

Iranian EFL Learners' Perceptions of Various Language Activities in an Ideal English Class¹

Sasan Baleghizadeh² and Tahere Karamzade³, Shahid Beheshti University, G.C., Iran

Abstract

This paper reports on a study that was carried out to investigate Iranian EFL learners' views about their preferred language activities which they believed ought to be present in their ideal English classes. The data were collected from 190 English learners through a questionnaire and were analyzed using the Pearson Chi-square test. The three main lesson styles addressed in this study were communication-oriented, control-oriented, and form-oriented lessons. The results of the study showed that females showed stronger preference toward form-oriented lessons compared to males. However, regarding communication-oriented and control-oriented lessons, there were no significant difference in their attitudes. The results also revealed that learners' age and their language proficiency were not determining factors in shaping their attitudes, and preferences for any of the three main lesson types. This study has implications for teachers, teacher trainers and curriculum developers.

Resumen

Este artículo informa sobre un estudio que se llevó a cabo para investigar los puntos de vista de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera iraníes sobre sus actividades lingüísticas preferidas que creían que deberían estar presentes en una clase de inglés ideal. Los datos de 190 estudiantes de inglés fueron recogidos mediante un cuestionario y se analizaron mediante el test de Chi-cuadrado de Pearson. Los tres principales estilos de lección abordados en este estudio fueron orientados a la comunicación, al control y a la forma. Los resultados del estudio mostraron que las mujeres mostraron preferencia más fuerte hacia las lecciones orientadas a la forma en comparación con los hombres. Sin embargo, con respecto a las lecciones orientadas a la comunicación y al control, no hubo diferencias significativas en sus actitudes. Los resultados también revelaron que la edad de los estudiantes y su habilidad de lenguaje no fueron determinantes en la configuración de sus actitudes y de sus preferencias para cualquiera de los tres tipos de lecciones principales. Este estudio tiene implicaciones para profesores, formadores de maestros y desarrolladores de planes de estudio.

Introduction

The current state of English Language Teaching is characterized by giving more attention to language learners' feelings, attitudes and perspectives in every stage of the learning process. The beliefs that language learners hold about language learning have been considered as the important determinant of learning (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Oxford 2001). According to Nunan (1989), "although it is not always immediately apparent, everything we do in the classroom is underpinned by beliefs about the nature of language and about language learning" (p. 12). One of the important arguments for students' failure in learning English or any other language is the mismatches between teaching and learning approaches (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). It is unfortunate to see that in planning syllabuses and devising course materials, students' methodological preferences are not fully considered (Spratt, 2001). If teachers have more information about what their students actually prefer regarding the lesson, the teachers can lower the mismatches with more insight, wisdom, and strategies that are available to them (Littlewood, Liu, & Yu, 1996). And if teachers lack this knowledge, they will wonder

¹ This is a refereed article.

² sasanbaleghizadeh@yahoo.com

³ t.karamzade@gmail.com

“why don’t learners learn what teachers teach” (Allwright, 1984, p.3). Research shows that it is important to identify students’ style and give the kind of instruction that fully matches that learning style, and by doing so, we will be in a better position to understand when effective teaching has taken place (Claxon & Murrell, 1987). According to Willing (1988), students’ satisfaction and achievement will increase if learning styles are accommodated through selecting the most appropriate teaching styles, methodologies, and course organizations.

Taking learners’ perceptions into consideration is a crucial, yet neglected issue in some EFL settings. In order to show the importance of finding out learners’ perceptions, we refer to Shuell’s (1996) psychological model of perception. According to him, whatever knowledge students gain in the classroom is influenced by the way they perceive, interpret, and process the information in the instructional setting. Moreover, Puchta (1999) believed that people’s previous ideas about the subject they study affect their interpretation of new information and their reaction to it. Some researchers believe that learners shape their beliefs about language learning from their experience as language learners (Holec, 1987; Horwitz, 1987; Puchta, 1999).

A brief overview of the related literature shows that the issue of learners’ preference for the lesson styles is still an under researched phenomenon and needs further exploration. Language learners are seldom asked about the kind of classroom activities they prefer the most and most research reports about learner preferences are based on anecdotal evidence and the teachers’ and researchers’ intuitive sense (Green, 1993). Thus it is necessary to consider the point that language learners need to be asked about their preferred lesson styles.

In order to expand our understanding regarding what types of classroom practices and activities students enjoy the most and due to the lack of research in this regard, the present study was conducted. With 190 participants, the study aimed at identifying English learners’ perceptions of an ideal English class. They were asked to consider what an ideal English class looks like, in terms of the activities used in the class. This study has implications for teachers, teacher trainers and curriculum developers who wish to provide the most efficient classroom context for their students.

Review of Literature

Language Learners’ Attitudes towards the Activity Types Used in the Class

A number of studies concerning students’ perceptions and beliefs with regard to their preferred classroom activity types have been reported in the literature. Green (1993) carried out a study to find out language learners’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of two main types of activities used in the classroom, namely communicative and non-communicative activities. He believed that the mismatch between classroom activities and students’ perceptions may cause many problems. Therefore, he conducted a study and examined students’ perceptions and judgments of the effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative classroom activities. He used a seventeen-item questionnaire in which nine communicative and real-language activities and eight non-communicative and form-based techniques were listed. The participants had to rate them on three independent five-point scales. Green found that the students did not believe that the activities which

emphasized formal correctness were more effective than those which emphasized real use of language.

Willing (1988) conducted a study in Australia to find out students' attitudes about the efficiency of activities which are used in the classroom. The participants were 517 migrant students who were asked to rate 30 classroom activities listed in a questionnaire. According to the results obtained from the study, students believed that using form-oriented activities helped them learn better compared to using communication-oriented activities.

Rao (2002) showed that learners may prefer a combination of traditional and communicative activities. He implemented a case study approach to explore Chinese university students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities. He worked with 30 students majoring in English and surveyed their opinions and beliefs using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The results suggested that Chinese EFL students favored non-communicative activities to communicative ones, and that they perceived traditional activities to be more effective in the process of language learning. The reason for this preference lies in the fact that Communicative Language Teaching had not become a dominant method of English language teaching in China then. It is important to note that the researcher stated that Chinese students expressed preference for the combination of both communicative and non-communicative activities. In fact he suggested that if instructors present a combination of these two activity types to the learners, they may have a positive attitude toward it.

The value of finding out students' preferences concerning the kind of activities they like the most has also been emphasized by Spratt (2001). Working with 997 university students in Hong Kong, Spratt showed how important it is to know the students' preferences in planning syllabuses and designing materials. The major findings of the study were that the students' preferences for activities, were not perceived by their language teachers and that students liked both communicative and non-communicative activities. The findings of this study supported Nunan's (1996) emphasis on learning-centered syllabus in which students have a role in choosing what classroom activities they wish to practice and what learning objectives they want to achieve. The findings also supported what Rao (2002) found concerning Chinese students who preferred the combination of both communicative and non-communicative activities.

The Effect of Gender in Shaping Language Learners' Attitudes towards a Specific Lesson Style

One of the variables which might affect language learners' attitudes towards a specific lesson style is their gender. In order to understand whether this assumption is correct, some studies have been conducted by different researchers.

Arabsky (1999) conducted a pilot study to investigate the male and female language learners' approaches toward lesson styles and their preference to various classroom activities. He used 60 participants in his study, and found that females differed from males in their strategy use. Females made use of strategies such as asking for correction, keeping English diaries, watching TV shows and movies in English, and most importantly in starting conversations in English and looking for opportunities to speak in English. This differed from the strategies used by males.

Sampson (2010) investigated the difference between male and female language learners' perceptions to a specific lesson style in Japan. The study was conducted in an EFL university context and the data were collected about female students' past English learning experiences. Sampson argued that by being well-informed about the students' past language learning experiences, their expectations can be better matched with the lesson styles. The results showed that female students had a strong preference toward communicative lesson style.

In an attempt to unravel the female and male English learners' differences with regard to their preference for using autonomous language learning activities, Varol and Yilmaz (2010) reported that females were more willing to take opportunities to speak English in the class. Moreover, females outperformed males in trying new things, suggesting new types of activities and devising new vocabulary games and role-plays. The results of this study also revealed that females studied grammar more regularly.

The Effect of Nationality, Age and Language Proficiency on Shaping Language Learners' Attitudes towards Lesson Styles

Some of the variables which are considered to impact language learners' attitudes towards lesson styles are their nationality, age and language proficiency.

One of the most recent and influential studies has been conducted by Littlewood (2010). Four hundred and ten students from Hong Kong, Japan, Mainland China and Singapore were selected and they were asked about their perceptions of their 'ideal English lesson'. By interviewing students, recurrent themes were identified. The themes were used to design a 40-item questionnaire. Littlewood selected ten items from among those forty items in order to explore the students' perceptions of their ideal English lesson. Using factor analysis, Littlewood recognized three main types of lessons that students preferred the most: communication-oriented lesson, control-oriented lesson and form-oriented lesson. The study results showed that students from all of the mentioned countries except Japan showed a clear preference for communication-oriented lessons. It is notable that the findings are in contrast with the findings of the studies by Rao (2002) and Spratt (2001). They respectively revealed that language learners in China prefer non-communicative and more traditional activities and that language learners in Hong Kong showed preference to the combination of communicative and non-communicative activities. Japanese students, however, showed a slight preference for form-oriented lessons. Littlewood stated that in his research, students' previous learning experiences which might be an important factor in shaping their present preferences, had not been taken into account. One of the drawbacks of Littlewood's study is that it did not focus on preferences that might be different due to the learners' background such as their age, field of study, and gender. Considering the age variable, Thienpermpool and Liangpanit (2013) showed that language learners' age was a determining factor in shaping their preferences and expectations to the lesson. In their study, language learners, from three different age groups namely, high school students, undergraduates and graduate students, were asked to complete a questionnaire and give their conceptions regarding their preferred English lesson. They found out that most of the participants, especially the high school students preferred learning vocabulary compared to grammar or culture.

Makewa, Role, and Tuguta (2013) examined the relationship between language learners' perceived proficiency and their attitude to language learning. The results showed a

positive correlation between English proficiency and attitude towards English. The students who had a positive attitude towards English perceived that their proficiency level in English was high. This implied that language learners' proficiency level could be a variable which might affect and shape their beliefs and perceptions.

The most recent study in this area was conducted by Littlewood (2010) and the only factor which was assumed to have considerable effect on determining learners' preference to certain activity types was their nationality. Moreover due to the contradicting results found in some of the reported studies above (Littlewood, 2010; Rao 2002; Spratt, 2001), the authors decided to conduct the present research. The aim was to explore the effect of language learners' gender, age and proficiency level on shaping their beliefs and perceptions.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perception of 190 Iranian EFL learners, concerning their ideal English class. Some factors, namely learners' gender, proficiency level, age, and the effect of these factors on the students' preference for a specific lesson type were explored. The following research questions were addressed:

1. Is there any relationship between learners' gender and their preference for one of the three types of lessons (communication-oriented, control-oriented, and form-oriented lessons)?
2. Is there any relationship between learners' proficiency level in English and their preference for any of the lesson types?
3. Is there any relationship between learners' age and their preference for one of the lesson types?

Methodology

Participants

In the present study, a total number of 190 EFL students (92 males, 98 females), who were studying English as a foreign language at several private English institutes in Zanjan, were asked to participate. The learners attended the English class three hours a week and the classroom context was their primary source of learning. In almost all of these English institutes in which the data for the study were collected, communicative language teaching was the basic method of language teaching. It is important to mention that Iranian students learn English at public schools, but the method of teaching in public schools is mostly the audio-lingual method, and many students attend private language institutes after school time to learn English where the communicative method is used. The participants' ages ranged from 12 to 35. They were divided into the teenage group (72 teenagers, ages from 12 to 18) and the adult group (118 adults, ages from 19 to 35). Only advanced and intermediate students were chosen to take part in this research (94 intermediate and 96 advanced participants). The authors believe that the learners of these levels have more objective views about the issues related to language learning because of their sufficient exposure to English. It is also important to point out that in the current study there were 43 intermediate adult participants, 75 advanced adult ones, 51 intermediate teenagers and 21 advanced teenagers. Another aspect to be pointed out is the institute placement system in which the data were collected. Prior to entering the institute, all of the applicants take written and oral placement tests from the *Top Notch*

package used at the institute. The written section of the placement test is a multiple choice format, focusing mainly on grammar and vocabulary. Following the written exam, the applicants must go through an interview which checks the accuracy and fluency of speaking. Following the written placement test, they should be interviewed by the institute teachers. Based on the results obtained from the test and interview, the applicants' proficiency levels are determined, and they are placed in the most appropriate class. In the present study, the authors depended on the institute placement system, and the language proficiency grouping was carried out by the institute.

Instruments

A rather short questionnaire was administered (Appendix) based on Littlewood's questionnaire (2010) with a slight modification of an ambiguous item. The item was: "A lot of time is spent working independently of the teacher (e.g. individually or in groups)". Littlewood called this item 'neutral' because it specifies exactly what kind of independent activity is meant. He believed that independent activities in the class can range from imaginative discussion to focused grammar exercises. In order to include this item in the present study, attempts were made to remove its ambiguity by clarifying the item. It was clearly mentioned in the questionnaire that by independent activity, pair or group discussions are meant in which students discuss and manage everything in the groups on their own and the teacher does not interrupt or correct them. Consequently, this item was returned to the communication-oriented category. Another point to consider was the number of items in the questionnaire. In the description of the questionnaire below there are 11 items but in the questionnaire distributed to the participants we had ten items. The reason is that one of the items which is "The teacher corrects most of the grammar mistakes" is categorized in both form-oriented and control-oriented lessons. As mentioned before, the questionnaire used in this study was designed by Littlewood (2010), and the authors used his questionnaire without any changes except for the previously mentioned point. The elements for each of the three lesson types are explained and presented below according to Littlewood (2010). The communication-oriented lesson type is defined in the following:

1. The atmosphere is relaxed.
2. There is plenty of active discussion.
3. Authentic materials are used.
4. There is a lot of enjoyment.
5. A lot of time is spent working independently of the teacher, through pair or group discussions.

According to Littlewood (2010), this lesson type relates to the category of communicative learners defined by Willing (1988). These learners like talking to friends, participating in pair-works, playing games, watching videos and listening to native speakers. In the form-oriented lesson type:

1. The teacher teaches new language items.
2. The teacher corrects most of the grammar mistakes.
3. There is revision of grammar.

Littlewood (2010) mentions that the form-oriented lesson type also relates to Willing's category of analytical learners who like to find their own grammatical mistakes, study grammar and read. In the control-oriented lesson type:

1. The teacher pays a lot of attention to correct pronunciation.
2. The teacher guides most of what the students do.
3. The teacher corrects most of the grammar mistakes.

In order to clarify the control-oriented lesson type, Littlewood (2010) refers to Willing's category of authority-oriented learners who like to get all the information they need from the teacher and they feel that teacher must explain everything to them. These learners also like studying grammar.

The questionnaires were distributed after the students finished their regular classes. They had to check each item on a five-point likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. In order to secure the validity of the students' responses to the questionnaire items, a Persian version was distributed to some classes with intermediate students. For all the advanced level participants, the English version was used based on the assumption that they would clearly understand all the statements in English and that they would not need any help to understand the statements.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process by which the researcher interprets the data which is available to him (Powney & Watts, 1987). To provide more precise information to the test, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the questionnaire data. The *strongly agree* and *agree* answers were merged together, since the authors believed that there would not be so much difference between them. Due to the same reason, the *strongly disagree* and *disagree* responses were also combined. In order to get the most reliable results from the study and to answer all the research questions, the Pearson Chi-square test was used for the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of the study concerning the perceptions of Iranian EFL learners about the three lesson styles are presented. More specifically, this research is carried out to find the relationship between the variables of the study and learners' preference to lesson types.

Research Question 1: Is there any relationship between learners' gender and their preference to one of the three types of lessons (communication-oriented, contro-oriented, and form-oriented)?

In Table 1 the statistics are provided for the three lesson types of the study by considering the gender variable.

	Communication-oriented lesson				Form-oriented lesson				Control-oriented lesson			
	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage
	Responses		Responses		Responses		Responses		Responses		Responses	
Strongly agree and agree	429	77	293	75	316	94	194	83	303	90	203	87
Undecided	58	10	62	15	14	4.1	23	9.8	23	6.8	18	7.7
Strongly disagree and disagree	65	11	33	8.5	6	1.7	16	6.8	9	2.6	11	4.7

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for gender.

Table 1 shows the number of responses answered in either way; *strongly agree* and *agree*, *undecided*, or *strongly disagree* and *disagree*. The table also reveals that 77% of the females’ responses and 75% of the males’ responses to communication-oriented lesson are *strongly agree* and *agree*. Moreover, it manifests that 10% of the females’ responses and 15% of the males’ responses to this lesson type are undecided. Also 11% of the females’ responses and 8.5% of the males’ responses to the communication-oriented lesson are *strongly disagree* and *disagree*. The percentages of males’ and females’ responses to form and control-oriented lesson types are also provided in the table above.

It is important to mention a point about the descriptive statistics tables in the result section. The missing responses were not reported, and that is why the numbers do not add up exactly. In each section of the results, a small number of responses were actually missing. For example, there were 112 females and 78 males in the study, and there were five items for the communication-oriented lesson. Therefore, there should be 560 and 390 responses by the females and males, respectively. If we add up the number of responses of *strongly agree/agree*, *undecided*, and *strongly disagree/disagree* with the small number of missing responses which were eight for the females and two for the males, we get the exact number of total responses.

In order to find out whether this difference is significant or not, the Pearson Chi-square and post-hoc tests were run. The results are shown in Table 2 below:

Communication-oriented lessons				
Gender	Chi square	df	<i>p</i>	Effect size
	8.580	2	.035	0.15

Table 2. The Pearson Chi-Square Test for communication-oriented lessons.

We learn from Table 2 that the calculated Chi-square value (8.58) for male and female learners in the communication-oriented lesson with 2 degrees of freedom is significant ($p = .035$; alpha level set at .05). Because the contingency table is 2*3, we used Cramer’s V for calculating the effect size. By referring to the Cramer’s V table, it is observable that the effect size reported in the above table is small.

The result of the Pearson Chi-square test showed that there is actually a relationship between learners’ gender and their preference to the communication-oriented lesson type. The Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that the difference between the two genders comes from their different responses to the undecided option. Based on the post-hoc test result, we learned that the difference between male and female language learners’ attitude to

the communication-oriented lesson is located in their undecided responses and that compared to females, more males have been undecided about the communication-oriented lesson.

Scrutinizing the literature, we can conclude that the findings of most of the studies conducted in this domain showed females' higher preference to the communicative activities or lesson types (Arabsky, 1999; Sampson, 2010; Varol & Yilmaz, 2010). However, The results of the present study contradicts the findings of previous studies. Males and females have had almost near agreement response percentages to the communication-oriented lesson and females have had slightly higher disagreement response percentages to this lesson type. Therefore, these differences have not led to any significant result.

For the form-oriented lesson however it was revealed that females showed stronger preference for form-oriented lessons compared to males. The results are shown in Table 3:

Form-oriented Lessons				
Gender	Chi square	df	<i>p</i>	Effect size
	14.219	2	.003	.24

Table 3. The Pearson Chi-Square Test for form-oriented lessons.

As it is shown in the table, the Chi-square value (14.21) for male and female learners in the form-oriented lesson with 2 degrees of freedom is significant ($p = .003$). Moreover, the calculated effect size is .24 which is close to medium size. Taking a look at Table 1, we can see that 94% of the females' responses and 83% of the males' responses to the form-oriented lesson type are *strongly agree* and *agree*. Moreover 4.1% of the females' responses and 9.8% of the males' responses are undecided and 1.7% of the females' responses and 6.8% of the males' responses are *strongly disagree* and *disagree*. The Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that the difference between the two genders comes from their responses to all three options of *strongly agree*, *undecided*, and *strongly disagree*.

If we take a close look at the items for form-oriented lesson, we realize that the main elements are acquisition of new language items, correcting grammar mistakes and revision of grammar. Table 1 reveals that female participants have higher *agree* response percent rate to the form-oriented lesson type. However, females have lower *undecided* and *disagree* response percent rates to this lesson type. Therefore it can be concluded that females show more preference for the form-oriented lesson style.

The result of this section is consistent with the results of the study by Varol and Yilmaz (2010), in that they also discovered that females studied grammar more regularly and they came up with new grammar points. They were also more eager to do the non-compulsory tasks in comparison to males. The result of the Pearson Chi-square for control-oriented lesson was not statistically significant and is found in Table 4.

Control-oriented Lessons				
	Chi square	df	<i>p</i>	Effect size
Gender	1.780	2	.619	.08

Table 4. The Pearson Chi-Square Test for control-oriented lessons.

The table shows that when males and females were compared in their preference for the control-oriented lesson, there was no difference in their inclination to this lesson type. In other words the calculated Chi-square value (1.780) with 2 degrees of freedom in the control-oriented lesson is not significant ($p = 0.619$). Also the calculated effect size for the control-oriented lesson is .08 which is assumed to be small. In Table 1, all of the response percentages for the females and males about the control-oriented lesson are provided. As Littlewood (2010) puts it, this lesson type is likely to relate to Willing's (1988) 'analytical learners' who enjoy learning grammar, reading and finding their own mistakes.

The elements comprising the control-oriented lesson are the correction of grammar and pronunciation mistakes. These elements convey the idea of the teacher being the main and the dominant figure in the class who not only corrects the mistakes but also guides most of what the students do. It is clear from the literature of corrective feedback that the main aim of using correction techniques is to give the students a new opportunity to put their production in the correct way (Harmer, 1983). It is obvious that in the communicative language teaching approach which is practiced in the private language institutes in Iran, language learners, either males or females, would not be willing to be strongly controlled and corrected by the teacher regarding their grammar mistakes or pronunciation. The reason of non-significance of results in this part may be traced back to the same English learning experience that both males and females have had during their education at public schools in Iran. Actually, the widely practiced method of language teaching at public schools in Iran is mostly audio-lingual method, which is control-oriented in nature.

Thus, it can be concluded that since both genders have been exposed to the control-oriented activities once in their life time at public schools, we do not see any difference in their attitude in this regard. The fact that English learning at public schools is examination-oriented, and that learners learn English through intensive drills has been supported by Littlewood and Liu (1996). They investigated Hong Kong first year university students, and they found out that their command of using spoken English was limited. Such an argument is also true in the foreign language context of Iran, consequently it is not surprising to see that both males and female have the same attitudes to this lesson type.

To sum up the findings of this section it was found that females expressed stronger preference for the form-oriented lesson. We also learned that no significant difference was found between males' and females' attitudes towards the communication and control-oriented lesson styles.

Research Question 2: Is there any relationship between learners' proficiency level in English and their preference to one of the lesson types?

The participants of this study consisted of 96 advanced and 94 intermediate students. The aim was to find out if the learners' proficiency levels, namely intermediate and advanced,

would influence their preference to one of the three lesson types, and whether learners from these two proficiency levels have different ideas with regards to their preference toward the lesson types. In Table 5 the descriptive statistics for the three lesson styles of the study in relation to the language proficiency variable are reported.

	Communication-oriented lesson				Form-oriented lesson				Control-oriented lesson			
	Intermediate	Percentage	Advanced	Percentage	Intermediate	Percentage	Advanced	Percentage	Intermediate	Percentage	Advanced	Percentage
	Responses		Responses		Responses		Responses		Responses		Responses	
Strongly agree and agree	348	74	374	79	259	91	251	87	258	88	248	86
Undecided	69	14	51	10	15	5.3	22	7.6	27	9.2	24	8.3
Strongly disagree and disagree	51	10	47	9.9	8	2.8	14	4.8	6	2	14	4.8

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for language proficiency.

The response percent rates for the intermediate and advanced participants are provided in the descriptive Table 5 above. Moreover, the number of responses are shown in the responses column. The result of the Pearson Chi-square was not statistically significant, i.e. the proficiency level of language learners did not affect their attitude to any specific lesson type. The result is summarized in Table 6:

Proficiency	Communication-oriented Lesson				Form-oriented Lesson				Control-oriented Lesson			
	Chi square	df	Sig.	Effect size	Chi square	df	Sig.	Effect size	Chi square	df	Sig.	Effect size
	3.195	2	.362	.09	5.090	2	.165	.14	5.750	2	.124	.15

Table 6. The Pearson Chi-Square Test for proficiency level.

In contrast to our expectation that the proficiency level would be a determining factor in shaping the students’ attitude to the lesson types, such claim was not supported by the results of the test. It was assumed that because advanced learners’ have had more exposure to language instruction than intermediate students, they would have more insight into the lesson types and that they may prefer one of them. However, we see from the table that this assumption is not statistically supported. The reason might be due to the nearness of the learners’ proficiency levels, namely intermediate and advanced. One assumption might be that if the proficiency difference between the participants was greater, like the proficiency difference between elementary and advanced learners, then we may have been able to find significant results in this section. It is important to note that this assumption must be checked in a future study in order to make sure about its accuracy.

Research Question 3: Is there any relationship between learners’ age and their preference for one of the lesson types?

We wanted to see if adults and teenagers who took part in our study preferred any of the lesson types. As language learners get older, due to more experience in learning and utilizing the language, their preferences might change by the passage of time

(Thienpermpool & Liangpanit, 2013). In Table 7 below, statistics for the three lesson styles are provided by considering the age variable.

	Communication-oriented lesson				Form-oriented lesson				Control-oriented lesson			
	Teenager	Percentage	Adult	Percentage	Teenager	Percentage	Adult	Percentage	Teenager	Percentage	Adult	Percentage
	Responses		Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Response	Percentage
Strongly agree and agree	261	72	461	79	196	90	314	88	196	91	310	88
Undecided	56	15	64	10	12	5.5	25	7	15	6.9	26	7.3
Strongly disagree and disagree	41	11	57	9.7	8	3.7	14	3.9	4	1.8	16	4.5

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for age.

The number of responses are provided in the response column and the response percent rates for the adult and teenage participants are shown in the table above. The results of the Pearson Chi-square showed no statistical significance in this regard as well. It is therefore concluded that the learners' age had nothing to do with their preference to any of the lesson types. The results of the Pearson Chi-square tests are summarized in Table 8.

Age	Communication-oriented lesson				Form-oriented lesson				Control-oriented lesson			
	Chi square	df	Sig.	Effect size	Chi square	Df	Sig.	Effect size	Chi square	df	Sig.	Effect size
	1.843	2	.606	.07	2.840	2	.417	.1	4.569	2	.206	.13

Table 8. The Pearson Chi-Square Test for age.

Considering the results of the last two research questions, it can be concluded that in the case of the present study, language learners' proficiency level and age had no effect on shaping their perception to any types of the lesson targeted in this study.

Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

This article reports on a study in which Iranian language learners' perceptions of different lesson types were surveyed to realize whether their age, gender and proficiency level would affect their preferences in this regard. The overall results demonstrated that Iranian female students prefer form-oriented lessons compared to male students. However, in terms of control-oriented and communication-oriented lessons there were no significant differences in their attitudes. With regards to the other variables (age and language proficiency), no significant results were found. Some may assume that Asian language learners are still inclined to the traditional approaches of language teaching and learning. It is obvious from this and other related studies that this assumption is not supported by research and what language teachers witness from their learners is quite different. Iranian language learners are active in class, and they value being able to communicate through English more than mere memorization of grammar rules and new words.

We hope that the findings of this study encourage teachers, teacher trainers and curriculum developers to be mindful and sensitive to their language learners' preferences, perceptions and their actual needs, although, in the present study we found that language learners' gender was the only variable which influenced their preference for the form-

oriented lesson type. Moreover, taking into consideration the results of this study, we learned that language learners' proficiency level and age had no effect on shaping their perception to any types of the lessons targeted in this study. Thus, it would not be compulsory for the English institutes to take these two variables into account when assigning language learners to classes with specific lesson types. The findings also suggest that teacher trainers should transfer this information to their trainees so that the future teachers will be open to innovative and varied activities. According to Littlewood (2010), teachers should rely on their students' flexibility to ensure a variety of teaching and learning approaches.

The present study has some limitations. One of the limitations is that the study was conducted in a private English institute in Iran, and contained a limited number of participants which would inevitably hinder the generalization of the findings of the study. The other limitation is the small number of items on the questionnaire which was unavoidable, since we used the format of questionnaire designed by Littlewood (2010). It is hoped that the drawbacks and limitations which were present in this study, would be addressed in the future related studies.

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Appendix 1

The ideal English lesson questionnaire (based on Littlewood, 2010)

Demographic Information:

Name (optional)

Age:

Male/Female:

Level in English class:

Directions:

Read each statement below carefully. Please respond to the statements as your personal belief and point of view. Decide whether you *strongly agree*, *agree*, are *undecided*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*.

Note: this questionnaire is designed to view your idea regarding the characteristics of an ideal English lesson. Therefore, avoid checking the statements based on what you see in your present English class.

Questionnaire Statements:

In my ideal English lesson:

1. The atmosphere is relaxed.
2. There is plenty of active discussion.
3. Some of the materials used are from real life (e.g., TV, magazines).
4. Some time is spent 'having fun' (e.g., singing songs or playing games).
5. The teacher teaches new language items (e.g., grammar or vocabulary).
6. The teacher corrects most of the grammar mistakes.
7. Some time is spent revising grammar.
8. The teacher insists, most of the time, on correct pronunciation.
9. A lot of time is spent working independently of the teacher (e.g., individually or in groups).
10. The teacher guides most of what the students do.