

## DEFICIENCIES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN/SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF IRAN & INDIA

BADRIYEH MIRZAI RIZI<sup>1</sup>, MOHD. AKHTAR SIDDIQUI<sup>2</sup>, REZA AFSHAR MOGHADDAM<sup>3</sup>  
& SHANKAR MUKHERJEE<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,4</sup>Faculty of Education, Institute of Advanced Studies in Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, Islamic Azad University of Science and Research, Tehran, Iran

### ABSTRACT

The process of teaching and learning English in Iran is not satisfactory. Most of the Iranian students, who have passed seven years of learning English (from junior to secondary school), fail to acquire expected level of proficiency in English. In the Indian context also, a high percentage of school dropouts who were taught English for about six periods per week for six years, leave their schools as ignorant of English usage.

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to identify the existing problems of teaching and learning English as a foreign/second language in the secondary schools of Iran and India.

**Material & Method:** The samples consist of 400 randomly selected government secondary school students, (200 Iranian and 200 Indian), and 20 English teachers of the same schools. The questionnaires mainly focused on language usage, teaching strategies, medium of instruction and English textbooks.

**Results & Discussions:** Indian students found to have better access to English audio-visual aids, they read English newspapers and magazines more than five times as compared to the Iranians and majority of them find the contents of their English textbooks interesting. The extent of speaking English in their English classes was higher than the Iranians.

**KEYWORDS:** ELT (English Language Teaching), EFL (English as a Foreign Language), ESL (English as a Second Language), Questionnaire

### INTRODUCTION

English language is considered by many as the international language. It is a language which has secured a place for itself alongside local languages in multilingual communities and is also learnt by all classes of the society. Its acquisition can guarantee the availability of opportunities to employment, traveling, higher education, and even better life (Crystal, 1997). The knowledge of English is also essential to access higher education which is dependent on English in many countries.

In Iran, English is taught as a foreign language and in India it is taught as a Second Language. The major difference between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) is presented in this paper. In an ESL context, English is the partial or universal medium of instruction in some or most subjects in school, while in an EFL context instruction in other subjects is not normally given in English (Prator, 1991).

Teaching English in Iranian schools starts from the first grade of guidance school with three-hour weekly program and continues in the four grades of secondary education. In spite of this, the Iranian school gradulators aren't able to communicate in English (Mahmoodi, 1990). English is taught in Indian schools about six periods per week for six years (Jahangard, 2005). But it has been estimated that they hardly know few words by the time they join a University. This means that they have hardly been able to learn English words at the rate of one word per period. They do not know how to use the commonest structures of English. The mistake is in Educational system itself as teacher's target is to "prepare" his students for the examination and not to make them skilled in the use of the language they are learning (Subramanian, 1985). Communicative language teaching was introduced in India in the 1980s; it was a stuffy failure for the first few years because of the lack of the right context (Gupta, 2005).

### **Significance of the Study**

In this study, the researcher tried to examine the reasons behind the failures of the Iranian students to acquire the expected level of proficiency in English in spite of learning English for seven successive years (from the first year of junior to last year of secondary school). Even though various efforts have been taken by the Iranian educationalists for improving the situation of English language teaching for the past few decades in Iran, a disappointing situation still exists in the achievements of English learning among the Iranian students of secondary schools. So, it is really necessary to explore real reasons behind the poor achievements of the students in English. It is also important to identify the problems the Iranian students encounter in the process of learning English.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are presented below:

- To explore the ways of developing ELT in Iran at the level of secondary schools.
- To study and compare perceptions of teachers and students of Iranian and Indian secondary schools about the following:
  - Medium of instruction in English class.
  - Methods used in English class.
  - Difficulties faced in ELT.
  - Textbooks.
- To suggest ways for improvement of status of ELT in Iranian secondary schools.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

For systematically describing the situation, we have used a "Descriptive Method" to examine the ELT status of the Iranian and Indian secondary schools. At the same time, this study could be called as a qualitative research which deals with issues not directly observable.

#### **Materials**

The sample in the present study were consist of 400 government secondary school students, 200 from Iran and 200 from India, and 20 English teachers, 10 from Iran and 10 from India.

### Iran Sample

A total of 100 students from a girl's secondary school in the west of Tehran, 50 students from two boy's secondary schools from the center of the city and 50 students from the two government secondary schools (boys and girls) of Isfahan (the second major city of Iran) participated in this study. Further, a total of ten teacher's questionnaires were distributed and filled in by the English teachers of the same schools.

### India Sample

The Indian study was carried out in three districts of New Delhi. Questionnaires were collected from 200 students of four government secondary schools of these districts. Out of four schools, one was a boy's school, two were girl's schools and the fourth was a co-educated one. A total of ten teacher's questionnaires were distributed among the teachers of the same schools.

### Instrumentation: Development of Tools

#### Questionnaires

The materials comprised of two types of questionnaires, one for students and the other for teachers, consisting of mainly multiple-choice questions and some open-ended questions.

#### Student's Questionnaire

The student's questionnaire, with 29 questions, was planned with three parts: personal information, nineteen multiple-choice questions covering the areas of English classes, English textbooks etc. The last part gave emphasis to teaching styles and methods which contained five questions.

#### Teacher's Questionnaire

The teacher's questionnaire, with 30 questions, was designed in four parts: personal information, fifteen multiple-choice questions, six open-ended questions on the problems posed in ELT classes, textbooks etc., and the last part which questioned teaching and learning strategies.

### Distribution of the Student's Sample

Table 1 shows the percent of the students in terms of class and their nationality attended in this survey.

**Table 1: Participated Students in Terms of Classes**

Nationality	Total Sample	Class 9 <sup>th</sup>	Class 11 <sup>th</sup>
Iran	200	128 (64%)	72 (36%)
India	200	92 (46%)	108 (54%)

Table 2 is showing the gender of participated students in this study.

**Table 2: Percent of the Students in Terms of Gender and Their Nationality**

Nationality	Total Sample	Girls	Boys
Iran	200	167 (83.5%)	33 (16.5%)
India	200	67 (33.5%)	133 (66.5%)

### Techniques Used for Data Analysis

After the data were collected, the questionnaires were content analyzed. Subsequently, the frequency of each response was tabulated. Comments from the open – ended questions were used as part of analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Some of the major tables related to the issue are presented below. Further, the results of study with interpretation and discussion of the results according to the main objectives of the study are also presented.

### Reason for Studying English

All students were asked about the reason for need of English. According to the Table 3, 65.5% of Iranian students considered passing exam as their reason for studying English, on the contrary, only 31% of Indian students felt that English was needed to pass the exam.

It can be concluded that majority of the Iranian students learn English only to pass their exam. The finding of Kamrul Hasan (2004) supported the result of the Iranian respondents to the question. In his finding, he cleared that most of the students study English because it is a curricular subject, and they have to read it to pass the examinations and still most of the teachers spend their time in the English classroom in how to prepare their students to pass exam.

**Table 3: Do you Need English to Pass Exams?**

Nationality	Sample (n)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Iran	200	131 (65.5%)	69 (34.5%)
India	200	62 (31%)	138 (69%)

### Teaching/Learning Strategies/Methods

#### Listening English TV News/Watching English TV Programs

Learning strategies are tools and techniques that learners and teachers use in their learning/teaching process. In fact, the Indian students have more access to English media (e.g. TV channels, newspapers, magazines, etc.) as compared to Iranian students. According to the table 4, the Indian students have better access to audio-visual aids in English as 54.5% of them are listening or watching English TV news or programs, while comparatively, fewer Iranian students (26.5%) have this kind of access.

**Table 4: Do You Listen to English TV News or Watch English TV Programs?**

Nationality	Sample (n)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Iran	200	53 (26.5%)	147 (73.5%)
India	200	109 (54.5%)	91 (45.5%)

### Reading English Newspaper

As showed in table 5, reading English newspapers differ greatly between Indian and Iranian student. The Indian students read English newspapers more than five times as much of Iranian ones (54.5% vs. 10% respectively).

**Table 5: Do You Read English Newspapers?**

Nationality	Sample (n)	Yes	No
Iran	200	20 (10%)	180 (90%)
India	200	109 (54.5%)	91 (45.5%)

### Reading English Magazines/Journals

The Indian students acknowledged that 52.5% of them read English magazines/journals regularly, while the Iranian students don't pay much attention to this and only 11% of them were interested to read the magazines/journals on a regular basis (Table 6).

**Table 6: Do You Regularly Read English Magazines/Journals?**

Nationality	Sample (n)	Yes	No
Iran	200	22 (11 %)	178 (89 %)
India	200	105 (52.50 %)	95 (47.50 %)

The Indian students showed more importance to read English magazines/journals for improving their English language. As we noticed from the table 5 and table 6, the percent of the Indian students was about five times more than the Iranian ones.

It should be noted that publication and circulation of English magazines/journals in India is much higher than in Iran and it may be the main reason of not reading this English aids by Iranian students as much as Indian counterparts. Moreover, poor English knowledge of the Iranian students may further discourage them to read English magazines/journals.

### Listening to English News

Majority of the Indian students i.e. 89.5%, listen to news in English, while Iranian students pay less attention to this learning aid as only 39% of them answered yes to this question.

**Table 7: Do You Listen to News in English?**

Nationality	Sample (n)	Yes	No
Iran	200	78 (39 %)	122 (61%)
India	200	179 (89.5%)	21 (10.5%)

There are good numbers of English TV channels in India, while Iranian English learners are suffering due to shortage of enough English media in their country. Most of the learners prefer learning through audio and audio visual aids. Television, videos and films are the most popular media with language learners.

### Need for Language Teaching Aids in Schools

The details of the table 8, shows that all the Iranian teachers and 50% of the Indian teachers in the present study strongly agreed that language teaching aids such as films, tapes, short stories, etc. should be used in schools to improve student's English learning. Remaining 50% of the Indian teachers in the present study also agreed to the importance of these teaching aids. According to these data, agreement of the Iranian teachers on this issue was twice as compared to the Indian teachers. Usage of Audio/video English aids such as films, tapes, short stories, etc. are not obligatory for the Iranian teachers in their teaching process. As the Iranian students are mostly weak in their English speaking and listening, the Iranian teachers feel they need to have such media to improve their teaching English as a second language.

**Table 8: To What Extent Do You Agree with the Following Statement to Improve Student's Learning? Language Teaching Aids Such as Films, Tapes, Short Stories, etc. Should be Used in Schools**

Comments	Iran (N=10)	India (N=10)
Strongly Agree	10 (100 %)	5 (50 %)

**Table 8: Contd.,**

Agree	0	5 (50 %)
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), the high choice of the audio or video aids by the learners may be due to the fact that such media motivate students by bringing a slice of real life into the classroom and by presenting language in its more complete communicative context. Another reason may be the fact that students like to see what they hear, and such media are more vivid and attention catching than radio or tapes.

### Attending Coaching Classes

The table 9 suggested that a significant number of the Iranian students are attending coaching classes (53.5%), whereas the Indian student's attendance in these classes is not considerable (30%).

**Table 9: Do You Attend Any Coaching Class to Improve Your English?**

Nationality	Sample (n)	Yes	No
Iran	200	105 (53.5 %)	95 (47.5 %)
India	200	60 (30 %)	140 (70 %)

High attendance of the Iranian students may be interpreted in two different ways: Firstly, their English class at school is not sufficient enough and they prefer to have outside English classes. Secondly, the teaching qualities of the Iranian coaching classes are better than their English class in school. This also shows the willingness and interest of Iranian student's to learn English language.

### Increase of English Classes

For improving student's learning, both Iranian and Indian teachers were asked whether there should be an increase in number of English classes in their school. As table 10 indicates, 100% of the Iranian teachers (70% strongly agree and 30% agree) and 90% of the Indian teachers (40% strongly agree and 50% agree) agreed that more English classes were required.

**Table 10: To What Extent Do You Agree with the Statement "English Classes Should be Held More" to Improve Student's Learning?**

Comments	Iran (N=10)	India (N=10)
Strongly Agree	7 (70 %)	4 (40%)
Agree	3 (30%)	5 (50 %)
No answer	0	1(10 %)
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0

### English Textbook Assessment

Textbooks play an essential role in language classrooms in all types of educational institutions. To evaluate and compare the English textbooks prescribed in the secondary schools of the two countries, the researcher devised some questions in the both student and teacher's questionnaires as presented below in table 11 and 12. As observed, there was a very big difference between the Indian and Iranian responses regarding the contents of their English textbooks. It meant that the Iranian learners were not satisfied with their English textbooks. This factor has a negative impact on learning process. According to the table 11, majority of the Indian students find the contents of their English textbooks

interesting (74.5%), whereas only 15.5% of the Iranian students thought that way. Further, 32% of the Iranian as compared to only 10.5% of the Indian students found their English textbook boring.

The Iranian students stated that their English textbooks were not interesting. It means that Iranian English textbooks contents need to be revised in a more interesting and interactive manner. According to Moradi (1996), Iranian English textbooks of the secondary schools are suffering from various problems, as being bulky, lack of relation among the materials and insufficient explanation of the words which cause more problems for the students.

**Table 11: How Do You Find the Contents of Your English Textbook?**

Comments	Iran (N=200)	India (N=200)
No answer	11 (5.5%)	2 (1%)
Interesting	31 (15.5%)	149 (74%)
Boring	64 (32%)	21(10.5%)
Not sure	93 (46.5%)	26 (13%)
Others	1 (0.5%)	2 (1%)

For improving student’s English learning, both teachers were asked to what extent they agree to have interesting English textbooks for students. The findings of the table 12, suggested that all the Iranian teachers strongly agreed that the textbooks should be interesting regarding the contents, pictures, colors, etc. 80% of the Indian teachers strongly agreed and rest 20% agreed that their textbooks should be made more interesting.

**Table 12: To What Extent Do You Agree with the Following Statement to Improve Student’s Learning? The Textbooks Should be Interesting (Regarding the Content, Pictures, Colors, etc.)**

Comments	Iran (N=10)	India (N=10)
Strongly Agree	10 (100%)	8 (80%)
Agree	0	2 (20 %)
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0

The teachers were asked to define the teach ability of their English textbooks i.e. how far the textbooks were able to impart English learning to students. According to the findings of table 13, the results showed 80% of the Iranian and only 20% of the Indian teachers stated that their English textbooks are not interesting.

Cunningsworth (1995) suggested that textbooks are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presentation material, a source of ideas and activities, a reference source for students, a syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence. He also contends that we should also ensure that "careful selection is made, and that the materials selected closely reflect the needs of the learners and the aims, methods, and values of the teaching program". From the above statements, we can conclude that, one of the ways to improve a curriculum is to improve the textbooks by evaluating and assessing them from the learners.

**Table 13: Express Your Opinion about the Teach Ability of the Textbook You Teach**

Comments	Iran (N=10)	India (N=10)
Not interesting	8 (80%)	2 (20%)
Good books	0	1 (10 %)
Some boring some interesting	0	6 (60%)
Blank	2 (20%)	1 (10 %)

### Medium of Instruction

Medium of instruction is the language that is used in teaching. In India, media of instruction switches among English, Hindi, and the respective state's official languages, while in Iran medium of instruction is mostly Persian (Farsi). Following tables explore the issue among the both Iranian and Indian secondary schools.

As observed from the table 14, the Indian students converse in English more than Iranian students (36% vs. 29.5% respectively) and use their mother tongue less than the Iranians in their English class (17% vs. 27% respectively). The other finding of this table shows that the usage of English along with local language (mother tongue) is more preferred by the Indian students (47% vs. 37% respectively).

**Table 14: Which Languages Do You Mostly Use in English Classes?**

Comments	Iran (N=200)	India (N=200)
English & local	74(37%)	94 (47%)
English	59 (29.5%)	72 (36%)
Local	54 (27%)	34 (17%)
No answer	13 (6.5%)	0

With these findings, we could conclude that both the Iranian and Indian students use their mother tongue in English class but the usage of local language by the Iranian students was higher than the Indian ones. Hosseini (2007) has discussed this matter and said "English taught through student's mother tongues, exaggerates the context in Iran as compared to India, and therefore, students do not have ample opportunities for more natural acquisition of the language". This conclusion supports our findings in both the countries and justifies the last finding related to lack of English environment in Iran.

According to results of table 15, majority of the Indian teachers (90%) believed that their students are able to follow his/her class if conducted in English however only 30% of the Iranian teachers believing the same.

**Table 15: Are They Able to Follow Your Class if Conducted in English?**

Nationality	Sample (n)	Yes	No
Iran	10	3 (30%)	7 (70 %)
India	10	9 (90%)	1 (10 %)

The next question of the study on medium instruction was about the importance of avoiding use of mother tongue in English classes by both teachers and students. As we see in table 16, 50% of the Iranian teachers (10% *strongly agree* and 40% *agree*) and eighty percent of the Indian teachers (50% *strongly agree* and 30% *agree*) agreed that teachers and the students should try to avoid using mother tongue in English classes.

**Table 16: To What Extent Do You Agree with the Following Statement to Improve Student's Learning? The Teachers and the Students Should Try to Avoid Using Mother Tongue in English Classes**

Comments	Iran (N=10)	India (N=10)
Strongly Agree	1 (10%)	5 (50%)
Agree	4 (40%)	3 (30%)
No answer	2(20%)	0
Disagree	1 (10%)	2 (20%)
Strongly disagree	2 (20%)	0



## CONCLUSIONS

According to findings opted from the present study, ELT in the Iranian and Indian secondary schools seems to be unsuccessful and English language proficiency and communicative competencies of a majority of the students are still open to question. In Iran, most of the students, who have passed seven years of learning English (from junior to secondary school), were not able to communicate even their basic intentions effectively. This is the reality in spite of the fact that they have had nearly 1000 hours of formal language instruction in their language classes before entering the university. Most of them have a very poor command over the English language.

On the basis of the conclusions of this study, it can be said that most of the Iranian students don't receive adequate exposure to the English language, only the textbooks and not any other English books are taught, and there is frequent use of mother tongue by both students and the teachers.

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