Teachers and Learners' Perceptions of Online Instruction and Assessment during COVID-19 Lockdown in Iran: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

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Abstract

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, all face-to-face instruction at higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide has been suspended. Therefore, many institutions and universities relied on online learning to continue the instruction process. The perceptions of teachers and students who went through this experience can provide useful information regarding the success of the online instruction. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran. Additionally, it aimed at exploring the main advantages and disadvantages of online instruction during this time. To this end, 250 English language teachers and students were selected from different English language institutes and universities in Iran. Drawing upon Khan et al.'s (2021) questionnaire and an open-ended question, this study showed that both teachers and students had positive perceptions towards online learning and teaching during COVID-19 lockdown despite the fact that some students had not the necessary facilities and infrastructure for online classes. Furthermore, this study showed that validity, reliability, construction, administration, and effectiveness of online assessment was a major concern for both teachers and students. Besides, both groups expressed the benefits of online instruction more than its drawbacks. The results of this study have implications for higher education teachers, and stakeholders to get a better understanding of the students' and teachers' perception toward online instruction.

Keywords: D-learning, E-learning, learner perception, lockdown, teacher perception

1. Introduction

On a worldwide scale, education has become a valuable commodity, both for personal accomplishment and for the growth of a nation as a whole. The increasing demand for university degrees over the last several decades has resulted in the emergence of online learning, and many students from all over the world have engaged in learning through online environments (Hosseinpur & Parsaeian, 2023). Originally, the term "e-learning" was coined at a computer-based Training systems seminar in 1999. In quest of a clearer description, other terminologies such as "online learning" and "virtual learning" began to develop (Rani et al., 2016). With the advent of the computer and Internet in the late twentieth century, and the emergence of online learning, many e-learning tools were developed in the process of teaching and learning. As a result, online learning has shown to be more efficient and adaptable to students' various family and social obligations.

This shift from the face-to-face education to online education is considered a fundamental transition in the higher education sectors in Iran following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. For a long time, face-to-face teaching and learning process has been conducted in Iranian Higher Educational Institutions and universities. Therefore, making the shift to implementing educational activities in an innovative online environment is considered a challenging task. This transition to online teaching and learning disrupts comfort and typically creates situations filled with anxiety and uncertainties among the beneficiaries of the change (Issah, 2018). Teachers and students developed different perspectives on the feasibility of online learning. Thus, teachers' and students' perceptions may be effectively exploited to highlight the benefits and drawbacks of this unusual experience for most institutions and universities, ensuring a better teaching and learning environment (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Therefore, this study intends to investigate the perception of teachers and students about online teaching and learning during Covid-19 lockdown in Iran.

2. Literature Review

2.1. E-learning and D-learning

With the exponential growth of the World Wide Web (WWW), the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has become one of the helpful approaches that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of education. In this way, E-learning and distance education are two new achievements of ICT that may give the needed answers to overcome the complexities of traditional methods. The term "e-learning" was coined by White (1983) as "learning via electronic sources, such as television, computer, videodisk,

teletext, and videotext" (White, 1983, p. 13). Following that, other authors such as Rosenberg (2000) and Hartley (2001) developed the concept of E-learning. Simply put, e-learning is a type of learning that involves using computers and other devices to access learning materials that are tailored to particular learning needs.

Distance learning, also called distance education, refers to a type of education in which learners or students are not required to attend school every day. In other words, they learn and study their subject online without going to a college or university campus. Nowadays, the Internet serves as the primary mode of distance education for the great majority of students, who may access it from their own homes or from public libraries (Ryan, 1997). D-learning may include other technological formats such as television, DVDs, and printable materials, but many distance learners prefer Web-based learning because of its availability and functionality.

2.2. Technology Integration into Teaching and Learning

Technology integration, according to Redmann and Kotrlik (2004), is defined as "the use of the Internet, computers, CD-ROMs, interactive media, satellites, teleconferencing, and other technological means in instruction to support, enhance, inspire and create learning" (p. 2). Simply put, technology integration is the use of technological resources like computers, cell phones, the Internet, and other computer related facilities in regular classroom activities and school management to support teaching and learning. When technology is implemented in the classrooms, students are more engaged with learning objectives. In fact, it paves the way for differentiated instructions to address students' and learners' specific requirements.

Teachers believe that technology increases student engagement, which enhances students' performance in class (Kay et al., 2009). According to Saine (2012), students are more engaged and innovative when they use technology. Additionally, some studies indicated that technology both facilitates and encourages cooperation and engagement (Shaltry et al., 2013). However, incorporating technology into learning and teaching has various barriers and challenges. These challenges can be access to technology and online tools, time, support, professional development training, as well as teacher's confidence in their ability to employ technology and their conviction in its use. Similarly, several research have shown that learner's factor can hinder efforts to implement technology in education. The level of student resistance reflects their unfavorable perceptions regarding the usage of technology. As a result, it is critical to understand users' attitude about technology and online learning, since what is effective and important in one environment might not be useful on another. In order to develop the educational perspectives of online learning,

it is critical to address the concerns of the learners (Al-Mahmood & McLoughlin, 2004). Thus, Esichaikul et al., (2011) suggested the use of adaptive e-learning systems, which allow content to be tailored to the user's knowledge and behavior level. Otherwise, ignoring pertinent issues may lead to technical difficulties, students' frustration and reluctance to the use of technology in learning and teaching, all of which may impede successful learning.

2.3. Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

By the end of December 2019, the coronavirus pandemic (known as the COVID-19) had made its way into China. Due to the circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, e-learning or d-learning has become a common and preferred method of education, and many institutions and schools have started online classes using software such as Zoom, Skype, and/or Google Meet. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 33.1 percent of college learners were involved in some form of distance or online learning in 2017 (Grinder et al., 2019). Nevertheless, since the advent of COVID-19, this number has risen dramatically, and online learning has become a necessity for educational institutions.

In February 2020, Iran's first COVID-19 case was reported (Shalbafan & Khademoreza, 2020), and the authorities chose to shut down all universities and schools, and persuaded people to stay home to hinder its spread. Due to the fact that online or distance learning fosters multimedia contact between instructors and learners (Garrison, 2011), the higher education institutions in Iran decided to conduct online instruction through available software applications and platforms soon after the government's decision to impose nation-wide lockdown. Thus, e-learning can be seen as a turning point in Iranian education due to COVID-19 outbreak. The main problem, however, is the quality of teaching and learning, which is directly related to how effectively the material is created and implemented. The effectiveness of teaching and learning is also influenced by how information is chosen for the online environment, as well as by identifying and resolving the constraints that instructors and learners encounter.

2.4. Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Online Learning

Perception, according to Qiong (2017), is a mental process that involves being aware of or comprehending sensory data. Perception refers to the entire process of the conscious human mind gathering information from its surroundings. Thus, perception might be defined as the act of comprehending the meaning of the stimulus. Based on the concept of perception given above, teachers' perception is the way they perceive the visuals and understand what

they are feeling. This process is divided into steps that begin with the collection, recognition, and interpretation of sensory data.

Different teachers and instructors have different viewpoints and perspectives on classroom management. In research conducted in Europe (Becta, 2008), teachers' perception on the effectiveness of technology in making instruction engaging, as well as classroom constructivists teaching and learning settings, were highlighted to be contradictory. Some teachers believed that integrating technology into classroom had a positive influence on students' and their own learning; that it had helped to individualize learning and enhance the connection between classroom learning and the learning outside the classroom. According to these studies, however, some teachers think that the benefits of technology integration into classrooms are not noticeable in students' performance.

When it comes to learning, particularly e-learning, every student clearly has their own preferred style. Therefore, it is essential to know how students recognize and respond to elements of e-learning, as well as how to apply these approaches to improve learning (Koohang & Durante, 2003). According to Lui et al. (2006), the success of educational technology integration is influenced by student perception. The perceived efficacy of an educational technology is influenced by the perceived characteristics of the technology as well as the characteristics and backgrounds of students.

On the contrary, students and learners also experienced several challenges which reduced their readiness towards online learning (e.g., Kaur & Zoraini Wati, 2004; Thaufeega, 2016). These studies also revealed that students were less satisfied with e-learning platforms than with traditional systems, or they were still not yet prepared for e-learning (Thaufeega, 2016). According to studies, institutions, policy makers and regulatory authorities must play a pivotal role in improving e-learning facilities and programs (Kaur & Zoraini Wati, 2004).

2.5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning

During the COVID-19 epidemic, online learning has been identified as a significant and necessary resource for learners and schools all around the world. Thus, many educational institutions have been forced to embrace a new method of instruction. The adoption of technology and online learning has increased dramatically in recent years and will continue to do so in the future. Online learning, like any instructional method, has its own set of advantages and disadvantages.

There are various advantages to incorporating online learning into higher education institutions. Previous studies have shown various benefits

related to the use of online learning technology in university education (Raspopovic et al., 2017). The main advantages of online learning are cost-saving and efficiency (Aczel et al., 2008) as students do not need to travel back and forth to their institutions to attend their classes. According to Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015), the flexibility and accessibility of online learning is another advantage. In online learning, learning may take place anywhere and at any time, which makes it incredibly flexible. Students do not need to be at a certain location to take lessons, as they would in a traditional classroom setting.

Furthermore, online learning systems have been shown to improve communication between students and teachers. According to Radu et al. (2015), learners can actively participate in online courses from any location, offering those who are traveling or relocating with a readily accessible resource for experience and learning. Online learning allows students to access and share content easily, either by uploading to a ready-made cloud storage, or distributing via social networks, improving student collaboration, particularly in group or project-based learning settings.

Despite having significant advantages, online learning also has its disadvantages. According to Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015), online learning in certain cases is held through remoteness; therefore, misinterpretation might happen. In fact, due to the lack of face-to-face interaction with instructors, online learning may be less successful. This may have a detrimental influence on a learner's academic success and development. Online students and teachers who spend a lot of time seated and staring at a computer may develop physical issues like sight or back problems, and their outdoor activity may reduce as a result (Nazarlou, 2013).

2.6. Previous Related Studies

Even though online learning research has increased over the past decades in terms of teaching techniques and studying the barriers to e-learning implementation, there have been few studies regarding the perception of teachers and students towards it, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Allo, 2020; Kamal & Illiyan, 2021). Drawing on published research about investigating students' perception of e-learning during the COVID-19 epidemic, Allo (2020) conducted a qualitative study and discovered that students had a favorable opinion toward online learning, considering it as constructive and effective throughout COVID-19 crisis. Besides, the study revealed that students want materials and assignments to be explained before the tasks are given.

Focusing on teachers' perceptions of online teaching during COVID-19 epidemic, Kamal and Illiyan (2021) distributed a questionnaire to 200

school teachers and analyzed the compiled ones to see their perceptions and the challenges they faced in online teaching. According to the results, on average, teachers had a favorable perception about virtual teaching during COVID-19 for reducing the learning gap and shaping students' future during the crisis. Nonetheless, they faced several challenges in online education, including technological issues, difficulty with online exams and assessment, and so on.

Based on these reviews, only a small number of research has looked at both negative and positive perceptions of long-term online education. Therefore, more study into the perceptions of teachers and students in online classrooms is required. The major goal of the current study was to explore the perception of teachers and students about online instruction and assessment during Covid-19 lockdown in Iran. Using an open-ended questionnaire, the study also intended to investigate the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy from the perspective of students and teachers. More specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are Iranian teachers' and students' perception of online instruction during COVID-19 lockdown?

RQ2. What are Iranian teachers' and students' perception of online assessment during COVID-19 lockdown?

RQ3. What are the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy in the COVID-19 situation?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Due to administrative issues, convenience sampling was used to choose participants for this study. In this type of sampling, the researcher decided to select the participants that were available to be investigated. In this study, two groups of participants, about 50 male and female English language teachers and university professors in Iran, as well as 400 EFL students (BA and MA students) from different English language institutes and universities in Iran, were invited to take part in this study through email and professional networks. The researcher selected various educational institutions in Iran since he was aware that during the COVID-19 lockdown, they were actively employing e-learning platforms for their courses and assessments.

Since the researcher employed convenience sampling technique for this study, 46 English language instructors and teachers (26 males and 20 females), as well as 204 EFL students (98 males and 106 females), were found

accidentally and selected as a sample. The teachers and students were selected from the University of Isfahan, Qom, Tehran, to name a few. Moreover, most of the teachers had one to five years of teaching experience. Regarding the students, most of them were BA students. Those who volunteered to participate in this research were presented with a teacher and student survey questionnaire and a descriptive question.

Due to the lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey questionnaire and the descriptive questions were sent to all sample participants through an email or a Google link. Afterward, they were assured that their participation in this study would be voluntarily, and their personal information would be treated confidentially.

3.2. Instruments

The researcher adopted the questionnaires as the major data collection instrument. Two questionnaires, considering teachers' and students' perceptions of online instruction and assessment during COVID-19 lockdown in Iran, and an open-ended question were employed in this study to gather the data.

The questionnaires utilized in this study were borrowed from Khan et al. (2021). These questionnaires were adopted as the main instruments because they were in accordance with the needs of the researcher. These two questionnaires comprised two sections. The first section dealt with some demographic information of the respondents such as institutional affiliation, gender, designation and teaching experience for the teachers, and level of study for the students. The second part of the questionnaires consisted of some Likert-type, yes-no and multiple-response questions that addressed three major themes: Teachers' and students' readiness for online instruction during COVID-19 pandemic, pedagogy and materials, and assessment.

Teachers' and students' online class experiences, their training, logistics, and affordability were considered under readiness. The students' active class participation and engagement, their participation in group discussion, the feedback they received, and learning materials and teaching aids were dealt with under the second theme pedagogy and materials. Issues such as test fairness, construction, and administration were taken care of under the third theme assessment. Overall, there were 18 questions in the teacher questionnaire and 17 questions in the student questionnaire.

Along with these two questionnaires, an open-ended question was employed to get further information from the participants. The participants were invited to write at least one paragraph about online instruction and assessment. The main rationale behind this open-ended question was to extract

some further information from the participants that the questionnaires have failed to do so.

3.3. Procedure

Due to the social distancing amid COVID-19 pandemic and the continued lockdown in the country, the face-to-face interaction and questionnaire distribution could not be conducted. Therefore, the questionnaires and the open-ended question were designed on Google Forms, and then the links were forwarded to the sample participants through emails and professional networks such as Telegram or WhatsApp. It is worth noting that the necessary permission for conducting the study was obtained from institutions and universities before the questionnaires were distributed. Besides, the participants were well-informed about the objectives of the study.

Also, the researcher explicitly indicated that the participation in this study would be voluntary, and that the participants' privacy and anonymity would be protected. Then, the researcher assured that the participants had received the questionnaires by some follow-up emails and messages in the professional networks, and he attempted to address any questions the participants had about the questionnaires. Besides, through further follow-up emails and messages, the researcher tried to maximize response rate. Then, data were collected over two weeks. Finally, the researcher ascertained that all the participants successfully completed the questionnaires, and the data were gathered completely. In other words, those questionnaires that were not completed or incorrectly filled out, were discarded or excluded from consideration for data analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

To answer the questions of this study, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed for data analysis. The data obtained from the first two research questions of the study were quantitative data, and they were analyzed through descriptive statistics. To organize and analyze teachers' and learners' perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in Iran, SPSS software (version 22.0) was employed by the researcher. The qualitative data gathered through the open-ended question related to the third research question of the study were coded, categorized, and analyzed thematically (Dörnyei, 2007).

4. Results

This study was aimed at investigating teachers' and learners' perceptions of online instruction during the Covid-19 lockdown in Iran. The collected data from teachers and learners were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. To examine the first research question (i.e., what are Iranian teachers' and students' perceptions of online instruction during COVID-19 lockdown?) questions 1-10 of the students' questionnaire and 1-11 of the teachers' questionnaire were examined.

4.1. Addressing Research Question One

Considering virtual instruction during the pandemic lockdown, the participants expressed different opinions. For example, 60.9% of the instructors preferred virtual instruction, whereas 23.3% were not clear about it. About 53.4% of the students, on the other hand, stated that the educational centers should welcome online instruction; however, 27.5% of them were against online instruction, and the rest of them were double-minded on the issue. As with online teaching and learning experiences, the results of the study indicated that almost all teachers (100%) had received sufficient instruction on online teaching. In the same vein, it came to light that many students (95.1%) had already experienced online classes, and just 4.9% of them were not that familiar with online courses.

Regarding technology skills, logistics, and affordability, about 67.4% of the instructors held that they enjoyed the required skill and ability to run online classes, and a considerable number of them (87%) stated that they had access to facilities such as laptops and smartphones. In the same vein, about 67.4% of the teachers were under the assumption that their students enjoyed the required devices for making presence in online courses. Likewise, about 54.3% of the instructors were of the opinion that the students could afford the Internet expenses for participating in online courses. On the other hand, 61.2% of the students believed that they enjoyed the necessary skills and abilities for participating in virtual classes, and just 47.1% of them trusted the ability and knowledge of their teachers in running online classes. Considering technological facilities, many students had access to smartphones (49.5%) and laptops (43.1%), and the rest drew upon desktop computers (4.4%) and tablets (2.9%) to attend online classes.

The results of the survey demonstrated that the participant teachers had already had the experience of employing a wide range of teaching aids and materials in their classes. They expressed that they had already taken

advantage of video clips (71.7%), power point slides (67.4%), eBooks (56.5%), audio lectures (52.2%), printed materials (23.9%), online articles (19.6%), whiteboards (2.2%), and other instructional materials (13%).

Having access to the Internet was not a problem for almost all of the students (97.5%); however, apart from 5.9% and 23.5% of them that were satisfied with their Internet speed and considered it very strong and strong, respectively, the low speed of the Internet was a serious concern of most of the students, and 51% of the students labelled their Internet connectivity as average and 19.6% of them regarded it as poor or very poor. Regardless of connectivity, the participant students' opinions varied considering the costs of the Internet access. Most of them had no problem with the Internet cost (54.9%), 24% of them stated that they may not be able to afford the Internet cost, and 21.1% of them were sure that they would not be able to afford it.

The students' involvement and engagement in the process of online teaching and learning was a serious concern of most of the teachers. More than half of them (54.3%) had their own doubts regarding active student involvement, and about 69.6% of them believed that there was no way to keep track of students in online classes. To 63% of the instructors, having group discussions in online classes was an unattainable goal. However, 30.5% of them believed that they could provide immediate feedback in their virtual classes. 46.6% of the students, on the other hand, stated that they could interact with their teachers in online courses, and 40.7% of them were satisfied with group discussions held in online programs.

4.2. Addressing Research Question Two

Regarding validation, reliability, the construction, administration, and effectiveness of online assessment, the results of the study showed that online assessment was the main drawback of the online programs from both teachers' and learners' perspectives. About 63% of teachers found online test and exam administration a tough and demanding activity, and 45.6% of the instructors believed that test construction for online courses was challenging. As with validity and reliability of the online assessment, just 34.8% and 13% of the teachers believed in the validity and reliability of the online assessment, respectively. However, a small number of the teachers (15.2%) believed that online assessment is an effective means for measuring students' learning outcomes.

Regarding fairness and the effectiveness of online assessment, about one-fourth (27%) of the students viewed assessment during online courses fair;

however, 46.1% of the students were under the assumption that online assessment was not fair, and a larger number of the students (56.4%) stated that the obtained exam scores were not a true reflection of the students' knowledge.

Cheating was considered one of the main shortcomings of the online assessment by both teachers and learners. About 69.6% of the teachers and 58.3% of learners were of the opinion that online assessment furnished the ground for the cheating of the students. Among different testing techniques, 63% of the teachers advocated written assignments, while this technique was favored just by 47.1% of the learners. Having quizzes as a means of online assessment was favored by most teachers (69.6%) and students (78.4%). The employment of oral tests and presentations were controversial among teachers and learners. While most teachers were in favor of oral tests (63%) and presentations (73.9%), less than half of the learners regarded oral tests (42.2%) and presentations (46.1%) as effective means of online assessment. In addition, 43.5% of the teachers and 52.9% of the students supported short questions, while 41.3% of the teachers and 21.1% of the students favored reading tests.

The students had various opinions regarding the quality of online instruction. About a quarter of them held that online instruction could ensure quality education; however, a larger number of them (50.9%) did not believe in the quality of the online instruction. Considering finding online study materials, the students were divided in their opinions. More than half of them (61.2%) believed that they can find study materials online, whereas about one-fifth (18.1%) of them thought the opposite.

As regards the introduction of online classes in the department, the students were divided in their opinions. Nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of the participants believed that if online classes are introduced in their department, they will be at a disadvantage, whereas more than one-third (35.3%) of them thought the opposite.

4.3. Addressing Research Question Three

The data of this section were analyzed after collecting the answers of the respondents to the relevant qualitative open-ended question (i.e., What are the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy in the COVID-19 situation?). Initially, positive and negative factors were extracted separately from the opinions expressed by each respondent for both groups of teachers and students (Table 1).

Table 1
Analysis of Initial Codes

Groups	Advantage	Disadvantages
Teachers		
	teaching remotely	non-engagement of students in the learning process
	saving time and energy, helping the environment to be cleaner	physical and mental harms, misunderstandings
Students		
		lack of communication, poor connection, lack of access to teachers, lack of participation
	Access anytime and anywhere, feeling more comfortable	Misunderstandings, physical and mental disorders/diseases

Table 2 lists some of the most important advantages and disadvantages for teachers and students.

Table 2
Advantages Extracted as Secondary Codes

Secondary codes	Example Quotes		Frequency	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
access and learning anytime and anywhere	The main advantage is being able to teach remotely. Saving time and energy by establishing online classes wherever net connection is available and helping the environment to be cleaner by using no public transportation or private vehicles for commuting to work/schools every day.	Advantages are ease of access to the online classes due to the fact that online classes are easily available wherever net is available. You can feel more comfortable in online classes rather than formal ones.	7	14
saving time and cost			5	11
helping the environment to be cleaner			1	2
saving energy			4	5
flexibility in setting time			-	3
saving contents			1	-
getting familiar using new technology			1	3
having time for doing physical activities			1	-
easy to access to teacher			3	1

As shown in Table 2, the frequency of access and learning anytime and anywhere and saving time and cost are the most frequent advantages reported by both teachers and students, with students having higher frequencies (n= 14, n=11) than teachers (n= 7, n=5). Table 3 lists some of the most important disadvantages for teachers and students, which were extracted from the qualitative data.

Table 3

Disadvantages Extracted as Secondary Codes

Secondary codes	Example Quotes		Frequency	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
non-engagement of students in the learning process	The main disadvantage is non-engagement of students in the learning process. Physical and mental harms that appear due to long-term using digital gadgets by which students enter online classes will be one of the negative side effects of online classes and also misunderstandings that happens almost in online classes is the second disadvantage	The disadvantages are you're not in person and face to face. You might have some issues on the internet, you can't ask and answer questions easily, you can't camper sentences in exercises you do	1	1
physical and mental harms			2	1
misunderstandings			1	3
improper teaching and learning			-	1
invalid and unreliable testing and measuring students' abilities			4	1
cheating			-	7
lack of communication between teachers and students			4	7
Lack of group work			1	1
lack of access to teachers			1	2
lack of motivation			2	2
no face-to-face communication			2	1
lack of test administration			1	-
teachers' burnout			1	-

As depicted in Table 3, with regard to disadvantages, students reported cheating (n=7) and lack of communication between teachers and students (n=7) as the most disadvantageous factors while teachers reported invalid and unreliable testing and measuring students' abilities (n=4) and lack of communication between teachers and students (n=4) as the most negative factors.

5. Discussion

This study explored teachers' and students' perception toward online teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Iran, as well as the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy from the perspective of students and teachers. Regarding the perceptions of online instruction during the COVID-19 lockdown, the questionnaires consisted of some constructs, such as shifting to online classes, training and online experience, technology skills, to name a few. In terms of shifting traditional classes to online classes, the data suggested that most of the teachers had positive perceptions toward shifting the environment. Similarly, a substantial number of learners believed that their classes should be converted to online programs. In fact, both groups of study thought that shifting to online classes is required for the HEIs and universities, and that no problems would occur because of this transition. Nevertheless, this perception differed from that of Issah (2018), who found that shifting to online environment make students uncomfortable.

In terms of training and online experience, the data revealed that all teachers had experience of online instruction. Likewise, most of the students had prior experience of participating in online classes. Therefore, both groups had positive experiences with online instruction. This suggested that Iranian teachers and students were ready to embrace technology and online instructions and had a positive perception about them. This finding was in line with that of Kamal and Illiyan (2021) who discovered that teachers had positive perceptions toward virtual teaching amid the COVID-19 for reducing the learning gap and shaping students' future.

With regard to technological skills, logistics and affordability, the data revealed that more than half of the teachers had the technological skills and devices for delivering online lessons. Moreover, more than half of the teachers believed that the students had the required devices, and they would be able to cover the cost of accessing the Internet for online education. Likewise, more than half of the students had necessary technological abilities to participate in online programs, while a little less than half of them thought that their instructors have the necessary skills for conducting online courses. Regarding the cost of the Internet, more than half of them responded that the costs of the Internet is not a serious concern. Overall, this suggested that technology skills,

infrastructure and facilities, and economic problems were not a barrier for almost half of the teachers and students, and teachers had positive perceptions toward them. This finding was not like that of Ramij and Sultana (2020) who reported lack of technology infrastructure, and the expensive Internet cost were obstacles to online learning and teaching in Bangladesh.

Regarding teaching aids and materials, the results of the study pointed that the teachers were considerably more likely to employ video clips, PowerPoint slides, eBooks, and audio lectures for teaching purposes. However, a small number of them utilized printed materials, online articles, and whiteboards for teaching. Similarly, a large percentage of students also utilized cellphones and laptops to attend online classes. This finding implies that both groups of respondents had no difficulty facilitating teaching materials and receiving them. In fact, this kind of asynchronous teaching and providing video clips, PowerPoint slides, and audio lectures made it easier for students to obtain the content.

Concerning the Iranian teachers' and students' perceptions of online assessment during COVID-19 lockdown, the results revealed that online assessment was a serious issue for both groups of study. Their concern was related to validity, reliability, construction, administration, and effectiveness of assessment. Only one-third of the teachers noted that assessment in an online environment would be valid. It is worth noting that nearly one-seventh of teachers thought that assessment in an online environment would be reliable. Moreover, a large number of them thought that administration of online tests would be challenging. In the same vein, only one-fourth of the students discerned that online assessment would be fair, and nearly half of them had negative opinions about it. Moreover, both groups believed that online examinations would increase student cheating. Overall, both teachers and students expressed a significant lack of faith in online assessment during COVID-19 pandemic. This finding was like that of Khan et al. (2021) who found out that the issues of affordability and equity in online assessment posed a major threat.

Regarding the main advantages and disadvantages of online pedagogy in the COVID-19 situation, the data suggested that a great majority of the students found online learning beneficial and advantageous since they could study at any time from any location. They could also save time and cost with online instructions. Students thought that online learning would help them stay safe during this pandemic. Moreover, some students thought that online learning was beneficial since it could provide relief for their shyness. Teachers also believed that online teaching would save their cost and energy. With online learning integration, teachers thought that they could access a lot of

educational content and saving them easily. These findings were like that of Aczel et al. (2008) as well as Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015). However, some respondents pointed out some interesting advantages for online learning and teaching. To name a few, some students noted that online learning was advantageous since they had more individual attention and responsibility, and it made them increase their abilities and skills. Likewise, some teachers believed that with online learning, students could get a degree from anywhere in the world.

Concerning the online learning disadvantages, most of the students stated that no interaction and communication happens between teachers and students. Moreover, they added that cheating is endemic among students in online assessments. Students also stated that they are unable to concentrate clearly in an online environment and it is distracting. It is obvious that some students and teachers faced with poor Internet connection during online instruction which is another disadvantage of online learning. On the other hand, some teachers believed that testing and measuring students' abilities would not be valid and reliable. They also thought that online learning could cause physical and mental harms. These above-mentioned findings were also similar to that of Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) and Nazarlou (2013).

6. Conclusions and Implications

Several key findings could be obtained from this investigation. Firstly, both teachers and students agreed on the move to online education. With respect to having good experience of online teaching and learning, in fact, they showed a positive perception about online instruction amid COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, the result of this study showed that technology skills, infrastructure and facilities, and economic problems were not a constraint to online instruction even though some students would be left behind because of the inaccessibility to technological tools. Thirdly, providing teaching materials and receiving them was not a challenge for both teachers and students since they had necessary technological skills. Fourthly, the study findings indicated that both teachers and students were concerned about the validity, reliability, construction, administration, and effectiveness of online assessment. They had negative perceptions towards online assessment. Finally, online instruction seemed to be advantageous for Iranian teachers and students since they expressed more benefits for that.

The findings of this study illustrated that the teachers must be adept in dealing with the new online teaching styles to produce a completely successful online learning environment. Teachers in HEIs should recognize that the change is unavoidable, and they must be prepared to adapt and try new approaches to classroom instruction. Moreover, they should recognize that

they have a vital role in providing a supportive atmosphere for students that are already suffering because of the sudden transition in the educational system.

On the HEIs level, they should be ready to construct the essential capacity to have a robust and powerful educational system that would be prepared for any future crises. The priority must be to have a strong online learning system. Furthermore, these institutions should offer teachers with the technology abilities and competencies which will allow them to be extremely skilled professionals who can successfully use online learning technologies. Besides, HEIs should give emotional and technological support to their students by assisting them in acquiring the necessary electronic devices. Finally, stakeholders who work in English language education should guarantee that higher education is available to all Iranian teachers and students. They should implement additional laws and regulations to make online learning as simple as possible, especially in times of emergency.

Furthermore, the current study was confined to investigating the perception of teachers and learners. Hence, a recommendation for further research is to investigate the perception of stakeholders that work in English language education. To generalize the findings of the research, the number of participants needs to be as large as possible. Since this study was limited to 250 teachers and students, further studies with many participants could be done to get a better understanding of the students' and teachers' perception toward online instruction during the COVID-19 lockdown.

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The Impact of Automated Writing Evaluation on Iranian EFL Learners' Essay Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

While writing skill is extensively studied in EFL contexts, more in-depth research is needed to explore how technology can assist its pedagogy. The present study aimed to investigate the impact of using an automated writing evaluation on Iranian EFL learners' essay writing. Learning how to reduce errors (in an EFL context) by being corrected at the moment and being exposed to different examples regarding that error in the learners' new texts through automated writing evaluation (AWE) tends to be the significance of this study. To this end, 50 Iranian EFL learners who were studying at the University of Qom, were randomly chosen. The sample included 25 females and 25 males, whose ages ranged from 19 to 25. The participants were given a pre-test before using AWE software. They were given a topic to write about as a pre-test. After the treatment, an IELTS Task 2 was utilized as a posttest. The IELTS writing band descriptors were used to evaluate the writings. The ANCOVA results showed a remarkable improvement in the essay writing of the EFL learners using an AWE software (i.e., Grammarly). The analysis of interview data revealed that the learners were more enthusiastic about using the AWE feedback because they were corrected while they were writing their essays. Since AWE is discovered to be a helpful device to promote learners' writing skills, students would also be inspired to become associated with such online learning environments and utilize them earnestly and productively. This research also discovered the learners who got feedback from the AWE device got more prosperous but they also started to ask their teacher to provide more feedback to have AWE feedback and traditional feedback combined. The findings have implications for language teachers, material developers, and curriculum designers.

Keywords: automated writing evaluation, essay writing, mixed-methods study, process writing

1. Introduction

In the past decade, a highly increasing Interest in the field of L2 writing has been noticed by automated writing evaluation (AWE) (e.g., Al-Inbari & Al-Wasy, 2023; Fan, 2023). Disputably, the most propitious point of contact between the areas of AWE and L2 writing tends to be automated feedback (Shermis & Burstein, 2003; Warschauer & Ware, 2006). This feedback tends to play a crucial role in learners' writing ability as it is cost-effective, practical, and helpful. Receiving the feedback, the learners would be aware of their errors immediately, and they'd be given the information they require on the spot, which can exert a good impact on the writing process of language, and some perceive it as a menace.

Those who support AWE use in the classroom dispute this point that the tremendous advantages of AWE are their ability to assess and respond to student writing as well as humans do (Attali & Burstein, 2006) and doing so in a much more time- and cost-effective way. Hypothetically, AWE can motivate and guide student revision and the learners' autonomy would be enhanced too (Chen & Cheng, 2008). It is meant to support process writing approaches that the value of multiple drafting is emphasized through scaffolding suggestions and explanations. The assimilation of AWE into the curriculum is highly believed to be consistent with the drive toward individualized assessment and instruction (Burstein & Marcu, 2003).

As mentioned previously, there have been various arguments over the beneficial or deleterious impact of the feedback given by AWE software on learners' writing ability. In fact, the experiential evidence on corrective feedback tends to be contradictory and away from being definite, and they frequently challenged Truscott's claims against corrective feedback (Ferris, 2004; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Following the mentioned points, Ferris (2004) stated that "positive impacts are predicted by existing research for written error correction" (p. 50).

Correcting learners' essays and giving feedbacks on them, by using applications which fulfill this task automatically, provide learners with the correct form of their errors at the moment that can exert a good impact on their writing ability. This automated system is known as AWE (Automated Writing Evaluation). Despite the recent development of AWE technology and the increasing interest in utilizing this technology in language classrooms, the effects of using AWE on reducing grammatical errors in L2 writing have been considered by a few studies (e.g., Liao, 2016).

As a matter of fact, nowadays most language learners have been inundated with technology, so teachers can utilize this golden opportunity to

assist them develop their writing skill. In other words, since they are facing lots of time-consuming and abundant commenting on student drafts and inspired by assurance of computerized writing assessment, AWE is considered as a silver bullet for language and literacy development (Warschauer & Ware, 2006).

2. Literature Review
2.1. Automated Writing Evaluation

Various researchers have been dealing with improvement of language programs that what they do is to deal with grading and presenting feedback on the writing skills. Burstein and Marco (2003) maintained that writing tends to be a particular language capability which possibly tends to be best developed by writing constantly, suitable and constant feedback. Due to new technological inventions in this field as the AWE computer program, these checking processes have been automated which is believed to be a supporter to teachers and a tool that freedom and planning time to students in increasing their level of motivation is provided by that. (Shim et al., 2013).

The utilization of AWE has been rising as a teacher assistant tool which high-level of feedback and writing quality is provided by it. This computer program is believed to assist learners` writing quality be improved because of its fast and individualized feedback that is accompanied by explanations of grammar, spelling, sentence and word usage which learners 'autonomy can be contribute to (Wang, et al., 2013). It would also provide the learners with the amount of clarity, coherence and cohesion their text possess.

The advantages of this tool to improve writing is confirmed by several studies that the use of AWE is promoted in three extents. Initially, word processing facilitates the aspects of editing and revising grammar and spelling which contributes to learners 'awareness in their writing (Wang et al., 2013). Second, through an error correction program the students are given the opportunity to recognize their errors immediately and teachers have the chance of interacting with their learners in specific error correction and feedback (Shim et al., 2013). Moreover, computerized feedback concentrates the learners' attention on sentence-level error which encourage them to enhance inaccurate usage and their capability to identify and reformulate errors when no human support is available which can encourage autonomous learning (Wang et al., 2013). Third, artificial technology systems claim to be more objective and accurate when grading standardized essay tests, as human markers in the typical test score diverge by some points needing a third marker to have a final grade agreement (Warschauer & Grimes, 2008). In addition, the

feedback produced by the people tends to be flexible and restricted according to student´s background and needs. However, the AWE is able to check large number of essays and score them immediately and accurately due to the Latent Sematic Analysis technique.

2.2. Relevant Empirical Studies

It has been said that former studies have investigated English writing development due to studying in the ESL context if it is long-term development (e.g., Knoch et al., 2015) or short-term development (e.g., Storch, 2009). A thorough inspection of AWE and its related research studies was presented by Warschauer and Ware (2006) last decade and it might be disputed that their wide categorization of various types of AWE research still holds true, with some studies which the validity of AWE and comparison of the machine scoring with the human scoring is concerned by it (e.g., Deane, 2013); others on the use of AWE in developing students' standardized writing test scores (Attali, 2004; Tang & Rich, 2017). However, the factor which is considered as a significant point is for more process-product research on the utility of AWE to disclose the process of AWE particular application and how it affects instructing the writing (Warschauer & Ware, 2006).

Actually, after their call for classroom research on AWE (Warschauer & Ware, 2006), the last ten years observed an ascending body of studies, which were published in international peer-reviewed journals investigating the use of AWE in the classroom (e.g., Chen & Cheng, 2008; Grimes & Warschauer, 2010; Li et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2013; Warschauer & Grimes, 2008) and even a particular Calico issue on AWE released in 2016 (cf. Li et al., 2016), whose findings appeared to support Grimes and Warschauer's recommendation of AWE's "utility in a fallible tool" if deployed effectively (Grimes & Warschauer, 2010, p. 4).

Chen and Cheng (2008) examined the utility of an AWE program with three similar classes of three teachers during one term. It may be discussed that the most significant contribution of their research to the field tends to be their thoughts and understanding of the AWE usage in the revising process of writing instruction, pursued by teacher and peer feedback in the later process. In addition, it is them who initially suggested the potential usefulness for constructing a minimum score demand as a prerequisite for submission to AWE. For instance, AWE score and feedback were used as a reference in her scoring by one teacher in their study, who wanted her students to revise their essay in the system till they had attained a minimum score of 4 out of 6 before they handed it in to teacher assessment and peer review.

Warschauer and Grimes (2008)'s mixed-methods exploratory case study of four schools in their use of two AWE programs divulged that although the program encouraged students to revise more, the revision was limited to language forms only, few on content or organization. In addition, teachers' use of AWE varied from school to school and was ascertained most by teachers' prior beliefs about writing pedagogy, which debatably called for the inevitability of teacher training on writing pedagogy if AWE was to be successfully applied in the classroom.

Grimes and Warschauer (2010) did a 3-year longitudinal study about using AWE in eight schools in California and came to the conclusion that AWE motivated students to write and revise more and promoted learner autonomy. The successful use of AWE was attributed fairly to the maturity of the AWE programs in the study, but more crucially to the local social factors such as technical, administrative and teacher support, which seemed but to confirm the assertion that the key to technology use might be neither hardware nor software, rather human.

In the EFL context, Wang et al. (2013) the effect and role of applying AWE was probed on freshmen writing with a group of 57 students from a university. The quasi-experimental pretest/posttest research design was applied and a vivid difference was displayed by outcomes between the experimental group and the control group in writing accuracy, that the experimental group showed a clear writing attainment regarding writing accuracy and learner autonomy perception. In discussing the pedagogical implications, they suggested that teachers be involved more energetically in teaching models of writing to students so that students know how their language accuracy can be developed and how their writing content and structure can be improved. In examining the impact accuracy with 70 nonnatives.

Li et al. (2015) discovered that corrective feedback had enhanced the number of revisions and improve writing accuracy. Their study seemed to support the claim of the utility of the practice suggested by Chen and Cheng (2008) of requiring a minimum score before submission to AWE. Additionally, similar to the previous studies (e.g., Grimes & Warschauer, 2010; Warschuaer & Grimes, 2008; Wang, et al., 2013), their study strengthened the significant role of teachers, and it was suggested that the instructor's ways of implementing AWE might impact how students involved themselves in revising in AWE. Al-Inbari and Al-Wasy (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine the impact of an AWE program on the peer and self-editing of cause-and-effect essays. The results of qualitative and quantitative data analysis revealed that students who used the AWE tool

thought that the AWE feedback was very helpful with their editing had improved significantly. Fan (2023) investigated how AWE feedback through Grammarly affected EFL students' writing using a mixed-methods design. The results revealed that there were not any significant differences between the experimental and control groups. Moreover, the analysis of the qualitative data (fixed-response and open-ended questionnaire data) supported the quantitative results.

Although the significance of teacher pedagogical roles has been implied or proposed in some of the studies (e.g., Li et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2013; Warschauer & Grimes, 2008), no systematic training was presented to teachers regarding the writing pedagogy in those studies reviewed. Moreover, none of these AWE studies seemed to suggest a conjectural procedure of utilizing AWE efficiently in the classroom so far, in most cases, the ways of utilizing AWE merely depended on teachers (e.g., Link et al., 2014). To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the following research questions of the present study were formulated:

RQ1: Does the learners' writing quality change using AWE process writing program?

RQ2: Do the learners find it helpful to be evaluated by AWE software and does it help them in writing new essays?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Due to the difficulties of randomization, available sampling was used. The sample of the study, who were at an intermediate level of English proficiency, included 50 Iranian EFL learners at the University of Qom. They included 25 females and 25 males, and their ages ranged from 19 to 25. They were assigned to an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group used an AWE program to receive feedback on their writing.

3.2. Instrumentation

3.2.1. Oxford Placement Test

The Oxford Online Placement Test was used to determine the level of the participants before applying the AWE approach. It helps to place students into the appropriate level class for a language course. The Oxford Placement Test is computer-adaptive, which means that the test adjusts the difficulty of questions based on the student's responses. This makes it more motivating and ensures that it gives a more precise measurement than traditional placement

tests. Answers are automatically marked after each task, giving you an instant result once the test is complete. It is also used as a quick measure of a student's general language ability. This test is different from most other placement tests. The Oxford Placement Test has two sections: Use of English and Listening. The Use of English section assesses students' knowledge of grammatical form and vocabulary. The Listening section assesses students' general listening ability. Both sections test how well students understand the meaning of what is being communicated, which is an excellent indicator of general language ability.

3.2.2. Pretest and Posttest

The participants were given a topic from Cambridge IELTS tasks 2 to write about as a pre-test to evaluate their writing. After the administration of the treatment, the participants' improvement was checked through another topic from Cambridge IELTS tasks 2 as a post-test.

3.2.3. Automated Writing Evaluation Tool

The software "Grammarly" was used to see the impacts of it on learners' writing development. Grammarly is a popular software available as a browser add-on for Google Chrome, Firefox, and even Microsoft Edge. It checks for grammar and spelling errors as you write something. It will show an indicator at the bottom right corner of the writing area. Clicking on the indicator will show you the number of errors. Spelling, grammar, and contextual errors will be highlighted with an underline as you write. This software assessed the following: Correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery in the participants' writings. In fact, the data were gathered and the participants' writing (which was accomplished using the software Grammarly) was checked and evaluated.

3.3.4. Open-ended Questionnaire

Cambridge IELTS writing band descriptors are the criteria based on which the IELTS test takers' writing tasks are evaluated and assessed. Each criterion was awarded a band score from 0 to 9. The criteria are weighted equally and the overall band score is the average of the four component scores, rounded to the nearest whole or half band.

3.3.5. Open-ended Questionnaire

The participants were asked some questions about the effectiveness of the AWE software. In this regard, an interview was conducted which included

open-ended questions. The validity and reliability of the questions were examined by an expert. The questions of the interview were as follows:

1. Were you satisfied with Grammarly feedback?
2. What kind of feedback was helpful the most to you?
3. How did you use the feedback in terms of revising?
4. What kind of strategies did you use to achieve your best score?
5. Was it easy to correct the highlighted errors in Grammarly based on the feedback?
6. Are you confident in using Grammarly?
7. Was it easier to find/identify errors by yourself after using Grammarly?
8. What kind of errors do you usually make in writing?
9. Can you identify your writing weakness from the feedback in Grammarly?

3.4. Procedure

To conduct this study, two groups of participants were utilized which include an experimental group and a control group. The participants were given a pre-test before using AWE software. In fact, they were administered the Oxford Placement Test to determine their English proficiency levels. So, all the participants, whether in the experimental group or the control group, took the test to determine their English level. Thus, after taking this test, the participants' proficiency level (i.e., intermediate) was revealed. Then, the participants were given a topic to write about as a pre-test. Cambridge IELTS writing band descriptors were used to evaluate and assess the IELTS test takers' writing tasks.

Afterward, the control group received feedback from their teacher. However, the AWE software was utilized to monitor its impact on experimental group's writing. The software named Grammarly was applied to check learners' writing. This software includes some items: correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. In the correctness part, the software will check and improve spelling, grammar, and punctuation. *Clarity* helps the learners make their writing easier to understand, which can play a crucial role in having clear writing with high coherence. "Engagement" makes the writing more interesting and effective, and *Delivery* helps to make the right impression on the reader. These options, available in this software, will help the learners improve their writing ability and since they'll see their mistakes being corrected right away, with suitable explanations and examples given by the software, they'll probably have better writings later, and this improvement was checked through the post-test.

Therefore, the data were gathered and the participants' writings (which was accomplished, using the software Grammarly) were checked and

evaluated. After this process, a qualitative open-ended questionnaire was given to those participants to know their ideas upon utilizing this AWE software and the impact of it on their writing quality. In fact, the interview questions were made into a Google document and distributed among the participants in the experimental group, who received feedback through Grammarly.

3.5. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, ANCOVA was applied to explore the impacts of automated writing evaluation-assisted process approach on Iranian EFL learners' essay writing, to probe the quantitative research question. Finally, the qualitative data were analyzed using the procedure, suggested by Dörnyei (2007).

4. Results

The purpose behind the present study was to investigate the effect of the AWE process writing program on the improvement of the writing quality of Iranian EFL learners. The statistical analysis of one-way ANCOVA was employed to analyze the data collected through this study. Before discussing the results, it should be noted that the assumption of normality was retained. As displayed in Table 4.1, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were lower than +/- 1.96; hence, normality of the data. It should be noted that the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors are analogous to standardized scores (Z-scores) which can be compared against the critical values of +/- 1.96 at .05 levels.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality of Data

Group		Skewness			Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Experimental	Pretest	-.332	.409	-0.81	-1.040	.798	-1.30
	Posttest	-.390	.409	-0.95	-.940	.798	-1.18
Control	Pretest	-.136	.597	-0.23	-1.018	1.154	-0.88
	Posttest	-.143	.597	-0.24	-1.065	1.154	-0.92

4.1. Homogenizing Groups on Pretest of Writing Quality

An independent-samples t-test was run to compare the experimental and control groups' means on the pretest of writing quality in order to prove the two groups were homogenous in terms of their writing quality prior to the administration of the treatment. Table 2 displays the results of the descriptive statistics for the two groups on the pretest of writing quality.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Writing Pretest by Groups

	Group	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	33	51.15	17.136	2.983
	Control	14	45.93	20.656	5.521

The results showed the experimental (M = 51.15, SD = 17.13) and control (M = 45.93, SD = 20.65) groups' means on the pretest of writing quality. Table 3 displays the results of the independent-samples t-test.

Before discussing the results, it should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained on the pretest of writing quality. As displayed in Table 2, the non-significant results of Levene's test indicated that the two groups were homogenous in terms of their variances on pretest of writing quality, F = .403, p > .05. The results of independent samples t-test, which represented a weak effect size, indicated that there was not any significant difference between the two groups' means on the pretest of writing quality, t (45) = .899, p > .05, r = .133. Thus, it can be concluded that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their writing quality prior to the administration of the treatment.

Table 3
Independent-Samples t-test; Pretest of Writing Quality by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.403	.529	.899	45	.374	5.223	5.812	-6.483	16.929
Equal variances not assumed			.832	20.973	.415	5.223	6.275	-7.828	18.274

4.2. Intra-Rater Reliability Indices

Table 4 displays the results of the Pearson correlations computed to estimate the intra-rater reliability of the indices for the pretest and the posttest of writing quality.

Table 4

Pearson Correlations; Intra-Rater Reliability of Pretest and Posttest of Writing Quality

		Pre-Rater 2	Post-Rater 2
Pre-Rater 1	Pearson Correlation	.874**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	
Post-rater 1	Pearson Correlation		.926**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N		40

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

Based on these results it can be concluded that there were significant agreements between the rater's ratings on the pretest of writing quality, representing a large effect size, r (45) = .874, p = .000), and the posttest of writing quality, representing a large effect size, r (45) = .926, p = .000).

4.3. Exploring the First Research Question

A one-way analysis of covariance (one-way ANCOVA) was run to compare the experimental and control groups' means on the posttest of writing quality after controlling for the effect of their baseline writing ability as measured through the pretest. Besides the assumption of normality, which was discussed above, one-way ANCOVA has three more assumptions (i.e., homogeneity of variances of groups, homogeneity of regression slopes, and the linearity of relationship between the covariate (i.e., pretest of writing quality) and posttest (i.e., dependent variable). The results are shown below.

Table 5

Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances; Posttest of Writing Quality by Groups with Pretest

F	df1	df2	Sig.
3.725	1	45	.060

As shown in Table 5, one-way ANCOVA assumes homogeneity of variances of the groups. The non-significant results of Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained, $F(1, 45) = 3.72$, $p > .05$. The second assumption requires that the linear relationship between the pretest and the posttest of writing quality be roughly equal across the experimental and control groups (i.e., homogeneity of regression slopes). As shown in Table 6, the non-significant interaction between the covariate (i.e., pretest) and the independent variable, representing a weak effect size, indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was retained, $F(1, 43) = .044$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta = .001$.

Table 6

Test Homogeneity of Regression Slopes; Posttest of Writing Quality by Groups with Pretest

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	68.308	1	68.308	5.246	.027	.109
Pretest	15319.883	1	15319.883	1176.515	.000	.965
Group * Pretest	.574	1	.574	.044	.835	.001
Error	559.921	43	13.021			
Total	173293.000	47				

One-way ANCOVA assumes that there is a linear relationship between the pretest of writing quality (i.e., covariate) and the posttest (i.e., dependent variable).

Table 7

Test of Linearity of Relationship between Pretest and Posttest of Writing Quality

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Posttest * Pretest	Between Groups	(Combined)	18221.38	34	535.923	11.92	.000
		Linearity	17609.33	1	17609.33	391.9	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	612.047	33	18.547	.413	.978
		Within Groups	539.167	12	44.931		
		Total	18760.55	46			
		Eta Squared (η^2)	.971				

According to Table 7, the significant results of the linearity test, representing a large effect size, indicated that the relationship between pretest

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and posttest of writing quality was a linear one, $F(1, 46) = 391.9$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .971$.

Table 8 displays the descriptive statistics for the experimental and control groups on the posttest of writing quality after controlling for the effect of their writing quality ability as measured through the pretest.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Writing Quality by Groups with Pretest

| Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Experimental	59.670[a]	.623	58.415	60.926
Control	51.849[a]	.960	49.914	53.783

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pretest = 49.60.

The results indicated that the experimental group ($M = 59.67$, $SE = .623$), after working with the AWE process writing program, significantly outperformed the control group ($M = 51.84$, $SE = .960$) on posttest of writing quality after controlling for the effect of the pretest.

Table 9

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects; posttest of Writing Quality by Groups with Pretest

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	16460.475	1	16460.475	1292.182	.000	.967
Group	590.720	1	590.720	46.373	.000	.513
Error	560.494	44	12.739			
Total	173293.000	47				

Table 9 displays the main results of one-way ANCOVA. The results, representing a large effect size, indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the posttest of writing quality after controlling for the effect of the pretest, $F(1, 44) = 46.37$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .513$.

Figure 1
Means on Posttest of Writing Quality by Groups with Pretest
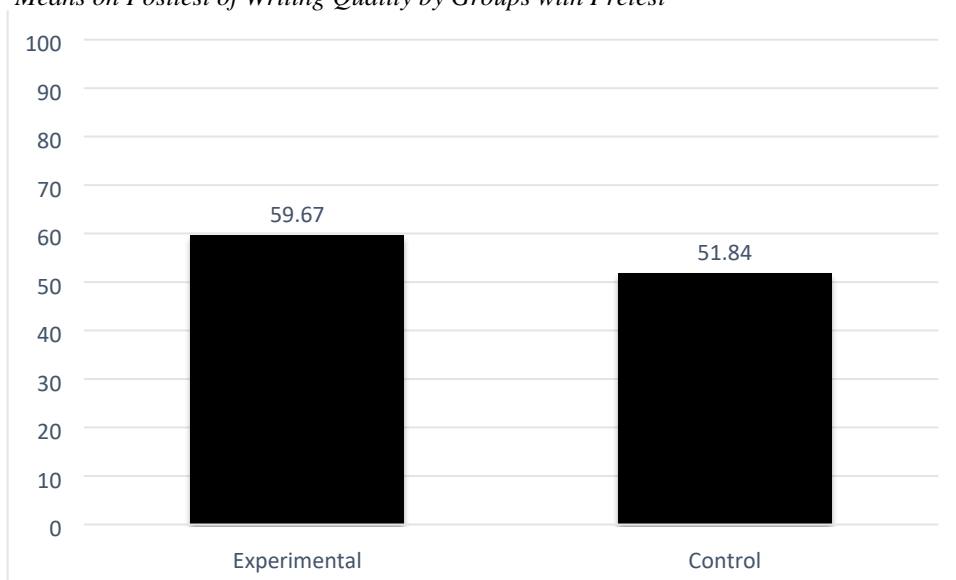
4.5. Exploring the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question (i.e., if the learners find it helpful to be evaluated by AWE or not, and if it helps them in writing new essays), it should be mentioned that learners who took part in the interviews, had different opinions upon the usefulness of this AWE process.

Analysis of the interviews with some students reveals the fact that AWE helped them with drafting their essays. For example, all the students, who used Grammarly, to varying degrees felt that it assisted them in structuring their essays. A less experienced student for example, commented that they felt Grammarly had provided a scaffold, which allowed them to write a better assignment answer. Students commented that Grammarly gave them confidence in their writing. For example, one of them said they were "not really confident about how to structure an essay, and that's where this Grammarly has assisted."

One of them commented that Grammarly gave confidence that they had covered the topic areas required to answer the assignment question and she felt a sense of being secure and accurate while writing the essay. Another participant commented "AWE helped me convey what I mean clearly, and it increased the coherence of my writings." AWE has also helped the participants make fewer grammatical mistakes while writing their essays as an interviewee said, "When I wrote something, Grammarly immediately showed the

feedback, and my mistakes were corrected on the spot, with showing me the reason. Therefore, it helped me be more accurate in writing later essays." A participant also commented that they wrote fewer drafts of their essay

> …. because it's (Grammarly) given me the feedback to be able to get straight to where I need to change, while before I didn't have that so I just relied on other people reading it and thinking I needed to change so it drastically lessened the number of drafts I did.

On the other hand, besides the usefulness of this application, some participants said that the AWE program cannot only replace teacher feedback since the students still need help from the teacher to enhance the content of their writing. For example, an interviewee put "The program is actually restricted to the semantic analysis of the language." Most of the participants made grammatical mistakes and they found it helpful to be corrected immediately by the application rather than themselves. For instance, one of them stated "It's much more helpful to be corrected by Grammarly and learn from your mistakes".

They also said that after using the AWE process, they could identify their weakness in writing through the feedback they received from Grammarly. In the same way, one of the interviewees commented, "Before using this program, I didn't know exactly where my weakness is, but now, I know it and I can start improving it and I think it can really help me." While almost two-thirds of interviewees were positive about Grammarly's feedback, it was observed by some of them that some errors can also be identified by Microsoft Word. Likewise, most of the students found Grammarly's grammar feedback useful and practical, while none considered it pointless. Meanwhile, some of the interviewees uttered their doubts about the accuracy of some grammar feedback, as mentioned below:

> *Excerpt 1*: Longer sentences would be marked as 'grammatical errors.' When this happens, I have to change a sentence into a simpler structure by cutting it shorter.
> *Excerpt 2*: When a main clause and a subordinate clause both have verbs, it's identified as verb error. It is misleading.

Additionally, the interviewees mentioned the kind of feedback they considered helpful and here are some of their opinions upon it. Before that, it's worth mentioning that some feedback and revisions are considered to be good and practical while others tend to be misleading and impractical. In other words, good revisions correctly recognize problems, elucidate ideas, or enhance expressions; neutral revisions neither improve nor worsen the well-

formed or ill-formed original text; 'bad revisions' generate errors or degrade the quality of the original text. Here are some opinions of the interviewees regarding some good revisions they've received and learned from:

> Well, actually, I felt it was useful for me because I myself really love grammatical feedback and I think they tend to be helpful in writing s.th because these kinds of feedback would also teach you s.th beside correcting you. That's why I personally believe that grammatical feedback is perfect. For example, I remember a sentence that I wrote which was "We noticed that the girl was disappeared." Then I received the grammatical feedback by Grammarly which was :>Verb error. Disappear cannot be used in passive voice.>Revision: We noticed that the girl disappeared. So here I could also learn s.th which was so good."

In addition to all the mentioned points, some of the interviewees talked about having stress while they were writing an assignment for their class. They said they would always feel anxious and worried about making mistakes in their essays. Here's one of their opinions:

> To tell the truth, I'm always worried about making grammatical mistakes or even punctuation mistakes in my writing but after using Grammarly, I felt completely confident while writing s.th, because I was corrected immediately, and it gave me confidence and motivation for writing other essays.

All in all, the participants found it totally helpful to receive feedback from Grammarly and being corrected right away, and they prefer to be corrected by this application since it's believed that AWE can gradually lead to remarkable progress in learners' writing particularly in the long run.

5. Discussion

The study aimed at investigating the effects of an AWE tool (i.e., Grammarly) on EFL students' writing development. Another purpose of the study was to examine if the learners found it helpful to be evaluated by AWE and if it could help them in writing new essays. In relation to mentioned objectives, the following research questions were asked to evaluate the effects of an AWE tool (Grammarly) on students' writing development:

1. Does the learners' writing quality change using AWE process writing program?
2. Do the learners find it helpful to be evaluated by AWE software and does it help them in writing new essays?

To address the above research questions, the pre-test and post-test scores were inspected, and some conclusions were drawn. The first conclusion that can be deduced from the study is that applying AWE software has transparently supportive effects on EFL learners writing development. With the aid of a comparison of the holistic scores gained from the pre- and post-tests, it tends to be vivid that receiving the AWE feedback would enhance writing development of university-level EFL students. The fact that students utilizing an AWE tool promoted their writing scores remarkably is steady with a number of research studies which were done on the same topic (Dikli, 2006; Hoon, 2006; Kern & Warschauer, 2000; Li et al, 2015; Warschauer & Ware, 2006; Wang et al., 2013, Al-Inbari & Al-Wasy, 2023).

Another point that can be discussed is that AWE makes learners capable of getting remarkably higher writing scores when compared to traditional pen-and-paper instruction though either method bring about development in writing. As mentioned by Zhang and Hyland (2018), various sources of formative assessment can possess a massive possibility in facilitating student involvement in writing assignments. However, when above-mentioned writing instruction and feedback methods were compared, as Wang et al. (2013) discovered, according to the total impact and the detection of students' thoughts toward their usage of the AWE software, it was seen that students who used AWE display noticeable writing improvement. Hence, it can be mentioned that AWE reveals to be more helpful than traditional pen-and-paper instruction and feedback in terms of university-level EFL students' writing performance by providing constant corrective feedback with vivid explanations.

The second issue to be discussed is that AWE and pen-and-paper method may have similar and different impacts on learners' writing inclination. To initiate, both groups can appear to be similar in terms of planning before writing, admiring being a good writer, enjoying literary analysis papers and research papers, and their tendency to get the highest score on a writing task. However, the students who get traditional feedback might be more extrinsically motivated compared to the students who get AWE feedback. It means that they might have become more dependent on an external effect while writing. Moreover, the control group seems to create more positive attitudes regarding perceived value of writing. This is perhaps since - unlike the students who get AWE feedback- they have to indicate a lot of struggles, preparation, and time on writing because of having restricted number of essay presentation during a restricted period of time and absence of software or peer aid, which might have ended up comprehending writing as a more significant skill which is worth a lot of struggles. Moreover, requiring a teacher to get writing feedback can be enhanced more in the experimental group when

compared to the control group merely since it's thought that there might be some points that the software may fail to recognize and give feedback on.

This finding tends to be consistent with the results of several previous studies, such as Fan (2023) and Lipnevich and Smith (2009), mentioned students are in favor of teacher feedback and comments rather than AWE feedback. However, when the two groups are compared, it can be said that AWE made some positive impacts on learner's intrinsic inclination towards writing. Enjoying writing which can involve creative writing tasks and without attention to being scored, being capable of expressing opinions, detecting writing nice essays and spelling easy, and being motivated to write in their classes were the items that indicated an essential difference between groups. Wilson and Czik (2016) and Liu et al. (2010) stated that online learning environments, for instance AWE, cause students to improve positive attitudes and abilities to share views, and get involved more, which provide greater levels of motivation.

6. Conclusions and Implications

This study was designed and carried out to examine the impact of using an AWE-assisted process writing on Iranian EFL learners' essay writing. Furthermore, this study attempted to investigate the effect of AWE on students' later essay writing. The result of this study was a confirmation of the power of automatic writing evaluation as the learners' key to success in writing more powerfully. The findings of the research indicated that although the students are used to teacher's feedback on their essays, they could feel a considerable improvement in their essays, including spelling, clarity, engagement and accuracy. The second concern of this study was to investigate the impact of AWE on learners' later essay writing. The result indicated a remarkable improvement in their essays and meanwhile they appeared to be more enthusiastic about writing various essays since they attained a high proficiency and grasp of writing points; therefore, some development can also be seen in their subsequent writing tasks.

In relation to English language teaching practice, the study has some implications for language teachers, material developers, and curriculum designers. Firstly, it can be recommended that AWE tends to be a highly helpful technique in teaching writing since it appears to enhance EFL learners' writing development. That's why language teachers could be informed that the significance of online learning areas and combining them to their teaching program for assisting students expedite learning and to boost their writing grades. Since AWE is discovered to be a helpful device to promote learners' writing skills, students would also be inspired to become

associated with such online learning environments and utilize them earnestly and productively. After all, because the recent research discovered the learners, who got feedback from the AWE device, got more prosperous and started to require their teacher more to receive feedback, it tends to be more logical to have both AWE feedback and traditional feedback combined in an effort to conduct the suitable effectiveness of feedback and to guarantee prosperous learning.

Secondly, motivation is highly related with being good language learners and considered as an essential component which has a considerable influence on foreign language learning achievement. Since AWE's individualized feedback meets university-level EFL students' specific needs, increases writing motivation, and encourages learners to take responsibility of their learning, language teachers had better pay attention to this fact and can carry out process-based writing instruction with the help of an AWE tool in order to increase students' writing motivation, autonomy, and self-efficacy. However, one important point that should be taken into consideration is that language teachers may need to supervise especially low students since they may have difficulty understanding the computerized feedback, which may influence them to cause a decrease in their motivation.

Another pedagogical implication for language teachers might be to make use of those rapid developments in technology to get efficiency. To make use of technological advancements, language teachers had better be digitally literate. Besides, teachers' technology literacy is necessary to effectively incorporate it in their learning and teaching processes and facilitate students' learning. Namely, utilizing AWE in EFL writing classes allows teachers to reduce the time spent on huge number of essays and therefore increase the number of writing assignments to provide student ability and self-efficacy.

When it comes to material developers and curriculum designers, they should integrate new teaching environments to writing curriculum. It is a widely accepted fact that technology helps English language learners get involved in the target culture and language more easily and find a voice. Thus, advances in technology can be fully and creatively used and integrated into writing curriculum to help students learn as much as possible. Language learners should also be able to embrace new developments and undertake digital learning activities at any place and time instead of being limited to learning in a traditional classroom in order to get the optimal efficiency in their language learning process.

This study was conducted with the participation of 50 university level students who were English language learners. Since it is deficient in generalizability to the population because of small sample size, a further study

can be conducted with a larger sample in order to reach more reliable results. Moreover, a study with participants from different proficiency levels or from various backgrounds can be fulfilled to know if similar results can be reached or not. Additionally, the recent study probed the impacts of AWE on learners' writing development holistically because of the laws of the university where the research was conducted. A further study can be implemented to consider the impacts on the writing field individually. To put it in another way, the way students improve in vocabulary utility, organization, coherence, content, grammar and spelling can be considered separately in order to gain more thorough outcomes and also to compare the post-test results with the software's scores for each domain of writing directly. Furthermore, for removing the researcher impact totally, a further study can be done with the same teacher teaching both groups during the experiment

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Stage-Like Development of Morpho-Syntactic Structure of Do-S-V (O) in Iranian EFL Learners' Writing and Speaking: A Mixed-Methods Analysis

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Abstract

Processability Theory (PT) is a theory of second language acquisition (SLA) developed to explain developmental sequences in SLA as well as some other phenomena. Within the framework of Processability Theory (PT) and through analyzing the written performance of Iranian EFL learners, the present research focused on the acquisition of the morpho-syntactic structures of *"do- s- v (o)"* across five proficiency levels, from elementary to advanced and compared it with the stage-like development model of morpho-syntactic structures proposed by Pienemann (2005a). The study followed a mixed method design and the data were collected from 350 participants in five different proficiency levels from elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced; furthermore, 45 pre-intermediate to advanced students were interviewed. The participants were asked to provide samples of their written performance on different tasks such as introduction task, habitual action task, story retelling task, picture description task, composition, and communication task; furthermore, they were interviewed on the same topics. The data in this research were analyzed both qualitatively to identify and classify the type and order of the morpho-syntactic structures in the written and oral data, and quantitatively through inferential statistics. The results of Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that "do-subject- verb was concordant with Pienemann's (2005a) model. This finding implies that PT is valid for Iranian EFL learners, considerably. The findings of this research can be of benefit for language teachers, learners, and syllabus designers.

Keywords: do-s-v(o), foreign language learning, morpho-syntactic structures, processability theory, stage-like development

1. Introduction

Processability has been a major concern in second language acquisition research (SLA) since the 1990s with the pioneering efforts by Pienemann (2005a). The goal of SLA research has been to explain how the learners acquire a language based on the input they receive and to describe different patterns to show regularities and systematicity in the learning and use of second language (L2) (Ellis, 2008). Regardless of whether it is a first language or an L2, one can find a large amount of evidence in support of the notion that language learning for the speakers of any language is systematic (Doughty, 2003; Ellis, 2008, Pienemann, 2011).

As Doman (2012) pointed out, research conducted in various fields, such as speech processing, SLA, the study of language change and variation, and the study of pidgin and Creole languages, acknowledge contributions to the notion that language learning is systematic. Researchers strongly pointed to the idea that language is learned in sequences, although they showed that some amount of variation occurred in language learning. The existence of SLA orders was originally proposed by Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974) and Bailey et al. (1974), inspired by the research by Brown (1973).

Up to the present time, several different studies concerning SLA have examined the validity of processability theory (PT) in a number of languages, including Swedish (Glahn et al., 2001 as cited in Pienemann, 2005b); (Håkansson, 2001, 2013); Arabic (Husseinali, 2006; Mansouri, 2000, 2005); Italian (Bettoni et al., 2009). Moreover, there are some studies done in this field in EFL and ESL contexts (e.g., Taki & Hamzehian, 2016). The results of these studies showed that morpho-syntactic structures were acquired following the fixed sequence predicted by PT. The above-mentioned studies have illustrated that PT has been a focus of research in recent decades. Meanwhile, it seems that the research on the developmental stages of second language learning is in need of more investigation, at least in Iran.

What is missing in the previous studies is that they investigated this stage-like development mostly on speaking skill and two cases on writing skill with the least number of learners and the least number of morpho-syntactic structures. Therefore, the present study aimed at investigating the stage-like development model of morpho-syntactic structures with more detail in EFL learners' writing and speaking performance at different levels from elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate, to advanced learners who studied English language during 42 terms. Therefore, the present research focused on the acquisition of the morpho-syntactic structure *do-s-v (o)* across five proficiency levels from elementary to advanced, and compared it with the stage-like development model of morpho-syntactic structures

proposed by Pienemann (1998a). Following a mixed-methods design, the purpose was to find out whether the orders of emergence of these structures in the Iranian EFL learners' writing and speaking performances were compatible with the order presented in Pienemann's (2005a) model or not. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were explored:

1. Are there any statistically significant differences among the frequencies of the morpho-syntactic structure of "do- s- v (o)" in the Elementary to advanced EFL learners' writing performance?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences among the frequencies of the morpho-syntactic structure of "do- s- v (o)" in the pre-intermediate to advanced EFL learners' spoken performance?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Background of Processability Theory

Researchers (e.g., Pienemann, 2011; Salleh, 2017), interested in appreciating how people acquire an L2, especially the acquisition of morpho-syntactic structures, have been discussing two research issues for decades: the logical problem and the developmental problem (Hawkins, 2001). The logical problem is to account for what makes it possible for L2 speakers to develop the mental representations of grammar in the first place. As it is often observed, the L2 syntactic knowledge that speakers have developed appears to go beyond the properties of input that they have been exposed to (i.e., how do speakers come to know more than presented in the input?). The developmental problem is to describe how the knowledge of morpho-syntax develops over time (i.e., why some properties are acquired earlier than others, and why some properties remain difficult even for advanced L2 speakers?) (Hawkins, 2001).

PT's predictions have been found to be compatible with longitudinal results in bilingual and child English L2 acquisition, as outlined in the previous section. One study with contradictory findings is Charters et al. (2011) who claim that in some (exactly 5 out of 36) of the Vietnamese children tested by Dao, plural agreement seemed to appear before lexical plural marking. The study design is, however, cross-sectional and ignores the examined children's previous learning. Thus, the developmental claims may be regarded as not necessarily reliable (Di Biase et al., 2019).

The multidimensional model was proposed by Clahsen et al. (1981) based on further investigations of the morpheme studies to predict SLA sequence. In this model, two significant aspects of L2 development were highlighted: fixed development sequence, which is not affected by the individual and environmental differences, as well as variation features responding to the individual and environmental differences. The fixed

developmental sequence is based on the learner's language processing capacity and the variation features rely on the learner variables, such as the learner's psychological orientation toward the simplification of grammar.

The teachability hypothesis was proposed by Pienemann (1984, 1988) based on his application of the multidimensional model to German as a second language. According to the teachability hypothesis, instruction does not change an L2 learner's acquisition sequence of grammatical structures because none of the developmental stages which was hypothesized by the multidimensional model can be skipped by the L2 learners.

Later, Pienemann and Johnston (1985, 1987a, 1987b) suggested a new predictive framework relying on a set of universal speech processing constraints in order to explain the implicational order of SLA. This theoretical framework initiated a shift in research from the multidimensional to PT (Pienemann, 1998b). PT is a psychological approach toward language acquisition processes indicating that language acquisition is reliant on the acquisition of a set of procedural skills. The aim of PT is to solve the developmental problem of what causes the development of L2 competence to follow a describable route. The main construct in this theory is that language-processing mechanisms constrain SLA. Hence, language development occurs mainly based on the elimination of these processing constraints (Pienemann, 1998c). Therefore, based on a universal psycholinguistics matrix, namely the hierarchy of language processability (Pienemann, 1988, 2005a), one can identify the current states of learner's L2 development.

Pienemann (1998c) stated that the three central features of PT are language-specific, incremental, and linear. According to processability theory, there are specific procedural skills obligatory for the processing and the production of utterances in an L2. In the first stage, learners develop a lexicon that is the basic element of all language processing in later stages. In the second stage, the learners use the bound morphemes to produce free morphemes. In the third stage, disconnected phrases are brought together by intra-phrasal components such as conjunctions. Nevertheless, learners have no knowledge of syntactic structures, and the order of words is based on pragmatics. In the fourth and fifth stages, lexical features gradually emerge into phrases based on syntactic knowledge. The last stage is consistent with the automatic use of subordinate clauses. These parallel processing routines illustrate that speech production is incremental.

Therefore, the language acquisition procedures pass through different stages according to the PT, each of which processes specific structures and learners can only produce and comprehend those specific structures relevant to their current stage of language acquisition and moving to the next stage

necessitates processing of the former stages. As Pienemann (2005a) stated, the logic underlying PT is that "at any stage of development, the learner can produce and comprehend only those L2 linguistic forms which the current state of the language processor can handle" (p. 2). Therefore, new linguistic information can only be acquired if the prerequisites have been previously provided. It is consequently important to understand the architecture of the language processor and the way in which it handles an L2. This enables one to predict the course of development of L2 linguistic forms in language production and comprehension across languages since knowing about the path of L2 development provides important insights into what learners are ready to acquire in the foreign/second language at any given point of time and this can support L2 learning both in natural and instructional settings (e.g., Kessler, 2008, Pienemann & Kessler 2007). Pienemann (1998a) claims that English morphology and syntax develop in six stages, including 6 stages of word/lemma, category procedure, noun phrase procedure, verb phrase procedure, sentence procedure, and subordinate clause procedure.

2.2. Lexical Functional Grammar

Processability theory is supported by lexical functional grammar (LFG) as a grammatical theory. LFG belongs to the frame of generative grammar and feature unification is the main characteristic of this grammar. Put simply, the process of feature unification ensures that the different parts that constitute a sentence do fit together. (Pienemann, 1998a). The original version was published by Kaplan and Bresnan in 1982 and consisted of three parts: a constituent structure(c-structure) component that generates surface structure constituents and c-structure relationships, a lexicon whose entries contain syntactic and other information relevant to the generation of sentences, and a functional component which compiles for every sentence all the grammatical information needed to interpret the sentence semantically.

The model was revised by Bresnan (2001) and contains additional features that were necessary to preserve the principle of typological plausibility. While the original version only accounted for the constituent structure, Bresnan (2001) included an argument and functional structure (a- and f-structure). These structures only appear in the extended version of PT since the original version (Pienemann, 1998a) was based on the early LFG. Pienemann's (2005a) choice for LFG was due to many factors. First and foremost, the processability hierarchy of PT relies on the concept of feature unification and this concept is a central notion in LFG. The concept of feature unification is very important to PT because it "captures a psychologically plausible process that involves the identification of grammatical information

in the lexical entry, the temporal storage of that information and its utilization at another point in the constituent structure" (Pienemann 2005a, p.18).

LFG also adjusts to PT because the grammar has proven to be typologically plausible. According to Pienemann (2005a), PT has to be applicable to any given language. Finally, LFG considers language acquisition as a lexically driven process, hence it represents a lexical approach to grammar. In a lexically driven grammar, lexical items can also contain grammatical information. The words of a language are considered the atoms of the syntactic structure, signifying that they are the smallest units of the language (Fabri, 2008).

2.3. Previous Studies

PT has been supported by numerous studies. Table 1 shows that the studies through almost two decades confirmed the PT. These studies have been done in different languages focusing on various morpho/syntactic features.

Table 1

Interlanguage Studies based on PT from 1996 to 2004 (Pienmann, 2005b, p. 61-65)

Researcher/Year	Language	Structure	Results
Fetter (1996)	English	Morphosyntax	Does not confirm PT as there are a lot of patterns missing in the implicational scaling
Pienemann & Håkansson (1999);	Swedish	Morphosyntax	Confirmation of PT
Bartning (2000)	French	Morphology and Syntax	Morphology is more systematic and develops in a predictable way, unlike syntax
Mansouri (2000)	Arabic	Morphology and syntax	Confirmation of PT
Devaele & Veronique (2001)	French	French adjectives in gender assignment	PT is not suitable for this kind of research
Glahn et al (2001)	Scandinavian languages	Morphology Syntax	Confirmation of PT
Håkansson, Salameh, & Nettelblatt (2003)	Swedish and French acquisition in bilingual children	Morphology	Confirmation of PT
Di Biase & Kawaguchi (2002);	Japanese Italian	Morphosyntax	Confirmation of PT
Iwasaki (2003)	Japanese	Morphosyntax	Confirmation of PT

Table 2 displays that most of the structures are acquired according to the schedule predicted by the PT.

Table 2

The Latest Interlanguage Studies based on PT

Researcher/Year	Language	Structure	Results
Kawaguchi (2005)	Japanese	Syntax	Confirmation of PT
Mansouri (2005)	Arabic	Morphology and Syntax	Confirmation of PT
Zhang (2005)	Chinese	5 grammatical morphemes	Morphemes are acquired in a predicted order proposed by PT
Håkansson & Norby (2007, as cited in Håkansson, 2013)	Swedish	Written and oral production	Confirmation of PT
Philipsson (2007)	Swedish	Question and verb morphology	the structures testing declarative knowledge, unlike procedural, are not acquired according to the predictions of PT
Ellis (2008)	English	Grammatical structures	the structures testing declarative knowledge, unlike procedural, are not acquired according to the predictions of PT
Jensen (2008)	German	Cross-sectional study of German word order	Confirmation of PT
Rahkonen & Håkansson (2008, as cited in Håkansson, 2013)	Swedish	Lexical morphology Phrasal morphology Inter-phrasal morphology	The structures emerge according to the predicted order, lexical and phrasal morphology emerge first, followed by the word order in subordinate clause
Doman (2012)	English	Syntax (relative clauses)	Confirmation of Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis
Bonilla (2014)	Spanish	Morphology and Syntax	Confirmation of PT
Tang & Zhang (2015)	English	Written and oral production	Confirmation of PT, learners are more successful in written testing
Zhang & Lantolf (2015)	Chinese	Topicalization in Chinese language	It is possible to artificially construct a developmental route different from the one predicted by developmental sequences
Salleh, R. T. A. M. (2017).	Malay/ English	plural expressions	Confirmation of Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis
Vahdat et al. (2018)	Iranian	Right- and Left-Brain Dominance	No Confirmation of Pienemann's Hypothesis
Tabatabaee et al. (2021)	English	negation	Confirmation of Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis

Furthermore, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, it is possible to predict the path of an L2 by applying PT not only to English but also to other languages as well. PT has been supported by a number of empirical studies, which have mainly targeted learners' oral performance (e.g. Baten, 2011, Kawaguchi, 2009; Dyson, 2009). Recently, the learners' production as well as the reception skills have been tested using the PT framework (Spinner, 2013; Buyl & Housen, 2015). These studies have suggested that a similar mechanism may be at work for the learners in an L2 development course concerning both production and reception.

However, the validity of PT has not been adequately tested for writing performance because the learners' writing performance based on PT has not been sufficiently studied yet. The PT studies on writing were done by Michimoto (2015a; 2015b), in which 45 and 56 Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners participated, respectively. Unfortunately, technical problems remain in both these studies and the studies have insufficient morphological data to meet the PT criterion regarding the emergence of lexical and morphological variation. Michimoto (2015a) discusses how to establish a suitable method for designing writing tasks. In his current study, a reanalysis was done for the data from Michimoto (2015a) by separating morphology and syntax in accordance with recent PT studies (Eguchi & Sugiura, 2015; Yamaguchi & Kawaguchi, 2014). The results of the study showed evidence of predictive ability regarding the learners' syntactic structures based on PT. Also, Håkansson and Norby (2007) studied Swedish learners' writing performance. They tested PT with production and writing tasks such as composition and translation tasks to elicit target structures from the learners. The results clarified that the participants produced syntactic structures in accordance with PT production in their speaking and writing, but for some participants, the writing tasks which allowed planning time helped the participants produce some target structures that they could not produce in speaking tasks. The results of writing done by the subjects showed evidence of predictive ability regarding the learners' syntactic structures based on PT.

Furthermore, In Iran, Taki and Hamzehian (2016) investigated the validity of processability theory among Iranian EFL learners' oral performance. In order to do research, 10 intermediate EFL learners were selected based on their performance on the Oxford Placement Test. Then, they participated in five tasks: interview, spot-the-difference task, picture description, picture identification, and story-telling task. Their speech was recorded and then transcribed according to predetermined target structures (i.e., interrogatives, word order, and negation). The frequency of the occurrence of target structures was calculated based on the emergence criterion. The results indicated that Iranian EFL learners produced language

structures in the predicted procedural stages as proposed by processability theory. Likewise, Mohammadkhani et al. (2011) tried to find a relationship between L2 instruction and learners' productive use of 3rd person singular-s. Researchers collected written data from 151 participants in three different proficiency groups in two phases. The findings showed that elementary learners were less developed in their interlanguage and were in lower levels of development based on PT (Pienemann, 1998a, 2003) while advanced and intermediate learners were in higher levels of processing capacity and could provide the grammatical structures systematically.

Vahdat et al. (2018) ran an investigation into the syntactic development of right-brain and left-brain dominant Iranian EFL learners based on PT. Iranian university students, who took part in this study, received a demographic questionnaire, the hemisphere dominance inventory (DHI), a validated researcher-made grammar test designed based on the stages of PT. To analyze the data classical item analysis was used. The results of the research questions revealed that the stages predicted by PT did not account for the Iranian left and right-brain dominant EFL learners in learning syntax. Results of this study indeed showed that the difficulty level of different grammatical structures presented by Pienemann's PT did not match the difficulty order obtained in this study by Left and Right-Brain Dominant EFL respondents.

Also, Tabatabaee et al. (2021) studied the acquisition of copula inversion and negation across five proficiency levels, from elementary to advanced, and compared it with the stage-like development model of morpho-syntactic structures. They found that the competence of the learner grew stronger in concern with these variables through the higher proficiency levels. They concluded that PT is valid for Iranian EFL learners' stage-like development of morpho-syntactic structures.

As it is evident, there are very few studies testing PT on EFL learners, and in other countries, PT has been supported by a number of studies which have mainly targeted learners' oral performance and very few cases on writing performance with the fewer number of participants. So, the present study tries to address this gap by focusing on the acquisition of *"do- s- v (o)"* across five proficiency levels, from elementary to advanced on EFL learners' writing and speaking performances and comparing it with Pienemann's (2005a) stage-like development model of morpho-syntactic structures.

3. Methodology

Following a descriptive model of research, and a mixed data collection procedure of writing and speaking performance, the purpose of this study was to find out whether *do- s- v (o)* in the Iranian EFL learners' writing and

speaking performances was compatible with the order presented in Pienemann's (2005a) PT model or not. Accordingly, *do- s- v (o)* is a morpho-syntactic feature, which does not emerge very early in the interlanguage of the language learners' performance and emerges in the third stage of L2 development.

3.1. Participants

Since the study included participants from different institutes from elementary to advanced levels and the researcher did not afford random sampling from a pool of participants, the researcher followed a non-random and availability sampling. The research was administered in different branches of a language institute, located in the city of Tehran. The proficiency level of participants ranged from elementary to advanced (i.e., 62 male and female elementary students, 45 male and female pre-intermediate students, 43 male and female intermediate students, 100 male and female upper intermediate students, and 100 male and female advanced students). They were all adult EFL learners, whose ages ranged from 18 to 55 years old. They were all native speakers of the Persian language, learning English through the Touchstone series from elementary to advanced levels. The learners' proficiency levels were determined using institutional placement tests.

3.2. Corpus

The corpus, utilized in this study, consisted of learner corpora output, collected from the EFL learners studying in different branches of a language institute in Tehran. The corpora were 350 writings from the five levels of the elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced learners. The writings were elicited through different writing tasks, such as picture description task, habitual action task, story writing task, story retelling task, audio-video retelling task, communication task, introduction task, and composition.

Furthermore, the second part of the corpus in this research was the recorded interviews of 45 students chosen based on availability circumstances: 10 students from the pre-intermediate level, 15 students from the intermediate level, and 20 students from the advanced level. They were interviewed on topics with such tasks as picture description task, habitual action task, story writing task, story retelling task, audio-video retelling task, communication task, introduction task, and composition.

3.3. Procedure

The procedures followed in the present research included the following steps. Initially, the data were collected through different tasks including an introduction task, habitual action task, story retelling task, picture description task, composition, and communication task. Then, the raters were trained for the assessment of the participants' writings and recording interviews at different levels based on the model presented by Pienemann (1988, 2005a) related to the type and frequency of morpho-syntactic structures at different stages, Finally, the writings were rated, (i.e., 1 for correct morpho-syntactic structure and 0 for each absent or incorrect structure).

3.4. Data Analysis

Analyzing the data via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22, the written and spoken data in this research were analyzed qualitatively in order to identify and classify the type and order of the morpho-syntactic structures. The quantitative data were analyzed using cross tabulation, normality test, and Kruskal-Wallis test.

4. Results

4. 1. Results for "do- s- v (o)" in participants Writings

The variable studied in this dissertation was *do- s- v (o)* usage across the levels, from elementary to advanced and the purpose was to analyze the performances based on the stage-like development model of morpho-syntactic structures proposed by Pienemann (2005a).

Table 3

Crosstabulation of Do-Subject-Verb by Levels

Count

		Do-Subject-Verb				
		.00	1.00	2.00	3.00	Total
Level	Elementary	62	0	0	0	62
	Preintermediate	45	0	0	0	45
	Intermediate	42	0	0	1	43
	Upperintermediate	98	2	0	0	100
	Advanced	87	6	2	5	100
Total		334	8	2	6	350

In Table 3, the lowest and highest scores and the frequency for the scores in regard to language learners' performance for true usage of *do- s- v (o)* have been illustrated. The next step for this variable is to show the graphic representation of the distribution of *do- s- v (o)*across five levels from elementary to advanced. In order to find out if there is any significant

difference among the distributions of *do- s- v (o)* across the levels, a comparison of the means distribution for each level was necessary. To choose the appropriate statistical test, the normality was checked.

Table 4

Tests of Normality[b,c] for Do-Subject-Verb

	Level	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Do-subject-verb	Intermediate	.537	43	.000	.140	43	.000
	Upper-intermediate	.537	100	.000	.123	100	.000
	Advanced	.504	100	.000	.383	100	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
b. do-subject-verb is constant when Level = Elementary. It has been omitted.
c. do-subject-verb is constant when Level = Pre-intermediate. It has been omitted.

Table 4 shows that the data is not distributed normally ($p <05$). Therefore, Kruskal-Wallis Test was chosen to compare the means of distribution of *do- s- v (o)* at each level.

Table 5

Ranks for Do-Subject-Verb

	Level	N	Mean Rank
dosubjectverb	Elementary	62	75.00
	Preintermediate	45	75.00
	Intermediate	43	76.74
	Total	150	

Table 6

Kruskal Wallis Test for Do-Subject-Verb

	Do-Subject-Verb
Chi-Square	2.488
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.288

According to Table 6, there is no statistically significant difference among the distribution of *do- s- v (o)* across language learners' levels of language proficiency.

4. 2. Results for Do- S- V (O) in Interview Data

After running normality test for the interview results, it was noticed that the data is not distributed normally. Therefore, Kruskal-Wallis test was run to find the answer to the second research question.

Table 7
Kruskal-Wallis Test for Do- S- V (O) in Interview Data

	Level	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Sig
	preintermediate	10	27.55			
Total degree	Intermediate	15	21.87	1.568	2	.457
	Advanced	20	21.58			
	Total	45				

Table 7 displays the findings regarding the *do- s- v (o)* in participants' interviews. The table indicates there is no statistically significant difference among the distribution of *do- s- v (o)* across language learners' level of proficiency, X^2 (2, n=45) = 1.568, *p* = .457

5. Discussion

The findings of this study showed no significant difference in the distribution of *do-s-v (o)* across different levels. First, the results showed that the use of *do-s-v (o)*was not observed in the writing and speaking performance of language learners in the elementary and pre-intermediate levels but in the intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced levels with the gradual increase in the language proficiency level. The findings imply that *do-s-v (o)* is a morpho-syntactic feature, which does not emerge very early in the Interlanguage of the language learners' performance. However, the competence of the learner grows stronger in concern with this variable through the higher proficiency levels. The findings of this study are in line with Pienemann (1998a) who concluded that this structure emerges in the third stage of L2 development. The findings of the present study are generally consistent with the predictions made by PT. Generally, PT was shown to be valid for Iranian EFL learners.

The findings of this research are in line with Tabatabaee et al. (2021) focusing on the acquisition of copula inversion and negation. They found that the competence of the learners grew stronger in concern with their chosen variables through the higher proficiency levels. They implied that PT is valid for Iranian EFL learners, as well. Meanwhile, the present study was different

in findings from Vahdat et al. (2018) whose study did not fit into Pienemann's (2005a) suggestions. They concluded that the difficulty level of different grammatical structures presented by Pienemann (2005a) in PT did not match the difficulty order obtained in this study by Left and Right-Brain Dominant EFL respondents.

6. Conclusions and Implications

According to the results of the study, it is concluded that Iranian EFL learners pass through definite stages in the processing of L2 development. Their development is progressed hierarchically. These stages are acquired cumulatively in an order predicted by PT. Systematicity in language acquisition is certainly a substantial consideration and this has given rise to theories such as the one proposed by Pienemann (2005a). PT is intended to explain why L2 learners follow a similar path in the development of morpho-syntactic structures (Plag, 2008). It paved the way for scholars to theoretically predict the order of acquisition for L2 grammatical skills. Processability theory has then shed new light on SLA studies. The findings of this study are hoped to have both theoretical and practical implications. Meanwhile, variability ought not to be neglected since it can shed light on idiosyncratically and socially motivated variations in language learning.

The results of this study reveal that the existing models for illustration of stage-like development of morpho-syntactic structures in the development of an L2 are in general appropriate for the prediction of learner language. Meanwhile, there are some fine-tuning needed for the models, which should be done through local considerations in concern with the language learners, including their first language, their cultural background and the context of their learning an L2. This claim is because of some minor differences between the results of this study and the suggested models.

This study can have implications for language teachers and learners and material developers. It benefits the material developers, since they can develop the standard materials based on the natural order of language development, because knowing about the path of SLA provides important insights into what learners are ready to acquire in the foreign/second language at any given point in time. Therefore, this can support L2 learning both in natural and instructional settings. The teachers will benefit from this study in a way that they can provide appropriate input to their learners. They can evaluate the syllabuses in terms of their adaptation with the natural order language development as suggested by the relevant models. They can also choose the best materials from among the available textbooks. Furthermore, they can have a better view in assessment of the language learners' progress.

Generally, by investigating the developmental patterns, one can get a closer insight into the development of the learner's interlanguage. Since developmental stages can be predicted in advance, a conclusion that interlanguage develops in a regular, predictable way can be drawn. Furthermore, it is important to describe and determine developmental stages in advance to adjust teaching to the learner's current developmental stage. It is also necessary to introduce the teachers the notion of interlanguage and developmental stages to observe the factors that hinder or facilitate their learner's progress applying an individualized approach to each learner while at the same time observing the changes in the learner's interlanguage on his/her way of mastering an L2. Observing the developmental path of the student's interlanguage removes the focus from describing and counting errors and makes the teachers aware that errors are to be expected and inevitable in the development of the learner's L2 and they are indicators of progress.

There are also some implications perceivable for language learners. The process of language learning can be discouraging for the learners at different stages. If the learners are somehow provided with a general illustration of the due time of emergence of morpho-syntactic structures in their approximate system, they can formulate more logical expectations for themselves and self-assess their course of development. This can help them cope with the complexity of the situations of language learning and therefore give weight to their self-confidence.

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Iranian EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of the Localized EFL Textbooks: A Mixed-Methods Analysis

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Abstract

Nowadays, the goal of language education has changed from mastery of structure to the ability to use language for communicative purposes; however, the cultural content of the ELT textbooks in Iran has never been sufficiently discussed. Therefore, the major purpose motivating this study was to study the perceptions of teachers and learners of the localization of Iranian English textbooks in the Iranian EFL textbooks (i.e., Prospect series), besides investigating if there were any significant differences between the perceptions of teachers and learners. For this purpose, the participants of this study comprised two samples. The first group who took part in this study were 87 EFL teachers, and the second was a sample of 105 EFL learners. The research instruments were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. For the evaluation of the textbook, a researcher-made questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was designed based on Cheng (2005). The purpose of this questionnaire was to probe the Iranian EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of the localized materials. In order to explore teachers' attitudes towards localized materials, a semi-structured interview was used. The findings suggest that while teachers and learners might view the series differently, there exists a common ground of appreciation for its value in enhancing the English learning experience. This convergence in positive perceptions emphasizes the importance of educational resources that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences. This study can have some pedagogical implications for curriculum developers, educational policymakers, teachers, and material designers.

Keywords: ELT textbooks, Learner perspectives, Prospect series, teacher's perspectives

1. Introduction

In the past, the goal of teaching English was to master the structure of the language; however, nowadays, English seems to play a central role and the goal of language education has changed from mastery of structure to the ability to use language for communicative purposes (Yamini & Barjesteh, 2016). According to Ho (2009), it has been widely recognized that learners need not just knowledge and skill in the grammar of a language but also the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately. Similarly, language teacher`s awareness of intercultural communication seems necessary for modern language education and language educators need to feel the necessity of the inclusion of cultural components in their curriculum in order for their learners to become successful in their intercultural interactions (Hammer & Bennett, 2004).

According to Nunan (1988), materials and textbooks are among the most fundamental components "within the curriculum and more than simply profit the wheels of learning. At their best, they prepare concrete models for desirable classroom practice. They act as curriculum models and at their very best they comply with a teacher development role" (p. 98).

Localization, according to Taylor (2004), is the freedom of schools or local education authorities to adapt this curriculum to local conditions, and the relevance of the curriculum and teaching methods and use to the local environment. Localization is the use and adaptability of content to determine local resources, to address a specific style of presentation, to adapt to a different basic level, to different disciplines, to adapt to a different environment, to respond to different needs, to address a priority cultural, to support a specific educational need, and to address the standardized curriculum of a school or a district (Taylor, 2004).

Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2013) opined that EFL textbooks play a pivotal part in the process of teaching and learning in general and it sounds hard to imagine language free from culture as they are interwoven and mutually significant. According to McKay (2002), one of the major goals of teaching English as an international language is to make it easier for learners to communicate their ideas and cultural understandings in the medium of English. Intercultural competence, the ultimate aim of acquiring language, cannot be attained if the textbooks focus solely on the learner's native culture or the target culture. As Mozaffarzadeh and Ajideh (2019) stated, ELT textbooks are mostly based on the source culture, which does not seem to help promote intercultural competence and cultural understanding.

In recent years, educators and materials developers in Iran have been trying to take control of the contents that are taught in EFL textbooks to incorporate Iranian-Islamic culture in them (Boroomand & Yazdani, 2017). Some have modified the original textbooks so that some cultural aspects that are deemed dangerous can be controlled. Some others have attempted to develop textbooks that have been designed based on this culture from scratch. All the same, it is concluded that there is a need to evaluate our localized and domestically produced textbooks by utilizing high-quality, standardized, and culture-free checklists to find out where we stand in the development of textbooks.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Culture

Culture has been defined and studied from different angles for many years as more than one hundred sixty definitions of culture have been identified. Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined culture as "the set of practices, codes, and values that mark a particular nation or group: the sum of a nation or group's most highly thought of works of literature, art, music, etc." (p.149). As Mozaffarzadeh and Ajideh (2019) stated, culture is a concrete term and plays a vital role in language classrooms.

There are three ways to understand culture (Kramsch, 1995; Kramsch et al., 1996). The first one is the way a given social group represents itself and others through art, history, and literature. The second way is through peoples' beliefs, attitudes, and the way they behave and think (Liberman, 1994; Nostrand, 1989). Culture can also be discussed through different views. One of these views is *little C* and *big C* culture. *Big C* culture refers to the culture institutionalized in a particular form such as "social, economic, political, and linguistic systems - the kinds of things that usually are included in area studies or history courses" (Bennett, 1998, p.3). The third influential view is that culture is viewed as "a contested zone" (Martin & Nakayama, 2000, p.58). Proponents of this view claim that people have to acknowledge the differences of a particular culture rather than focus on the universal qualities of people in different cultures.

Five important functions of culture have been explicated by Ting-Toomey (1999). They are: (1) identity meaning function, (2) group inclusion function, (3) intergroup boundary regulation function, (4) ecological adaptation function, and (5) cultural communication. First, as it has been mentioned in definitions of culture, culture serves the identity meaning by providing the frame of reference in the shape of values, beliefs, and norms. Culture helps students and teachers to identify themselves. Second, culture is

at the service of the group inclusion function. It is responsive to the need of us, to be included in a specific group; this function of culture is important for students whose cultures differ from those of others. They want to be accepted within the new school environment. When the teachers work with such students, they should make an effort to justify their actions which normally need no explanation. The intergroup boundary regulation function is the third role of culture. Ting-Toomey (1999) asserted, "Culture helps us to form evaluative attitudes [positive or negative] toward in-group and out-group interactions" (p.13).

The fourth role of culture is ecological adaptation. According to Triandis (1994), "realities of the environment create conditions for the development of particular cultural, socialization, and behavioral patterns" (p.23). Culture as an important factor "facilitates the adaptation processes among the self, the cultural community, and the larger environment" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 14). The fifth function served by culture is cultural communication. Intercultural communication researchers conceive culture as a set of knowledge, which helps individuals to know how to communicate with people of different cultures and how to interpret their behaviors (Gudykunst, 2004). Ting-Toomey (1999) concludes that these several functions of culture are considered "an essential component of the effort of human beings to survive and thrive in their particular environment" (p. 12).

Most theoreticians believe that the relationship between language and culture is strong and complex (Risager 2006). Due to the existence of various cultures and languages, intercultural competence has become prominent (Elorza, 2008). Since it is difficult to identify specific components of intercultural competence, there is no specific definition in the field (Deardorff, 2006). Zakaria (2000) asserted that intercultural competence consists of behavioral, cognitive, and affective parts. Chen and Starosta (1996) opined that in the behavioral part, communicational skills help an individual to act appropriately and efficiently in a community of target culture. For multicultural coexistence, both an understanding of one's own culture and the influence of culture on one's behavior, which is regarded as self-awareness, are required. The third part of intercultural competence is like intercultural sensitivity (Zakaria, 2000).

2.2. Localization

Language is one of the main factors for the relationship between human beings, and culture and language are two inseparable categories. English has not become an international language by incident but is gradually formed as part of the socio-economic and political world of the West and hence has

become part of a global scene, and different people find it inevitable to be learned (Ibrohimova & Ziyaboyeva, 2022).

Although English in our past colonial times may have been used as a means of domination for the civilization of the indigenous and domination of their thoughts, there is no reason to think that the effects of those policies are still on us to continue (Leiss, 2023). After years of research on what localization is and its importance, as well as why there is such a need, we have concluded that to protect our Iranian-Islamic culture and values, localization is imperative. While having an eye on globalization, the national and cultural identity of each country and nation has to remain firm in place. In other words, globalization does not mean that we have to let go of our national and cultural identity (Esfandiyari & Nourabadi, 2020).

Most of the above-mentioned studies have focused on the "whatness" and "whyness" of localization and developing localized materials. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, none of these studies has focused on the "howness" of this process. The trend of research on the localization process shall eventually lead to the development of a framework. The other important factor that needs to be taken into account when we research localization is analyzing the needs of our indigenous learners. This needs analysis is a delicate, time-consuming process that has to be worked more on. Different factors such as common errors of Iranian learners in learning the foreign language under study, factors leading to the promotion of motivation in the learners such as incorporating humor in the materials that fit to the cultural values more and are believed to be more efficient. In conclusion, it is suggested that research on localization start a direction moving towards the processes of developing a framework for incorporating what we know about what to do and why we need to do it in development of materials that are more specific to our cultural and national identity.

2.5. Empirical Studies

There have been some studies that have evaluated ELT textbooks. Soozandehfar and Sahragard (2011) analyzed the conversation sections of Top Notch Fundamental textbooks from the pragmatic dimension of language functions and speech acts. For this purpose, 14 conversations from the entire 14 units of the books were selected randomly and the two pragmatic models were applied. The results of their study indicated that the conversations in these textbooks are not pragmatically efficacious and functional.

In another study, Sahragard et al. (2010) evaluated a series of ELT materials namely, Interchange 3rd edition. They found that Interchange is not

completely along with the objectives intended for it. They further continue that the book does not use learners or even the teachers as a source for its content. They continue that the supra-sentential level as well is ignored for both the expected output and input of the learners.

In another study, Riazi and Aryashokouh (2007) intended to investigate how English lexis is treated in English textbooks in Iranian high schools. The main objective of their study was to examine the vocabulary exercises in the current English language textbooks used in Iranian high schools and to propose some guidelines to enhance vocabulary teaching. Results of their study indicated that none of the exercises in English books 1, 2 and 3 could be considered to raise learners' consciousness. Overall, they found that only 1.02 percent of the exercises in the four textbooks could be categorized under consciousness-raising.

On the role of localized materials in learning of FFL students, Mahabadi (2013) carried out a study. The aim of her study was to investigate the effects of localized materials on students' comprehension in a context in which French was taught as a foreign language. She selected 30 male and female Iranian learners of French and asked them to read two stories: one written originally in French by a native writer, and another written originally in Persian and translated into French. After reading the stories, the participants were asked to answer reading comprehension questions.

In another relevant study in this regard, Yamini and Barjesteh (2016) investigated the attitudes of EFL teachers and students toward localized materials from a willingness to communicate approach. Their paper was also aimed at identifying what obstacles Iranian EFL teachers faced with in taking advantage of localized materials. In order to find the answer to these questions, they used Litz's (2005) textbook evaluation checklist to compare the attitudes towards the localized materials.

To provide an explanation of what it means to teach EFL in an Islamic-Iranian context Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) attempted to look beyond the global tendency to learn English and look into the future with an emphasis on the importance of including the local specificities of the Iranian culture and religion. They concluded that as the British and American aim to impose their specific ideological, cultural, and attitudinal views, it is necessary to take greater control of what takes place in the Iranian context by localizing the materials and textbooks.

All the same, the cultural content of the ELT textbooks in Iran has never been explicitly discussed. There is a serious absence of studies that examine

the quality and the types of materials used in teaching culture. Therefore, the major purpose motivating this study was to study the perceptions of teachers and learners about the localization of Iranian English textbooks in Prospect series and to investigate if there were any significant differences between the perceptions of teachers and learners. To that, the questions which were going to be investigated in this research were as follows:

> **RQ1**. Are there any statistically significant differences between the perception of Iranian EFL school teachers and learners about the localization of the Prospect series?
>
> **RQ2**: What do Iranian EFL school teachers and learners think about the localization of the Prospect series?

3. Method

3.1. Design

This study followed a sequential mixed-method design using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to find out whether there are significant differences among the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers and learners toward the localized materials of EFL textbooks (i.e., Prospect series).

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were of two groups of people. The first group who took part in this study were EFL teachers, and the second group of participants were EFL learners. Both groups were Iranians and had the same national background, and English was their foreign language. The details of these groups are discussed in this section.

As for the first group, a total of 87 EFL teachers were selected to take part in this research. The sampling method for the teachers was convenience sampling and they were selected based on availability. In order to screen the probable difference in Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of localized materials as far as their teaching experience is concerned, care was taken to include an equal number of participants based on their experience. For this purpose, they were selected from three levels of teaching experience: level 1 (1 to 10 years of experience), level 2 (11 to 20 years of experience), and level 3 (21 to 30 years of experience).

The learners who took part in this study were 105 EFL learners who were in seventh, eighth, and ninth grade in junior high school. Their ages ranged from 11 to 15. They were selected as the participants of the study through the convenience sampling technique. They were also classified according to their grade at the high school. In fact, in order to screen the probable difference in Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of localized materials

as far as their grade is concerned, care was taken to include an equal number of participants based on their grade: level 1 (the seventh graders), level 2 (the eighth graders), and level 3 (the ninth graders).

3.3. Materials and Instruments
3.3.1. Materials

The main material that was used in this study was the Prospect series, which was the mainstream EFL textbook of the Iranian education system. The Prospect series written by Alavi Moghaddam et al. (2015), Alavi Moghaddam et al. (2015), and Alavi Moghaddam et al. (2016) were examined in this study. Each book consists of 8 lessons, each lesson including 1. One conversation, two practices, one sound and letter conversation, listening and reading sections, speaking and writing sections, a conversation.

3.3.2. Questionnaire

For the evaluation of the textbook, a researcher-made questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was designed based on Cheng (2005). The purpose of this questionnaire was to probe Iranian EFL teachers' and students' attitudes towards the localized materials. In fact, this questionnaire was used in order to explore the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers and learners toward the school English textbooks (Prospect series). The questionnaire comprised of 28 items in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). The questionnaire consisted of three sections including national identity, cultural aspects, and practical and intercultural knowledge aspects. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured through Cronbach's alpha within the context of Iran (α=.89). In addition, the validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by 2 experts in this field, who were university professors.

3.3.3. Semi-structured Interview

To explore teachers' attitudes about localized materials, a semi-structured interview developed by Yamini and Barjesteh (2016) was used. It comprised five open-ended questions, used to crosscheck the written information given by the participants as well as to gain verbal insight into ELT teachers' perceptions towards the localized textbooks. In other words, the interview was used to elaborate on the data retrieved from the questionnaires.

The interviews were conducted in Farsi, which allowed the interviewees to express their feelings and ideas more fluently and fully. They were done via phone, internet (WhatsApp Call), and face-to-face based on the

participants' preferences, because all of the participants were not available for face-to-face interviews. Each phone or face-to-face interview took approximately 30 – 40 minutes and was recorded with the permission of the interviewee. The questions in the interview were as follows:

> **Q1**. What difficulty do Iranian EFL teachers encounter while using localized materials within the context of Iran?
>
> **Q2**. What boundaries do Iranian EFL teachers encounter in preparing localized materials within the context of Iran?
>
> **Q3**. Do these textbooks provide you with an opportunity to boost your students' motivation to learn English?
>
> **Q4**. What are your opinions on the different items of the general design of a model ELT textbook and the merits and demerits of localized textbooks?
>
> **Q5**. Are the language skills being emphasized equally?

3.4. Procedure

First, the questionnaires were distributed to 50 teachers and 50 learners. The participants were asked to complete questions after being provided with the necessary directions. The interview was conducted most conveniently for the participants. The participants were informed about the general purpose of the research, but not the specific questions that might be asked. In addition, they were informed in advance that they would be recorded, and the researcher would ask them whether they had any problems with this.

In all of the interviews, Farsi language was used, and the interviews were tape-recorded. The real names of the respondents were kept anonymous, and numbers were used to identify each interviewee. The five semi-structured questions were asked from teachers about their perceptions of the localized materials of school English textbooks.

3. 5. Data Analysis

All the data, collected through a mixed-method design, were analyzed. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) software was employed to analyze the data collected from the groups. A T-test was run to compare the means of the participants in the groups on a questionnaire. In addition, the results of the semi-structured interview were analyzed based on the Dörnyei's (2007) guidelines.

4. Results

4.1. Results of Descriptive Statistics

This study investigated the Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of the Prospect series. The quantitative research question was analyzed through descriptive statistics and the Chi-square test. Table 1 shows the demographic information for the teachers' age and gender.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages for Distribution of Teachers by Age

	N	P
Age		
18-25	13	14.94
26-30	9	10.34
31-35	10	11.49
36-40	18	20.69
40 & above	37	42.54
Total	87	100.00
Gender		
Male	27	31.03
Female	60	68.97
Total	87	100.00

Based on the results shown in Table 1, it can be concluded that most of the teachers (i.e., 68.97 %) were female with the highest percentage of teachers, aged 40 and above. Table 2 shows the distribution of the EFL learners based on their gender and grade.

Based on the results shown in Table 2, it can be concluded that the majority of the learners; (i.e., 74.29 %) were female, 20 percent were male, and another 5.71 percent did not answer the question. Table 2 also shows the distribution of EFL learners by their age and grades. Based on the results it can be concluded that the majority of the learners (i.e., 20.97 %) were 13 years old which equals the seventh grade. This was followed by 18.10 percent, who were 14 years old and another 16.18 percent, who were 15 years old. The results also showed that 15.24 percent were 16 years old and another 15.25 percent were 17 years old. Finally, the remaining 14.29 percent at the 12th level were 18 years old.

Table 2
Frequencies and Percentages for Distribution of Learners by Gender

	N	P
Gender		
Male	21	20.00
Female	78	74.29
Not Specified	6	5.71
Total	105	100.00
Age (Grade)		
13 (K7)	22	20.95
14 (K8)	19	18.10
15 (K9)	17	16.18
16 (K10)	16	15.24
17 (K11)	16	15.24
18 (K12)	15	14.29
Total	105	100.00

4.2. Exploring the First Research Question

Table 3 shows the frequencies, percentages, and standard residuals for the first research question (i.e., Are there any statistically significant differences between the perception of Iranian EFL school teachers and learners about the localization of the Prospect series?). Before discussing the results, it should be noted that, if the standard residual is higher than 1.96, it can be claimed that the observed frequency is significantly more than what is expected whereas standard residuals higher than -1.96 indicate that the frequency is lower than what is expected.

Table 3
Frequencies and Percentages for Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of Localization

		Choices					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
Teachers	N	96	603	537	979	214	2429
	%	4.0%	24.8%	22.1%	40.3%	8.8%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-9.7	4.4	1.4	2.2	-2.6	
Learners	N	420	441	511	910	315	2597
	%	16.2%	17.0%	19.7%	35.0%	12.1%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	9.4	-4.2	-1.3	-2.1	2.5	
Total	N	516	1044	1048	1889	529	5026
	%	10.3%	20.8%	20.9%	37.6%	10.5%	100.0%

Based on the results shown in Table 3, it can be concluded that a higher percentage of EFL learners (12.1 % vs. 8.8 %) strongly agreed with the Prospect series. The Std. Residual for the learners (2.5 > 1.96) indicated the frequency of EFL learners holding a positive attitude towards the Prospect series was significantly beyond what was expected. However, a higher percentage of EFL teachers (40.3 % vs. 35 %) agreed with the 'Prospect' series. The Std. Residual for the teachers (2.2 > 1.96) indicated the frequency of EFL teachers showing agreement attitude towards the Prospect series was significantly beyond what was expected.

On the other hand, a higher percentage of students (16.2 % vs. 4 %) strongly disagreed with the Prospect series. The Std. Residual of 9.4 indicated that the observed frequency was significantly beyond what was expected. However, a higher percentage of teachers (24.8 % vs. 17 %) disagreed with the Prospect series. The standard residual of 4.4 indicated that the observed frequency was significantly beyond what was expected. The results also indicated that 22.1 percent of teachers and 19.7 percent of learners did not decide about the Prospect series. These results were further supported by the results of Chi-square (Table 4).

Table 4

Chi-Square Tests for Teachers and Learners' Perceptions towards Localization

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	245.688[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	261.706	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	20.992	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	5026		
Cramer's V	.221		.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 249.38.

The results, representing a weak effect size, indicated that there were significant differences between teachers and learners' perceptions towards the Prospect' series, χ^2 (4) = 245.68, $p < .05$, *Cramer's V* = .221. Thus, the null hypothesis (i.e., there was no significant difference between the perception of Iranian EFL school teachers and learners about the localization of Prospect series) was rejected. Figure 1 shows the percentages presented above.

Figure 1

Percentages of Teachers and Learners' Perceptions towards Localization of 'Prospect' Series
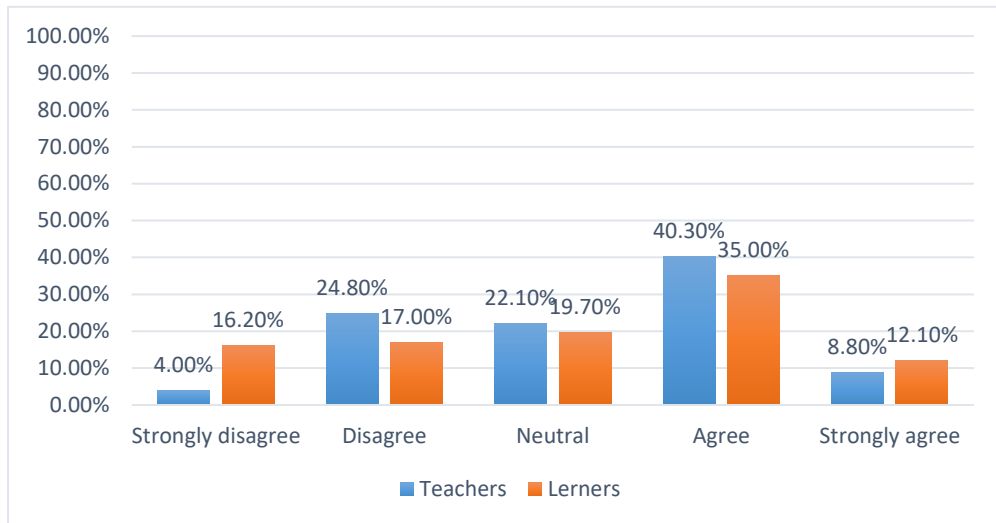

Table 5 shows the significance or non-significance of the difference between the opinions of the teachers and the learners.

Table 5

Differences between Teachers and Learners' Opinions

items		Teacher Mean (SD)	Student Mean (SD)	*P*
1	The book maintains cultural assets and local identities.	3.25(1.19)	3.47(1.31)	.24
2	The book fosters local knowledge with roots in local values and traditions.	3.26(1.09)	3.60(1.31)	.06
3	The curriculum is based on local values and cultural assets.	3.30(1.02)	3.67(1.25)	.02
4	The selection of global knowledge depends on the needs of the local community and cultural preference.	3.40 (.98)	4.07(.85)	.00
5	The expected outcome in the book is to develop a local person with international outlook.	3.13(.96)	3.27(.85)	.29
6	The book accumulates the global knowledge along local expectations and demands.	3.19(.86)	3.33(1.08)	.30
7	The book fosters local knowledge with clear local needs in globalized education.	3.11(.87)	3.13(1.09)	.85
8	The curriculum identifies the core local needs and values as the fundamental seeds to accumulate the relevant global resources for education.	3.25(.89)	3.00(1.21)	.10

|				
9	The expected educational outcome is to develop a local person who can remain as a local person but equipped with some global knowledge.	3.41(.93)	2.93(1.06)	.00
10	Efforts are made to limit the local interactions with the outside world to a fixed framework.	3.28(.97)	3.50(1.05)	.14
11	The incoming global knowledge is filtered in the book.	3.57(1.05)	3.57(1.24)	.98
12	The local developments are protected from the global influences.	3.29(.95)	3.50(1.05)	.15
13	The book is designed within a framework of ideological boundaries and social norms.	3.49(1.03)	3.93(1.07)	.00
14	Local relevance is ensured in globalizing education.	3.28(1.19)	3.00(1.31)	.07
15	Any loss of local identity and concerns is eliminated in the face of international exposure.	3.33(1.03)	3.50(1.30)	.17
16	Local traditions are removed and are replaced with new ideas borrowed from Western countries.	2.90(1.13)	2.07(1.28)	.00
17	The book replaces the existing weaker local components with the better key elements from the global knowledge.	3.02(1.06)	3.00(1.11)	.88
18	The book replaces the invalid local knowledge with vital global knowledge through globalization or globalized education.	3.20(1.04)	3.00(1.07)	.21
19	Students are strongly encouraged to be open to transplanting any good elements into local contexts.	3.13(1.02)	3.07(1.34)	.75
20	The expected educational outcome is to develop a person with locally and globally mixed elements.	3.30(1.18)	2.93(.96)	.02
21	The book absorbs certain relevant types of global knowledge instead of creating local knowledge from the beginning.	3.01(1.06)	2.79(1.21)	.18
22	The curriculum aims at enabling students to learn what global knowledge is valuable and necessary to their own developments.	3.36(.97)	2.71(1.16)	.000
23	The expected educational outcome is to develop a person equipped with certain types of global knowledge.	3.24(1.20)	2.38(.84)	.000
24	The book has no clear local identity and vision for its growth but is dependent on external resources and knowledge.	3.52(1.07)	2.43(1.50)	.000
25	The book aims to make full use of global knowledge with minimal local constraints.	2.94(1.01)	2.36(1.50)	.002
26	The book uses global knowledge in the local context to foster local knowledge.	3.15(1.20)	2.07(1.28)	.000

Table 6 shows the results of the second research on Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of the localization of Prospect series.

Table 6

Frequencies and Percentages for Participants' Perceptions of the Localized Books

	Teachers		Learners	
	N	%	N	%
Strongly Disagree	96	4.0%	420	16.2%
Disagree	603	24.8%	441	17.0%
Neutral	537	22.1%	511	19.7%
Agree	979	40.3%	910	35.0%
Strongly Agree	214	8.8%	315	12.1%
Total	2429	100.0%	2597	100.0%

The results indicated that 28.8 percent of EFL teachers (4 % strongly disagree plus 24.8 % disagree), held a negative attitude towards the localization of the Prospect series while 33.2 percent of EFL learners (16.2 % strongly disagree plus 17 % disagree) stated a negative perception of the localization of the Prospect series. On the other hand, 49.1 percent of teachers (40.3 % agree plus 8.8 % strongly agree) held a positive perception of the localization of the 'Prospect' series; while 47.1 percent of EFL learners (35 % strongly disagree plus 12.1 % disagree) stated a positive attitude towards the localization of the 'Prospect' series. The results also showed that 22.1 percent of teachers, and 19.7 percent of learners were neutral (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Percentages of Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of the Localized Prospect Series
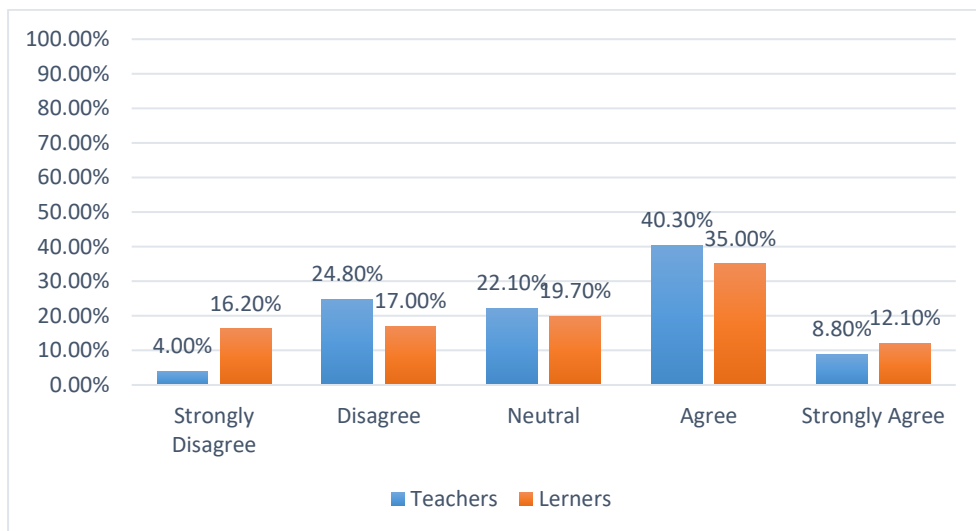
4.3. Exploring the Second Research Question

The results of the qualitative data analysis, derived from the semi-structured interview questions, had the following results:

4.3.1. Question 1: What difficulty do Iranian EFL teachers encounter while using localized materials within the context of Iran?

Out of the interview data collected from the participants, two prominent excerpts were as follows:

1. "Teaching a language without considering the culture of that language is useless. In Iran, teachers have to teach localized books which can't help students learn English at all because these books haven't considered the English culture."
2. "As Iranian EFL teachers intend to prepare their students for the international marketplace where each student will be ideally able to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, it is best not to incorporate localized materials within the English school textbooks and instead use globalized texts to provide the opportunity so that the students are familiarized with the global English culture."

These responses were close to the following scenarios:

- Response 2 aligns more closely with Cheng's (2005) scenario 2 (i.e., totally globalized education) by emphasizing the importance of preparing students for international communication.
- Response 1 leans toward Cheng's (2005) scenario 3 (i.e., totally localized education) by highlighting the need to consider the culture of the language being taught.

4.3.2. Question 2: What boundaries do Iranian EFL teachers encounter in preparing localized materials within the context of Iran?

Based on the responses given to this question by the participants, the two very prominent responses were as follows:

1. "Teachers cannot find suitable information with correct grammatical structure and right level in English for use in the classroom."
2. "Iran is a vast country with diverse ethnolinguistic and cultural backgrounds. It's practically impossible and undesirable to design textbook materials based on the localized idiosyncrasies of these ethnic groups."

These responses were close to the following scenarios:

- Response 1 does not strongly align with any particular scenario but implies a challenge related to localized materials.
- Response 2 leans toward Cheng's (2005) scenario 3 (i.e., totally localized education) by emphasizing the diversity within Iran and the challenges of localized content.

4.3.3. Question 3: Do these textbooks provide you with an opportunity to boost your motivation in learning English and your willingness to communicate?

Two particularly noteworthy extracts from the participants that expressed their ideas in a straightforward and concise manner were:

1. "No. The focus is more on grammar."
2. "Not at all. The main purpose of these books is to teach grammar. Students have to learn a lot of grammar."

These responses were close to the following scenarios:

- Responses 1 and 2 align more closely with Cheng's (2005) scenario 2 (i.e., totally globalized education) by highlighting the focus on grammar and the neglect of speaking skills.

4.3.4. Question 4: What are your opinions on the general design of a model ELT textbook and the merits and demerits of localized textbooks?

Out of the responses given to this question by the participants, the two very prominent responses that clearly expressed their opinions were:

1. "We can publish new textbooks with a combination of the localized materials and institute textbooks. The new textbook should develop students' four language skills, especially speaking and writing."
2. "In my opinion, localized materials should have no place in an English classroom. English is an international language. EFL textbooks should prepare the students to get to know this international culture better."

These responses were close to the following scenarios:

- Response 1 aligns with Cheng's (2005) scenario 1 (i.e., highly globalized and localized education) by suggesting a combination of localized and global content to develop language skills.
- Response 2 strongly aligns with Cheng's (2005) scenario 2 (i.e., totally globalized education) by advocating for a focus on international culture in ELT textbooks.

4.3.5. Question 5: Are the language skills being emphasized equally?

Among the answers provided by the interviewees on this question, two particularly noteworthy answers that unambiguously conveyed their thoughts were:

1. "No. Listening and speaking skill are neglected especially in Prospect 1,2, and 3."
2. "Not at all. Speaking is less important in these books."

These responses were close to the following scenarios:

- Responses 1 and 2 both align more closely with Cheng's (2005) scenario 2 (i.e., totally globalized education) by highlighting the focus on grammar and the neglect of speaking skills.

Overall, the analysis shows that the participants' responses vary in their alignment with the scenarios, but there is a tendency toward emphasizing the importance of grammar and receptive skills in the current ELT context in Iran, which aligns with Cheng's (2005) scenario 2 (i.e., totally globalized education). However, there are also elements of Scenario 1 (Highly Globalized and Localized Education) and Cheng's (2005) scenario 3 (i.e., totally localized education) in some responses, indicating a diverse range of perspectives.

5. Discussion

Comparing and contrasting with previous research endeavors sheds light on diverse perspectives within the academic landscape. Mahabadi's (2013) investigation into the effects of localized materials on French language comprehension among Iranian learners showcased positive outcomes, with participants performing better on localized content. In contrast, the study delved into the perceptions of both Iranian EFL teachers and learners, uncovering nuanced views on the localization of English textbooks.

Yamini and Barjesteh (2016), focusing on the willingness to communicate, identified obstacles faced by EFL teachers in utilizing localized materials. In alignment with their emphasis on teacher attitudes, the present study extends this exploration to learner perspectives, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. Pishghadam and Zabihi's (2012) exploration of EFL teaching in an Islamic-Iranian context emphasized the need for incorporating local specificities into language education. This aligns with the current study's focus on understanding the agreement or disagreement of Iranian EFL teachers and learners with the localization of ELT textbooks, providing a nuanced examination of cultural considerations.

Javdani et al. (2009) study on cross-cultural factors in EFL in Iran highlighted learners' preferences for bilingual/bicultural teachers, emphasizing the impact of cultural background on language learning. In comparison, the present study probes into perceptions regarding the Prospect series, delving into participants' attitudes towards national identity, cultural aspects, and practical intercultural knowledge within the localized materials. Pishghadam and Kamyabi's (2008) investigation into the relationship between accent and deculturation among EFL learners in Iran revealed a negative correlation between mimicking native-like accents and alienation from Iranian culture. In contrast, the current study explores broader aspects of localization, encompassing cultural, practical, and intercultural knowledge aspects in the evaluation of the Prospect series.

Overall, the present study contributes a deeper understanding of Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' attitudes toward localized ELT materials, specifically the Prospect series, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between culture, language, and educational materials in the Iranian context. In Cheng's (2005) theory of tree, where fostering local knowledge is rooted in local values while absorbing relevant global resources, teachers generally showed higher agreement percentages in questions related to basing the curriculum on local values (questions 3 and 4) compared to students. However, in questions 1 and 2 about maintaining cultural assets and fostering local knowledge with roots in traditions, students' agreement levels were relatively lower than teachers', suggesting a potential perception gap in understanding the integration of these elements within the curriculum. The theory of tree suggests discrepancies in perceptions between teachers and students regarding cultural bias and the extent of cultural integration within the curriculum (Cheng, 2005). Students might perceive a lesser incorporation of cultural assets and local identities compared to educators. Their differing expectations regarding cultural integration within the curriculum could contribute to this discrepancy.

6. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the examination of Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions regarding the Prospect series offers valuable insights into the dynamics of educational material reception within the Iranian context. The significant difference found between the perspectives of these two key stakeholders highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing the varied viewpoints that educators and learners hold regarding teaching resources. Despite this disparity, the shared positive view towards this EFL textbook series suggests its general acceptance and perceived utility among most participants. This collective positive sentiment underscores the potential effectiveness and suitability of the series within the Iranian EFL educational framework.

This study can have some pedagogical implications for curriculum developers, educational policymakers, teachers, and instructional designers. These implications can also be directly and indirectly helping EFL learners. Understanding the differing perceptions between teachers and learners regarding the 'Prospect' series is crucial for curriculum developers and policymakers. They can utilize these insights to make informed decisions about the selection and adaptation of teaching materials. Additionally, teachers can benefit from these findings by gaining a deeper understanding of their students' perspectives, enabling them to adjust their teaching methodologies and materials to better suit the preferences and needs of their learners.

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EFL Teachers' Self-regulation Strategies and Teaching Effectiveness: A Mixed-method Study

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Abstract

Teachers' self-regulation (SR), which improves teaching practices, has not received due attention from EFL researchers. This mixed-methods study aimed to examine the SR strategies and teaching effectiveness of English language teachers in Iranian universities and institutes located in three Iranian cities. The first sample of this study comprised 172 EFL teachers (128 males and 44 females) from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 23 to 55 years old. The majority of them majored in the different branches of English—English literature (5 BAs, 30 MAs, 10 PhDs), English teaching (10 BAs, 50 MAs,16 PhDs), and English translation (7 BAs, 28 MAs, 16 PhDs). On the other hand, the second sample comprised 153 EFL learners, who were the students of the participating teachers (49 males and 104 females). The age range varied from 14 to 35, and they came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. A study was conducted Teachers completed a Teacher Self-Regulation Scale (TSRS) questionnaire to declare the types and frequency of SR strategies they used while the participating students completed the Characteristic of Successful Iranian EFL Teachers (CSIET) questionnaire, which included ten questionnaire items. According to the quantitative data analysis, SR strategies and teaching effectiveness were negatively correlated. Moreover, 20 EFL teachers were interviewed to determine their awareness of their teaching effectiveness. The study indicates that teachers were not familiar with SR strategies, which can negatively impact their teaching effectiveness. The findings of the study may have insights for teacher educators, administrators, and university teachers, highlighting the role of SR in EFL teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: EFL, self-regulation, self-regulation strategies, teaching effectiveness

1. Introduction

Researchers have asserted that instructors' self-regulation (SR) may also contribute to successful teaching (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). According to Sahranavard et al. (2018), teachers' use of self-regulatory strategies may greatly improve their ability to design effective lesson plans, teach effectively, and affect students' learning. In the setting of second-language reflective instruction, Language teachers' feelings of self-efficacy are also influenced by their ability to self-regulate (Huang, 2022). Moreover, a teacher that lacks SR may have difficulty scaffolding activities and experiences that increase their students' SR skills (Opdenakker, 2022).

Teaching effectiveness can be influenced by the self-efficacy of teachers. Despite the recognition that SR plays a significant role in teachers' self-efficacy and instructional planning (Opdenakker, 2022), there is a dearth of research examining the specific relationship between SR strategies employed by EFL teachers and their teaching effectiveness. Previous studies have focused on the impact of SR on teachers' self-efficacy and lesson planning (Huang, 2022); however, there are a few studies, which explored the association between EFL teachers' success and their metacognitive abilities, particularly SR, in the area of EFL language teaching (Monshi Toussi et al., 2011). This gap in the literature highlights the need for further investigation into how EFL teachers utilize SR strategies and how these strategies affect their overall teaching effectiveness. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the association between teachers' SR and teaching effectiveness as perceived by students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation (SR) is defined as the "process of setting goals for oneself and engaging in behaviors and cognitive processes that lead to goal completion" (Bandura, 1986, p. 347). Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of SR as part of human agency and exercise of control, encompassing an essential component of humanness with the self-control of individuals over their situations, environments, and contexts. Zimmerman (2000) applied the concept of SR to academic contexts and viewed it as a fundamental element for academic success.

In the field of SR, various overlapping conceptualizations can be found. Gillebaart (2018) defined SR as "a system that guides behavior toward desired end states" (p. 3), mirroring Carver and Scheier's (2012) definition. The literature on teacher SR distinguishes between SR of teaching and SR of

learning from teaching' (Butler, 2003; Kramarski & Michalsky, 2009; Kramarski & Revach, 2009; Randi, 2004). Self-regulated teachers are primarily described as proactive agents who shape educational beliefs, construct suitable instructional practices, and control the teaching environment (Butler, 2003; Randi, 2004). Self-regulated teachers make deliberate and reflective decisions, which emphasize introspection and self-assessment, potentially leading to knowledge modification (Butler, 2003; Randi, 2004). As independent learners, self-regulated teachers employ strategies such as seeking mentorship, obtaining feedback, and researching new ideas (Butler, 2003; Randi, 2004).

Zimmerman (2000) elaborated on the notion of SR as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (p. 14). In other words, people set goals, make plans, decide on strategies to attain these goals, and self-evaluate their performance. They benefit from these experiences in their future performance. Zimmerman (1990) stated individuals set goals, impose structure on the learned materials, and self-assess their performance in the metacognitive phase. Via motivational processes, individuals exhibit persistence, high self-efficacy perceptions, and intrinsic task interest, while behavioral processes enable them to select, organize, and control the performed task, and they are involved in self-instructing and self-reaction during task performance (Bembenutty, 2011).

According to Panadero (2017), self-regulated learning encompasses three main components (i.e., cognition, metacognition, and motivation), which can be further subdivided into several subcomponents: a) cognitive component, which includes simple strategies, problem-solving, and critical thinking; b) metacognitive component, which consists of two general components-knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition, each of which includes several subcomponents as declarative, procedural, conditional knowledge, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, respectively; c) motivation component, which comprises two subcomponents: self-efficacy and epistemological beliefs (Panadero, 2017).

SR supports individuals in learning and coping with demands and competing priorities. It might help teachers to increase their self-knowledge and maintain their motivation as well (Cardelle-Elawar & Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga, 2007). If teachers want to become effective in teaching, they need to become effective learners first. Likewise, they might benefit from SR as well (Dembo, 2001). Luckily, the nature of the teaching profession itself provides opportunities to develop SRL. Developing SRL skills thrive well in environments where learners can engage in complex meaningful tasks and get

opportunities to control their processes and outcomes (Peeters et al., 2014). Moreover, traditional teacher tasks such as lesson plans and assessments can also facilitate teachers' learning and SR (Randi, 2004).

According to Zimmerman (1990), self-regulated learners are aware when they know a fact or possess a skill and when they do not, view the acquisition as a systematic and controlled process, and accept responsibility for their achievement outcomes. Empirical studies demonstrated that SR is positively correlated to academic achievement and other cognitive and affective factors conducive to learning (Yumusak et al., 2007). Moreover, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1990) maintained that self-regulated learning strategies like rehearsal, elaboration, reflection, and goal setting are decisive factors in students' successful performance. Similarly, Zimmerman (1990) revealed that the level of SR predicted the academic achievement of the students.

2.2. Teaching Effectiveness

Researchers agree that teachers are among the most important school-based resources for determining students' future academic success and lifetime outcomes (e.g., Chetty et al. 2014; Rivkin et al. 2005; Rockoff 2004). Consequently, there has been a strong emphasis on improving teacher effectiveness to enhance student learning. Chetty et al. (2014) found that students taught by highly effective teachers, as defined by student growth percentiles and value-added measures, were more likely to attend college, earn more, live in higher-income neighborhoods, save more for retirement, and were less likely to have children during their teenage years.

In this context, effective teachers are described as self-regulated agents who can activate their beliefs to take appropriate actions leading to successful and effective teaching (Randi, 2004). Delfino et al. (2010) added that the complexity of individual and social aspects of teaching roles calls for self-regulated teachers who can demonstrate effective teaching. Overall, effectiveness in teaching typically refers to the types of actions that produce or facilitate learning (Ferguson & Danielson, 2015). In this article, we define teacher effectiveness as the impact of high-quality teaching on student learning in terms of achievement gains. We regard high-quality teaching as the dynamic and interactive process of creating, fostering, adapting, and negotiating learning environments in which all students are supported in activities that have a good chance of improving learning (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007).

2.3. Related Studies

Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010) conducted a study aimed at substantiating the relationship between EFL teachers' critical thinking ability and their student-evaluated professional success. To this end, measures of the critical thinking ability of 67 Iranian EFL teachers were obtained using the Farsi version of Watson-Glaser critical thinking appraisal, form A (WGCTA-FA) (Watson & Glaser, 1980). The Pearson product-moment correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant relationship between the two sets of measures. More specifically, the multiple regression analysis demonstrated that three of the five aspects of critical thinking (i.e., drawing inferences, interpreting evidence, and evaluating arguments) are significantly positively correlated with Characteristics of Successful Iranian EFL Teachers questionnaire scores. The results suggested the need to accommodate critical thinking as an essential aspect of EFL teacher education and teacher evaluation programs and to readdress the concept of EFL/ESL teacher effectiveness with an eye to teachers' critical thinking ability.

Monshi Toussi et al. (2011) investigated the relationship between EFL teachers' SR and teaching effectiveness. In so doing, 76 EFL teachers were selected according to a convenience sampling from different English language institutes in Mashhad, Iran. The findings of the study indicated that teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers are recommended to incorporate self-regulated learning strategies into teacher training programs. In line with the current trends in teaching effectiveness, these programs are expected to undergo a shift from curricula pivoting around solid bases of content area knowledge to equipping teachers with regulating their actions, thoughts, and emotions, as recommended by Dembo (2001). This in turn should encourage teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers to introduce self-regulated learning strategies to teacher training programs. Subsequent data analyses indicated that among the components of SR, intrinsic interest, mastery-goal orientation, and emotional control have the highest correlations with teaching effectiveness. In line with this, prospective teachers should be equipped with self-regulatory strategies to be able to teach these skills and model for their students, since it seems plausible to presume that teachers who lack self-regulatory skills will find it difficult or even impossible to construct the SR of their students. The findings of the present study may also highlight the contributing roles of intrinsic and emotional factors in teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, the contributing effects of intrinsic and emotional factors on teaching, especially those targeted at improving teaching tasks and personal interest, should be considered by the EFL trainers and teachers themselves.

Heydarnejad et al. (2021) investigated the impact of teacher SR on university teachers' emotions and preferred teaching styles. Using the Teacher Self-Regulation Scale (TSRS), emotions questionnaire for teachers (EQT), and Grasha's teaching style inventory (TSI), the research involved 320 university teachers in Iran specializing in English literature, English teaching, and English translation. The results of Path analysis revealed that teachers' SR positively predicts pleasant emotions and student-centered teaching styles (i.e., facilitator and delegator), while negatively predicting unpleasant emotions and teacher-centered teaching styles (i.e., formal authority, personal model, and expert). The findings underscore the significance of teachers' SR in fostering positive emotions and student-centered teaching approaches. These results have practical implications for teacher psychology and education, suggesting avenues for enhancing teachers' psychological well-being and professional development.

This study sought to bridge this gap by exploring the relationship between EFL teachers' SR strategies and their teaching effectiveness, as perceived by their students. Besides, the study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of how EFL teachers utilize SR strategies and how these strategies affect their overall teaching effectiveness. Given the previous background, the following research questions were put forward:

RQ1: Is there any statistically significant relationship between EFL teachers' self-regulated strategies and teachers' effectiveness in language teaching?

RQ2: How are EFL teachers aware of their teaching effectiveness?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The purpose of this research was to examine the link between teachers' SR strategies and teaching effectiveness. To achieve this, two research questions (i.e., Is there any statistically significant relationship between EFL teachers' self-regulated strategies and teachers' effectiveness in language teaching? and Are EFL Teachers aware of their teaching effectiveness?) were formulated. Therefore, this research utilized a sequential mixed-methods design to explore the relationship between SR strategies and effective teaching among different genders, using two questionnaires and an interview as part of a descriptive correlational study followed by a qualitative phase (i.e., QUAN-qual).

3.2. Participants

Convenience sampling was used between April and August 2017 in three big cities in Iran, which relied on the availability of participants. A sample of 172 EFL teachers that consisted of 128 males and 44 females from different socioeconomic backgrounds, aged from 23 to 55 years old. The majority of whom had majored in the different branches of English—English literature (5 BA, 30 MA, 10 Ph.D.), English teaching (10 BAs, 50 MAs,16 PhDs), and English translation (7 BAs, 28 MAs, 16 PhDs). On the other hand, the second sample comprised 153 EFL learners, who were the students of the participating teachers. They were 104 females and 49 males, whose ages varied from 14 to 35, and who came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Their language proficiency varied from elementary to advanced level. This research sampling method was in the case of availability.

3.3. Instruments
3.3.1. Teacher Self-Regulation Scale

To measure EFL teachers' SR, the researcher applied the Teacher Self-Regulation Scale (TSRS), designed and validated by Capa-Aydinet al. (2009). This questionnaire is based on the model proposed by Zimmerman's (2000) self-regulation. It consisted of 40 items using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 6 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Scores on this test represented a teacher's degree of self-regulated strategies, which they applied in classrooms. The internal consistency reliability of TSRS was acceptable (α=0.85).

3.3.2. Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers' Questionnaire

To evaluate language teachers' performance and success in language teaching, the Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers Questionnaire (CSIET), which was designed and validated by Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) was used in this research. It consists of 47 Likert scale items ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). The results of the reliability analysis show that the total reliability of the questionnaire was very high (α=0.94). The results of factor analysis indicated that the questionnaire measures 12 constructs: teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism.

3.3.3. Interview

A structured interview protocol was utilized to collect data from 20 EFL teachers (12 BAs, 4 MAs, 4PhDs) to recognize their awareness of their teaching effectiveness. The CSIET questionnaire was used, consisting of 10 questions. The questions covered topics such as the teacher's interest in the subject, their willingness to help students in and out of the classroom, their behavior towards learners, the way they respect learners as individuals, and their ways of encouraging learners.

3.4. Procedure

For this research, the process of data collection was carried out in English institutes and universities of Qom, Tehran, and Shiraz in Iran between April and August 2017. There were three steps in the data collection procedure of this research: collecting the data on SR strategies, the data collection on effective teaching, and interviewing teachers.

To gather the TSRS questionnaire data, the institutes were selected based on convenience sampling. The teachers were distributed a TSRS questionnaire, which they completed and delivered back to the researcher. The process of data collection took four weeks. The institute teachers of Qom were given a TSRS questionnaire to fill in and deliver back to the researcher in a week. In all the institute teachers delivered back the questionnaire on time, and they completely answered the questions based on their activities. Before distributing the questionnaires, the researcher assured the respondents about the anonymity of their personal information and asked them not to write their names. Simultaneously, a TSRS questionnaire was sent to the professors at the universities of Qom, Tehran, and Shiraz by email. They were asked to send back the questionnaire in three weeks. All the professors answered and delivered back the TSRS questionnaire based on the following time and helped the researcher to achieve the goals. Teachers' questionnaires were coded numerically, and they were asked not to write any names on their questionnaires. They were just required to provide demographic information such as gender, degree, age, and field of study.

Through the CSIET questionnaire, the teachers' performance was evaluated by their students. Simultaneous with the TSRS questionnaire data collection, the CSIET questionnaire was given to the learners of those teachers who took part in the previous part of the study. The researcher gave the CSIET questionnaire to the institute teachers of Qom and asked them to give the questionnaire to their students. Moreover, the researcher emailed the CSIET questionnaire to one of the teachers in Tehran and another one in Shiraz. They were requested to distribute the questionnaires to all students of the professors

that had taken part in the TSRS data collection. Before, the researcher got permission from all of the professors that participated in this study by emailing them and receiving their permission. To receive a reliable evaluation by the learners, the researcher explained the purpose of completing the questionnaire and assured the learners that their views would be confidential. Besides, learners' questionnaires were coded numerically, and they were asked not to write any names on their questionnaires. They were just required to provide demographic information such as gender, degree, age, and major. The students delivered back the questionnaires within four weeks.

The study utilized a structured interview protocol to collect qualitative data on teachers' awareness of their teaching effectiveness. The CSIET questionnaire questions were used. The interviews were recorded. The researcher asked 10 questions individually from 20 teachers to gather data. The interviews were conducted in two ways, with 10 teachers from Qom participating in the face-to-face interviews, and 10 professors from Tehran and Shiraz universities participating in phone interviews. The interviews took an hour on average and were tape-recorded. Some participants did not respond to some questions, but all MA teachers answered completely.

3.5. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researcher applied SPSS version 20. To explore whether there was a correlation between teachers' SR and teachers' effectiveness, the Spearman correlation coefficient was run. Due to the qualitative nature of the interview data for the second question, Dörnyei's (2007) interview analysis guidelines were used to analyze the data.

4. Results

4.1. Results of the First Research Question

To investigate the first research question (i.e., Is there any relationship between EFL teachers' self-regulated strategies and teachers' effectiveness in language teaching?), the data were tested for normality assumption via Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the results of which indicated that the data violate the normality assumption ($p<.05$). Therefore, the researcher used the Spearman correlation coefficient. Table 1 shows the results of descriptive statistics for the questionnaire data.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of TSRS and CSIET Questionnaires

	N	M	SD
CSIET	153	5.3642	.56308
TSRS	172	4.6735	.28006

As shown in Table 1, the CSIET scale yielded a mean score of 5.36 ($SD = 0.56$) based on responses from 153 participants. The mean score of 5.36 suggests that, on average, participants scored around 5.36 on the CSIET scale. This indicates a relatively high level of community teachers' effectiveness in education among the participants. Moreover, the teachers' self-regulation scale (TSRS) resulted in a mean score of 4.67 ($SD = 0.28$) based on data from 172 participants. The mean score of 4.6735 suggests that, on average, participants scored around 4.67 on the TSRS scale. This indicates a moderate level of SR among the teachers.

To address the first research question, the researcher used the Spearman correlation coefficient to measure the strength and direction of association between teachers' SR strategies and teachers' effectiveness (Table 2).

Table 2
Results of Spearman Correlation Coefficient

		Effectiveness	Self-regulation
Effectiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.124
	N	153	153
Self-regulation	Correlation Coefficient	-.125	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.124	-
	N	153	172

As shown in Table 2, the null hypothesis (i.e., There is not any relationship between EFL teachers' self-regulated strategies and teachers' effectiveness in language teaching.) was rejected since the significance value was more than 0.5.

4.2. Results of the Second Research Question

The interview data for the second question were transcribed and analyzed as follows. The first question (i.e., Can you please talk about your interests in the subject matter that you are teaching?) was about teachers' interests in the subject that they teach in classes. While analyzing the

interviews, the researcher considered that 18 teachers used their immediate knowledge and their subjects to teach all lessons, and they did not concentrate on special subjects in books and 2 of them had lesson plans to teach each session based on the book's subjects.

The second question (i.e., How are EFL teachers aware of their teaching effectiveness?) was all about helping their students in and out of the classroom. 15 teachers claimed that they preferred to answer students' questions all in class. They believed that interaction between teachers and students could be the most helpful way to increase learning and student's enthusiasm, and 5 of them preferred to continue answering students' questions out of the class to focus more on their mistakes and to be more friendly with them. For example, a student explained to a teacher that something unexpected happened in a classroom situation, or the teacher gained insight while interacting, and they helped their students to obtain the answers only in the class due to a shortage of teachers' time out of the classes.

Thirdly, in response to the third question (i.e., Are you friendly toward your learners?), All teachers agreed on being strict and almost friendly, which was mostly formal in interactions in universities. They thought it could be the most helpful way. The fourth question (i.e., How do you respect learners as individuals?) was about the ways that teachers could respect learners as individuals. All teachers believed that teachers should be well-behaved towards their learners to respect them, and there should be a friendly relationship between teachers and their students to help them from all aspects.

The fifth (i.e., What ways do you use to create opportunities for discussions and asking questions in whole classes?) and sixth (i.e., 4.2.6. How do you create equal opportunities for the students to participate in discussions?) questions were all about the ways that teachers used to create opportunities to participate in discussions. Twenty teachers claimed that they tried to take turns among students and asked them questions by addressing their names and asking them special questions, also let all students speak individually in the class and have their own time was their best way.

In response to the seventh question (i.e., What are the ways that you utilize to return the test results to your students?), all interviews assumed that they were in shortage of time to give comments on students' papers. They opined that addressing student's most vital mistakes and errors could be the only option.

The eighth (i.e., What are the best ways of encouraging learners?) and ninth (i.e., What are your ways to attend to your students' problems in learning?) questions were dealt with together by the teachers. They believed

that encouragement could be one of the best ways of solving students' problems in learning. They thought that with increase in the number of teachers' classes, they could not take enough time and passion to pay more attention to individuals because they should just create an opportunity for the whole class to get them to help each other and solve their problems.

The last question (i.e., Can you please talk about the effect of your tidiness and cleanliness of your appearance on students?) was about the effect of tidiness and cleanliness on teachers' appearance. Even though five teachers claimed there was no reason for paying attention to appearance, and they did not care about this issue, fifteen teachers believed that they took care of their appearance and tried to be completely tidy. They assumed that tidy teachers could be effective on students' personalities, and it was the most imperative motivation for them to even participate in classes.

5. Discussion

The first purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' SR and their teaching effectiveness. It was found that there was a negative relationship between EFL teachers' self-regulated strategies and teachers' effectiveness in language teaching. This finding was confirmed by the qualitative finding that most teachers did not pay attention to SR too much. This agrees with the qualitative finding that although teacher SR is a significant factor for all teachers, most teachers do not pay attention to SR and teaching effectiveness (Lee et al., 2020; Zhang, 2024). However, the findings of this study contradict the common assumption that teachers' effectiveness solely relies on their subject matter knowledge and teaching experience (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

On the other hand, although it could be crucial to emphasize the positive role of teachers' self-regulatory skills in the successful accomplishments of their professional tasks, it seems that the Iranian educational system has failed to emphasize this issue and to enhance EFL teachers' self-regulatory skills (Gol & Royaei, 2013). Therefore, the more EFL teachers develop their self-regulatory skills, the more likely they are to be evaluated successfully by their students. Considering this, teachers need to be taught how to increase self-regulatory skills, and the educational system should provide this course. This finding may also be due to the study's context (i.e., private language institutes and universities in Iran). Most Iranian language institutes are characterized by their disciplined conduct and the implementation of communicative language teaching approaches (CLT), but universities are not as strictly evaluated as the language institutes. Since most institutes are run by private administrations and rely heavily on language learners' interests,

these institutes and particularly their teachers are constantly evaluated and observed by institute authorities, students, and their parents. Due to this, institute teachers are more effective and self-regulatory than university professors (Kreber et al., 2005). The teachers' training programs should introduce self-regulated learning strategies, and courses for teachers' improvement should be genuine and strong.

6. Conclusions and Implications

According to the present study, it can be concluded that teachers' SR is critical to teaching effectiveness. A major teaching implication of the present study lies in the fact that EFL teachers need courses to become familiar with this aspect of teacher effectiveness and SR. The improvement of EFL teachers' success is directly related to their SR, so teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers should be encouraged to incorporate self-regulated learning strategies into teacher training programs, and there should be genuine and effective courses for teachers. This, in turn, necessitates exploiting and developing courses and preparation programs for EFL teachers that emphasize self-regulatory skills to help them handle their classes and their skills appropriately, pay close attention to their effectiveness in the classroom, and be sensitive to students' emotions. Both more experienced and less experienced teachers, as well as males and females, should be targeted in these programs.

Based on the findings of the present study, developing EFL teachers' SR contributes to their success. Teachers should undergo long training programs to enhance their self-regulatory skills in such a case. In addition to the recent trends in teaching effectiveness, these programs are expected to make a shift from curricula balancing around a solid basis of content area knowledge to those equipping teachers with regulating their actions, thoughts, and emotions, as recommended by Dembo (2001). Thus, effective ways must be found to develop SR in teachers. Furthermore, EFL trainers and teachers should consider how intrinsic factors contribute to effective teaching, especially those aimed at improving teaching tasks.

It can be suggested to other researchers to use the strategies presented in this study to analyze participants in other parts of the country. Also, in this study, the relationship between SR strategies and teachers' effectiveness was not considered across different degrees. In that case, the relationship between these two variables could be investigated in terms of degrees in sufficient numbers of participants across different genders with various academic degrees. Since this study was conducted only in language institutes and universities, further research is needed in high schools in order to compare the results.

In the present study, the researcher faced some limitations. Regarding the limitations of the study, two issues are concerned. it was clear that not much has been done in this study to observe the teachers' classroom practices. The sample of the study was limited, and if more precise results are needed, a much bigger sample is necessary.

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Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy and their Beliefs about the Role of Textbooks in Fostering it: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of learner autonomy; however, the roles of teachers and language materials in fostering in have not received due attention. This mixed methods study investigated the association between what Iranian teachers perceived of LA and what they thought about the role of textbooks in fostering EFL learners' LA, and to what extent they believed the principles of LA in their classrooms. The participating teachers were 200 male and female teachers that taught Iranian tenth-grade EFL textbook in senior high schools of Qom, Arak, and Karaj. The first instrument was a questionnaire developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), which primarily focused on the teachers' perspectives and opinions about LA. The second questionnaire was used to investigate how Iranian EFL teachers think the EFL textbook Vision 1 helps foster LA. The questionnaire was developed based on the LA principles (Fenner & Newby, 2000). The last instrument was an interview protocol that was developed by the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' promoting LA in their teaching. The interview protocol also was based on Fenner and Newbys' (2000) principles. For this study, the questionnaire data were collected through two questionnaires. Moreover, an interview protocol was used to gather qualitative data from 12 teachers, who participated in the interviews (i.e., 2 face-to-face and 10 online interviews). The result of the bivariate correlation test showed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' perception of learner autonomy and their opinions about the LA-fostering role of the Iranian 10th-grade EFL textbook. The results of the interview analysis showed that the principles of learner autonomy were largely approved of by the interviewees. The study has some implications for textbook developers, teacher trainers, and teachers.

Keywords: EFL, Iranian EFL textbooks, learner autonomy, teacher's perceptions

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy (LA) has been a major area of interest in foreign language (FL) teaching for some 30 years (Little, 2022). LA is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision-making about processes regarding their language competence, "they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning" (Littlejohn, 1985, p. 258), and learning can be more focused and purposeful for them (Chan, 2001; 2003). Additionally, the fact that "learners have the power and right to learn for themselves" (Smith, 2008, p. 2) is seen as an essential aspect of LA.

There is evidence in studies to support the claim that "increasing the level of learner control will increase the level of self-determination, thereby increasing overall motivation in the development of learner autonomy" (Chan, 2001, p. 506). Thus, students must be involved in their learning to contribute to the development of LA in language classrooms. Through this process, the autonomous learner establishes "a personal agenda for learning" (Chan, 2003) by setting up directions in the planning, pacing, and evaluating learning process.

To achieve this goal, well-designed textbooks can be a useful tool in fostering LA (Fenner & Newby, 2000) because they serve as the basis for much of the language practice that occurs in the classroom (Richards, 2001), help students to achieve learning targets and objectives, consolidate what they have learned, extend their personal knowledge, include inexplicit focus on learning strategies, and encourage students to reflect on their progress (Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011). In this way, textbooks do play an important potential role in the development of LA.

Moreover, teachers' role in promoting LA is essential, as teachers need to carefully plan their lessons to provide learners with opportunities to develop and exercise their autonomy (Benson, 2001). Not only should teachers have this awareness that they should promote LA, but also they should be bold enough to put a variety of teaching techniques into practice to foster students' autonomy in their daily teaching (Little, 2022). Nevertheless, only limited space in the literature has been awarded to the study of what LA means to teachers. Additionally, teacher's voices and the role of language materials in fostering LA have been largely absent, and little is known about what LA means to language teachers and what tasks and activities the textbook should have to promote LA.

Given the gap in the literature, there is a need to develop an understanding of the association between teachers' perceptions and opinions

about LA and their LA-fostering practices, and what factors the textbook should have to foster LA. To discover and understand teachers' beliefs about LA, there is a requirement to examine what teachers say, intend, and do about facilitating LA. Therefore, given the preceding background, this study aimed to explore Iranian EFL teacher's perceptions about LA and their beliefs about the role of textbooks in fostering LA through the newly developed Iranian EFL textbook (i.e., Vision 1) in fostering LA, besides investigating the alignment of their agreements with LA principles.

2. Literature Review
2.1. An Overview of Learner Autonomy

The origin of the research on autonomy in language teaching and learning dates back to the early 1980s (Holec, 1981). Nowadays, there are many definitions of autonomy, which consider teaching/learning contexts. The most known definition used in the literature is that LA means the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981). Later, Little (1991) described autonomy as "a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning, a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (p.2), Dickinson (1987) outlined autonomy as "a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his [or her] learning and the implementation of those decisions" (p.81). Although Holec's (1981) definition covers all the areas that involve the transfer of control over learning from the teacher to the learner, other researchers do not agree with him and maintain that Holec's account of LA does not take into consideration "the nature of the cognitive capabilities underlying effective self-management of" (Benson, 2001, p.49).

According to Benson (2005), LA has the following three important characteristics. Firstly, LA refers to the language learner's attitude. Language learners are willing to take an active attitude toward their language study and take the initiative to be responsible for the study. Secondly, LA is viewed as a capacity. Through learner training and teacher support, language learners can develop the capacity to learn independently. Finally, the development of LA cannot be accomplished without a supportive environment or context. Here environment includes the teacher's guidance, teaching and learning facilities, and learning materials. Based on the above discussion a language teacher largely plays a crucial role in classroom teaching in fostering LA.

2.2. Teachers' Roles in Fostering LA

Although developing autonomy is a phenomenon within learners, teachers can help learners achieve this goal by fostering LA (Benson, 2001). The traditional view is that teachers should be in control of the classroom and

direct learning. To some, LA may sound more like bringing chaos into the classroom. Nevertheless, teachers can successfully choose between relinquishing control and sharing it with the learners (Lacey, 2007). Fostering autonomy in the classroom is done by providing learners with "opportunities to make significant choices and decisions about their learning" in an informed way (Nunan, 2003, p. 290). That means the learners have a say in what and how they learn, and the teacher encourages this by giving the learners opportunities and tools to make informed decisions regarding their learning. This applies both to choosing appropriate material and learning strategies.

There are various ways of describing teacher's roles and the principles for fostering LA. However, they all have the commonalities as follows. First, the nature of autonomy decides that the classroom should be learner-centered and context-based (e.g., Cotterall, 2000). Second, teachers need to raise learners' metacognitive awareness of the learning process (Cotterall, 2000; Sinclair, 2000). Third, teachers need to give opportunities to help learners exercise their autonomy in their learning—from setting goals, and choosing relevant materials, to the use of strategies and evaluation (Martinez, 2008; Nunan, 1997; Sinclair, 2000). Fourth, teachers should constantly equip learners with various learning strategies and skills to effectively take control of their learning (e.g., Sinclair, 2000).

In the aspect of how teachers should promote LA in practice, however, there is "little empirical evidence available for the effectiveness of any particular approach" (Benson, 2001, p. 110), which makes the beliefs of the teachers important in fostering LA. It is clear, therefore, from the above illustration that the teacher's role in fostering LA should be well-considered (Little, 2022).

2.3. The LA-Fostering role of Language Materials

A textbook has long been considered the most preferred instructional material in ELT. They are best seen as a resource in achieving aims and objectives that have already been set concerning learner needs (Cunningsworth, 1995). Fenner and Newby (2000) demonstrated that textbooks can help promote self-directed learning. Nunan (1997) illustrated how the principles of LA can be incorporated into learning materials. He has given examples of ways to modify materials in terms of experiential content and learning procedures so that they can assist in the development of LA. Textbooks can include tasks focusing on the learning process and encourage learners to reflect on their learning progress (Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011). Inclusion of such tasks in language textbooks make learners less dependent on the teacher and gradually helps them develop as independent learners. It can

be said that the concept of developing autonomy and the use of textbooks are not mutually incompatible. Therefore, textbooks do have a potential value in the development of LA.

All the same, Green (2000) criticized that textbooks are potential obstacles to the development of LA. It seems that the whole concept of developing LA may coincide with the use of language textbooks because most textbooks determine the learning progression; therefore, they may not fulfill the individual needs of all learners. All in all, although LA has caught the attention of many scholars and researchers in the past few decades, surprisingly the degree of LA-fostering role of language textbooks has not been studied enough. It may probably be due to the controversy over the role and use of language textbooks in fostering LA.

2.4. Related Research

In the past decades, several studies have investigated LA and language teacher beliefs regarding LA. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) shed light on teachers' positive theoretical dispositions of LA and their views about the feasibility of promoting it in practice. They also explored teachers' views on the factors that hinder the development of LA. The most salient finding of their study was that learners lacked motivation with limited experience of independent learning. They also found that institutional factors (e.g., fixed curricula) were barriers to LA fostering.

Al-Asmari (2013) found that both male and female teachers agreed with the involvement of students in making decisions about their language learning. Findings also showed that there was a great tendency for autonomous learning among teachers, and they believed that the autonomous learner should have an active positive role in the learning process and make use of learning opportunities.

Daflizar and Kamil (2022) found that the EFL university students felt good about their capacity for independent learning and participated in several independent activities within and outside of the classroom. The participants' usage of language learning strategies and their opinions of their skills, as well as the practices of independent English language learning outside of the classroom, were found to be significantly correlated.

Singh Negi and Laudari (2022) used a mixed-method research design to examine students' engagement in autonomous learning and discussed the difficulties and strategies of learner autonomy in an EFL context. They gathered from students (n = 84) and teachers (n = 20) from various colleges (n

= 15) located in Far Western Nepal. According to this research, students relied too much on their teachers, and teachers often acted as though they were spoon-feeding their students throughout class.

Almusharraf and Martínez Agudo (2023) did a qualitative case study that involved instructors as participants over an extended length of time to investigate their methods and their agentive roles on the language development of female students as an agentive self within the sociocultural environment of language acquisition. The data were gathered through audio recordings of instructional practices, in-person semi-structured interviews with six teachers from two distinct classrooms, and observations of two of the six teachers in the classroom. The results show that students' intrinsic motivation to learn new words and their level of intrinsic engagement are significantly influenced using autonomous learning.

There is a growing body of research studies on autonomous language learning in Iran. Zohrabi (2011) used a reciprocal approach to enhance language learning autonomy among 63 students in an English for general purposes (EGP) course. The researcher used different instruments to collect data (i.e., informal needs analysis, informal discussions with students, field notes, continuous observation of students, journals, and diaries) to give freedom and autonomy to the students to learn English based on their needs and aims. Results showed that the students in an autonomous classroom setting can learn the language based on their needs and aims. Most recently, Ahmadi and Izadpanah (2019) sought to study whether learner autonomy and thinking style were related. They found that there was a correlation between linguistic anxiety and thinking style.

Given the previous literature review, some of the previous studies that addressed LA were generally based on the learner's perception of LA (e.g., Alibakhshi, 2015; Almusharraf & Martínez Agudo, 2023; Singh Negi & Laudari, 2022) and mostly done in universities, while the beliefs of teachers about the role of textbooks have never been addressed. Therefore, the following research questions were put forward:

RQ1: Is there any statistically significant relationship between teachers' perception of LA and their opinions about the LA-fostering role of the Iranian 10th-grade EFL textbook (i.e., Vision 1)?
RQ2: How is LA fostered by Iranian EFL teachers?

3.Method

3.1. Design

A mixed-method research design was selected to answer the research questions of this study. This research approach is used when this integration provides a better understanding of the research problem than either of each alone (Johnson et al., 2007). Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires. Qualitative data consisted verbal and textual data that the researcher gathered through interviews. The data collection was based on sequential explanatory design, in which the collection and analysis of quantitative data was followed by the collection and analysis of the qualitative data (Hashemi & Babaei, 2013). Priority was given to the quantitative data, and the findings were integrated during the interpretation phase of the study.

3.1.Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 200 male (40%) and female (60%) Iranian teachers, who were teaching the newly developed the EFL textbook Vision 1 in senior high schools of Qom, Arak, and Karaj. Forty-four percent of the participating teachers had 15 to 19 years of teaching experience, 41 percent had experience in teaching EFL from 20 to 24 years, and the remaining 13 percent had more than 25 years of EFL teaching experience. The 56.9 percent of the participants were BA holders, 42.5 were MA graduates, and the remaining 1.5 percent did not mention their last qualification. From among the participants, twelve teachers voluntarily participated in the face-to-face (n=2) and online (n=10) interviews conducted by the researcher.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Materials

The material of this study was the Iranian senior high school EFL textbook Vision 1 (Alavi Moghaddam et al., 2016). This book consists of two volumes: a student book and a workbook. The student book includes 4 lessons; each lesson consists of different parts (i.e., get ready, conversation, new words and expressions, reading, grammar, listening and speaking, pronunciation, writing, what you learned). Compared with the previous high school books which were based on traditional approaches in language teaching and learning and taught for 25 years without any change in Iran, the new textbook values speaking, listening, and writing, which was really absent in the previous Iranian EFL textbooks and there is special attention on pre-teaching and post teaching activities. The cultural values of Iran are also considered in different parts of lessons. The workbook has different kinds of activities (i.e., identifying, selecting, matching, ranking, sorting and sequencing, producing, guided practice, controlled practice, and opinion gap activities).

3.2.2.Instruments

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods of research to examine teacher's perceptions of LA and whether local authors have integrated principles of LA into newly developed senior ELT textbooks in Iran. To answer the four research questions of this study, data were collected from three instruments.

The questionnaire developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) based on Borg (2012), was used to explore the teachers' perceptions of LA. The questionnaire included 37 items based on the ten-point Likert scale. The questionnaire included no right or wrong answers, and it primarily focused on the teachers' perspectives and opinions about LA. It enjoyed established reliability and validity for measuring teachers' beliefs about LA (Cronbach's α = .96). This instrument has proved to be highly influential in the consideration of present research methods, given the considerable work they carried out drafting, reviewing, redrafting and piloting, before finalizing their questionnaire (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Another questionnaire was used to investigate how Iranian EFL teachers think the Iranian EFL textbook Vision 1 (Alavi Moghaddam, 2016) helps foster LA. The questionnaire was developed based on the list of LA principles drawn by Fenner and Newby (2000). This includes principles of LA which were considered by 50 textbook authors and publishers before they published textbooks. This list of principles of LA was adapted and used in this questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 21 items. The reliability of the questionnaire was computed, and it resulted in a good level of reliability (Cronbach's α = .93).

The other instrument was an interview protocol that was developed by the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of teachers' evaluation and practice of promoting LA in their teaching. The interview protocol also was based on Fenner and Newbys' (2000) principles. The purpose of the interviews was to identify the underlying practical issues from the teachers' point of view that led to their assessment prospect of LA in high school education in Iran. The interview protocol was arranged according to Dörnyei's (2007) guidelines.

3.3. Procedure

In adapting Borg's questionnaire these changes were made. Section 1, which comprised 37 items, and Section 3 were used with some minor changes in their wordings. For example, questions concerning the specific institution on which Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) based their study were changed. Section 2, which investigated desirability and feasibility of LA and section 5 were eliminated.

The other questionnaire, which investigated how Iranian EFL teachers think the EFL textbook Vision 1 helps foster LA, was administered to participants. An online instrument was selected given the speed with which it can be administered without geographical constraints (an unrestricted compass), and its low cost to administrate the questionnaires to a broader geographical region.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and online. Two face- to-face semi-structured interviews were administered, with interviewees' responses to the questionnaire serving as the basis for question direction and discussions. They lasted approximately 15-20 minutes; the interviews were conducted in a neutral, non-academic environment convenient to the interviewees in English, and were digitally recorded. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data, collected through two questionnaires, were subjected to descriptive statistics to answer the first two research questions. Pearson correlation was used to probe any significant relationship between total autonomy and belief to probe the third research question. Cronbach's alpha reliability indices were also computed for the questionnaires.

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed through a process of qualitative thematic analysis (Newby, 2010). This process involves reading the data carefully, identifying key issues in them, and then organizing these issues into a set of broader categories. The questions in the questionnaire and the interview schedule provided an initial structure within which specific answers could then be further categorized. Given the mixed methods nature of this study, data analysis also involved a comparison of the questionnaire and interview data. This allowed the researcher to corroborate particular conclusions from two perspectives and to obtain a more meaningful understanding of why teachers answered particular questionnaire items in the ways they did.

4. Results
4.1. Results for the First Research Question

In the first phase of the study the participants completed the teachers' perception of LA questionnaire. The results of descriptive statistics for the data collected through the Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Autonomy Questionnaire and its Components

	Min	Max	M	SD
Age and Learning Autonomy	0	5	2.59	.99
Teacher Role	1	5	2.58	.94
Technical Perspective	0	5	2.57	.98
Proficiency & Learning Autonomy	1	5	2.56	1.01
Psychological Perspective	1	5	2.55	1.03
Benefits of Learning Autonomy	1	4	2.55	.94
Political Perspective	1	4	2.52	.92
Cultural Universal	0	5	2.52	1.11
Learner Centeredness	0	4	2.50	1.03
Social Perspective	0	5	2.50	.96

Table 1 shows that the mean scores ranged from 2.59 for age and learning autonomy to a low of 2.50 for social perspective and learner-centeredness. According to the results, the second most attractive component was the teachers' role with a mean score of 2.58.

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for the six components of the researcher-made questionnaire on teachers' beliefs about LA in textbooks, based on Fenner and Newbys' (2000) list.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Beliefs

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
External resources	200	1	5	3.45	.958
Selecting materials	200	2	5	3.29	.678
Self-reflection	200	1	4	3.24	.772
Setting goal	200	2	4	3.15	.666
Self-assessment	200	1	4	2.94	.748
Selecting learning strategy	200	2	5	2.94	.705

As shown in Table 2, the mean scores ranged from 3.45 for external resources to a low of 2.94 for self-assessment and selecting a learning strategy. The second most supported orientations are selecting materials and self-reflection with a mean score of 3.29 and 3.24, respectively. The second least supported component is setting goals with a mean score of 3.15. To answer the question of whether there was any statistically significant relationship between teachers' perception of LA and their opinions about LA fostered by *Vision 1*, Pearson correlation was conducted. The normality of questionnaire data was checked using skewness and kurtosis in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality Assumption

	N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Autonomy	200	-.044	.172	-.255	.349	.342	-1.02
Belief	200	-.020	.172	-.116	-.006	.342	-.017

As shown in Table 3, the assumption of normality was met because the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were lower than +/- 1.96.

Table 4
Pearson Correlation between Belief and Autonomy

		Autonomy
	Pearson Correlation	.87**
Belief	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	200

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

As depicted in Table 4, a Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between belief and autonomy. Based on the results, the null hypothesis (i.e., there is no statistically significant relationship between teachers' perception of autonomy and their belief.) was rejected, r (198) = .879, p = .000. It can be concluded that there was a significant relationship between the two variables.

4.2. Results for the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question, ten interviews were conducted face-to-face, and two interviews were run online. The questions of the interview were developed based on the principles of LA by Fenner and Newby (2000). In what follows, the prominent findings from the interviewees' responses to the questions are presented.

4.2.1. Do your students have any power to set or modify the goals and objectives of the tasks?

This question aimed to evaluate principle 1/A. Eight teachers believed that they had to cover the syllabus because the textbook was published by the Ministry of Education.

> *Excerpt 1:* The principle of allowing learners to be aware of their objectives is a fundamental factor in boosting the learners' autonomy.
> *Excerpt 2*: Opportunities for learners to determine their level are not provided at all educational levels investigated.

4.2.2. Do you give your students the opportunities to choose content of learning based on their interests and needs?

The second question in the interview was based on principle 3/A. Eight cases supported this principle while the rest of them disagreed with it due to the lack of time. Based on the answers given, teachers asserted that it is important for the teachers to implement the opportunity for their learners to choose the content of learning and to express their feelings towards the class material.

> *Excerpt 1:* "The students are told to do the task they are assigned, but they are sometimes permitted to add one or two items to the exercise existing in the course book."
> *Excerpt 2*: "Lack of time and a tight syllabus were another problem pointed out by the teachers."

4.2.3. Do your students have any power to choose their activity types?

The third question aimed to explore principle 2/A. Seven teachers disagreed with the theme of the question.

> *Excerpt 1:* "The type of activity that is completed by the learners can play an important role in fostering autonomy in learners."
> *Excerpt 2:* "The learners did not have any power to choose their activities."

4.2.4. Do your students have any chances to make decisions on the execution aspects of the tasks such as brainstorming ideas, planning working steps, and collection of information?

The fourth question, which was supposed to cover the principles 3/B, 3/E, and 3/D. Nine teachers approved of the idea. For them, brainstorming and collecting information can contribute to a better learning opportunity since the learners have the chance to collect and possibly exchange ideas.

> *Excerpt 1:* "For making a poster in the class, the students should be allowed to create their ideas and talk about the topics. Alternatively, the students were asked to talk about and choose a topic. They were then put in groups to collect information in order to discuss the case."
> *Excerpt 2:* "The tasks and brainstorming ideas should be planned by teachers."

4.2.5. Do you encourage your students to bring their own materials into class?

This question, which aimed to check principles 3/B and 3/D, received different answers from the teachers. Ten of the interviewees approved of the idea whereas only two interviewees answered negatively.

Excerpt 1: "It would be so helpful to get help from students in collecting extra materials."
Excerpt 2: "The materials should also be developed by authorities."

4.2.6. Do you allow your students to choose and monitor their own learning strategies?

Question six was based on principles 2/B and 3/E, which say that learning strategy involves two factors, being aware of the strategies and being able to choose the most suited strategies. Only one interviewee disagreed with the sixth question since they believed that it would be impossible in high school classes and maybe it could be done in private institutes, while the other 11 teachers approved of the idea.

Excerpt 1: "The students are sometimes allowed to utilize different ways to present their ideas. For example, in discussion tasks, they need to choose a topic first, and then they work in groups in class. One group can go to the computer to surf the net to find some information. Another group can talk with others to brainstorm. Some of them may bring photos to share in class with others."

Excerpt 2: "They are able to choose their strategies to learn and they can choose to work in groups or independently. They work in the same group all the time but they share ideas or they can get some ideas from others."

4.2.7. Do you allow your students to monitor and assess their own learning progress?

The seventh question was developed to check principle 4. Nine interviewees approved of the idea, stating that they let their students check their exercises and correct their mistakes. The remaining three interviewees were negative.

Excerpt 1: "Yes. For example, before handing in their writing task, they may be given a checklist to see whether they have used the correct tenses and stuff like that."

Excerpt 2: "I don't pay much attention to their learning progress; I just do my task I mean I just teach and I never have time to pay attention to them one by one because the classes are very crowded."

4.2.8. Do you ask your students to correct their own errors?

In addition to the previous question, question 8 is connected to a self-assessment factor (i.e., principle 4). Surprisingly, all interviewees agreed with the idea.

Excerpt 1: "I ask students to check their responses."

Excerpt 2: "My students are allowed to discuss their answers in groups."

4.2.9. Do you encourage learners to reflect on their choices of the tasks?

The ninth question, which is based on Principle 5, has two sections: learners' reflection on their choice and their learning. Seven teachers were positive while the remaining five were negative.

> *Excerpt 1:* "I always invite my students to share what they liked and disliked."
>
> *Excerpt 2:* "I ask them what they learned, and how they felt about the tasks."

4.2.10. Do you think the tasks in the textbooks can help to promote LA? How effective do you think they are?

Question 10 is to discover the relevance of principle 3/D to using additional resources in the class to help the learners complete their learning process. Eight teachers believed that the textbooks were not enough to promote LA. The four remaining teachers thought that the tasks in the textbook allowed students to look for information and knowledge and develop their creativity.

> *Excerpt 1:* "The textbooks just provide some basic information and do not encourage students to find additional resources to foster LA."
>
> *Excerpt 2:* "The textbooks help them develop their creativity although the design of the tasks is quite controlled."

4.2.11. Which level of students would you like to allow to take more responsibility? Why?

As to the 11th question, which aimed to check principle 5, two teachers stated that they gave responsibility to intermediate and higher-level students, another two teachers agreed that all levels can take responsibility for their learning, and two other interviewees preferred their lower-level students to take responsibility. The rest of the interviewees were against the theme of this question.

> *Excerpt 1:* "My average intermediate learners are allowed to take responsibility."
>
> *Excerpt 2:* "The students at higher proficiency levels can make better choices."

4.2.12. What do you think is the best way to encourage students to learn English independently?

One dimension of learning independently is the ability to choose learning materials or to produce learning content (Fenner & Newby, 2000). All interviewees confirmed that motivation is the most important factor and stated if they get motivated to learn, they will make use of every opportunity to learn by themselves. Only one was negative as to the theme of this question.

> *Excerpt 1:* "If the students get interested in learning, they will learn better. But it is not easy to find something that all students like."
> *Excerpt 2:* "Due to time limitations, it would be impossible to take any action in encouraging them."

Overall, what emerges here is a picture of a group of teachers who are, in theory, positively disposed towards LA and familiar with key concepts commonly used in defining and promoting it. As to the working context, though, these teachers are much less positive about the extent to which autonomy can be productively fostered in their learners. Opportunities for learners to exercise their autonomy do exist both within and outside the education system; however, there was a general sense that the learners lacked the capacity and willingness to take advantage of these opportunities. Teachers also felt hindered by a top-down curriculum in which content and assessment were defined top-down. Nonetheless, most of the teachers felt that they did, to some extent, foster LA in their practices. All the same, the practices they adopted in doing so varied significantly as did their judgments about what constituted LA among their students.

5. Discussion

The first purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers' perception of autonomy and their LA beliefs. Based on the results, there was a significant positive relationship between the two variables. All in all, it was found that the learners' age and the teacher's role had the most important place in teachers' perception of LA. The social perspective and the learners' centeredness were not supported much by the respondents. This result can be due to the teachers' tendency to work alone and not being part of a team. Technical perspective and proficiency level occupied the second and third places, respectively, while the psychological issues were in the middle in terms of importance.

The findings of the second questionnaire revealed that teachers mostly supported the external resources and selecting materials items in connection with their beliefs about the textbook Vision 1. However, learning strategies and self-assessment, which were supported by most teachers in the interviews, did not receive much attention from the questionnaire respondents. It suggests that the results of the questionnaire data and interviews did not match to some extent. This is against Cotteral (2000), who opined that learning how to learn is a procedure that helps learners become aware of the learning process, and learning strategies help them to develop positive attitudes toward language and language learning. Based on the results from the interviews, the setting goals component was not favored by most interviewees. According to them, they had

to cover the syllabus so that there remained no place for their students to build the goals of the task. Self-assessment did not have a good place in the questionnaire results. However, it was confirmed by the majority of the teachers in the interviews as an LA principle.

Lack of attention to the social dimension by the respondents can represent the fact that teachers are not certain that cooperation and social interaction (as opposed to individual work) play in fostering LA. The present result contradicts Dam et al.'s (1990) view that LA is an independent and cooperative capacity in a learner as a social being. It was also found that the Ministry of Education and policymakers are the main challenges for teachers to help learners become autonomous. The educational system does not involve teachers and learners in selecting materials, objectives of the curriculum, teaching styles, and assessment methods.

Due to the policy of the Ministry of Education, the participants of the present study felt that they were not able to promote LA because of the centrality of the objectives, types of materials, and ways of evaluation. This finding is in line with Benson (2011), Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), and Alibakhshi and Rezaei (2013) who found that there are some constraining factors involved in the formal learning environment that may be viewed as hindrances to the development of LA. The results are also in line with Reinders and Lazaro (2011), who argued that teachers believed that learners did not understand the importance of developing autonomy, lacked the skills to learn independently, and were not accustomed to being asked to take responsibility for their learning.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that most Iranian EFL teachers are somehow aware of LA principles, and their beliefs about LA mostly correspond with their opinions about the LA-fostering role of the particular textbook they used in a classroom although there are some praxis gaps between their beliefs and practices. Therefore, this implies that materials developers should draw their attention to the incorporation of LA elements into the EFL textbooks. Moreover, publishers should follow the LA principles when releasing textbooks. Hence, in light of the findings, there is still a place for fostering LA in the textbooks, which could help the learners stay less dependent. Therefore, there is a need for authors and publishers to reflect on and modify the design of the textbooks so that they can foster the development of LA. It is crucial that EFL textbooks contain activities that lead learners to set their goals, monitor their learning progress, and reflect on what and how they have learned.

Managers and administrators should empower EFL teachers and increase their awareness about their role in fostering LA in learners as a major goal in language learning. Another implication of the findings is that they should raise the awareness of the teachers and even the students as to the development of LA through training elements or courses that would aim to provide them with the strategies to take responsibility for their learning. The result of this study can be illuminating for EFL teacher trainers since they should promote LA in their workshops. This study also highlights the importance of boosting the teachers' perception of their students' autonomy. In fact, the teachers should follow the LA guidelines as a reference when choosing or suggesting textbooks.

All in All, the result of this study cannot be generalized to all EFL learning contexts because of some complications and limitations. First, this study was limited in terms of the number of participants. Therefore, the sample might not be representative of the population of EFL teachers. Moreover, since the researcher could employ other qualitative data collection instruments (e.g., diaries, observations, focus group interviews), the result of the current study may not be dependable enough.

Therefore, it would be beneficial to replicate this research project with a larger sample of EFL and ESL teachers and instructors. Moreover, replication of this study with male and female teachers in other contexts is necessary to understand how well the findings can be generalized to other contexts. Furthermore, future studies can be conducted with the samples of language learners to as they are the parties involved in using the textbooks. Future investigation can also examine the differences and similarities between teachers' and students' perceptions of LA factors to see if a match or mismatch between teachers' and learners' perceptions of and beliefs about LA factors may influence the learners' performance.

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