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A Text-Type-Based Translation Criticism of Moradi Kermani's *Khomreh (The Water Urn)*

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Abstract

Translation criticism is essential for effectively conveying meaning and representing foreign cultures, languages, and literatures to target readers. The study contributes to the field of translation studies by demonstrating the application of Reiss's (2000) revised model in the evaluation of a literary translation and underscoring the need for rigorous translation criticism to uphold the integrity of cross-cultural communication. It provides an objective assessment of the Persian novel *Khomreh (The Water Urn)* by Moradi Kermani (2004), translated into English by Caroline Croskery in 2014. The results established that the book is a form-focused text, where the primary function of language is expressive. They also revealed that the translator has successfully preserved most linguistic elements and extra-linguistic determinants in her English translation. Therefore, this translation can be regarded as a faithful equivalent of the source text, effectively representing the Iranian culture, society, and atmosphere of the narrative. Additionally, the study underlines the necessity of considering both linguistic and cultural aspects of a text during the translation process to ensure a high-quality, meaningful, and accessible translation for the target readership.

Keywords: text types, translation quality assessment, linguistic components, extra-linguistic determinants

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1. Introduction

Translation criticism is a fundamental aspect of ensuring the quality and effectiveness of translated texts. It is defined as "the act of making judgments on a translation" and involves assessing the quality of the target text by comparing it with the original (Manafi Anari, 2005, p. 49). Within this field, various approaches and theories provide frameworks for translators, aimed at improving translation quality. These frameworks offer objective critiques that help translators navigate common challenges, ultimately playing a critical role in conveying meaning and making foreign cultures, languages, and literatures accessible to a broader audience (Esai, 2020, p. 35). Overall, they contribute to the development of translation studies by enhancing critical discourse on translation practices and improving the quality of translated works across different languages and genres.

Given the importance of translation criticism, this study focused on Reiss's (2000) text-type model as a lens through which to evaluate the English translation of Houshang Moradi Kermani's *Khomreh (The Water Urn)*, originally written by Houshang Moradi Kermani in Persian (2004) and translated into English by Caroline Croskery (2014). By first outlining Reiss's model and its methodological framework and briefly reviewing the related literature, this paper aimed to provide a foundation for the subsequent analysis. The application of Reiss's model allows for a detailed discussion of the findings, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the translation. The paper concluded with a comprehensive assessment of the translation's quality as informed by the model, thus providing insights that contribute to the broader discourse on translation criticism.

2. Literature Review

Translation criticism serves as a vital component of translation studies, providing frameworks for evaluating translations' efficacy and faithfulness against their source texts. One influential model in this field is Reiss's (2000) text-type model, which lays the groundwork for assessing how translations fulfill their intended communicative purposes and the challenges encountered, especially in cross-cultural contexts like English and Persian. The following part briefly introduces this model as it is the methodological framework of the current study.

2.1. Methodological Framework: Reiss's (2000) Model of Translation Criticism

In her influential work, *Translation Criticism: The Potentials and Limitations,* Reiss (2000) adopts a linguistic-textual approach to translation criticism. She argues that the most significant invariant factor in translation is the type of text from which the translation originates. According to Reiss (2000), the text type dictates all subsequent choices a translator must make throughout the translation process. She asserts that the functional category of a text serves as the primary criterion for evaluating purposeful translations.

She argues that the most significant invariant factor in translation is the type of text from which the translation originates. According to her, the text type dictates all subsequent choices a translator must make throughout the translation process. Reiss (2000) avows that the functional category of a text serves as the primary criterion for evaluating purposeful translations (Reiss, 2000). She identifies four distinct text types:

1. Content-Focused: This type is evaluated based on its semantic, grammatical, and stylistic characteristics.

2. Form-Focused: This text is assessed in terms of aesthetics, alongside its stylistic, semantic, and grammatical features.

3. Appeal-Focused: Characterized by presenting information from a specific perspective and with an explicit purpose, this type is judged based on its non-linguistic outcomes.

4. Audio-Medial: This type relies on non-linguistic technical media, employing graphic, acoustic, and visual expressions, and is evaluated according to its effectiveness.

According to Reiss (2000), conducting objective translation criticism involves several steps: first, defining the text type and selecting the appropriate translation method; second, assessing the extent to which the translator has adhered to the relevant criteria. In this process, the critic should examine the linguistic features and their equivalents in the target language, including semantic, lexical, grammatical, and stylistic elements. Additionally, the critic must consider extra-linguistic factors that influence both the source and translated texts. These extra-linguistic elements encompass the immediate situation, subject matter, temporal and spatial contexts, audience considerations, speaker dynamics, and the implications of the translation. It is important to note that the entire process of translation criticism must be carried out with careful attention to the specific function of the translation in question.

2.2. Related Studies

This review specifically focuses on the English-Persian translation pair and briefly examines some of the most related studies that have used Reiss's (2000) model to assess the translation quality of different texts in Iran.

Manafi Anari and Jahanjouyan (2014) assessed the English translation of *Dāstān-hā-ye Shahr-e Jangi* (2009), published as *A City Under Siege* (2011), using Reiss's (2000) text typological model. Using her descriptive-comparative methodology, they found that *A City Under Siege* is a form-focused text that largely meets Reiss' (2000) proposed requirements for equivalence. Additionally, they showed that the translation effectively preserved the accuracy of information presented in the source text while retaining essential formal and aesthetic elements.

Similarly, Manafi Anari and Adili (2016) focused on the translation of a form-focused Persian short story entitled *The School Principal* written by Jalal Al-e Ahmad and its English-translated version by John K. Newton (1974). Their analysis revealed that the translator effectively transferred most linguistic elements and extralinguistic factors into English, positioning the translated version as a valid equivalent of the original.

Abdi (2021), however, explored the applicability of Reiss's (2000) approach to translation criticism by examining the English version of J. K. Rowling's (2000) *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and its Persian translation. The results demonstrated that the translator successfully achieved equivalence at nearly all levels, although some grammatical and punctuation issues emerged within the language category, indicating a degree of inconsistency in the translation. Overall, the study concluded that Reiss's (2000) functionalist approach was largely appropriate for critiquing translated texts.

Interestingly, Shanazary (2022) examined the English translation of Grand Ayatollah Hossain Wahid Khorasani's book of *Islamic Laws* (2014), applying Reiss's (2000) model. His study found that the translation met 80% of Reiss's (2000) criteria, with most discrepancies relating to semantic elements and certain place factors being overlooked in the translation.

The reviewed studies collectively underscore the significance of Reiss's (2000) text-type model in evaluating translation practices between English and Persian. They highlight the model's versatility in addressing various text types and its applicability in navigating the complexities inherent in cultural and linguistic differences. Further exploration of diverse texts by Reiss's (2000) model aids in identifying strengths and weaknesses in translations, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in interpreter and translator decision-making processes.

3. Method

This research aimed to conduct an objective, descriptive critique of Houshang Moradi Kermani's novel *The Water Urn* (2004). Selected as the case study, this book is authored by Moradi Kermani, a prominent figure in Iranian literature for children and young adults. His works are celebrated for their resonance with both Persian and English-speaking audiences and have been translated into multiple languages, inspiring several film and television adaptations.

The Water Urn was chosen due to the researcher's familiarity with Moradi Kermani's writing style and thematic concerns. The novel encapsulates a nostalgic representation of the daily hardships and human tragedies experienced in a typical Iranian village. It intricately weaves local culture into its narrative, exploring themes of poverty, nature, cultural traditions, and marginalized groups, ultimately aiming to immerse readers in profound human experiences (Christensen, 2014). The English translation of this novel was completed by Caroline Croskery in 2014.

Reiss's (2000) revised model was selected for this research due to its comprehensive framework, which categorizes texts by their primary functions—expressive, informative, or operative. This approach is particularly relevant for analyzing *Khomreh* (*The Water Urn*), as its primary purpose is to convey the expressive qualities of Iranian culture and society. By applying Reiss's (2000) model, the study systematically evaluated how well the translation preserves the linguistic and cultural nuances of the original text while reinforcing the importance of translation in cross-cultural communication.

The model involves a comparative analysis of the source text and its pertinent target text through a series of extra-linguistic determinants, including subject matter, time factor, place factor, audience factor, speaker factor, and affective implications, alongside intra-linguistic elements such as semantic, lexical, grammatical, and stylistic criteria.The actual assessment followed these steps:

1. Identification of Text Type: The first phase involved classifying *The Water Urn* according to its text type, guided by Reiss's framework.

2. Close Reading: The researcher conducted a sentence-by-sentence comparative reading of both the Persian source and the English translation, keeping the criteria for translation criticism in mind.

3. Collection of Examples: A selection of examples was drawn from the text, comprising source text extracts alongside their English translations. These examples were chosen to illustrate how the translation addressed the established criteria.

4. Analysis and Evaluation: After compiling the examples, the researcher reviewed and analyzed them in relation to both extra-linguistic and intra-linguistic elements, making observations about the translation quality.

5. Conclusion of Quality Assessment: Finally, based on the analysis of the recorded examples and their correspondence to the set criteria, a judgment regarding the quality of the translation was formulated.

This structured approach allows for a thorough examination of the translation, providing insights into its effectiveness in conveying the source text's meaning, style, and emotional depth.

4. Results and Discussion

The following sections present the results of the translation quality assessment of *Khomreh* (*The Water Urn*) (2004) based on Reiss's (2000) framework, which emphasizes text-type-based criticism.

4.1. Identifying the Source Text Type

With over 100,000 copies sold, *The Water Urn* stands out as one of Houshang Moradi Kermani's award-winning novels. Rooted deeply in his experiences, Moradi Kermani's narrative reflects his heartfelt emotions and childlike perspective. His unique voice has crafted a structure and linguistic style that boldly captures the essence of his story. His courageous choice of words resonates with the sound and soul of the narrative, renewing the subject matter and vividly conveying his mental imagery. Moradi Kermani effectively employs colloquial language and humor to illuminate the social challenges of his time. He is not afraid to incorporate uncommon or archaic words, which enrich his narratives with depth and texture. This linguistic freedom enables him to traverse the complex pathways of plot and character, transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary (Abdelsadek, 2011).

Based on Reiss's (2000) text typology, Moradi Kermani's *The Water Urn* can be classified as a form-focused text. In such texts, the primary function of language is expressive. The author carefully employs formal elements to create a distinctive artistic expression, leading to a source-language-oriented text. For a translation to be considered authentic, the expressive function must find an equivalent form in the target language, allowing the translation to evoke a similar impression as the source (Reiss, 2000, pp. 31–33).

4.2. Examination of Linguistic Components

4.2.1. Semantic Elements

As Reiss (2000, p. 53) notes, preserving the content and meaning of the source text requires careful consideration of its semantic components. Establishing semantic equivalence necessitates examining the linguistic context, including both microcontext and macrocontext. The microcontext involves the immediate surroundings of a word—typically within a sentence—while the macrocontext encompasses broader elements, such as paragraphs or the entire text. The degree of equivalence between the source and target texts serves as the benchmark for evaluating the semantic components in the translation.

To illustrate how the translator has managed these semantic elements, consider the following example (Example 1), from *The Water Urn*:

Example 1:

Source Text (Persian): یا الله ...، توی اتاق هستید آقای مدیر؟ (p. 78)

[Lit.: O God... Are you in the room, Mr. Headmaster?]

Target Text (English): Hello? Are you in here, Sir? (p. 93)

In this instance, the Arabic phrase *یا الله* (y*ā* All*ā*h) is used, traditionally invoked in Iranian culture by a person, especially a man, entering a home. It serves as a signal for the inhabitants to prepare for a guest, prompting women to wear hijabs as a sign of propriety. This phrase is a specific speech act with cultural implications.

Caroline Croskery, the translator, adeptly recognizes the pragmatic significance of this phrase and takes into consideration the macrocontext of the narrative. Rather than providing a literal translation, she interprets it idiomatically as “Hello,” a phrase that serves a similar function in seeking permission to enter English-speaking cultures. Croskery’s sensitivity to both the microcontext and macrocontext in determining the appropriate linguistic form demonstrates her skillful rendering of the phrase. This nuanced approach appears consistently in her translation, evident in numerous other examples throughout the text.

4.2.2. Lexical Elements

The lexical components of the target text are largely adequate. It is crucial for critics to assess the translator’s competence in handling various lexical elements, including technical terminology, special idioms, false friends, homonyms, untranslatable words, names, metaphors, wordplay, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs (Reiss, 2000, pp. 57–59). The following sections will delve into these aspects, providing representative samples from the corpus of this study.

Idiomatic usage: Moradi Kermani's writing is rich in idiomatic expressions. Table 1 illustrates how these idioms were translated, either through a direct English equivalent that conveys a similar meaning but differs in form (Numbers 1 & 3) or through unidiomatic expressions that preserve the intended meaning (Number 2).

Table 1

Idiomatic Usage in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	خوب خودت را رسوا کردی (ص. ۱۲). [Literal English translation (Lit.): You have disgraced yourself well.]	You've really disgraced yourself, young man (p. 9)!
2	خوب نیست آدم پشت سر کسی حرف بزند (ص. ۱۵). [Lit.: It's not good to talk behind someone's back.]	It's not good for a person to gossip. Do you understand (p. 12)?
3	می‌ترسم معلمشان سر لج بیفتد (ص. ۲۱). [Lit. I'm afraid their teacher will get stubborn.]	I'm afraid the schoolmaster might hold a grudge against our child (p. 20).

Play on words: In a form-focused text, wordplay at the lexical level should ideally be mirrored by some parallel structure in the target text (Reiss, 2000, p. 59). However, Table 2 demonstrates that the translator has sacrificed the original form and the play on words to prioritize conveying the overall sense.

Names: Names in *The Water Urn* significantly contribute to the story's setting, reflecting the culture and religious beliefs of society (Farhadi, 2015). Table 3 outlines how names are handled in the translation. Many names are rendered literally to maintain their impact (e.g., Numbers 3 & 4), with some accompanied by explanations (Number 1). However, in certain cases, features are omitted or adapted to align with the expectations of the target audience (Number 2).

Table 2

Play on Words in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	ای آقا، مردم از این چرت و پرت‌ها زیاد می‌گویند. زیاد به حرفشان توجه نکنید (ص. ۵۰). [Sir, people say a lot of silly things. Don't pay much attention to what they say.]	You know that people talk. Don't let it bother you so much (p. 58).
2	بچه‌ها زیر چشمی نگاهش می‌کردند. پچ‌پچ می‌کردند (ص. ۳۱). [Lit. The children were glancing at him from the corner of their eyes. They were whispering.]	The children were stealing glances at him and whispering (p. 33).
3	آن‌قدر کش و واکش کردند تا بطری افتاد و شکست (ص. ۱۰۴). [Lit. They tugged and pulled on it until the bottle fell and broke.]	They kept tugging at the bottle until it fell and broke (p. 129).

Table 3

Names in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	پیرمردی بالای آبادی می‌نشست که «عموجان» صدایش می‌کردند (ص. ۸۹). [Lit. An old man sat at the top of the village, whom they called "Uncle'.]	An old man lived on the north side of the village. Everybody addressed him out of respect for his old age with the term of endearment "Amu Jaan," meaning "Uncle dear" (P. 109).
2	سلام، کل رضا (ص. ۷۷)! [Lit.:: Hello, Kal Reza!]	Salaam, Mr. Reza (p. 91).
3	سید رضا از دکان بیرون آمد (ص. ۸۳). [Lit.: Seyed Reza came out of the shop.]	Seyed Reza finally emerged from the shop (p. 99).
4	سرشب آقای صمدی در اتاقش را بست (ص. ۱۷). [Lit.:: Mr. Samadi closed the door to his room at dusk.]	The evening, Mr. Samadi closed the door to his room (p. 15).

Untranslatable words: Table 4 reveals that the translator opted to substitute the untranslatable term قران (qerān) with the more general word "*coin*" The term قران (qerān) refers to a coin that was used in Iran more than fifty years ago. The word is deeply embedded in the culture (Manafi & Adili, 2016, p. 29). In the researcher's view, this strategy is acceptable as it conveys the core meaning of the word and avoids any potential confusion.

Table 4

Untranslatable Words in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	آقا، ما تخم‌مرغ نداشتیم. بابام دو قران داد و گفت خودتان تخم‌مرغ بخرید (ص. ۴۶). [Lit.: Sir, we didn't have any eggs. My dad gave two *qerān* and said to buy eggs yourselves.]	Sir, we didn't have any eggs. My father sent two coins for you to buy eggs (p. 53).

False friends: Table 5 highlights the false friends identified in the corpus. For instance, translating the Persian word کت (kot) as "coat" fails to capture its accurate meaning. In Persian, کت (kot) refers specifically to what English speakers would call a "suit coat," whereas "*coat*" in English implies a warm outer garment (Manafi Anari & Adili, 2016, p. 29). Consequently, this translation may not reflect the original meaning accurately.

Table 5

False Friends in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	بابا کتش را پوشید،... (ص. ۳۳). [Lit.: Dad put on his coat...]	Father put on his coat,… (p. 35).

In summary, the comparative analysis of selected samples from the source text alongside their translated counterparts reveals that the translator has effectively conveyed the lexical elements throughout the translation process.

4.2.3 The Grammatical Elements

Reiss (2000) asserts that correctness should be the primary criterion for evaluating the grammatical components of a translation. Acknowledging the differing grammatical systems of languages, she emphasizes prioritizing the morphology and syntax of the target language. All the extracted English sentences from the corpus were found to be grammatically correct.

4.2.4 The Stylistic Elements

According to Reiss (2000, pp. 63–65), the criterion for stylistic evaluation in translation is complete correspondence, particularly important in form-focused texts. The translator must consider the stylistic components of the source text, paying attention to standard, individual, and contemporary usage. Additionally, the translator should identify any stylistic deviations from normative expressions.

Houshang Moradi Kermani employs a colloquial, simple prose style in *The Water Urn*, reflecting everyday dialect and common expressions. His writing features brevity, rearrangement of sentence elements, and a unique sense of humor, effectively depicting poverty and deprivation. These stylistic elements will be analyzed in the translation.

Brevity: Table 6 illustrates examples of brevity in the text, showing that the translator has successfully retained this stylistic feature through similar short forms in both the source and translation.

Colloquial language: Regarding colloquial language, the translator appears to have effectively captured the spirit of the source text. Table 7 showcases examples that demonstrate this correspondence.

Rearrangement of the sentences: In formal Persian, the typical sentence structure follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order. However, Persian speakers often rearrange sentence elements in informal contexts, resulting in a more conversational tone. Conversely, English consistently adheres to a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure.

Table 8 provides instances where the author employs sentence rearrangement as a stylistic feature. This informal usage fosters a sense of intimacy. However, such rearrangements cannot be directly mirrored in English due to structural differences between the two languages. The grammatical framework of English does not permit the same flexibility seen in Persian, thereby limiting the transfer of this stylistic element.

Table 6

Brrevity in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	راه افتادند. بابا جلوجلو می‌رفت و زن و باقری دنبالش می‌دویدند. بابا همین‌جور که می‌رفت زیر لب میگفت: «من می‌دانم و آن معلم، باید بگردد و بچه را پیدا کند» (ص. ۳۳). [Lit.: They set off. Dad was walking ahead while the woman and Bagheri were running behind him. As Dad walked, he was murmuring: "I know and that teacher, he should search for the child and find him."]	They left; father was walking ahead with his wife and Bagheri running behind him. As father went, he was muttering "I'll settle this with that teacher myself! He needs to go looking for our child" (p.35)!
2	آقا، می‌گویند عباس توی شهر مانده. کارگری می‌کند. می‌خواهد همانجا بماند، دکان باز کند. دیگر به ده برنمی‌گردد. می‌خواهد همانجا زن شهری بگیرد (ص. ۱۱۲). [Lit.: Sir, they say Abbas has stayed in the city. He works as a laborer. He wants to stay there, open a shop. He won't return to the village anymore. He wants to marry a city woman.]	"Sir, they say Abbas is staying in the city. They say he is doing construction work and is going to stay there and open a shop. They say he isn't coming back to the village and that he wants to marry a city woman there" (p. 139).
3	رنگش زرد شده بود و چشمهایش گود افتاده بود. بچه‌ها و اقای صمدی دور اتاق نشسته بودند. حال و روز پیرمرد را که می‌دیدند، غصه می‌خوردند (ص. ۱۴۱). [Lit.: His color had turned yellow and his eyes were sunken. The children and Mr. Samadi were sitting around the room. Seeing the old man's condition made them sad.]	His complexion was sallow and his eyes sunken. Mr. Samadi and the children all sat down around his bed. They felt terrible for this old man's circumstances (p. 181).

Table 7

Colloquial Language in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	بیخود خودش را می‌گیرد و فیس و افاده می‌کند. توی بطری آب است. از همین آب‌هایی که همه می‌خورند (ص. ۱۰۴). [Lit.: He is absurdly showing off. It's just water in the bottle—just like the water everyone drinks.]	He is just acting and pretending! It's water in that bottle! It's the same water that everybody else drinks (p. 128)!
2	رویش نمی شد تو صورت آقا نگاه کند (ص. ۲۸). [Lit.: He couldn't look in the master's face.]	He could not bear to look at master's face (p. 30).
3	آبروی من رفت (ص. ۲۹) [Lit.: My dignity was gone.]	I've lost my reputation there (p. 30).
4	از خجالت زده به چاک (ص. ۲۹). [Lit.: Embarrassed, he shrank back.]	He ran away from school in shame (p. 35).

Table 8

Rearrangement of Sentence Elements in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	نشست کنار در کلاس. دست گذاشت روی پیشانی‌اش (ص. ۱۱۵). [Lit.: He sat next to the classroom door. He put his hand on his forehead.]	He sank down by the classroom door, and put his hand on his forehead (p. 142).
2	ترسیدم بندازید گردن ما (ص. ۱۲) [Lit.: I was afraid you'll blame us.]	I was just afraid you would blame me (p. 9).
3	اگر بلایی سر بچه‌ام بیاید هم شما را می‌کشم و هم خودم را (ص. ۱۱۴). [Lit.: If anything happens to my child, I will kill both you and myself.]	"If anything happens to my child, I'll kill you and myself" (p. 141)!

4.3. Examination of Extra Linguistic Determinants

4.3.1 Subject Matter

Translating a text and evaluating its translation necessitates a solid understanding of the subject matter. This includes not only knowledge of the vocabulary but also an understanding of the concepts behind the words. Such familiarity significantly influences the linguistic forms in both the source and translated texts. As noted by Reiss (2000, pp. 70–71), this understanding must be recognized by both the translator and the critic.

The Water Urn is a children's novel set in a mid-20th-century rural Iranian schoolhouse. It nostalgically captures the daily challenges and dramas of village life, focusing on the adventures of local children and their beloved schoolmaster, Mr. Samadi. Houshang Moradi Kermani's vibrant characters highlight the importance of collaboration for community survival.

The literary translator, Caroline Croskery, is a native English speaker who has translated the novel for an English-speaking audience. Born in the United States, she moved to Iran at twenty-one and holds a Bachelor's degree in Iranian Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her extensive experience in language teaching, translation, and voiceover acting has endowed her with a profound understanding of the subject matter, allowing her to accurately convey related terminologies in the target language.

For example (see Example 2), the Persian term کدخدا (kadkhodā) which translates to "the headman of the village," is culturally bound and reflects the social dynamics within the story. In the translation, the term is first accompanied by a brief explanation, with subsequent occurrences of the word appearing as "Kadkhoda."

Example 2:

Source Text (Persian)**:**

لب رودخانه، کدخدا را دید و دو تا از ریش‌سفیدهای آبادی که داشتند با هم حرف می‌زدند و از کنار رودخانه می‌آمدند بالا (ص. ۵۰).

[Lit.: By the river, he saw the headman and two of the elders from the village who were talking to each other and coming up alongside the river.]

Target Text (English): At the edge of the river, he saw the village headman, whom they all addressed as Kadkhoda. Kadkhoda was talking with two of the village elders as they walked up from the riverside (p. 57).

4.3.2 Time Factor

The time factor influences translation decisions and should be considered an evaluative criterion, particularly for texts tied to specific historical periods (Reiss, 2000, p. 71). In the case of *The Water Urn,* the time factor is less critical since the narrative unfolds in contemporary Iran.

4.3.3 Place Factor

The place factor encompasses the cultural and geographical context of the source language, including the customs and institutions peculiar to that environment (Reiss, 2000, pp. 74–78). Addressing these elements is crucial for translators, as they help the target audience understand the narrative.

The translator of *The Water Urn* demonstrates an awareness of this issue. She has provided explanations for Persian words and phrases within their immediate context, avoiding footnotes that might disrupt the reading flow. This aligns with Reiss's (2000) recommendation for handling place-related factors in form-focused texts.

4.3.4. Audience Factor

The audience is defined as "the reader or hearer of the text in the source language" (Reiss, 2000, p. 78). This audience may differ from the anticipated readership the translator has in mind. The criteria for this consideration involve understanding "what the author of the original had in mind for his readers when forming the original text" (Reiss, 2000, p. 78).

The Water Urn is addressed primarily to contemporary Iranian readers, particularly children and young adults. Moradi Kermani assumes that his audience is familiar with their own culture and society. As a result, he provides footnotes only for those elements deeply rooted in rural life that might be unfamiliar to readers, particularly in the context of a small Iranian village in the 20th century. Some of the culturally specific terms explained are:

کماجدان: دیگ بزرگ مسی (ص. ۱۸)، [komājdān: a big copper pot]

مویز: انگور خشک شده (ص. ۱۹)، [maviz: dried grapes]

گل رختشوی: گلی سفید که کمی کف هم می‌کند و به جای صابون با آن رخت می‌شویند. (ص. ۱۰۰)

[gel-e rakhtshooy: white clay that makes a little foam and instead of soap, clothes are washed with it.]

In translating these terms, the translator employed various strategies. In some words, she adopted a domestication approach, translating culturally specific items to align with the target culture. For instance, *کماجدان* (kom*ā*jd*ā*n) is rendered simply as "pot" (p. 16), while the word (maviz) *مویز* is translated as "raisin" (p. 18). In these cases, the translator omitted the author's footnotes, as additional explanation was deemed unnecessary.

In other instances, the translator integrated the explanations provided by the author into the main text. For example, *گل رختشوی* (gel-e rakhtshooy) is translated as "the white washing mud which they used for washing" (p. 123). This method prioritizes the ease of reading while maintaining the joy of the narrative for the target audience.

However, it is worth noting that there are many elements familiar to the Iranian readership that may appear strange or incomprehensible to the Western audience. Consider the following example (Example 3):

Example 3:

Source Text (Persian)**:** مادر قنبری داشت خمیرهای توی تغار را چنگ می‌زد (ص. ۲۹).

[Lit.: Qanbari's mother was grabbing the dough in the trough.]

Target Text (English): Ghanbary's mother was kneading bread dough in an earthy bowl (p. 31).

The term *تغار* (taq*ā*r) is culturally bound, and Moradi Kermani assumes Persian readers will understand it. The translator substitutes it with "an earthy bowl," which conveys the essential meaning but loses the original cultural context and atmospheric richness.

Similarly:

Example 4:

Source Text (Persian): روز جمعه، خاور چادرش را بست به کمرش (ص. ۷۶)

[Lit.: On Friday, Khavar tied her chador to her waist.]

Target Text (English): On Friday, Khavar put on her chador and wrapped it around her waist (p. 90).

Here, چادر (ch*ā*d*or*) is retained as "chador." This term is borrowed into English and is included in the Longman Contemporary Dictionary (2014). However, a more comprehensive explanation would benefit English-speaking readers, as the translation lacks sufficient context for understanding.

In summary, in form-focused texts, the form and atmosphere of the source text possess an aesthetic value that needs to be reflected in the translation as fully as possible. In *The Water Urn*, the original form is sacrificed in many instances for the sake of meaning which can detract from the overall aesthetic experience of the translated work.

4.3.5. Speaker Factor

The speaker factor encompasses elements that influence the author's language and creation as extra-linguistic factors. Present at the lexical, grammatical, and stylistic levels, these factors shape an author's style, reflecting influences from their origins, education, era, and affiliation with specific schools or traditions. Thus, they play a crucial role in establishing the stylistic "persona" of an author, particularly in form-focused texts (Reiss, 2000, p. 82).

Moradi Kermani's distinctive voice permeates all his works. His writings embody a commitment to honesty, serving as reflections of his rural upbringing and childhood perspective. The third-person narrative in his stories often mirrors real experiences from his youth, tackling significant issues such as children's lives, poverty, and rural existence. Kermani is also recognized as a satirist whose critiques address the social and economic hardships faced by Iranians (Kaedi, 2000, p. 20).

The translator, a native English speaker with familiarity with Iranian culture, has endeavored to capture these intrinsic elements of Moradi Kermani's *The Water Urn* in the English translation. Her efforts aim to reflect the author's unique style and thematic concerns while making the text accessible to a wider audience.

4.3.6 Affective Implications

Reiss (2000, pp. 83–86) highlights the significance of emotional determinants in assessing translation quality. These determinants influence lexical, stylistic, and even grammatical aspects of source texts, and it is essential that the translated version accurately reflect these emotional nuances. Reiss emphasizes that it is often the context—preferably the situational context—that dictates the specific type of affective quality present in the text. Emotional elements typically relate to linguistic mechanisms for expressing humor, irony, scorn, sarcasm, excitement, and even profanity.

The Water Urn incorporates many of these emotional dimensions. The following subsections illustrate how the translator has recognized and addressed these elements to maintain their integrity in translation.

Humor: Humor pervades nearly all of Moradi Kermani's works, and *The Water Urn* is no exception. In Table 9, examples demonstrate how the translator successfully conveys the humor present in the source text, ensuring that the same enjoyable experience is accessible to target language readers.

Scorn or sarcasm: Table 10 presents examples that exemplify the colloquial and sarcastic language utilized in *The Water Urn*. The sarcastic impact of the source text has been preserved and successfully transferred into the translated version. The translator has exercised caution in rendering idiomatic expressions (as seen in Number 3) by employing equivalent idiomatic phrases, ensuring that the humor and tone remain intact for the target audience.

Excitement: The examples presented in Table 11 illustrate how the words آهای (āhāy) and اوهوی (ohoy), which convey excitement in Persian, are effectively translated into English as "Hey," maintaining the same sense of enthusiasm.

Table 9

Humor or Irony in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	پنج تومان؟ اصلاً تو چکاره‌ای؟ کدخدایی؟ مدیر مدرسه‌ای؟ دولت خودش باید برای مدرسه خمره بخرد. <u>دست کن توی جیبت. چشمهایت را ببند. خدا را یاد کن. هرچه به دستت رسید بده به من. تا ندهی از اینجا نمی‌روم.</u> بچه‌ها زدند زیر خنده (ص. ۷۷). [Lit.: Five tomans? What do you even do? Are you the headman? A school headmaster? The government should buy the water urn for the school itself. Dig into your pocket. Close your eyes. Remember God. Give me whatever you find in your hand. I won't leave until you do. The children burst into laughter.]	"Five tomans?!! Who do you think you are? Are you the headman of the village? Are you the schoolmaster? The district itself should buy the school a water urn" "<u>Close your eyes and put your hand into your pocket. Think of God. Give me whatever amount comes into your hand. I won't leave until you give me something</u>." The kids started laughing (p. 92).
2	گردن خمره را با طناب بسته بودند به کمر درخت چناری که گوشه حیاط مدرسه بود. <u>بچه‌ها به‌شوخی می‌گفتند: «خمره را بسته‌ایم که فرار نکند</u>» (ص. ۱۲). [Lit.: They had tied the neck of the water urn with a rope to the trunk of the sycamore tree in the corner of the schoolyard. The children jokingly said, "We've tied the jar so it doesn't escape".]	They had tied a rope around the neck of the urn and tied it to the trunk of a sycamore tree in the corner of the playground of the school. The children <u>would make funny comments like, "We've tied up the urn so it won't run away</u>" (p. 7).
3	بعد قیافه خمره را در نظر گرفت، خمره عین آدم چاقی شده بود که پالتویی کشیده باشند روی سرش. پالتو کوچک بود و تن گنده خمره را خوب نمی‌پوشاند. <u>آقا خنده‌اش گرفت و خودش پالتو را پوشید</u> (ص. ۶۷). [Lit.: Then he imagined the water urn's face; the water urn had become like a fat person with a coat draped over its head. The coat was small and didn't cover the water urn's bulky body well. The sir found it funny and put on the coat himself.]	He imagined the urn a fat man covered with a coat too small for his big body. <u>He smiled and put the coat on himself (</u>p. 78).

Table 10

Scorn or Sarcasm in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian)	Target Text (English)
1	آقای صمدی چیزی بهش نگفت، خودش در رفته. تو دیگر حرف نزن (ص. ۱۱). [Lit.: Mr. Samadi didn't say anything to him; he left on his own. Don't talk anymore.]	Bagheri spoke up, "Mr. Samady didn't say a word to him! He ran away himself." "Don't you interfere in this" (p. 36).
2	آقا چپ‌چپ به معصومه نگاه کرد که یعنی «باز خبرکشی کردی» (ص ۶۶)؟ [Lit.: The sir gave a sidelong glance at Masoumeh, which meant, "Did you gather news again?"]	He threw a reproachful glance at Masoumeh that said, "Have you been snitching again?"(p. 83)
3	به تو چه مربوط است که مدرسه خمره دارد یا ندارد؟ چرا به مردم زور می‌گویی؟ چرا دیوانه‌بازی در می‌آوری؟ اگر آن جوان، مدیر مدرسه خامت کرده که دوره بیفتی و ... (ص. ۷۸). [Lit.: What does it matter to you whether the school has a water urn or not? Why are you bullying the people? Why are you acting crazy? If that young man has tricked you into thinking that...]	What business is it of yours? What makes you think you can confront people by force? Have you lost your mind? If that young man the schoolmaster put you up to doing this… (p. 93).

Table 11

Excitement in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	آهای چه خبرتان است (ص. ۱۶)؟ [Lit.: Hey, Hey, what's going on with you?]	Hey! What's going on with you people (p. 13)?
2	اوهوی، قنبری وایستا (ص. ۲۴). [Lit.: Hey, Ghanbari Stop!]	Hey Ghanbari! Wait up (p. 23)!
3	آهای بچه‌ها، آقای مدیر! عباس دارد می‌رود شهر که خمره را بیاورد (ص. ۸۴). [Lit.: Hey children, Mr. Schoolmaster! Abbas is going to the city to bring the water urn!]	Hey children, hey schoolmaster! Abbas is going to the city to bring back a water urn (p.100)!

Swear words: Table 12 demonstrates how the translator has employed suitable equivalents for the swear words found in the source text. She appears to have been quite successful in conveying the level of offense present in the source, ensuring that the emotional weight is preserved in the translated version.

Table 12

Swear Words in The Water Urn

No.	Source Text (Persian):	Target Text (English)
1	<u>برو گمشو</u>، چی می‌خواهی از جان من (ص. ۲۳)؟ [Lit.: Go away, what do you want from my life?]	<u>Get lost</u>! What do you want from me (p. 22)?
2	کدوم <u>گوری</u> رفته بودی (ص. ۳۴)؟ [Lit.: Which grave were you at?]	Where the <u>hell</u> have you been (p. 37)?
3	<u>خفه شو</u>. کسی از تو سؤال نکرد (ص. ۴۷). [Lit.: Shut up. Nobody asked you.]	<u>Shut up!</u> Nobody has asked you (p. 54)!

5. Conclusion

In this study, an effort was made to assess the quality of the English translation of Moradi Kermani's *Khomreh* (2014) based on Reiss's (2000) model. The results indicated that the translation can be regarded as an almost entirely successful equivalent translation. Large sections read as though they were originally written in English. The content of the source text was effectively transmitted, reflecting the translator's deep understanding of the atmosphere and culture inherent in the source material.

This understanding enabled the translator to adopt appropriate strategies for the various categories examined. As a result, Iranian culture, society, and the overall ambiance of the story were represented satisfactorily. The translator consciously endeavored to respect the forms of the source language while seeking equivalent structures in the target language. She demonstrated a keen awareness of the subtleties of linguistic elements and extra-linguistic determinants as well as the structural differences between Persian and English. Overall, the examples presented in the study attest to the translator's meticulous attention to these elements, culminating in a translation that merits recognition as equivalent.

Conflict of interest

The author certifies that she has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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The Relationship Between Intra-/Interlingual Translation and Iranian Advanced EFL Learners' Speaking Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Speaking skills are at the core of learning a language and are needed twice as much as reading and writing skills in daily communication. Many factors influence the development of speaking skills. One of the most important factors is the learners' speaking self-efficacy. However, in what ways can EFL teachers promote learners' self-efficacy? The present study aimed to investigate one such method and examine whether there is a relationship between translation and speaking self-efficacy. For this purpose, three groups of advanced Iranian EFL learners were asked to perform several speaking tasks before and after rating a speaking self-efficacy questionnaire in an experiment. The first experimental group (EG1) was taught through intralingual translation, the second experimental group (EG2) through interlingual translation, and the third group, the control group (CG), without using any translation. The data were analyzed using ANOVA tests. The results revealed a significant relationship between interlingual translation and the learners' speaking self-efficacy, and EG2 outperformed both EG1 and CG. The study concluded with some practical implications for both EFL learners and teachers.

Keywords: interlingual translation, intralingual translation, Iranian learners, self-efficacy, speaking

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1. Introduction

Speaking is recognized as a critical skill across all languages, with its importance in daily communication being approximately twice that of reading and writing (Rivers, 2018). Individuals are typically identified primarily as speakers rather than readers or writers, positioning speaking as potentially the most critical of the four main language skills (Ur, 1996). For many learners worldwide, the ultimate objective of acquiring a new language is to attain proficiency in speaking (McCarthy, 1998). Nevertheless, the levels of success among language learners vary significantly. Recent research has begun to focus on individual differences and self-perception to explain this variance. A pivotal theoretical framework relevant to this inquiry is the notion of self-efficacy, introduced by Bandura (1986) as individuals' judgments of their abilities to systematically arrange and implement the necessary actions to achieve specific performance outcomes. This belief in self-efficacy pertains to a learner's capability to accomplish academic tasks at a defined level. Extensive interdisciplinary research studies have demonstrated that elevated levels of self-efficacy correlate with enhanced performance across various language learning tasks (Bavaqar, 2019; Farjami & Amerian, 2013; Liu, 2013; Mills et al., 2006, 2007; Rahimi & Abedini, 2009; Shirkhani & Mir Mohammad Meigouni, 2019). However, a thorough review of existing literature indicates that limited examinations have been conducted on the factors that foster and enhance language learners’ self-efficacy, particularly in speaking. Specifically, no studies have explored the impact of translation on improving learners' speaking self-efficacy. Hence, the current study sought to explore the correlation between translation skills and speaking self-efficacy among advanced EFL learners in Iran. To accomplish this goal, the researcher analyzed Jakobson's (2012) triadic categories of translation—specifically intralingual and interlingual translation—to address the following research question:

What is the relationship between intra-/interlingual translation and Iranian advanced EFL learners' speaking self-efficacy?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Efficacy in Speaking Skills

From a psychological standpoint, self-efficacy is essential in comprehending achievement behaviors. Self-efficacy denotes an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute behaviors effectively in particular situations (Schunk, 1984). Self-efficacy is a fundamental aspect of self-concept, influencing how individuals perceive their personal capabilities (Williams & Burden, 1997). The notion of self-efficacy was first introduced by Bandura (1986), who articulated it as individuals' judgments of their abilities to systematically arrange and implement the necessary actions to achieve specific performance outcomes (p. 391). As claimed by Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is defined as an individual's ability regarding their capacity to carry out a particular academic task at a designated level of proficiency. It is noteworthy to mention that even if students possess the requisite skills to complete a task, their ability to manifest those skills is contingent upon their belief in their own capabilities. Bandura further elucidates that experiencing success in a particular task significantly bolsters an individual's self-efficacy. Within the context of this research, self-efficacy in speaking is specifically concerned with learners' perceptions of their capability to communicate competently in the target language.

According to Bandura (1997), beliefs in self-efficacy are derived from four primary sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and psychological states. Mastery experience highlights the importance of past experiences in shaping self-efficacy beliefs. Individuals who have successfully completed a task tend to possess a heightened sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, to enhance speaking self-efficacy among learners, speaking instructors should initially provide tasks that are manageable and do not demand excessive effort, thereby increasing the probability of learners succeeding in these tasks. This approach can positively influence their self-efficacy regarding speaking skills. Vicarious experience occurs when learners observe the achievements of their friends and peers, which enables them to assess their own abilities in comparison to the accomplishments of others. Witnessing peers excel in a task can foster positive perceptions about one's own abilities, contributing to an increase in self-efficacy. Consequently, instructors should encourage learners to remain attentive during speaking classes and motivate them to observe their classmates' speaking performances, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy in speaking. The third source of influence, social persuasion, pertains to the initiation of tasks, the effort invested in achieving success, and the adoption of new strategies. In EFL classrooms, the feedback and evaluation provided by the teacher can serve as either positive or negative forms of persuasion. It is crucial for speaking instructors to deliver constructive feedback to learners, as this can significantly bolster their self-efficacy. Ultimately, psychological and affective states, including excitement, anxiety, fear reactions, fatigue, and stress can also impact self-efficacy. Research indicates that learners who experience lower levels of stress and anxiety are more likely to complete tasks successfully. Accordingly, it is essential to transform debilitating states into facilitating ones, as this is a critical factor in enhancing perceived self-efficacy beliefs. Given that learners in speaking classes can face various negative affective influences such as shyness, stress, and anxiety, instructors should strive to cultivate a supportive and relaxed classroom environment to foster improved self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura's proposal has been extensively utilized by numerous researchers to examine how various factors influence the enhancement of speaking self-efficacy among EFL learners. Notably, several studies have identified self-efficacy as an outstanding predictor of academic achievement (Doordinejad & Afshar, 2014; Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Rahimpour & Nariman-Jahan, 2010) and proficiency in language tasks and language skills (Raoofi et al., 2012). Some researchers (e.g., Kargar & Zamanian, 2014; Naseri & Zaferanieh, 2012) have established a positive correlation between achievements in reading comprehension and self-efficacy beliefs. Chen (2007) further elucidated the positive relationship between achievement in listening comprehension and self-efficacy, while Rahimi and Abedini (2009) demonstrated that self-efficacy in listening comprehension notably correlates with actual listening proficiency. However, the exploration of the relationship between achievement in speaking and speaking self-efficacy beliefs remains relatively scarce. Saeidi and Ebrahimi Farshchi (2012) in a study investigated the impact of teaching communication strategies on the self-efficacy of Iranian EFL students in speaking within content-based courses, concluding that such instruction positively influences students' self-efficacy in speaking.

One of the limited studies addressing speaking self-efficacy was conducted by Liu (2013), who explored the impacts of a campus English Bar on the speaking self-efficacy of college students. The findings indicated that students who constantly engaged in English conversation at the Bar exhibited a significantly higher level of self-efficacy in their speaking abilities compared to those who infrequently or never participated in such activities.

2.2. Use of Translation in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT)

Over the last thirty years, the paradigms of language teaching and learning have evolved significantly, transitioning from a complete dismissal of translation, the use of first language (L1), to a notable revival of its application in educational environments (Cook, 2010; Hall & Cook, 2012). Historically, the use of L1 was prominent during the Grammar-Translation Method's dominance; subsequently, the Direct Method, emerging at the end of the nineteenth century, prohibited the use of the mother tongue. Nevertheless, the acceptance of L1 re-emerged with methodologies such as the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, and Community Language Learning before communicative approaches largely rejected it for various reasons (Cook, 2010). As Laviosa (2014) notes, there has been a recent focus among translation instructors and researchers on the relationship between language teaching and translation. The incorporation of translation, which involves learners using their L1 to acquire a new language (Kerr, 2014), has long been a prevalent technique in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. However, the efficacy of this method for facilitating language learning remains a subject of debate (Brown, 2000). Currently, numerous EFL instructors employ translation as a traditional pedagogical approach, playing a crucial role in the educational process by providing "equivalents" in students' mother tongue, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of the target language's syntax and lexis (Sanatifar & Jalalian, 2019). This method is regarded as a valid and favorable model of language teaching, serving as a practical shortcut, particularly in the teaching of grammar and vocabulary (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

A comprehensive review of research conducted over the past three decades, both within and outside of Iran, regarding the role of translation in language teaching and learning, reveals a generally favorable perspective among EFL teachers toward the integration of translation into language development practices (e.g., Carreres, 2006; Husain, 1994; Kern, 1994; Liao, 2006; Malmkjær, 1998; Mogahed, 2011; Naynava & Sanatifar, 2018; Newmark, 1991; Omura, 1996; Owen, 2003; Siregar, 2020; Yüzlü & Atay, 2020). Notably, Naynava and Sanatifar (2018) found that advanced Iranian EFL learners who engaged with interlingual translation exhibited superior performance compared to those who participated in intralingual translation or did not engage in translation activities at all. An experimental study conducted by Yüzlü and Atay (2020) further demonstrated the significant impact of L1 utilization on the speaking abilities of EFL students. Their results underscored that L1 usage is instrumental in enhancing students' speaking skills, as it mitigates cognitive load and fosters a stress-free learning environment conducive to oral language improvement. Additionally, Siregar (2020) conducted an experiment elucidating the beneficial role of translation activities in foreign language acquisition. His findings indicated that such activities enhance learners’ capabilities in reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary comprehension, grammar understanding, as well as idiomatic expressions. Siregar advocates for a greater emphasis on translation in teaching practices to facilitate improvements in learners' speaking skills.

In a small-scale investigation examining the impact of interlingual subtitles and intralingual subtitles on vocabulary acquisition among intermediate Brazilian EFL learners, Matielo et al. (2013) noted distinct differences between the control and experimental groups. They highlighted a trend indicating the immediate effects of intralingual subtitles on vocabulary enhancement in comparison to both interlingual subtitles and control conditions. Through a comprehensive review of studies conducted over the past two decades concerning language domains, Matielo et al. (2015) recognized emerging research trends within the interplay of second language acquisition (SLA), subtitling, and captioning. Their focus encompassed word recognition, second language (L2) vocabulary acquisition, and L2 reading and listening comprehension. Notably, however, the authors devoted relatively little attention to the domain of L2 grammar acquisition.

Zarei and Rashvand (2011) explored the impact of both verbatim and non-verbatim interlingual subtitles and intralingual subtitles on the comprehension and production of vocabulary in L2 learners. Their findings indicated that non-verbatim subtitles enhanced vocabulary comprehension, irrespective of whether they were interlingual or intralingual. Conversely, intralingual subtitles were found to be more effective for vocabulary production, regardless of the verbatim or non-verbatim nature. In a related study, Rathert and Cabaroğlu (2020) examined the potential impact of bilingual practice on learners' self-efficacy. Their analysis revealed that only five out of twenty-five students exhibited significant changes in self-efficacy perceptions related to speaking and writing. Through interviews, the researchers noted that shifts in self-efficacy were only partially linked to the implementation of bilingual activities, with adverse course conditions largely undermining any potential positive effects of such practices. Similarly, Mohammadi (2017) conducted an investigation with pre-intermediate and intermediate language learners, demonstrating that translation as a communicative activity played a significant role in enhancing speaking performance. This effectiveness was evident in the interactions between teachers and learners during task completion. However, concerning the influence of various types of translation, such as intralingual and interlingual translation, there appears to be a scarcity of research available to date.

3. Method

3.1. Interlingual and Intralingual Translation

To explore the relationship between translation and speaking skills, Jakobson's (2012) classifications of interlingual and intralingual translation were employed. He articulates these two translation types as follows:

1. Intralingual translation (rewording) involves interpreting verbal signs through alternative signs within the same language. This form of translation occurs monolingually, wherein a verbal sign (word) from a specific language is substituted with another sign (word) from the same language.

2. Interlingual translation (translation proper) refers to the interpretation of verbal signs through different languages. This form of translation occurs bilingually, wherein a verbal sign from one language is replaced by a sign from another language.

3.2. Participants

A total of 45 female advanced EFL learners were chosen through random sampling. These participants were enrolled at Majd English Language Academy in Sanandaj City, Kurdistan, Iran. Following an assessment of their homogeneity in English language proficiency, the participants were organized into three groups of 15 individuals each, which comprised one control group (CG) and two experimental groups (EG1 and EG2). Among the participants, 23 were native Kurdish speakers, while 22 were native Persian speakers, with ages ranging from 26 to 50 years (mean age = 33.1).

3.3. Instruments

The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) standard version was administered to assess the homogeneity of the learners. The OPT contains 60 multiple-choice questions, each requiring the test taker to select the most appropriate answer to complete a given item. The highest possible score on the test is 60. All participants were allotted 30 minutes to complete the test under consistent testing conditions. According to the established scoring criteria, individuals who achieved scores in the range of 41-60 were classified as advanced learners. Additionally, speaking self-efficacy was evaluated using a questionnaire developed and validated by Asakereh and Dehghannezhad (2015) (see Appendix A). This instrument included 28 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

3.4. Materials

The assessment of learners' speaking proficiency utilized a set of 10 advanced speaking tasks derived from the Passages/2 textbook authored by Richards and Sandy (2008). This textbook represents the final installment in the Passages series, which is published by Cambridge University Press and is specifically designed for advanced English learners. Within the text, the four essential language skills are integrated through a variety of themes and topics, incorporating thought-provoking discussions and advanced vocabulary.

3.5. Procedure

The methodology employed in this study was genuinely experimental, incorporating one CG and two experimental groups. The participants in the experimental groups underwent treatment that involved learning a language through both interlingual and intralingual translation, while the CG engaged in language learning without the use of translation methods. The experimentation proceeded through several distinct phases:

1. Utilizing the OPT, an analysis of participants' scores in grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension was conducted to ensure uniformity in proficiency levels. From this analysis, 45 advanced learners were selected for the study.

2. A speaking self-efficacy questionnaire was administered as a pre-test. Participants were briefed on the aims of the research, with assurances that their personal information would be kept confidential. There was no stipulated time limit for the questionnaire; however, the majority of participants completed it in approximately 20 minutes.

3. In this study, participants were allocated randomly to one CG and two experimental groups. Prior to the commencement of session 1, all groups completed a speaking self-efficacy questionnaire, in which they were asked to provide ratings. The teacher guided the learners through a series of 10 advanced speaking tasks across 10 seventy-five-minute sessions, dedicating one task to each session. In EG1, each session began with the teacher asking the students to close their books, refocusing their attention on the topics at hand, followed by an engaging debate. Subsequently, the learners were instructed to reopen their books, during which the teacher explained the tasks, highlighted useful expressions and vocabulary, and read these items aloud. They then engaged in pair and group activities to practice their speaking skills, culminating in a class-wide sharing of ideas. The teacher provided assistance with any vocabulary-related inquiries, facilitated the identification of challenging words and phrases, and conducted intralingual translation—translating terms into English. EG2 followed a similar treatment procedure throughout the 10 sessions, with the key distinction being that the teacher translated problematic words and phrases into the learners' mother tongue, specifically Kurdish or Persian, thereby employing interlingual translation. In the CG, the learners engaged with and completed the advanced speaking tasks in accordance with the provided instructions during all 10 sessions, without the incorporation of either intralingual or interlingual translations. Following the completion of session 10, the same self-efficacy questionnaire was administered to the learners as a post-test, whereupon they were asked to rate their responses.

4. Following the treatments, the same speaking self-efficacy questionnaire was re-administered to participants to assess the effects on their speaking self-efficacy, with results analyzed and compared using ANOVA in SPSS.

4. Results

4.1. Pre-Test Results

Prior to the application of any treatment, descriptive statistics were employed to measure the mean and standard deviation of the scores across the three groups:

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Self-Efficacy Pre-Test

	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	Std. Error	St.	St.
EG1 pre-test	15	24.00	60.0	84.0	72.3	9.2	85.9	.10	.58	-1.6	1.1
EG2 pre-test	15	20.00	65.0	85.0	76.8	5.7	33.4	-.76	.58	.012	1.1
CG pre-test	15	30.00	60.0	90.0	73.4	10	107.6	-.03	.58	-1.3	1.1
Valid N (listwise)	15										

The preliminary analysis was conducted to confirm that the assumptions of normality were not violated, specifically examining skewness and kurtosis, which fell within the range of +2 to -2 for the variable in question. In EG1, the mean score for speaking self-efficacy was recorded at 72.3, with a standard deviation of 9.2. For EG2, the mean score increased to 76.8, accompanied by a standard deviation of 5.7. Conversely, the CG demonstrated a mean score of 73.4 and a standard deviation of 10 (see Table 1).

Table 2

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Speaking Self-Efficacy Pre-Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
4.310	2	42	.080

Table 2 indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variance remains intact, as the significance value (Sig.) obtained from Levene's test is .08, which exceeds the threshold of .05.

Table 3

ANOVA for Speaking Self-Efficacy Pre-Test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	163.244	2	81.622	1.078	.349
Within Groups	3179.333	42	75.698		
Total	3342.578	44			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the differences in speaking self-efficacy among the three groups. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in speaking self-efficacy scores at the $p<.05$ level, with a significance value of .34, which exceeds .05 [$F(2, 42) = 1.07$, $p<.05$].

4.2. Post-Test Results

After the treatment, descriptive statistics were used to measure the mean and standard deviation of the scores of the three groups:

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Self-Efficacy Post-Test

	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	St.	Std. Error	St.	St.
EG1 post-test	15	21.00	79.00	100.0	90.53	7.68	59.1	.13	.58	-1.41	1.12
EG2 post-test	15	33.00	87.00	120.0	99.73	11.30	127	.59	.58	-1.22	1.12
CG post-test	15	30.00	60.00	90.00	73.53	10.33	106	-.07	.58	-1.30	1.12
Valid N (listwise)	15										

The initial analysis was conducted to ascertain that the assumptions of normality were not violated, indicated by skewness and kurtosis values falling within the range of +2 to -2 for the variable in question. The mean score for speaking self-efficacy in EG1 was found to be 90.53, with a standard deviation of 7.68. In EG2, the mean score for speaking self-efficacy was 99.73, and the standard deviation was 11.30. Meanwhile, the CG exhibited a mean score of 73.53, accompanied by a standard deviation of 10.33 (see Table 4).

Table 5

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Speaking Self-Efficacy Post-Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.915	2	42	.160

Table 5 indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variance remains intact, as evidenced by Levene's test, which yields a significance value (Sig.) of .16, exceeding the threshold of .05.

Table 6

ANOVA for Speaking Self-Efficacy Post-Test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5300.400	2	2650.200	27.067	.000
Within Groups	4112.400	42	97.914		
Total	9412.800	44			

The one-way ANOVA analysis revealed a significant difference among the three groups, with a p-value less than .05. The speaking self-efficacy scores showed a notable difference, indicated by a significance value of .00, well below the threshold of .05 [F (2, 42) = 27.06, p<.05].

In terms of mean scores, learners in EG2 achieved an average of 99.73, followed by EG1 with 90.53, and the CG at 73.53, demonstrating that EG2 learners excelled compared to the other groups (EG2 > EG1 > CG). Figure 1 illustrates these findings.

Figure 1

Means of Speaking Self-Efficacy Post-Test

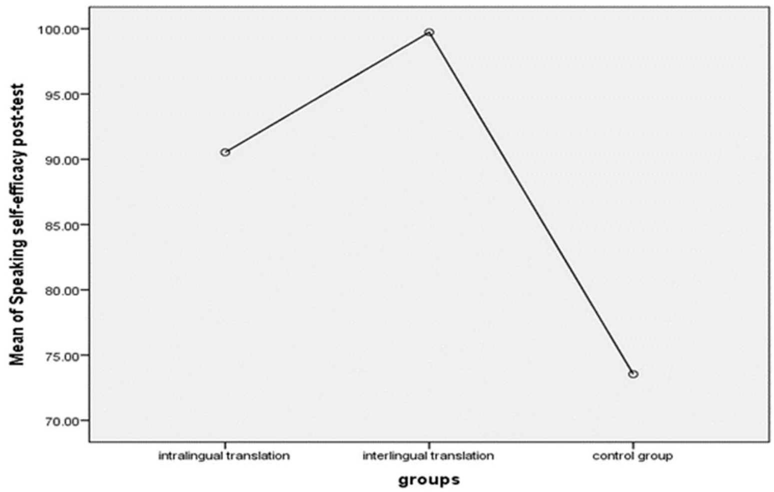

Table 7

Multiple Comparisons for Speaking Self-Efficacy Post-Test

(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
EG 1	EG2	-9.20*	3.61	.049	-18.36	-.03
	CG	17.00*	3.61	.000	7.83	26.16
EG 2	EG1	9.20*	3.61	.049	.03	18.36
	CG	26.20*	3.61	.000	17.03	35.36
CG	EG1	-17.00*	3.61	.000	-26.16	-7.83
	EG2	-26.20*	3.61	.000	-35.36	-17.03

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

As illustrated in Table 7, post hoc comparisons conducted using the Tukey HSD test revealed significant differences in the mean scores among the learners in the three groups. The presence of asterisks (*) adjacent to the reported values indicates that the mean scores for the experimental groups, EG1 and EG2, as well as the CG, were significantly different from one another.

5. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that intralingual translation exhibited a weaker association with learners' speaking self-efficacy in comparison to interlingual translation. Nonetheless, it demonstrated a marginally more positive correlation with the CG. Moreover, the results indicated a significant positive correlation between interlingual translation and the speaking self-efficacy of learners. Specifically, the advanced Iranian EFL learners who engaged in interlingual translation during the experimental phase (EG2) demonstrated superior performance compared to those who participated in intralingual translation activities (EG1) and those who received no translation support (CG). This suggests that translating into the learners' L1 —Persian or Kurdish in this context— was a more effective treatment approach than intralingual translation (paraphrasing in English) or the absence of translation entirely.

The researcher proposes that one plausible explanation for the established relationship between intralingual and interlingual types of translation and speaking self-efficacy lies in the intricate nature of speaking as a skill that necessitates deliberate development. This enhancement is most effectively achieved through classroom practice involving activities such as translation, which foster interaction among learners. Such interaction not only contributes to the engagement of learners but also serves to bolster their speaking self-efficacy in the EFL context. Further, the cognitive demands associated with translation as an intelligent activity—requiring creative problem-solving within diverse textual, social, and cultural frameworks—suggest that it often involves a conscious level of engagement. Consequently, this makes translation a valuable pedagogical strategy within FLT, especially when both learners and teachers share a common native language. Additionally, it may be argued that the utilization of the L1 during interlingual translation can alleviate cognitive load, thereby creating a less stressful learning environment conducive to the enhancement of speaking skill self-efficacy in L2.

The findings of this experiment largely corroborate the results of prior research studies. Beginning with Bandura's (1997) sources of self-efficacy development, it is noteworthy that interlingual translation may serve as both the first source (mastery experience) and the fourth source (psychological and affective states). Regarding mastery experience, Bandura indicates that previous experiences significantly influence the formation of self-efficacy beliefs. Individuals who have successfully completed a task often exhibit elevated levels of self-efficacy. When applied to the present study, translation into learners' L1 —identified as interlingual translation— may be viewed as a form of past 'experience' and achievement. Therefore, instructors can integrate translation into speaking tasks to enhance learners' speaking self-efficacy. Utilizing interlingual translation, which does not demand extensive effort, can exert a positive influence, thereby fostering improvements in speaking skills and related self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997) posits that affective and psychological states, including excitement, anxiety, fear reactions, fatigue, and stress can significantly impact self-efficacy. For example, learners who experience lower levels of stress and anxiety typically demonstrate more successful task performance. Consequently, the transformation of debilitative states into facilitative states emerges as a crucial factor in enhancing perceived self-efficacy beliefs. In the context of this study, utilizing learners' L1 through interlingual translation serves as an important strategy to mitigate these debilitative states. Given that students in speaking classes often face various negative affective factors such as shyness, stress, and anxiety, it is imperative for instructors to foster a relaxed atmosphere, facilitated by (interlingual) translation, to support the enhancement of learners' self-efficacy beliefs.

The findings of this study offer partial corroboration of the findings from Zarei and Rashvand (2011), which indicated that intralingual subtitles facilitated vocabulary production more effectively. Conversely, the results diverge from those reported by Rathert and Cabaroğlu (2020), who concluded that the impact of bilingual practice on self-efficacy in speaking and writing was not substantial, with only 5 out of 25 students exhibiting significant changes in self-efficacy perceptions, characterized by a moderate effect size. These inconsistencies may be attributed to various factors, including the types of materials and testing methods employed, the mode of translation, the specific language skills or components analyzed, the size of the sample, the design of the study, or variations in participants' proficiency levels.

The findings of this study regarding the influence of translation on various skills and components of language, as well as on the language development of EFL learners, are consistent with the conclusions of numerous previously reviewed studies. Notably, this study supports the assertions made by Cook (2010), Hall and Cook (2012), Laviosa (2014), Kerr (2014), and Heltai (2016) concerning the beneficial role of translation in language learning and teaching (TILT). Furthermore, the results align with the research conducted by Naynava and Sanatifar (2018), which established a positive correlation between inter- and intralingual translation and the speaking fluency of advanced Iranian EFL learners. Additionally, the findings corroborate the experimental work of Yüzlü and Atay (2020), which investigated the impact of L1 utilization on EFL learners' L2 speaking abilities, concluding that L1 use significantly enhanced students' L2 speaking skills. Moreover, the results are in agreement with the study by Mohammadi (2017), which demonstrated that translation, as a communicative activity, played a crucial role in the speaking performance of learners.

6. Conclusion

Based on the preceding experiment and ensuing discussion, the researcher concludes that within the Iranian EFL context, specifically among female advanced EFL learners, interlingual translation serves as an effective communicative activity. This method enhances the interaction between teachers and learners, subsequently aiding in the improvement of learners’ speaking self-efficacy. When employed systematically and purposefully within language instruction and integrated into regular classroom activities, interlingual translation emerges as a valuable tool for language teaching and learning. The researcher emphasizes that a crucial factor in FLT is to facilitate and motivate learners' use of interlingual translation as a means to bolster their speaking self-efficacy. The researcher advocates for a revival of 'translation' in EFL classrooms, akin to traditional methodologies such as the Grammar-Translation Method, where presentations and exercises were grounded in translation tasks (see Sanatifar & Jalalian, 2019). However, this approach should now prioritize 'tasks' and the integration of translation activities designed to enhance speaking self-efficacy. To facilitate their growth, learners are encouraged to actively participate in speaking tasks and engage with both teachers and peers, fostering their speaking self-efficacy. Adopting a positive outlook toward translation will serve as a beneficial strategy in facilitating SLA. EFL teachers should prioritize creating a relaxed atmosphere for teaching speaking. By connecting the lessons to students' personal experiences, including their

L1, they can boost learners' confidence in their speaking abilities. It is essential for teachers to foster motivation and ensure that students feel comfortable expressing themselves without the pressure of stress.

The present study's findings were accompanied by certain limitations that may have influenced the outcomes. Consequently, caution is warranted when generalizing these results to other analogous EFL contexts. Among the identified (de)limitations were: the participant pool, consisting solely of Iranian EFL learners from Majd English Language Academy in Sanandaj City, Kurdistan, Iran; the limited sample size of 45 learners; the potential discrepancy between the EFL learners' responses and their actual proficiency levels; and the neglect of variables such as age and gender of the EFL learners within this study.

This study explored how both interlingual and intralingual translation influence speaking self-efficacy. Future research could investigate different types of translation and their effects on speaking self-efficacy in various learner demographics, including considerations of gender, age, number, and attitudes, to enhance generalizability. Additionally, examining the relationship between interlingual and intralingual translation and other language skills —such as listening, reading, writing skills, vocabulary, and grammar —would provide valuable insights.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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Appendix

The speaking self-efficacy questionnaire (developed and validated by Asakereh & Dehghannezhad, 2015)

Name: .... Gender: .... Age: ....

SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree

	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I have enough ability to improve my speaking skills.					
2	I am sure that if I practice speaking more, I will get better grades in the course.					
3	I can speak better than my classmates.					
4	Even if the speaking task is difficult and I don't have the required vocabulary, I can find the strategy to get the message across.					
5	I am not stressed out when speaking English in the classroom.					
6	I enjoy speaking with a proficient partner.					
7	I am one of the best students in speaking courses.					
8	I enjoy meeting tourists because I can speak with them well.					
9	The more difficult the speaking practice is, the more enjoyable it is.					
10	When the instructor asks a question, I raise my hand to answer it even if I'm not sure about it.					
11	I'm confident about my ability to interact with other English speakers.					
12	While speaking, I can deal efficiently with unexpected situations.					
13	While speaking, I can remain calm when facing difficulties.					
14	When I'm talking with fluent speakers, I let them know if I need help.					
15	I'm confident I can communicate what I mean easily.					
16	I feel confident that I can achieve a native-like accuracy in speaking.					
17	I'm able to actively participate in my speaking classes.					
18	I'm sure I can use English outside the classroom.					
19	I believe I am a good English speaker.					
20	I strongly believe that I can achieve native-like fluency in English.					
21	I can describe my university to others in English.					
22	I can tell a story in English.					

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Exploring the Impact of Phonological Awareness on Elementary School Students' Mathematics Achievement

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Abstract

Phonological awareness is the recognition of the sound structure of words, and it is an important and reliable predictor of reading ability. Furthermore, it has been identified as a skill related to the development of mathematics skills for children. The present study aimed to explore the effect of phonological awareness on the mathematical performance of Persian female students. This research employed a quasi-experimental study, which included a pre- and post-test design with the control group. The population included 140 female second-grade students divided into a control and an experimental group. The experimental group underwent phonological awareness training for ten weeks, each session lasting 30-35 minutes, whereas the control group did not receive any intervention. The findings revealed that instructing phonemic awareness techniques in mathematics had a considerable effect on the operation area of the second-grade female students in elementary school. Phonological processing acts as a prerequisite for retrieving mathematical data and a facilitator for mathematical operations, and people with good phonological skills perform better in mathematics.

Keywords: phonological awareness, phoneme, reading, mathematics, operation area

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1. Introduction

Human beings are inherently social creatures, needing to express feelings and emotions, exchange thoughts and opinions as well as communicate with others. Reading acts as an efficient means of communication and exchanging thoughts. In order to develop reading skills, a set of fundamental aptitudes must be acquired including grapheme-phoneme correspondence, phonetic representation, decoding, phonemic labeling, identifying the directional nature of written symbols, and knowledge of spelling rules (Thomson, 1991). Reading and writing lead to the development of phonological awareness, which brings about improvement in other capacities.

Today, the vast majority of school proficiencies, like reading, writing, and comprehension, are prerequisites for both academic and work situations (Kaltner & Jansen, 2014). Reading skills are of utmost importance as a person with satisfactory reading proficiency is more likely to succeed in mathematics, social studies as well as other scientific domains (Melekoglu, 2011).

A multitude of studies have also reported evidence of overlapping brain activation for math and phonology in this region (De Smedt & Boets, 2010; Pollack & Ashby, 2018; Simon et al., 2002). A number of mathematical problems, especially those solved by retrieval, are linked to phonological processing capability and necessitate activity in the left-brain areas responsible for phonological processing (Pollack & Ashby, 2018). Long-term studies have established that phonological skills can be used as a predictor of future math aptitude; accordingly, phonological awareness assessed in 4-5-year-old is significantly associated with mathematic skills (Koponen et al., 2007; Simmons et al., 2008). Examining all these cases together demonstrates that there exists a linguistic basis for certain mathematical dimensions.

There is an inseparable association between language proficiency and math performance, with language capabilities being a part of math knowledge. Accomplishing elementary mathematical tasks entails the retrieval of phonological codes as well as the encoding and preservation of phonological representations in instantaneous awareness (Simmons et al., 2008). Insufficiency in phonological processing postpones the employment and storage of verbal codes such as counting and solving simple math problems. Studies of various languages have evidenced a mutual connection between phonological awareness and learning (Plaza & Cohen, 2004; Soleimani et al., 2008). It follows that if children have issues with phonological awareness skills, they will encounter difficulties in mastering other skills such as reading and writing, and, consequently, in acquiring other sciences and knowledge. Meanwhile, the association between phonological awareness skills and mathematics may appear attenuated and unrelated while the results of many studies, including Hecht et al. (2001), Alloway et al. (2005), De Smedt and Boets (2010), Jordan et al. (2015), Kuzmina et al. (2019) and Kourti and Warmington (2021), have shown a strong association between phonological awareness skills and mathematic performance particularly among young children and in the first years of school going. Jobstl et al. (2023) believed that rapid automatic naming and number system knowledge explain variance in shared skills between reading and math. Reading and math involved domain-specific cognitive components, and both required visual and verbal networks and semantic information that was explained by rapid automatic naming. Guez et al (2022) showed that language skills in children aged five years and five months predicted multiplication but did not predict addition and subtraction scores at the age of 11.5 years. In contrast, early visuospatial skills predicted addition and subtraction but not multiplication scores. These results provided strong support for the existence of dissociation in mathematical mental operations and explained the existence of long-term associations between language and visual-spatial skills and computational abilities. While addition and subtraction may rely more on visual-spatial reasoning, multiplication relies on verbal abilities. Kourti and Warmington (2021) demonstrated that phonological awareness correlated with simple math skills such as math skills in preschool children and first-grade students. Mathematical skills were correlated with reading abilities and the age of the subjects. Amland et al. (2021) displayed that phonological awareness can predict math progress from preschool to first grade when elementary reading, elementary math, general language skills, and nonverbal abilities are controlled. In their opinions, the relationship between phonological awareness and math was limited to verbal math, that is, simple math problems presented orally and calculated mentally. Vanbinst et al. (2020) suggested that phonological awareness predicted not only beginner reading but also beginning mathematics.

Theories have demonstrated that verbal codes are employed in mathematics tasks, indicating that phonological processing abilities can influence math accomplishment (Simmons et al., 2008). Younger children utilize counting strategies to figure out math problems, and this requires them to retrieve the phonetic codes of number words (Logie & Baddeley, 1987). Geary (1993) believes that when children employ counting techniques to solve mathematical problems, they retrieve phonological representations of numerical words and keep the problem in their working memory (Geary, 1993). Hecht et al. (2001) indicated that if phonological codes are maintained with greater strength, their retrieval will be more rapid and precise. Generally, when children are confronted with a math problem (e.g., 2+2=x), they apply their phonological awareness and memory to identify the symbols, and they draw on counting techniques to solve the problem and finally, through continual engagement with the problem, the solution will gradually come to mind (Espinas & Fuchs, 2022).

Mathematical knowledge is an indispensable part of education, and any lack of understanding of math can have a detrimental effect on a person's performance in school and in real life. Recent research has shown that 7% of school-aged kids possess cognitive or neuropsychological deficiencies, which can be improved through the development of mathematical skills (Geary, 1993). Poor phonological ability is believed to have a direct effect on math achievement as math involves the retrieval and retention of verbal numerical codes (Robinson et al., 2002). For solving single-digit math problems, children either retrieve the phoneme-based numerical code directly from long-term memory or reconstruct the answer by counting the phonetic codes of the numbers (Hecht et al., 2001). Of the three aspects of phonological proficiency including syllable awareness, inter-syllabic awareness, and phonological awareness, phonological awareness has a greater impact on predicting math performance (Hecht et al., 2001). Some researchers have reported an association relationship between phonological and mathematical skills, especially phonological awareness, with the development of arithmetic and mathematical skills (Alloway et al., 2005; Koponen et al., 2007). A child would utilize a counting strategy to solve a math problem that involves a phonological system (Buchner et al., 1998). Counting necessitates the child to retrieve the phonetic representation of numerical words, which can be achieved through phonemic working memory (Logie & Baddeley, 1987). Difficulties in retrieving information make it hard for children with poor phonological skills to count, so they must resort to counting to solve math problems in their early years. Bearing in mind that children with poor phonology exhibit weaker counting skills and are less efficient, which in turn leaves them with fewer chances to get the right answer, for arithmetic calculations, the more effective the storage and manipulation of numerical representations in the phonological memory is, the greater the ability of working memory for arithmetic procedures (Bull & Johnston, 1997). Due to the fact that the math and reading processing center is located in the left hemisphere of the brain, and reading in turn reading is associated with a person's phonological knowledge, it appears that there is a substantial association between phonemic knowledge and mathematical aptitude, thereby requiring a person to decode and retain the exact depiction of the phonemes of the word in memory. The same procedure is also applied to mathematical problems, and the problem is finally processed using specific strategies.

Phonological awareness enhances basic math skills such that phonological working memory represents the extent to which phonological codes are accessed (De Smedt & Boets, 2010). The connection between phonological processing and math is a strong point of reference in phonological representations as well as phonological codes (Simmons et al., 2008). Poor phonological representation hinders the ability to manipulate, retrieve, and retain phonological codes. Similarly, poor phonological representation of mathematical data hinders their effective retrieval (Boada & Pennington, 2006).

To sum up, it is obvious that some students have phonological problems in some manner, so the problem in phonological awareness skills affects many aspects of a person's life, the least of which is problems in reading skills and consequently writing skills, which in turn affects other aspects of a person's life, including math, science and other areas of learning. Taking into account the great influence of phonological awareness on all aspects of education, therefore, by educating phonological awareness skills, difficulties can be circumvented and reading capabilities as well as other areas of knowledge are advanced. Finally, the outcomes of the present research are quite applicable and beneficial for students, educators, and practitioners in the area of education.

2. Literature Review

Studies have shown that phonological awareness is a substantial contributor to early reading acquisition (Vloedgraven & Verhoeven, 2009). Phonological awareness is an independent language function that forms the basis for the abilities of listening, speaking, and writing. A robust phonological awareness is an essential component of literacy, which is profoundly imperative in guessing the acquisition of reading and writing skills. It should be emphasized that having a satisfactory degree of mathematical knowledge is required for academic success. In this regard, obtaining mathematical knowledge in elementary school is fundamental (Clements & Sarama, 2016). Struggling with mathematics in elementary school is a stumbling block in reading or problem-solving (Geary et al., 1991). Neurocognitive studies have demonstrated that mathematics and phonology are involved in separate parts of the left frontal gyrus (Booth et al., 2002; Dehaene et al., 2005; Prado et al., 2011; Simon et al., 2002).

In a study, Yang and McBride (2020) examined phonological processing skills (phonological memory, phonological awareness, and rapid automatized naming, RAN) in relation to early Chinese reading and early Chinese mathematics for young children. Early Chinese reading was assessed with single-character reading and multi-character word reading, and early mathematics was assessed with procedural arithmetic and arithmetic story problems. Among 86 Chinese kindergarteners, phonological processing skills explained 20% of the variance in character reading and 28% of the variance in word reading; they accounted for 8% of the variance in arithmetic and 11% of the variance in story problem performance. Specifically, findings further highlighted the general importance of phonological awareness in early Chinese single-character reading, word reading, simple arithmetic, and story problems, and the specific role of RAN in single-character reading and simple arithmetic.

Muitana and Amato (2022) studied the influence of phonological awareness on academic performance in Brazilian studies and presented the main standardized instruments used in the assessment of this skill. Articles from the last five years were searched in LILACS and SciELO databases using descriptors in English: “phonological awareness” and “reading” or “writing” or “mathematics” or “academic performance” or “academic ability”, as well as descriptors in Portuguese using the same expressions. Open access studies carried out in Brazil, published in Portuguese, English, or Spanish, which used a standardized instrument and presented the descriptors mentioned in the title or abstract, were selected. The results revealed that out of the 18 articles analyzed, 17 concluded that phonological awareness was important for reading, writing, and mathematics, with reading and writing being the most investigated skills. The instruments used assessed the main components of phonological awareness and were developed by Brazilian authors. The findings showed that phonological awareness is a very important skill for academic performance in different grades. It reinforces the need for monitoring, assessment, and early intervention with skills in typical and atypical children.

In a study in 2023 by Li et al., 251 primary school children (mean age: 8.31 ± 0.89 years old), including 87 first graders, 83 second graders, and 81 third graders, participated. Children's rapid automatized naming was measured using a rapid digit naming task, and phonological awareness was measured with a character rhyming task. Additionally, children's visual perception was measured with a figure matching task, and mental rotation was measured with a 2D/3D mental rotation task. Children's mathematical abilities were measured with three mathematics tests: calculation task, mathematical problem-solving task, and mathematical reasoning task. Regression analyses and Bayesian hypothesis testing showed that phonological awareness uniquely contributed to children's mathematical abilities, especially mathematical problem-solving. The results suggested that phonological awareness serves as a key precursor of mathematical abilities during the primary education phase.

3. Method

This research employed a quasi-experimental method, which included a pre- and post-test design with the control group. This cross-sectional study was conducted between September 2022 and June 2023 on 140 female second-grade students of Quchan (one of the cities of Khorasan Razavi) with an average age of 7.6 who were randomly selected. The second-grade students were chosen because they have acquired basic knowledge of letters, sounds, and phonemes in the previous formal educational level (first grade) but their mastery is still limited. On the other hand, they have become familiar with basic mathematical concepts such as counting numbers, basic addition and subtraction of the first type, as well as the concept of a combination of numbers.

Analysis of the students' academic portfolios revealed that all of them had natural intelligence and had never been unsuccessful at the prior educational level (first grade). According to the study by Dastjerdi and Soleimani (2006), and considering the ages of subjects, five sub-tests of phonological awareness were used in the sub-section of phonemic awareness including the sub-test of naming and removing the initial phoneme, the sub-test of naming and removing the final phoneme, the sub-test of identifying words with the same final phoneme, the sub-test of removing the middle phoneme and finally the sub-test of phoneme segmentation. The math test was considered a dependent variable and based on the Iran Key Math Test of Mathematics which includes three areas of concepts, application, and operation. In this study, the researcher focused on the operation area; so teacher-made math test questions were designed in the operation area. The content of the test was approved by technical professors and experts in relation to the subject of the research and had the necessary validity. The reliability of the test was also calculated using Cronbach's alpha. It was 0.84, which indicates good reliability.

3.1. Data Collection

Phonological awareness and math tests were performed as a pre-test. Data was gathered through the utilization of the phonological awareness test of Dastjerdi and Soleimani (2006) and a teacher-made math test. The students were randomly divided into two control and experimental groups. After administering the diagnostic tests (phonemic awareness & math tests), 70 individuals were chosen as the experimental group (exposed to phonological awareness) and 70 as the control group (not exposed to phonological awareness and followed the natural process of education).

The experimental group underwent phonological awareness training for ten weeks, each session lasting 30-35 minutes, whereas the control group did not receive any intervention. The experimental group was trained in groups of five subjects. Grouping the trainees in groups of five helped the examiner to observe better and improve the students' learning experience through their discussions. Individual training proved to be quite lengthy with each subject having to spend 30-35 minutes per session. The primary phonological awareness aptitudes of the subjects included phoneme recognition as well as phoneme segmentation. The training was structured in such a way that the easier skills were taught first, followed by the more difficult ones once the participants mastered them. Initially, instruction focused on word and syllable recognition, culminating in teaching of recognizing the initial and final syllables of two-, three-, and four-syllable words. At the phoneme-related training sessions, the participants were presented with phoneme recognition techniques, followed by exploring phoneme segmentation. Phonological awareness training was presented in a systematic and organized fashion, which lent itself to plentiful practice and repetition, with various examples provided to encourage and improve the chances of success for the students. Each exercise included between 8 and 10 words with the training session lasting 30-35 minutes. Given that the training mainly focused on phonology, phoneme recognition, and segmentation, each session was tailored to its specific purposes.

During the phoneme recognition sessions, the examiner made the subject find the first, the middle, and the last phonemes in a word, identify words with the same final sound, or remove a phoneme from the word. During phoneme segmentation training, the subject was instructed to articulate each phoneme of the word consecutively, with a pause of two seconds between each phoneme. For example, to separate the phonemes of the word "hand" as "/h/, /æ/, /n/, /d/". To begin with, the examiner demonstrated this action to the subjects and then requested them to perform it. Through phoneme segmentation activities, the subjects realized that words consist of separate phonemes. During phoneme segmentation training, the subjects had difficulties with articulating the sound of the word accurately, inserting incorrect pauses between phonemes, and, for example, dividing the word into syllables rather than phonemes. In the case of these mistakes, the examiner would demonstrate the correct answer, direct the examinee to the right response, and finally, evaluate the subject to ensure proper word segmentation is being acquired. This is vital for students to have a successful learning experience and to maximize their progress. The examiner gave encouragement and praise when the subjects correctly answered during the procedure. Examples of phonemic awareness training are outlined below.

Education professionals in the education system can apply the results of this research in formulating lesson plans and giving practical skills training in primary schools, particularly in the first and second grades where students learn the fundamentals of reading, writing, and mathematics. The findings of this study can be highly pertinent to any future research in the domain of phonological awareness generally and phoneme awareness particularly, as well as factors influencing the learning and management of children experiencing learning disabilities. Finally, given the valuable results of this research for learning disability centers, phonemic awareness training can be applied to educate children with learning disabilities in these facilities as well as devise and implement suitable training and capability enhancement programs. It is noteworthy that some of the training sessions were derived from the phonological test of Dastjerdi and Soleimani (2006). Table 1 presents the course of training sessions.

Table 1

Phonological Awareness Training Sessions

Session	Training
1	Awareness and recognition of words, segmentation of sentence to words
2	Awareness of sounds, recognition of words with the same ending phoneme
3	Recognition of the initial sound of the word
4	Recognition of the initial sound of the word and removing it
5	Recognition of the final phoneme
6	Recognition of the ending sound of the word and removing it
7	Recognition of the middle sound of the word and removing it
8	Phoneme manipulation and Substitution
9	Phoneme segmentation
10	Phoneme segmentation and phoneme classification

In the following, to ascertain the effectiveness of phonological awareness training over a three-month interval (due to the lack of access of the researcher to the subjects because of the exam season and getting permission to attend classes again), both the control and experimental groups underwent a math test and a phonological awareness test as post-tests. Finally, descriptive and inferential statistics were then applied to analyze the obtained results.

3.2. Data Analysis

Considering that the phonological awareness test employed in the present study was a variant of the phonological awareness test by Dastjerdi and Soleimani (2009), its reliability was reassessed using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire phonological awareness test was 0.83, indicating good reliability.

For the components of the same final phoneme, phoneme segmentation, naming and removing the final ending phoneme, deleting the middle phoneme, and naming and deleting the initial phoneme, the numbers were obtained as 0.78, 0.80, 0.81, 0.77, and 0.79 respectively, which seemed appropriate. Besides, the reliability of the math test was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a score of 0.72 which is suitable reliability. For the purpose of data analysis, the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied to ascertain the normal distribution of the scores of the control and experimental groups. Levine's test was also applied to check the equality of variances and ultimately covariance analysis was performed.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The research variables are elucidated. Tables 2 and 3 depict the skewness and kurtosis indices of the research variables to verify the normality. The normality of the data determines the optimal statistical method to answer the research questions (Dörnyei & Griffee, 2010). To measure the dispersion of the frequency of data and to verify the normality of the distribution, skewness and kurtosis statistical tests were used. According to the results for the control group, the mean operation score in the pre-test was 4.043, and in the post-test was 4.457.

Based on the results of the experimental group, the mean operation score in the pre-test was 4.1, and in the post-test was 5.44. Figure 1 shows the mean operation scores for both the control and experimental groups.

4.2. Inferential Statistics

In the present study, the Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized to evaluate the normality of the research variables. When checking the normality of the data, the null hypothesis of the normal distribution of the data is tested at a 5% margin of error. Therefore, if the test statistic is greater than 0.05, then there is no justification to reject the null hypothesis due to the normality of the data. That is to say, the data will conform to a normal distribution. Considering that the significance level of the pre- and post-test in the control group exceeds 0.05, it can be said that the investigated variables have a normal distribution.

Table 2

Results of Pre- and Post-Test Results in the Control Group

Variable	Pre-test				Post-test			
	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Operation	4/043	0/842	-0/232	0/333	4/457	0/896	0/070	-0/696

Table 3

Results of Pre- and Post-Test in the Experimental Group

Variable	Pre-test				Post-test			
	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Operation	4/100	0/745	-0/38	-0/420	5/44	0/795	0/644	-0/183

Figure 1

The Mean Operation Scores From Pre-Test and Post-Test in Two Control and Experimental Groups

Table 4

Results of the Shapiro-Wilk Test in the Control Group

Variable	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Number	Test statistics	significance level	Number	Test statistics	significance level
Operation	70	0.874	0.071	70	0.879	0.083

Table 5

Results of the Shapiro-Wilk Test in the Experimental Group

Variable	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Number	Test statistics	significance level	Number	Test statistics	significance level
Operation	70	0.825	0.062	70	0.800	0.060

Since the significance level of the pre- and post-test in the experimental group is above 0.05, it is evident that the studied variables have a normal distribution. In addition, the analysis of covariance test was employed to assess the question: Does phonological awareness influence the operational area performance of second-grade female students? The tables below demonstrate the results. The mean and standard deviation of the two experimental and control groups in the post-test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Mean and Standard Deviation in Two Groups

Group	Mean	SD
Control	4.457	0.896
Experimental	5.443	0.792

Results from Table 6 demonstrate that in the post-test, the average score of the control group in mathematical operations was 4.457, whereas the average score of the experimental group was 5.443. Since Leven's test had a significance level greater than 0.05, the assumption of equality of variances is confirmed. Table 8 presents the results of covariance analysis.

Table 7

Results of Equality of Variances Test Pertaining to Operations

Leven statistic	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	level of significance
4.034	1	138	0.057

Table 8 reveals that the pre-test variable has an *F* statistic of 72.412 and a significance level of less than 0.05. In this way, the presupposition of a linear correlation between pre-test and post-test variables is verified.

Table 8

Results of Covariance Analysis Pertaining to Operations

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F statistic	Level of significance	Effect size
Modified model	68.117	2	34.058	72.303	<0.001	0.514
Width from the origin	29.271	1	29.271	62.141	<0.001	0.312
Pre-test	34.109	1	34.109	72.412	<0.001	0.346
Group	31.544	1	31.544	66.966	<0.001	0.328
Error	64.533	137	0.471			
Total	3563.000	140				
Modified Total	132.650	139				

In Table 8, the *F* statistic for the group variable was reported to be 66.966 and its significance level was lower than 0.001. In this way, it can be said with 99% certainty that there is a significant difference in the field of mathematical operations in both the control and experimental groups. In other words, the average operation score in the experimental group is greater than that of the control group. It is, therefore, evident that phonological awareness has a considerable effect on the operational test results of second-grade female students. Furthermore, the effect size of 0.328 was obtained which is a large effect size based on Cohen's criterion.

5. Discussion

The present study explored the effect of phonological awareness on the operation area of mathematical performance of monolingual Persian female students. Phonological awareness influenced the operation area of mathematics knowledge of second-grade female students. This means that phonological awareness training had a positive effect on the math operation area of second-grade female elementary school students. With a 99% certainty, it can be asserted that phonological awareness skill training has a positive effect on the performance of mathematical operations, including addition and subtraction.

After the concept area (there were three different fields in studying mathematics: concepts, application, and operation), phonological awareness skill training in the area of mathematical knowledge operations had the highest impact on the improvement and development of second-grade elementary school students.

The results of this study are in line with those of Hetch et al. (2001), Simmons et al. (2008), and Kuzmina et al. (2019). These researchers revealed that phonological awareness is a powerful indicator of math development. Evidently, these investigations have explored the association between phonemic awareness teaching methods and overall math performance. However, none have studied the efficacy of phonological awareness aptitude in a certain area of mathematics. Some researchers have confirmed the overlapping of phonological and mathematical processing networks. Some studies have not shown any correlation between phonemic and math skills. This can be attributed to various reasons in these studies. Factors such as not being limited to a specific age, the variety of tests used to measure phonetic skills, studying phonetic skills in general or as only a sub-component, using general tests to measure math skills in contrast to tests that give more accurate results of math, whether the initial level of math skills is controlled or not, the extent of controlling the general abilities of the cognitive domain and linguistic clarity, all affect the correlation between phonemic and math skills. Moreover, only the components of phonological awareness have been studied in the relevant literature, overlooking the age range and the corresponding training of phonemic awareness skills while these are especially taken into consideration in the current study.

Therefore, of the seven sub-components of phonological awareness, only five components of identifying words with the same final phoneme, phonetic crossing, naming and omitting the final phoneme, naming and omitting the initial phoneme, and omitting the middle phoneme were selected being suitable for the age group under study and the other two sub-components of phonological awareness, namely phonological composition and recognition of words with the same initial phoneme, were left out because they were not suitable for the age group under study.

Echoing the elucidation of the outcomes of this investigation, Hetch et al. (2001) believe that some phonological manipulations require mathematical processes. Tasks dealing with beginning and ending sounds necessitate subtraction processes, while phonological integration tasks require addition processes (Hecht et al., 2001). Subtraction is rarely memorized and relies mostly on numerical operations. In other words, subtraction involves numerical operation areas.

Alternatively, the three-code model claims that there are different representational systems for the mental processing of numbers, each of which is related to different dimensions of calculation. As part of the language network, the verbal system is one of these systems; it is not just for numerical operations. This system is primarily tied to operations that require retrieving mathematical data from memory, such as multiplication and addition.

In this verbal system, numerical figures and mathematical information just like any other word are expressed lexically, phonetically, and syntactically. The system is linked to the language network of the left hemisphere (encompassing the middle and superior temporal gyrus) and most notably the left angular gyrus (Dehaene et al., 2005).

It seems that phonological awareness and phonological skill training affect mathematics because speech sounds play an important role in tasks such as math calculations and operations. Poor phonological ability may directly affect math achievement because math requires the retrieval and retention of verbal numerical codes.

There is a strong likelihood that different mathematical approaches will be utilized when operations affect brain activity. Temporoparietal brain activity is associated with math retrieval data (De Smedt, 2018).

Subtraction is a mathematical operation that necessitates temporal activity and can be solved using retrieval procedures and this is in line with the results of De Smedt and Boets (2010), who observed a notable association between phonological processing and problem retrieval and in fact, the quality of phonological representation explains the relationship between phonological processing and mathematical data retrieval. Simmons et al. (2008) were the pioneers of the exploration of the neural overlap between phonological and mathematical processing. They concentrated on the parietal cortex while observing brain activity during a phonological task and subtraction task. In the phonological task, subjects have to determine whether a specific phoneme is present in a visually presented word or not. This task requires a lot of activity in the inferior frontal gyrus and left angular gyrus compared to letter recognition control. In the subtraction task, a task involving the bilateral frontal parietal network, subjects have to subtract two numbers. By studying the overlap in brain activity between these two tasks, they found that a small area in the middle part of the posterior part of the intraparietal sulcus and the angular gyrus was activated during both tasks.

Andin et al. (2015) observed that the frontal regions of the left angular gyrus were more engaged in the phonemic task, while the posterior part of the left angular gyrus was more active in mathematics. Phonological memory, also known as the production or phonological loop, is the temporary encoding and storing of sound-based representations (Hecht et al., 2001). Decoding and storing phonological information in working memory should enable the child to pay close attention to solving continuous mathematical calculations (Bull & Johnston, 1997). For example, a child may decode "one plus two" as "1+2" when solving a simple math problem. Effective retrieval of simple math answers is possible when a strong link between the math problem and the representation of the answer is established in long-term memory (Siegler, 2015).

Neuro-imaging studies have confirmed the close relationship between phonological processing and mathematical data retrieval (Prado et al., 2011; Simon et al., 2002). These studies have shown that solving mathematical problems involves areas of the brain that are related to language processing (Pollack & Ashbay, 2018). Studies have also shown that children with math and reading problems are usually weak in phonological processing, while children who only have problems in math often do not have phonological problems (Geary, 1993; Moll et al., 2015). Studies have also proven that the co-occurrence of deficits in reading and math affects the quality of phonological representation, which is ultimately important for early reading and math (Amland et al., 2021).

Also, the evidence of cognitive neuroscience and neuro-imaging shows that there is an overlap between phonological awareness and mathematical performance; both are connected with the left temporal cortex areas of the brain, which leads to the activation of the left temporal cortex and the left gyrus. Meanwhile, activation of the left angular gyrus in phonological awareness tasks is related to individual differences (Mulhearn, 1999). Therefore, the left angular gyrus also plays a role in the use of mathematical numbers and figures in the sense that some mathematical dimensions have a linguistic basis (Vukovic & Lesaux, 2013). Since the same working memory that is used to solve mathematical problems is used to perform phonological tasks, both mathematical domains and phonological awareness require resources from phonological memory and central executive control. Repetition of mathematical data is based on phonological ability. When numerical data is repeated, phonological information must be generated and stored, and each repetition strengthens the association between the question and the answer (Jordan et al., 2015), which leads to learning. Therefore, the effect of phonological ability on math is more prominent in math functions that are based on data retrieval strategies (Polspoel et al., 2017).

To solve a simple problem, the general efficiency is the number naming codes that are available associated with the speed with which one can phonologically retrieve the answer code from long-term memory (Campbell, 1998). Successful retrieval of phonological naming codes requires the child's attention to use appropriate methods to solve the problem. On the other hand, phonological manipulation tasks such as subtracting or adding phonemes and syllables require mathematical processing (De Smedt, 2018). As a result, the phonological process can both facilitate and serve as a requirement for obtaining mathematical data. Put differently, phonologically proficient individuals outperform mathematicians. To be more precise, those with well-developed phonological skills tend to perform better in mathematics.

The quality of phonological representations can be important for solving mathematical problems in several ways. First, to solve a computational problem, the child must first convert the numbers and operations in the problem into speech-based codes (Dahaene et al., 1999; Hetch et al., 2001). It seems that children use this Arabic numerical to verbal translation in a routine and usual way not only to solve simple math problems but also for more general calculation problems such as divisions and long fractions. The second stage during which phonological representations may be important is after Arabic-to-verbal translation. The child must process phonological information using a task-solving strategy (=3+4); s/he must retrieve the answer directly from long-term memory, and thus the ability to solve such a problem depends on the storage of phonological information (Amland et al., 2021).

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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The Relation Between Iranian EFL Learners' Perception of Teacher Enthusiasm and Their Engagement in the Context of Second-Language Classrooms

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the intersection of perceived Teacher Enthusiasm (TE) and Learner Engagement (LE) in the context of second-language classrooms. To this goal, 92 Iranian advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners completed a self-report questionnaire on the effectiveness of teaching and learners' engagement. Two focus-group interviews were conducted, and a correlational analysis was performed. The results indicated a significant correlation between the two variables. Additionally, the analysis revealed three main themes testifying that perceived TE led to higher excitement and enjoyment for L2 learners, feelings of security and confidence, and a positive appraisal of teacher quality. It was also found that self-set goals and personal vision are significant antecedents of engagement, which may even outdo perceived TE. Emotional consequences were identified as the dominant links between the two variables. The results also revealed that perceived TE influences LE through stimulation and emotional arousal. The findings of this study recommend that ELT teachers' performance, enthusiasm, and behavior have a significant impact on EFL learners' evaluation of the quality of instruction.

Keywords: EFL learners, learner engagement, teacher enthusiasm

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1. Introduction

During the last decade, research on Teacher Enthusiasm (TE) has gained momentum in the field of second or foreign language (L2) learning and teaching. An increasing number of studies have been devoted to investigating the nature of TE and its associations with other teacher/learner variables (e.g., Burić & Moè, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Frenzel et al., 2019; Keller et al., 2018; Kuhn et al., 2024; Safdari, 2022; Wang & Derakhshan, 2021; Xue, 2024; Zhang & Ye, 2023). This growing attention is due to the conviction that TE characterizes effective teachers (Safdari, 2022) and is a major factor in promoting learner motivation and positive emotions (Cui et al., 2020; Fauth et al., 2019; Frenzel et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2018). Moreover, scholars have found significant links between TE and several other variables such as autonomy (Cui et al., 2017), learner enjoyment (Frenzel et al., 2009), recall (Moè, 2016), academic achievement (Burić, 2019), and interest (König, 2020). As Burić and Moè (2020) maintain, TE has also been reported to boost teachers' emotions and well-being (Safdari, 2022). Dewaele and Li (2021) argue that, very recently, L2 researchers have demonstrated interest in scrutinizing the potential links between TE and another newly popularized language learner characteristic, namely Learner Engagement (LE).

LE is understood as learners' active involvement and participation in academic activities (Dörnyei, 2020). Research has shown that LE has a significant influence on learners' effort, enthusiasm, attention, and academic achievement (Carroll et al., 2021; Quin, 2017; Wei et al., 2024). According to Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), LE is the way motivation is expressed in learners' actions and behaviors. LE is all about how engaged or disengaged learners are during the learning process - how they think, feel, participate, and perform. Several studies have suggested that teacher emotions or motivational practices can impact the level of LE (e.g., Burić et al., 2023; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Lazarides et al., 2019; Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

However, the relationship between TE and LE has not been extensively researched. This gap in research is particularly noticeable in the field of L2 learning and teaching. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to fully understand the connection between these two factors in the L2 classroom. Additionally, if there is a relationship between TE and LE, to what extent is it significant and essential? What are the possible experiences or emotions that arise when TE and LE intersect? It is important to determine how effective TE is at keeping language learners engaged in their classroom activities; therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between TE and LE and to uncover the emotions that are responsible for the connection between TE and L2 learners' level of engagement.

2. Literature Review

An extensive body of literature exists examining the relationship between personality traits and job-related aftereffects across various vocations, and the English Language Teaching (ELT) context has not been an exception. It is important to understand how L2 instructors' non-cognitive traits (i.e., personality characteristics) influence their behavior in the classroom and impact EFL learners' academic achievement (Burić et al., 2023). It is worth mentioning that in the field of L2 research, the concepts of *TE* and *LE* have extensively been studied independently, but their probable connection has received little attention. In this regard, the researchers will review the existing literature on these concepts separately, and then examine research studies that have explored the relationship between TE and LE, or other relevant emotions.

2.1. Teaching Quality

Understanding what makes a teacher effective is a complex task that involves several components. One of them is teaching quality, which is an idiosyncratic aspect of instructor effectiveness according to Goe et al. (2008). The term *teaching quality* is often used interchangeably with other terms, but it is a vital part of the teacher effectiveness construct (Burić et al., 2023). It comprises three main components: 1) input (e.g., teacher traits and qualifications), 2) processes also known as teaching quality or instructional quality (e.g., teacher practices), and 3) outcomes (e.g., influence on student engagement, achievement or social-emotional well-being).

Teaching quality is the ability to effectively teach a diverse range of students, maintain classroom discipline, meet the needs of students in a specific context, and achieve instructional goals (Darling-Hammond, 2015). In German-speaking contexts, a widely used teaching quality model is based on three core dimensions. These dimensions are defined by Praetorius et al.

(2018) as: a) classroom management, which involves identifying and promoting positive learner behavior while managing negative behavior, b) student support, which entails fostering social and emotional rapport between both learners and their teachers and among learners, and c) cognitive activation, which provides opportunities for knowledge acquisition as well as intellectual stimulation. The mentioned dimensions (cognitive, meta-cognitive, and motivational) are considered applicable across different cultures, grade levels, and school subjects, as they are generic (Burić et al., 2023; Praetorius et al., 2018).

2.2. Teacher Enthusiasm

Along with teaching quality, the teacher researchers evaluated EFL learners' perceptions of TE. TE is not just a characteristic that affects teaching quality but also a method of delivering high-quality instruction (Kunter et al., 2008). Additionally, Kunter et al. (2008, p. 470) defined TE as "the degree of enjoyment, excitement, and pleasure that teachers typically experience in their professional activities". In particular, a large amount of research on teacher effectiveness suggests that TE is one of the key components of effective teaching (e.g., Burić et al., 2023; Safdari, 2022). In the same fashion, Keller et al. (2016) defined TE as "a set of behaviors in the classroom that convey energy and excitement and help create an environment conducive to learning". Indeed, studies have shown that TE positively affects learners emotions, motivation, and interest to learn (e.g., Burić et al., 2023; Frenzel et al., 2018; König, 2021; Wang & Derakhshan, 2021; Xue, 2024; Zhang & Ye, 2023).

Kunter et al. (2011) declare that TE maintains two facets: 1) activity-related enthusiasm also known as teaching enthusiasm, and 2) topic-related enthusiasm also known as subject enthusiasm. To assess TE, it is important to consider whether students can differentiate between a teacher's genuine excitement and their teaching approach. Therefore, the researchers will use a student-rated scale to evaluate whether a teacher displays enthusiasm while teaching, taking into account a holistic view of their behavior.

Moreover, there has been a long-standing debate over how TE can be best understood and defined. One group of researchers has consistently examined TE as an internally experienced feeling, with a focus on teacher enjoyment and positive emotions (Keller et al., 2014). In addition, the second research approach used a different definition that focused on the level of enthusiasm displayed by teachers as perceived by their students. In this perspective, teachers' excitement and enthusiasm are conveyed through observable behaviors and are detected by students using both verbal and non-verbal instructional cues. Besides, Keller et al. (2016) proposed a new definition that combines both strands (Lazarides et al., 2018). However, Keller et al.'s (2018) investigation indicated that the two dimensions do not necessarily occur together (Safdari, 2022).

Research has testified that TE is connected to several desirable consequences. These include increased learner interest, better academic achievement and success, greater perceived learning support for students, improved self-efficacy, more motivated behavior and active learning, and increased enjoyment (Burić & Moè, 2020; Keller et al., 2014; König, 2020; Kunter et al., 2013; Lazarides et al., 2018, 2019, 2021). Moreover, some studies have suggested that enthusiastic teachers tend to use better teaching methods (e.g., Baier et al., 2019; Burić et al., 2023; Frenzel et al., 2009; Kunter et al., 2008; Safdari, 2022; Xue, 2024).

2.3. Learner Engagement

LE can be viewed as "the exertion of one's physical and psychological ongoing effort during the learning process to realize academic achievement or learning goals" (Wei et al., 2024, p. 3). One of the variables closely related to L2 learners' achievement and the adaptive process in the class context is LE or involvement in the task (van Rooij et al., 2018). As Schaufeli (2017) maintains this feeling of well-being goes beyond the conditioning factors and commitments acquired and helps overcome obstacles (Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024; Quin, 2017). According to Ellis (2019, p. 48), engagement is a crucial element of learning and serves as a significant driving force. Mercer (2019) suggests that engagement differs from motivation in that it is characterized by action. Learners who are engaged are actively committed to participating in learning activities (Zhou et al., 2021). This kind of active involvement and dedication can cause positive outcomes, for example, academic achievement and meaningful learning (Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024; Hiver et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2017).

Research suggests that students who are engaged invest more attention, concentration, persistence, and behavioral self-regulation, which leads to improved learning outcomes and success (Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Quin, 2017; Svalberg, 2017). Being a multi-dimensional construct, engagement consists of several components (Lambert et al., 2017). Engaging with a task, activity, or situation in the educational context (known as LE) involves social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement according to Philp and Duchesne's (2016) seminal work. LE relates to the active participation and positive attitude of students towards their learning process (Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024). Research has manifested that LE is associated with greater long-term knowledge retention and higher academic performance. Thus, LE is considered an essential component of (L2) learning. This is because successful learning of an L2 requires learners to persistently practice language use (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Engagement can occur at different levels, such as community, school, classroom, and tasks, which means that it can be examined over various timescales and scopes (Shernoff, 2013).

2.4. Four Dimensions of Learner Engagement

Engagement is a complex concept that comprises different components. According to Philp and Duchesne's (2016) research, LE has four dimensions: behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. Various studies have shown that LE is reflected in these four interconnected dimensions (e.g., Ferrer et al., 2020; Gavín-Chocano et al., 2024; Henry & Thorsen, 2020; Sandoval-Munoz et al., 2018). *Behavioral Engagement* pertains to the observable participation of learners in learning activities. Learners' behavioral engagement involves their participation in learning activities and tasks (e.g., lectures, course materials, video lectures, assessments, and discussion forums) as well as their effort and on-task attention and investment in the learning procedure (Kang, 2020; Wei et al., 2024). In the case of L2 learners, this participation is typically measured by the amount of production, voluntary involvement, persistence, time management, and even hand-raising during the learning process (Safdari, 2022). *Emotional Engagement* refers to the affective quality of learners' participation. It involves expressing positive emotions such as interest, curiosity, enjoyment, and enthusiasm towards what they have learned (Skinner et al., 2008). It is simply the way learners feel about the learning situation, activities, and people involved. These emotions can be either facilitative (e.g. enjoyment, enthusiasm, interest) or debilitative (e.g. boredom, anxiety, frustration), and they can significantly impact learners' performance. *Cognitive Engagement* is the process of mental activity and investment in learning. Engaged learners who are cognitively active put their attention and thoughts into the learning process. This involves intentional and focused attention aimed at achieving specific learning goals. As per Kuo et al. (2021), cognitive engagement involves learners utilizing metacognitive self-regulation and high-order learning strategies to acquire content knowledge and master skills (Wei, Saab & Admiraal, 2024). Cognitive engagement is visible through activities such as questioning, hesitating, repeating, private speech, and non-verbal communication, as well as the intensity and quality of interaction. Learners showcase this engagement by exchanging ideas, providing feedback, and explaining concepts to others. Various studies have already highlighted the importance of cognitive engagement, including Baralt et al. (2016), Hiver et al. (2020), and Lambert et al. (2017). *Social Engagement* is closely associated with emotional engagement and highlights the significance of social context and communities of language learners. Research has shown that social engagement supports constructive rapport, communication, and feedback quality (Maronski & Toth, 2016). It focuses on contextual factors, such as patterns of interaction, the role of teachers, and the role of peers (Hiver et al., 2021; Quin, 2017; Svalberg, 2009).

2.5. Related Studies

Engagement is not solely dependent on the learner, but also on various contextual, cultural, instructional, and social factors (Zhou et al., 2021). These factors interact dynamically and can affect the learner's level of engagement (Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Qiu & Lo, 2017). Therefore, personal and contextual factors play a vital role in forming the learning experience and ultimately affecting engagement. Various studies have suggested that factors such as classroom practices, teacher behavior management, and school discipline have a significant impact on student engagement (Safdari, 2022). Similarly, TE is one of the variables that can potentially influence engagement. Several studies have manifested that when instructors exude enthusiasm in the classroom, it can influence students positively (Lazarides et al., 2021). This contagious enthusiasm can enhance emotions, motivation, and engagement among students.

In a study conducted by Lazarides et al. (2018), it was found that perceived TE is significantly interrelated with learners' mastery goal orientation. Such finding is also supported by a recent study conducted by Frommelt et al. (2021). Similarly, König (2020) reported that perceived TE has a significant impact on learners' enjoyment, motivation, and overall rating of the teacher's instructional quality. Moreover, several studies have suggested that learners' perception of TE is closely linked with their level of interest in the subject-specific content (e.g., Frommelt et al., 2021).

To explore the relationship between students' perceived TE and their engagement and emotions, Dawaele and Li (2021) conducted research. The study held that there are significant positive correlations between these variables. The researchers concluded that perceptions of TE and LE are closely associated. They also suggested that emotions like boredom and enjoyment play a significant role in mediating this association.

Similarly, Cui et al. (2020) believe that learners' perception of TE is negatively associated with boredom in the classroom. Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021) pointed out that the desirable enjoyment and emotions of enthusiastic teachers are passed on to their students, positively impacting their performance. This explanation is a rudiment to Philp and Duchesne's (2016) ideas. They highlighted a connection between engagement and positive emotions. The researchers argued that students' perception of their teachers' feelings and behavior leads to emotional evaluations and judgments that, in turn, have (un)desirable consequences on students' engagement and performance.

According to the existing research, emotions play a vital role in the relationship between TE and LE. This means that when teachers are more engaged, students experience positive emotions, which results in improved engagement. This suggests a significant relationship between TE and LE. However, current research on this topic is limited and requires further investigation, especially in the field of L2 teaching and learning. There is a need for additional evidence to support the link between TE and LE. Furthermore, the influence of TE on LE through emotions is an area that requires deeper exploration (Safdari, 2022). The current literature has not fully explained the emotional factors that trigger the connection between TE and LE. Therefore, it is requisite to conduct further research to discern the nature and quality of this connection and shed light on the emotional factors that influence it by employing a mixed-methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design (Ary et al., 2019), where qualitative data is collected after quantitative data, the current study aims to explore this relationship by addressing the following research questions.

2.6. Research Questions

1. Is there any statistically significant correlation between Iranian advanced EFL learners' perception of TE and their engagement?

2. What are the emotions that mediate the relationship between ELT TE and EFL LE?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A total of 90 Iranian EFL learners (45 males and 45 females) participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 29 years old, with 23.33 determined as their mean age. Based on the records of the private language school and portfolios of the learners, they were all attending advanced English courses. The language institute was located in Amol City, Mazandaran, Iran. Furthermore, the participants were selected through convenience sampling and were divided into six classes, three all-male and three all-female, with each class having 15 students. The study was conducted with the participation of six teachers, three male and three female, who taught each of the six classes. All the seasoned teachers had Master's degrees in TESOL from domestic universities and had an average teaching experience of 12 years. The age of the teachers ranged from 28 to 35 years, with an average age of 31. The classes were scheduled to meet twice a week, with each session lasting for 75 minutes.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. The Questionnaire

A self-report questionnaire was used to measure *LE* and *perceived TE* quantitatively. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first part of the questionnaire was used to collect respondents' demographic information (i.e., age and gender). The second part had four multi-item scales with a total of 28 items. One of the scales which had 4 items was adopted from Dewaele and Li (2021) to measure learners' perceived TE. The other three scales (adopted from Hiver et al., 2020) mainly focused on LE consisting of 24 items and 3 parts: 1) emotional engagement (8 items), 2) behavioral engagement (8 items), and 3) cognitive engagement (8 items). Respondents were required to respond to the items by selecting a number on a six-point Likert-type scale, which ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

In the current study, the four subscales yielded adequate indexes of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha calculated to be .79 for perceived TE, .81 for emotional engagement, .79 for behavioral engagement, and .86 for cognitive engagement.

3.2.2. Focus-Group Interview

Two focus-group interviews were arranged and conducted to gather qualitative data, with a purposive sample of twelve participants. The interviewees included two EFL learners from every class: those who scored the highest on the perceived TE scale, and those who achieved the highest mean scores on LE. Six participants with high *perceived TE* mean scores were interviewed in one session, and six participants with high *LE* mean scores were interviewed in another session. The main objective of the interviews was to explore students' feelings and ideas about TE, and how their perception of TE impacted their engagement and performance. The researchers used a few prompt questions and then let the respondents express their thoughts freely and openly. The respondents were assured that the session content would definitely be kept confidential and used merely for the current study. Their consent was also obtained to record the session. The interviews were conducted in Persian to ensure maximum comfort of expression, and each session took approximately 90 minutes to complete. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researchers.

3.3. Procedures

This study used a mixed-methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design qualitative data was collected after quantitative data. First, after explaining the research aims and receiving consent from the EFL learners, a quantitative questionnaire was submitted to six classes during the sixth week of their academic term, after they had already attended ten sessions. The questionnaire took about 30 minutes on average, and the researchers were present in case there were any problems, but none arose. Two days after the questionnaire, the researchers conducted two interview sessions to collect qualitative data.

3.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 22 through correlational analysis. In addition, the qualitative data was analyzed through thematic coding analysis by following an inductive approach. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model was used for this analysis. Firstly, the recorded data was carefully transcribed and listened to. Then, the transcribed passages were read and reread to gain familiarity with the data and to notice the patterns and ideas embedded in them. Secondly, the meaning-carrying elements of the text that were related to the research goal were highlighted by the researchers after reading through the data set. After that, the initial codes were produced from the data, and the extracts related to each code were marked. In the research process, the codes that were identified were grouped to identify themes that could represent an overarching category. The themes that emerged were then reviewed to ensure that they were compatible with the codes and the raw data. If any themes lacked sufficient support, they were removed, and if any were too large, they were broken down into separate themes. Once the themes were refined, they were matched with relevant extracts to ensure they were a suitable representation of the data. Finally, in the sixth phase, the researchers prepared the final report, selecting the most appropriate extracts to illustrate and exemplify the themes that were finalized.

4. Results

4.1. the First Research Question

The obtained quantitative data is presented in Table 1, which shows that all scales had reliability estimates above acceptable levels.

A correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the probable connection between EFL learners' perceived TE and LE. To ensure the normal distribution of data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was employed, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

After confirming the assumption of normality, a Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between perceived TE and LE. According to the results of Table 3, the analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between the two variables (r =

.611, n = 90, p = .000), indicating a close association between perceived TE and EFL LE. The summary of correlation results is depicted in Table 3.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Questionnaire Data

Questionnaire Sections	Scales	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
First Section	Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm	90	3.19	0.85	0.79
Second Section	Behavioral Engagement	90	3.99	0.73	0.79
	Emotional Engagement	90	4.21	0.83	0.81
	Cognitive Engagement	90	3.59	0.73	0.80

Table 2

Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	
	Statistic	Sig
EFL Learner Engagement	.199	.151
Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm	.129	.089

Table 3

Results of Correlation Between Perceived TE and LE

Variables		LE	Perceived TE
EFL Learner Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	92
Perceived Teacher Enthusiasm	Pearson Correlation	.611**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90

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

4.2. the Second Research Question

The second research question was answered using the qualitative interview data. After the analysis, several concepts and themes emerged that represent the EFL learners' thoughts and emotions about the impact of teachers' enthusiasm on their engagement and learning. In this regard, the data analysis showed how learners felt about the perceived effectiveness and importance of teachers' enthusiasm for their engagement and performance. In the following section, these themes are presented with examples from the interviewees' quotations. To protect their privacy, respondents' real names are not mentioned.

4.2.1. Teacher Quality Evidence

During interviews, advanced Iranian EFL learners often express their opinions about the effectiveness and quality of their teachers. A common theme that conjures up from the following conversations is that EFL learners judge and evaluate their teachers based on their level of enthusiasm. Whether a teacher is energetic and passionate or appears unenthusiastic and disinterested, students tend to take this into account when assessing their teacher's effectiveness. Both interview groups agree that teachers' enthusiasm is a reliable indicator of their expertise and quality. Concerning this issue, one interviewee said:

Extract 1.

> To be a good teacher, it is essential to have the willingness to teach and work with students. A teacher who behaves like a reluctant employee at a governmental office, regardless of their knowledge, is of no use. A good teacher creates interest and motivation in the classroom and shows great happiness about it. So, if my teacher is enthusiastic and eager to teach, I ensure that he or she understands the subject matter well. Bahman was an interviewee who also believed that having high levels of energy is an important characteristic of effective teachers. He was part of a group of highly motivated learners. Yet, he believed that his engagement was not dependent on the Teacher's Enthusiasm: I recognize a skillful teacher from his/her ability to get students to concentrate on the task at hand. Language lessons and materials are tough and require sustained energy. Thus, being proficient in the rules and vocabulary of a language is not sufficient for being a good teacher. An effective teacher can transmit happiness, energize learners, and inspire them to persevere. However, even if the teacher possesses such qualities, there is no guarantee that students will continue to work hard. For that, there must also be purposeful students who have a clear vision. … who feel the need to work hard… and who understand the necessity to learn. It is too much to expect teachers to set such goals for learners.

4.2.2. The feeling of Confidence and Security

The feeling of confidence and security is believed to be an important facet of education. Many students believe that the teacher's behavior affects their level of security and confidence. Teachers who act enthusiastically help to reduce their students' inhibitions and self-defense mechanisms by creating a non-threatening and safe atmosphere. This encourages students to express themselves freely and participate in activities without fear of being embarrassed or criticized. Therefore, the level of engagement is improved.

Extract 2.

Teachers are scary. One of my previous teachers was strict, easily irritated, and unkind. Nobody would raise a hand as a volunteer. I seldom raised my hand. I can never remember his smile. However, this semester, our teacher entered the classroom with a big smile and looked kindly at the pupils. You feel eager to participate… I mean to get involved… to communicate and enjoy the company. You think if you stay aside, you will feel like you have missed something good. The sensation of safety creates a comfortable environment that motivates students to take risks with greater confidence, even in the face of potential mistakes. I would say I had a passionate instructor! My teacher was enthusiastic and exuded a sense of willingness. She is friendly, and energetic, and appears to genuinely enjoy her job and responsibilities. At times, it seemed as though she was more motivated or interested than any of us- the EFL learners. I witnessed that her positivity and energy activated the class and inspired learners to try new things and make mistakes without fear. She supported us in every situation, creating an environment where we could work without hesitation and energetically as well.

4.2.3. Excitement and Enjoyment

The statements of the respondents revealed that feelings of excitement and enjoyment were common during the interviews. Students from both groups expressed their excitement and pleasure at the enthusiasm displayed by their teachers. Excitement is an integral part of TE and has been consistently mentioned as the primary outcome of teacher effectiveness in the classroom. In this regard, another EFL learner's description is relevant:

Extract 3.

Whenever the teacher shows enthusiasm through his gestures, facial expressions, and verbal passion, I immediately notice that the whole class follows him with a high rate of excitement. Personally, in such cases, I start to enjoy the session greatly. The teacher delivers the lesson with such positive feelings and happiness that you develop the same emotions right away. Then, no matter what the subject is, even if it's grammar which we least like, you have fun and enjoy the process.

However, there were conflicting opinions about the impact of enjoyment generated by TE experiences on engagement. Some interviewees claimed that the feeling of excitement and enjoyment did not contribute significantly to their engagement. For instance, a female EFL learner with a high LE mean score suggested that enjoyment might not always be a precursor to her engagement. In the same vein, such perspective was further consolidated when another male EFL learner with a high perceived TE score confirmed that excitement or enjoyment did not necessarily lead to engagement with the material:

Extract 4.

I remember the occasions when my teacher's performance caused bunches of excitement. Frankly, I like that very much. Her emotional performance enthralls me greatly and I enjoy it. But I don't think that if her enthusiasm faded away, my engagement and motivation would follow it, and that's for sure! Irrespective of her mood and excitement, I stick to my own goals and plan. I am studying to prepare for the IELTS test, and this is the only important thing.

Extract 5.

I would say when my teacher teaches passionately, he pours his excitement and joy over us, as he becomes more funny! And I always enjoy it. Yes, it is fun and that's for sure… but sometimes, I just focus on his funny performance and enjoy it. However, if the stuff is not interesting or I consider it less relevant, I can hardly concentrate on it. For example, once he was passionate and funny and then assigned us to pairs to make up a conversation and perform it. Unfortunately, my partner did the whole thing and I just read my lines.... Miserable me!

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the potential relationship between Iranian advanced EFL learners' perceived TE and their engagement in learning activities. The first research question focused on the connection between the two mentioned variables, and the statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between them. In other words, when EFL learners perceive their teachers' practice as enthusiastic, they tend and prefer to engage more in overall learning activities. This finding can be corroborated by the manifestations of some previously conducted research studies (Burić et al., 2023; Burić & Moè, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Frenzel et al., 2019; Lazarides et al., 2021; Mercer, 2019; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021; Wang & Derakhshan, 2021; Xue, 2024; Zhang & Ye, 2023).

According to various studies, there is a strong link between the emotions and feelings of students and the emotions of their teachers. This is because teachers who are passionate and enthusiastic tend to exude positive emotions, which can be contagious and transmitted to their students. As a result, the classroom environment becomes more positive and engaging, and students are more likely to participate actively and interact with each other. This positive atmosphere also helps to reduce negative sensations such as unhappiness, boredom, anxiety, fear, and depression. Some other research studies (e.g., Becker et al., 2014; Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Philp & Duchesne, 2016) support this interpretation.

The second research question aimed to identify the potential underlying reasons or mechanisms that affect the connection between perceived TE and LE. Analysis of the qualitative data manifested three major themes mentioned by the respondents as salient issues in the association of TE and LE. The three following themes were identified in the research: 1) teacher quality evidence, 2) feeling of confidence and security, and 3) excitement and enjoyment.

The first theme suggests that the use of TE in the classroom brings positive emotions like joy, happiness, and elation to students. Respondents also believed that these emotional states are contagious and can be transmitted from enthusiastic teachers to students. This finding is consistent with the research of Becker et al. (2014), König (2020), Frenzel et al. (2009), Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021), Safdari (2022), who also emphasized the contagious nature of excitement and enjoyment. Besides, the present study showed that engagement in learning activities does not solely depend on the teacher's enjoyment and enthusiasm. While some respondents found enjoyment and pleasure in their teacher's enthusiastic approach, they also believed that their strong determination and previously set goals played a more significant role in keeping them engaged. This finding differs from several studies that have highlighted the significance of contagious pleasure and enjoyment in promoting engagement.

The second theme that emerged from the study was teacher quality evidence. The EFL learners interviewed believed that when a teacher shows enthusiasm, it is a sign of their quality or expertise. This belief is supported by Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021), who found that learners prefer happier ELT teachers and rate them positively. Similarly, Lazarides et al. (2021) agree that learners' perception of a teacher's expertise is a crucial factor when deciding about their instructional quality. Some of the respondents also highlighted the importance of determination and self-set goals. They expressed that without a clear purpose and vision, the teacher's enthusiasm alone may not be enough to motivate and inspire students to take action which has previously been highlighted by Safdari (2021). The significance of L2 learners' vision construction and its effectiveness in motivating them have already been cogently argued and evidenced (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014).

The third significant concept revolved around confidence and security. Teaching excellence is expected to subside negative emotions like fear or anxiety and ignite positive emotions like pleasure and enjoyment. According to the respondents, when they perceive enthusiasm in their instructors, they feel more confident and secure in the classroom. This, in turn, boosts their engagement and participation in class activities. These findings align with other studies such as Lazarides et al. (2019), Linnenbrink-Garcia et al. (2011), Philp and Duchesne (2016), and Safdari (2022).

Based on the qualitative data, the absence of negative emotions can cause greater involvement and engagement in the learning process. The qualitative data highlights two important points. Firstly, the themes emerging from the data reflect the emotional reactions and judgments of Iranian EFL learners towards their classroom learning experience in addition to their perceptions of their teachers' enthusiasm, regardless of whether these were positive or negative. Secondly, learners' perception of their teachers' enthusiasm had several consequences that influenced not only their emotional appraisal but also their judgment of the learning experience. The role of emotional appraisals has been observed in several research findings (e.g., Böheim et al., 2020; Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2017; Dao, 2021; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Larson et al., 2021; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2011; Safdari, 2022) as a mediator between perceived teacher effectiveness and learners' engagement. The studies suggest that TE primarily affects learners' engagement, leading to emotional repercussions. These emotions, in turn, can significantly regulate and mediate the intersection of TE and LE. The second major issue is the importance of learners' determination and persistence, regardless of perceived TE. This new observation has important implications. It suggests that while perceived TE is effective in creating a positive and enjoyable classroom environment, other personal variables such as meaningful purposes, vision, and self-set goals may have a stronger and more lasting impact on learners. These variables go beyond transient emotions that are limited to the classroom context.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to probe into the relationship between teachers' perceived enthusiasm and advanced EFL learners' engagement in classroom activities. The results revealed that perceived TE is closely linked to, and influences, LE through stimulation and emotional arousal. Emotional outcomes of perceived enthusiasm, such as evaluation of teacher quality, feelings of confidence and security, and learners' excitement and enjoyment have an impact on their engagement. However, the findings suggested that there may be other factors that have a greater influence on LE, such as self-determined goals and personal aspirations.

The findings of this study revealed that ELT teachers' performance, enthusiasm, and behavior have a significant impact on EFL learners' evaluation of the quality of instruction. Teachers need to pay attention to the way they present themselves to their students to create a positive learning environment. Simply possessing knowledge and skills is not enough to gain the acceptance and trust of learners. Enjoyment, confidence, and a secure atmosphere are also essential ingredients for success; therefore, educators may choose to emphasize the importance of training novice teachers to understand the significance of enthusiasm as a pedagogical tool and learn how to communicate with the optimum level of passion and vitality. However, despite its importance, enthusiasm alone is not enough to ensure academic engagement. Personally important goals and self-determination are crucial for language learners. As a result, assisting them in creating a clearer personal vision and setting self-concordant aims can be highly effective and may even surpass the potential impact of other contextual factors, such as the teacher's enthusiasm.

Finally, the researchers suggest that L2 teachers pay attention to how they present themselves to create a positive learning environment for their students as possessing knowledge and skills is not sufficient to obtain the trust and acceptance of learners. Moreover, L2 learners' sense of engagement and community can be developed through collaborative coursework, discussion forums, and peer review assignments. This can help promote positive attitudes towards L2 teachers and L2 learning. To enhance L2 learners' self-efficacy, curriculum instructors and designers can use methods such as verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and performance accomplishments. This will make them feel more confident and motivated in the language class. Additionally, fulfilling L2 learners' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness through need-supportive teaching can be an effective way to arouse intrinsic value. At last, novice teachers should be trained to understand and communicate effectively using enthusiasm as a pedagogical tool.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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To Keep or to Leave: Unlocking the Efficiency of General English Course in Iranian Context

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Abstract

General English Course (GEC), considering its syllabus, is a misnomer for the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction in Iran. The major goal of GEC, as set by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, is to help undergraduate students develop a reasonable ability to read and comprehend their reference textbooks in their majors. Since a lot of time, money, and energy are spent on GEC and given the dropout rate among students, its efficiency needs to be evaluated meticulously. This study was an attempt to assess the efficiency of GEC in achieving its purported objectives. Two hundred and sixty-six university students taking their GEC sat for the pretest of the study in order to get a preliminary profile of their reading comprehension ability as well as their knowledge of vocabulary. After 15 sessions of treatment, based on the GEC syllabus, the learners took a posttest. Results of a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed an improvement from the pretest to the posttest, which is negligible with regard to a small effect size. This state of affairs denotes that GEC has not achieved its goals completely. The implications of the study for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators are discussed.

Keywords: EAP, ESP, evaluation, General English Course (GEC), semi-specific texts

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1. Introduction

Once an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course has been implemented, it needs to be evaluated to see if it has been accountable enough to help learners achieve the main course objectives (Yang et al., 2023). Evaluation, according to Anthony (2018, p. 122), "… is often the first and the most important concern for many stakeholders." The outcome of this evaluation might necessitate revisions to be made in syllabi, materials, tasks, or methods with the aim of course improvement. The results might also be used by course administrators to make important decisions about teachers. Similarly, at the program level, the outcome of evaluations might be used by senior management to determine how to best use funding and resources for the courses or which courses should be expanded or reduced in size. Despite the significance attributed to it in the literature, very few studies, as Gillet and Wray (2006) argue, have been conducted to gauge the effectiveness of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses in practice. Furthermore, they claim that there is little research reporting the success of an EAP course, specifically discussing the extent to which these programs help learners succeed in their discipline. The present research was an attempt to examine the efficiency of the EAP program in an EFL context comparing the students' entry and exit scores.

2. Literature Review

General English Course (GEC) is widely implemented by Iranian universities as a compulsory 3-credit course designed by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. A closer examination of the content of the syllabus indicates that the course is divided into two sections. The first section (12 two-hour sessions) is devoted to reading general English passages whereas for the second section of the syllabus, which forms 18 two-hour sessions, the students are required to practice reading semi-specific texts about their discipline. Considering the ESP taxonomy presented by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), it can safely be claimed that the main objective of the course is teaching/learning EAP and the learners need it for their academic studies rather than for work or training. EAP, on the other hand, according to the same taxonomy, is a subcategory of English for Science and Technology (EST), which in turn is a main division of ESP. In designing and implementing ESP courses some stages and factors are involved (Ajideh, et al., 2018; Anthony, 2018). As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) put it “the stages in ESP are needs analysis, course (and syllabus) design, materials selection (and production), teaching and learning, and evaluation” (p. 121).

The present review of the related literature, to make it more relevant, intends to focus on the extreme ends of these stages, namely needs analysis and program evaluation. Other stages are not in the scope of this paper.

In his exquisite short review of the trends in teaching English as a foreign language, Farhady (2006) refers to the modifications which foreign language education has witnessed in the last few decades. These changes have been conducted with the improvement of the outcome of the teaching/learning processes as their main objective in order to help language learners acquire a reasonable competency in English. They were typically materialized in the form of different teaching methods which appeared for rather a short period of time and faded away being replaced by another method simply because of some sort of theoretical as well as practical shortcomings. These failures happened partly because “the field of language teaching was not well equipped enough to accommodate the needs of the learners” (Farhady, 2006, p. 577).

These inadequacies seriously questioned the idea of a one-fits-all-approach to language teaching (Hyland, 2006, cited in Nouri & Mazdayasna, 2014; Long, 2005) and led the scholars to pay special attention to issues such as determining the expected performance of the learners and skill specification. This means that for a language education program to be successful, one minimum requirement is to choose which skill(s) is/are most critical and crucial for the learners (Işık-Taş & Kenny, 2020). In fact, this selectivity is considered as the basis of ESP syllabi. Put another way, the courses are developed with a backdrop of practical constraints which arise with regard to the particular terminal performance expected from a certain group of learners (Hyland & Jiang, 2021a, 2021b).

Needs, according to Brown (2014), can be also specified with regard to a diagnostic view where these needs correspond to linguistic features and skills considered necessary for optimal performance in a target setting. In this view, all the stakeholders can play a role in determining what is necessary with more emphasis assigned to the ideas of stakeholders who have direct knowledge and experience of the target setting. "In the EAP context these can include experienced ESP instructors, course coordinators, head of department and subject specialists as well as future employers and graduate alumni now working in the target field" (Anthony, 2018, p.66). Indeed, investigating needs has been repeatedly reported to be “an accepted principle in language education” (Farhady, 2005, p. 8) and the basis of curriculum/course design and development in different branches of ESP (e.g., Nazari, 2020; Tahririan & Chalak, 2019). Specification of needs, on the other hand, is accomplished through considering a large number of factors with each one assumed to play a role in a particular instructional program. That is why these needs are prepared through multiple sources of information including interviews with the participants or investigating the use situation and examining the specialist discourse (Basturkmen, 2010; Liu & Hu, 2021).

One of the important decisions to be made with regard to the specification of the needs of the learners is skill specification (Farhady, 2006). Put differently, in designing ESP courses, it should be determined in advance which skill(s) is/are most significant for certain groups of learners regarding the future language use context in which they are expected to act.

The ability to comprehend academic texts has been considered by many curriculum developers and course designers as the most important need university students have (Chostelidou, 2010; Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Khany & Tarlani-Aliabadi, 2016; Liu et al., 2011; Nergis, 2013; Smith et al., 2022). Iranmehr et al. (2018, p. 173) state that “the main objective of the EAP programs [in Iran] is claimed to be bridging the gap between the students' General English Proficiency (GEP) and their ability to read authentic discipline-specific texts." These scholars justify their position by claiming that a large amount of scientific and technological information is published in English, so in order to keep up with the latest findings and developments in their fields, students need to have a good command of reading skills. What is more, to obtain a reasonable and acceptable functioning ability in reading, one needs to gain a remarkable amount of L2 vocabulary (Koda, 2007) as well as enough competence in L2 syntax, though the effect of the latter one is still inconclusive (Shiotsu & Weir, 2007).

Nevertheless, the results from some other studies (e.g., Bacha & Bahous, 2008; Evans & Green, 2007; Taillefer, 2007; Zohoorian, 2015) put more emphasis on writing and speaking skills. In another study by Kim (2006), speaking and listening skills were found to be a must for the successful performance of nonnative learners.

Once a course has ended, irrespective of whatever skill has received more attention, or while the course is going on, it is necessary to know how effective the course is and whether it needs revision or not. As Anthony (2018) asserts, "administrators of ESP courses and programs are also concerned with evaluation because it allows them to determine if the learners are making progress and if instructors are facilitating or hindering that progress" (p.122). Despite the significance attributed to this subject in the literature, there is still a paucity of research examining the efficiency and effectiveness of an ESP course (Kaivanpanah et al., 2021).

As a general classification, evaluations are divided into two main categories: formative evaluation or during-the-course evaluation, which, as the name suggests, is conducted while the course is running, and summative or end-of-course evaluation, which is run at the end of the course and "its purpose is to assess impact and to provide information that can be fed into repeat version or related activities" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p.128).

It should be noted here that the design pursued in this study was rather exceptional, in that most of the research studies conducted to assess a course have taken data collection procedures such as non-participant observation reports, student and teacher questionnaires, and teachers' self-reports and interviews (e.g., Atai, 2005; Nouri & Mazdayasna, 2014) as well as content analysis of textbooks (e.g., Iranmehr et al., 2018; Vosoughi et al., 2013). The present research employed a pretest-posttest design in order to present a better picture of the overall gain achieved on the part of the EAP learners at the end of a course compared to their entry competence. To that end, the following research question was generated:

Does General English Course lead to higher achievement of language proficiency among EFL students?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The initial participants of this study were 266 university students (201 boys and 65 girls) majoring in medicine at the Islamic Azad University in Ardabil, Iran. The mother tongues of the students were Azeri-Turkish and Persian. Their age ranged from 19 to 38. These students belonged to all existing intact GEC classes (n=10), which were held during three successive semesters at this university. It is worth mentioning that only 192 students took the pretest and 211 students sat for the posttest. However, the number of participants who were present at both administrations of the test was 137 (94 males and 43 females). Table 1 presents the profile of the participants. Two university professors taught in these classes.

Table 1

Composition of Participants

	MP	MA	TM (P & A)	FP	FA	TF (P & A)	TP (M & F)	TA (M & F)	GT (M & F, P & A)
Pretest	140	61	201	52	13	65	192	74	266
Posttest	155	46	201	56	9	65	211	55	266

Note. M = male; F = female; P = present; A = absent; T = total; G = grand.

3.2. Materials

To implement the course objectives elaborated in the course syllabus, two coursebooks were used, each pertaining to one section of the syllabus offered by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology for GEC. The first book was *Thoughts and Notions* by Ackert and Lee (2005) and the second one was *English for the Students of Medicine (I)* written by Deedari and Ziahosseiny (1989). It is explicitly mentioned in the syllabus that for the second part of the semester a semi-specific (EAP) book published by SAMT (The Organization for Researching and Compiling University Textbooks in Humanities) should be studied.

A valid and reliable test comprising 30 items was also used in this project (See Appendix A). It consisted of 10 vocabulary items and 20 reading comprehension items belonging to four passages (five items each). The passages were related to the materials covered in the two sections of each semester. Two of them were EGP texts and the other two were semi-specific (EAP) ones. Two forms of this test were used following a counterbalanced design. The test validity was confirmed by two ELT experts. Cronbach's alpha was also used to assess the reliability of the test with a pilot group of 32 learners, which turned out to be 0.78.

3.3. Procedures

At the beginning of each semester, a pretest was administered to gauge the initial proficiency level of the students. The whole semesters were divided into two parts. For the first six weeks of each semester (12 two-hour sessions as a whole), the book *Thoughts and Notions was used* and for the remaining nine weeks of the semesters (18 two-hour sessions), the book *English for the Students of Medicine (I)* was utilized. It should be noted that the teachers just taught the course based on the proposed syllabus. This comprised a set of pre-reading, reading, and post-reading tasks as instructed by the books. The same test was administered again at the end of each semester in the form of a posttest. Both teachers followed the same teaching methodology.

3.4. Design and Analyses

This study was a pre-experimental research with a one-group pretest posttest design. Here, the effect of GEC on the achievement of students was studied. So, GEC was the independent variable of the study and students' English language proficiency was considered as the dependent variable.

Using IBM SPSS software (version 28), the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was run to compare the performances of students on the pretest and posttest. The effect size was also calculated to see the strength of the difference.

4. Results

In this section, the results of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses can be seen. The descriptive statistics for the scores of students on the pretest and posttest are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Scores on Pretest and Posttest

	N	M	SD
Pretest	192	14.81	5.003
Posttest	211	16.37	5.162

Table 2 shows that the mean performance of students has improved from pretest to posttest (16.37 > 14.81); however, in order to check the existence of any statistically significant difference between the two performances, the following steps should be taken. First normality checks should be run on the scores in the pretest and posttest. Then based on the results appropriate statistical tests should be applied to seek the difference.

The results of descriptive statistical analysis are followed by the inferential statistical results. Table 3 illustrates the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check the normality of the distributions of scores on the pretest and posttest.

Table 3

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.098	192	<.001
Posttest	.099	211	<.001

It is evident from Table 3 that the distributions of scores on both tests are not normal (Sig. < .001). This necessitates running a nonparametric test to compare the performances of students on the pretest and posttest. Table 4 depicts the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for comparing pretest and posttest scores.

Table 4

Wilcoxon Test on Pretest and Posttest

Z	Sig.
- 4.043	<.001

The result (Sig. < .001) in Table 4 confirms the fact that there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of students in the pretest and posttest. In order to seek the strength of the difference between the pretest and posttest scores of students, the effect size was calculated using Cohen’s d (1988) formula (r = .2). It is almost a small effect, according to Cohen’s guidelines, denoting that although the mean score of participants has increased from

14.81 to 16.37, there seem to be other factors involved, which can be responsible for this small increase.

5. Discussion

This study was conducted with the aim of evaluating GEC (an EAP course) to see if it can lead to betterment of EFL students' English proficiency. Having employed a pretest-posttest design, a very slight improvement in the learners' exit level competence compared to their entry level proficiency was witnessed. This little improvement, despite being statistically significant, was not remarkable with regard to a rather small effect size. A number of factors may warrant consideration regarding this somewhat surprising result.

First and foremost, there is sufficient evidence emanating from the university students' scores in the entrance examination, which reveals a low proficiency level among the students at the outset (Askari Arani, 2005; Behtary & Davaribina, 2011; Chostelidou, 2010). This problem can have its roots in English instruction in high school. Behtary and Davaribina (2011) also found that the two-credit Prerequisite English Course (PEC), compulsorily taken by weak students in Iranian universities, was not efficient enough to prepare these learners for GEC. In a similar vein, Atai and Tahririan (2004) claim that "the learners' problems might basically stem from their inadequate GEP [General English Proficiency] level rather than the technicalities of the scientific texts, domain-specific background knowledge, or methodology factor" (p. 272).

A second reason for the lack of expected progress in GEC might be related to the low motivation level of the learners. A number of studies have delved into the relationship between motivation and language learning (Atai, 2005; Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). There is no doubt that one way to facilitate the learning process among the students is to specify the demotivating factors and try to take action to remove them.

Last but not least, a mismatch between the latest principles of teaching and assessing reading and the contents and exercises of books introduced for EAP courses is likely to give rise to the current state of affairs. As a case in point, some well-established micro and macro skills of reading (Brown & Lee, 2015) such as skimming, scanning, or semantic mapping are missing in both textbooks covered in GEC. Vosoughi et al. (2013) and Mohammadi and Safayee Moghadam (2015) provided further evidence for this fact. Overall, these findings further support Gillet and Wray (2006), who claimed that very few researchers document EAP programs as successful.

6. Conclusion

This research set out to evaluate the present state of EAP instruction in the Iranian context focusing on GEC. The findings like those of many previous ones were not promising, showing only a minute improvement in the learners' English proficiency. This can be a crucial warning for the educational stakeholders to avoid overestimating the course outcome and to adjust their expectations accordingly. Additionally, it might serve as a reminder to curriculum developers in general and syllabus designers in particular to reconsider the linguistic components to include in the program development process. Based on these findings, educators may also desire to include extralinguistic features such as motivation boosters in their classroom environment to take the most out of the course and act more efficiently.

There were some limitations in this study, making the findings less generalizable. First, with regard to scope, the study was limited to just one university in Iran. Second, the participants were limited to medicine students, a very small proportion of the whole Iranian student population studying in different disciplines. Third, the moderator variable of sex was not controlled because of administrative restrictions.

Other similar research can be conducted with the aim of extending the boundaries of this study and improving its validity. As an example, a study can explore if the proficiency level of learners has the potential to alter the outcomes. Another set of studies can be designed to compensate for the above-mentioned limitations.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers’ bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-

financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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Appendix

A- Read the following four passages and answer the questions following them. Mark your answers on the answer sheet.

PASSAGE ONE

Thomas Alva Edison lit up the world with his invention of the electric light. Without him, the world might still be a dark place. However, the electric light was not his only invention. He also invented the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and over 1,200 other things. About every two weeks he created something new.

Thomas A. Edison was born in Milan, Ohio, on February 11, 1847. His family moved to Port Huron, Michigan, when he was seven years old. Surprisingly, he attended school for only two months. His mother, a former teacher, taught him a few things, but Thomas was mostly self-educated. His natural curiosity led him to start experimenting at a young age with electrical and mechanical things at home.

When he was 12 years old, he got his first job. He became a newsboy on a train that ran between Port Huron and Detroit. He set up a laboratory in a baggage care of the train so that he could continue his experiments in his spare time. Unfortunately, his first work experience did not end well. Thomas was fired when he accidentally set fire to the floor of the baggage ***car***.

Thomas then worked for five years as a telegraph operator, but he continued to spend much of his time on the job conducting experiments. He got his first patent in 1868 for a vote recorder run by electricity. However, the vote recorder was not a success. In 1870, he sold another invention, a stock-ticker, for $40,000. A stock-ticker is a machine that automatically prints stock prices on a tape. He was then able to build his first shop in Newark, New Jersey.

Thomas Edison was totally deaf in one ear and hard of hearing in the other, but thought of his deafness as a blessing in many ways. It kept conversations short, so that he could have more time for work. He called himself a "two-shift man" because he worked 16 out of every 24 hours. Sometimes he worked so intensely that his wife had to remind him to sleep and eat.

Thomas Edison died at the age of 84 on October 18, 1931, at his estate in West Orange, New Jersey. He left numerous inventions that improved the quality of life all over the world.

1. In his life, Thomas Edison did things in this order:
   a. became a telegraph operator, a newsboy, and then got his first patent.
   b. became a newsboy, got his first patent, and then became a telegraph operator.
   c. got a patent, became a telegraph operator, and then became a newsboy.
   d. became a newsboy, a telegraph operator, and then got a patent.
2. In paragraph 3 line 17 the word ‘car’ means …..
   a. automobile.
   b. coach.
   c. machine.
   d. vehicle.
3. Edison considered his deafness …..
   a. a disadvantage.
   b. a blessing.
   c. something from a priest.
   d. a necessity.
4. Of all the inventions, the ….. was probably the most important for civilization.
   a. vote recorder
   b. stock ticker
   c. light bulb
   d. motion picture camera
5. The main idea of this passage is that …..
   a. Thomas Edison was always interested in science and inventions, and he invented many important things.
   b. Thomas Edison could not keep a job.
   c. Thomas Edison worked day and night on his experiments.
   d. deaf people make good inventors because they can focus without the distraction of spoken conversation.

PASSAGE TWO

The human skin can suffer from a number of diseases although the face is relatively immune. Constant exposure to air and sun protects the face from a lot of infections that are due to organisms who love dark and damp areas, such as between the toes. But for men, any diseases on the face can affect shaving.

The one face rash which is very common is acne. The complaint is far more common among youths than any other age group, especially young men. Unless a male patient has a desire to grow a beard, I advise him to continue shaving but rather sketchily, ***skating around*** the worst spots. He should use a good, unscented soap, or a medicated one.

Eczema of the face is much less common than acne. Again, keep on shaving, but avoid the worst areas as far as possible. Fortunately, eczema rarely lasts for anything like as long as acne.

Impetigo, another skin infection, seems to prefer the face to any other parts of the body surface. Germs affect isolated areas of the face but do not spread outwards from the main areas. Sufferers should seek medical advice since it is very often rapidly cleared up by the appropriate antibiotic drug.

Since the majority of men do not have the time to go to the barber, and therefore do their own shaving, barber's rash is now a rarity. Even among the few who still attend hairdressing salons, the latter are now almost invariably carefully maintained and have a high standard of hygiene.

Whatever the skin condition from which the face may suffer, the patient must always ***keep to*** his own towel. Also, the razor must be thoroughly cleaned after every shave, (though actual scalding is said to blunt the edge). Very occasionally a patient who uses an electric razor gets an allergic rash due to the chrome or nickel in the razor. But it is possible to identify the metal responsible and take precautions.

Finally, use pleasantly warm water for shaving when you have any skin trouble on the face, and don't follow the shaving by after-shaving lotion until the rash is better. There are plenty of shaving products for men that are available, such as skin soothers or moisturisers, so, if you are not suffering from any infections, there is no reason why you cannot have a close shave and maintain healthy skin.

6. The main idea of the passage is how to …..
   a. manage face skin troubles.
   b. shave in cases of having skin infections.
   c. follow hygienic rules in barber-shops.
   d. treat skin problems in the best way.
7. 'Skating around' in line 9 means …..
   a. shaving.
   b. cleaning.
   c. avoiding.
   d. rubbing.
8. How many different face infections are mentioned in this passage?
   a. Three.
   b. Four.
   c. Five
   d. Six
9. 'Keep to' in line 25 means …..
   a. share.
   b. carry.
   c. buy.
   d. use.
10. The writer is probably …..
    a. in favor of attending hairdressing salons.
    b. not in favor of attending hairdressing salons.
    c. in favor of a close shave.
    d. not in favor of a close shave.

PASSAGE THREE

At the very top of a rocky, wind-whipped ridge above this sprawling ski resort west of Yellowstone National Park stands a towering grove of ancient whitebark pine trees. They are one of the few living things that thrive in the harshness at such altitudes, and they produce a large nut that is rich in fat and critical to wildlife.

There is mounting concern among biologists and other researchers, however, that global climate change may be creating conditions in and around the park that are ***inhospitable*** for the tree. If climate warming is the real, long-term phenomenon that many experts think it is, scientists believe it could set off a series of changes that could kill 90 percent or more of the whitebark pine trees and possibly compromise the future of the threatened grizzly bear.

The whitebark pine produces cones with pea-size nuts that bears eat in the fall. "Of all the vegetable foods in the ecosystem, whitebark pine is probably the most important," said Chuck Schwartz, leader of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, a federal agency responsible for protection of the bear. "They are critical to the fall fattening process to get the bears through the winter."

10. The word ‘inhospitable’ in line 8 means …..
    a. dangerous
    b. welcoming
    c. far-reaching
    d. inviting
11. The main idea of this passage is that .....
    a. whitebark pines can live at high altitudes.
    b. grizzly bears eat whitebark pine nuts.
    c. global warming may be a real problem, but no one knows for sure.
    d. global warming is affecting whitebark pines and grizzlies.
12. Grizzly bears need to eat whitebark pine nuts because the nuts …..
    a. are the only food available in the park.
    b. help the bears fatten up for the winter.
    c. contain an important kind of protein.
    d. are hard for other animals to open.
13. Chuck Schwartz's job is to ..…
    a. manage Yellowstone National Park.
    b. protect grizzly bears.
    c. protect pine trees.
    d. save pine trees from bear damage.
14. Scientists believe that global warming is affecting grizzly bears by ..…
    a. making their coats less warm.
    b. causing them to have fewer cubs.
    c. increasing the number of animals that can kill them.
    d. harming the trees that produce their major food.

PASSAGE FOUR

Surgery has always been one of the most effective ways to remove cancers. By the removal of localized growths, the patient may be completely cured. Approaches to treatment may be varied, and may not, in some cases, even include surgery. X-ray or radium treatment is employed successfully in many types of pelvic cancer. Chemical therapy includes hormone treatments of breast and prostate cancer, and also drug management of the leukemias, blood cancers. Often a combination of surgery, X-ray, and drugs is used.

Among the substances being applied in studies of cancer treatment is a product in various forms known as aminopterin and teropterin. A substance called folic acid has the power to stimulate the growth of blood cells. The substance called aminopterin opposes folic acid. Therefore, it has been used in an attempt to control rapid growth of cells, and there seems to be evidence that in some instances it does delay growth because patients may say that they feel better and suffer less pain. In addition, aminopterin has been applied with some success in attacking leukemia.

The use of radioactive isotopes is the most exciting of the recent approaches to the treatment. Since these chemicals are likely to go directly to one tissue of the body, they concentrate in that organ and destroy abnormal tissues there. Cancer of the thyroid has been successfully treated by using radioactive iodine. Iron, sodium, potassium, chlorine, bromine, calcium, strontium, sulphur, carbon, and hydrogen have all been subjected to experiments in controlling growths in various parts of the body. Radioactive phosphorus has also been applied externally to warts, moles, and other growths on the surface of the body, and in some instances with apparent success.

The nitrogen mustard chemicals, developed for the use in warfare, have been helpful in destroying cancer cells of the blood. These drugs are used effectively in Hodgkin’s disease, chronic leukemia, and in other forms of blood tumors.

Much remains to be learned about cancer, and much will depend on the cooperation of patients in promptly reporting to their doctor any suspicious signs. Regular yearly checkups aid in early detection of cancers.

15. One of the most effective ways of cancer treatment is …..
    a. the removal of localized growth.
    b. the exposure to X-ray.
    c. chemical therapy.
    d. drug management.
16. Aminopterin is one of the substances applied to …..
    a. stimulate the growth of blood cells.
    b. develop folic acid.
    c. control rapid growth of blood cells.
    d. develop leukemia.
17. Radioactive isotopes is a recent approach to …..
    a. concentrate cancer in one tissue of the body.
    b. the treatment of blood cells.
    c. control the growth of radioactive iodine.
    d. the treatment of the thyroid.
18. The nitrogen mustard chemicals are helpful in …..
    a. destroying the affected cells in pelvic cancer.
    b. the treatment of growths on the surface of the body.
    c. chronic leukemia and other forms of blood tumors.
    d. attacking folic acid in the blood.
19. Cancer can be prevented and treated successfully by …..
    a. regular yearly checkups.
    b. increasing the intake of folic acid.
    c. learning more about cancer.
    d. consuming mustard.
20. Cancer can be prevented and treated successfully by …..
    e. regular yearly checkups.
    f. increasing the intake of folic acid.
    g. learning more about cancer.
    h. consuming mustard.

B. Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the words from the following table to complete the sentences

Verb	Noun	Present Participle	Past Participle
defend	defense	defending	defended
inject	injection	injecting	injected
expose	exposure	exposing	exposed
react	reacting	reacting	reacted
manufacture	manufacture	manufacturing	manufactured

21. The most modern television cameras are ………………..in that country.
22. A weak body cannot ………………..itself against germs.
23. The nurse is ………………..pencil line into the patient.
24. One ………………..against germs is to keep things clean.
25. This medicine should be ………………..into the muscle.
26. Vaccination is an effective ………………..against some diseases.
27. The human body can ………………..itself against many diseases.
28. If we ………………..this material to the sunlight, it will lose its color.
29. How did the baby ………………..to penicillin? He showed a strong ………………..to the vaccination after two days. He had a high fever.
30. As his body was ………………..to sunlight, he got sun-burnt.

Applications of Language Studies

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Attitude Toward EFL Reading as Predicted by Self-Reported Self-Regulation Ability

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Abstract

Through academic self-regulation, learners use affective, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral feedback to adjust their strategies and behaviors to attain their goals. The present study utilized a correlational research design to explore how EFL intermediate learners' self-reported self-regulation ability would predict their attitude toward EFL reading. The participants were 91 Iranian EFL learners in some English language institutes. They were put in the intermediate classes at the beginning of their program on the basis of their scores on the Preliminary English Test (PET). They were assigned the L2 Reading Attitude Questionnaire and the Self-Regulated Foreign Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (SRFLLSQ). The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that the metacognitive factor played the most strongly predicted attitude toward EFL reading, followed by cognitive, meta-affective, and meta-sociocultural-interactive factors. The sociocultural-interactive factor, albeit still relevant, was the weakest predictor of attitude toward EFL reading. The findings underline the different aspects of attitude toward EFL reading and self-regulation, with implications for EFL reading teachers and curriculum designers.

Keywords: attitude toward EFL reading, cognitive, sociocultural-interactive, meta-affective, metacognitive, meta- and sociocultural-interactive self-regulation strategies

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1. Introduction

Reading is an important macro-skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners since it makes information accessible, improves language proficiency, and backs up academic success (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). In the same line, attitude is an influential factor that affects determination to read in the second language (L2) (Day & Bamford, 1998), and a positive attitude to EFL reading has a remarkable part to play in shaping reading engagement, motivation, comprehension, their proficiency in EFL, and success in acquiring language skills (Lee & Schallert, 2014; Yamashita, 2013), but developing it can be a challenge for learners. Moreover, attitude to reading is derived from different sources, for example, personal and educational experiences, and it is linked with affective responses to tasks and situations (McKenna, 2001, as cited in Grabe, 2009). Likewise, the cultural and social dimensions of reading, such as the role of teachers, peers, and the learning environment foster a positive attitude toward EFL reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). On the other hand, Crawford Camiciottoli (2001) contends that positive attitudes toward L2 reading may not engross L2 readers and that these attitudes only have a weak link with actual reading performance. In addition, attitudes toward reading are a multifaceted characteristic of motivation along with other aspects, including extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Mori, 2002; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Likewise, some researchers believe that further research is required to look into the relationship between attitudes toward reading processes (Kamhi-Stein, 2003), and how metacognitive strategies impact EFL learners' reading comprehension ability and attitudes toward reading (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). As academic *self-regulation* encompasses learning strategies including reading strategies (Chamot, 2014; Oxford, 2011, 2017), there has also been an interest in understanding learners' self-regulation strategies and their effect on L2/EFL learning outcomes (e.g., Daniel et al., 2016; Li et al, 2022; Kim & Linan-Thompson, 2013). Zimmerman (2000) defines academic self-regulation as the process by which learners can map out, keep track of, and assess their learning. There have been many studies on the interaction of self-regulation teaching on EFL reading ability (e.g., Costa-Ferreira & Veiga Simão, 2012; de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok, 2012; Finkbeiner et al., 2012; Mbato, 2013). However, there have been scarce empirical research findings, confirming the interplay between self-regulation of EFL reading and attitude toward it (e.g., Hemmati et al., 2017). While some studies have investigated other factors related to L2 reading, such as efficacy beliefs and metacognitive strategy use (Schoonen et al., 1998; Yau, 2009), more research is required to understand how self-regulation of EFL reading interacts with attitude toward EFL reading.

On the one hand, self-regulation helps learners to continue learning despite unfavorable situations (Chamot, 2014), and self-regulation training of EFL reading comprehension has proved to have a positive impact on EFL reading ability (e.g., Maftoon & Tasnimi, 2014; Morshedian et al., 2016). On the other hand, poor readers with negative experiences may develop negative attitudes (Woolley, 2011), and most reading attitude studies in EFL contexts focused on extensive reading and its effect on the reading attitude (e.g., Hayashi, 2011; Takase, 2007). Hence, it might be supposed that EFL readers with self-regulation ability can keep a positive attitude toward their reading tasks; albeit challenging. This fact led the researcher to probe into the association between self-regulation in intensive EFL reading inside the classroom and a positive attitude to reading.

Two key tools that are underrepresented in this exploration are the L2 Reading Attitude Questionnaire (Lee & Schallert, 2014) and the Self-Regulated Foreign Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (SRFLLSQ) (Habók & Magyar, 2018). The former offers an updated and comprehensive framework for evaluating learners' attitudes toward L2/FL reading and is a valuable tool for understanding learners' perceptions of their reading abilities and the challenges they face in reading L2/FL texts. Hemmati, et al. (2017), for example, used Yamashita's (2013) questionnaire of attitudes toward EFL reading in their research, which was devised and validated specifically for extensive reading. Their research also involved self-regulatory intervention (i.e., the effect of training in self-regulation of EFL reading upon attitude toward EFL reading). The latter includes sociocultural-interactive and meta-sociocultural-interactive factors such as social interaction, cultural background, and collaborative learning which have been recognized as influential in learning a language (Lantolf, 2000). They were missing in Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich et al., 1993) used by Morshedian et al. (2016) and Morshedian and Meshkat (2020) to gather self-report data from their participants to see how their self-regulation ability would impact their EFL lexical retrieval ability. The fact that SRFLLSQ (Habók & Magyar, 2018) is a newly developed tool and validated specifically for FL context necessitates a new investigation to know how it shows the predictive link between self-reported self-regulation ability and attitude toward EFL reading.

In other words, despite the individual contributions of these tools, there is no research using them on the predictive interaction between learners' self-reported self-regulated learning ability and their attitude toward L2 reading. Thus, this research tried to bridge this gap by delving into how EFL intermediate learners' self-regulation abilities, as assessed by the adapted-to-reading version of SRFLLSQ (Habók & Magyar, 2018) could predict their attitude toward L2 reading, as measured by the L2 Reading Attitude Questionnaire (Lee & Schallert, 2014). Accordingly, the research question of the study was:

How much does self-regulation in the case of Iranian EFL learners at the B1 level predict their attitude toward reading?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Affective Factors in L2 Reading

Alexander and Filler (1976, as cited in Yamashita, 2013) define reading attitude as feelings about reading that make the learner avoid or approach a reading task. Also, according to Mathewson (1994, as cited in Lee & Schallert, 2014), the reading attitude involves willingness to read and beliefs and feelings about reading. Similarly, McKenna et al. (2012) also define attitude toward reading as the learned inclination to react consistently favorably or unfavorably to reading. Yamashita (2007) identifies five factors in attitudes to both first language (L1) and L2 reading: anxiety, comfort, intellectual, linguistic, and practical value. Anxiety and comfort are related to the affective part, and the other factors to the cognitive part of reading attitude. Likewise, Day and Bamford (1998) developed a model for attitudes to L2 reading, with four elements contributing to it: attitudes toward L2 and L1 reading, earlier experiences in L2 reading, self-efficacy, and self-concept.

On the one hand, L2 reading attitudes are shaped by L2 readers' individual experiences (Yamashita, 2004, 2007, 2013). It has been proved empirically that extensive reading resulted in a positive attitude toward L2 reading. For instance, Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) concluded that extensive reading positively impacted EFL Saudi Arabian learners' reading attitudes and their attitudes toward class and learning. Liem (2005) also found that extensive reading by six Vietnamese computer science students resulted in better L2 reading attitudes, reading autonomy, and diverse strategy use. However, extensive reading does not always lead to improved attitudes. In a study by Robb and Susser (1989), extensive reading did not result in significantly better EFL reading attitudes. In addition, learner's attitudes to EFL reading may be related to the type of learners. Also, in Walker's (1997) study in the UK, general English students had better attitudes to the extensive reading program than the EAP ones. On the whole, affective factors such as self-confidence, anxiety, and motivation can impact learners' attitudes toward EFL reading (e.g., Ainley et al., 2002; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002).

On the other hand, a positive attitude toward reading is linked with persistent L2 reading (Mori, 2004), and a favorable attitude toward reading influences L2 learners' reading performance and achievement, influences the decision to read, and improves engagement in reading (Yamashita, 2004, 2007, 2013). In the same line, other researchers found out about the impact of affective determinants on EFL reading, the impact of attitude to L2 reading on determination to read in L2 (Day & Bamford, 1998), the effect of EFL learners' attitudes to reading on their reading comprehension capability and vocabulary learning (Ghaith & Bouzeineddine, 2003; Lee & Schallert, 2014; Rafi et al., 2021), the link of favorable L2 reading attitudes with higher levels of engagement, motivation, and willingness to put effort in reading tasks (Bernhardt, 2011), and the importance of emotions, beliefs, and self-efficacy in learning a language (Aragão, 2011; Papi, 2010). Last but not least, Kamhi-Stein (2003) looked into the association between the use of L2 and L1 reading strategies and the impact of attitude toward L1 and L2 reading behaviors among four college students who read Spanish and English as an L2. She found out that learners' attitudes toward reading and home language influence their behavior. On the other hand, negative attitudes can block L2 learners' progress and result in low self-efficacy and motivation, and bad reading performance (Mori, 2002).

2.2. Self-Regulation in Language Learning and Its Relationship With Attitude Toward L1/L2/EFL Reading

Self-regulation entails goal-setting, mapping out, keeping track of, and assessing the process of learning (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-regulated students perform learning tasks successfully, continue learning despite difficulties, and finally obtain better learning outcomes (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-regulated learners are generally thought to have attitudes and beliefs that make them engage in and continue learning activities (Wolters, 2003). According to Schunk (1991), self-efficacy, a main component of self-regulation, shows itself in students' attitudes, abilities, and background experience before they begin working and during the activity. Likewise, self-efficacy is believed to play a part in one's motivation for and attitude toward learning a language (Bandura, 1997, as cited in Swalander & Taube, 2007). In fact, self-efficacy not only influences attitude formation (McQuillan, 2013) but is influenced by language attitudes (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995, as cited in Koehler, 2007). In other words, self-efficacy affects the reader's attitude before and during a task (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). For instance, in a qualitative case study to examine self-efficacy beliefs and the utilization of SRL strategies in mastering English as an L2, Wang (2004) found that self-efficacy beliefs of elementary school students were linked with some factors including attitude to English, the English-speaking society, and its cultural and social context.

As mentioned above, research on self-regulation has underlined that self-regulated students have not only cognitive and metacognitive abilities but also the attitudes necessary to direct their learning (Borkowski et al., 1987; Dörnyei, 2005; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Victori & Lockhart, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). For example, researching the link between family requirements, SRL, reading attitude, and reading ability, Swalander and Taube (2007) found out that females performed better in reading expository and narrative texts, and had a more positive reading attitude and a better linguistic self-concept in comparison with males. James (2012) also taught students L1 reading strategies of making predictions and asking questions while reading as well as goal-setting as a self-regulated reading strategy. He found increased engagement and participation during reading groups and an improved attitude toward reading. Focusing on children's attitudes to and engagement in reading and writing at school, Perry et al. (2003) also examined differences between two Canadian first graders' home and school contexts in terms of how they could promote self-regulated learning of L1 reading and writing. They found that the classroom context could create opportunities to develop attitudes and actions linked with self-regulated learning. Elsewhere, Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) found out about the importance of various aspects of self-regulation in EFL reading to improve learners' attitudes toward reading. Interestingly, Turkyilmaz (2015), who delved into L1 reading and whose population was secondary school students, did not find any predictive link between self-reported self-regulation ability and attitude to L1 reading.

Some research has also explored how L2 reading attitudes and self-regulation might be related. Learners with self-regulation skills usually have a better attitude toward reading in L2 since they can manage their reading process and overcome its challenges (Mikami, 2016). Studies by Agustiani (2017) and Rafi et al. (2021) also discovered a significant correlation between students' reading attitude and their reading scores and achievement. Likewise, Macaro & Erler (2007) carried out a longitudinal self-regulation intervention research study of reading among young English students who were beginner learners of French as an L2. They found enhanced comprehension of simple and complex texts, a change in strategy utilization, and enhanced reading attitudes. In addition, Hemmati, et al. (2017) implemented a self-regulation model for EFL reading comprehension which resulted in an improved attitude toward EFL reading.

3. Method

This study used a predictive correlational research design to delve into how EFL intermediate learners' self-reported self-regulation ability in reading would predict their attitude toward EFL reading.

3.1. Participants

The participants were 91 female Iranian EFL learners in some English language institutes. They were aged between 18 and 38 and selected through convenience sampling and intact classes. The criterion for the selection of institutes was that they administer the Preliminary English Test (PET; Hashemi & Thomas, 1996) and then place learners at the intermediate level at the onset of their program. Therefore, the learners who had scores of 70-84, corresponding to the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CERF) were accepted in the intermediate groupings and were the participants of the study, irrespective of the years they had been learning English because their level of English proficiency at the time of study mattered.

3.2. Instruments

3.3.1. L2 Reading Attitude Questionnaire (Lee & Schallert, 2014)

It consists of 30 items and measures EFL learners' attitudes to reading in English including their motivation, interest, and enjoyment. Lee and Schallert (2014) validated this 5-point scale through this process: developing the questionnaire by adapting the L1 reading attitude questionnaire, administering it to a sample of adolescent Korean readers of English, and analyzing the data using factor analysis (see Appendix A).

Through this process, they identified five factors: conative attitude, cognitive attitude, anxiety, negative affect, and self-evaluation. Also, acceptable reliability coefficients were reported for the questionnaire's subscales, between .70 and .92. Moreover, the questionnaire showed convergent validity, as it positively correlated with L2 language achievement and proficiency, and L1 reading attitude. In this questionnaire, the cognitive attitude refers to L2 reading's linguistic and intellectual value (e.g., getting a good occupation later), the conative factors to the L2 reading behavior (e.g., reading websites in English), the negative-affect factors entail the negative emotions about L2 reading (e.g., difficulty concentrating when reading an English text), being anxious and feeling threat and unease (e.g., to feeling overwhelmed when seeing an English page), and self-assessment involves the conceptions of L2 reading ability (e.g., to be able to read an English text).

It has been used in some studies to assess the effect of instructional interventions on learners' EFL reading attitudes. For instance, Akbari et al. (2017) used this questionnaire to measure L2 and L1 reading attitudes among Iranian English learners. The results suggested that factors of L1 reading attitude correlated significantly with those of L2 reading attitude. This indicates that the questionnaire validly assesses EFL reading attitudes.

3.2.2. The Self-Regulated Foreign Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (SRFLLSQ) (Habók & Magyar, 2018)

Habók and Magyar (2018) reconsidered Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) in light of her newly improved Strategic Self-Regulation (S2R) Model (2011, 2017) and developed and validated SRFLLSQ empirically among lower secondary EFL students. This 34-item and 5-point scale questionnaire includes metacognitive, cognitive, sociocultural-interactive, meta-sociocultural-interactive, and meta-affective factors. It was adapted to EFL reading for the purpose of the study; for example, "I try to find out how to be a better learner of English," changed to "I try to find out how to be a better reader of English." To ensure that the translated questionnaire is readable, it was also piloted on 10 intermediate EFL students and had a reliability index of .75 (see Appendix B).

3.3 Data Collection

L2 Reading Attitude Questionnaire (Lee & Schallert, 2014) and SRFLLSQ (Habók & Magyar, 2018) were administered to the participants in two different sessions. Both of these measures had been translated to Persian and back-translated into English by a second translator to prevent any false interpretation by participants due to their deficient language ability. Before administering both questionnaires, necessary arrangements were made with the managers of institutes, and participants took part in the study willingly.

4. Results

To calculate the reliability of subscales in SRFLLSQ (Habók & Magyar, 2018), Cronbach's alpha was used. The predictive or criterion variables, meta-sociocultural-interactive, cognitive, sociocultural-interactive, metacognitive, and meta-affective scales, had acceptable reliability indexes of .80, .81, .84, .78, and .75 respectively. While controlling for other variables, one can use multiple regression analysis to see if either of the above-mentioned factors would significantly predict participants' attitudes toward EFL reading. For a regression model, five assumptions of homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, singularity, sample size, and linearity should be examined (Pallant, 2005).

There is a formula to calculate the sample size requirements study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, as cited in Pallant, 2005), and based on it, the number of independent variables was also considered: N > 50 + 8m (where m equals the number of independent variables). In this study, the calculation yielded 91 > 50 + 8*5 = 90, satisfying the requirement. Afterward, the data was tested for the intercorrelations and multicollinearity among the variables. As shown in Table 1, all predictors had acceptable variance inflation factors (VIFs) (4.10 ~ 4.20 ~ 4.15 ~ 4.10 ~ 4.05 < 10). These VIF values indicate that it is not necessary to delete any variable from the regression model for multicollinearity checking (Pallant, 2005). Likewise, the tolerance values for sociocultural-interactive, meta-sociocultural-interactive, cognitive, metacognitive, and meta-affective scales were .40, .45, .40, .45, and .50, respectively, all of which were greater than .1, rejecting the possibility of multicollinearity.

Table 1

Coefficients for the Regression Equation (Model) and Collinearity Statistics

	Unstandardized coefficient		**standardized coefficient**	**t**	**Sig.**	**95.0% confidence interval for B**		**correlations**			**Collinearity statistics**	
Model	B	Std Error	Beta			Lower bound	Upper bound	Zero-order	partial	part	tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.35	0.15	0.30	0.30	0.01	0.10	0.40					
Metacognitive	0.45	0.12	0.40	0.40	<0.01	-0.25	-0.05	.888	.887	.455	0.45	4.10
Cognitive	0.30	0.10	0.30	0.30	0.03	0.02	0.22	.749	-.242	-.120	0.40	4.20
Meta-affective	0.25	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.01	0.00	0.16	.367	-.375	-.312	0.50	4.15
Meta-sociocultural-interactive	0.20	0.08	0.20	0.20	0.01	0.00	0.36	.555	.560	.521	0.45	4.10
Sociocultural-interactive	0.15	0.08	0.15	0.15	0.05	0.02	0.26	.510	-.114	.084	0.40	4.05

a. Dependent variable: attitude

Table 2

Correlation Between Attitude Toward EFL Reading and Metacognitive, Meta-Affective, Sociocultural-Interactive, Cognitive, and Meta-Sociocultural-Interactive Scales

	Attitude toward EFL Reading	Metacognitive	Meta-affective	Sociocultural-interactive	Meta-sociocultural-interactive
Attitude toward EFL Reading	-				
Cognitive	0.44**	-			
Metacognitive	0.49**	0.54**	-		
Meta-affective	0.34**	0.39**	0.54**		
Meta-sociocultural-interactive	0.24**	0.29**	0.39**	0.54**	-
Sociocultural-interactive	0.19*	0.24**	0.34**	0.44**	0.54**

The correlation between the dependent variable and independent ones (i.e., $r < .7$) also showed there was no multicollinearity. As shown in Table 2, all of the scales, metacognitive, cognitive, sociocultural-interactive, meta-affective, and meta-sociocultural-interactive, correlated with attitude toward EFL reading, $r(91) = .49, .44, .19, .34$, and $.24$, respectively, $p < .01$.

Figure 1 shows the residuals of the regression standardized were normal; points were nearly aligned in a straight line. Likewise, Figure 2 also depicts the scatterplot of standardized residuals of independent and dependent variables, i.e., residuals were distributed almost in a rectangular shape, and most scores fell in the middle. Thus, assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were all supported (Pallant, 2005).

As depicted in Table 3 and Table 4, it was also discovered that cognitive ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.7$; $\beta = 0.30$, $p = 0.01$), metacognitive ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.8$; $\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$), meta-affective ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.6$; $\beta = 0.30$, $p = 0.03$), meta-sociocultural-interactive ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.7$; $\beta = 0.20$, $p = 0.01$), and sociocultural-interactive ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 0.5$; $\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.05$) collectively predicted 40% of the variance of participants' attitude toward EFL reading ($M = 20$, $SD = 3$);($F(6, 85) = 10.25$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.4$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$).

Figure 1

The Normality of the Regression Standardized Residuals

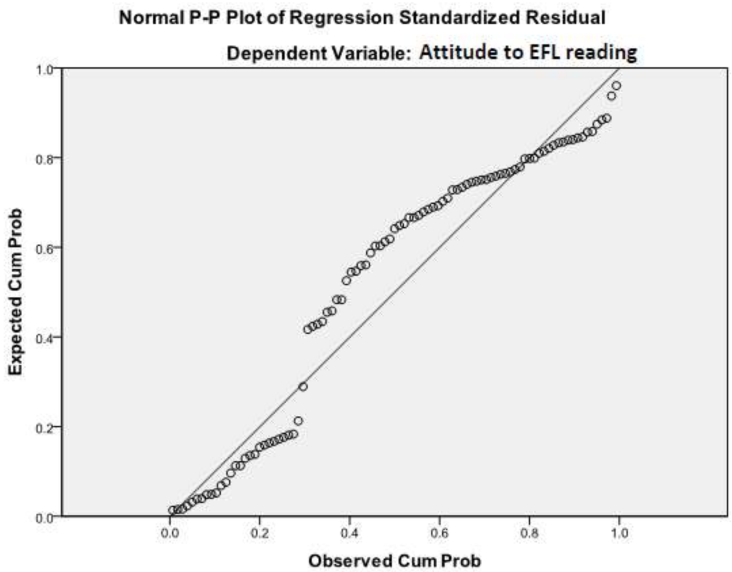

Figure 2

Scatterplot of the Standardized Residuals

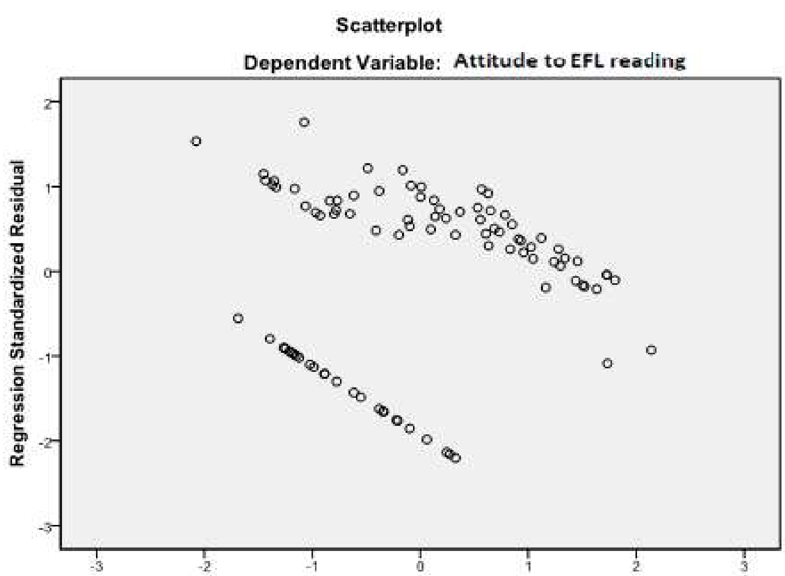

Table 3

ANOVA for Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Regulation Predicting Attitude Toward Reading

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
1	Regression	16395.768	2	8197.884	10.25	.005
	Residual	24042.060	88	267.134		
	Total	40437.828	90			

a. Predictors: (Constant), cognitive, metacognitive, meta-sociocultural-interactive, meta-affective, sociocultural-interactive,

b. Dependent Variable: attitude

Table 4

Summary of the Standard Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Cognitive	0.35	0.15	0.30	2.50	0.01
Metacognitive	0.45	0.12	0.40	3.20	<0.01
Meta-affective	0.30	0.10	0.30	3.00	0.03
Meta-sociocultural-interactive	0.20	0.08	0.20	2.50	0.01
Sociocultural-interactive	0.15	0.08	0.15	1.88	0.05
Constant	2.50	0.30	-	8.00	<0.001

Note: $R^2 = 0.4$ & adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$

In other words, metacognitive, meta-affective, cognitive, meta-sociocultural-interactive, and sociocultural-interactive strategies were positively correlated with attitudes toward EFL reading, increasing by 0.40, 0.30, 0.30, 0.20, and 0.15 for every point in the attitude toward EFL reading, respectively. The metacognitive variable predicted 16% of the variance in the attitude toward EFL reading. Cognitive strategies predicted 9% of the variance in the attitude toward EFL reading. The meta-affective variable also predicted 9% of the variance in the attitude toward EFL reading. Sociocultural-interactive strategies explained 2.25% of the variance in the attitude toward EFL reading. Meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies explained 4% of the variance in the EFL reading attitude.

The effect of cognitive, sociocultural-interactive, metacognitive, meta-affective, and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies was significant, t (85) = 2.50, p = 0.01, t (85) = 1.88,

$p = 0.05$, $t(85) = 3.20$, $p < 0.01$, $t(85) = 3.00$, $p = 0.03$, and $t(85) = 2.50$, $p = 0.01$, respectively. The size of SE B also shows that the values were clustered around the regression line, so it cannot be concluded that the significance was less probable. Overall, the results suggested that the metacognitive factor most strongly predicted attitude toward EFL reading, followed by cognitive, meta-sociocultural-interactive, and meta-affective factors. The sociocultural-interactive factor, albeit still relevant, was the weakest predictor of attitude toward EFL reading.

5. Discussion

It has been found that all self-regulation components of SRFLLSQ (Habók & Magyar, 2018) emerged as predicting L2 reading attitudes. In other words, the metacognitive factor most strongly predicted attitude toward EFL reading, followed by cognitive, meta-sociocultural-interactive, and meta-affective factors. The sociocultural-interactive factor, albeit still relevant, was the weakest predictor of attitude toward EFL reading. The findings underscore the significance of self-regulation in EFL learners' attitudes toward L2 reading and the significant predictive association between intermediate learners' self-regulation strategies and their EFL reading attitude. This implies that learners who are better at regulating their emotions while learning are more likely to have a favorable attitude toward EFL reading.

Given that self-efficacy is an important element of self-regulation ability (Zimmerman, 2000), the findings are generally in line with Schunk's (1991) idea that self-efficacy shows itself in students' attitudes before and during the task. Besides, given the significant role of EFL reading attitudes (e.g., Mori, 2004; Yamashita, 2013), the findings can act as an impetus for learners and teachers to employ self-regulatory processes to instill a positive EFL reading attitude in learners.

In addition, the results are congruent with McKenna's (2001, as cited in Grabe, 2009) assertion that attitude to reading is derived from personal and educational experiences and Woolley's (2011) statement that poor readers with negative experiences may develop negative attitudes. In other words, considering the fact that training EFL learners in self-regulation of EFL reading has proved to have a positive effect on EFL reading capability (e.g., Maftoon & Tasnimi, 2014; Morshedian et al., 2016), it can be said that learners who reported self-regulatory strategies more frequently had positive EFL reading experiences. This empirically proved Day and Bamford's (1998) assertion that positive or negative experiences with reading in L2/EFL contribute to the formation of attitudes to EFL/L2 reading.

On the one hand, attitude to reading is linked with affective responses to situations and tasks (McKenna, 2001, as cited in Grabe, 2009). On the other hand, SRL entails self-regulation of affect (Pintrich et al., 1993). Thus, it can be concluded that the study proved this link between self-regulation and positive L2/EFL reading attitude which, according to Bernhardt (2011), is included in the nonlinguistic factors explaining L2/EFL reading along with linguistic knowledge.

These findings extend the results that self-regulation of L1 reading comprehension can lead to enhanced positive attitudes to reading (e.g., James, 2012; Swalander & Taube, 2007) in EFL reading, as well. In addition, the obtained results echo the contentions that self-regulation turns learners into autonomous ones (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997), and as a result, they are in control of their learning which leads to a more positive attitude to reading (Bandura 1993, as cited in Woolley, 2011). However, the obtained results are not in agreement with those achieved by Turkyilmaz (2015), who found that self-regulation did not significantly predict L1 reading attitude. This discrepancy can be attributed to the facts that Turkyilmaz's (2015) research delved into L1 reading, his population was secondary school students, and he used different instruments, i.e., Attitude Scale of Reading Attitude developed by Türkyılmaz and Aydemir (2014, as cited in Turkyilmaz, 2015) and Self- Regulation Scale for Adolescents by Moilanen (2007, as cited in Turkyilmaz, 2015).

The strong association between meta-affective, metacognitive, and cognitive factors to EFL reading highlights the importance of students' ability to utilize effective reading strategies and the significance of their emotions and beliefs about their cognitive abilities. This result aligns with other research results about the importance of metacognitive awareness in learning a language (e.g., Borkowski et al., 1987; Victori & Lockhart, 1995). Moreover, the results support Dörnyei's (2005) assertion that cognitive abilities affect learners' self-perceptions and motivation. This is also consistent with findings of earlier research about the weight of cognitive processes, e.g., comprehension and interpretation, in learners' proficiency and attitude (Zimmerman, 2000). To sum up, explicit instruction and targeted interventions are needed to enhance learners' cognitive and metacognitive skills which may lead to enhanced attitude and then better reading performance.

The finding that the meta-affective factor also plays the same role as the cognitive one in predicting attitude toward EFL reading may suggest that emotions about reading, as well as awareness of these emotions (meta-affect), can impact attitude toward EFL reading. This also supports the literature emphasizing the role of affective determinants in learning a language (Pekrun, 2006), and parallels the research highlighting the importance of emotions, beliefs, and self-efficacy in learning a language (Aragão, 2011; Papi, 2010). On the whole, EFL learners' understanding of their reading competence and their emotional responses to EFL reading can affect their attitude toward it. After all, affective determinants such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence can impact learners' attitudes toward EFL reading (e.g., Ainley et al., 2002; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002).

While meta-sociocultural-interactive and sociocultural-interactive factors emerged as weaker predictors compared to meta-affective, cognitive, and metacognitive ones, the former, including emotional experiences and self-perceived ability, also play a role in shaping attitudes toward EFL reading, and their roles should not be overlooked. These factors include elements such as social interaction, cultural background, and collaborative learning, which have been recognized as influential in learning a language (Lantolf, 2000). However, despite what Yamashita (2004) asserted about the context-bound research on reading attitudes because reading attitudes are formed socially, the weaker prediction observed may show that these factors have a more indirect part in shaping attitudes toward EFL reading, possibly by influencing meta-affective, metacognitive, and cognitive processes.

Moreover, the role of meta-sociocultural-interactive and meta-affective factors in predicting EFL learners' reading attitudes highlights the multi-faceted nature of self-regulation, which is in line with Al-Homoud and Schmitt's (2009) findings about the importance of various aspects of self-regulation in the EFL reading to improve learners' attitudes toward reading. The finding that the sociocultural-interactive factor, including social and cultural aspects of learning, showed a relatively minor impact on attitude toward EFL reading might result from the participants' cultural homogeneity or limited variability in cultural and social experiences, reducing the influence of these elements on their attitude. This result necessitates addressing the cultural and social dimensions of reading, such as the role of teachers, peers, and the learning environment in fostering a positive attitude toward EFL reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2013).

6. Conclusion

Overall, the results provided insights into the processes impacting attitudes toward EFL reading and have implications for EFL reading teachers and curriculum designers. In other words, the findings underlined the necessity of enhancing self-regulation skills and cultivating a positive attitude toward L2 reading in EFL contexts. EFL reading teachers should provide targeted support to learners with negative attitudes and create a positive learning environment that prompts learners to self-regulate effectively, particularly in cognitive, metacognitive, and social reading strategies; for example, scanning, self-monitoring, and help-seeking.

When designing reading activities and interventions, EFL reading curriculum developers should not only consider developing cognitive and metacognitive skills but also address the sociocultural-interactive and meta-affective aspects of reading. This holistic approach may cultivate positive attitudes toward EFL reading, leading to higher reading proficiency and overall learning of a language. In addition, EFL educators should consider the sociocultural context where learners are reading English and create a supportive and inclusive environment that values and acknowledges various EFL reading experiences and backgrounds.

It should be noted that this research had some limitations. First, the research on reading attitude is context-bound because reading attitudes are formed socially (Yamashita, 2004), so a questionnaire of attitude to EFL reading as devised considering the Iranian social context should have been utilized but was non-existent. This reminds the researcher of the necessity of a research study devising and validating such a questionnaire. Second, as girls had more favorable attitudes to L1 reading as a result of self-regulation ability (e.g., Swalander & Taube, 2007), and generally, females had more favorable attitudes to EFL reading (e.g., Crawford Camiciottoli, 2001; Yamashita, 2004), future research is necessary to scrutinize the possible predictive link between self-regulation ability and both male and female learners' attitude to

EFL reading. The next limitation was that the data was self-reported, which may have been affected by social desirability or participants' biases.

Future longitudinal or experimental studies could examine the causal interaction between self-regulatory strategies and attitudes toward EFL reading, using the instruments of the study or interview and think-aloud protocols. Qualitative research methods could reveal learners' perceptions and experiences of self-regulation and attitudes toward EFL reading. In addition, researchers could investigate the role of other factors, including learners' motivation, self-efficacy, language proficiency, and different educational settings, in forming a link between attitudes toward EFL reading and self-regulation. Another extension of the study is to probe into how SRFLLSQ (Habók & Magyar, 2018) and EFL reading comprehension are related, which could provide insights into how self-regulation strategies are related to learners' EFL reading comprehension.

The small role of sociocultural-interactive in predicting attitudes toward EFL reading does not indicate that sociocultural and interactional factors are unimportant; rather, cultural and social considerations could be also considered in research design and data analysis to generalize results across different cultural contexts. In other words, further research can examine the interplay of these factors in various populations, considering the influence of social and cultural experiences and probable cross-cultural differences on learners' attitudes toward EFL reading.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Self-Regulated Foreign Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (SRFLLSQ) (Habók & Magyar, 2018): Adapted to Reading

When I read in English,

Metacognitive

I think of the relationships between what I already know read and new things I learn read in English.

I first skim an English passage, then go back and read carefully.

I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.

I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.

I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study read English.

I pay attention when someone is speaking i am reading English.

I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

Cognitive

While reading English, I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.

After reading an English text, I use the English words I know have learned in different ways.

While reading English, I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.

While reading English, I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.

While reading English, I try to find patterns (grammar) in English.

While reading English, I try not to translate word for word.

Meta-affective

I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using reading English.

I encourage myself as I learn read English so that I can learn read what I would like.

I read in English as a leisure-time activity.

I organize my English language learning reading so that I always enjoy doing it.

I plan my English language learning reading so that I can perform better.

I have more success learning reading English when I feel like doing it.

I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in reading English.

I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using reading English.

Meta-sociocultural-interactive

I try to learn read about English-language cultures and/or other cultures through English.

I look for people I can talk to in English about my reading activities in English.

I look at English-language TV shows, movies (with English subtitles) or websites to get to know the cultures of English native speakers and/or other cultures through English.

I choose leisure reading activities where I encounter English-language cultures and/or other cultures through English as well.

I plan what I want to find out about the cultures of English speakers and/or other cultures through reading English.

I practice reading English with my peers.

I look for similarities and differences between my own culture and the cultures of English native speakers and/or other cultures through reading English.

Getting to know English-language cultures helps me to learn read the language.

Sociocultural-interactive

I start conversations reading in English.

I make up the meaning of new words in English texts if I do not know the right meaning ones.

When I speak with highly proficient speakers of English, I think it is important to get acquainted with their culture of reading in their native language.

I encourage myself to speak read English even when I feel afraid of making a mistake.

Appendix B

L2 reading attitude questionnaires (Lee & Schallert, 2014)

Cognitive attitude:

I can acquire English vocabulary if I read English.

Reading English is useful to get a good job in the future.

I can acquire broad knowledge if I read English.

I can develop my English reading ability if I read English.

I can develop my English writing ability if I read English.

I can become more knowledgeable if I read English.

Reading English is useful to get a good grade in class.

I can improve my sensitivity to the English language if I read English.

Negative affect

If I do not understand content in reading, I skip the part.

Reading English is troublesome

Reading English is dull.

I don't mind even if I cannot understand the book content entirely.

I feel tired if I read English.

I do not want to read in English even if the content is interesting.

When I read in English, I find it difficult to concentrate.

Conative attitude

If someone tells me that he or she likes an English book very much, I am going to read it too.

I get to know different values if I read English.

I want to avoid reading in English as much as possible.

During my vacation I want to read at least one English book.

I want to read many English books in the future.

I try to find time for reading in English.

I sometimes visit English websites and read them on the Internet.

I go to a library to borrow or read English books.

I like to read English books in my spare time.

Anxiety

I sometimes feel anxious that I may not understand what I read.

I feel anxious if I don't know all the words in reading passages.

I feel overwhelmed whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.

Self-assessment

I am good at reading in English.

My grades for English reading tests at middle school are very good.

I feel confident when I am reading in English.

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Genre Analysis of Enquiry Business Emails in English as an International Language

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Abstract

This study examined the generic and linguistic features of enquiry-based business emails exchanged between an Iranian shipping company and its international business partners, using English as a lingua franca (ELF). The data for this study comprised 300 emails exchanged between the Iranian company and its partners from Japan, South Korea, and China. Drawing on a combination of Santos's (2002) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad's (2013) models of genre analysis, the research investigated the structural and linguistic characteristics of these emails. The findings revealed the presence of four primary moves: establishing the negotiation chain, providing information, requesting action, and concluding the email. Notably, several modifications to the generic structure were identified, reflecting significant flexibility in move ordering. This adaptability underscores the importance of practicality and efficiency in international business communication. Additionally, the study highlights the frequent use of imperative structures, unconventional abbreviations, and acronyms, which are influenced by cultural and contextual factors. These findings enhance our understanding of how ELF functions in professional settings and provide valuable insights for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners and instructors.

Keywords: business communication, enquiry emails, English as a lingua franca, genre analysis

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1. Introduction

Business communication was traditionally conducted through letters and other modes, such as fax, until the emergence of a new genre: electronic mail, or email. The advent of email can be attributed to the growing demands of international business and rapid technological advancements. Characterized by its convenience, speed, and flexibility —unconstrained by time or place— email has become the predominant medium of business communication worldwide. This significance and widespread adoption have, in turn, prompted extensive research into the genre, employing various analytical approaches (Abbasian & Tahririan, 2008; Sarbandi et al., 2017).

Genre analysis, one of the most widely used models in email studies, has been instrumental in identifying both the generic and lexico-grammatical features of emails across various contexts, including academic, commercial, and others (Farangi & Rashidi, 2022). According to Swales (1990), a genre is defined as a set of communicative events that share a common communicative purpose. This shared purpose influences the schematic structure, content, and style of the communication. At the macro-level, genres are realized through a series of moves and steps. A move represents a structural unit that fulfills a specific communicative intention and contributes to the writer's overall purpose, while steps are smaller units or strategies within a move that help achieve this intention (Swales, 1990). Consequently, since its introduction, the concepts of moves and steps have become key analytical tools in research on written communication. It is worth noting that the interest in genre analysis has largely been driven by pedagogical considerations. Specifically, genre studies are seen as beneficial for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students and teachers, as they provide insights into formal and content schemata. This pre-knowledge of generic conventions and the linguistic resources used to realize them can significantly facilitate learning and improve writing proficiency (Bhatia, 1993; Farangi et al., 2024).

Although email has become the dominant medium in business correspondence, it remains a relatively new genre compared to traditional forms such as letters and faxes (Farangi & Zabbah, 2023). Consequently, fewer studies have explored its generic features, and those that exist often face one or more of the following limitations:

a) Limited access to authentic data due to the tendency of companies in today's competitive business environment to safeguard their information and market position (e.g., Jalilifar & Beitsayyah, 2011; Mehrpour & Mehrzad, 2013).

b) Data sets typically comprising emails exchanged between only two groups, often a native and non-native speaker pair.

c) Most critically, these studies predominantly adopt an etic perspective, analyzing the phenomenon from an external viewpoint rather than considering the insider perspective.

Email communication is a vital tool in professional settings (Ho, 2018; Millot, 2017). A 2013 Microsoft survey of 9,908 employees across 32 countries found that over 93% relied on email as their primary workplace communication method. Emails are favored for their speed, ability to reach multiple recipients globally, and their role as a communication record. In international business, where English is the common language, emails are used by both native and non-native speakers (Farangi & Nejadghanbar, 2024). In global business contexts, emails serve specific purposes, such as requesting, ordering, complaining, or informing. Requests are particularly common and are often communicated through emails (Ho, 2018). These emails reflect the sender’s expectation of the recipient’s action, but the act of requesting can risk offending counterparts or threatening their face. The style of request emails, including directness or politeness, is shaped by cultural and contextual factors (Warren, 2016), influencing how messages are interpreted.

Despite the fact that research on business English emails has grown, key questions remain unresolved, such as the types of moves in request emails, how move sequences or lengths correlate with specific lexical and syntactic features, and the pragmatic strategies essential in modern workplace communication. As language evolves rapidly, business emails are becoming increasingly complex in international settings (Gimenez, 2006). This complexity highlights the need for both L1 and L2 professionals to grasp diverse pragmatic features of business emails in English as a lingua franca context (Millot, 2017). This study addresses a research gap by examining business emails exchanged between an Iranian company and several international firms. Workplace communication, especially business emails, often follows prototypical patterns shaped by social contexts. Factors like power dynamics and culture can influence the form and content of these texts (Warren, 2016). If professionals fail to account for cultural and contextual variables when writing English request emails, misunderstandings may arise, potentially harming business relationships (Farangi & Khojastemehr, 2024).

2. Literature Review

Several genre analysis studies have been conducted using models proposed by Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993), and Santos (2002) to explore the generic features of business correspondence. For instance, Abbasian and Tahririan (2008) analyzed emails exchanged between EFL teachers and biology professionals for the purpose of obtaining and providing information, employing Santos's (2002) model of Business Letters of Negotiation. Their findings revealed multiple irregularities in parallel moves, strategies, and formal linguistic features, which they attributed to cross-disciplinary variations and the prevalence of intertextuality.

In an interdisciplinary study, Hayati et al. (2011) examined request emails written by postgraduate students in EFL and physics, following Swales's (1990) model. At the macro-level of move structure, similarities were observed between the two corpora; however, differences emerged at the micro-structural level. The researchers suggested that these discrepancies were influenced by the writers' exposure to previously learned texts. Similarly, Jalilifar and Beitsayyah (2011) conducted a comparative analysis of 200 Persian and English business letters using Santos's (2002) model. They found that both corpora generally adhered to the moves identified by Santos (2002), with only minor differences in sub-steps. However, significant distinctions were noted at the lexico-grammatical level, particularly in the use of structures such as passive voice, personal pronouns, and politeness strategies. These differences were attributed to sociocultural factors.

Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013) compared English business emails written by Iranian and native English speakers, also based on Santos's (2002) model. At the macro-level, both groups employed similar generic structures to achieve their communicative goals of requesting and providing information. At the micro-level (lexico-grammatical level), however, notable differences were identified, which the authors attributed to the distinct socio-cultural backgrounds of the two groups. On the other hand, Asztalos (2014) investigated the move structure of emails written by first-year commerce-marketing students at Budapest Business

School, utilizing Zsubrinszky's (2009) Email Genre Model. She concluded that Zsubrinszky's model could be applied to describe the students' confirmation emails with slight modifications. However, the study's small dataset may limit its generalizability.

Qasim et al. (2015) examined 100 business emails written in English by Pakistani employees, applying Bhatia's (1993) model for sales letters. While their analysis of generic features largely confirmed Bhatia's model, modifications were made to Move Four due to observed differences in its realization. Additionally, the lexico-grammatical analysis revealed frequent use of words like "*please*" and "*kindly*," reflecting an emphasis on warmth and affability to address partners' negative face. Warren (2016) examined how intertextuality enhances coherence in business emails by analyzing the use of recurring words and phrases. The study used a corpus of email exchanges from two Hong Kong professionals, identifying key terms with corpus linguistics tools and analyzing their context to determine if they signaled intertextuality and its directionality. Findings indicated that these terms are linked to intertextual references. The study also highlighted how power dynamics between writers and readers influence language choices, providing implications for ESP education.

In addition, Ho (2018) investigated how professionals employ metadiscourse to persuade through workplace emails. Using the interpersonal model of metadiscourse, the study analyzed 659 request emails from Hong Kong professional settings. It identified and compared the types and frequency of metadiscourse categories in emails with those in non-computer-mediated persuasive communication. Findings indicated that (1) emails provide a convenient platform for persuading colleagues by appealing to logic, credibility, and emotions; (2) persuasive strategies in emails differ from other communication channels in their use of metadiscourse; and (3) specific persuasive strategies may be preferred in different sections of workplace request emails. Millot (2017) investigated the interpersonal functions of language in English as a Business Lingua Franca. The study analyzed 400 emails exchanged by 14 French professionals using English for internal and external communication. After examining the concept of positioning in professional discourse, the research explored the hypothesis that English users adopt not only an L2 voice but also professional and corporate voices. These voices reflect how professionals assess situations based on their field of work and the strategic decisions of their companies. The findings, derived from quantitative and qualitative analysis, focused on linguistic features that either "include" or "exclude" the voices of other participants.

Finally, Park et al. (2021) compared request emails written by Korean (L2) and American (L1) professionals in workplace settings. Using an online survey, 60 emails (30 from each group) were collected and analyzed with NVivo, Lexical Complexity Analyzer, and L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer. The study focused on move frequency, sequence, length, and related lexical and syntactic features. Findings revealed that L1 writers often included supportive moves like compliments or compensation offers, while L2 writers preferred concise, direct requests. The research offered insights into intercultural communication in business English, with implications for L2 business writing and ESP.

3. Method

3.1. Data Selection

The data for this study comprised 300 emails exchanged between an Iranian shipping company and its international business partners from Japan, South Korea, and China over the period of 2011 to 2015. These emails were initially categorized based on their communicative purposes, resulting in the selection of 100 enquiry emails for detailed analysis. These emails were chosen because they specifically addressed the purposes of providing and requesting information or action. The researcher, having worked as an employee of the Iranian shipping company, was granted access to these authentic emails for research purposes. Formal consent was obtained from the company to utilize these documents as research data, ensuring compliance with ethical and legal standards. To ensure confidentiality, all names, email addresses, and identifying details were replaced with fictitious information.

3.2. Analytical Framework

The analysis employed a combination of Santos's (2002) Business Letters of Negotiation model and Mehrpour and Mehrzad's (2011) adapted framework. This hybrid model was chosen to capture both the structural moves and linguistic features unique to enquiry emails. The study utilized MAXQDA software (version 10) for data coding, enabling systematic categorization of moves and steps within the emails. The coding process began with the frameworks of Santos

(2002) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2011) and was iteratively refined as additional steps emerged from the data.

3.3. Procedure

Each email was meticulously analyzed to identify its structural components—referred to as "moves" and "steps"—which aligned with the communicative purposes defined in the analytical framework. Moves such as establishing the negotiation chain, providing information, requesting action or information, and ending were examined for their frequency and sequential flexibility. Lexico-grammatical features, including sentence structures, politeness strategies, and abbreviations, were also explored to understand how linguistic choices facilitated effective communication in a multilingual, multicultural business context. The study further categorized emails into three types: those providing information, those requesting information or action, and those combining both functions. The frequencies of these types were calculated, and illustrative examples from the corpus were provided. Special attention was given to unique features such as the use of acronyms and informal abbreviations, which reflected the practical constraints of the business environment.

3.4. Reliability and Validation

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, two independent raters coded the data, achieving an interrater agreement of 92%. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and reference to established coding guidelines. The iterative nature of the analysis ensured that the framework was thoroughly tested and appropriately adapted to the data. By addressing both macro-level schematic structures and micro-level linguistic realizations, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of enquiry business emails in the context of English as a lingua franca.

4. Results

4.1. Types of Emails

After analyzing the data, the following types of emails were found, each of which is illustrated by an example, and their frequency in the data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency of the Emails

Types of emails	Frequency	Percentage
Information providing	40	40%
Request emails	34	34%
Information and Request	26	26%
Total	100	100%

1) Information providing emails: The emails in this category can further be divided into two subtypes: a) Those which often provide a response to an earlier request email for information and are usually followed by further communication (Example 1); b) Those which often are more formal intended to give prior notice/information to the recipients without requiring a reply from them which will be elaborated on later under the section about Move 1: Establishing the negotiation chain. For now, Example 2 suffices to illustrate the point.

Example 1:

Good Day,
With ref. to your email requiring about the vessels berthing, please be advised that Pilot has boarded the vessel at about 0600 Hrs LT today (01/08/2011) in order to direct her to the Jetty No.2 for berthing.
Best Regards
Iran Sea Company
Mehdi Tabrizi
Branch Manager

Example 2:

Dear Mr. Naderi,
Please note, the above vessel has arrived/anchored at Pilot station on July 3rd, 2012 at 1600 LT and is ready in all respect to discharge her cargo.
However, as per the owners' instruction, due to unpaid freight, vessel will not proceed to berth till further instruction.
Best Regards,
Iran Sea Company

As Agent

2) Request emails (information/action/favor): These are used to enquire about information or ask for action, favor.

a) Requesting information:

Example 3:

Dear Agent,
Kindly advise how much time it's take for the port authorities to issue the New document.
Best regards
Jack Shark
Temporary operation superintendent,
Union Management Services (Ltd)
TEL: **********
MOB: *********

B) Requesting action/favor:

Example 4:

Dear Captain,
With reference to below, please provide us with the copy of passport & CDC of below mentioned crew in order to prepare required letters/permissions in advance.
Your prompt reply is highly appreciated.
Best Regards,
M. Hamidi
Operations Team
Iran Sea Company

3) Emails that both provide and request information/favor and action:

Example 5:

Dear Mr. Williams,
Please note that your visa has been issued by the immigration office.
Thus, provide us with your travel schedule to arrange for your stay here.
Best
A. Rezaee

Iran Sea Company
Azadi street, Tehran, Iran
Phone: *********

Example 6:

Dear Sir,
Pls confirm receipt pre-arrival info.
Fyi, Vessel discharging the cargo at Jebel Ali, next port Abu Dhabi ETA Iran 22.06.2011
Yours Faithfully,
Capt. Edward
Master of MT "Harmony"
INM Tel: ***** (Master)

4.2. Generic structure

The data analysis revealed that the following four moves introduced by Santos (2002) were also applicable here:

Move 1: Establishing the negotiation chain

Move 2: Providing Information

Move 3: Requesting (information/action/favor)

Move 4: Ending

4.2.1. Move 1: Establishing the Negotiation Chain

This move comes at the beginning of an email and sets the scene of the communicative act by providing information about the sender, receiver, date, reference, subject, and also greeting the addressee (Santos, 2002). Thus, more or less following Mehrpour and Mehrzad's (2013) model, this starting move consists of three steps, each having its own sub-steps. The first one has been called 'setting the scene' rather than 'defining participants' used by Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013), since in addition to participants, it includes information about other categories such as date, subject, hence the title 'setting the scene' appears more inclusive than defining participants.

(i) Setting the scene

(a) Sender line

(b) Date line

(c) Recipient line

(d) CC line

(e) Subject line

It is worth mentioning that today most email applications like *Outlook* has a built-in feature which provides blank spaces for sender (from), date (sent), receiver (to), subject and CC (Carbon Copy) to be filled by the writer. Thus, these sub-steps usually do not appear in the email text but at the above in the interface of the software. Therefore, most of the emails examined in the present study started with the addressing and greeting sub-step.

Example 7:

Good day
Thank you for the below message. All well noted.
Please instruct master to keep us posted with vessel's movements including ETA BNK on a regular basis.
Best Regards,
M. Fazeli,

However, when an email is replied to or forwarded to others, the categories appear in the above section of the email text to inform the new recipients of the forwarded email of the original sender, date, recipient, etc. Look at the following example which is the same message in the example above when forwarded to a new recipient.

Example 8:

From: Sea Star/Ops (11)
Sent: Monday, October 31, 2011 2:00 PM
To: ops1@marine.net
Cc: busheher@bay.net; marine@reed.net;
Subject: RE: Bw - Arrival Information
Good day,
Thank you for the below message. All well noted.
Please instruct master to keep us posted with vessel's movements including ETA BIK on a regular basis.

Best Regards,
M. Fazeli,

Furthermore, in the data, within the information providing category, a special type of email was found, which is highly formal and bears all the steps of setting the scene mentioned above. In other words, this type of email is very similar to traditional business letters. The shipping agency companies like the one from which our data was obtained have a kind of coordinating role among many parties, such as ship owners, charters or sub-owners, captains, port authorities, and the terminal. Hence, it is very important for any shipping agency to provide and transmit the related information exactly and immediately. Since any mistakes and delays in this regard might lead to heavy charges against the company. Therefore, such essential information is usually transferred by a special type of email which is formally similar to traditional business letters.

Another characteristic of such emails is that they are often sent to several people simultaneously through the CC step or features explained below. The reason behind including so many people in the CC section is to increase the legal value of the message by using the added concerned parties as witnesses in case of possible damages, accidents, and delays, their consequent fiscal disputes (Gimenez, 2006). Examples 9 and 10 below belong to this category.

Example 9:

Msg: MH-9440-EN
Date: 16/Oct/2012
Fm: Iran sea
To: B.C.C/ Tehran/ Oil Dept/ Mr.Amini
Cc: B.I.O.C/ Blusher/ Shipping Dept./ Mr. Ekrami
Cc: Sky oil/ Singapore/ Ms. Lilian cc: T.T.P.C./ Head of Jetties
Re: Viyo – ETA Pilot Station 19/Oct/2012 at 0001 LT
Please accept this message as '3-day' advance notice of arrival of Sea Whale at MIS with ETA of October 19th 2012 at 0001 LT.
Best Regards
Iran Sea/Tehran
As Agents

It also should be noted that the step CC or Carbon Copy, which has a similar function to the Copy-to line step in the ending move of Santos (2002) Business Letter of Negotiation model and is missing in Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013) model of business email, is a valuable feature of emails in today's business world which makes it possible to send one email to many parties simultaneously, a necessity in today's international business interaction in which companies in different parts of the world need to communicate and make decision together (Gimenez, 2006). In the following example, an email has been sent to several recipients simultaneously with this CC feature.

Example 10:

From: Sun flower
Sent: Monday, May 28, 2012 1:17 AM
To: bushahr@bay.net
Cc: gardine@rtede...fg; lpgsct@sgage.co.jp; refops@ammo.com.sg; mares@donline.co; performance@gaslie.co.jp
Subject: Suny flower
Dear Mr. Fahimi
Please be advised that Vessel's ETA to Pilot Station is at 12:00LT on 29th May 2012. (Sailed from Fujairah UAE: 2330LT 27th May 2012)
And will revert with updated ETA notice accordingly.
Best Regards/
Capt. Shen

Opening and reference to previous contact steps: In line with the findings of Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013), the data in the present study showed the existence of the following two sub-steps within this opening step:

(ii) Opening

(a) Addressing

Greeting the address: However, the step thanking included in Mehrpour and Mehrzad's (2013) model has been considered as a type of greeting since as the following example shows here the thanking is just a way of being polite, thus considered a greeting.

Example 11:

Dear Sir,

Your below instructions well noted with thanks…

Will come back to you with draft of the B/L accordingly.

Best Regards,

M. Hamidi

Reference to previous contact step: This step was used in about 60 percent of the emails investigated. The writers of the emails usually started their message with this step by using expressions such as

Example 12: With respect to your below email, …

Example 13: Further to below, …

Example 14: Further to our telephone conversation, …

Example 15: Regarding the above message, …

The frequency of this step in the data can be attributed to the important role that this step plays in linking the present email to previous ones, while at the same time providing the reader with a hint at the subject of the present email. This step performs some part of the role played by the reference-line step in traditional letters. Reviewing the emails, the researchers found that all 60 emails were either providing an answer to a previous enquiry or adding some new information to previous emails.

4.2.2. Move 2 & 3: Providing Information and Requesting (Information/Action/Favor)

As mentioned by both Santos (2002) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013), these two moves account for the communicative purpose of each email. Thus, each email to be considered as an example of "enquiry" (Jalilifar & Beitsayyah, 2011) or what Santos (2002) calls Letters of Negotiation needs to have at least one of Moves 2 or 3 or both of them. According to Santos's (2002) study, when Moves 2 and 3 accompany each other, providing information must precede requesting information. In the present study, however, they either precede or follow each other. In Example 16, the author first provides information (Move 2), then requests information (Move 3). While in Example 17, the order is reversed.

Example 16:

Dear Captain,
Please note as per Terminal instructions, your berthing prospects will be for tomorrow PM, for which Please standby on VHF to receive the latest instructions about pilot boarding time/position.
Best\Bagheri

Example 17:

Good day,
Pls confirm receipt pre-arrival info.
Vessel discharging the cargo at Jebel Ali, next port Abu Dhabi ETA BIK 22.06.2011
Yours Faithfully,
Capt. Sergey
Master of Sea Star

This flexibility of business emails in using both moves can be attributed to some reasons, among which one can refer to a) the importance of speed in international business and b) a great number of emails that need to be sent on a daily basis. This, in turn, has led to an inclination among business email writers to focus on carrying out a lot of communicative acts in one email without caring too much about the order of providing and requesting information.

Move 2: Providing Information

In the present study, this move occurred 73 times and was the most frequent move in the data. Most of the optional steps and sub-steps proposed by Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013) were supported by the present data. Each of the steps is illustrated by an example from the data:

(i) Information

(a) Introducing and providing information

Example 18: Please note that your visa will be issued by tomorrow.

(b) Continuing/adding/updating

Example 19: Besides, your ticket was purchased today.

(c) Agreeing/confirming information

Example 20: We confirm your appointing us as your agent.

(d) Showing opposition (unexpected results)/disagreeing

Example 21: Unfortunately, bunker services are not available in our port.

(e) Acknowledging the receipt of a message

Example 22: We acknowledge receipt of your below message

Example 23: Your below message was duly noted.

Example 24: Your NOR was well-received.

It should be noted that this step was missing in Mehrpour and Mehrzad's (2013) model and in Santos's (2002) original model. It was only included in the third move. In the present study, this step occurred 37 times, which shows the importance of confirming the receipt of messages in the business world, in which missing an important piece of information might lead to irreversible damage to the reputation of a given company and its subsequent market. Furthermore, acknowledging messages increases the credibility of the given company in the eyes of its business partners.

(ii) Advising about the message: This step provides readers with extra information

(a) Along with e-mail (attachment)

Example 25: Please find attached.

(b) Within the e-mail

Example 26: Please note the following chart.

(c) Via link/website

Example 27: For more information, consult our website.

Move 3: Requesting (Information/Action/Favor):

As the second pillar of enquiry emails, this move occurred 58 times in the data. For this move, based on the analysis of the data, the following steps have been proposed, which result from combining and revising the steps in both Mehrpour and Mehrzad's (2000) and Santos's (2002) original models. The first revision was rephrasing the names of some of the steps that were found a bit confusing during the data analysis.

(i) Information

(a) Requesting explanation/clarification/information

Example 28: Please clarify what these restrictions are and what options we have.

(b) Seeking ideas/opinions/suggestions

Example 29: Please advise us of a reliable surveyor

(c) Asking for confirmation of information

Example 30: Will you confirm the amount of USD 1000 to be paid to the master?

Example 31: If you agree, our agent will contact you for the payment process?

(d) Asking for acknowledgment of a message

Example 32: Attached please find and confirm its safe receipt.

(ii) Actions/favors of:

(a) Material/document mailing

Example 33: But could you please kindly send us the draft B/L later?

(b) Service/action

Example 34: Please arrange for sb to pick us at the airport.

Steps common to both moves 2 & 3

(iii) Apologizing

This step was used with different functions. For instance, in Example 35, the person is really apologizing, while in Example 36, it has been used as a strategy to reduce imposition and to be more polite.

Example 35: Sorry for the delayed response. We will send you the bill by tomorrow.

Example 36: Sorry for disturbing you, but please resend the tide table.

(iv) Evaluating

(a) Giving personal opinions

Example 37: You had better supply your provisions in Fujairah.

(b) Making comments

Example 38: We think the fee is reasonable.

(v) Drawing attention to something

Example 39: Please note….

Example 40: For your kind attention,

(vi) Indicating wishes/plans/intentions

Example 41: We are intending to attend the vessel at berth

(vii) Applying pressure tactics

Example 42: Your prompt reply is highly appreciated

Example 43: Please sent us the document ASAP.

4.2.3. Move 4: Ending

This move, as the name suggests, brings the communicative event to an end. It consists of the following steps:

a) Signing off:	Best Regards
b) Signature:	Reza Afshar
c) Job status:	General manager
d) Contact information:	Phone: +98912*******
e) Company information:	Sea Tide, Bander Abbas, Iran

The above steps are almost common in both Santos's (2002) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad's (2013) models. However, the present study revealed that in many emails, writers have used some sentences that more or less show that they are about to sign off. We called this function the pre-signing off step, which usually comes immediately before closing terms like *Best Regards*, *Respectfully*, and so on. Thus, this step consists of the following sub-steps:

i) Pre-signing off

a) Promoting further contact

1) Soliciting Response, e.g.,

Example 44: Looking forward to hearing from you

2) Indicating availability

Example 45: Feel free to reach us anytime

b) Promising further contact, e.g.,

Example 46: We will come back to you in this respect accordingly.

Example 47: We will keep you posted with further news accordingly.

According to the data, participants usually used the promising further contact step while they were answering a request for information. Through personal communication with an experienced member of the business community from which the data was gathered, we learned that business email writers usually apply this sub-step when they have not acquired the needed information yet or in cases in which they cannot reveal it. Thus, by applying this technique, they buy some time until they get the information or they get to the point in time where the confidentiality of the information is no longer an issue, so they can pass it. By doing this, they maintain the reputation of their company and avoid possible problems and keep their good relationship with their clients.

Example 48:

Dear Mr. Vijay,

Thanks for your email. Vessel is presently in the process of becoming all fast at Bahar terminal.

With respect to your below email, we are now doing our best to collect some further details regarding the delays occurred (apart from the reasons terminal brings such as the last vessel's technical problems during loading, etc.).

We will come back to you in this respect accordingly.

Best Regards,

Farhadi

Ops Manager

Based on the findings of the present study, the following revised version of the generic structure of enquiry emails has been proposed:

A Revised Generic Structure of Enquiry Emails

Moves:

Move 1: Establishing the negotiation chain

Steps:

(i) Setting the scene

Sub steps

(a) Sender line

(b) Date line

(c) Recipient line

(d) CC line

(e) Subject line

(ii) Opening

(a) Addressing

(b) Greeting the address

(iii) Reference to previous contact

Move 2: Providing information

(i) Information

(a) Introducing and providing information

(b) Continuing/adding/updating

(c) Agreeing/confirming information

(d) Showing opposition (unexpected results)/disagreeing

(e) Acknowledging the receipt of a message

(ii) Advising about the message

(a) Along with e-mail (attachment)

(b) Within the e-mail

(c) Via link/website

Move 3: Requesting (information/action/favor)

(i) Information

(a)Requesting/ explanation/clarification/information

(b) Seeking ideas/opinions/suggestions

(c) Asking for confirmation of information

(d) Asking for acknowledgment of a message

(ii) Actions/favors of:

(a) Material/document mailing

(b) Service/action

Steps common to both moves

(iii) Apologizing

(iv) Evaluating

(a) Giving personal opinions

(b) Making comments

(v) Drawing attention to something

(vi) Indicating wishes/plans/intentions

(vii) Applying pressure tactics

Move 4: Ending

(i) Pre-signing off

a) Promoting further contact

1) Soliciting Response, e.g.,

2) Indicating availability

b) Promising further contact, e.g.,

(ii) Signing off

(iii) Signature

(iv) Job status

(v) Contact information

(vi) Company information

Lexico-grammatical features

In the first move, the addressing terms such as *Dear Sir*, *Dear*, and a title like *Dear Captain*, *Dear Agent*, and also *Dear Mr.* with family names like *Dear Mr. Hamidi* were repeatedly used. However, among the greeting expressions used, *Good day* was the most frequent one, occurring 50 times. This can be due to the fact that the business communicators in the present study come from different time zones, so they preferred to use this expression to avoid possible embarrassment that might be caused by, for instance, mistakenly saying *Good morning* instead of *Good evening.*

The second move, providing information, was linguistically realized by declarative sentences. The sentences mostly started with a service or product, usually with a passive structure. (e.g., *The b/l will be couriered to you by DHL* or *The fresh water will be supplied to you at the berth*). Besides, in cases where the sentences were started with a person, it was usually in the third person (e.g., *Our colleague Mr. Rahimi will pick you up at the airport.*) or with the first-person plural subject pronoun. This finding is in line with those of Jalilifar and Beitsayyah (2011) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013), who attribute this inclination to focus on company and group rather than the individual among Iranian business correspondents to cultural factors.

Furthermore, the participants used the following expressions frequently in the data while providing information.

Example 49: For your information

Example 50: Please be advised

Example 51: Please be informed

Example 52: Please note

The third move, requesting (information/action/favor), was predominantly (90 % of the time) realized by imperative structure mitigated by *please* or *kindly*:

Example 53: Kindly advise how much time it's take for the port authorities to clear the vessel

Example 54: Pls confirm receipt of this msg

Example 55: Also please provide us with the following information

This frequent use of imperative structure to request information or action in the data can be partly accounted for by the importance of clarity and brevity in business email correspondence, or it might be due to the lack of proficiency of business correspondents in English. This, however, needs to be explored by further research. In addition to linguistic realizations of the moves mentioned above, the data were also full of acronyms and unconventional abbreviations, contractions, and short spellings such as

ASAP: as soon as possible

RYM= regarding your message

FYI: for your information

Brgds: best regards

G'day: good day

Vsl: vessel (ship)

pls, plz: please

msg: message

Oprns: operations

ETA: estimated time of arrival

ETD: estimated time of departure

ETC: estimated time of completion

This feature of business emails results from the nature of email technology, which has provided its users with a kind of freedom to exert their agency (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000). However, this has not hindered the communication among the discourse community although it might be problematic for those who have newly joined the discourse community. The following interesting email sent by a Japanese to an Iranian business partner is an illustrative example.

Example 56:

DEAR Mr. AMIRI
RE BELOW APPENDED MSGS OF YR COMMUNICATION WITH THE MASTER,

PLS BE ADVD THAT UNDERSTOOD TO BE ARNGD FLWGS
(1)
FILIPINO CREW MEMBER TO BE ARNGD DOCTOR'S MEDICAL
TREATMENT AT B.I.K TODAY:
2.
IN CASE OF DOCTOR ADVD/CNFMD ABV CREW MEMBER
'UNFIT FOR DUTY
3.
PLS ARNG HM TO DEBARK IN YR END THRU TAKING
NECESSARY FORMALITIES OF IMMIGRATION N CUSTOMS.
4.
UPON DOCTOR CNFMD 'FIT FOR SINGLE TRAVEL'
KINDLY ARNG REQUIRED FORMALITIES OF
IMMIGRATION N CUSTOMS.

YR KIND ATTENDANCE/COOPERATION N PROMPT ATTENTION
FOR ABV CREW MEMBERS MEDICAL TREATMENT CASE WL BE
HIGHLY APPRECIATED.
PLS CNFM.
THANKS IN ADVANCE N BEST REGARDS/
KIM

As it is illustrated in the above-mentioned example, this Japanese writer has used his agency to the extreme by writing in capital letters and using a lot of abbreviated forms within one email.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated the generic structure and lexico-grammatical features of emails used in the Iranian shipping industry, contributing to our understanding of how these emails function as tools for negotiation and communication in international contexts. By comparing the findings with previous studies, we can better appreciate the similarities and differences across various professional settings.

5.1. Types of Emails and Their Functions

The analysis identified three primary types of emails: information-providing (40%), request (34%), and combined (information and request) (26%). These proportions align closely with Santos's (2002) model and corroborate findings from Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013), who also observed a high frequency of information-providing and request emails in business correspondence. However, the prevalence of combined emails (26%) highlights the efficiency-driven nature of communication in the shipping industry, where time-sensitive decisions necessitate concise yet comprehensive messages. This finding contrasts slightly with Qasim et al. (2015), who focused on sales letters and found that requests were more prominent than informational emails. The difference may stem from the specific context of the study—the shipping industry often requires simultaneous provision and confirmation of information, making combined emails particularly useful. Additionally, Warren (2016) noted that power dynamics influence email content; in hierarchical industries like shipping, combined emails might serve as a strategic tool to balance authority and politeness.

5.2. Generic Structure of Enquiry Emails

The revised generic structure proposed in this study was built upon models by Santos (2002) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013). Key moves include:

Move 1: Establishing the Negotiation Chain

The findings expanded on earlier models by introducing "setting the scene," which encompasses the sender, recipient, date, subject, and CC lines. While most emails omit these details due to software defaults, their inclusion in formal emails mirrors traditional business letters. This reflects the legal importance of documentation in the shipping industry, consistent with Gimenez's (2006) observation that CC lists enhance accountability and reduce disputes.

Move 2: Providing Information

Declarative sentences dominated this move, often using passive voice or third-person subjects. This aligns with Jalilifar and Beitsayyah (2011) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013), who attributed such structures to Iranian cultural norms, emphasizing group identity over individual responsibility. Furthermore, the frequent use of acknowledging phrases (*We acknowledge* *receipt...*) underscores the importance of reliability and trust in long-term business relationships.

Move 3: Requesting Information/Action/Favor

Imperative structures mitigated by polite expressions (e.g., *kindly advise, pls confirm*) accounted for 90% of requests. While clarity and brevity are essential in business communication, this pattern may also reflect limited English proficiency among some writers—a hypothesis requiring further investigation. Park et al. (2021) similarly noted that L2 writers tend toward directness compared to L1 counterparts, who incorporate supportive moves like compliments or compensation offers.

Move 4: Ending

Pre-signing strategies, such as soliciting responses or promising future contact, were prevalent. These techniques maintain ongoing relationships and ensure follow-up actions, echoing Ho's (2018) findings on metadiscourse in persuasive emails. Promising further contact, specifically, allows writers to defer sensitive information while preserving professionalism —a strategy highlighted in personal interviews with experienced business communicators.

Lexico-Grammatical Features

The linguistic analysis revealed several notable trends:

Addressing Terms and Greetings

Neutral greetings like *Good Day* predominated, likely reflecting the global nature of the shipping industry and the need to accommodate diverse time zones. This contrasts with Warren's (2016) observation of warmth and affability in Pakistani emails, suggesting cultural variations in politeness strategies.

Sentence Structures

Passive voice and third-person subjects reinforced group-oriented language, consistent with Iranian cultural values. This finding supports Bhatia's (1993) argument that genre conventions are shaped by sociocultural factors.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Extensive use of abbreviations (e.g., *ASAP, FYI*) exemplifies the influence of email technology on written communication. Although these shortcuts enhance efficiency, they may pose challenges for newcomers unfamiliar with industry-specific jargon. Example 56, showcasing extreme abbreviation usage, illustrates how personal agency shapes discourse while maintaining mutual intelligibility within established communities. Asztalos (2014) similarly noted variability in students' application of email conventions, highlighting the role of exposure and training.

6. Conclusion

Business communication has evolved significantly with the advent of email, which has become the predominant medium for professional correspondence due to its convenience, speed, and flexibility. This study examined business emails exchanged between an Iranian shipping company and international firms, focusing on their generic structure and lexico-grammatical features. The analysis revealed three primary types of emails: information-providing (40%), request (34%), and combined (26%). These proportions align with previous studies but highlight the efficiency-driven nature of communication in the shipping industry, where combined emails balance multiple communicative purposes. A revised four-move model was proposed, expanding upon frameworks by Santos (2002) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013). Move 1 (Establishing the negotiation chain) was enhanced to include "Setting the scene," encompassing the sender, recipient, date, subject, and CC lines. Moves 2 and 3 focused on providing information and requesting actions/favors, respectively, while Move 4 addressed endings with pre-signing strategies like soliciting responses or promising further contact. Lexico-grammatical features included neutral greetings ("Good Day"), declarative sentences often using passive voice or third-person subjects, imperative structures mitigated by politeness markers ("please" or "kindly"), and extensive use of abbreviations (e.g., "ASAP," "FYI"). These findings contribute to genre analysis and ESP pedagogy by offering insights into formal and content schemata.

Despite the growing body of research on business emails, key questions remain unresolved, such as the correlation between move sequences and lexical/syntactic features and the pragmatic strategies essential in modern workplace communication. This study addressed a gap by analyzing authentic emails from an Iranian shipping company, highlighting both universal trends and context-specific variations. For instance, group-oriented language emphasizing company-wide actions over individual responsibility reflects Iranian cultural values, consistent with findings by Jalilifar and Beitsayyah (2011) and Mehrpour and Mehrzad (2013). However, the frequent use of imperative structures for requests (90% of cases) may indicate a preference for clarity and brevity or limited English proficiency among writers—a hypothesis requiring further investigation. Comparisons with previous studies reveal similarities at the macro-level but differences at the micro-level, influenced by sociocultural factors and power dynamics. Recent studies, such as those by Ho (2018), Millot (2017), and Park et al. (2021), emphasize the importance of metadiscourse, positioning, and intercultural communication in business emails. By integrating these insights, this study enriches our understanding of how language operates in specialized professional contexts, offering practical implications for teaching and training in ESP programs. Future research could expand the dataset to include diverse organizations and explore deeper pragmatic functions or sociocultural dimensions.

This study advances research on business communication within specialized domains by analyzing authentic emails from the Iranian shipping industry, revealing how structural conventions, cultural norms, and technological affordances collectively shape professional discourse. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that ESP curricula —particularly in maritime contexts —should prioritize teaching clarity, politeness, and adaptability in email communication, while also familiarizing learners with industry-specific abbreviations and acronyms. Culturally, the prevalence of group-oriented language in the data reflects broader Iranian societal values, highlighting the need for ESP programs to address such nuances to equip learners for effective cross-cultural interactions, especially where norms may diverge from Western conventions. Furthermore, the frequent use of informal language and abbreviations underscores the evolving nature of digital communication, urging researchers and practitioners to integrate these technological influences into training frameworks and assessments of communicative competence. Together, these insights emphasize the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and technology in professional settings, offering actionable guidance for both educators and industry stakeholders.

The findings of this study have important pedagogical implications, particularly for ESP programs. By providing detailed descriptions of the generic structures and linguistic features of business emails, this research offers a practical framework for teaching business communication. ESP instructors can use these findings to develop targeted training materials that address the specific needs of learners, such as mastering the use of moves and steps, employing culturally appropriate politeness strategies, and understanding the functional use of acronyms and abbreviations. In professional practice, the study highlights the need for greater awareness of intercultural communication strategies. Business professionals who use English as a lingua franca should be mindful of the cultural and contextual factors influencing their communication. For instance, adopting a polite tone and acknowledging receipt of emails can significantly enhance interpersonal relationships and foster trust in international business contexts.

While this study provides valuable insights, certain limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the dataset is drawn exclusively from one Iranian shipping company, potentially limiting generalizability. Future studies could expand the scope to include other organizations or industries. Second, the analysis focuses primarily on surface-level features; deeper investigations into pragmatic functions or sociocultural dimensions would enrich our understanding of business communication.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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Appendix

1) The generic structure of non-native Iranian business e-mails

MOVE 1: Establishing the negotiation chain

(i) Defining participants

(a) Sender- line

(b) Recipient- line

(c) Subject- line

(d) Date- line

(e) Attention to the message- line

(ii) Opening

(a) Addressing and greeting the addressee

(b) Thanking the addressee

(c)Apologizing

(iii) Reference to previous contact

MOVE 2: Providing (Information/Answers)

(i) Information

(a) Introducing and providing information

(b) Continuing/adding/updating

(c) Agreeing/confirming information

(d) Showing opposition (unexpected results)/disagreeing

(i) Offering something in return

(ii) Advising about the message

(a) Along with e-mail (attachment)

(b) Via link/website

(c) Within the e-mail

MOVE 3: Requesting (Information/Action/Favor)

(i) Information

(a) Explaining/clarifying/requesting information

(b) Exchanging/asking for ideas/opinions

(c) Confirming information

(ii) Actions/favors of:

(a) Material/document mailing

(b) Service/action

ESTPS COMMON TO BOTH MOVES 2 &3

(iii) Evaluating

(a) Giving personal opinions

(b) Making comments

(iv) Drawing attention to something

(v) Indicating wishes/plans/intentions

(vi) Applying pressure tactics

MOVE 4: Ending

(i) Prompting further contact

(a) Soliciting response*

(b) Indicating availability

(ii) Signing-off

(iii) Signature-line

(iv) Job status in the company

(v) Company name

(vi) Contact information

(vii) Note & PS-line*

2) The generic structure of native business e-mails

MOVE 1: Establishing the negotiation chain

(i) Defining participants

- (a) Sender- line
- (b) Recipient- line
- (c) Subject- line
- (d) Date- line

(ii) Opening

- (a) Addressing and greeting the addressee
- (b) Thanking the addressee

(iii) Reference to previous contact

MOVE 2: Providing (Information/Answers)

(i) Information

- (a) Introducing and providing information
- (b) Continuing/adding/up-dating
- (c) Agreeing/confirming information

(d) Showing opposition (unexpected results)/disagreeing

(i) Offering something in return #

(ii) Advising about the message

(a) Along with e-mail (attachment)

(b) Via link/website

(c) Within the e-mail

MOVE 3: Requesting (Information/Action/Favor)

(i) Information

(a) Explaining/clarifying/requesting information

(b) Exchanging/asking for ideas/opinions

(c) Confirming information

(ii) Actions/favors of:

(a) Material/document mailing

(b) Service/action

STEPS COMMON TO BOTH MOVES 2 &3

(iii) Evaluating

(a) Giving personal opinions

(b) Making comments

(iv) Drawing attention to something

(v) Indicating wishes/plans/intentions

(vi) Applying pressure tactics

MOVE 4: Ending

(i) Prompting further contact: indicating availability

(ii) Signing-off

(iii) Signature-line

(iv) Job status in the company

(v) Company name

(vi) Contact information

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Effects of Dynamic Assessment Through Telegram on Academic Vocabulary Learning and Retention of Iranian Dentistry PhD Applicants

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Abstract

The effects of dynamic assessment (DA) principles on enhancing academic vocabulary learning of Iranian dentistry PhD applicants through Telegram were investigated in this study. The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was conducted to evaluate 60 Iranian dentistry PhD applicants' general English knowledge. Then, 30 intermediate applicants were chosen, divided and assigned into three equal groups of control (CG), DA without using Telegram (DWTG), and DA using Telegram (DUTG). Initially, a pretest was taken to assess the participants' previous academic knowledge of vocabulary in the field of dentistry. The research was conducted in 10 sessions of two hours and 25 words, in each session, were presented to the three groups of the study utilizing narrow reading techniques involving repeated readings from thematically relevant short texts. After completing the treatment, they were tested to assess their vocabulary improvement. Then, they were tested again after two weeks to assess their vocabulary retention. The findings indicated that the participants in the experimental groups demonstrated significantly better performance, and the participants who learned vocabulary by Telegram significantly exceeded the ones who learned without telegram on the posttest. The same findings were also obtained for the delayed posttest.

Keywords: dynamic assessment, MALL, Telegram, vocabulary learning, vocabulary retention

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1. Introduction

Assessment is an essential component of every educational program, and an effective teaching course requires a suitable evaluation method (Farhady et al., 2001). Dynamic assessment (DA) is a language assessment approach that examines the impact of deliberate, short-term interventions on learners' achievement, aiming to measure both the level and rate of learning (Hadigheh & Khaghaninezhad, 2012). It merges assessment and instruction to assess and intensify learning potentials (Antón & García, 2021). Additionally, DA serves as an alternative approach to assess the language knowledge of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners compared to traditional methods. DA differs from traditional static assessment in three ways: 1) it focuses on the procedure rather than the product, emphasizing how learners approach tasks rather than their existing knowledge; 2) it incorporates the examiner's feedback; and 3) it shifts from examiner noninvolvement to establishing a personalized teaching and helping relationship (Grigorenko & Sternberg, 1998).

The concept of DA is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) learning theory and Feuerstein's (1979) theory of mediated learning experiences. According to Vygotsky, learning happens within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) through social communications, where an instructor guides and supports learners to improve their task performance (Limmerstedt & Lyhre, 2011). Feuerstein's theory of mediated learning experiences involves an educational process in which a teacher aims to enhance the learner's performance. Meditational interactions, as proposed by Feuerstein, foster higher mental operations like active learning, self-regulation, representational thinking, and strategic problem-solving. Lantolf and Poehner (2004) assert that focusing on the process rather than the outcome of development is crucial for understanding human mental functioning. This foundational principle distinguishes DA from other assessment methods.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) integrates mobile technology into language learning, offering learners the flexibility to access educational materials without the constraints of physical classroom settings or fixed computer locations. MALL serves as an effective solution to address challenges related to time and location in language learning, as highlighted by Mosavi Miangah & Nezarat (2012). The emergence of mobile learning, which leverages portable electronic devices for information access and sharing, represents a significant advancement in higher education. This transformative approach reshapes the learning process and instructional delivery methods, as noted by Geist (2011) and Miller (2012). By enabling students and professionals to swiftly access information from any location, mobile learning facilitates learning opportunities that are not bound by time or place, as emphasized by Rossing et al. (2012).

Commonly, a collection of words with their corresponding meanings is the best definition for vocabulary. A word encompasses various features, including its meaning, associations, collocations, grammar, and spelling (Schmitt, 2000). Vocabulary is a lexicon, which may include single and compound words, and idioms (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Vocabulary knowledge connects the written form of a word to its meaning (Shanker & Ekwall, 1998). According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge represents the number of words known by a language learner. Conversely, "depth of vocabulary knowledge" alludes to the extent to which a language learner understands a word (Akbarian, 2010, p. 392).

The significance of vocabulary learning becomes even more evident in the context of English acquisition. English vocabulary is extensive and complex, combining Germanic and Romance words (Meara, 2005). The importance of vocabulary knowledge in English language instruction and foreign language learning has been increasingly recognized (Iheanacho, 1997). Kawauchi (2005) points out that "language teachers generally acknowledge the importance of vocabulary learning and are exploring more effective ways to promote it" (p. 1). According to Laufer (1997), vocabulary learning lies at the core of language learning and language use. Vocabulary learning is highly valuable as it helps EFL learners enhance their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, ultimately improving their comprehension and production abilities (Gorjian et al., 2011).

Narrow reading is a valuable approach for EFL learners to expand their vocabulary knowledge by repeatedly encountering new vocabulary in various contexts. Learners are encouraged to engage in frequent reading to be exposed to a large volume of authentic English and develop their vocabulary knowledge (Krashen, 2004). Narrow reading is part of extensive reading and involves reading within a specific subject, genre, or author's works. The conception of narrow reading, in line with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, suggests that shared context across different texts increases the likelihood of incidental learning. (Cho et al., 2005).

However, the potential benefits of narrow reading go beyond vocabulary learning and recycling, such as exposing L2 readers to the consistent stylistic and discourse patterns of specific authors (Gardner, 2008). He explains that narrative writings by a particular author contain more vocabularies with low frequency compared to texts written by various authors. Therefore, narrow reading is most valuable when combined with activities designed to provide direct instruction (Min, 2008).

Understanding words is crucial in any language. It is important especially for students to grasp academic and specialized English terms across different subjects. Additionally, MALL has become a popular method for teaching and learning languages, showing promise in improving EFL learners' understanding. Pérez-Paredes and Zhang (2022) point out that many studies have focused too much on technology, resulting in a fragmented view of second language (L2) instruction due to the diverse uses of mobile devices. Furthermore, DA offers an alternative way to assess EFL learners' abilities and can strengthen the connection between teachers and students. Thus, the current study aimed to explore how DA could enhance the vocabulary skills of Iranian dentistry PhD applicants through the use of Telegram.

2. Literature Review

Numerous findings have supported DA. Group-based DA effects in L2 classroom contexts were examined by Poehner (2009). The study demonstrated that organizing classroom activities using this approach allows teachers to explore and stimulate the group's ZPD while supporting individual learners' development.

Naeini and Duvall (2012) scrutinized the impact of DA on the reading comprehension performance of university students studying English Language Training (ELT). The study involved 10 ELT students in a pretest-mediation-posttest design, showing a significant development in their reading comprehension performance. Hadigheh and Khaghaninezhad (2012) studied the effects of DA on the general English test performance of Iranian medical students. The results indicated that teacher’s mediation within the students' ZPD significantly facilitated student learning. Taghizadeh and Bahrami (2014) examined the influence of DA on the lexical inferencing ability of intermediate EFL learners in Iran. The study showed that DA, through appropriate mediation, enhanced learners' lexical inferencing ability. Hessamy and Ghaderi's (2014) study demonstrated that incorporating DA as an additional procedure to traditional testing positively impacted test performance and vocabulary learning for the learners.

Kao (2015) examined the interactionist DA's role in developing conceptual writing skills in L2 Chinese learners. The teacher's dialogic mediation supported learners' development, promoting understanding and enhancing their L2 skills, as shown in this research as a result. All participants effectively utilized appropriate rhetorical structures for writing tasks, although one instance of unhelpful mediation was identified.

Rajaeizadeh et al. (2015) investigated the effectiveness of DA on English vocabulary learning in young Iranian EFL learners. The study included 25 female elementary-level Iranian EFL learners. The Megasection method, applying the interventionist cake model of DA, was implemented. The analysis revealed a significant improvement in learners' English vocabulary abilities. Hanifi et al. (2016) studied the effectiveness of DA on incidental vocabulary learning in technical textbooks for electronic engineering students. A group of 25 BA electronic students participated. DA procedures were used to personalize the assessment. The results showed that DA significantly enhanced participants' incidental vocabulary learning by increasing their awareness of strategies and providing structured hints during the mediation process.

Adokh and Rafiee (2016) explored the perspectives of EFL teachers and learners on the procedure and practicality of DA in the Iranian educational context. The study involved 25 EFL teachers and 45 EFL learners who underwent a DA interventionist model while learning to write an essay. The results showed that student participants generally had positive opinions about DA, though not strongly positive. In contrast, teachers perceived the usefulness of DA in Iranian English classrooms to be low. Alemi et al. (2019) investigated the use of Telegram to enhance the DA of grammatical accuracy in EFL learners. They found that online DA conducted through Telegram facilitated noticeable progress in writing accuracy, surpassing performance in traditional contexts. The researchers suggested integrating online contexts, such as social networks, into classes for enhanced feedback methods and time efficiency. They recommended utilizing social networks like Telegram for improved feedback access and retention.

Alsaadi (2021) discussed DA as a valuable approach that combines teaching and assessment, allowing language learners to be evaluated through authentic tasks. He emphasized the importance of adopting DA not only as an assessment tool but also as a means to increase language learning and teaching. By incorporating social media and DA in his study, he found valuable opportunities to improve learners' assessment, teaching methods, mediation procedures, and the provision of corrective feedback during the learning process.

Abdullateef and Muhammedzein (2021) conducted a study to investigate how DA could enhance EFL language learning. Their work was based on Vygotsky's ZPD and emphasized mediation within a supportive social setting and practice. The experimental group included 25 EFL students for the writing task and 20 students for the reading task. Pre-tests and post-tests were conducted using specific models for each task. Additionally, an online questionnaire was dispersed to 43 university teachers to gather their opinions. The analysis demonstrated a significant relationship between DA and language learning, particularly in the improvement of reading and writing skills. Teachers exhibited a positive attitude towards the use of DA in their classes.

In Momeni and Nushi’s (2022) study, the beliefs of EFL teachers towards DA and its impact on students’ motivation were explored. They also compared the points of view of university and language institute teachers. The study involved 40 Iranian EFL teachers from universities and language institutes. Data was collected through email interviews. The results, analyzed using statistical tests, showed no significant difference in the attitudes of university and language institute teachers towards DA. Both groups held an affirmative attitude towards its use.

Rezapour (2024) investigated the effect of DA on the motivation of Iranian elementary-level EFL learners. This quasi-experimental design investigation with two intact classes of 15, disclosed a meaningful difference between the DA versus non-DA groups. The obtained results suggested that elementary-level teachers should incorporate DA in their classrooms to enhance learners' motivation.

Klungthong & Wasanasomsithi (2024) investigated the impact of DA on enhancing academic vocabulary knowledge among low-proficiency university students in Thailand. In this mixed-methods research, they highlighted how DA can facilitate vocabulary acquisition through structured tasks and mediation stages. While the study did not specifically focus on Telegram, it provided valuable insights into DA's effectiveness in academic vocabulary learning, which could be relevant when considering the integration of digital platforms like Telegram for similar educational goals.

Gatlabayan (2024) determined the effectiveness of MALL in improving the students' English vocabulary skills. In this quantitative research design, pre and post-tests were used to determine the influence of MALL on enhancing students' vocabulary skills. The results showed the usefulness of MALL platforms in improving the students' English vocabulary skills. The study also indicated the effect of different factors such as ease of use, usability, efficacy, compatibility, and the intention to use which affect system acceptance and learning.

While previous research has examined the effectiveness of DA, MALL, and vocabulary learning, there is limited literature on the role of DA in teaching academic vocabulary to EFL learners through Telegram. This research sought to build on existing studies of DA by implementing it through Telegram to enhance and evaluate vocabulary knowledge among Iranian dentistry applicants by broadening the scope of DA applications. This study posed the following research questions to answer:

1. Does DA significantly improve Iranian dentistry PhD applicants' academic vocabulary knowledge and retention?

2. Does using Telegram significantly improve Iranian dentistry PhD applicants' academic vocabulary knowledge and retention?

3. What is the Iranian dentistry PhD applicants' attitude towards learning academic vocabulary by using Telegram?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design, featuring one control group and two experimental groups. In this study, DA was the independent variable, and vocabulary learning and retention were the dependent variables.

3.2. Participants

In this study, 60 Iranian dentistry applicants at Isfahan Azad University took part in the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), and 30 intermediate ones were chosen based on their scores. Also, they had already received an average of three English courses instruction at the university, considering their scores on their final exams, and were considered intermediate students based on OQPT guidelines. Randomly, they were assigned to three equal groups of control (CG), DA without using Telegram (DWTG), and DA using Telegram (DUTG) groups. Each group consisted of 10 learners. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic background.

Table 1

Demographic Background of the Participants

Number of Students	30
Gender	Male & Female
Native Language	Persian
Major	Dentistry
University	Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran
Academic Years	2023-2024

3.3. Instruments

The Instruments and Materials used to conduct this study were as follows:

3.3.1. Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

Prior to conducting the research, the OQPT was utilized to assess the participants' overall understanding of the English language. It is a dependable and effective tool for teachers to place students at the beginning of a course (Allan, 2004). It includes 60 multiple-choice items which evaluate the learner's grasp of grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

3.3.2. Vocabulary Assessment (Pretest, Posttest, and Delayed Posttest)

To conduct the study, a pretest was administered to both the experimental and control groups to assess their dentistry-specific knowledge of vocabulary. A vocabulary test of 40 multiple-choice items, taken from the book "English for the Students of Dentistry" by Tahririan and Mehrabi (2014) was selected. This book specifically targets dentistry students and includes words relevant to their field of study. The selected words were academic and deemed important for PhD candidates. The test underwent a pilot study to assess its reliability using the KR-21 formula, which resulted in a reliability coefficient of .85. Six experienced university lecturers, familiar with the book, confirmed the validity of the test. However, some words were found to be difficult for students to understand and memorize. Then the posttest, the modified version of the same test as the pretest, was developed to measure vocabulary improvement and make comparisons between groups, thus evaluating the effectiveness of the method.

3.3.3. Questionnaire

A researcher-designed questionnaire was administered to the participants of the DUTG to assess their points of view towards using Telegram for learning English vocabulary. The questionnaire includes 15 Likert-scale items, and participants were asked to select one of five options to express their opinions. The questionnaire's reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which showed high reliability with a coefficient of 0.87.

3.4. Procedures

The research was conducted over 10 sessions, each lasting two hours. During each session, 25 words were presented to all three groups (CG, DWTG, and DUTG) through narrow reading, which involved repeated reading of thematically related short texts. The CG and DWTG received vocabulary instruction using regular methods, while the DUTG received instruction through Telegram. The study consisted of three main steps: the pretest, treatment along with immediate posttest (posttest 1), and delayed posttest (posttest 2). The duration of teaching was equally the same for all three groups. The pretest was administered before the main study to evaluate participants' vocabulary knowledge and ensure they were at the same level. Selected texts with various vocabulary exercises were given to the CG, while the DWTG used the same teaching method but underwent DA to evaluate their vocabulary knowledge and improvement. In the DUTG, words and related exercises were posted on a Telegram group, and participants completed the exercises with feedback provided by the researcher, who served as the group admin. The same assessment material used for the DWTG was also used for the DUTG. The Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD) model of DA was employed, focusing on evaluating the learning process and identifying cognitive functions, operations, and problem-solving strategies. The LPAD emphasizes dynamic potential and mediation between the evaluator and the student. To measure short-term improvement, the first posttest was administered, using the same test as the pretest. The delayed posttest (posttest 2) was administered to assess vocabulary retention and long-term improvement two weeks later.

3.5. Data Analysis

To assess the normality of the data obtained from the research instruments, the Shapiro-Wilk test was employed. The Shapiro-Wilk test was selected due to its suitability for small sample sizes. The results of the normality assessment indicated that the data for all measures followed a normal distribution, as evidenced by p-values exceeding 0.05. Consequently, parametric tests were deemed appropriate for the subsequent analysis.

Table 2

Results of the Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality of Data

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
OQPT	0.946	30	0.210
Pre-test	0.962	30	0.792
Post-test	0.958	30	0.740
Delayed Posttest	0.972	30	0.912
Questionnaire	0.903	10	0.226

The Shapiro-Wilk test results, as presented in Table 2, indicated no statistically significant deviations from normality for any of the measures ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the assumption of normality was considered tenable, allowing for the use of parametric tests in the data analysis. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to address the first two research questions, while a one-sample t-test was used to analyze the questionnaire data. The specific findings from these analyses will be detailed in the following section.

4. Results

4.1. Addressing Research Questions One and Two

These two research questions determined the effects of DA and Telegram on the learning and retention of academic vocabulary by Iranian dentistry PhD applicants. Therefore, the researcher compared the participants' scores on the posttest and delayed posttest.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest Result

	N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*Std.* Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
CG	10	22.50	.972	.307	21.80	23.20	21	24
DWTG	10	21.90	1.912	.605	20.53	23.27	20	24
DUTG	10	22.30	1.767	.559	21.04	23.56	20	25
Total	30	22.23	1.569	.286	21.65	22.82	20	25

Table 3 presents the mean scores for CG (M = 22.50), DWTG (M = 21.90), and DUTG (M = 22.30). The data revealed no significant differences among the mean scores. To confirm this, a one-way ANOVA analysis was done to ensure that there was no statistically significant variance among the groups.

Table 4

Results of the One-Way ANOVA for the Pretest

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	1.867	2	.933	.363	.699
Within Groups	69.500	27	2.574		
Total	71.367	29			

The results of Table 4 indicate no significant difference among the groups since the *p* value was greater than .05 ($p = .699$). Consequently, all participants possessed a similar level of vocabulary knowledge. To assess the impact of DA and Telegram on enhancing participants' vocabulary proficiency, their posttest scores were compared against each other.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of the Results of the Posttest

	N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*Std.* Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
CG	10	30.00	1.633	.516	28.83	31.17	27	32
DWTG	10	32.50	1.080	.342	31.73	33.27	31	34
DUTG	10	34.30	1.567	.496	33.18	35.42	30	35
Total	30	32.27	2.273	.415	31.42	33.12	27	35

Table 5 indicates the mean scores and standard deviations of CG ($M = 30$, $SD = 1.63$), DWTG ($M = 32.50$, $SD = 1.08$), and DUTG ($M = 34.30$, $SD = 1.57$) on the posttest. The findings highlighted the differences among the mean scores of the three groups on the test. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to figure out whether these differences were significant or not.

Table 6

Results of the One-Way ANOVA for the Posttest

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	93.267	2	46.633	22.246	.000
Within Groups	56.600	27	2.096		
Total	149.867	29			

According to Table 6, significant differences were found among the groups since the *p* value was lower than .05 ($p < .001$). The Bonferroni test was conducted as a post hoc analysis to precisely determine what groups were different from each other.

The results of Table 7 indicate a significant difference between CG and DWTG ($p = .002$), CG and DUTG ($p < .001$), and DWTG and DUTG ($p = .029$). Therefore, it can be concluded that DA had a significant effect on improving the students' vocabulary knowledge.

In addition, employing Telegram significantly improved the participants' vocabulary knowledge. The findings are also shown in Figure 1.

Table 7

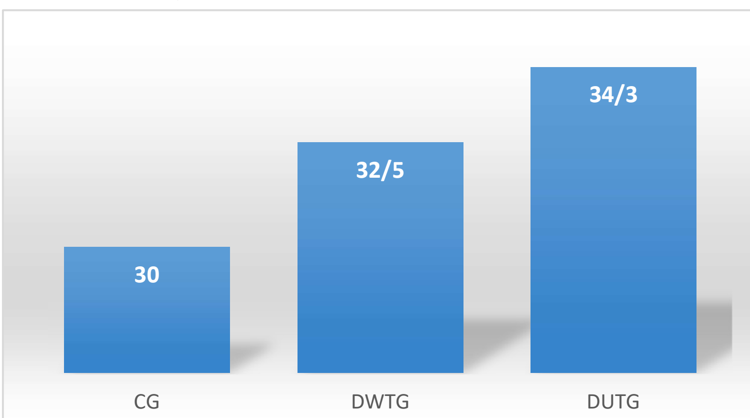
Results of the Bonferroni Test for Comparing the Mean Scores of the Groups on the Posttest

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	*Std.* Error	*Sig.*	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CG	DWTG	-2.500*	.648	.002	-4.15	-.85
	DUTG	-4.300*	.648	.000	-5.95	-2.65
DWTG	CG	2.500*	.648	.002	.85	4.15
	DUTG	-1.800*	.648	.029	-3.45	-.15
DUTG	CG	4.300*	.648	.000	2.65	5.95
	DWTG	1.800*	.648	.029	.15	3.45

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure 1

Mean Scores of the Groups on the Posttest



Participants' scores on the posttest were compared with one another to scrutinize the effects of DA and Telegram on improving their vocabulary retention.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of the Results of the Delayed Posttest

	N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*Std.* Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
CG	10	25.70	1.252	.396	24.80	26.60	23	27
DWTG	10	27.40	1.506	.476	26.32	28.48	25	29
DUTG	10	29.00	.816	.258	28.42	29.58	28	30
Total	30	27.37	1.810	.330	26.69	28.04	23	30

Table 8 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of CG ($M = 25.70$, $SD = 1.25$), DWTG ($M = 27.40$, $SD = 1.51$), and DUTG ($M = 29$, $SD = .82$) on the delayed posttest. The results indicated the differences among the mean scores of the three groups on the test. A one-way ANOVA was done to figure out if these differences were significant.

Table 9

Results of the One-Way ANOVA for the Delayed Posttest

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	54.467	2	27.233	18.156	.000
Within Groups	40.500	27	1.500		
Total	94.967	29			

According to Table 9, there were significant differences among the groups since the p value was lower than .05 ($p < .001$). The Bonferroni test was conducted as a post hoc analysis to figure out precisely what groups were different from each other.

The results of Table 10 indicate a significant difference between CG and DWTG ($p = .013$), CG and DUTG ($p < .001$), and DWTG and DUTG ($p = .021$). Accordingly, it can be concluded that DA had a significant effect on improving the participants' vocabulary retention. In addition, employing Telegram significantly improved the participants' vocabulary retention. The findings are also depicted in Figure 2.

Table 10

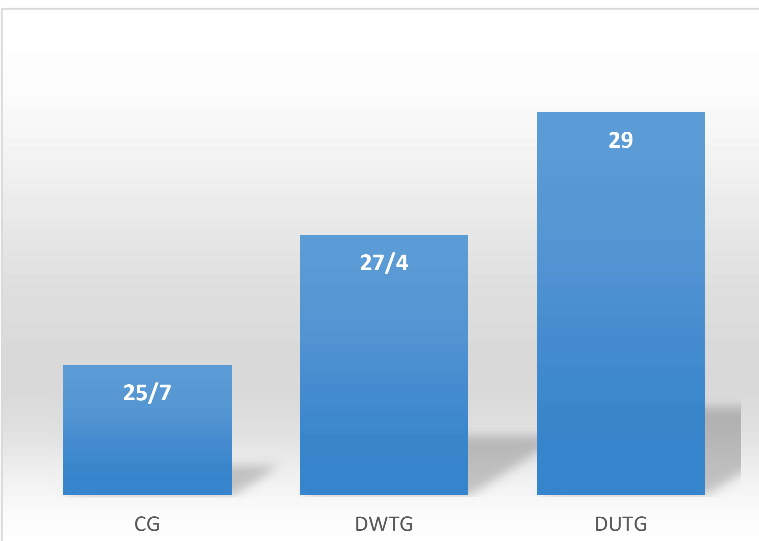
The Results of the Bonferroni Test for Comparing the Mean Scores of the Groups on the Delayed Posttest

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CG	DWTG	-1.700*	.548	.013	-3.10	-.30
	DUTG	-3.300*	.548	.000	-4.70	-1.90
DWTG	CG	1.700*	.548	.013	.30	3.10
	DUTG	-1.600*	.548	.021	-3.00	-.20
DUTG	CG	3.300*	.548	.000	1.90	4.70
	DWTG	1.600*	.548	.021	.20	3.00

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure 2

Groups' Mean Scores on the Delayed Posttest



4.2. Addressing Research Question Three

A one-sample t-test was conducted to analyze the results of the questionnaire which was administered to the participants of DUTG.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics of the Results of the Questionnaire

	N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*Std.* Error Mean
Attitude	10	3.610	.3213	.1016

As illustrated in Table 11, the average score of participants' attitudes was 3.61, surpassing the set criterion of 3.00. This method evaluates the average score against a fixed value (in this analysis, 3.00, as the questionnaire choices ranged from 1 to 5 with an average of 3). These findings suggested that participants had a positive attitude towards learning vocabulary through Telegram. To determine if this positive attitude was statistically meaningful, it was important to assess the significance level (2-tailed) in the one-sample t-test.

Table 12

One-Sample t-Test Results for Participants' Attitude Scores

	Test Value = 3.00					
	t	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Attitude	6.004	9	.000	.6100	.380	.840

Table 12 demonstrates a notable contrast between the participants' average attitude score ($M = 3.61$) and the standard value of the options (3) as the p-value was below the designated level of significance ($p < .001$). Therefore, it can be deduced that the participants held favorable views towards learning vocabulary via Telegram.

5. Discussion

Evaluating learners' performance is essential, but traditional static assessment methods have faced criticism for their limitations. In EFL context, static assessment is viewed as a missed opportunity for learning, particularly in language acquisition. To address these shortcomings, new tendencies in language assessment have emerged. This research aimed to scrutinize the role of DA in the acquisition and retention of academic English vocabulary by Iranian PhD candidates in dentistry, utilizing the social platform Telegram.

The data analysis revealed that DA had a significant positive impact on participants' vocabulary knowledge and retention. Participants demonstrated improved word learning and more effective memorization. The questionnaire results indicated that participants held positive attitudes towards using DA and learning vocabulary through Telegram. These findings support previous studies that have shown the constructive role of DA in language learning and teaching. Similar positive attitudes towards learning vocabulary through Telegram were also found in studies conducted by other researchers.

Furthermore, the outcomes of this research align with the results of Saeidi and Hosseinpour's (2013) study in which the role of DA in vocabulary learning in general English classes and its positive impact on student performance was highlighted. DA goes beyond mere vocabulary testing by incorporating various evaluation methods such as projects, essays, and performances, which significantly enhance the teaching and learning quality. This approach provides an opportunity for active learning.

Implementing DA in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes increases learners' engagement and motivation, and reduces test anxiety. It allows teachers to gauge learners' understanding, identify areas where additional support is needed, and actively involve learners in the learning process. Consequently, DA can be effectively employed in English classes to enhance language education and improve learners' vocabulary knowledge (Hanifi et al., 2016).

MALL has been extensively studied in previous research (Ahmad, 2013; Chinnery, 2006; Khabiri & Bagher Khatibi, 2013; Traxler, 2009; Wagner, 2005; Wong & Looi, 2010), and most research studies have demonstrated the beneficial impact of using Telegram on enhancing learners' overall English proficiency, particularly in terms of vocabulary. The current study's results are consistent with prior research, indicating that participants who utilized Telegram for vocabulary learning showed superior performance compared to those who did not.

Also, the research results corroborate the findings of Yunus et al. (2013), who highlighted the benefits of using information and communication technology (ICT) in English classrooms. They found that ICT attracts learners' attention, facilitates vocabulary acquisition and memorization, and improves reading and writing abilities. The integration of mobile applications in learning allows learners to connect language and content, providing opportunities for enhanced language learning (Yassaei, 2012). This finding supports the notion that MALL, coupled with advancements in educational technology, can improve language learning among EFL learners, as confirmed by Wu et al. (2012).

Mobile devices offer learners a wide range of learning opportunities, overcoming the constraints of time and space. Learners can access vast amounts of information online, watch educational videos, listen to podcasts, and utilize electronic dictionaries on their mobile phones. Mobile devices also provide pronunciation support, enabling learners to listen to correct word pronunciation, and facilitating more effective learning and memorization. Social networks like Telegram foster knowledge sharing and collaboration among learners, further enhancing language learning motivation.

Furthermore, learners utilize their cell phones to listen to the accurate pronunciation of new words, enabling them to learn and memorize them more effectively. In addition, platforms such as Telegram offer learners the chance to exchange ideas and knowledge, thereby enhancing their English proficiency. Hence, MALL serves as a motivational tool for EFL learners, as evidenced by the findings of the current study and supported by several prior studies (Khodashenas & Amouzagar, 2013; Kukulska-Hulme & de los Arcos, 2011; Mosavi Miangah & Nezarat, 2012). As the previous studies indicate, DA emphasizes the interactive learning process which makes learners aware of their potential and is also effective and helpful for learning skills and subskills.

6. Conclusion

Implementing DA in EFL classes encourages learners' engagement, boosts motivation, and reduces test anxiety. It allows teachers to gauge learners' understanding, identify areas requiring additional support, and actively involve learners in the learning process. The learning and retention of vocabulary are effectively enhanced through DA. Additionally, the use of Telegram positively impacts EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge and retention, with learners displaying favorable attitudes towards learning vocabulary through the platform.

However, the study faced limitations. The unavailability of Telegram in Iran posed challenges for participants in the DUTG, as they were unable to join the class conveniently, potentially affecting the results. Time constraints limited the researchers' ability to teach the same content to both the DUTG and DWTG, leading to limitations in individual learner evaluation. A smaller sample size was chosen due to time limitations, impacting the generalizability of the statistical results. Some participants were hesitant to participate in class activities, making it difficult to assess their performance dynamically. Due to the limited number of dentistry applicants at the desired level, 30 participants were selected (10 per group). Conducting this study with a larger sample size (at least 20 per group) would likely yield more impactful and generalizable results.

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for EFL test constructors, educational administrators, teachers, syllabus designers, curriculum planners, materials developers, and EFL learners seeking to improve their language proficiency. It is crucial for all students to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

Future studies can duplicate this research with diverse participants in various settings. The effect of DA on language skill acquisition and other linguistic components can be analyzed separately. While this study concentrated on intermediate learners, it can be broadened to encompass learners at various skill levels. Gender disparities can also be investigated by separately analyzing the performance, vocabulary retention, and attitudes of males and females when using DA.

Conflict of interest

The author certifies that she has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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A Study of Iranian EFL Senior High School Teachers' Perceptions and Practices Regarding Teaching English Idiomatic Expressions

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Abstract

This study was an endeavor to analyze how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers at Iranian senior high schools perceive the challenges of teaching idiomatic expressions and how they address them in the classroom. To this end, the researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 30 Iranian male and female teachers who teach English as compulsory courses at all grades of senior high schools in Qom, selected through convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate in this inquiry. Grounded theory was used to analyze the data. The results revealed that many teachers were concerned about the inadequacy of the textbooks used in senior high schools (Vision series), as they do not emphasize the teaching of English idiomatic expressions, even though such expressions have been included in the recent University Entrance Examinations. Regarding teaching strategies for idiom comprehension, on the other hand, the teachers often provided first language (L1) equivalents for L2 idioms, guided students' attention to contextual clues, and explained the meanings of idioms. Additionally, for idiom production, they had students make stories, conversations, or sentences using the target idioms and provided them with lists of frequent idioms to memorize and use as needed. These findings shed light on the challenges teachers face and their strategies when teaching idioms at school.

Keywords: idiomatic expressions, L2 idiom teaching, challenges of L2 idiom teaching, strategies of L2 idiom teaching, Iranian high school teachers

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1. Introduction

For English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, idiomatic expressions and phrases, such as *once in a blue moon*, *beat around the bush*, *make up your mind*, *you don't say*, *I can't agree with you more,* and many others, in utterances, almost always present an area of difficulty during their learning process. They may misunderstand the intended meanings of such phrases and employ them inappropriately in different contexts. Furthermore, many EFL learners make use of constructions that appear to be error-prone and are rarely used in oral or written discourse in English (Hinkel, 2017). Across languages, there are different ways to express the same concept or convey the same message, but even when the meanings of expressions are fairly clear, "the problem is that native speakers do not say it in that way" (Shin & Nation, 2008, p. 340), for instance, **weak as a mouse* or **urgent news*, instead of *weak as a kitten* or *breaking news*.

As they are not merely poetic or rhetorical embellishments but an inherent constituent of natural language, it seems essential for every learner to tackle the challenge of learning the second language (L2) idiomatic phrases. L2 learners should learn not only individual words but also conventionalized multiword units (MWUs) such as phrases, expressions, collocations, and phrasal verbs to communicate fluently and naturally under real-time conditions for real-life purposes (Boers et al., 2004). There would be a rationale behind developing the term 'idiomatic competence' by Liontas (2015, p. 622), which refers to the ability to comprehend and produce idioms properly, correctly, and effortlessly in a wide range of sociocultural contexts, like native speakers. Native speakers acquire it through frequent exposure to spoken and written language. However, in the EFL context, the limited exposure to the language necessitates addressing idiomatic phrases in the classroom. This raises several important questions about whether L2 idiomatic expressions are taught in class, whether they are included in textbooks, how teachers approach them, and whether there are effective strategies for students to learn them inside and outside the classroom.

The teaching of idioms, as suggested by Zarei (2014), has been a major practical challenge in EFL teaching in recent years. Zyzik (2011) emphasizes the necessity of addressing idioms in the English language classroom due to their pervasiveness in everyday communication. Despite the attention that idiomatic expressions have received in research, they are still relatively less commonplace than other components, such as vocabulary and grammar, in teaching (Hinkel, 2017). According to several researchers (e.g., Mäntylä, 2004; Vasiljevic, 2015), some teachers pay little attention to the teaching of L2 idiomatic phrases in their classrooms, some seem to prefer teaching certain areas of language, such as grammar, to teaching less certain ones, such as non-literal expressions, some take the learning of this subcategory of vocabulary for granted, some do not think that they should spend particular time and effort teaching them, employing different techniques and strategies in class because they consider them unnecessary and just decorative in language teaching, or others do not make a difference between teaching idiomatic expressions and teaching other lexical items. Whatever the reason is, this lack of attention or action leads to a condition where L2 idioms are not well addressed or treated in class. Vasiljevic (2015, p. 1) succinctly and metaphorically opines that idioms have remained "the ugly duckling" of vocabulary teaching. Some teachers still use traditional methods (i.e., presenting students with lists of decontextualized idioms and their equivalents or definitions and having them memorize them) to teach this part of the vocabulary. The memorization technique is the simplest way for teachers to utilize it, but it creates a heavy learning load that the students have to carry (Lechner, 2015). Not only is it time- and effort-consuming, but it makes students lose their motivation and fail in comprehension, retention, and production of idioms in real-life situations. Inexperienced teachers are not usually familiar with effective strategies for dealing with these expressions in class. Therefore, how idiomatic expressions are treated in class is worth studying because some outdated strategies have not been empirically supported (Zimmerman-Edison, 2015). Examining the status quo may give language practitioners a better understanding of the strategies currently used to help students interpret and/or produce figurative language better.

In particular, the Iranian educational system presents compulsory English courses at all grades of high schools to all students across the country. Although some idiomatic expressions have been presented in the newly developed English textbooks for senior high school students and tested in the recent University Entrance Examinations, many students have trouble learning them and there has been little research into the challenges of idiom teaching and the strategies teachers often employ to settle these issues. Hence, identifying the problems they confront in the process of English idiom teaching and reviewing effective strategies for dealing with these challenges at Iranian high schools may seem critical. The objective of this study was to fill part of this existing gap, providing Iranian EFL senior high school teachers with an opportunity to express their concerns, challenges, and suggestions related to teaching English idiomatic expressions in English classes, and investigating the methods that they frequently use in this regard. The findings of this study might offer helpful insights for syllabus designers, material developers, and teachers, allowing them to better understand the challenges of teaching these expressions and develop effective strategies to address them. To this end, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Iranian EFL senior high school teachers regarding the challenges of teaching English idiomatic expressions to students?

2. What strategies do Iranian EFL senior high school teachers use to help students comprehend English idiomatic expressions?

3. What strategies do Iranian EFL senior high school teachers employ to help students use English idiomatic expressions?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Idiomatic Expressions

During the 1990s, vocabulary teaching witnessed a shift in emphasis from teaching lists of single words to teaching language chunks, word strings, or MWUs such as metaphors, similes, proverbs, and idioms (Mäntylä, 2004). All conventionalized expressions can be as small as single words or short phrases (e.g., *whatever*, *the last straw*, or *easy as ABC*) or as long as complete sentences (e.g., *what is done is done*, *actions speak louder than words*, or *don't look a gift horse in the mouth)*. An idiomatic expression is defined as a conventionalized expression whose meaning is not always constructed from the meaning of its constituents (Fernando, 1996; Irujo, 1986). For instance, the figurative meaning of *to put in a nutshell* cannot be determined from the meanings of *put* and *nutshell* or the non-literal meaning of *to spill the beans* has nothing to do with *beans* or with *spilling* in its literal sense. Considering their level of figurativeness, idioms can be classified into four groups (Moon, 1996): a) transparent idioms (e.g., *like a kid in a candy store*), b) semi-transparent idioms (e.g., *to break the ice*), c) semi-opaque idioms (e.g., *to know the ropes*), d) opaque idioms (e.g., *to kick the bucket*).

2.2. Teaching L2 Idioms

Teaching idioms was a neglected topic in the English language teaching literature before the 1990s, mainly due to three misconceptions about the nature of language and the significance of teaching figurative language (Boers et al., 2004, p. 54). First, language was viewed as a dichotomy of 'grammar rules' and 'lists of individual words', and MWUs did not fit into this dichotomy. Second, figurative expressions were seen as serving stylistic purposes for rhetoric and poetry, leading to the belief that idiomatic expressions were only useful for making language colorful. Third, it was widely believed that the meanings of idioms were unpredictable, making it impossible to teach them systematically or insightfully.

However, cognitive semantics has provided new insights into the teaching and learning of idioms. Boers et al. (2004, pp. 54-55) specify the main assumptions of cognitive semantics which are in reaction to the traditional approach to language and idiom teaching as follows: First, 'the grammar-lexis' dichotomy has been rejected, and language is now viewed as a continuum from simple units to more complex ones, where MWUs fit into a central position. Second, figurative expressions are not merely optional embellishments but are widely used in everyday language. Third, a significant amount of figurative language, including idioms, is not random or arbitrary but has underlying reasons. This means that while the intended meaning of many idioms may not be transparent, it is possible to explain how and why that meaning came about. For instance, the phrase *life is a rollercoaster* can be motivated by the idea that life, like a rollercoaster, has its ups and downs. This implies that it is possible to teach idioms systematically and insightfully.

Why teach idioms? Liontas (2017, pp. 9-16) argues that idioms should be included in the L2 curriculum for the following reasons. First, idioms allow students to understand the mechanisms of natural human language. Second, students can go beyond the word-for-word meaning of such expressions and realize the critical role that context plays in idiom comprehension. Next, asking them to use idioms like native speakers provides students with an opportunity to develop mastery of them. Fourth, idioms help students scrutinize their own mental images pertinent to figurative expressions and the conceptual metaphors intervening in their idiomatic interpretations. Last, delving into idioms in the classroom can create an avenue for L2 practitioners to design a systematic program for facilitating the L2 learners' acquisition of idiomatic competence.

Today, the question, however, is not whether teachers should teach idioms, but rather the questions of what idioms should be taught and how may be significant (Kainulainen, 2006). As Yoshikawa (2008) avows, there is no single best approach to teaching all types of idioms in L2 classrooms, so it requires a multi-faceted approach. Teachers are sometimes advised to teach the structure of idioms; for example, they can explain the difference between separable and non-separable verbal idioms to the learners. When teaching certain idioms, comparing the first language (L1) and L2 may be effective, whereas for others, drawing a relationship between literal and figurative meanings may be helpful. Schmitt (1997) suggests that grouping and categorizing idioms can be an effective way to teach them. Learners' English proficiency is also an important factor in determining the appropriate teaching strategy. Boers et al. (2004) hold that intermediate learners can benefit the most from the cognitive linguistic approach to idiom teaching. However, traditional methods that emphasize memorization through various activities can be applied to all levels. Due to the insights of cognitive semantics, elementary language learners may have trouble understanding the vocabulary used in the expressions. Advanced learners may also hesitate about the acceptability of some L2 idioms, causing them to be reluctant to use them.

2.3. Previous Studies on the Challenges and Strategies of L2 Idiom Teaching

Many research studies have been conducted on learning idioms, but there are fewer studies on teaching idioms in L2 classrooms. Among these studies, some researchers have looked into teachers' attitudes toward teaching idioms as well as the challenges they face while teaching them in class (see, for example, Najarzadegan & Ketabi, 2015). Others have explored the effect of different methods and techniques on teaching idioms (see, for example, Tabatabaee & Rezvani, 2019).

Regarding the challenges, Robo (2014) studied the problems of teaching idioms in primary and secondary schools faced by Albanian EFL teachers. The data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 41 English teachers. The results suggested that teaching idioms was a challenging task, especially in deciding on the appropriate strategy. Primary school teachers found translating idioms with similar forms and meanings in the target language to be effective, while secondary school teachers used translation by paraphrasing as an alternative method. Similarly, Alrishan (2015) explored the perceptions of EFL Jordanian University teachers regarding the process of teaching the translation of idioms. The sample of her study was selected purposefully including six university professors with a PhD in translation or linguistics with more than five years of teaching experience. They taught translation courses to Master's students in English at two universities. She used an interview as an instrument of data collection and found that teaching students how to translate idioms, particularly opaque idioms, was not an easy task. Some of the instructors reported that they often have students present the word-for-word translation of idioms if it helps them get the true meaning. In their paper, Najarzadegan and Ketabi (2015) administered an attitude survey to 50 Iranian EFL university teachers teaching English courses to the students of English translation and English language teaching to identify the problems of teaching and learning idiomatic expressions and their causes. The findings indicated that the students were not familiar with the term 'idiomatic expressions' and their significance and sometimes failed to differentiate between idioms and other phrases. Their skills of guessing the meaning from context were also poor. Additionally, they had no information about their functions. Many students used the wrong particle or preposition with the verbs. Participating instructors also reported that their students confused idioms with proverbs and had definition or perception difficulties. The study suggested several causes for these problems such as the complicated structural patterns of idioms, little importance given to idioms in courses and textbooks at the university, and teachers' unawareness of useful sources of idioms to introduce.

Concerning L2 idioms teaching methods, on the other hand, Maisa and Karunakaran (2013) distributed a 25-item questionnaire, containing closed and open-ended questions, to five teachers teaching at universities in Hyderabad, India, to elicit their ideas about teaching idioms. The participants responded that the best way to teach idioms is to treat them as new items and try to encourage learners to guess their meaning from the situation and context. Elsewhere, Zarei and Rahimi (2014) did an experimental study to investigate the effects of different presentation techniques, including etymology explanation, contextualization, and explicit instruction of vocabulary, on L2 idioms learning. To this end, they selected 60 male intermediate-level EFL students and divided them into three groups to receive one of these instructions. Following two one–way ANOVA procedures to analyze data, they found no distinct effects of these techniques on the comprehension of English idioms. However, providing etymological information was found to be more helpful for the participants' idiom production compared to the other techniques. At the same time, Zarei (2014) also probed the effects of cooperative learning techniques, namely jigsaw, student teams achievement divisions, and group investigation, on the learning of English idioms among Iranian EFL learners. He chose four classes of Iranian EFL university students at the BA level. One class received traditional instruction (non-cooperative), while the others were taught using one of the above cooperative techniques. Analyses of the data using two one-way ANOVA procedures demonstrated that cooperative and traditional teaching methods yielded significant differences between participants' performances, which means that all three cooperative techniques were found to be more beneficial than the traditional treatment in terms of English idiom learning.

Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015) as well as Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh (2017) examined the influence of different ways of presenting idioms to Iranian EFL learners. In the former study, they examined the effect of short stories and etymological elaboration on the idiom understanding of 60 intermediate EFL students at a private language center. They were assigned to three groups with different instructions and given both pre- and post-tests. Analyzing the data showed the significant effect of short stories on the participants' consciousness of the concepts existing in idiomatic expressions. Besides, giving etymological elaboration had a positive effect on a higher level of idiomatic development. Similarly, in the latter study, they delved into the effectiveness of short stories and pictures in teaching idioms. 52 Iranian EFL learners in three groups participated in the experiment. Thirty English idioms were taught to each group in ten sessions using stories, pictures, and conventional techniques such as using definitions. Comparing the participants' performances on the pre- and post-tests supported the use of pictures and short stories in comparison to traditional instructions in teaching idioms.

Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki and Mahmoodi (2015), Freyn and Gross (2017), Khoshnevisan (2019), Tabatabaee and Rezvani (2019), and Khamrakulova (2023) also explored the impact of utilizing a multimodal teaching approach, such as using YouTube videos, movie clips, television shows, podcasts, pictures, diagrams, or websites, on teaching L2 idioms to EFL learners. They all reported similar results, indicating that participants who received instructions through a variety of modes outperformed on the idiom post-tests compared to the control groups. However, in another experimental study, Zarei (2020) compared the effect of four teaching techniques (i.e., visualization, storytelling, game, and lexical awareness) on the participants' learning of L2 idioms. The participants were 80 female Iranian EFL learners who studied English at a language center in Qazvin, Iran. Comparing their performances on idiom comprehension tests before and after the instructions revealed no significant difference among the four techniques; yet, they were differentially productive in terms of the participants' use of idioms. More specifically, visualization and storytelling were more beneficial than game and lexical awareness in English idiom learning. Recently, Zhao (2024) conducted a study to see if raising EFL learners' awareness of cross-language overlap helps L2 idiom teaching. The participants were 45 Chinese EFL learners assigned to two different treatment conditions. While the experimental group was taught 28 English idioms emphasizing the overlaps, the comparison group was taught these idioms using a traditional instruction method. Results obtained from the pre- and post-tests disclosed that participants took advantage of cross-language overlaps from both instructions, but the effect of the experimental condition on the semantic overlaps was more considerable.

Reviewing the previous studies makes it conspicuous that EFL learners experience numerous hindrances to understanding and using English idiomatic expressions. Teachers also have differing perspectives on the challenges associated with teaching these expressions and use various strategies to address them. However, despite the relative plethora of research, especially quantitative, on various aspects of L2 idioms among university or institute students, there seems to be a paucity of qualitative research using interviews with open-ended and non-judgmental questions to mirror more precisely the status quo of L2 idioms teaching at Iranian senior high schools from teachers' perspectives. Conducting interviews and using open-ended and non-judgmental questions allow participants to freely express themselves and tell their own stories concerning a certain topic. There is a need to investigate school teachers' perspectives on the challenges of teaching English idiomatic expressions to students and their teaching practices in depth. This study was descriptive and qualitative, aiming to bridge part of the existing gap by exploring the uncharted territory of idioms and the difficulties teachers confront in teaching them in English classes at schools. It also sought to investigate the strategies employed by teachers for teaching L2 idioms in the context of Iranian high school English classes.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This qualitative research was carried out in different senior high schools located in the four distinct districts of Qom, Iran, and the participants were selected among English teachers through the nonrandom convenience sampling method based on their availability and willingness to participate in the whole research process. There were 30 Iranian male and female teachers (15 males and 15 females) teaching English as a compulsory course at public or private senior high schools. All participating teachers were native Persian speakers having over three years of teaching experience at senior high schools. Nearly half of them (n = 14) had a BA in English language-related majors, such as literature, translation, and teaching, while the others either held an MA or were MA students in these fields. Since the participants' teaching contexts and geographical distribution might also affect the outcomes, the sample included almost an equal number of teachers from the different schools in the four districts of Qom (i.e., seven from District 1, seven from District 2, eight from District 3, and eight from District 4). Prior to administering any instrument, the participants were fully informed of the objective and importance of the current research. They were told that their information and responses would be treated as strictly confidential in order to encourage them to feel free to share honest and true responses. They could also ask for any clarification anytime they needed.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments employed to collect the relevant data consisted of individual semi-structured interviews conducted with Iranian high school English teachers in their L1 (i.e., Persian) in person. According to Charmaz (2006), such a technique makes it possible to examine a specific topic or experience in depth. The medium of interviews was the participants' L1 due to two reasons. First, language nuances might impact the data interpretation. Second, it was likely for some participants to feel uncomfortable verbalizing their ideas, thoughts, and experiences in English. The interview questions comprised open-ended items aimed at exploring how they deal with idiomatic expressions, what challenges they face in teaching these expressions, and which strategies they employ in teaching them in their classrooms. Employing open-ended questions can open a door for detailed discussions of the subject by eliciting unanticipated responses from the participants. It is inevitable that new ideas emerge during the interview. The interviewees were encouraged to speak freely and provide their own answers regarding their experience with English classes, textbooks, and students. The time spent for responding to the open-ended items ranged from 5 to 15 minutes with a mean of 10 minutes and 41 seconds. All responses were recorded during the interviews and later transcribed for subsequent analyses.

3.3. Procedures

This study was conducted in four phases. Initially, the researcher selected 30 Iranian male and female English teachers working in senior high schools on the basis of their availability and eagerness to cooperate in this inquiry. Next, a specific time was arranged for each participant to attend the interview session. To foster a comfortable environment, the researcher tried to engage with the participants as much as needed. Within the period of 30 days, the researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants to collect their perceptions about the problems they usually encounter in teaching idiomatic expressions. They were also asked to clarify how they deal with them to help students comprehend and use them. The participants were free to use their L1 (Persian) to respond to the interview questions and describe their current situations with the researcher's minimum interruption and management to maximize the chance of articulating their personalized conditions in any way they wished. All the interview sessions were recorded. Later, the recorded responses were transcribed verbatim, analyzed meticulously, and translated into English by the researcher. Finally, to ensure the credibility of the findings, member checks through which the participating teachers were asked to give their own ideas about the extracted themes and categories as well as the translated statements were utilized.

3.4. Data Analysis

To conduct a thorough analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the researcher followed grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and systematically categorized the responses into distinct, meaningful segments through the process of initial coding. During the subsequent cycle of coding, the previously coded data were placed into relevant categories.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Challenges Facing Teachers in the Teaching of L2 Idiomatic Expressions

The first research question of the study attempted to scrutinize the challenges Iranian EFL senior high school teachers confront in teaching idiomatic expressions to students in class. To answer this question, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with 30 teachers. The grounded theory analysis of the data revealed that Iranian EFL school teachers faced seven major challenges in terms of L2 idiom teaching as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Major Categories of Challenges of Teaching L2 Idiomatic Expressions

No.	Challenges	Frequency	Percent
1	Inappropriacy of materials or syllabi used at high school	12	38.7%
2	Students' inability to distinguish between idiomatic and literal expressions	7	22.58%
3	Students' low level of language proficiency	7	22.58%
4	Teachers' lack of time or energy	2	6.45%
5	Teachers' perceptions of idioms as unimportant units of language	1	3.22%
6	Teachers' unawareness of effective idiom teaching strategies	1	3.22%
7	Complexity of idioms	1	3.22%

Total	31	100%

Table 2 illustrates one by one the teachers' summarized responses to the open-ended question of interviews: "*What problems and difficulties do you encounter in teaching idiomatic expressions to the students in your class*?"

Table 2

Challenges of Teaching L2 Idiomatic Expressions

Teachers	Teachers' Responses
T1	Lack of a suitable source for introducing and teaching new words and expressions.
T2	Our students' low level of language proficiency does not let us work with expressions whose meanings are beyond their literal interpretations.
T3	The students cannot distinguish between literal and idiomatic expressions. I cannot teach them any idioms since they get confused easily.
T4	If I teach them idiomatic expressions, I think I will waste my time because they are not considered important in textbooks and syllabi. There are other important areas like grammar.
T5	Little attention is paid to idiomatic expressions in textbooks although there are some idiom items in the vocabulary section of the Entrance Examination.
T6	Students do not pay attention to the figurative meaning of idioms; instead, they translate them into their mother tongue word by word.
T7	I like to help the students learn how to understand and use idioms, but I do not have enough time and energy. They don't know the ABC of English.
T8	Teaching idioms is one of the hardest parts of language teaching and I do not know any teaching principles for making teaching idioms more effective.
T9	The low quality of the materials used in Iranian high schools is a big problem.
T10	Time limitation makes a problem. We have a lot of things to teach which are more important than idioms.
T11	Textbooks do not provide enough idiomatic expressions and exercises to develop the students' idiom comprehension. They are not able to prepare students for the Entrance Examination.
T12	There are more than 25 students in my class and they are not homogeneous in terms of their level of proficiency. I cannot teach these expressions in my class.
T13	My students cannot arrive at the right meaning of an idiom until I provide them with its

	equivalence in Persian.
T14	The newly developed English textbooks for high school students marginalize cultural issues. As a result, the language used in these textbooks is not authentic and native. You can see simplified and graded sentences without using any idiomatic expressions. Why should I teach idioms when they are not presented in the textbooks?
T15	My students often get in trouble when I speak in literal and simple English, let alone when I use some idiomatic expressions. Idioms are not literal; they do not mean what they say. By using idioms, my students cannot get what I am talking about.
T16	Students look up any single word in a dictionary. They do not know that there are also MWUs in English.
T17	I teach useful and frequent English idioms, but those that are not in frequent use are difficult for the students to learn.
T18	One of the difficulties in teaching English idioms is the lack of suitable activities in the textbooks to help the students deal with both comprehension and production of idioms.
T19	Most teachers, students, and parents care too much about exams and scores. They do not think about the learning process. As long as textbooks and syllabi do not consider idioms important, they do not pay attention to them.
T20	You cannot teach idiomatic expressions to high school students since their level of proficiency is low.
T21	The main problem is that the students cannot understand that the expression that they face is idiomatic. They define it literally. For example, there was a phrase *a far cry from* in a passage in their books; all the students treated it as a literal phrase.
T22	Even if I teach my students some English idioms and they master their meanings, it is not possible for them to use them correctly yet. They will learn them by themselves later.
T23	One difficulty in English idioms learning is the lack of suitable materials for teaching them.
T24	The main problem is misunderstanding. When the students do not know the meaning of unfamiliar words in an expression, they ask me to help them. However, a large number of idiomatic expressions in English look deceptively easy to the student at first sight, but their meanings can be radically different from what one might expect.
T25	I always have difficulty teaching my students how to distinguish between figurative and literal expressions.
T26	When my students encounter new idiomatic expressions, they tend to translate each word of the

	expression into Persian. Consequently, they often misinterpret the intended meaning.
T27	I have no difficulty since I teach them how to use context to construct the right meaning of idioms. They are often successful.
T28	Syllabi and textbooks often neglect to include enough idiomatic expressions or give them sufficient attention.
T29	There are not more than 5 or 6 idioms in their textbooks. Textbooks do not help us to know what to do with idioms.
T30	Because idiomatic expressions are cultural specifics and their textbooks ignore cultural similarities and differences, students' lack of English cultural background causes a problem in understanding idioms.

The teachers' interview responses showed that they encountered several various difficulties and challenges in teaching English idioms. As Table 1 and Table 2 demonstrate, many teachers (12 teachers: T1, T4, T5, T9, T11, T14, T18, T19, T23, T28, T29 & T30) complained about the inappropriacy of materials, sources, or textbooks used in Iranian senior high schools in terms of teaching English idiomatic expressions. They believed that these sources inadequately introduce and teach these expressions from both quantitative and qualitative aspects. They claimed that enough attention is not paid to them in syllabi and textbooks, leading to insufficient time and effort devoted to their teaching. However, the recent University Entrance Examinations have included several English idioms in their vocabulary sections. Furthermore, teachers noted that the newly developed English textbooks for high school students (Vision series) overlooked or marginalized cultural issues resulting in a scarcity of idiomatic expressions to avoid making students aware of cultural similarities and differences. Idioms mirror the culture of the language. This lack of English cultural background was seen as potentially hindering the students' comprehension of idioms inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, teachers observed that the language used in these textbooks was not authentic and native, as it was simplified, literal, and graded at the expense of figurative or culture-based expressions. Materials developers tried to separate the language from the target culture and localize it. Some teachers also claimed that the lack of suitable exercises in the textbooks hindered students' abilities to comprehend and produce idioms. Finally, a few teachers questioned the necessity of teaching idiomatic expressions when the textbooks did not emphasize or include them. This dissatisfaction prompted the researcher to identify and quantify the idiomatic expressions used in their textbooks. In total, 20 idiomatic expressions were found in the three senior high school books (Vision series): two expressions in Vision 1 for 11th grade, one in Vision 2 for 12th grade, and 17 in Vision 3 for 13th grade. This finding is supported by Liontas's (2002), Alshiraida's (2014), Khan and Daşkin's (2014), and Najarzadegan and Ketabi's (2015) studies, which revealed that idiomatic expressions are rarely and poorly introduced in English textbooks and have a marginal position in syllabi.

Seven teachers (T3, T6, T16, T21, T24, T25 & T26) also found it challenging to teach students how to distinguish between idiomatic and literal expressions in context. They explained that the main issue is that the students cannot recognize that the expression that they come across in context is idiomatic. Thus, they treat it as a literal expression, interpreting each word literally; they often get the wrong meaning of it. Many idiomatic expressions in English may seem simple or non-figurative at first glance (e.g., *couch potato, a far cry from* used in their textbooks), but their true meanings can be quite different from what they appear to be. Some of the tricky expressions included in Iranian senior high school textbooks are as follows: *No pain, no gain*, *spare no pains*, *Too many cooks spoil the broth*, *Cut your coat according to your cloth*. Students often fail to diagnose that they are idiomatic phrases that necessitate figurative interpretations. They interpret them literally at first and only realize their mistake when someone points out that the expression is idiomatic or the literal interpretation does not make sense in context. Eventually, they learn to approach these expressions differently to understand their true meanings. This finding lends support to Cieslicka's (2006) and Najarzadegan and Ketabi's (2015) findings that the students could not discriminate between idiomatic and literal expressions, leading to activating their literal meanings. To settle this problem, teachers can give students explicit instructions or hold workshops through which they raise students' consciousness of the nature, structure and function of idioms and practice with them to detect these expressions from spoken and written contexts and examples from corpora, highlighting the beneficial role of contextual clues. In addition, Vasiljevic (2015) suggests exploiting judgment tasks to draw students' attention to figurative interpretations. In this activity, students can see a group of sentences in which some idioms are employed figuratively and others are used literally. The following is an instance of this activity:

1. *The man whose cell phone was stolen sees red.*
2. *a. What color do you see in this room?*

   b. I see red.

Moreover, seven teachers (T2, T7, T12, T13, T15, T20 & T22) explained that most Iranian senior high school students have a low level of proficiency so they do not understand literal expressions, let alone idiomatic ones. In other words, when the teacher or the textbook uses simple and literal sentences, the students have trouble understanding them. If idiomatic expressions are used, the students will get in bigger trouble. If teachers decide to spend time teaching them in class, they will face time limitations since they are not specified in their syllabi and textbooks. In contrast, there are more pivotal areas, such as grammar, that need to be taught. Accordingly, teachers, as T7 & T10 mentioned, prefer to focus on the areas outlined in syllabi and textbooks, skipping others. Furthermore, teaching idioms is not an easy task and is more demanding than teaching grammar or individual vocabulary items. This difficulty could be a reason why teachers refrain from using idioms in their classrooms and instead opt for simpler and easier-to-understand sentences. This finding is compatible with the results of Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016), suggesting that teachers hardly ever teach and use idiomatic expressions because of their students' low proficiency level. They intentionally omit idioms and use simple, concrete, and literal sentences while speaking in class to be more understood by students of different proficiency levels. However, learners of a lower level of language proficiency are always deprived of L2 idiom exposure. A question arises here: 'Textbooks and teachers avoid teaching idioms to the students, but won't they meet them in different forms of real-life language outside the classroom?' If so, they should skip or ignore them since they are learners of the so-called low level of language proficiency. It is a paradox that beginners are often discouraged from learning idioms because they may struggle to use them effectively. However, if beginners are not taught to engage with idioms at all, they may miss out on developing the idiomatic competence that is crucial for their overall communicative skills and language proficiency. In this regard, Khan and Daşkin (2014) recommend that idioms not be avoided or delayed for later stages in the language development of a learner as they are categories of figurative, formulaic, and functional language and cultural references and the comprehension and production of them can assist learners in enhancing their communicative competence. However, beginners can start with more transparent, more frequent, and less demanding idiomatic expressions.

4.2. Strategies Used by Teachers to Help Students Comprehend English Idiomatic Expressions

The second research question of the study attempted to investigate which strategies Iranian EFL senior high school teachers use to teach students to comprehend L2 idiomatic expressions. To answer this question, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with teachers. Analysis of the data, following grounded theory, indicated that Iranian EFL school teachers used nine major categories of strategies in teaching L2 idiom comprehension as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Major Categories of Strategies Used by the Teachers to Help the Students Comprehend English Idioms

No.	Strategies	Frequency	Percent
1	Comparing L1 and L2 idioms and offering L1 equivalents	13	29.54%
2	Highlighting or providing contexts through examples, stories, etc.	10	22.72%
3	Defining, paraphrasing, or elaborating	7	15.9%
4	Asking to memorize	4	9.09%
5	Ignoring	3	6.81%
6	Teaching how to use a dictionary	2	4.54%
7	Presenting a list of common idioms	2	4.54%
8	Asking to guess	2	4.54%
9	Making a comparison between the non-idiomatic and idiomatic phrases	1	2.27%
	Total	44	100%

Furthermore, Table 4 displays one by one the teachers' summarized responses to the open-ended question of interviews: "*What strategies do you use to teach the students to understand English idiomatic expressions?*"

Table 4

Strategies Used by the Teachers to Help the Students Comprehend English Idioms

Teachers	Teachers' Responses
T1	For every English idiom, I introduce an equivalent in Persian. Using appropriate equivalents really works.
T2	I give them a list of frequent and useful English idioms with their Persian equivalents.
T3	I introduce idiomatic expressions through different appropriate contexts.
T4	I make a simple story while teaching a particular idiom.
T5	I provide them with the Persian equivalents of English idioms.
T6	I teach them how to look new idioms up in a dictionary.
T7	I introduce idioms in examples, stories, etc.
T8	I never focus on them. They can understand them based on the context.
T9	I help them use a dictionary to find the right meaning of idiomatic expressions.
T10	It depends on the type of idiomatic expression. If it is transparent, I try to provide my students with the context to get the meaning. If it is opaque, I provide my students with an L2 definition or L1 equivalent.
T11	I ask the students to translate the literal meaning into their L1 (Persian) to understand idioms and find the suitable equivalent based on the passage.
T12	I ignore them. They are not frequently used in their textbooks. Even if they are used, the context can help the students guess their meanings.
T13	I ask them to memorize the Persian equivalence of every frequent idiom.
T14	I present a Persian equivalent of English idioms.
T15	I encourage the students to memorize the idiomatic expressions as MWUs.
T16	I give an L2 definition or L1 equivalent for every idiom they meet in the context.
T17	My students should memorize every idiom used in the textbooks or in class with their interpretations in L2 or equivalents in L1.
T18	I teach idioms through elaboration and paraphrasing.
T19	I tell them to focus on the context to get the right meaning of the idiom.
T20	I translate each word of the idiom into Persian and I help them to find its equivalent in Persian.
T21	I have a list of frequent idioms with their equivalents in Persian. I give it to them.

T22	I paraphrase idioms or make new stories using them to make their meanings clear.
T23	They should memorize English idioms with their definitions or Persian equivalents.
T24	I help them to predict the right meaning of idioms.
T25	I define the new words of the idiom in English and then students can guess the right meaning of the idiom in English.
T26	I use simply literal synonyms for figurative expressions. For example, I say "*to teach someone*" for the expression "*to show someone a rope*".
T27	I use the idiomatic expression in other similar examples to make its meaning clear.
T28	I help them define every new word of the expression and then they find an appropriate equivalent in Persian.
T29	I skip them. The students can construct their own meaning using the passage.
T30	I provide my students with more examples to make the meaning of idioms clear.

The responses from the interviews with English teachers showed how they taught senior high school students to understand English idiomatic expressions. According to Table 3 and Table 4, except for three teachers (T8, T12, & T29) who did not explicitly address English idiomatic expressions in class, the teachers used three methods more frequently to help students understand them.

First, they provided the students with L1 equivalents of English idioms, highlighting the similarities and differences between L1 and L2, and asked them to memorize idioms along with their equivalents so that they become able to understand them the next time they come across them. Table 4 illustrates that many teachers (14 teachers: T1, T2, T5, T10, T11, T13, T14, T15, T16, T17, T20, T21, T23, & T28) used this strategy. They assisted the students in arriving at the meanings of L2 idioms by comparing idioms in L1 and L2. Irujo (1986) and Zhao (2024) particularly lend support to this strategy claiming that a comparison of L1 and L2 idioms is an effective way to enhance learners' awareness about the cross-linguistic differences of idioms. Certain idioms are used by both L1 and L2 speakers similarly and in a similar context, for example, the expression *white as snow* occurs both in English and Persian. Such similarity makes L2 idioms easier to learn in comparison to those that partially or completely differ from the learners' L1 (e.g., the English idiom *clear as mud* does not occur in Persian). Teachers are suggested to begin with the former. Those expressions that do not present special and cultural problems should also be taught first. Additionally, teachers should start with expressions with transparent figurative meanings; transparent idioms are relatively easier to understand and translate than opaque ones. On the other hand, many scholars insist that teaching the commonly used ones that learners are more likely to encounter when reading books and stories, listening to podcasts and music, watching TV shows or movies, or interacting with L2 speakers online or in-person be regarded as a high priority. Nation (2001), for instance, postulates that idioms should be taught taking their frequency and range of occurrence into account, which means that the more frequently the idiom is used, the more significant it is to be dealt with in EFL classes. Appropriate pedagogical and authentic materials, and real-life conversations on social media, TV, radio, podcasts, movies, magazines, or newspapers provide good sources of idioms. L2 instructors can have students take notes and write down the idioms and expressions they face when utilizing these sources.

Second, the teachers encouraged the students to pay attention to the context to make intelligent guesses and infer the true meanings of English idioms. As shown in Table 4, eight teachers (T3, T4, T7, T8, T10, T12, T19, & T29) employed this strategy. This finding is in line with those of Maisa and Karunakaran (2013), Najarzadegan and Ketabi (2015), and Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016), which revealed that teachers urged their students to guess or infer the meaning of idiomatic expressions from context. It also confirms the study by Bulut and Celik-Yazici (2004), which indicated that the strategy of using contextual information was the first common and effective strategy among others. Similarly, Nation (1990) holds that guessing from context is one of the most effective strategies in vocabulary learning. One point here is that teachers should not insist on teaching various vocabulary items out of context in a vacuum. This point particularly stands true in terms of teaching idioms. Teachers should use contextualized examples. For instance, using video clips from popular shows that feature idiomatic expressions can help students see them in context, making them more relatable. However, some teachers simply resort to addressing L2 idioms in isolation, rather than integrating them into broader contexts. This kind of teaching is no better than teaching single words in isolation. Decontextualized idioms are more difficult to learn. Idioms can be processed better in context and it helps meaningful learning take place. Idioms that appear in context often seem simpler to understand since the listener/reader has access to more contextual clues to infer the intended meaning. Decontextualized idioms are dead; "A word out of context is a fish out of water." Material developers and teachers should not only try to provide students with as many contexts as possible to teach idiomatic expressions but also equip them with appropriate skills to utilize contextual clues in guessing the figurative meaning of idioms. This finding provides further confirmation of those of Tabatabaei and Hajizadeh (2015), Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh (2017), and Khamrakulova (2023), displaying that short stories had a significant effect on L2 learners' consciousness of the concepts underlying figurative and idiomatic expressions.

The third most frequent method that the teachers employed was to explain and paraphrase English idioms in the students' L1 or L2 to make their meanings clear. According to Table 4, six teachers (T18, T22, T24, T25, T26 & T27) utilized this method. For instance, when the students encountered the idiom *to show someone a rope*, the teacher (T26) rephrased it as *to teach someone*. Table 4 also indicates that the teachers seldom explained the origin of idioms to make a connection between idioms and their meanings. Since many idiomatic expressions carry non-arbitrary meanings, providing such information will allow learners to comprehend and recall them more successfully. Teachers should not forget that finding the meaning of idiomatic expressions by students is not as easy as they think. It is not always included in the dictionary or shared on the Internet. The regular dictionary presents them with the non-idiomatic interpretation of the words constituting an idiomatic expression. Hence, teachers should introduce special dictionaries that suggest expressions and phrases along with their true meanings and train students to benefit from them when necessary. Teachers can also train them how to use the Internet and artificial intelligence-powered programs to find the intended meanings of idioms.

Since no single technique can teach all types of idioms to all students in L2 classrooms, a multi-faceted approach in which teachers can use a wide range of techniques considering different factors, such as types of idioms, learners' level of proficiency, learners' background knowledge and native language, and objectives of the course, is recommended. For instance, to teach transparent idioms, teachers can focus on the relationship between literal and idiomatic interpretations (e.g., there is an obvious relationship between *listening eagerly* and *being all ears,* or *completing two tasks with one action* and *killing two birds with one stone*). On the other hand, they can provide L1 equivalents or contextual clues to teach opaque idioms (e.g., *this luxurious house cost me an arm and a leg,* the contextual clue such as *luxurious house* helps understand the idiom).

4.3. Strategies Employed by Teachers to Help Students Use English Idioms

The last research question aimed to investigate which strategies English teachers employ to help high school students use L2 idiomatic expressions. To answer this question, the researcher interviewed 30 senior high school teachers. Analyzing the data, using grounded theory, suggested that Iranian EFL school teachers employed eight major categories of strategies to teach L2 idiom production as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Major Categories of Strategies Used by the Teachers to Help the Students Produce English Idioms

No.	Strategies	Frequency	Percent
1	Asking to use idioms in contexts, such as stories, dialogues, discussions, sentences, etc.	21	52.5%
2	Providing a list of productive idioms	4	10%
3	Asking to memorize	4	10%
4	Asking to translate from L1 into L2 or vice versa	3	7.5%
5	Treating idioms like other vocabulary items	3	7.5%
6	Offering L1 equivalents	2	5%
7	Ignoring	2	5%
8	Visualizing	1	2.5%
	Total	40	100%

Moreover, Table 6 demonstrates one by one the teachers' summarized responses to the open-ended question of interviews: "*What strategies do you use to teach the students to use English idiomatic expressions?*"

Table 6

Strategies Used by the Teachers to Help the Students Produce English Idioms

Teachers	Teachers' Responses
T1	I ask my students to make stories using idioms. They can also have a conversation in pairs using a couple of idioms.
T2	I encourage them to memorize new idioms with their definitions or Persian equivalences. They can use them like other new words while speaking English.
T3	When I introduce idioms, I tell my students to make a sentence with each one.
T4	I ask the students to give a lecture or something and use a couple of relevant idioms.
T5	I introduce some frequent idioms in their mother tongue, they should find their English equivalents.
T6	I have started teaching frequent idioms used in speaking. I ask the students to memorize them like new words and use them when necessary.
T7	Making stories with idioms can be helpful.
T8	I teach idioms like other new words. They can memorize and use them if they know their meanings.
T9	I give them a list of useful idioms to use.
T10	Memorizing and exemplifying.
T11	I make new stories with idioms to show the students how they can use them in context.
T12	In the twelfth grade, we have a part devoted to idiomatic expressions. Here, I ask the students to present dialogues using some of them.
T13	"*A word out of context is a fish out of water*". I teach my students how to use idioms in different contexts.
T14	They can make their own stories using relevant idioms. They can learn how and when they use idioms.
T15	Not only do I teach the meaning of idioms, but I also teach my students how to use them correctly and effectively by providing different examples and stories.
T16	I provide idioms in context or I ask some pairs or groups of students to make a conversation or dialogue and use a couple of idioms in it.
T17	I present some idioms with funny pictures.

T18	I ask the students to contextualize the idioms. They can use them in their stories, sentences, etc.
T19	The majority of students cannot say or write simple sentences. How should I expect them to use idiomatic expressions?
T20	I show the new idiomatic expression in different contexts. The student will use them in those contexts.
T21	I provide the equivalent of English idioms in Persian.
T22	I help my students understand the idioms that they come across in the passage, and I want them to make similar sentences.
T23	I ask them to make a list of frequent idioms, memorize them, and use them in their sentences.
T24	I give the definition and equivalent of idioms in L2 and L1.
T25	By making sentences with idioms, they can learn how to use them.
T26	I give my students a Persian idiom, they should find its equivalent in English.
T27	When I speak English, I try to use some idioms intentionally so that my students get familiar with them and finally use them while speaking.
T28	I present English idioms with their Persian equivalents to encourage them to use some of them.
T29	I never ask my students to use idiomatic expressions.
T30	I provide the situation and ask for the relevant idiom.

The teachers' interview responses showed how Iranian senior high school teachers taught the students to use English idioms. According to Table 5 and Table 6, two common methods were identified: first, the teachers asked the students to create stories, role-play conversations, or make sentences using the target idioms; second, the teachers provided the students with a list of idioms along with their definitions or equivalents, and asked them to memorize and use them like other lexical items when necessary.

The majority of teachers (18 teachers in total: T1, T3, T4, T7, T10, T11, T12, T13, T14, T15, T16, T18, T20, T22, T23, T25, T27 & T30) taught the students how to use English idiomatic expressions through contextualizing, providing examples, and making stories, conversations, dialogues, and sentences. They could do these activities in pairs or groups or even individually. As Nation (2001) recommends, idioms can be added to the vocabulary items being acquired by integrating them into dialogues and stories. This finding also corroborates those of Wu (2008), Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016), Zarei (2020), and Khamrakulova (2023), showing that teachers can teach idioms through group discussion, story writing/telling, dialogue writing, and role-playing. These activities will offer a good chance for students to produce L2 idioms to communicate with their peers and classmates and have fun in L2 learning. Since most Iranian EFL learners are not in contact with native English speakers and have little exposure to English input outside the classroom, the responsibility of providing a natural language environment is on the shoulders of materials and teachers. They should expose the students to real-life language containing idioms.

Ten teachers (T2, T5, T6, T8, T10, T21, T23, T24, T26, & T28) also familiarized the students with the idioms along with their English definitions or Persian equivalents to use them in spoken or written English. Some teachers presented Persian idioms and asked the students to provide their English equivalents. Four teachers (T5, T6, T9, & T23) provided a list of frequent English idioms with Persian equivalents and had the students memorize and use them like single words. Idioms can be dealt with as if they are single words and a part of everyday vocabulary. Since the form of idioms tolerates little or no variation, learners should learn to treat them as a single unit. Some teachers also categorized idioms into different groups based on their common topics or words. These results support Najarzadegan and Ketabi (2015), who showed that some teachers used these strategies to teach idiom production. However, learners cannot simply be encouraged to acquire idioms by giving them vast lists of idioms and asking them to memorize them. This approach is based on the traditional approach, which considers figurative expressions as 'dead metaphors' that could be learned only through blind memorization.

One important point in the teaching of idiom production is that you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink; that is, teachers can make the students aware of the role of using idiomatic expressions in developing communicative skills, present lists of idioms, and provide opportunities to practice them. However, no one can oblige them to employ such expressions in their language production. Although a good command of idioms is related to a high level of language proficiency and using them appropriately and accurately may make learners' language sound more natural, L2 learners, due to the complexity of idioms, tend to avoid employing them. A solution to this problem is that if they take responsibility for their own learning, the more they communicate in L2, and the more they are exposed to natural input (e.g. newspapers, TV shows and series, podcasts, and movies), the more they may realize their needs to use ready-made idiomatic expressions in addition to non-idiomatic ones to convey their thoughts naturally in L2. Therefore, encouraging them to listen to the news, watch television programs, and read authentic materials such as newspapers, articles, novels, and Internet pages, highlighting idioms is the first step in improving students' idiomatic competence. Moving from idiom comprehension (listening and reading) to idiom production (speaking and writing) by providing students with ample opportunities to communicate using these expressions naturally could be the next step. For instance, a productive technique to assist students in learning idioms is to put idioms in speaking and listening activities as follows:

Who drives you crazy at your home? What is your pet peeve?

5. Conclusion

This research examined how teachers dealt with idiomatic expressions in English classes at Iranian senior high schools. It was found that most teachers struggled with the textbooks' inadequate focus on English idiomatic expressions. They also found it challenging to teach students to differentiate between idiomatic and literal expressions. Moreover, many teachers reported that Iranian senior high school students generally have a poor command of English, making it difficult for them to understand both literal and idiomatic utterances. However, the teachers mentioned three common methods that they used for teaching idiom comprehension: providing L1 equivalents for L2 idioms, focusing on cross-language overlaps, and asking them to memorize them, directing their attention to contextual clues to infer the meanings of idioms, and explaining idioms in L1 or L2 to make their meanings clear. For teaching idiom production, the teachers often asked students to create stories, conversations, or sentences using relevant idioms or provided a list of idioms with their L2 definitions or L1 equivalents for students to memorize and use in their language production.

The results offer several pedagogical implications for EFL teachers, curriculum developers, syllabus designers, and material developers. Many participating teachers expressed difficulty with teaching idiomatic expressions due to the lack of focus on them in syllabi and textbooks. Idioms should not be treated as an activity for embellishing textbooks or killing class time. Material developers and syllabus designers should take the suggestions of EFL teachers more seriously and make necessary modifications to the existing syllabi and textbooks by reconsidering the role of situational and cultural contexts in learning L2, specifying a good place for teaching idioms, and presenting effective instructions, strategies, and techniques in this regard. Adding multimodal sources to the existing materials, namely video clips, podcasts or pictures, which contain and depict everyday idiomatic expressions to enrich their exposure can help students see them in context within various modes, making them more understandable and productive. Additionally, teachers can benefit from effective ways to provide learners with ample opportunities to work with L2 idioms. Activities such as inserting them in speaking questions, stories or conversations, or presenting students with both literal and figurative phrases to convey the same concept are some instances. Furthermore, teachers should not neglect the facilitative role of L1 in teaching L2 idioms. Idioms that are shared in both languages are easier to process. Thus, it is reasonable for teachers to pair up L1 idioms with their counterparts in L2, and vice versa.

Limitations are an inevitable part of any research, and the present research is no exception. Addressing some of the study's limitations can help prevent potential overgeneralizations. The primary limitations of the study included the limited number and variation of participants, the methods of sampling, the data collection and analysis techniques, and the variation of materials.

Research on the role and place of English idiomatic expressions in teaching, particularly in the context of Iranian schools is still limited. Thus, further research in this specific area using different variables is recommended. The participants of the current study were Iranian senior high school teachers; however, the outcomes may differ if participants from different grade levels, teaching experiences, educational backgrounds, teaching contexts, geographical distributions, cultural backgrounds, and native languages are included. Although this study was descriptive and qualitative in nature, aiming to describe the status quo through interviews, further experimental and quantitative studies could explore the effectiveness of all the teaching strategies reported in this study in learning L2 idioms. Finally, while the present study used interviews to gather data on teachers' perceptions and practices, other studies could use alternative data collection methods, such as observations or journals.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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The Connection Between English Language Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity in Iranian Context

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Abstract

Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and identities are regarded as the key elements in boosting their effectiveness in improving their learners' performance. Professional identity as a quality of a teacher can be evolved in a constant and continuous process. It is usually shaped in educational and social contexts. Among the teacher characteristics which influence teachers' performance, professional identity and self-efficacy are considered to be vital characteristics. The current study was set to explore the association between Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' professional identity and self-efficacy. Therefore, in order to gather the data required for the aims of this research, 92 English language teachers were chosen as the participants of this research study. Two questionnaires were utilized to gather the data. The data collected was analyzed via Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results revealed a positive bond between Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity and self-efficacy. The findings of this study can be of help for teacher educators and English language teachers.

Keywords: English language teachers, identity, professional identity, self-efficacy, teacher education

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1. Introduction

Throughout the past decades, researchers working in the realm of teacher education have concentrated their studies on different characteristics of teachers and their effects on students' academic achievement. Teachers are regarded as the most effective elements in the education arena and the efficacy of education is dependent on the teachers' effectiveness in any educational system (Coombe, 2014, 2020; Pishghadam et al., 2019). In addition, teachers play a major part in students' educational success through helping them to learn by providing students with chances to examine their talents and transfer them into abilities (Soodmand Afshar & Hamzavi, 2017). Teacher identity, a dynamic quality of teachers, is an inseparable part of the process of language teaching. According to MacLure (1993), identity is "a resource that people use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large", (p. 311). Also, Deschamps and Devos (1998) define identity as "what makes you similar to yourself and different from others" (p. 3). In accordance with Pennington (1999), teachers' professional identity is built via linking individual characteristics to contextual characteristics. Furthermore, according to Pennington and Richards (2016), a teacher is required "not only to know things and know how to do things, but also to be her/himself, that is, to adapt and personalize disciplinary or professional knowledge to her/his own individual identity and contexts of teaching" (p. 6). Besides, Varghese et al. (2005) assert that attending to the manifold dimensions of a teacher's identity including individual, social, political, and professional identities helps researchers and teacher educators to have a deeper understanding of teachers and their identities.

Moreover, teachers' self-efficacy is regarded as a significant teacher characteristic in the realm of education. As Bandura (1997) asserts, self-efficacy is "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Based on this definition, self-efficacy contributes to individuals' reflectivity and influences their purposes and behaviors (Schunk & Meece, 2006). Besides, it has an impact on individuals' decisions as well as the amount of attempt they devote to conducting a specific task (Pajares, 1997). As Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) argue, teacher self-efficacy refers to "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 22). In other words, self-efficacy is concerned with the teachers' insights into their own capability in the act of teaching and their role in helping their learners enhance their performance. Self-efficacy at its lower levels can create a negative attitude in teachers toward their job and educational setting (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015). Research findings have indicated that teachers who possess a high degree of self-efficacy manifest higher levels of planning, organization, and enthusiasm; in addition, they tend to less criticize the learners when they produce erroneous utterances (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Coladarci, 1992). Furthermore, teachers who have high self-efficacy are firmly dedicated to their profession and exhibit collaborative connections with colleagues and parents (Coladarci, 1992). Moreover, teacher self-efficacy as a key variable turns out to contribute to teachers' psychological status including more job satisfaction and teaching dedication along with less teaching stress and burnout (Aloe et al., 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

1.1. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Teachers, all around the world, are constantly facing challenges as how to manage diverse roles, expectations, and demands as professionals when circumstances and relationships start changing. Teachers' identities are influenced by situational and interactional factors, i.e. their conceptualizations and self-images are shaped by the context in which they work and the connections they establish with their colleagues and students. In this regard, Bressler and Rotter (2017) assert that "the political, social, and cultural circumstance of a person and the relation and communication with other persons is seen to be critical external components in the composition of identity" (p. 239). According to Danielewicz (2001), teachers' identity is concerned with several elements including adjustment, motivation, efficacy, confidence, commitment, and satisfaction with their jobs. Also, it is undeniable that one's identity is connected to his/her profession, i.e. no one can be isolated from his/her profession. As Loughran (2007) asserts, "it seems unlikely that the core of the person will not impact the core of the professional" (p. 112). Therefore, teachers' identity as a pivotal element in the educational setting is directly related to their profession. In accordance with Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), teachers' professional identity is not predetermined or stable, rather, as asserted by Trent (2010), “it is dynamic and constructed and reconstructed during an active process of learning to teach” (p. 695). Professional identity is prosocial and influenced by interactional contexts, new student populations, experience, and personality. Therefore, exploring teachers’ professional identity and its effect on other teacher-related features is deemed essential. A plethora of studies have been conducted to explore teacher-related factors and their interrelationships. Some researchers have investigated self-efficacy with regard to work stress and burnout in different contexts (Grau et al., 2001; Law & Guo, 2015). However, there seems to be a paucity of research studies examining the interplay between Iranian EFL teachers’ self-efficacy and professional identity.

1.2. Significance and Justification for the Study

As Eslami and Fatahi (2008) assert, teachers play a significant part in the educational system, thus, knowing their insights and beliefs is invaluable since they put theories into practice in educational contexts. Furthermore, according to Ross (1994), teachers’ self-efficacy is considered an influential feature because it is highly possible for teachers who possess higher degrees of efficacy to utilize novel teaching approaches and techniques to overcome the challenges in their teaching and help students with learning difficulties. Also, in accordance with Sheybani and Miri (2019), professional identity is totally associated with teachers’ growth. The findings of the current research may be of help to English language teachers who might have no idea about the different aspects of their professional identity. They can also help them manage the factors influencing their professional identity in different domains.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), teachers play a crucial part in ensuring effective teaching and learning. Thus, as Eslami and Fatahi (2008) assert, investigating their perceptions of themselves as teachers is of importance since they put educational theories into practice in their classes. According to Varghese et al. (2005), the key to understanding language teaching is understanding identity. Also, as Fogle and Moser (2017) argue, exploring teachers’ diverse identities is crucial to perceive the factors influencing their attitudes, decisions, and beliefs.

2. Literature Review

Identity is a dynamic construct formed in social contexts which evolves throughout people's lifetime, and it requires certain stages with their own characteristics depending on the individuals' interaction with their environment (Erikson, 1968). According to Mead (1934), there is a relationship between identity and the concept of self, explaining how the self is shaped via interactions with the social context.

In teaching, as Pennington and Richards (2016) point out, "identity emerges as a dynamic construct that is shaped by the context in which the teacher works and that may have different features at different times" (p. 2). Identity is described as one's distinctive quality which is realized in contrast with that of other people (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Also, in accordance with Coldron and Smith (1999), in educational contexts, professional identity is considered an intricate and dynamic feature which makes a balance between teachers' professional self-image and their roles in their workplace. In addition, as Barkhuizen (2016) states, teachers' professional identity is formed historically, contextually, and socially.

Bandura (1986) introduces the notion of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, as Bandura (1997) asserts, is based upon theories of social cognitive theory. It emphasizes the evolvement and agency of humans so that they can exercise more control over what they do. In accordance with Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is defined as "peoples' beliefs and attitudes about their abilities to produce intended levels of performance to exert more influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 8). Later, Bandura (1997) explains self-efficacy as "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Moreover, Usher and Pajares (2008) argue that self-efficacy is a key factor in teaching different subjects to learners. They assert that teachers can make sure that they have helped their students enhance the different skills they need by improving factors influencing their self-efficacy. In addition, according to Usher and Pajares (2008), self-efficacy has significant impacts on "cognitive, motivational, affective and decisional processes, and cause individuals to think positively and hopefully or negatively and cynically, in self-enhancing or self-debilitating manners" (p. 120). In accordance with Bandura (1994), teachers with degrees of self-efficacy can benefit from certain positive traits such as possessing high degrees of self-confidence to accomplish challenging tasks, setting challenging targets and being extremely committed to them, getting involved in activities, and immediately recovering their positive self-efficacy after failure.

One of the implications of self-efficacy theory, proposed by Bandura (1997), is reflected in teacher efficacy. As Bandura (1994) states, teachers' self-efficacy is "the degree to which teachers believe they have the ability to affect students' performance" (P. 12). Bandura (1994) mostly emphasizes individuals' realizations of their abilities rather than their actual potential abilities. Also, as Rich et al. (1996) put it, teacher efficacy is "a teacher's general feeling that the education system is capable of fostering student academic achievement satisfactorily despite negative influences external to the teacher" (p. 101). According to Berman et al. (1977), teacher efficacy refers to "the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance" (p. 137). Also, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) explain teacher self-efficacy as ''the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 22).

2.1. Empirical Studies

Vaezi and Fallah (2011) carried out a research study to examine the bond between Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy and occupational stress. The findings of their study indicated a significant relationship between self-efficacy and stress among EFL teachers. Babaei and Abednia (2016) conducted a study to investigate the bond between reflective teaching and teachers' self-efficacy. They reported a significant association between self-efficacy and reflective teaching. Malmir and Mohammadi (2018) investigated the bond between English language teachers' reflective teaching and self-efficacy and professional achievement. The results of their study indicated that teachers' achievement had positive connections with self-efficacy and reflective teaching. Motallebzadeh and Kazemi (2018) investigated the interplay between EFL instructors' self-esteem and professional identity. They found that self-esteem sub-constructs (satisfaction, communication, commitment, knowledge, and adaptation,) could positively predict professional identity. Fathi and Derakhshan (2019) examined the effect of teachers' emotional regulation and self-efficacy in anticipating the amount of teaching stress among English language teachers. They reported that teacher self-efficacy positively anticipated teaching stress. Moslemi and Habibi (2019) conducted a study to examine the link among English language teachers' self-efficacy, professional identity, and critical thinking skills. They found a positive association between English language teachers' self-efficacy and professional identity and their critical thinking skills. Derakhshan et al. (2020) explored the impacts of autonomy and professional identity on EFL teachers' success and found that EFL teachers' success was significantly influenced by their autonomy and professional identity. Parsi and Ashraf (2020) investigated the correlation among English language instructors' professional identity, critical thinking, and teaching experience. The results demonstrated that EFL instructors' critical thinking was positively related to professional identity and teaching experience. Aghaei et al. (2021) examined the association between Iranian English language instructors' reflectivity and professional identity. Their results demonstrated a positive bond between the two variables. Gümüş and Bellibaş (2021) examined the bond between instructors' self-efficacy and the kinds of professional development activities they participate in. Their findings revealed that instructors taking part in job-embedded professional development activities were likely to gain a deeper understanding of self-efficacy. Kalali Sani et al. (2021) studied the link between Iranian English language instructors' goal orientation and their professional identity. They reported a significant association between English language instructors' professional identity and goal orientation. Hamilton and Reeves (2022) explored the links between self-efficacy, course-taking, and anxiety for data-driven decision-making (DDDM). They reported that taking courses in DDDM is significantly linked with instructors' self-efficacy for DDDM. Mohammadi et al. (2023) examined the impact of teacher self-efficacy, burnout, teaching style, and emotional intelligence on teacher motivation. Regarding self-efficacy, they found that it had a significant influence on teachers' motivation. Kamyabifar and Safdari (2024) explored the effect of high school English language instructors' emotional experiences on their professional identity. They found that teachers' emotional experiences can have a positive effect on forming their identities.

This study aimed at answering the following research question:

RQ**:** Is there an association between Iranian English language instructors' self-efficacy and professional identity?

3. Method

3.1. Design

The current research followed a survey design. In accordance with Brown (2001), language surveys refer to research "that gather data on the characteristics and views of informants about the nature of language or language learning through the use of oral interviews or written questionnaires" (p. 2). In addition, this study was correlational as its goal was to explore the association between Iranian EFL instructors' self-efficacy and professional identity. In other words, this survey study followed a correlational design which focused upon exploring the variables in relation to each other. The variables of this research study included Iranian EFL instructors' self-efficacy and professional identity.

3.2. Participants

Efforts were made to select teachers from both genders with different age groups and years of teaching experience to ensure generalizability. Accordingly, a sample of 92 Iranian EFL instructors teaching at public or private schools, language institutes, and universities of Bukan, Iran, were chosen to take part in the study. They were chosen on the basis of convenience sampling. The participants were full-time and part-time teachers teaching English at different levels.

Table 1

The Participants

Number of the participants	92 Iranian English language teachers
Gender	Male (N = 39), Female (N = 53)
Education	PhD, PhD candidates, MA, and BA
Field of study	English language teaching, English translation, and English literature
L1 background	Kurdish and Turkish
Teaching Experience	4-23 years
Age	21-49

The participants were native Kurdish and Turkish speakers, and they were regarded as multilingual since they had some level of language proficiency in Kurdish and Turkish as their mother tongue, Farsi as the language of their country, as well as English as the language of their educational fields. They included female (N = 53) and male (N = 39) instructors who possessed diverse levels of educational degrees (PhD, PhD candidates, MA, and BA). The age range of the teachers taking part in the present research was 21-49. Besides, the participants' teaching experience varied from 4 to 23 years.

3.3. Instruments

The following questionnaires were employed to gather the data required for the current research.

3.3.1. Teacher Professional Identity Scale (TPIS)

Zhang et al. (2011) introduced this scale, comprising two sections: the first section contains Background Information which elicits information regarding participants' gender, age, teaching experience, and the like, and the second section includes 15 items scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4: 1 "I strongly disagree", 2 "I disagree", 3 "I agree", and 4 "I strongly agree". The respondents needed 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire, and its scores ranged from 4 to 60. This questionnaire encompasses three factors including intrinsic value identity, which mostly pertains to participants' subjective feelings toward the teaching job (seven items), extrinsic value identity, which centers around cognition about external factors of the teaching job (three items), and voluntary behavior identity, which is mainly concerned with one's willingness to enter the job (five items). The total reliability index of the TPIS used in this research turned out to be 0.75, suggesting an acceptable reliability index.

3.3.2. Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES)

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) developed the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES). It was utilized to assess the participants' self-efficacy. This questionnaire consists of 24 items involving three efficacy sub-categories: educational techniques (eight items), class control (eight items), and learner involvement (eight items). The items require teachers to rank their level of competence in each item on a five-point Likert scale using the following scale: 1= Nothing, 2= Very little, 3= Some influence, 4= Quite a bit, 5= A great deal. In the present research, the reliability of the scale was 0.78.

3.4. Procedure

Data for this research study was collected using the scales described in the instruments section. The process of the study began by finding and contacting English language teachers whether in person through attending language institutes, schools, and universities in Bukan or on the phone and social media (like Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram). Then, online versions of the scales were produced by Google Docs so as to facilitate administration and scoring processes. The online versions included explanations about the scales, instructions on how to fill out them, and the questionnaires themselves (i.e., TSES and TPIS). After informing the teachers about the study and its objectives and getting their consent to take part in this research study, the questionnaires were sent to the participants via social media and email, in accordance with their convenience. The online versions were also shared in WhatsApp and Telegram groups whose members were English language teachers. The teachers engaging in the present research study were assured that their data would remain confidential and would only be utilized for the aims of the current research. The total amount of time for both questionnaires was 30 minutes.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 software. Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Also, to investigate the association between the participants' self-efficacy and professional identity, Pearson's product-moment correlation was utilized.

4. Results

The results of the data analysis along with their explanations are provided in the following sections.

4.1. Normality Assumption

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to ensure the normal distribution of data. Table 2 exhibits the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for self-efficacy and professional identity questionnaires.

Table 2

The Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Self-efficacy	0.7	92	0.09
Professional Identity	0.8	92	0.2

As depicted in Table 2, the p-values reported for self-efficacy and professional identity were 0.09 and 0.20. Since the significance values of both variables are larger than 0.05, the normality of the data can be confirmed for both scales.

4.2. Reliability Analysis of the Instruments

To check the reliability of the items in the questionnaires employed in the current research study, Cronbach's alpha was utilized. The results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Reliability Statistics of TSES

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.78	24

TSES comprises 24 items assessing three dimensions of efficacy, i.e., educational techniques, class control, and learner involvement. As presented in Table 3, the reliability index for the self-efficacy questionnaire used in this research equaled 0.78, revealing an acceptable index of reliability. Table 4 displays the results of the reliability coefficient of TPIS.

Table 4

Reliability Statistics of TPIS

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.75	15

In accordance with Table 4, Cronbach's alpha for TPIS turned out to be 0.75. This coefficient value suggests that the professional identity scale developed by Zhang et al. (2011) can be considered a reliable instrument for measuring the participants' professional identity.

4.3. Descriptive Statistics

Table 5 contains the descriptive statistics related to professional identity and self-efficacy scales including mean, standard deviation, maximum, and minimum scores.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of EFL Teachers' Self-efficacy and Professional Identity

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.
Self-efficacy	92	118	214	191.25	8.64
Professional Identity	92	21	57	45.27	4.39

In accordance with Table 5, the range of score for the professional identity scale with 15 items was between 21 and 57, and for self-efficacy with 24 items was between 118 and 214. As the table shows, the mean score of teachers' professional identity was 45.27 with a standard deviation of 4.39. Regarding the self-efficacy scale, the mean score was 191.25 with a standard deviation of 8.64.

4.4. Inferential Statistics

The research question probed into the bond between EFL teachers' self-efficacy and professional identity. A Pearson correlation test was run to answer this question. This test was employed to analyze the teachers' professional identity and self-efficacy scores so as to find out the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables under the focus of the current research study. The results of the Pearson correlation test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Pearson's Correlation Between EFL Instructors' Self-efficacy and Professional Identity

		Self-efficacy	Professional Identity
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.42**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00
	N	90	90
Professional Identity	Pearson Correlation	0.42**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	90	90

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

Pearson correlation was carried out at a 95% significance level. As shown in Table 6, the correlation was 0.42, and the obtained level of significance equaled 0.00, which was less than 0.05. This means that there was a positive association ($r = 0.42$, $P = 0.00$) between Iranian EFL instructors' professional identity and self-efficacy. The significant bond between the variables indicated that English language instructors' self-efficacy grows when their professional identity rises.

5. Discussion

The major objective of this research was to investigate the bond between Iranian English language instructors' professional identity and self-efficacy. The findings confirmed a positive link between Iranian EFL instructors' self-efficacy and their professional identity. The significant association between the variables meant that a rise in Iranian EFL instructors' level of professional identity would lead to a rise in their self-efficacy. In other words, the English language instructors with higher levels of professional identity have better self-efficacy tendencies.

Furthermore, the findings of the current research are in line with the results of Vaezi and Fallah (2011), who reported a significant bond between EFL teachers' self-efficacy and stress, Malmir and Mohammadi (2018) who found that instructors' self-efficacy was positively associated with their professional success, Motallebzadeh and Kazemi (2018) who reported that self-esteem had a positive link with professional identity, Moslemi and Habibi (2019) who found a significant bond between EFL instructors' professional identity, self-efficacy, and critical thinking skills, Derakhshan et al. (2020), who found the significant impact of EFL instructors' professional identity and autonomy on their success, Aghaei et al. (2021), who reported a significant bond between Iranian EFL instructors' professional identity and reflectivity, Kalali Sani et al. (2021), who found out a significant association between English instructors' professional identity and goal orientation, Hamilton and Reeves (2022), who found that taking courses in DDDM is consistantly linked with teachers' self-efficacy for DDDM, Mohammadi et al. (2023), who reported that self-efficacy had a significant effect on teachers' motivation, and Kamyabifar and Safdari (2024), who reported that teachers' emotional experiences can have a great effect on forming their identities.

The link between EFL instructors' professional identity and self-efficacy can be explained from a socio-psychological point of view. As Day et al. (2006) argue, instructors' professional identity is generally built not only by practical and emotional aspects of their professional and personal lives, but by the interactions within the educational, social, and cultural milieus. In the same vein, Fajardo Castaneda (2011) asserts that "a teacher's identity not only comprises personal knowledge and action, but is also influenced by the ideological, political and cultural interests and circumstances surrounding teachers' lives and work" (p. iii). Thus, as Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) believe, emotional and personal aspects of teachers' lives and professions along with their cultural and educational contexts can impact their ability to organize their efforts, plans, opinions, and the strategy they use when facing challenges. Furthermore, becoming a competent teacher is a dynamic system consisting of a teacher's personality, identity, responsibilities, and professional ability (Smith, 2014). Based on this view, both instructors' identity and self-efficacy are features of a dynamic concept (Kelchtermans, 2009).

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the correlation between Iranian English language instructors' professional identity and self-efficacy. The findings of statistical analysis revealed that the professional identity perception of Iranian EFL instructors was positively related to their self-efficacy beliefs. This relationship was also found to be statistically significant. This finding highlights the impact of identity development in enhancing instructors' self-efficacy. Therefore, it can be proved that the identities that Iranian English language teachers develop when it comes to their teaching profession can contribute to their views of themselves as competent individuals to accomplish specific tasks in various contexts. The positive bond between professional identity and self-efficacy specifies that the higher the level of professional identity, the more efficacious EFL instructors will be when they are involved in teaching English courses. The important characteristic of these two variables is a desire to teach well. When scrutinizing these variables, it can be concluded that they share a common feature that aims at a shared target. They both intend to provide better chances for influential teaching and teacher development.

Kalali Sani et al. (2021) hold that “identity is a powerful component of the inspiration, self-efficacy, engagement, and effectiveness of teachers” (p. 142). In a similar vein, Hammerness et al. (2005) assert that the identities developed by teachers can “shape their dispositions, where they place their effort, whether and how they seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations they see as intrinsic to their role” (p. 384). According to Fogle and Moser (2017), investigating teachers’ identities can greatly contribute to a deeper understanding of the circumstances influencing their decision-making process, values, and behaviors. As Smith et al. (1999) state, individual identity helps people greatly manage the way they view others, their motivation, efficacy, self-confidence, self-esteem, as well as efforts they make in different spheres of their lives. Murray and Male (2005) argue that identity is placed at the center of academics’ professional practice and constant progress. As an affective variable, self-efficacy can also impact individuals’ decision-making, efforts, and actions when confronting challenges (Bandura, 1986). Also, professional identity plays a crucial part in perceiving instructors’ effectiveness because it is firmly related to the view instructors hold toward themselves and their roles in their workplace (Varghese et al., 2005). Day and Gu (2007) point to the importance of instructors’ self-efficacy in the process of shaping identity suggesting that a person establishes one’s identity somewhat by means of a self-assessment of his/her capability in the particular roles.

Furthermore, as Bandura (1998) opines, one’s profession is an important indicator of his/her personal identity. He also maintains that a sense of efficacy plays a critical part in professional development. As Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) put it, teacher efficacy hinges on several significant educational matters such as instructors’ perseverance, commitment, eagerness, and educational behavior. It also depends upon student issues like accomplishment, self-efficacy beliefs, and motivation. As Volkmann and Anderson (1998) avow, professional identity is an elaborate construct in which an instructor’s image of him/herself is evaluated via different social parts she/he has to play.

6.1. Pedagogical Implications

The results of the present research can familiarize instructors, especially EFL instructors, with the notion of professional identity when involved in the process of instruction. Instructors need to be aware of self-efficacy as an important affective factor. They also should know that their professional identity is shaped through the evolvement of their self-efficacy dimensions and this identity determines their professional success in the workplace. In addition, one's perception of professional identity is regarded as a strong element of his/her identity (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Moreover, the results of the current research may be of use to EFL instructors as they need to strive to discover the potential sources of boosting their self-efficacy and the ways their professional identity is formed and developed. As Varghese et al. (2005) assert, understanding one's identity is one of the effective ways whereby teachers, especially teachers, can realize their professional, political, cultural, and social identities. Teacher educators and administrators of English language teacher development centers may gain profits from the results of the present research. They should focus more on various kinds of instructors' identities (like professional identity) and their self-efficacy as two influential factors in teachers' professional development and performance. Instructors who possess high levels of professional identity and self-efficacy can demonstrate better and more effective performance.

6.2. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The current research suffered from some limitations. Firstly, this study was undertaken only in Bukan, West Azerbaijan, Iran. Secondly, the instructors taking part in this study were selected via convenience sampling which might endanger the representativeness of the sample of the study. Furthermore, because of the relatively low number of instructors, generalization of the results of this research for all English language teachers should be done with caution. Finally, this research study examined the link between professional identity and self-efficacy; however, other qualities like stress, motivation, and so on were not considered in this study which might affect the quality and direction of the bond between the variables under the focus of this research.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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A Model of Critical Peer Feedback Using Patterns of Pair Interaction to Improve Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Skills

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Abstract

The current project was an attempt to explore processes of critical peer feedback using patterns of pair interaction in order to improve both the quality of peer feedback and the quality of English writing, and to summarize the model of critical peer feedback. A 16-week qualitative case study was conducted with a group of 12 Iranian EFL students for one semester at Poldokhtar University. The Revised Bloom's Taxonomy Model was introduced to the participants in the workshop. Collaborative learning through peer interaction was used in workshops to teach the model of critical thinking. Three kinds of data, including semi-structured interview transcripts, six writing assignments, and artifacts of critical peer feedback, were analyzed by QSR NVivo 8.0 with the thematic analyses. The codes were quoted in descriptions, and the nodes and models were illustrated with visualization in the findings. The findings revealed that critical peer feedback improves both the quality of peer feedback and the quality of English writing. This study may be significant for the knowledge of higher-order peer feedback to improve the quality of higher-level writing.

Keywords: critical thinking, English writing, patterns of interaction, peer feedback

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1. Introduction

In the realm of second/foreign language learning, the development of writing skills is widely accepted and uncontroversial among researchers (Merkel, 2018; Muller & Gregoric, 2017). Writing is globally considered a pivotal role in language acquisition and proficiency (Steinlen, 2018). English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) trainees consistently seek ways to enhance their writing abilities to meet language requirements (Sadiku, 2015). However, teaching methods often fall short in effectively improving the overall quality of students' writing. Consequently, concerted efforts are necessary to elevate the standard of writing and writing instruction through constructive feedback and guidance aimed at fostering the development of learners' writing competence. Notably, shifts in writing techniques have brought about revolutionized feedback routines, complementing trainer feedback with peer feedback. In consequence, peer feedback adoption is regarded as an essential element in the manifold-draft process-oriented approach to teaching writing skills (Khalil, 2018).

Farrah (2012) suggests that peer feedback dynamics, encompassing learners in distributing, furnishing, and picking up convenient feedback, can significantly enhance writing strategies. This pedagogically effective method has various benefits in second language (L2) writing. For instance, peer feedback can ameliorate learners' assurance and certainty and promote perceptive analysis skills as they read and respond to their peers' texts (Ferris, 1995). Furthermore, the use of peer feedback dynamics brings about learning encouragement and enhances interpersonal relation strategies, as it seems to be a social practice that influences students' behavior and engagement (Koka & Hein, 2006). The theoretical support for peer feedback in the education and training platform emphasizes shared and group learning, discoursed collective bonds, and L2 linguistic achievement (Kagan & Olsen, 1992; Oxford, 1997, as cited in Kunwongse, 2013). Consequently, peer feedback acts as a crucial factor in L2 writing and has numerous impacts on learners' writing improvement.

When it comes to peer feedback dynamics in educational settings, Luk and Lin (2007) emphasize the significance of exchanges in language contexts as crucial group communication endeavors for learners. These interactions play a pivotal role in the development of erudition, character, and self-reliance as proficient language users. Utilizing pair interaction patterns, peer feedback dynamics primarily focus on enhancing writing skills through the provision of high-quality feedback.

The study aimed to delve into the dynamics of peer feedback in English writing and identify patterns of pair communication to enhance the nature of both peer feedback and writing ability. Furthermore, it sought to propose effective strategies to bolster students' critical thinking abilities. To accomplish these objectives, the researcher employed a constructivist grounded theory methodology and formulated a model of critical thinking based on learners' perceptions.

2. Literature Review

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), social constructivism, the sociocultural and interaction theories in second language acquisition (SLA) (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lai, 2016; Topping, 1998) are related to interaction. The mentioned theories shed light on the various roles peers play in the feedback process. In higher education, peer feedback is regarded as an underlying approach (Lai, 2016), with some investigators asserting that it fosters deep learning, professional development, and self-evaluation skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lai, 2016; Morris, 2001). Recent inquiries have also suggested that peer feedback can contribute to greater student autonomy (Yang et al., 2006). It is evident that students' self-efficacy and knowledge are fundamental to the success of peer feedback.

In the realm of learning, the acquisition of knowledge is heavily influenced by an individual's mental framework. Sociocultural theory in linguistics underscores the pivotal role of language communication and learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Vygotsky (1978), in his exploration of the development of cognitive processes related to writing, contends that interactions with knowledgeable individuals contribute to the advancement of higher-order thinking. He stresses the irreplaceable nature of active sociocultural communication and interaction in knowledge construction. Consequently, higher mental functions stem from both sociocultural exchanges and individual mental structures. Individuals demonstrate varying levels of mental functioning, with some exhibiting superior capabilities. Those with higher mental functions play a crucial role in facilitating the learning processes of individuals with lower functions through effective sociocultural communication and interaction. It is widely recognized that individuals with advanced mental functions tend to be more skilled and intelligent learners (Wang, 2007). Sociocultural theory is recognized as a fundamental framework in the scholarly examination of peer feedback (Wang, 2012).

Peer feedback plays a crucial role in collaborative learning by providing scaffolding for peers to overcome challenges. It involves an active exchange of feedback between students, allowing them to construct knowledge from their learning experiences. This reciprocal process empowers students to both give and receive feedback, fostering a supportive learning environment (Breslin et al., 2014). In the context of writing, peer scaffolding encompasses error correction, asking questions, repetition, providing explanations and confirmation, and error identification (Lin & Samuel, 2013). In the realm of English language learning, learners possess varying reasoning abilities and language proficiency. Through peer feedback, students with advanced skills can support those with lower proficiency levels, particularly in process-oriented writing instruction. This collaborative approach enables students to enhance their writing skills and overall language proficiency (Breslin et al., 2014).

2.1. Writing Ability, Thinking Critically, and Feedback

Strategies of writing are closely tied to other language techniques such as common sense, word knowledge domain, spelling, and social awareness. Bayat (2014) identifies key components of writing as the ability to create texts, language perception, vocabulary knowledge, and critical thinking, which is crucial for supporting the writer's ideas effectively.

Critical thinking is a crucial practice that involves the evaluation of opposing settings or ideas, distinguishing it from other forms of cognitive activity. This process integrates an amalgamation of knowledge, strategies, and prospects. Critical thinking entails recognizing problems, gathering evidence to support arguments, assessing the accuracy of that evidence, and fostering an attitude conducive to this analytical process (Bayat, 2014). Watson and Glaser (1964) delineate five essential dimensions of critical thinking: inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, analysis, and assessment of arguments. Furthermore, writing is an important manifestation of critical thinking and creativity. Empirical research has demonstrated that engaging in peer feedback cultivates students' critical thinking abilities, allowing them to provide more constructive evaluations of their peers' writing and to make objective assessments of their own work (Breslin et al., 2014; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Jerry, 2012).

Feedback is a critical component in the post-response phase of analyzing and evaluating a writer's work. Numerous researchers have emphasized the strong correlation between feedback and critical thinking, contending that both processes involve similar analytical and evaluative mechanisms. In educational contexts, evidence suggests that feedback can significantly enhance individuals' critical thinking skills (Duron et al., 2006; Ertmer & Richardson, 2007). Nonetheless, there exists a gap in comprehensive research addressing the intersection of critical thinking and feedback within educational environments.

2.2. Critical Peer Feedback Dynamics and Writing

Pearlman (2007) investigated critical pedagogy to enhance peer feedback by means of critical collaborative evaluation, highlighting the importance of integrating critical thinking in collaborative learning. Li (2007) studied the influences of critical evaluation training on both the quality of peer feedback and the final projects of learners involved in peer assessment. Additionally, Cox et al. (2013) identified key characteristics of an effective preceptor in peer assessment, stressing the need to cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Research has indicated that the dynamics of peer feedback and the resulting interaction patterns significantly enhance students' writing skills in L2 contexts (Hu & Lam, 2010; Khalil, 2018; Min, 2016). Furthermore, peer feedback facilitates a deeper understanding of the role of technology in the educational process for both learners and instructors (Alharbi, 2019). Brusa and Harutyunyan (2019) assert that peer feedback operates as an effective learning tool, rooted in the sociocultural approach. This approach fosters increased levels of autonomy and critical thinking, drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, thereby contributing to improved student learning outcomes.

Various researchers have emphasized the benefits of peer feedback for learners seeking to improve their writing skills. The timely and informative nature of peer feedback allows students to actively engage in offering constructive criticism, providing them with a voice in shaping their writing abilities and expressing their ideas (Lu & Law, 2012; Reynolds, 2009). The dynamics of peer feedback offer learners various sources of feedback, leading to increased self-awareness, confidence, motivation, and critical thinking skills, while also nurturing social strategies (Farrah, 2012; Orsmond et al., 2013). Additionally, the process of peer feedback empowers learners to take charge of their learning journey and develop autonomy, ultimately leading to higher levels of critical thinking. Moreover, it helps students cultivate critical reflection skills, learn to listen, assess using obvious criteria, and provide high-quality feedback.

In the context of L2 writing, several studies have highlighted the significance of pair interactions in peer feedback, as they contribute to students' social interaction abilities and lead to improvements in their writing skills. Understanding and utilizing patterns of interaction can effectively describe the social peer feedback dynamics (Ferris, 2003).

2.3. The Current Study

Social Cognitive Theory posits that peer feedback facilitates open communication and fosters collaborative learning, which significantly enhances students' writing skills in English. Within the framework of the ZPD, students exhibiting advanced cognitive capabilities can provide constructive feedback to their peers with lower proficiency levels. This paper investigated the impact of critical thinking skills on the peer feedback process in English writing. Specifically, it sought to elucidate how individuals who possess strong writing abilities can effectively collaborate and communicate, thereby offering valuable support to their less proficient peers during feedback exchanges. Central to this investigation is the concept of critical thinking, as it aspires to elevate the overall quality of peer feedback. Ultimately, the study intended to analyze the interaction patterns within peer feedback sessions to enhance both feedback quality and the writing competencies of students in English. The research question posed was: What are the dynamics of peer feedback in the context of English writing among Iranian EFL learners, as manifested through patterns of pair interaction?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The initial phase of the study comprised two workshops, each spanning three hours, during which participants were introduced to the principles of critical peer feedback and its application in English writing. These workshops addressed the Paul-Elder Model (2012), Reichenbach's Six-Step Model (Reichenbach, 2001), and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Critical Thinking (Forehand, 2005). These theoretical frameworks equipped participants with the essential knowledge and skills necessary for providing effective critical peer feedback. The second step of the research encompassed the collection and analysis of data over the course of one semester during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The analyzed data included transcripts from semi-structured interviews, six writing assignments, and artifacts of critical peer feedback, all of which were assessed utilizing QSR NVivo 8.

This study examined the influences of peer feedback on learners' writing abilities through a qualitative methodology. Participants were introduced to principles of critical thinking, the process of critical peer feedback, a critical thinking framework, and assessment rubrics for English writing. The researcher facilitated training sessions, observed peer feedback interactions, and conducted interviews to obtain valuable insights. The training materials underscored the importance of utilizing critical peer feedback in order to enhance writing skills via written exchanges. The study encompassed various concepts, including peer feedback, critical thinking, interaction patterns, English writing, and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of critical thinking (Forehand, 2005).

3.2. Participants

The study was conducted in the first semester of the 2023 academic year at Poldokhtar University in Iran, focusing on an English paragraph writing course. The primary instructional approach utilized peer feedback dynamics, incorporating methods of pair interaction and collaborative learning. The course convened once a week for a duration of 90 minutes, spanning a total of 16 weeks.

Three weeks before the commencement of the research, participants were provided with an introduction to critical thinking and the principles of critical peer feedback. This included a critical thinking model as well as rubrics specifically designed to facilitate peer feedback in

English writing. These introductory sessions were conducted separately from the main course lectures.

A total of 18 male students between the ages of 18 and 22 were enrolled in the course. All of them were majoring in English Language Teaching. From these participants, six pairs were selected based on their active participation in lessons and pair work, as well as their willingness to engage in the study, assertiveness, and the researcher's supervision over the three weeks preceding the collection of data.

The study subjects all shared Persian as their native language and were studying English Language Teaching. They were given permission to work in equal self-selected pairs throughout the semester. The researcher assured the students that all data collected from peer feedback processes, stimulated recalls, interviews, and classroom observations would be kept confidential. The students provided consent before the research began. All 12 case participants agreed to participate in the study and completed the necessary consent forms. Written consent was obtained from each participant, and they signed a form outlining all ethical considerations before the study commenced. This form provided detailed information to help participants make informed decisions about their involvement in the study. Key ethical procedures included informing participants about their roles in the study, using pseudonyms in all written and published data, and emphasizing that participation was voluntary.

3.3. Instruments

In this study, various instruments and materials were used for data collection and analysis:

*In-depth Interviews***.** The interviews were spaced out to allow for reflection and in-depth responses. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and took place in a relaxed setting at the researcher's office in the School of Foreign Languages at Poldokhtar University. Conducting the interviews after work and class hours ensured that the participants were more comfortable and able to focus on sharing their thoughts and experiences regarding peer feedback dynamics.

*QRS NVivo Software***.** The data collected from the interviews was analyzed using the QRS NVivo software version 8.0. This software is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).

*Writing Assignment and Artifacts of Peer Feedback Dynamics***.** In addition to interviews, data collection methods included reviewing writing assignments based on the syllabus of English writing and gathering the re-writing submissions after participants received critical peer feedback. The interactions and conversations between participants were documented through written records and audio recordings, with careful consideration of ethical guidelines. Following the submission of their assignments, participants provided critical peer feedback to each other using patterns of pair interaction, which was then analyzed to assess its effectiveness in improving writing skills.

The collected data was analyzed using a qualitative method to identify patterns of interaction between peers during the peer feedback process. This analysis aimed to understand how the dynamics of peer feedback influenced the quality of the final English writing assignments. Additionally, the study aimed to determine whether certain pairs of peers were more effective in providing constructive feedback and how this impacted the overall improvement of English writing skills. Finally, recommendations were made for optimizing peer feedback dynamics to enhance the learning experience and improve writing proficiency among students.

Furthermore, the data collection process involved analyzing the process, language characteristics, quality, and development of peer feedback dynamics based on patterns of pair interaction in other peers' document files. This approach allowed for a comprehensive study of one peer's engagement in critical peer feedback dynamics.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducted two workshops in the research setting, initially as a trainer and later as an observer and interviewer. The lecturer, who has eight years of experience, led the workshops.

After the preparation stage, participants engaged in peer feedback activities, giving and receiving feedback on each other's written work. The focus was on providing constructive criticism, highlighting strengths, and offering suggestions for improvement. Participants were encouraged to apply the techniques and concepts learned in the training workshop during these feedback sessions. The researcher observed and recorded the interactions to analyze the effectiveness of peer feedback in improving writing skills.

The analysis of peer feedback dynamics in teaching English paragraph writing involved observing pair interactions, collecting data, and conducting a detailed analysis. Participants were asked to keep their writing tasks in student portfolio folders and files and to provide feedback within a week. The writing assignments corresponded to the syllabus for English Paragraph Writing.

Throughout the semester, detailed records were kept of the feedback given by peers on each writing assignment. This information was stored in the students' portfolio folders and files, allowing for a comprehensive collection of feedback from week 4 to week 16. By preserving these documents, the progress of each participant and the development of their writing skills according to the English writing syllabus could be tracked. Efforts were also made to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants.

The data collection process involved a combination of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Three in-depth interviews were carried out by the researcher at the School of English Languages between weeks 7 and 16. The interview questions were refined as the study progressed to align with the evolving research focus and new insights. Interviews were scheduled to accommodate participants' engagement with peer feedback dynamics in English writing, taking place after work or class hours. Each interview was conducted face-to-face, with audio recording using a record player and interview protocols provided in hard copy to enhance participants' comfort and understanding.

To investigate the dynamics of peer feedback, the researcher implemented a series of three in-depth one-on-one interviews with each participant. These interviews were transcribed prior to conducting data analysis. To facilitate comprehensive expressions of thoughts, participants were encouraged to articulate their perspectives thoroughly before each interview.

The questions were formulated in a semi-structured format, thereby creating an environment conducive to comfortable and relaxed face-to-face interaction. The objective of conducting three interviews was to obtain reliable and continuous data while also enabling a comparative analysis of peer feedback dynamics across various sections of the study, utilizing three distinct interview protocols.

Additionally, the document analysis involved a systematic examination of critical peer feedback dynamics as represented in written texts. Data collection comprised six English writing assignments for each participant, in accordance with the Academic English Writing Syllabus. The components of critical peer feedback dynamics extracted from each writing assignment were sorted out for subsequent analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Utilizing QRS NVivo 8, a software application designed for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, the data sources were meticulously coded and categorized. This software facilitated the management of data and concepts, enabled data querying, and supported the modeling and reporting processes (Bazeley, 2007). Given that the research data comprised text-based materials, including interview transcripts, artifacts from English writing assignments, and peer feedback, QRS NVivo 8 demonstrated significant efficiency in organizing and analyzing the information. The selection of QRS NVivo 8 was based on its suitability for the analysis of textual data.

The 'EW Artifacts' folder contained samples of English writing by students, the 'PFD Artifacts' folder included feedback provided by peers, and the 'Interviews' folder stored audio recordings of interviews with participants. The data management feature in QRS NVivo 8 allowed for efficient organization and storage of these diverse data sources.

In the second round of coding, the 'Free Nodes' were refined and set into broader categories called 'Tree Nodes,' allowing for a more structured and systematic approach to data analysis. Finally, in the third round of coding, the 'Tree Nodes' were further refined and developed into key themes and sub-themes that captured the essence of the data and provided a comprehensive overview of the research findings (Saldaña, 2016). This meticulous coding process enabled a deep understanding of the internal sources and facilitated the extraction of valuable insights and conclusions relevant to the research objectives.

During the second phase of coding, the 'Free Nodes' were restructured into 'Tree Nodes'. To enhance the analysis of the 'Tree Nodes', the source data underwent recoding to ensure consistency. In the final coding phase, integration of the 'Free Nodes' occurred within the 'Tree Nodes'. Following the categorization of the 'Tree Nodes' in QRS NVivo 8, these nodes were subjected to comprehensive validation and reliability assessments conducted by data examiners, including third-party experts, case participants, and the lecturer. Informed by their feedback, the 'Tree Nodes' were re-evaluated and revised as necessary. Subsequently, the 'Free Nodes' were reassessed by the data examiners. The finalization of the 'Tree Nodes' received endorsement from both the data examiners and the research conductor involved in this research.

4. Results

The study involved an extensive analysis of themes and codes from 116 Free Nodes and three Tree Nodes. It is worth mentioning that one of the three nodes specifically addressed the research question and main findings. Additionally, the study explored the dynamics of peer feedback, focusing on patterns of pair interaction in English writing.

Based on findings from analyses conducted using QSR NVivo 8, it was observed that the participants opted for the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy to facilitate critical peer feedback dynamics. These dynamics encompassed three key elements: awareness, interaction, and cooperation. Preceding the critical peer feedback, the participants leveraged their existing knowledge of English writing for remembering, recognizing, and applying their peers' writing. Subsequently, they endeavored to provide critical peer feedback on their peers' writings.

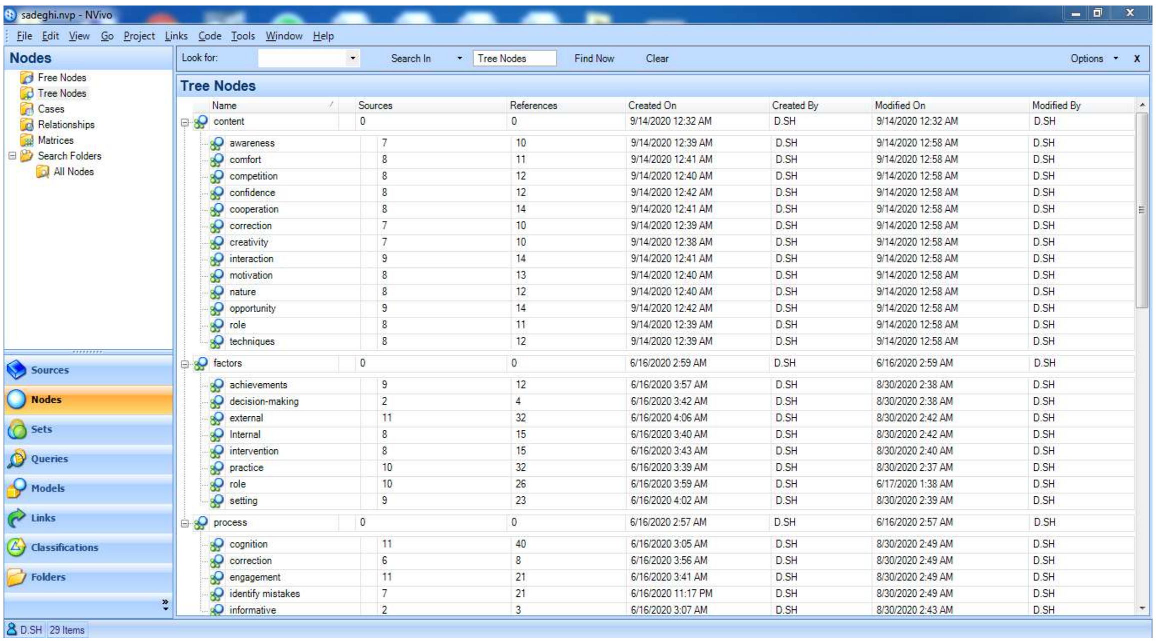
The participants expressed that engaging in critical peer feedback equips them with a higher-order strategy for enhancing their English writing skills.

Example 1:

It seems that our feedback has evolved to become more critical peer feedback. While our comments may be more advanced, comprehensive, and logical, we still need to work on eliminating grammar errors. I believe our capacity for critical peer feedback has improved, allowing us to identify the specific areas that need to be addressed in our feedback. As a result, our ability to provide peer feedback has become more impactful. (Interview Transcript)

Figure 1

Peer Feedback Dynamics in QRS NVivo 8



Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
content	0	0	9/14/2020 12:32 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:32 AM	D.SH
awareness	7	10	9/14/2020 12:39 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
comfort	8	11	9/14/2020 12:41 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
competition	8	12	9/14/2020 12:40 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
confidence	8	12	9/14/2020 12:42 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
cooperation	8	14	9/14/2020 12:41 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
correction	7	10	9/14/2020 12:39 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
creativity	7	10	9/14/2020 12:38 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
interaction	9	14	9/14/2020 12:41 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
motivation	8	13	9/14/2020 12:40 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
nature	8	12	9/14/2020 12:40 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
opportunity	9	14	9/14/2020 12:42 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
role	8	11	9/14/2020 12:39 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
techniques	8	12	9/14/2020 12:39 AM	D.SH	9/14/2020 12:58 AM	D.SH
factors	0	0	6/16/2020 2:59 AM	D.SH	6/16/2020 2:59 AM	D.SH
achievements	9	12	6/16/2020 3:57 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:38 AM	D.SH
decision-making	2	4	6/16/2020 3:42 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:38 AM	D.SH
external	11	32	6/16/2020 4:06 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:42 AM	D.SH
Internal	8	15	6/16/2020 3:40 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:42 AM	D.SH
intervention	8	15	6/16/2020 3:43 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:40 AM	D.SH
practice	10	32	6/16/2020 3:39 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:37 AM	D.SH
role	10	26	6/16/2020 3:59 AM	D.SH	6/17/2020 1:38 AM	D.SH
setting	9	23	6/16/2020 4:02 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:39 AM	D.SH
process	0	0	6/16/2020 2:57 AM	D.SH	6/16/2020 2:57 AM	D.SH
cognition	11	40	6/16/2020 3:05 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:49 AM	D.SH
correction	6	8	6/16/2020 3:56 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:49 AM	D.SH
engagement	11	21	6/16/2020 3:41 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:49 AM	D.SH
identify mistakes	7	21	6/16/2020 11:17 PM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:49 AM	D.SH
informative	2	3	6/16/2020 3:07 AM	D.SH	8/30/2020 2:43 AM	D.SH

In Example 1, CP6 underscored the significance of critical peer feedback as a more sophisticated form of evaluation. Other participants also acknowledged its critical role in enhancing the hallmark of peer feedback within the context of English writing. The twelve case participants recognized that their prior feedback primarily concentrated on correcting grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. They admitted to lacking the requisite knowledge and skills to deliver higher-order feedback beyond mere error correction, regarding such corrections as a lower-order feedback approach.

Example 2:

It's evident that our peer feedback goes beyond mere error correction. Critical peer feedback allows us to identify numerous issues and then proceed to analyze, summarize, evaluate, and rewrite the content. This approach greatly enhances the quality of feedback. (Interview Transcript/CP1)

In the context of peer feedback, critical thinking represents a transition from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking. Engaging in critical peer feedback involves higher-order critical thinking. It entails reading the title, comprehending it, and then delving into analysis, evaluation, and the generation of new ideas. It's a holistic process. (Interview Transcript/CP2)

I have come to realize that critical thinking emphasizes the creation of new ideas and logical reasoning. It's a systematic and comprehensive approach to addressing a problem. Only through this logical process can we gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand and effectively tackle it. (Interview Transcript/CP3)

In the second example derived from the initial interviews, participants exhibited a fundamental understanding of critical thinking skills such as comprehension, application, awareness, interaction, and cooperation, which correspond with the principles of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. The analysis of frequency conducted using QSR NVivo 8.0 indicated that the six keywords "remembering, understanding, applying, awareness, interaction, and cooperation" ranked among the top 100 words mentioned. This finding suggests that participants frequently referenced these terms associated with the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. Moreover, all participants unanimously agreed that the critical thinking skills delineated in the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy are particularly effective for facilitating constructive peer feedback.

Example 3

I utilize the Revised Bloom's model in the peer feedback process, which follows a systematic methodology that emphasizes pair interaction. Currently, my capacity to deliver critical peer feedback remains limited in the areas of remembering, understanding, and applying concepts. As a result, I have not yet achieved a satisfactory level of self-awareness, engagement, and cognitive development. (Cited from Interview transcript/ CP5)

The dynamics of peer feedback utilizing patterns of pair interaction significantly enhance engagement, self-awareness, and self-confidence among learners. This strategy is instrumental in cultivating critical thinking skills and fostering learner autonomy and social interaction. Furthermore, it promotes collaboration and cooperative learning.

Peer interaction is a crucial element in enriching students' learning experiences, facilitating knowledge construction through social sharing and collaboration. This collaborative approach contributes to improvements in grammatical knowledge, oral engagement, and the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of writing skills. This notion is supported by Vygotsky's theory, which posits that learning unfolds in two stages: initially via interaction with others, followed by integration into a participant’s cognitive framework.

Critical peer feedback operates upon two levels: interpersonal peer interaction and the cognitive processes associated with providing critical feedback. Without these interactions, the development and application of critical thinking skills, along with subsequent critical peer feedback, are rendered ineffective. The cognitive framework of critical thinking, enhanced through reading and writing, ultimately contributes to the effectiveness of critical peer feedback. It is essential to recognize that critical peer feedback encompasses both the resultant feedback and the ongoing process of critical thinking.

Participants in the study underscored the significance of awareness in delivering critical peer feedback in the context of English writing, emphasizing aspects such as wording, sentence structure, logic, cohesion, and overall communication strategies. Their exploration led to the identification of an innovative peer feedback strategy that integrates critical thinking skills, thus enabling the provision of higher-order peer feedback encompassing awareness, interaction, and cooperation. Furthermore, the participants strongly supported the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy Model of critical thinking, acknowledging the pivotal role of critical thinking skills such as awareness, interaction, and cooperation in enhancing the quality of peer feedback.

Findings indicate that the twelve participants predominantly employed the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy to enhance the dynamics of peer feedback through structured pair interactions. The analysis of interview transcripts utilized free coding within the QRS NVivo

8.0 software, which led to the development of tree nodes that depict the 'Process of Peer Feedback Dynamics' (PFD). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of this process, illustrating its components effectively.

According to Figure 2, the process involved five key nodes: identifying mistakes, error correction, providing information, fostering engagement, and enhancing cognition. The study's 12 participants followed a five-step process for peer feedback dynamics, utilizing patterns of pair interaction specifically tailored for English writing: 1. identifying and assessing the errors of grammar and sentences; 2. correcting the errors of grammar, spelling, and punctuation in text; 3. employing necessary strategies to solve problems more easily and using practical problem-solving skills to resolve learning difficulties; 4. the ability to comprehend, mental act, or process of knowing; and 5. offering suggestions on how to enhance writing to ensure successful communication. This can be achieved by using clear and engaging language, structuring the content effectively, and incorporating relevant examples to support key points. This five-step process is the concrete output of peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction.

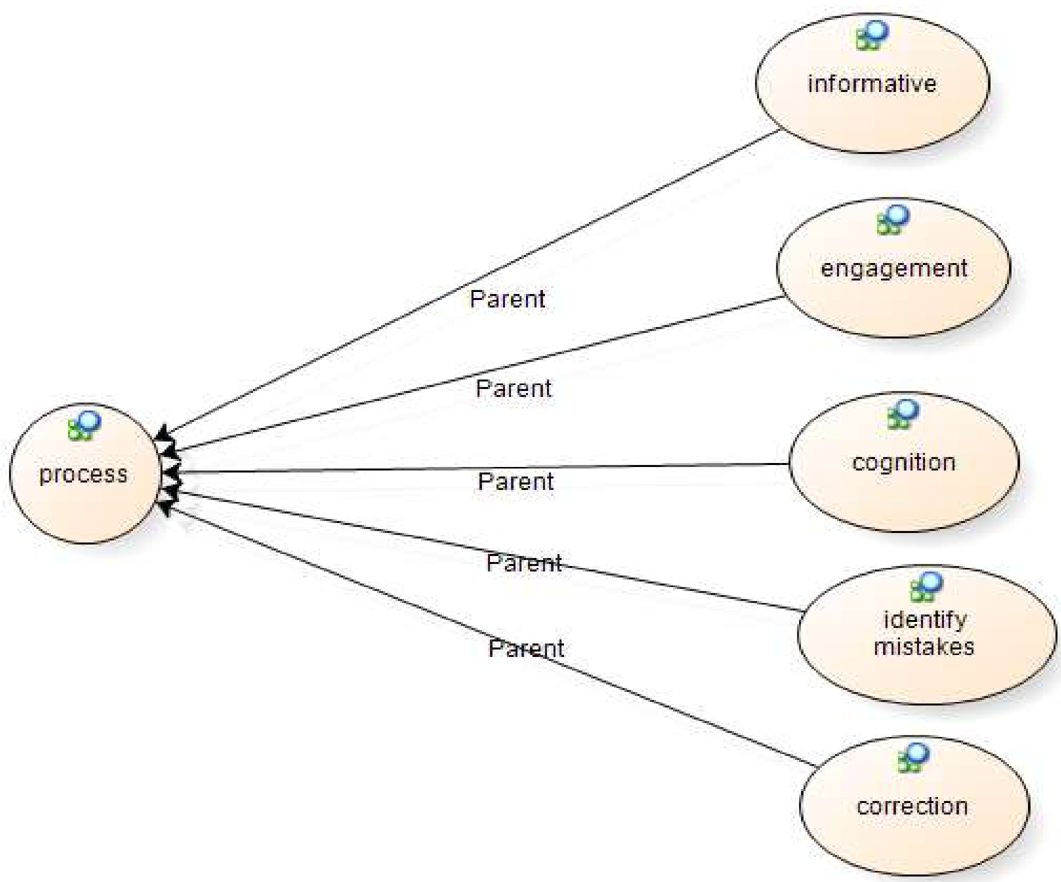
The cognitive processes associated with peer feedback dynamics in English writing, as analyzed in this study, can be delineated into three distinct steps based on the interaction patterns observed among pairs.

When assessing a peer's writing, it is imperative for the reviewer to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the writing tasks, language usage, and overall organization. This initial evaluation establishes a foundation for a thorough review process. Such assessment is aligned with the lower-order thinking stages (LOTs) of Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy, which encompass the processes of remembering, understanding, and applying.

The concept of "intake" refers to the internalization of input by an individual within the framework of SLA (Pawlak, 2011; Rast, 2008). In this context, a peer's intake during the peer feedback dynamics involves the active engagement in remembering, understanding, and applying English writing skills. Throughout the intake process, students may focus on one, two, or all three of these components simultaneously and may transition fluidly between them. It is important to note that at the intake stage, an essential phase within peer feedback dynamics, these three activities of remembering, understanding, and applying English writing do not occur in a sequential or linear manner.

Figure 2

Nodes of Process in Peer Feedback Dynamics for English Writing



Second, after the initial intake stage, the focus shifted to critical thinking, involving activities centered on awareness, cooperation, and interaction. All the participants in the case study embraced a three-step model of critical thinking, emphasizing the importance of awareness, cooperation, and interaction. They found this model to be concrete, clear, and accessible for novice participants in peer feedback dynamics using pair interaction patterns, particularly underscoring the significance of interaction in the context of English writing. Engaging in peer activities allows students to assess their own work and that of their peers using teacher-provided rubrics, thereby enhancing their critical thinking awareness, especially when employing interaction patterns. Through peer activities, students can evaluate their learning process and outcomes by appraising others' work and accepting their feedback, facilitating the identification of their learning blind spots and the restructuring of their learning objectives and plans. Additionally, various researchers have highlighted that utilizing peer feedback dynamics can foster students' critical thinking awareness (Wang et al., 2016).

In the final stage of peer feedback dynamics, utilizing patterns of pair interaction known as the output stage, individuals utilized their acquired knowledge to critically evaluate their peers' writing and then provided constructive feedback. In this context, "output" is related to the language generated by a language learner in the field of linguistics (Zhang, 2009). Specifically, in this study on peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction, "output" pertains to the written feedback language produced by a peer for their counterpart's writing. This concluding stage can be considered the culmination of the peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction for English writing in this particular research.

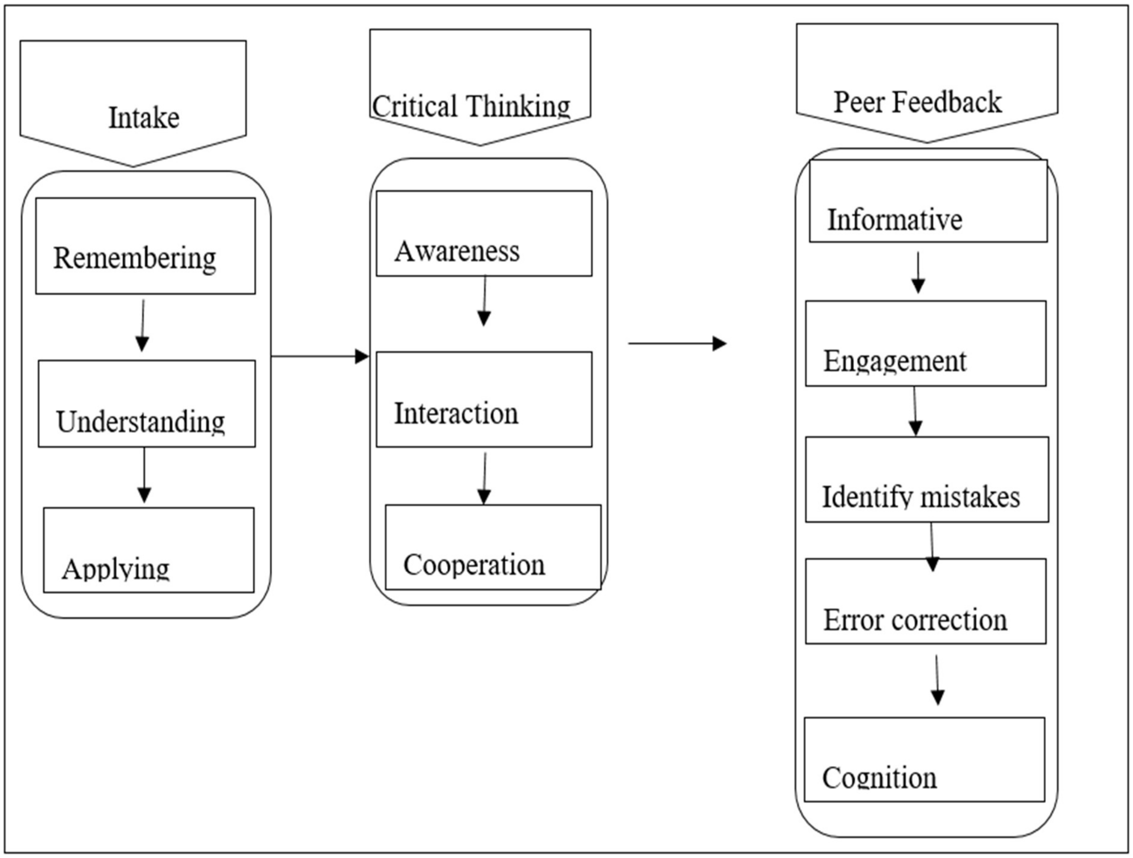
According to the tree nodes of peer feedback dynamics process using patterns of pair interaction in Figure 2, the output of peer feedback dynamics usually includes five parts: identify mistakes, error correcting, informative, engagement, and cognition. The detailed process can be shown in the figure below (see Figure 3).

During the PFD output process, the first step involved a peer providing valuable strategic information to guide their counterpart toward successfully completing the task. This information focused on helping the peer detect errors, overcome obstacles, and apply more efficient strategies to solve the learning tasks. Informative feedback was used to inform learners why their responses were correct or incorrect, providing them with task-related information.

The next step focused on engagement, which is defined as a psychological process including the attention, interest, investment, and attempt that learners put into their learning. This definition implied both affective and behavioral participation in the learning experience. Creating a classroom environment that encouraged students to make meaningful connections by thinking critically and reflecting on their experiences helped to engage the participants in classroom activities. The use of peer feedback dynamics increased engagement and enhanced critical thinking skills in the writing classroom.

Figure 3

Process of Peer Feedback Dynamics in English Writing



Higher-level cognitive processes in peer feedback dynamics have significantly contributed to the development of critical thinking skills, thereby enhancing students' interest and engagement in English lessons. This, in turn, has led to improvements in the quality of peer feedback and written assignments. The third step of the process involved a thorough analysis of the English writing tasks and their associated requirements, followed by a meticulous evaluation of each criterion. Subsequently, attention was directed toward error correction, an element often overlooked in higher-level peer feedback but recognized as a form of metacognition for Iranian students. This step encompassed the correction of grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors, as well as an assessment of task fulfillment, cohesion, coherence, and the overall logic pertaining to syntax, pragmatics, and discourse.

Finally, the last step involved studying cognition, which refers to the ability to comprehend mental acts or processes of knowing. This encompasses the brain's acquisition, processing, storage, and retrieval of information, as well as integrative neuropsychological processes such as mental imaging, problem solving, and perception, and is pertinent to emotion and affect. These five steps form the basic cognitive process of peer feedback dynamics.

Providing critical peer feedback is underpinned by the Model of Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 2001), which serves as a foundational framework for critical thinking. This methodology is further reinforced by the "intake," "reaction," "input," and "output" hypotheses in the context of SLA (Pawlak, 2011; Rast, 2008; Zhang, 2009), underscoring its logical and rational basis. In contrast to previous research that primarily examined the physical activities involved in peer feedback—such as reading, commenting, discussing, and writing (Asikainen et al., 2014; Lai, 2016; Pol et al., 2008)—the current approach emphasizes the mental and psychological dimensions inherent in critical thinking during the peer feedback process.

5. Discussion

The research findings demonstrated that students can effectively understand critical thinking and the dynamics of peer feedback through structured workshops. The study employed the six-step model of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy as a valuable framework for novices in providing peer feedback. Participants engaged in analyzing peer writing by first utilizing the initial three steps of remembering, understanding, and applying concepts. Subsequently, they employed higher-order critical thinking skills, including interaction, cooperation, and awareness, to deliver constructive peer feedback. This approach is regarded as an effective strategy for refining higher-level writing, consistent with existing literature that underscores the significance of critical thinking in enhancing both peer feedback and writing quality (Bloom et al., 1956; Duron et al., 2006; Paul & Elder, 2002; Reichenbach, 2001). The study underscores the necessity of cultivating these skills within educational frameworks.

The outcomes of the report indicated that subjects possessed a limited understanding of peer feedback dynamics, primarily focusing on error correction prior to the investigation. This situation highlights the necessity for training in EFL writing skills (Lai, 2016). Although the participants considered themselves advanced writers, they acknowledged the imperative to develop sophisticated peer feedback abilities to promote effective communication and collaborative learning within the classroom setting. Furthermore, they asserted that the incorporation of critical feedback dynamics not only enhanced the quality of peer feedback but also contributed positively to their English writing proficiency. This perspective is supported by interview data and aligns with existing literature, which posits that critical feedback can significantly improve both peer interactions and writing outcomes (Cox et al., 2013; Forster, 2007; Li, 2007; Ruggiero, 2012; Zhao, 1996).

The dynamics of peer feedback, characterized by distinct interaction patterns, serve as a valuable model for understanding critical thinking processes. This framework is illustrated through the 'intake,' 'reaction,' 'input,' and 'output' hypotheses pertinent to SLA (Pawlak, 2011; Rast, 2008; Zhang, 2009). It can be inferred that effective peer feedback represents a higher-ranking assessment that integrates critical thinking skills, including awareness, cooperation, and interaction. These skills are built upon essential lower-order cognitive abilities such as remembering, understanding, and applying writing concepts. The Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of critical thinking is recognized as a suitable framework for analyzing these peer feedback dynamics.

Critical peer feedback serves as a valuable strategy for fostering higher-order thinking in formative assessments of advanced writing competencies. This skill set can be effectively developed through systematic instruction and practical exercises. The process encompasses three fundamental component such as intake that involves the initial engagement with the written work, emphasizing the cognitive processes of remembering, recognition, and using foundational thinking skills and critical thinking that participants are encouraged to cultivate awareness, engage in interaction, and foster cooperation with peers and output in which individuals articulate their analytical feedback in a written format. These components work together to enhance collaborative learning and improve writing proficiency.

Following the receipt of peer feedback, five activities are proposed to enhance writing quality and facilitate further critical evaluation. These activities include proofreading, re-editing, self-reflection, and rewriting. Although these processes may not be strictly cognitive tasks, they serve as important responses to the feedback received. After engaging in self-reflection, a subsequent cycle of critical peer feedback can be undertaken to assess the revisions, with this iterative process continuing until the writing is refined or accepted by peers.

The present paper indicates that individuals with higher-order thinking skills effectively support those with lower-order thinking abilities. Furthermore, individuals possessing higher-order thinking skills are able to provide feedback of a higher quality compared to their lower-order counterparts. Additionally, those with well-developed critical thinking skills demonstrate greater efficiency in delivering constructive peer feedback.

6. Conclusion

The ability to think critically is crucial for success in today's world. Both teachers and learners play essential roles in education and should be well-versed in the concept of critical thinking. This research aimed to investigate critical thinking skills in peer feedback dynamics for English writing, with the goal of enhancing the quality of peer feedback and English writing. Additionally, the study explored the process of peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction through written discourse and presents a model of critical peer feedback.

The implications of this research are significant for EFL teachers, learners, curriculum developers, and syllabus designers. Incorporating critical thinking skills into peer feedback through pair interaction patterns can help students identify key points, stay open-minded, evaluate peer work critically, reflect on their own thinking processes, and make logical deductions. These results emphasize the importance of integrating critical thinking into peer feedback dynamics using pair interaction patterns to enhance the nature of peer feedback and English writing. In today's world, the demand is increasing for individuals who can think critically, solve problems efficiently, and communicate and collaborate effectively in both personal and professional contexts.

In this way, teachers can establish a stimulating learning setting that encourages students to think independently, analyze information critically, and form their own opinions. By shifting the focus from memorization to understanding and application, individuals will be better equipped to navigate the complexities of the up-to-date world and contribute meaningfully to society.

Conflict of interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR THE PARTICIPANTS (the original was in Persian)

1. Could you please provide your understanding of critical thinking?

2. How do you understand critical peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction?

3. How do you use critical peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction in English Writing?

4. What difficulties do you have at your critical peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction?

5. How do critical peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction improve your quality of feedback in English Writing?

6. What is your process of critical thinking in English Writing?

7. What is your process of peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction in English Writing?

8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction in English writing?

9. What are the contents of peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction in English writing?

10. How do peer feedback dynamics using patterns of pair interaction improve your English writing?

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The Effect of Task-Based Embedded Instruction on Listening Comprehension and Metacognitive Strategy Awareness in Listening of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study sought to empirically investigate the effects of task-based instruction on the listening comprehension and metacognitive strategy awareness of intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Iran. A sample of 60 male EFL learners was selected based on their performance on a proficiency test. Following a pre-test assessing their listening skills and the completion of a metacognitive awareness questionnaire, participants were assigned to either an experimental group, which received task-based instruction, or a control group that underwent traditional listening instruction. The experimental group was engaged in task-based teaching through three designated tasks: Input-driven tasks, Pedagogical-driven tasks, and Performance-based tasks, whereas the control group experienced conventional instruction methods. After the instructional intervention, all participants undertook a listening post-test alongside a metacognitive awareness questionnaire. A thorough analysis of the data, conducted using independent sample t-tests, indicated a significant positive effect of task-based instructional methods on both the listening comprehension and metacognitive strategy awareness of intermediate EFL learners in Iran.

Keywords: listening comprehension, metacognitive strategy awareness, task-based teaching

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1. Introduction

Listening is a fundamental language skill that young learners acquire, typically preceding the development of speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Most children can cultivate their listening skills organically, without the necessity for formal instruction (Siegel, 2015). In contrast, second language (L2) listening poses a complex and considerable challenge, imposing significant cognitive demands on language learners (Satori, 2022).

Listening is an active, intentional process that involves understanding spoken language (Brown, 2001). It is a receptive skill, similar to reading, requiring individuals to absorb and interpret the information presented. Therefore, it is not uncommon for people to regard listening as a passive skill (Siegel, 2014). However, this conventional viewpoint overlooks the fact that listening requires active engagement. Listeners must connect what they perceive with their existing knowledge base. As learners integrate the information they hear with their own thoughts and experiences, listening can be viewed as an act of constructing meaning within the mind (Zhang & Shen, 2023).

In recent years, there has been a shift in listening pedagogies from repetitive exercises or traditional question-and-answer formats to more communicative methodologies, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Chou, 2016). These approaches prioritize interactive listening and verbal communication through a structured sequence of tasks that include pre-task, during-task, and post-task phases, all aimed at achieving tangible learning outcomes for students. Within the context of L2 or foreign language (FL) instruction, it is widely recognized that the application of learning strategies can significantly aid and enhance the educational process (Cohen, 2014). TBLT promotes syllabi centered on the learning process and enriches learners' authentic language utilization through communicative tasks (Norris, 2011). Recent research identifies three key attributes of TBLT pertinent to educational practice: alignment with a learner-centric educational philosophy (Ellis, 2003), comprising elements such as goals, procedures, and specific outcomes (Murphy, 2003), and endorsing content-based meaningful activities over linguistic structures (Gass et al., 2011). Task-based instruction (TBI) has been strongly endorsed as an alternative to traditional language teaching methods in language classrooms, emphasizing functional communicative language application (Ellis, 2006). Ellis (2009) posits that TBI can serve as both an input provider and an output prompter. Similarly, Shehadeh et al. (2018) contend that tasks engage language learners in understanding, producing, and manipulating language while prioritizing meaning over form.

Another crucial aspect is the significance of metacognitive strategies in L2 listening. It is widely accepted that explicit instruction in general learning strategies can enhance listening skills, defined as "approaches or methods used to tackle a problem or task, operational modes for achieving a specific goal, planned strategies for managing and manipulating particular information" (Brown, 2007, p. 104). In the same vein, Richards and Schmidt (2002) delineate metacognitive strategy as a classification of learning strategy that encompasses the act of "contemplating the cognitive processes, overseeing learning as it unfolds, and assessing learning post completion" (p. 329). Metacognitive strategies include activities such as planning, note-taking, self-monitoring, selective attention, parsing, and so forth (Wang, 2015).

The definition and evaluation of metacognitive awareness relating to listening strategies have been thoroughly examined, taking into account five core components: problem-solving, planning-evaluation, mental translation, person knowledge, and directed attention (Vandergrift et al., 2006). Metacognitive strategies are described as "superior executive abilities that may encompass planning, monitoring, or assessing the effectiveness of an activity" (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 44), enabling learners to control, direct, regulate, and guide their learning processes (Chou, 2016). Nonetheless, it is essential to emphasize the development of instructional models focused on metacognition that foster an appropriate understanding of metacognitive knowledge and enhance the effective application of metacognitive strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. TBLT and Listening Comprehension

TBLT represents a novel approach to language instruction that offers abundant opportunities for the acquisition of second and foreign languages. It has garnered increasing interest due to its emphasis on meaningful tasks that prompt learners to utilize their cognitive and linguistic resources to engage in real-life activities, as highlighted by Ellis (2003). The focus on tasks' life-like qualities makes TBLT an effective method for teaching, assessing, and researching learning processes (Ahmadian, 2016).

While there exist multiple interpretations of TBLT, a common understanding defines a 'task' as an activity oriented toward specific outcomes, motivating learners to establish connections between their learning and practical application outside the classroom (Norris, 2011). Tasks are distinct from exercises in that they prioritize communicative meaning and content over linguistic form and meaning, facilitating the internalization of linguistic skills for future use (Ellis, 2009). Previous studies on task-based approaches have explored the impact of language complexity, accuracy, and fluency on attentional resources during task performance (e.g., Ellis, 2000), as well as how different task types influence second language acquisition (SLA).

The evolution of TBI has shifted focus from performance aspects like accuracy and fluency to exploring various task types and their effects on language learning processes (e.g., Ellis, 2009; Foster & Skehan, 1999). This transition has led TBLT to prioritize learner-centered approaches over traditional teacher-centered methods, emphasizing the learner's central role in all aspects of language teaching, from planning to evaluation (Shehadeh, 2018).

In the exploration of task-based listening research, it is crucial to initially delineate the various types of listening tasks. These can be broadly classified into one-way and two-way listening tasks. One-way listening tasks necessitate minimal teacher intervention and limited interaction with speakers, primarily aimed at comprehending discourse for specific communicative purposes (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). The results of such listening activities should closely resemble authentic listening situations, including tasks like note-taking or filling in missing information. Although one-way listening tasks are more commonly encountered, it is imperative to recognize the significance of interactive listening, which entails reciprocal interactions that emulate real-world communication, wherein both listening and speaking roles are fluid and subject to time constraints. Interactive listening is defined by contextual elements that relate to the goals and intentions of communication, thereby facilitating effective and appropriate meaning delivery and exchange (Rost, 2013). However, within the educational context of interactive listening, the focus is often skewed toward speaking competence rather than actual listening skills (Field, 2008). Rost (2013) argues that not all forms of interaction or collaborative tasks are guaranteed to improve listening abilities. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between one-way and two-way listening tasks and their influence on listening performance.

A conventional task-based listening lesson is typically structured into three primary stages: the pre-listening task (pre-task), the listening activity (during-task), and the post-listening task (post-task). Nevertheless, Norris (2011), in synthesizing insights from various sources related to TBLT (e.g., Chaudron et al., 2005; Ellis, 2006), asserts that a task-based lesson generally comprises, though not exclusively, four fundamental phases: task input, pedagogical task work, target task performance, and task follow-up. The task input phase familiarizes learners with authentic communication tasks utilizing visual and/or auditory stimuli to foster motivation, activate prior knowledge, and create connections between the target language and its contexts. Following this, during the pedagogical task work phase, tasks are dissected into manageable steps, elaborated upon, and modified by the instructor to enhance learners' cognitive awareness of new language structures and their practical application for specific communicative functions (Ellis, 2006; Norris, 2011). Input enhancement strategies, such as intensive listening or textual emphasis, may be prioritized during this stage. Norris highlights the necessity for educators to ensure that learners understand the framework, scaffolding, and objectives of the task to guide their progress effectively. It is imperative that teachers oversee both the processes involved in the task and the learners' language use, providing feedback as needed. In the target task performance phase, learners participate in the practical application of language for genuine communication. In listening task contexts, comprehension can be developed through communicative engagements such as role-plays, debates, or oral presentations. Learners utilize their linguistic and thematic knowledge, along with their cognitive and strategic skills, to successfully complete the task (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Ultimately, the task follow-up stage entails a reflection on the tasks, reinforcing performance in relation to any shortcomings in language, content, or understanding of the tasks, with the objective of refining the task (Norris, 2011).

2.2. Metacognitive Listening Instruction

Metacognitive listening instruction (MCI) was introduced by Vandergrift (2007) and Goh (2008) as an evolution of Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI). This metacognitive framework prioritizes the development of learner independence, self-assessment, self-management, and self-regulation. The importance of this instructional method stems from its ability to provide structured support to learners, facilitating sustained improvement in listening skills through innovative, process-oriented tasks both in and out of the classroom. Consequently, a holistic approach to teaching listening is employed.

Learning strategies can be categorized into two main types: metacognitive and cognitive strategies. As highlighted by Oxford (2011, p. 44), metacognitive strategies serve a role akin to that of a "construction manager," overseeing the direction, organization of resources, planning, coordination, scrutiny, and evaluation of one's progress in acquiring an L2. Vandergrift et al. (2006), who developed the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) to measure L2 learners' metacognitive awareness and their perceived use of listening strategies, identify five categories of metacognitive strategies: (1) planning-evaluation, (2) directed attention, (3) person knowledge, (4) mental translation, and (5) problem-solving. The application of metacognitive strategies requires considerable cognitive involvement to comprehend the target language and complete associated tasks. Importantly, there has been a shift from merely identifying the most effective strategy for listening comprehension (e.g., Osada, 2001) to emphasizing strategy-oriented instruction (SBI) within listening pedagogy (e.g., Graham & Macaro, 2008; Rahimirad & Shams, 2014). Field (2008) proposes two methods for strategy training implementation. One common approach, prevalent in SBI studies, involves cultivating awareness through teacher guidance and illustrating strategy selection using brief authentic excerpts. An alternative method is integrating strategy introduction and practice within a broader listening task, known as "embedded instruction" in O'Malley and Chamot's (1990, p.153) terminology. Essentially, metacognitive instruction is interwoven into task-based lessons to foster learners' metacognitive awareness of listening (Goh, 2023). By integrating a task-based educational framework into English listening classes, the task sequences, ranging from predicting topics, strategic planning, processing linguistic input, utilizing strategies, and monitoring to providing feedback and self-assessment, present a framework coherent with metacognitive processing in strategy acquisition.

It is crucial to highlight that, despite the abundance of literature on TBLT in listening, limited research has delved into employing task-based embedded instruction to enhance awareness of metacognitive strategies for listening comprehension. Moreover, as Oxford (1990, p. 561) points out, "Students lacking metacognitive strategy awareness are essentially learners devoid of guidance or opportunities for reflecting on their progress, achievements, and future learning trajectories." Given the gap mentioned above, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Does TBI have any statistically significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

RQ2: Does TBI have any statistically significant effect on the metacognitive strategy awareness of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

To carry out this investigation, a total of 100 male EFL learners aged between 14 and 25, enrolled at Pardis and Shokouh Language Institutes in Hamadan, Iran, were chosen using convenience sampling. To ensure sample homogeneity, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered. This test identified 60 participants from the initial 100, whose scores deviated one standard deviation above and below the mean (Mean ± SD), while excluding 40 individuals with exceptionally high or low scores. The remaining 60 candidates were divided into two groups for distinct instructional approaches, randomly assigned to either the experimental group (task-based instruction) or the control group.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. OPT

The OPT is a widely recognized assessment tool for determining the language proficiency level of ESL or EFL learners. The test sample in this study is split into two sections: Part A consisting of 40 items and Part B consisting of 20 items. Part A includes 25 pictorial multiple-choice questions, 15 multiple-choice cloze text questions, and 20 grammatical multiple-choice items.

Part B comprises 10 cloze text multiple-choice questions and 10 vocabulary multiple-choice questions, with the entire test lasting for 50 minutes.

3.2.2. Listening Pre-Test and Post-Test

For both pre- and post-listening comprehension assessments, the listening section of the TOEFL Junior Standard test was utilized. To ensure the reliability of these assessments, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency test was employed, yielding α = .74 for the pretest and α = .72 for the post-test.

3.2.3. Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire

The MALQ was developed to assess the metacognitive strategies utilized by L2 learners in listening, as well as their perceptions as L2 listeners (Vandergrift et al., 2006). This instrument consists of 21 items divided into five domains of metacognitive awareness that pertain to L2 listening: problem-solving, planning and evaluation, mental translation, directed attention, and self-knowledge. In a study conducted by Rahimi and Katal (2013) within an Iranian context, the authors reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.76 for this questionnaire, suggesting a robust level of internal consistency.

3.3. Procedures

To conduct this investigation, the following procedures were implemented, which can be categorized into three primary phases: (i) pre-test, (ii) experimentation, and (iii) post-test. Prior to the instructional phase, an OPT was administered to a sample of 100 learners to ensure there were no significant differences among the participants. Students were informed about the study's conduct across various groups. After conducting the homogeneity assessment, the data were analyzed, leading to the selection of 60 learners whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean to participate in the study. The participants were then evenly distributed into an experimental group receiving task-based instruction and a control group.

Following the administration of the listening pretest and the MALQ, the participants' listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness regarding the use of listening strategies were evaluated prior to the instructional intervention. After the pretests, the instructional materials were provided to both the experimental and control groups. The learners were briefed on the instructional procedures before the sessions commenced. The instruction comprised seven sessions, each lasting 45 minutes, conducted three times per week over approximately three weeks. Both groups received identical materials, duration of instruction, and number of sessions; however, distinct methodologies were employed in three classes.

For the participants in the experimental group, task-based embedded instruction was carried out through three distinct tasks: 1. Input-driven tasks, 2. Pedagogical-driven tasks, and 3. Performance-based tasks. Specifically, students who underwent task-based instruction were first acquainted with the subject matter of the passage or dialogue, followed by the presentation of images or brief videos, accompanied by discussion questions relevant to the topic, serving as pre-tasks. This initial phase acted as the task input component, aimed at activating students' prior knowledge. Participants were prompted to connect pertinent target vocabulary with contextual elements and their previous learning experiences by sharing ideas, expressing opinions, and providing examples to both the class and the instructor.

After the pre-task phase, participants engaged in a one-way pedagogical listening task. This type of task encompasses various forms, including restoration, sorting, comparison, matching, jigsaw tasks, narrative completion, embellishment, evaluation, and reconstruction. Given that the participants possessed only an intermediate level of English proficiency, careful selection of tasks was necessary. Among the nine task types mentioned, those perceived to impose less cognitive load (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) — specifically sorting, comparison, matching, and evaluation tasks — were deemed most appropriate for the participants.

For example, participants first engaged in sorting activities, using information from a text to order, classify, or rank items. Next, they discerned similarities and differences among multiple brief listening passages during comparison exercises. In matching assignments, they listened to a series of short texts and paired each with the most fitting topic provided. During evaluation tasks, participants assessed the accuracy, consistency, or discrepancies in the information conveyed through the audio. The listening segment was played twice: the first instance instructed participants to grasp the main ideas, note key terms, and establish connections between the context and the target language. In the second instance, participants focused on details, adjusted interpretations, revised their responses, and reflected on their understanding. The third phase incorporated an interactive listening task, such as creative dictation, role-play simulation, discussions, role-play interviews, or debates. For instance, participants worked in pairs and were allotted 15 minutes to prepare a brief dialogue for presentation to the class.

Conversely, the control group was exposed to a different approach. Participants were instructed using the traditional method still prevalent in certain educational institutions in Iran. This involved playing the listening material once, followed by random requests for students to listen and repeat. Subsequent to practicing the material, participants responded to follow-up queries. This routine persisted for seven one-hour sessions across all groups. Following the intervention, all participants completed a listening post-test and the MALQ.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics pertaining to the participants' pre-test and post-test scores in the listening test for both the experimental and control groups are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Experimental and Control Groups

	N	Mini.	Maxi.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statis.	Statis.	Statis.	Statisti.	Statistic	Statis.	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Exp (listening pre-test)	30	10.00	17.00	13.9333	2.18037	-.294	.427	-1.009	.833
Exp (listening post-test)	30	14.00	20.00	17.4000	1.79271	-.229	.427	-.853	.833
Control (listening pre-test)	30	10.00	17.00	13.8333	2.19848	-.170	.427	-1.113	.833

Control (listening post-test)	30	11.00	17.00	14.0333	1.99107	-.105	.427	-1.078	.833
Valid N (listwise)	30								

Furthermore, Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the participants' pre-test and post-test scores concerning metacognitive awareness within the same groups.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Groups

	N	Mini.	Maxi.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statis.	Statis.	Statis.	Statis.	Std. Error	Statis.	Std. Error
Exp(metacognitive pre)	30	30.00	58.00	44.0000	8.36660	.000	.427	-1.127	.833
Exp(metacognitive post)	30	36.00	80.00	52.6667	12.33815	.642	.427	-.486	.833
Control(metacognitive pre)	30	30.00	58.00	43.9333	8.39923	.015	.427	-1.146	.833
Control(metacognitive post)	30	30.00	58.00	43.9667	8.44652	.027	.427	-1.144	.833
Valid N (listwise)	30								

4.2. Normality of Distribution of Test Scores

It is essential for the distribution of scores related to the dependent variables to exhibit normality for each independent variable. To evaluate this assumption, both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted. The findings from these tests indicate that the normality assumption for the test scores is upheld, as the results were non-significant ($P > .05$).

4.3. Homogeneity of Error Variances

In order to assess the homogeneity of variances, Levene's statistic was employed. This statistic examines the assumption that the error variance of the dependent variable remains consistent across groups. The outcomes of Levene's test were not significant for the listening pre-test (F = .02, Sig = .887, P > .05), the listening post-test (F = .29, Sig = .587, P > .05), the metacognitive pre-test (F = .003, Sig = .953, P > .05), and the metacognitive post-test (F = 3.965, Sig = .051, P > .05). Therefore, it can be inferred from these results that no significant differences exist between the variances of the groups.

4.4. Addressing H01 and RQ1

In relation to the first research hypothesis, which posits that task-based embedded instruction does not significantly influence listening comprehension ability, the descriptive statistics indicated a variance between the pre-test (M=13.93, SD=2.18) and post-test scores (M=17.40, SD=1.79) within the experimental group regarding listening capabilities. To assess the significance of this difference, a paired-samples t-test was conducted, and the results are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3

Paired Samples T-Test Between the Pre-test and Post-test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Task-based	-2.90	1.68	.308	-3.53	-2.26	-9.406	29	.000

The findings illustrated in Table 3 demonstrate that, with a 95% confidence level, a significant disparity exists in the mean scores of participants between the pre-test and post-test within the experimental group (t= -9.406, P<0.05). Additionally, as shown in Table 3, a noteworthy change was identified in the post-test scores for listening ability compared to the pre-test scores, leading to the rejection of the first research hypothesis. Furthermore, to evaluate the existence of a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the post-test (between-group difference), an independent samples t-test was performed. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that a significant difference was observed between the two groups in the post-test ($t=6.164$, $P<0.05$), confirming that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test following the intervention.

Table 4

Independent Samples T-Test Between the Two Groups in the Post-test

	Between Group Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Task-based	2.567	1.224	.251	1.733	3.403	6.164	58	.000

4.5. Addressing H02 and RQ2

In relation to the second research hypothesis, which posits that task-based embedded instruction does not have a significant effect on metacognitive strategy awareness in listening among Iranian Intermediate EFL learners, the descriptive statistics indicated a discernible difference between the pre-test ($M=44.00$, $SD=8.36$) and post-test scores ($M=52.66$, $SD=12.33$) within the experimental group concerning learners' metacognitive awareness. To ascertain the meaningfulness of this difference, a paired-samples T-Test was conducted. The findings from this analysis are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Paired Samples T-Test Between the Pre-test and Post-test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Task-based	-5.76	3.62	.662	-7.121	-4.413	-8.710	29	.000

The results illustrated in Table 5 reveal, with 95% confidence, that a statistically significant difference exists in the mean scores of participants between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group (t= -8.710, P<0.05). This indicates a notable increase in the post-test scores regarding the learners' metacognitive awareness compared to the pre-test scores, leading to the rejection of the second research hypothesis. Furthermore, to investigate whether a significant difference existed between the experimental and control groups in the post-test (between-group difference), an independent samples t-test was conducted. As demonstrated in Table 6, a significant difference was found between the two groups in the post-test (t=6.808, P<0.05), confirming that the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly following the instructional treatment.

Table 6

Independent Samples T-Test Between the Two Groups in the Post-test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Corpus-based metalinguistic explanations	5.93	4.24	.872	4.189	7.678	6.808	29	.000

5. Discussion

With regard to the first research question, the finding aligns with the conclusions drawn by various researchers (e.g., Buck, 2001; Chou, 2016; Newton & Nation, 2020) who determined that the integration of task-based embedded instruction can serve as a robust technique in listening instruction to enhance learners' comprehension. One potential rationale could be attributed to the fact that task-based embedded instruction appears to provide participants with an opportunity to effectively link phonemic sounds to their meanings, thereby evaluating their listening skills in real time. Over time, as the treatment sessions progressed, participants developed the capacity to automatize their phonological skills and students were able to concentrate on missing elements, facilitating their comprehension of the text and enabling them to grasp its main points. Consequently, through repeated practice, their cognitive processing abilities were enhanced.

Field (2008) supports the argument that the TBLT approach enhances learners' procedural knowledge regarding strategy implementation—essentially, their practical understanding of "how"—more so than their declarative knowledge, which concerns a factual understanding of "what." Learners were guided to apply strategies for planning and establishing objectives pertinent to the task, utilize relevant information presented in tables or forms, connect applicable schemata to the task, and direct listeners' attention to specific aspects prior to engaging in the task. The listening exercises designed for the experimental group alleviated the cognitive load typically associated with the simultaneous application of multiple strategies during listening activities by enabling participants to practice the strategies beforehand, which likely facilitated more efficient strategy retrieval.

With respect to the second research question, the results align with those reported by scholars such as Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), Goh and Taib (2006), and Vandergrift (2007). This alignment suggests that task-based embedded instruction significantly affects the metacognitive strategy awareness related to the listening comprehension skills of Iranian EFL learners. This effect can be explained by the fact that through task-based embedded instruction, the students developed the capacity to actively monitor, regulate, and organize the auditory information they receive. As a result, this promoted the process of noticing among language learners, a concept extensively recognized within the field of SLA research, which is crucial for both uptake and the long-term acquisition of language (Schmidt, 1990). Drawing from Schmitt and Frota's (1986) perspective on noticing the gap, learners are encouraged to meticulously observe the differences between their interlanguage and the target language forms, thereby attending to subtle nuances in the input to effectively integrate it into their evolving interlanguage.

6. Conclusion

The outcomes of the analysis and interpretation of data indicated that the utilization of task-based embedded instruction had a noteworthy influence on individuals' listening comprehension proficiency and awareness of metacognitive strategies related to listening comprehension. Wang (2016) emphasizes that metacognitive strategy awareness assists language learners in strategically planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning materials consciously. When students are equipped with the skills to plan, monitor, and evaluate their performance in a listening task, they are able to effectively control their own learning, leading to increased autonomy and competence, as highlighted by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) who point out that task-based embedded instruction equips language learners with the necessary knowledge and skills for the meaningful application of learning, enabling them to comprehend authentic texts beyond the classroom.

Based on the findings, it can be deduced that task-based embedded instruction offers language learners an opportunity to concentrate on the process rather than the end product. Participants in the experimental group received guidance on real-life listening scenarios, learning how to apply various strategies to effectively engage with the diverse types of listening situations that arise in real-world settings. Zhang and Shen (2023) elucidate that metacognitive strategy awareness aids students by enhancing their ability to retain incoming information, although an extended period of practice is required to enhance students' listening comprehension abilities when dealing with longer passages.

The current research carries implications for EFL instructors, textbook authors, and curriculum designers in Iran. Educators must recognize that integrating task-based embedded instruction fosters students' self-regulation and accountability for their own learning. Hence, it is imperative for educators, particularly those in Iran, to move from traditional product-oriented teaching methods in listening to process-oriented approaches that emphasize strategic listening, which holds greater promise for students' advancement.

Understanding the reasons behind varying levels of willingness among language learners to employ listening strategies in educational settings is crucial. In light of this, educators should explore the influencing factors that determine learners' readiness to utilize a range of listening strategies, while simultaneously working to eliminate barriers that impede students' willingness.

Textbook authors and curriculum developers should integrate diverse task formats into forthcoming educational materials to enhance students' listening comprehension skills and augment their metacognitive strategy awareness. Furthermore, in light of the alignment between task-based embedded instruction and heightened listening comprehension, it is recommended that listening assessments incorporate more of these types of assessment tools to ensure the validity of listening tests.

While the present study has yielded findings that are significant for both theoretical and practical applications in pedagogy, the generalizability of these results to heterogeneous populations with differing degrees of English listening proficiency may be limited. It is essential to emphasize that the choice of task categories utilized in the study, including sorting, comparison, matching, and evaluation for one-way listening, as well as role-play simulation for two-way listening, constrains the interpretative framework. Subsequent research might expand the application of TBLT in listening instruction by integrating alternative task types to assess the effectiveness of teaching practices for EFL learners across various proficiency levels.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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