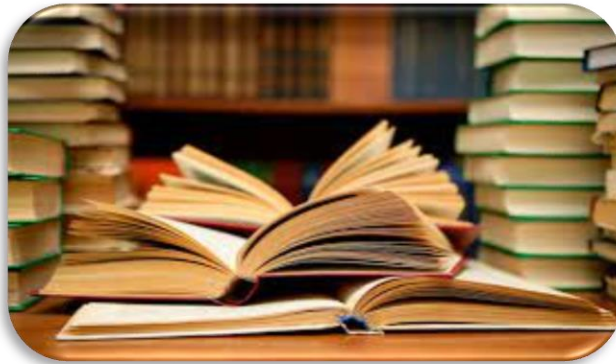




Research Paper



The Effect of Learner-Oriented Assessment (LOA) on the Development of Iranian EFL Learners' Interlanguage Pragmatic (ILP) Competence

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ABSTRACT

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) is a complex dimension of English language for learners. Learner-oriented assessment (LOA) can be utilized as a strategy to help learners acquire ILP. This study sought to investigate the effect of learner-oriented assessment (LOA) on the development of Iranian EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence. To this end, a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test post-test design was used. Participants consisted of 30 conveniently selected female intermediate EFL learners from a language institute in Mashhad. For data collection, Quick Placement Test (QPT), a researcher-made LOA Questionnaire and Written Discourse-Completion Test (WDCT) were used. Data analysis was run using exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha Test, and mixed repeated measures ANOVA. The results showed that the LOA Questionnaire enjoyed high validity and reliability. Moreover, it was proved that LOA was significantly effective on the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence. The results have some implications for EFL teachers, learners and curriculum planners.

Keywords: *Assessment, Interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence, Learner-oriented assessment (LOA)*

تأثیر ارزیابی فراگیر-محور بر گسترش توانش کاربردشناختی بین زبانی فراگیران ایرانی زبان انگلیسی

کاربردشناسی بین زبانی یکی از ابعاد پیچیده زبان انگلیسی برای فراگیران است. ارزیابی فراگیر-محور (LOA) را می توان بعنوان راهبردی برای کمک به فراگیران در یادگیری کاربردشناسی بین زبانی بکار گرفت. این تحقیق به دنبال بررسی تأثیر ارزیابی فراگیر-محور بر گسترش توانش کاربردشناختی بین زبانی فراگیران ایرانی زبان انگلیسی بود. به این منظور از یک طرح شبه-آزمایشی تک گروهی پیش آزمون پس آزمون استفاده شد. شرکت کنندگان شامل ۳۰ فراگیر زن زبان انگلیسی سطح متوسط بودند که از طریق نمونه گیری راحت از یکی از موسسات زبان مشهد انتخاب شده بودند. برای جمع آوری داده ها از آزمون تعیین سطح سریع، یک پرسشنامه محقق ساخته LOA، و تست تکمیل گفتمان کتبی (WDCT) استفاده شد. تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها با استفاده از تحلیل عاملی اکتشافی، تحلیل عاملی تاییدی، تست کرونیباخ آلفا، و انوای اندازه گیری های مکرر ترکیبی انجام شد. نتایج حاکی از روایی و پایایی پرسشنامه LOA بود. همچنین، نتایج نشان داد که ارزیابی فراگیر-محور بر گسترش توانش کاربردشناختی بین زبانی فراگیران ایرانی زبان انگلیسی تأثیر معناداری دارد. نتایج کاربردهایی برای مدرسان زبان انگلیسی، فراگیران و برنامه ریزان درسی دارد.

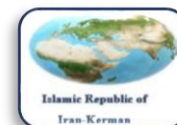
کلمات کلیدی: ارزیابی، توانش کاربردشناختی بین زبانی (ILP)، ارزیابی فراگیر-محور (LOA)

INTRODUCTION

In the process of language learning, learners begin to compare their first language with the second/foreign language and, over time, they invent a new language that is an idiosyncratic combination of the rules and regulations in both first and second language. Such an innovation by language learner is called interlanguage (IL). IL was first presented by the American etymologist Selinker (1972) alluded to the linguistic framework displayed when a grown-up language learner tries to show implications in the language being studied. IL is seen as a different linguistic framework, plainly unique in relation to both the students' first and target languages, yet connected to both of them (Tarone, 2001). IL consists of the same subcategories as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics that each of which with some specific linguistic features. Semantics is regarded as the study of postulates; syntax is the study of phrases and sentences; and pragmatics investigates linguistic performances and the settings in which they are executed (Stalnaker, 1998). Pragmatics refers to “the study of language from the perspective of its users which focuses on the choices they make, the challenges they face during social interactions, and the impact their language use has on others involved in communication” (Crystal, 1997, p. 301).

Among the subcategories of IL, pragmatics has been well-studied in the literature. In this regards, Huang (2007) noted that pragmatics touches upon the efficient investigation of meaning concerning language use in context. At the point when pragmatics is contemplated amidst two languages, ILP appears to be more proper. In other words, pragmatics is normally referred to interlanguage pragmatics. ILP deals with IL features, which is identified with learning the language and pragmatics which is the investigation of language in each specific situation. Hence, ILP considers learning the second/foreign language in the specific situation it is applied. In line with this, Kasper and Rose (2002) offered a comprehensive definition of ILP: “As the study of second language use, interlanguage pragmatics examines how non-native speakers comprehend and produce actions in a target language. As the study of second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics investigates how L2 learners develop the ability to understand and perform actions in a target language” (p. 5). Many learners still struggle to use the language appropriately in real-world situations. This highlights the critical need for explicit pragmatics instruction in EFL teaching/learning, especially given that formal education is often the primary exposure to the target language for most learners. The challenge of learning English pragmatics is even greater in EFL environments compared to ESL settings. This is primarily due to the limited opportunities for EFL learners to communicate with native speakers. Cook (2001) noted that language classrooms frequently prioritize academic language learning over communicative proficiency. This emphasis on decontextualized language practice, limits learners' exposure to the social and cultural aspects of language use and consequently hinders the development of pragmatic competence. While linguistic forms can be developed through grammar study and practice, language use is not governed by fixed rules. The complex interplay of various factors influences appropriate language use, often leaving EFL learners uncertain about how to improve their pragmatic skills in their interlanguage. Furthermore, the lack of authentic, learner-centered teaching methods further hinders the expansion of pragmatic skills in EFL learners.

Due to the significance of ILP and pragmatic competence among second and foreign language learners, choosing an appropriate assessment method is necessary to examine the learners' understanding and knowledge. According to Rich (2011), assessments are not required to just examine what learners



have learned; rather, there can be techniques for motivating students to learn as they are doing an assignment or while they are being assessed. Learner-oriented learning requests that students establish their own goals for learning and specify the assets and exercises that will enable them to meet those aims (Jonassen, 2000). In a learner-oriented teaching framework, assessment is utilized to consider the importance of increasing scores as well as advancing learning (Weimer, 2002). In this regard, teachers are required to help their students to be more occupied with both the learning and assessment procedures. Carless (2015) asserts that in a learner-oriented assessment (LOA), it is contended that when learners are inquired basically to show what they have understood, they devote additional time, provide a more innovative answer, and are frequently more prosperous than the time they are assessed traditionally.

LOA requires the students to show that they comprehend what they are provided by re-explaining it in a new way and learning deeply (Atherton, 2005). If teachers try to understand the way learners comprehend a point, they could help them to learn more than before (Bransford et al., 2000). According to Purpura (2004), "Learning- Oriented Assessment (LOA) involves the collection and interpretation of evidence about performance so that judgements can be made about further language development" (p. 236). Carless (2015) asserts that the aim of LOA is not to question other formats of assessment approaches; rather, it focuses on bringing about a learning-based assessment program that attaches greater importance to the learning factors than measurement ones. Consequently, it is associated with formative assessment as it focuses on the learning process by combining learning and assessment. LOA is an approach to language learning rather than a step-by-step method. In addition, it places much of the learning workload on the shoulders of the learners. As a result, and due to different understandings of this approach, what happens in the classroom may differ from one context to another. This also urges the need to focus on the teachers' practices in LOA classes. The success of a teaching method in a particular context depends on several variables. Above discussions imply that LOA can be utilized as a strategy to help learners acquire ILP. More interestingly, in a recent study in the context of Iran by Esfandiari and Allaf-Akbary (2024), it was shown that English interaction among learners was significantly enhanced under the effect of LOA. This can be a promising sign of LOA effectiveness on learning ILP. However, few studies have investigated LOA in the context of Iran in general and in relation to ILP in particular. Hence, more studies are required to take advantage of LOA in an attempt to reduce problems of EFL learners with learning ILP. With a view to this, the present study sought to investigate the effect of LOA on the development of Iranian EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) competence. To this end, the two following research questions were formulated:

To what extent does the LOA Questionnaire enjoy validity and reliability measures in the assessment of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence?

To what extent is learner-oriented assessment (LOA) Questionnaire effective in the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

One of the main theoretical frameworks in this study is "social constructivism" as suggested by Vygotsky (1987). LOA is a reform to meet the changing needs of the society as observed and perceived by the



people in the society. It is hope that by doing so, educators can produce autonomous learners with practical knowledge. Reality in the mind of LOA educators is not accepted based on standards of education rather it is accepted as it is formed in the mind of the learners. Such philosophy in education accords with the concept of social-constructivism and stands against positivist understanding of reality.

Another significant theory which is used in this study is Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory is also proposed by Vygotsky (1978) and emphasizes that learning occurs by entering others' proximal zone of knowledge. In turn, the theory urges the need for collaboration, formative assessment, peer feedback, etc. all of which are present in LOA.

Empirical Studies

Ashegh Navaie (2018) sought to investigate how LOA could impact the pronunciation learning of EFL learners. According to the results, LOA affects pronunciation abilities. Also, it was discovered that LOA significantly affects the learners' retention of pronunciation knowledge. Beikmohammadi et al. (2020) explored Iranian EFL university teachers' beliefs and practices of LOA of reading comprehension. The results showed that in their reading comprehension assessment, Iranian teachers apply both traditional and alternative assessment methods. Almost half of the teachers said they inspire learners to use self-assessment and peer assessment. In addition, it was accepted by the teachers that proper feedback motivates learners to advance their learning.

Beltrain (2014) worked on learning- oriented assessment and considered the learning dimensions of it. He discussed some of the key factors concerning the learning dimension of LOA, and mentioned that this approach does not aim at undermining other approaches or assessment practices. Instead, the aim of LOA is to make a better informed assessment culture, with the special focus on learning at different levels of curriculum and instruction. To his idea, LOA seeks to maximize learning and implement careful planning and use assessment tasks aligned with learning objectives, cognitive processes, the people involved, and the characteristics of learning context.

Carroll (2017) investigated the learning- oriented assessment perspective on scenario- based assessment. He believed that standardized traditional testing cannot fulfill the requirements of 21st century and this inadequacy has led to the emergence and development of a novel way of testing which is called LOA. He came up with a framework to integrate instruction, learning and assessment with the use of which assessments can be validated. This study indicated the extent to which the LOA framework can support the SBA development theoretically.

Smith (2014) discussed the importance of contextual dimensions in learning- oriented assessment and believed that this dimension is often over looked but may be considered as a help to unlock teaching practices. In a language learning classroom where students are at its heart, the contextual dimension includes the students' background, their L1 and its distance from L2, their L1 knowledge, non- linguistic aspects such as motivation, learning styles, and language ego. Contextual dimensions need to receive special attention as they may offer helpful answers for the probable challenges in learner- centered language instructions in the future. Heil (2014) mentioned that in LOA this dimension addresses the linguistic and content knowledge, skills, and abilities L2 students have and it is called the "what" of teaching and learning. This means that students should be aware of their proficiency gaps in order to be able to close them. In this paper proficiency dimension was discussed in various ways from the use of



scaffolding strategies to new assessment techniques. It was said that classroom data can provide information about learners' proficiency. Future studies can focus more on learners' awareness about their proficiency levels.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

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

Instruments

Written Discourse-Completion Test (WDCT)

A Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT), selected from Birjandi and Rezaei (2010), was picked up in 20 items in multiple choice format. It was validated by a group of three EFL university teachers. Moreover, Cronbach's reliability index of it was calculated .80.

Learner-Oriented Assessment Questionnaire (LOA Questionnaire)

The researcher developed the LOA Questionnaire for the assessment of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence through consulting her supervisor and the relevant literature. It consisted of two general sections including form and content, each of which had a number of sub-categories. Based on the teacher's explanations and students' own observation of their performance, students were asked to choose one of the options 1: very good, 2: good, 3: average, 4: poor, and 5: very poor for each item. Form consisted of Naturalness of Discourse, Styles of Expression, and Clarity of Expression. Content consisted of Content Suitability, Content Accuracy, and the Amount of Information. Each sub-category was subdivided into more sub-sub-categories as follows: Naturalness of Discourse: Context-Dependent Language and Authenticity; Content Suitability: Novelty and Beneficiality; Styles of Expression: The Passive Expression, The Aggressive Expression, The Passive-Aggressive Expression and The Assertive Expression; Content Accuracy: Correctness and Believability; Clarity of Expression: Using Common, Easy to Understand Expressions, and Using Language That Is Known by Most of the Target Audience; and the Amount of Information: Completeness and Conciseness. Reliability and validity of the LOA Questionnaire were checked through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha test.

Design

This study used a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test post-test design (Ary et al., 2010). In this type of design, no random sampling was present. Moreover, just one group called the experimental group participated in the study. Additionally, both the group participated in pre-test and post-test.



Data Collection Procedure

To collect the data, the group sat a WDCT as the pre-test. Then, it was provided with ten regular educational sessions of the institute wherein the participants were taught English pragmatics according to the textbook of the institute. However, in four non-consecutive sessions, the group was provided with the LOA Questionnaire as a tool for self-assessment and peer-assessment of their ILP competence. One week after the end of treatment, the group again sat the WDCT as the post-test.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and Cronbach's Alpha test to estimate the validity and reliability of the LOA Questionnaire. Also, mixed repeated measures ANOVA and Mauchly's test were run to investigate the effect of the LOA Questionnaire on the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence.

RESULTS

In order to answer the first research question To what extent does the LOA Questionnaire enjoy validity and reliability measures in the assessment of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence?, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was run based on SEM. CFA uses several statistical tests to determine the adequacy of the model fit with the data. For the measurement model or the CFA model to be confirmed, the t-value should be significant. This means that at the 95% confidence level, the t-value should be greater than 1.96 or smaller than -1.96 ($t > 1.96$ or $t < -1.96$). Moreover, its indexes should have a good fit. The indexes used in this study include relative chi-square, which is calculated by simply dividing the chi-square value by the degree of freedom of the model (χ^2/df), and the acceptable value for this index is between 1 and 3; Root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) index whose acceptable value is less than 0.08; and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), Goodness – for- fit index (GFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Normal Fit Index (NFI) index whose acceptable value is greater than 0.9. The figures of the CFA of the questionnaire, the path coefficients and the values of the t statistic (Figures 1 and 2) are shown below.

Figure 1

Path Coefficients

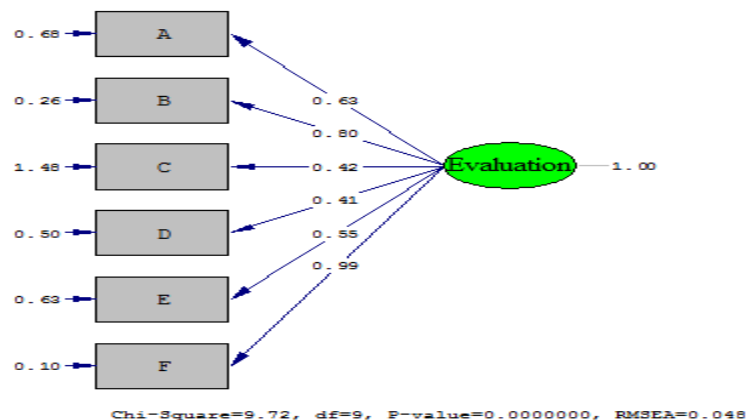


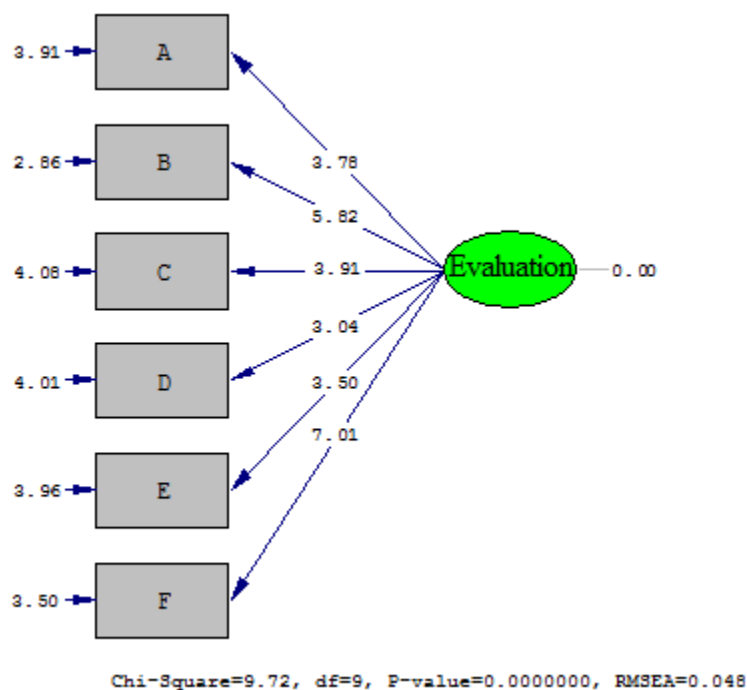
Figure 2*T-Value*

Table 1 shows the results of CFA.

Table 1*Results of the CFA*

questions	Path Coefficients	t-value
A	0.63	3.78
B	0.80	5.82
C	0.42	3.91
D	0.41	3.04
E	0.55	3.50
F	0.99	7.01

It can be seen in the Table 1 that factor structure of the items is suitable. In Table 2, the values related to the fit indices are shown.

Table 2*Goodness-of-Fit Indices*

χ^2/DF	RMSEA	NFI	GFI	IFI	CFI	AGFI
1.08	0.048	0.92	0.92	0.91	0.91	0.93



As shown in the Table 2, the LOA questionnaire is valid. Then, to check the reliability of the LOA Questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was run whose results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.785	6

According to the Table 3, the LOA Questionnaire is reliable. To answer the second research question To what extent is learner-oriented assessment (LOA) Questionnaire effective in the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence?, mixed repeated measures ANOVA was run. Before running the mixed measures ANOVA, the assumption of homogeneity of variances, known as sphericity, was checked using Mauchly's test. The results of Mauchly's test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4*Results of Mauchly's Test of Sphericity*

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.	Epsilon ^a		
					Greenhouse-Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-bound
	.955	7.333	5	.450	.890	.940	.255

As illustrated in the Table 4, the assumption of sphericity was met ($p > .05$). Table 5 shows the results of the Repeated Measures ANOVA.

Table 5*Results of Repeated Measures ANOVA*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pre/post/ LOA Sphericity Assumed	1363.227	5	314.307	45.755	0.000

According to the Table 5, there is a significant the difference between the mean scores in pre-test, post-test and repeated administrations of LOA questionnaire ($F = 45.755$, $p < 0.05$). This means that learner-oriented assessment (LOA) has been effective in the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence. To locate the difference, the Tukey post hoc test was used, the results of which are shown in Table 6:

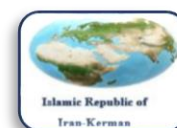


Table 6*Results of Tukey Post hoc Test*

Experimental Group	Experimental Group	Std. Error	Sig.
Pre-test	LOA 1	.79400	.000
	LOA 2	.79400	.000
	LOA 3	.79400	.000
	LOA 4	.79400	.000
	Post-test	.79400	.000
LOA 1	LOA 2	.79400	.000
	LOA 3	.79400	.000
	LOA 4	.79400	.000
	Post-test	.79400	.000
LOA 2	LOA 3	.79400	.000
	LOA 4	.79400	.000
	Post-test	.79400	.000
LOA 3	LOA 4	.79400	.000
	Post-test	.79400	.000
LOA 4	Post-test	.79400	.000

The Tukey test results, as indicated in the Table 6, indicate that the mean scores of the experimental group are significantly different in repeated administrations of LOA questionnaire. Moreover, the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the group are significantly different. This shows that LOA has been effective in the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence.

DISCUSSION

Concerning the first research question To what extent does the LOA Questionnaire enjoy validity and reliability measures in the assessment of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence?, the results confirmed that the LOA Questionnaire enjoyed high validity and reliability measures in the assessment of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence. With regard to the second research question To what extent is learner-oriented assessment (LOA) Questionnaire effective in the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence?, the results proved that learner-oriented assessment (LOA) was significantly effective in the development of Iranian EFL learners' ILP competence.

The results are in line with the studies by Fitriyah and Jannah (2021), Galikya et al. (2019), Kalali et al. (2022), Suryoputro (2018), and Xu and Liu (2018) which have shown the effect of LOA on EFL learning. LOA enhances the participants' communicative skills. This makes remarkable positive changes in their IL pragmatic competence. LOA improves the participants' sense of responsibility. This



encourages them to work more on their pragmatic knowledge. Consequently, their IL pragmatic competence is improved.

LOA enhances the participants' active involvement which in turn contributes to enhancement of knowledge and understanding. This contributes to improvements in their IL pragmatic competence. LOA makes a dynamic and interactive relationship between instruction, learning and assessment. This dynamic relationship can lead to remarkable improvements in learners' IL pragmatic competence.

Because LOA includes learning tasks, self and peer assessment and feedback, it encourages students to become engaged in learning and assessment process. The final outcome of this chain can be improvements in learners' IL pragmatic competence. As a result of LOA, learners' analytical thinking, problem-solving and meta-cognitive activities are developed. This in turn contributes to enhancement of their IL pragmatic competence.

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

Moreover, LOA helps learners set individual learning goals for themselves, and provide evidence for their learning. This helps them learn pragmatics more effectively. LOA enhances learners' critical thinking and self-awareness. This gives them useful insights into the learning process. As a result, their IL pragmatic competence is improved. Because through LOA, learners can see the learning outcomes at the end of the course more effectively, their pragmatic learning is positively enhanced. LOA improves learners' decision making ability. This has also the potential to scaffold them in learning ILP.

LOA gives a sense of empowerment to the participants. Empowerment has proved to be effective on learning different skills and aspects of EFL. Therefore, it can also be positively effective on the participants' IL pragmatic competence. LOA encourages the participants to self-study educational materials in their different forms available in physical and virtual space. This can serve as a kind of input enhancement which can in turn lead to higher IL pragmatic competence in them.

Furthermore, LOA activates the participants to produce more instances of language. That is, LOA makes learners more productive. This acts as a kind of output enhancement that contributes to improvements in their IL pragmatic competence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the LOA Questionnaire developed in the present study can serve as a tool for LOA of EFL learners' ILP. The traditional assessments currently used in educational settings cannot engage learners in the learning and assessment of ILP. In recent procedures accepted in developed systems, learners are taken as a main agent in assessment procedures. LOA merges assessment, learning and learners in an effective way. Therefore, it can be recruited in teaching pragmatics as a complex language teaching domain. It can also be concluded that LOA can be used in interventive programs with the aim of developing ILP competence of learners. In this way, problems associated with learning ILP is reduced significantly.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that EFL learners in Iran need LOA for development of their ILP competence. The mainstream teaching methods currently used in educational settings



cannot guarantee learners' engagement in learning of ILP. In LOA, learners adopt an agentive role in learning procedures.

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

The findings have pedagogical implications for various groups of stakeholders in the field. EFL learners can take advantage of LOA questionnaire developed in the present study in developing their ILP competence. Teachers can also benefit from the LOA Questionnaire in training learners on ILP. Curriculum planners can utilize the LOA Questionnaire in developing future EFL curricula in a way that learners can develop in their ILP competence more effectively.

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