# Differential Impact of Sequential and Simultaneous Input Enhancement on Iranian EFL Learners' Intake

## Mehri Jalali[*1], Manoochehr Jafarigohar[2]

1. *Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran*
2. *Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran*
*Corresponding Author Email: mehrijalali2013@yahoo.com

## Abstract

This study set out to explore whether different input enhancement tasks as implicit instruction techniques had any significant impact on the intake of causative verbs in English as a foreign language among Iranian EFL learners. For this purpose, three intact classes consisting of 75 male and female intermediate L2 learners were randomly divided into three conditions: simultaneous grammar consciousness-raising tasks (GCR, n= 22), sequential textual enhancement (TE, n= 28), and control group (CON, n= 25) that received reading comprehension passages totally free from the target structure. A grammaticality judgment test was used as the pre and posttest in order to measure the participants' intake. Results revealed that the learners in GCR group had significantly better intake of the target structure than those in the TE group, while control group made no gain. The findings cast doubt on the usefulness of focusing on form before focusing on meaning.

**Introduction**

The importance of the role of input in second language acquisition has been the focus of attention for decades. According to Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975), investigating language learning from input perspective can even illuminate the function of output. Moreover, Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" (1985) promoted more concentration on input effects with its main assumptions as follows: (1) access to comprehensible input is feature of all instances of successful first and second language acquisition; (2) it seems that greater quantities of comprehensible input leads to better and faster L2 acquisition; and (3) lack of access to comprehensible input brings about little or no acquisition (Long, 1982). Moreover, as Wong (2005) pointed out, when learners receive input, they are feeding their developing linguistic system with the data that is required to begin the process of acquisition; therefore, without input, successful language acquisition cannot occur.

Language learners usually encounter two types of input: interactional and non-interactional. The first one refers to the linguistic features learners obtain by means of communicating with at least one native or non-native speaker. The second type refers to the input that is received through a non-communicative way. A case in point is the input which is obtained by reading a text in the second/foreign language (Ellis, 1994).

However, the type of input is not so essential for language acquisition, unless it is changed into intake. Gass and Selinker (2008) defined intake as "the mental activity that mediates between input and grammars" (p. 486). As Alsadhan (2011) stated, the level of analysis that is performed by the learners may possibly set up whether the comprehended input turns into intake or not. She recommended that the analysis at the level of syntax has more likelihood to become intake than the analysis at the level of meaning.

According to Ellis (1994), noticing of the input is under the influence of some factors like task demands, existing linguistic knowledge, frequency and saliency of the new target form in the input, and interactional modification during negotiation of meaning. Additionally, there are some form-focused approaches such as input enhancement and processing instruction that help instructors to increase the frequency and saliency of the target form in the input. According to Sharwood Smith (1991, p. 119) "input

enhancement is defined as any pedagogical intervention that is used to make specific features of L2 input more salient as an effort to draw learners' attention to these features." Therefore, input enhancement is a process that cannot be accomplished without "noticing".

Different types of input enhancement vary in the degree of explicitness and elaboration. Alsadhan (2011) argues that explicitness refers to the degree of complexity applied in attention-drawing. Meta-linguistic description of the linguistic features needs the maximum amount of explicitness, whereas textual enhancement of the target linguistic features requires the minimum amount of explicitness. On the other hand, elaboration is related to the amount of time that is used when enhancement technique is executed (Alsadhan, 2011). Furthermore, Sharwood Smith (1993) suggested two kinds of positive and negative input enhancement. The positive input enhancement emphasizes the correct forms in the input while the negative input enhancement highlights the incorrect forms. Visual input enhancement (VIE) is one instance of positive input enhancement and using error flags is a good example of negative input enhancement. Other examples of the positive input enhancement techniques are input flood, textual enhancement, structured input, and grammar consciousness-raising tasks. These techniques mainly rely on the prerequisite of the meaning-bearing input that includes samples of the target forms.

Input enhancement in second language acquisition has been dealt with in investigations of focus-on-form instruction by many researchers who have attempted to experimentally manipulate input in a variety of ways (Alanen, 1995; Doughty, 1991; Izumi, 2003; Leow, 1997, Lyddon, 2011; Reinders& Ellis, 2009; 2002; Sarkhosh&Sarboland, 2012; White, 1998; Wong, 2003).

Textual Enhancement is an input enhancement technique used to expand the saliency of the new target form(s) and as Simard (2009) assertd, it attempts to draw learners' attention to linguistic features through typographical cues like underlining, boldfacing, italicizing, capitalizing, highlighting with colors, and changing the size or the font of the letters. Based on some scholars' views (Lee & Huang, 2008;; Sharwood Smith, 1991; VanPatten, 2007), we can increase the probability of noticing the target structures via making them more salient.

However, the findings of the studies on textual enhancement are controversial (Combs, 2008; Farahani&Sarkhosh, 2012; Hernández, 2011; Izumi, 2003; Jourdenais, Stauffer, Boyson, & Doughty, 1995; Lee, 2007; Leow, 1997; Leow, Egi, Nuevo, Tsai, 2003; Wong, 2003). Some of these studies failed to find comparatively positive effects of the TE over other implicit or explicit instructions. For example, Leow (1997) examined the effects of underlining and boldfacing as two textual enhancement techniques on processing impersonal imperative forms of Spanish verbs. In order to measure the subjects' intake of the target form, a short-answer comprehension task and a multiple-choice recognition task were used. The findings rejected the effects of TE on both comprehension and intake. Moreover, the results of the study done by Leow et al. (2003) revealed that TE had no significant effect on the amount of reported noticing and intake of the Spanish present subjunctive or present perfect form. Also TE had no superiority over unenhanced input for learners' comprehension of the reading passage. In another study, Lee (2007) compared the roles of visual input enhancement (VIE) and input flooding in adult second language learners' acquisition and comprehension of English passives and found that VIE could support the learning of the target forms while having unfavorable effects on meaning comprehension. Also, Combs (2008) found no positive impacts for TE and topic familiarity on the acquisition of the target form.

On the contrary, some findings have indicated the effectiveness of input enhancement on provoking noticing and assisting learners acquire a particular linguistic feature (e.g., Jourdenais et al., 1995; White, 1998). White (1998) attempted to examine the effect of TE (enlargement, different combinations of boldfacing, italicizing, and underlining) on using third person singular possessive determiners. To do this, she selected eighty-six French learners of English and developed a passage-correction, a multiple-choice and a picture-description task to measure the participants' developing knowledge and using the target form. The results indicated that TE only had effect on using these features. Berent and Kelly (2008) proved the positive effect of textual enhancement on noticing and learning of grammatical knowledge. Izumi (2002) also examined the effect of four output and visual input enhancement on the acquisition of English relativization. The results were in favor of the effects of these tasks on noticing but not learning.

The term consciousness-raising, as Wong (2005) stated, commonly means to increase awareness about something. In SLA, this term was introduced by Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1985) for the first time. They define it as "external attempts to draw L2 learners' attention to formal properties of a target language" (p. 14). Later, Sharwood Smith used "input enhancement" instead of this term to emphasize that consciousness-raising does not guarantee the learners' paying attention to the targeted form.

Grammar consciousness-raising (GCR) tasks as input enhancement techniques may be attributed to the work of Ellis and Fotos (1991). They refer to GCR task as an approach to grammar instruction using a task type that supplies learners with grammatical problems to solve interactively. It is communicative and has an L2 grammar problem as well. In Ellis' (1993) view, these activities help learners to construct their own explicit grammar. The theoretical basis of these tasks is that if learners know how a particular grammar structure works, they will be able to notice that structure in subsequent communicative input (Fotos, 1994). According to Sugiharto (2006), one of the principles of these kinds of activities is to develop awareness of specific grammatical structure at the level of understanding and they don't force learners to produce them in communication.

Within the last two decades, the findings of a number of investigations have supported the need for language learners to be exposed to explicit use of the language through consciousness-raising activities (Amiran&Sadegi, 2012; Fotos, 1993; Fotos& Ellis, 1991; Mohamed, 2004; Sa-ngiamwiboo, 2007; Scott, 2008). For example, Mohamed (2004) examined learners' perspectives of the effectiveness of deductive and inductive GCR tasks. The findings indicated that learners have no strong preference for a particular type of task over the others. They viewed the tasks to be useful in assisting them to learn new knowledge about language. Sa-ngiamwiboo (2007) also attempted to prove that GCR, at the level of noticing, is effective for enhancing Thai students' writing achievement. He employed a pretest/posttest design and the target features were noun, pronoun, article, verb, and word order. The findings asserted that GCR instruction had significant effects on promoting participants' writing skill. Moreover, Scott (2008) conducted a research on the role of the first language when pairs of

intermediate-level college students of French and Spanish were engaged in consciousness-raising, form-focused grammar tasks. Using conversation analysis of the audio taped interactions and stimulated recall sessions, she explored the ways students used their L1 and second language to solve a grammar problem. The findings invited the teachers to tackle the "problem" of the L1 in the foreign language classroom. Also, Amiran & Sadegi (2012) compared the traditional approaches with Consciousness-Raising (CR) tasks. The results were compared with those of a control group who were taught based on the pattern drill practice and traditional approaches. The analysis showed that using CR tasks in grammar teaching is significantly more effective than the traditional approaches.

Despite the abundance of research on input enhancement, SLA investigation needs to find the differential effects of various enhancement techniques on learners' noticing and, as a result, intake of the target forms. Up to date, very few studies have tried to enhance grammatical features after encouraging the learners to understand the meaning of the whole input or study it from sequential and simultaneous perspective. The present study considered the textual enhancement (TE) and consciousness-raising tasks(C-R) to increase the learners' intake of the English causative structures. To shed light on this issue, this study attempted to answer the following question:

1. Do different input enhancement techniques, namely, sequential textual enhancement and simultaneous grammar consciousness-raising tasks, have significantly differential effect on the intake of English causative structures?

## Method

### Participants

Three intact classes including a total number of 80 Iranian male and female university EFL learners with the average age of 23.5 were selected. All of them had 6 to 7 years of previous English study in junior and senior high schools with Persian as their L1. Based on the scores on an English language proficiency test (Cambridge), the participants were assessed as being fit for the pre-intermediate level. These three classes were randomly assigned to three groups: textual enhancement (TE) group, grammar

consciousness-raising (GCR) group, and a control group (COG). It is noteworthy that through using 60% cut-off level, the data belonging to two learners from the control group and three learners from the TE group were not included in the analysis since their scores were above the cut-off-point. Therefore, the final number of the participants was as follows: TE (n = 28), GCR (n = 22), and COG (n = 25).

### Target Structure

English causatives were selected as the target form of this study. This structure is selected based on Van Patten's (2004, 2007) "First Noun Principle". According to this principle, the order in which learners encounter sentence elements is a powerful factor in assigning grammatical relations amongst sentence elements. In relation to this principle, Van Patten has commented that, "… the human mind may be predisposed to placing agents and subjects in a first noun position" (Van Patten 2007, p. 15). Therefore, English causatives are good examples for investigating this principle. In this structure, the first noun in the sentence is not the subject of the sentence which makes the comprehension and production of this structure difficult. In this study, not only the causative verbs *make, have, get* but also the verbs *let and help* are included. As it is stated in Focus on Grammar (Brown, 2000, p.139), "let and help" are grouped together with the causative verbs because these five verbs are related in meaning and structure, that is, in all of these patterns, the first noun is the person who causes somebody else to do the action. Additionally, it is necessary to mention that all of the verbs were considered in active voice.

### Instructional Materials

Consciousness-raising tasks: According to Ellis (2008), C-R tasks can be designed in inductive or deductive form. The tasks in the present study were inductive, hence the data were given to the learners and they were asked to make an explicit rule for the grammatical feature which the data illustrated. The learners were supposed to work in small groups to work on a short story titled "A Bad Day". They had to read the story containing examples of causative verbs and answer the comprehension questions.

Additionally, there was a three-column table made of correct examples of target structures in the first and incorrect ones in the second column. The last column was dedicated to the explanation of the incorrect samples in learners' first language. Finally, following the table, a space was provided for constructing explicit rules for using these verbs.

Sequential textual enhancement tasks: The story mentioned above was used in making these tasks.  At first, it was presented without any highlighting and underlining the target structures, with primary purpose being reading comprehension. After reading the story and answering its related reading comprehension multiple choice items, the learners received the passage once more but textually enhanced this time. They also worked in small groups to answer some interpretation questions based on the target forms without receiving any explicit instruction.

**Instrumentation**

Language proficiency test: The first instrument of the study was a standardized language proficiency test (Cambridge English: PET) used to ensure that there was no significant difference between the language knowledge of the three groups. Based on the results of this test, the participants were set at the pre-intermediate level of language proficiency.

Timed grammaticality judgment tests: two parallel tests (A, B) were used, with test A as the pretest, and test B as the immediate posttest. These tests were developed to assess the participants' intake of the English causatives. They consisted of 20 sentences , for both pre and posttest, equally divided into grammatical and ungrammatical forms. Fifteen out of these 20 sentences were related to target forms and 10 were distractors. The distractor sentences contained the same verbs but were not in causative structures. The participants received one point for each correct answer. The tests were timed. To determine the time limitation, they were trialed with 10 advanced EFL learners. They answered the items quickly but no time limitation was enforced. In this way, the average response time for answering all of the items was calculated. Subsequently, the same tests, with the same instruction, were presented to 20 learners of intermediate level; however, this time there was time limitation for answering. For setting the time limit, the average time taken by advanced learners was added by 100

seconds (five extra seconds for each sentence). The participants' average time was calculated one more time and compared with the advanced learners' average. The difference between the two was calculated and was added to the average gained for the pre-intermediate level learners. Therefore, the actual participants were given 50 seconds for every item. Hence, the total time limitation for each test (pre and posttest) was determined as 17 minutes. The time limitation was set, because according to Reinders and Ellis (2009), giving too little time will obviously impair understanding, whereas giving too much time risks allows participants to reflect on the sentences.

In the present study, KR 20 analyses were performed to calculate the participants' response consistency across two versions of the grammaticality judgment tests. The estimated values were 0.91, and 0.88 respectively. For approving the content validity of the test measures, they were studied by two native speakers and four ELT teachers as a result of which a number of the sentences were replaced as they were found to be too easy or difficult.

**Procedure**

The present investigation used a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design. The pretest was given to the participants to ensure they were at the same level regarding the knowledge of the target structure. One week later, the treatment started and the instructional groups received training on how to do the tasks before the treatment. Instruction was delivered during the participants' regular class time by one of the researchers.

In GCR group, the learners received a story with the title of "A Bad Day" containing many examples of the causative verbs. Then, they were asked to work in small groups to read the passage and do its exercises which were divided into two parts: reading comprehension and C-R activities in form of an incomplete table. So, they focused on both meaning and form simultaneously. The first column of the table contained correct examples of target structures and the second column was dedicated to the incorrect sentences. The correct forms of the sentences with grammatical errors could be found exactly in the story since all of sentences were extracted from it. The students were supposed to compare the correct and incorrect samples

and find why some samples were false. Then, they were asked to write their reasons (in their first language) in the space provided for them in the third column. And finally, the participants were requested to construct an explicit rule for using these verbs. Also, it was told that they were not required to produce the samples of the target form at all. Furthermore, the instructor provided some help when it was needed. It is necessary to mention that because piloting the instructional packages revealed some problem with understanding the explicit instructions, they were presented in the learners' first language. Moreover, a list consisted of bilingual vocabulary items, was provided as well so that they could read the story more easily.

On the other hand, in sequential TE group, the English causative verbs were visually enhanced. However, the first time, the story was presented to the learners without any focus on the target forms through underlining and boldfacing. The participants were again asked to work in small groups in order to read the passage and answer its multiple-choice comprehension questions. Like the participants in the GCR group, they could use a short list of bilingual vocabulary items which were used in the story. After this, they were given the passage for the second time which was visually enhanced. Now, the learners were requested to pay attention to the underlined and bolded sentences and to the form and meaning of the verbs used in these sentences. Then they were asked to answer the multiple-choice interpretation tests which followed the reading passage, however, they did not receive any explanation or error correction related to this activity. Additionally, both experimental groups were told that they could take the time they needed to complete the tasks. On average, each group took 60 minutes to complete the activities. Finally, to measure the intake of the target structure, the posttest was administered immediately after the completion of the instruction through using the split-block design.

In the present study, grammaticality judgment test was used to operationalize intake. In the past two decades, researchers in the field of second language acquisition have used a variety of ways to measure intake. Some researchers like, Reinders and Ellis (2009), Rosa and O'Neill (1999), and Simard (2009), have operationalized intake as a change in performance through using recall protocols, grammaticality judgments, rule formation, multiple-choice recognition tasks, and cloze tests. However, Rosa and

O'Neill (1999) indicated that performance measures should be administrated immediately after the treatment or exposure to the linguistic features. They asserted that production measures are not appropriate because possibly production routines promoted by them could lead to interference from previous knowledge. Because of this reason, the posttest was administered soon after the first session of the exposure.

It is worth mentioning that the control group took all the tests administered to the treatment groups, but the class time was spent on the instruction targeting the development of reading comprehension skills, with no reference to the target grammatical structure.

## Results

In order to answer the research questions, first the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was carried out to confirm the normality of the scores distribution and the legitimacy of using parametric tests. The test showed probability values of 0.09 and 0.18 for the pretest and the posttest respectively, indicating that the distribution were normal. Then, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether all of the groups were comparable at the pretest (the level of significance was set at 0.05 for all statistical tests). The results indicated that the participants were comparable at the pretest since no significant difference was observed, $F(2, 72) = 0.41$, $p = 0.71 > 0.05$). Tables 1 and 2 show the descriptive statistics and the ANOVA results.

*Table 1*
*Descriptive Statistics for the Three Groups at Pretest*

| Instructional Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GCR | 22 | 5.18 | 1.139 | .242 | 3.00 | 7.00 |
| TE | 28 | 5.03 | 1.201 | .227 | 2.00 | 7.00 |
| CON | 25 | 4.96 | 1.743 | .348 | 1.00 | 8.00 |
| Total | 75 | 4.97 | 1.361 | .132 | 1.00 | 8.00 |

*Table 2*
*Result of One-way ANOVA for Grammaticality Judgment Pretest*

|                | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F   | Sig |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-----|-----|
| Between Groups | 2.35           | 3   | .78         | .41 | .74 |
| Within Groups  | 190.56         | 101 | 1.88        |     |     |
| Total          | 192.91         | 104 |             |     |     |

However, the results of a one-way ANOVA conducted on the immediate posttest revealed a significant difference among the study groups in the amount of intake, $F (2, 72) = 62.71$, $p < 0.05$. Table 3 and 4 show the descriptive statistics and ANOVA results for the posttest.

*Table3*
*Descriptive Statistics for the Three Groups at Posttest*

| Instructional Group | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------------------|----|------|----------------|------------|---------|---------|
| C-R                 | 22 | 8.68 | 1.766          | .376       | 6.00    | 13.00   |
| TE                  | 28 | 7.17 | 1.567          | .298       | 3.00    | 11.00   |
| CO                  | 25 | 4.76 | 1.384          | .276       | 1.00    | 7.00    |
| Total               | 75 | 5.97 | 2.625          | .256       | 1.00    | 8.00    |

*Table 4*
*Result of One-way ANOVA for Timed Grammaticality Judgment Posttest*

|                | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig   |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------|
| Between Groups | 466.48         | 3   | 155.49      | 62.71 | *.000 |
| Within Groups  | 250.42         | 101 | 2.47        |       |       |
| Total          | 716.91         | 104 |             |       |       |

In order to find the exact point od difference among the groups A Post-hoc *Schefee* test was conducted the results of which provided further support for the following: (1) both treatment groups were superior to the control group on the immediate post-test and control group made no gain; (2) there were significant differences among the treatment groups on the immediate posttest and GCR group scored higher than TE group on grammaticality judgment test measuring the amount of the intake. As for the effect sizes, the eta squared figures of 0.62 and 0.26 showed that the magnitude of the

differences was large enough to be really meaningful. Table 5 shows the results of the *Schefee* test.

*Table 5*
*Results of Scheffe Test for Timed Grammaticality Judgment Posttest Scores*

| Groups | | Mean | Mean Difference | Std. Error | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PI | CR | | 2.00* | .44 | .000 |
| TE | | 10.26 | 3.35* | .41 | .000 |
| CO | | | 5.70* | .42 | .000 |
| C-R | PI | | -2.00* | .44 | .000 |
| TE | | 8.68 | 1.35* | .44 | .032 |
| CO | | | 3.70* | .46 | .000 |
| TE | PI | | -3.35* | .41 | .000 |
| CR | | 7.17 | -1.35* | .44 | .032 |
| CO | | | 2.34* | .43 | .000 |
| CO | PI | | -5.70* | .42 | .000 |
| CR | | 4.76 | -3.70* | .46 | .000 |
| TE | | | -2.34* | .43 | .000 |

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to compare the differential effects of simultaneous and sequential input enhancement techniques on the intake of the English causative verbs. Grammar consciousness-raising tasks were used as an example of the simultaneous input enhancement in which the participants concentrated on both meaning and forms at the same time. On the other hand, through using textual enhancement technique, the target forms were presented sequentially in which learners could first focus on comprehension and then on forms. The positive answer to the research question confirms that input enhancement has a significant effect on the intake of the target forms. The findings point out that the learners in the experimental groups outperformed the control group on the grammaticality judgment tests.  These results  confirm that the development of L2 grammatical knowledge can be achieved by manipulating input, which verify  the findings of the preceding investigations (e.g., Jourdenaise et al.,

1995; Simard, 2009) on the impact of various input enhancement types on the intake of the targeted structures.

However, the GCR group showed better performance on the posttest which suggests that the learners' ability to recognize target forms would enhance when they achieve an explicit rule related to the structure under question.  If learners discover the rules in meaning-oriented and communicative activities themselves, they show a better performance on intake tests in comparison to the situation when they only confront the bolded structures without any attempt to find out the rule which governs them. Therefore, the results assert that GCR tasks are more successful in directing the participants' attention to the target forms in the input that they received. Hence, they could make causative verbs more prominent. While the participants in the textual enhancement group were exposed to the highlighted and bolded structures, the learners in GCR group had to discover this rule by comparing the correct and incorrect samples of the meaning-oriented activity. They also had the opportunity to discuss the metalinguistic features of target structures. Therefore, this may involve learners in a deeper mental and perceptual processing. As Craik and Lockhart (1972) state, this can improve the quality of memory trace and consequently improve the amount of intake and acquisition. Since these findings are not in agreement with the findings about the effects of sequential textual enhancement discussed in the related literature (Lyddon, 2011;Lee, 2007), as Han, Park and Comb (2008) claim, the advantage of sequential input enhancement over the simultaneous one should be considered more cautiously if an input-based activity is expected to lead to more intake or acquisition.

Current studies on second language acquisition (SLA) have shifted towards focus-on-form and researchers specially have attempted to find out whether providing rich and comprehensible input through various input enhancement techniques provide opportunities for learners to use language in spontaneous and meaningful interaction. Some studies (Shook, 1999) suggest the effectiveness of using sequential input enhancement in ESL/EFL classrooms. However, the results of this study revealed that simultaneous grammar consciousness-raising tasks were more effective in triggering the noticing of the intended structure and its subsequent intake. Researchers

like, Jourdenaise et al., (1995), and Lee (2007) also came up with comparable results. This indicates that learners need something more than textual enhancement to notice the target features since better intake was obtained when they were forced to discover the rules.

The findings of this study have provided evidence that GCR as one input enhancement technique can enable learners to be conscious about the existence of target forms which they would otherwise ignore. As a result, by designing such activities, teachers can provide cooperative learning conditions for learners to discover the rules themselves, and through this type of discovery learning, they might come up with questions that the teacher has not yet asked. In conditions where learners cannot initially process certain linguistic forms, GCR tasks can be used as an influential instrument to assist them develop an awareness of that form. The results also supported the conclusion that language teachers should recognize which input-based form-focused technique (input enhancement) is the most appropriate for expanding the learners' attentional resources by promoting noticing.

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## Biodata

**Mehri Jalali** holds Ph.D in TEFL, MA in TEFL, BA in English translation; author of some papers in national and international journals; presentation in more than 10 international and national conferences; and 12 years of experience in teaching English as foreign language. Her areas of interest include task-based instruction and materials design and evaluation.

**Manoochehr Jafarigohar** holds Ph.D. in TEFL, MA in TEFL, BA in English translation; head of PNU central library; author of thirteen academic textbooks; presentation in more than 20 international conferences; published papers in journals; 17 years of experience in teaching English; 22 years of teaching and research in distance education.