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## Research Article

**Analysis of Iranian EFL Learners' Needs to Learner-Negotiated Syllabus for Interlanguage Pragmatic (ILP) Competence Development**

**Arezoo Nik Khormizi<sup>1</sup>**  
**Gholam-Reza Abbasian<sup>2\*</sup>**  
**Massood Yazdanimoghaddam<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Teaching, Kish International Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kish Island, Iran  
*toosmivehkhorsan@yahoo.com*

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English Language, Imam Ali University, Tehran, Iran  
*gabasian@gmail.com*

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English Language, Garmsar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Garmsar, Iran  
*massood.yazdanimoghaddam@gmail.com*

**ABSTRACT**

This study sought to analyze Iranian EFL learners' need to learner-negotiated syllabus for interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence development. To this end, a quantitative survey design was used. Participants consisted of 30 conveniently selected female intermediate EFL learners from a language institute in Mashhad. For data collection, a researcher-developed questionnaire was used. Data analysis was run using descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test. The results showed that Iranian EFL learners need learner-negotiated syllabus for interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence development. The results have some implications for EFL teachers, learners and curriculum planners.

**Key Words:** Interlanguage, interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence, learner-negotiated syllabus, pragmatics



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language learning is characterized with learners' beginning to compare their first language with the foreign language and, in the passage of time, they develop a new language that is the result of the rules and structures of both first and second language. Such language development is called interlanguage (IL). IL was first proposed by the American etymologist Selinker (1972). IL is seen as a different linguistic framework which is connected to both languages (Tarone, 2001). IL consists of the same subcategories as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics that each of which with some specific linguistic features. Semantics is regarded as the study of postulates; syntax is the study of phrases and sentences; and pragmatics investigates linguistic performances and the settings in which they are executed (Stalnaker, 1998). Pragmatics refers to "the study of language from the perspective of its users which focuses on the choices they make, the challenges they face during social interactions, and the impact their language use has on others involved in communication" (Crystal, 1997, p. 301).

Pragmatics is a subcategory of IL that has been well-probed in the literature. In this regards, Huang (2007) noted that pragmatics touches upon the efficient investigation of meaning concerning language use in context. At the point when pragmatics is contemplated amidst two languages, ILP appears to be more proper. In other words, pragmatics is normally referred to interlanguage pragmatics. ILP deals with IL features, which is identified with learning the language and pragmatics which is the investigation of language in each specific situation. Hence, ILP considers learning the second/foreign language in the specific situation it is applied. In line with this, Kasper and Rose (2002) offered a comprehensive definition of ILP: "As the study of second language use, interlanguage pragmatics examines how non-native speakers comprehend and produce actions in a target language. As the study of second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics investigates how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform actions in a target language" (p. 5).

Many learners still struggle to use the language appropriately in real-world situations. This highlights the critical need for explicit pragmatics instruction in EFL teaching/learning, especially given that formal education is often the primary exposure to the target language for most learners. The challenge of learning English pragmatics is even greater in EFL environments compared to ESL settings. This is primarily due to the limited opportunities for EFL learners to communicate with native speakers. Cook (2001) noted that language classrooms frequently prioritize academic language learning over communicative proficiency. This emphasis on decontextualized language practice, limits learners' exposure to the social and cultural aspects of language use and consequently hinders the development of pragmatic competence. While linguistic forms can be developed through grammar study and practice, language use is not governed by fixed rules. The complex interplay of various factors influences appropriate language use, often leaving EFL learners uncertain about how to improve their pragmatic skills in their interlanguage. Furthermore, the lack of authentic, learner-centered teaching methods further hinders the expansion of pragmatic skills in EFL learners.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Estaji and Safari (2023) evaluated the impact of learner-based teaching on reflective and impulsive EFL learners' argumentative writing skills. The results showed that learner-based teaching significantly enhanced learners' writing performance. Moreover, the findings indicated that students generally held positive views toward learner-based teaching.



Gholami et al. (2022) addressed the Iranian EFL teachers' perception and practice of learner-centered instruction using a mixed-methods design. To this end, a 35-item questionnaire consisting of various items for investigating perceptions towards learner-centered instruction was designed. The findings showed that females had more positive perceptions than males towards the use of learner-centered instruction.

Saygili (2021) conducted an experiment to assess the pedagogical influence of learner-based tasks on the academic writing skills of Turkish learners. This experimental study also investigated participants' attitudes after the implementation of learner-based tasks in their classroom. The results indicated an improvement in the participants' writing proficiency.

Jalilzadeh and Yeganehpour (2021) investigated the beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers about learner-centeredness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study revealed that Iranian teachers favored learner-centeredness as a method for assessing their students. Most teachers agreed that learner-centeredness was highly effective and suitable for evaluating learners' writing skills.

Beikmohammadi et al. (2020) examined the beliefs and practices of Iranian EFL university instructors regarding learner-oriented teaching. The findings revealed that instructors use a combination of traditional and learner-oriented methods. Nearly half of them reported encouraging learners to engage in class tasks. Additionally, the teachers acknowledged that providing effective feedback motivates students to further develop their learning.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Choosing an appropriate syllabus is necessary due to the significance of ILP and pragmatic competence among second and foreign language learners. Learner-negotiated syllabus is a good candidate for this purpose given that it has proved to be effective on different language skills. According to Rich (2011) and Jonassen (2000), learner-negotiated learning requests that students establish their own goals for learning and specify the assets and exercises that will enable them to meet those aims. In a learner-negotiated teaching framework, assessment is utilized to consider the importance of increasing scores as well as advancing learning (Weimer, 2002). In this regard, teachers are required to help their students to be more occupied with both the learning and assessment procedures. Carless (2015) asserts that in a learner-negotiated learning, it is contended that when learners are inquired basically to show what they have understood, they devote additional time, provide a more innovative answer, and are frequently more prosperous than the time they are assessed traditionally.

Learner-negotiated learning requires the students to show that they comprehend what they are provided by re-explaining it in a new way and learning deeply (Atherton, 2005). If teachers try to understand the way learners comprehend a point, they could help them to learn more than before (Bransford et al., 2000). According to Purpura (2004), learner-oriented learning involves the collection and interpretation of evidence about performance so that judgements can be made about further language development. Carless (2015) asserts that the aim of learner-negotiated instruction is not to question other formats of instructional approaches; rather, it focuses on bringing about a learning-based program that attaches greater importance to the learning factors than measurement ones. Consequently, it is associated with formative assessment as it focuses on the learning process by combining learning and assessment. It is an approach to language learning rather than a step-by-step method. In addition, it places much of the learning workload on the shoulders of the learners. As a result, and due to different understandings of this approach, what happens in the classroom may differ from one context to another. This also urges the need to focus on the teachers'



practices in learner-centered classes. The success of a teaching method in a particular context depends on several variables.

It can be hypothesized that learner-negotiated syllabus may help learners acquire ILP. To support this, Esfandiari and Allaf-Akbary (2024) found that English interaction (which is part of pragmatics) among learners was significantly enhanced under the effect of learner-centered teaching. However, the first step to deal with this hypothesis is doing a needs analysis research to see whether Iranian EFL learners need learner-negotiated syllabus in learning ILP. With a view to this, the present study sought to investigate Iranian EFL learners' need to learner-negotiated syllabus for interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence development.

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

The following research question was formulated:

1. Do Iranian EFL learners need learner-negotiated syllabus for ILP competence development?  
Accordingly, this study hypothesized that:

“H0: Iranian EFL learners do not need learner-negotiated syllabus for ILP competence development.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The participants included 30 Iranian female intermediate learners from a language institute in Mashhad. The sampling procedure was based on convenient sampling. All learners' mother tongue was Persian and they were already homogenized through the Quick Placement Test (QPT). The group was informed of the aims of the study, and ensured about anonymity, confidentiality and lack of leakage of their information. Their mean age was 18.

To collect the data, a Needs Analysis Questionnaire was developed by the researcher through consulting university professors experienced in English pragmatics, and related studies (e.g., Estaji & Safari, 2023; Gholami et al., 2022). It consisted of 23 items in a Likert Scale in a range from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Its Cronbach's Alpha reliability was calculated .83 and its validity was confirmed by a group of five teaching experts who were university professors with more than 20 years of teaching experience.

This study used a quantitative survey design (Ary et al., 2010). In this type of design, a quantitative tool is used to survey the participants' views about a phenomenon.

To collect the data, the participants were asked to fill the researcher-made Needs Analysis Questionnaire. More specifically, survey questions were sent to the participants via communication platforms to be answered. Originally, the questions were sent to 36 learners, however, 2 learners did not answer the survey, and 4 learners' answers were incomplete. Therefore, they were excluded from the data and 30 learners' answers remained as the main data. Three reminder messages were sent 3 to 6 weeks after the initial distribution of the survey. No extra incentive was offered to the participants. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test were run.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS



As mentioned above, the first data analysis procedure used was descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows the results of descriptive statistics.

**Table 1**  
Results of *Descriptive Statistics*

N	Mean	SD	SEM
30	80.33	.40	.08

As shown in Table 1, the average scores of the learners are above the hypothesized mean of 2.5 (which was derived from the statistical formula). This indicates that the learners' average scores are higher than the expected mean. To assess the statistical significance of these mean scores in relation to the population mean, one-sample t-tests were performed. Table 2 presents the results of one-sample t-test.

**Table 2**  
Results of *One Sample t-test*

Test Value = 2.5					
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
9.662	29	.000	-2.17	-3.2	-1.5

Table 2 shows a significant difference between participants' mean scores and the population's ( $t(29) = 8.662, p < .05$ ). Accordingly, it is concluded that Iranian EFL learners need learner-negotiated syllabus for ILP competence development.

Concerning the research question Do Iranian EFL learners need learner-negotiated syllabus for ILP competence development?, the results confirmed the need of Iranian EFL learners to learner-negotiated syllabus for ILP competence development.

The results are in line with the studies by Fitriyah and Jannah (2021), Galikya et al. (2019), Kalali et al. (2022), Suryoputro (2018), and Xu and Liu (2018) which have shown the effect of learner-oriented teaching on EFL learning. Learner-oriented teaching improves the participants' communicative abilities. This contributes to considerable changes in their IL pragmatic competence. They feel responsible for learning as a consequence of learner-negotiated learning. This encourages them to work more on their pragmatic knowledge. Accordingly, their IL pragmatic competence is improved.



Participants need learner-negotiated syllabus because their active involvement, knowledge and understanding is improved by this kind of syllabus. Learner-negotiated instruction makes a dynamic and interactive relationship between instruction, learning and assessment. This dynamic tie can generate remarkable improvements in learners' IL pragmatic competence.

Since learner-negotiated syllabus includes learning activities, self and peer assessment and feedback, it stimulates students to become engaged in learning and assessment process. The final product of this chain can be improvements in learners' IL pragmatic competence. As a result of learner-centered syllabus, learners' reason-based thinking, problem-solving and meta-cognitive activities are expanded. This in turn contributes to enhancement of their IL pragmatic competence.

Learner-negotiated teaching is process-based and combines formative and summative assessment, thus, it contributes to IL pragmatic competence as a progressive and developmental construct. Additionally, because learner-centeredness provides learners with the opportunity of evaluating their learning stage by stage, it can lead to progress in their IL pragmatic competence.

Moreover, a syllabus based on learner-centeredness helps learners set individual learning goals for themselves, and provide evidence for their learning. This helps them learn pragmatics more effectively. It enhances learners' critical thinking and self-awareness. This gives them useful insights into the learning process. In practice, their IL pragmatic competence is improved. Because through learner-negotiated syllabus, learners can see the learning outcomes at the end of the course more effectively, their pragmatic learning is positively enhanced.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that EFL learners in Iran need learner-negotiated syllabus for development of their ILP competence. The mainstream teaching methods currently used in educational settings cannot guarantee learners' engagement in learning of ILP. In learner-negotiated syllabus, learners adopt an agentive role in learning procedures.

Learners' need to learner-negotiated syllabus is rooted in merge of assessment, learning and learners in this kind of syllabus. Therefore, it can fulfill their needs in learning pragmatics as a complex language facet. It can also be argued that need of learners to learner-negotiated syllabus is justified due to exhaustion of learners from current static teaching methods. Learner-negotiated syllabus can reduce learning problems in ILP competence development significantly.

The findings have pedagogical implications for various groups of stakeholders in the field. EFL learners can take advantage of learner-negotiated syllabus in developing their ILP competence. Teachers can also benefit from learner-negotiated syllabus in training learners on ILP. Curriculum planners can utilize learner-negotiated syllabus in developing future EFL curricula in a way that learners can develop in their ILP competence more efficiently.



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