Impact of Needs Analysis on Intermediate Learners' L2 Writing Development

Sara Zafari[1], Hossein Heidari Tabrizi[2]*, Azizeh Chalak[3]

[1]Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
Sarazafari76@yahoo.com
[2]Associate Professor, English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
Heidaritabrizi@gmail.com
[3]Associate Professor, English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
azichalak@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The use of needs analysis has been a longstanding practice in determining the areas that ought to be incorporated into a program, thereby optimizing its efficacy. In second language (L2) learning contexts, needs analysis studies have been utilized to ascertain the pedagogical components that must be included or excluded to cater to the needs and preferences of learners. This research study specifically focused on the impact of user needs analysis on enhancing the writing ability of L2 learners. The study involved 128 intermediate English language learners from Iran who were enrolled in two private language centers and were fortuitously split up into an experimental or a control group. The researchers employed interview and questionnaire data to tailor the syllabus according to the learners' requirements, while the control group gained instructions based on the general outline of the institute. The outcomes revealed a significant difference in the average score of the learners in the experimental group in comparison to those in the control group. These outcomes suggest that performing a needs analysis at the outset of each course, based on empirical data that captures individual groups' needs and wants, is crucial for adjusting the pedagogical approaches accordingly.

Keywords: Needs analysis, second language writing, wants, needs

INTRODUCTION
Writing Skill
Proficiency in various language skills is essential, but it is widely regarded that writing is a crucial aspect for evaluating the performance of language learners in their respective fields of study. According to Hyland (2019), writing is considered an indispensable skill in language acquisition as it allows instructors to monitor students' progress and academic development effectively. The ability to write is a tool for language progression, critical thinking, and learning across different disciplines. However, concerns have been raised regarding EFL schemes and programs being prepared without implementing a systematic needs analysis from the students' points of view (Eslami-Rasekh, 2010). Educational procedures' content has a profound impact on the performance of such organizations (Hanssen &

Solvoll, 2015), and negative outcomes for language learners can have undesirable impacts on the entire program (Lee & Mak, 2018). Needs analysis is an essential step in developing a thorough and effective curriculum and syllabus for a language course, improving learners' satisfaction with their requirements and priorities. It is a method used to evaluate the specific linguistic needs of the individual trainee or group of trainees (Jeczelewski, 2016). The primary function of needs analysis is to bridge any gaps among learners, teachers, and teaching materials (Haque, 2014). Otilia and Brancusi (2015) stated that needs analysis could help evaluate the learners' communicative needs and the employed techniques for achieving specific teaching objectives.

Upton (2012) emphasizes that students have diverse needs that can affect their motivation and learning efficiency. Specifying the learners' needs helps provide direction for addressing program activities. Students' involvement in specifying their needs is essential because their individual needs indicate the potential that exists in each learner. To increase the effectiveness of EFL courses, teachers have utilized needs analysis to revise the goals and objectives of the course (Basturkmen, 2010; Richards, 2017; West, 1994). The primary aim of needs analysis is to determine whether the course content and techniques match learners' needs. Thus, gaining a deep insight into learners' needs helps achieve efficient and successful course design. By performing needs analysis, teachers can differentiate between desired conditions (ideal conditions) and existing conditions (real conditions) (Arias-Contreras & Moore, 2022). Consequently, educational needs and priorities are specified by conducting a needs analysis when designing the curriculum.

However, some issues with regard to the impact of needs analysis on language learners remain unexplored. One such issue is investigating the effectiveness of user needs analysis on language learners' writing skill development. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this area has remained unexplored. This study classifies needs into three proposed criteria by Allwright, which divides needs into three sub-dimensions of needs, wants, and lacks in an Iranian context.

RQ. The research question for this study is: Does teaching based on needs analysis increase Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing skills?

METHODOLOGY
Research Context
The present study was conducted in Iran, which is recognized as an EFL context. In this context, English language learners have minimal exposure to English outside of their classrooms. The study aimed to enhance writing instruction in the Iranian context by examining the impact of needs analysis on student writing skills. Qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to the research design in order for data collection and analysis. The study focused on intermediate-level learners enrolled in the Isfahan English-language institutions of Danesh Pazhuhan and Daneshjoo during 2018-2019.

Research Design
The participants were accidentally split into experimental and control groups, with a pre-and post-test design applied to determine the impact of the independent variable being treatment on the dependent variable being writing scores.

Participants
The participants in this study included 128 intermediate learners and four English instructors registered in private English language centers in Esfahan, Iran. Both female (n=75) and male (n=53) learners, aged between 18 and 25, participated in the study. The subjects' ages were between 18 and 25. Afterward, the subjects were randomly divided into two equal groups; they were all native Persian speakers.

Instruments

The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

This test was utilized to ensure that all subjects who took part in this investigation were placed at the right place, the level of intermediate in terms of language ingenuity. The subjects answered this paper and pencil 60-item test in 30 minutes. According to the rubric of the OQPT for the score bands, scores ranging from 30 to 47 represent the intermediate level of language dexterity.

Writing Task in Pre-test and Post-test

The writing task utilized in this investigation was chosen from the *Solution series* (Davies & Falla, 2018). The writing samples of the experimental as well as control groups were collected in the first and last weeks of the semester as one pre-test and the other one post-test. The teachers asked the students in experimental and control groups to write four paragraphs (200-250 words) about one of the two topics to collect writing samples. The teacher collected the papers to analyze and prepare information about both groups' pre and post-test performance. One of the researchers, an English writing expert, also assigned scores to the texts. With the use of Pearson correlation, the inter-rater reliability was profoundly computed. The Pearson correlation was 0.81, which is high for inter-rater consistency.

Researcher-made Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed alongside the interview to triangulate the data collected from students. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers based on the pertaining literature and past investigations that dealt with the students' needs in the process of English language learning. Using students' voices promotes learners' autonomy and critical thinking and considers students as active participants, which is the primary characteristic of needs analysis (Benesch, 2001). A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire based on the Allwright needs classification consisting of three sub-dimensions of needs, wants, along with lacks was used. The learners were required to rate every single item utilizing a five-point Likert scale. Before the commencement of the collection phase, the questionnaire had been piloted to ensure the comprehensibility of the items.

Semi-structured Interview

In conjunction with the use of the questionnaire, an interview was conducted in this study to elicit additional in-depth information to complement the questionnaire. The face- to- face interviews with both females and males were conducted. It was conducted with 28 students in the experimental group. The interview consisted of six questions regarding writing skills. Regarding validity, the questionnaire was given to two university professors to provide their feedback. The researchers modified the questions to suit the research objectives in light of their comments. The face validity of the interview was obtained to evaluate what they were supposed to evaluate. The researchers interviewed the participants to collect enough data. The collected data was analyzed inductively. The utterances were analyzed, and inter-coder reliability of 0.78 was achieved.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researchers started the study by examining the participants' English language proficiency scores. They included intermediate English language learners in the present study. These participants were fortuitously split up into control and experimental groups. The mean scores of participants' writing performances were collected at the beginning of the study. At the beginning of the semester, the researchers administered a needs analysis questionnaire to discover the participants' needs, desires and

deficiencies. The researchers also interviewed the participants to examine their needs. In the control group, the instructors provided instruction based on the mainstream syllabus of the institute; however, in the experimental group, the instructors modified their syllabus according to the participant's responses to the questionnaire and interview questions. Finally, the researchers collected the participants' writing scores toward the end of the term to test the effectiveness of the implemented treatment.

RESULTS

The findings are presented based on the sub-dimensions of need and categories of interview questions in what follows.

Table 1
Frequencies and means of writing questionnaire sub-dimensions

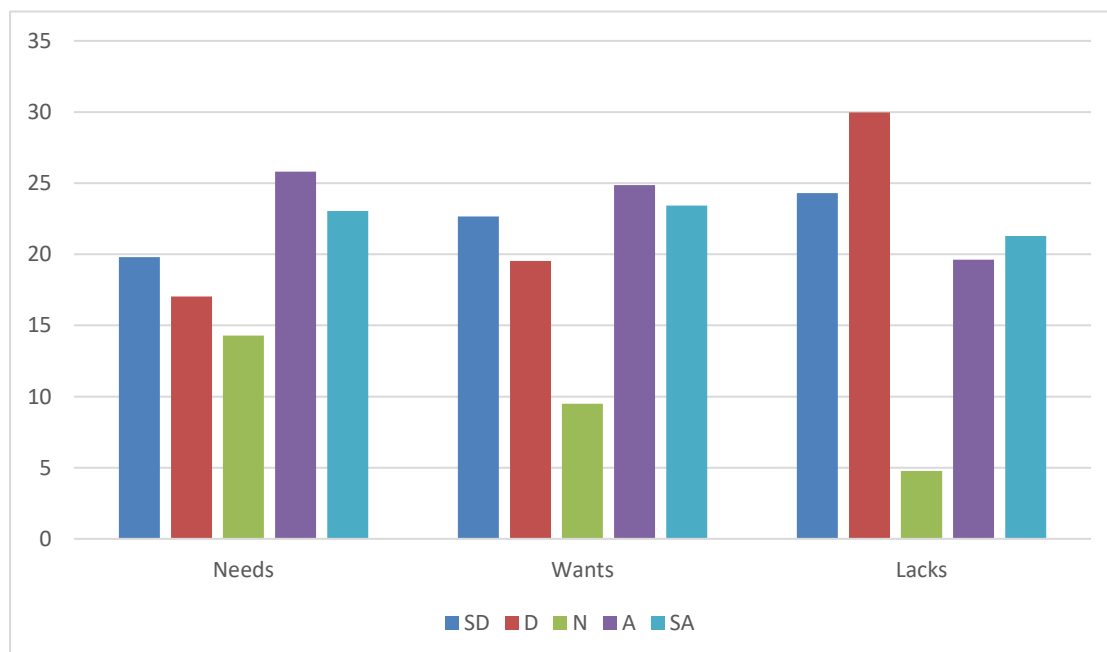| Category	Frequency					Mean
	SA	A	N	D	SD	
Needs	184 (23.05	206 (25.81 %)	114 (14.28	136 (17.04 %)	158 (19.79 %)	3.15
Wants	180 (23.43 %)	191 (24.86 %)	73 (9.5 %)	150 (19.53 %)	174 (22.65 %)	3.07
Lacks	218 (21.28 %)	201 (19.62%)	49 (4.78 %)	307 (29.98 %)	249 (24.31 %)	2.84

Figure 1. *The frequencies of writing questionnaire's sub-dimensions*

As illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1, the writing questionnaire comprised 3 sub-dimensions of subjects' needs, wants, and lacks. The highest mean score was the needed sub-dimension (M = 3.15).

In addition, in 48.86 percent of cases, the participants agreed (both strongly agree and agree) with the needed items, and the participants disagreed in 36.83 percent of cases. The biggest mean score in the needs sub-dimension was related to the grammar of the lesson in writing (M = 4.40), which was followed by the need to read their assignments in the class (M = 3.77), to write about the topics of their interest (M = 3.44) and the issues they have information about (M = 3.34). The last two needs with lower ranks were their need to write about different fields (M = 2.48) and to work on their problems with their classmates (M = 1.99).

The next sub-dimension addressed the students' wants (M = 3.07). Overall, the respondents agreed with 48.29 percent of the items related to this sub-dimension, and in 42.18 percent of the cases, the participants disagreed with these items. The most popular item was the application of some strategies by the teacher to improve students' engagement in the class (M = 4.08). The students suggested chain activities in small groups (M = 3.86), followed by the selection of writing topics with the agreement of the students (3.84). The students believed the comments their partners provided in pair work were more helpful (M = 2.50). They thought they better understood their mistakes when they worked on them with their partners (M = 2.20), and the last suggested item referred to having more writing parts for each lesson (M = 1.94).

The third subdivision was related to the students' lack (M = 2.84). As presented in Table 1, the participants agreed with 40.9 percent of items and expressed their disagreement with 54.29 percent of the items related to the lack. The highest level of agreement was the item addressing not having extra resources besides the course book (M = 4.19). Again, they had the problem of not having the chance to read their assignments in class (M = 3.34). As mentioned before, they thought they needed more assignments (M = 2.52). The next problem was the teacher's lack of attention to the students' differences (M = 2.32). The questionnaire analysis showed that the teacher did not give enough time for writing assignments (M = 2.12). The last mentioned problem was about the book not having sufficient instruction parts (M = 2.05).

Table 2

Frequencies and means of writing interview sub-dimensions

Category	Frequency
Subjects' priority	40
Teachers' techniques	35
Learners' difficulties	54
Main techniques	42
Suggestions for better leaning	51
Learners' expectations	30

Table No.2 summarizes the subjects' understanding of questions arising in the interview. The outcomes of the interviews' analysis showed that some themes were mentioned mainly by students. As table 2 shows, to answer the first question regarding their preferences for learning the writing skill, the students expressed a variety of answers. Students reported they preferred to learn by group practice (35.71%), by writing a diary (32.14%), and by using social media (25.00%). The two other mentioned themes were writing stories and reading storybooks with the same frequency (21.43%), and finally, the students reported they prefer individual practice (14.29).

The next question tackled the ways the learners preferred the instructor to apply in teaching writing. They mentioned that they wanted the instructor to provide feedback on their writing assignments (60.71%), to create interaction among the students (46.43%), and to introduce extra recourses besides their course book (17.86%). The third question asked about the learners' problems. In their response, subjects reported that they encountered obstacles in writing, such as tenses (57.14%),

word spelling (53.57%), structure of the sentence (42.86%), and manifold-meaning vocabulary (39.29 %). Interview question four wanted the participants to mention the main techniques to develop their writing skills. In their response to the cited question, students alleged vital techniques to ameliorate their writing skills as having more homework (57.14%), writing a summary (46.43%), having more lessons to practice writing (25.00%), and learning English from an earlier age (21.43%).To answer the fifth question concerning suggestions for better learning, the students gave answers such as I require more communication with my colleagues and instructor both in the educational centers (64.29%), I wish to pick up further new vocabulary in various contexts (53.57%), I desiderated to be given lessons for the due course (42.86%), and I wish to apply technology in class (21.43%).

The last interview question tackled the students' expectations of their teacher. The responses given by the subjects were as explained in the coming section: I envisage the instructor loving teaching and being highly motivated (42.86%), creating a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom (35.71%) and understanding students' feelings and opinions (28.57%).

Table 3

Two groups in the pre-test in between-group comparisons

		Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	-		
Experimental Control Group	Pre-test	.391	.193.36	1.1	126	.74

As shown in Table No.3, the independent sample t-test result indicated no noticeable discrepancy between the two groups of so-called the pre-test (t=1.08, p<.05). The mean difference between the two groups was not strikingly high. (M =.391).

Table 4

Two groups in the post-test in between-group comparisons

		Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	-		
Experimental Control Group	Post-test	2.922	.193.378	7.377	126	.000

According to table number 4, the independent sample t-test result had an indication of a noticeable discrepancy in the post-test scores of the two cited groups (t =7.377, p<.05). The mean difference appearing in the post-test was: (M =2.922).

Table 5

Within-group comparisons of the experimental group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental group Pretest-posttest	6.250	2.131	.266	-23.467	63	.000

As indicated in Table 5, the treatment successfully improved the participants' writing abilities during the semester. The outcome of the paired-samples t-test showed that the post-test mean score of the subjects in the post-test was strikingly higher than their pre-test scores ($t = -23.467$, $p < .05$). The outcome of the t-test named paired-sample illustrated that the post-test mean score of the participants in the category named experimental was vividly higher than that of the pre-test (mean difference = 6.250).

Table 6 *Within-group comparisons of the control group*

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	-		
Control group	Pretest-posttest	2.938	2.754	.344	-8.534	63	.000

As indicated in Table number 6, the paired-samples t-test demonstrated that the mean score of subjects in the post-test was considerably higher than that of scores of the pre-test ($t = -8.53$, $p < .05$). The research question was about the impact of applying needs analysis on enhancing Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing proficiency. The outcomes of the between-group comparisons revealed that the treatment successfully improved learners' writing ability. A pre and post-test design were used to understand the effects of treatment. The outcomes of the independent-samples test indicated that the composition ability of the participants in the experimental group was noticeably greater than those in the class called control. The outcomes of the paired sample t-test were also in line with the outcomes of the independent sample t-test. It showed improvement in the writing capability of the class called experimental once given the treatment.

The outcomes of the present study suggest that employing needs analysis benefits foreign language learners. The results have shown a combination of criteria that play a significant role in specifying the needs of EFL students in Iran and the inescapable urge to determine priorities. The findings indicated that paying attention to students' needs is beneficial in improving their writing skills. The findings suggested that the writing ability of those who received treatment improved significantly more than those in the control group. The scrutiny of the participants' perceptions showed that the needs analysis provided them with more learning chances. The needs analysis by providing more chances enables students to improve their writing ability.

DISCUSSION

The study strived to delve into the effectiveness of needs analysis on the development of foreign language subjects'' writing proficiency. The results of the investigation revealed that students benefited from needs analysis in improving their writing skills, which is consistent with previous research findings by Atai (2000), and Atai and Tahririan (2003). These studies emphasized the importance of

determining the specific needs of students to prepare them effectively for future tasks and expectations. The researchers used a picture story writing approach to improve students' grammatical knowledge, which involved providing information both before and after performing tasks. Picture stories are highly effective in teaching and learning English language writing skills, as they serve as primary materials and stimulate students' imagination and creativity. Additionally, using vocabulary stories, where students write stories incorporating new vocabulary words, fulfilled their needs for learning vocabulary besides their writing needs in small groups. This type of writing helped students understand and remember vocabulary items better.

Research indicates that rich vocabulary instruction and word consciousness have a positive impact on writing skills. Therefore, students need to recall words spontaneously and be able to use them correctly to improve the quality of their writing. The breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary directly influence the descriptiveness, accuracy, and quality of their writing. In addition, written communication is more impressive when using a variety of words and having command over the language.

Diary writing was the most preferred activity among the students and improved their writing skills. It created a relaxed environment for students to express their ideas, feelings, and experiences freely without any pressure. Diary writing can assist students in mastering their writing skills by improving their vocabulary, grammar, and writing mechanics.

The interview results also supported the questionnaire findings, revealing that students preferred engaging in small group practices, diary writing, and social media use. Teachers need to promote learner interaction, provide feedback, and create an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their feelings. Students' writing problems were mostly identified in multiple-meaning words, word spelling, sentence structure, and tenses. The respondents suggested additional techniques, such as writing summaries, learning English at an early age, increasing lesson frequency, and doing more homework, to improve writing skills. Moreover, they recommended learning new vocabulary in various domains, using technology in classes, communicating more with colleagues and instructors, and having more lessons to support the learning process. Finally, learners expected instructors to create a relaxing atmosphere in class, demonstrate an understanding of students' feelings, have a passion for teaching, and be highly motivated.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes of this investigation demonstrate the utilization of needs analysis is effective in enhancing the writing skills of second language learners. These findings suggest that employing needs analysis can provide teachers with valuable insights into the techniques they can implement to facilitate students' learning through the syllabus. Introducing modifications to the learning process without attention to the curriculum is not feasible. Howsoever, if teachers intend to make changes, they should take several factors into account, including the number of activities, alignment of the new changes with the existing program, and ensuring students' comfort in adapting to the new curriculum.

Needs analysis offers several benefits to teachers as it enables them to obtain clear information regarding students' needs, wants, and deficiencies. Firstly, teachers can review certain aspects by analyzing their work. Secondly, if they sense the need for change, they can develop a new program. In some instances, teachers may also reassess their methods and techniques to improve students' motivation and interest in learning materials. Student motivation is a crucial aspect that guarantees successful academic outcomes. Addressing students' interests and requirements is vital, as students value how their interests are recognized. Teachers of foreign languages are encouraged to incorporate needs analysis in their classes, as it offers participants the chance to engage in learning English. Adult learners are more motivated to participate in activities when given the flexibility to decide on preferred times and locations.

By recognizing the hierarchical nature of social institutions and treating inequality as a central

concern, needs analysis can be employed as an alternative approach to curriculum development (Chiu, 2021; Sieglová, 2019). Therefore, as the overarching theme of this study, teachers are advised to utilize needs analysis to maximize student engagement and collaboration. Students should be encouraged to identify their own needs, whereby needs analysis can empower students to express themselves and make informed decisions.

Lastly, the findings of this research contribute to the existing body of literature on needs analysis by indicating how changes in course organization and class conditions can significantly impact students' language learning outcomes. The implications of this investigation can inform the theory of needs analysis in a foreign language writing program.

References

Allwright, R. L. (1982). Perceiving and pursuing learners' needs. In M. Geddes & G. Sturtridge (Eds.), *Individualization* (pp. 24–31). Modern English Publications.

Arias-Contreras, C., & Moore, P. J. 2022. The Role of English Language in the Field of Agriculture: A Needs Analysis. English for Specific Purposes. 65: 95-106.https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2021.09.002.
(16) (PDF) Needs Analysis of English Language Use in Tourism Industry in Selangor, Malaysia. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361303942_Needs_Analysis_of_English_Language_Use_in_Tourism_Industry_in_Selangor_Malaysia [accessed Jul 20 2022].

Atai, M. R. (2000). *ESP revisited: A reappraisal study of discipline-based EAP programs in Iran*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. The University of Isfahan.

Atai, M. R., & Tahririan, M. H. (2003). Assessment of the status of ESP in the current Iranian higher educational system. In: *Proceedings of the 14th European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes: Communication, culture, and knowledge*. University of Surrey, Guilford, UK.

Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing courses in English for specific purposes.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Benesch, S. (2001). *Critical English for academic purposes: Theory, politics and practice*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Chiu, W. Y., Liu, G. Z., Barrett, N. E., Liaw, M. L., Hwang, G. J., & Lin, C. C. (2021). Needs analysis-based design principles for constructing a context-aware English learning system. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1-27.

Davis, P.A., & Falla, T. (2018). *Solutions*. Oxford University Press.

Eslami-Rasekh, Z. (2010). Teachers' voice vs. students' voice: A needs analysis approach to English for academic purposes (EAP) in Iran. *English Language Teaching, 3*(1), 3-11.

Hanssen, T. &Solvoll, G. (2015). The importance of university facilities for student satisfaction at a Norwegian University. *Facilities,33*(13), 744–759.

Haque, N. (2014). A brief study on need analysis. *Express,* 1(1), 2348-2052.

Hyland, K. (2019). *Second language writing*. Cambridge university press.

Jeczelewski, S. (2016). *Needs analysis, course design and evaluation of business English*. [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Iceland.

Lee, I., & Mak, P. (2018). Metacognition and metacognitive instruction in second language writing classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, *52*(4), 1085-1097.

Otilia, S. M., & Brancusi, C. (2015). Needs analysis in English for specific purposes. *Annals of the Constantin Brâncuşi University of Târgu Jiu, Economy Series, 1*(2), 54-55.

Richards, J. C. (2017). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sieglová, D. (2019). From motivation to successful learning: Needs analysis for effective teaching. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, *9*(2), 429-443.

Upton, T. A. (2012). LSP at 50: Looking back, looking forward. *Ibérica: Revista de la Asociación Europea de Lenguas para Fines Específicos (AELFE)*, *23*(1), 9-28.

West, R. (1994). Needs analysis in language teaching. *Language Teaching*, *27*(1), 1-19.

Biodata

Sara Zafari is a Ph.D. candidate of TEFL at the English Department, IAU, and Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Iran. Her research interests include language teaching methodology, second language acquisition, and foreign language acquisition.
Email: *Sarazafari76@yahoo.com*

Hossein Heidari Tabrizi is an associate professor of TEFL and currently the head of the English Department at Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran. He is the director-in-charge of Research in English Language Pedagogy (RELP). His research interests include language assessment, translation studies, and critical discourse analysis.
Email: *heidaritabrizi @gmail.com*

Azizeh Chalak is an associate professor of TEFL at the English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran. She is the Editor-in-Chief of Research in English language Pedagogy (RELP). Her research interests include Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, and Intercultural Communication.
Email: *azichalak@gmail.com*