Attitudes towards Dialectical Varieties of English and Persian: Iranian EFL Teachers' Perspectives

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigated Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward standard and non-standard varieties of English and Persian. Attitudes towards English and Persian dialects were evaluated using modified versions of questionnaires developed by Taylor for the English language and Hoover and colleague for the Persian language. 212 EFL teachers from across Iran, representing a range of ages (23-57), teaching experience, and educational levels, participated in the study. The participants completed the questionnaires online or in print. Findings revealed a strong preference for standard dialects in both languages, with a significant correlation between attitudes towards Persian and English varieties. These results indicate a lack of awareness among Iranian EFL teachers regarding the importance of dialectal variation. Therefore, teacher training programs should integrate instruction on English and Persian dialect variations and the pedagogical implications. This includes equipping teachers to acknowledge and address dialectal diversity (e.g., through authentic materials and discussions about language variation).

1. Introduction

Linguists believe that dialects refer to natural linguistic variations common to a language that indicate cultural and geographical differences in how a particular language is used; however, many others consider dialectical differences as incorrect or poor (Cross et al., 2001). In other words, the public seems to believe that there exists only one standard dialect and many non-standard dialects in each language. This idea may cause problems when it comes to the assessment of students in educational contexts, as any divergent forms of the standard dialects are recognized as "poor, slovenly, broken, bastardized, or corrupt" (DeBose, 2007, p. 31).

The appeal of particular dialects and the positive attitudes towards prestige forms are influenced by various sociolinguistic factors. Research indicates that listeners often associate specific dialects to desirable traits, leading to dialect preference. Standard dialects are frequently associated with power structures and social status, thereby reinforcing their perceived prestige. This association is often the result of historical and sociopolitical factors rather than inherent linguistic superiority. For example, Received Pronunciation (RP) in the United Kingdom has achieved its "standard" status not through any intrinsic linguistic merit; but rather due to its historical connection to the upper classes and its subsequent adoption by institutions of power and influence (Andreiko et al., 2021). This phenomenon is not unique to English.

In Croatia, Škifić (2010) found that high school students exhibited a strong preference for the standard language over regional dialects, revealing a clear ideological bias towards the standard variety and its perceived social advantages. Similarly, Alajmi (2024) demonstrated that the Central Najdi dialect in Saudi Arabia is viewed favorably and linked to positive social attributes such as being civilized and educated, while other Najdi dialects are perceived less favorably. Yost (1977), in his study, affirmed the hypothesis that students who had listened to both Standard English and black nonstandard English, preferred the standard dialect as more understandable and credible. These findings across diverse linguistic contexts highlight how societal perceptions and power dynamics contribute to the elevation of particular dialects to "standard" status and the subsequent devaluation of others.

Of particular concern is teachers' attitudes and awareness of dialects since their failure to understand the notion of dialect variations can negatively influence their students' learning. For example, Goodman and Buck (1973, p.7) stated that "the only special disadvantage which speakers of low-status dialects suffer in learning to read is one imposed by teachers and schools. Rejection of their dialects and educators' confusion of linguistic difference with linguistic deficiency interferes with the natural process by which reading is acquired and undermines the linguistic self-confidence of divergent speakers".

Bowie and Bond (1994), for instance, conducted research on pre-service teachers and reported that 61% of them believed that African American language operated 'under a faulty grammar system' (p. 114). Choy and Dodd (1976) found that speakers of standard variety were judged to be more confident, successful and less 'disruptive' by teachers (p. 184). Similarly, Ren et al. (2016), Tajeddin et al. (2019), and Salehpour et al. (2023) reported a strong teacher preference for Standard English in the classroom.

Despite increased attention to linguistic variation, negative attitudes towards linguistically diverse learners persist. Beyond preparing teachers for EFL/ESL contexts, efforts should be made to develop linguistically responsive teachers. Cross et al. (2001) claimed that "if the majority of teachers believe that there is one "correct" dialect and that their duty is to uphold that dialect while eradicating all competing dialects, many students will come to believe that not only their language but their culture is invalid" (p.212). Studies by Baugh (2000), Rickford (1999), and Green (2002) highlighted how misinterpreting dialect features as errors can lead to inaccurate evaluations of students' abilities and hinder their academic progress. These studies underscored the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy that values linguistic diversity and recognizes the unique strengths of all students.

In other words, teachers' attempts to replace students' non-standard dialects with the standard dialect can be detrimental. According to Delpit (2006), criticizing children and youth for communicating through their dialect may cause them to develop negative attitudes towards school and education. Johnson (1971) claimed that when educators understand that some students do not speak the standard variety, they incorrectly assume that their speech is full of grammatical and phonological errors. These beliefs can lead to erroneous perceptions of students' intelligence, education, personal characteristics, and success, which can, in turn, lead to self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, if teachers undervalue students' abilities and refer to their language as 'inferior,' 'street talk,' or 'broken language', it can lead to self-fulfilling prophecy for the non-standard dialect speakers and they may show poor performance in school (Cazden, 1988; Davies & Catherine, 2004). In other words, teachers will have low expectations for disadvantaged group speakers and provide them with less instruction "and so the students actually end up doing worse" (Gerard, 2012, p.179)

There are some studies on sociolinguistic aspects of English (e.g., Mirshahidi, 2017; Rezaei et al., 2019; Rezaei & Tadayyon, 2018) and Persian (Modarresi, 2001; Rezaei et al., 2014) in Iran. However, in contrast to the important role of teachers' attitudes discussed above, there has been hardly any research about Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards dialectal variations of English and Persian in Iran. In other words, English and Persian non-standard dialects are not given due attention in a multilingual country like Iran. Different variations of English exist all around the world, and they are categorized under the names of Inner Circle (countries such as England), Outer Circle (countries such as India), and Expanding Circle (countries such as Iran) (Kachru, 1992). It is pretty clear that Iranians learn English for various purposes such as business, education, tourism, and politics, among others.

A primary reason Iranian EFL learners study English is for international communication. Matsuda (2000) stated that international communication means interacting with speakers of various standard and non-standard dialects of English rather than only with American and British English speakers. She further emphasized the need to enhance students' and teachers' exposure and awareness of dialectal differences. The issue of different varieties of Englishes (World Englishes), however, has not been examined from teachers' perspectives in Iran. While Iranian EFL teachers may favor standard varieties of English, their attitudes can reveal the extent to which they accept non-standard varieties as teaching and learning models. As Canagarajah (2006, p. 26) maintains, "a proficient speaker of English today needs to shuttle between different communities, recognizing the systematic and legitimate status of different varieties of English... to be really proficient in English in the postmodern world, one has to be multidialectal".

Furthermore, it seems necessary to undertake some teachers' attitude studies in Iran, focusing specifically on perceptions of standard and non-standard forms of Persian speech. Although there are many dialectical differences in Iran, Ghafar Samar et al. (2010) stated that the educational system follows a 'monolingual' or 'monodialectal' approach, with the language used in textbooks and classroom communication being standard Farsi. They added that "one of the reasons for adopting a monolingual and monodialectal educational system despite of the existence of other languages such as Turkish, Kurdish, Baluchi, and Arabic may be the fact that the policy makers try to make the Iranian nation unified" (p.25). Clearly, Iran is a country with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, so it is essential to conduct studies on teachers' attitudes towards Persian dialect differences (Negari, 2012). Furthermore, there is a dearth of research investigating Iranian EFL teachers' transfer of Persian dialectal varieties attitudes towards English dialectal differences.

It seems that Iranian EFL teachers' understanding of both standard and non-standard varieties of Persian may help them better address non-standard varieties of English. Concerning the Japanese non-standard varieties, McKenzie (2007), for example, stated that learners' familiarity with their L1 non-standard varieties can be beneficial. As McKenzie (2007) claims, "it would be of considerable value to incorporate discussion about and exposure to standard and non-standard varieties of Japanese into the English language classroom in Japanese schools in order to equip learners with levels of variation awareness sufficient to later cope with the cultural and linguistic bias that appears to exist towards particular forms of both non-standard native and non-native varieties of English and their speakers, both inside and out with Japan" (p. 240). However, it seems that prior to learners, teachers' awareness and acceptance of non-standard varieties of L2/FL is critical because teachers' attitudes and behaviors influence learners' performance. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What attitudes do Iranian EFL teachers have towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of English?

2. What attitudes do Iranian EFL teachers have towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of Persian?

3. Do the language attitudes that Iranian EFL teachers hold towards varieties of Persian correlate with any perceptions they have of varieties of English?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants and Setting

The participants of this study were 212 Iranian EFL teachers, consisting of 72 females (33.72%) and 140 males (66.28%). Among the participants, 41 were from Tehran, 36 from Guilan, and the remaining participants were from Mashhad (33), Ghazvin (31), Qom (15), Mazandaran (27), and Sistan and Baluchestan province (29). Of this sample, 138 participants (65.35%) were between 23 and 30 years of age, while 74 participants (34.65%) were above 30. Regarding the education level of the participants, 100 (47.17%) held a Bachelor's degree, 91 (42.92%) held a Master's degree, and 21 (9.91%) held a PhD. Their years of teaching experience ranged from 2 to 15 years or more. The participants were selected to fill out the questionnaire (either the online or paper version) based on their availability and convenience. It should be mentioned that the snowball sampling method was employed for the selection of the participants in this study. Efforts were made to ensure relative representativeness by including participants with diverse ages, genders, geographic locations, teaching experience, and educational levels.

2.2 Instruments

The Language Attitude Scale (LAS), developed by Taylor (1973), was employed to evaluate Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the standard and non-standard varieties of English. The questionnaire was a modified adapted version. Formatted as a Likert-type scaling instrument, the questionnaire was

designed to collect data about standard and non-standard varieties of English and the teachers' acceptance of them in educational contexts. Opinions on the questionnaire were investigated through 15 language statements. The questionnaire involved the four content categories of "Structure of Nonstandard English", "Consequences of using and accepting Nonstandard English", "Philosophies concerning use and acceptance of Nonstandard English" and "Cognitive and intellectual abilities" of Nonstandard English speakers (Taylor 1973, p.196). Rating scales were numerically coded as "Strongly Disagree", "Mildly Disagree", "No Opinion", "Mildly Agree" and "Strongly Agree". Although this questionnaire is known as a valid and reliable instrument, the researcher reestablished its reliability and validity as the existing questionnaire was modified. The reliability of the scale was measured 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha formula. The validity of the questionnaire was also examined and ensured by three experienced EFL researchers.

This study did not require teachers to have in-depth knowledge of specific non-standard varieties. Instead, it asked them to reflect on their beliefs about language variation and their acceptance of different dialects in educational contexts. To do so, the statements within the questionnaire were carefully chosen to avoid overly specific references to any particular non-standard varieties that might have been unfamiliar to Iranian EFL teachers. Following the panel's recommendation (Miciak et al., 2016), Standard English in this study refers to the "language variety associated with education, government, media, and enterprise" (p. 824).

Hoover et al's. (1996) questionnaire was administrated to study Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes about standard and non-standard varieties of Persian in Iran. In other words, the questionnaire consisted of 15 items adapted with some modifications. The original questionnaire items reflected three different perspectives on African American Vernacular English: the "excellence perspective", "deficit perspective" and "extreme difference perspective" (Hoover et al., 1996, p.385). The teachers were required to choose from a five-point response Likert scale ("Strongly Agree", "Agree", "No Opinion" "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree") to rate each statement. Hoover et al. (1996) evaluated the reliability and validity of the instrument. Due to the modification of the questionnaire, however, the researcher reestablished its reliability and validity within the context of this study. The Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the questionnaire was 0.79. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire items, the confirmation of three experienced EFL researchers was sought. Based on the feedback obtained, several modifications were done.

The Hoover et al. (1996) questionnaire, despite its original design for a different context, offered a valuable framework for exploring teachers' attitudes toward language variation. Its core constructs regarding the standard and non-standard language varieties are relevant across diverse language contexts, including EFL settings. Furthermore, this questionnaire has been previously employed in research on Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards dialect differences, as demonstrated by Negari (2012). In this study, "standard Persian is defined as the Tehran variety, which is widely 'used in Iranian media and the formal education system', and 'is spoken by people from the capital city, Tehran' (Mirshahidi, 2017, p. 147).

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was undertaken over a two-month period. As detailed previously, the data was gathered by the researcher from Iranian EFL teachers in a total of seven provinces in Iran. The two attitude questionnaires were administered in two forms. The paper-based versions were distributed

manually in two provinces (Sistan and Baluchestan, and Tehran) and completed by 70 participants. The online versions of the questionnaires were administered electronically to 142 teachers. The respondents were sent email invitations to participate in online surveys. It should be mentioned that a participation information sheet was also included in both questionnaires. The initial section of each questionnaire gathered demographic information from the participating teachers, including age, gender, ethnicity, educational attainment, and years of teaching experience. The subsequent section comprised statements designed to evaluate teachers' attitudes towards standard and non-standard language varieties.

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Attitudes towards Standard vs., non- Standard Varieties of English

The first research question guiding the current research related to the Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of English. Table 1 outlines the 15 statements from the questionnaire and the percentages of responses from the teachers for each item.

A majority of the teachers strongly disagreed that non-standard English sounds as good as standard English (92.5%) or is a clear, thoughtful, and expressive language (90.7%). Conversely, large majorities strongly agreed that non-standard English has a poor grammatical system (86.7%) and is imprecise or unclear (79.8%). Regarding the impact of accepting or rejecting non-standard English on abstract issues like national interest, welfare, and unity, most teachers (83.2%, 79.6%, and 81.2%, respectively) expressed no opinion.

Regarding the societal and educational acceptance of non-standard English for the development of self-esteem among non-standard dialect English speakers, 73.6% of teachers strongly disagreed that it is a significant aspect. Similarly, 85.3% strongly disagreed that rejecting a student's native language harms the student. 79.3% of teachers strongly believed that non-standard English offers no benefits. Regarding academic progress, 75.2% strongly agreed that Standard English is vital for academic success, while 74.9% strongly disagreed that non-standard English can lead to educational achievement. For classroom use, 85.5% strongly agreed that non-standard English should be eliminated. While 77.3% believed using of non-standard English wouldn't influence their evaluation of students, 80.6% strongly supported the standardization of English in schools.

Table 1

Teachers' Responses for Standard vs., non- Standard Varieties of English

Items	SD (%)	MD (%)	NO (%)	MA (%)	SA (%)
1. Non-standard English sounds as good as standard English.	92.5	2.3	0.3	3.1	1.8
2. Non-standard English is a clear, thoughtful and expressive language.	90.7	6.7	0.1	0.45	2.05
3. Non-standard English is an inferior language system.	2.9	3.1	0.4	6.9	86.7
4. Non-standard English is too imprecise to be an effective means of communication.	4.1	3.4	2.1	10.6	79.8

5. The encouragement of non-standard English would be beneficial for the national interest.	3.9	4.6	83.2	4.6	3.7
6. It would be detrimental to a country's social welfare if use of non-standard English became socially acceptable.	6.7	2.9	79.6	2.9	7.9
7. A decline in the use of non-standard dialects would have a positive influence on social identity.	0.5	7.4	81.2	9.5	1.4
8. Societal and educational acceptance of non-standard English is important for development of self-esteem among non-standard dialect English speakers	73.6	6.2	0.69	9.7	9.9
9. When teachers reject the native language of a student, they do him great harm.	85.3	9.2	1.2	3.2	1.1
10. The continued use of a non-standard dialect English accomplishes nothing worthwhile for an individual.	2.1	5.9	2.1	10.6	79.3
11. Allowing and accepting non-standard English in the classroom will retard the academic progress of the students.	75.2	14.9	0.8	5.7	3.4
12. If use of non-standard English were encouraged, speakers of non-standard English would be more motivated to achieve academically.	74.9	13.9	1.2	5.2	4.8
13. Teachers have a duty to ensure that students do not speak non-standard dialects of English in the classroom.	1.8	4.7	0.5	7.5	85.5
14. Use of non-standard English will affect teachers' evaluation of students.	77.3	6.9	2.3	8.7	4.8
15. One of the goals of the school system should be the standardization of the English language.	4.8	2.5	1.2	10.9	80.6

The following figure (Figure 1) presents the attitudes towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of English.
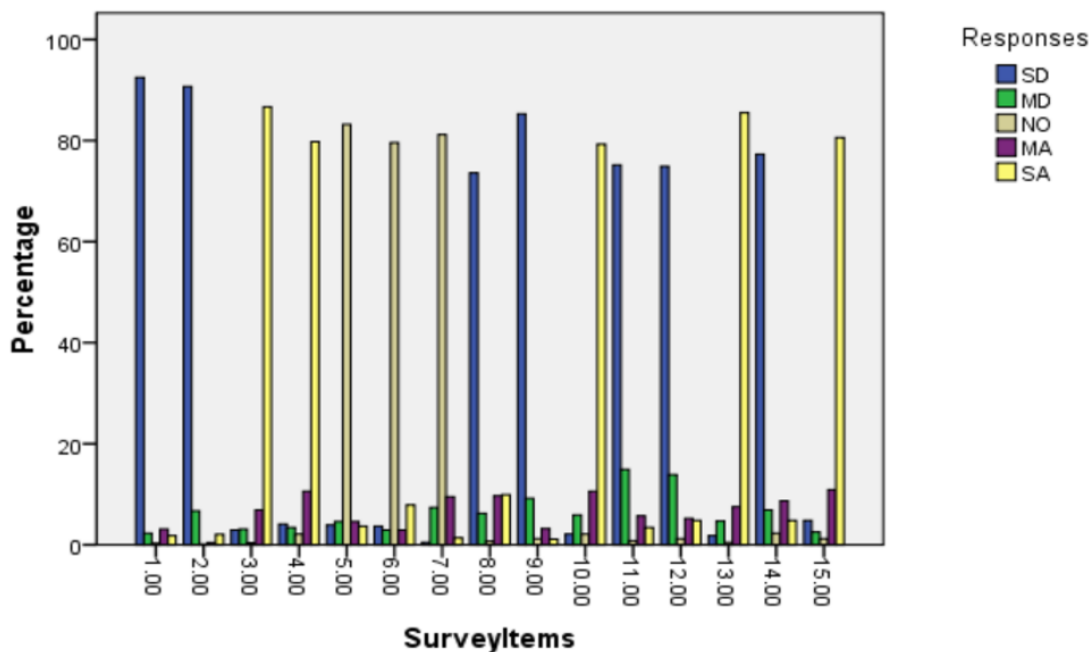

Figure 1 Attitudes towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of English

3.2 Attitudes towards Standard vs., non- Standard Varieties of Persian

Table 2 displays the percentages of teacher responses to 15 statements concerning attitudes towards standard and non-standard Persian. A large majority (91.1%) acknowledged awareness of language

variation and dialects. Regarding academic impact, 82.3% strongly felt that children using non-standard Persian might experience academic problems. A similar proportion (87.9%) agreed that non-standard dialects are 'lazy' forms of Persian. Concerning the use of non-standard dialects in teaching, 85.3% disagreed that they are adequate for subjects like social studies or math. 89.8% of teachers strongly agreed that students using non-standard Persian would not advance as far without standard Persian. For future job opportunities, 93.6% of the participants strongly agreed that standard Persian should be prioritized.

Regarding the role of standard Persian in schools, 85.6% strongly agreed that schools should ensure student proficiency and 79.9% strongly agreed it should be the dominant language. 90.1% of teachers disagreed that bidialectal education is the right of every child who does not speak standard Persian, and 94.2% strongly disagreed with allocating government funds for such programs. Regarding the characteristics of non-standard dialects, 81.3% strongly believed they have distinctive speech patterns, but few agreed with their widespread use (specific number not provided). Concerning grammatical structure, 92.6% strongly agreed that standard Persian's structure is superior. Regarding the impact of accepting non-standard dialects on school standards, 52.9% agreed it would lead to falling standards. Finally, 83.4% agreed that standard Persian expresses things better than non-standard Persian.

Table 2

Teachers' Responses for Standard vs., non- Standard Varieties of Persian

Items	SD (%)	D (%)	NO (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
1. People speak differently in different situations.	2.1	2.5	1.2	3.1	91.1
2. Some children do poorly in school because they do not speak standard Persian.	3.9	4.2	2.1	7.5	82.3
3. Dialects are lazy Persian.	1.9	2.5	1.3	6.4	87.9
4. Non- standard dialects would be adequate to teach subjects such as social studies or math.	85.3	4.5	1.9	5.9	2.4
5. Students with non-standard Persian would advance further in school without standard Persian.	89.8	6.5	1.5	1.2	1
6. Since only standard Persian is useful in getting a job, it should be preferred over non-standard Persian.	2.5	1.4	0.4	2.1	93.6
7. One purpose of schools is to make certain that all students graduate proficient in standard Persian.	2.7	5.2	2.6	3.9	85.6
8. Standard Persian must be the dominant language in schools.	5.6	4.8	3.4	6.3	79.9
9. Bidialectal education is the right of every child who does not speak the standard Persian.	3.6	90.1	1.3	2.9	2.1
10. Government funds should be used to support bidialectal education.	94.2	2.8	1.5	1.1	0.4
11. Non-standard Persian speakers have their own distinctive pattern of speech.	6.6	5.9	3.8	2.4	81.3
12. The use of non-standard dialects should not be restricted to particular region or social group.	93.7	3.1	1.1	1.8	0.3
13. Standard Persian is superior to non-standard Persian in terms of grammatical structure.	1.4	1.7	2.1	2.2	92.6
14. Acceptance of non-standard dialects of Persian by teachers would lead to a lowering of standards in school.	4.5	7.8	8.9	25.9	52.9
15. Standard Persian is more expressive than non-standard Persian.	3.7	4.6	3.1	5.2	83.4

The following figure (Figure 2) presents the attitudes towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of Persian.
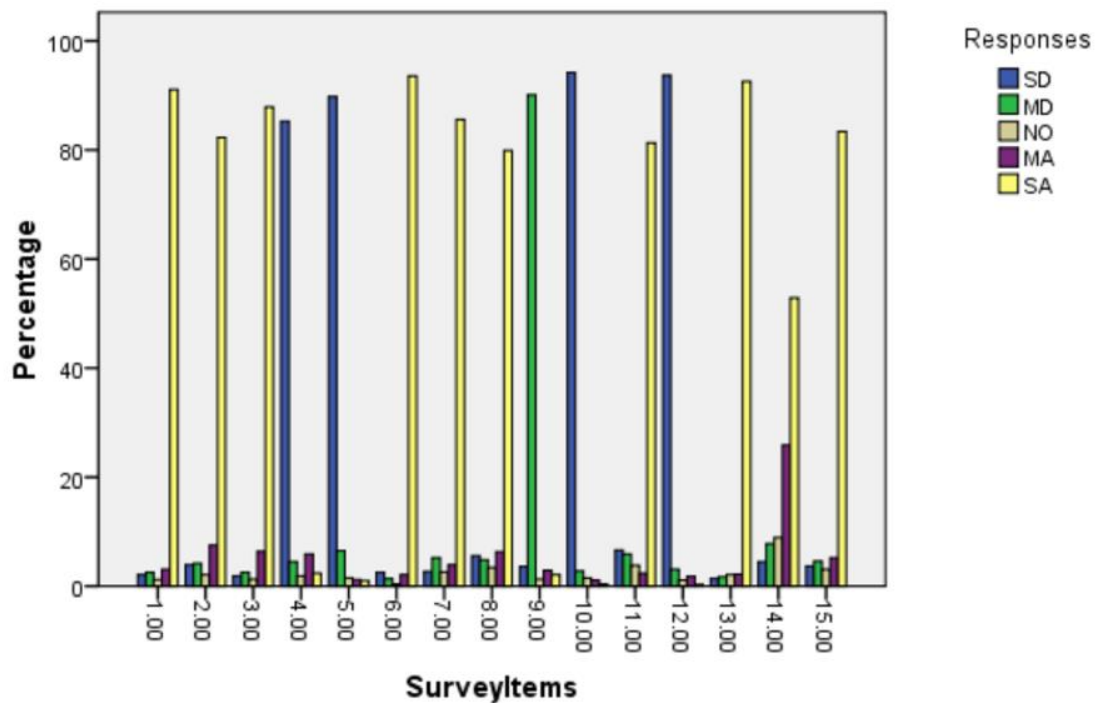

Figure 2 Attitudes towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of Persian

3.3 Relationship between Teachers Attitudes towards non- Standard Varieties of Persian and English

This study also examined the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards non-standard varieties of Persian and English. To this end, a correlation analysis was conducted on the collected data. As Table 3 shows, the correlation analysis revealed a strong, statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.981$, $p < 0.01$) between these two sets of attitudes. Specifically, teachers who expressed negative views towards non-standard Persian dialects were significantly more likely to hold negative views towards non-standard English varieties. Conversely, teachers who demonstrated more positive or accepting attitudes towards linguistic diversity within the Persian language were significantly more likely to also exhibit positive attitudes towards diverse forms of English.

These findings provide strong empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that teachers' perceptions of language variation in their first language (L1) significantly influence their views on language variation in their second/foreign language (L2/FL). This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating a strong link between L1 and L2/FL language attitudes (Baker, 2011; Holmes, 2013). This correlation between teachers' attitudes toward their L1 language and their teaching practices has profound implications for language education, suggesting that teachers' L1 language attitudes may significantly influence their pedagogical approaches, classroom practices, and, ultimately, the learning experiences of their students.

Table 3

Relationship between Attitudes towards Varieties of Persian and English

		Varieties of Persian	Varieties of English
Varieties of Persian	Pearson Correlation	1	.981
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	212	212

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to probe the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers towards the standard and non-standard varieties of English and Persian and the probable correlation between them. The results revealed that Iranian EFL teachers have a negative attitude towards English and Persian non-standard varieties. The correlation between language attitudes towards variations in Persian and English proved to be very significant.

Addressing the first research question, which examined Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward standard versus non-standard varieties of English, the data presented reveal a consistent and strong preference for standard English (Survey item 1) among the Iranian EFL teachers surveyed, coupled with a corresponding negative evaluation of non-standard varieties. This pattern aligns with broader societal attitudes towards language variation, where standard forms are often perceived as superior and non-standard forms are stigmatized (Lippi-Green, 2012; Filson, 2018). The teachers' responses (Survey items 2, 3, and 4) indicated a belief that non-standard English lacks the clarity, expressiveness, and grammatical rigor of Standard English. This perception is reflected in the high percentages of teachers who disagreed with statements suggesting the equivalence of non-standard English and agreed with statements highlighting its perceived deficiencies. This binary view of language, where standard varieties are idealized and non-standard varieties are denigrated, overlooks the inherent linguistic validity and systematic nature of all dialects (Byrd & Mintz, 2010). It is important to emphasize that non-standard dialects are not simply "incorrect" or "lazy" versions of the standard; instead, they are distinct linguistic systems with their own rules and conventions (Fromkin, 2014).

The majority of the teachers had no opinion regarding the impact of acceptance or non-acceptance of the non-standard English dialects on the abstract issues such as national interest, welfare and unity (Survey items 5, 6, and 7). Therefore, it seems that there should be an attempt to increase teachers' stance on the non-standard language policy matters which can, in turn, play an important role in educational and other social phenomena. In fact, discrimination resulting from good English or bad English language policy has the potential to influence issues much more than the language itself. Thus, it is worthwhile to mention that any blind or uncompromising stance on non-standard dialects may result in different aspects of social harm. Furthermore, the teachers showed apparent dismissal of the impact of non-standard English acceptance on self-esteem (Survey item 8). This may mean that they do not consider the role of societal and educational influence, which can affect the self- esteem of the individuals and "the damage done to the self- esteem of non-standard speakers which was held to result from the repeated correction and denigration of their spoken

language" (McGill, 2000, p.76). Bettivia (2011) also claims that "allowing natural forms of expression encourages students and helps them increase their sense of self, which has a huge influence on future success" (p.172). The findings also revealed that a substantial percentage of teachers do not believe rejecting a student's native language is harmful (Survey item 9). Therefore, they may be less likely to welcome or allow non-standard English dialects in the classroom. However, Filson (2018) states that "language and culture are so intrinsically connected; a teacher's rejection of students' language can be interpreted as a rejection of the students themselves" (p.8). Furthermore, Milroy and Milroy (2014) stated that non-standard dialect is related to someone's personal and social identity. The teachers strongly agree that no benefits can be gained from the continuous use of non-standard English (Survey item 10). It seems that there is a need for a transition within teachers from unawareness to awareness of the value of non-standard English and they should also have a clear appreciation of the value of non- standard English when being used in education and community. For example, Yiakoumetti (2011) stated that speaking a non-standard dialect does not appear to be an educational drawback because researchers report very inconsistent results concerning the performance of standard and non-standard dialect speakers.

Mauranen (2012) also believed that some variables may interfere with the continued use of a non-standard language; still it is important to note that there is no need to look for an alternative standard form, provided that no negative feedback is received. The teachers' responses to the items 11 and 12 may indicate that to succeed in the academic world, Standard English is vital and only Standard English can predispose its users to academic achievement. The teachers' support for eliminating non-standard English from the classroom (Survey item 13) underscores the need for interventions that challenge these prevailing attitudes and prioritize standard English in the classroom.

Ellis (2013), however, stated that using non-standard English in the classroom can make some suspicions about the individuals' 'skill', 'intention' and 'level of education'. Most importantly, Brady (2015) added that instructors need to know how to provide students with the official language in a way that equips them with benefits associated with "privilege" and "power" but not underestimate their identities, which they may link to other dialects. Although most teachers claimed that they would not judge students based on their home dialects (Survey item 14), some researchers such as (Haller & Waterman, 1985; Mehan, 1987 as mentioned in Bowie and Bond, 1994) believe that these judgments and decisions generally occur unconsciously.

Cross et al. (2001) also mentioned that teachers' quick and negative attitudes towards non-standard dialects of the English in the classroom may be "reflected in their classroom management and evaluative processes" (p. 224). Finally, in response to the last questionnaire item (Survey item 15), the teachers strongly supported the standardization of English language in schools. As literature informs us, some external and internal factors such as language power, prestige, diversity reduction, education system, national unity, and best usage are influential in the process of language standardization. Teachers' negative attitudes towards non-standard dialects and its speaker "by perpetuating the myth that there is a correct way to speak English" can cause the standardization process in education (Filson, 2018, p.28). Furthermore, Lippi- Green (2012) states that "the education system may not be the beginning, but it is the heart of standardization process" (p.68).

The second research question examined Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards standard vs., non- standard varieties of Persian. The respondents demonstrated a high degree of awareness regarding the phenomenon of language variation and multiple dialects within spoken language (Survey

item 1). It seems that the respondents have realized that variations in language use can occur due to different social situations. In brief, the lexical, phonological, and grammatical variants seem to act dependent on the situations in which individuals find themselves. As Hopper (1973) states "dialects are sociolinguistic phenomena and should be viewed primarily as carriers of social information about situations. Dialects of a language differ largely in that different usages are most appropriate for particular speakers within particular contexts" (p. 212).

A substantial proportion of the teachers strongly believed that students who speak non-standard Persian in the classroom are likely to experience academic difficulties (Survey item 2). The respondents in this study rated non-standard Persian children as less able to do well academically than standard Persian-speaking children. However, there is no reason to attribute the children's educational performance to features of any non-standard dialect of Persian. Some researchers such as (Taylor, 1973) and (Bowie and Bond, 1994) stated that teachers' negative attitudes towards students' non-standard dialect harmfully affect their chance, motivation and academic performance. Furthermore, some researchers such as Snowden (2014), Blake and Van Sickle (2001), and Van Sickle et al. (2002) expressed that including non-standard dialects into the educational system and engaging students in their language can help them to progress in school not only in their mother tongue, but also in the standard language. Most teachers agreed that non-standard dialects are lazy forms of Persian (Survey item 3).

However, most disagreement with this statement would be found among the teachers if they had been aware of the fact that non-standard dialects are rule-governed and systematic. As Byrd and Mintz (2010) claim, "every dialect is systematic in its structure and follows coherent patterns in its use" (p.64). They also add that "it would be completely out of realm of science to consider any dialect of any language as substandard, lazy or corrupt version of that language" (p.64). It is also worth mentioning that when a particular dialect is recognized as lazy, then students using that dialect may be wrongly judged to be lazy, too.

A substantial proportion of teachers disagreed with the proposition that non-standard dialects are appropriate for instructional purposes in subjects such as social studies or mathematics (Survey item 4). In the same vein, Blake and Cutler (2003) claimed that teachers were not informed about how non-standard dialects could be employed to teach subjects. It should also be mentioned that because most of text books are written in the standard dialect, the use of non-standard dialects can interfere with students' understanding and impede their learning.

However, teachers should keep in mind that a standard dialect does not necessarily increase the intelligence of students and it will not teach them various subjects such as math, science, or geography (Delpit, 2012). Accordingly, Cross et al. (2001) states that "teachers of all subjects and grades should be made aware of linguistic implications of differences in dialect and understand that "different" is not necessarily "wrong" and that students should not be penalized or rewarded based on of their spoken or written dialects (p. 223).

Most of the teachers strongly disagreed with the notion that students who speak non-standard Persian would achieve greater academic success without proficiency in standard Persian (Survey item 5). The idea that the standard dialect may contribute to students' further advancement is, to some extent, accepted. Teachers, however, should be informed that if there is no place for students' dialect in schools, they may still be vulnerable to educational disadvantage. The purposeful use of non-standard dialect and a recognized need to use a standard dialect may bring more fruitful results. Regarding job opportunities in the future, almost all of the teachers strongly agreed that the

standard Persian should be given priority over non-standard dialects (Survey question 6). Many employers make judgments about individuals applying for a job based on their 'speech patterns' (Hopper & Williams, 1972) and unfortunately, the standard dialect may only be considered as the correct language in the job market. Deterding (1998) believed that although people do favor a change in society, it won't happen in a short period of time. He adds that "while society is the way it is, the future prospects of students are harmed if they are unable to use a variety of English that is close to the standard" (Deterding, 1998, p. 20).

The teachers overwhelmingly endorsed the view that schools have a responsibility to ensure student proficiency in standard Persian (Survey question 7) and, further, that standard Persian should be the primary language of instruction within educational institutions (Survey question 8). Teachers need to know the best way to help students become proficient in the standard Persian is not through a process of domination of the standard Persian. Teachers should not speak from the viewpoint of the "dominant language ideology".

The educational system is one of the institutions which can impose the superiority of standard variety over non-standard varieties (Dent, 2004). As a result, the standard dialect becomes the dominant language in schools for non-standard dialect students, largely due to the dominant language ideology. But attempts should be made to give more attention to the significance of non-standard dialects in schools and not to replace them with the dominant language of education. A majority of teachers expressed disagreement with the concept of bidialectal education as a right for all children who do not speak standard Persian (Survey question 9).

Furthermore, a substantial proportion of teachers strongly opposed the use of public funds for the implementation of bidialectal education programs (Survey question 10). Researchers who advocate the bidialectal education believe that it can provide students with bidialectal programs to "have a firm foot in both worlds" (Blundon, 2016, p.227).

Some other researchers, however, argue from the point of view of factors such as a threat to national unity and dialectical interference to disagree with the bidialectal education (Pavlou, 1990; Pavlou& Papapavlou, 2004). Blake and Cutler (2003), in their study found that 20 percent of the teachers agreed with the bidialectal education and 24 percent of them believed that federal funds should be devoted to bidialectal programs. A majority of teachers strongly assented to the proposition that non-standard dialects possess their own unique and identifiable patterns of speech (Survey question 11). Very few, however, agree with the widespread use of non-standard dialects (Survey question 12). In other words, although respondents judged a non-standard dialect to be distinctive enough to have its grammatical forms and vocabularies, almost all of the teachers strongly felt that its use should be restricted to a particular geographical location or a social or ethnic group. It is stated that distinctive patterns refer to variations in vocabulary and grammar (Seargeant& Greenwell, 2013) and the use of distinctive patterns of speech is limited to a particular region or a specific social or ethnic community (Forlini et al., 1990).

A majority of the teachers strongly agreed that the grammatical structure of standard Persian is superior to non-standard dialects (Survey question 13). Many people consider the syntax of non-standard dialects as inappropriate. Henry (2005) stated that even the grammatical judgments of native speakers of non-standard dialects "are likely to be clouded by their knowledge that many of the structures in their dialect are considered 'ungrammatical' or 'incorrect' by speakers of the standard variety" (p.1599). Thus, such forms could usually not find their ways into the educational system and researchers believe that these forms would be 'stigmatized' (Henry, 2005, p. 1599; Cheshire, 1989).

More tolerant attitudes may be necessary in working on the grammatical structure of non-standard language varieties. Fromkin (2014) stated that although the grammatical structures and usage of the standard dialect may be more appropriate in some occasions, linguistically standard dialects do not have inferior or superior grammars compared to less prestigious or non-standard dialects.

A substantial percentage of the teachers concurred with the idea that teacher acceptance of non-standard Persian dialects would negatively impact academic standards within schools (Survey question 14). In other words, the respondents report a possible relationship between low standards and non-standard dialects of Persian. Falling standards in schools is one of the reasons for the concern with standard dialects. However, it should be noted that it is not the presence or absence of non-standard dialects that contributes to standards in schools; rather, teachers' ignorance or negative responses towards non-standard voices can negatively affect educational standards in schools.

Finally, most of the teachers agreed with the assertion that standard Persian possesses superior expressive capabilities compared to non-standard Persian dialects (Survey question 15). However, many researchers (e.g., Fromkin, 2014; Spears, 1999; Trudgill, 1979) believed that from a linguistic point of view, no dialect is more expressive than other dialects. As Fromkin and Rodman (1998) state, standard dialects are "neither more expressive, more logical, more complex, nor more regular than any other dialect or language" (p. 409). Thus, it seems that both standard and non-standard dialects have the same expressive power and the respondents' opinions about superiority of the standard dialect can be due to social rather than linguistic reasons (Trudgill, 1979).

Regarding the third research question, the results indicated that the teachers' attitudes towards non-standard varieties of Persian may play a key role in their evaluations of varieties of English. Accordingly, a change in teachers' attitudes towards non-standard forms of Persian may account for their perceptions of non-standard varieties of English. Generally speaking, if non-standard varieties of L1 are viewed positively in the educational system, then both teachers and learners may tend to evaluate non-standard varieties of L2 or foreign language more favorably. This idea is in line with McKenzie (2007), who states that "the general attitude changes currently occurring amongst Japanese nationals towards a greater acceptance (and presumably, a greater awareness) of varieties of Japanese speech, may, in future, result in increased tolerance of local varieties of English speech amongst Japanese learners" (p.220). McKenzie (2007) argued that perceptions in L1 varieties (Japanese speech) can influence or form the attitudes held towards varieties of English. Kunschak (2003) in his study also found a positive correlation between learners' awareness of and perceptions of variation in L1 (English) and L2 (German). On the other hand, he stated that an understanding of language variation is a potential determent of perceptions both within and across languages.

The results of this study imply that teachers can be in a position to improve their support of non-standard dialects and their speakers only once they have developed their own and their students' understanding of non-standard dialects and gained a greater awareness and knowledge of the fact that the non-standard dialects exist as an important influence on language and educational success. Clearly for this to happen, Wodak and Corson (1997, p. 107), for example, state that "in-service education of practitioners in sociolinguistics of schooling would certainly be helpful in identifying undesirable prejudices and eliminating the practices that result from them". Thus, teachers do not present students' non-standard dialects as inferior but value the non-standard varieties in schools and increase the appreciation of the appropriate time and place for the use of standard and non-standard forms.

Furthermore, to value the non-standard varieties, school systems and policy makers need to move towards an informed policy that promote greater importance of both standard and non-standard varieties in classroom context as language variation contributes to education. As Corson (2000) states, "the absence of formal policies that give explicit respect to non-standard varieties actually creates a tacit form of language policy that legitimizes the standard variety" (p. 68). Attempts should be made to eliminate the bias against the non-standard varieties and not to label their speakers as 'educationally disabled', which can help make the necessary changes in attitude.

The strong correlation reported between attitudes towards language variation in LI and L2/FL can offer that developing teachers' positive attitude and awareness towards L1 variation could potentially influence their level of acceptance of L2 or FL variation and "promoting the integration of language variation into LI teaching may have some positive outcome on L2 awareness and attitudes" (Kunschak, 2003, p. 152). Further studies are thus required to investigate variables and courses which can prepare teachers and students learn about language variation and then probe how they can take advantages arising from their greater awareness of the role of language variation in educational contexts. While generalizability of the findings might be limited due to the study sample size, future research studies may employ a larger and more diverse sample. Triangulating data through methods such as classroom observations, interviews, or analysis of teaching materials could provide more in-depth data. Subsequent research could also examine how teachers' beliefs about standard and non-standard varieties influence their instructional choices, students' feedback, and classroom management strategies.

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