languages. It is this naturalness which appears to be one of the major platforms for CLIL's importance and success in relation to both language and other subject learning".* (Marsh & Lange, 2000)

Since the notion of CLIL is a recent one, it may take time for students to be familiarized with this type of education. However, once they get familiar with that it is highly likely that they improve at a higher rate than usual. Based on CILT, the National Center for Languages' website, students may benefit CLIL instructions from the following perspective:

- stronger links with the citizenship curriculum (particularly through the use of authentic materials, which offer an alternative perspective on a variety of issues)

- increased student awareness of the value of transferable skills and knowledge
- greater pupil confidence

Marsh and Lange (2000), taking the benefit of establishing the analogy between playing the piano and learning the language, mention that in case of non-language subjects there are almost always opportunities for learners to practically experience what they have already theoretically learned in a real context. For example a learner of the piano, after having received theoretical instructions, most probably is capable of finding an opportunity to practice what he/she has learned practically on a real piano. However, in the case of language, especially in EFL contexts, learners may rarely be capable of being benefitted from real-life and authentic opportunities to *practically* practice language. What Marsh and Lange try to suggest is that CLIL might possibly a highly reasonable solution to solve this problem. According to Marsh & Lange (2000), the following are the potentials of CLIL approach:

- The ability to use a language is much more than knowing its words and grammar, and speaking in perfectly formed sentences. Central to language is ability to communicate which is a highly complex human behavior. Since the infants and very young children can demonstrate an incredible ability to communicate with a very limited knowledge of language, a learner of a second/foreign language may exhibit the ability of communicating even though the knowledge of grammar already acquired is faulty, the knowledge of word is weak or pronunciation ability is poor. This can be to a great extent fostered and enhanced through CLIL approach as it paves the way for real use of language.
- Learning different languages may greatly increase the learner's thinking abilities. Since CLIL is a dual-focused approach (content and language), it enhances the ability to think about different concepts in another language which itself double the thinking enhancement effects. CLIL provides the opportunity for the learner to learn to think in another language, not just the language itself as the main focus of the course.
- CLIL offers an opportunity to the youngsters to be actual bilingual or even plurilingual users of languages. CLIL can provide learners with this opportunity regardless of their social and economic positions. CLIL is a highly social phenomenon.

The primary goal of this study is to show the potential implications of European-led projects and researches in the field of CLIL in the Iranian context. As an EFL situation, Iranian learners of English virtually lose all their connection to authentic English outside the classroom environment i.e. the sole opportunity of practicing English is in the classroom. In this case, the major portion of educational burden is transferred to classes and school system.

According to Ghorbani (2009) local educational authorities in Iran have less power in decision-making as the educational policies are almost entirely decided by the central government and passed down to the local organization to be employed in schools. In this system the provincial schools are bound with the textbooks and methodologies determined by the superior Ministry of Education. As mentioned before, due the natural lack of authentic context of using English outside the classroom in such EFL context of Iran, it is expected that this lack is compensated by the educational policies within the school system. However, according to Jahangard (2007), Iranian students' oral and aural skills are not within the focus of Iranian EFL textbooks and the primary focus of the present educational system is to make students pass tests and exams. There also some other reasons that why Iranian students are not able to develop and subsequently demonstrate a reasonable level of proficiency in communication skills within the school framework. According to Namaghi (2006), there are some sociopolitical factors which affect the teaching process:

- Since the educational policies and consequently the educational materials are solely determined by a governmental organization- Ministry of Education- teachers cannot choose the materials which best suit their students' needs
- The output of teaching process is highly influenced by the national testing system. Thus the assessment scheme used by teachers may not go beyond the goals of the national testing system. As an evident consequence, in this way teachers are not able to develop tests which have positive washback effects on the learners.
- Since the Iranian context is highly sensitive to educational achievements which are almost always seen in the scores obtained by the students, there is a great pressure from parents, students and school authorities on teachers. In this case it seems impossible for a teacher to deviate what has already been determined by the central policymaker.

It is evident that within such a context neither the lack of authentic opportunities of foreign language is

compensated by the Iranian educational system nor the educational system contributes to achieving even the minimal levels of proficiency in foreign language acquisition.

Based on the definitions and the potential advantages of incorporating CLIL approach into the national educational policies and the inefficiencies of Iranian educational system in providing an effective foreign language learning and acquisition context which have been hereinbefore mentioned, the author would like to propose that, based on the following reasons, establishing a movement toward incorporating CLIL approach in Iranian educational system is of evident benefits:

- Most youngsters spend at least 12 years in this educational system before entering academic environments- this can be increased if we take into account the preschool courses, which potentially provides the students with an invaluable opportunity to acquire a foreign language.
- CLIL approach perfectly works within the national educational system since it integrates the subject matters taught at schools and language.
- It may perfectly compensate the lack of authentic opportunities of foreign language use which is an inherent quality of any EFL context.
- It necessarily leads to nurturing students with higher international academic skills and better cross-cultural understanding.

## **2. CLIL Dimensions and Focuses and Their Implication in Iranian Context**

According to the CLIL Compendium, a European project supported and funded by the Directorate-General for education and culture of the European commission, there are 5 dimensions based on issues relating to culture, environment, language, content and learning. Within each dimension there are a number of focal points based on three major factors: age-range of learners, sociolinguistic environment, and degree of exposure to CLIL. These factors will be fully discussed in the section relating to types of CLIL.

The 5 dimensions are as follow:

### *2.1 The Culture Dimension - CULTIX*

#### **2.1.1 Build Intercultural Knowledge & Understanding**

Iran is a developing country and is not needless of foreign technologies and resources. Therefore, the potentiality of establishing international relationship is significantly high as it has already been established to some extent. Another point is that, based on geographical diversity, Iran is a highly potential tourist destination. Though, as a result of relative isolation of Iran in international community in recent years and also religious limitations, this potential has not been turned into an actuality, it seems obvious that Iran will be benefitted from this global market soon or later. The establishment of such industry might be translated into an increasing number of tourists who in turn will need infrastructures like hotels and related industries. This emerging need will lead to a high demand of knowledgeable work force with high intercultural knowledge and understanding. Therefore, any investment in this field will be of evident benefits.

#### **2.1.2 Develop Intercultural Communication Skills**

As mentioned before, Iranian educational system has proved to fail to produce proficient users of English since its main focus is on national exams. Further, based on relative isolation of Iran in international community, the degree of exposure to different cultures is relatively low in Iran. Since incorporating CLIL methodologies into Iranian educational system will be in need of investigating and even emulating foreign resources, this trend will necessarily result in an introduction to different points of view employed in other countries in order to develop educational materials which in turn are true reflections of cultural atmospheres of those countries. Such a process will help the students and even teachers and other authorities develop better intercultural communication skills.

#### **2.1.3 Learn about Specific Neighboring Countries/Regions and/or Minority groups**

Since this project has been conducted in a European framework, this aspect of cultural dimension might not be relevant as such in Iranian context. However, this aspect may offer some insights. Incorporating CLIL approach will definitely result in better understanding of different countries even if not neighboring countries.

#### **2.1.4 Introduce the Wider Cultural Context**

Introducing a foreign language, specifically English into an educational system will bring with itself cultural issues related to that language and speakers of that language. Additionally, mixing language with specific contents will make students aware of other cultures' perspective toward life-related issues.

## 2.2 *The Environment Dimension - ENTIX*

### 2.2.1 Prepare for Internationalization, Specifically EU Integration

Except the part for EU integration which is not relevant for Iran, studying in an international language, even if partly, will bring with itself a more thorough understanding of the international community. As mentioned earlier, Iran is on the verge of being international. Introducing CLIL approach is a strategic investment.

### 2.2.2 Access International Certification

Incorporating CLIL approach means being more in harmony with international standards. As a consequence of Iranian educational system a strong tendency toward certification has been created between Iranian students and even their parents. An increase in number of private institutes which offer courses to prepare students for entering different undergraduate courses, and even the permanent requests of Iranian English learners for a kind of certificate are symptoms of Iranians' tendency toward certification. Integrating CLIL approach into this kind of educational system may correct these kind of views toward certification while providing a sound framework for international harmonization and certification.

### 2.2.3 Enhance School Profile

In recent years, English has been included in the programs of most private kindergartens and preschools in Iran. Growing interest in Iranian parents to send their children to these institutes despite of their relatively high expenses might be considered as a sign of understanding the position of English as an international language among Iranian parents. Subsequently, schools and institutes offering these kinds of courses are likely to find a higher prestige in the market. Further, regardless of social prestige, introducing CLIL courses in such institutes means entering more English proficient teachers which in turn means a possible higher understanding of international trends in education.

## 2.3 *The Language Dimension - LANTIX*

### 2.3.1 Improve Overall Target Language Competence

Since the emergence of the notion of language acquisition, huge amounts of study have been conducted in order to propose a workable framework within which language can be acquired more naturally and effectively. According to Marsh & Lange (2000) successful language learning may occur when people alongside the instructions they receive can experience authentic and real-life situations in which they can use and acquire language. As mentioned before, in an EFL situation of Iran in which the connection to English and chance of having real-life opportunities to use English outside the classroom is virtually zero, creating a quasi authentic situation inside the classroom and within the school framework seems to be a rational remedy. If this is the case, introducing CLIL in the Iranian school system seems to be the best option.

### 2.3.2 Develop Oral Communication Skills

Based on what hereinbefore mentioned e.g. Ghorbani (2009), Iranian students' oral and aural skills are not within the focus of Iranian EFL textbooks and the primary focus of the present educational system is to make students pass tests and exams. According to Razmjoo & Riazi (2006), Iranian schools lack the methodologies like Communicative Language Teaching, Community Language Learning, or Cooperative Learning. Since the sole focus of CLIL is not language and also a specific content, naturally a CLIL class involves high degrees of communication which in turn may help students develop oral communication skills.

### 2.3.3 Deepen Awareness of Both Mother Tongue and Target Language

On the contrary to the claim the above statement proposes, many parents might think that a CLIL class may hurt the children's first language. It seems that this is not the case. CLIL classes not only help students learn a second language –here English- but also help them gain a better understanding of their mother tongue as they naturally and subconsciously keep both languages alongside each other. Further, since CLIL is not supposed to be the main medium of teaching in schools and is seen as a complementary activity, students are given this opportunity to compare how content can be delivered in different languages thus they will find a better understanding of their own language.

### 2.3.4 Develop Plurilingual Interests and Attitudes

CLIL approach aims at developing students which can study and learn in at least on additional language- here English. Once such ability has been formed, it may encourage students to develop their abilities in other languages as well. Introducing different subjects through different languages naturally brings with itself some knowledge

about the speakers of those languages. Since Iran is a relatively high mono-cultural environment, developing plurilingual attitudes may open new horizons to the Iranian students.

#### 2.3.5 Introduce a Target Language

CLIL, in its simplest definition is teaching a specific content through an additional language. Therefore, it is quite obvious that in this case English –target language- will be widely introduced.

### 2.4 The Content Dimension -CONTIX

#### 2.4.1 Provide Opportunities to Study Content through Different Perspectives

It has been mentioned earlier that learning a new language will provide learners with this opportunity to learn something from the speakers of that language and their culture. Mixing language with specific content not only enhances the cross-cultural understanding but also helps learners look at content through a different perspective as content-related materials in the target language may exhibit to some certain extents how teaching of that specific content is practiced where that specific language is used.

#### 2.4.2 Access Subject-specific Target Language Terminology

Studying a specific content through another language – here English- will necessarily lead to learning the content-related terms in the target language. Therefore, students will be able to use extra-curricular materials which might be written and produced in the target language. This ability will have evident positive effects on the students' future academic success.

#### 2.4.3 Prepare for Future Studies and/or Working Life

The number of Iranian students seeking higher education in English-speaking universities overseas is increasing. Introducing CLIL into Iranian educational system may serve as a preparation period for those who want to continue their education in other countries.

### 2.5 The Learning Dimension - LEARNTIX

#### 2.5.1 Complement Individual Learning Strategies

Different learners have different learning styles which urge them to use different learning strategy. Since schools are required to follow a standardized program it is quite possible that this prescribed methodology does not suit a number of learners. Since in Iranian context school programs are dictated from a central authority and this prescribed system is not efficient at least in terms of English teaching, many students may not find the official school programs so effective. CLIL as a complementary program to the school standard program may provide students an opportunity to experience a new perspective toward learning different contents and subsequently foster more personalized learning procedures.

#### 2.5.2 Diversify Methods & Forms of Classroom Practice

CLIL adds a degree of variation to the conventional practice of teaching.

#### 2.5.3 Increase Learner Motivation

Once the students have found that they can actually learn something through another language they may experience a higher level of motivation.

### 3. CLIL Types, Focuses and Their Potential Applicability in Iranian Context

As mentioned earlier in the previous section, the five dimensions of CLIL are actualized around some focal points. According to CLIL Compendium project, these focal points are as follow:

- Age-range of learners
- Socio-linguistic environment
- Degree of exposure to CLIL

Based on the factors of socio-linguistic and age-range of learners, CLIL Compendium proposes the following CLIL types:

- MONOLINGUAL 14-20 YEARS
- BILINGUAL 14-20 YEARS
- MULTILINGUAL 14-20 YEARS
- MONOLINGUAL 5-15 YEARS



- BILINGUAL 5-15 YEARS
- MULTILINGUAL 5-15 YEARS
- MONOLINGUAL 3-6 YEARS
- BILINGUAL & MULTILINGUAL 3-6 YEARS

Since the aim of this study is to propose an initial framework for incorporating CLIL approach into Iranian context and school system, the above list should be refined in order to reflect the Iranian context.

Iran is a monolingual country. By this we do not mean that there is no other existing language in this country. However, the principal mode of delivery in schools all over the country is Farsi which is the national language of Iran. In other words, it hardly ever happens that one can find classes within the country which consists of students with different languages. Even though in some regions and provinces across the country, for example Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, or southern provinces, people speak with some other languages alongside the national language, Farsi has such widespread acceptability that we can safely assume Iran as a monolingual context. Therefore, the abovementioned list might be initially refined to the following list:

- MONOLINGUAL 14-20 YEARS
- MONOLINGUAL 5-15 YEARS
- MONOLINGUAL 3-6 YEARS

Another possible refinement would be in case of age-range of learners. We propose that the age-range of learners is determined so that it could correspond to Iranian school system. In order to do so, we propose the second refinement would be done in the following way:

- MONOLOINGUAL 3-6 YEARS which corresponds to kindergarten and preschool ages
- MONOLINGUAL 7-11 YEARS which corresponds to elementary school ages
- MONOLINGUAL 12-14 YEARS which corresponds to secondary school ages
- MONOLINGUAL 15-18 YEARS which corresponds to high school ages

Considering a highly influential factor i.e. The Iranian National University Entrance contest which has a significant effect on the studying orientation in high schools years among Iranian students and even their parents which naturally results in establishing extra-curricular courses and classes which solely focus on improving testing skills, we believe that incorporating CLIL courses in this period might not work properly. Therefore, in order to achieve a workable framework, we propose the third level of refinement done in the following way:

- MONOLOINGUAL 3-6 YEARS
- MONOLINGUAL 7-11 YEARS
- MONOLINGUAL 12-14 YEARS

The other factor which has not been discussed here is degree of exposure to CLIL. According to CLIL Compendium Project, the degree of exposure to CLIL is defined as follows:

*The proportion of CLIL teaching experienced by a learner in a school year*

- *Low - about 5-15% of teaching time*
- *Medium - about 15-50% of teaching time*
- *High - over 50% of teaching time*

Naturally as students progress to higher level of education, the number of subjects taught increases as well. The diversity of subjects potentially promises a richer context for employing CLIL approach. Therefore, we propose the following degrees of exposure to each CLIL type mentioned above:

- MONOLOINGUAL 3-6 YEARS, Low to Medium
- MONOLINGUAL 7-11 YEARS , Medium
- MONOLINGUAL 12-14 YEARS, Medium to High

The abovementioned list means that the incorporation of CLIL may start from a set of limited hours in kindergarten and preschools and gradually increases to higher amounts of exposure in elementary and secondary school.

#### 4. Conclusion

CLIL is of evident potentiality for Iranian context. Since internationalization is becoming an emerging trend all over the globe, each nation should be equipped with the right tools to be prepared to deal with this global orientation.

CLIL has experienced most of the research in European context mostly through EU and European Commission funded projects. Though these projects mostly manifest and reflect cultural and socio-linguistic characteristics of European countries, we believe that they may provide us with invaluable insights about incorporating such an approach into different local contexts especially those of developing countries which seek to find their position in the international community.

This study is an initial attempt to localize European-led projects in the field of CLIL in the Iranian context.

It is strongly suggested that scholars and researchers in the field of TEFL in Iran pay much more attention to the potentialities of CLIL. As mentioned earlier, any attempt to establish such a trend is a strategic investment.

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## Difficulties Students Face in Understanding Drama in English Literature at the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG)

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### Abstract

The present paper explores the problems of English Language and Literature junior and senior majors, who are enrolled in a drama course at the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG). The course emphasizes the significance of drama. Morgan (1987: 7) defines drama as an “art of communication,” which is essential in teaching literature. A survey was administered and the questionnaire consisted of open and closed questions to have both quantitative and qualitative information of what each participant attributes to each facet of the study. The participants of the study consisted of 133 randomly selected students, which is 39% of the population of the current study. The population included both male and female students of “English Literature in the 20th Century” in the second semester (2006–2007). The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation, T-test independent sample, Spearman correlation, means and percentages, as well as Alpha Cronbach and Split-half. Findings showed that a majority of the students agreed that “reading drama is more common than watching it.” Students face this major difficulty in learning drama. Over 70% of the students agreed that “students feel frustrated with the length of a play,” “Extensive use of symbolism, similes, metaphor,” and “writing style” were serious problems. Further research is strongly recommended to be conducted particularly in IUG, to fill in the gap among issues students face such as cultural, communicative, and linguistic facets in learning drama. The removal of these obstacles can benefit different aspects of learning and teaching drama and literature. These implications can be multi-dimensional in terms of linguistic, cultural, and communicative aims.

**Keywords:** English language and literature, drama, difficulty

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this present paper is to investigate the aspects of drama in the learning and teaching of English language and literature. The focus of this current study is one of the most important subjects of investigation within the recent years.

Different researchers and authors, some of whom have devoted worthwhile surveys to the subject of literature and its significance, mention the importance of learning literature (Carter and Long 1991, Habib 1994, Zayda 1997, Ghosn 1998, Annaralla 1999, Keshta 2000, Dodson 2000, Carter and McRae 2001, Henning 2001, Shrimpton and Godinho 2002, Showlter 2003, McNaughton 2004, Crumpler 2005, Kornfeld and Leyden 2005, Boddén 2006, Costello 2006, Dupre 2006, Gina 2006, Gurley 2006, McNaughton 2006)

The Palestinian educational environment, specifically Islamic Gaza University, is not an exception. Even if students study literature, they always face problems or difficulties that make them unable to understand different courses, such as drama (Keshta 2000, Mourtaga 2004).

“English is a universal language: the language of communication among countries in the international world of trade, business, communications, air transportation and technology,” according to Keshta (2000, p.1). In Palestine, English has become an essential demand for all levels and almost in all fields. The Palestinian government paid attention to the teaching of English as a second or foreign language and allocated 80 credit hours to English Language and Literature (Al-Breem 1999: 3). This move secures the interest and benefit for its people (Al-Breem 1999: 4–5). However, there are still problems in this context. For instance, Mourtaga (2004: 16) explains that the motivation towards English do not mean that all Palestinian students are good at English in spite of its importance.

Despite the great attention paid to English language development, there are some obstacles or problems (Keshta 2000: 44–45) in the way of the aspired development, such as the lack of proper arts for language learning and

teaching. In addition, most English language and literature teachers in IUG are not selected based on the qualifications a professional is required to have. Thus, most students deal with problems in their learning literature and drama on their own (Shaqfa 2007).

Drama is a window that not only permits its audience to look into the cultural values of the people but also allows for reflecting a social life in which the reader can deduce and determine the culture and the way of living in any society (Keshta 2000: 53). This insight is in line with the definition of Morgan (1987: 7), in which he states that drama is an art of communication. In addition, Keshta cites that drama involves the whole living process from birth to death (2000: 53).

Based on the above reasons, the present paper reports the outcome of the research conducted on the difficulties of students taking the course of drama at IUG. For this purpose, the answers were derived from the multiple choice and open-ended questions in a questionnaire designed to respond to the aim of the present study. In drama, learners have the opportunity to express themselves in less controlled and more creative situations. This technique is an effective approach in foreign language teaching as well. The mentioned feature of drama helps the learners apply the language they have learned (Scheutz and Colangelo, 2004). Some scholars offer priceless information for colleagues who aspire on a smaller scale to achieve class objectives relating to drama (Dodson, 2000). Others talk specifically about drama on a larger scale and achieve out of class theatrical production goals (Bancheri, 1996; Moody, 2002; Savoia, 2002; Schultz and Heingk, 2002).

The learning of every language, including English, and the significance of each participating component and sub-component are closely dependent on the background of that language, such as the culture where that language is dominantly used. In this respect, literature paves the way to enlighten the path and the procedures employed in solving the difficulties students deal with in learning drama. Studies can help identify what students should know about the techniques involved in learning drama. These difficulties might range from linguistic to non-linguistic criteria since drama and literature, whether contemporary or old, are in line with the common cultural ground of the people who speak the target language.

## 2. Research Objectives

The objectives of the present study represent the research questions in every respect of the effects of drama learning among the English Language and Literature students of IUG. Finding solutions to the difficulties facing students can facilitate learning that specific subject matter. The current research paper provides a clear insight of the obstacles facing students learning drama in English literature at the IUG, Palestine. In addition, this present article targets some of the reasons behind low levels of English language among junior and senior students at the mentioned university. The objectives of the present research paper are as follows:

1. To discover the main difficulties students majoring in English Language and Literature face regarding the nature of drama
2. To find the importance of learning drama in a conducive environment

In an attempt to achieve the above mentioned objectives, the current research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Is the low proficiency of students in the English language involved in their having difficulty with drama reading?
2. Which elements of drama make it difficult to be learned by students?

## 3. Literature Review

Many scholars confirm the fundamental role of English language and literature in the lives of people (Henning 2001, Shrimpton and Godinho 2002, Showlter 2003, McNaughton 2004). In addition, the lack of knowledge in English makes international communication impossible. Habib (1994:5) considers the value of literature in its attempt to explore, recreate, and seek for meaning in the human experience. At the university level, this importance is even more notable. Having access to new types of technology, recently published papers relate to different fields, updated textbooks and so on, makes English as a certain requirement for all university students. In this regard, the main method of learning a language acknowledges that literature is an inevitable part of communication. Different countries deem learning the English language as part of their priorities in their teaching and training aims. Some countries tailor the varieties of English and approaches to achieve their purposes.

Morgan (1987: 7) defines drama as “an art of communication.” Drama is one of the most complicated forms of literature. Among the different literary works, drama needs a subtle arrangement of the language, which is the facet adding to its difficulty.

In this sense, Showlter (2003: 84) states that basically “Plays are not meant to be read.” In other words, if drama were meant to be read, there would be no chance of its correction to the addressee, while acting out the drama allows for such a modification. For instance, this is imaginable in a theater stage where modification and conveying of the true message of the drama can happen.

Drama and plays are written to be acted. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to bring out and transfer what is on the page to action. However, this creates a problem when it comes to the role of the students in non-English speaking countries with different languages and cultures.

Palestine, like other countries, considers the importance of English education. Teaching English language, including literature, is one of the main components of the Palestinian education curriculum. Consequently, the English department at the IUG realizes the importance of teaching English literature as a means of developing creative leaders. Therefore, 80 credit hours are devoted to English language and literature. Half of these courses are classified as Literature, in which instructors are normally free to organize and select the course content based on the course syllabus. These literature courses represent about one-third of the total requirements of the B.A degree in English Language (Al-Breem, 1999: 3). According to Al-Breem (1999: 4) most of the English Departments in Palestinian universities contain courses devoted to the study of language and literature.

Al-Breem (1999: 4–5) enumerates several characteristics of a literary course in Palestinian universities. The first component is that the material is selected based on the traditional approaches. In other words, instead of using the modern and up-to-date sources, the teachers mostly introduce the courses they had previously covered. Al-Breem continues that this selection of old material turns the students passive rather than active and participative. When students are asked to memorize what their instructors have read earlier, they become passive. In addition, students attempt to get a passing mark by memorizing sources they have covered rather than applying deep analysis (Shaqfa, 2007). According to Al-Breem (1999: 5), this practice affects the cognitive ability of the students.

Finally, Al-Breem (1999: 5) states that another prominent issue apparent in the Palestinian drama learning context is the lack of interest to follow the linguistic facets of the literary work among the instructors and the students. Furthermore, Al-Breem adds, “this can negatively affect the literary skills of the students and their capacity for literary appreciation.”

For the purpose of the present study, removing those obstacles facing the learning of drama is a step towards achieving the flourishing aims in different realms of language, literature, and even culture.

### *3.1 The Importance of Teaching Drama*

Several studies have been done to determine the importance of teaching literature in different perspectives and case studies. Ghosn (1998) presented four good reasons to use literature in the primary schools and integrate it into the English as a foreign language program, especially in cases where language proficiency was the ultimate goal of the learning-teaching process. However, it is limited to the classroom and school. The first reason states that authentic literature provides a motivating and meaningful context for language learning, and it presents natural language at its finest by promoting vocabulary development in context. The second reason cites that literature stimulates oral language and involves the child with the text while exposing him or her to some aspects of the target language culture. The third reason is that literature promotes academic literacy and critical thinking skills, and has the potential of fostering private interpersonal and intercultural attitudes. Finally, good literature deals with some aspects of the human condition and attempts to come to some understanding of life, either symbolically or metaphorically, and can contribute to the emotional development of a child (Ghosn, 1998).

Another study was conducted by Keshta (2000). The study examines the perception of foreign students regarding the understanding and teaching of English literature. In his study, Keshta investigated Gaza university student perceptions of drama and short stories in English with respect to (1) teaching approaches and strategies, (2) specific problems encountered, (3) benefits, and (4) reasons for studying literature. Keshta designed a questionnaire-based survey and randomly selected a sample of 147 foreign students majoring in English in Gaza universities to participate in the study. The study reports three major findings. First, major problems facing foreign students in learning drama in English literature were understanding the theme, conflict, length of the play, and writing style. Second, major problems facing foreign students in learning short stories in English literature were vocabulary, writing style, character role, plot, and theme. Third, the appreciation of other cultures, evaluating and creating new ideas, and promoting language development were the beneficial components of understanding English literature.

Henning (2001) suggests relating literature and culture to undergraduate foreign language (FL) curriculum from the beginning through the advanced levels. The proposed curriculum is organized around socio-cultural and socio-historical values, attitudes, issues, and preferred literary texts in the broad sense. The role of literature in

FL curricula is a means of presenting culture at the intermediate level, a separation between lower-division and upper-division FL courses, and are goals at intermediate-level courses. The study highlights an intermediate French sequence designed to integrate language, literature, and culture.

The course explores cultural values and attitudes, focusing on France and Quebec. To develop their cognitive abilities, linguistic skills, and cultural knowledge for success in higher division courses, students constructed their own goals. They also moved the foreign language curricula away from literary history and civilization courses that strive to make students uncultured without helping them understand the socio-cultural significance of what they are studying. The research focused on the importance of relating culture studies and literary history.

Shrimpton and Godinho (2002) discussed the differences in student engagement in small-group literature discussions and the strategies that teachers used to support student speech. Case studies were used, which draw on videotaped data from small-group literature discussions, interviews with teachers, and student focus groups to provide insights into teacher practice in small-group discussions. The research project was conducted in three schools located in the Melbourne suburbs. Approximately 120 children participated and 12 teachers were recruited from the three primary levels. The study found that what was emerging as more significant than gender-based differences in the ways that boys and girls engage in literature discussions was their socio-cultural positioning in the discussion process. They observed that the differences in student engagement in literature discussion were due to cultural and social understanding.

#### 4. Methodology

The present research used the descriptive analytical method. A descriptive study, according to Brown and Rodgers (2002: 117), is “a research that describes group characteristics or behaviors in numerical terms.” A questionnaire was designed to gather the data needed for the present study. In previous studies, asking an open-ended question to students and teachers allowed them to express their difficulties in learning drama. Leaving a space for the respondents to provide their points of view through the open-ended questions was the other way to extract their opinions about what they have figured out to be their problems in reading drama.

The questionnaire in the present study was developed to identify the main problems students face in learning drama. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items containing difficulties related to the nature of drama. The stated expressions fell in five scales: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), No opinion (3), Agree (4), and Strongly agree (5).

Al Agha (1996: 121) believes that the internal consistency indicates the correlation of the degree of each item with the total average of the test. The internal validity coefficient was computed using the Pearson formula.

Table 1. Correlation coefficient at the items

No.	Item	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
1	Length of play	0.505	Sig. at 0.01
2	Use of old English	0.427	Sig. at 0.01
3	Writing style	0.304	Sig. at 0.05
4	Extensive use of symbolism, similes, metaphor.	0.326	Sig. at 0.05
5	Use of non English vocabulary	0.337	Sig. at 0.05
6	No chance for acting the play.	0.358	Sig. at 0.01
7	Lack of familiarity with culture and social context	0.508	Sig. at 0.01
8	Negative attitude towards drama.	0.530	Sig. at 0.01
9	Syllabus includes recent or modern plays.	0.345	Sig. at 0.05
10	Syllabus includes Muslim or Arab authors.	0.294	Sig. at 0.05
11	Lack of motivation towards drama.	0.648	Sig. at 0.01
12	Lack of fun.	0.525	Sig. at 0.01
13	Lack of participation and discussion.	0.281	Sig. at 0.05
14	No facilitators except teachers' notes.	0.587	Sig. at 0.01
15	The unawareness of the writer's background.	0.407	Sig. at 0.01
16	Students depend totally on the summary of teachers.	0.359	Sig. at 0.01
17	Watching drama is better than reading it.	0.291	Sig. at 0.05
18	Reading drama is not exciting.	0.550	Sig. at 0.01
19	Students do not study the whole play.	0.539	Sig. at 0.01
20	Students level is weak in English.	0.313	Sig. at 0.05
21	Students feel frustrated with the length of the play	0.357	Sig. at 0.05
22	Students do not have the right to choose the text they want to study.	0.434	Sig. at 0.01
23	Focusing on tragic drama	0.427	Sig. at 0.01
24	Shortage of literary references of drama.	0.453	Sig. at 0.01
25	Focusing on certain periods of literature.	0.375	Sig. at 0.01

Table 1 shows the data analysis of the correlation coefficient of each item with the domain.

The provided tables represent the significance of the answers obtained through the questionnaire. These figures determine if there is any meaningful relation between the items provided earlier or not. For this purpose, the correlation coefficients are calculated using SPSS and whether they are significant (less than .05) or insignificant are shown in the table. The comparative analysis of the gained data indicates the degree of the importance each respondent, i.e. each student, ascribe to each criterion or item.

The results of Table 1 show that the value of the items suitable, highly consistent, and valid for conducting this study.

The population of the study consisted of both male and female students of the English department at IUG who registered for the course “English Literature in the 20th Century” in the second semester (2006–2007). This course acquaints the students with the main literary movements and the major writers of the 20th century. In taking advantage of some basic texts, the student is provided with a historical sense of the period together with some in-depth study of important works. The population of the study has 338 students, which consists of 67 males and 271 females.

The pilot sample of the present study comprised of 50 students out of the population of the study. The pilot study aims to ensure the reliability and the stability of the instrument of the study. The sample of the study consisted of 133 students constituting 39% of the population of the study. In selecting the participants, stratified random sample was used. All the students were in English language and literature field. The students were enrolled in the academic year (2006–2007) in the third and fourth levels.

Table 2. The distribution of the sample according to classification

Marital status	Junior		Senior		total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	16	12.03	29	21.80	45	33.83
Female	10	7.52	78	58.65	88	66.17
Total	26	19.55	107	80.45	133	100.00

Table 2 shows the distribution of the sample according to classification and Table 3 shows it according to marital status.

Table 3. The distribution of the sample according to marital status

Marital status	Married		Single		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	1	0.75	44	33.08	45	33.83
Female	25	18.80	63	47.37	88	66.17
Total	26	19.55	107	80.45	133	100.00

In order to analyze the data, the SPSS statistical package version 15 was used. As for analysis, the collected data were computed using Spearman correlation, Alpha Cronback, and Split-half techniques to confirm the validity and reliability. Means and percentages determined the main difficulties facing students in learning drama.

#### 4.1 Analysis and Result

The main focus of the present study is on the investigation of the difficulties students face when learning drama, the word “difficulty” needs to be clarified. According to OD (2000), a difficulty is “a problem; a thing or situation that causes problems: e.g. the difficulties of English syntax.” However, in this current study, difficulty refers to some obstacles facing the students in learning drama. Drama in the present study uses the definition of Khader (2007), which states that it “is a kind of literary composition meant to be enacted on the stage in which the story is told through dialogue, presenting characters placed in a situation of conflict and confrontation.”

Table 4. Frequencies and rank of each difficulty of the nature of drama

No	Difficulties	Strongly Disagree	Dis-agree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Sum	Mean	Weight (%)	Rank
1	Length of play	11	28	5	70	19	457	3.44	68.72	8
2	Use of old English	16	35	4	46	32	442	3.32	66.47	10
3	Writing style	9	16	14	73	21	480	3.61	72.18	5
4	Extensive use of symbolism, similes, metaphor.	2	26	7	71	27	494	3.71	74.29	4
5	Use of non English vocabulary	18	51	12	45	7	371	2.79	55.79	23
6	No chance for acting the play.	26	25	9	47	26	421	3.17	63.31	14
7	Lack of familiarity with culture and social context	18	36	3	53	23	426	3.20	64.06	12
8	Negative attitude towards drama.	19	46	12	44	12	383	2.88	57.59	22
9	Syllabus includes recent or modern plays.	21	32	19	46	15	401	3.02	60.30	19
10	Syllabus includes Muslim or Arab authors.	39	29	19	30	16	354	2.66	53.23	25
11	Lack of motivation towards drama.	21	42	10	46	14	389	2.93	58.50	20
12	Lack of fun.	18	55	7	44	9	370	2.78	55.46	24
13	Lack of participation and discussion.	13	49	2	43	25	414	3.14	62.73	16
14	No facilitators except teachers' notes.	32	35	10	47	19	405	3.05	60.90	17
15	The unawareness of the writer's background.	17	39	16	44	17	404	3.04	60.75	18
16	Students depend totally on the summary of teachers.	17	29	5	39	43	461	<b>3.47</b>	69.32	7
17	Reading drama is more common than watching it.	9	13	2	37	72	549	4.13	82.56	1
18	Reading drama is not exciting.	15	58	4	37	19	386	2.90	58.05	21
19	Students do not study the whole play.	14	26	10	45	38	466	3.50	70.08	6
20	Students level is weak in English.	11	36	13	53	20	434	3.26	65.26	11
21	Students feel frustrated with the length of the play	2	16	13	61	41	522	3.92	78.50	2
22	Students do not have the right to choose the text they want to study.	10	18	8	41	56	514	3.87	77.29	3
23	Focusing on tragic drama.	5	35	16	58	19	450	3.38	67.67	9
24	Shortage of literary references of drama.	12	27	27	58	8	423	3.18	63.61	13
25	Focusing on certain periods of literature.	10	46	11	47	19	418	3.41	62.86	15

As shown in Table 4, the difficulties were arranged according to the percentage weight and rank related to the difficulties facing IUG students in learning drama. As noted in this table, over 82% of the students admitted that "Reading drama is more common than watching it." Moreover, over 70% of the students agreed that "Students feel frustrated with the length of the play," "Students do not have the right to choose the text they want to study," "Extensive use of symbolism, similes, and metaphor," "Students do not study the whole play," and "Writing style were serious difficulties." Over 60% of the students identified "Students depend totally on the summary of teachers," "Length of play," "Focusing on tragic drama," "Use of old English," "Students level is weak in English," "Lack of familiarity with culture and social context," "Shortage of literary references of drama," "No chance for acting the play," "Focusing on certain periods of literature," "Lack of participation and discussion," "No facilitators, except teachers' notes," "The unawareness of the writer's background," and "Syllabus includes recent or modern plays" as specific difficulties they encountered. Finally, the least six difficulties were "Lack of motivation towards drama," "Reading drama is not exciting," "Negative attitude towards drama," "Use of non English vocabulary," "Lack of fun," and "Syllabus includes Muslim or Arab authors."



## 5. Conclusion

After analyzing the data, the major and serious difficulties students face in learning drama in English literature according to its nature were noticed. The very significant fact was that reading the drama was considered more common than watching it. In addition other difficulties such as the length of the play, the themes, the right to choose the text for study, extensive use of symbolism, similes, metaphor, and writing style were the major difficulties facing the students in learning drama in English literature.

Based on the findings and as mentioned in the literature review about the role of the students, the role of the drama instructor is not an easy job. The primary criterion each literary instructor or drama teacher requires to know is in the aspect of creativity, which is dependent on the teaching style of the instructor. One of the major tasks of the instructor is the removal of the psychological barrier between students and literature and participation.

Another significant conclusion drawn from the points of view of the respondents and data analysis is that acting out various parts of drama is the most effective strategy in teaching drama. This is in line with the very first conclusion that reading drama is more common than watching it. In other words, the need to apply drama into real life can be considered a contributive aspect dealing with the difficulties in learning and teaching of drama. Finally, as an issue that can further studied, drama plays an essential role in bridging the gap between cultural differences. This conclusion is in line with the claim that drama and literature affect culture. In other words, the cultural aspects of the student studying drama should be considered. Cultural differences in the comprehension of foreign learners of drama and literary work must be given attention. However, this phenomenon should not be overgeneralized.

## 6. Recommendation and Implications

The most significant implication of the study benefits the English Language and Literature of the students in IUG who learn drama. By having an inclusive overview of the importance of drama and the role it plays as an “art of communication” (Morgan, 1987: 7), students and teachers can benefit from the learning and teaching drama for better communication. Secondly, curriculum developers and syllabus designers can benefit in recognizing the difficulties and try to include materials based on the findings proposed in the present study. Thirdly, the conclusion that acting out drama, rather than reading it, is an effective way in learning and teaching drama, should be taken into consideration in exposing the students to the theater. One way is to take the literature and drama students to the theatrical stage rather than remain inside the classrooms.

This present study recommends the establishment of a theater for the English department to have a venue, where it could stage some relevant plays to involve the students. Instructors can use more visual aids such as LCDs, videos, TV, and films in teaching drama. Using visual materials creates an atmosphere for students to become more engaged in the process of learning and appreciating drama.

Another recommendation is to focus on the importance of literature and drama in daily life, its role in progressing nations, and in creating new leaders. Instructors should allow the students to participate and use their previous knowledge, experience, and ideas in order to increase positive feelings towards drama. Moreover, it would be highly effective for English literature instructors if they include the teaching of culture when they teach literature. They should focus on cultural similarities and then on cultural differences to bridge the gap between Arab and English cultures.

Moreover, instructors should begin with modern drama to avoid archaic English vocabulary and teach students classical dramas at advanced level courses. It would be highly positive for English drama students to engage in discussion by using their skills in paraphrasing, comparing, and summarizing in order to develop fluency. Their participation will make them braver, more confident, and have more self-esteem. Encouraging students to participate in acting some episodes in the text itself gives them a chance for self-expression.

In addition, teachers must vary their techniques in teaching drama. Teachers should be cognizant of the cultural distance, which influences the understanding of drama and reinforces student confidence, particularly, those students whose opinions might be wrong.

More studies should be conducted to investigate the role of psychological and cultural factors on how students learn drama. Furthermore, it is suggested to teach and add many literary works by local researchers and authors, such as Arab authors, to the syllabus of IUG.

Drama, in particular, and literature, in general play important roles in conveying the cultural message of a people of an age (Morgan, 1987: 7), or at least their representatives of that specific time. The need to further investigate the relation between culture and literature interrelating with the role of linguistics in each realm is felt specially in

Arab countries like Palestine (Keshta, 2000). Non-native learners of English literature face many cultural and linguistic differences, which sometimes turn to difficulties and barriers for the students and instructors. Overcoming these barriers needs to be tackled in later research.

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# The Effect of Context on the EFL Learners' Idiom Processing Strategies

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the effect of context on the strategies the EFL learners utilized to process idioms. To do so, ten Iranian intermediate EFL learners were randomly assigned to two groups who then attended a think-aloud session. The 5 subjects in the first group were exposed to an animated cartoon including 23 unfamiliar idioms while their counterparts in the second group were exposed to the written version of the same material. The subjects of the two groups were asked to verbally report their thought processes when trying to define the unfamiliar idioms. The data thus gathered from the small sample revealed 8 major strategies which were then used to prepare a questionnaire to be administered to a larger sample. The new sample included 60 subjects randomly assigned to two groups of 30. The first group as in the think-aloud session was exposed to the animated cartoon while the other read the respective script. The subjects in both groups were asked to check the strategies they resorted to when guessing the meaning of unfamiliar idioms. The results of the study showed both inter and intra-group differences confirming the effect of context on the strategies applied in processing unfamiliar idioms.

**Keywords:** idioms, video graphic context, written context, idiom processing strategies

## 1. Introduction

An Idiom in a simple definition is a multi-word expression whose components are fixed or semi-fixed and whose meaning is different from the sum of its parts. Idiomatic expressions are figurative expressions such as “as cool as cucumber” or “beat around the bush” which as suggested by some are regarded as single lexical units. They are stored and retrieved similar to other words in the mental lexicon (Qualls, O'Brien, Blood, & Hammer, 2003).

Ellis (1997) suggests that sufficient knowledge and appropriate use of idioms in a second language is an important indicator of the language learners' communicative competence. According to Liu (2008), many L2 learners, especially intermediate and advanced students, are eager to learn more idioms due to the fact that these learners have had a good exposure to the target language and hence have learnt to appreciate the value and the importance of idioms, including their vividness and effectiveness in communicative tasks. Gibbs (1999) states that idioms are one of the commonest forms of figurative language which differ in many aspects such as transparency, compositionality and frozenness. In other words, Idioms are multi-faceted expressions whose proper definition involves various viewpoints and approaches and that's why despite various attempts by researchers (e.g., Barkema, 1996; Cowie, 1998; Glaser, 1998) they aren't still well-defined. However, the discrepancy between what is said and what is meant remains the essential characteristic of idiomatic expressions which in turn makes their verbatim processing almost impossible.

## 2. Review of the Literature

### 2.1 Theoretical Background

Different hypotheses have been offered in the literature to explain the way idioms are processed. Idiom-list model by Bobrow and Bell (1973) states that when encountering an idiom, we first interpret it literally. If a literal meaning does not fit the context in which the expression is used, we search for that idiom in our mental idiom lexicon and then choose its figurative meaning. The second model for idiom processing is the lexical representation model (Swinney & Cutler, 1979). It depicts idioms as long words retrieved from the mental lexicon along with all other words. In a simultaneous processing of both literal and figurative meanings, it's the context which determines the winner. The third model, the direct access model (Gibbs, 1980; Schweigert, 1986),

is not far from the lexical representation model. Accordingly, we usually disregard the literal meaning of an idiomatic expression and the figurative meaning is directly derived from the mental lexicon. Glucksberg (1993) somehow confirms this model by stating that idiom access is normally completed more quickly because it does not require the lexical, syntactic, and semantic processing needed for full linguistic analysis. The next hypothesis, the Configuration Model (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988), states that the literal meaning of the words comprising an idiom is activated and remains so during its processing. Still the other recent model, idiom decomposition hypothesis, developed by Gibbs and his colleagues (Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Gibbs, Nayak & Cutting, 1989) emphasizes the feature of compositionality. An idiom is decomposable when its individual components contribute to its figurative meaning. Idioms whose individual components do not make such a contribution are non-decomposable. The words comprising a rather decomposable idiom are retrieved from the learner's mental lexicon and then combined with the other components while the meaning of a non-decomposable idiom is retrieved directly from the lexicon. The last major idiom comprehension model is the hybrid model (Titone & Connine, 1999). Based on an eye-tracking study they concluded that both the literal and figurative meanings of the idioms are automatically activated. But for non-decomposable idioms it takes more time to come to a contextually appropriate meaning.

While most of the models proposed for idiom comprehension are based on L1 studies, research on processing of L2 idioms and figurative language has mainly focused on L1 transfer (Irujo, 1986; Kellerman, 1983).

In general, studies on idiom comprehension focus on three major factors, namely, semantic transparency, familiarity, and context. According to Nippold and Taylor (1995) Transparency is the degree of agreement between the literal and figurative meanings of an idiom. The meaning of a transparent idiom matches well with the image it depicts. An idiom like "*go by the book*" is highly transparent because its literal meaning, to follow directions in a book exactly, is closely associated with its nonliteral meaning, to closely follow rules and regulations. But the expression "*beat around the bush*" is not transparent, because its literal meaning is not associated with its nonliteral meaning, reluctance to talk about a topic. Semantic transparency is not a fixed and absolute feature. It can be regarded on a continuum from highly literal to highly figurative correspondence. Many idioms are neither completely transparent nor opaque. The concept of transparency can also be discussed in terms of decomposition (Glucksberg, 2001). The concept of Compositionality states that idioms are at least partly decomposable, and speakers can intuitively understand the way the components of the idiom contribute to its whole meaning and this notion can determine the syntactic behavior of the idioms: the more an idiom seems analyzable and hence transparent, the more likely that idiom will be treated as syntactically flexible (Gibbs & Nayak, 1989). Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994) suggest that idiomatic phrases are, for the large part, semantically compositional, and seldom totally rigid. They believe that the words in idioms can appear in more than one form though not in all forms. They don't reject that some idioms are inflexible, but claim that such idioms comprise just a small part. Though the claims of the idiom decomposition are now widely accepted (Glucksberg, 2001), the empirical evidence to support the view is controversial. Gibbs et al. (1989) found that decomposable idioms are more flexible and are processed faster than non-decomposable and rigid ones, while Swinney and Cutler (1979) didn't find any time difference in the processing of flexible and nonflexible idioms. In another study Titone and Connine (1999) found that non-decomposable idioms were read more slowly when the sentential context preceded the idiom than when it followed it.

Familiarity, the other main factor influencing idiom comprehension, is the frequency of occurrence of an idiom in the language. While an idiom such as "*call it a day*" is frequently used in English, another idiom like "*get your wires crossed*" is one that is rarely used. The data from Nippold and Taylor (1995) showed that high-familiarity idioms were easier to understand than those of low familiarity. The findings are in agreement with the "language experience" hypothesis, the view that frequency of exposure enhances learning the meanings of idioms.

The third major factor influencing idiom comprehension is context. Idiomatic expressions are understood in relation to the context in which they are used. As a result, the skills used to process and understand language in context are thought to be important for the development of idiom understanding (Levorato & Cacciari, 1995).

Many studies are done to enhance the process of learning idioms with regard to the 3 major factors mentioned above. The results of an experiment by Boers, Lindstromberg, Littlemore, Stengers and Eyckmans (2008) suggest that creating a connection between figurative idioms and their literal origins can indeed be a pedagogically effective technique to help learners remember the given expressions. One way to help learners to create such connections is the use of images. This is also in agreement with the dual coding theory (Paivio, 1986) according to which, the association of verbal information with a mental image is beneficial as it creates an additional pathway for the recollection of the verbal information. Boers, Eyckmans and Stengers (2006) based on the results of their study state that individuals whose cognitive style shows a predisposition for thinking in mental pictures generally obtain better scores in the meaning multiple-choice and the gap-fill exercises compared

with their low-imager peers. In their study Boers et al. compared a group of students exposed to on-line exercises in which the explanation about the origin of the idioms was accompanied by a picture (a photograph or a drawing) with another group who was presented with no pictures to elucidate the verbal input. The performance under the picture-enhanced version revealed a significant ( $p < .02$ ) improvement in the meaning multiple-choice exercises.

### 2.2 Verbal Protocols

One of the common ways to investigate the processes involved in comprehension is verbal reports or verbal protocols. As Kasper (1998) describes, Verbal reports are oral records of thoughts, provided by subjects during or immediately after completing a task. Research on the reliability of such methods of verbal reporting has shown that think aloud (during the task) procedures provide more reliable information and less task interference than introspection does (Ericsson & Simon, 1993).

Cooper (1999) employed think-aloud to understand how adult second language learners processed idioms since this methodology allowed for the evaluation of the usually silent processes involved in reading comprehension. To give the idiomatic expressions context, he included more literal idioms (e.g. *to see eye to eye*) and more oral idioms or slang (e.g. *what's cooking?*). All were embedded in one to two sentences. Some of the limitations of his study were lack of controlling factors such as familiarity and context. The sample was also linguistically variable in their first languages.

## 3. Significance of the Study

Owing to the important role assigned to idioms in L2 acquisition and the difficulties EFL learners experience in their learning, finding a way to enhance their learning is of high importance. But this would be possible if there is an awareness of the processes involved in comprehending idioms. Such awareness can help the language teaching practitioners and material developers in decision making which would in turn lead to the development of a better curriculum.

Previous developmental research on idiom processing has mainly focused on L1 speakers. Furthermore, those few studies focusing on L2 learners have mainly paid attention to L1 transfer and have hardly attempted to investigate and compare the processes involved in comprehending idioms in different contexts. The present study is an attempt to fill such a gap.

## 4. Research Questions

The present study tries to investigate the major processes involved in idiom comprehension by Iranian intermediate EFL learners in the traditional written context and an animated cartoon context. The study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the major strategies involved in idiom processing while the L2 learners are exposed to a written context?
2. What are the major strategies involved in idiom processing while the L2 learners are exposed to a video-graphic context?
3. How far do the strategies followed by EFL learners to process unfamiliar idioms in written and video-graphic contexts differ?

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Participants

The participants of the study were 70 intermediate EFL learners (16 males and 54 females) studying English language at Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. They were chosen out of 104 students in three different classes based on their scores on the Oxford Placement Test. The subjects were then assigned to 4 groups. 10 subjects in the same class made up the first two groups for the think aloud process. The remaining 60 subjects were also divided into 2 groups of 30 to answer the questionnaires. The subjects were majoring in either English translation or English literature, and their average age was 20. All had studied English in Iran for an average of 8 years.

### 5.2 Materials

The subjects were exposed to the selected idioms through the "Symphony in Slang", an animated cartoon by Tex Avery, and its script. The cartoon animation included 27 idioms of daily use based on Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2008 edition) and Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Idioms (2002 edition).

An idiom familiarity judgment task following Nippold and Rudzinski (1993) was the instrument used to choose the idioms rather unfamiliar to the subjects. They were asked to choose their familiarity level, the frequency of previously encountering that specific idiom in spoken or written contexts, in a 4 point scale (1 = many times, 2 =

a few times, 3 = once and 4 = never).

Think-aloud was the instrument used to determine the most common strategies the language learners applied to comprehend unfamiliar idioms in the two different contexts.

A questionnaire constructed based on the results of the think-aloud sessions was the next instrument used to determine the specific strategy used by subjects in large samples to define each of the unfamiliar idioms.

### 5.3 Procedures

To identify the major strategies that Iranian intermediate EFL learners refer to while guessing the meaning of unfamiliar idioms, first of all, a familiarity judgment task was administered to all 70 subjects to select the rather unfamiliar idioms. Each of the subjects was given a booklet including 27 more frequently used idioms from "Symphony in slang" by Tex Avery consulting Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2008 edition) and Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Idioms (2002 edition). The subjects were asked to assess the familiarity level of each idiom by indicating how frequently they had encountered it before in written or spoken forms, using a 4-point scale (1= many times; 2= a few times; 3=once and 4= never). The highest score for each idiom in this task was 4 with a lower score indicating more familiarity. Just the idioms with the average scores of 3 to 4 were selected resulting in a list including 23 items. The idioms "raining cats and dogs", "eat like a horse", "had his hands full" and "died laughing" were rejected at this stage due to their being more familiar to the subjects.

In the next stage of the study, 10 subjects all in the same class attended a session to get familiar with verbal reports. The researcher started with verbally reporting his thought processes while doing a multiplication task. Two of the subjects were asked to practice it and then for further familiarity the researcher gave them a handout including a passage with 3 idioms. The researcher then read the passage and verbally reported the processes he followed to guess the meaning of one of those idioms. Two volunteers went on with the rest of the job. The 10 subjects were then randomly assigned to 2 groups of 5 hereafter referred to as animation and text groups to attend a think-aloud session. The subjects of the animation group entered the researcher's office individually and were seated at a desk with a laptop and high quality speakers attached to before them. To help the subjects to further focus on their cognitive processes, the researcher sat in the corner of the room in a way not to face the subjects directly. After a short explanation about the story, they were exposed to the animated cartoon and were asked to orally report their thought processes involved in defining each of the 23 paused at idioms.

The subjects in the text group also entered the office individually who were then given the transcript of the cartoon animation with the same 23 unfamiliar idioms underlined. After the researcher's brief explanation about the story, they were asked to read the text and verbally report their thought processes when trying to define the underlined idioms. As seen in both cases there was no teaching session, and the subjects of the two groups were only once exposed to their relevant materials.

The think-aloud sessions with both groups were wholly audio-taped and the protocols were transcribed and then analyzed based on the research objectives. To make sure about the reliability of the coding process, the researcher recoded the data after a week rendering almost similar results. As shown in table, the results of the think-aloud process indicated 11 strategies the subjects referred to when guessing the meaning of unfamiliar idioms. The coding process was mainly based on the existing literature though the category "Focusing on the accompanying animated picture" was new.

Table 1. Strategies used by subjects in animation and text groups

Major categories	Subcategories
Idiom based	Focusing on a key word in idiom Focusing on the literal meaning Reference to the origin of the idiom paraphrasing and elaboration of the idiom
Respondent based	Drawing on background knowledge Visualization (forming a mental image of the written idiom) Requesting information about the idiom in general or unfamiliar words
L1 based	Translating the idiom into first language or Finding an equivalent in Persian
Context based	drawing on the accompanying animated picture Drawing on the written context (sentence, paragraph or the whole text)
others	Resorting to wild guesses

8 single strategies out of the above 11 were selected as the major strategies referred to by the subjects of both groups, which were then used to prepare a questionnaire to be administered to a larger sample including 60 subjects (2 groups of 30). This was done to get more accurate results particularly while just single (not combined) strategies were the focus of attention and also for the purpose of triangulation. 3 strategies, i.e. referring to the origin of the idiom, wild guessing and requesting information, which had the lowest frequencies in the think-aloud experiment, were excluded in the questionnaire due to their low statistical value and the size of the sample.

The questionnaire (see appendix A) thus consisted of 23 rather unfamiliar idioms with 8 columns for the subjects to check the single strategy they used in defining them plus two other choices “combination of strategies” and “other strategies”.

Following the think-aloud sessions, the subjects of the two groups were exposed to the script and animated cartoon of “symphony in slang” respectively. They were then asked to check the main strategy they used to define each underlined or paused at idiom. In case they resorted to more than one strategy, they checked the column “combined”. The column “other” was checked when the strategy the subjects used was not among the existing categories.

## 6. Results

The strategies used by the subjects attending the think-aloud session were examined for shared features and then classified mainly based on the existing literature.

Table 2 shows the frequency of different strategies that each subject resorted to in order to define the 23 idioms. Occasionally, the subjects resorted to more than one strategy to define a single idiom.

Table 2. The frequencies of different strategies in the think-aloud session

Group1 (Text)											
Subjects	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11
1	4	6	2	2	1	1	1	4	4	2	0
2	3	4	2	2	2	0	1	6	4	1	0
3	7	6	4	3	1	0	2	3	3	4	0
4	3	4	2	1	0	0	1	2	3	2	0
5	5	4	4	2	0	2	2	4	6	5	0
Total frequency	22	24	14	10	4	3	7	19	20	14	0
Group2 (Animation)											
1	4	5	1	0	1	0	1	2	4	4	4
2	5	2	3	0	1	1	0	1	5	3	5
3	3	4	4	0	1	0	0	3	3	4	6
4	4	4	2	0	2	0	1	5	4	5	3
5	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	8	3	4	7
Total frequency	18	17	11	0	5	2	2	19	19	20	25



- S1 Drawing on background knowledge
- S2 Drawing on context (relating the idiom to the wider familiar context like the whole paragraph)
- S3 Translation (finding an L1 equivalent for the unfamiliar idiom or just translating it )
- S4 Visualization (forming a mental image of the written idiom)
- S5 Referring to the possible origin of the word in L1 or L2
- S6 Wild guessing
- S7 Requesting information (particularly the meaning of unfamiliar words)
- S8 Paraphrasing and elaboration
- S9 Focusing on key words
- S10 Focusing on the literal meaning
- S11 Drawing on the animated picture

Strategies 4 and 11 proved contexts dependent and mutually exclusive though both focused on images (whether mental or animated). Strategies 5, 6 and 7 were relatively of low frequency in both groups (selected less than 10 times), while strategies number 2 and 11 were the most frequent ones in the text and animation groups respectively.

The questionnaire prepared based on the results of the think-aloud session (appendix A) was then administered to both groups. Table 3 and figure 1 show a cross-comparison between the frequencies of choosing each strategy in the questionnaire by the subjects of two groups. In table 3, strategy No.7 includes both focusing on the animated pictures, a strategy exclusively used by the subjects of the animation group, and visualization, the strategy specific to the text group. This was done for the ease of comparison as both strategies though different in nature shared the feature of focusing on images.

Table 3. The frequencies of different strategies used by the respondents to the questionnaires

Strategies	F. Text	F. Animation
S1 Translation	23	18
S2 Focusing on keywords	81	74
S3 Paraphrasing and elaboration	24	28
S4 Reference to the Literal meaning	32	23
S5 Reference to context	70	56
S6 Reference to the back ground knowledge	45	40
S7 Focusing on the animated Picture/visualization	37	80
S8 Combination of strategies	41	55
S9 Other strategies	11	6

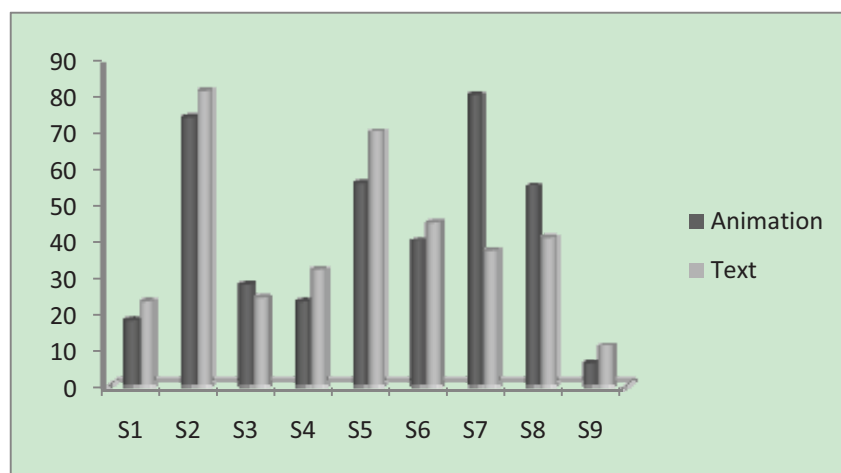


Figure 1. Paired frequencies of strategies based on the result of the questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire roughly confirmed those of the think-aloud session though the two strategies of “paraphrasing and elaboration” and “reference to the literal meaning” displayed minor differences.

As table 3 shows, reference to animated pictures was of the highest frequency in the animation group while focusing on keywords was its counterpart in the text group. Translation to L1 takes the lowest position in the ranking of single strategies in both groups. Resorting to key words attains the highest rank if the preferences of both groups are taken into account.

Table 4 displays the order of the strategies referred to by the subjects of the two groups based on the descriptive data. The table arranged based on the frequencies, indicates differences in the order of strategies applied in the two groups.

Table 4. Strategies used by two groups in a descending order

Text group	Animation Group
1. Focusing on keywords	1. focusing on the animated Picture
2 Reference to context	2. Focusing on keywords
3. Reference to the back ground knowledge	3. Reference to context
4. visualization	4. Reference to the back ground knowledge
5. Reference to the Literal meaning	5. Paraphrasing and elaboration
6. Paraphrasing and elaboration	6. Reference to the Literal meaning
7. Translation	7. Translation

The differences displayed in table 4 were based on descriptive statistics. To find out if such differences are statistically significant, intergroup and intra-group comparisons were made using chi-square tests. Table 5 displays the results of the inter-group comparison. As shown in the table, the two groups were significantly different in resorting to images, i.e. mental images vs. animated pictures. In other words, the subjects in the animation group regarded the images as their main source for reference (see figure 1) while this was not the same for the subjects in the text group. Comparison between the frequencies of other strategies also indicated differences though such differences didn't prove statistically significant.

Table 5. The chi-square results for intergroup comparison of paired strategies

Strategies	Chi-square	Asymp. Sig.	df
1. Translation	0.610	0.435	1
2. focusing on key words	0.316	0.574	1
3. Paraphrasing and elaboration	0.490	0.484	1
4. Reference to the literal meaning	1.473	0.225	1
5. Reference to the context	1.556	0.212	1
6. Reference to the background knowledge	2.368	0.124	1
7. focusing on the animated picture / Visualization	16.407	0.000*	1
8. Combined strategies	2.042	0.153	1

An intra-group comparison between the frequencies of different strategies shed further light on the context-dependent differences in processing idioms. Tables 6 and 7 show the pairs of strategies that proved significantly different in their frequency of use in the text and animation groups respectively.

Table 6. Pairs of strategies that proved significantly different in frequency of use by the text group

Intragroup strategy comparison (Text)	Chi-square	Asymp. Sig.	df
1. Translation & background knowledge	7.118	.008	1
2. key word & back ground knowledge	10.286	0.001	1
3. background & context	5.435	.020	1
4. keyword & paraphrase	32.346	0.000	1
5. Keyword & visualization	16.407	0.000	1
6. Literal meaning & context	14.157	0.000	1
7. Literal meaning & keyword	21.248	0.000	1
8. Paraphrase & background	7.118	0.008	1
9. Paraphrase & Context	23.753	0.000	1
10. Translation & Context	23.753	0.000	1
11. Translation & keyword	32.346	0.000	1

Table 7. Pairs of strategies that proved significantly different in frequency of use by the animation group

Intragroup strategy comparison (Animation)	Chi-square	Asymp. Sig.	df
1. Animation & background knowledge	13.893	0.000	1
2. key word&paraphrase	20.745	0.000	1
3. Animation & context	5.321	.021	1
4. keyword & Context	2.492	0.014	1
5. Keyword & Background knowledge	10.140	0.001	1
6. Literal meaning & Animation	32.346	0.000	1
7. Literal meaning &Context	13.785	0.000	1
8. Literal meaning &Keyword	26.814	0.000	1
9. Literal meaning & Background knowledge	4.587	0.032	1
10. Paraphrase & Animation	25.771	0.000	1
11. Paraphrase & Context	9.333	0.002	1
12. Translation & Animation	40.091	0.000	1
13. Translation & Context	19.514	0.000	1
14. Translation & Key word	34.087	0.000	1
15. Translation & Background Knowledge	8.345	0.004	1
16. Translation & Paraphrase	2.174	0.040	1

As shown in tables 6 and 7, while 11 pairs of strategies proved significantly different in the text group, the animation group indicated 16 cases of difference which in turn emphasizes the discrepancy between the processes involved.

## 7. Discussion

Identifying the strategies used in language learning has recently developed as a prominent research field. Empirical research has provided evidence that such strategies can be taught (Vance, 1999), which is a major reasons for language practitioners to focus on the strategies involved in learning different areas of language.

The present study was an attempt to shed further light on idiom processing by EFL learners. The think aloud session led to an inventory of strategies the subjects referred to in two different contexts. The two groups shared most of the strategies though they differed in the frequencies of using them. The frequency differences thus identified between the small samples were almost confirmed by the results obtained through administering the questionnaires to considerably larger samples. The descriptive data indicated differences both in frequencies and ranking of the strategies each group referred to in defining idioms. In other words, the primary results provided an inventory of the strategies the two groups referred to in defining idioms which in turn roughly answered the first two research questions. The descriptive results also indicated differences in the frequencies or types of strategies applied by the two groups, which is an answer to the third research question. However, going beyond the descriptive statistics further clarified the issue. Inferential statistics confirmed both inter-group and intra-group differences. The most significant difference in inter-group comparison was attributed to the two image based strategies, namely visualization and focusing on the animated pictures. Other similar strategies applied by the members of two groups were not significantly different in their frequencies. The intra-group comparison between the frequencies of pairs of strategies indicated even further differences. While the frequencies of the strategies used by the text group revealed 11 statistically different pairs, the animation group outnumbered the text group by indicating 16 cases of significant difference. So the results of the study while confirming the important role of context in language processing have some implications for language practitioners and material developers. Contextualizing language in general and idioms in specific can significantly influence the way language learners process the information. Therefore creating the appropriate context would prove productive in enhancing the language learning process.

The present study despite its attempt to control as many factors as possible, suffers from some shortcomings. Due to the limitations in the available materials, the idioms used in this study were not of a specific category following the classifications existing in the literature. The subjects of the study were both males and females and some strategies with lower frequencies were ignored in the preparation of the questionnaire. In addition the present study just focused on the difference in the type and frequencies of the applied strategies with no regard to the correctness of the answers. Other studies are needed to focus on the effect of each context on enhancing the language learners' comprehension. In addition, as the present study only focused on single strategies, other studies are needed to investigate the combined strategies applied in comprehending idioms.

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## Appendix A

Dear Student:

The present study aims at enhancing teaching and learning idioms by language learners. Please follow the instructions and fill in the questionnaire carefully.

Watch the animated cartoon and check the strategy (T1, T2, T3...) you follow to guess the meaning of each idiom paused at. The list of possible strategies is below the table. If the strategy you use is not in the list, choose "other". In case you apply more than one strategy, and you are sure all of them are equally important to lead you to its definition, check the last column on the right i.e. "combined". But if despite applying different strategies, just one is the main Strategy leading you to the definition of the idiom, only check that single major T(Strategy).

Familiarity: I'm already familiar with this idiom. (Choose the appropriate option to show how familiar it is.)

T1: Drawing on background knowledge

T2: Contextualizing: referring back to the previous sentences or parts of the story

T3: Translation: finding a Persian equivalent for the unfamiliar idiom or translating it to Farsi

T4: Animated cartoon elucidation: Focusing on that specific part of the cartoon to define the idiom

T5: Paraphrasing and elaboration: simplifying and rephrasing the idiom to make the meaning clear

T6: Focusing on (a) key word(s): choosing specific words as the main or key words of the idiom to guess its meaning

T7: Focusing on the literal meaning: guessing the meaning of idiom by focusing on its literal (non-idiomatic) meaning

T8: Combination of strategies (read the instructions above.)

Idioms	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	other	Combined
1. Well, I was <u><i>born with a silver spoon in my mouth.</i></u>										
2. One day <u><i>at the crack of dawn</i></u> I got up.										
3. I <u><i>couldn't cut the mustard.</i></u>										
4. I was <u><i>beside myself with anger.</i></u>										
5. I was <u><i>all thumbs.</i></u>										
6. Mary's clothes <u><i>fit her like a glove.</i></u>										
7. I put on my <u><i>white tie and tails.</i></u>										
8. We went around together for some time, <u><i>painting the town red.</i></u>										
9. At dinner, Mary <u><i>let her hair down.</i></u>										
10. I was really <u><i>in a pickle.</i></u>										
11. The proprietor <u><i>drew a gun on me.</i></u>										
12. In no time the <u><i>law was on my heels.</i></u>										
13. Every time I opened my <i>mouth</i> , <u><i>I put my foot in it.</i></u>										
14. I felt myself <u><i>going to pot.</i></u>										
15. It sure felt good to <u><i>stretch my legs</i></u> again.										
16. she got <u><i>on her high horse.</i></u>										
17. I couldn't <u><i>touch her with a ten-foot pole.</i></u>										
18. Guess the <u><i>cat had her tongue.</i></u>										
19. After that I <u><i>went to pieces.</i></u>										
20. The guy at the piano <u><i>played by ear.</i></u>										
21. I heard <u><i>from the grapevine</i></u>										
22. But the guy really spent his money <u><i>like water.</i></u>										
23. But the guy <u><i>got in my hair.</i></u>										

**Thank you for your attention.**

## A Case Study: Translation Problems in the Story of Rustam and Sohrab Based on Warner & Warner Translation

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### Abstract

Throughout the history, translation has played an important role in conveying thoughts and knowledge from one nation to other nations. Apart from this importance, the act of translating is not simply changing a message from the source language into the target one; translation is an act of problem-solving. Sometimes it is difficult to solve problems existing in translation, and so the notion of untranslatability emerges. Regarding the text-types, this problem is more prominent in the translation of literary texts like poems. This study attempts to investigate untranslatable elements in a poem, and for this purpose it concentrates on the story of Rustam & Sohrab selected from Shahnameh by Firdowsi and its equivalent translation by Warner & Warner. Then it focuses on the relation of untranslatability in the story of Rustam & Sohrab with the semantic translation of Warner & Warner and the style of Firdowsi. Further research is required in this direction to answer questions concerning the notion of untranslatability and other related matters like the purpose of translation and untranslatability.

**Keywords:** literary translation, the story of Rostam and Sohrab, Warner and Warner translation, untranslatability

### 1. Introduction

Human being is a social creature having an inclination towards interaction; one of the ways that she / he interacts is translation. In fact, through translation, they attempt to convey their thoughts and knowledge. In Bate's words, "Nothing moves without translation. No change in thought or in techniques spreads without the help of translation, because if it is to spread, it has to spread from people to people and therefore from language to language" (1936: 7). According to Newmark (1988: 7), "translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and / or statement in another language". So, in the process of translating, translators deal with two languages: Source language (SL) and Target language (TL). It means that translators should decode the information which is encoded in source language in respect of the structures of the two languages. Regarding the abovementioned definitions proposed for translation, is it possible to replace a message in the SL by a message in the TL completely and without any problem? Apparently it is not so. Since no two languages are identical, surely problems arise in the process of translating. Here the notion of translatability and untranslatability emerges; these two terms are proposed to examine the extent to which a text with its all nuances including intralanguage and metalanguage factors can be rendered into another language. Some scholars in translation studies define untranslatability in terms of the original text-type, the purpose of translation, and the translation method. By reference to these factors (text-type, purpose and translation method), they reject the absolute translatability. As it was mentioned, one of the important factors in the definition of translatability is text-type. Based on Newmark, there are three types of text: 1) informative text-type in which the "topic" or content is the main focus, 2) the expressive text-type in which the author and the aesthetic dimension are important, 3) vocative text-type in which the reader-response is important. This study will concentrate on the notion of untranslatability in the expressive text-type, namely poetry. For this purpose, at first the writer examines the untranslatable elements in poems which include only literary or aesthetic factors here. Then, they are investigated in the story of Rustam and Sohrab by Firdowsi, the well-known poet of Persian language and its equivalent translation by Warner & Warner. After comparing the Persian elements persisting to the English translation, their untranslatability will be explained in terms of translation method and the original style of writer.

### 2. What Is Untranslatability?

Translation used to be considered an inter-language transfer of meaning; talking about the faithful transfer of

meaning from the SL to the TL, the issues of translatability and untranslatability arises and throughout the history of translation the question “Is translation possible or impossible?” has been repeatedly asked and debated among philosophers, linguists as well as translators and translation theorists. Among all kinds of text-types, there has been a considerable literature on the degree literary texts are translatable. In other words, translating literary texts, namely poetry has been the potential scene for translators, linguists and scholars to talk on untranslatability. Translation of poetry was, and still by some, believed as impossibility. The arguments include linguistic elements and cultural ones. Most importantly untranslatability looks upon poetry as beauty itself which is untouchable for once it is touched it is destroyed.

Croce (quoted in Carrveta, 1997) holds that poems cannot be composed, as each is unique. Translation is impossible; it is only a pedagogical necessity. The responsibility of the interpreter is to capture “the mood or state of being of its author.”

Catford (1965) distinguishes two kinds of untranslatability, that is, linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability.

*Linguistic untranslatability*, according to Catford, occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the target language for a source language item. For example, the Danish *Jeg fandt brevet* (literally “letter [I] found the”) is linguistically untranslatable, because it involves structures that does not exist in English.

*Cultural untranslatability* is due to the absence in the target language culture of a relevant situational feature for the source text. For example, the different concepts of the term for *bathroom* are untranslatable in an English, Finnish or Japanese context, where both the object and the use made of that object are not at all alike (Bassnett-McGuire, 1980: 32).

Others (Von Humboldt, Quine, Virginia Woolf, and Derrida, to name a few) insist that translation is ultimately impossible. Von Humboldt e.g. maintains that all translations are apparently attempts at finding a solution to some insoluble problem (Ke, 1991: 10).

Darbelnet and Viney (quoted in Wilss, 2001) have analyzed in detail the points of linguistic difference between the two languages, differences that constitute areas where translation is impossible. Popovic (quoted in Wilss, 2001) also has attempted to define untranslatability without making a separation between the linguistic and cultural factors.

Wolfram Wilss (quoted in Wolfram Wilss, 2001) says, “the translatability of a text can thus be measured in terms of the degree to which it can be re-contextualized in TL, taking into account all linguistic and extra-linguistic factors.... The translatability of a text is thus guaranteed by the existence of universal categories in syntax, semantics, and the (natural) logic of experience.... Linguistic untranslatability occurs when the linguistic form has a function beyond that of conveying factual relationships and is therefore is a constituent part of the functional equivalence to be achieved. This, for example, is that of play on words, which can usually be adequately translated semantically but not stylistically.”

Jacobson (1966: 238, quoted in Wolfram Wilss, 2001) comes to conclusion that poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible.

All scholars mentioned above directly and indirectly considered two types of untranslatability: linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability. To analyze both kinds of untranslatability in the Story of Rostam and Sohrab is beyond the scope of this paper. So, it only explores untranslatability in the light of linguistic factors although both linguistic and cultural elements are interrelated.

### 3. Significance and Purpose of the Study

Although this topic is an important one in translation, no one has ever done research on it. Since this topic is a problematic one and hitherto no one has done research on the relationship between untranslatability and translation method on the one hand and its relationship with the style of original writer on the other hand it seems necessary to investigate this issue. The purpose of this study is to find the relation between untranslatable elements in the story of Rustam and Sohrab by Firdowsi, translation method exerted by Warner & Warner and the style of original writer (Firdowsi). It is hoped that the findings of this research can be useful to translators, translation students, translation trainees and literary scholars; furthermore, consideration of untranslatability in terms of translation method can lead to modify the notion of untranslatability and also make us appreciate our literary figures, masterpieces and their uniqueness in the world. Since it is aimed to examine an English translated version of Shahnameh, namely, the story of Rustam and Sohrab, it is proper to present a précis of its history.



#### 4. A Brief Summary of Shahnameh Translations

Joseph Champion was the first one who translated Shahnameh. His book, entitled *"the poems of Firdowsi"* published in 1788. He translated it in verse from the birth of Rustam. Then in 1814 James Atkinson translated the story of Rustam & Sohrab in both prose and verse. In 1832 he translated the synopsis of Shahnameh into English in nine volumes. In the early 20th century, two brothers, Arthur George and Edmund Warner translated Shahnameh into English in nine volumes. After them, Reuben Levy rendered it into English prose. Jerome Clinton is another translator of shahnameh including the story of Rustam and Sohrab. The most recent translation of Shahnameh has done by Dick Davis. He translated it into English prose and published it in 2007. In addition to these abovementioned translations, a great number of stories in Shahnameh have been adapted and translated in proses which are beyond the scope of this paper to be included.

#### 5. Method

The story of Rustam & Sohrab, from Shahnameh of Firdowsi edited by Sobhani (1383), has been selected as the literary source texts to be compared closely with their corresponding English translated text by Warner & Warner. In this research, there were some imitations, namely, time restriction which itself yielded other restrictions. Due to this restriction, only the story of Rustam and Sohrab were selected as the representative of Shahnameh. To collect data, the same texts were read and the instances containing the untranslatable elements or elements difficult to translate were identified. After that, their equivalent instances were identified and then they were compared to the Persian elements. At the last part, their untranslatability had been explained in terms of two factors: translation method and the style of writer.

#### 6. Literary or Aesthetic Problems

Aesthetic values or poetic truth in a poem are conveyed in word order, and sounds, as well as in cognitive sense (logic). These aesthetic values have no independent meaning, but they are correlative with the various types of meaning in the text. Hence, if the translator destroys the word choice, word order, and the sounds, he impairs and distorts the beauty of the original poem. Delicacy and gentleness, for instance, will be ruined if the translator provides crude alliterations for the original carefully composed alliterations. So, the problems in translating a poem is how to retain the aesthetic values in the TL text. The aesthetic values, according to Newmark (1988: 651) are dependent on the structure (or poetic structure), metaphor, and sound. Poetic structure includes the plan of the original poem as a whole, the shape and the balance of individual sentences in each line. Metaphor is related to visual images created by combinations of words, which may also evoke sound, touch, smell, and tastes, while sound is anything connected with sound cultivation including rhyme, rhythm, assonance, onomatopoeia, alliteration, etc. In the following, we attempt to examine these problems in a tangible way by citing examples from the story of Rustam and Sohrab and try to assess how much they are translatable.

##### 6.1 Poetic Structure

The first factor is structure. It is important to note that structure meaning here is the plan of the poem as a whole, the shape and the balance of individual sentence or of each line. So, it is not related directly to the sentential structures or grammar of a language, although it is very much affected by the sentential structure. Thus, maintaining the original structure of the poem may mean maintaining the original structure of each sentence. The following are some examples in the story of Rustam and Sohrab and its translations by Warner and Warner: did they retain the original poetic structure?

Example (a)

بر مادر آمد پرسید از او	بدو گفت گستاخ با من بگوی
که من چون ز همشیرگان برترم	همی باآسمان اندر آید پرّم؟
بدو گفت مادر که بشنو سخن	بدین شادمان باش و تندى مکن
تو یور گو پیلتن رستمی	زدستان سامی و از نیرمی

**He bluntly asked his mother once: "Now tell me,**

**Since none of my milk – fellows can compare**

**With me, and my head reacheth to the sky."**

**His mother said: "then listen and rejoice,**

**But be not rash. Thou art the son of Rustam,**

**The hero of the elephantine from,**

**The progeny of Zal the son of Sam,  
And Nairaman, they head out – topped heaven  
Because thou comest of the famous stock,**

As you see, the poetic structure of Persian poems and its English translations is different because translations are different and translators combined two hemistiches of Persian poem into one distich like the first distich in the above example. Another reason is that they omitted some parts of distich and reduced it so that the structure of original poem has been destroyed and finally its beauty has been impaired. As a result, it can be said that the poetic structure is something untranslatable because it depends on word order, word choice and the syntactic rules of one language which themselves are language-specific and also in the case of expressive texts, these differences and gaps become more tangible. In the following, there is another example from the story of Rustam and Sohrab. Regarding the poetic structure, you can see how Warner & Warner destroyed it through changing the sequence of original lines.

ز گفتار دهقان یکی داستان	بپیوندم از گفته‌ی باستان
ز موبد بدین گونه برداشت یاد	که رستم برآراست از بامداد
غمی بد دلش سازنخجیرکرد	کمر بست و ترکش پراز تیر کرد
برفت و برخش اندر آورد پای	برانگیخت آن پیل پیکر ز جای
سوی مرز توران بنهاد روی	چو شیر دژ آگاه تحجیر جوی
چو نزدیک شهر سمنگان رسید	بیابان سراسر پر از گور دید

**I tell what rustic bard and archimage  
Told from the legends of a bygone age:  
One morn in dudgeon Rustam rase to hunt,  
Girt him, filled up his quiver, mounted Rakhsh,  
And hied him to the marches of Turan,  
A savage lion prowling after prey.  
When he drew near the marches and beheld  
The plain well stocked with onager,**

Like the previous example, Warner & Warner destroyed the original poetic structure. For this purpose, they omitted some parts of a line. They combined the first, the second and the third lines in a way that the narrative structure of the poem has been lost. It is more serious when they placed the fifth line immediately after the third line of original poem. Sometimes they clipped a line into one simple sentence like the forth line which has been translated into one sentence: "**mounted Rakhsh**". Besides of clipping a line, they accommodated it into another line; for example, the forth line has been both clipped and accommodated into another line. Regarding these examples, it becomes obvious that translating the exact poetic structure of poems especially Firdowsi's ones are not an easy task. But it challenges the process of translation from one language into another one (Persian–English).

### 6.2 Metaphorical Expressions

Metaphorical expressions, as the second factor, mean any construction evoking vision, sound, touch, and taste. They also include the traditional metaphors, direct comparisons without the words "like" and "as if", and all figurative languages. Intentionally, the writer does not use the term metaphor in sub-headings since it has different meaning for different people. What is generally known as (traditional) metaphor, for example, is not the same as metaphor meant by Newmark. To understand the meaning of metaphor as proposed by Newmark, it is advisable to understand the following terms: object, image, sense, metaphor, and metonym. Object, called also topic, is the item which is described by metaphor. Image refers to the item by which an object is described. It is also called vehicle. The next term, sense, refers to the point of similarity between aspects of the objects and the image. Metaphor here means the word(s) taken from the image. And finally, metonym refers to one-word image which replaces the object, figuratively but not metaphorically. In the expression "rooting out the faults", for example, the object is fault, the image is "rooting out weeds, the sense is (a) eliminate, (b) with tremendous effort, and the metaphor is "rooting out". The expression the "seven sea" referring to 'the whole world ' is not metaphorical. It is figurative and a metonym. Below, there are some metaphorical expressions from the story of Rustam & Sohrab which are difficult to translate. Of course, they are untranslatable in terms of both preserving

the same original image and the sense.

Example (a)

هنوز از دهن بوی شیر آیدش                      همی راه شمشیر و تیر آیدش

**Although his mouth will Savoreth have milk**

**His mind is set on shaft and Scimitar,**

In this example, although translators reproduced the same image in the TL, they didn't transfer the sense. Because the same sense in the two languages occurs in two different ways, the metaphorical expression for it is **to smell of mother's milk**. The expression **"his mouth still savoureth of milk"** doesn't have metaphorical meaning. Maybe scholarly reader of English language can understand its metaphorical meaning but an ordinary reader may not understand it. In conclusion, the expressive beauty of Persian poem has been impaired.

Example (b)

همانگونه بخواد ترا نزد خویش                      دل مادرت گردد از درد ریش

**Then will he summon thee and rend may heart.**

In the above example like the previous one, the image has been rendered. They failed to render its meaning. Again it is possible for a scholarly reader to understand its meaning by relating the image to the sense.

Example (c)

بدو گفت کز من رهایی مجوی                      چرا جنگجویی تو ای ماهروی

**Why seekest thou the fury. O moon – faced maid?**

Although the word "moon" is a symbol of beauty in Persian language, it is not the same in the English; English speakers use the word "rose" to refer to beauty; therefore, the symbol of beauty is different between English and Persian. So, people translating such expressions attempt to replace them with an equivalent metaphor which moves the readers equally. As you see, it is simply possible to translate these expressions in some aspects; we mean there are not identical equivalents for them in English language. As a result, they are relative in translation; a translator cannot preserve all the elusive components of meaning peculiar to the expressive texts in the process of translation; therefore, the word "moon-faced" is not the exact equivalent of ماهروی, since the speakers of these two languages have different attitude toward beauty. Examining more instances shows that Warner & Warner attempted to translate in a literal way and tried to be loyal to the writer. In fact, their method is writer-oriented method; they aimed to retain the metaphorical expressions exerted by Firdowsi in composing poems.

Example (c)

چو خورشید آن چادر تیرگون                      بدرید دازپرده آمد برون

**When sol had pierced night's pith- hued cloack and come**

Example (d)

تو گفتی همه تخت سهراب بود                      بسان سرو شاداب بود

**Upon the other, thou hadst said that he**

**Filled all the throne and seemed a verdant cypress.**

It seems that Warner & Warner had translated literally most metaphorical expressions without considering the situational context of the TL. Probably he selected this method not to confront to the problem of untranslatability.

### 6.3 Sound

The last literary or aesthetic factor is sound which is very important in composing poems, and it is an essential criterion which makes distinction between poems and other texts. It is this feature of poetry which enhances its beauty and moves the feeling of readers. In spite of the importance of sound in literary texts like poems/ poetry, it is the most difficult part of one poem to be translated. If we claim that it is not translatable at all, certainly this claim is not false. Below, there are some examples with their translations.

Example (a)

ز لشکر گزید از دلاور سران                      کسی کو گراید به گرز گران

**Then from the valiant captains of the host ...**

**Those that were wielders of the massive mace ...**

Example (b)

برفتند بیدار در پهلوان                      بنزدیک سهراب روشن روان

**Those two shrewd paladins went to Suhrab**

Example (c)

همی گفت از آن پس دریغا دریغ                      که شد ماه تابنده در زیر میخ

"Noe's me !" he thought , the bright moon is beclouded ! "

ز من نام پنهان نبایدت کرد                      چوگشتی تو با کنون هم نبرد

**For as my foe thou showdst not hide thy name.**

**Art thou the famous Rustam of Zabol**

All examples presented above have a common feature, alliteration. Alliteration means the reiteration of the same sound/ sounds in a line which give a remarkable beauty to poems in terms of sound effects. Firdowsi's poems are so matchless that we can claim its uniqueness in the world. The sound helped the meaning of the poems. But maintaining this feature in another language through translation seems impossible unless the translator himself would be a poet. Through comparing the abovementioned examples with their translations, obviously every one can understand that sound effects created through alliteration has been impaired completely. Regarding these aspects of poetry, it seems possible to generalize that all poems are untranslatable. It is more serious in case of Firdowsi's poems and the story of Rustam and Sohrab because Firdowsi used sound effects widely in composing Shahnameh. From this point and regarding the translation of Warner & Warner, Firdowsi's poems are difficult to translate.

### **7. The Relation between Untranslatability, Translation Method of Warner & Warner and the Style of Original Writer**

Before investigating the relation between untranslatability, translation method of Warner & Warner and the style of original writer, it is appropriate to explain the translation method exerted by Warner & Warner. Based on methods proposed by Newmark (1988), they have chosen the semantic method of translation. Newmark proposes two methods for translation: semantic and communicative translation. Newmark defines these two methods in the following way:

*Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original (Newmark, 1988:39).*

As it was mentioned, Warner & Warner used semantic translation, because they attempted to translate as closely as the structures of the second language regarding the syntactic rules of that language. It was more obvious in translation of metaphorical expressions. With hind sight, you can see that they rendered exact metaphorical expressions of the original poems without any modification in terms of TL context. In fact, they preferred to be loyal to the original writer and did not regard to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Now what is the relation between the the method of translation and untranslatability? Can translation method affect untranslatability?

Certainly there is a direct relation between them. The method of translation can determine to what extent a text like a poem is translatable and for this reason, the assumption of absolute translatability has been rejected and it is defined in relation to the original text-type, purpose of translation and the method a translator adopts for translating. Sometimes it happens that while a text is supposed to be untranslatable using an approach based on formal equivalence, it is possible to be more translatable if its apposite approach, dynamic equivalence, will be applied. As a result, some elements imposing problems in the process of translation can be rendered successfully into another language if the translator uses more various and different approaches in translation. Regarding these statements, some of the untranslatable elements mentioned in this paper based on the translation method applied by Warner & Warner comes back to the fact that they aimed to reproduce the contextual meaning of the original text considering the cultural context of the TL; therefore, some elements rooted in the SL culture resist to this method of translation; for example, metaphorical expressions were difficult to translate because they were rooted in the Persian culture. Finally, we can conclude that semantic translation is appropriate for some features of one poem not its whole, like poetic structure. We can conclude that some untranslatable elements found in the story of Rustam and Sohrab are untranslatable due to this approach, which is semantic translation. The

untranslatability of some elements has another reason; it is the highly qualified style of one poet in a way that if a translator attempts to translate it using all available approaches in translation ranging from word-for-word translation to free translation, it will still remain untranslatable. This is the relation of untranslatability and the style of original poet; therefore, some challenges arising in translation of one poem depend on whether its style is highly qualified or not.

Investigating the story of Rostam and Sohrab from this point, it becomes obvious that most problems of untranslatability in this story are related to the excellent and qualified style of Firdowsi and his competency in using sound effects like alliteration.

## 8. Conclusion

Throughout the history, written and spoken translations have played a crucial role in interhuman communication, not least in providing access to important texts, for scholarship religious and artistic purposes. Absolutely, all people know the importance of translation. But the act of translating is not an easy act for the translator who deals with two languages having different syntactic, semantic and pragmatic rules; therefore, translation is always a problem-solving act. Sometimes these problems seem impossible to solve. It is here that the issues of translatability and untranslatability come into play. In this paper, we attempted to investigate the notion of untranslatability and its factors including literary or aesthetic ones throughout the story of Rostam and Sohrab and its equivalent translations by Warner & Warner. After comparing the untranslatable elements in the story of Rostam and Sohrab regarding their translation, it became obvious that they are untranslatable for two reasons: the translation method exerted by Warner & Warner (semantic) translation, and the highly qualified style of Firdowsi. Of course, there are many other factors which influence the extent of translatability and untranslatability but they are beyond the scope of this paper. Every research is an incomplete and continuous process and demands other researchers to investigate other influential factors on the same issue.

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## Postcolonial Reading of a Colonial Text

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### Abstract

The discussion and analysis focuses on the ways colonialist discourse, in this case Maugham's short story *Footprint in the jungle*, positioned the colonized natives into European colonialist socio-cultural hierarchy. This study examines Maugham's depictions of non-white communities - Malay, Chinese and Indian. Hence, we look at how this colonialist writer reinforced and spread the idea of physical and social differences between the Europeans and the non-European races, rendering the latter an inferior position to the former. In this section we see that the distinction made was not only rooted in physically grounds but culturally and socially as well, which go hand in hand with Edward Said's notion of Orientalism.

The analysis shows that Maugham's narrative represents the Eastern social and cultural practices in an unpalatable manner. For example, the geography and landscape of the colonized territory is sketched as evil, savage, dark, et cetera. We see the forest in Maugham's *The Footprint in the Jungle* as a place where everything becomes dangerous: people lose their sanity; loves takes on the face of violence and hatred.

**Keywords:** postcolonial, orientlaism, discourse, narrative, colonized, marginalized

This research paper based on Said's notion of *Orientalism*, the imperial idea that fundamental cultural differences between the European and non European world was profoundly important to the civilizing mission in a number of ways. For example, the characterization of non-European societies as backward and primitive legitimized conquest of these societies and justified the measures colonial powers used to control and transform these peoples. Antony Anghie tries to show the role of international law in legitimizing colonialism: the civilizing mission's hidden agenda (Anghie, 2005: 5-6).

There are a number of reasons behind British colonialism and expansion. Denis Judd (1996: 3-5) explains that there is no question that the existence of the Empire brought profit and wealth to a section of the British population; the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led the establishment of the imperial structure. The Empire served many other purposes, such as it provided a means of outdoor relief for a substantial number of the upper and middle classes personals. The Empire rule over indigenous peoples also provided the colonizer with easy psychological defense mechanism: principally upon inferior black and brown people which seemed to boost the confidence, persona, financial and sexual aggrandizement of the white individual and nation in manifold opportunities. In addition to that, it introduced strange exotic foods, foreign flora and fauna, vocabulary, indigenous cultures, and a whole host of different ways of living into the British experience. For instance, the British expansion throughout Southern Africa created a cheap, readily available, supply of African labor through conquest (Paulin 1999: 1). The opening up of colonized ports to British-based trade and European commercial entrepreneurship established British colonization from country to country and from continent to continent, but resulted in the dislocation of the local economy of the place and the manipulation of indigenous markets and industries. As far as colonialism is concerned, Kathrin Onyiaorah (2000) also displays that, by twenty-first century, the number of British colonies had reduced drastically. The twentieth century brought with it the colonial downfall, and the decolonization of millions of people, who were once subject to the British crown. Colonies from Canada to Gibraltar, India, Malaya and Africa belonged to the British Empire of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As discussed, British colonialism expanded its territories looking for material and trade, which was the prime reason for the capture of new territories. Trade also included the trade of human beings – slaves. The slave trade by the British started sometime in 16<sup>th</sup> Century and continued with a growing rate till it was abolished in 1833. This trade of the human flesh resulted in subordination and subjugation of the colonized societies.

To conclude, I wish to point here that one country is not necessarily colonized only by one colonial power, there are countries which have been colonized by a number of different European colonizers. This resulted in the competition between those European countries. In other words, the most powerful won the colony: the colony became a trophy of the European colonizing race.

Street states that the white man will always occupy the highest rank, followed by the native, a rank located a bit higher than the animal's is used by European man to scale man's civilization (Street 1975: 78-80). Presiding over this hierarchy, in colonialist discourse, is the European male character. The myth that the European man is always a survivor and the fittest, which is projected through colonialist writings, is a colonialist ideology. Next, on this hierarchy of representation, is the European female character. Only then comes the non-European male, and, lastly, lowest on the ladder is the non-European female character. The characters that are given a voice are mostly always the European characters, especially the male characters. In Maugham's *Footprints in the Jungle*, Gaze talks about Mrs. Cartwright:

*I've known Mrs. Cartwright for over twenty years," he said slowly. "She wasn't a bad-looking woman in those days ... she was young it didn't seem to matter so much. It was rather attractive. She was married to a man called Bronson Reggie Bronson (Maugham 1993: 7).*

In the above excerpt, we see that the European male character, Gaze, is given a voice to express his opinion of Mrs. Cartwright. Through him, the readers get a projection of Mrs. Cartwright, who is depicted as not a bad looking woman. This act of speaking about another character reflects the social hierarchy discussed in the preceding paragraph. Gaze definitely seems to have a higher placing in this story as compared to Mrs. Cartwright, who is a European female character, as he is given the authority to describe her: the readers see her through his eyes. This is one example which makes evident that the European male characters are in the centre of narration in colonialist discourse.

Western discourse during colonialism was full of stereotypes of the East, which perpetuated the notion of difference between the former and the latter. According to Edward Said, when the Europeans came to the East, they thought that "the main thing for the European visitors was a European representation of the Orient" (1995: 1). Perhaps, to the Europeans, the people of the East were incapable of representing themselves, and as such took this burden upon themselves. As a result, there emerged representations of the East that were derogatory and full of stereotypes. Since Western world view at that time was rooted in imperial ideology, the East, instead of being represented, was misrepresented, at times advertently and at other times unconsciously. Facts were manipulated and the East was deformed in the eyes of the world. Edward Said elaborates:

*... the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic being, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences (Said 1995: 2).*

Therefore, we see how the term 'Orient' is actually the invention of the West to divide the world for political and economical reasons. This is perhaps what Said means by the Orient is the creation "of the living tableau of queerness (1995: 104)." The binary separation was a means of projecting the West as superior and the East as backward. In sum, the Occident deformed the Orient to form its 'Self'.

Likewise, Maugham's *The Footprints in the Jungle* represents the native woman character as ageing before time.

*She was a woman somewhere in the fifties, with white hair very untidily arranged, and a constant gesture with her was an impatient movement of the hand to push back a long wisp of the hair that kept falling over her forehead (Maugham 1986: 3).*

The excerpt above tries to show how women in the East tend to look old very quickly. Gaze, the character who is a policeman in the story, remarks, "It ages one before one's time (Maugham 1993: 9)." These kinds of remarks become stereotypical overgeneralizations. Because one woman, for some reason or another looks older than her age, the East is represented as a place where people age quickly.

Thus, we see how isolated cases, perpetuated by colonialist ideology, are generalized to negatively represent the colonized world. These colonialist narratives, such as Maugham's, we see block the colonized peoples into physical bondage and show them in a light that is inferior to the colonial 'Self'.

Even the colonized land is depicted as primitive and dangerous in colonialist discourse, and constantly compared to the Western earth, which is represent as beautiful, serene, et cetera. Here, I provide textual evidences from Maugham's *Footprints in the Jungle* and *Neil MacAdam*. In one story, a murder takes place, and in the other, a person is lost and found dead. Both these tragedies take place in the Malayan jungle. Therefore, the Malayan jungle, as depicted by Maugham, comes to signify evil, death and savage. With this, the attention of the reader is narrowed, from a general situation, to the representation of the Orient as a place that harms.

The excerpt below from Maugham's *Footprints in the Jungle* relates the Malayan landscape with images of death and decay.

But in our silence the din of the jungle was deafening; those damned cicadas and the bull-frogs were making enough row to wake the dead. Even under ordinary circumstances the noise of the jungle at night is uncanny; because it has an odd effect on you, that ceaseless and invisible uproar that beats upon your nerves. It surrounds you and hems you in. Believe me it was terrifying. That poor fellow lay dead and all round him the restless life of the jungle pursued its indifferent and ferocious course (1993: 23-24).

The above representation of the Malayan landscape is indeed terrifying. Colonialist discourse is filled with such negative representations of the colonized world to ensure that physical differences between the East and the West are maintained. These ugly stereotypical images were means to achieve the imperial agenda.

Maugham's description of the physical appearances of the natives and their way of life in his discourse, which takes a Eurocentric stand, paints a primitive and uncivilized picture of the colonized world. This shows that colonialist writers, like Maugham, placed European culture at the centre and all other cultures at the fringe of their narration.

The colonialist representation of bondage through stereotypes goes back far in time. Ania Loomba states that racial stereotyping can be traced right back to the Greek and Roman periods. In medieval and early modern Europe, Christianity and Islam were opposing forces. It was then that negative images of the East were spread. Religious, racial, cultural and ethnic differences were highlighted. During the rise of colonialism, these ideas were further intensified, expanded and reworked. Stereotypes, constructed by European nations, to construct the 'Other' were "laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality" (Loomba 1998: 107). Continuous repetitions of these impressions about the colonized stereotyped the other.

Maugham's *Footprints in the Jungle* is an example of colonialist discourse that represents the colonized peoples with negative images: the Malays and Chinese are described as extravagant, murderers and gamblers. These stereotypes create a boundary between the 'Self' (West) and the 'Other'. Mr and Mrs. Cartwright, in the story, are never questioned about Bronson's murder because they are Europeans and therefore are supposedly always innocent. When the murder takes place, the first suspect is the Chinese. "I think a pair of Chinks might think out a trick like that..." (Maugham 1993: 22). Next on the suspect lists were "the coolies of his estate" (27). This again puts blame on the non-Europeans. Aggression and violence is constantly associated with the Chinese and the Indians. No fingers are pointed towards the European. The character, Gaze, generalizes and stereotypes the Malays and Chinese when investigating Mr. Bronson's murder:

*I felt I knew the native temperament enough to be sure that the possession of it was a constant temptation. The Malays are an extravagant race and a race of gamblers, and the Chinese are gamblers, too; sooner or later someone would start flinging his money about, and then I should want to know where it came from. (1993: 27).*

The excerpt above produces a negative generalization of the people of the East, stereotyping them as thieves and murderers. This kind of generalizations, made on minimal observation, is extended to represent all the colonized peoples. Coming back to the story, when the officer finds that the Malay is not brave enough to murder, the Chinese is accused and tortured, while the actual murderer escapes punishment. This verifies the earlier discussion in Chapter Three (section 3.3.3) that the colonizer viewed the colonized people as socially inferior and placed them on very low ebb on the scale of civilization.

On the other hand, colonialist discourse portrayed the Europeans as civilized. For instance, the European woman, in *Footprints in the Jungle*, is depicted as socially charming and graceful, in a manner that totally contrasts the native's image, as seen below:

*I thought her a very agreeable person. I liked her frankness. I liked her quick wit. I liked her plain face. I never met a woman who obviously cared so little how she looked... but none of this mattered. Everything she wore was perfectly in character (1993: 4).*

Although this woman is seen to have a "plain face", yet she is liked by the narrator: for she "was perfectly in character". This is one of the many descriptions in colonialist narratives which highlight the Europeans as sociable, pleasant and smart, and in control of their life and behaviour. These kinds of mighty images are then contrasted with denigrating descriptions of the natives, so that the Europeans look even higher on the scale of civilization.

These kinds of stereotypes, which are actually based on assumptions, confirm John Mcleod's argument that "Orientalism makes assumptions about race (Mcleod 2000: 44)." Edward Said elaborates, "The relationship



between Occident and Orient is relationship of power, domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony (Said, 1995: 6).”

Maugham's short stories on Malaya, as we have seen so far, emphasize and reinforce these stereotypes of the colonizer-colonized relationship. Homi Bhabha states that the West fixes stereotypes in its representation of the colonized people, as seen in the statement below:

*An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated (Bhabha 1994: 66).*

Fixity and repetition is evident in Maugham's narration. His short stories of Malaya repeatedly portray the native characters in a negative light. As a result, the colonized peoples got a derogatory image.

For instance, Maugham's *Footprints in the Jungle*, through repetition, reinforces a depiction of the unruly native and abnormal native land.

The government offices are still in the old Raad Huis that the Dutch built when they owned the land, and on the hill stand the grey ruins of the forty by aid of which the Portuguese maintained their hold over the unruly natives. You know how many fellows when they come out east seem to stop growing (Maugham 1993: 1-12).

As seen in the above excerpt, colonialist narratives demonstrate European superiority and show them in control of the colonized other, who is depicted as unruly. The phrase "stop growing" implies that there is something abnormal about the land as if the place interferes with the growth of a person.

John McLeod also identifies Orientalism as "a study of how the Western colonial powers of Britain and France represent North Africa and Middle Eastern lands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (McLeod 2000: 39). However, the analyses here examine Maugham's narratives by using Said's theory of binary opposition of the East and West. The study explores the texts and the author and the complex collective formation against which selected texts of the colonialist writer are set. By way of the intertextual method of analysis and I will lay bare and challenge the representation of the colonized as exotic and masculine-looking and uncivilized Other by setting Maugham's short fiction against colonialist postcards, a travelogue written by an anonymous Western tourist and other forms of popular culture. A postcolonial reading of these texts will allow for the involvement of the colonized in the formation of identity.

Thus so far we have seen that colonialist discourse is abundant with negative portrayals of the colonized peoples. Colonial ideology is achieved through comparison – binary opposition: the colonial form versus the native formlessness, colonial order versus native chaos, et cetera. These comparisons are the basis of colonial hegemony.

Therefore, we see that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is based on binary oppositions. Europeans were categorized as superior, civilized, advanced, sophisticated, brave, rational, and intelligent, while the natives were portrayed to be blood-thirsty, stupid, slave of customs, irrational, lazy et cetera. This 'created' an urgent need to put everything in order; imperial intervention was considered an absolute necessity. In accordance, it was the most natural thing for the European race to intervene, dominate, control and rule the Orient. More than that, since the natives, depicted as devoid of natural intelligence, were incapable of utilizing fully their natural environment for their benefit, Europeans had to carry out the job for them. These binary opposites were broadcasted to legitimize their presence in the East.

The West employed its power of discourse over the East, and it did not permit the Orientals to represent themselves and their culture. This illustrates Said's notion of power: in *Orientalism* as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said 1995: 3).

During the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution gave certain countries in Western Europe vast economic power. Countries such as, France, Britain, and Germany emerged as industrialized powers, with high population and high production. During the time when Social Darwinism was popular, it was only natural that these nations compete with each other for survival (BookRages 2006). The most important agenda for Europeans to colonize, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, was to support their own countries economically and to compete with the other European powers. One of the main ways a colony could help its colonizer is by providing it with another economic market. As a result of Industrialization, production was too high as compared to demand in Europe. That indicates, unless there is another market to sell their national products employment could decline drastically

within the nation and eventually cause riots. Therefore, Jules Ferry, French Prime Minister, wrote an appeal to the Government, demanding for colonization in his request notes:

*We must say openly that the higher races have a right over the lower races. The very structure of the colonial enterprise shows the exploitation of the natives. The Europeans sought to exploit these colonies in order to achieve even higher levels of profit and economic gain (Mega Essay 2008).*

The quotation above clearly reveals the desire to exploit the other and is rooted deeply in the common belief that Europeans were the dominant race. Also because products need consumers, colonization became the resolution, which perpetuated imperial authoritative beliefs. Thus, we see how the traits of conquering and dominating other people and their territories are stemmed from Western colonial ideology.

Thus, we have seen how colonialist narratives, in this case Maugham's short story, indulged in the construction of binary oppositions and stereotypes, based on racial differences, which deformed, denigrated, marginalized and misrepresented the East. This physical, social, and psychological aspect created misleading and incorrect notions of the colonized subject. In other words, the negative portrayal of the colonized peoples in discourse was actually an imperial ideology to justify colonial rule.

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# Different Learning Style Preferences of Male and Female Iranian Non-academic EFL Learners

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## Abstract

Learning, as the most important concept in education, demands urgent attention. Individuals have different learning styles and awareness of these individual differences by both students and teachers is vital for the most effective use of the methodologies and pedagogical strategies available to teachers in maximizing learning success. Despite the groundswell of literature on learning styles and academic performance, little research has focused on the differences between learning styles of academic and non-academic learners in the Iranian context. This study sought to investigate the style preferences (LSPs) of Iranian non-academic EFL learners and to examine the differences between the LSPs of male and female learners. To do so, 132 students studying English as a foreign language at language institutes participated in the study. Paragon Learning Style Inventory (PLSI) was employed to examine the LSPs of the participants. The results were reported descriptively. In order to check the statistical significance of the observed differences between male and female students, a set of Chi-squares were carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 18. The findings supported the claim that there are discrepancies between the LSPs of male and female students. These findings connote that there is a call for awareness of learners' individual differences, mainly their LSPs in the attempt to idealize the outcomes of TEFL in language institutes in Iran. The findings of this study can assist course developers and syllabus designers base their work on the individual differences of the learners in order to meet the requirement of all learners as much as possible.

**Keywords:** Learning Style Preference, LSP, Iranian non-academic EFL learners, PLSI

## 1. Introduction

Several factors can affect the success of foreign language learning apart from teaching methodologies and pedagogical strategies employed in the instruction of foreign languages. These factors include learners' interest, motivation, learning style preferences (LSP), and personality trait, among others. Learning style preference, as claimed by some educators and researchers, is one of the main factors determining the success of the process of foreign language teaching and learning. A student's LSP refers to the way he/she responds to stimuli in a learning context, and to the student's specific way of acquiring knowledge.

As shown by several studies, people have different learning styles. Considering the variety of learning style preferences among students, the most effective mode of instruction tends to vary for different contexts. This diversity leads to the need for diverse teaching styles on the part of teachers and instructors in order to provide a successful instruction. As Felder (1993) states, the alignment between students' learning styles and instructors' teaching styles leads to better recall and understanding as well as to more positive post-course attitudes.

A considerable body of research has been conducted with a focus on LSP in the fields of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language). A branch of this body of research attempted to describe and illustrate the LSP differences among different groups of learners such as male and female learners, EFL and ESL learners, and learners from different levels of knowledge, varied fields of study, age groups and different nationalities (e.g. Reid, 1987; Melton, 1990; Kang and Shumin, 1999).

In the Iranian context, several studies can be found with a focus on learning styles and their eminence in teaching English as a foreign language (Riazi & Riasati, 2007; Noora, 2008; Soltani, 2008; Zamanzade, Valizade, Fathi Azar & Aminaie, 2008). However, despite the crucial role of learners' learning styles awareness in providing a

successful instruction, little if any attention has been paid to the students' individual differences of learning styles in designing syllabi and EFL courses for the students studying English as a foreign language in both academic and non-academic language institutions. This can be deemed as one of the factors hindering ultimate goals of TEFL in Iran. Having this in mind and considering the significance of LSPs, the present research sought to investigate the learning style preferences among male and female Iranian nonacademic EFL learners. The findings of this study can assist course developers and syllabi designers to base their work on the individual differences of the learners in order to meet the requirements of all learners as much as possible.

To achieve the aforementioned goal, 132 students studying English as a foreign language participated in the study. The participants were selected from four language institutes, namely Iran Language Institute, Parse Language Institute, Marefat Language Institute, and Zabankade. In order to assess the LSPs of the participants a questionnaire known as Paragon Learning Style Inventory (PLSI, 1998, See Appendix A) was applied. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 18. The findings of the study supported the claim that there are discrepancies between the LSPs of male and female learners which connotes that there is a call for awareness of learners' individual differences, mainly their LSPs in the attempt to idealize the outcomes of TEFL in non-academic settings in Iran.

### *1.1 Learning Style*

Several definitions have been offered for learning styles. Ellis (2001) defines learning style as the consistent pattern of behavior and performance by which an individual approaches educational experiences. Sternberg (2001) sees learning style as a habitual pattern or preferred way of doing something that is consistent over long periods of time and across a variety of activities. For Dybvig (2004), learning style is the way a person processes, internalizes, and studies new and challenging materials. According to Vester (2005), learning style is the more or less consistent way in which a person perceives, conceptualizes, organizes, and recalls information. What all these definitions have in common is that learning styles are individual preferences in learning situations.

### *1.2 The Importance of Learning Style Awareness in Education*

Both learners' and teachers' awareness of the individual differences among students can be of great help in successfully leading them through the process of instruction. Without sufficient knowledge about students' style preferences, teachers are not likely to provide the required instructional variety to match the diversity that exists among students in a class. According to Felder and Brent (2004), an understanding of the students' learning styles can help educators adjust their teaching styles to address the students' needs. Kaplan and Kies (1993) have also stressed the utility of learning style awareness on the part of teachers and learners.

## **2. This Study**

Recently, there has been a major shift in the field of foreign language instruction. Traditional teacher-centered approaches are replaced with more learner-centered ones and learner preferences have gained increasing notice; however, learner preferences are rarely addressed in planning language courses and designing syllabi in the Iranian context in both academic and nonacademic settings. Perhaps, one of the main sources of the students' frustration and lack of success in learning foreign languages at Iranian educational system of universities and foreign language institutions is the instructors' and syllabus designers' unawareness of the students' learning styles and the effect LSPs can have on their acquisition and attitude toward their learning experience.

Obviously, planning lessons and designing syllabi on the basis of individual differences of students is very difficult or even impossible and would cost much time and money. Further, in the Iranian educational settings, students are not allowed to participate in decision-makings of their courses. Considering all these, the present study attempted to identify the learning style preferences of Iranian non-academic students and to investigate the relationship between their LSPs and gender. This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the learning style preferences of Iranian nonacademic EFL learners as measured by the Paragon Learning Style Inventory?
2. Is there any relationship between Iranian nonacademic EFL learners' learning style preferences and their gender?

### *2.1 Rationale for the Study*

It is hoped that the findings of this study will enhance the syllabus designers', decision makers' and educators' awareness of learning style variations among university students and help them as a guide for matching the teaching styles to students' learning styles. Moreover, the results can increase the students' awareness of their learning style preferences, so that they can modify their learning styles and develop additional ones in order to

enhance their course achievement.

## 2.2 Participants

In order to achieve the goal of investigating the distinctions in LSPs of male and female learners in the Iranian context, 132 Iranian EFL learners studying English as a foreign language participated in the study. The participants were selected from four language institutes, namely Iran Language Institute, Parse Language Institute, Marefat Language Institute, and Zabankade in Hamedan. 68 of the participants were female and 64 were male. Their age ranged from 18 to 22. The criterion for selection of the students was the age range. The participants had attended English classes for 2-4 years and were chosen from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate levels.

## 2.3 Instrument

This study utilized Paragon Learning Style Indicator (PLSI, See Appendices A) in order to examine the participants' LSPs. PLSI is a reliable and validated inventory that examine the participants' learning styles. The PLSI is a 48 item learning style inventory, developed by Shindler and Yang (2002) specifically for use in educational settings with students aged eight or older. The PLSI is based on the personality test called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which is based on Jung's theories of personality (Jung 1923). The MBTI was developed by Briggs-Myers in 1962 to classify people along the four Jungian psychological learning dimensions, giving a measure of cognitive and perceptual preferences (Shindler and Yang, 2002).

The instrument measures four dimensions of a person's personality: Extraversion (E) vs. Introversion (I), Sensing (S) vs. Intuitive, Thinking vs. feeling, and Judging vs. Perceiving (P) which are defined in Table 1. Each of the four dimensions is independent of the other three, and relationships among the four bipolar dimensions provide 16 possible types: ISTJ, ISFJ, INFJ, INTJ, ISTP, ISFP, INFP, INTP, ESTP, ESFP, ENFP, ENTP, ESTJ, ESFJ, ENFJ, and ENTJ.

Table 1. Characteristics of learning styles for each dimension

Learning Style	Function	Characteristics
Extrovert	Concerns the way people deal with other people and ideas	Learn through the outer world of people, things and actions
Introvert		Learn through the inner world of ideas and impressions
Sensing	Deals with how people take in information	Uses senses to draw on what is real
Intuitive		Use imagination to envision what is possible
Thinking	Concerns how people make decisions	Make decisions based on logic
Feeling		Make decisions based on people and their actions
Judging	Concerns the lifestyle a person prefers	Have preference for living a planned life
Perceiving		Spontaneous and flexible

## 2.4 Procedure and Data Collection

In order to collect the required data, PLSI (See Appendices A) was administered to the participants during the summer term and then the questionnaires were examined by the researcher. Each item of the PLSI relates to one of the four dimensions of learning style and was scored according to which learning style is preferred. The score for each dimension was then obtained by summing the individual scores for all questions for that dimension. Doing so, the LSPs of participants were at hand for further investigation. The analysis of the quantitative data involved a number of statistical procedures, namely, descriptive statistics and Chi-square. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 18.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Learning Style Preferences

The first question was set as 'What are the learning style preferences of Iranian university students as measured by the Paragon Learning Style Inventory?' In order to answer this question, PLSI was administered to 132 Iranian non-academic EFL students to determine their learning style preferences. Then, descriptive statistics were used to determine the frequencies and percentages of the learners with each of the eight learning styles. The results are illustrated in table 2.

Table 2. The distribution of LSPs among participants

SP	Number	Percent
Extrovert	82	62.12 %
Introvert	50	37.88 %
Sensing	94	71.21 %
Intuitive	38	28.79 %
Thinking	78	59.09 %
Feeling	54	40.91 %
Judging	98	74.24 %
Perceiving	34	25.76 %

Figure 1 also represents the distribution of preferences on four scales of PLSI. It should be noted that the figure shows the distribution based on percentages.

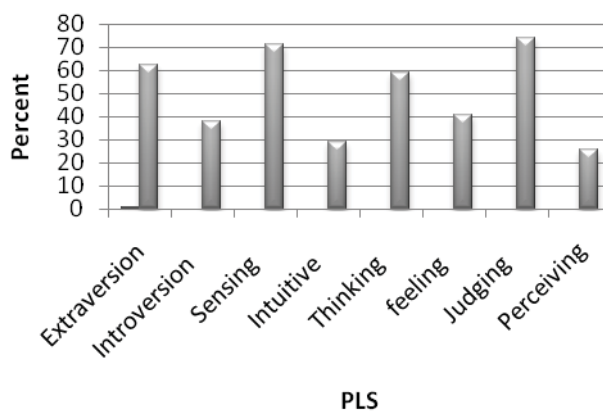


Figure 1. The Distribution of Learning Style Preferences

As Table 2 and Figure 1 illustrate, there are considerable diversities in the learning style preferences of Iranian non-academic EFL learners as examined by PLSI. As the findings indicate, the majority of the sample in this study has showed a strong preference for two dimensions of learning style, namely Sensing and Judging. It means that most of the participants tend to be interested in what their five senses show them, that is what exists in the present. They use the senses to draw on what is taught to them. This implies that the instructors should attempt to teach EFL learners in a way that they can receive as much as possible through their senses.

They also like to have things decided; life is likely to be planned and orderly for them. Most of the students have preference for a planned teaching syllabus. It implies that exposing them to non-planned and flexible syllabi will have destructive effect on their learning. The participants are more extrovert rather than introvert. It entails that in order to learn better, they need to communicate with the outer world and people. Providing communication with other learners and native speakers can be a great help in promoting learning.

### 3.3 Learning Style Preferences and Gender

The second question was stated as: 'Is there any relationship between Iranian non-academic EFL learners' learning style preferences and their gender?' To answer this question, the participants were divided into two groups of male and female and the number and percentage of the groups who preferred each learning style were determined. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for frequency distribution of learners' LSPs based on gender

LSP	Female (n)	Female (%)	Male (n)	Male (%)
Extrovert	42	61.76	25	39.07
Introvert	26	38.24	39	60.93
Sensing	53	77.94	37	57.81
Intuitive	15	22.06	31	42.19
Thinking	41	60.29	23	35.93
Feeling	27	39.71	41	64.07
Judging	59	86.76	46	71.87
Perceiving	9	13.24	18	28.13

The following figures also represent the preferences on four scales of PLSI. It should be noted that, because of the nature of the index, the results are illustrated scale by scale.

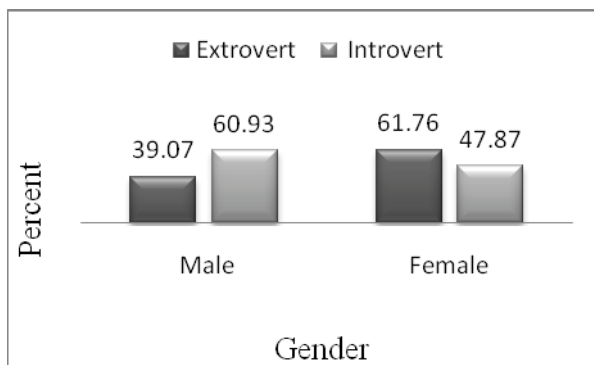


Figure 2. Comparing Students’ Preferences based on Gender on Extrovert/Introvert Scale

As illustrated in Figure 2, in the case of the first scale (Extrovert-Introvert), male students show a preference for Introversion rather than Extroversion. This means that male students tend to relate easily to the inner world of ideas and impressions; while, the female participants prefer the Extroversion dimension, it means that females tend to relate easily to the outer world of people and things. These differences show the need for different teaching styles to students from two genders.

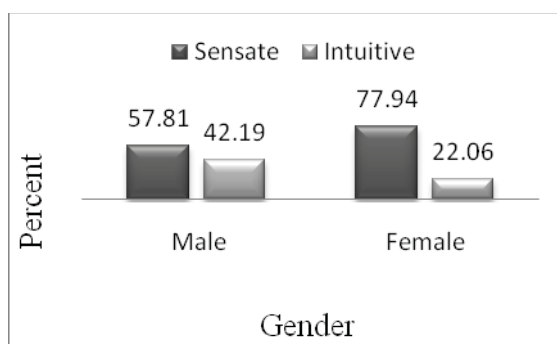


Figure 3. Comparing students' preferences based on gender on sensate/intuitive scale

In the case of the second scale (Sensing-Intuitive), as shown in figure 3, both groups express their preference for Sensing dimension. Of course, this preference is stronger for female students. As previously mentioned, this means that they tend to be interested in what the five senses show them. Although, students of both genders show a tendency for sensing learning style, females tend to be more dependent on what they gain through their five senses and this has implications for teaching females.

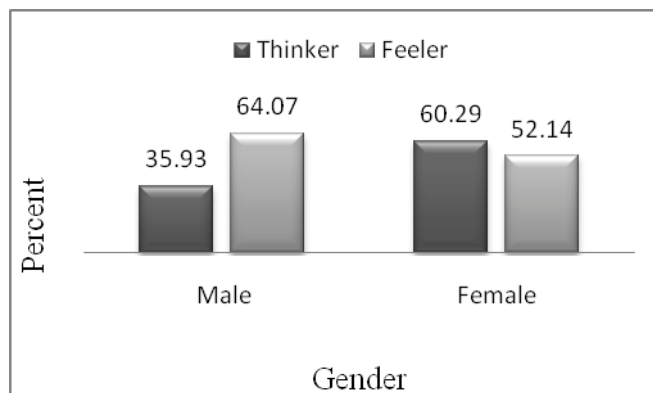


Figure 4. Comparing students' preferences based on gender on feeler/ thinker scale

As the results shown in figure 4 indicate, for the third scale, (Thinking-Feeling), a moderate majority of male students prefer the feeling dimension rather than the Thinking one. It means that they tend to base decisions on values and people-centered concerns. In the case of female students, there seems to be little difference between those who prefer feeling learning style and the thinking one. However, female students prefer thinking dimension rather than the feeling one. This means that they tend to base decisions on objective analysis and logic.

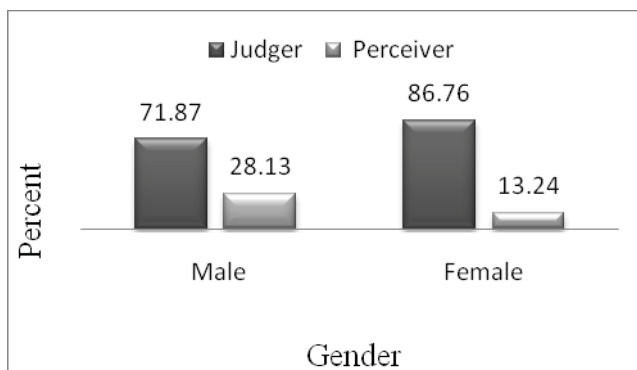


Figure 5. Comparing Students' Preferences based on Gender on Judger/Perceiver Scale

As shown in figure 5, for the fourth scale (Judging-Perceiving), the male participants express a fairly strong preference for Judging dimension. It means that they tend to like to have things decided. The female participants also show the same preference; though, their preference is stronger than the males. It implies that both groups tend to prefer to be taught in a planned and orderly way.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that male students are more Introvert, Sensate, Feeler, and Judger; while female students tend to be more Extrovert, Sensate, Thinker, and Judger. In order to examine the significance of the observed differences between the learning style preferences of the two genders, the obtained data were subjected to Chi-square computation using SPSS software, version 18. The following tables represent the Chi-square results for four scales.

Table 4. Chi-square Results for LSP in Terms of Gender

	Extrovert	Introvert	Sensate	Intuitive	Feeler	Thinker	Judger	Perceiver
<b>Chi-square</b>	4.31	2.60	2.84	5.56	5.06	2.88	1.61	3.00
<b>df</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Sig.</b>	.03*	.10	.09	.01*	.02*	.09	.20	.08

\*= Statistically Significant

As indicated in Table 4, merely the observed differences for the three scales of Extroversion, Intuition, and Thinking are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Considering the results, it can be claimed that male and female participants have been observed to have different learning styles.

#### 4. Conclusion

The present study intended to identify the learning style preferences of Iranian university students and to investigate the relationship between their LSPs, gender, and field of study. With reference to the statistical procedures employed and their results, it can be concluded that Iranian non-academic EFL learners use different learning styles as measured by the Paragon Learning Style Inventory (PLSI) (1998), with the majority of them applying Sensate and Judger styles. This means that they are more interested in what their five senses show them rather than what their imagination tells them. It also implies that they are less interested in what exists at present rather than what can exist in the future. They also like to have things decided; life is likely to be planned and orderly for them rather than flexible and spontaneous.



Further, the results of this study indicated that there are a number of similarities and differences in the learning styles preferred by the male and female participants. Both groups of the participants intended to be more sensible than intuitive. In addition, both groups preferred the Judging dimension over the Perceiving one. However, there are some differences. First, the female participants tend to be more Extrovert; while, the male students preferred the second dimension and tend to be more Introvert. Second, the male participants showed a great preference for feeling dimension of the Feeling-Thinking scale, but the female students preferred the latter dimension more. Of course, it should be mentioned that there was only a slight difference (4.28 %) in the preference of the female students between these two dimensions. Having these differences in mind, it can be claimed that there seems to be a relationship between the learning styles used by students and their gender. In view of the observed differences between male and female participants regarding their LSPs, it is concluded that these groups require distinct teaching styles and syllabi in order to achieve the ultimate goals of instruction.

It is hoped that the findings of this study can be used to improve the teaching practice and the performance of students. In view of the results of this study, it may prove beneficial to consider learning style preferences when designing and teaching courses to maximize learning success. As mentioned earlier, it is quite difficult to determine individual learning styles of the students, dividing them into classes based on their learning styles, and teaching them accordingly. However, the teachers can address each learning style at least some of the time in their teaching. This way, the students' positive attitude toward the courses would also be promoted.

## 6. Further Research

Further research is required to be conducted with larger samples to check whether the same results will be gained. Similar research can also be done in Iranian academic settings to check the claims. Moreover, considering the significant role of students' learning styles, more research seems to be required to investigate the relationship between learning styles and teaching styles. In conducting these studies, other learning style batteries would be applied to investigate the discrepancy of learning style preferences among both academic and non-academic EFL learners.

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#### **Appendix A: Paragon Learning Style Inventory, English Version**

For each of the 48 questions below select either "a" or "b" to indicate your answer. Please choose only one answer.

1. When you come to a new situation you usually

- a. try it right away, and learn from doing
- b. like to watch it first and try it later

2. Do you think people should be more

- a. sensible and practical
- b. imaginative and inspired

3. When you come to an uncertain situation

- a. you usually trust your feelings more
- b. you usually trust your thinking more

4. Would you say you are

- a. a little more serious
- b. a little more easy-going

5. Do you spend most of your time

- a. often in bigger groups and seldom alone
- b. in smaller groups or alone

6. It is better to

- a. be able to accept things
- b. want to change things

7. Is it worse to

- a. do mean things
- b. do unfair things

8. Do you prefer when things are

- a. planned and structured
- b. spontaneous and unplanned

9. After a day spent with a lot of people do you

- a. feel energized and stimulated
- b. feel drained and like being alone

10. When you need to get something important done, you prefer to

- a. do it the way that has worked before
- b. do it a new way that you just thought of

11. Which is a bigger compliment?

- a. "he/she is really nice"
- b. "he/she is really smart"

12. When it comes to time, are you more likely to

- a. usually be on time

- b. be pretty flexible
13. When you are in a group do you usually
- a. do a lot of the talking
- b. mostly listen and talk a little
14. Are you more interested in
- a. what really is
- b. what can be
15. When you look at two things, you mostly notice
- a. how they are the same
- b. how they are different
16. Do you tend to get along better with
- a. people who are a lot like you
- b. lots of different types of people
17. Most other people seem to see you as
- a. kind of out-going
- b. kind of shy and reserved
18. When it comes to work that is very exact and detailed
- a. it comes pretty easily to you
- b. you tend to lose interest in it quickly
19. When your friends disagree, it is more important to you
- a. to help them agree and come together
- b. to help them come to the right answer
20. When you get-up in the morning
- a. you know pretty much how your day will go
- b. it seems every day is pretty different
21. When it comes to using the phone
- a. you use it a lot and make most of the calls
- b. you use it most when others call you
22. When you work on group projects, do you prefer
- a. helping make sure the project gets done and works
- b. helping come up with the ideas and plans
23. Others often describe you as a
- a. warm-hearted person
- b. cool-headed person
24. Which is more your way
- a. to "do the right thing"
- b. to "just do it"
25. When you talk to strangers you've just met you
- a. talk pretty easily and at length
- b. run out of things to say pretty quickly
26. When it comes to work you
- a. prefer steady effort and a regular routine

- b. work in spurts, really "on" then really "off"
27. Is it worse to be
- a. too critical
- b. too emotional
28. Would you rather have things
- a. finished and decided
- b. open to change
29. When it comes to news at school, you seem
- a. to find it out quickly
- b. to be one of the last to know
30. Are you more likely to trust
- a. your experience
- b. your hunches
31. I prefer teachers who are more
- a. caring and supportive
- b. knowledgeable and expect a lot
32. Is it more your way to
- a. finish one project before you start a new one
- b. have lots of projects going at once
33. Which is more true of you? do you
- a. too often act and talk without thinking much first
- b. spend too much time thinking and not enough doing
34. Games would be more fair if kids
- a. would just follow the rules
- b. would just use "good sportsmanship"
35. Is it usually easier for you to tell
- a. how someone else is feeling
- b. what someone else is thinking
36. Which is the more useful ability
- a. to be able to organize and plan
- b. to be able to adapt and make do
37. At a party or gathering
- a. you do more of the introducing of others
- b. others introduce you more
38. Do you think more about
- a. what is going on right now
- b. what will happen in the future
39. It is more your way to
- a. usually show what you are feeling
- b. usually not show your feelings
40. You are the kind of person who
- a. needs to have things a certain way

- b. does it any old way
41. When you get done with an assignment
- a. you feel like showing it to someone
  - b. you like to keep it to yourself
42. Things would be better if people were
- a. more realistic
  - b. more imaginative
43. Would you say you are more concerned with
- a. being appreciated by others
  - b. achieving something important
44. It is better that people
- a. know what they want
  - b. keep an open-mind
45. Friday night after a long week you usually
- a. feel like going to a party or going out
  - b. feel like renting a movie or relaxing
46. When you do a job, it's usually your approach to
- a. start from the beginning, and go step-by-step
  - b. start anywhere, and figure it out as you go
47. When you tell a story, you mostly talk about
- a. how the people involved were effected
  - b. what went on in general
48. You feel most comfortable when things are more
- a. planned and you know what to expect
  - b. unplanned and flexible

# On the Impacts of Perceptual Learning Style and Gender on Iranian Undergraduate EFL Learners' Choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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## Abstract

Students' learning styles and vocabulary learning strategies are among the main factors that help determine how students learn second language vocabulary. This work examined the extent to which choice of vocabulary learning strategies is affected by students' perceptual learning style. In this research, the participants were 54 EFL learners at Farbiat Moallem University majoring in English literature, ranging in age from 20 to 22, and they consisted of both males and females. TOEFL test, Schmitt's (1997) vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire including 5 categories (Determination, Social, Memory, Cognitive, Metacognitive), and Joy Reid's (1987) perceptual learning style preference questionnaire were used in present study. After collecting the data, a number of descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted on the data. The findings of the study revealed there was a relationship between learners' perceptual style and vocabulary learning strategies they use so that learners' perceptual styles make statistically significant contribution to the prediction of vocabulary learning strategies. The results showed that specific learning styles correlated with specific vocabulary learning strategies. Descriptive statistical analyses showed that the most frequent learning style was visual style. Kinesthetic and auditory styles ranked the second and third styles. Also it was shown that group style with the average of 16.0741 was the least frequent. Moreover, it was indicated that the most preferred vocabulary learning strategy category of all was related to metacognitive strategies. Determination strategies ranked the second. Cognitive, memory and the social strategies ranked the third to the fifth. Concerning the gender differences in both vocabulary learning strategies, and perceptual learning styles of the participants, an independent samples t-test was conducted, and the results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the vocabulary strategy preferences or learning styles of the two genders. The research emphasized assessing styles and vocabulary learning strategies in the L2 classroom, attuning L2 instruction and vocabulary learning strategy instruction to learners' style preferences, and remembering that no single L2 instructional methodology fits all students.

**Keywords:** perceptual learning style, vocabulary learning strategies, gender

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is central to language and of critical typical importance to the language learner (Zimmerman 1998), so it has always been an indispensable part of language teaching and learning; however, while interest in the second language vocabulary acquisition (SLVA) has grown in the last ten years and there is a large number of research articles investigating word learning in SLA, a number of rather basic questions about SLVA have remained unanswered and the impact of the researches on vocabulary pedagogy has been rather limited (Zahar, Cobb & Spada, 2001). In other words, vocabulary teaching has not been responsive to problems in the area. One of these areas that need more investigations is related to Vocabulary Learning Strategies defined as "the process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved and used" (Schmitt, 1997) or as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information" (O'Malley & Chamot 1990, p. 1). A comprehensive inventory of vocabulary learning strategies is developed by Schmitt (1997). His taxonomy contains determination, social, cognitive, metacognitive, and memory strategies. To Schmitt,

determination strategies are used when “learners are faced with discovering a new word’s meaning without recourse to another person’s experience” (p. 205). Hence, learners try to discover the meaning of a new word by guessing it with the help of context, structural knowledge of language, and reference materials. For Schmitt, the second way to discover a new meaning is through employing the social strategies of asking someone for help with the unknown words. Beside the initial discovery of a word, learners need to employ a variety of strategies to practice and retain vocabulary. Learners thus, use a variety of social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies to consolidate their vocabulary knowledge. Cooperative group learning through which learners study and practice the meaning of new words in a group is an instance of social strategies for consolidating a word. Memory strategies, traditionally involve relating the word with some previously learned knowledge by using some form of imagery or grouping. Cognitive strategies include repetition and using mechanical means such as word lists, flash cards, and vocabulary notebooks to study words. Finally, metacognitive strategies in Schmitt’s taxonomy are defined as strategies used by learners to control and evaluate their own learning, by having an overview of the learning process in general (Schmitt, p. 216).

Recently research on second language learning strategies has received much attention in SLA not only as an obvious consequence of shift of emphasis from product of learning to its process (Oxford, 1990) but also from teacher to learner (learner-centered approaches) (Wenden, 1991; Tamada, 1996). It means that recently individual factors of learners have been under more emphasis. Concerning vocabulary learning strategies, what is important is that choice of these strategies is related to individual factors such as age, gender, and style. Thus, there should be some studies on this issue. Although there were many studies on vocabulary learning strategies in the past, the role of individual factors had been ignored in most of them. Besides, in the few existing works about the relationship between individual factors and choice of second language vocabulary learning strategies, the considered individual factors were limited to age, gender, level of proficiency or level of vocabulary knowledge. One individual factor ignored in these studies was perceptual learning style. This major factor may have relations with strategy use. Dunn and Dunn (1979 as cited in Reid 1987) define learning styles as “a term that describes the variations among learners in using one or more senses to understand, organize, and retain experience” (p. 89). Perceptual learning styles are of different types: auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic, group, and individual. Auditory learners are “students who enjoy the oral-aural learning channel. Thus they want to engage in discussions, conversations, and group work. These students typically require only oral directions” (Oxford, 1995, p. 36). Visual learners are learners who “prefer to learn via the visual channel. Therefore they like to read a lot, which requires concentration and time spent alone. Visual students need the visual stimulation of bulletin boards, videos and movies. They must have written directions if they are to function well in the classroom” (Oxford, 1995, p. 35). Tactile learning “suggests learning with one’s hands through manipulation or resources, such as writing, drawing, building a model, or conducting a lab experiment” (Kinsella, 1995, p. 172). Kinesthetic learning “implies total physical involvement with a learning environment such as taking a field trip, dramatizing, pantomiming, or interviewing” (Kinsella, 1995, p. 172). A group learner is the one who “learns more effectively through working with others” (Reid, 1995). An individual learner is someone who “learns more effectively through working alone” (Reid, 1995).

In addition to considering the perceptual learning styles, it should be reminded that, although the importance of second language vocabulary strategies in student-centered approaches have made it as a basic component in some of second language researches, the results of these studies have been inconclusive so that in different contexts, different results have been found (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990). Therefore, context of learning English as a second language or foreign language, and the degree of exposure to English language in that context can affect second language learners’ choice of vocabulary strategies. Consequently, the results of other studies in one context cannot have important implications in a different context.

The literature on vocabulary learning strategies points to a number of factors that correlate with learners’ use of strategies. Among these, in some contexts, learners’ level of language proficiency (Chang, 1990; Green & Oxford, 1995), motivation (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989) and gender (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Chandler, Lizotte & Rowe, 1998) have been shown to have a strong effect on learners’ use of different types of strategies. However, as the researches indicate these effects are context specific. So in this study some of these factors were regarded in Iran as an EFL context of learning with low exposure of learners to L2. Also, the effect of some other factors such as perceptual learning style on choice of vocabulary strategies which has not yet been investigated was studied in this work.

In sum, these mentioned problems provided the motivation for more investigations on this area in Iran so that the relationship between use of second language vocabulary strategies and individual factors such as gender and perceptual learning style were investigated. The minor aim of present study was to investigate frequency and type of vocabulary learning strategies used by Iranian EFL students.

The research questions to be investigated in this study are:

Is there any relationship between Iranian Undergraduate EFL Learners' use of second language vocabulary strategies and their perceptual learning style?

Is there any relationship between Iranian Undergraduate EFL Learners use of second language vocabulary strategies and gender?

## 2. Methodology

In this research, the participants were 54 EFL learners at Tarbiat Moallem University majoring in English literature, ranging in age from 20 to 22, and they consisted of both males and females. At first, TOEFL Test was given to participants to assure that they are all in the same level of proficiency. Next, Schmitt's (1997) "taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies" was filled by learners to report their chosen vocabulary learning strategies. This questionnaire includes 5 categories, including Determination, Social, Memory, Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies, also it consists of 58 items with five-Likert Scale, ranging from (1= scarcely used, to 5= always used). As reported by Schmitt, the test is both reliable (.81) and valid. Then Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) developed by Reid (1987) was filled by the participants. It is a self-reporting questionnaire consisting of five statements on each of the six learning style preferences to be measured: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group learning, and individual learning. The participants responded based on a five point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

## 3. Data Analysis

In this study the data was collected and a number of descriptive (mean + Standard Deviation, SD) and inferential analyses (Correlations) were conducted on the data.

The statistical analyses were conducted by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Regarding PLSQ, A t-test was conducted to identify whether there was significant difference in the learning style preference between males and females. Similar statistical procedures were used to analyze the data obtained from the SILL. Descriptive statistics were used to rank order the strategy categories from the most preferred to the least preferred category. A t-test was also conducted to find whether there was difference in the preference of learning strategies between males and females. In order to reveal whether there was a significant relationship between the learning styles and the language learning strategies the Pearson correlation was used.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Analysis of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Schmitt's (1997) "taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies" was filled by learners to report their chosen vocabulary learning strategies. This questionnaire includes 5 categories, including Determination, Social, Memory, Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies, also it consists of 58 items with five-Likert Scale, ranging from (1= scarcely used, to 5= always used). The results of the descriptive statistics conducted to identify the general tendency of vocabulary strategy preferences of the participants in this study, indicated that the most preferred strategy category of all, with a mean score of 3.1380 was the one related to metacognitive strategies. Determination strategies ranked the second with an average of 3.0000. The third place in the ranking order was taken by the cognitive strategies with a mean score of 2.8677. The mean scores of the memory and the social strategies were 2.7847 and 2.2259 respectively, and ranked the fourth and the fifth (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Concerning Vocabulary Learning Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metacognitive	54	2.00	4.40	3.1380(a)	.56925
Determination	54	2.14	4.14	3.0000	.47340
cognitive	54	1.57	3.86	2.8677	.54723
Memory	54	1.94	3.65(b)	2.7847	.38688
Social	54	1.20	3.40	2.2259	.51255
Valid N (listwise)	54				

Concerning the gender differences in the vocabulary learning strategies of the participants, an independent samples t-test was conducted, and the results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the Vocabulary strategy preferences of the two genders because all of the values were far above the significance value,  $p < .05$  (see Table 2).



Table 2. Independent Samples T-test for Gender Differences in Vocabulary Learning Strategies Group Statistics

	gender	N	df	Std. Error	t	p
			Mean	Mean		
Determination	female	44	3.0357	.07302	.249	.16528
	male	10	2.8429	.12857	.211	.14786
Social	female	44	2.2636	.07205	.261	.17907
	male	10	2.0600	.20450	.367	.21683
Memory	female	44	2.8008	.06212	.527	.13630
	male	10	2.7140	.07966	.400	.10101
Cognitive	female	44	2.9708	.07498	.003	.17749
	male	10	2.4143	.17360	.012	.18910
Metacognitive	female	44	3.1648	.09083	.473	.20033
	male	10	3.0200	.12454	.359	.15414

#### 4.2 Analysis of the Perceptual Learning Styles

The results of the descriptive statistics conducted to identify the perceptual learning styles of the participants in this study, indicated that the most frequent learning style was visual style with a mean score of 37.6296. Kinesthetic and auditory styles with mean scores of 36.4815 and 36.1111 ranked the second and third styles. Also it was shown that group style with the average of 16.0741 was the least frequent (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Concerning Perceptual Learning Style

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Visual	54	10.00	50.00	37.6296	7.60411
Kinesthetic	54	.00	48.00	36.4815	8.97742
Auditory	54	10.00	48.00	36.1111	7.72564
Tactile	54	10.00	46.00	33.6667	6.89271
Individual	54	10.00	25.00	17.4074	3.99301
Group	54	.00	23.00	16.0741	4.84808
Valid N (listwise)	54				

Concerning the gender differences in the learning styles preferences of the participants, an independent samples t-test was conducted and at  $p < .05$  the no significance value for perceptual styles was found. This means that there is no statistically significant difference in the preference of learning styles between females and males (see Table 4).

Table 4. Independent Samples T-test for Gender Differences in Perceptual Learning Styles

	gender	N	df	Mean	Std. Error	t	p
				Mean	Mean		
Visual	female	44	37.5909	37.5909	1.23305	.938	-.20909
	male	10	37.8000	37.8000	1.44376	.913	-.20909
Tactile	female	44	34.3182	34.3182	.95997	.147	3.51818
	male	10	30.8000	30.8000	2.73577	.250	3.51818
Auditory	female	44	36.8636	36.8636	1.09080	.135	4.06364
	male	10	32.8000	32.8000	2.93939	.220	4.06364
Group	female	44	16.2500	16.2500	.68826	.581	.95000
	male	10	15.3000	15.3000	1.94964	.655	.95000
Kinesthetic	female	44	37.0909	37.0909	1.38010	.300	3.29091
	male	10	33.8000	33.8000	2.53772	.273	3.29091
Individual	female	44	17.0909	17.0909	.58777	.225	-1.70909
	male	10	18.8000	18.8000	1.36463	.271	-1.70909

#### 4.3 Analysis of the Relationship between Learning Styles and Learning Strategies

In order to determine whether there was a statistically meaningful relationship between the learning style preferences and the vocabulary learning strategy preferences of the students, the Pearson correlation was computed. The results revealed that the auditory perceptual learning styles significantly correlated with social ( $p=0.019$ ) and cognitive ( $p=0.023$ ) vocabulary learning strategies at  $p < .05$  significance value. Also, there was significant correlation between group perceptual style and social vocabulary learning strategies ( $p=0.020$ ). In addition, it was indicated that kinesthetic styles and social vocabulary strategies correlate to each other significantly ( $p=0.025$ ).

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Matrix

		Determi	Social	memory	cognitive	metacognitive
visual	Pearson Correlation	-.061	.243	.025	.173	-.209
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.659	.077	.858	.210	.129
	N	54	54	54	54	54
tactile	Pearson Correlation	.119	.252	.223	.227	-.071
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.392	.066	.105	.099	.611
	N	54	54	54	54	54
auditory	Pearson Correlation	.159	.318(*)	-.011	.308(*)	.097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.250	.019	.934	.023	.486
	N	54	54	54	54	54
group	Pearson Correlation	.049	.317(*)	.142	.187	.120
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.723	.020	.304	.177	.388
	N	54	54	54	54	54
kinesthetic	Pearson Correlation	.072	.306(*)	.239	.193	.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.603	.025	.081	.162	.455
	N	54	54	54	54	54
individual	Pearson Correlation	-.014	-.068	.016	-.028	.047
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.918	.625	.910	.841	.738
	N	54	54	54	54	54

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

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this work which examined the extent to which choice of vocabulary learning strategies is affected by students' perceptual learning style, the findings revealed that the most frequent learning style for Iranian learners at this proficiency level was visual style. Kinesthetic and auditory styles ranked the second and third styles. Also it was shown that group style with the average of 16.0741 was the least frequent. Moreover, it was indicated that the most preferred vocabulary learning strategy category of all was related to meta cognitive strategies. Determination strategies ranked the second. Cognitive, memory and the social strategies ranked the third to the fifth. These findings support what was offered by Reid (1987) that the learning style preferences of ESL learners from different language differ significantly from each other. For instance, in his research, the Korean students were found to be the most visual in their learning style preferences. They were significantly more visual than the US and Japanese learners. Japanese learners, on the other hand, appeared to be the least auditory of all learners and were significantly less auditory than Arabic and Chinese learners.

Concerning the gender differences in both vocabulary learning strategies, and perceptual learning styles of the participants, the results of current study showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the vocabulary strategy preferences or learning styles of the two genders. This result seems to support the findings of Ehrman and Oxford (1990) who reported that the number and kind of strategies used by females were similar to those used by males. However, their research was about learning strategies in general.

The results of data analysis in present study indicated that there was some kinds of relationships between learners' perceptual style and vocabulary learning strategies they use so that learners' perceptual styles make statistically significant contribution to the prediction of vocabulary learning strategies. The results revealed that

the auditory perceptual learning styles significantly correlated with social ( $p=0.019$ ) and cognitive ( $p=0.023$ ) vocabulary learning strategies at  $p < .05$  significance value. Also, there was significant correlation between group perceptual style and social vocabulary learning strategies ( $p=0.020$ ). In addition, it was indicated that kinesthetic styles and social vocabulary strategies correlate to each other significantly ( $p=0.025$ ). These findings revealed that auditory learners are very good at learning new L2 words through cooperation or practicing unknown words by asking others for help. Also, such learners try to consolidate the new words through cognitive strategies. They frequently use mechanic means such as word lists, flash cards, and vocabulary notebooks to study words. According to the results, the learners with Group Perceptual Style, learn new words best through social strategies, and this is something that is completely suitable to their style since a group learner is the one who “learns more effectively through working with others” (Reid, 1995). Moreover, in this study it was shown that kinesthetic learners learn the new words and consolidate them through social strategies, and this is supported by Kinsella (1995)’s definition that Kinesthetic learning “implies total physical involvement with a learning environment such as taking a field trip, dramatizing, pantomiming, or interviewing”. All these results emphasized assessing styles and vocabulary learning strategies in the L2 classroom, attuning L2 instruction and vocabulary learning strategy instruction to learners’ style preferences, and remembering that no single L2 instructional methodology fits all students.

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# A Think-aloud Protocols Investigation of Saudi English Major Students' Writing Revision Strategies in L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English)

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## Abstract

This study investigates the writing revision strategies used by 16 Saudi English as foreign language (EFL) students. Two research methods were employed. First, think-aloud reporting was used to gain insight into the thought processes utilized by the students, and to study the revision strategies that Saudi male university students make use of while writing compositions in L1 Arabic and L2 English. Second, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the aim of supporting the think-aloud data. Analysis of the think-aloud sessions and the interviews revealed that most of the time, strategies were used more frequently when students wrote in English rather than when they wrote in Arabic. In addition, it was found that in general, specific strategies used when writing in Arabic were also used when writing and vice versa.

**Keywords:** writing strategies (WS), writing revision strategies (WRS), and writing process (WP)

## 1. Introduction

What writing revision strategies (WRS) do Saudi male English major students employ when writing compositions in L1 Arabic and L2 English? This question was the central focus of this study. It has been my experience as a professor of English as a foreign language, that the majority of students have difficulty with writing composition, and the reasons may be three-fold. One, a lack of experience using the English language; two, a low level of writing/language proficiency; and three, poor use of writing strategies. The present study aims to explore WRS in a new context and therefore contribute to the field of L1 and L2 writing. It will consider a comprehensive range of WRS by using two research methods (think aloud and interview), which will provide the L1 and L2 literature with crucial information on the use of writing strategies. The primary purposes of this study are to describe and analyze both the writing revision strategies that undergraduate Saudi male EFL students use while writing in L1 and L2 and the possible influence the L1 writing process has on the L2 writing process and vice versa.

This study is of particular significance within the Saudi males EFL context since only one empirical study has looked at the writing composition processes of Saudi males and the writing strategies they use either in Arabic or English. Generally, most of the research that has been done so far on the writing skills of Arabic speaking students learning English as a second or a foreign language has concentrated on the product of writing, with the exception of a limited number of studies in the middle East which looked at one particular aspect of Arabs' writing processes, namely revision (Alam, 1993) and the use of Arabic when writing in English (Al-Semari, 1993).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Writing in Saudi Schools

Broadly speaking, within the Saudi educational system, teaching writing in general, and the process in particular, is neglected in courses that teach both L1 and L2 writing. In other words, the weak L1 and L2 writing skills of Saudi students can be attributed to the inadequate teaching and training they receive in the subject in both their native language and EFL in Saudi Arabia. El-sayed, 1983, argued that the problems contributing to the poor quality of Arabic-speaking students' English writing comes from many sources, one of which is the way the teaching of English writing is organized. Compared with many other Arab countries, the method of teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia although different is not better.

The teaching methods EFL teachers usually use are more concerned with the structure. Vocabulary and grammar, according to Aljamhour (1996), are the main concern in teaching English writing in Saudi Arabia. He stated that

“Teaching English writing in Saudi schools is based on the belief that those students who learn more vocabulary will be good writers. As a result, students are required to memorize a great deal of vocabulary in order to speak, read, listen, and write in English, but little emphasis is placed on other important writing skills, such as planning, and organization” (p. 16).

In most Arab countries adult learners who have successfully learned English grammar rules are unable to use them productively and communicatively because they cannot utilize their intellectual understanding of the language in communicative situations (El-daly, 1991 cited in Aljamhour, 1996). This problem exists in Saudi schools, where teachers, who are the source of knowledge, teach grammar, vocabulary and organization, ignoring other essential aspects of writing that learners must know beyond those basic skills. El-daly (1991 in Aljamhour, 1996), in a study explaining the problem of emphasizing grammar and vocabulary, stated “English was considered an academic course like ‘history’, ‘geography’, or ‘social studies’. Our main task [as students] was to memorize a lot of grammatical rules, a lot of vocabulary and structures with a view to passing the course and moving ahead to the next level” (p. 3).

In terms of the dominant pedagogical approach which is still grammar translation, there are not sufficient opportunities for writing instruction. The reason that grammar translation is still the dominant approach is that, for the most part, the teachers of English themselves may have a low level of proficiency in the language. Alnofal (2003) stated that Saudi students in general give little attention to how they approach the act of writing in both L1 and L2 respectively. Rather their attention is directed more toward the service aspects of writing, such as grammatical structure, spelling and word choice. He believes that this common phenomenon can be attributed to the way Saudi students are taught to write in both L1 and L2. This researcher agrees with that point, based on experience teaching Saudi students who study English as a foreign language (EFL), and after considering the results of a variety of studies conducted on Saudi ESL/EFL students (Al-Hozaimi, 1993; Alsemeri, 1993; Aljamhour, 1996; Jouhari, 1996).

In fact, in terms of writing proficiency, the goals stipulate the ability to produce a connected passage of up to a full page on a subject of descriptive or discursive nature, but for a variety of reasons, this goal is not being met. An additional factor concerns the students themselves. Saudi EFL students, in this researcher’s experience, are less enthusiastic about learning English and the majority of students lack the motivation to improve their proficiency.

It is in the context of the above discussion that this researcher believes very little attention is given to the teaching methodology of the writing process in English in Saudi Arabia. Most, if not all, of the sources related to the teaching of English writing that this researcher reviewed showed a neglect of writing as a process. Instead, recommendations presented with the intent of helping L1 teachers of writing, are limited to guidelines that encourage producing good quality pieces of writing.

## 2.2 Writing Strategies

An important aspect of any research on the writing process is the recognition of writing strategies. The term strategy has been defined by many professionals under different names. Rubin, (1981) for example, defined strategy as: “operations or steps used by a learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information” (p. 5). Stern, (1983) on the other hand, stated that “in our view strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, leaving learning techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior, more or less consciously employed by the learner” (p. 405). However, these days, this nomenclature is not usually followed. The present tendency among researchers is to use the term strategy for specific behaviors. Further, Cohen (1998) defines strategies as “processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in actions taken to enhance the learning or the use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about the language”. For the purposes of this study then, strategy is defined as a series of actions, methods, steps and techniques employed by a learner behaviorally or mentally, and more or less consciously, to facilitate their processing, retrieving, and using of information.

Writing strategy is defined by Cornaire and Raymond (1994) cited in Beare, S. 2000, as a plan of action or a conscious intervention in dealing with the task for the purpose of problem solving or reaching a goal. Further, Leki (1995) discusses writing strategies as the kind of actions that writers undertake to produce a written text (e.g. rereading the text several times). More recently, Kieft et al. (2006) define the writing strategy of an individual as the way that person tends to organize cognitive activities such as planning, formulating, and reviewing.

## 2.3 Writing Revision Strategies

Among the various proposals made to define and study writing revision strategies, the one made by Flower,

Hayes, Schriver, Stratman, and Carey (1986) is undeniably the most precise. These authors give a more complex description of the «reviewing» process, previously thought to be composed of only two sub-processes («evaluate» and «revise»; Flower & Hayes, 1981), by breaking down the process into four components and by further specifying the kind of knowledge the revision activity involves and generates. They grant a more important role to the reviser's selection of what knowledge to apply and what strategic choices to make as he/she a) defines the task, b) evaluates the text and defines the encountered problem, c) selects a strategy involving either going back to the preceding processes or going on to modify the text, and d) modifies the text either by revising it or rewriting it.

From a functional standpoint, the above sub-processes of revision are organized hierarchically. Each of the four steps required to make a correction is necessarily subordinate to the preceding one. The reviser can nevertheless decide not to go on to the next step, and restart the sequence at any one of the higher-order sub-processes. This process-sequencing flexibility accounts for the functional variants so fully described by Flower et al. (1986).

In order to revise, writers must have, and if not build, a representation of what they consider to be involved in evaluating and improving a text. They must plan what they are going to do by specifying:

- The goals to be reached (for instance, revise to make the text clearer).
- The characteristics of the text to be examined (for instance, revise the local or global aspects of the text).
- The means that can be used to reach the defined goals (for instance, correct the text several times in succession).

Flower et al. (1986) attribute a clearly metacognitive role to the notion of task definition.

Indeed, this definition serves as the control manager for the sequencing of complex subprocesses by setting the goals, constraints, and criteria required to guide the entire revising activity. These authors make an inventory of the various «definitions of the task» that revisers of differing degrees of expertise can verbalize, and thus ascertain that experts have more meta-knowledge and knowledge likely to promote the setting of objectives like «check for correct meaning, text length, and text type», or «check the number, density, and complexity of the problems and errors in the to-be improved text», etc. The scope of an experts' processing unit is the entire text, whereas that of novices is the sentence at this point, Flower et al.

#### *2.4 Research Questions*

The main questions of concern to the researcher are:

1. What are the WRS that Saudi male undergraduate EFL students use when they write in Arabic (L1) and English (L2)?
2. What are the similarities or differences in frequency between the WRS Saudi male undergraduate EFL students apply when writing in L1 and L2?

### **3. Methods**

#### *3.1 Participants*

The participants of the study were 16 Saudi male third-year students majoring in English in the Department of English, at the College of Art at the University of Ha'il, Saudi Arabia. They were selected randomly, subject to willingness to participate in the current study.

#### *3.2 Instruments*

##### *3.2.1 Think Aloud*

Think-aloud reporting was used in this study to gain insights into what goes on in the student writer's mind and to study the complex processes and strategies that Saudi male college students use while composing in both languages.

##### *3.2.1.1 Procedure*

Initially the researcher explained the think-aloud procedure to the 16 chosen subjects as a group, how it works, and how effective it is in obtaining information from verbalized behavior during composition writing. An introduction to the think-aloud while composing concept was provided for the subjects as used in previous EFL studies (e.g., Arndt, 1987; Pennington and So, 1993; Raimes, 1985, 1987). The subjects listened to others who had been audio recorded during a reading task in order to guess the meaning of some unknown words. The researcher chose this kind of practice so it would be different from the method used during the actual study as normally the practice task is not identical to the one used during the study. This prevents influencing the students on anything that they might report on later. After that, the researcher asked the subjects to take part in a

brief think-aloud session as part of the practice. The aim of this introduction was to make the subjects aware of how to perform the think-aloud task as a way of eliciting information which would be needed to investigate their writing strategies when writing in Arabic and English as a foreign language.

In the same week, a writing session was held where the students were asked to write about a topic in English. The next week, they were asked to write about a topic in Arabic. The purpose behind instructing the subjects to write the L2 essay first was based on the fact that the impact of L1 on L2 is well established in the literature whereas the impact of L2 on L1 is generally thought to be relatively less pronounced.

Subjects were placed into eight groups in order to counterbalance a “topic effect”. The first subject in the first group wrote topic one in English and topic two in Arabic while the second subject wrote topic two in English and topic one in Arabic. The same procedure was followed with the other groups. Think aloud writing sessions were conducted in a quiet room and the subjects performed the writing sessions individually, following a schedule that the researcher made up according to when the subjects were available. The schedule provided a clear picture of which assigned student would come, at what time, on which day, and enabled the researcher to make good use of time. In the writing room, a table and a chair were set up, and two pens and sufficient paper were provided. Also, subjects were provided with a tape recorder to turn on as soon as the writer started the task. The subjects were directed to externalize and verbalize their thoughts and composing activities as much as possible.

They were told that they could use whichever language (or a mixture of both) they felt more comfortable with and in which they found it easier to verbalize their thoughts. The researcher also told the subjects that an hour and half would be provided for each writing task. In order to minimize any distractions to the fluidity of the writing process and to simulate how students usually write when doing an exam, no preparation or dictionaries were provided. Additionally, students were allowed to ask the researcher any questions except about procedure. Students who wanted to revise their essays on the same draft were asked to write in a different colored ink so that revisions could be easily differentiated from original writings. Moreover, subjects were instructed not to erase text that they did not intend to use, simply to cross once through anything they did not need.

Each time, before the think-aloud protocol started, the researcher reminded each student what to do by reading the think-aloud instructions and the assigned topic. Once, the actual writing session started, the researcher sat at the back of the room and reminded students to speak out when it was felt that the subject stopped verbalizing. After each writing session, all drafts and notes were collected.

#### 3.2.1.2 Writing Topics for the Think-aloud Session

All students were required to write on specific topics which were chosen by the researcher who was concerned about assigning topics that the subjects would know something about, in the belief that topics related to the subjects personally and their country would motivate the subjects to get involved in their writing. Each of the topics assigned in the L2 and L1 sessions were descriptive in nature. The topics were as follows:

**Topic one:** “In everybody’s life there are happy moments; describe a happy moment in your life.”

**Topic two:** “Describe your favorite city, town, or village”

The choice of these particular topics was based on researcher knowledge that these topics would both be interesting to the students and that subjects shared the same educational background and had similar prior knowledge of both topics. Also, the researcher had in mind to give the subjects topics that they had not written about recently. This was confirmed with the subjects’ teachers so as to preclude writing from memory. In addition, the choice of descriptive prose over argumentative writing was made in order to help the subject write more freely, and so that they could more easily generate ideas, encouraging them to write fluently and think aloud with ease. The purpose of the writing was not specified in the writing prompts nor was the target reading audience, since this would not normally be done for regular writing tasks and it was in fact a study objective to determine to what extent the subjects were concerned about these rhetorical issues.

Both topics were presented as non-fiction and in both tasks the content was left non-specific so the writers could enjoy some freedom of choice.

#### 3.2.1.3 Transcription of Think-aloud Protocols

Each writer’s audio-tapes were transcribed in order to create a hard copy of the think-aloud sessions. The think-aloud tapes were transcribed in the language(s) that the subjects used to externalize their thought during the writing process.

#### 3.2.1.4 Developing an Adapted Coding System

Prior to developing a coding system for use in the study, the researcher read numerous studies on think-aloud

reporting for the analysis of writing so as to examine the purpose of the studies, the theoretical underpinning of the investigations, and the subsequent rationales for the coding system. The coding scheme developed for L1 writers by Perl (1979) and later modified for EFL writers by researchers such as Arndt (1987), Rashid (1996), El Mortaji (2001), El-Aswad (2002), Junju (2004) were good sources for the development of a coding system and shed light on a variety of WRS.

A starting point for the identification of WRS used was a theoretical anticipation of what the transcripts would reveal so verbalization were listened more than nine times in order to ensure accuracy of the verbal protocols. After that, each transcript was reviewed one by one several times and what was inferred to be individual strategies were identified and written down. All protocols were examined more than 14 times.

Two weeks later, each protocol was examined twice more to ensure all potential strategies had been identified. In order to categorize the strategies, all the coded strategies were written down, each on an individual card. Eighteen AWRS from the Arabic writings and 17 EWRS from the English writings were identified. Each coded strategy was validated as unique by asking a contrast question, “is this a strategy and if it is, is it different from the last one?” Consequently, 14 AWRS and 3 EWRS emerged. The researcher was then able to develop a list of strategies, and apply them to the data. To corroborate content coding, a sample of the protocols (two students’ protocols for each language, Arabic, English) was checked by an expert coder.

### 3.2.1.5 Counting the Strategies

After the protocols of the 16 subjects (in both languages) were coded, the frequency of utilisation of each individual strategy was calculated by counting occurrence of each strategy listed in the classification scheme for each subject, including the number of times each strategy was repeated. By giving every strategy used a score of one and strategies that had not been used a zero score, the number of *strategy type* used by each subject one or more times was counted and recorded. For example, if the student used a strategy but rehearsed it many times, it was counted as one type. This yielded a total number of strategies for each subject which represented the size of their strategy repertoire. The frequency of use of each strategy (*as tokens*) was calculated for each protocol by counting the total number of occurrences of each strategy. This included counting where the same strategy was repeated. Based on the students’ protocols, a number of 14 AWRS, and 13 EWRS were identified.

### 3.2.1.6 Interjudge Reliability

The researcher thought it would be ideal to find another person who knows about learner strategies in general and think-aloud protocol analysis in particular. Therefore, he contacted a Professor of Applied Linguistics in the same department where the researcher works. The researcher explained to him the purpose of his research and provided him with a copy of the detailed strategies and pointed out what each strategy involved using examples from different protocols. Also, he answered all the questions raised and responded to the remarks made to satisfy the coder’s curiosity. Finally, we went over our strategy classification scheme together to make sure that each strategy was clearly stated and defined. Since the rater said that he did not need any further training on how to code strategies, four protocols of four subjects were given to him. To ensure complete understanding, we provided him with the list of instructions as follows:

1. Please make sure that you understand each writing strategy and its definition before you start coding.
2. Protocols typed in italics means that the participant thought aloud in Arabic. Segments typed in a regular font meant the student thought aloud in English. Three or four dots indicate that the participant paused for a while.
3. Read the protocol of each sentence/phrase and then please decide whether a certain segment of the protocol is a strategy or not.
4. Write the strategies you identify in the right hand column and underline the segment(s) of the protocol which identifies the strategy you have indicated. If you cannot identify the strategy for a particular word, phrase or sentence or have any doubts, write a question mark or just leave it blank.
5. Make sure that each strategy you identify fits the definition given in our list of the writing strategies. If, however, you identify a *new* strategy not included in our list, write the strategy name and underline it.
6. If any protocol is not very clear, please contact me.
7. Please take your time and kindly double-check your coding.

(Adopted from Mushait, 2003)

The independent coder returned the four protocols for the four subjects after coding them six weeks later. He identified a total of 230 writing strategy tokens used by the four subjects, (see Table 1). A total of 205 tokens of writing revision strategies were coded the same as ours. To find out how much agreement was found, we



contrasted his coding with ours. We obtained an overall 83.67 per cent agreement between our coding and those of the independent coder. The maximum agreement was 87.50% per cent and the minimum was 77.96% per cent. Having judged that the agreement rate was acceptable, we coded the rest of the data.

$$\frac{\text{Number of strategies placed in the same category by both judges}}{\text{Number of strategies tokens coded by the researcher}} \times 100$$

The overall agreement is  $205 \div 245) \times 100 = 83.67\%$

Table 1. Interjudge reliability

Subjects	Number of strategies coded by the researcher	Number of strategies coded by the independent rater	Total agreement between the researcher and the rater	
1	70	67	58	82.85%
2	59	52	46	77.96%
3	48	46	42	87.50%
4	68	65	59	86.76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>83.67%</b>

### 3.3 Interview

Semi-structured interviews were also used at the end of the think-aloud sessions for two reasons. First, it is a supplementary instrument to the main instrument which is the introspective think-aloud reporting. It triangulates the data sources for the investigated variable and therefore increases the reliability and validity of the gathered data and its outcome. Second, I also employed interviews to help clearing up any ambiguity and confusion found in the think aloud protocols. The questions were open ended and the responses were taped for later transcription.

### 3.4 Quantitative Analysis of Think-aloud Data

The quantitative analysis with SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) involved descriptive statistics for frequency counts of 14AWRS and 13EWRS in 8 protocols in each language. Frequencies, percentages, mean values and standard deviations were computed to capture the similarities and/or differences between the two languages (Arabic vs English) in the employment of different strategies. The Wilcoxon test was used to see if there was a significant difference between the two languages.

## 4. Discussion

According to the classifications developed for this study, reviewing strategies are divided into two subprocesses: first, are actual reviewing strategies and second are strategies used to aid reviewing. Table 2 shows actual reviewing strategies used by Saudi male students when writing in Arabic and in English.

### 4.1 Actual Reviewing Strategies

Table 2. Actual reviewing strategies

AWS&EWS	Descriptive statistics				Inferential statistics	
	Arabic composition		English composition		z	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1. Edit after each sentence.	.299	.436	2.38	3.07	-2.02	.043
2. Edit after each paragraph.	.512	.577	1.16	1.12	-2.02	.043
3. Edit only after writing the whole passage.	.256	.358	0	0	-1.60	.109
4. Revise what has been written after each sentence.	.791	.692	2.35	1.98	-2.02	.043
5. Revise what has been written after each paragraph.	.562	.665	.297	.460	-.527	.612
6. Revise what has been written after writing the whole passage.	.258	.491	.208	.395	-.365	.715
7. Focus on content when revising.	3.40	2.94	6.32	.909	-2.38	.017
8. Focus on organization when revising.	4.22	3.32	7.80	1.34	-2.38	.017
9. Focus on finding more appropriate words or phrases (Substitution).	.902	.478	3.04	3.16	-2.10	.036
10. Delete whole or partial sentences or paragraph.	.217	.449	1.45	1.30	-2.20	.027
11. Rearrange sentences and paragraph.	.329	.372	.630	.702	-.676	.499
12. Add some words, sentences or paragraphs.	1.65	1.02	2.95	2.21	-1.40	.161
13. Give reasons for changes	.463	.415	.881	.714	-1.35	.179

Table 2 shows similarities in rank order and the correlation between the means is significant ( $r = .494, p < .001$ ). Some strategies were used more when writing in Arabic (strategies 3, 5, 6). It is also evident that global editing and revision (i.e. strategies 3, 6) is less disfavoured in L1 than in L2. This result could have been influenced by the fact that it is notably easier to write in L1 than in L2. The rank order of the mean frequency in each language is as follows:

In English: 8 > 7 > 9 > 12 > 1 > 4 > 10 > 2 > 13 > 11 > 5 > 6 > 3

In Arabic: 8 > 7 > 12 > 9 > 4 > 5 > 2 > 13 > 11 > 1 > 6 > 3 > 10

Analysis of the data revealed that focusing on organization when revising, and focusing on content when revising occur first and second respectively in frequency among all the strategies used in both Arabic and English, (means = 4.22, and, 3.40 and SD = 3.32, SD = 2.94; means = 7.80; 6.32, and SD = 1.34; .909). This echoes the findings of Al-Semari, 1993; and Rashid, 1996, El-Aswad, 2002, who found that their students pay a lot of attention not only to organization but also to content when revising L1 compositions. Interviewees reported that they focus on the organization of the content to be sure that the order of the content is fluid and to avoid conflicting ideas. These findings coincide with other L2 English studies including El-Semari, 1993. Furthermore, in a study of Spanish students, Gaskill, (1986) reported revisions involving breaks in existing paragraphs to produce new ones, the movement of a paragraph from one location to another or the joining of two previously separate paragraphs. On the other hand, this pattern is inconsistent with El-Aswad, 2002, who found that the Arab subjects did not focus on the organization of the content, and attributed that to the fact that they were either not used to doing so, or were unable to change or add anything to their written texts. Additionally, it is reported that the teaching of writing is worse in Libya than Saudi Arabia.

We can see from the focus of organization and content revision strategies that Saudi male students feel that to produce a good essay and convey their ideas clearly it is necessary to revise the content of the essay before handing it in. This is in line with Beach's (1976) study on L1 English writers, where extensive revision is defined as "one in which the writer substantially changed the content or form of the previous draft" (p. 160). In addition, Al-Semari, 1993, found that his Saudi subjects were concerned about the content of their essays when revising. Victori, (1999) also found that most of her Spanish subjects claimed that when they revised their essays they focused on content in order to make sure that they were on the right track in terms of writing coherently, using the most appropriate expressions, and to avoid repeating words.

The third most frequently used revision strategy in Arabic is adding words, sentences or paragraphs (mean = 1.65 and SD 1.02). This strategy came in fourth frequently in English (mean = 2.95 and SD = 2.21). While focus on finding more appropriate words or phrases was found to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> most frequently used strategy in English with a mean frequency of 3.04 and SD 3.16, it was 4<sup>th</sup> in Arabic (mean = .902 and SD = .478). This parallels the findings of other studies (e.g., Zamel, 1983; Li, 1999) which found that subjects added words and sentences when revising and explained that it is important to add information or words to help clarify the concept more clearly.

Differences between Arabic and English exist in the least-frequently used strategies. In the case of AWS this includes deleting whole or partial sentences or paragraphs, editing only after writing the whole passage, and revising what has been written after writing the whole passage. These findings are consistent with Al-Semari, 1993, El-Aswad, 2002.

With respect to EWRS, less-frequently used revision strategies include, partial editing only after writing the whole passage which was not used at all, revising what has been written after writing the whole passage, revising what has been written after each paragraph, and rearranging sentences and paragraphs. This is in line with findings from El-Aswad's 2002.

A comparison between the two languages was made, the findings of which are presented in Table 2. The results show that there are divergences of frequency in the adoption of revision strategies by all subjects between the two languages (Arabic and English). For example, while strategies 3, 5, 6, were found to be used more frequently in Arabic than in English though not significantly so, the rest of the strategies were found to be used in English more frequently than in Arabic. Significant differences were found between the two languages in the use of four strategies (Strategies 7, 8, 9, 10) In addition; three strategies (Strategies 1, 2, 4) were borderline as can be seen in Table 2. The above discussion confirms RH 1 which predicted that students would use editing strategies more in L2 than in L1 ( $z = -2.201, p = .028$ ). Also, RH 2: students revise more during L2 writing than during the L1 writing, was also confirmed ( $z = -2.380, p = .017$ ). These statistics were arrived at by calculating the mean of the incidence of editing strategies (strategies 1, 2), and the mean of revision strategies (strategies 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12), Table 2. The two languages were then compared in the use of editing strategies and revision strategies and it was found that revision strategies were used more frequently in English (mean = 2.78, SD .788) than in

Arabic (mean = 1.37, SD .862). The same is true for editing strategies (means= 1.77; .406; and SD 1.93; .354, for English and Arabic respectively).

#### 4.2 Strategies Used to Aid Reviewing: (SAREV)

Table 3. Strategies done to aid reviewing

AWS&EWS	Descriptive statistics				Inferential statistics	
	Arabic composition		English composition		z	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1. Read what was written to aid next bit of revision	5.30	2.55	11.6	6.91	-2.100	.036
2. Assess + or – what was written	.728	.341	1.92	.905	-2.521	.012

Table 3 indicates that there was a consistent pattern between the two languages in the use of these strategies used to aid revision. The rank order in terms of their mean frequency is identical in both languages: 1 > 2

Reading what was written to aid the next bit of revision was found to be used most frequently in Arabic as well as in English with a mean frequency of 5.30; 11.61, and SD 2.55; 6.91, respectively. In fact, this strategy was found to be the most-frequently used strategy of all writing strategies in both Arabic and English and confirmed RH 4. Other studies also supported this finding specifically El Mortaji and 2002; El-Aswad, 2002.

Both strategies were used more than twice as much in English as Arabic, however, and both differences were significant. Assessing + or – what was written was found to be the lesser used strategy in this subcategory in both languages. This is in line with the findings of Junju, 2004.

In summary, as is shown in Table 1 and 2, the answers to RQs 1 and 2 indicate that Saudi male EFL students used Arabic/English AWRs as well as EWRs, however, there were differences between the two languages in the use of these strategies. AWRs/EWRs were found to be used more frequently in English than in Arabic, except three strategies (strategies 3, 5, 6 in Table 1) which were found to be used more frequently in Arabic than in English, though the differences were not significant. This could be because Saudi male students are L2 learners thus feel the need to review their essays and focus on specific aspects of language when they write in L2 more than in L1 to ensure competency in meaning and use of the language.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study investigated the WRS of Saudi male third-year English major students. It was intended to reveal the actual relationship between revision strategies in L1 and L2. The results revealed that most of the strategies were found to be used more frequently in English than in Arabic. A major similarity was that, in general, those strategies which were found to be mostly used in Arabic were also used most in English as well and vice versa. It could be noted that there is a ‘floor effect’: the more frequent a strategy, the more likely the language difference will be significant. Where strategies are very infrequent in both languages there is not much scope for a significant difference.

The findings of the study showed that Saudi female students differed in their writing styles and used different revision strategies to produce a text. The think-aloud results supported this as subject 7 use the strategy of focusing on content when revising 3 times, on the other hand subject 6 used it 13 times. Additionally, they had no clear sense of the strategies that may be effective or ineffective as had been illustrated from the interview for Q 15 as subject 13 said: “*In fact, I use some strategies such as focus on content when revising but I don’t know if they are useful strategies. I used to use them*”. The teaching of Arabic composition writing in Saudi Arabia, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, is still product-based/oriented in general and the training of strategies is not yet common in writing instruction. The teaching of Arabic composition writing should involve clear instruction about the writing process so that the students can be aware of their own writing style and learn to know when more attention should be paid to revision and in what situations rehearsal need more emphasis.

The teaching of L1 writing in public schools in Saudi Arabia starts in the third grade and ends by the end of the twelfth grade. Even during the nine years of one-class-a-week instruction, L1 writing is regarded as a course in which no student can fail. Many teachers and students do not give writing class the attention it deserves. Therefore, it is essential for the educational policy-makers in Saudi Arabia to consider the following four measures in order to ensure improvement in the practice of teaching L1 writing and how it is perceived by

educators and students.

First, the teaching of the L1 writing should be taken more seriously, and educators should always emphasize the fact that writing is a core course and that it can be failed. Second, L1 writing teachers should be offered in-service training in the teaching of L1 writing. Third, the teaching of L1 writing should not end at the twelfth grade, but should continue to the sixteenth grade (end of university/college). To put it differently, this study found that the EFL participants practised little L1 writing after they had started learning L2 writing at the college level. Therefore, it is very important to give the L2 learners, mainly at the early stages, the chance to write in L1 frequently as this will maintain and develop their cognitive skills in writing in both L2 and L1. Finally, the researcher highly recommends establishing local and regional associations that work as a medium to organize and facilitate increasing the awareness of L1 writing among students. This could be done by publishing their writings and holding regular meetings to discuss matters related to writing in general. Therefore, a good L1 writing program should not only include instruction about the writing process, but also the training of effective writing strategies. Teachers need to teach students “how to deal with the text of the question and their own emerging text, how to generate ideas on a topic, how to rehearse ideas, and how to consider the options prior to devising a plan for organizing their ideas”. Students need to learn, too, “how to rescan their text and which questions to ask to revise and edit more effectively” (Raimes, 1987, p. 460).

With regard to English writing instruction and as in L1, it was apparent in the present study that these subjects varied in their writing styles and used different revision strategies to produce a text. Although foreign language teaching has become much more process-oriented during the last few years (Wolff, 2000), the teaching of English writing in Saudi Arabia, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge is still product-based/oriented in general and the training of strategies is not yet common in writing instruction. It is about time that composition teachers in Saudi Arabia focus on the process of writing as well as product. In other words, the teaching of EFL writing should involve clear instructions about the writing process so that the students can be aware of their own writing style and learn to know when more attention should be paid to revision and in what situations rehearsal need more emphasis. This seems to imply they should be taught to manage their strategies better. I.e. decide when to do this, when to do that. That is Flower & Hayes ‘monitoring’ or O’Malley & Chamot ‘metacognitive’. Teachers should have different attitude. After all, books on teaching process writing like White and Arndt recommend also leaving editing for the language to the end, not after each sentence, so as not to interrupt the flow of ideas.

One of the significant implications of this study is that teachers should be aware of individual differences between their students in their writing and should therefore try to use different approaches to meet their different needs at schools as well as colleges. In order to do that and as a first step, teachers should encourage peer feedback and get their students interested in each others’ writing. They have to try and arrange as many tutorial sessions as possible so the students can learn to talk openly about their writing and discuss it with others. In these tutorial sessions it could be positive and beneficial to put poor writers with good ones, so that the former can learn from the latter some good approaches and strategies, and attempt to adopt them.

It has been found that students’ mother tongue is the main resource when they write in L2 (English). Friendlander(1990) claimed that considering the language proficiency and the writing ability of EFL students at earlier stages preparatory and secondary schools a limited use of L1 and translation, is acceptable and necessary in order to facilitate the students understanding of and familiarisation with L2 rhetoric and conventions at the time of text generation. The students’ protocols showed that students differed in reliance on their mother tongue according to their writing proficiency. For example, good writers use it to generate ideas and organize the writing, while poor writers use it mainly to deal with language problems such as vocabulary and sometimes to retrieve content. Qi, 1998, argued that “it would be extremely misleading to advise our L2 students to refrain from using their L1 in L2 performance” (p. 429) while the mother tongue may be best used to plan and straighten out the ideas and organize the writing (e.g., Friendlander, 1999; Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992). Hence, the mother tongue in the writing process could be both a friend and a foe for EFL writers. Thereupon, the use of L1 should be reduced gradually as the students start pick up and learn more English, and one should assist them to employ L2 more frequently instead of L1.

Finally, there should be co-ordination between college writing courses and pre-college writing curricula in both L1 and L2. College staff and pre-college teachers would ideally be encouraged to meet and discuss the writing problems encountered by their students, try to settle on the causes of these problems and hint the best solutions to help their students write properly in both languages

### *5.1 Limitations of the Study*

The present study, like all studies, has its limitations. Firstly, the think-aloud protocol in this study focused only

on the WRS of the students when they worked on a descriptive essay. Therefore, it does not explain all the aspects of the WRS of L1/EFL writers in all modes of L1 or EFL writing. Secondly, this study cannot examine the changes over time in the WRS or the adoption of WRSs as a result of writing instruction. Thirdly, there was no attempt to measure effectiveness/successfulness of strategy use, only frequency of use. We cannot tell for example if high and low proficient students who use the same strategy use it equally effectively. Lastly, like all questionnaires, think-aloud and interview studies, it is unable to throw light on the (presumably large) part of the WRS which is automatic and performed below the level of conscious awareness.

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# The Effects of Controlled Language Processing on Listening Comprehension and Recall

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## Abstract

This study seeks to determine the possible interactions between listening proficiency and the state of strategic self-awareness; second, and more importantly, to investigate the effects of learned strategies on listening comprehension and recall; and finally to describe the most common real-time listening comprehension problems faced by EFL learners and to compare the differences between learners with different listening abilities. After ten training sessions, an assessment was made to see whether or not well-learned strategies could provide students with ample opportunity to practice the comprehension and recall processes. The analyses of the data revealed the causes of ineffective low-level processing and provided insights to solve the problems of parsing. Moreover, the study reveals that explicit instruction of cognitive and metacognitive strategies is needed if a syllabus wishes to help learners improve their listening comprehension and become more-proficient at directing their own learning and development as L2 listeners.

**Keywords:** language processing system, listening strategies, metacognitive-knowledge

## 1. Introduction

Listening is the skill with which many learners feel the most uncomfortable. Arnold (2000, p. 774) comments on how listening induces a noticeable load on learners, because of the pressure it places on them to process input rapidly. In many ways, it is unsurprising that learners perceive listening as difficult. Buck (2001: 29) emphasizes the complexity of the listening process and maintains that listeners must use a wider variety of knowledge sources, linguistic and non-linguistic, to interpret incoming data. Recently, Foreign Language Learning (FLL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has witnessed a preponderance of studies that examine language acquisition under cognitive and information processing frameworks (Leow, 1997; Doughty and Williams, 1998; Field, 2003; Radwan, 2005; Graham, 2006; Ali, 2007).

To check the reliability of the processing framework, this study has mainly focused on ways to explore the role of controlled language processes (i.e., awareness, cognitive and metacognitive strategies) in listening tasks. This study discusses several issues in language learning strategy research that affected a sample group of Iranian English learners. These issues include: identification procedures of learning strategies, the effects of learner characteristics on strategy use, explicit and integrated strategy instruction, and application of strategies to the required tasks. To accomplish these issues, the research sought to explore the relationship between preferred language strategies, proficiency, and self-efficacy believes.

### 1.1 Research Questions

The present study intended to shed light over the effects of learned attention as a controlled language process on listening comprehension and recall in EFL learners during listening tasks. It was attempted to trace the role and allocation of attention in the control of memory with the aim of enhancing the encoding, storing, and retrieving of information. The study, therefore, sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) How can listening proficiency level determine students' state of consciousness?
- 2) How can selective attention and learned strategies influence what is comprehended and stored in the process of listening?
- 3) What are the problems in information retrieval?

### 1.2 Objectives and Significance of the Study

In his review of theoretical perspectives on listening, Lynch (1998) calls for further examination of listeners' on-line procedures for monitoring and remedying gaps in comprehension. It is believed that students who do not seem to realize that a learning task is not progressing well can be taught to monitor their comprehension, production, or recall so that they can identify difficulties and select learning strategies to address the difficulties (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999).

Learning strategies are the conscious thoughts and actions that learners take in order to achieve a learning goal. Strategic learners have metacognitive knowledge about their own thinking and learning approaches, a good understanding of what a task entails, and the ability to orchestrate the strategies that best meet both the task demands and their own learning strengths. Many language instructors are aware that individual learner differences more or less contribute to the success of language learning. This paper discusses several issues in language learning strategy research that affected a sample group of Iranian English learners.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2001), a variety of learner differences can be grouped into two main categories: (1) conceptualization, indicating how they conceptualize second-language acquisition (e.g., attitude and beliefs); and (2) actions, indicating what they do (e.g., learning strategies). Extensive research (Ellis, 1985; Call, 1985; Wenden, 1999; Brown, 2000) has identified the learning strategies used by students of a variety of second and foreign languages and a somewhat smaller body of research (Leow, 1997; Goh, 2000; Radwan, 2005) has documented the effectiveness of helping less successful language students improve their performance through learning strategy instruction.

### 1.3 Information Processing System

The acts of comprehending and producing language are performed within the constraints of the information processing system. This system consists of three structural components- sensory memory, working memory, and permanent memory- along with a set of controlled processes that govern the flow of information within the system (Carroll, 1994). When information is temporarily stored in initial memories (sensory and short-term), activities such as scanning, searching, and comparing may relate it to other information in long-term storage, resulting in comprehension.

According to Carroll's (1994, p. 49) model of mental functioning, environmental information is successively encoded, stored, and retrieved by a set of distinct mental structures. As shown in Figure 1 below, the model consists of three mental structures and a set of processes that move information from one structure to another.

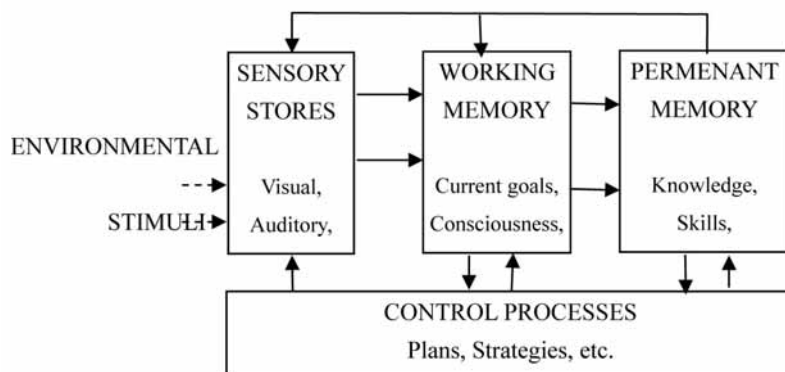


Figure 1. A general model of information processing (Carroll, 1994, p. 49)

As Carroll (1994, p. 50) points out, at the first step in the information processing sequence, the sensory stores represent information in a literal, unanalyzed form. Most of the information in these stores disappears very rapidly because it is not germane to the current goals. But the processes of taking in new information, identifying it, and choosing whether or not to process it more extensively, though rapid, take a measurable amount of time. The sensory stores perform the invaluable function of preserving this information long enough for more extensive processing to be initiated. Concurring with Carroll, Robinson's (1995, p. 322) study on short-term memory constraints approves that attentional resources are limited and these limitations play an essential role in



L2 speech processing, because its mechanisms are only partially automatic and require conscious controlled attention.

#### 1.4 Automatic and Controlled Processes

Controlled processing and automatic processing are identified to be the two principal processing modes: a controlled process "utilizes a temporary sequence of nodes activated under the control of and through attention by the subject". An automatic process is a "sequence of nodes that nearly always becomes active in response to a particular input configuration" and is "activated without the necessity of active control or attention by the subject" (Shiffrin and Schneider, 1977, p. 155-156).

Automatic processes require sufficient training to develop, since they depend upon a relatively permanent set of node associations. McLaughlin, Rossman, and McLeod (1983, p. 144) note that most automatic processing occurs incidentally, in normal communication activities, while most controlled processing occurs in performing new language skills which require a high degree of focal attention. They note that the development of the skills necessary to deal with complex tasks such as language processing "involves building up a set of well-learned, automatic processes so that controlled processes will be freed up for new tasks". Automatic processing is critical to comprehension because too much controlled processing may lead to overload and breakdown.

#### 1.5 Listening Strategies

Learning strategies occupy an important position; these have been defined by Cohen (1998, p. 4) as an "action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language". Field describes these strategies as 'strictly compensatory' (1998, p. 117), used to make up for learners' imperfect knowledge of the L2 syntax and vocabulary (2000, p. 189).

In 2000, Goh appraises the framework for listening proposed by Anderson (1995). This framework presents listening as a three-stage process, beginning with *perceptual* processing. Here attention is focused on the text and phonemes are segmented from the speech stream. In the second stage, *parsing*, meaningful mental representations are formed from words. In the last phase, *utilization*, information gathered in the previous two phases is related to existing knowledge in the form of schemata. Goh (2000, p. 57) claims that her learners reported 10 listening problems which related to all three phases of listening. One difficulty involved was 'understanding the words but not the intended message' (p. 62) but over half of the problems were concerned with word recognition and attention failure during perceptual processing. Lower-ability listeners reported more problems with low-level processing such as speech recognition.

#### 1.6 Research Hypotheses

These issues include: identification procedures of learning strategies, terminology and classification of strategies, the effects of learner characteristics on strategy use, explicit and integrated strategy instruction, language of instruction, and application of strategies to the required tasks. To accomplish these issues, the research seeks to explore the relationship between preferred language strategies, proficiency, and self-efficacy awareness. Responding to the call for more replication of strategy research and for research in different cultural contexts, this research was conducted at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz on 70 students of English Translation between 2008 and 2009. In reference to the above research questions, this study hypothesizes that:

*Hypothesis 1:* Subjects' proficiency levels determine their strategic self-awareness and consequently affect their cognitive and metacognitive strategy use.

*Hypothesis 2:* Well-learned strategies will provide students with ample opportunity to practice the comprehension and recall processes.

*Hypothesis 3:* Some real-time listening comprehension problems can be identified and prioritized for teaching purposes.

## 2. Method

To diagnose the realization of these objectives, this section focuses on participants and settings, materials and procedures.

### 2.1 Participants and Settings

The study was conducted on 70 English students, two junior EFL Oral Translation classes. One of the classes was treated as the control group and the other as the experimental. The researcher grouped and ranked the students according to the TOEFL test which was administered to determine the listening proficiency of the

students. According to Dreyer and Nel (2003, p. 254), those students who obtained percentages below 55% were categorized as less-proficient whereas the students who obtained percentages above 55% were categorized as more-proficient. In the control group, 16 students obtained scores below 55% and 19 above 55%; for the experimental group, 15 students were considered as less proficient and 20 students as more proficient.

## 2.2 Materials and Procedures

Generally, four instruments were utilized for data collection purposes in the study. These included a pre-instruction assessment, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) self-report questionnaire, training sessions and think-aloud protocols, and post-instruction assessment. Each of these instruments will be discussed below.

The listening pre-test required students to listen to a number of authentic texts recorded from VOA news program and to verify comprehension by checking the correct choice and recall by answering open-ended questions. The pre-test was administered before the strategy instruction began. The listening component appraised a range of listening skills, such as listening for gist, listening for details and making inferences.

The self-report questionnaire employed in this study was an adapted version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), originally devised by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), used to collect and analyze information from the learners. For the aim of this study, the researcher modified the number and the content of the SILL questions to apprehend the learners' overall controlled language processing statuses.

Ten training sessions were conducted on the experimental group to alert the subjects: (a) to identify the listening goal and to decide whether to obtain specific information or the gist of the message, (b) to determine the major facts about a message, such as topic, text type, setting, (c) to outline predictable sequences in which information may be presented: who-what-when-where, (d) identify key words and phrases to listen for (e) to compensate the missing parts by drawing inferences, (f) to monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies.

Twelve weeks later, as the experimenter assured that the students had been aware of and practiced how to monitor and remedy the gaps in listening comprehension and recall, the post-test session was held in which the students sat for the final listening test in which they were to listen to authentic texts just parallel to those presented to them in the pre-test session to verify comprehension and recall through multiple-choice questions and free recall test successively. The administration of this phase took one class period. The results were compared with those obtained from the pre-tests and analyzed for further introspection.

## 3. Results

At this time, the results of each phase of study, including pre-instruction assessment, SILL questionnaire, think-aloud protocols, and post-instruction assessment are presented successively.

### 3.1 Pre-instruction Assessment

The listening pre-test required subjects to listen to a number of authentic texts recorded from VOA news program and to verify comprehension by checking the correct choice and recall by answering open-ended questions. As Chun and Payne (2004, p. 499) suggest, pre-test measures of learners' listening aptitude would enable a more "fine-grained analysis" of individual learner's behavior patterns and make it possible to "rule out any pre-existing differences" among subjects and groups. Table 1 below summarizes the descriptive analysis of the mean pre-test scores of the participants, which are 16.12 (SD= 0.30) and 15.95 (SD= 0.24) for the experimental and control group, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores of experimental and control groups

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	35	16.1286	1.80009	.30427
Control	35	15.9571	1.47714	.24968

Table 2. T-test results of pre-instructed assessments of Experimental and Control group

	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% Interval Difference	Confidence of the Upper
Equal variance assumed	.417	.521	.436	68	.665	.17143	.39360	-1.61399	.95685
Equal variance not assumed			.436	65.504	.665	.17143	.39360	-1.61453	.95739

\*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

According to the results presented above (Table 2), the pre-test scores of the subjects in the experimental and control groups indicated that there was not a statistically or practically significant difference in their mean scores. This trait established an identical basis for the two groups.

### 3.2 SILL Questionnaire

In this study, language learning strategies were identified through Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) self-report questionnaire (devised by Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995). The subjects were asked to mark their learning processes and strategies through the retrospective questionnaire of SILL. This instrument was applied in this study to correlate strategy use with proficiency levels. Here is a summary of how subjects from the two main proficiency levels appraised themselves as strategy users.

### 3.3 Think-aloud Protocols

According to the think-aloud protocols, gathered during the ten training sessions, more-proficient listeners approached the task globally, inferring meaning from context, engaging in effective self-questioning, and relating what they had perceived to their world knowledge and personal experience. Their less-proficient counterparts made fewer connections between new information and their own personal experience.

Think-aloud protocols, subjects' oral self-assessment, were conducted after each training session. Goh (2000, p. 59-64) identified listeners' comprehension problems of the listening phases (perception, parsing, and utilization) as below (Table 3):

Table 3. Problem patterns related to the three phases of listening comprehension (Goh, 2000)

Perception	Parsing	Utilization
Do not recognize words they know	Quickly forget what is heard	Understand words but not the intended message
Neglect the next part when thinking about meaning	Unable to form a mental representation from words heard	Confused about the key ideas in the message
Cannot chunk streams of speech	Do not understand subsequent parts of input because of earlier problems	
Miss the beginning of texts		
Concentrate too hard or unable to concentrate		

Among the possible problems that Goh encountered in her study, five of them were reported to be more problematic by the experimental groups. In the following figure (Figure 2), these five most common problems that the subjects reported as the most serious ones are illustrated. The figure demonstrates the percentages of experimental subjects for whom these problems seemed to be more challenging.

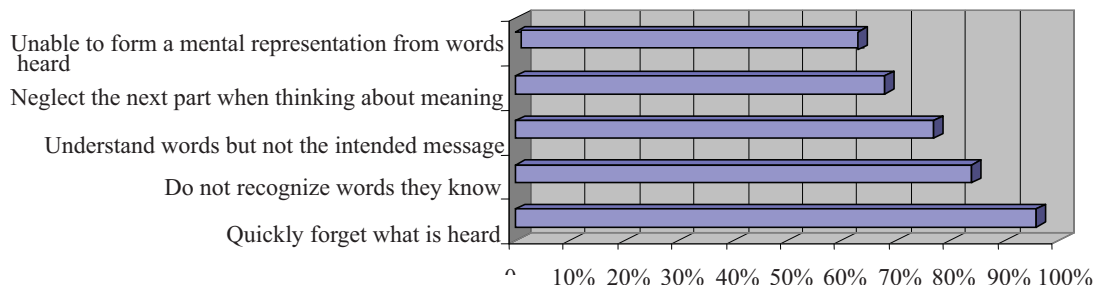


Figure 2. The percentages of five common listening comprehension and recall problems among experimental subjects

### 3.4 Comprehension Difficulties

Concerning the framework proposed by Anderson (1995), we with the help of the lecturer of the training sessions adopted a qualitative analysis of the listeners' think-aloud protocols. Among the possible problems that Goh encountered in her study, five of them were reported to be more problematic by the experimental groups. In the following figure (Figure ), these five most common problems that the subjects reported as the most serious ones are illustrated. The figure demonstrates the percentages of experimental subjects for whom these problems seemed to be more challenging.

### 3.5 Post-instruction Assessment

Here, the results were compared with those obtained from the pre-tests to check the possibility of any differences between the two groups. The comparison of the results obtained from the two groups revealed that the instructed group (experimental) performed better than the control group. Table 4 below summarizes the descriptive analysis of the mean post-test scores of the participants; that is 16.44 (SD= 1.56) for the 'experimental group' and 15.44 (SD= 2.31) for the 'control group'.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the post-test scores of experimental and control groups

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	35	16.4429	1.56135	.26392
Control	35	15.4429	2.31609	.39149

Table 5. T-test results of post-instructed assessments of experimental and control 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	5.268	.025	2.118	68	.038	1.00000	.47214	.05786	1.94214
Equal variances not assumed			2.118	59.613	.038	1.00000	.47214	.05545	1.94455

\*Mean is significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

With the benefits of the training sessions, the work of experimental group was satisfactory. Statistically, Table 5 indicates that there was a significant difference in the final output of the two groups ( $p < 0.05$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

Following Flavell's framework (1979), Wenden (1999:437) and Victori (1999:539) proposed three aspects for metacognitive knowledge: knowledge of person variables, what learners know about how humans in general learn, as well as what they know about how they as individuals learn; task variables, what learners know about the nature of a task and the demands it might make on their knowledge and skills; and strategy variables, learners' knowledge of different strategies and their appropriate deployment.

##### 4.1 Identification of Language Learning Strategies

According to table 1, less-proficient subjects' mean score at listening proficiency test was 46 while more-proficient subjects' was 57. Two weeks later after the listening proficiency test, the subjects sat for the SILL self-report questionnaire, unexpectedly, less-proficient subjects' mean score at the questionnaire was reported to be 15 percent more than more-proficient subjects'. It appeared that less-proficient subjects might have a misconception of what they had actually done in their listening classes, as they thought they were vigorous in applying and practicing various compensating strategies. Surprisingly, more-proficient subjects marked themselves lower than the aforementioned group and maintained that they employed fewer cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the listening tasks.

##### 4.2 Insights Gained throughout the Training Sessions: Think-aloud Data

Parallel to Goh's (2000) finding and according to the analysis of the think-aloud data showed, during the first phase, *perceptual processing*, it turned out that strategies such as "selective attention" and "directed attention" proved to be crucial. More skilled listeners were able to maintain attention or redirect it when distracted, whereas less skilled listeners were easily thrown off when they encountered anything unknown. In this phase, subjects were required to focus on the text to segment the phonemes from the speech stream. Therefore, listeners' wrong grasp of sounds would interfere with comprehension if they did not monitor their attention carefully and concurrently.

During *parsing*, the second phase, grouping and inferencing proved to be crucial strategies. More-proficient listeners processed larger chunks and inferred the unknown from the context using a top-down approach. When this failed, they attended to individual words. Less-proficient listeners tended to segment what they had heard on a word-by-word basis, using almost exclusively a bottom-up approach. Field (2004:64) asserts that the terms 'bottom up' and 'top down' refer not to particular levels of processing but to directions of processing. In a 'bottom-up' process, small (lower level) units are progressively reshaped into larger ones; in a top-down process, larger units exercise an influence over the way in which smaller ones are perceived.

Finally, as Anderson suggested (1995) and as Goh (2000:59) confirmed, during the last phase, *utilization*, "listeners made use of prior knowledge to assist comprehension and recall". Elaboration is what subjects knew about the topic and inferencing is the ability to predict possibilities (Chamot and Kupper, 1989:20). Thus, elaboration seems to be the dominant strategy, and the degree to which listeners are able to use this strategy determines their effectiveness as listeners.

##### 4.3 Listening Comprehension Difficulties

As it follows, the five most problematic stages of listening which were identified throughout a whole semester are explained and elucidated through exact evidence from the subjects' think-aloud protocols. The reasons some subjects cited for these problems are also mentioned.

###### 4.3.1 Quickly Forget What Is Heard

According to the Figure 2, nearly all the subjects, 94 percent, reported that they could not remember certain words and phrases they had just heard or even they had missed the content. One of the most common complaints was that although they could understand what was said when they heard the passage, they would forget it as soon as they began listening to another part of the message.

1. When I listen to a new text, I forget what I have understood formerly. (*H.M.*) (Note 1)
2. When I listen in English, I can understand most of words, but I forget the precedent sentences after listening to the present sentence. (*N.B.*)

The subjects recognized words in the aural text and had apparently understood what they heard, but they soon forgot the contents. A possible cause is the limited capacity of the listeners' short-term memory. However, two

factors, as Nagle and Sanders (1986:15) believe, can also impede the processing of new information: *trace decay* (fading of the sensory input) and *interference* from newly arriving input. To overcome these impeding factors, Nagle and Sanders (1986:15-16) believe that *associative links* between words may strengthen an item in short-term memory, besides, Robinson (1995:322) asserts that input decoding will become manageable if the detection of input is followed by *rehearsal* in short-term memory.

Overlap among the three comprehension phases was evident from some subjects' verbal reports. There was some indication that the subjects experienced this problem most when the part they had just parsed was followed by input with unfamiliar elements, such as new concepts or vocabulary. *H.M* (comment 1) seemed to suggest this. Having to process more demanding input had most probably caused a cognitive overload. This would have resulted in little or no spare processing capacity to form meaningful associations with existing knowledge in long-term memory. *N.B.* (comment 2) suggests that the listener had successfully perceived and parsed the input. However, before he could utilize the interpretation (store it in long-term memory for later retrieval), it was displaced by new input occupying the limited-capacity short-term memory. As a result, he could no longer recall the words or the meaning of what he had parsed.

#### 4.3.2 Do Not Recognize Words They Know

The second most common problem the subjects faced during listening was related to a fundamental aspect of comprehension-perceptual processing. As it was depicted in Figure 2, 83 percent of subjects said that although some words sounded familiar, they were unable to recall their meanings immediately. Consequently, they were unable to process the message using those words. Here are two reports highlighting this:

3. When I listen to English news, some words sound familiar but I cannot remember their meanings. (*N.H.*)

4. For example, I know the word "optimum", and if I read this, I can easily understand but I couldn't get it during the listening task. (*F.S.*)

Many subjects, such as *N.H.* and *F.S.* (comments 3 & 4 above), remarked that they had to learn to speed up their reaction to the words they heard. A possible reason for this slow recognition is that the subjects could not match the sounds they heard with any script in their long-term memory. It is likely that for some of them, "sound-to-script relationships have not been fully automatized" (Goh, 2000:61). Therefore, although they knew certain words by sight, they could not recognize them by sound. Put another way, "their listening vocabulary was underdeveloped" (Ibid.). Their ability to understand spoken words was greatly handicapped because they had not stored the sounds of lexical items efficiently in long-term memory. This underdeveloped listening vocabulary can be directly related to the way the subjects learnt new words. Many of them said they learnt by memorizing the spelling of words and often neglected to remember how the words sounded.

Another possible explanation for this problem is that word-referent relationships might not be automatized (Field, 2003:16). Concurrently, Garrod & Pickering (1999:88) believe in *recency effect* and suggest that spreading activation may also be the explanation for an effect known as *priming*. Priming occurs when a word with a similar semantic representation is presented before the target.

#### 4.3.3 Understand Words But Not the Intended Message

According to Figure 2, almost 76% of the subjects said that they were unable to get the full meaning of the message even though they had understood the word-by-word meaning of the clauses. This is a utilization problem because it is related to the listeners' ability to make useful elaborating inferences or act on the intended meaning of the message (Goh, 2000:62).

5. Sometimes I don't think when I'm listening, I just find the meaning, not the contextualized meaning. (*N.R.*)

Most subjects did not explain why they could not get the intended meaning from what they heard, though in some think-aloud protocol the reason was given, as *Z.A.* and *N.R.* (comment 5 & 6). Sometimes, the reason could be inferred from the verbal report, as with the following comment by *G.B.* (comment 6):

6. I listened to the text. A man talked some genetic factors affecting the amount of rice yield. I can understand most of the words, but I can't join them together and understand whole sentences meaning. (*G.B.*)

This subject did not have sufficient background knowledge, or the relevant schema, for the text he was listening to. His lack of prior knowledge about genetics had limited his top-down processing of the text. Carrell & Eisterhold (1983:562) believe that through membership in a culture, an individual has privileged information which is represented in a rich system of schemata. Therefore, in such a case of foreign language learning context,

there was a mismatch between the background knowledge presupposed by the text and the background knowledge possessed by the subjects.

Moreover, inferencing is a process essential to comprehension (Eysenck and Keane, 1995:104) and a crucial mental activity during utilization (Anderson, 1995:213). In the absence of a relevant schema, *G.B.* (comment6) was unable to make appropriate elaborating inferences. Besides limitations of content knowledge, problems during utilization may also arise from the listener's lack of communicative competence (Ali, 2007:163). The listener might be able to make literal sense of an utterance at the parsing phase, yet still not understand the illocutionary force the utterance might have, as the following report shows (Wenden, 1999:438), as reported by *M.H.* (comment 7).

7. I think culture is the key element in language. Sometimes I can catch the whole sentence. But I can't understand the true meaning of the words. (*M.H.*)

#### 4.3.4 Neglect the Next Part When Thinking about Meaning

The fourth most common problem cited by 66 percent of the experimental subjects was missing the next part of a text when they stopped to think about unfamiliar words or the interpretation of a segment of text (Figure 2). As Goh (2000:63) explains, this is an attention problem which directly affects the amount of acoustic input that can be perceived and processed. The following protocol *K.E.* (comment 8) shows this problem:

8. When I listen clearly to the first sentence and think about its meaning, the second has come, so what can I do now? (*K.E.*)

These reports not only illustrate a common listening problem, they once again show overlapping of the three phases of comprehension (perception, parsing, and utilization). Twenty-three out of thirty-five experimental subjects were unable to process the information fast enough; therefore, they experienced several problems simultaneously: they could not understand some words and so tried to search for the meaning. This had to be done under the constraints of a limited short-term memory, which was further limited by the demands of processing a language in which they were not completely proficient (Field, 2004). The decreasing cognitive processing capacity became even more severely overloaded when they had to keep up with the new input. Goh (2000, p. 64) explains that this problem could have caused the subjects "to be caught in a vicious circle of perception and parsing, with few opportunities to utilize mental representations they tentatively formed".

#### 4.3.5 Unable to Form a Mental Representation from Words Heard

The last of the five common problems occurs at the parsing phase. 61 percent of subjects reported that they failed to derive a reasonable mental representation of the input by connecting the words they heard (see Figure 2 above).

9. When I was listening, I could catch most words. But I could not put all the words into a full sentence to get a full idea. (*R.I.*)

One likely reason for this problem is that many of the words the subjects managed to hear were not key or content words, but merely words the subjects were familiar with and could recognize instantly (Graham, 2006, p. 168). *M.K.* (comment 10) demonstrated her insight into this problem when she said:

10. I mean, for example, you say I'm going to do *something*. Catch the first part "I'm going to do" but I usually miss the content word that comes after. (*M.K.*)

Tomlin and Villa (1994, p. 196) realize that foreign language learners do not yet know the specific mapping relations holding between mental representation and syntactic information, and it is precisely these that listeners must struggle to incorporate into their developing interlanguage grammar. They (Ibid.) believe:

1. The learner must discern that there is a relationship between these two levels of grammatical form and mental representation.
2. The learner must send those observations off for further processing (hypothesis formation and testing).

In line with the above findings, during the training sessions, the researcher with the help of the lecturer provided the subjects with numerous examples which exemplified how the subjects' knowledge of grammar (i.e., types of sentences and questions, different roles of subject and object, and verbal transitivity) could fill their comprehension gaps which impeded the formation of an appropriate mental representation.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has provided an introspective understanding of the subjects' language processing system. The findings of the study can serve as a useful cue to the causes of ineffective low-level processing and provide insights to

solve some of the problems of parsing. Results of this study show that: (a) a higher level of strategy awareness correlates positively with language development, and (b) students who received explicit instruction outperformed those exposed to implicit instruction. While the conducted study shows that explicit instruction is favored over implicit instruction when the instructional period is short, it does not rule out that longer instructional treatments might produce different results, especially in light of Ellis's (1993) assertion that learning under implicit conditions is generally slow and requires more input to become effective.

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**Note**

Note 1. The numbered comments describe each problem reported by our subjects whose names are abbreviated.

## Using Original Methods in Teaching English Language to Foreign Students (Chinese) in Indian Classroom

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### Abstract

The article gives information on English language teaching schemes in Indian classrooms for foreign students. The teacher monitors as facilitator and instructor. The trainees were trained in the four macro skills, LSRW. I taught some topics in three skills, namely, writing, listening and reading (just three, not speaking skills) to Chinese students in VIT University. The other skill speaking was trained by other teachers among the four. Students were trained to listen to English words and passages, to read the comprehension passages and answer the questions, and to coach basic grammar and revising it. More over, beginners were also guided to learn technical words related to their respective disciplines (major subjects) other than English words. For example, Chinese students posed a query to the faculty to explain on technical words and terms of their main subjects in English, for instance, B.Sc Computer Science (under graduate programme) students wished to learn about the word *data*. Since, the English Oxford Dictionary meaning is ‘facts or statistics used for reference or analysis’, but in the field of Computer Science, the word means “information processed by a computer”. So, there arouse a need to help them in distinguishing the different meanings of the word. In addition to, many students were not familiar with English. Thus through the above said way of facilitating, they acquired a good knowledge by varied types of expressions to master their particular subjects. It was a moment to state that they had come from China to India to obtain the nuances of English language. They undertook and were gradually expertised at specific courses in English medium of instruction, perhaps to get degree. Teacher’s a few lesson plans (how the practices are conducted in listening, reading and writing skills) as well as some parts in allotted syllabus (listening to songs, passages, writing a paragraph and essay, picture-story writing and write about yourself, reading the passage and writing) were discussed in the current paper. Role of the teacher and student were explained in detail. Therefore, the abstract would portray how the beginners were trained, taught, convinced, persuaded and managed by a tutor to reach the goal of English language teaching to Chinese students.

**Keywords:** innovation, writing, listening, reading, roles of teachers and learners, applications, grammar, humanistic, holistic and heuristic

### 1. Introduction

*“Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation”.* (Chomsky, 2012)

Being a single source, language, with its complexity, generates communication all around the world. Since it is the method of free creation, the diverse systems of schooling are implemented through this unique cause. Schopenhauer’s (2009, p. 5) idea, “The word of man (woman) is the most durable of all material” ensures the quality of teaching Basic English (English Bridge Course) to Chinese students in VIT University. As a matter of fact, any one will be stirred by this attitude and will have authentic interest and pleasure to render service in the institution. The students are coming from China to India especially to study and develop their skills in English language. There are students from Wuhan and Zhen Zhou Universities under Top Up Programme scheme, who were taught English to acquire proficiency in English. Justice was rendered to students in teaching. However, Dewey’s (2012) concept “The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think—rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men”, made me (as an individual not influenced by other men’s thoughts) to plan and adopt

Communicative Language Teaching methodology with power point presentation device. White board and marker pen were also used as a traditional means to communicate distinctly to students creating concrete classroom ambience.

### 1.1 Innovation

Secondly, "Innovation is fostered by information gathered from new connections; from insights gained by journeys into other disciplines or places; from active, collegial networks and fluid, open boundaries. Innovation arises from ongoing circles of exchange, where information is not just accumulated or stored, but created. Knowledge is generated anew from connections that weren't there before". (Wheatley, 2009)

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, innovation is "the introduction of new things, ideas or ways of doing something" similarly, in the above passage, innovation would mean invention through creation. Innovation in trainer's perspective would denote the recent implemented methods of the trainer. The trainer trained the students with collected data and implemented her own style to train the learner in suitable ways. New things or ideas could be the adopted methods of the trainer. The trainer created new types of exercise and the learner was encouraged to develop his creative activities through lessons. Hence the learner was given practice in new lessons and in doing some kinds of exercises. One illustration for a new exercise would be the pre-listening practice that was discussed below, was not familiar earlier to students. Every exercise in four skills was new to them, perhaps a few might be known to them. They knew English grammar and managed to talk English. They did learn English language in China yet not familiar with language and communication skills. The four teachers trained the trainees to acquire sufficient knowledge in language and communication skills. The acquired skills helped them to prepare and appear for competitive exams.

As a result, the teachers' tireless efforts in executing creative teaching methodologies in LSRW skills allows English to touch the culminating point in the present scenario through English language teaching and the teaching-learning process. The outcome is extremely useful to the current generation to sustain in any industry or multi-national company.

In this paper, some of my innovative techniques in teaching English to Chinese students are advocated. Four members of faculty were allocated to teach English to Chinese students. The course was started from the preliminary level and the plan was to train them fundamentally to learn English language. Thus the syllabus was designed in such a manner as to facilitate them to use English as a tool in their future professional career. In my case, I was given Writing in English (Written English). My task was quite interesting. When I asked them to write simple sentences on the topic, "Write about yourself", every student was asked to write about his/her details in own words. It was a free practice like free writing. In connection to the given exercise, some points were dictated in the class to help the learners. Subsequently they were asked to convert the points into coherent sentences. The given points were:

- Your score/grade
- Your exams - which will you take, for (eg.) IELTS OR GRE
- Your work experience
- Your hobbies and interests

They furnished the required details and thus the teacher enlightened them to give self details. Hence, during interviews they could depict their proficiencies for the job market in future. This exercise was given as an assignment and papers were submitted in proper format (A4 size paper) written or printed copies. Their names and registration numbers (University roll numbers) were mentioned.

In fact, "Effective writing involves conveying a message in such a way as to affect the audience as the writer intends". (Parrott, 2010, p. 211), and reasons for writing are, "for diagnostic purposes, develop linguistic competence, providing practice in aspects of writing skills per se, for example: selecting characteristic features of particular text types according to the purpose in writing, including appropriate stages in the process of composition, assessing the knowledge, assumptions, attitudes and interest of the intended audience and addressing them accordingly" (Parrott, 2010, p. 222)

With reference to the above quotations, another kind of exercise was also offered namely, descriptive type of essay. The students had to write a paragraph on seeing a visualized picture in the classroom through projection and later to write essays so as to strengthen their power of expressions. Even general topics based on the Chinese culture, for example, writing a summary on the significance of Chinese stone lion, were assigned as class work. At this juncture, it would be apt to share the expressions of Vernier, Barbuzza, Giusti, and Moral (2012), "EFL

teachers' role is to value students' native-language-related rhetorical traditions and guide them through a process of understanding them rather than rejecting students' backgrounds. Hence, culture is at play". The underlying idea of the quote was that the teachers should understand students' affinity towards their native language, culture and traditional practices. As the title (Chinese stone lion) was related to their own nativity, the very sense inspired them to develop their writing skills. It was an approach in creating interest for writing skill.

### 1.2 Interest

Curiosity is one of the most permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect. (Johnson, 2012)

Curiosity instigated many learners to know language whole heartedly. Specifically students of that batch were better in thinking, planning and writing. One batch (b-batch) was extremely good at studies. The wonder was, the English language was novel to many Chinese students, but they were hard workers in learning the language and proved to be better than other students. The next practice was story writing, a visual image was displayed, pupils were expected to analyse the picture and simultaneously questioned to do a write up on the given picture. The word limit was about 150 words divided into two paragraphs. The first paragraph had to give the aim of the paragraph/introduction. The second paragraph should state the substance as well as conclusion of the paragraph. A title must be selected as every component of the paragraph would be awarded marks. For example, the title of the paragraph and grammar carried one mark, introduction had two marks and conclusion was allotted two marks. The maximum marks of four was awarded.

## 2. Listening Skills

In the next unit, the concentrated lesson was listening skills, Pree's (2009) words, "a speaker holds a conch shell as a symbol of temporary position of authority. Leaders must understand who holds the conch—that is, who should be listened to and when", in this context, the two noticeable factors are the encoder (sending) and decoder (understanding) and their communication process. The teacher conveyed the message during her class period and students reciprocated in the same period. That is, when the information was communicated, it must be made clear that why and whom it was to be communicated. This process affirmed when students enjoyed English songs and speeches during class periods.

*"To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the 'music,' but to the essence of the person speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows, but for what he or she is. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow our mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning."* (Senge, 2009)

The given passage clearly depicts the importance of keen listening. Here, the learners were able to recognise some indistinct English words in songs, possibly because of their foreign origin that would be difficult to Indian students. Even, in Wikipedia, free encyclopedia (2012) we can find a message that supports the said view, (i.e.) "in Chomskyan's linguistics, External language (for foreigners, English language is External language) applies to language in social contexts, i.e. behavioral habits shared by a community". Foreign learners' society and people they met would have influenced them to be familiar with some native speakers' accents and sounds. More over, keen listening allowed them to realise the essence of the words of singer or speaker. Thorough understanding of innate feelings were realised through listening than seeing. In fact, the speed of light (any bright image) is faster than the speed of sound. But sound is more effective than light. Light is just a flash but sound reverberates within oneself. And it is no wonder that listening is the key skill among other skills. Thus the skill is given importance since it leads other skills. Needing to highlight the significance of listening skills several exercises were assigned in the curriculum. Accordingly, some listening tasks and practice were done in classroom and in the English language laboratory. Classroom questions such as, Fill in the blanks, Choose the correct option and One word question were queried to evaluate their listening skills.

Mao Tse-tung's (2009) perception, "We should never pretend to know what we don't know, we should not feel ashamed to ask and learn from people below, and we should listen carefully to the views of the cadres at the lowest levels. Be a pupil before you become a teacher; learn from the cadres at the lower levels before you issue orders" gave a notion that whomever might be would stoop down to gain knowledge and to learn persons. No matter, whether we were students or teachers, we should be like students when we wanted to and would be teachers when needed to. Therefore, it had become essential to listen to the words of students (low cadre) thereby a chance for an individual to improve herself as a teacher (higher cadre). Hence learning process could make us to feel free to learn information. The very attitude in knowing information and people guided me to observe foreigners' easy way of recognising the words of native speakers than Southern region students of Tamil Nadu (Tamil Nadu is a state in India (Indians) who found difficult in identifying the words. In that instant, I realised

their problem with learning words (vocabulary) in English and writing paragraphs/essays than identifying sounds and words in language. Home-work was given to inspire and assess their skills. It was an approach to improve their language skills in terms of creativity.

Conceivably their assignment tasks in listening exercise (another example, listen to a passage/message) gave an insight to the trainer and her inference was associated with the views of Larry Barker (2009) who knowingly gave his message as, "Effective listeners remember that "words have no meaning - people have meaning." The assignment of meaning to a term is an internal process; meaning comes from inside us. And although our experiences, knowledge and attitudes differ, we often misinterpret each other's messages while under the illusion that a common understanding has been achieved". As a matter of fact, the idea was very clear that students understood the listening exercise with their instinctual knowledge than dictionary meanings. Perhaps the accents allowed them to comprehend the lesson. Despite the search for meanings from dictionary, the trainees attempted the listening exercise. There was no point of understanding thoroughly the content but the ability to find out the answers through words enhanced their sharpness and capacity to identify native speaker's accents and words. Hence, in spite of lacking vocabulary knowledge, they were able to perceive and work.

### 2.1 Classroom Task in Listening Skill (One Model)

1. Audio track was played twice like the notion of Epictetus that, "Nature gave us one tongue and two ears so we could hear (listen) twice as much as we speak" (Kathy, 2005), or once.
2. The material included conversations or messages/news bulletins, for e.g. BBC news
3. The exercise was to *fill up the blanks* or *choose the correct answer*.
4. To answer questions, one word answers or writing answers in sentences

The key was displayed for evaluation in terms of self- assessment and self-study. I adopted peer-correction method in a few classes.

### 2.2 Teacher's Role in Listening Exercise

The lecturer allowed the class to listen to the audio track. She is the key motivator to create interest in attentive listening. Authorised and standard materials were used to help students in order to encounter tough competitions. Of course, the tasks were based on exam-oriented and career-oriented lesson plans. Learners underwent lessons for certain purpose. They were given instructions that they could discuss in groups or in pairs to learn and get to know better after completing the class work. Encouragement was given to pay attention during listening sessions in order to attempt questions. While checking and discussing answers they grasped meanings accurately and avoided errors. One audio track was sufficient in assisting them to make out native speakers' words and accents. Students acquired knowledge through given syllabus. The curriculum was designed and devised for the welfare of students. Conversation and dialogues would increase their fondness for vocabulary and right usage of words in English language. The fill in the blanks worksheet allowed them to guess keys. When training listening skill, the trainer spelt words with intonation and stress so that trainees could immediately identify native speakers' style of speaking and practise to talk like them.

- The instructor must take pains and put in efforts to speak slowly.
- It is necessary to use good quality audio tracks and sound systems to avoid chaos and commotion in class.
- Books published from Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press are recommended to use in teaching English language. There are British English and American English. It is better to use versions of Oxford University press and Cambridge audio tracks for survival of ideal English language through out the world.

### 2.3 Students' Job in Listening Exercise

The learners were asked to listen to the sound tracks and write the answers. And answers not known could be found after listening twice or after discussion. They worked according to the directions of the teacher. With presence of mind they answered some questions and wrote after listening with rapt attention. Sometimes they would be misled by pronunciation or content and in some cases the matter might not be recorded properly. Barriers to communication like, noise during listening practice could also be a hindrance to students.

- Pre-listening task - Before paying attention to a description of the town in which they are studying, students are commanded to make a list of points or say something about the place. As they listen to the narrative they confirm the points which are, in fact, mentioned.
- Students listen to a song and subsequently answer questions (post-listening task) about the environment of the song and tone of the poet.

#### 2.4 Application of Listening Skill

- Listening keenly to the words in presentation
- Increasing memory power and knowledge power
- In maintaining records (after oral-aural summit)
- Stability in storing information
- Expanding the talent in keen notice of foreigners' accents and English words

#### 2.5 Why Are Listening Skills Taught to ESL and EFL Students?

Its applications play as dominant constituents in the career-orientation of novices. Every candidate is a product in any industry and really meant to bring fortune to the firms where one works. All four skills (LSRW) are equally important but listening is the key dexterity forming base in any kind of communication skill. A person develops his perseverance by entering into the depth of listening process to accomplish the objective.

### 3. The Significance of Reading Skills

Reading skills improve concentration and help to continue with stable mind assuring clarity of gaining relevant sense in a piece of work. The two techniques skimming and scanning are efficient criteria to seek the main points and sub-points of reading comprehension text. Every passage has a topic sentence highlighting the theme of the paragraph. Direct and simple language of a transcript will stimulate the reader to read further. Analysing the needs and psychology of audience is essential for a writer and for the reader as well.

#### 3.1 Role of Teachers and Students

The students would inquire the teacher about the unknown words. When the reading was done fast the students found difficult in searching for results. Purposely they would try to predict many kinds of data in justifying a short story book. The teaching-learning process of both (teachers and students):

- “Students work out the meaning of selected words and expressions from the context.
- The teacher teaches a few key words.
- The teacher draws attention to some of the grammar in the text.
- Students complete a detailed true/false exercise.
- Students locate topic sentences in some of the paragraphs.
- Students discuss topic related to the content of the text.
- Students scan the text to pick out proper names”. (Parrott, 2010, p.183)

### 4. Grammar

“A pedagogical grammar is a grammatical description of a language specifically designed as an aid to teaching that language, such as the grammar textbooks used in foreign-language classes or the grammar instruction offered to trainee teachers”. (Davies, 2007, p. 2).

Since pedagogical grammar was designed as an aid to teach language, thereby, trainers were at ease to train the trainees. In addition to that, recommended grammar lessons provided good exposure to trainees. The foreign learners had plans to go in for English proficiency tests such as IELTS or GRE. So tutors could train them for these as well as the prescribed curriculum. As one part of the lesson was punctuation, power point presentation tool was utilised, slides were displayed, and marker pen was used to denote punctuation and passages were written on the white board, in the teaching-learning process. The students learnt methodically, indeed it was an interactive session. Sir Ken Robinson's (2009) saying, "If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original" was verified when the beginners had a few doubts and as a result went wrong in the given exercises. Doubts were clarified, in fact, a new light was thrown in English as a foreign language learning programme. Some issues were discussed in terms of awareness and also answered in the class. Thus, “It (syllabus) is intended to assure reliable preparation for students and an orderly, consistent progression from level to level” (Feder, 2008).

#### 4.1 Part Played by the Teacher and Learner in Teaching-learning Process

##### 4.1.1 Student-centred Classes

The first and foremost priority was always given to students for their well being in the field of studies. Their need was the primary scope of the teacher. Every individual was considered and his/her problems were solved.

He or she was taken into care. Proper guidance was provided. Self-study was appreciated and encouraged. Self-learning should be the best way of studying to understand the content without ambiguity. If information was imposed or overloaded, the receiver might be confused or bored to pursue with lessons. The main purpose would be satisfied when pupils were made to follow the context and comprehend the content. This type of method was adopted while teaching grammar to students. Since Grammar is a difficult task, students were given extra care. If students could understand, it would be easy. Here, they should be sharp enough to apprehend the rules of varied grammar exercises.

### **5. Service of Teaching through Humanistic and Holistic Approaches**

Caring and sharing bond between mother (teacher) and child (student) is ascertained by treating each individual (student) as a “complete” person. The language is inculcated as a only skill and not as assorted or as any definite skill. The linguistic and cross-cultural augmentation are inseparable, inter-linked with one another. The prescribed syllabi is incorporated with linguistic, cross-cultural, communication and other necessary skills. The learners are motivated to test their capacity of learning and plan for action after the self-assessment.

### **6. Focusing on Learning than Teaching**

1. Instructors prepare students to find out their inner self
2. Inspiring them to work hard in receiving information through various sources
3. “Talk less and work more”, trainers talk less and trainees work more
4. Self-learning attitude is injected in the minds of the students
5. Hunting for novel ideas
6. Creating new trends and tendencies
7. Supporting to carry out project proposals suitable to core subject
8. Practical way of learning is highly recommended for cross-cultural growth
9. Text book serves as a funnel to pour knowledge into skulls and “learning takes place outside as well as inside of the classroom through continual language practice and cross cultural contact” (Feder, 2008)

The focal point of student-centered learning is to convert the student into nucleus inside the atom. Atom (teacher) will induce the nucleus for its operation. Major consideration for new learners, essential needs of students, educational and cultural backgrounds, distinctive learning modes, and informal situation, circumstances then atmosphere, completely compose the aim of teaching, the result of teaching, the destination of teaching-learning process and the feed back of students. The feedback of teachers and students display the job done by both. Sometimes students feedback may be misleading. As a result, necessary changes due to feedback will not be certain. Hence it is imperative to go for exact feedback of students to plan for correction. So, “A program of teaching should not be a Procrustean bed to which students must conform regardless of their individual needs and predilections, but should be flexible and responsive. Instruction must focus more on students themselves than on the materials of instruction. Textbooks are tools and not the core of a class and should never be allowed to dominate the conduct of a class. We cannot truly “teach” students but only assist them in their learning. The responsibility for learning belongs to the learner. The teacher’s role is to be a facilitator and guide who provides “a nurturing context for learning” (H. D. Brown, 1980) and fosters the “learner's feeling of primacy in a world of meaningful action” (Stevick, 1980) (Feder, 2008).

### **7. What Is Holistic Learning?**

Holistic learning denotes two aspects, teaching to an entire person (humanistic view), and the combination of talents and matters within a pre-arranged classroom activity. This bi-thought shall complement each other. Neither the learner nor the language can be disregarded in a language classroom in terms of Humanistic approach. But the Holistic approach focuses both on learner and classroom tasks, (i.e.) men and matters. As a matter of fact, “Aiming towards holistic learning requires us to recognize the complex human nature of the learner as well as the intricate, abstruse nature of language as a medium of communication. A communicative, experiential approach promotes interaction between whole learner and whole language. The utilization of theme-based tasks is one way to emphasize the communicative use of language and allows us to present the different threads of language and of culture in a unified, contextualized, integrated manner” (Feder, 2008).

### **8. What Is Heuristic Learning?**

Heuristic learning or how to learn is inclined to these forms viz. initiative, innovative, investigative, impulsive and energetic in teaching-learning method. The prototype of heuristic learning is embodied by a basic learner in

trying to look for a solution to the problem than swallowing the information supplied by the instructor. “Gattegno’s Silent Way exemplifies this concept. Concentrating on the work of the learner rather than the performance of the teacher, and seeking to help the learner to develop criteria for language use instead of promulgating rules, this approach focuses on learning how to learn and not the accumulation of discrete facts and pieces of information” (Feder, 2008). A learner gains wisdom by probing into every detail through his self-study and self-discovery. Therefore, equips himself/herself to master any topic which can be carried out by him/her through out his/her career life and personal life to face crisis and to analyse critical situations in future. Some activities like Riddles and puzzles, crossword puzzles, information-gap exercises, mono-act, giving dialogue exercises (spoken), and role-play (single and pair) support heuristic learning. Hence, “Setting up situations from which a student can learn requires more skill and patience than dispensing information, but the rewards are proportionally great. The role of the teacher is to be a guide and to devise effective opportunities for learning” (Feder, 2008).

## 9. Conclusion

This write up sums up the investigation of field work with the result. Each communication skill (L,S,R,W) was guided in the classroom with relevant modus operandi but some parts of listening and reading and a few more parts of writing were assigned to a teacher (me) in the given syllabus. The planned cum prepared lessons facilitated the learners to acquire knowledge and skill, uniquely in English language, during one particular semester in VIT University. Teaching English as a foreign language to students promoted the trainer’s skill and increased her patience towards the Chinese students. Students were not able to compete with the pace and style of native speakers due to their low level of understanding in English language. They could identify a few words might be of their foreign origin they handled the tasks. Reading and writing skills’ lessons were presented through power point technique so as to grasp the study materials. They didn’t attempt to memorise but tried to understand the definition or theorem by referring the Oxford dictionary. Generally, the teaching-learning process between the teacher and student develops three approaches, 1. Humanistic approach, 2. Holistic approach, 3. Heuristic approach to make the language learning procedure simple and direct. Humanistic approach propels the student-centred learning, Holistic approach advocates to identify the complex connection between human (learner) and language tasks in terms of communication. Heuristic learning aims at individual study and analysis rather imposing ideas on pupils. They avoid theory and highlight the practical way of obtaining language skills. These approaches can be put into operation only by teacher-student learning orientation. Thus the roles of teachers and students ensure the purpose of education by working out various assignments and targets of both in English language teaching to attain their goals. Their combination introduced a scheme known as teaching-learning process. Finally English is accepted unanimously as universal language and there is no formal life on earth without English. Therefore, developing new modern teaching methods and updating English language teaching systems is very important for language trainers and trainees.

## 10. Recommendations in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

- a) First, we must teach Indian customary teaching practices to the Chinese
- b) Next, they may obey and be mentored in an Indian classroom atmosphere
- c) It is important to shower kindness on them so as to avoid agitated behaviour from them
- d) We ought to speak unhurriedly with accurate accents
- e) We need to pronounce words and sentences with stress, intonation and pause gradually, otherwise they shall lose interest to listen
- f) They can understand the conveyed message better than giving a lecture in the class through visual devices (power point presentation and over head projection)
- g) It is mandatory to have a check with the Chinese biological clock as it differs from Indians
- h) The teacher is obliged to talk loudly in the class so that students will not feel sleepy. They are prone to tiredness due to climatic changes
- i) Ice-breaking sessions ought to be conducted to avoid inhibition
- j) There is a need to make them adaptable to the classroom environment

If Chinese students are trained by the above said recommendations, they will be the initial persons to earn reputation out of their extra ordinary skills. The only truth behind them is hard working and nothing else. Teaching plans and roles of teachers are steps to climb up their career ladders for success. It is a pride to an Indian teacher to teach foreigners English in Indian classroom.



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## Appendix 1

### SYLLABUS COPY

**Course Code** - EBC101 (E-English B-Bridge C-Course 101)

**Course Title** - English Bridge Course for the Chinese

**LTPC** L- Lecture, T - Theory, P - Practical , C – credit

**Theory** - 10 credits, Practical – 4/2=2 credits= 12 credits

10 credits =10 theory periods, 4 credits (laboratory sessions - 4/2= 2 credits = 2 periods),

totally 12 periods thus 12 credited course

**Version No. 1.0**

**Course Pre-requisites - English Proficiency Test (Beginners)**

### Objectives:

1. To facilitate the students to use English in day to day practical usage.
2. To make the students appreciate the correct use of vocabulary.
3. To help the students achieve fluency and to gain poise in spoken English.

4. To enhance writing skills among the students

**Expected Outcome:**

- To understand the key skills in English and to use them appropriately in real life situations.
- Students will learn to use English effectively in academic and professional scenario.

**Unit No. 1**

*Listening*

Introduction to Listening skills, Listening to Pronunciation (Consonants & Vowels), Listening to Vocabularies, ***Listening to Songs, Passages***, Dialogues, Speeches & ***Conversations***, Listening for Announcements, Specific Information & Main Ideas

**Unit No. 2**

*Speaking*

Situational Conversation-Meeting, Parting, Daily Activities, Talking About Activities, Meeting At The Airport, Language Learning Problems, A Simple Dialogue, (Friends, Near and Dear), Body Language – Structural Conversation: (Simple Questions and Negatives, Short Answer Interrogative Words, Irregular Verbs, Comparisons, Two-Word Verbs, Conversation Drill. - Speaking Activities: Extempore, Debate, Role Play, Addressing The Audience (Welcome Address & Vote Of Thanks),Talk About Countries, Nationalities, Habits, Routines, Personal Details, Jobs, Likes and Dislikes, Possessions, Leisure Time Activities, Food and Drink, Requests, Future Plans, Past Experiences ,Describe Places, Houses, People

**Unit No. 3**

*Reading*

***Skimming the Text, Scanning the Text, Reading for Vocabulary, Reading for Pleasure***, Central Idea, tone and Intention, Strategies for Reading Comprehension, Reading a Content and Retelling/Writing, Reading at Sentence and Paragraph Level, ***Reading Stories*** for Specific Information

**Unit No. 4**

*Writing*

***Write About Yourself***, Letter Writing, Composing e-mails, CV, Developing The Hints, ***Paragraph Writing, Picture Story Developing, Essay Writing***, Dialogue Writing, ***Use Capitalization and Punctuation Correctly***, Write a Story, Process & Product Description

**Unit No. 5**

*Grammar and Vocabulary*

***Parts Of Speech***, Tenses, Voices, Concord, Phrasal Verbs, Question Tags, ***Punctuation***, Conditionals, Use of Modals, Sentence Patterns. Root List, Word Cluster, Migratory Words, Phobias and Manias, -isms , Main Words and Root Words Based on Core Subjects, Essential English Words and phrases, Develop a Strategy Learning/Recording Vocabulary, Recognize and Use High-Frequency Words and Expressions, Commonly Confused and Misused Words

**Text Books**

1. Enhance Your English Skills (Starter) – New Century Book House

**References**

1. Essential Grammar in Use; Cambridge University Press
2. Rapid Vocabulary Builder; Goodwill Publication
3. Reading between the lines: Integrated Language and Literature activities ; Cambridge University Press
4. Academic Writing-A practical guide for students; Routledge Falmer

**Mode of Evaluation** Continuous Assessment (Quizzes, CATs (C-Continuous, A- Assessment, T-Tests), Assignments, etc.) and TEE (T-Term-E-End, E- Examination)

**Recommended by the Board of Studies on 11-11-2010**

**Date of Approval by the Academic Council 30-11-2010**

**Proceedings of the 21st Academic Council of VIT [30.11.2010] 429**

**Please Note:** Italicised-bold titles (lessons) are taught and done as Indian classroom exercises with original methods

## Appendix 2

### LESSON PLAN

- Lesson plan – with reference to the article
- Specification of lesson plan (with reference to suggestion)

#### 1. Writing skills

- Lesson plan -1 –Write about yourself (20 minutes)

Give your details (name, qualification, from which place/country, name of your educational institution, your exams, your scores, your working experience in any industry/firm/institution, your aim, your presentation (in conference)/project, hobbies and sports)

- Story writing visual picture(s) – internal choice – to write a write up either on first picture or on second picture (30 minutes)



OR



**Questions:**

1. See the picture
2. Analyse the picture and give a suitable title to the chosen picture
3. Write a paragraph on any one of the given pictures in about 150 words
4. Write the aim of story writing (introduction)
5. Give details and conclude your paragraph

**2. Listening skills – post listening tasks and pre-listening task**

1. *Listen to songs and do the exercises (15-20 minutes)*
  - a. Listening song 1 – Elton John mp3pro 3 December, 2002 (given exercises - choose the correct option and one word question)
  - b. Listening song 2 – Michael Jackson, greatest hits, history, volume 1 (given exercise - fill in the blanks (oral or written) can be assigned)
2. *Listen to passage/message and do the exercises (15-20 minutes)*
  - a. Listening message/passage 1– Vlc mp3 (\$100 laptop for world's poor children) (given exercise – one word answer or write answer in one sentence)
  - b. Listening passage 2 – BBC learning English activity (Fill in the blanks and choose the correct answer)
3. *Listen to conversation/BBC news bulletin (15-20 minutes)*
  - a. Learner-contracts-conversation – Learn English Professionals – British Council/Professionals (given exercise – one word answer or write answer in one sentence)
  - b. Home work - instructed to listen to BBC news bulletin
4. *The description of places was delivered by the teacher (Pre-listening) (30 minutes)*
  - a. Students were questioned to say some points on India.
    - Special features of India
    - Unity in diversity
    - Indian food
    - India's customary practice
    - Tradition and heritage
  - b. They were asked to list out their points on Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India (the place where they were studying in), the following points were expected from the learner,
    - VIT University
    - Historical place
    - Sepoy (soldier) mutiny
    - Christian Medical College (CMC)
    - Vellore jail
    - Vellore fort
    - Chinese restaurant

Due to time constraint either first question or second question may be asked.

**3. Reading skills**

- a. Any reading content (a passage describing a process or narrating an information/story was given to do skimming and scanning processes (20 minutes)
- b. Home work – advised to read/learn novels and short story books thus encouraged them in giving instruction such as, 'reading is for pleasure'

**4. Grammar**

- a. Parts of speech (using noun and verb forms in sentences or paragraphs) (one period – 50 minutes/60

minutes)

b. Punctuation (how and where to use punctuation) (one period – 50 minutes/60 minutes)

**Websites:**

- a. <http://www.tigurl.org/images/tiged/docs/activities/341.pp> (Picture development)
- b. <http://www.myplick.com/view/4oMWffp7sGx/Capital-Letter-Punctuation-ppt> (Capitalisation and punctuation)
- c. <http://as3v1olet.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/the-basic-in-grammar.ppt> (The basic in grammar)
- d. <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/ppt/parts.pps> (Parts of speech)
- e. <http://www.rhlschool.com/read5n3.htm> (Reading comprehension-one model)
- f. [www.britishcouncil.org/learningenglish](http://www.britishcouncil.org/learningenglish) (3(a). Listening)
- g. [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com) (2(b). Listening)

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