

**A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF  
MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES IN DEVELOPING  
MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATION AND LISTENING  
PROFICIENCY AMONG IRANIAN TEFL STUDENTS**

**by**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**August 2011**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledging God's assistance, I would like to express my deepest and sincerest gratitude to all the people who inspired, supported and helped me with making this study possible. First and foremost, I am grateful to Professor Ambigapathy Pandian, my supervisor, who taught me a lot. Not only did he give me pertinent advice and scholarly guidance on the academic work during the doctoral process, but also I learned how a real intellectual should behave as a human being. To me, he is well characterized with a combination of merits and virtues, knowing how to use them to guide another person in life. He is hardworking, strict, disciplined, tough and serious; and at the same time, kind, gentle, patient, generous and flexible with such a great sense of understanding and empathy for others. He is a man of both success and values. He expects his graduate students to "sacrifice" and at the same time, he exemplifies what "sacrificing" means. I really appreciate his providing me with spiritual, moral and mental support and will never ever forget his guidance throughout my rest of life.

Secondly, I am thankful to a number of people for their generous sharing of knowledge. I appreciate all the reviewers for their insightful feedbacks on the early draft of this thesis. Also, I thank those editors and anonymous reviewers who made valuable comments on the papers I submitted to journals and conferences. In particular, I express warmest gratitude to Professor Robert A. Croker, (University of Nanzan, Japan) who was incredibly supportive in my learning process of mixed-methods research. My special thanks go to Dr. Baghaei (English Department, Mashhad Islamic Azad

University) and Dr. Khatijah Sey (IPS, USM) who helped me with statistical data analysis.

Thirdly, my special word of acknowledgement goes to the authorities of the Universiti of Sains Malaysia (USM) for admitting me as a PhD candidate and providing all the facilities needed to pursue my studies in a well-equipped, peaceful and beautiful setting. I also appreciate their awarding me the fellowship which reduced my financial concerns, to a large degree. I am also grateful to Islamic Azad University-Branch of Mashhad (MIAU) who granted my requests for a leave and extending it over and over, helping me to have less mental engagement.

I am also deeply indebted to my family. I owe a lot to my husband who had to tolerate a life without a “woman”; to my children, Mehran (26) and Mahram (20), as graduate and undergraduate students who needed me at home. They should know that there is someone who really knows and appreciates what hardship they have to go through while pursuing their studies. I hope they will enjoy my support from now on.

I am also thankful to my colleagues at MIAU who gave me a hand in confirming the validity of the instruments used for this study. And last but not least, my words of appreciation and best wishes are expressed for all the sophomore TEFL students in the English Department, MIAU, (enrolling in the academic year of 2008-2009) who enthusiastically participated in this study helping me with collecting data. I hope, in return, they will find the results of this research study beneficial.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Associate Diploma
AMTB	Attitude/Motivation Test Battery
ALM	Audio-Lingual Methods
BA	Bachelor of Art
BE	Bachelor of Education
CA	Cronbach Alpha
CCR	The Council of Cultural Revolution
CLL	Community Language Learning
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EBP	English for Business Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EG1	Experimental Group 1
EG2	Experimental Group 2
EGP	English for General Purposes
EIL	English as an International Language
ELL	English Language Learner
ELT	English Language Teacher
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
g	General intelligence

GTM	Grammar Translation Method
HS	Hijri-Shamsi (Persian solar calendar based on the Hijrat / Migration of Prophet Mohammad Peace Be Upon Him)
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
INS	Instrumental Motivation
INT	Integrative Motivation
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LCS	Listening Comprehension Strategy
LLS	Language Learning Strategy
LP	Listening Proficiency
LS	Learning Strategy
MA	Master of Art
MCHE	Ministry of Culture and Higher Education
MET	Ministry of Education and Training
MHME	Ministry of Health and Medical Education
MI	Multiple Intelligences Theory
MIDAS	Multiple Intelligences Development Assessment Scale
MO	Motivational Orientation
PBT	Paper Based Test
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy

QUAL	Qualitative Data / used in mixed-methods research when qualitative data is weighted more heavily (Creswell, 2002)
QUAN	Quantitative Data / used in mixed-methods research when quantitative data is weighted more heavily (Creswell, 2002)
SILL	Strategy Use Inventory for Language Learning
SPSS	Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences
SW	Silent Way
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TESOL	Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages
TL	Target Language
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TPR	Total Physical Response
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### Journal articles and book chapters:

- Bemani Naeini, M. & Pandian, A. (2010). On the possible relationships between Multiple Intelligences, listening proficiency and motivational orientation among Iranian TEFL university students. *The Iranian EFL Journal*. 6(2), 75-99.
- Bemani Naeini, M. & Pandian, A. (2010). On the relationship of Multiple Intelligences with listening proficiency and attitudes among Iranian TEFL university students. *TESOL Canada*, 28(1), 97-114.
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- Bemani Naeini, M. & Pandian, A. (2009). On the role of Multiple Intelligences in listening proficiency and motivation among Iranian TEFL university students. In *Creativity and Collaboration in English Language Teaching and Learning in Asia: The 7<sup>th</sup> Asia TEFL International Conference, held on August, 7-9, 2009, Bangkok, Thailand.*



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**SUATU KAJIAN SEPARA EKSPERIMEN TENTANG PERANAN  
KECERDASAN PELBAGAI DALAM PERKEMBANGAN ORIENTASI  
BERMOTIVASI DAN KEMAHIRAN MENDENGAR DALAM KALANGAN  
PELAJAR IRAN YANG MENGIKUTI PROGRAM TEFL.**

**ABSTRAK**

Berasaskan trend semasa dalam pendidikan yang memberi tumpuan atau pemusatan khusus terhadap pelajar, maka Teori Kecerdasan Pelbagai (Multiple Intelligences Theory, MIT) dipercayai dapat membantu para guru menilai perbezaan kognitif dan afektif bagi setiap pelajar ESL/EFL. Namun demikian, tiada kajian khusus tentang kognitif dan afek dijalankan bagi mengkaji masalah kelemahan dalam pendengaran (listening deficiency). Justeru, berasaskan hipotesis bahawa aspek pendengaran sepatutnya digabungjalinkan dengan Kecerdasan Pelbagai (Multiple Intelligences, MI) pelajar, maka kajian ini bermatlamat menyelidik peranan serta potensi hubung jalin pelbagai komponen MIT, termasuk MI yang sedia ada, serta peningkatan motivasi pelajar, dalam kemahiran mendengar 60 pelajar TEFL Iran. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini mengenal pasti profil MI subjek serta menyelidik sebarang hubung jalin yang mungkin ada bagi MI peserta dan skor yang mereka peroleh dalam ujian pendengaran dan Orientasi Bermotivasi (Motivational Orientation, MO). Di samping itu, kajian ini juga berusaha meneroka sebarang perubahan dalam persepsi motivasi serta kemahiran mendengar, sebagai hasil daripada aktiviti berasaskan MI. Dalam ujian pra / pasca kajian separa eksperimen, yang berasaskan dua andaian terbitan daripada MIT, subjek diagihkan kepada dua kumpulan, iaitu 30 subjek dalam setiap kumpulan, yang secara rawak dinamakan sebagai Kumpulan Eksperimen 1

(Experimental Group 1, EG1) dan Kumpulan Eksperimen 2 (Experimental Group 2, EG2). “EG1” dikhususkan untuk aktiviti amali kecerdasan, manakala “EG2” pula bersandarkan kekuatan MI mereka. Berdasarkan tabii objektif dan permasalahan penyelidikan, kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk tiga sudut (triangulation design) dalam usaha mengumpul data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Inventori MI McKenzie’s (1999) digunakan untuk mengenal pasti identiti profil MI. Di samping itu, dua soal selidik jenis Likert yang diubah suai termasuk soalan respons terbuka digunakan untuk memperoleh data tentang persepsi motivasi peserta. Selanjutnya, kemahiran mendengar peserta diukur melalui ujian TOEFL, yang dijalankan sebelum dan selepas intervensi. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa peserta tergolong dalam lapan profil kecerdasan dengan “Motivasi Integratif” yang tinggi. Analisis inferens menunjukkan tiada hubung jalin yang signifikan di antara MI dan skor atau MO. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat suatu perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor yang diperoleh oleh kedua-dua kumpulan eksperimen, yang menunjukkan EG1 lebih menyerlah daripada EG2. Di samping itu, perbezaan yang signifikan di antara skor sebelum (pra) dan selepas (pasca) ujian ujian menunjukkan impak intervensi yang positif. Analisis deskriptif tentang respons terbuka dengan rujukan pada tema yang dikod berulang kali, memudahkan perbandingan keputusan kuantitatif dan kualitatif, dalam usaha memperoleh suatu kesimpulan yang sahih tentang motivasi. Berdasarkan kontradiksi yang ditunjukkan, didapati wujudnya jurang di antara “desirable motivation” dan “desired motivation” dalam kalangan pelajar Iran yang mengikuti program TEFL.

**A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF MULTIPLE  
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**ABSTRACT**

Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) is believed to provide for teachers to consider ESL/EFL learners' individual cognitive and affective differences. However, there is no research on cognition and affect in one single study to investigate the problem of listening. Thus, based on the hypothesis that the aspects of listening might be connected to the learners' Multiple Intelligences (MI), the present study aimed at investigating the relationship and potential impact of MI in and on 60 Iranian TEFL students' Motivational Orientation (MO) and listening through the intervention of MI-based activities in one academic semester. This pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental study derived two assumptions from MIT: 1) accommodating students' different range of strengths, aiming to strengthen the weaknesses; 2) accommodating the particular strength of students recognizing their preferences. Based on these assumptions, two intact groups, with 30 subjects in each, were assigned to Experimental Group 1 (EG1) and Experimental Group 2 (EG2). "EG1" was intended to practice activities across all intelligences while "EG2" was formed based on the subjects' MI strengths. This study was a mixed methods research with triangulation design. McKenzie's (1999) MI Inventory was used to identify MI profiles. Also, questionnaires were used to elicit quantitative and qualitative data about all participants' motivational orientation before the experiment. "EG2" received one more Likert-scale questionnaire including open-response questions about their

perceptions of the intervention i.e. working on only the activities that reflect their MI preferences. Moreover, the participants' listening proficiency was measured administrating the listening sections of two TOEFL tests. These tests were used before and after the intervention for both study groups. There was no significant difference between MI and the score of listening or MO due to the culture-bound nature of MI. However, the results suggest a significant difference between the pre- and post-listening scores suggesting the positive impact of the intervention. Also, EG1 significantly outperformed EG2 in listening after the intervention that testifies to the interactional aspects of MIT. The results of quantitative and qualitative data about MO diverge from one another suggesting contradiction between “desirable motivation” and “desired motivation” at two phases of the study. As a whole, the qualitative results favor the intervention, mainly concerning “academic success”, which is justified by the dominant educational methodology in Iran.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

In the last few decades, because of the development of information technology throughout the world as well as the drastic transformation in Iran's political, economical and educational systems, the goals of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Iran have undergone dramatic changes (Askarzadeh Torghabeh, 2007; Saffarzadeh, 1988). As referred to by the Islamic leader of the nation in one of his important speeches on the first day of *Nowrooz* (the New Year), 1385 HS. (21 March, 2006), there is a tremendous need for people to improve their English as an International Language (EIL) to challenge the global developments all over the world. As a distinctive feature of such movement is considering English language instruction to be introduced at elementary or even at pre-school levels. There has been a great tendency to learn English to the extent that parents choose to send their children to the private language centers of high quality of teaching. In many cases, most parents prefer private schools due to some limitations in state/public schools (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Beniss, 2007). In addition to introducing English at high school levels, passing English proficiency test is considered as a requirement for attending university, no matter what the field of study would be (Saffarzadeh, 1988; Tajandi, 2002; Yarmohammadi, 1995).

However, in spite of realizing the importance of English as an international language by Iranian officials and scholars, Iranian community suffers from low proficiency level of English among the EFL learners (Ahmadi Darani, 2003; Gorjian, 2005). In order to deal with the problem of poor language proficiency, listening

comprehension, in particular, EFL teachers need to seek for the ways that really work in their English classrooms. They also need to find out what educational theories underpin effective practices and what TEFL research says about effective ways of learning by English Language Learners (ELLs). In the realm of language acquisition, Krashen & Terrell (1983) focus on a non-threatening environment in which the learners communicate through receiving and giving messages. In such an environment, teachers' role is of crucial importance in that they need to encourage and praise every learner for using the second language'/foreign language. In such situations, the challenge for teachers of English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) is to use teaching strategies that effectively promote development of English in all four skills. Teachers can facilitate the acquisition of English even more effectively if they use multiple strategies that elicit active involvement (Terrell, 1982).

In addition, over the last two decades, there has been a shift from teacher-oriented approaches towards calls for providing a flexible, needs-oriented personalized learning environment in which there is more focus on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching (Nunan, 1988). Within the field of individual differences, educational research informs us that learners, reflecting their individual characteristics, process and represent knowledge in different particular ways, adopting different styles and strategies. Literature also informs us that such differences have been found to predict learners' performance; hence, providing for teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to those different traits (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Cohen, 2003; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Thus, to develop a learner-centred curriculum, teachers are encouraged to better understand their



students' traits and the ways through which they process information. To do so, some ideas have been integrated into language pedagogy from disciplines like psychology.

From psychological perspective, Gardner calls attention to neurological studies which underpin effective theoretical bases for language learning/teaching. Proposing his Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT), Gardner (1983) indicates that human brain stores different types of learning elements in particular areas of the brain and that various types of learning take place as a result of synaptic connections between cells in different areas of the brain. According to this theory, all individuals are born with all types of intelligences which are necessary to effectively function in society. Nevertheless, each person develops some of these intelligences more strongly than the others (Armstrong, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, the focus is on examining the efficiency of MIT to explore if it has any educational benefit since MIT is believed to provide for a non-threatening learning environment by recognizing learners individual differences. Logically, the first step would be providing for learning situations that accommodate learners' different learning characteristics; thus, improving their performance on language learning. The challenge in developing such learning situations is in identifying the salient individual differences that affect learning, in particular learning a foreign language, knowing that second language (L2) strategy classification is related to separate language skills. Then, the next step would be adapting the instruction to such differences to give all learners the opportunity to fulfil their potential needs (Christison, 1996; Lazear, 1999).

One way for teachers to help EFL students to be more successful in learning English is to broaden their teaching approaches and methods. As a support for this fact, Gardner (1999) states that at any one time in learning and teaching experience, only about seventy percent of the students are responding to the teaching methods that are employed in class. Also, Christison (1998) reports that, in ESL/EFL courses, instructors tend to focus upon Linguistic and Visual clues to teach language, which may not reach students who do not respond to those clues. Then, there is the need to develop a model for using Multiple Intelligences (MI) and to develop the content that reflects those principles.

Christison (1998) considers learning to use the intelligences in problem situations as the first step which will lead to discovering the fact that using different intelligences creates a richer and more varied approach to learning. Such approach is beneficial to the students in that they become aware of their own and their fellow students' strengths, and examine through cooperative group work the contributions those differences could make. Teachers, in turn, structure activities that rely on the strengths of several intelligence areas. Finally, teacher training programs will get to upgrade their curriculum by providing trainees with the kind of training relevant to their own instructional situations in three areas: identifying students' current MI; hence, their learning strategies through surveys, interviews, or other means; helping individual students discern which strategies are most relevant to their intelligences and or learning styles; and aiding students in developing orchestrated strategy use rather than a scattered approach.

On the other hand, it has been emphasized in literature that not only cognitive dimensions, but also affective aspects play crucial roles in learning languages (e.g. Arnold & Brown, 1999; Brown, 1994; Chastain, 1988). It is also envisioned by MIT that once the learners find the teaching methodology and learning activities in accordance with their own interests and preference, they develop more positive attitudes towards learning and raise motivation about it. As a consequence, it facilitates the task of learning materials (Gardner, 1983, 1993). It is in this respect that this research study seeks to investigate and explore the possible relationship between cognition and affect.

So, in order to find out whether developments in individual difference theory, MIT in particular as well as instructional design can be integrated together to make a positive impact on learning outcomes, mainly listening proficiency, it is necessary to review:

- The aspects of individual differences that need to be taken into account, including their MI profiles and motivation
- How a change of instruction can accommodate individual differences through the use of the learners' MI profiles
- How could such a change of instruction accelerate learner motivation as the mediator, leading to learner success

Addressing the above mentioned points, this study will review the nature and dimensions of individual differences and in particular the trait dimensions of intelligence or ability, and style. It will also review how enhanced teaching strategies can support individual trait differences in the domain of affect, and how, in

particular, the use of the MI framework of individual differences can offer a new dimension in the design of EFL instruction so that it accommodates learners' both cognition and affect.

Since the study will investigate the challenges and problem in Iran, it would be of some benefit to introduce a background to the Iranian system of education, in general and EFL education, in particular, with a special regard to listening competency in the next section, focusing on the Iranian studies done on listening, MIT and affective factors.

## **1.2 Background Information about Iran**

This section will briefly review some facts about Iran, its educational system and more specifically TEFL in Iran, where the study takes place. Thus, it will provide the readers with a better understanding of the relevant context of this study.

### **1.2.1 Geographical Facts about Iran**

Being located in South-Western Asia, Islamic Republic of Iran covers 1,648,000 square kilometers with an estimated population of about seventy two million people of a variety of ethnic backgrounds and regional dialects. About ninety percents of the population are Muslims of Shea sect while about eight percent are Sunni Muslims. The remaining population consists of some other religious groups like Christians and Jews. The whole nation is divided into 26 provinces. Tehran, as the largest and the most crowded city is the capital with a population of about twelve million people. Having common borders with the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman in the south, Iran shares borders with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, Turkmenistan

and Kazakhstan to the north. The western neighbors are Turkey and Iraq while it is bordered by Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east. (Wikipedia, 2005)

### **1.2.2 Education System in Iran**

According to the education profile provided by the Higher Education Advisory of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Oslo, the school system in Iran is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) which is also responsible for some teacher training and some technical institutes. The structure of the educational system is divided into five main cycles as follows:

#### **1.2.2.1 Elementary-School and Middle-School Cycles**

Children five years of age receive the basic ideas needed to automatically proceed to primary school through a one-year program, called Pre-School Cycle. In the next cycle, Primary School, six to eleven year old children receive their elementary education for five years; i.e., grades one to five. At this stage which is both compulsory and free, students acquire basic knowledge about 3R skills. Then, they need to take exams at the end of each year to promote to the following grade. Besides, there is a nation-wide examination at the end of grade five. The students who pass this examination will be allowed to go to the next cycle; i.e. Middle (Guidance) Cycle which covers grades six to eight for children of eleven to thirteen years of age. At this stage, based on their abilities and interests, the students are guided to decide for either Academic or Technical/Vocational branch in the next cycle for attending which they are required to pass a regional exam under the supervision of the provincial boards of education.

### **1.2.2.2 Secondary Education Cycle**

This three-year stage covers grades nine to eleven, from age fifteen to seventeen. There are two main branches: Academic and Technical/Vocational. The former, also known as Theoretical Branch, includes three mainstreams, giving students three options to choose their area of study: Humanities, physics-mathematics and experimental sciences. The latter is particularly designed to train technicians for the labor market, covering three mainstreams: Technical, Business/Vocational and Agriculture. There are nation-wide examinations at the end of each grade in the Secondary Cycle (Jahani, 2006).

During their course of study, high-school students are required to complete ninety six units to be awarded the High School Diploma. There is still another one year of school, compulsory for those secondary graduates who wish to take part in the National University Entrance Examination, also known as “Konkur”. This examination measures the candidates’ competency on their knowledge about both general and specialized courses of study. It also consists of a third section on foreign languages, mainly English (Yarmohammadi, 1995).

### **1.2.2.3 Higher Education**

There are two ministries responsible for post-secondary education: The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education (MCHE) and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MHME). However, it is the responsibility of the MET to have jurisdiction over some post-secondary programs like primary and guidance teacher training colleges and higher institutes of technical and vocational education. Secondary school teachers are trained in universities under the MCHE.

#### **1.2.2.4 Teacher Education**

Secondary school teachers are trained at tertiary-level institutions, namely universities. In order to qualify for teaching at high school level, teachers must have a Bachelor degree. There are two ways to qualify: One is that a Bachelor-degree holder in a field other than education completes a one-year teacher-training program. The other way is that a secondary school graduate completes a four-year program leading to a Bachelor of Education (BE). The latter can be done in two stages of two years, each. At the end of the first two-year program, a graduate may choose to receive an Associate Diploma (AD), qualifying the teacher-to-be to teach at the level of Guidance Cycle (Hadad Narafshan, 2003; Manzari, 2001).

#### **1.2.3 EFL in Iran**

The history of TEFL goes back to the early 1900s when petroleum was discovered in Iran, leading to the British and American Imperialism in the country. It was in 1909 when a petroleum company called the Anglo-Persian, later known as the British Petroleum, was founded in the southern regions of Iran. Due to such an important event in the history of the nation, the political, social, economical and naturally cultural aspects of life went under a dramatic change, as a result of which a need for teaching and learning English began to grow. Later on, after the Second World War, the United States of America (USA) found interest in having establishments in Iran to maintain its geo-political status in the area. They, too, started to establish organizations like the USA Technical Cooperative Mission, leading to still more growth and popularity of English especially that it was supported by the government as a language of modernity. Since then, teaching English was mainly in the control of two major language centres: The British

Council and Iran-America Society. Besides, English replaced French to gain a place in the curricula of Iranian schools and universities. Its popularity kept growing to the extent that English became the language of instruction in some universities like Pahlavi University (now known as University of Shiraz). In many other universities, native speakers of English were being offered the job of teaching English, especially for the departments and faculties concerned with English language (Tajadini, 2002). However, since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, teaching English in Iran was subject to some major changes.

It was in 1981 when the MCHE got the mission to set up the Council of Cultural Revolution (CCR) to review and make decisions about the higher education and university curricula. As a part of their responsibility, the council started reviewing the English-teaching system of the time and came to realize that the goals must be modified. According to the new policy, the goals of teaching English at the level of university are:

- 1) Developing the ability of using the scientific and technological information found in English language publications to achieve national self-sufficiency in science and technology
- 2) Using English for cultural exchanges and for the introduction of the Islamic-Iranian culture and teachings to the world (Saffarzadeh, 1988)

Within the Council, a committee known as the Committee for Curriculum Planning of Foreign Languages (CCPFL) was formed to propose and make decisions concerning teaching foreign languages in the country. Based on the decisions made by this committee, among the four basic language skills, reading and writing



received more attention. It was explicitly recommended by CCPFL that there be special focus on reading and writing at the level of pre-university. However, at the level of university, the main approach taken by the committee was that of English for Academic/Specific Purposes (EAP/ESP). In this regard, most of the attention was proposed by the committee to be paid to reading component of the foreign language to be taught (Saffarzadeh, 1988; Tajadini, 2002). So, it is based on such decisions that the current Iranian EFL curriculum does not pay the due attention to oral skills of language teaching/learning.

At the university level, EAP/ESP is offered in a variety of fields of study like basic sciences, humanities, engineering, medical sciences and the like. These students are required to take English as both general courses for three credit units and as specialized courses for two, four, or six credits, depending on the course syllabus of different academic departments. Those university students who are interested in TEFL may pursue their studies for Bachelor of Art (BA), Master of Art (MA), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees in different fields of study such as English Language and Teaching, English Language and Literature, Linguistics and Translation. They are required to complete two years of general English instruction in order to learn (or re-learn) the four language skills before they focus on their specialized courses of study during the following two years (Manzari, 2001; Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Beniss, 2007).

Generally speaking, after the revolution, English was not duly attended and its use was limited. The reactions against TEFL, in certain ways, went to extremes in

a way that a movement known as “book purging” started. The purpose was “deculturalization” of school and university textbooks (Aliakbari, 2002).

However, at present, the dominant trend is to put more emphasis on teaching/learning English. As one of their chief priorities, the Iranian government has recently provided the ground to increase the production of knowledge which is generally known as a shift from “software movement” into “hardware movement”. To this end, the related ministries are very much concerned with financing research programs in different fields and TEFL is no exception (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Beniss, 2007).

In addition to public schools, Iranian EFL learners, at different age groups, can learn the language in nation-wide private language schools where they enjoy higher standards of teaching English. There is a competition among these institutes to raise their quality of teaching by being well-equipped with language facilities. They also tend to hire native-speaking teachers or more qualified and competent Iranian teachers who have good knowledge of applying recommended teaching methodologies (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Beniss, 2007; Yarmohammadi, 1995).

In this respect, the number of authorized institutes and language centers for teaching English has increased:

“From the total number of 4678 educational institutes in Iran which are licensed by the Ministry of Education, 1971 institutes are language institutes whose first language taught is certainly English. This accounts for 42% of the total number of institutes” (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Beniss, 2007: 88).

“As for the private institutes issued by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, from the total of 186 institutes, 127 are English teaching centers which make up 68% of the total” (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Beniss, 2007: 88).

Along with the world-wide development of English as an international language (Crystal, 2003), there has been an upsurge of interest in English teaching/learning as an effective means of communication in Iran, too. In this regard, Iranian English Language Teaching (ELT) scholars have been motivated to study the ways in which English can be learned more optimally as Iranians’ interest for pursuing learning English grows. However, teaching English in Iran has generally failed to duly meet the learners’ needs. English learners in both private language centers and state schools and universities complain that the programs are not efficient to prepare them to use English communicatively. Apart from this, university students are too much involved in difficult subjects of their major to get to use English more effectively (Sadeghi Beniss, 2003). In addition, as literature informs us, Iranian EFL learners are not capable of handling English to communicate (Kamyab, 2004; Talebinezhad and Sadeghi Beniss, 2002, 2005). They do not appear as proficient as they should in spite of the high rate of motivation found among them (e.g. see Eslami Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004; Hayati and Ostadan, 2008; Sadighi and Zarafshan, 2006; Vaezi, 2008).

#### **1.2.4 The Position of Teaching English in EFL Contexts**

Teaching English as a Second Language/to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESL/TESOL) requires peculiar kind of conditions and when it comes to TEFL, the situation becomes even more idiosyncratic, on its own right. One way to investigate such contexts is through studying their educational curricula in different countries. In

this respect, in a comparative study, Safarnavadeh (2004) made an attempt to compare and contrast EFL curricula and the first-grade textbooks taught in three countries of Iran, Pakistan and Japan. In this study she aimed at investigating the commonalities and differences among the curricula in terms of the dominant approach, global and specific goals, the EFL learners' age when starting official learning of English and the class time allotted for teaching English. Using the technique of content analysis, she placed emphasis upon the influence of Western culture on teaching English in the fore-mentioned countries. Also, the content of English textbooks in those countries was appraised in respect to cultural and educational aspects of language teaching. Regarding the former, the study sought to investigate the elements of pictures, proper names and vocabulary as influenced by the Western culture while the latter was attended by seeking to study elements such as the use of pictures, structure, and all four language skills. The results of the study are summarized as follows:

- All three countries have adopted a communicative approach to teaching English, but the content analysis of Iranian English textbooks revealed that practically, Iranian curriculum is far away from the set goals, as compared to the other two countries.
- Official teaching of English in Japan, Pakistan and Iran starts at the age of twelve, five and eleven, respectively.
- Comparing to the other two countries, Pakistan has allotted more class time to teaching English.
- All three countries use pictures for facilitating learning to almost the same degree.

- Grammatical structures are attended by all three curricula in Pakistan, Iran and Japan; however, in Pakistan grammar is not taught as explicitly as it is in the other two countries.
- Listening skills have been specified in both Japan and Pakistan, but it has been ignored in the content of Iranian textbook.
- Speaking skill has been emphasized at a varying degree from “a lot” to “a little” in Japan, Pakistan and Iran, respectively.
- Reading skill has been emphasized in Pakistan’s textbooks. In Japan, less attention has been paid to this skill and the content of Iranian English textbooks has not paid much attention to this skill.
- Writing skill has received a range of attention from “a lot” to “a little” in Pakistan, Iran and Japan, respectively.
- In terms of cultural aspects, Iranian textbooks have not been influenced by Western culture while Japanese textbooks reflect more of such influence than textbooks in Pakistan do.

By reviewing the situation of teaching and learning EFL in many countries, one may arrive at the conclusion that those countries share almost the same experience of relying on structure-based teaching methodology. However, there are some countries, such as South Korea which have realized the necessity of a shift from structure-based approaches to communicative ones in their EFL curriculum. In many cases, the existing problems are associated with the dominant methodology. For instance, in an attempt to propose solutions for the problems of teaching EFL in China, Jie (2006) evaluates Structural Approach (SA) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) being practiced in China and concludes that both teaching methods

go to the extreme as a result of which neither has been effective enough. As a solution to the problem, the integration of the pre-mentioned methods has been suggested.

Through a description of English classes in China, Jie (2006) points out that the Chinese students, before getting their first degree, learn English for ten years in a grammar-oriented context. They are treated as passive recipients because it is mostly the teacher who carries the responsibility of acquainting the students with the rules and usage of English through analyzing sentence structures, translating English into Chinese and explaining grammatical rules and lexical items. However, although the students may be successful academically and gain good command of form and usage of the language, when they are in a foreign country, they cannot properly use the language as a means of expressing themselves. Therefore, the author concludes, the effectiveness of SA was challenged. As a result, some English teachers in China have realized the necessity of improving their students' communicative competence and tended to practice the other extreme, CLT.

Taking the approach of developing learners' communicative competence, Chinese teachers began to make an attempt to provide an authentic environment to practice English like what takes place in real life. Thus, the EFL learners in China are encouraged to do communicative activities that would polish their language skills, especially oral skills, in a natural way. However, although such a development has been considered a success in the quality of language teaching, according to Jie (2006), CLT has failed to be effective enough, too because as a theory it is not quite practical in English classes. It is not possible to create an authentic setting as real

communication is not predictable and artificial setting is different from real context. Besides, CLT requires well-trained teachers who are able to use real language themselves. Furthermore, the students in China are still required to have good command of English usage and structure to pass code-based exams. Thus, Jie (2006) concludes that no matter how attractive CLT sounds in theory, one should be realistic enough to admit that practically, it cannot be implemented in EFL settings.

Along with the world-wide development of English as an International Language (EIL) (Crystal, 2003), there has been an upsurge of interest in English teaching/learning as an effective means of communication in Iran, too. In this regard, the above mentioned points about teaching English in EFL contexts apply to Iranian environment as well. Being regarded as a foreign language, English in Iran has no official role (Askarzadeh Torghabeh, 2007). English in Iranian public schools is currently taught from the second year of Secondary or Guidance School up to the Pre-University level where the students study English as one of the major courses. They are required to attend English classes for three hours a week to acquire both receptive and productive skills. Besides, a good number of Iranian EFL learners have a chance to improve their English skills through private language institutes or centres. However, the degree to which mastery in each of the skills and sub-skills is emphasized varies from the most dominant (i.e. reading, grammar, vocabulary and spelling) to the least (i.e. listening comprehension, speaking and writing) (Hadad Narafshan, 2003; Manzari, 2001; Sadeghi Beniss, 2003; Tajadini, 2002; Yarmohammadi, 1995).

Accordingly, EFL teaching and learning situations in countries like Iran face major problems. For instance, in an attempt to compare teaching English in Iranian public schools and private language institutes, Ahmadi Darani (2003) evaluates their success and/or failure as a pedagogical enterprise. Pointing out the reality that, in spite of having at least 450 to 500 hours of background in English, a very large number of Iranian high school graduates are not capable of producing or comprehending English, he admits that learner needs are not met. Hence, the general agreement among Iranian EFL scholars acknowledges a paradigm shift favoring individual needs and preferences (e.g. Rastegar, 2003; Talebinezhad & Aliakbari, 2002; Zare, 2004).

### **1.2.5 Importance of Teaching Listening**

Realizing the importance of listening skills and comprehension goes back to the late 1960s when second language instructors showed some concerns about teaching listening (Morley, 1990). In relation to the importance of teaching listening, it is worth mentioning that listening has been estimated to be the most frequently used language skill. Of the time most individuals devote to communicating, 45% is spent on listening, 30% on speaking, 16% on reading, and approximately 9% on writing (Nichols & Stevens, 1957:29). In a more recent study, Vandergrift (1999) cites Rivers (1981) who also estimates that people use more time listening (45% to 50%) than other skills. This way, he accounts for the importance of listening in fulfilling life needs. Asher calculated that “by the time a child reaches age 6, he or she has listened to his or her native language for a minimum of 17,520 hours, equivalent to more than 50 years of college instruction” (1982:2).



By comparison, the average EFL learner who completes one year of English instruction on a system of two semesters with 16 weeks of instruction and 3 hours of classroom hours of English each week (a typical EFL course in Iranian Secondary school system), (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Bennis, 2007)) have heard English for only about 96 classroom hours, with perhaps, in a very generous estimate, an additional 50 to 100 hours of language lab exercises or other voluntary listening practice (Manafi, 1977). In today's globalized society, where there is nearly universal exposure to television, radio, the internet and satellite broadcasts available to individuals, there is an increasing need for them to develop their listening comprehension so that they could receive and process information through listening, more than ever before (Ahmadi, 2007; Akbari, 2005; Zare, 2004).

Although teaching listening comprehension was underestimated by traditional approaches to language teaching, more recent approaches tend to consider it more important as it helps in building up language competence by providing sufficient Linguistic input. The most innovative methods like Asher's Total Physical Response (TPR), Gategno's Silent Way (SW), Curran's Community Language Learning (CLL), Lozanov's Suggestopedia, Terrell's Natural Approach and some others all emphasize communicative competence which gives priority to listening over speaking (Asher, 1977; Brown, 1994; Feyten, 1991; Krashen, 1982, 1985; Richards & Rodgers, 2003).

Thus, owing to the development of communicative and proficiency approaches to the language teaching over the past decades, listening in the second/foreign language classroom is not regarded as a "passive" or "receptive" skill

any more (Bacon, 1989; Feyten, 1991; Field, 2000 ; Joiner, 1991; Morley, 1990; Murphy, 1991; Richards, 1983; Wong, 2001). The term passive was inappropriate; it suggests that the listener is a mere bystander or recipient of input during language classroom hour. Many researchers and theorists (e.g. Berne, 1998; Joiner, 1991; McDonough, 1999; Murphy, 1991; O'Malley, Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Purdy, 1997; Thompson & Rubin, 1996; Vandergrift, 2006) have realized that listening is an active process in a way that meaning is constructed from a stream of sounds. It is not a process of just hearing or perceiving the sounds, but also the listeners should make an attempt to comprehend what message is delivered by the speaker. According to Purdy (1997), listeners actively try to comprehend the information and feelings in what they hear by paying attention to not only what the speaker says, but also to how it is said, and in what context the language is used.

In addition, Listening is considered as a complex, problem-solving process because it requires different types of knowledge, such as the knowledge of Linguistic competence like phonology, lexicon, syntax, semantics, and text structure. Listeners are also required to rely on other types of knowledge to successfully comprehend a message. For example, they should have good command of socio-cultural competence in order to understand the social and cultural expectations of native speakers of the language. Also some degree of strategic competence is required so that the listeners can use appropriate strategies like guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words to compensate for their lack of knowledge. Besides, the knowledge of discourse competence is necessary for the listeners to, for example, follow the unity of a message through relying on their knowledge of cohesive devices (Douglas, 1988; Dunkel, 1991; Faerch & Kasper, 1986).