An Investigation of Iranian Students' English Proficiency Test Scores in Relation to some Selected Sociolinguistic Variables

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ABSTRACT

Since the first day of language teaching in history, the main objective of language educators has been improving the target language competency among their students. However, achieving identical learning outcomes among language learners is almost impossible. No matter what teaching methodology and what teaching materials are used, the learning outcomes of students differ from each other. Considering this fact in mind, the researcher has tried to find whether socio-economic variables play any role in the learning outcome differences. Meantime, since the education system of Iran is highly centralized, it is a unique context to deliver this study. However, there is another fact valid for the Islamic Republic of Iran's Educational System that makes Iran a unique context. After four decades of anti-intrusion policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) against the English language, the researcher has also tried to evaluate their success rates and to study the status of this language in Iran. This study has thus investigated the status of the English language in Iran on two levels: one concerning the state's policies and another, the people's attitudes. To do so, we carried out research on the content of education documents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the English language teaching textbooks employed in the education system. To locate the society's stance on the English language, we administered a survey study on 472 participants randomly sampled from undergraduate students from four state universities. We concluded that there is an evident gap between the approach of the Islamic government and the people's approach toward the English language in the current Iranian society. In relation to the socio-economic variables, this study concluded that the attitudinal stances of Iranian EFL students towards learning English were more instrumentally oriented. However, their attitudes were more limited to

affect level; they did not show that they were putting sufficient effort and desire to practice English out of classroom context. Accordingly, their generally low level of English competency can be explained. The next conclusion was that family background plays an active role in determining the success or failure of language learning attempts. The father's occupation and the number of siblings were significantly interlaced related to the English competency level of participants. Age is another important factor in determining the English competency of Iranian EFL learners while the gender of the students does play an active role in their English competency earning, it needs to be highlighted that this is not valid in all geographical locations touched by this study. Geographical Location plays a very important role in determining success or failure among Iranian EFL learners. Finally, it should be underlined that 'location' and 'culture' have shown to be interrelated. Therefore, it can be concluded that culture is also an important factor.

ÖZ

Tarihte dil öğretiminin ilk gününden beri, dil eğitimcilerinin temel amacı, öğrenciler arasında hedef dil yetkinliğini geliştirmek olmuştur. Ancak, dil öğrenenler arasında aynı öğrenme çıktılarına ulaşmak neredeyse imkansızdır. Hangi öğretim metodolojisi ve hangi öğretim materyallerinin kullanıldığı önemli değildir, öğrencilerin öğrenme çıktıları birbirinden farklıdır. Bu gerçeği göz önünde bulundurarak, araştırmacı sosyoekonomik değişkenlerin öğrenme sonucu farklılıklarında rol oynayıp oynamadığını bulmaya çalışmıştır. Bu arada, İran'ın eğitim sistemi oldukça merkezi olduğu için bu çalışmayı sunmak için eşsiz bir bağlam. Bununla birlikte, İran'ı eşsiz bir bağlam kılan İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin Eğitim Sistemi için geçerli olan başka bir gerçek var. Araştırmacı, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin (IRI) İngilizceye karşı kırk yıl süren ihlal politikalarından sonra, başarı oranlarını değerlendirmeye ve bu dilin İran'daki durumunu incelemeye çalışmıştır. Bu çalışma bu nedenle İran'daki İngiliz dilin durumunu iki düzeyde araştırdı: biri devletin politikaları ile ilgili, diğeri ise halkın tutumları. Bunu yapmak için İran İslam Cumhuriyeti eğitim belgelerinin içeriği ve eğitim sisteminde kullanılan İngilizce öğretimi ders kitaplarının içeriği üzerine araştırmalar yaptık. Toplumun İngilizce'deki duruşunu bulmak için dört eyalet üniversitesindeki lisans öğrencilerinden rastgele örneklenen 472 katılımcı üzerinde bir anket çalışması yaptık. Şu anki İran toplumunda İslam hükümetinin yaklaşımı ile insanların İngiliz diline yaklaşımı arasında açık bir fark olduğu sonucuna vardık. Sosyo-ekonomik değişkenlerle ilgili olarak, bu çalışma İranlı EFL öğrencilerinin İngilizce öğrenmeye karşı tutumlarının daha araçsal yönelimli olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Ancak, tutumları seviyeyi etkilemek için daha sınırlıydı; İngilizce'yi sınıf dışı bağlamda pratik etmek için yeterli çaba ve arzularını gösterdiklerini göstermediler.

Buna göre, genel düşük İngilizce yeterlilik düzeyleri açıklanabilir. Sonraki sonuç, aile geçmişinin, dil öğrenme girişimlerinin başarısını veya başarısızlığını belirlemede aktif bir rol oynadığıydı. Babanın mesleği ve kardeş sayısı, İngilizce katılımcı seviyesine bağlı olarak önemli ölçüde yer değiştirdi. Yaş, İranlı EFL öğrenenlerinin İngilizce becerilerini belirlemede bir diğer önemli faktörken, öğrencilerin cinsiyeti İngilizce yeterlilik kazanımında aktif rol oynamaktadır, bunun araştırmanın dokunduğu tüm coğrafi bölgelerde geçerli olmadığı vurgulanmalıdır. Coğrafi Konum, İranlı EFL öğrencileri arasında başarı veya başarısızlığın belirlenmesinde çok önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Son olarak, "yer" ile "kültür" arasındaki ilişkinin gösterildiğinin altı çizilmelidir. Dolayısıyla kültürün de önemli bir faktör olduğu sonucuna varılabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyodilbilimsel Değişkenler, Coğrafi Konum, Yaş, Cinsiyet, Sosyoekonomik Durum, Tutum, Eğitim Politikası

To my Father and the Memory of my Mother

I cordially dedicate this thesis to my father, Dr. Mehdi Rassouli. He has sacrificed his life to raise me and has nourished me spiritually throughout my life. He has always been the biggest source of inspiration for me.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter in eight sections describes the procedures taken throughout this study as well as the major variables involved in this study. The first section provides background information on the study. The second section introduces the statement of the problem. The third section deals with the purpose of the study. In the fourth section, the significance of the study is highlighted. The fifth section presents the definitions of the terms used throughout the study. The sixth section briefly explains the methodology used in this study. Finally, the last two sections present the limitations and the outline of this study, respectively.

1.2 Background of the Study

Throughout history, learning a language other than the mother tongue has always been popular among human beings around the world. However, the learning outcomes of all other language learners are not identical at all. Some students achieve native-like command on the other language while some others can never achieve even survival language competency. This problem is valid even in learning the mother tongue. Some kids acquire their first language earlier than other kids do. There have been thousands of researchers investigating the reasons behind such differences in the field of English language learning and teaching. None of them has led to principles generalizable to all learners. In fact, whenever the subject of a study is related to human beings and human

learning, in fact, due to the human factor, no single study can investigate and/or propose all factors affecting learning outcomes.

This piece of study tries to investigate the English language learning behavior of adult Iranian students. Taking a standardized English language test, the researcher tries to find whether all the Iranian English language learners participating in the study have reached identical English language competency. Then if their learning outcomes differ, the researcher tries to find whether some specific socio-economic variables (including geographical location, age, gender, economic status, and attitudinal stance towards the English language) have had any impact(s) on their learning outcome differences. The definitions referred to in this study have been briefly explained in the following section. More extended reference to the variables in the literature is provided in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Learning another language is not over a night task. It needs constant practice through the correct path under the proper light provided by teachers and/or material developers. The literature in the field of English Language Teaching has witnessed a significant number of studies in different subdivisions pursued in search of an end solution to the learning difficulties of EFL/ESL learners. However, no study could lead to the best outcome; hence, there are not yet any best materials, teachers, or teaching methodologies. In other words, although language teaching programs have tried to employ better and more effective teaching materials, teaching approaches, and well-trained teachers, there is still a great deal of dissatisfaction claimed by language learners. Moreover, despite all the attempts, energy and time spent by language teaching institutions learning differences and difficulties are very common.

There is no difference where and how a language is taught, language learners hardly perform identically, even in learning their mother tongue. There are some students scoring higher in language tests and communicating more competently with the target language speakers while there are some others who see the language learning task as a tedious experience. Learners' cognitive differences are addressed to as responsible for language learning differences (Clark, 2004; Cook, 1977; Gentner & Medina, 1997; Skehan, 1998). However, the researcher believes that the cognitive side of the learning story should not be the only criminal; learners are not isolated swamps, they are in fact live oceans giving birth to their world by being in contact with each other. Learners are human beings and human beings are alive to live together, to communicate with each other and to build their world together. Therefore, when they act differently their society and their role and status in their society must be studied.

In the Iranian context, the Ministry of Education identically for all the Iranian schools provides English language education. English language as a foreign language (EFL) is taught from grade seven in the Iranian 12-year general education schooling system. All the teaching materials and textbooks are issued and provided by the Ministry of Education and all the English language teachers should pass through the same educational and recruitment procedures to be allowed to teach English in Iranian schools. However, the researcher as an experienced English language teacher and founding director of language schools has witnessed English language learning differences among English language learners. He, therefore, assumes that English language learning differences should be dealt with by considering the socio-economic status of the students as well as their attitudinal stances towards the English language.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate how Iranian students' test scores in English competency tests are dependent on some selected sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables. That is, how learners' test scores depend on their gender, age, economic status, their geographical location, and their attitudes towards English as a foreign language. However, the Iranian students have been trained within an educational system that has been designed and employed by the Iranian regime according to its socio-political policies. Therefore, this study cannot ignore the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in relation to the English language and its teaching. The study, thus, seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Do sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables affect learners' performance in English competency tests?

2. What sort of impact(s) do different sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables have on learners' performance in English competency Tests?

3. What attitudes do Iranian students have toward the English language?

4. What is the status of the English language teaching in the Iranian educational system?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study can be considered significant in several respects. First, existing literature on language learning, more specifically English language learning has been mostly confined to behaviorist, mentalist and cognitive studies. In essence, although society and sociolinguistic variables play an important role in students' learning, infrequent studies have been recorded. Therefore, once this study is completed, it is believed that the outcome of the study will enrich the literature in the field of English Language

Teaching (ELT) related to the impact of sociolinguistic variables on language learning leading to learning differences among language learners.

On the other hand, in spite of the increasing number of materials accessible for language learners, few of them have been inspired by sociolinguistic considerations to ease learning among language learners from different socio-economic backgrounds. One reason could be the point that material developers may ignore the importance of sociolinguistic variables. Therefore, by doing this study we hope language teaching/learning educators and material developers may become aware of sociolinguistic issues, especially to develop more effective materials and to employ more effective language teaching techniques to ensure more satisfactory results among language learners.

1.6 Context of the Study

This study is implemented in four different cities of Iran on university students majoring in different fields other than the English language, who have received English teachings for at least six years in the Iranian national educational system. The main reason for choosing Iran as the target society to do this study is the anti-Western, pro-Islamic ideology targeted by the Islamic Republic government of Iran. In fact, the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran has acted as a cut-point in the approach of the country towards the westernization trend practiced by almost all its neighboring nations after almost 50 years of westernization experience of the country itself. This sudden and swift return to traditions and Islamic values has made Iran a unique context to be studied.

There are many points that need to be highlighted in answering why this study refers to Iran as a unique context. As will be explained in more detail in the following sections, Iran's turn in its nation's values and governmental policies has frozen the nation in a status of uncertainty. After five decades of prompt and forceful westernization, quick industrialization and economic growth, the country decided to have a huge turn back to traditional Iranian-Islamic values followed by an eight-year war resulting in vast economic devaluation. As one of the results of such a revolutionary approach, the socio-economic value structure may have changed. In addition, as the result of vast purification educational policies, the nation's attitudes towards foreign languages in general, the English language in specific, may have changed.

At the time being, not only as of the result of technological growth but also due to the development of faster and more convenient transportation services, knowing a language other than the mother tongue is de rigueur for every member of modern societies. Among all languages spoken throughout the world, English is considered as the most popular international language (UN Report, 2010).

In Iran's current educational context, English is taught as a compulsory course at different levels in the Iranian centrally developed and run National Educational System, ranging from secondary schools to institutions of higher education as well as in private language schools (Rassouli & Osam, 2013, 2019; Shariatmadari, 1985; Shoarinejad, 2008; Shokouhi, 1989). Regarding its presence in higher education institutions, the English language is not the medium of instruction in any of Iranian university programs. In fact, it is offered as a foreign language (FL) in the Iranian secondary, high schools and institutions of higher education, universities included.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the English language has been totally nativized, students are taught to read passages in the English language which never point at any cultural reality of English speaking societies unless to condemn them (Rassouli & Osam, 2019). Meanwhile, the minimum level of education required for applicants of teaching English is 'Associate Degree' for secondary school (in fact, sometimes not even compulsory to have majored in ELT) and 'Bachelor's Degree' to teach at high schools. All applicants should take a test administered throughout Iran on the same day, which assesses applicants' general knowledge in different fields, not specifically their knowledge of the English language and/or English language teaching. Once an applicant passes the test, s/he has to attend an interview to be assessed ideologically to see whether they have pro-Islamic beliefs, which is the most important step of the official recruitment procedure.

In contradiction to the anti-English approach of the Islamic regime, the people, in search of better living standards and living in more liberal countries started immigrating to other countries, majorly English-speaking countries. That immigration trend has resulted in amazing numbers of 150,000 Iranians starting new lives in other countries ("World Migration Report," 2011), mostly in English speaking countries such as the US, the UK, and Australia. In 2019, more than six million Iranians, the majority of them well educated, live in countries else than Iran. In addition, demanding more promising visa application results and easier communication possibilities with the locals in other countries, people have started improving their communicative skills; however, the English language has won the competition against other foreign languages. English language, as will be shown in Chapter Four, is a popular and prestigious language attracting more and more students. Moiinvaziri (2008) studied the motivation of Iranian students in learning the English language and concluded that

they show both instrumental and integrative orientations. Vaezi (2008) delivered another study in the same year and concluded that Iranian students were more instrumentally pushed to learn English as a foreign language. The researcher, considering such contradictory results in the literature and being aware of the unique socio-political and religious context of the country, has decided not to limit this study to a specific geographical region in Iran. He is thus going to report the findings of his survey in 4 different geographical regions and participants from varied socioeconomic and family backgrounds. The current study has been administered in North West, South East, North East, and Capital city of Iran on 472 students of state universities doing their undergraduate programs in different departments.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

The present study includes some socio-economic variables that have been defined briefly as follows:

- **Age:** Age is defined simply as the length of time somebody has existed, usually expressed in years. Therefore, throughout this study age refers to the number of years after the birth of participants.

- **Gender:** The other factor, which is stated in the literature as affecting learning, is sex or gender. Sex is mostly used synonymously with gender and its relationship with language learning and teaching has been well studied. However, while sex is defined as biological or anatomical differences between men and women, gender in sociolinguistics studies refers to the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females (Giddens, 1989).

- **Social Status:** Human beings cannot be considered isolated from society. In fact, human beings are intermingled with their society in a way that they get

affected by their society. Having this fact in mind, by social status we mean the relative position of the participants in the society in which they live.

- **Attitude:** An attitude is roughly defined as a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for an item. In psychology, an attitude may be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, events, activities, and ideas (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Moreover, in the opinion of Bain (1927), an attitude is "the relatively stable overt behavior of a person which affects his status."

North (1932) has defined attitude as "the totality of those states that lead to or point toward some particular activity of the organism. The attitude is, therefore, the dynamic element in human behavior, the motive for activity."

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Overview

The first chapter presented an outline of this study and stated the research questions for which we are seeking answers. It also briefly defined the variables involved in this study. This chapter, however, reviews in more depth the theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to the present study.

Scholars from second/foreign language acquisition have also studied some of the socio-economic variables (e.g. age and gender) extensively; however, this study is addressing these variables in link with the socio-economic considerations. In this chapter thus, the researcher presents major issues and findings in relation to each variable, with special reference to the literature related to Iran, wherever possible.

2.2 Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Human beings cannot be considered isolated from their society. In fact, human beings are intermingled with their society in a way that they get affected by their society. Living together makes them accept each other's differences, similarities, and personal values. This has led to a conventional value system that affects society members' attitudes.

But how are human beings placed in their society? To answer this question, Karl Marx (1818-1883) referred to means of production (property) as the single factor to be considered in deciding about members' social place (status). Following Marx's

capitalist theory, Max Weber (1864-1920) theorized that only having control over means of production is not important. He added that social status is to be reconsidered according to the economic differences that share nothing with property. Later on, Durkheim, an American functionalist, theorized that people's occupation determines their social status and came up with a hierarchy of occupations. From this, social groups with different interests and values emerge along occupational lines (Bedisti, 2004; Kerswill, 2006, 2007; Morrison, 2006).

Following any of these views, in reality, the socio-economic status of individuals will be determined according to the culture and rituals of their very society. In general, socio-economic status is determined by financial measures (Falkingham & Namazie, 2002). Although there are debates over monetary measurements (Berkman & Macintyre, 1996; Chuma & Molyneux, 2009; Friedman, 1957; Howe, Hargreaves, & Huttly, 2008; Sahn & Stifel, 2003), it needs to be highlighted that individuals make culture-specific decisions before obtaining economic possessions (Yadollahi, 2011; Yadollahi & Hj Paim, 2010; Yadollahi, Paim, & Taboli, 2013). The set of strategies practiced by any particular society varies in accordance with historical, ecological and cultural circumstances (Fleuret & Fleuret, 1980).

2.2.1 Socio-Economic considerations in learning another language

Learning a language is crucial to the academic and individual development. In this relation, it must be pointed out that as the process of growth shapes the development of language skills, the economic, family and societal background of an individual act as facilitators or inhibitors in the process of their language learning.

The stress families put on the development of their children's communicative skills adjusts their language development. Meantime, as families may vary in their societal,

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economic, education and social prestige, the conversational or language experience of their children is shaped accordingly. In other words, since the language children face is dependent on the social interactions they experience, the language they learn and later on use correlated with their families' social class. However, at an individual's level, their social level can be determined, upgraded or downgraded in the future according to their occupation, income, and their education.

There is a direct link between social class and interlanguage development (Preston, 1989). Bernstein (1961a, 1961b) has come up with the conclusion that the language heard and spoken by lower-working class children differs from the input a child receives from a home of different social status. Some studies have also considered the social class of L2 learners as a determining factor (Burstall 1975 ; Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen, and Hargreaves 1974).

Barton (1963) pointed at socio-economic status as the most determining factor in the reading skill of school kids. He states that students from families of higher socioeconomic backgrounds have more extended experience and background knowledge. Their past experience and knowledge enhance their abilities to learn their tasks in a faster manner.

Socio-economic variables are related to language development (Subbhurram & Ananthasayanam, 2010). When a learner either comes from an economic independent family, they have had a better home environment and have experienced a better-quality family. On the other hand, better or higher education usually leads to improving occupational status and as the result to higher income and esteem (Kao & Thompson, 2003; V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2002; Machin, 2006). Putting these together, it can be

concluded that the educational level of parents and their occupation may lead to a supportive home environment. Such an environment has an important role in children's aspirations and attitudes (Subbhurram & Ananthasayanam, 2010).

Moreover, students' social learning experiences in the family differ from one another due to their home status (Subbhurram & Ananthasayanam, 2010); therefore, their academic achievements are significantly different accordingly (Charlick, 1978). For example, middle-class learners are in a better situation in comparison with pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Better financial status brings about more opportunities for learning and verbal interaction. These alongside parents' expectations for their children's intellectual development are advantages for middle-class students (Subbhurram & Ananthasayanam, 2010). In other words, learners from lower socio-economic families are not privileged enough to develop their natural talents. Worley and Story (1967) have found that the language facility of pupils from low socio-economic strata was over a year lower than those from high socio-economic status.

Olshtain, Shohamy, Kernp, and Chatow (1990) investigated the English L2 competency level in 196 grade, seven learners. They divided participants into two groups of 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' according to learners' socioeconomic status. They concluded that the two groups differed significantly in L1 cognitive academic level proficiency (CALP) and that a number of measures of this difference correlated significantly with L2 English achievement. The 'Advantaged' group was better in L2 because of better L1 CALP or sociolinguistic status.

However, Skehan (1990) recorded a moderate correlation between language learning aptitude and the family social class background as well as between foreign language achievement and family background. Meanwhile, Holobow, Genesee, and Lambert (1991) consider no difference in learning the outcome of students from different socioeconomic status.

In sum, it can be stated that the literature approves that when the program emphasizes formal language learning, the social class makes differences but if the program emphasizes communicative language skills, social class is of no impact on learners' learning outcomes. In fact, it is not socioeconomic status per se leading to learning differences, but it is the world experience of learners. Contrasting life experiences lead to different levels of school achievement. Therefore, the social status of students is of great importance when investigating factors affecting their language learning outcomes.

2.2.2 Parents' Status as Determining Factors

It can be inferred from the literature that parents' socioeconomic status (SES), which typically includes educational attainment and occupational status (von Stumm, 2017; von Stumm et al., 2019), has been the most powerful predictor of differences in the normal range of children's educational achievement. Parents' SES has been shown to account for about 9% of the variance in children's educational achievement (Strenze, 2007).

In relation to the effect of parents' education and occupation, the literature describes the relationship between these variables and the children's educational attainment in some forms. The most prominent one is that parents' education directly affects the academic achievements of their children. As it accounts, during their student life,

parents learn something from their schooling that influences on how they will interact with their children's education (Kalil & Mayer, 2016) and the learning opportunities they will create for them (Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1995; Corwyn & Bradley, 2002; Davis-Kean, 2005; Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 1993; Hoff, Laursen, Tardif, & Bornstein, 2002).

Parents' education affects their parenting skills, their attitudes, and knowledge about the educational system, and the value they allocate to education (Lerkkanen & Pakarinen, 2019). In addition, parents with higher education use linguistic forms that are different from parents with low or no education. These, in turn, influence their children's educational behaviors because of the different models they have in their access (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011; Eccles, 2005). The linguistic input that parents with better education provide for their children during their daily conversations is more complex in comparison with less-educated parents that in return predicts the language, linguistic forms, and reading skills their children will obtain (Hoff, 2003).

Meantime, parents with higher education are keener about their children academic attainments in the future and because of their higher expectation (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994; Cross, Marchand, Medina, Villafuerte, & Rivas-Drake, 2019), they create more chances for their children to be exposed with more and varied educational opportunities (Furstenberg et al., 1999; Wolf & McCoy, 2019).

Parents' education affects the educational attainment of their children indirectly as well. The parents' education plays a major role in the career choices or job types of them which is directly related to the family income and where the family can live (Eccles, 2005). In the same line, the education an individual has received works as a

major factor in choosing his/her marriage partner, which is directly interrelated to the family income and its place of residence (Miller, 2019). These two factors of family income and place of residence influence the types of schools their children will have in their access (Bischoff & Reardon, 2014; Taylor & Fry, 2012) and the type of people they will interact within their neighborhood (Burdick-Will, 2016; Coleman, 1987; Furstenberg et al., 1999). In return, these two factors impact children's academic and sociolinguistic attainments (Bradley & Putnick, 2012).

Children growing up in language-rich literate backgrounds prior to school entry have larger vocabularies and a greater appreciation of the tasks of reading and writing (Goodman, 1986; Hart & Risley, 1999; Snow, 1991; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) especially when the school language is the same as the home language (Heath, 1983; Tabors & Snow, 2001; Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Similarly, child literacy learning appears to be associated with parental education and wealth in the middle and upper range of the socio-economic gradient (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014). There is also variation between homes in the importance placed on literacy-related pursuits and on the nature of 'talk' directed to preschool children (Puglisi, Hulme, Hamilton, & Snowling, 2017; Serpell, Sonnenschein, Baker, & Ganapathy, 2002; West, Robins, & Gruppen, 2014). Such differences are also observed when children are in primary school (Sénéchal, Lefevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2011) and beyond (Purcell-Gates, Melzi, Najafi, & Orellana, 2011; Sylva, 2014).

2.3 Age

Age has been defined in dictionaries as a stage of time in someone's life. In other words, it is calculable as the total number of years an individual has received birthday congratulations. Scholars in the field of SLA have pointed at the age as an important determining factor in learning a language; however, sociolinguists have taken a different approach towards age in relation to language. In this section, the researcher will present some of the major findings and trends with reference to age as a sociolinguistic variable.

Sociologists determine the age of an individual with reference to his/her society. Penelope Eckert defines age as "a person's place at a given time in relation to the social order: a stage, a condition, a place in history… experienced individually and as part of a cohort of people who share a life stage, and/or an experience of history" (cited in Columns, 2007, p. 151).

2.3.1 Age as a Sociolinguistic Variable

Aging is a central experience practiced by everyone. "It is the achievement of physical and social capacities and skills, a continual unfolding of the individual's participation in the world, construction of personal history, and movement through history of the community and of society" Eckert (2007, p. 151). However, if aging is movement through time, "age is a person's place at a given time in relation to the social order: a stage, a condition, a place in history" (ibid). Age and aging are experienced both individually and as part of a cohort of people who share a life stage, and/or experience of history. "Like gender, age correlates with variation by virtue of its social not its biological status… The study of age as a sociolinguistic variable, therefore, requires

that we focus on the nature and social status of age and aging" (Eckert cited inCoulmas (2007, p. 151).

Due to feasibility concerns, however, Western social scientists have considered chronological age in their studies. But it needs to be highlighted that since social and biological developments do not move hand in hand with chronological age, even with each other, reference to an individual's chronological age is able only to provide an approximate measure of the speaker's age-related place in society. And since "individual differences in that age are relatively small in relation to the life span, chronological age would be an adequate measure" (Eckert, cited in Coulmas 2007, p. 155).

Aging is a universal issue that is incorporated into the social structure of all societies and is highly invested with value in culturally specific ways. Age is a significant matter in all societies because of an individual's place in the different layers of society, from the family to social communities, changes through time. In industrial societies, chronological age, computed as an accumulation of years since birth, serves as an official measure of the individual's place in life course and in society (Eckert, cited in Coulmas 2007).

Across different cultures, different relations between age and other social factors have been reported. In other words, it is not logical to assume that age systems affect all people identically across the world. For example, with regards to the relationship between age and gender, if in a society age sets are valued inversely for different genders, for instance, restricted age sets for males, while women's age is treated more fluidly, there is no doubt this could also have implications for interactions between

gender and age in variation. Indeed, in such a society, age, and gender are interrelated (Eckert, 2007).

Guttmann (1975) hypothesized a universal crossover between gender and age. He declared that while women become more autonomous, competitive, aggressive, and instrumental with aging, men, on the other hand, become more passive, dependent and expressive. In the same line, Labov (1972) found that older men's linguistic behavior seems to relax and their speech is less conservative as they lose concern with power relationships.

Paunonen (1994) carried out a study in Finland and found women are becoming more normative in their use of /d/ as they moved from early adulthood to middle age. He also reported that in contrast, older women were becoming less normative as they moved from middle to old age. He attributed this to changes in women's position in society, presumably associating a greater serve of choice and power with the flouting of standard norms.

In other words, Adults have regularly been shown (Labov, 1966 ; Wolfram, 1969 ; Trudgill, 1974 ; Macaulay, 1977) to be more constructive in their use of variables than youngster age groups. However, it needs to highlight that there is no consensus on the relationship between age and language and language learning. The following section lists some of the major studies in relation to age and language learning.

2.3.2 Age in Second Language Acquisition Studies

Age is one of the important factors in language acquisition. There are as many conflicting views about the relationship between age and SLA as researchers investigating this field. Addressing this situation, Singleton (1989) states that there is

no common argument agreed by all the research. Meanwhile, Birdsong (2006) studied theoretical issues and empirical findings of age related research of SLA. Alongside contradictory views and findings, he concluded that brain memory, learning conditions and second language processing speed are connected with the age factor, which is also responsible for language learning differences.

In general, there are two major views regarding the effect of age on language acquisition; the younger, the better and the older, the better. Under the first view, the literature has highly addressed the Critical Period Hypothesis (known also as the sensitive period) in the relationship between age and success in second language acquisition. Critical Period Hypothesis (abbreviated as CPH) defines the critical period as "the period during which a child can acquire language easily, rapidly, perfectly and without instruction" (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 145). It is a period of time between birth and somewhere around the age when a child enters puberty, in which learning a second language can be accomplished more rapidly and easily than times falling outside of this period i.e. post-puberty (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Being supported by critical period studies, the first widely held lay belief is that younger second language learners generally do better than older learners do. It is generally believed that younger children learn the second language more easily and more quickly in comparison with older children (R. Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Mayberry & Lock, 2003);.

However, there is another contrasting view arguing that older language learners perform their language learning tasks better in comparison with the younger pupils. Archibald (in O'Grady, Archibald, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2004) argues it is hard to

say whether a critical period exists or not. "It is much more difficult to predict knowledge or ability in any of the other areas of communicative competence (syntax, cohesion, sociolinguistics, etc.) based on the age of the acquisition" (p. 420). Rather he values other variables such as individual differences, the second language classroom, modified input, modified interaction, and learning environment in the context of second language learning.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) arguing in favor of older learners claim that learning is depended on learners' characteristics and the environment. Older learners have a higher level of problem-solving and metalinguistic abilities. Adults in comparison with children naturally find themselves in situations that demand more diverse linguistic features, more complex language, and expression of more complicated ideas; whereas children lack pressure and maturing in second language learning (Bista, 2009)

Harley (1986) investigated the level of children's attainment of the French verb system in French bilingual programs in Canada. The subjects were in two groups of different ages. She found that after 1000 hours of instruction, the older students demonstrated full control of the verb system, while children were still lagging behind.

Asher and Price (1967) did an experiment with ninety-six students from the second, fourth and eighth grades of a school and thirty-seven undergraduate students of a college learning Russian, as the target language. Participants had no knowledge of the Russian language. After three short pieces of training, results showed that eighth-graders performed significantly better than the younger participants did. They also noticed a consistently positive relationship with advancing age and learning

performances of students. They hypothesized that adult learners' better performance might be because of the above-average mental ability of adults.

Politzer and Weiss (reported in Singleton, 1989) did a similar study on subjects who were students of four different grades: second, fifth, seventh, and ninth grades of a school. They made sure that experimental procedures were consistent and they posed the two-hundred fifty-seven subjects with an auditory discrimination test, a pronunciation test and a reading test. Checking the performance of subjects, they recorded a gradual improvement of scores correlated with increasing age in all three tests. Their results showed that older learners proved to have an advantage of second language acquisition over younger ones.

Olson and Samuels (1973) did an experimental study to investigate the relative capacity of native English speakers in learning the German language phonological system under laboratory conditions. Subjects were in three different age groups: twenty of them were elementary level pupils, twenty of the subjects were junior high, and the other twenty were college students. Each group received a total of ten sessions, each lasting 15-25 minutes. They were trained by using pre-taped German phoneme pronunciation instructions. Thirty-three phonemes were instructed in two weeks using mimicry drills. On the test of pronunciation, it was found that the two older groups performed significantly better ($P < .01$) than the elementary level age group.

Some other studies concluded that adult subjects performed better than children (Bland & Keislar, 1966); Burstall et al., 1974; Singleton, 1989). Bland and Keislar (1966) took two groups of total ten students: six students were fifth-graders at school and four of them were younger, from kindergartners. They conducted an individualized

program instructing oral French. They concluded that among the fifth graders, the time of attainment of each French phonological system feature ranged from 4.5 to 11 hours with a mean being 6.9 hours; whereas among the kindergartners, this time range was from 12.5 to 17.5 hours with a mean of 15.1 hours. They concluded that the younger learners took more than twice as long as the older learners did to acquire French pronunciation.

Burstall et al. (1974) experimented with a study that included three age groups of pupils from selected primary schools in England and Wales. Subjects were selected from eleven years old, thirteen years old, and sixteen-year-old school students. Their results indicated that older students dramatically achieved higher scores in listening and speaking tests than the younger ones.

In the same line, some researchers have pointed at learners' motivational orientations as being probable causes for different learning outcomes among language learners. Schleppegrell (2008) argued that older adults learn a foreign language for a specific purpose "to be more effective professionally, to be able to service in an anticipated foreign situation and for other instrumental reasons" (P. 3). Younger learners may not have the extrinsic motivation or may not see a specific goal in learning another language.

In general, young learners are considered silver-tongued in communication of the second language and believed to have the potentials to achieve a native-like accent. In contrast, learners after the age of puberty are suggested to not have the advantage of acquiring a native-like accent of a second language but to have complex learning patterns. Meanwhile, research suggests that children and adult second language

learners pass through different developmental stages in second language learning. It is mentioned that learning depends on cognitive maturity and neurological factors (Bista, 2009).

2.4 Gender

Gender or sex has been addressed by several scholars as one of the variables that may lead to different language learning behaviors. Sex is mostly used synonymously with gender and its relationship with language learning and teaching has been well studied. However, while sex is defined as "biological or anatomical differences", gender in sociolinguistic studies refers to "the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females" Giddens (1989, p. 158). In fact, from a social construction perspective, both sex and gender are considered as socially developed statuses. It makes no sense, therefore to assume that there is just one set of traits that characterize men in general and thus defines masculinity; or likewise, that there is one set of traits for women, which define feminity" (Lorber & Farrell, 1991, p. 129).

Lewontin and Freeman (1982) emphasizes the relevance of the socialization process and states that the development of gender identity "depends on what label was attached to him/her [any member of the society] as a child… Thus, biological differences became a signal for, rather than a cause of differentiation in social roles" (quoted in Wodak, 1997, p. 4). In sum, he takes the view that society determines the femininity or masculinity of the child, therefore such concepts change in various generations. Many sociolinguists thus prefer 'gender' because it emphasizes the social construction of male and female (Kramarae, 1990).

This socially defined masculinity or feminity is an impact factor on different sides of an individual's life. In fact, the difference between males and females is so widespread that it covers almost all aspects of their behaviors, attributable to different social, physical, cognitive, and linguistic behaviors (Aliakbari & Sadeghdaghighi, 2013).

Regarding linguistic choices each sex makes to reflect their different identity given to them by the society, Wardhaugh (2011) argues that males and females are different in the intonation of their voice, paralinguistic system, the use of gestures, and lexical choice. Females normally talk about some issues like fashion, perfumes, food, and books while males talk about harsher topics such as business, sports, political issues, and taxes.

However, parts of the language differences might be explained by genetic makeup. The same as babies are born male or female; they acquire the language of their sex later on in life. Burman, Bitan, and Booth (2008) investigated differences between males and females' brain systems. They found that female participants liked to spend more time with their friends and choose their best friends among their spouse or family.

Different linguistic behaviors, either in the form of lexical choices, different intonation patterns, or any other linguistic aspect, have acted as an amusement park attracting many linguists and researchers. Labov (1991) has seen two distinct and contradictory principles relating to sex differences in language used by different individuals. He discusses that men usually use a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women and in contrast, women are running in the frontline in the majority of linguistic changes; they use a higher frequency of the incoming forms than men.

Women, as Rod Ellis (2008) puts, nearly always outstrip males in using standard and prestige forms. Women are more sensitive to new forms and use them in their speech; however, once they are aware of the change, they will reject using those novel forms. Men, in contrast, are less sensitive to new forms but if they start using them, they are less probable to reject them (ibid).

In general, as Rod Ellis (2008) writes women might perform better than men in the second language learning. They are likely to be more open to new linguistic forms in the target language input and they will be more likely to exonerate themselves of interlanguage forms that deviate from the target language norms.

2.4.1 Gender and Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistic research on gender and sex has flourished as an important issue since the early 1970s. Most of the early gender studies were comparative studies, which tried to come up with a model in describing similarities and differences between males' and females' languages. In sum, it can be stated that most of the early studies were following a model famous as 'difference model'. This model was introduced to reflect the differences existing in females' and males' linguistic behavior.

In general, almost all early studies passed through two phases; the first one has consisted from studies which favored a deficiency model for women's language in comparison with males' language (e.g. Lakoff, 1972) and the second phase of studies put high stress on women's linguistic superiority towards men (Wodak & Benke, 2007). Those studies considered little role for the context of language use and emphasized the strengths of styles more commonly used by different genders. As a result, some concepts such as 'women's style' as a good style and 'men's style' as the less preferred style arose (Tromel-Plotz, 1984).

The second decade of linguistic gender studies investigated subtle differences in the speech behavior of men and women, resulting in a situational ranking of the sexes. The category of gender played an important role in conversation and was different in every situational context (Wodak & Andraschko, 1994; Henley & Kramarae, 2001; Ochs, 1992). As a result, the deficit theory was replaced by the dominance theory. Studies in this era were more context-sensitive and took the power structures of society into consideration.

In the next phase, the emphasis was on research on gender socialization. Boys and girls learn different verbal and nonverbal skills in their mainly same-sex children and peer groups (Summarized in Wodak & Schulz, 1986 and Eckert, 2007). These skills remain relevant for adults in many situations (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1991; Wodak & Schulz, 1986). These approaches were summarized as 'difference theory'.

More recently, social constructivist approaches (Fenstermaker, West, & Zimmerman, 1991) have been taken into action. In this approach, gender is understood as an indirectly developed identity category, integrated into the formation of other identity categories. It implies a non-unitary approach to gender. Gender roles in institutions and the communicative behavior of men and women are not separated from one another.

In the following parts, each of these approaches will be discussed in more depth. Meantime, major theories in relationship with gendered speech will be introduced.

2.4.1.1 Otto Jespersen

Otto Jespersen, one of the pioneers in the studies of gendered speech, in his book, Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin (1922) introduced a set of ideas about women's language. He claimed that women talk a lot and use half-finished sentences.

He argued that these sentences have resulted in the reality that women speak before they have thought about what they will say. He also argued that women link sentences with 'and' because they are emotional rather than 'grammatical'. They use adjectives such as 'pretty' and 'nice' too much. They are also fond of saying '*so* pretty' and '*so* nice'. They use adverbs too much and tend towards hyperbole. In comparison with men¸ women have a smaller vocabulary but know them so well that they are more fluent and less hesitant than men, who are searching for the precise word in their large vocabularies. He states that novels written by women authors are easier to read. They also master speaking a foreign language more easily than men but face more problems when putting to the test in translating a difficult text, in which men are superior. Men are responsible to introduce new words to the language while women have a debilitating effect upon the language and it was reasonable for men "certainly with great justice [to]object that there is a danger of the language becoming languid and insipid if we are to content ourselves with women's expressions".

2.4.1.2 Robin Lakoff: Women's Place in Language

Lakoff in her book, 'Language and Women's Place' (1972), has discussed the differences existing between men and women in terms of their linguistic behaviors. She introduces several layers of differences between males and females' speech and advocates a deficiency model for women's language.

Lakoff (1973) discusses that an individual's feelings about the world colors their expression of their thoughts mirrored in the form of language(s). Therefore, investigating speakers' linguistic behaviors can uncover their hidden feelings about things and in particular about the other gender. She claims that women experience linguistically discrimination in two ways: the way they are taught to use language and the way general language use treats them. "Both tend to relegate women to certain

subservient functions; that of sex object or servant; and that certain lexical items mean one thing applied to men, another to women" (ibid: p. 46).

Now, what happens if a girl 'talks rough' like a boy? Lakoff (1973) replies that she will normally be ostracized, scolded, or made fun of society, in the form of her parents and friends, keeps her in line with the norms of her society about sound (linguistic) behavior, or as Lakoff words it, in such a situation society keeps the girl in her prescribed social place. The result of such social positioning, Lakoff argues, is that only if she learns her lessons well, she will not be questioned about her linguistic behavior. Otherwise, she will be accused of being "unable to speak precisely or to express herself forcefully" (Lakoff, 1973, p. 47).

Women, in general, are supposed to learn their socially prescribed lessons well and to accept their denial of power. However, this situation is to some extent less marked for women who have received college/university education. "Women's language shows up in all levels of the grammar of English. We find differences in the choice and frequency of lexical items; in the situations in which certain syntactic rules are performed; in intonational and other super segmental patterns" (ibid: 49).

Therefore, "Women's language – meaning both language restricted in use to women and language descriptive of women alone – submerges a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly" (Lakoff, 2004, p. 7). This situation guides women through systematically denied access to power. According to Lakoff, languages used by men and women are different which is rooted in the different position of males and females in the society (2004).

Lakoff (1972, 1973, 2004) discusses that women's speech is dissimilar to males' language in several aspects. Grammatically, women's language is 'hypercorrect' with 'meaningless particles' and empty adjectives. Women have a larger vocabulary to talk about 'colors' whereas men find themselves easier to talk about 'engines. They use 'tag questions', 'hedges' and 'intensifiers' more frequently to hide strong emotions and assertions which reflect their uncertainty and their fear of affirming themselves strongly. Women avoid coarse language, use more frequent apologizing, and select using super polite forms.

In summary, according to Lakoff (1972), women's language is uncertain reflecting their sense of inferiority in relation to their male counterparts and reflects their uncertainty and low confidence.

2.4.1.3 Difference Approach

The difference Model (also known as 'dual-cultural' theory) is an approach emphasizing the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures (Coates, 1993). Since men and women live in different worlds in terms of culture, they use different ways of speaking. These different ways of speech have been interpreted as reflecting and maintaining gender-specific subcultures (Coates, 2008). Moreover, because boys and girls are socially and physically separated from their childhood, they acquire and use different cultures and beliefs (Aliakbari & Sadeghdaghighi, 2013). Women assert that they have a different voice, different psychology and different experience from love, work, and the family compared to men (Coates, 2004).

Many of these differences "arise because boys and girls grow up in what are essentially different cultures, so talk between women and men is cross-cultural communication." (Tannen, 1991, p. 18). She mentions several areas responsible for differences in

genders' speech. Different genders have different views when they are to talk about troubles. When the conversation is made to ask for some information, e.g. asking for directions, genders use different speech. Men are easier in doing public speeches while women are easier in private reports and rapport talk.

By 'rapport talk', Tannen (1991) means that the language of conversation between women is foremost a language to establish connections and to negotiate relationships. Women tend to display similarities and match their experiences with each other and in meetings; they tend to argue by using their own experience as evidence.

Conversely, for men, language is a way to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in the hierarchy. Men do this by exhibiting their knowledge and skill. All men do this through 'holding center stage', for example, by telling stories, joking or conveying information. Men in meetings, for example, tend to argue by making categorical statements about right and wrong (Tannen, 1991).

2.4.1.4 Dominance Approach

The dominance approach is associated with Dale Spender (1980), Pamela Fishman (1978, 1983) and Zimmermann & West (1975).

Zimmerman and West (1975), recorded thirty-one conversation segments based on which they introduced a model reflecting the dominance existing in genders' talk. They claimed that men tend to interrupt more while conversing with women speakers. They also concluded that women felt the obligation to exhibit weakness as subordinate speakers in their conversation because of their male-dominated societies. In other words, the differences between males and females attribute to inequality of power between them.

Greif (1980) did a small scale study on subjects from the University of California (Santa Barbara campus). Participants were middle-class white speakers younger than thirty-five. He recorded their conversations with speakers of different genders and reported that men interrupted women almost 23 times more frequently within 11 conversations. In line with his findings, he adds that in the family context, both parents are more seemingly to interrupt daughters than sons and fathers show more frequent evidence of interrupting.

Because they based their model on a small sample, Beattie in writing in 'New Scientist' magazine (cited in (Oliveira, Cezar, & De Oliveira, 2010, p. 3) in 1982 criticized their dominance model and stated that "the problem with this is that you might simply have one very voluble man in the study which has a disproportionate effect on the total". Beattie also questions the meaning of interruptions: "Why do interruptions necessarily reflect dominance? Can interruptions not arise from other sources? Do some interruptions not reflect interest and involvement?" Beattie (1982) recorded 10 hours of tutorials happening in a context involving both men and women. He concluded that male and female participants showed almost similar behavior regarding the interrupting frequency (men speakers 34.1% compared with the women's record of 33.8%.

Dale Spender (1980) pointed at the significant presence of an unequal power system favoring male speakers. She blamed the society for hosting a patriarchal order that resembles an uneven situation dealing with women speakers. She claimed that women could hardly challenge the power distribution in their society. On page 57 she writes "the crux of our difficulties lies in being able to identify and transform the rules which govern our behavior and which bring patriarchal order into existence. Yet the tools we

have for doing this are part of that patriarchal order while we can modify, we must nonetheless use the only language, the only classification scheme which is at our disposal. We must use it in a way that is acceptable and meaningful. But that very language and the conditions for its use in turn structure a patriarchal order".

Pamela Fishman is another figure taking the dominance approach in defining the nature of gendered languages. She recorded conversations made in families between wives and husbands (Fishman, 1978). She argued that conversational patterns within the family reflect gender inequality. Based on her sample, she concluded that female partners tended to start a conversation and asked questions; however, they used minimal response. In contrast, the men controlled the flow of conversation by defining what they had to talk about not considering remarks from their wives. She introduces 'conversational shitwork' to mirror the role that women act to keep a conversation going in the familial conversations. In her book, Fishman (1983) argues that due to the conversational behavior of male speakers, the male-female conversations usually fail.

Talbot (2010) criticizes the dominance approach because, as she comments, by a very small limited set of data, it is not possible to reach a pan-contextual theory that all men are dominating women. She says by only one counterexample whole the approach is under question e.g. she states that her mother/grandmother/aunt uses utterances in total contrast with what Lakoff examples. Therefore, she suggests that it needs to be more sophisticated to make such a strong conclusion. Moreover, considering the fact that language and culture vary as there are different people, places, languages, and cultures, she claims that the 'difference' model doesn't present ethical and practical difficulty as the dominance model.

2.4.2 Genders and Language Learning

Most postsecondary educational institutions employ some type of language proficiency assessment for international applicants to assess their language skills (Alderson, 1987; Chalhoub-Deville & Turner, 2000; Kahn, Butler, Weigle, & Sato, 1994; Seaman & Hayward, 2000; Weigle, Kahn, Butler, & Sato, 1994). The performance of these applicants is of interest to administrators, faculty, staff, and researchers alike, with gender variations being one issue often studied. These types of studies tend to compare the performance of females with males in terms of mean test scores by subtest and/or total test scores, and in some cases, by specific test questions or types of questions.

With reference to language test performance, the literature has recorded stronger performance among females; however, these differences, in general, tend to be quite small. As it follows, in all major internationally recognized tests, females proved to do slightly better than men candidates did.

Zeidner (1987) investigated the impact of gender on an English language aptitude test for selection and placement at Israeli educational institutions. Results showed that mean scores were significantly different among genders. Higher scores tended towards female candidates in comparison with male applicants.

Johnson and Song (2008) did a study on the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB). They concluded that based on the scores obtained in Michigan English Language tests taken in 2007, females scored higher than males.

In another report, Carleton University (2009) declared that based on scores obtained from tests taken from 2002 to 2008 in the Canadian Academic English Language test (CAEL), females scored slightly higher on all four language subtests – Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking.

Educational Testing Service in its annual report on TOEFL iBT (ETS, 2014) showed that in total, females scored marginally higher than males on tests conducted between January 2013 and December 2013. At the individual level, females did also better in listening, speaking and writing while males scored higher only in the reading subtest.

In line with the results taken from internationally recognized Standard English language tests, it is shown by several individual researchers that females normally do better in language tests in comparison with their male counterparts. This superiority has been also reflected in the items level of language tests by different scholars. Pae (2004) examined the effect of gender on an English test of reading comprehension for Korean learners and found items with content relating to mood, impression, and tone tended to be easier for females while items with logical inferences were easier for males.

Breland, Bridgeman, Fowles, and Board (1999) did a study on learners taking part in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and concluded that males showed to act better in multiple-choice subtests whereas females were easier in answering essay portion of TOEFL.

Takala and Kaftandjieva (2000) used English vocabulary test - as one of the subtests of Finnish Foreign Language Certificate Examination – and reported that in items

level, some items favored males and some females; however, the general test scores proved to be gender-neutral.

James (2010) did a study at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. He collected data from students of English as a Second or Alternative Language (ESAL). Students' test scores over a two-year period (2005-2008) were analyzed. Students ranged between sixteen to fifty-four years old with an average age of 22.0 years. 57% of participants were males and 43% were females from forty-seven different countries. The taken test was the Accuplacer ESL testing system which is a web-based program marketed by the College Board and assesses the English skills of students who have learned English as a second language or an alternative language. The results showed that for every test (listening, reading, and writing) females scored higher than males; however, differences were quite small. The differences were more significant in language usage, reading skills, and sentence meaning.

In relation to language pedagogy, there are several, sometimes contradictory, findings recorded. Starting with Gardner and Lambert's study (1972), it was concluded that female learners were more motivated and had more positive attitudes towards speakers of the target language.

Burstall (1975) did a study on children learning a second language and documented that girls and boys differed significantly in their learning outcomes and their level of motivation measured by their attitudes towards the target language and learning another language was far from each other; girls scored significantly higher than boys, while boys tended to drop French as a second language to a significantly greater extent.

Several other studies have also recorded dissimilar language use and verbal abilities among male and female subjects (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Thorne, Kramarae, & Henley, 1983). It is possible to come up with the general conclusion that female subjects exhibit stronger verbal abilities compared with male subjects (Akhoondali, 2013; Cole, 1997; Demo, 1982; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974); however, it depends on the type of verbal ability studied.

In general, despite the female advantage in general verbal ability, there seems to be no agreement as to whether and to what degree gender differences exist in different types of verbal ability. Hyde and Linn (1988) investigated 56 different vocabulary studies meta-analytically. They reported that eight of the studies found stronger command on vocabulary among female subjects and six studies found contrasting results. However, the bulk of studies did not locate significant differences in the command of different genders on vocabulary. In other language abilities, they reported that ten out of the 21 studies reported stronger performance of female subjects in reading comprehension compared with five studies reporting male subjects' outperformance. They concluded that female subjects exhibited better records in reading, speaking, writing and general verbal ability. However, the differences were so minimal that there was no verbal gendered verbal ability existent.

Statistics from ACT of 2001 also showed no significant sex differences in English or reading, although the means of females were slightly higher than those of males (Zwick, 2002). In contrast, a gen.der study conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) yielded completely different results. This comprehensive study (Cole, 1997) involved 400 tests and millions of students. It was reported that a language advantage for females had remained unchanged compared with 30 years ago. Female

superiority in verbal ability ranged from noticeable differences in writing and language use to very small differences in reading and vocabulary reasoning.

Boyle (1987) performed a study on 490 Chinese university students (257 men and 233 females) in Hong Kong and reached the conclusion that female students achieved much higher in general English proficiency tests; meanwhile, boys performed better on two sets of listening vocabulary activities.

Contrastingly, in the context of second language proficiency testing, gender differences have been examined only to a limited degree. Generally, little differential performance by gender has been found. According to Ryan and Bachman (1992), the TOEFL did not demonstrate gender DIF. Of a total of 140 test items, no items were classified as 'C' (large DIF). Of the six level-B (moderate) DIF items, four favored males and two favored females. When means of subtests were compared, no significant gender differences were found in listening, structure and written expression, or vocabulary and reading. Wainer and Lukhele (1997) also reported that the reading comprehension testlets of TOEFL showed essentially no differential functioning by gender.

2.5 Attitude and motivation

Attitude is the opinion someone has in relation to someone else or something. It can be positive, negative or neutral; however, usually, a list of factors shape altogether shape it. For example, someone's attitude towards a political matter may change over a period of time according to the events they experience. Attitude is referred to as a mental state including beliefs and feelings that determine the understanding of others

about someone's behavior (Latchanna & Dagnew, 2009). Beliefs on themselves play an important role in someone's learning outcomes(Ajzen, 1970, 2005).

In Likert's (1932) words, attitude is "an inference which is made on the basis of a complex of beliefs about the attitude object" (cited in Gardner 1980, p.267). Based on this definition, R. Gardner (1980) defines attitude as "the sum total of a man's instincts and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears, threats, and convictions about any specified topic" (p.267). Ajzen (2005, p. 3) interprets attitudes as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event". Baker (1992) takes a step further and considers attitude as "a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence. of human behavior" (p.10). In other words, attitude acts either as the motor for continuing behavior, as a brake for stopping a behavior, or as a steering wheel for changing direction of a behavior.

Attitudes may play an important role in learning languages thus they need to be taken into consideration (Gömleksiz, 2010). Krashen (1985) considers attitudes as bridges or barriers in the process of learning another language and labels them as 'environmental ingredients'. He proposes that learning another language can only happen if the learner is armed with certain affective conditions (e.g. positive attitudes). As Krashen hypothesizes, when suitable effective settings and positive attitudes exist, the input can be processed by the learner and the learning can happen.

There are a plethora of studies investigating the impacts of attitudes on language learning behaviors of students around the world. It is generally believed that a student's attitude toward a target language and learning that language is one of the leading predictors of their success. Lennartsson (2008) believes that if students are

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preoccupied with attitudes that they cannot succeed in learning another language, then their attitudes have in fact turned into obstacles. In other words, negative attitudes can impede learning a language (Ellis, 1994). However, as Kramsch (2006) highlights language learners are not like robots made only to communicate or solve the problems. They have identities, memories, and fantasies. Therefore, their negative attitudes may turn into positive ones to facilitate their language learning (Lennartsson, 2008).

In the Middle East, there is also an excessive number of studies on language learners' attitudes. Arani (2004) did a study on Medical Sciences students at Kashan University. They investigated the language learning needs of students with a primary focus on their attitudes towards learning English as a curricular subject matter. Their results showed that their participants have generally positive attitudes towards learning English as a school subject as well as their English language teachers.

Karahan (2007) implemented a study in the Turkish EFL context to find answers for the concerns and complaints reported by the students, their families, their teachers, and their school administers about the frequent failures of students in attaining the desired English language proficiency level. They conducted their study on the interlaced relationship between the attitudes of Turkish learners of English and their language learning. They found although their 190 subjects (94 females and 96 males) had more frequent curricular exposure to the English language in comparison with other students studying at public schools, they showed mildly positive attitudes towards the English language. They concluded that despite their subjects' positive beliefs about the importance of English as another language in their life, they never revealed a high motivation to learn English. In addition, their results showed that although their

students showed mildly positive attitudes towards the English language culture, they were not welcoming Turkish people speaking in English among themselves.

In the EFL context of Arab states, Al-Quyadi (2000) administered a study on five hundred and eighteen subjects from Sana'a University. Their findings revealed that in the Yemen context, students exhibited positive attitudes towards the English language and using it in their society. They could also locate both instrumental and integrative orientations towards the English language among their participants.

Attitude and motivation are sometimes used interchangeably. However, motivation is defined as an inner source, desire, emotion, reason, impulse or purpose that moves a person to a particular action (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). Motivation is one of the main factors known as determining the speed and amount of success of learners of another language. It is also the most frequently employed concept for explaining the failure or success of a learner (ibid). Dörnyei (1998) introduces motivation as a key to learning.

Attitude is the main factor leading to enhanced or hindered motivation. It is of utmost importance for teachers and educators to take into consideration their students' attitudes when designing teaching materials and learning settings. Having favorable attitudes towards the target language is a good start to learn a language (Gömleksiz, 2010). A positive attitude towards learning a second language has a direct effect on students' motivation in learning that language (Csizér, Kormos, & Sarkadi, 2010). Reece and Walker (2003) concluded "a less able student, who is highly motivated, can achieve greater success than the more intelligent student who is not well motivated" (p. 78). In other words, the more motivated students are, the better they will learn the target language (Saville-Troike, 2006). Rod Ellis (2008) reports on how the speed of

learning a new language can be adjusted according to the motivation students show in learning that language. If students have the feeling that learning a target language is useful for them, their learning outcomes will be much better than the students who see not benefits in learning the other language.

2.5.1 Motivation

It is hard to define motivation. As Robert C. Gardner (2006) states "motivation is a very complex phenomenon with may facets…Thus, it is not possible to give a simple definition" (p. 242). However, in the words of Richards and Schmidt (2002) motivation is "the driving force in any situation that leads to action" (p. 343). From a language learning perspective, motivation is combined with the learners' willingness, desires, and attitudes to enhance efforts in the process of learning a second language.

Douglas Brown (2007) has reviewed definitions of motivation based on three main concepts. (1) Behaviorism based on which motivation is the anticipation of reward-driven to acquire positive reinforcement. Based on an individual's prior experience, they repeat to get rewards or avoid the activity not to receive punishments. (2) Cognitivism in which motivation is referred to as the choices people make. The forces behind our decisions are the needs or drives. Following this concept, Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian (1978) identified six needs for the construct of motivation listed as a) exploration, b) manipulation, c) activity, d) stimulation, e) knowledge and f) ego enhancement. And finally (3) constructivism according to which, each person is motivated differently regarding their immediate social context and their individual personal choices. In SLA, however, motivation is mainly categorized into four types: Intrinsic/Extrinsic and Instrumental/ Integrative.

The concept of motivation is categorized into two types of integrative and instrumental (extrinsic). To an integratively motivated language learner, the process of learning is enjoyable. On the contrary, in order for an instrumentally motivated learner to learn a language a variety of external factors like academic requirements, expectations of the society, the pressure of parents, etc. need to be available. Therefore, as Robert C Gardner (1985) assumes, a language learner's goals can have integrative or instrumental orientations. The first one implies that the learner possesses a positive disposition to the community of the second language and is willing to interact with and be similar to them; while the instrumentally oriented goals are concerned with pragmatic gains such as higher salary or job promotion through proficiency in a second language.

Integrative motivation is composed of three main elements: integrativeness, attitude, and motivation. Integrativeness is defined as being interested in a certain second language and having a positive attitude towards members of the L2 community. While having a positive attitude towards the course, the teacher, and the situation of learning, in general, is considered as an important component having a desire to learn a second or foreign language (motivation) is also known as another crucial component.

Giles and Coupland (1991) regard integrative and instrumental motivations as effective and useful factors to involve and encourage learners in the process of learning. Compared to instrumental motivation, Robert C Gardner and Lambert (1972) consider integrative motivation as more facilitating. Though it is believed that motivation is an unstable trait, high motivation is required to continue learning.

It is difficult to find an operational definition of integrative motivation (Crookes & Schmidt, 1989). Through employing self-report questionnaires, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) define the term 'integrative motivation' as the willing a student shows towards learning another language if he or she is inspired to learn that language, has the willing to join the other language group, and holds positive attitudes towards whole the learning process.

Moiinvaziri (2008) has referred to motivation as the original impetus in SL/FL research and has pointed out that it comes from social psychology. Because learning the language of another community cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions towards the speech community. However, Gardner (1985) defines motivation as "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language" (p.10, cited in Moiinvaziri, 2008) because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in the activity.

Intrinsic/extrinsic motivation is related to the locus of control, first introduced and term by Rotter (1966). He points out that if a person places responsibility for his/her life within the self, s/he has an internal locus of control, but if s/he places the responsibility on others and on circumstances outside self, s/he has an external locus of control. Maslow, Frager, Fadiman, McReynolds, and Cox (1970) have considered intrinsic motivation superior to extrinsic because the learner is motivated to achieve 'self-actualization'. In other words, one of the most effective ways is helping the learner to be freed from the control of rewards (Bruner & Knowing, 1962).

On the other hand, Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced two major types of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivations. By integrative motivation, they

meant the desired learner has to integrate and/or assimilates with the target language speech community which is in contrast with instrumental motivation which puts stress on the need learners have to fulfill career or educational expectations. Later on, Gardner and MacIntyre (1992, 1993) referred to these two types of motivation as 'motivation orientations' and highlighted that depending on learners' orientation, different needs must be fulfilled in foreign language teaching.

In some cases, different types of motivation may overlap or it may be difficult to distinguish them sharply. However, the presence of motivation can increase learning behavior (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). General speaking, a successful learner is the one possessing positive attitudes towards the target language and its speech community. De Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor (2005) have claimed that "teachers, learners and researchers… agree that high motivation and a positive attitude towards a second language and its community help second language learning" (p. 72).

2.5.2 Motivation and Language Learning

Motivation is regarded as a major factor contributing to learning a second language in SLA research. However, different approaches have been employed by teachers and researchers in an effort to conceptualize motivation (Ellis, 1994). In Dornyei and Skehan's words "individual differences in second language learning, principally foreign language aptitude and motivation, have generated the most consistent predictors of the second language learning success…" (2003, p. 589). They highlight the importance of motivation in second language learning success and state that "aside from age of onset, no other potential predictors of second language learning success consistently achieve such levels" (ibid, p. 589).

According to Entwisle, Alexander, Cadigan, and Pallas (1986) both integrative and instrumental motivations are involved when a learner gets engaged in an academic career. Clément (1978) argues motivation plays an active and crucial role in determining whether a learner continues learning a foreign or second language or withdraws. However, it can be extrapolated that those learners who are more active and more willing to succeed in language learning possess more integrative motivation and are more persistent (Gliksman, 1976).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) believe that in formal learning contexts, integrative motivation is a more powerful achievement predictor compared to instrumental motivation. While instrumental motivation turns out to be an important factor only in a number of studies, integrative motivation has been proved to be correlated with second language achievement invariably. On the contrary, Chihara and Oiler (1978) claim that there is an insignificant relationship between achievement and integrative motivation. In the same vein, Dunkel (1948) conducted a study in which students learning Farsi were offered a financial reward. Based on the results of a grammar test he concluded that the learners did not perform better significantly (maybe due to the amount of the financial reward), but some tendency in that direction was seen.

There are many studies that admit that there is a meaningful relationship between the performance and motivation of the learners. Motivated learners pay more attention to language input and its pragmatic functions (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Schmidt, 1993) and perform better in role plays (Csizer & Dörnyei, 2005). Foreign language learners who have higher integrative motivation achieve better results on proficiency tests (Lambert, 1963).

In a research project, Keihaniyan (2011) studied the motivation of Iranian language learners in private institutions and found that both integrative and instrumental motivations are high among them. Finding better jobs and understanding English speakers are two of the main factors motivating them to pursue English learning. They have positive attitudes and dispositions toward learning English. Contrastively, high school students have to attend English courses as a mandatory requirement of the curriculum. They develop negative attitudes and consider English learning as a boring activity that wastes their time. Their progress in English learning is not satisfactory because the only thing that matters is passing the course.

Based on the reviews of McDonough (1981) and Bley-Vroman (1989), Byram (1994) claims that it is difficult to infer that there is always a causal relationship between motivation and learning a language. Success in language learning might be the cause of high motivation rather than its result. Burstall et al. (1974) confirm this viewpoint and propose that high achievement leads to high motivation and a positive attitude.

2.5.3 Motivation & Gender

Motivational orientation is significantly affected by gender (Yang, 2003). Generally, it is believed that integrative orientation is higher among females and, compared to males, they have more positive attitudes towards learning a second language (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001; Kissau, 2006; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Mori & Gobel, 2006; Yang, 2003). In the following section, a number of contradictory findings of different studies are mentioned.

As a very contradictory example, Oller, Baca, and Vigil (1977) concluded that negative attitudes may lead to more successful learning outcomes. They carried out a study in California on Mexican women who were learning English. They found that

those learners who had negative attitudes towards Anglo people were more successful in comparison with the learners who showed positive feelings towards the Anglo English speakers.

Although Shaaban and Ghaith (2000) claim that there are no gender differences as far as integrative or instrumental motivation is concerned, many studies prove that female learners are more integratively motivated (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001; Kissau, 2006). In a study conducted on East Asian English learners, Yang (2003) found that integrative motivational orientation was higher among female participants. Similarly, Mori and Gobel (2006) investigated 453 sophomore non-English major students' motivations. Their findings showed that their Japanese female learners were more integratively motivated and were more willing to learn English as a foreign language.

Contrastively, Lukmani (1972) reported that for non-westernized females of Bombay, who were learning English as a second language, integrative orientations were less important than instrumental orientations. In another study, Bacon and Finnemann (1992) investigated gender differences in self-reported beliefs about foreign language learning among 938 students of Spanish. They developed a 109-item questionnaire for their specific study in which participants responded on a 5-point Likert format regarding their beliefs and attitudes towards the Spanish language. They found that their female participants in comparison with the male students showed a higher level of motivation in language learning and were in fact more instrumental motivated.

2.5.4 Motivation and Age

Studies investigating the relationship between motivational orientations and age are not abundant in the literature. According to Alsayed (2003), motivation is subject to

change over time and can vary by age. Burstall et al. (1974) consider age as a significant predictor of differences in motivation.

Though Kormos and Csizér (2008) argue that there is no difference related to age in integrative motivation, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) showed that integrative motivation declines with learner's age. In another study, Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) investigated the enthusiasm of 7-grade English learners. They expressed a high level of enthusiasm initially, but this feeling diminished gradually after 2 years. The researchers concluded that 7 graders had higher integrative motivation compared to 9 graders.

2.6 Context of the Study: Iran

"Modern. Iran, as a developing Asian country with old history and rich culture, is an excellent sociolinguistic laboratory for researchers" Modarresi (2001, p. 1). However, to come up with an idea about the context of the study, it seems essential to point out some historical and factual realities about the context of this study, Iran.

Iran ranks the second largest country in terms of the population - with 75 million people (after Egypt) and economy- with a GDP of 400 Billion US dollars (after Saudi Arabia) in the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Iran is also the second-largest OPEC oil producer with a production of about 4 million oil barrels per day (in 2017) which is her chief source of foreign exchange. Its economy can be characterized by a large hydrocarbon sector and a much smaller private agriculture and services sector, which reflects the noticeable presence of its government in the manufacturing and finance of Iran.

Iran's social indicators have improved in the past four decades and are relatively higher than regional standards. Most human development indicators have expanded noticeably based on the Government's efforts to increase access to education and health. Virtually all children of the relevant age group were enrolled in primary schools in 2018 and enrollment in secondary schools increased from 66% in 1995 to 84% in 2018. As a result, youth literacy rates increased from 77% to 99% over the same period, rising significantly for girls. Ove the years, Iranian women have been playing an increasingly important role in the economy, though their market participaion and employment rates remain limited. Iran's health outcomes have also improved considerably over the past thirty years. The mortality rate for chidren under five steadily decline from 65 (per 1,000) in 1990 to 27 in 2018. Similarly, maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births declined from 150 to 30 during the same period. Consquently, health indicators are usually above regional averages. This success is based on the effective delivery of primary health care that almost balanced health care outcmes in rural and urban areas. Iran's new 6th five-year development plan from 2011 to 2015 continues to focus on social policies.

According. to the Statistical Centre of Iran (Yearbook, 2013), 71 percent of Iran's population is settled in urban areas and 25.17 percent of Iran's population is of the 15-24 age grouping, which reflects the importance of education in finding more occupational opportunities in Iran. Moreover, statistics show increasing chances of Iranian families to possess private housing and automobile- %23 of families in urban areas and %12 of families in rural areas have bought their first private houses within the period 2010-2011 and almost 3 percent of both rural and urban families have purchased their first private cars.

2.6.1 Educational System in Iran

According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, public education in. the primary level is compulsory. Public education at all levels is free of charge; however, due to the limited number of seats for free education, there are private schools and universities that educate students and demand tuition fees. The government statistics show that more than 95% of Iranian kids are receiving primary and secondary education in more than a hundred thousand schools. Schools for boys and girls are separate and there are 18,000,000 students trained by almost one million teachers (Yearbook, 2013).

The population of Iran in 2018 is more than 80 million and almost half of the population is younger than 35 years. This huge number of young population has created a great demand for education in both K12 and university levels. All applicants of universities must take part in the national entrance exam (Konkur) to be accepted in one of the 2800 universities inside Iran. At the moment, there are more than 1.5 million students receiving higher education. The demand for health-related subjects in higher education is greater than in other fields of study. There are 63 universities of medical sciences active in the 2018-2019 academic year. All these universities are state-run and there is no private university educating health-related subjects in Iran. The only private university permitted to offer medical and health-related programs is Islamic Azad University. IAU offers its programs in a hybrid way. It means that the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education, as well as the Iranian Organization of Evaluation, control the quality of education and quantity of admitted students to the IAU. However, IAU students are required to pay tuition fees and take part in some after-graduation assessments to find permission to work in the health and treatment sector of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

2.6.2 School Educational System

When the Prime Minister of Qajarieh, Amir Kabir, ordered for establishment of Dar ul-Funun Institution (the first modern higher education training center) in 1851, the clerics and religion trainers (Mullahs and Sheikhs) started a propaganda claiming that the modern education is satanic and has the order from the Satan to weaken Islam and the religious beliefs of Muslims. However, by the full support of the Prime Minister and the elites who have been mostly educated in France, modern education in Iran could find its way in the heart of society. In 1886, all their efforts led to the establishment of the first modern school (Roshdieh School) by Haj Mirza Hassan Tabrizi. Since then the educational system that was formulated according to the French educational system has been in charge of all schools throughout the country; however, this highly centralized educational system has experienced several reforms and revolutions until today.

During the Pahlavi era, 1925-1979, the regime implemented policies with the main objective of the modernization of society. Reza Shah (1925-1941) ordered for closure of all Islamic Maktabs (Madrasahs), banned all forms of Islamic extremist festivals and ordered for using Farsi as the only official language of the country. He also ordered the establishment of the Academy of Persian Language in order to alternate the big number of words borrowed from Arabic as the result of the widespread Quranic education throughout the country. In addition, public education at the Primary level for both boys and girls became compulsory. His son, Mohammad Reza Shah, took the same approach. In 1963, in line with the White Revolution or a far-reaching series of reform principles, he ordered for establishment of Literacy Corps, which was in fact composed of both male and female high school / higher education graduates who were sent to villages and remote areas around the country educating people for minimum

literacy. In the first 10 years, the Literacy Corps could educate 2.2 million children and 600,000 adults in rural areas.

Within the White Revolution principles of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the Iranian Senate approved the 15th and 16th principles in 1963. According to these principles, the government was required to allocate the budget for the establishment of 2500 modern colleges and schools in cities around the country. Public education became compulsory and free for all Iranian children and young adults at all levels. All state universities were funded by the government and became free for the students who could be admitted. Free food and health care were provided for all students in all schools around the country.

After the 1979 change of the regime in Iran from the secular Pahlavi Monarchy to the Islamic regime, the educational system in line with all the other socio-political and economic rapid changes throughout the country experienced swift fundamental revolutions. In essence, the Iranian revolution seems to have been a move in the opposite direction: from western capitalism, globalization, and the spread of their attached English language to an isolating ideology condemning both West and East in search for an Islamic Euphoria paving the way for the resurrection of Shiite's 12th Imam. Iranian general education witnessed a revolutionary reversal in its modern and pro-Western approach to an anti-Western pro-Islamic educational ideology. However, more recently, the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, condemned the educational system and policies that were practiced in Iran since the 1979 revolution:

> ما در آموزش و پرورش احتیاج به تحول داریم. آموزش و پرورش کنونی کشور ما، ساخته و پرداخته فکر ما و برنامه های ما و فلسفه ما نیست. بنای کار بر آن فلسفه ای نبود که ما امروز دنبال آن فلسفه هستیم.
>
> We. need a reform. in our education. Education. practiced in our country at the moment is not the. product of our thoughts, our plan's and our philosophy. It

is not based on the philosophy which we are following now (cited in FRDE, 2011, p. 8, own translation).

His speech and orders led to the formation of a 'foundational reform' in the educational system in Iran applied in 2011. The resulting educational system of Iran includes three levels (see Table 2.1) that require the graduating students to take part in nationally administered examinations in order to proceed from into level three. Education at the Primary Level is compulsory for all Iranian children. Meantime, there are special education opportunities for gifted (with special talents), children of refugees, children with special needs as well as students from minority groups.

Table 2.1: Structure of Educational System in Iran

Level	No. of years	Age of students
Pre-school	1 academic year	5
Primary School	6 academic years	6-12
High School	6 academic years	12-18

Pre-school education is not compulsory because of limited resources especially in distant and rural areas; however, because it plays an essential task in preparing kids for understanding the responsibility of learning, it is strongly advised to all parents to send their children to pre-schools. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been successful in the provision of necessary infrastructure, human resources and required teaching materials throughout the whole country at the primary school level. Therefore, primary education is compulsory that has resulted in the drop of illiteracy (not being able to read or write) to almost 0% in Iran.

By the end of the Primary education, those students who can pass the nationally administered final exams successfully will be given permission to proceed to the second level (high school, known in Farsi as Dabirestan). The first three years of this level is acting as the preparatory phase for students to decide about their future lives. In other words, prior to the start of year 9, students are encouraged to decide in what field of study (i.e. Experimental Sciences, Math & Physics, Human Sciences, or Technical & Vocational studies) they wish to continue their education. By the end of the 8th year, students are asked to take part in regionally administered examinations as well as some nationally administered exams (e.g. Math) in order to proceed to the second phase of high school.

In accordance with their exam results, students will be streamed into two main branches of 'theoretical' and technical & vocational studies. The academic or 'theoretical' branch comprises four subject areas: human sciences, theology and religion, math and physics, and experimental sciences. The technical stream is more technic and vocation oriented divided into the four sub-areas of arts, industries, agriculture, and management & services.

After choosing their favorite stream of studies, students are required to pass a total of 96 units within the next 3 years in order to be eligible to receive their high school graduation diploma (Diplom-e-Dabiristan). All the exams taken by the end of the high school cycle (year 12) are nationally administered and students are required to receive a minimum of 10/20 (see Table 2.2) in order to pass any subjects.

Table 2.2: Iran's Grading System

Iran Grades	US Grades equivalent
16-20	A
14-15	B
12-13	C
10-11	D
0-10	E

Students wishing to enter Higher Education (universities) (See Figure 2.1) must meet the necessary requirements to obtain a high school diploma by which they will be permitted to sit for the highly competitive National Entrance Exam (Konkur), success in which is imperative in order to gain a place at university.

The Iranian Ministry of Education employs all the teachers teaching students in the K12. All the teachers must meet the Ministry's requirements (both educational and ideological) in order to be permitted to teach in any schools within the country. The Ministry is in charge of the teachers' training centers and the curricula for teacher training programs in the higher education institutes are designed with the cooperation of this Ministry.
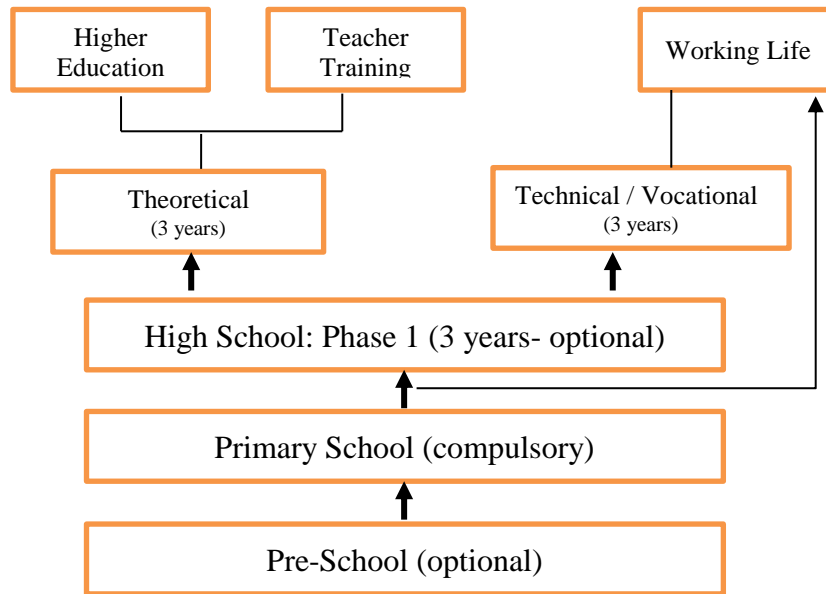
Figure 2.1: The Educational System of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In 2012, a university known as the Farhangian University (named after the old name of the Ministry, Vezarat-e-Farhang) has been established. All the teacher training centers in the country were dissolved within this institution and in fact, Farhangian University is now the prominent route to employment for those students who wish to become teachers in their future.

2.6.3 Higher Education in Iran

The main objective of the Islamic government succeeding in the Pahlavi Monarchy was promoting Islamic rules and regulations within all aspects of the life of Iranians and Islamizing all the sectors that used to be governed with secular principles (Rakel, 2007). The educational system in both K12 and Higher Education levels was also fundamentally reformed according to Islamic values (Paivandi, 2008) practiced by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Being in the list of top priorities of the Revolution and its leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Cultural Revolution Headquarters (later the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution) was formed that ruled the closure of all universities between 1980-1983. During this period, all the students who were believed

not to respect the Islamic values and could not prove their complete obedience to the values of the Islamic revolution were forced to quit their studies. In the meantime, all the professors and lecturers who were linked to the previous regime or showed any belief in the West were purged from the universities. Almost all foreign professors and instructors, especially the native English speakers, were fired from their universities.

After the reopening of the universities in 1983, those students who could prove their obedience to the Islamic values were called back to continue their studies. New students were admitted according to their academic performance in the nationally administered entrance examination of universities (Konkur) as well as their performance in an (Islamic) ideological interview that was administered by the representative of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, who was, in fact, an approved clergy. In the meantime, the Konkur examination, which used to include only question items from the subjects related to the favorite field of studies of the applicants, started questioning the applicants' knowledge in Arabic language and Islamic thoughts and religion.

The new instructors who were selected according to their obedience to the Islamic values rather than their academic resumes replaced the instructors fired from their positions after the application of the Cultural Revolution in universities. Their command on the holy book of Muslims, the Quran, was one of the major factors in being the opportunity to teach in universities or finding an administrative position.

However, by the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the decease of the Revolution Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, the atmosphere in universities got a bit lighter. The President of the time, Rafsanjani as the missioned President of the Supreme Council of the Cultural

Revolution disagreed with the request of Islamic revolutionists for applying gender segregation in the universities, constructing walls on campus to divide male and female students or turning universities into only-male or only-female institutions (as what happened in K12 schools).

As a result of his resistance as well as his succeeding Reformist government, in the early 1990s, the revolution educational system faced another reform, famous as New Educational System. According to those reforms, practiced until now, the admission of new students to universities (as follows) is based on their mark in the Konkur and the ideological interviews stopped their influence on the admission decisions.

The admission of students to all state universities and private universities is based on the marks that applicants obtain in the highly competitive nationally administered Entrance Exam, called Konkur.

All the universities must educate their students according to the central curricula confirmed by the Ministries of 'Science, Research, and Technology' (for non-medical programs) and 'Health and Medical Education' (for medical fields). Associate programs (Kardani) take about 2 academic years (4 semesters) and after the successful passing of 78 credits, students can receive their degrees. Bachelors (Karshenasi) programs take four academic years and students must pass 148-155 credits with a general average of 12/20.

Applicants for Master programs should sit for another nationally administered examination (known as Konkur-e-Karshenasi Arshad) in order to be placed among the successful students based on the quotas applied differently for different programs.

Students are required to pass courses (total of 32 credits) in order to do and defend their thesis studies. Their minimum pass mark is 14/20; however, according to the policies of the government, if they do not succeed to publish at least one journal article, the maximum mark will be 18/20. It must be highlighted that there is no non-thesis or research-based master program offered in Iran.

Ph.D. Programs admit their applicants according to the entrance examinations taken by different universities. Successful students should pass 32 credits and defend their dissertation within 4.5 years in order to receive their Doktora degrees. Recently, some universities have started offering Research-based programs at the Ph.D. level.

All the programs in state universities in all levels are free of charge; however, the programs offered in private universities or the students admitted in surpass of the quotas of state universities are charging students with tuition fees.

Medical universities in Iran are all administered and funded by the state and obey the rules and regulations approved by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. There are 63 universities of medical sciences in charge of educating students as well as providing public health care. Curricula, admission requirements, admission quota and even the chancellors of all universities are screened and set centrally by the Ministry. An undergraduate program takes four years and Professional Doctor programs (Medicine, Dentistry, and Pharmacy) take 5.5 to 7 academic years to finish. Some universities offer graduate programs in master and Ph.D. levels whose applicants should pass the national entrance exam.

The demand for higher education in Iran is quite huge; therefore, to cope with the demand, the government decided to permit the establishment of Islamic Azad University (the largest and most famous private university in Iran), Distance education university (Payam-e Noor) and privatized higher education institutions. There are 2746 universities educating 3,616,414 students in Iranian universities for the 2018-2019 academic year (Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2019).

2.6.4 English Language Education in Iran: 1901-Present

The good days of the English language in Iran are mostly within the reign of Pahlavi prior to the installation of the Islamic regime in Iran. In the early 1900s, the British socialite, William Knox D'Archy could win the assent of the Persian king on oil concession in Persia (today's Iran). Since then the English language has entrusted a new role of opening doors to modernity in Iran.

Apropos foreign language education in Iran, Sadiq (1965) states that after the establishment of the first Iranian modern educational institution, Dar-al-Fonoon, in 1851 the main objective of foreign language instruction was communication and understanding French, which was the medium of instruction. This was because the administration in Dar-al-Fonoon was based on Western teaching methods, especially on the French system of education, and because most of her teachers were native speakers of French.

Later on, especially after the excavation of oil by the British engineers and the expansion of dependency of the Iranian economy on its oil revenue, the English was the substituting foreign language. However, after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran (1941) and ensuing attempts of the Iranian Prime Minister of the time leading to the nationalization of the Oil Industry, the United States could achieve a greater presence

in Iran. No need to say that the American Dream as well as the expanding presence of the US in the world, especially in the Middle East, enticed the Iranian state to develop its economic, political, military, and educational relationships with the US. Many Iranian students, teachers, and professors dispatched to the US in order to advance their professional, technical, and communicative skills (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011).

As Strain (1971) reports, one of the focal objectives of the Iranian education system was bilingualism. English as a foreign language was instructed during the ending 6 years of the Iranian K-12 between 1934-1970, which was increased to 7 years afterward (Bagheri, 1994). In 1950, the Iran-American Society, in fact, the first official language institution teaching English to Iranian society, was established. Meantime, through study-abroad programs such as Fulbright activities (1950-1959) as well as sending American English teachers to hold training workshops for the Iranian teachers of English language in different cities of Iran, the US attempted to increase its involvement in teaching English as a foreign language in the Iranian schools (Strain, 1971; Khatami, 1979). Moreover, English became a key necessity in the military. In the process of military modernization, most of the high-ranking officers were sent to the US to study in military sciences. So they had to pass some courses in English as a prerequisite (Tollefson, 1991). The motivation of the Iranian students in learning English was relatively high as well; Strain (1971) writes that more than 90% of the Iranian school students elected English as a foreign language.

All this together led to a situation in which modernization was amalgamated with the Iranian culture. "If Iran before Islam had a mainly Persian identity and Iran after Islam had an Islamic-Iranian identity, Iran after the exposure to the West found a triple identity, that of Islamic-Iranian-Western" (Riazi, 2005: 102). However, this mixture

was not well welcomed among the religious majority of the Iranian society who were afraid of endangerment of the Islamic identity of the society. Therefore, in 1979 the society led by an Islamic fundamentalist, Ayatollah Khomeini rebelled against the secularization and westernization with the principal momentum of diluting those Western norms and espousing the Islamic values, which were tried to be marginalized during the modernization era in Iran.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, ELT experienced a rigid and rapid washout. All ELT institutions were shut down, native-speaking English language teachers and university professors were expelled. Besides, ELT materials experienced rigid censorship purging them from any Western norms and messages. In addition, the Islamic state entrusted locally trained non-native English language teachers to develop indigenized textbooks empty from any elements advertising English or Western culture. In sum, the Iranian education system went through an Islamization process that can be described as a 'process of de-modernization' (Paivandi, 2012). Consequently, any teachers opposing the ideology of Islam and Islamization of the educational system were purged from the system. Certain restrictions were applied to both schools and their students; co-education, which was normal prior to the Revolution, was substituted with single-sex schools. In addition to those changes, a series of religious activities were added to the education system.

Those speedy reforms, however, were not completely applauded by Iranian society. The society started to answer her needs after a while. Despite the hostility of the Islamic regime towards English (Dahmardeh & Hunt, 2012), the society answered its needs by opening an increasing number of private-run ELT centers. Debates on minimizing the dependency of the Iranian economy on the oil industry and promotion

of alternative industries such as tourism got hotter. The Iranian traders and industry owners as well as workers and business owners especially in tourist destinations such as Tehran, Kerman, and Tabriz found out that their future is contingent on improving their communicative skills in English (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011). English could also find its way through the heart of the Islamic state. The Iranian government established Press TV and some other TV channels as well as several written media in English (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011) in order to broadcast its ideological views and news.

Having a look over Iranian foreign language education (FLE) gives a contradictory impression. Although the importance of FLE is highlighted as a necessity for both economic and technological development, in reality, FLE has been considered as a threat to the national and Islamic identity of the nation (Kiany, Mahdavy, & Samar, 2011). In fact, western language education, in specific English, is condemned by some government and religion figures as the language(s) of enemies. A noticeable number of changes in foreign language education in Iran is arbitrary (Kiany et al., 2011) which are mostly based on personal ideas of different separate individuals without considering the macro and micro policies of the country.

English as a foreign language is introduced from Grade 7 (for children aged 12) within the secondary school system. Some languages such as German, Italian, French, Spanish and Russian have been planned to be offered in addition to English. However, in reality, due to the lack of required resources in the majority of schools around the country, English is the most (maybe the only) language taught.

The curriculum followed in the Iranian educational system is designed and introduced by the Ministry of Education. All textbooks, methodology of teaching and objectives

are introduced by the same Ministry and all schools are required to follow them. Textbooks focus on vocabulary, reading comprehension and grammar and the methodology of teaching is basically Grammar Translation. The success of learning is evaluated according to students' ability in translating texts into their mother tongue and their knowledge of grammar. Reading skills are not usually taught or presented. Only in the Pre-University year, students are presented with some reading skills. Topics and contents are more related to technology and science in comparison with the textbooks of high school.

Some studies were done on textbooks most of which resulted in critics on them. Razmjoo (2007) investigated materials used in high schools in accordance with Communicative Language Teaching principles and found that textbooks fail to reflect those principles. A. M. Riazi and Mosalanejad (2010) investigated objectives aim at with textbooks used in all grades of high school and the pre-university year according to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) and found in books of all grades only lower-order cognitive skills are targeted. However, there are some degrees of higher-order learning objectives found in the textbook of the pre-university year.

Describing a typical high school English language class, Namaghi (2010) writes:

> Nearly thirty students sit in rows facing the blackboard. A ninety-minute class is mainly teacher-fronted, and teacher-centered. Lecturing is the rule, though there may be an occasional variation on the part of novice teachers. Learning activities are text-centered. Teachers' main concern is coverage rather than responsive teaching. Similarly, students' main concern is passing the final exams and scoring high rather than learning English. Thus, responses to the questions about the text tend to consist of relevant passages quoted from the text. A limited version of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is the best guarantee for teachers to cover the material in the pre-specified time-line, and an efficient method of helping students score high in the finals since oral skills are totally ignored in the finals. Since final exams cover reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar, teachers' main tasks are: providing Persian equivalents for new words, translating the text, making the students

> translate, explaining grammar, and making students do written exercises at home, and finally giving feedback on the accuracy of their answers… (P. 217).

In the 1990s, more than 50% of Iran's 66 million population was under the age of 25, which caused huge demand within the education system. Therefore, in addition to normal schools, private schools (including language schools) were permitted to re-open in 1988 as 'non-profit institutions. It is estimated that over 2 million students (both children and adults) are currently enrolled in private English Language institutes, the most renowned center being the Iran Language Institute with more than two hundred fifty-thousand English language learners. This body is self-funding but government-affiliated and accounts for approximately a quarter of the total enrolment nationally. There are very few native English speakers permitted to teach within Iran and the methodology and resources available to English teachers are very limited. American ELT textbooks are commonly used in language schools, with 'Interchange' being the most popular. The majority of the books used are pirate copies.

The teaching of English is not currently permitted by foreign bodies such as the British Council. However, two IELTS examination centers (including the British Council) are now operating within Iran.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

In this chapter, the methodology applied to do the current study is explained in detail. It starts by presenting the research questions behind this study and then describes the overall design of it. Then it addresses the context in which we implemented our study starting from the broad context moving to the immediate context of our data sample. Meanwhile, data collection tools and procedures will be described in detail. Finally, it will discuss the data analysis procedures used in this study ending with limitations we faced through doing the current research. In the end, this chapter is summarized in a section.

3.2 Introduction

Language is one of the most valuable features of all nations and societies around the world. Meanwhile, almost all scholars in the field of linguistics share the same belief that language is the only tool by which people (i.e. nations and societies) communicate their ideas. However, teaching a language does not always end to parallel learning outcomes among students of that language. To find an answer to those learning differences and to ease the learning difficulties of languages, the field of language teaching has experienced different teaching methods and approaches offered by different scholars and practicing teachers. However, that search for the best method did not succeed. There are still teachers who find that in spite of all their efforts in employing different teaching methods and materials their students' learning outcomes

are not identical. Some students excel at others and even reach a native-like linguistic competence but some fail to reach a target language competence.

Learning English as a second or a foreign language occurs all over the world triggered by a variety of reasons ranging from immigration to the demands of commerce and sciences and similarly the requirements of education (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). However, due to the complexity of second language acquisition "it is not possible to investigate it from any single perspective" (ibid, P. 22). As reflected by different pioneers in second language research, it varies according to three main issues. Second language research may be affected by firstly the circumstances under which the research is conducted, then by the methodology being used in the research, and finally the tools used to study the second language (ibid). However, those circumstances are directly under the governance of the context in which acquisition takes place, whether the other language being learned is a second or a foreign language, as well as individual learner's characteristics (gender, age, etc.).

Therefore, the current study bearing in mind the role of society and communities in language learning has tried to investigate the probable impact(s) of some social variables (age, gender, social status, family background, economic status, and attitudinal and motivational status of learners) on language learning outcomes of Iranian adult learners assessed through a standardized English competency Test.

3.3 Research Questions

As already explained, this study intended to investigate how Iranian students' test scores in English competency tests are related to their sociolinguistic and socioeconomic background defined through several variables. That is, how learners'

test scores differ in accordance with their gender, age, socioeconomic status, family and educational background, the geographical location of their residence/education, and their attitudes towards English as a target language. The study, thus, has sought answers to the following questions:

1. Do sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables affect learners' performance in English competency tests?

2. What sort of impact(s) do different sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables have on learners' performance in English Competency Tests?

3. What attitudes do Iranian students have toward the English language?

4. What is the status of the English language teaching in the Iranian educational system?

3.4 Research Design

To answer these questions, a 'cross-sectional descriptive and quantitative' approach was employed in the study. It is a cross-sectional study since we have tried to investigate final English language learning outcomes of participants who have received English tutorials in the Iranian General Education without taking into consideration how teaching English happened during their studies or how learning English occurred among them throughout their general education in the Iranian Educational System. In other words, we are dealing with the results rather than procedures taken into use to conclude those results. It is a descriptive study because we have collected data to describe the social and socioeconomic background of our research participants. Finally, this study has employed a quantitative approach to participants' learning results. Numerical applications give in debt an understanding of the competency level of the participants; therefore, it was used in this study.

However, we should note that the literature of social research has witnessed arguments when it comes to deciding whether a study has a quantitative or qualitative structure. At first sight, it may be easy to distinguish quantitative from qualitative research by considering whether the collected data is numerical or non-numerical (Dörnyei, 2014). However, as Richards (2005, cited in Dörnyei, 2014) points out such a distinction is very superficial. Because qualitative research usually collects some numerical information, while on the other hand quantitative research usually collects some non-numerical information (e.g. gender or nationality of participants). Meanwhile, Miles and Huberman (1994) state that in some sense, all data collected by social researchers are qualitative since they refer to "essences of people, objects and situations" (p. 182).

Therefore, despite all these arguments, referring to main characteristics of quantitative research listed by Dörnyei (2014), we can conclude that our research method was quantitative because we have collected numerical data, we had a 'prior categorization', we dealt with variables rather than cases, we employed 'standardized procedures' (as it follows), and we have reported our findings through the 'language of statistics'.

3.5 Context of the Study

As already discussed, this study is conducted to find the probable socioeconomic reasons behind learning outcome differences among Iranian adults who have received almost the same English language tutorials during their studies under the Iranian highly centralized General Education Curriculum. However, one of the key issues prior to collecting our data was deciding whether it is feasible to implement this study in Iran. Since the major teaching experience of the researcher has been in Iran and his teaching practice over there made him think about probable socioeconomic effects on learning differences, he concluded that he has access to the necessary research resources and

he can find an adequate number of participants for his study. In addition to this, the researcher (as explains in the following) has found that the current socio-economic situation of Iran is unique which has made the researcher more eager to target there in order to implement such a study.

To enrich the reliability of data needed to be collected for this study and to enlarge the applicability of its results, 472 students, who have been taught English as a foreign language, have participated in this study. Moreover, to increase the creditability of this study, it was aimed to collect data from participants of different socio-geographical backgrounds. Therefore, four different geographical locations were chosen to sample participants. Tabriz in the West, Mashhad in the East, Kerman in the South and Tehran (the Capital City) were targeted and the required data was collected from the State Universities in each location. Universities are referred to as the mirrors of societies in which the best representation of the socio-economic situation of the society is always accessible (Kibrik, 1977).

3.6 Iran's Current ELT Context

In Iran's current educational context, English is predominantly popular among students (Samar & Davari, 2011). English is taught as a compulsory course at different levels in the Iranian centrally developed and top-down National General Educational System (Persian: Nezam-e-Amoozesh va Parvaresh, directly translated as Training and Education System), ranging from secondary schools to institutions of higher education as well as in private language schools (Shariatmadari, 1985; Shoarinejad, 2008; Shokouhi, 1989). Regarding its presence in higher education institutions, the English language is not the medium of instruction in any of Iranian university programs. In

fact, it is offered as foreign language (FL) courses in secondary schools, high schools and institutions of higher education, universities included.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the English language has been totally nationalized, students are taught to read passages in the English language which never point at any cultural reality of English speaking societies (Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012) unless to condemn them. Conversely, due to economic, educational or political reasons, people -- in their search for better work and better educational opportunities -- have become increasingly mobile and have started to immigrate to different English-speaking countries. According to statistics, every year around 150,000 Iranians (most of them well-educated in engineering, medicine, etc.) immigrate to other countries, especially to English speaking countries like the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia ("World Migration Report," 2011). It means that people and particularly the younger generations usually have some kind of positive feelings towards English. Consequently, knowing and learning English have progressively become more prestigious and more popular, particularly among high school and university students. These contradictory realities reflect the unique nature of the Iranian society that has encouraged the researcher to conduct this study.

3.7 Participants

Deciding how large our sample needed to be was an argumentative issue. In fact, as Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) address there are no "hard and fast rules" (p. 62) to define how large an optimal sample should be. However, literature prescribes some considerations to define how large a data-collection sample needs to be. The major estimates of sample size are 'Rules of thumb' and 'Statistical considerations' (Dörnyei, 2007, 2014). The former introduces the magic sampling fraction of one to

ten percent of the whole population with a minimum of 100 participants. The latter argues that a meaningful sample should have a 'normal distribution' which is required to have at least 30 participants to be achieved (Hatch, Lazaraton, & Jolliffe, 1991). Therefore, with reference to both considerations, the total number of 472 participants (as shown in table 3.1) took part in this study.

Table 3.1: Participants according to Geographical Location and Gender

Location	Female Participants	Male Participants	Total No. of Participants
Kerman (South)	67	59	126
Tehran (Centre)	61	63	124
Mashhad (East)	72	36	108
Tabriz (Wes)	44	70	114
Total	**244**	**228**	**472**

The participants were all pursuing their studies at state-run universities in each of the cities. Two-hundred and twenty-eight of them were males and two-hundred forty-four of them were females. All of them shared a similar characteristic; they had finished their general education in Iranian schools. In other words, they have received similar English language tutorials delivered by the Iranian Ministry of Education, through highly centralized and identical teaching/learning materials. For their training, teachers with more or less the same teaching experience and pedagogic knowledge have been employed. Therefore, if they did not study the English language on their own or their families did not provide them with extra financial resources to be spent on extracurricular English language tutorials, it can be concluded that their English language learning experience has been almost similar.

3.8 Data Collection Tools

In this study, we aimed at measuring Iranian university students' English language learning outcomes in relation to their social, economic and attitudinal status in their societies. To do so, we needed to employ some tools enhancing us to collect to the point data, which are valid meantime. Considering these issues, we were not left with a bunch of tools. Moreover, we had to make sure that the tools we were going to use needed to be handy, fast, and reliable. As Dörnyei (2007) states, quantitative data can be collected through a number of ways; however, "the most common instrument used for this purpose is the test" (p. 95). Meanwhile, he further declares that another most frequent tool for collecting quantitative data is a questionnaire. Therefore, to find answers to our research questions, we came up with employing a questionnaire and a standardized test of English competency, which is described in detail as follows.

3.8.1 The Questionnaire

One of the most frequent methods aiming at describing the characteristics of a population (or a sample population) is conducting a survey study. Survey data can be collected through a number of ways like structured interviews and questionnaires. However, researchers interested in social sciences have preferred using questionnaires more frequently than other instruments (Dörnyei, 2007). The data collected by means of a questionnaire are typically quantitative while it may include open-ended questions (ibid). Questionnaires are relatively popular in social sciences (Dörnyei, 2007; Oppenheim, 1992) firstly because they can find answers to questions in a systematic manner and then since they are "relatively easy to construct, extremely versaile and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of infomation quickly in a form that is readily processible" (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 101-102).

Our study is not an exception, either. Aiming at a better descriptive image about the level of English competency of Iranian EFL learners, we decided to benefit the most two frequent tools for data collection. The first instrument used in our study was a questionnaire including two main batteries and 74 questions in total in 6 pages (See Appendix A). Our questionnaire was designed in specific for this study and the validity and reliability of items were analyzed ($\alpha= 0.877$) through a pilot study collecting data out of a sample population of 56 participants.

As findable in appendices, our questionnaire was covered by a cover page explaining the aim of our study to participants and assuring them about the confidentiality of data they were going to provide us with. On the same page, contact details of the researchers were written and participants were required to reflect their consent of attendance by filling in the questionnaire and answering the questions of the English Competency Test.

The first battery of our questionnaire included 42 question items aiming at collecting data about participants' backgrounds and personal information like their gender, age, years of schooling, etc. At the time of constructing the first draft of our questionnaire, targeting the flexibility of our questionnaire and increasing the participating motivation of our attendees, we decided to include open-ended items more frequently. However, after applying them to our pilot-study participants, we found that not only open-ended items in our questionnaire do not motivate our participants to fill in our questionnaire more eagerly but also such items confuse them and demotivate them. Therefore, to address this problem while making our questionnaire more coding friendly, we decided to convert all open-ended items into close-ended ones with mixed choices. For example, the first item asking for the age of participants was an open-

ended question, which used to leave us with problems at the time of analyzing the questionnaire results. Instead, we decided to include five choices (16-18, 18-20, 21-24, 25-28, 28+) each of which represent the general age limits of the Iranian Educational System in accordance to different university degrees (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, Master's, Ph.D., and probable Second Degree or Late Onset of university studies by 28+ choice).

Nevertheless, why are different questions included in the questionnaire? Item One and Two were asking for participants' age and gender. Age is a binary variable; physiologically it can be counted as the number of birthday candles someone has blown. It can also be considered as a socially constructed entity, which requires a detailed study to calculate it. Therefore, we left it for our participants to choose their age as they assume it was. Gender is also an argumentative issue. Sociolinguists consider gender as a socio-culturally constructed variable while physiologists have a rather simple view as defining the sex of an individual based on their sex organs. Therefore, we left it open to our participants to identify themselves as a female or as a male.

Our other aim was reaching an image of participants' family backgrounds. Items 3, 5, 21, 22, 22.1, 23, 24, 25, 25.1, and 26 were included to do so. Item 3 was asking for the marital status of participants by giving them to choose either 'married' or 'single'. Since being in a relationship out of marriage is not acceptable by the Iranian cultural norms and Iranian Judiciary Laws, we decided to not include a third option of 'in a relationship' to avoid being culturally biased. Item 5 was asking for the number of children in participants' families; the number of siblings is referred to as a critical variable in socio-economic studies. The general belief is that the more children a

family has the less financial resources will be available for educating and nurturing them. Items 21, 22, 22.1, 23, 24, 25, 25.1, and 26 were addressing participants' parents' educational and occupational status and their foreign language knowledge. In the literature as referred to in chapter two, parents' education and foreign language knowledge play a critical role in their support for their children's foreign language education. Meantime, literature has considered an individual's occupation as a cardinal variable in placing them socio-economically in their society.

To define participants' educational background, we used items 4, 6, and 6.1 which were asking for the number of years they have received education and English language education per se. Meanwhile, items 7 and 7.1 were asking whether they studied the English language on their own or they were motivated enough to spend on English language tuition which was addressed by items 8 and 8.1. Another key issue in participants' learning outcomes is their knowledge of any other foreign language, which was asked by questions number 9 and 9.1. Moreover, to find whether students had any experience of using the English language instrumentally to communicate in live conversations, we employed items 10 and 10.1 that were asking for their traveling experience to any English language speaking country.

Extracurricular practice in any foreign language can be done by daily pastime activities like fun-reading, watching movies or listening to music. To find whether our participants were practicing English language on their own during their leisure time, question items 14, 14.1, 15, 15.1, 16, and 16.1were asking whether they read in English, they watched English movies (or with English subtitles) or they listened to English music while considering the amount of time they specify for each activity. Meantime, to find whether they considered extracurricular (fun) reading as an

important activity in their lifestyle, items 11, 12 and 13 were employed to ask whether they had fun-reading and if so, how much time they specify to do accordingly and how many financial resources they allocate on providing reading materials for themselves.

Our main target in doing this study was answering whether socio-economic variables play any kind of role in learners of English language learning outcomes. To reach a conclusion about participants' place in Iranian society according to their financial status items 17 to 20 were included. The literature of socio-economic studies has been initiated by surveys asking their participants' furniture and electronic devices owning. However, during the second decade of the 21st century, the accessibility of commercial furniture and electronic devices like TVs is so widespread that it is not wise anymore to ask whether an individual has a TV set at home or not. However, some larger belongings like cars and houses still play significant roles in placing someone in upper or lower social stratifications. Therefore, items 17 and 17.1 were asking whether our participants owned private cars or not while items 18, 18.1, and 18.2 were asking about their residential status. In other words, whether they owned private houses and if so, how much its value was but if not, how much they paid for their rentals. Carl Marx (1818-1883) who believed that access to such means of production moves an individual's status upward or downward in society considers land as the major means of production. Therefore, we included items 19 and 19.1 to find whether participants owned pieces of lands and how much they worth. If they owned then we asked whether they used their lands as means of production (item 19.2) and if yes, how much income they used to make out of them (19.3).

The second battery of the questionnaire contained 32 items in a five-level Likert-scale format. This section was aiming at describing participants' attitudinal stance towards

the English language and learning it as a foreign language. Meanwhile, this section included some items to describe the type of motivation participants take in order to learn English as a foreign language. As Douglas Brown (2000) concludes second language acquisition studies have divided motivation into four major groups under two main categories: Internal and Integrative versus External and Instrumental motivations. Therefore, to locate our participants' motivational stance towards learning English as a foreign language we included 32 items. Eleven of them were used to find whether they carried any external push or instrumental reason to learn the English language while the rest were asking whether our adult Iranian participants were internally motivated to be willing to integrate with English language speakers.

3.8.2 English Language Competency Test

After placing our participants' socioeconomic status and checking their motivational stance towards learning English as a foreign language, we had to employ an English language test to check how competent they were in English. According to principles of language testing, as stated by different scholars (Lyle F. Bachman, 1990; Lyle F Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Hughes, 2003), language teaching scholars and practitioners have to make sure that the language test they employ tests what is taught to test takers. Therefore, to decide what test we could employ to understand our participants' competency in the English language, I analyzed teaching materials used in the curriculum of the Iranian General Education while going through papers and research reports accordingly.

As discussed earlier, Iranian General Education and Higher Education curricula are prescribed by the Ministries of Education and Higher Education centrally to all state-run educational institutions (Secretariat of the Higher Council of Education, 2006). In other words, curricula in Iranian schools and universities are not flexible to apply

changes in accordance with learners' needs. Therefore, by analyzing the materials used, we could easily conclude how our English language competency test needed to be constructed.

In addition, materials currently used in the Iranian General Education schools and institutions reflect English language culture very little (Aliakbari, 2004; Dahmardeh, 2009; Farhady, Hezaveh, & Hedayati, 2010; Sarab, 2006). Moreover, the major emphasis of the Iranian curricula is teaching students the grammatical structure of the English language and some vocabulary items. Therefore, our test was required to address the cultural points of English-speaking countries marginally while questioning participants' grammatical and lexical knowledge. However, as Bachman and Palmer (2010) discuss competency in any language is equivalent to how actively individuals can use their linguistic knowledge to perform their needs. As a result, considering all these issues, we decided to employ a standardized test, which actively measures participants' knowledge of the English language. Our test was a shortened combination of specimen examinations from Eastern Mediterranean English Language Proficiency Entrance Exam (Part 1) which is a standardized test taken by Eastern Mediterranean University, School of Foreign Languages and Cambridge University ESOL Examinations, KET which is a globally recognized standardized English language test marketed by British Council around the world.

Since attending our study was a voluntary task and our participants had no obligation to complete our test of the English language, we did not have the luxury to take a thorough test of English competency. Therefore, to minimize the risk of participants stepping out reactions and to maximize the efficiency of our test, we decided to employ a shorter standardized English language test. We employed EMU's 'English language

Placement Examination' test that included 50 question items in five sections in a level placement format. Each section included 10 questions, which were assessing participants' lexical and grammatical knowledge. Meanwhile, to enhance the participants' speed in answering our questions, we did not include any essay-writing questions. In fact, our students were required either to answer multiple-choice questions or to fill in gaps that needed 1 to 5 words to be completed.

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

To find answers to our research questions in a structured scientific manner, we went through the following steps, as it will be described. Moreover, as mentioned, we employed a questionnaire and a language competency test to collect our required data. Therefore, in order to measure the reliability of our questionnaire and to check whether our research method would lead to generalizable and meaningful findings, we implemented a pilot study beforehand.

In the pilot study, we chose our target data collection geographical location in accordance with the convenience of the researcher. We randomly selected our participants from the Freshman Iranian students of Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) who completed their registration for the first academic semester in different Undergraduate and Master programs else than English Language Teaching. The reason that we did not select our participants from English Language Teaching programs was the fact that they were assumed to have received extra English language training than the general Iranian High Schools and University curricula.

After finding the participants who were willing to take part in our pilot study, we distributed our questionnaires among them to be filled in. Moreover, to find their level

of competency in the English language, we got their permission and the permission of the administrative board of the EMU's School of Foreign Languages to access their results of the SFL's English Proficiency Exam.

We collected data from a total number of 58 participants. After collecting the questionnaires and the results of the SFL's English test, we implemented the statistical analyses by employing the SPSS program, 18th Version. We could find that although the statistics have proved the reliability of the questionnaire items, we faced some difficulties in coding our collected data. Therefore, we revised our questionnaire accordingly and then distributed it to 32 more participants to evaluate the changes we have made to the items. Moreover, we found that using the EMU's SFL English Proficiency Exam lacks feasibility because it takes at least two hours to answer its questions completely. There is no need to point out that such a time-consuming and relatively long data collection tool could demotivate participants for our study, therefore, it could act as a significant limitation for our study. Therefore, we decided to alternate our English proficiency exam with a combination of EMU SFL's English Language Test (Part 1) and another standardized English proficiency level test. We decided to employ a specimen ESOL examination, KET, developed by Cambridge University English Language Testing Board marketed and taken globally by the British Council as the representative of the Cambridge ESOL Examination.

After completing our pilot study and ensuring the reliability and validity of our data collection instruments and our research method and applying the needed changes, we started the main phase of our study by collecting the main body of our data. As mentioned earlier, the main aim of our study was to find whether socioeconomic variables affect the English competency of Iranian students. Therefore, to find a better

image of the Iranian students' English competency, we decided to collect data from four different geographical locations, Mashhad (East), Tabriz (West), Tehran (Centre) and Kerman (South). In all these locations, we stratified our accessible population to students of State Universities; in fact, because of the literature in which it is discussed that universities mirror a true image of the real society. The other main reason in choosing state universities was the fact that in the Iranian Educational System, state universities accept their applicants through a nationally taken entrance exam known as Konkur (rooted in the French term of Concours (Competition) reflecting the battle-like system of admitting applicants). As a result, while studying in those universities is free of charge, students are admitted according to their knowledge and test-taking skills without considering their family or economic background. Therefore, since we could have access to students from different social and economic backgrounds, we assumed that state universities were the heaven we were looking for.

After choosing our target population, we applied for permission to collect our data by writing a request letter to the administrative boards (see appendix 3) of all the universities. Receiving their permission, we applied a systematic selection among the departments of each university and then among the classes held in each of the selected departments. We targeted every third department among the list of departments in each university after discarding the English language departments (English Language Teaching, English Language Literature, and English Language Translation departments, for the reason explained above).

Finding our target classes, we explained our study and the aim of our study to the course instructor and asked for a chance to collect our data from their students. Reaching their permission, we explained our study to their students and introduced our

data collection tools to them. As can be seen in our questionnaire cover letter, we explained to our participants that taking part in our study was completely non-compulsory and the information they provided to us was considered as filed and confidential. Gaining their consent, we distributed our questionnaires among them and asked them to fill in them. Later, we asked them to take part in our English Competency level test.

After collecting the completed questionnaires and tests, we filed them into envelopes and transferred them to the researcher's home office is where they were kept in his bookshelf drawers to be statistically analyzed later.

3.10 Data Analysis Procedures

After collecting the necessary data, the analysis stage starts. Considering the notion that our research methodology was quantitative and the collected data was quantitative in nature, we decided to employ the most commonly used software package in educational research marketed as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) recommended by Dörnyei (2007) in order to analyze the collected data.

The other reason for using SPSS was in fact related to our in-depth analysis of the numeric values to answer each research question. In order to prepare the collected data, we generated codes for each item. After entering the background information of the participants, we fed the results of the English language test into the system.

Finally, to start analyzing the data collected, we applied data splitting procedures according to our independent variables like participants' gender, age or geographical origin. Then we applied frequency measurements for different variables while

analyzing Mean and Standard Deviation. We chose the statistic outputs to be reflected

in tables, charts, and graphs in accordance with our needs and analysis.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study. Starting with the general findings and expressive characteristics of the research population, we will continue to present the relationship between each of the sociolinguistic variables and the English competency results of our participants. Finally, we will present our findings related to the place of the English language and its teaching in the Iranian K12 system compared with the attitudinal stance of the participants.

4.2 General Characteristics of the Population

In order to respond to the research questions, a population of 472 Iranian students randomly sampled from four different state universities took part in this study. The vast geography of Iran, as well as its geopolitical status in the region of MENA and the ethnicity distribution of the Iranian population altogether, made the researchers not limit the data collection to a specific area. Moreover, as Dörnyei (2007, 2014) discusses a research population cannot be reliable unless it represents the whole population numerically. All these made us increase our access point to four major cities from four different geographical locations. Participants thus were sampled from the state universities from four different locations, namely Tehran (Capital City), Mashhad (East), Kerman (South East) and Tabriz (West) as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Participants according to Geographical Location and Gender

Location	Female Participants	Male Participants	Total No. of Participants
Kerman (South)	67	59	126
Tehran (Centre)	61	63	124
Mashhad (East)	72	36	108
Tabriz (West)	44	70	114
Total	**244**	**228**	**472**

The main objective of the current study was to evaluate the effects of both broad and narrow sociolinguistic variables on the learning outcomes of Iranian K12 graduates in relation to the English language. For that reason, this study has focused on participants who have received training in the English language through the Iranian K12 English language curriculum. Therefore, sampling was done among undergraduate students of Iranian state universities, especially the 3rd and 4th-year students. In the following, detailed information related to other sociolinguistic variables (economic and family background) and the English language test results of the participants will be presented.

As shown in Table 4.2, the majority of participants were aged 18 to 25 years old. However, it seems that as participants get older, the frequency of female participants increases. In other words, Iranian boys are less willing to continue their education at the university level if they are older than 24 years old. The number of male participants with an age of more than 28 years old drops by almost fifty percent.

Table 4.2: Age of Participants according to their gender

Gender	AGE	Frequency	Percent
Female	16-18	8	3.3
	18-20	104	42.6
	21-24	92	37.7
	25-28	16	6.6
	28+	24	9.8
	Total	244	100.0
Male	16-18	14	6.1
	18-20	107	46.9
	21-24	81	35.5
	25-28	14	6.1
	28+	12	5.3
	Total	228	100.0

While 24 of the female participants in this study are from the +28-years-old age group, only 12 of our male participants came from that age group. This situation might have several possible reasons. Firstly, male citizens of Iran are required to serve an obligatory soldiery service for about two years from the age of 18. They can be temporarily exempted in case of continuing education in higher education levels; however, they cannot have a break of more than 6 months in their education. Otherwise, they will be called for the obligatory military service. Secondly, in Iranian culture, the norm dictates the male citizens to be concerned about finding a job or an income source because they are seen as the breadwinners for their families.

4.2.1 Economic Status of the population

Several scholars have addressed economy of a society as a crucial factor in how the members of that society behave in relation to different issues, e.g. education (Kılıçgün & Oktay, 2013; Sewell & Shah, 1967; Melchior et al., 2010; McLeod & Owens, 2004; Twenge & Campbell, 2002; Wells, 2001; Uz & Eryılmaz, 1999). It can be deduced that foreign languages education is not an exception; it is, in fact, dependent on the socioeconomic pattern of its host society (Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2012; Robert C Gardner, Masgoret, & Tremblay, 1999; Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Gayton, 2010;

Kormos & Kiddle, 2013). Therefore, since Iran may not be an exception, the Iranians' education in general and their foreign language learning in specific might be dependent on their socio-economic strata.

To come up with a general image of the current socio-economic situation in Iran, we employed several items in our questionnaire aiming at determining the economic status of the participants. This study has defined economic status based on major economic markers (e.g. properties), participants' (or their families') annual income and their family background (their parents' occupational and educational background as well as the number of their siblings). These socio-economic status determiners were selected based on different definitions offered by major figures such as Marx and Weber (Morrison, 2006) for socioeconomic status.

In some other studies, especially early studies, the socio-economic status was determined by items asking about participants' in-house properties (housewares) e.g. whether participants owned a fridge or s sofa at home (Mattheoudakis & Alexiou, 2009). However, in today's Iran economic situation, it is very unlikely that someone who continues his/her education at the university level does not own home appliances such as a refrigerator or a TV set. Therefore, instead of home appliances, we questioned possession of larger commodities such as real estate properties or automobiles in order to determine participants' socio-economic status in Iranian society.

Asking participants whether they (or their families) own a private car (Item 17 in Battery A of the questionnaire), it was found that the majority of our participants (%90.3) possessed at least one automobile. However, in response to the item asking

about the value of their car in comparison with the general economic situation of Iran (Item 17.1), it is found that more than %67 of their cars are of medium value while only %18 of them drive expensive cars.

Table 4.3: Possession of at least a Private Car and its Value

Location	Private Car		Private Car Value (%)	
Mashhad	Yes	Percentage 91.8	Very Expensive	6.50
			Expensive	19.40
			Normal	54.80
	No	8.2	Cheap	15.10
			Very Cheap	4.30
Tabriz	Yes	Percentage 91.2	Very Expensive	7.50
			Expensive	15.10
			Normal	54.70
	No	8.8	Cheap	22.60
			Very Cheap	0.00
Kerman	Yes	Percentage 90.8	Very Expensive	4.50
			Expensive	8.90
			Normal	78.60
	No	9.2	Cheap	4.50
			Very Cheap	3.60
Tehran	Yes	Percentage 87.9	Very Expensive	10.10
			Expensive	0.00
			Normal	79.80
	No	12.1	Cheap	6.40
			Very Cheap	3.70

However, as shown in Table 4.3, we found that participants from different locations come from varied socioeconomic backgrounds based on the value of their cars. It is clear that participants from Mashhad and Tabriz drive expensive cars while the majority of the participants from Tehran and Kerman own cars of medium value.

Almost the same responses were provided for the items asking whether they own at least one private residence (Item 18) and if so, how much its value is in comparison with the current economic situation in Iran (Item 18.1). Almost eighty-eight percent of

participants claimed that they possess at least one home. Value-wise as shown in Table 4.4, their homes sit in a similar category as their cars do; %66.9 of participants own homes of average value, while only %6.7 of them live in homes of cheap or very cheap value. However, it seems that while participants from Shahid Bahonar University claimed that their homes are of at least medium value, a greater percentage of them inhabit in medium value residents in comparison with other cities.

Table 4.4: Possession of Private House and its Value

Location	Private House		Private House Value (%)	
Mashhad	Yes	Percentage 89.10	Very Expensive	6.90
			Expensive	17.20
			Normal	67.80
	No	10.90	Cheap	8.00
			Very Cheap	0.00
Tabriz	Yes	Percentage 92.90	Very Expensive	11.30
			Expensive	17.00
			Normal	66.00
	No	7.10	Cheap	5.70
			Very Cheap	0.00
Kerman	Yes	Percentage 82.10	Very Expensive	3.90
			Expensive	23.50
			Normal	72.90
	No	17.80	Cheap	0.00
			Very Cheap	0.00
Tehran	Yes	Percentage 87.90	Very Expensive	7.10
			Expensive	16.80
			Normal	62.80
	No	12.10	Cheap	6.20
			Very Cheap	7.10

In general, based on these two economic identifying variables, it may be concluded that the majority of our participants came from medium economic stratum.

Table 4.5: Annual income of participants' or their families

	High	**Normal**	**Low**
Mashhad	20.80	60.40	18.90
Tabriz	18.40	69.30	12.30
Kerman	35.20	50.80	13.90
Tehran	13.70	71.00	15.30
Annual Income (Total)	**22.50%**	**62.40%**	**15.10%**

With reference to the participants' or their families' annual income, shown in Table 4.5, more than sixty-two percent of Iranian university students either come from families with a medium annual income or receive average salaries. More than one-sixth of them (%15.1) have little or very little annual income and only %22.5 of them receive salaries higher than the norm of the society. 35.2 percent of participants from Kerman came from families with high income; however, majority of the participants from the capital city earn normal incomes and almost 90% of the participants in Tabriz came from families with medium or high income.

4.2.2 Parents' Occupation

One of the other factors that determine an individual's social status (or maybe economic status) is the occupation of their parents. In the pilot phase of our study, we included two open-ended items asking what their fathers'/mothers' occupation was. Later on, based on the information provided, we came up with items 23 (What type of occupation does your father have?) and 26 (What type of occupation does your mother have?) including some choices as shown in Table 4.6 and Table 4.7.

It was found that in all data collection sites working as an employee for an organization is the most cited occupation followed by farming else than in Tehran. However, in

general, it was found that fathers of the participants from Tehran come from a different career profile in comparison with the other locations. Having jobs else than the main categories (e.g. brokerage) provided was the second frequently mentioned choice.

Table 4.6: Fathers' Occupation

Location	Career	Frequency	Valid Percent
Mashhad	Academic	6	5.9
	Business	12	11.9
	Transportation	5	5.0
	Employed	43	42.6
	Medicine	2	2.0
	Farming	31	30.7
	Other	2	2.0
	Total	101	100.0
Tabriz	Academic	4	3.6
	Business	22	19.6
	Transportation	10	8.9
	Employed	36	32.1
	Medicine	4	3.6
	Farming	30	26.8
	Other	6	5.4
	Total	112	100.0
	Missing	2	
	Total	114	
Kerman	Academic	2	1.6
	Business	14	11.4
	Transportation	13	10.6
	Employed	41	33.3
	Medicine	4	3.3
	Farming	37	30.1
	Other	12	9.8
	Total	123	100.0
Tehran	Academic	0	0.00
	Business	26	21.0
	Transportation	4	3.2
	Employed	52	41.9
	Medicine	0	0.00
	Farming	8	6.5
	Other	34	27.4
	Total	124	100.0

Table 4.7: Mothers' Occupation

Location	Career	Frequency	Valid Percent
Mashhad	Academic	7	6.9
	Business	9	8.9
	Employed	8	7.9
	Medicine	5	5.0
	House-wife	72	71.3
	Total	101	100.0
Tabriz	Academic	20	17.5
	Business	0	0.00
	Employed	14	12.3
	Medicine	6	5.3
	House-wife	74	64.9
	Total	114	100.0
Kerman	Academic	7	5.7
	Business	8	6.5
	Employed	18	14.6
	Medicine	9	7.3
	House-wife	81	65.9
	Total	123	100.0
Tehran	Academic	0.00	0.00
	Business	9	7.3
	Employed	4	3.2
	Medicine	4	3.2
	House-wife	107	86.3
	Total	124	100.0

In contrast with the career profiles resulted from their fathers, the participants mentioned that the majority of their mothers do not have incomes; almost more than 2/3 of their mothers were housewives dealing with house chores and raising their children (see Table 4.7).

4.2.3 Family Size (number of siblings)

The family size determined as the number of members in a family (parents and the children) is one of the factors that has been addressed as one of the variables correlated to the socio-economic status and the distribution of the family income among its members (Al-Agha, Bo, Aiash, Mandourah, & Abukhalil, 2015; Grätz, 2018; Hauser,

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Sheridan, & Warren, 1999; Jencks, 1972; Solon, Corcoran, Gordon, & Laren, 1991). The number of siblings is directly correlated with how the income and economic resources of the family are distributed in the family. In other words, in a family with more than four children, the income of the family will be shared among the siblings more limitedly compared with a family consisted of two children with the same income.

Table 4.8: Family Size according to the number of children

Location	No.	Frequency	Percent
Mashhad	1	9	8.9
	2	21	20.8
	3-4	43	42.6
	4+	28	27.7
Tabriz	1	6	5.3
	2	22	19.3
	3-4	48	42.1
	4+	38	33.3
Kerman	1	14	11.4
	2	30	24.4
	3-4	29	23.6
	4+	50	40.7
Tehran	1	64	51.6
	2	46	37.1
	3-4	11	8.9
	4+	3	2.4

Therefore, to find whether the participants in this study have open or limited access to their families' economic resources, Item 5 was employed (How many children are there in your family?). It was found that else than in Tehran, the majority of the participants from other areas come from families with more than three children (see Table 4.8). 88.7% of the families in Tehran consist of 1 or 2 children while only 11.3 percent of participants have more than 2 siblings.

4.2.4 Parents' Educational Background

The literature points to the relationship between parents' educational background and academic achievements of their children. This relationship is in some forms; the most prominent one is that the parents' education directly effects on the academic achievements of their children because as it accounts, during their student life, parents learn something from their schooling that influences on how they will interact with their children's education (Kalil & Mayer, 2016) and the learning opportunities they will create for them (Davis-Kean, 2005; Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 1993).

Table 4.9: Fathers' Educational Background

Location		Frequency	Percent	Level N.
Mashhad	Illiterate	1	1.0	1.0
	Primary	18	17.8	64.3%
	Secondary	9	8.9	
	High School	38	37.6	
	Bachelors	29	28.7	34.7%
	Masters	4	4.0	
	PhD	2	2.0	
Tabriz	Illiterate	0	0.0	0.0
	Primary	20	17.5	59.6%
	Secondary	6	5.3	
	High School	42	36.8	
	Bachelors	40	35.1	40.4%
	Masters	4	3.5	
	PhD	2	1.8	
Kerman	Illiterate	1	0.8	0.8
	Primary	44	35.8	67.2%
	Secondary	12	9.8	
	High School	26	21.1	
	Bachelors	34	27.6	32.8%
	Masters	0	0.0	
	PhD	6	4.9	
Tehran	Illiterate	0	0.0	0.0
	Primary	22	17.7	74.9%
	Secondary	23	18.5	
	High School	48	38.7	
	Bachelors	23	18.5	25%
	Masters	8	6.5	
	PhD	0	0.00	

As shown in Table 4.9, the majority of the fathers of the participants have only received general education and have never pursued a university education. However, it must be highlighted that almost all of their fathers had received enough education to read and write, at least in the Farsi language.

Table 4.10: Mothers' Educational Background

Location		Frequency	Percent	Level N
Mashhad	Illiterate	0	0.0	0.0
	Primary	20	19.8	83.2
	Secondary	14	13.9	
	High School	50	49.5	
	Bachelors	15	14.9	16.9
	Masters	2	2.0	
	PhD	0	0.0	
Tabriz	Illiterate	2	1.8	1.8
	Primary	26	22.8	77.1
	Secondary	20	17.5	
	High School	42	36.8	
	Bachelors	22	19.3	21.1
	Masters	2	1.8	
	PhD	0	0.0	
Kerman	Illiterate	2	1.6	1.6
	Primary	30	24.4	75.6
	Secondary	19	15.4	
	High School	44	35.8	
	Bachelors	22	17.9	22.8
	Masters	6	4.9	
	PhD	0	0.0	
Tehran	Illiterate	0	0.0	0.0
	Primary	22	17.7	91.1
	Secondary	35	28.2	
	High School	56	45.2	
	Bachelors	11	8.9	8.9
	Masters	0	0.0	
	PhD	0	0.0	

Similar results were obtained in relation to the educational background of the participants' mothers (see Table 4.10). It shall be highlighted that in comparison to their fathers, a smaller percentage of their mothers have received a university

education. However, it was found that compared with fathers K12-limited education, a bigger number of mothers could finish high school. The other eminent point is that in general, the number of illiterate mothers is bigger than the number of fathers with no education.

Table 4.11: Parents' Knowledge of a Foreign Language

Location		Frequency	Percent	Valid %
Mashhad	Yes	25	24.8	25.0
	No	75	74.3	75.0
	Missing	1	1.0	
Tabriz	Yes	40	35.1	35.1
	No	74	64.9	64.9
Kerman	Yes	32	26.0	26.2
	No	90	73.2	73.8
	Missing	1	0.8	
Tehran	Yes	15	12.1	12.1
	No	109	87.9	87.9
Mothers' competency in another language:				
Mashhad	Yes	14	13.9	13.9
	No	87	86.1	86.1
Tabriz	Yes	24	21.1	21.1
	No	88	77.2	77.2
	Missing	2	1.8	1.8
Kerman	Yes	22	17.9	17.9
	No	101	82.1	82.1
Tehran	Yes	18	14.5	14.5
	No	106	85.5	85.5

Parents' competency in another language may play an important role in forming their attitudes towards learning another language (e.g. English language) and in determining the amount of the financial and emotional support they provide for their children to learn the other language. Vis-à-vis the familiarity of the parents of the participants with at least one other language, we asked them whether their father and mother know any other languages. It was found that almost one-third of participants' fathers and around

one-fifth of their mothers have knowledge in at least one other foreign language (See Table 4.11.

It is evident that the number of fathers knowing another language is bigger than the number of mothers familiar with at least a foreign language; however, within the scope of this study, it was not possible to find how much competent they were in the other language.

4.2.5 English Language Test Results

As already explained in Chapter Three, we employed a standardized English placement testing tool to evaluate how competent our participants as Iranian K12 graduates are in the English language.

Table 4.12: Participants' Competency in English Language

Competency Level	Percentage
Beginner	46.27
Elementary	36.70
Pre-Intermediate	9.32
Intermediate	4.82
Upper-Intermediate	2.85

The results of the test have shown that less than 10% of our participants had been competent in the English language more than the intermediate level (see Table 4.12).

4.3 Attitudinal Stance of Participants

In literature, the attitude has been addressed as a key factor in determining students' success or failure in education. Attitude defined as the positive or negative feelings that students have toward a particular language, the culture of people who speak that language as well as the speakers of that language (Alsayed, 2003) play a major role in

determining the amount of effort, time and financial resources students allocate to learn that language.

To locate what attitudes the participants of this study had towards the English language (both instrumental and integrative) and the functionality of the English language in today's Iranian society, we employed 32 Likert-scale items in Battery B of our questionnaire. Meantime, several items in Battery A of the questionnaire were used to find how much time and effort the participants spend in their daily life in order to develop their English language competency.

In the following section, the participants' attitudes towards the English language and its different roles in Iranian society are explained. In the same place, the attitudes and educational policies of the Iranian government towards the English language will be presented and compared with the participants' attitudes towards the English language.

4.3.1 Attitudes towards the English Language

Analyzing their responses, in general terms, it can be concluded that Iranian university students show positive attitudes towards English. In response to the item asking participants whether they 'like' English (Item 3 in Battery B), 80.6% of them expressed positive feelings towards English while only %4.5 of them showed negative feelings against English language in response to item 26 in part B, asking whether they hate English.

Table 4.13: Attitudes towards the English Language

	DA	Null	A
Item 1: Knowledge of English brings me advantages in the future.	0.8	7.6	91.6
Item 2: Learning English is necessary.	0.0	5.50	94.50
Item 3: I like English.	8.10	11.30	80.60
Item 4: I am content that I speak English.	3.50	15.80	80.70
Item 5: English should be taught as a foreign language in schools.	4.00	12.10	83.80
Item 6: Knowledge of English helps me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	5.10	16.30	78.60
Item 7: Watching English movies in the original language is better.	18.00	23.70	58.20
Item 8: Knowledge of English helps me to find a job in other countries.	6.60	11.70	81.60
Item 9: Learning English as a foreign language is praised by my friends.	9.60	20.10	70.30
Item 10: Learning the English language helps me to find a job.	5.50	9.70	84.80
Item 11: Everyone needs to learn English.	11.70	27.50	60.80
Item 12: It is important to communicate with English speakers in English.	4.70	15.10	80.20
Item 13: I prefer to read magazines, newspapers, and books in English.	23.30	39.70	37.00
Item 14: My family gives importance to learning English.	14.70	23.30	62.00
Item 15: I feel prestigious speaking English among my friends.	11.70	25.70	62.60
Item 16: My family supports me financially to learn English.	11.90	20.30	67.80
Item 17: I like to make friends with speakers of English.	7.60	22.20	70.10
Item 18: I respect those speaking English as a foreign language.	4.20	29.90	65.90
Item 19: English is to be compulsory at the university level.	6.90	21.70	71.50
Item 20: I watch English language TV shows or movies.	12.60	28.30	59.20
Item 21: Knowing English is a mark of prestige.	15.70	31.00	53.20
Item 22: Learning English is praised in my family.	7.70	18.60	73.70
Item 23: Knowledge of English helps me to continue my education.	3.40	5.60	91.00
Item 24: Learning English is a waste of time.	88.10	7.40	4.50
Item 25: Knowledge of English is a mark of literacy.	11.10	29.30	59.70
Item 26: I hate English.	85.30	10.30	4.50
Item 27: English is a functional language.	6.00	22.60	70.90
Item 28: I really have no interest in English.	80.60	8.80	10.60
Item 29: Learning English is important.	5.20	12.50	82.30
Item 30: I put off my English homework as much as possible.	62.00	26.30	11.70
Item 31: Native English speakers are friendly and kind.	15.90	60.50	23.60
Item 32: I have little interest in English.	68.90	11.70	19.30

However, their positive attitudes towards English are more instrumentally oriented than integratively driven. As shown in table, in response to Item 1 (Knowledge of English brings me advantages in the future) almost all of the participants (%91.6) expressed their agreement while their positive motivation to integrate with speakers of English language (questioned by Item 17) declines to 70.1 per cent and their negative motivation booms by more than 9 times and reaches %7.7.

However, with reference to the definition of Gardner (1982) on motivation, having positive or negative feelings/attitudes towards learning another language per se does not suffice to result in a learner's success or failure in learning that another language. As Gardner (1982) includes, motivation is a combination of effort, desire and affect; therefore, participants were questioned about their desire to learn or practice the English language as well as the amount of effort and time they spend on practicing the English language.

In this regard, it is found that although Iranian students generally express positive attitudes towards English as a foreign language, they generally neither show adequate desire to practice English in informal contexts (out of the classroom) nor they put sufficient effort in doing so. As shown in Table 4.14, almost %70 of participants showed reluctance to practice English through extra-curricular reading activities (Item 14: Do you read magazines, newspapers, and/or books in the English language?).

Table 4.14: Practicing English pastimes

Pastime Type	Yes	No
Item 14: Reading in English	32.7%	66.9%
Item 15: Watching movies in English or with English Subtitles	72%	27.5%
Item 16: Listening to English Music	63.2%	35.9%

While in response to items 15 and 16 in part A of the questionnaire %72 and %63.2 of participants claimed that they watch movies and listen to music in English, it should be highlighted when it comes to the amount of time they allocate to doing so, only a quarter of them spend average or more than average of their pastime watching movies

in English (Item 15.1). It gets worse when it comes to listening to music in English (Item 16.1). Only 19.2 percent of Iranian participants claimed that they spend average or much of their free time listening to English music (Table 4.15).

Table 4.15: Amount of time specified to practicing English pastimes

Pastime Activities Timing	Much	Average	Little
Item 14.1: Fun English Reading Time	7.2%	9.6%	83.2%
Item 15.1: Watching English Movies	9%	16.8%	74.2%
Item 16.1: Listening to English Music	11.9%	7.3%	80.8%

It is no surprise then, that there is little correlation between their 'positive' attitudes towards the English language and their competency. As shown in Table 4.16, the correlation coefficient r between participants' English language competency level and their positive feelings towards English is insignificant. It can be concluded that in the Iranian context, students' willingness to practice the English language has a little link with their positive attitudes towards that language. In other words, they do not learn English only because they like the language; there must be some other reasons behind their English language learning tendency.

Table 4.16: Correlation: attitudes towards English language and Competency

	English Prof.	Item 3
Pearson Correlation	1	.007
Sig. (1-tailed)		.440
N	472	470

In the following section, their attitudes towards the functionality of the English language in the Iranian context will be explained. Meanwhile, their attitudes towards the instrumentality of the English language in the Iranian society will be explained. Finally, it will be described whether the participants' English language competency results are due to their attitudes towards the instrumentality of the English language in their Iranian society.

4.3.1.1 Attitudes toward Functionality of English in Iran

In today's world, the English language plays several significant functions in different contexts. For example, English is the lingua franca in several countries (e.g. Nigeria), it is the language of science, and it is the language of media. However, in a society like Iran where the borders to the easy flow of information are closed, it is quite important to investigate what role(s) the English language plays.

As McGroarty (1996, p. 4) puts into words, "the status of a language in a society, whether native or second language, further shapes the social climate for language study". To find whether the English language takes a significant status in the mind of Iranian people, participants were asked to express their opinions towards the functionality of English language in the Iranian society in general, and among their friends and in their families in particular.

Item 27 and Item 29 in Battery B of the questionnaire were questioning the participants' attitude toward the functionality of the English language and about the importance of learning English in Iranian society. As shown in Table 4.17, almost 2/3 of participants stated that the English language plays a functional role in their society. Similarly, a significant number of them (82.3%) give importance to learning the English language.

Table 4.17: Attitudes towards the Functionality of English in Iran

	Positive	Null	Negative
Item 27: English is a functional language.	71.4%	22.6%	6.0%
Item 29: Learning English is important.	82.3%	12.5%	5.2%

However, it should be asked why more participants state that the English language should be learned, while the number of those participants who vote against the importance and functionality of English remains almost constant. We assume that due to the unique context of English language tutorial in the Iranian educational system as well as the anti-Western and anti-English approaches of the Iranian governments (as reflected in the FRDE, 2011), Iranian university students do not have a clear image about the functionality of English language in their society although they give importance to its learning. For 22.6% of participants, it was not clear whether the English language is a functional language in their society while only 5.2% of participants take a negative stance against the importance of English knowledge.

Learning the English language receives special value by most of the Iranian families. As it is clearly reflected in Table 4.18, 62% of Iranian families give importance to learning English and 73.7% of them support their children emotionally if willing to learn English. However, it should be noted that almost one-sixth of Iranian families (14.7%) do not include learning English on their priority list. It seems that the reason is more economic rather than attitudinal because only 7.7% of families do not praise learning the English language.

Table 4.18: Status of English in the participants' families

	Positive	Null	Negative
Item 14: My family gives importance to learning English.	62.0%	23.3%	14.7%
Item 22: Learning English is praised in my family.	73.7%	18.6%	7.7%

The same story is valid when the participants are asked about the importance of English language knowledge among their friends. More than sixty percent of participants (shown in Table 4.19) stated that learning the English language is praised by their friends and their English knowledge brings them prestige among them.

Table 4.19: Place of English knowledge among participants' friends

	Positive	Null	Negative
Item 9: Learning English as a foreign language is praised by my friends.	70.3%	20.1%	9.6%
Item 15: I feel prestigious speaking English among my friends.	62.6%	25.7%	11.7%

However, the fact that almost one-fourth of the participants (25.7%) do not have a clear idea about their friends' conception of the social stance of English knowledge needs to be highlighted. The researcher assumes that once more the almost isolated and closed Iranian society should be blamed. It is expectable that in an isolated society like Iran, a situation in which an Iranian individual finds the need to speak in English is almost rare. Therefore, English language learners find a limited number of opportunities to speak in English or show their English-speaking abilities to their friends.

The case is also valid when the participants were questioned about the place of English language knowledge in their Iranian society. While much fewer participants (53.2%) consider English language competency as a mark of prestige in their society, more than 30 percent of them do not have any clear idea about the role English plays in the eyes of their society. In addition, although there is a small increase in the number of positive attitudes toward the role the English language plays as a sign of literacy, almost one-third of participants were not able to reflect the idea of their society towards English literacy.

Table 4.20: Place of English language in the Iranian society

	Positive	Null	Negative
Item 21: Knowing English is a mark of prestige.	53.2%	31%	15.8%
Item 25: Knowledge of English is a mark of literacy.	59.6%	29.3%	11.1%

The reason for such a behavior might be due to the place the Iranian educational system and the Iranian Islamic government give to the English language. As stated before, English is offered as an EFL from grade seven by the Iranian schools. The focus of the educational system is mastery of English grammar and vocabulary through a Grammar Translation Method of teaching. The Islamic government, on the other hand, sees English language as a threat to the Islamic values practiced and promoted by the government in the society and as the result condemns the importance of English literacy in today's world. Therefore, English literacy is tried not to be seen as an advantage in the Iranian society, which makes some of the Iranian students not to have a clear perception about the place of English knowledge in their society.

Table 4.21: Attitudes towards English tutorials in school and university levels

	Positive	Null	Negative
Item 5: English should be taught as a foreign language in schools.	83.8%	12.2%	4%
Item 19: English is to be compulsory at the university level.	71.5%	21.6%	6.9%

However, any ideology is doomed to termination in the current age of technology and media. In today's world, the flow of information is so fast and easily in access that governments are left with a very marginal chance to control it. In other words, although ideologist governments (like the Islamic government of Iran) might allocate huge resources and capital to bind the easy flow of information, once modern technology opens its place in the society, people will find their own path. In Iranian society, most of the people (83.8% as shown in Table 4.21) give importance to the teaching of English in their schools as well as their universities (with a decrease to 71.5%).

4.3.1.2 Participants' Attitudes toward Instrumentality of English in Iran

An attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for an item. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, event, or a language. Positive attitudes towards learning a second language have a direct impact on students' motivation in learning that language (Csizér et al., 2010). As Reece and Walker (2003, p. 78) put into words "a less able student, who is highly motivated, can achieve greater success than the more intelligent student who is not well motivated". In other words, the more motivated students are, the better they will learn the new language (Saville-Troike, 2006).

The instrumentality of English knowledge is one of the areas addressed by pioneer scholars of attitudes studies. English language competency may serve students to answer their needs (e.g. finding a job or communicating with English speakers). Some students apply to learn another language (e.g. English language) in order to find a better job, some others start learning a new language to immigrate, and some students register for learning a language to be able to communicate. In other words, it is very hard to imagine a student registering for a language tutorial without having any specific need to fulfill.

In a society like Iran where English is offered as a foreign language, learning English is not a compulsory task; in fact, it is usually offered only as a school subject. Therefore, it is important to determine students' reasons for learning it. Apart from their reasons fueled by the functionality of learning a new language (English language), this study assumes that it is important to find whether Iranian EFL learners are learning English as an instrument to fulfill their needs.

To determine whether the participants pursue the fulfillment of any needs, some items were employed in Battery B of the questionnaire inviting the subjects to reflect their opinions about the instrumentality of English language learning in finding a job, continuing their education, or integrating/communicating with other English language literates.

In response to Items 8 and 10 (see Table 4.22), more than eighty percent of participants showed positive attitudes towards the instrumentality of learning English in order to find a job in another country or to find a job, in general (81.8 % and 84.8 %, respectively). Considering the relatively small number of participants who believed

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that the English language does not help them in finding a career, it can be concluded

that the English language benefits a high status among Iranian EFL learners.

Table 4.22: Attitudes towards the instrumentality of English to find a job

	Positive	**Null**	**Negative**
Item 8: Knowledge of English helps me to find a job in other countries.	81.8%	11.7%	6.6%
Item 10: Learning the English language helps me to find a job.	84.8%	9.7%	5.5%

When subjects were asked to reflect their opinions about the instrumentality of the

English language in assisting them to continue their education, the results were in

contrast with the educational documents. As stated before, having the intention to

protect the national identity, foreign languages (in fact, Western languages) are

condemned, as it is clear in the Iranian Supreme Leader's words mentioned in the

current education document:

> ... زبان ملی را مغشوش کردن، هویت اسلامی ملی را سلب کردن و مدل بازی بجای مدل سازی،
> پیشرفت نیست. راح حل حقیقی، راه حل بومی است. باید بذر سالم خود را بپاشیم و مراقبت کنیم تا
> سبز شود؛ دنبال تقلید از این و آن نباشیم؛ دنبال سخن گفتن با زبان و لغت بیگانه و عاریه گرفتن از
> تجربه های دست چندم آنها نباشیم.
> …Irritating the national language, taking away the national Islamic identity and
> modeling instead of making a [native] model are not [means] of advancement
> (Seyed Ali Khamenei, 2005, cited in the FRDE (High Council of Cultural
> Revoluion, 2011, p. 199) [own translation].

Table 4.23: Instrumentality of English knowledge to continue education

	Positive	**Null**	**Negative**
Item 23: Knowledge of English helps me to continue my education.	91%	5.6%	3.4%

As shown in Table 4.23, 91% of participants believe that 'knowledge of English' helps them to continue their education. More interestingly, only 3.4% of participants showed negative attitudes towards the instrumentality of the English language in continuing their education.

Analyzing the correlation coefficients between their attitudes towards the instrumentality of English knowledge in fulfilling their instrumental needs and their English competency, it was found that there is a significant correlation between them (Table 4.24). Although there is a significant correlation between the instrumentality of English knowledge and the competency results obtained by the participants, a deeper analysis reveals that the correlation coefficients are also meaningfully different.

Table 4.24: Instrumentality of English competency and Competency Results

	English Prof.	Item 8	Item10	23
Pearson Correlation	1	0.175[**]	0.216[**]	0.161[**]
Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
N	472	472	472	466
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).				

As clear in Table 4.24, there is a more significant correlation between participants' English competency and their attitudes towards the usefulness of English literacy in finding a career opportunity in a foreign country. In other words, although subjects' instrumental motivation to develop their English competency has significant impacts on their English competency, the mobility function of the English language and its usefulness in finding income opportunities determines their success or failure in learning English.

Another issue affecting language learning results is reported as the willing (motivation) of language learners to communicate and integrate with speakers of that target language. To find whether the instrumentality of the English language plays any significant role in the Iranian English language-learning context, an item (Item 6) was employed in the Battery B of the questionnaire. As shown in Table 4.25, it was found that 78.6% of Iranian students think positively about the practicality of English knowledge in integrating and communicating with more varied people (foreigners).

Table 4.25: Instrumentality of English knowledge to integrate with foreigners

	Positive	Null	Negative
Item 6: Knowledge of English helps me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	78.6%	16.3%	5.1%

However, it is noteworthy to highlight that almost one-sixth of participants (16.3%) could not clearly decide whether English knowledge helps them to find communication chances with speakers of other languages. It might be due to the isolation of the Iranian society in the current political atmosphere in the world. In addition, the researcher assumes that the little number of English literate tourists and the policies of the Iranian Islamic regime against free Internet Access might also be responsible for this confusion among Iranian EFL learners in relation to the communicative abilities of English knowledge.

Table 4.26: Correlation between Integrative Motivation and English Test Results

		English Prof.	Item 6
English Prof.	Pearson Correlation	1	0.038
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.206
	N	472	472

It should also be noticed that as shown in Table 4.26, there is no significant correlation between the Iranian EFL learners' integrative motivation and their English competency results. It can be interpreted that because the Iranian EFL learners do not find an immediate need to converse with the speaker of other languages in English, their integrative desires do not play any strong pushing roles in developing their English competency.

4.3.2 English Language in the Eyes of the Iranian Government

The English language was most prominent in Iran during the reign of Pahlavi prior to the arrival of the Islamic regime. In the early 1900s, the British socialite, William Knox D'Archy, could win the assent of the Persian king on oil concession in Persia. Since then, the English language, despite opposition made by extremist clergies, has been entrusted a new role of opening doors to modernity in Iran.

After the establishment of the first Iranian modern educational institution, Dar-al-Fonoon, in 1851, the main objective of the foreign language instruction was communication and understanding of French, which was the medium of instruction (Sadiq, 1965). The administration in Dar-al-Fonoon was based on Western teaching methods, especially on the French system of education, and most of the teachers were native French speakers.

After the excavation of oil by the British engineers and the expansion of dependency of the Iranian economy on its oil revenue, English served as the substituting foreign language. However, after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941 and ensuing attempts to nationalize the Oil Industry by the Iranian Prime Minister of the time leading to the nationalization of the oil industry, the United States was able to achieve a greater presence in Iran. The American Dream, as well as the expanding presence of

the US into the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East, enticed the Iranian state to develop its economic, political, military, and educational relationships with the US. Many Iranian students, teachers, and professors went to study in the US in order to advance their professional, technical, and communication skills (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011).

As Strain (1971) reports, one of the focal objectives of the Iranian education system was bilingualism. English was instructed as a foreign language during the last six years of the Iranian K–12 programs between 1934 and1970 and was increased to seven years afterward (Bagheri, 1994). In 1950, the Iran-American Society, the first official language institution teaching English in Iran, was established. American English teachers were sent to various parts of the country to host training workshops for native Iranian teaches, and study-abroad programs such as Fulbright activities (1950–1959), were actively encouraged as part of the attempt by the US to increase its involvement in teaching English as a foreign language in the Iranian schools (Khatami, 1979; Strain, 1971). Moreover, the English language was the key requirement for entering the military. In the process of military modernization, most of the high-ranking officers were sent to the US to study military sciences. Hence, they had to pass some courses in English as a prerequisite (Tollefson, 1991). The motivation of the Iranian students in learning English was relatively high as well; Strain (1971) writes that more than 90% of the Iranian school students elected English as a foreign language.

All these factors led to a situation of modernization becoming amalgamated with the Iranian culture. "If Iran before Islam had a mainly Persian identity and Iran after Islam had an Islamic-Iranian identity, Iran after the exposure to the West found a triple identity, that of Islamic-Iranian-Western" (Riazi, 2005: 102). However, this mixture

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was not well welcomed among the religious majority of the Iranian society who feared endangerment of the society's Islamic identity. In 1979, the society led by an Islamic fundamentalist, Ayatollah Khomeini, rebelled against the secularization and westernization with the principal momentum of diluting Western norms and espousing the Islamic values, which he felt were being marginalized during the modernization era in Iran.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, ELT has rapidly begun to disappear. All ELT institutions were shut down, and native-speaking English teachers and university professors were expelled. Moreover, the ELT materials were placed under rigid censorship and were purged of any Western norms and messages. In addition, the Islamic regime entrusted locally trained non-native English language teachers to develop indigenized textbooks empty of any elements advertising English or Western culture. In sum, the Iranian education system went through an Islamization process that could be described as a "process of de-modernization" (Paivandi, 2012). Consequently, teachers opposing the ideology of Islam and Islamization of the educational system were expelled from the system. Certain restrictions were applied to both schools and their students; co-education, which was normal prior to the Revolution, was substituted with single-sex schools. In addition to those changes, a series of religious activities were added to the education system.

Those speedy reforms, however, were not completely applauded by Iranian society. Despite the hostility of the Islamic regime toward English (Dahmardeh & Hunt, 2012), the society began to answer its needs by opening an increasing number of privately run ELT centers. Debates on minimizing the dependency of the Iranian economy on the oil industry and promotion of alternative industries such as tourism grew stronger.

The Iranian traders and industry owners, as well as workers and business owners, especially in tourist destinations such as Tehran, Kerman, and Tabriz, realized that their future was contingent on improving their communicative skills in English (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011). English could also find its way through the heart of the Islamic regime. The Iranian government established Press TV and some other TV channels as well as several written media in English (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011) in order to broadcast its ideological views and news.

Regarding the official approach of the Iranian government towards the English language, a reference to official documents is obligatory. There are two main education policy documents guiding the Iranian education system. In the following section, we present our findings in relation to their content analysis.

4.3.2.1 Fundamental Reform Document in Education (FRDE)

In 2006, the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, criticized the education system and policies practiced since the 1979 revolution in Iran and asked for reforms:

> We [Islamic regime] are in need of evolution and reorientation of education. The current education system in our country is not based on our way of thinking, our plans, and our philosophy; the foundation of the current education has not been based on the philosophy we are currently pursuing (cited in FRDE, 2011).

Khamenei then instructed the state to incorporate Islamic values as the main goals of the education system:

> The most outstanding thinkers should spend time and energy to plan for education. The philosophy of Islamic education should be clear and the future horizon of our country's education system has to be clearly based on this philosophy. We should be aware of what we are pursuing and where we are heading. Education has to be planned in accordance with clear guidelines and defined orientations. This is what we need. Education has to get rid of daily routines. This is the basis of our words (cited in FRDE, 2011).

His orders led to the formation of a "fundamental reform" in the educational system in Iran. The new system aims at producing the "perfect humankind" being devoted to Islamic lifestyle:

> We [Iranian society] are in need of an education system capable of materializing *Hayate Tayyebah* (the ideal Islamic life), universal justice, and Islamic-Iranian civilization. In light of such a sublime human capital, humanity shall be prepared for the realization of a global reign for perfect humankind, and under such governance, the talents and potentials of the humankind shall boom toward perfection.

Therefore, the main objective of FRDE was the materialization of *Hayate Tayyebah* (an idealistic Islamic life). To learn how it would achieve its goal, we analyzed all sections of FRDE dealing with language and foreign language instruction. It was found that language is considered as one of the key elements that form the national identity. However, foreign languages (i.e., the English language) and their education are often perceived as threats to the Islamic and national identity of Iranians:

> …Irritating the national language, taking away the national Islamic identity and modeling instead of making a [native] model are not [means] of advancement. The way out is to introduce a native solution. We should sow our own seeds and take care of them to grow. Do not try to copy others [foreigners], do not try to speak foreign languages, and do not borrow their overused experiences…. (FRDE, 2011: 259)

Khamenei instructed the government to construct an Iranian Islamic model of education; meanwhile, he warned against learning foreign languages (e.g., the English language). His approach clearly reflects the core attitudes of the IRI toward teaching English. In order to obey his orders, FRDE (2011) introduced Strategy 1-5 dealing with teaching foreign languages. That strategy was a "provision of foreign language education within the optional (Core-elective) section of the curriculum framework by observing the principle of stabilization and enforcement of the Islamic-Iranian

identity" (p. 32). In other words, teaching English was meant to strengthen the "Islamic-Iranian identity" of the students.

4.3.2.2 National Curriculum of Islamic Republic of Iran (NCIRI)

The National Curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a supplementary document to FRDE prepared and written by the Supreme Council of Education and the Iranian Ministry of Education in 2012. In its epigraph, the Minister of Education of the time (Hamid Reza Babaei) writes:

> The highly important responsibility of the 'National Curriculum' is preparing and providing useful equipment in order to design, compile, perform and assess educational syllabi nationwide to location-specific levels. Those syllabi should be based on the Islamic training philosophy and systemized educational and pedagogic concepts in order to provide children and young adults with a fun and charming school atmosphere (NCIRI, 2012: 4).

His words highlight the core role of the "Islamic training philosophy" in the formation and construction of NCIRI. Although he does not provide any definition for "Islamic training philosophy," by noting the subject matters introduced by NCIRI, it is possible to predict which areas are more expected to be influenced.

NCIRI (2012) lists 11 areas as the main subject matters of the Iranian education system. These areas are 1: Islamic philosophy and thoughts, 2: Quran and Arabic language, 3: Farsi Language and Literature, 4: Culture and Art, 5: Health and Physical Training, 6: Vocation and Technology, 7: Human Sciences and Social Studies, 8: Mathematics, 9: Experimental Sciences, 10: Foreign Languages, and 11: Life Skills and Family. It is hard to expect Islamic pedagogy to influence science, but those subject matters dealing with culture, languages, and arts may accept Islamic modifications.

Subject matter 10, Foreign Languages, is one of those topics that may accept Islamic philosophy modifications directly and/or indirectly. Two pages of 69–page NCIRI deal with teaching foreign languages. The descriptions are general and include vague statements that hardly give any detailed statements regarding how to deal with foreign language education. NCIRI defines the role of foreign language education as providing a "suitable basis for understanding, reception, cultural exchange, and transfer of human knowledge… for different purposes and different addressees within the frame of Islamic values" (p. 37).

NCIRI also sees the importance of foreign language education in paving social interactions under human societies' collaboration and the growth of technology. It states that in order to do purposeful and fruitful relationships, it is important that students learn another language "to be able to contact other societies and to get familiar with findings and achievements of other societies in the region and in the world" (p. 37). The other aim for foreign language instruction is developing interpersonal and intercultural communication for purposes such as tourism, trade, and socio-political consciousness. However, the main purposes of foreign language teaching are "cultural exchange" and "transfer of human knowledge" but within the framework of Islamic values.

NCIRI instructs the onset of foreign language education from the beginning of the first middle school cycle with the main objective of teaching the four linguistic skills and familiarizing students with "communicative skills." However, the goal setting for the outcome of the instruction is that "in the second cycle of middle school (years 9–12), students will be able to read intermediate level texts and comprehend them" (p. 38). Students' writing skills are limited to having the ability to write short passages. In

other words, the communicative skills meant by NCIRI are in fact pen and paper skills rather than performing live communication with speakers of foreign languages.

The foreign languages offered are English, French, and German. However, due to limitations in teaching and other resources, English is the main foreign language in Iran. The course content and learning outcomes are vaguely discussed. Nothing can express this issue better than the exact sentences of the NCIRI (2012):

> Foreign language education should pass the limited circle of teaching theories, approaches, and methods, and should act as a foundation for enhancing national culture and values as well as personal values. The approach of foreign language instruction is an approach based on active communication and self-esteem. During the primary stages of [FL] instruction, the educational content will be about local issues and the learners' [immediate] needs such as health, everyday life, their surrounding environment, cultural values, and norms of the society in a way interesting for the students. In higher levels, the course content will be chosen in relation to cultural, scientific, economic, political, and likewise subjects matched with the course content and textbooks of other subject matters, in order to deepen students' comprehension. By the end of the second Middle School, students should have the ability to read and understand simple technical texts and to write articles. During the second Middle School cycle, enhancing the repertoire of technical vocabulary [of students] will lead to [their] better comprehension of texts and their ability of academic communication (p. 38).

4.3.2.3 English Language in Iranian K12 ELT textbooks

After the victory of the IRI, the regime expelled almost all native-speaking English teachers and applied strict censorships to all ELT materials and textbooks. Meantime, the teaching of English was postponed from age 12 to age 13. Islamization policies were not limited to these; content of ELT materials and textbooks was also revised to minimize any possibility of reflecting English cultural traits. In fact, the current textbooks (Birjandi, Anani Sarab, & Samimi, 2014; Birjandi, Noroozi, & Mahmoodi, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Khadir Sharabyani et al., 2015) reflect Islamic and Iranian cultural traits but in English letters. Some snapshots from the high school English textbooks (English books 1, 2, and 3) picture the situation quite well (see Figure 4.1).

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Figure 4.1: Snapshots from Iran's high school textbooks (English book 1)

As pictures show, the IRI material developers have minimized any references to Western culture as much as possible. Some of the words presented in textbooks are not English at all. For Example, *manteau*"' (a type of women's outlets pronounced as /manto/) is listed in the "new words" section in the *English Language I* (2014), but could not be found in English dictionaries. In fact, *manteau* is a French word that means "a sleeveless cloak". However, the dress used by women in Iran with this concept is a long loose outer garment usually fastened with 6-8 buttons in front.

The IRI material developers also try to indoctrinate Iranian students with Islamic thoughts. None of the images used in the Iranian ELT textbooks include the relationship between the opposite sexes other than the ones allowed according to Sharia (e.g. father-daughter or father-mother). There is not even one single image used in any of the English language textbooks showing an ordinary inter-gender relationship in the West such as an opposite-sex teacher-student context (e.g., see Figure 4.2).
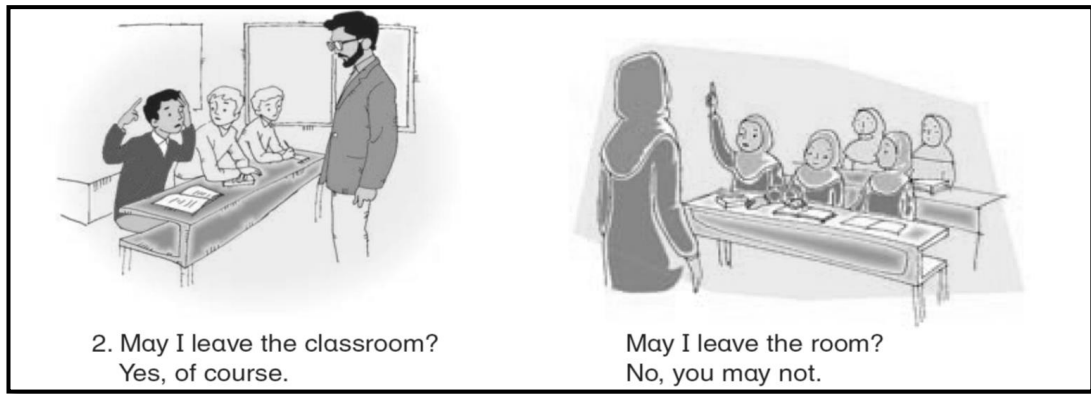
Figure 4.2: Single-sex student-teacher relationship
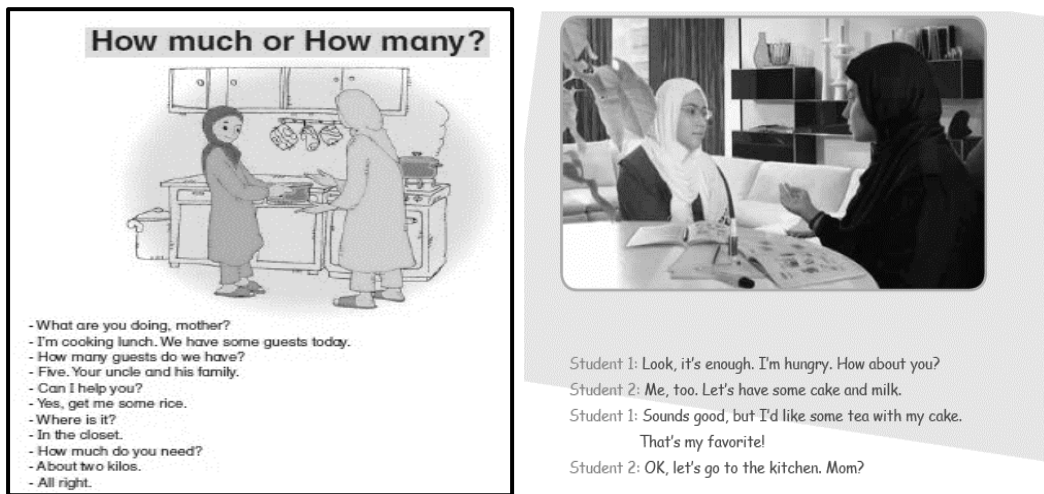
Figure 4.3: Traditional gender-specific roles (snapshot from *Prospect 2*)

In addition, textbook images depict roles prescribed by the traditional Islamic society of Iran (e.g., see Figure 4.3). For example, because Sharia prescribes the breadwinning role for men, it does not welcome women working outside of homes for income purposes. Therefore, as exemplified in Figure 4, the Iranian ELT textbooks try to imply that women should not work, and if they do, they are ought to have some specific careers (e.g. as a teacher or a nurse).

Figure 4.4: Jobs and Careers with respect to Sharia (From English Book 1)

Additionally, the textbooks emphasize more on teaching grammar, vocabulary items, and reading comprehension. Their teaching methodology is a limited version of the grammar-translation method and some insights from audio-lingualism. In other words, the Iranian ELT is missing the objective of improving students' productive skills and/or familiarizing them with the cultural competency required for communicative

purposes. In fact, the English language is not considered as a means of communication, but rather its usage is foregrounded (e.g., see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Productive skills tasks (Snapshots from English Book 3)

As portrayed in Figure 4.5, even productive tasks are not designed in order to enrich students' productive skills for communicative purposes. "Speak Out" tasks, employed in English books 1, 2, and 3 (Birjandi, Noroozi, et al., 2014a, 2014b; Birjandi et al.,

2015) are in fact parroting rote tasks asking learners to mechanically repeat some specific sentences. "Write It Down" tasks also present drills that are in fact mechanical grammar tasks rather than productive items enabling Iranian students to express themselves in writing.

4.4 Sociolinguistic Variables and Iranian EFL Learning Results

Socioeconomic variables determine an individual's status in his/her society. It is no wonder that the list of variables can be extended. For the current study, however, a selection of socioeconomic variables (age, gender, economic background, geographic location, parents' education, and parents' occupation) was chosen in order to investigate whether any traces of impact on language learners' learning performance can be found. In the following, the probable impacts of each sociolinguistic variable on the English language learning outcomes of the participants will be discussed.

4.4.1 Geographical Location and English Language Learning Outcomes

One of the variables that may play an important role in determining an individual's socioeconomic status is the 'location'. However, it is a surprise for the researchers that this variable is not studied as much as it should. The literature has referred to location more in relation with the effects of the school location on educational development (Osokoya & Akuche, 2012; Owoeye & Yara, 2011; Wang, Liu, & Hwang, 2017), multilingualism (John & Yi, 1997; E. Lee & Norton, 2009) rather than location as a macro factor affecting the whole society and the members of the society. The researchers could locate a few studies referring to geographical location (i.e. Cresswell & Underwood, 2004; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002) as a factor with a significant effect on the educational attainments of students.

In the current study, as already mentioned, the researchers collected the necessary data from four state universities located in four different areas in Iran. As presented in Table 4.27, the test results of the participants, despite the similar K12 education they have received, are varied in different areas.

Table 4.27: English Language Test Results in Different Locations

Location		Frequency	Percent
Mashhad	Beginner	19	17.6
	Elementary	40	37.0
	Pre-Intermediate	25	23.1
	Intermediate	16	14.8
	Upper-Intermediate	8	7.4
Tabriz	Beginner	60	52.6
	Elementary	36	31.6
	Pre-Intermediate	10	8.8
	Intermediate	4	3.5
	Upper-Intermediate	4	3.5
Kerman	Beginner	92	73.0
	Elementary	30	23.8
	Pre-Intermediate	4	3.2
	Intermediate	0	0.0
	Upper-Intermediate	0	0.0
Tehran	Beginner	54	43.5
	Elementary	67	54.0
	Pre-Intermediate	3	2.4
	Intermediate	0	0.0
	Upper-Intermediate	0	0.0
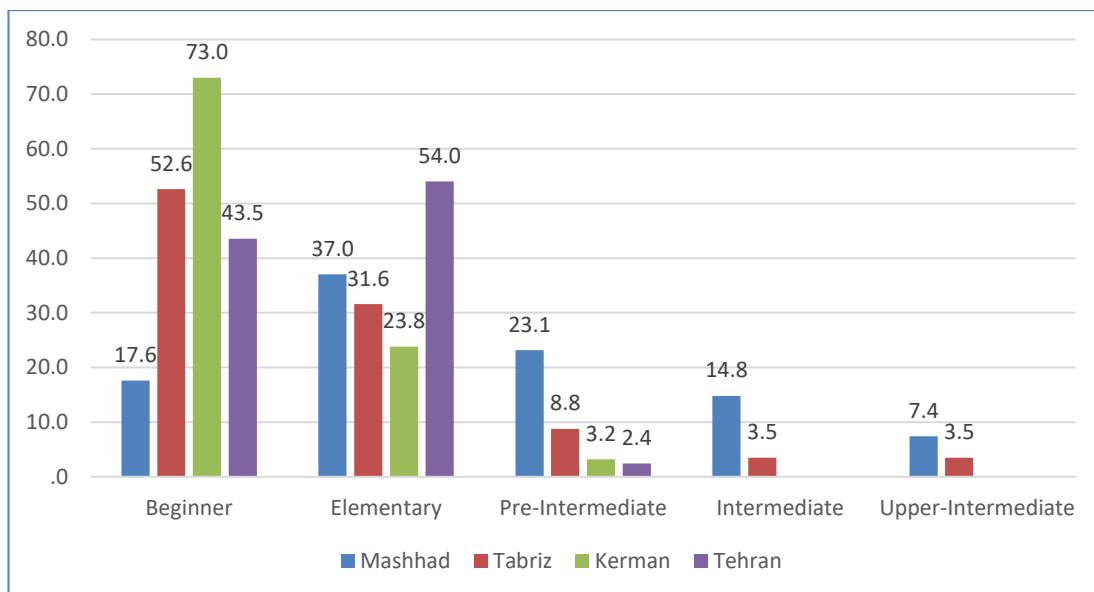
Figure 4.6: English language test results distribution in different locations

In order to find whether there is a correlation between geographical location and the participants' English language test results, we applied the Pearson Correlation Analysis and found that there is a negative significant correlation.

Table 4.28: Geographical Location and English Language Test Results

		Location	Eng. Prof
Location	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.383**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	472	472
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

As presented in Table 4.28, the correlation between location and the participants' English language test results is significant (r= -0.383). It means that the geographical location has a negative impact on the language learning outcomes of the Iranian K12 students.

4.4.2 Gender

As already explained, 244 female and 228 male K12 graduates pursuing their studies at Iranian state universities in four different areas took part in the current study. After filling in the distributed questionnaires, participants were asked to take part in an English language examination evaluating their competency in the English language.

As shown in figure 4.2, the female participants recorded better in the English language test. 10.66 percent of female participants could have achieved 'intermediate and upper-intermediate' competency in the English language while only 2.63% of male participants could reach that level of competency.

Gender: Female

■	Beginner
■	Elementary
□	Pre-Intermediate
■	Intermediate
□	Upper-Intermediate

- 4.10%
- 6.56%
- 11.48%
- 42.62%
- 35.25%
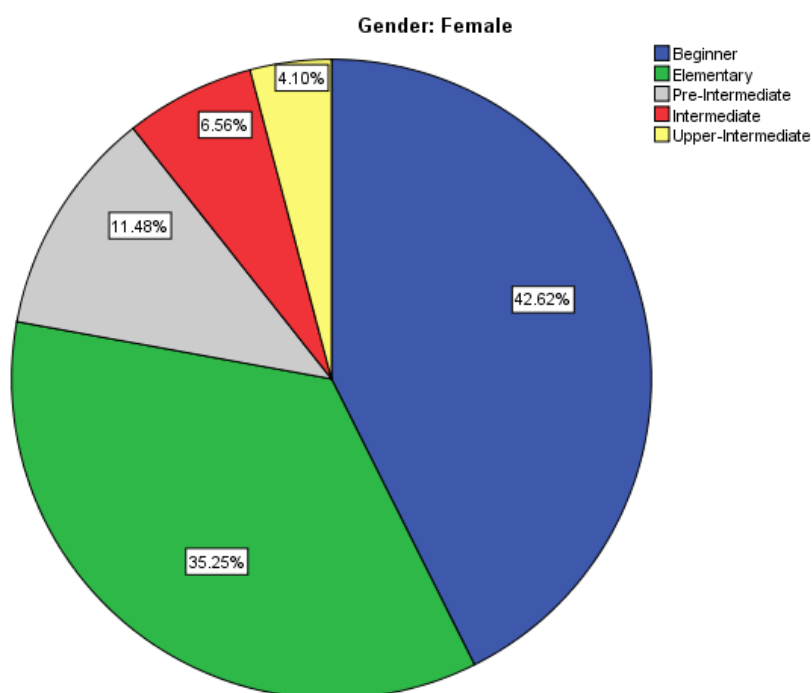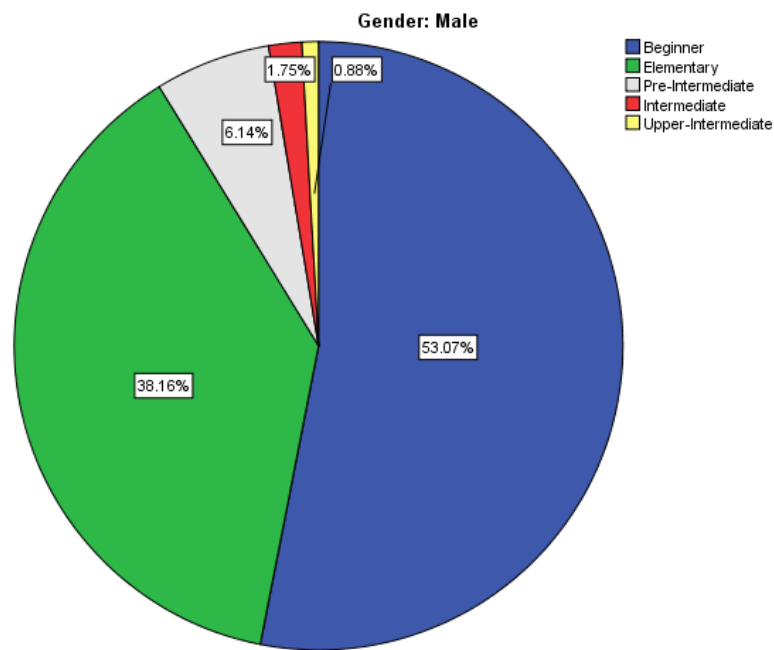
Figure 4.7: English Language Competency Levels of Females/Males

Table 4.29: Correlation between Gender and English Competency

		Gender	Eng. Prof
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.183[**]
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	472	472
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

To find whether the gender of participants has played any significant role in their English language competency, we applied a one-tailed Pearson correlation analysis between the participants' gender and their scores in the English language competency exam. As clear in Table 4.29, there is a negative correlation between the gender of participants and their test marks in English language teaching.

4.4.3 AGE

In the literature, age is one of the determining factors in language learning differences. As explained before, it was not feasible to conduct the current study on younger EFL

learners in Iran. Therefore, subjects were sampled from those students who have completed their high school studies.

As shown in Figure 4.8, it was found that the participants from the age range of 25-28 years old scored relatively better in comparison with the subjects from other age groups. While a total of 26.6% of students from that age group of 25-28 could improve their English competency to 'Intermediate' and 'Upper-Intermediate' levels, not more than 17.5% of participants from other age groups could reach higher levels in English competency. This is also valid in the other side of the continuum. 56.7% of subjects from the 25-28 years old age group were sitting among the beginner and elementary levelers; however, a greater majority of participants from all the other age groups, else than 18-20 years subjects, were B/E levelers.

|	16-18	18-20	21-24	25-28	28+
Beginner	36.4	25.6	48.6	50	47.2
Elementary	40	25.1	20.2	6.7	33.3
Pre-Intermediate	9.1	31.8	19.7	16.7	11.1
Intermediate	4.5	14.7	6.9	23.3	5.6
Upper-Intermediate	9.1	2.8	4.6	3.3	2.8
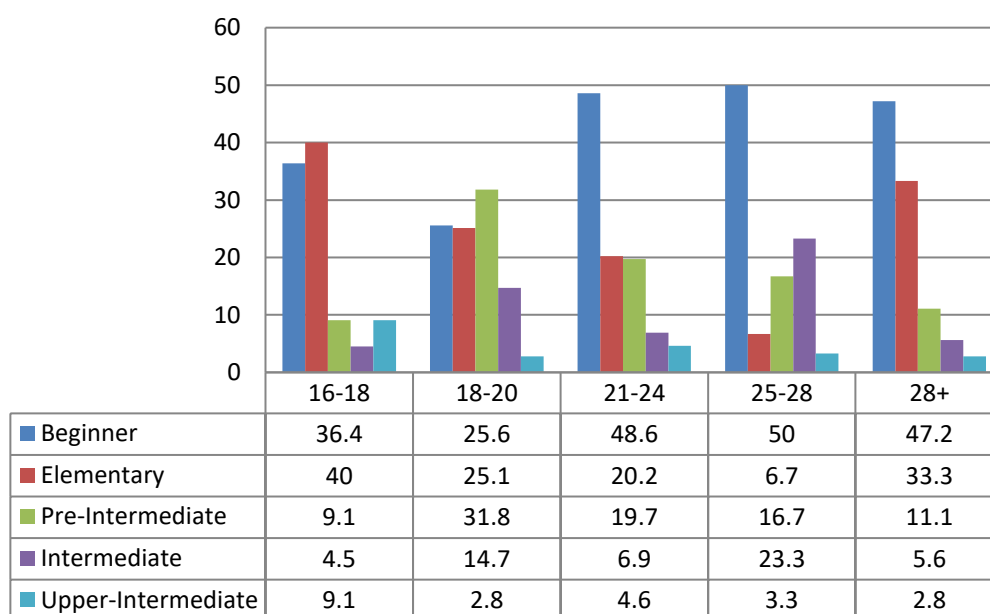
Figure 4.8: Age-Related English Competency Results

The relative better English competency results among the participants from 25-28 years old age group may be interpreted by considering the previous findings in relation

to the attitudes of the participants towards the instrumentality of English language knowledge. Based on the recent findings of the Iranian Statistics Centre (2011), the average age of first-time marriage is 27 and 23.5 years old for men and women respectively. Therefore, taking into consideration the high rate of positive attitudes towards the usefulness of English knowledge in finding a job, then the results for relative successful English language learning among the subjects aged 25-28 are not surprising.

The people aged 25-28, as already described, are more instrumentally motivated to learn the English language in order to find a job. In addition, it is clear that a career is usually synonymous with a better income. It is quite understandable, then, that why Iranian 25-28 years old participants are more willing to learn English; they are getting ready to step into the market. If they want to win in that challenging race of finding the job, they should improve their abilities, one of which is English language knowledge.

Moreover, as shown in Table 4.30, the correlation between age and English competency results of the participants is significant at 0.01 level with a coefficient of 0.202. There is thus a meaningful positive relationship between age and the English competency of Iranian EFL students. In other words, the older the participants are the higher their English language competency is.

Table 4.30: Correlations between age and English competency

		Eng. Prof	Age
Eng. Prof	Pearson Correlation	1	.202[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	462	462
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

This result may be interrelated with the approach the Iranian educational system has employed to teach the English language. As explained earlier, neither the teaching hours nor the materials are sufficient to scaffold students' learning of the English language. Therefore, it is possible to state that students' competency in the English language gets larger as they try to learn the language in the later stages of their lives. In addition, with reference to the attitudes expressed by the participants in relation with their needs to learn English (Items 2, 6, 8, 10, & 29 in Battery B), we can assume that they try to enlarge their competency in seek for better career and socializing opportunities while they progress in their life.

4.4.4 Family Background

The other important variable in determining an individual's socioeconomic status in society is their family background. Several familial issues have been addressed in the literature determining the individuals' stratum such as parents' educational level (Kalil & Mayer, 2016; Lerkkanen & Pakarinen, 2019), parents' occupation (Eccles, 2005; Miller, Votruba-Drzal, & Coley, 2019), and the size of the family (Jankowska & Karwowski, 2019; Sibley, Thomson, Longo, & Dearing, 2019)(i.e. the number of children).

Our results show that the family size determined by the number of children in the family is a significant factor in the English language competency individuals reach

while studying the English language. As shown in Table 4.30, the role of the number of children in a family is significant at with a negative correlation coefficient r of -0.084. It means that the more children a family has, the less successful an individual from that family is in learning the English language.

Table 4.31: Correlation between English Competency and Number of Children

		Siblings	Eng. Prof
N of Children	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.084[*]
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.034
	N	468	468
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).			

Meantime, as shown in Table 4.31, once again we found that geographical location keeps the results under the screen. Despite the finding that in Tabriz and Mashhad's number of children in the family does not leave significant traces in the participants' English language learning performance, we found that there is a negative correlation between these two issues in Kerman and Tehran with the coefficient of -0.169 and -0.234 respectively.

Table 4.32: Number of siblings and English Competency based on Location

Location		Siblings	Eng. Prof
Mashhad (East)	Pearson Correlation	1	0.101
	N	106	106
Tabriz (West)	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.152
	N	112	112
Kerman (South)	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.169[*]
	N	126	126
Tehran (Centre)	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.234[**]
	N	124	124
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).			
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

The second variable taken into consideration by this study as an important factor in determining an individual's status in society is parents' educational background. Data in reference to the participants' parents' educational background was collected by means of two specific items in the battery A of the questionnaire (Items 21 and 24).

Table 4.33: Parents' Education and English Competency Results

		Eng. Prof	Father's Education	Mother's Education
Eng. Prof	Pearson Correlation	1	0.226^{**}	0.260^{**}
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	472	470	468
Father's Education	Pearson Correlation	0.226^{**}	1	$.704^{**}$
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	470	470	466
Mother's Education	Pearson Correlation	$.260^{**}$	$.704^{**}$	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	468	466	468
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).				

As shown in Table 4.33, the correlation between the participants' English language test results and their father's or mother's educational background performs a significant role in the English language attainments of the Iranian K12 graduates. It should also be highlighted that although very marginal, mothers' educational background affects their children's English language competency more significantly.

4.4.5 Parents' Occupation

In determining which social strata an individual comes, parents' occupational nature is considered as an important factor in the literature (Durkheim, 1964). Therefore, this study considered the division of parents' labor as an important factor. However, in order to minimize the participants' tendency to conceal data, Items 23 and 26 were designed to collect data about the parents' occupational nature. Those two items asked

the participants to highlight their parents' occupation from one of the five areas of 'Academic' (e.g. a teacher), 'Business' (e.g. a shopkeeper), 'Transportation' (e.g. a transit driver), 'Employed' (e.g. a bank clerk), 'Medicine' (e.g. a nurse), or to select 'Other' (e.g. a housewife or a gardener) and specify the occupation.

Applying Pearson Correlation analysis, it was found that there is no significant correlation between the fathers' occupation and participants' English language learning attainments. However, there is a significant negative correlation between their English language learning outcomes and their mothers' occupation.

Table 4.34: Parents' Occupation and Participants' Test Results

		Eng. Prof	FJ	MJ
Eng. Prof	Pearson Correlation	1	-.079	-.265**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.089	.000
	N	472	470	472
Father's Job	Pearson Correlation	-.079	1	.138**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.089		.003
	N	470	470	470
Mother's Job	Pearson Correlation	-.265**	.138**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	
	N	472	470	472
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

However, once more we could locate the role of location as a determining factor in relation to other socio-economic variables and English language learning. As presented in Table 4.35, it is clear that the correlation between parents' occupation and their children's English language learning attainments varies according to its geographical location.

Table 4.35: Parents' Occupation and ELP distribution in locations

Location			FJ	MJ	Eng. Prof
Mashhad	FJ	Pearson Correlation	1	-.093	.219*
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.170	.011
		N	108	108	108
	MJ	Pearson Correlation	-.093	1	-.106
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.170		.138
		N	108	108	108
Tabriz	FJ	Pearson Correlation	1	.330**	-.203*
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.016
		N	112	112	112
	MJ	Pearson Correlation	.330**	1	-.369**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.000		.000
		N	112	114	114
Kerman	FJ	Pearson Correlation	1	.170*	-.239**
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.028	.004
		N	126	126	126
	MJ	Pearson Correlation	.170*	1	-.447**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.028		.000
		N	126	126	126
Tehran	FJ	Pearson Correlation	1	.000	-.037
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.500	.342
		N	124	124	124
	MJ	Pearson Correlation	.000	1	-.439**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.500		.000
		N	124	124	124
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).					
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).					

In Mashhad, while there is a significant correlation between the occupation of father and their children English language competency, there is a negative correlation traceable in Tabriz and Kerman without any significant correlation found in Tehran. In relation to the mothers' occupation, it was found that there is a significant negative correlation between it and the participants' English language learning outcomes. However, no significant correlation has been found in Mashhad (see Table 4.34).

4.4.6 Economic Background

Based on Marx's definition of determination means of social class, economic status is of high importance. As mentioned before, in early studies on socioeconomic studies, housewares and home appliances such as TV or washing machine have been taken into consideration in order to place someone into different social strata. However, considering the current economic improvements in Iran as well as Marx's theories

(Marx, 2000), the current study focused more on properties and means of production in order to determine the participants' socio-economic status. Therefore, this study asked for data about whether the participants own at least one private car, one house, and at least one piece of land. Meanwhile, the value of those properties was questioned. In addition, because the land is referred to as means of production in the literature, in case of owning any pieces of land, its use and the probable income out of it were also questioned. Finally, the annual income of the participants or their families was questioned.

Table 4.36: Correlation between properties and English language Competency

		PC	PCV	PH	PHV	Eng. Prof
PC	Pearson Correlation	1	-.176**	.151**	.064	-.144**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001	.194	.002
	N	466	423	466	417	466
PCV	Pearson Correlation	-.176**	1	-.191**	.612**	.124*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.010
	N	423	429	429	384	429
PH	Pearson Correlation	.151**	-.191**	1	.041	-.092*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000		.403	.045
	N	466	429	472	417	472
PHV	Pearson Correlation	.064	.612**	.041	1	-.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.194	.000	.403		.447
	N	417	384	417	417	417
Eng. Prof	Pearson Correlation	-.144**	.124*	-.092*	-.037	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.010	.045	.447	
	N	466	429	472	417	472
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

After applying the Pearson Correlation analysis to the collected data, it was found that there is a negative correlation between the English language competency of the participants and their possession of a private car or a private house. However, the value of their car as a means of determining their socio-economic status is significantly correlated to their English competency (r= 0.124). The same is valid when it comes to their means of production, 'land'. As shown in Table 4.37, there is a significant correlation between participants' English language competency and their possession of

at least one piece of land. The correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level with an r equal to 0.108. However, there is little correlation between the value of the land and the amount of income made from that land and the English language Competency level of Iranian university students.

Table 4.37: Correlations between Private Land and English Competency

	English Prof.	Private Land	Private Land Value	Private Land Income
Pearson Correlation	1	.108**	-.047	-.068
Sig. (1-tailed)		.009	.191	.248
N	472	472	354	102
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).				

As mentioned above, when general data was evaluated very limited traces of correlation between the participants' properties and their English language competency level could be found else than for owning at least one piece of land. However, this conclusion is not valid when a narrower analysis is applied to the data. It is found that Geographical Location plays a role, although marginal, in determining whether economic status can affect the English language learning outcomes of Iranian university students.

Table 4.38 shows that the value of private cars among Iranian university students plays a significant role in the West of Iran, in specific Tabriz. The same issue is valid between owning a private house and learning outcomes of EFL. It is found that there is a significant correlation coefficient at 0.05 level with an r of 0.187 in one of the geographical districts included in this study, in the East of Iran, Mashhad.

Table 4.38: Properties (Car & House), their values and English Competency

Location		Car	Car Value	House	House Value
Mashhad	Pearson Correlation	-.012	.037	.187[*]	-.034
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.453	.360	.027	.372
	N	105	99	108	93
Tabriz	Pearson Correlation	-.121	-.218[*]	-.066	-.061
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.100	.012	.244	.268
	N	114	106	114	106
Kerman	Pearson Correlation	.129	.149	-.041	-.005
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.077	.056	.323	.478
	N	123	115	126	105
Tehran	Pearson Correlation	-.083	.015	-.069	-.117
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.181	.439	.222	.109
	N	124	109	124	113
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).					

These findings can be explained by examining the contextual specifications of these two regions. Among the four regions, only Tabriz is located near one of the most important neighbors of Iran, Turkey. Turkey has the highest rate of economic relationship with Iran in comparison with her other neighbors. The border between Iran and Turkey is, therefore, one of the most important gates of import and export of commodities. This has made a unique context; apart from the cultural exchanges happened throughout the history between Iran and the late Ottoman Empire (or current countries of Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia, etc.), Tabriz is located in a 137km distance from Aras Free Economic Zone which benefits from imports without the need to pay the Customs taxes. This issue has made the opportunity of importing brand and luxurious cars with no need for paying the high tax rates of the Iranian Customs. Therefore, people can buy cars plated and registered under Aras Free Zone rules and regulations and drive them within East Azerbaijan provincial borders and in Tabriz. There is now a fever of driving more expensive and luxurious cars in the region.

Therefore, the significant correlation coefficient between car value and English competency might be explained accordingly.

Table 4.39: Private Land, Annual Income and English Competency

Location		Land	Land Value	Land Income	Annual Income
Mashhad	Pearson Correlation	.182*	-.043	-.234	.026
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.030	.350	.167	.396
	N	108	82	19	108
Tabriz	Pearson Correlation	.029	-.164	.022	-.012
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.381	.073	.459	.449
	N	114	80	24	114
Kerman	Pearson Correlation	-.042	.096	-.021	.019
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.321	.183	.451	.418
	N	126	91	36	125
Tehran	Pearson Correlation	.213**	-.089	-.150	-.080
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.009	.188	.248	.190
	N	124	101	23	124
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).					

When Pearson Correlation analysis was applied to the collected data according to the geographical distribution of the participants, it could be found that there was a significant correlation between owning at least one piece of land and English language learning outcomes in two regions, namely Mashhad and Tehran at 0.05 level with coefficient r of 0.182 and 0.213, respectively.

It needs also to be highlighted that there is a marginal correlation between 'income' (both annual and out of their private lands) and English language competency level of Iranian students. This finding is not in line with the findings of previous studies reported in the literature (Winsler, Díaz, Espinosa, & RodrÃguez, 1999; Mattheoudakis & Alexiou, 2009). However, analyzing the English competency levels

of Iranian university students (shown in Table 4.40) highlights some interesting findings. It is clear that when the annual income of the participants sits in the 'Very Little' category, they do not reach an Upper-Intermediate English competency level. An opposite pattern can be traced in the other side of the continuum; when the annual income of the participants is in the 'Very Much' margin, the highest rate of beginner and elementary levelers and the lowest rate of intermediate and upper-intermediate levelers (67.7% and 11.18%, respectively) can be found.
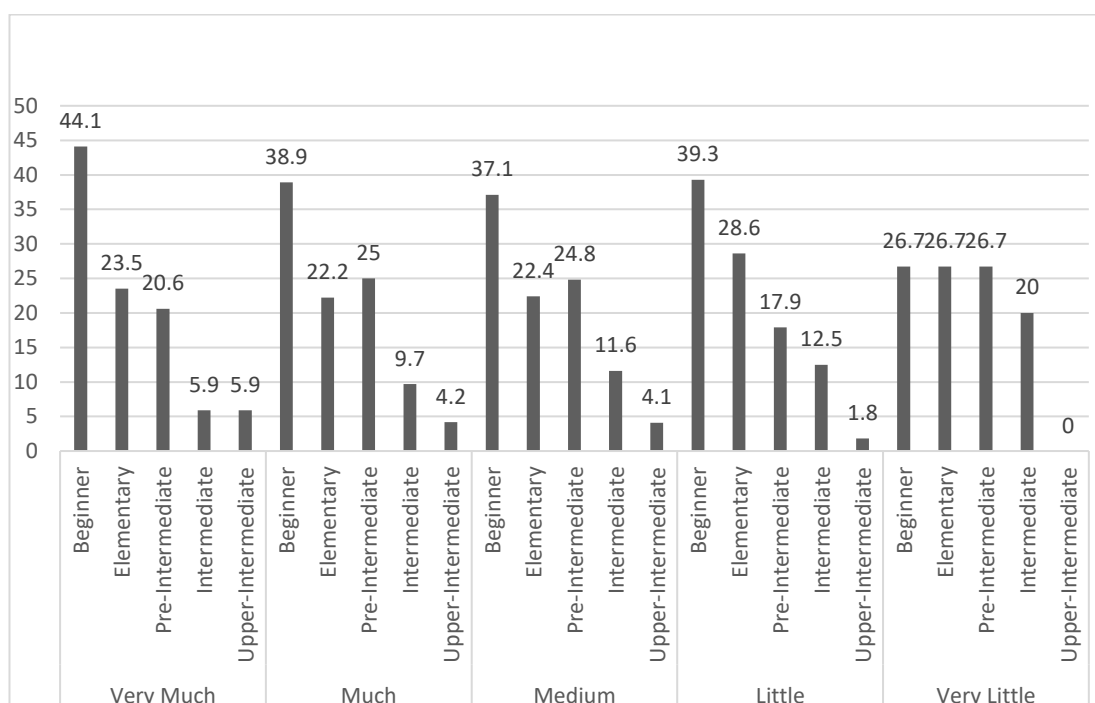
Figure 4.9: English Competency Level based on Annual Income

In other words, there is a similar behavior in the learning behaviors among the participants from the two economic poles based on their annual income. Meanwhile, as shown in Table 4.40, a tendency of social stratum upward movement is significant among the participants from the two economic classes with 'Very Little' and 'Medium' annual incomes.

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Table 4.40: English Competency Levels based on the Annual Income

Prof. level	Very Much	Much	Medium	Little	Very Little
B &E	67.6	61.1	59.5	67.9	53.3
PI	20.6	25	24.8	17.9	26.7
I & UI	11.18	13.9	15.7	14.3	20 *

The participants with medium annual income showed a different behavior; it is obvious that their English language competency is larger in comparison with the participants from one upper socioeconomic class as well as the dream annual incomers. Similarly, the participants from the lowest socio-economic stratum recorded unique and much better English language scores than participants from one higher socio-economic class. In fact, it must be highlighted that the participants with the lowest annual income recorded the highest English language competency among the other participants with higher incomes. Therefore, it is obvious that those participants from the lowest socio-economic class highly tend to improve their status in Iranian society by means of improving their linguistic skills.

This issue is highlighted in Figure 4.7. Item 7 and Item 7.1 in Battery A of the questionnaire asked for the English studying behavior of the participants. In response to Item 7 (Do you study English on your own?), almost 2/3 of participants (73.3%) from the lowest annual income category answered positively while only 47.06% of the participants with 'Very Much' annual income answered 'Yes' to that item.
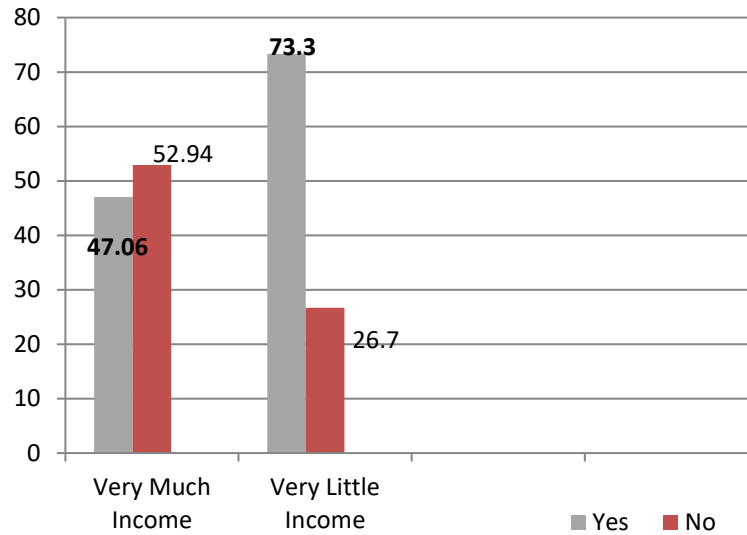
Figure 4.10: English Language Self Study

In response to Item 7.1 (How many hours on average do you spend on studying English on your own per week?), it was found that the participants from the lowest socioeconomic class spend much more time studying English on themselves per week. Most of them (60%) spend at least 2-3 hours per week studying English on their own while only 36.8% of the participants with the highest annual income spend the same amount of time practicing English on their own (see Figure 4.8).
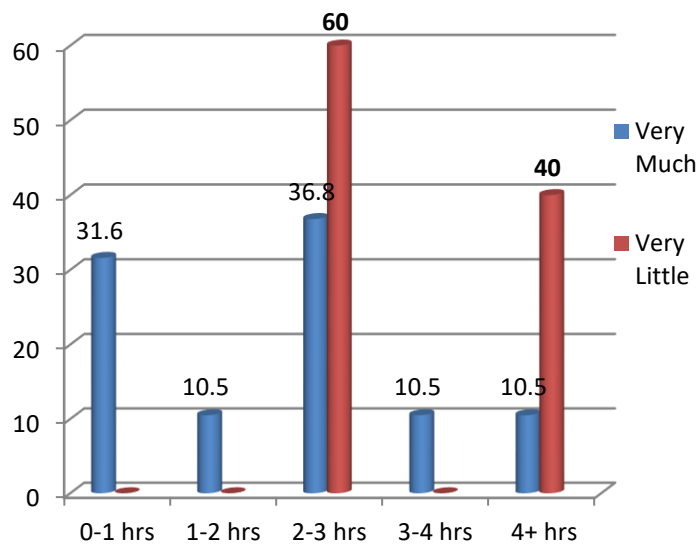
Figure 4.11: Self-Study Time per hour per week

These results can be explained by reference to the participants' annual income. Those who do not have considerable annual income are not able to afford the expenses for private or extra-curricular English tutorials; therefore, they spend time on practicing English on their own if they are willing to improve their English skills. In addition, the participants from the lowest socio-economic background showed a high tendency to improve their English competency and because of their economic limitations, they were left with the choice to spend more time practicing English in comparison with the participants with the highest income.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview

This study has been implemented in order to answer the following research questions:

1. Do sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables affect learners' performance in English competency tests?

2. What sort of impact(s) do different sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables have on learners' performance in English competency Tests?

3. What attitudes do Iranian students have toward the English language?

4. What is the status of the English language teaching in the Iranian educational system?

In the following chapter, with reference to the findings of the study, the research questions will be answered. Conclusions will be discussed and finally, we will discuss how interested scholars in the field of English language teaching may apply our findings.

5.2 Attitudinal Stance of Iranian Students

In relation to attitudes, it was found that there is a generally positive attitude towards the English language (80.6%) among Iranian university students. However, their positive attitudes were more instrumentally powered (91.6% positive attitudes about the advantageousness of English knowledge versus 70.1% positive attitudes towards making friends with English speaking people). This situation is quite understandable

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with reference to the socio-political isolation of Iranian society in today's world. The chance to meet an English native speaker is quite low in Iran. Meanwhile, considering the general economic situation of the Iranian society, traveling to English speaking countries in specific or foreign countries, in general, is generally almost a dream for the majority of Iranian society. Therefore, Iranian EFL learners show positive learning motivation usually in order to meet their instrumental needs rather than their communicative or affective needs.

In addition, the significant number of null responses to the item seeking for the participants' attitude towards making friends with English speakers (22.2%) reflects the limited opportunity Iranians have to come across native speakers of English as well as their unfamiliarity with the speakers of English and their culture.

However, it needs to be highlighted that positive attitudes Iranian EFL learners show towards the English language are almost at a surface level limited to 'affect' rather 'action'; in fact, participants did not show any effort to learn English. They preferred to limit their learning to formal classroom tutorials; participants, in general, did not reply positively to items asking them whether they watch movies, listen to English music or read English materials much. Therefore, the finding that there was no significant correlation between the participants' attitudes towards the English language and their competency level (r = 0.007) can be explained.

However, by paying a deeper investigation of the participants' attitudinal stances, some interesting findings have been achieved. As explained before, the Iranian Islamic government has tried much to push back the strong intrusion of the English language and its attached English (Western) culture. Although the Islamic regime's anti-

imperialism policies seem successful while referring to participants' English competency results, the reality is in total contrast. Iranian university students generally vote positively (71.4%) for the functionality of the English language in their Iranian society and 82.3% of them have their hands up when asked about the importance of learning English (as an EFL).

This situation is also valid when participants were asked about the attitudes of their families towards the English language. The majority of participants claimed that their families have positive views towards the English language. More than three-fifths of their families (62%) give importance to learning English and about two-thirds of them (73.7%) praise learning English. However, 23.3% of Null responses about the importance of learning English should be highlighted. This might be due to the generation gap phenomenon between the 21st-century participants and their revolutionary parents. However, once more, it is essential to stress the changing attitudes of the Iranian society towards their Western guests, the English language and its culture).

In isolated Iranian society, English knowledge has a unique role as well. The majority of the participants claimed that they feel prestigious among their friends because of their English knowledge that mirrors the appraisal feelings of the Iranian society (at least the younger generation society) about English language competency. However, once more the high rate of null responses has to be underlined. More than one-fourth of participants (25.7%) were left clueless facing the question of whether they have a sense of prestige while speaking English among their friends. This might be explained simply; they have a very limited chance to find a context in which they can demonstrate their English knowledge (such as the context of speaking in English with a native

speaker of the English language. However, their null response can also be due to being afraid that the participants' fluency in the English language might be conceived as a sign of divergence from their surrounding group of friends.

The participants' understanding of the Iranian society's attitudinal stance towards English language knowledge falls to average. Almost half of them (53.2%) claimed that their society considers English fluency as a mark of prestige while 59.6% of them consider English language knowledge as a mark of literacy in their society. This might be explained by referring to the general anti-imperialistic atmosphere in Iranian society; especially noticing the considerable number of participants with Null responses; 31% for English knowledge as a mark of prestige and 29.3% for the function of English language as a sign of literacy.

In addition, English knowledge in an isolated society like Iran considering the Islamic value system might be perceived as a sign of divergence rather than convergence. The, be Roman among Romans' principle is valid in this context as well. However, average positive attitudes might be due to the current global internationalization fashion spreading in today's world and the current political situation of Iran, too.

Now, there is a very limited chance to survive if a society is not willing to be open to internationalization and globalization, especially considering the fast technological improvements and the popularity of the internet and smartphones. People need to be connected to the network (the world) through the World Wide Web. It is no longer possible to stick to national languages and values without improving international skills, one of which is learning the international language, English.

This conclusion can also be supported by referring to the answers the participants have provided to the items asking them about the place of English language in the academic section of the Iranian society. The majority of them showed positive attitudes towards the importance of teaching English in school and university levels (83.8% and 71.5%, respectively).

Once more, it is quite necessarily important to highlight that fact these results are in contrast with the values stated in the Document of Education in Iran (2011). Although the policy documents do not refer to English language tutorials as a compulsory subject, the importance the Iranian society allocates to English language knowledge mirrors the reality of Iranian society in the first half of the second decade of the 21st century. The majority of Iranian students point at the (important) instrumentality of English fluency in their society; 81.8% of participants believe that English knowledge helps them in finding a job in Iran while 84.8% of them believe that the English language helps them in finding a job in a foreign country.

This finding reflects the current attitudinal stance of Iranian society towards the English language in general. The society, as their attitudes show, considers English language literacy as one of the qualifications on the priority list that people should have to find a job. Once more, it is important to state that although the Iranian government does not openly and straightly point at the importance of English in today's life, they should be alerted that isolation is no longer possible. Even if the government wants to export and spread its Islamic ideologies and/or revolutionary Islamic belief system, they should be competent in the international language. Otherwise, no one will listen to them and the communication never happens.

The other important finding in relation to the attitudes is related to the participants' attitudes towards the instrumentality of the English language in continuing education. A very significant majority of participants, 91% of them, believe that knowledge of the English language plays a very significant role in assisting them in continuing their education.

Moreover, it is important to remind that one of the ways to improve someone's intra-social status is higher education. In addition, one of the best ways to improve the international image (status) of a nation (society) is higher education. Education leads to changes in the behaviors of people and as a result the general behavior of a society. Once education is improved, living style (health, traffic behaviors, and intrapersonal behaviors) improves as well. People are aware of the importance of education and they are aware of the importance of the English language as the language of science for continuing education.

In line with these findings, a significant correlation between the participants' attitudes towards the instrumentality of the English language and their English competency results was found. As shown in Table 5.1, there is a larger correlation between the participants' attitudes towards the instrumentality of the English language in finding a job inside their country.

Table 5.1: Attitudes towards Instrumentality of English Knowledge

Attitude towards the Instrumentality of English Language:	Correlation r
to find a job in another country	0.175
to find a job in Iran	0.216
to continue education	0.161

The participants generally showed positive attitudes towards the instrumentality of English knowledge in communicating with speakers of other languages by a percentage of 78.6%. However, no significant correlation could be found between their general positive attitudes towards the instrumentality of the English language and their English competency results (r= 0.038).

In fact, this finding was expectable because as already addressed, communicating and integrating with foreign speakers, or speakers of English per se, is not among the top items in the list of priorities of the Iranian English language learners. It is quite expectable because of the unique context of Iran, both politically and economically. Based on the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs, meeting the immediate needs is prior to higher-level needs such as self-actualization which can be achievable through education (e.g. learning another language or getting familiar with other cultures).

5.3 People/IRI Regime vs. English Language

The Islamic regime of Iran sees the English language as a threat to its Islamic identity. The Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, criticized the before-Islamic-Revolution education system and ordered a revolution in education of Iran. Thus, the regime has employed an education system based on their "way of thinking … and philosophy" that aims at producing a 'perfect humankind' who believes in "Hayate Tayyebah, universal justice, and Islamic-Iranian civilization". Based on this objective, the regime screened the teacher training programs, dismissed all native speakers of English from the system, and employed English language teaching materials censored from any hints to the English language culture.

The English language teaching textbooks in the Iranian K-12, rather than teaching the authentic English language as used in the English-speaking countries, are perhaps a translation of the Islamic-Iranian culture into English words. They never point at any kind of opposite-sex relationship else than the ones permitted by the Sharia (i.e. father-daughter relationships). They do also imply specific roles for the females in the Iranian families (i.e. as housewives that shall look after preparing meals) and specific jobs as nurses and teachers. They do not aim at enlarging the cultural repertoire of the Iranian students in the English language and limit productive skills by employing parroting tasks and grammar-translation approach towards teaching the English language.

In contrast with the attitude and approach of the regime towards the English language, the Iranian society, or at least the younger generation, show positive attitudes. They do see the English language as a functional language that can assist them in meeting their instrumental needs (i.e. finding jobs or furthering education) and in gaining a better social status and enhanced prestige.

The anti-intrusion policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran might have roots in their assumption that the West is plotting to overthrow the regime (Beeman, 2008) or the belief that "discourses of Christianity are strongly embedded in the field of TESOL" (Mahboob, 2009, p. 176). However, we can conclude that regardless of the government's views, the English language has smoothly found its way to the heart of Iranians. Iran's younger generation is aware of the importance of English competency in the modern age and in fulfilling their instrumental needs. This awareness also reveals itself in the society. The knowledge of the English language constitutes an important element in locating social status, and Iranian families financially support their children's decisions in improving their competency in English.

However, it shall be pointed out that the Islamic regime of Iran has been partially successful in limiting the penetration and influence of the English language culture. In response to the item questioning the participants whether 'native English speakers are friendly and kind', 60.50% of them neither agreed nor disagreed. We assume that limiting the access of students to the English language authentic materials as well as echoing an artificial image of the English language in the textbooks employed in the Iranian education system are the main responsible elements for this finding.

5.4 Sociolinguistic Variables

As pointed out earlier, this study has tried to seek the effect of some sociolinguistic variables (age, gender, geographic location, and socioeconomic status) on the English language learning outcomes of the Iranian K12 graduates. In relation to these variables, the following major findings are achieved.

5.4.1 Geographical Location

As presented in Chapter Four, geographical location has affected the English language learning outcomes of the Iranian K12 graduates in several forms. Despite the highly centralized educational system employed in Iran in order to educate the Iranian students in the English language as well as the identical teaching materials and methodology employed in Iran, it is evident that the Iranian K12 graduates have not recorded similarly in the English language test. In fact, their competency results are not consistent and they vary in different locations. This finding (see Table 4.27) highlights the important determining effect of the geographical location. In addition, the negative correlation between the geographical location and the English competency results of the Iranian K12 graduates (r = -0.383) points out the role of geographical location.

5.4.2 Gender

A significant negative correlation has been located between the gender of the Iranian K12 graduates and their competency results in the English language (r = -0.183). Females' records in English are higher in comparison with the male K12 graduates and this finding is in agreement with some other studies done in the Iranian context (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Gorjian, Pazhakh, & Parang, 2012; Keshavarz & Ashtarian, 2008; Mahdavy, 2013; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013). This finding must have roots in the tendency of independence among Iranian women. they have the tendency to show their independence from the other mate (Barikani, Ebrahim, & Navid, 2012; Kian, 1997; Moghadam, 1994, 2003; Rahiminezhad & Arzjani, 2013). One of the ways is improving personal qualifications, among which is the improvement of English competency.

5.4.3 Age

Among different age groups, it was found that the scores of participants from the 25-28 years age group are relatively better than the other age groups. A higher percentage of participants from that age group were among the higher levelers and relatively a smaller fraction of them was among the lower levelers (See Table 4.8). Their greater tendency to improve their EFL skills might be due to the reality that the students from this age group are getting ready to step into the market and society.

However, it was found that the smallest fraction of low levelers was among the participants with an age of 18-20 years (50.7%). Their obvious tendency to improve their English competency (31.8% intermediate levelers and 17.5% higher levelers) reflects the current trend of attention to improving English competency among the new generation of EFL learners in Iran. This issue is also in line with the general tendency that the Iranian society shows towards the improvement and enlargement of its English

knowledge (Rassouli & Osam, 2019). Their readiness for getting globalized and stepping into the world market can explain their positive tendency towards internationalization, which is quite clear in the positive attitudes they have generally shown towards learning English.

A significant correlation between the age of participants and their English competency level could be found (r= 0.202). This finding is in line with the previously reported studies (Genç, 2016; Montero, Serrano, & Llanes, 2017; Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019; Sankoff & Lessard, 1975). Therefore, it can be concluded that 'age' as a sociolinguistic factor plays a relatively significant role in determining success or failure among EFL learners.

5.4.5 Family Background

In the literature, the family is referred to as one of the main factors in determining and shaping the path of thinking among the resulting generation (Amato, 2005; Bengtson, 1975; Steelman & Powell, 1991). No need, then, to amplify the important role families play on how language learners perceive learning a second/foreign language. How much support and importance families (especially parents) allocate to learning a language other than the native language of their home society as well as how much time they spent on broadening their children's linguistic skills are two very influential factors in determining success or failure among language learners.

Apart from the support (both financial and/or chronological support) that parents spend on the language learning of their children, this study could prove that the number of siblings in the family is another important factor leading to success or failure among EFL learners. It was found that there is a significant negative correlation between the number of siblings (family size) and the English competency levels of participants (r=

-0.084). It means that the more children a family has, the less competent the children will be in the English language. This finding, stressing the findings of some other studies (Al-Agha et al., 2015; Blake, 1989; Chan, Henderson, & Stuchbury, 2019; Kugler & Kumar, 2017), is of utmost importance, especially in today's world. These days the size of the family is shrinking more every day. This might be because of the economic difficulties families experience or due to some other factors. However, families with fewer children enjoy the advantage of more freedom in using their financial resources on the betterment of their children's linguistic skills.

As another family-related variable, it is evident that there is a significant correlation between the parents' educational background and their children's English language competency attainment. With a correlation coefficient of 0.260, it is evident that the mothers' educational background has a greater effect on their children's English language learning compared with the fathers' correlation (r= 0.260). This finding is in agreement with the results achieved by other studies (Cross et al., 2019; Duncan & Magnuson, 2011; Eccles, 2005; Lerkkanen & Pakarinen, 2019; Wolf & McCoy, 2019) and in line with other studies (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Crede, Wirthwein, McElvany, & Steinmayr, 2015; Kalil & Mayer, 2016) suggests that mothers do play a more important role in the educational attainments of their children. The results related to the other factor, the parents' occupation, have shown also pointed at the important role of mothers in the English language learning outcomes of the Iranian K12 graduates. The results show that there is no significant correlation between the fathers' occupation and the children's English language competency results. However, a significant negative correlation (r= -0.265) has been located between the mothers' career and the Iranian K12 graduates' English competency. It may have been the result of the Iranian culture, which allocates the breadwinning responsibility to fathers and

requires the mothers to spend their life on bringing up their children (Pirak, Negarandeh, & Khakbazan, 2019; Rahkar Farshi et al., 2018). Our findings thus point out that the Iranian K12 graduates whose mothers do not work perform better in learning English while their competency does not correlate with their fathers' employment/unemployment. In the meantime, the varied correlation results in the four locations may also support our verdict for the role of the culture.

5.4.5 Economic Background

The economic status of the pupils or their parents (based on the estate properties and annual income) does also influence the English language learning results. Our findings show that there is a significant correlation between owning a private land and the English competency level of participants (r= 0.108). It has been also cleared that there is a negative correlation between owning at least a private car (r= -0.144) and a private house (r= -0.92). However, while a positive significant correlation has been located between the value of the private car and the English language competency of the Iranian K12 graduates (r= 0.124), no correlation has been seen between the value of the land and the private residential building.

These findings may be explained by reference to the culture of the Iranian community. As shown in Table 4.13, one of the major motives for the Iranian K12 graduates for learning a foreign language is the betterment of their prestige in their society. We assume that the negative correlation between the properties and their English competency level is related to the matter that the Iranian K12 graduates find it less necessary to learn another language when they are in a better economic status than the rest of the society. This finding can be justified especially by considering the high rate of poverty and the economic difficulties the Iranian society suffers from (Bahramitash,

Sadegh, & Sattari, 2018; Mansouri, Emamian, Zeraati, Hashemi, & Fotouhi, 2018;

Shahriyari, Amiri, & Shahriyari, 2018) due to geopolitical reasons in the past decades.

5.5 Conclusion

In relation to the attitudinal stances of Iranian EFL students towards learning English,

it was found that their attitudes were more instrumentally oriented. However, their

attitudes were more limited to affect level; they did not show that they were putting

sufficient effort and desire to practice English out of classroom context. Accordingly,

their generally low level of English competency can be explained.

English is believed to be a functional language in the Iranian society. English plays a

significant instrumental role in finding a job as well as in continuing education both in

Iran and out of Iran. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Islamic Anti-Western and

Anti-English ideology as reflected in the current Iranian Document of Education (High

Council of Cultural Revoluion, 2011) is doomed to failure. No limiting and

prescriptive ideology have the chance to survive against the fast improvement of

globalization and internationalization. Unless a society is completely isolated, it is

hardly imaginable that it does not give importance to learning English; because English

is the language of science and the most popular international language in today's

world.

Communication and integration with speakers of other languages are not among the

list of top priorities of Iranian EFL learners. It might be resulted due to the current

sociopolitical and economic situation in Iranian society. Socio-economic status plays

an important role in determining the success or failure of Iranian EFL learners,

especially based on Karl Marx's Capitalism and Durkheim's Labor Division socioeconomic theories.

The next conclusion is that family background plays an active role in determining the success or failure of language learning attempts. Parents' education directly influences their children's English language learning. The size of the family is also important; the fewer number of children is equal to enlargement of English language learning and assistance to the family to invest more resources on the English language learning of their children. However, it should be highlighted that despite the finding that there is no correlation between the fathers' occupation and their children's competence in the English language, mothers' employment is negatively correlated. We conclude that this finding is interrelated with the culture of Iran and the roles mostly prescribed for mothers as child-raisers or housekeepers (Fathi, Mohammad-Alizadeh-Charandabi, & Mirghafourvand, 2018) in the country.

Our next conclusion is that age and gender are the other major determining factors in the English language learning of Iranian K12 graduates. It is clear that the students who are between 25-28 years old are keener to improve their English language linguistic skills. This conclusion can be justified with the reference to the importance the Iranian K12 graduates grant for the English language in enhancing their chance to find jobs and improving their social status (see Table 4.13). In the meantime, the intention of being independent should be the other reason that female students try to improve their competency in English as a foreign language. This is also evident in the greater willingness of the Iranian families in support of their daughters to learn English as a foreign language.

As the major conclusion of this study, we should highlight the very important role of the geographical location in determining success or failure among Iranian EFL learners. The literature is experiencing a gap in the studies investigating the complicated role of the geographical location in the educational attainments and the foreign language learning outcomes of the pupils. Our findings in relation to the geographical location stress the importance of it and point out the importance of its accompany, the culture.

5.6 Limitations and Delimitations

The present study entailed several limitations that should be noted. The first limitation dealt with the data collection phase, in which there was a risk that participants might not have provided true information while completing the questionnaire. The reason might be the face-threatening nature of questions aiming to inquire about personal information about the economic status of participants. However, this risk was tried to be minimized by assuring participants about the confidentiality of the information they provided in the questionnaire. Meanwhile, those items asking about learners' economic background or their parental educational or occupational background were designed in a way to minimize the risk of true lies among the participants. For example, Item 17 (Do you or your family have a private car?) could be answered simply by choosing *Yes* or *No*. However, when the value of their private car was questioned (Item 17.1: If Yes, what is the value of your private car? 1,000 to 5,000$ □, 5,000-10,000$ □, 10,000-15,000$ □, More than 15,000$ □) the researcher found that Pilot Study participants were either leaving the item unanswered or were commenting that the item is confusing for them. Therefore, the item was changed into 'Item 17.1: If Yes, which one does better describe its value in accordance with the current economic situation in your country? Very Expensive □, Expensive □, Normal □, Cheap □, Very Cheap □'.

In this way, the risk of providing the wrong answers or confusion among the participants was as minimized as possible.

The second limitation was concerned with the status of English language teaching in Iran at the time of pursuing this study. In Iran, English is offered as an EFL in Iranian schools from the 7th year of Iranian general education curriculum based on vocabulary and syntactic gradual plan, delivering English alphabets and simple present tense, for example, during the first year and introducing complex compound and conditional sentences by the last year of high school. Therefore, doing this study on participants of lower ages could maximize the danger of an unreal picture of the participants' competency level, because they were still learning linguistic components. To solve this problem, the study sampled participants from the university level and examined their competency level.

The last limitation was related to the fact that those participants studying English related majors may enjoy the luxury of more training in English than ordinary students may. To cope with this limitation, participants of this study were sampled from non-English majoring fields of study who have received identical years of schooling in English as an EFL through the Iranian general education curriculum.

5.7 Implications

The implications of the findings of this study in the field of English language teaching should be enlisted as follows:

a. The importance of geographical location and culture should be understood. Therefore, it is important to give the task of materials development as well as decision making about language teaching/learning objectives to local figures

(school administrators or provincial decision-makers in larger contexts like Iran).

b. Society specific features such as general economic and ideological specifications should be considered.

c. Language learners' immediate and late needs should be considered, especially with reference to their socio-economic status and socio-economic needs.

d. General socio-economic features of any society need to be highlighted and listed prior to developing materials or setting language teaching objectives.

e. Attitudes of English language learners should be studied with reference to the current socio-economic and socio-political features of their host society. Language learners' attitudes are of the most effective factors in enhancing or impeding their learning. However, their attitudes are shaped by the socio-economic and socio-political realities of their societies.

f. The function of English in society should be examined. Setting the objectives and customizing should be in line with the function the society perceives for that language.

g. Age and gender of participants should be considered prior to set educational objectives. An individual's attitudes and list of priorities change over time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire (English)

Project Title: *'The Iranian Students' English Test Scores in Relation to Selected Sociolinguistic'*

By filling the following questionnaire and test, you are accepting the following items:

- The nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and this will not affect my status now or in the future.

- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.

- I understand that if I participate in the project, the researcher will use my test results.

- I understand that my data will be stored under lock and key in the researcher's office and that only the researcher and supervisor will have access to it for the use of the study only.

- I understand that I may contact the researcher or his supervisor if I require further information about the research, the researcher's analysis of data or any other part of the dissertation in progress and proceed with comments, recommendations or objections.

Date …………………………………

Researcher: Aman Rassouli (aman.rassouli@emu.edu.tr, +90-533-873 1067)
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Necdet Osam (necdet.osam@emu.edu.tr, +90-392-630 4044)

Battery A: Personal Information Questionnaire

Please fill in or put a tick (√) in the space provided, reflecting information about the items provided below.

1. **Age:** 16-18 ☐   18-20 ☐   21-24 ☐   25-28 ☐   28+ ☐

2. **Gender:** Female ☐   Male ☐

3. **Marital Status:** Married ☐   Single ☐

4. **Years of schooling:** 10-11 ☐   12-13 ☐   14-15 ☐   16-17 ☐   18-22 ☐

5. **How many children are there in your family?** 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 4+ ☐

6. **Did you ever have an English education during your schooling?** Yes, ☐ No☐

6.1. **If _yes_, how many years have you studied English?**

   0-1 ☐   1-2 ☐   2-3 ☐   3-4 ☐   5+ ☐

7. **Do you study English on your own?** Yes, ☐   No ☐

7.1. **If _yes_, how many hours on average do you spend practicing English per week?**

   0-1 ☐   1-2 ☐   2-3 ☐   3-4 ☐   4+ ☐

8. **Do you take extra courses to learn English?** Yes ☐   No ☐

8.1.**If _yes_, how much do you spend on average for those courses?**

   Very Little ☐   Little ☐   Average ☐   Much ☐   Very Much ☐

9. **Do you know any foreign languages?** Yes ☐   No ☐

9.1.**If _yes_:** Turkish ☐ Arabic ☐ French ☐ German ☐ Other ☐ _____

10. **Have you ever been to any English-speaking countries?** Yes ☐   No ☐

10.1   **If _yes_, which of the following:**

   England   The USA   Australia ☐ South Africa ☐ Ireland ☐ Other _____

11. **How many magazines, newspapers, and books do you buy per month?**

0 ☐   1-2   3-4 ☐   5-6 ☐   7+ ☐

12. How much do you spend on average on buying magazines, newspapers, and/or books per month?

Very Little ☐   Little ☐   Average ☐   Much ☐   Very Much ☐

13. How much time on average do you spend on reading magazines, newspapers, and books per day?

Very Little ☐   Little ☐   Average ☐   Much ☐   Very Much ☐

14. Do you read magazines, newspapers, and/or books in the English language? Yes ☐   No ☐

14.1 If _yes_, how much time on average do you spend on reading magazines, newspapers, and books in the English language per day?

Very Little ☐   Little ☐   Average ☐   Much ☐   Very Much ☐

15. Do you watch movies in the English language or with English subtitles?

Yes ☐ No ☐

15.1 If _yes_, how much time on average do you spend on watching movies in the English language or with English subtitles per day?

Very Little ☐   Little ☐   Average ☐   Much ☐   Very Much ☐

16. Do you listen to English music? Yes ☐   No ☐

16.1 If _yes_, how much time on average do you spend on listening to English music per day?

Very Little ☐   Little ☐   Average ☐   Much ☐   Very Much ☐

17. Do you or your family have a private car? Yes ☐   No ☐

17.1 If _yes_, which one does better describe its value in accordance with the economic situation in your country?

Very Expensive ☐   Expensive ☐   Normal ☐   Cheap ☐   Very Cheap ☐

18. Do you or your family own a house?   Yes ☐   No ☐

18.1 If *yes*, which one does better describe its value in accordance with the current economic situation in your country?

Very Expensive ☐   Expensive ☐   Normal ☐   Cheap ☐   Very Cheap ☐

18.2 If *no*, how much do you pay for rent per month in accordance with the current economic situation in your country?

Very Much ☐   Much ☐   Normal ☐   Little ☐   Very Little ☐

19. Do you or your family own any pieces of land?   Yes ☐   No ☐

19.1   If *yes*, how much is it worth?

Very Expensive ☐   Expensive ☐   Normal ☐   Cheap ☐   Very Cheap ☐

19.2   If *yes*, for what purpose do you use it?

For productive purposes (farming and/or gardening) ☐   For personal use ☐

19.3   If for *Productive reasons*, how much is your annual income out of that?

Very Much ☐   Much ☐   Normal ☐   Little ☐   Very Little ☐

20. How much is your or your family's annual income in accordance with the current economic situation in your country?

Very Much ☐   Much ☐   Normal ☐   Little ☐   Very Little ☐

21. Father's education: Primary ☐   Secondary ☐   High School ☐

Bachelor's ☐   Master's   ☐   PhD ☐

22. Does your father speak any foreign languages?   Yes ☐   No ☐

22.1   If *yes*, which: English ☐   Turkish Arabic ☐   French Others _____

23. What type of occupation does your father have?

Academic   ☐   Business   ☐   Transportation   ☐

Employed   ☐   Medicine   ☐   Other _____

24. Mother's education: Primary ☐   Secondary ☐   High School ☐

Bachelor's ☐   Master's   ☐   PhD ☐

25. Does your mother speak any foreign languages? Yes ☐   No ☐

25.1 If _yes_, which: English ☐   Turkish ☐   Arabic French ☐   Others _____

26. What type of occupation does your mother have?

Academic   ☐   Business   ☐   Transportation   ☐

Employed   ☐   Medicine   ☐   Other _____

Battery B: Attitude towards English Language

Please put a tick (√) in the space provided, reflecting your opinion about the items provided below.

➢ **1= Completely Disagree   2= Disagree   3= Neither Disagree nor Agree   4= Agree   5= Completely Agree**

No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	Knowledge of English brings me advantages in the future.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Learning English is necessary.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I like English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I am content that I speak English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	English should be taught as a foreign language in schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Knowledge of English helps me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Watching English movies in the original language is better.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Knowledge of English helps me to find a job in other countries.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Learning English as a foreign language is praised by my friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Learning the English language helps me to find a job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	Everyone needs to learn English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	It is important to communicate with English speakers in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	I prefer to read magazines, newspapers, and books in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	My family gives importance to learning English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
15	I feel prestigious speaking English among my friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	My family supports me financially to learn English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	I like to make friends with speakers of English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	I respect those speaking English as a foreign language.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19	English is to be compulsory at the university level.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	I watch English language TV shows or movies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21	Knowing English is a mark of prestige.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22	Learning English is praised in my family.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23	Knowledge of English helps me to continue my education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24	Learning English is a waste of time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25	Knowledge of English is a mark of literacy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26	I hate English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27	English is a functional language.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28	I really have no interest in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
29	Learning English is important.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
30	I put off my English homework as much as possible.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
31	Native English speakers are friendly and kind.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
32	I have little interest in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix B: Questionnaire (Persian)

با سلام و احترام خدمت شما دوست عزیز،

اینجانب هم اکنون مشغول انجام یک پروژه تحقیقاتی جهت نوشتن رساله دکتری خود در رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی در دانشکده آموزش دانشگاه مدیترانه شرقی قبرس با عنوان *" بررسی تاثیر برخی از متغیرهای جامعه شناختی زبان بر روی سطح زبان انگلیسی دانشجویان ایرانی"* می باشم و سعی به روشن نمودن دلایل موفقیت و یا عدم موفقیت زبان آموزان ایرانی در فراگیری زبان انگلیسی با توجه به نتایج آزمونهای نوین زبان انگلیسی دارم.

متغیرهای جامعه شناختی زبان شامل سطح اجتماعی-اقتصادی زبان آموز، سن، جنسیت و نگرش وی به زبان انگلیسی و یادگیری آن بعنوان زبان خارجی می باشند. با پیش فرض اینکه متغیرهای مورد بررسی در این تحقیق بصورت مستقیم تاثیر بر نگرش زبان آموز و در نتیجه تاثیر مستقیم برروی بهره وری یادگیری زبان آموز دارند، تحقیق خود را با استفاده از پرسشنامه ذیل و یک آزمون سنجش مهارت زبان انگلیسی که در ادامه ملاحظه خواهید نمود، انجام می دهم و امیدوارم که با همکاری شما دوست عزیز بتوانم گامی در جهت ارتقا فراگیری زبان آموزان ایرانی بردارم.

ضمن خاطر نشان کردن محرمانه بودن داده های اخذ شده از شما و بالاخص مشخصات فردی شما، پیشاپیش از همکاری و توجه شما کمال تشکر را دارم.

با تشکر،

امان رسولی

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با تکمیل پرسشنامه ذیل و پاسخ به سوالات آزمون زبان انگلیسی شما رضایت خود را برای شرکت در این تحقیق با توجه به نکات زیر اعلام می دارید:

1. شما از این حق برخوردار می باشید که در هر زمانی همکاری خود را با محقق و تیم تحقیقاتی این پروژه بدون هیچگونه ممانعت و مشکلی پایان دهید.

2. به شما اطمینان خاطر داده می شود که هیچگاه مشخصات فردی شما و اطلاعاتی که در اختیار این پروژه قرار داده اید تحت نام شما در اختیار هیچ فردی قرار داده نمی شود و یا انتشار نمی یابد.

5. شما از این حق برخوردار هستید که با محقق و/ یا استاد راهنمای او تماس داشته باشید و در خصوص نتایج تحقیق پرسش نموده و آگاهی کسب نمایید.

تاریخ: ..../..../....

محقق: امان رسولی، دانشکده آموزش زبان انگلیسی دانشگاه مدیترانه شرقی، شماره تماس: 00905338731067

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بخش الف: پرسشنامه اطلاعات فردی

لطفا موارد زیر را مطالعه نمایید و جاهای خالی را پر نموده و یا بر حسب نیاز گزینه مورد نظر را انتخاب نمایید.

1. سن شما: 16-18 ☐   18-20 ☐   21-24 ☐   25-28 ☐   28+ ☐

2. جنسیت شما: مرد ☐   زن ☐

3. وضعیت تاهل شما: مجرد ☐   متأهل ☐

4. تعداد سالهایی که تحصیل نموده اید: ☐ 22-18   ☐ 17-16   ☐ 15-14   ☐ 13-12   ☐ 11-10

5. چند خواهر و برادر هستید: ☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 4-3   ☐ +4

6. آیا در طول تحصیلات خود دوره آموزشی زبان انگلیسی گذرانده اید: بلی ☐   خیر ☐

6/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، چند سال زبان انگلیسی خوانده اید:

0-1 ☐   1-2 ☐   2-3 ☐   3-4 ☐   5+ ☐

7. آیا بغیر از کلاسهای مدرسه، شما خودتان هم اقدام به مطالعه زبان انگلیسی نموده اید: بلی ☐   خیر ☐

7/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، حدودا چند ساعت در هفته مطالعات زبان انگلیسی دارید:

0-1 ☐   1-2 ☐   2-3 ☐   3-4 ☐   4+ ☐

8. آیا از دوره های فوق برنامه زبان انگلیسی با هزینه شخصی استفاده می نمایید: بلی ☐   خیر ☐

8/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، معدل هزینه شهریه دوره ها چقدر می باشد:

خیلی زیاد ☐   زیاد ☐   متوسط ☐   کم ☐   خیلی کم ☐

9. آیا زبان خارجی دیگری بغیر از زبان انگلیسی بلد هستید: بلی □   خیر □

9/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، چه زبانی بلد هستید:

ترکی استانبولی □   آلمانی □   فرانسه □   عربی □ غیره ....

10. آیا هیچگاه به کشور/های انگلیسی زبان سفر نموده اید: بلی □   خیر □

10/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، به کدام یک از کشورهای زیر سفر نموده اید:

انگلستان □   ایالات متحده آمریکا □   استرالیا □   آفریقای جنوبی □   ایرلند □   کشور دیگری: ....

11. چه تعداد مجله، روزنامه و کتاب در ماه خریداری می نمایید:

4+ □   3-4 □   2-3 □   1-2 □   0-1 □

12. حدودا ماهیانه چه مقدار هزینه صرف خریداری روزنامه، مجلات و کتاب می نمایید:

خیلی زیاد □   زیاد □   متوسط □   کم □ خیلی کم

13. حدودا روزانه چقدر زمان صرف مطالعه روزنامه، مجلات و کتاب می نمایید:

خیلی زیاد □   زیاد □   متوسط □   کم □خیلی کم

14. آیا مجلات، روزنامه و یا کتاب به زبان انگلیسی مطالعه می نمایید: بلی □   خیر □

14/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، حدودا روزانه چقدر زمان صرف مطالعه موارد فوق به زبان انگلیسی

می نمایید:

خیلی زیاد □   زیاد □   متوسط □ کم □ خیلی کم

15. آیا فیلم به زبان انگلیسی و یا با زیر نویس انگلیسی تماشا می نمایید: بلی □   خیر □

15/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، روزانه چقدر زمان صرف تماشا فیلم به زبان انگلیسی و یا با

زیرنویس انگلیسی می نمایید:

خیلی زیاد □   زیاد □   متوسط □ کم □ خیلی کم

16. آیا به موسیقی انگلیسی گوش می دهید: بلی □   خیر □

16/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، روزانه چقدر زمان صرف گوش کردن به موسیقی انگلیسی می

نمایید:

□   خیلی زیاد □   زیاد □   متوسط □   کم □ خیلی کم

17. آیا شما و یا خانواده شما دارای خودروی شخصی می باشید: بلی □   خیر □

17/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، کدام گزینه نشان دهنده قیمت خودرو شما نسبت به وضعیت اقتصادی

ایران می باشد:

خیلی گران □   گران □   متوسط □   ارزان □   خیلی ارزان □

18. آیا شما و یا خانواده شما دارای منزل شخصی می باشد: بلی □   خیر □

18/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، کدام گزینه نشان دهنده قیمت منزل شما نسبت به وضعیت اقتصادی

ایران می باشد:

خیلی گران □   گران □   متوسط □   ارزان □   خیلی ارزان □

18/2. در صورت <u>منفی بودن</u> جواب شما، کدام گزینه نشان دهنده اجاره بها محل سکونت شما نسبت به وضعیت

اقتصادی ایران می باشد: خیلی گران □   گران □   متوسط □   ارزان □   خیلی ارزان □

19. آیا شما و یا خانواده شما دارای حداقل یک قطعه زمین می باشد: بلی □   خیر □

19/1. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> پاسخ شما، کدام گزینه نشان دهنده قیمت زمین شما نسبت به وضعیت اقتصادی

ایران می باشد:

خیلی گران □   گران □   متوسط □   ارزان □   خیلی ارزان □

19/2. در صورت <u>مثبت بودن</u> جواب شما، زمین شما دارای کدام کاربری می باشد:

مصرف شخصی □   مصرف تولیدی (کشاورزی، صنعتی و یا غیره) □   بلا استفاده □

19/3. در صورتی که زمین شما کاربری <u>تولیدی</u> دارد، حدودا درآمد سالیانه شما از آن نسبت به وضعیت

اقتصادی ایران چه میزان است: خیلی زیاد □   زیاد □   متوسط □   کم □   خیلی کم □

20. درآمد سالیانه شما و یا خانواده شما نسبت به وضعیت اقتصادی ایران چه میزان است:

خیلی زیاد □   زیاد □   متوسط □   کم □   خیلی کم □

21. کدام گزینه نشان دهنده میزان تحصیلات پدر شما می باشد:

ابتدایی □   راهنمایی □   دبیرستان □   لیسانس □   فوق لیسانس □   دکتری □

22. آیا پدر شما با هیچ زبان خارجی آشنایی دارد؟   بلی □   خیر □

22/1. در صورت مثبت بودن پاسخ شما، چه زبانی می دانند؟

انگلیسی □   ترکی استانبولی □   فرانسه □   عربی □   غیره ....

23. کدام گزینه نشان دهنده نوع شغل پدر شما می باشد:

آکادمیک □   تجارت □   حمل و نقل □   کارمند □   پزشکی □   غیره ....

24. کدام گزینه نشان دهنده میزان تحصیلات **مادر** شما می باشد:

ابتدایی □   راهنمایی □   دبیرستان □   لیسانس □   فوق لیسانس □   دکتری □

25. آیا مادر شما زبان خارجی بلد هستند؟ ؟   بلی □   خیر □

25/1. در صورت مثبت بودن پاسخ شما، چه زبانی می دانند؟

انگلیسی □   ترکی استانبولی □   فرانسه □   عربی □   غیره ....

26. کدام گزینه نشان دهنده نوع شغل مادر شما می باشد:

آکادمیک □   تجارت □   حمل و نقل □   کارمند □   پزشکی □   غیره ....

بخش ب: نگرش شما نسبت به زبان انگلیسی

لطفا با توجه به عقیده شما نسبت به موارد زیر گزینه مورد نظر را انتخاب نمایید:

کاملا موافق	موافق	نه موافق نه مخالف	مخالف	کاملا مخالف	موارد	
......	......	......	......	......	دانش زبان انگلیسی برای آینده من مفید می باشد.	1
......	......	......	......	......	یادگیری زبان انگلیسی برای من لازم است.	2
......	......	......	......	......	من به زبان انگلیسی علاقه مند هستم.	3
......	......	......	......	......	من از اینکه قادر به صحبت کردن به زبان انگلیسی هستم، خشنود می باشم.	4
......	......	......	......	......	بایستی در مدارس ایران، زبان انگلیسی بعنوان زبان خارجی آموزش داده شود.	5
......	......	......	......	......	دانش زبان انگلیسی به من کمک می کند تا بتوانم با افراد بیشتری آشنا شوم.	6
......	......	......	......	......	من ترجیح می دهم فیلمهای انگلیسی را به زبان اصلی تماشا نمایم.	7
......	......	......	......	......	فراگیری زبان انگلیسی به من برای پیدا کردن شغل کمک خواهد کرد.	8
......	......	......	......	......	فراگیری زبان انگلیسی بعنوان زبان خارجی مورد تحسین دوستان من می باشد.	9
......	......	......	......	......	دانش زبان انگلیسی در پیدا کردن شغل در کشورهای دیگر به من کمک خواهد کرد.	10
......	......	......	......	......	همه افراد محتاج یادگیری زبان انگلیسی هستند.	11
......	......	......	......	......	برقراری ارتباط با افراد انگلیسی زبان به زبان انگلیسی مهم می باشد.	12
......	......	......	......	......	من ترجیح می دهم روزنامه، مجلات و کتاب را به زبان انگلیسی مطالعه نمایم.	13
......	......	......	......	......	خانواده من به فراگیری زبان انگلیسی اهمیت می دهد.	14
......	......	......	......	......	من در هنگام صحبت به زبان انگلیسی حس اعتبار و پرستیژ دارم.	15
......	......	......	......	......	خانواده من از لحاظ مالی مرا برای یادگیری زبان انگلیسی حمایت می نمایند.	16

کاملا موافق	موافق	نه موافق نه مخالف	مخالف	کاملا مخالف	موارد	
......	......	......	......	......	من علاقه مند هستم که با افراد انگلیسی زبان دوست شوم.	17
......	......	......	......	......	من به افرادی که به زبان انگلیسی بعنوان زبان خارجی صحبت می کنند، احترام می گزارم.	18
......	......	......	......	......	زبان انگلیسی بایستی بعنوان درس اجباری در مقطع دانشگاهی ارایه گردد.	19
......	......	......	......	......	من برنامه های تلویزیونی و یا فیلمهای انگلیسی زبان تماشا می کنم.	20
......	......	......	......	......	دانستن زبان انگلیسی نشانه اعتبار و پرستیژ می باشد.	21
......	......	......	......	......	فراگیری زبان انگلیسی مورد تحسین خانواده من می باشد.	22
......	......	......	......	......	دانش زبان انگلیسی به من در ادامه تحصیلاتم کمک می نماید.	23
......	......	......	......	......	فراگیری زبان انگلیسی تنها باعث هدر دادن زمان می باشد.	24
......	......	......	......	......	دانش زبان انگلیسی نشانه باسوادی می باشد.	25
......	......	......	......	......	من از زبان انگلیسی متنفر می باشم.	26
......	......	......	......	......	زبان انگلیسی زبانی کاربردی می باشد.	27
......	......	......	......	......	من در واقع هیچگونه علاقه ای به زبان انگلیسی ندارم.	28
......	......	......	......	......	فراگیری زبان انگلیسی مهم می باشد.	29
......	......	......	......	......	من تا جای ممکن از انجام تکالیف زبان انگلیسی خود سر باز می زنم.	30
......	......	......	......	......	افراد انگلیسی زبان مهربان و خوش مشرب هستند.	31
......	......	......	......	......	من علاقه کمی به زبان انگیسی دارم.	32

Appendix C: English Proficiency Test

As you know, this study tries to find the relationship between your level of English Language Proficiency with your Socio-Economic Status. In the past two sections, you kindly provided us with some information that helped us to analyze your socio-economic status and your attitudinal stance towards learning the English language. In the following section (Section C), by using a short test of English, we are trying to find how competent you are in the English language. This test includes 50 questions totally in five parts. Each part consists of 10 questions starting from easy questions to more advanced questions. In other words, the first part includes Beginner Level questions, the second part Elementary Level questions, the third part Pre-Intermediate items, the fourth part Intermediate questions, and the last part includes Upper-Intermediate questions.

> **Choose the correct answer according to the text.**
> <u>Mark's New Life</u>

Mark Wolton lived in Germany with his family, but two years ago, a company in England **offered** him a job. The money was good so he took the job. Now, he lives in a small house in North London. His family didn't come with him because his wife has a good job in Germany and the children go to school **there**.

Every month Mark spends some time with his family. Sometimes he goes to Germany and sometimes his wife flies to London with their two children. When they come to London, Mark takes them to interesting places. Sometimes they go out of London. At their last visit, they took the train to Scotland and stayed in a village. When Mark goes to Germany to see his family, they always spend time at home; they don't have any visitors, even Mark's parents.

1. Mark lives with his family now.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know
2. Mark took the job because the money was good.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know
3. He stays in a hotel in London.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know
4. His wife didn't come to London because she doesn't like it.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know
5. The children live with their mother.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know
6. He usually sees his family from Friday to Sunday.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know
7. **'there'** in paragraph I means _____.

8. When his family visits him, they don't always stay in London.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know
9. **'offered'** in paragraph I means _____.

10. Many people visit Mark and his family in Germany.
      a) True   b) False   c) Don't Know

> **Find the error in each item. Errors include spelling, structural, or word choice mistakes.**

11. They're three books in my bag. I bought them yesterday.
     A   B   C   D
12. I only like watching films on TV. I always go to the cinema.
              A   B   C   D
13. Who is the girl in front of the supermarket. She looks really nice.
     A   B   C   D
14. Although computers are very practical to use, we should use them more.
     A   B   C   D

15. Many youngsters worked in factories as university education was very
                 A   B   C
  expensive between 1945 and 1960.
         D
16. I don't see that company as an option. Furthermore, I don't think they are
                                     A
  generous enough to satisfy their employees financial.
     B   C   D
17. I have to put of the meeting with the managers. I scheduled another meeting
          A   B   C
  at the same time by mistake.
                D
18. Peter can't stand to sleep. He thinks there are better things to do with his
  time. A   B   C   D

19. Have you been <u>to</u> Paris <u>ever</u>? You <u>should</u> visit it if you <u>haven't</u>.
                               A   B   C   D

20. <u>It</u> is very <u>hot</u> today. I will go <u>in to</u> the house and stay <u>there</u>.
  A   B   C   D

➢ For questions, 21-25, complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence. Use the word given and other words to complete each sentence. **You must _NOT_ write more than _FIVE_ words. Do _NOT_ change the word given.**

21. We won't get to the airport in less than 30 minutes.
Least
It will _____ 30 minutes to get to the airport.

22. Despite knowing the area well, I got lost.
Even
I got lost _____ the area well.

23. I tried to talk to Jack about the problem but he was too busy.
Word
I tried _____ about the problem but he was too busy.

24. "I don't mind which film we see," I said.
Matter
I said that _____ me which film we saw.

25. Whenever I hear this song, I remember the time when I was in Paris.
Reminds
Whenever I hear this song, _____ the time I was in Paris.

➢ In the text below, there are <u>FIVE</u> mistakes (grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, or word order). You should find the mistakes and write the correct word(s) in the space.

Recent research lead many scientists to believe that the ability to recognize whether or not someone is telling the truth or is about to break bad news has much to do with science than a magic sixth sense.	26. ------------- 27. ------------- 28. -------------
The human body and brain subconsciously pick up signal so small that they would not normally noticed. If someone is telling lies, their body language is slightly different. The brain becomes aware	29. ------------- 30.-------------

➢ For questions 31-40, read the text below and decide which word or phrase **A, B, C** or **D** best fits each space.

Garrett A Morgan

An accident between a car and a horse-drawn carriage turned on a green light in the mind of one witness to it. Why not, thought Garrett A Morgan, design a signal that would (31) ----------- the movement of road traffic? As a result, in February 1927 Morgan produced the world's first automatic electric traffic signal.

His invention (32) ----------- of a pole with two arms that turned round to indicate when traffic should move. The words 'stop' and 'go' were on different sides of the arms, which automatically turned and (33) ----------- the right line of traffic when necessary.

Morgan, who had been concerned about road safety because of the (34) ----------- number of cars coming on the roads at the time, sold his invention to the General Electric Company for $40,000. Morgan was born in Kentucky in 1877 and (35) ----------- an elementary education.

In 1905, he began a job (36) ----------- sewing machines and in 1907, he formed his own shop for this. He (37) ----------- on to start a company selling hair treatments and later he invented the 'safety hood,' which (38) ----------- firemen from gas and smoke and (39) ----------- a prize at a 1914 exhibition.

Morgan died in 1963, just months after being (40) ----------- by the US government with an award for inventing the first automatic traffic signal.

31	A	Direct	B	train	C	master	D	rule
32	A	Composed	B	combined	C	constructed	D	consisted
33	A	Opposed	B	aimed	C	viewed	D	faced
34	A	Raising	B	increasing	C	enlarging	D	heightening
35	A	Attained	B	gathered	C	received	D	took
36	A	remedying	B	mending	C	revising	D	correcting
37	A	Took	B	went	C	kept	D	got

38	A	Covered	B	prevented	C	saved	D	protected
39	A	Reached	B	caught	C	won	D	succeeded
40	A	Respected	B	honored	C	approved	D	valued

➢ In questions 41-45, think of **ONE** word only which can be used appropriately in all three sentences. Here is an example (0).

Example:

0. They say the new minister is a lovely person and very ----------- to talk to.
   My neighbors have not had a very ----------- life, but they always seem cheerful.
   It's ----------- enough to see why the town is popular with tourists.

Answer: **EASY**

41. I can't see ----------- of all this paperwork, can you?
    I was so frustrated that I was on the ----------- of giving up, but my piano teacher persuaded me to keep on practicing.

    Now, let's move on to the final ----------- for discussion at this meeting.

42. I think it's ----------- to say that not everyone in the boardroom agreed with the decision about the site of the new factory.

    Rita complained that it was not ----------- that she had a smaller company car than her colleagues.

    My husband look nothing like his brothers and sisters because he is so --------.

43. The workers at the car factory are at present ----------- in negotiations to improve their position.

    As the business expanded and more staff were required, the company ---------
    the services of a recruitment agency.

    When my brother and his new girlfriend announced that they were -----------
    it took the whole family by surprise.

44. The instructions were written in such a complicated way that Joe had to spend a long time ----------- out how to set up the printer.

    First results indicated that the new drug was ----------- and had no side effects.

225

John was annoyed to find the drinks machine was not ----------- yet again.

45. Lisa is in ----------- while I'm away from the office, OK?

They've introduced a small----------- for parking outside the station.

The protestors moved back quickly in reaction to a sudden ----------- by the

police.

➢ For questions 46-50, complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do **_NOT_** change the word given. You must use between **_three_** and **_six_** words, including the word given. Here is an example (0).

Example:

0. James   would   only   speak   to   the   head   of   department   alone.

   ON

James ---------------------- to the head of department alone.

✓ The gap can be filled with the words '*insisted **on** speaking*.'

46. There were a lot of things that we had to think about before we could accept their

offer.

OBLIGED

There were several things that we ---------------------- consideration before we could

accept their offer.

47. Do you think you could help me to fill in this application form?

WONDERING

I ---------------------- me a hand filling in this application form.

48. I know that it was wrong of me to shout in front of the customers.

RAISED

I know that I should ---------------------- in front of the customers.

49. I don't mind whether we stay in or go out this evening, but John wants to go to the cinema.

DIFFERENCE

It doesn't ---------------------- whether we stay in or go out this evening, but John wants to go to the cinema.

50. It's possible that the thieves entered the building by forcing a window at the back.

BROKEN

The thieves may ---------------------- the building through a window at the back.

effort