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Teacher Burnout and Its Effect on Effective Teaching as Perceived by Students

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' feeling of burnout and their students' attitudes towards their effectiveness. To this end a teacher burnout questionnaire and a questionnaire of effective teaching as perceived by the students were utilized. The burnout questionnaire consisted of 22 Likert-scale items and the effective teaching questionnaire was comprised of 50 Likert-scale questionnaire which measured eight components of effective teaching (Socio-affective Skills, Teaching Procedures, Understanding and Building Students' Confidence, Creating a Non-threatening Classroom Atmosphere, Focus on Students' Oral Proficiency, and Knowledge of the Foreign Culture, Personalizing Instruction, and Feedback Method). The sample of this study consisted of 46 teachers as well as 1,912 students in 92 classes all of whom were the students of these 46 teachers. This study

utilized a cross-sectional design and the analysis of the data was conducted through SPSS. The results of the study revealed that teachers' feeling of burnout was statistically significantly in a negative relationship with teachers' effectiveness as perceived by their students. The relationships between teacher burnout and the nine components of teachers' effectiveness questionnaire were also analyzed and the results showed that teachers' socio-affective skills had the highest significant negative relationship with their burnout feeling. The lowest significant negative relationship belonged to the relationship between teachers' burnout and their focus on students' oral proficiency as perceived by the students. Teachers' knowledge of the foreign culture and their feedback method, respectively, were in a nonsignificant positive and negative relationship with their feeling of burnout.

Keywords: effective teaching, students' perceptions, teacher burnout

Introduction

One of the major problems that educational settings are facing nowadays is teacher burnout which is directly related to their teaching efficacy and efficiency (Carson, Plemmons, Templin, & Weiss, 2011). Burnout feelings are related to their quality of life, their job dedication, job turn over and the like (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Whipp, Tan & Yeo, 2007). The consequences of burnout are observed not only at the intrapersonal level but also at the interpersonal level (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). Intrapersonally, those suffering from burnout lose their enthusiasm, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy. Interpersonally, several studies (e.g., Ghorpade, Lackritz & Singh, 2007; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010) have documented the negative effect of individuals' burnout on their relationship with other people and their job performance. Maslach and Leiter's (1999) model of teacher burnout revealed that burn out affects both teachers and students in educational settings as well. In educational settings, burnout studies have focused on both teachers' and learners characteristics and their contribution to teacher burnout. Several studies (e.g., Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007) have revealed that teacher burnout is not only related to their motivation and job satisfaction but also their health. However, to date, no study has attempted to examine whether there is a relationship between students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of teachers and their teachers

feeling of burn out. The present study was an attempt to address this shortcoming and fill this gap in burnout literature.

Review of the related literature

Teacher burnout

It is not something uncommon for many teachers to experience some sort of stress in their profession (Jennett, Harris & Mesibov, 2003). Similar to many other human service occupations, teaching carries significant amount of stress with itself. The majority of teachers manage to cope with work stress, but for those who fail to do so, this stress may turn into burnout (Jennett *et al.*, 2003). Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) define burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. As Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) states, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are the two central elements of burnout. Emotional exhaustion, which includes feelings of emotional detachment, is claimed to be at the center of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Depersonalization refers to the state of having negative attitudes towards one's colleagues, students or anyone who might enjoy your goods and services. It is a state in which a person tries to detach oneself from those who might enjoy and benefit the services s/he provides. And finally, reduced personal accomplishment refers to negative self-evaluation and feeling of incompetence and uselessness (Schaufeli, Enzmann, & Girault, 1993). According to Maslach *et al.* (2001) reduced personal accomplishment can spring from feelings of inefficacy, while exhaustion and depersonalization are the consequences of overworking and social conflicts.

Different studies have observed the negative consequence of teacher burnout at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). Maslach and Leiter (1999) developed a burnout model for educational settings which suggested that both teachers' and students' behaviors might be influenced by burnout. As Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, Garn, Kulik and Fahlman (2015) suggest teacher burnout has a negative impact on teachers' involvement in classroom and their classroom preparation. Such a phenomenon can lead to students' criticisms and they are likely to change their perceptions towards teachers which can result in some changes in their behaviors and performances in the classroom (Shen *et al.*, 2015). These claims directly target the relationship between teachers' burnout and their effectiveness as perceived by their students.

Teachers' effectiveness

The noncontroversial element in all educational settings, including EFL settings, is that instruction should eventuate in students' learning. A myriad of factors contribute to students' success, and one of which is their attitude towards the efficacy of their teachers. In the field of language teaching, Brosh (1996) believes that effective language teachers are knowledgeable in what they teach, are able to explain, elaborate and describe, and show fairness and equity in their behavior. Teachers' effectiveness and the factors that contribute to it have been examined from the perspective of both teachers (e.g., Korkmaz & Korkmaz, 2013) and students (e.g., Ekin & Damar, 2013). Some studies (e.g., Adediwura & Tayo 2007; Schacter & Thum, 2004) have revealed that teachers' effectiveness is positively related with students' performance. Although some scholars (e.g., Nuhfer, 2004; Pozo-munoz, Reboloso-Pacheco & Fernandez-Ramirez, 2000) argue against relying merely on students' evaluation for determining teachers' effectiveness, several studies (e.g., Barnett, Matthews, Jackson, 2003; Pozo-Munoz *et al.*, 2000) have shown that students' ratings are in fact reliable measures of teachers' effectiveness. Students' perceptions of teachers' characteristics can also affect their attitude towards learning; the ultimate goal of any teaching program (Etuk, Afangideh, & Uya, 2013). Although innumerable studies have examined the characteristics of effective teachers, no study to date has explored the attitudes of students towards teachers who are suffering from burnout. Studies have revealed that teacher burnout is the source of different individual and interpersonal implications, but there is a need for further studies which examine how teacher burnout influences student perceptions of their teachers and also their performance and behavior.

Methodology

Research questions

Considering the fact that students' beliefs and perceptions about teachers' effectiveness has a significant impact on their scholastic achievements (Williams & Burden, 1997), it seems essential to explore how their teachers' feeling of burnout can influence learners' beliefs about their teachers' effectiveness. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the following research questions are raised:

1. Are students' beliefs about teachers' effectiveness associated with teacher burnout?

2. To what extent are different characteristics of effective teaching as perceived by students influenced by teachers' feeling of burnout?

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of both teachers and students.

Teacher participants

For the purpose of this study, 46 male high school EFL teachers who were from three provinces (Tehran, Alborz, and Kerman) in Iran were recruited. Their age ranged from twenty-three to forty-six, and they were all nonnative EFL teachers (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of teacher participants

Teachers	Alborz	Kerman	Tehran
Age	23-46	24-42	24-45
Teaching experience	1-23 (years)	3-20 (years)	2-22 (years)
N	14	16	16

Student participants

To select the student participants, the researchers initially asked each teacher to provide them with a list of their classes. Then the researchers randomly selected two classes from each teachers' list. Overall, 92 classes, i.e., 1,912 students, were selected as the student participants of this study. The students' age ranged from 14 to 18 and all the students were male (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of teacher participants

	Alborz	Kerman	Tehran	Total
Students	(28 classes)	(32 classes)	(32 classes)	(92 classes)
Age	14-17	14-17	14-18	14-18
N	595	637	680	1912

Instruments

Burnout questionnaire

The Persian-translated version of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was employed to collect data on teacher burnout. This instrument consists of 22 items about burnout symptoms which are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “never” to “every day”. Never received 1 and every day was coded 6. The validity of this questionnaire was checked by Akbari, Ghafar Samar, Kiany and Eghtesadi (2011), who made use of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to explore the factorial structure of this questionnaire and the result of their study confirmed the appropriacy of utilizing the Persian version of MBI for measuring the three components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) as proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1981).

Students' perception of teachers' effectiveness questionnaire

Alimoradi and Tajgozari (2016) developed a Persian effective teaching questionnaire which explored the factors that students observed in effective EFL teachers. Their questionnaire consisted of 50 Likert scale items which ranged from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4). All the items employed in this questionnaire were taken from effective teaching questionnaires utilized in different studies (e.g., Babai Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Moradi & Sabeti, 2014). Utilizing Cronbach alpha's formula, Alimoradi and Tajgozari (2016) also showed that their questionnaire enjoyed a satisfactory level of reliability ($r=0.73$). The results of their factor analysis revealed that the 50 items used in this multidimensional questionnaire loaded on eight components: Socio-affective Skills, Teaching Procedures, Understanding and Building Students' Confidence, Creating a Non-threatening Classroom Atmosphere, Focus on Students' Oral Proficiency, Knowledge of the Foreign Culture, Personalizing Instruction, and Feedback Method.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The two questionnaires of this study were administered in two separate stages. In the first stage, 100 burnout questionnaires were distributed among the EFL teachers. The researchers explained to the teachers how they should proceed in completing the questionnaire and asked them whether they were also willing to let their students sit for a questionnaire, the nature of which was unknown to them. Forty-six teachers returned

the questionnaires and announced that they would cooperate in administering the questionnaire to their students.

In the next stage of the study, students' perception of teachers' effectiveness questionnaire was administered to the students of those teachers who chose to participate in the study. In the administration phase of this questionnaire, the researchers explained to the participants how they are expected to answer the questions and at least one of the researchers was available during the administration process to explain any ambiguity that students may face.

Results

The data of the present study were analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v. 17.0) and the significance level which was selected for this study was 0.01.

To assure the appropriateness of the effective teaching questionnaire for the participants of this study, this questionnaire was initially piloted to a group of students who were similar to the participants of this study in age and education level. Cronbach alpha was employed to estimate the reliability of this instrument for the study and the results of the internal consistency analysis revealed that the reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable for this study ($r= 0.97$). The results also revealed that the reliability of each of the components of the questionnaire was also at an adequate level (Socio-affective Skills=0.77, Teaching Procedures=0.97, Understanding and Building Students' Confidence=0.75, Creating Nonthreatening Classroom Atmosphere=0.88, Focus on Students' Oral Proficiency=0.75, Knowledge of the Foreign Culture=0.84, Personalizing Instruction=0.76, Feedback Method=0.88).

As far as the first research question was concerned, all the constructs were summated and a correlation analysis was conducted on them so as to investigate the possible relationships between the components of teacher's effectiveness and teacher burnout (Table 3). To summate the data, the scores of each construct in each class were added up to gain a single score for that construct in that given class. After the computation of a single score for each construct, these scores were added up so as to obtain a single score for each class. This data summation was done since the sum of the attitudes of a whole class were to be correlated with their teachers' feeling of burnout.

Table 3. Correlations, means, and SD of effective teaching components with teacher burnout

	N of items	Means	SD		Teacher burnout
Socio-affective Skills	13	1.4806E	390.18	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.911** .000
Teaching Procedures	6	7.0496E2	160.50	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.916** .000
Understanding and Building Students' Confidence	6	7.5178E2	164.78	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.912** .000
Creating Nonthreatening Classroom Atmosphere	7	6.7830E2	197.94	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.906** .000
Focus on Students' Oral Proficiency	5	6.8911E2	181.94	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.754** .000
Knowledge of the Foreign Culture	4	5.3489E2	53.24	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.181 .229
Personalizing Instruction	4	6.8759E2	182.27	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.896** .000
Feedback Method	5	5.3367E2	52.56	Pearson Correlation Sig.	.004 .978
Total	50	50.5870	1187.16	Pearson Correlation Sig.	-.962** .000
Teacher burnout	22	50.58	19.44		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regarding the second research questions, as it is displayed in Table 3, there is a significant negative relationship between teachers' effectiveness as perceived by the students and teachers' feeling of burnout ($r=-0.96$, $n=46$, $p=0.00$). The results also demonstrate that the relationship between six of the components of effective teaching and teachers' feeling of burnout is significantly negative: (Socio-affective Skills, $r=-.911$, $n=46$, $p=0.00$; Teaching Procedures, $r=-.916$, $n=46$, $p=0.00$; Understanding and Building Students' Confidence, $r=-.912$, $n=46$, $p=0.00$; Creating Nonthreatening Classroom Atmosphere, $r=-.906$, $n=46$, $p=0.00$; Focus on Students' Oral Proficiency,

$r=-.76$, $n=46$, $p=0.00$; Personalizing Instruction, $r=-.896$, $n=46$, $p=0.00$). The relationship between teachers' feeling of burnout and their knowledge of the foreign culture was also negative, but nonsignificant ($r=-.181$, $n=46$, $p=0.22$). The results also showed that there exists a nonsignificant positive relationship between teacher's feeling of burn out and the feedback component ($r=.004$, $n=46$, $p=0.97$).

Discussion

As the results indicated, teacher burnout was negatively associated with teachers' effectiveness as perceived by students. That is, except for the feedback method and knowledge of the foreign culture components, all the other components of the teacher effectiveness as perceived by students were statistically significantly in a negative correlation with teachers' feeling of burnout. The component of teaching procedures had the highest negative relationship with teachers' feeling of burnout. The second rank was occupied by understanding and building students' confidence which also revealed a strong negative relationship with teacher burnout. Following these two components, the two components of personalizing instruction and socio-affective skills had an equal significant negative correlation with teachers' burnout. Creating nonthreatening classroom atmosphere was significantly negatively associated with teacher burnout as well. And finally, focus on students' oral proficiency had the lowest significant negative relationship with teacher burnout. As it was mentioned before, two components of the teacher effectiveness questionnaire, namely feedback method and knowledge of the foreign culture, were nonsignificantly correlated with teacher burnout. Among these eight factors, only feedback method demonstrated a positive relationship with teacher burnout, but this relationship did not reach the level of statistical significance.

Burnout teachers' weakness in social skills is in line with Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd's (2013) claim that states the social emotional competences of teachers can affect their burnout. Taking this claim into consideration makes this finding an issue of egg or chicken. That is, which one proceeds the other ? Whether burnout leads to deterioration in socio-affective skills or the other way round. As for the component of building confidence among students, the finding is neither supported nor rejected in the literature. As a matter of fact, no study has previously attempted to explore the relationship between these two variables. However, the finding of Caglar's (2011) study which demonstrated a low negative correlation between confidence and levels of burnout can be exploited to argue for the finding of this study. Since Caglar (2011)

showed burnout people are suffering from lack of confidence in their work, it can be safely reasoned that these people will not be able to present something which they themselves are lacking in. Ghazalbash and Afghari (2016) found a weak negative relationship between teachers burnout and reflective teaching in which, according to Murphy (2001), teachers attempt to enhance the quality of learning moments, use a wide variety of teaching strategies, and gain a better understanding of the processes of teaching and learning. Ghazalbash and Afghari's (2016) finding supports the negative relationship found between teacher burnout and their teaching procedures since the component of teaching procedure to a large extent overlaps the factors which are the target of reflective teaching. This finding is also partially supported by Javadi and Khatib's (2014) study which revealed a negative relationship between teachers' feeling of burnout and their reflection in teaching.

As for the atmosphere of the classroom, the findings also demonstrated that there exists a negative relationship between teachers feeling of burnout and their role in creating a non-threatening classroom atmosphere. As Schaufeli *et al.*, (1993) state the feeling of depersonalization, which is one of the elements of teacher burnout, leads to holding negative attitudes towards one's students. It can be argued that these negative attitudes towards learners directly influence burnout teachers' weakness in creating nonthreatening classroom atmosphere. This finding is also in harmony with Dorman's (2003) study which explored the relationship between teacher burnout and the environment of their classroom. This study showed that some dimensions of classroom environment can predict teachers' performance on Maslach burnout inventory (MBI).

As the results revealed, there was a negative relationship between teacher burnout and their focus on the oral proficiency of the students. One of the consequences of teacher burnout is frequent absenteeism. Brown and Arnell (2012) showed that teacher absenteeism which is one of the consequences of feeling of burnout can adversely affect the achievement of their students. It can be argued that burnout can lead to the overall deterioration of students' achievement in all walks of their education and oral proficiency is only one of them.

Although the measure of teacher effectiveness as perceived by students was overall negatively correlated with MBI, two components of the measure of teacher effectiveness i.e., feedback method and knowledge of the foreign culture, were in a nonsignificant relationship with MBI. Such a negative relationship between knowledge of the foreign and burn out, although nonsignificant, somehow supports Livermore's

(2011) claim which states that an increased knowledge of the foreign culture makes teachers unlikely to suffer from burnout. As far as the feedback method is concerned, no study has previously attempted to investigate the relationship between teachers' feedback method with their feeling of burnout, therefore this finding of the study is neither supported nor contradicted by any study in the literature.

In a nutshell, the findings of this study go hand in hand with Shen *et al.* (2015) claims which argues that teacher burnout can change students' perceptions and beliefs towards their teachers in a negative manner.

Conclusion

To identifying the relationship between teachers' feeling of burnout and effective teaching factors as perceived by students, an effective teaching and a burnout questionnaire were administered to a group of students and their teachers, respectively. The results of correlation analysis demonstrated that there was a negative relationship between teacher burnout and effective teaching as perceived by students. Further analysis of the results showed that six out of the eight components of the teacher effectiveness questionnaire were in a statistically significant negative relationship with teacher burnout. Building students' confidence and focus on students' oral proficiency had the highest and the lowest negative relationship with teacher burnout respectively. Two of the factors (knowledge of the foreign culture and feedback method) had a positive, but non-significant relationship with teachers' feeling of burnout. The finding of this study have several implications for everyone involved in educational domains. As Williams and Burden (1997) assert that learners' perceptions plays a key role in their future success. Such negative perceptions about burnout teachers which were revealed in the present study call for a thorough investigation of teachers' feeling of burnout at all educational levels, since students' ultimate success is highly dependent upon their perceptions Williams and Burden (1997). Teachers in general and EFL teachers in particular should work on their teaching skills, including the factors explored in this study, so as not to transmit such negative perceptions to their students. Educational stakeholders also need to provide an appropriate teaching environment and present burnout workshops for teachers to help them avoid the emergence of such feelings (Carson *et al.*, 2011).

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Creativity Styles and Thinking Styles among Iranian EFL learners

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Abstract

Much has been written on creativity and its relation with other variables (e.g., Houtz *et al.*, 2003; Plucker *et al.*, 2004; Sternberg, 2007; Zhu & Zhang, 2011). Respecting all these studies, however, one of the intellectual style variables that seems related to creativity and can predict creativity styles is thinking style. The correspondence of creativity and thinking styles can help EFL instructors determine the mind-set of their students, and come to the class with knowledge about their students' abilities, needs, and requirements. Recognizing the complex nature of creativity, on the one hand, and importance of thinking styles reported in the recent survey of research, on the other, has led the researchers to investigate the relationship between thinking styles and creativity styles among 110 Iranian EFL learners in Iran. To measure the participants' thinking and creativity styles, MSG Thinking Styles Inventory (Sternberg & Wagner, 1991) and Creativity Styles Questionnaire-Revised (Kumar & Holman, 1997) were used. It was found that there are significant correlation coefficients between thinking styles and creativity styles. Results of multiple-regression analysis indicated that 8 out of 13 thinking styles: legislative, progressive, conservative, hierarchical, monarchic, oligarchic, anarchic, and external styles significantly predicted creativity styles. It is

suggested that EFL instructors pay due attention to the students' thinking styles and creativity styles in advance. Findings also suggest that EFL/ESL instructors should treat their students in correspondence with their creativity styles. They need to be aware of the appropriate methods and educational situations which are helpful in fostering creativity and ultimately language learning process.

Keywords: thinking styles; creativity; creativity styles; EFL learners; Iranian context

Introduction

Education system, as the center of sketching, designing, developing, and structuring students' thoughts and skills, focuses profoundly on creativity – enabling individuals to use their skills creatively, creating new products, and doing things in new and efficient ways. This undertaking process commenced from the very beginning i.e., pre-school levels, to the higher levels of education. Undoubtedly, preparing creative students requires creative teachers and thinkers. Teachers are not the mere transformers of knowledge and information but they are in responsible of contributing their students in using their creative thinking skills over appropriate situations and problems. Being aware of students' thinking skills and creativity styles is a facilitative instrument for teachers. Having such a useful instrument is appropriate for all levels of education. In undergraduate level, where extraction of information from the students is more convenient, providing information on the students' thinking and creativity styles are feasibly significant for instructors. Respecting such information, instructors could adapt their teaching approaches to their students' preferences and abilities. Such an adaptation can be observed in every fields of study. However, among all, EFL/ESL teachers, as those who are teaching a new language and culture, more necessarily need matching with their students' thinking and creativity styles. Moiiinvaziri (2012) pointed out that it is necessary to become acquainted with students' learning habits and expectations so as to have applicable syllabus and course design. Birkmaier (1971) stated that one of the language teachers' duties is helping students cope with their unsuccessful efforts and encouraging them to try more and find alternative ways. Students enroll in the classrooms with different learning preferences and approaches. If teachers find out these tendencies, they can teach these students in learnable ways. Aliakbari and Tazik (2011) reported that EFL learning preferences are different and EFL teachers need to gear their teaching strategies to these differences.

In Iranian EFL context, wherein students of different provinces with various cultural and linguistic backgrounds study in the same college, being aware of students' abilities and preferences seem to be a must for their instructors. To make such awareness, many studies have been done. Language learning styles and strategies are among the most-investigated areas related to the EFL students in Iran (Aliakbari & Hayatzadeh, 2008; Aliakbari & Mahjub, 2010; Aliakbari & Tazik, 2011; Bidabadi & Yamat, 2012; Farhoush & Ahmadi, 2013; Mahdavi & Azimi, 2012), to name but a few. Some studies were also found to focus on Iranian EFL students' thinking styles and their relationship with learning styles and strategies (Abdi, 2012; Bakhshayesh, 2013; Heidari & Bahrami, 2012; Khodae Balestane, Hashemnezhad, & Javidi, 2013). Reviewing literature, however, reveals that creativity as the cornerstone of any successful movement in education have been overlooked by Iranian researchers. As Kiliç (2013) contends, in creativity, which included invention and innovation, "all cognitive, competencies, thinking processes, imagination, and senses are in interaction with each other" (p. 122). Therefore, to make such relations salient for students and teachers, it is necessary to study creativity and its relationship with many other related factors.

One of the aspects of creativity is "creativity as a product" which means realization of creative thinking in everyday activities and doing them in new ways (Holmes, 1997). People employ different strategies for doing their works innovatively. These preferences are called creativity styles. On the other hand, whatever is happening in one's mind mirrors his/her thoughts which are called thinking styles. The correspondence of creativity and thinking styles can help EFL instructors determine the mind-set of their students, and come to the class with knowledge about their students' abilities, needs, and requirements. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the relationship between thinking styles and creativity styles among Iranian EFL learners. In the following section, creativity styles and thinking styles are extensively elaborated and related studies are reviewed.

Literature Review

Creativity

Creativity as a prerequisite for change, progress, and transformation (Runco, 2007), individually or socially (Zhu & Zhang, 2011), has received much attention in the past few decades (Beghetto, 2007; Finke, Ward, and Smith, 1992; Kumar & Holman, 1997; Plucker *et al.*, 2004; Sternberg, 2007; Ward, 2007; etc.). With all these studies carried

out on creativity; however, the nature and scope of creativity remained a rather fuzzy concept. This fact has led researchers to study creativity from various perspectives. For instance, Reuter (2007), inspecting the genetic predisposition of creativity, investigated the genetic nature of creativity. He contended that following new advancement in the field of neuroscience and molecular genetics, investigating biological underpinnings of creativity is possible.

Some researchers focus on the cognitive abilities in relation to creativity. They claim that novel and useful ideas come out of mental operations structured and performed on existing knowledge (Ward, 2007). Among different cognitive approaches to creativity, creative cognition approach developed by Finke, Ward, and Smith (1992) and Ward, Smith and Finke (1999) “provides an organizing framework for thinking about the interplay between knowledge and skills” (Ward, 2007, p. xxiv). In this approach, creativity is “assumed to emerge from the application of ordinary, fundamental cognitive processes to existing knowledge structures which results in ideas that are novel and useful” (Ward, 2007, p. xxiv).

Divergent thinking and associative theory, as other creative cognition theories, tell us “something about the cognitive processes that may lead to original ideas and solutions” (Runco, 2007, p. 10) and look to the ways ideas are generated and chained together, respectively. Runco (2007) contends that theories of divergent thinking and associative processes assume that creative ideas result from problem solving. He points out that some others have opposite view and consider problem-solving as a kind of creativity.

From a different standpoint, Sternberg (2007) views creativity as a habit and believes that creativity is not an inborn trait but a responding to events and problems in a fresh and mindful way. He proposes some suggestions for strengthening this habit by providing opportunities for engaging in it, encouraging people to make advantage of such opportunities, and rewarding them to behave creatively. Similarly, Brown (1989) points out that creativity is a trait distributed among different populations. Therefore, every person is creative and by designing instruments, the creative style of each can be determined. To develop this habit in children, as Sternberg (2007) suggests, they must learn to redefine problems, question and analyze assumptions, sell the ideas, encourage idea generation, view knowledge as a prerequisite for creativity, identify and surmount obstacles, encourage sensible risk-taking, encourage tolerance of ambiguity, build self-

efficacy, find what they love to do, tolerate delaying gratification, and provide an environment that fosters creativity.

All in all, Sternberg (2007) states that creativity is the interactive combination of six distinct but interrelated resources- knowledge, intellectual abilities, thinking styles, personality, motivation, and environment. Therefore, every person can be creative and each of these factors can enhance creativity. Nevertheless, the concern is employing techniques and methods for relating creativity to each of these factors. In other words, according to Plucker *et al.* (2004), our knowledge of creativity has advanced over the past several decades but our strategies for enhancing it lag behind. One solution for this problem can be realizing *creativity styles* as consistent methods and approaches that people use to deal with their everyday works and problems (Kumar & Holman, 1997).

As a matter of fact, it is so difficult to find how much creativity an individual possesses. Instead, it is possible to explore how people approach their daily activities and cope with their problems. This process of exhibiting creativity is called creativity style (Isaksen & Dorval, 1993). The issue of creativity style, as Houtz *et al.* (2003) point out, is a new topic in the area of creativity research. Research on this issue contributes to the advocates of applying creativity in education and offers ways that students can improve their everyday problem-solving methods and techniques. Studying the relationship between creativity styles and different factors that make creativity can provide useful information applicable for educational contexts. Additionally, studying this notion, as Houtz *et al.* (2003) note, can help people do their daily activities in more creative ways. They hypothesized that personality characteristics may influence the development of particular creativity styles that, in turn, may predict creative behavior. Hence, in their study with sixty-two student teachers enrolled in an initial teacher education program, they investigated the relationship between creativity styles and personal types. Using the Kirton (1976) Adaptation-Innovation Inventory, Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, and Khatena and Torrance's (1976) What-Kind-of-Person-Are-You checklist, and following path analyses, they found that personality types can predict the creativity styles. However, they recommended more research in this area.

Among other factors that are related to creativity and can predict creativity styles are thinking styles. "Thinking styles are very relevant to creativity as they reflect people's preferred ways of using the abilities that they have" (Zhu & Zhang, 2011, p. 363). However, to the researchers' best knowledge, few, if any, studies have been done on the relationship between thinking styles and creativity styles in educational contexts in

general, and in EFL contexts, in particular. Therefore, this study aims at studying the EFL learners' thinking styles and creativity styles in Iranian context. The second and more important aim was to investigate the predictive power of thinking styles for creativity styles.

The importance of researching the relationship between thinking styles and creativity, as Balchin and Jackson (2005) noted, could be productive for several reasons: (1) it helps teachers and researchers to discover what creativity styles work best for different students; (2) it helps teachers to appreciate why the same problems are solved differently by different students; and (3) it helps those teachers who prefer group creativity.

Thinking Styles

Thinking styles are the preferred ways of thinking. These are not abilities but rather the ways that we use abilities we have (Sternberg, 1997). The styles that are used are not coincidental but rather they are the mirrors of persons' minds. Sternberg's (1988) self-government theory is established on this idea. It assimilates diversity of controlling and managing everyday mental activities to the governing of society. This theory has three functions (legislative, executive and judicial), four forms (monarchic, hierarchic, oligarchic and anarchic), two levels (global and local), two scopes (internal and external), and two learning aspects (conservative and progressive). Its functions "are reflected both in mental processes and problems that utilize them and in the styles that they generate" (p. 1). Each function has its own processes and styles. Legislative style characterizes individuals who enjoy creating their own rules and prefer problems that do not have pre-structured solutions. Individuals with an executive style mostly like to face problems with prefabricated tested solutions. Finally, judicial style involves judgmental activities. People with such style tend to evaluate rules and procedures, and prefer activities that exercise the judicial function. Other styles are global, local, progressive, conservative, hierarchic, monarchic, oligarchic, anarchic, internal and external (definition of each style is given in Appendix 1). Following this theory, MSG Thinking Styles Inventory (Sternberg & Wagner, 1991) was developed. The inventory consists of 104 items, 8 items for each style. Zhang (2004), by referring to her previous studies on thinking styles, classified the styles in three types. Type I thinking styles, which include creativity-generating styles and "denote higher levels of cognitive complexity" (p. 1552), are the legislative, judicial, hierarchical, global, and liberal

(progressive) styles. Type II, which characterizes styles with norm-favoring tendencies and denotes “lower levels of cognitive complexity” (p. 1552), consists of executive, local, monarchic, and conservative styles. The remaining styles, Type III, (anarchic, oligarchic, internal, and external) have a mediocre role i.e., “they may manifest the characteristics of the styles from both groups, depending on the stylistic demand of the specific task” (p. 1552). Depending on the situation, they tend to have the characteristics of either group. The inventory has been used in many studies some of which are reviewed below.

Zhang and Postiglione (2001) investigated the relationship between students’ thinking styles, socio-economic status (SES), and self-esteem. They found that, regardless of age, the students with creativity-generating and more complex thinking styles, and those who reported higher self-esteem tend to be a member of high SES. They discussed that the reason is that students with higher SES tend to be involved in more challenging situations. This exposure expands their horizons and makes them more analytical.

Zhang (2002) in her paper intended to study the relationship between thinking styles and personality traits. Results of her study showed that thinking styles and personality traits statistically overlapped, though in a limited way. However, she discussed that this overlapping does not reject the necessity of measuring thinking styles and personality traits separately. Because, thinking styles make unique contribution to the understanding of individual differences; additionally, the purposes behind using and measuring each inventory are different. Indeed the two measures are inextricably entwined. Fan and Zhang (2009) examined the relationship between thinking styles and achievement motivation among Chinese university students. Results of their study showed that the more creativity-generating and complex thinking styles were positively correlated with achievement motivation to approach success and negatively correlated with achievement motivation to avoid failure. They contended that students who predispose toward using open and creative thinking styles tended to be more confident when they are facing with uncertain conditions.

Zhang (2009) examined the relationship between anxiety and thinking style among university students in China. She found that creativity-generating styles and the external style were negatively related to the anxiety, whereas the conservative style was positively related to the anxiety. She discussed that those students with creativity and external thinking styles are more resistant to the anxiety than those whose thinking style

is conservative. Zhang (2010) studied the relationship between thinking styles and psychosocial development among Chinese students. She found that creativity-generating thinking styles positively and monarchic and conservative thinking styles negatively contribute to the psychosocial development. Abdi (2012), using Wagner and Sternberg's (1991) questionnaire, studied the relationship between thinking style and critical thinking style among Iranian students enrolling in higher education. He found that there were significant relationships between thinking styles and critical thinking styles. It has been discussed that because thinking styles can contribute to the development of critical thinking style, instructors should take thinking styles into full account in order to develop critical thinking skills among students.

There are many similar studies that have been done on the relationship between thinking styles and various psychological and physiological aspects of students' immediate and distant domains of life. However, the relationship between thinking styles and creativity styles has not been given due attention. Recently, Zhu and Zhang (2011) investigated the relationship between thinking styles and conceptions of creativity among 917 Chinese university students. Using Sternberg's (2007) Thinking Styles Inventory-Revised II (TSR-II) and Conceptions of Creativity Scales (CCT), developed based on Sternberg and Lubarts' Investment Theory, as the measuring instruments, they found that motivation plays the foremost role in nurturing creative personnel and intelligence plays the second role. Personality, knowledge and environment were regarded as third to fifth important factors in creativity. Findings of their study also provided empirical evidence for the significant relationships between thinking styles and conceptions of creativity; all three types of thinking styles were related to motivation and intelligence factors for identifying creative talents. Though they attempted to demonstrate the relatedness of the two concepts, again the strategies that creative thinkers employ are absent in such studies. One reason may be related to the assumption that creativity-generating thinking styles overlapped creativity styles.

Generally, Zhang (2001) states that individual differences in abilities partially answer to the question that why students with the same abilities perform differently in their lessons; there must be some non-ability measures that can affect the students' performance and achievement. She maintains that it is generally acceptable that there is no absolutely perfect thinking style to deal with a learning task. However, those thinking styles which more likely enable students to adapt themselves to new situations and to solve the creatively problems of both present and future are more effective.

Therefore, in addition to realizing students' thinking styles, exploring those strategies that students should follow for strengthening their creativity is paramount.

One of the main underpinning assumptions beyond conducting research on intellectual styles, in general, and thinking styles, in particular, has been foregrounding the students' preferences in language classrooms and making their teachers aware of them. Along with this movement, Zhang (2004) attempted to demonstrate if university students' thinking styles affect their teaching preferences. Results of his study indicated that regardless of factors such as age, gender, university class level, and academic discipline, students' thinking styles were correlated with specific teaching approaches.

Considering all these facts and recognizing the complex nature of the interaction among these diverse aspects of creativity, on the one hand, and importance of the thinking styles reported in the recent survey of research, on the other hand, has led the researchers to investigate the relationship between thinking styles and creativity styles among EFL students in Iran.

Method

Design of the Study

The current study is a quantitative survey study that used questionnaire for data collection. Probabilistic (random) sampling was taken for selecting the respondents. All the respondents were Iranian EFL learners studying at Ilam University. The criteria of selecting the sample population were (1) the students' major: the researchers intended to work in the EFL area and generalize the findings to this field, (2) the students' ability in reading and comprehending original version of the questionnaires which allow the researchers not to translate the questionnaires, and (3) the students' level of study: all were BA students. Andres (2012) noted that results of survey studies are used for two general purposes, to generalize over large populations or to transfer to similar situations. Finding of this survey study intended to be used for the latter.

Participants

One hundred and ten EFL students, sixty females and fifty males, at Ilam University, Iran, were randomly selected for this study. Their age ranged from 18 to 26 and most of them, except fifteen (these students hold BA and graduated from university), were BA students. The data were collected during four days, forty-five minutes in each day.

Instrumentation

To measure the participants' thinking and creativity styles, MSG Thinking Styles Inventory (Sternberg & Wagner, 1991) and Creativity Styles Questionnaire-Revised (Kumar & Holman, 1997) were used.

Creativity Styles Questionnaire-Revised

The Creativity Styles Questionnaire-Revised (Kumar & Holman, 1997) explores the way people go about accomplishing the creative act. The term "creative", as Kumar and Holman (1997) point out, is used in the sense of doing everyday things in new ways. The questionnaire consists of 78 items and 8 scales. Since for each statement the participants were asked to rate themselves on a 5-point scale, some of the scales were reversed for scoring. The scales are:

1. Kumar and Holman's Global Measure of Creativity Capacity. The scale consists of two items, and measures the extent to which a person perceives herself/himself to be creative.
2. Belief in Unconscious Processes. The scale consists of seventeen items that measure the extent to which a person believes in the creative process as insightful and inspirational over which he/she has little control.
3. Use of Techniques. The eighteen items in this scale measure the extent to which a person uses specific strategies to facilitate his/her creative work.
4. Use of other people. The nine items on the scale reflect the extent to which a person consults other people, work with other people, or share ideas or creative products with other people.
5. Final Product Orientation. The seven items on the scale reflect the extent to which people are motivated to engage in creative work by the development of a final product.
6. Environmental Control/Behavioral Self-Regulation. The eighteen items on the scale measure the extent to which a person sets up discriminative stimuli to self-regulate, or facilitate his/her creative work.
7. Superstition. The two items on the scale measure the extent to which a person engages in superstitious behavior to facilitate creative work.
8. Use of the Senses. The five items on this scale measure the extent to which a person uses the five senses for creative work.

Before administration, the questionnaire was judged by four faculty members of

English Department at Ilam University. These faculty members were all associate professors who have been extensively interested in research in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Additionally, they were all familiar with survey study design and, therefore, their comments could be useful for completing the task. They commented that some of the items are culturally-loaded and should be revised. For instance, the words “alcohol” or “caffeine” in items related to the “superstition” scale were substituted with “tea” and “sugar”. It should be noted that just some words in the items were replaced and other parts of the items remained intact. After revisions, once again the judges meticulously read the questionnaire and reported that it can be used in Iranian context. Regarding reliability, the reported alpha reliability by Kumar and Holman (1997) for the scales is respectively .76, .70, .81, .74, .45, .83, .72, and .76. Obtained Cronbach alpha for the scales in this study were respectively .81, .68, .85, .77, .56, .80, .70, and .79.

Thinking Styles Inventory

The MSG Thinking Styles Inventory measures 13 different styles of thinking (see Appendix 1 for the definition of each style). The inventory is based on Sternberg’s (1988) theory of mental self-government. It consists of 104 items that the respondents rated themselves on a 7-point scale, from 1 to 7, which 1 indicated that the item does not apply to them and 7 indicated that the item extremely well characterizes them.

Obtained reliability and validity for the questionnaire are fairly encouraging (Abdi, 2012; Alipour *et al.*, 2012; Sternberg & Wagner, 1991; Zhang, 2001, 2004, 2009, 2011; Zhang & Postiglione, 2001). Reported subscale reliabilities (Coefficient Alpha) by Sternberg and Wagner (1991) for college students ranged from .42 to .88; Monarchic (.42), and External (.88). The Coefficient Alpha obtained for subscales in this study ranged from .51 (Monarchic) to .89 (Legislative). Inter-scale correlation for determining the validity of the inventory was satisfying e.g., conservative style negatively correlated with progressive style (-.17, $p < 0.001$).

Procedure for Data Collection

This study was commenced in the early 2015. The questionnaires elaborated and described above were administered among EFL students at Ilam University in February, 2015, by three students and two PhD students. The process of administrating

questionnaires and collecting them took about two to three weeks. After receiving the completed questionnaires, the researchers began to extract required data and prepared them for further statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, descriptive statistics were computed to determine mean and standard deviation of each subscale among EFL students in Iran. Correlation coefficient was calculated for determining the relationship between EFL students' thinking styles and creativity styles subscales. And finally, multiple regressions were used to test if thinking styles can predict EFL students' creativity styles.

Results

Relationship between Thinking Styles and Creativity Styles

As Table 1 shows, significant correlation coefficients were observed among thinking and creativity styles. All the subscales in 13 thinking styles were significantly related to the Kumar and Holman's (1997) Global Measure of Creativity Capacity subscale in creativity style inventory. Conversely, most subscales, except monarchic and oligarchic styles, did not show any relationship with superstition creativity style. EFL students with creativity-generating thinking styles (using Zhang's (2004) words) tend to use their senses for doing creative works, and students with norm-favoring thinking styles engage in creative works for the development of final products.

Regarding one by one relationships, strong correlations ($p < 0.001$) were observed between "legislative thinking style" with, belief in unconscious processes, use of techniques, use of the senses; "judicial style" with Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity and environmental control/behavioral self-regulation; "local style" with Kumar and Holman's (1997) global measure of creativity capacity and final product orientation; "monarchic style" with Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity, use of other people, final product orientation, and environmental control/behavioral self-regulation; "conservative style" with final product orientation; "anarchic style" with Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity and belief in unconscious processes; "external style" with Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity and use of other people; "hierarchical style" with final product orientation. Total relationships are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficient of creativity and thinking styles

	Creativity¹	Process	Technique	Others	Product	Control	Superstition	Senses
Legislative	.70 **	.79 ***	.83 ***	.28	.74 **	.17	-.14	.94 ***
Executive	.72 **	-.38	.61 *	.03	.69 **	.73 **	-.30	.68 **
Judicial	.97 ***	-.08	.56 *	-.04	.77 **	.91 ***	-.30	.66 **
Global	.71 **	.75 **	.23	.40	-.24	-.03	.11	-.11
Local	.88 ***	-.14	.14	-.22	.88 ***	-.19	.006	.02
Progressive	.79 **	-.19	.59 *	-.02	.07	.58 *	.14	.78 **
Conservative	.64 **	.43	-.22	-.61 *	.94 ***	-.17	.08	-.37
Hierarchic	.59 *	-.008	.79 **	.24	.95 ***	.32	.43	.69 **
Monarchic	.95 ***	.08	.32	.90 ***	.92 ***	.97 ***	.60 *	.31
Oligarchic	.66 **	.29	-.06	.61 **	.67 **	.73 **	.62 **	.31
Anarchic	.98 ***	.89 ***	.26	-.11	-.02	-.01	.34	-.54 *
Internal	.76 **	.55 *	.32	.37	.70 **	.20	.41	-.28
External	.80 ***	-.33	-.24	.88 ***	-.33	.53 *	.30	.38

¹Note: Kumar and Holman's Global Measure of **Creativity** Capacity; Belief in Unconscious **Processes**; Use of **Techniques**; Use of **other** people; Final **Product** Orientation; Environmental **Control**/Behavioral Self-Regulation; **Superstition**; Use of the **Senses**

* p<.05

** p<.01

*** P<.001

Predicting Creativity Styles from Thinking Styles

For the purpose of predicting creativity styles from thinking styles multiple-regression analysis was run. Results indicated that 8 out of 13 thinking styles significantly predict creativity styles: legislative, progressive, conservative, hierarchical, monarchic, oligarchic, anarchic, and external. The amount of variance in students' preferred creativity style predicted by their thinking styles were .74% for Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity, .80% for belief in unconscious processes, .62% for use of techniques, .86 for use of other people, .65% for final product orientation, .76% for environmental control/behavioral self-regulation, .59% for superstition, and .49% for use of the senses.

Among the predictors, legislative, hierarchical, and external thinking styles positively predicted Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity creativity styles; anarchic and progressive thinking styles positively predicted belief in unconscious processes creativity styles; external, legislative, and progressive positively predicted use of techniques creativity styles; external, oligarchic, monarchic positively, and hierarchical negatively predicted use of other people; external, progressive, hierarchical, and monarchic positively predicted final product orientation; monarchic

and conservative positively predicted environmental control/behavioral self-regulation; legislative negatively, while external and oligarchic positively predicted superstition; external and monarchic positively predicted use of senses creativity styles. More detailed results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Predicting creativity styles from thinking styles (N=150)

	Creativity¹	Process	Technique	Others	Product	Control	Superstition	Senses
R	.74	.80	.62	.86	.65	.76	.59	.49
β	.26 _{leg} **	.25 _{Anar} **	.30 _{Ext}	.31 _{Ext} **	.33 _{Ext} **	.26 _{Mon} *	-.38 _{Leg}	.33 _{Ext} *
	.27 _{Hie} *	.31 _{Prog} *	.29 _{leg} *	.42 _{olig} *	.26 _{Prog} *	.32 _{Cons} *	.20 _{Ext} *	.23 _{Hie} *
	.25 _{Ext} *		.27 _{Prog} *	.22 _{Mon} **	.31 _{Hie} **		.45 _{Olig} *	
				-.24 _{Hier} *	.43 _{Mon} *			
F	8.61**	9.22**	6.09**	24.13**	12.34**	34.02**	4.86*	4.32*
df	149	149	149	149	149	149	149	149

Note. Leg=legislative, Prog=progressive, Hier=hierarchical, Mon=monarchic, Olig=oligarchic, Ana=anarchic, Ext=external. ¹ Kumar and Holman's Global Measure of Creativity Capacity; Belief in Unconscious Processes; Use of Techniques; Use of other people; Final Product Orientation; Environmental Control/Behavioral Self-Regulation; Superstition; Use of the Senses

* p<.05

** p<.01

Discussion

This study was an attempt to study the relationships between thinking styles and creativity styles, and the contribution of thinking styles in prediction of EFL students' creativity styles.

As regards the relationship between EFL students' thinking and creativity styles, it was found that EFL students in Iran perceive themselves as creative people. All 13 thinking style subscales positively related to the Kumar and Holman's (1997) global measure of creativity capacity which is shown in Table 1. Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity measures the extent to which one perceives himself/herself a creative person. Therefore, regardless of their thinking styles, EFL students showed that they tend to be creative thinkers. "However, creative thinkers do

not necessarily stick to or possess only one thinking style; it is very helpful if one is able to use other thinking styles” (Zhu & Zhang, 2011, p. 363). As these students characterize themselves as creative persons, it can be implied that they can alternatively adapt their thinking style to the situations.

Legislative thinking style correlated with Kumar and Holman’s global measure of creativity capacity, belief in unconscious processes, use of techniques, final product orientation, and use of the senses. It shows that those students, who like situations that need creativity and planning perceive themselves as creative persons, unconsciously provide creative solutions for the problems, and use their senses and specific strategies to develop final products. Sternberg (1997) contends that disappointingly current school programs and teaching approaches discourage legislative style. He believes that since students with this style prefer to make their own rules do not need to memorize facts and pre-established formulas. Findings of this study showed the same trend among EFL learners in Iranian universities and suggested that students find their own way and by using their techniques and strategies make final products.

Executive style that characterizes students who prefer to follow established rules correlated with Kumar and Holman’s global measure of creativity capacity, use of techniques, environmental control/behavioral self-regulation, and use of the senses creativity styles. It means that they build their creativity on the structured rules, and by serving specific strategies and internal or external stimuli, in addition to the use of their senses provide solutions for problems or create something. Sternberg (1997) sees pressure from school as a reason for adopting this style by the students. It seems that exposing safe and sound rules can provide opportunities for such students to be creative in their own best.

Judicial style correlated with Kumar and Holman’s global measure of creativity capacity, use of techniques, final product orientation, environmental control/behavioral self-regulation, use of the senses. EFL students with such thinking style prefer to have external or internal stimuli, and by using strategies and senses develop a product.

Global and local styles had shown relationship with Kumar and Holman’s global measure of creativity capacity. However, students with global style view creativity as unconscious insight while local ones prefer to see the final product. No relationships with other creativity styles were observed regarding the two styles. Similarly, progressive and conservative thinkers perceive themselves as creative person.

Conservative thinkers prefer to receive consultation and help from other and see the final product that they produce. However, progressive thinkers perceive creativity as unconscious process and by using their senses, techniques, and environmental or self-regulated stimuli find new solution for problems or make something.

Hierarchical thinkers prefer to use techniques and senses to create a concrete product. According to Stenberg (1997), situations that allow creation of hierarchy of goals for fulfillment are the favor of these thinkers. Providing such situations in addition to attending to the creativity styles that they prefer can enhance their creativity.

EFL students with monarchic and oligarchic thinking styles prefer similar creativity styles. They like to use other people, techniques, and external or internal stimuli to develop a product. Only these thinkers believe in superstition creativity style. They may prefer to drink, listen to music, smoke etc. before starting to create a product. Such similar preferences may show that creativity styles do not discriminate creative people. They just crystallize the preferences that creative thinkers employ to reach their aims.

Anarchic thinkers, like global ones, perceive themselves as creative people and view creativity as inspirational process. However, they use their senses during the creating process. EFL students with internal thinking style perceive creativity as an inspirational process and prefer to observe the final product that they produce while external tinkers prefer to use other people or environmental and self-regulated stimuli during the creativity process.

Regarding the classification of thinking styles by (Zhang, 2004), it was found that students with Type I styles, creativity-generating styles, preferred to use their senses for creativity. This tendency is predictable; thinkers of this type do not limit themselves to the available rules and use their senses to go beyond the limits and create new ways for the current problems. Students with Type II, norm-favoring styles, harmoniously preferred to observe the final product that they produce. No similar tendency was shown by Type III. This finding shows that students of Type III styles change their direction in accordance with circumstances.

The second purpose of the study was the contribution of EFL students' thinking styles to their favorite creativity styles. Results of multiple-regression analyses indicated that thinking styles, positively or negatively, predict the students' creativity styles.

Among Type I, positive prediction of the Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity and use of technique styles and negative prediction of superstition

style by legislative thinking style make sense. Those students who prefer situations that demand creativity use specific techniques and do not believe in superstition. Likewise, hierarchical thinkers who define hierarchy of goals for fulfillment prefer to define their own goals and use their senses. This style negatively makes contribution to the students' use of other people creativity style. Progressive style positively predicted belief in unconscious processes, use of technique, and final product orientation. Though thinking styles in Type I did not show harmonious contribution to the EFL students' creativity styles, results confirmed Sternberg's (1997) elaboration of these styles and Zhang's (2004) typology of them – the styles tend to show that creative thinkers prefer to work on their own rules.

Type II of thinking styles (monarchic and conservative) positively predicted environmental control/behavioral self-regulation. Meanwhile, monarchic thinking style predicted that EFL students of this thinking type like to work with other people, final product orientation, and use senses for creativity. Results indicate that norm-favoring thinking styles demonstrate the students' preference for relying on well-defined and preexisted rules for creativity, the rules may be self or environmental controlled.

Regarding Type III styles, three of the thinking styles (external, anarchic, and oligarchic styles) positively contributed to the prediction of creativity styles. External thinking style simultaneously contributed to the prediction of Kumar and Holman's global measure of creativity capacity, use of techniques, final product orientation, use of other people, use of senses, and superstition creativity styles. Anarchic thinking style makes contribution to the students' belief in process creativity style. Similar to the external thinking style, oligarchic style predicted EFL students' use of other people and superstition creativity styles.

The sample population of this study was EFL students in Iran. Results of the study indicated that EFL students in Iran perceived their thinking styles and creativity styles in a way that can be reflected on their orientation towards specified tasks in language classes. The correspondence between thinking and creativity styles implies that EFL students in Iran should be treated based on their thinking styles and move towards their creativity perspectives in order to reach satisfying results.

Implications

This study made contribution to the literature concerning thinking styles and creativity styles. Both EFL students and teachers can highly benefit from the

pedagogical implications of this study. EFL Teachers should be aware that their students possess various thinking and creativity styles and prefer to use their abilities in different ways. Understanding such differences and variability can encourage EFL teachers to teach in ways that reach all students and enable them to benefit from instructions. Moreover, being aware of the relationships between thinking and creativity styles can induce teachers to provide conditions through which students highly engage in the learning process.

One of the major implications of this study is reemphasizing the fact that no two students learn in the same way and no two students enroll the language classroom with similar backgrounds. Any EFL/ESL instructor who comes to the classroom needs to be aware of these two fundamental concepts. This fact is generalizable to any learning process and context. Through determining and taking learners' creativity styles and thinking styles into account, EFL/ESL instructors can equip their students with favorable strategies and provide learnable situations via variety of tasks.

Findings of this study also implies that using various number of language learning tasks in the classroom and requiring students to participate actively and creatively could enhance the learning opportunities. Students have variety of thinking styles and creativity styles, and instructors and practitioners should be aware of these abilities, employ variety of tasks, and make room for students' brainstorming and creativity.

Findings suggest that EFL/ESL instructors should treat their students in correspondence with their creativity styles. They need to be aware of the contingent methods and educational situations which are helpful in fostering creativity and ultimately language learning.

Additionally, findings of the study can be employed by book designers, curriculum developers, and in general policy makers to take into account EFL students' tendencies and predispositions. Furthermore, all those academic specialists working the area of EFL and attempting to help their students to be creative can be influenced by the findings so as to promote their students creative thinking and creativity styles. In this way, they can motivate their students and facilitate the process of language learning.

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Limitations

After reviewing literature, the researchers found that thinking styles and creativity styles were among the most relevant styles to EFL context which were overlooked by researchers in the field. Therefore, investigating the relationship between these two

styles was regarded as the main motivation for doing the study. The main conclusion of the study has been the positive correlation between creativity-oriented thinking styles and creativity styles. This conclusion can contribute to the centrality of thinking and creativity styles in EFL context in Iran.

The main recommendation for further study along the present one is to do empirical studies. Finding relationship and correlation between different variables in a survey study does not imply causal relations. Conducting experimental studies and collecting empirical evidence can be a complement for correlational studies. Therefore, it is highly recommended to conduct studies on the effects of the correspondence between thinking, creativity, and teaching styles in EFL classrooms regarding four reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

As any other studies, the current study had its own limitations. The main limitation is the primary intention for generalizing the findings to EFL population studying in BA level. To make safe generalization to other levels or contexts, it requires conducting a national survey study. Another limitation is skipping age, gender, and language and cultural background in the stages of data collection and data analysis. Studying intellectual variables in relation to these variables could produce more effective and applicable findings. Therefore, researchers are recommended to take these variables into account for further study.

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Appendix 1. Definition of Thinking Styles

Thinking styles	Definition
Legislative	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on tasks that require creative strategies.
Executive	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on tasks with clear-cut rules and instructions
Judicial	Characterizes an individual who prefers tasks which allow for evaluating one's or other people evaluation
Hierarchical	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on tasks with priority
Monarchical	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on tasks which requires complete focus at a time
Oligarchic	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on multiple tasks at a time
Anarchic	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on tasks that would allow flexibility
Global	Characterizes an individual who prefers to pay more attention to abstract ideas
Local	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on tasks with concrete and objective details
Internal	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work on tasks that allow one to work independently
External	Characterizes an individual who prefers to work in collaboration with others
Liberal	Characterizes an individual who prefers tasks that involve innovation
Conservative	Characterizes an individual who prefers tasks which can be done with existing rules and procedures



On the Consideration of Existing ESP Syllabuses in Iranian Educational Setting

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Abstract

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as an approach rather than a product. They mean that ESP does not follow a specific methodology, instructional materials, or instruction. Rather, they mention learners' needs as the most significant consideration of ESP. This study was an attempt to elaborate on the present ESP syllabuses in Iranian educational setting and the extent to which they correspond with the ESP standards and criteria. To this end, 110 university students, selected through cluster random sampling, and 22 ESP instructors, selected randomly, participated in the study. The main data gathering instrument was a checklist for course book evaluation. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used. The results indicated that in

majority of the cases, Iranian ESP textbooks which are mostly provided by SAMT organization are not in accordance with ESP criteria. Because it was revealed that regarding the most important skills such as listening, speaking, and writing, the current ESP textbooks do not allocate any, or enough, space; therefore, learners cannot benefit from these skills which are of considerable significance in their future careers.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, book evaluation, checklist, ESP principles

Introduction

Certainly, a great deal about the origins of ESP can be written. Considerably, there are three major reasons common to the emergence of all ESP: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) stated two key historical periods which paved the way for ESP to come into vogue. First, the end of the Second World War brought with it an "... age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale, for various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role of international language fell to English" (p. 6). After that, the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into the oil-rich countries. The language of this knowledge became English. The general impact of all this development was to apply pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required goods. Whereas English had previously decided its own destiny, it now became subject to the wishes, requirements, and demands of people other than language teachers (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The second key reason mentioned as having a profound influence on the emergence of ESP was a revolution in linguistics. Whereas traditional linguists managed to describe the features of language, revolutionary vanguards in linguistics began to lay emphasis on the ways via which language is used in real communication. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) highlighted that one significant discovery was in the ways that spoken and written English vary. That is to say, given the specific context in which English is used, the variant of English will change. This idea was taken one step farther. That is to say, if language varies in different situations, then it is also possible to alter language instruction to meet the needs of learners in particular contexts. Hence, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, there were many attempts to describe English for

Science and Technology (EST). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify Ewer and Latorre, Swales, Selinker and Trimble as a few of the eminent pioneers in English for Science and Technology (EST).

The final reason Hutchinson and Waters (1987) refer to as affecting the emergence of ESP has less to do with linguistics but everything to do with psychology. Rather than putting emphasis on the method of language delivery, more attention was devoted to various language acquisition methods and the ways through which learners acquire language. Learners were observed to draw upon different learning strategies, employ different skills, enter with various learning schemata, and be motivated by varied needs and interests. Therefore, focus on the learners' needs became equally as paramount as the methods employed to distribute linguistic knowledge. Moreover, designing specific courses to meet these individual needs was a natural extension of this thinking.

Being two different branches of the same trunk, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and GE (General English) share the same principles of language teaching and possess effective and efficient learning as their main objective. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the chief difference between ESP and GE lies in the awareness of a need. ESP learners are current or future specialists who need English for their specific area and are aware of their needs in this regard. They know exactly what they need English for, and they know what the ESP course should offer them. Therefore, ESP is not considered a language product, but rather an approach to language teaching which puts emphasis on learners needs. In other words, it is an approach in which all decisions "as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Having prominent significance in all educational settings, textbooks are considered as inseparable elements of ESP courses. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) believe that textbooks are known as universal elements of English language teaching and each year, various projects all around the world are implemented in order to produce these significant elements. Moreover, Richards and Renandya (2002) hold the view that textbooks are very important factors, because they provide a specific framework for both learners and teachers to follow. Moreover, according to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), when we think about English as a foreign language, textbooks are the only way to expose learners to English language. Therefore, due to the undeniable importance of textbooks in different majors and the process of learning and teaching in ELT, it seems logical to elaborate on different textbooks and discover their strong points and pitfalls.

Regarding this issue, Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011) cite that in Iranian EFL context, the systematic evaluation of textbooks is not usually carried out and students' needs and opinions regarding the materials designed for them are mostly ignored. Similarly, Eslami-Rasekh (2005) mentioned that ESP textbooks provided for the students of engineering by the Ministry of Higher Education in Iran is not based on any systematic needs analysis.

ManafiAnari (2005) dealt with what he considers to be the major demerits of ESP practice in Iran. In his paper, he identified three major problems: un-preparedness of majority of the students for their ESP courses, the ESP textbooks' unduly high level of difficulty, inappropriate material design and development. Finally, he suggested certain ways for overcoming these problems.

However, despite the above-mentioned studies and many other explorations on ESP programs and textbooks, it seems that very few studies have yet been conducted with regard to the investigation of the current ESP syllabuses in Iranian educational setting and their correspondence with the standard principles of ESP. therefore, the current study aims at considering the existing syllabuses in Iran in order to find out that to what extent the syllabuses designed for Iranian ESP programs match the standard principles and criteria of ESP and whether these principles are followed by ESP material designers in Iran educational setting. In other words, this study aims at reflecting on the following research question:

How and to what extent do the syllabuses of the existing Iranian ESP books correspond with the ESP criteria?

Literature review

English for specific purposes (ESP) refers to the teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language by the purpose of recognizing and covering the needs of learners in a particular domain. It is said that ESP is a "reaction against conventional foreign language instruction" (Strevens, 1977, p. 145).

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as an approach rather than a product. That is to say, they mean that ESP does not follow a specific methodology, instructional materials, or instruction. Rather, they mention that learners' needs are known as the most significant consideration of ESP. Therefore, the required instruction and materials should be provided based on this underlying concept, learners' needs. In addition, Robbinson (1991) accepts the essential significance of

learners' needs in ESP practice and defines it as a goal-directed process which should be built upon the learners' needs and wants. There are a lot of different definitions for ESP. However, what is common among all of them is the presence and significance of needs and wants of the learners which should be necessarily taken into consideration in all aspects of ESP especially its textbooks.

ESP text books have been of considerable concern to a great number of researchers in Iran and overseas. Then, based on the available frameworks and checklists, the ESP textbooks have been evaluated and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Many studies have evaluated the ESP textbooks according to learners' needs. Mehisto (2007) hold the view that in order to avoid the mismatch between the workplace needs and ESP courses offered, it is essential to collaborate with content specialists and also perform needs analysis. In a study conducted by Othman (2005), students ranked speaking and writing as the skills with the utmost significance. Likewise, Kwok (2004) recognized the need to develop oral and written communication skills among ESP learners. According to Romanowski and Sergey (2001), lack of communication skills is reported to be the most prominent problem in most of the ESP courses.

However, in a study conducted by Amirian and Tavakoli (2009), it was reported that ESP courses have been successful in establishing background knowledge on terminology and reading proficiency of that specific field for the prospective engineers. In his evaluation on the language needs of engineering students participating in ESP courses, Atai (2008) came to the conclusion that written skills and language components were of great significance for learners. He reported that the students had some difficulties with skills including reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Having evaluated ESP textbooks of Humanities used in undergraduate programs at Iranian universities, Zanjani (2009) reported that from the students' perspective, word formation and vocabulary exercises, vocabulary study through examples, reading comprehension and comprehension questions were considered inappropriate; whereas, pronunciation practice, vocabulary study through definition, grammar and translation exercises appropriate. Moreover, the results revealed that from the instructors' point of view, word formation exercises, grammatical exercises and translation practices were known to be inappropriate; whereas, pronunciation practice, vocabulary study through definition, reading comprehension texts and vocabulary exercises were reported to be appropriate. Therefore, regarding the inclusion and consideration of students' language and learning needs, the respondents' attitudes revealed that objectives and materials of

the textbooks were not in line with students' language and professional needs. Tayebipour (2005) addressed some major inadequacies of ESP curriculum in Iran in terms of instructors' competence and the design of the materials. He criticized the current read-only approach for being too narrow and inefficient, and offered some suggestions to improve the practice of ESP/EAP in the country.

Farhady (2005) discussed ESP parameters including needs, materials, method, learner, teacher, and context to be of great significance. Moreover, taking into account some issues such as carrying out thorough needs analysis, changing the design and concepts of the materials, training qualified teachers, and reforming the testing procedures, he decided to provide a series of suggestions to improve ESP programs in Iran. Moreover, in a study conducted by Khoshsima and Khosravani (2014) on ESP book evaluation, it was reported that majority of the ESP instructors all over Iran were not satisfied with the overall contents of the ESP textbooks and the books did not meet their expectations.

Methodology

Since this is a descriptive study, the researchers decided to investigate the extent to which syllabuses of ESP books in Iranian educational setting correspond with ESP criteria and standard principles. Therefore, due to descriptive nature of the present paper, the research question was a quantitative one without any hypothesis. In order to explore answers to the research question, a well-developed checklist was administered to a group of students at Yasouj University of medical sciences. The checklist was given to the students who had already passed the ESP courses. Moreover, the checklist was administered to some lecturers teaching ESP programs, because the purpose was to seek their viewpoints on the current ESP books syllabuses as well.

Participants

Benefiting from cluster random sampling, the researchers selected participants of the present study from students and lecturers at Yasouj University of medical sciences. Therefore, from among different ESP classes, 4 intact classrooms were randomly selected and the checklist was given to all the students in those classes. Moreover, 35 checklists were distributed among instructors, who were selected randomly, in the above-mentioned University; however, since not all the instructors cooperated with the researchers, the number of lecturers participating in the study reduced to 22 cases. In

the next step, the same checklist was distributed among 110 students who had studied ESP in medical sciences at the same university. Since they had studied these courses and had enough experience with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of these types of textbooks, their views and suggestions could be considered as highly significant.

Instrumentation

In the current study, the main instrument for data collection was a well-developed checklist provided by Demir and Ertas (2014). Due to the type of the questions, this checklist can provide us both quantitative and qualitative data. Checklist method is considered as one of the most widely adopted ways of judging course books and there are plenty of ELT course book evaluation checklists which are designed for making material selection and evaluation process easier and more systematic. As distinct from many other available checklists, this is an eclectic checklist by borrowing items from quite different evaluation instruments available in the literature.

In addition to the above-mentioned checklist, some ESP textbooks, following almost the same pattern in every section, provided by SAMT organization were also used in order to be taken into account in the present paper. Since SAMT (the organization for researching and composing University textbooks in humanities) is a great organization for providing Iranian ESP textbooks for almost all majors in general and medical sciences in particular, the researchers decided to choose some popular textbooks being taught every year in Iranian universities of medical sciences in order to find answers to the research question. The ESP books which were investigated in this study were as follows:

English for the Students of Nursing, written by Kayhani , Akbari, Barekat, and Goudarzi (2002)

English for the Students of Emergency Care written by Shokrpour and Sedigh (2007)

English for the Students of Midwifery written by Ahmad Soltani(2001)

Special English for the Students of Health Care Management written by Aminlari, Keshtkaran, Sajadi, and Totonchi (2004)

Procedure

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the current ESP syllabuses in Iran and the extent to which they correspond with the existing ESP criteria and principles. Since textbooks constitute an undeniable part in ESP courses, analyzing them to

consider their degree of obedience to ESP standards and criteria is of considerable significance. Therefore, the researchers decided to choose some ESP books provided by SAMT organization and examine their contents against ESP principles. To this end, a checklist was distributed among a number of students and ESP instructors at Yasouj University of medical sciences. They were asked to respond to questions listed in the checklist by providing “YES” or “NO” answers to each item. In addition, the last question of the checklist was an open-ended statement, as complimentary to the checklist questions, which needed to be answered by all participants. In this way, more in-depth responses and ideas could be gathered with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of the ESP books being investigated; because participants can have various ideas and suggestions which may not be highlighted through a checklist per se.

In order for the students to answer the checklist questions, they were asked to allocate the last 20 minutes of their class time for this purpose. Moreover, the researchers personally met the instructors to give them the checklist and gather the required data. It should be mentioned that all of the students participating in this study completed the checklist in the presence of the researchers, because there might be a need for extra explanation and elaboration on some items of the checklist. The researchers also assured the participants of confidentiality of the data. Finally, when the data was collected, they were all entered into the SPSS, version 22. Then, depending on the research question, appropriate statistical procedures, mainly descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and inferential statistics (chi-square test), were selected to analyze the data.

Results

As mentioned in previous sections, the main purpose of the present study was to elaborate on the current ESP syllabuses in Iranian educational setting and their correspondence with principles of ESP. To this end, four books, following the same framework in every section, which were provided by SAMT organization, were taken into consideration. In order to analyze the items of checklist in detail, they were divided into three main categories: subjects and contents, skills and sub-skills, and practical considerations. Results of the first category, questions 1 to 10, are shown in Table 1.

As shown in this table, questions in the first category which account for subjects and contents of ESP books were answered almost in the same way by both students and instructors. In majority of the cases, both groups believed that contents of the books are

not really interesting and they do not adequately strengthen motivation of ESP learners. Moreover, based on 86% of participants' ideas, these books lack enough variety in subject and content and they follow a monotonous pattern. However, in Table 1, it is revealed that texts and topics of the books are free from any kind of discrimination and both groups (more than 85%) agree on this issue.

Table 1. Students' and instructors' responses to the first category questions (subjects and contents)

Answers Questions	Students' responses			Instructors' responses		
	YES	NO	Total Number	YES	NO	Total Number
Q1	21 (19.1%)	89 (80.9%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q2	15 (13.6%)	95 (86.4%)	110	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)	22
Q3	48 (43.6%)	62 (56.4%)	110	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	22
Q4	21 (19.1%)	89 (80.9%)	110	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)	22
Q5	30 (27.3%)	80 (72.7%)	110	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	22
Q6	15 (13.6%)	95 (86.4%)	110	3 (13.6%)	19 (86.4%)	22
Q7	27 (24.5%)	83 (75.5%)	110	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)	22
Q8	101 (91.8%)	9 (8.2%)	110	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)	22
Q9	75 (68.2%)	35 (31.8%)	110	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	22
Q10	26 (23.6%)	84 (76.4%)	110	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)	22

In addition to the information provided by descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, mainly the chi-square test, also revealed that since $\chi^2 = 33.2$, $DF = 9$, and $Sig = .000$, there is a statistically significant difference between the participants' responses given to the questions in category 1 (Table 2).

Table 2. Inferential statistics for participants' responses to the first category questions

	Value	DF	Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi Square	33.2	9	.000

The second category including questions 11 and 35 has to do with skills and sub-skills covered by the ESP books being investigated. In order to elaborate on this section in detail, this category was divided into comprehension skills (reading and listening), production skills (speaking and writing), and sub-skills (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation).

Questions 11 to 13 have to do with the reading skills. As shown in table 3, more than 60% of the participants believed that reading comprehension is somehow satisfactory in these ESP books. However, while 67% of students believed that there is no wide range of various reading text with different subject contents, 68% of the instructors mentioned that the books provide different reading texts including various contents. In addition, more than 70% of participants in both groups stated that texts are not authentic pieces of language.

Regarding listening skill, all of the instructors (100%) believed that there were no activities covering this important skill throughout the books. Moreover, more than 90% of the students also provided the same answer to questions 14 to 16 which account for this skill. Actually, both groups believed that no space is provided for this significant skill (Table 3).

Table 3. Students' and instructors' responses to the second category questions (comprehension skills)

Answers Questions	Students' responses			Instructors' responses		
	YES	NO	Total number	YES	NO	Total number
Q11	67 (60.9%)	43 (39.1%)	110	15 (68.2%)	7 (31.8%)	22
Q12	36 (32.7%)	74 (67.3%)	110	15 (68.2%)	7 (31.8%)	22
Q13	86 (78.2%)	24 (21.8%)	110	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)	22
Q14	9 (8.2%)	101 (91.8%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q15	8 (7.3%)	102 (92.7%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q16	7 (6.4%)	103 (93.6%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22

Moreover, the inferential statistics for this category revealed that, since $\chi^2 = 30$, DF = 5, and Sig = .000, there is a statistically significant difference between the participants' responses given to the questions in category 2 (Table 4).

Table 4. Inferential statistics for participants' responses to the second category questions

	Value	DF	Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi Square	30	5	.000

Table 5 provides results for production skills including speaking and writing. As shown in this table, almost all of the participants taking part in the study mentioned that speaking skill is totally forgotten in these textbooks and this skill is also ignored. In addition to the speaking skill, results of another production skill are also provided in Table 5.

In this table, it is indicated that more than 75% of both groups were not satisfied with the writing activities provided in the books; therefore, according to results shown in Table 5, it can be concluded that both of these production skills, speaking and writing, are to a great extent ignored in the ESP books being investigated (Table 5).

Table 5. Students' and instructors' responses to the second category questions (production skills)

Questions	Students' responses			Instructors' responses		
	Answers YES	NO	Total number	YES	NO	Total number
Q17	0 (0%)	110 (100%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q18	7 (6.4%)	103 (93.6%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q19	0 (0%)	110 (100%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q20	10 (9.1%)	100 (90.9%)	110	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)	22
Q21	18 (16.4%)	92 (83.6%)	110	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)	22
Q22	7	103	110	0	22	22

(6.4%) (93.6%) (0%) (100%)

Once again as shown in Table 6, by the use of Pearson chi square test as a type of inferential statistics, it was indicated that the responses participants provided to the questions in this category were significantly different.

Table 6. Inferential statistics for participants' responses to the third category questions

	Value	DF	Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi Square	49	5	.000

Table 7 shows the results for sub-skills. With regard to the vocabulary load of the books, both groups of participants believed that the amount of vocabulary presented in each unit is reasonable and their distribution seems rational, too. However, more than 70% of both groups stated that vocabularies are not integrated in various contexts and situations. However, with regard to the grammar and pronunciation parts as some other subs-kills covered by the books, both groups agreeably indicated that none of these two items are given weight throughout the books being investigated.

Table 7. Students' and instructors' responses to the second category questions (sub-skills)

Questions	Students' responses			Instructors' responses		
	Answers YES	NO	Total number	YES	NO	Total number
Q23	64 (58.2%)	46 (41.8%)	110	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	22
Q24	87 (79.1%)	23 (20.9%)	110	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)	22
Q25	75 (68.2%)	35 (31.8%)	110	13 (59.1%)	9 (40.9%)	22
Q26	87 (79.1%)	23 (20.9%)	110	19 (86.4%)	3 (13.6%)	22
Q27	26 (23.6%)	84 (76.4%)	110	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)	22
Q28	7 (6.4%)	103 (93.6%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q29	0 (0%)	110 (100%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q30	10 (9.1%)	100 (90.9%)	110	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)	22
Q31	0 (0%)	110 (100%)	110	3 (13.6%)	19 (86.4%)	22
Q32	23 (20.9%)	87 (79.1%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q33	10 (9.1%)	100 (90.9%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q34	9 (8.2%)	101 (91.8%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22

Q35	31 (28.2%)	79 (71.8%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
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The following table (table 8) shows the inferential statistics related to the 4th category. Since $\chi^2 = 69$, $DF = 12$, and $Sig = .000$, it is indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the responses participants gave to this category's questions.

Table 8. Inferential statistics for participants' responses to the fourth category questions

	Value	DF	Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi Square	69	12	.000

Question 36 to 42 were mostly accounting for layout and physical make-up of the books. In majority of the cases, students and instructors were satisfied with the general layout and price of the books. However, in some other cases, they believed that the books lack enough pictures, diagrams, tables and some other informative illustrations. Therefore, these issues can be mentioned as some pitfalls of the above-mentioned books regarding their general layout and framework.

Finally, Table 9 accounts for the results related to practical considerations of the books. In this table, it is shown that the books are up-to-date and they are published within the last 10 years. Moreover, more than 90% of participants stated that the books are easily accessible. However, almost all of them believe that no supplementary materials such as tapes, visual aids, or online materials are provided for these books, and in majority of the cases, it was stated that these books do not follow CLT principles as well as learning styles and strategies. Moreover, participants believed that no self-assessment activities are provided in the books and the type of syllabus design used in these books is not appropriate for ESP learners.

Table 9. Students' and instructors' responses to the third category questions (practical considerations)

Answers Questions	Students' responses			Instructors' responses		
	YES	NO	Total number	YES	NO	Total number
Q43	105 (95.5%)	5 (4.5%)	110	16 (72.7%)	6 (27.3%)	22
Q44	103 (93.6%)	7 (6.4%)	110	22 (100%)	0 (0%)	22

Q45	89 (80.9%)	21 (19.1%)	110	22 (100%)	0 (0%)	22
Q46	0 (0%)	110 (100%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q47	5 (4.5%)	105 (95.5%)	110	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)	22
Q48	7 (6.4%)	103 (93.6%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22
Q49	5 (4.5%)	105 (95.5%)	110	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)	22
Q50	0 (0%)	110 (100%)	110	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)	22
Q51	9 (8.2%)	101 (91.8%)	110	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)	22
Q52	10 (9.1%)	100 (90.9%)	110	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)	22
Q53	26 (23.6%)	84 (76.4%)	110	4 (18.2%)	18 (81.8%)	22
Q54	22 (20%)	88 (80%)	110	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	22
Q55	35 (31.8%)	75 (68.2%)	110	7 (31.8%)	15 (68.2%)	22
Q56	0 (0%)	110 (100%)	110	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22

This is also the table for inferential statistics indicating that Since $\chi^2 = 103$, DF = 13, and Sig = .000, there is a statistically significant difference between the responses participants provided for the last category's questions (Table 10).

Table 10. Inferential statistics for participants' responses to the fifth category questions

	Value	DF	Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi Square	103	13	.000

In addition to the quantitative results of the study, participants, in qualitative section, also mentioned some points which were mostly in accordance with their ideas presented in the checklist. In majority of the cases, participants believed that the current ESP textbooks do not contain all skills and sub-skills they need. Moreover, they stated that the internal designs of the books need to be changed somehow and decorated with some informative illustrations. Some of the participants also declared that if some videos containing materials related to the texts be added to the course books, they will become more interesting and appealing.

Discussion

In this study, attempts were made to investigate the degree to which current Iranian ESP textbooks follow the standard principles and criteria of ESP. The results indicated that in majority of the sections provided in the textbooks, there are some pitfalls and shortcomings which need to be pondered over by the syllabus and course book designers. Regarding the first category which accounted for the books' contents and subjects, more than 80% of the students and instructors participating in the study were dissatisfied with the issue and mentioned that these books are without enough motivational activities and most of them contain a monotonous pattern. Similarly, in a study conducted by Razmjoo and Raissi (2010) on some aspects of ESP books in Iran, it was reported that participants were dissatisfied with the contents and organizational features of the books. However, in another study conducted by Ghalandari and Talebnejad (2012) on the evaluation of some ESP textbooks, it was found that ESP textbooks in medicine are appropriate books for the purpose of medical English for Iranian physicians and compatible to student's needs and achievements.

Results of the second category revealed that considerable amount of focus is laid upon reading comprehension, but another comprehension skill, that is listening skill, is totally ignored in these books. In line with the same findings, Tayebipour (2005) criticized reading-only approach in effectiveness, and narrowness of ESP materials in Iranian educational setting. In addition to the comprehension skills, the production skills, speaking and writing, were also taken into consideration in this study. Findings indicated that these two skills were also given the least amount of attention throughout the ESP books provided by SAMT organization. Moreover, through the open-ended question coming at the end of the checklist, participants mentioned that they need to practice speaking and writing in English due to their career needs, but these skills are not given adequate weight in these course books.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the four skills, except reading skill, are not given enough space in these books. This is in line with what Tajeddin (2005) found in his study on some ESP textbooks published by SAMT organization. He concluded that SAMT textbooks on ESP not only lack one integrated approach and lesson plan, but also do not follow any specific purpose regarding the selected reading passages and activities designed for improving the learners comprehension or production abilities. In this regard, Rahimi (2008) also stated that space allocation to the four skills is not in line with curriculum objectives, and reading skill is the only main objective of the textbooks in EAP programs.

In addition, results of the current study revealed that not only are these three skills, listening, speaking, and writing, ignored to a great extent, but also other sub-skills including grammar and pronunciation are also forgotten in these ESP textbooks. In the ESP textbooks provided by SAMT organization, no explicit grammar focus or pronunciation practice is presented throughout the books.

In the last category focusing on practical considerations, it was found out that in majority of the cases, both groups were not highly satisfied with the overall practicality of the ESP course books, since they declared that the books do not possess any self-assessment sections, do not follow various learning styles and strategies, do not embrace different methodologies in ELT, and are not integrated into technology or some online activities. In a similar vein, Khoshshima and Khosravani (2014) stated that Iranian ESP instructors' opinions towards the current textbooks being used are not positive, and the ESP instructors all over the country are not fully satisfied with the content and some other sections embedded in ESP textbooks.

Moreover, in another study on ESP textbook evaluation which was conducted by Khoshshima and Ghasemi (2014), it was reported that the ESP textbooks used in faculties of management and fisheries at Chabahar Maritime University were not complied in correspondence with the learners' needs and wants; therefore, the books did not have enough power to motivate the students and facilitate their language learning.

A major point in ESP textbook writing is that any textbook should be compiled on the basis of learners' needs and wants. Students should be aware of the latest scientific advances and technologies which are growing fast. In this way, they can follow what others are doing in some other parts of the world. Therefore, English can be considered as an important tool for language learners to acquire the world's latest scientific breakthroughs and resources. To this end, all textbooks in general and ESP textbooks in particular need to be updated and equipped with the latest scientific improvements in each field.

Widdowson (1987) logically mentioned that the contents of ESP textbooks must be specified after detecting students' needs and desires and any obstacles or hindrances to this purpose should be removed. In a relevant study, Zanjani (2009) claimed that most of the ESP textbooks about liberal arts are inappropriate from the viewpoint of instructors and students and they are in dire need of immediate revision, since they do not meet the students' needs.

In their famous book, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) ask 6 questions about ESP textbook contents and syllabus:

- 1- **Why** do students need special English?
- 2- **Who** is involved in learning process?
- 3- **Where** does this process take place?
- 4- **When** does this process take place?
- 5- **What** do students need to learn?
- 6- **How** is this process accomplished?

In order to compile a successful ESP textbook, one should keep in mind that all these 6 questions need to be taken into consideration; otherwise, the book will not be an acceptable and appropriate one. Therefore, it can be concluded that the main problem of Iranian ESP textbooks in general and the ESP textbooks published by SAMT organization in particular is that the authors do not take these important factors into account. That is why, majority of the ESP students and instructors believe that ESP books in Iranian educational setting are inappropriate for a specific course. By the same token, Ahmadi and Rahimi (2012) enumerated variety of factors as barriers to ESP learning among Iranian university students among which textbooks' inefficiency was the most prominent one.

In sum, the current study revealed that ESP text books published by SAMT organization are not completely appropriate for the Iranian educational setting and they need to be revised and observe the standard criteria of ESP textbook writing

Conclusion and implications

This study was an attempt to shed light on the current Iranian ESP syllabuses and their correspondence with ESP standards and criteria. According to the results of the present study, it can be concluded that Iranian ESP textbooks which are mostly provided by SAMT organization are not in accordance with ESP criteria. Because it was revealed that regarding the most important skills such as listening, speaking, and writing, the current ESP textbooks do not allocate any, or enough, space; therefore, learners cannot benefit from these skills which are of considerable significance in their future careers.

It can also be concluded that the textbooks do not contain different subjects and contents, and they just follow a monotonous pattern in all section throughout the books. Since most of the Iranian ESP books are reading-center, both students and instructors participating in the study were not totally satisfied with the topics and the way the texts

are integrated. Moreover, the reading skill which is mostly taken into consideration in all Iranian ESP books needs some modifications as well.

In sum, the present study provides ESP instructors, textbook designers, and curriculum planners with valuable information about the current situation of ESP textbooks in Iranian educational settings and revealed some weak points of the current ESP textbooks of which majority of the ESP instructors are unaware. Therefore, this study's results allow ESP teachers and textbook designers to ponder over their textbook selection and implement the necessary changes in their approach toward ESP teaching and ESP textbook writing. In other words, regarding all of the shortcomings mentioned for the current ESP syllabuses in Iranian educational setting, it is worth mentioning that the ESP syllabus designers need to think about this issue deeply and bring about some changes in these books in order to make them follow the standard principles of English for specific purposes (ESP).

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Title

Blogging as a Tool in Developing Writing Skills: Lessons from the Experience of the
Students and Class Teacher

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Abstract

Blogging is often seen as an online tool that promotes authentic and interactive communication that could realize the collaborative demands of a task-based classroom. This has triggered the interest of language practitioners and researchers alike in its value in developing language skills. This paper describes a study that was aimed at discerning the students' and their class teacher's views toward blogging in their writing classroom. Specifically, it delved into the use of this asynchronous online medium in the teaching of writing. The participants were the teacher and the 25 ESL students of a writing class, where most of the tutorials were conducted online and where all the writing activities were posted on the students' blogs. The data were collected using the Students' Perception Questionnaire and the teacher's reflective log of her teaching. The findings suggest that although the students were intrigued by the novelty of using blogs in language learning, several considerations need to be made as this online medium is challenging for both the learners and the teacher.

Keywords: *Blogs, Computer-Mediated Communication, Socio-Cultural theory, feedback, process writing.*

Introduction

This paper presents some pedagogical considerations in the use of blogs in developing students' writing, which is not a simple process and not an easy skill to develop. (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2008). However, because of the importance of writing not only as a means of communication but also for school and work, it becomes a major concern of English teachers to find alternative ways to develop their students' writing skills.

One of the resources that teachers have started to use to develop their students' writing skills is the weblog (commonly known as a blog), which is an online medium that provides an authentic environment where learners can practise their writing skills. Blogs are especially conducive to the teaching of process writing, which includes prewriting, drafting, editing and revising, and which requires students to collaborate with their peers in completing their written task, where they provide feedback on each other's writing drafts. In addition,

blogs are also an ideal tool for reflective and collaborative learning when learners express their ideas and receive comments from online readers (Pinkman, 2005), as technology provides learners with a channel to practise their writing and share it with the public (Hyland, 2003). Using blogs to develop students' writing skills is especially attractive as learning can take place beyond the domain of the classroom.

In Malaysian classrooms, most writing activities are conducted in groups, where the students will be given a topic to write within a specified time. They are encouraged to brainstorm and discuss their ideas in their respective groups before writing their first drafts. The students will then exchange their written drafts with their peers for them to comment on and give feedback, as this would enable them to participate in their each other's efforts at developing their writing skills. However, according to Fung Yan Long (2010), many Malaysian students avoid giving feedback as they are generally submissive and less expressive, and prefer to be neutral and to "save face." They also often feel threatened when others give face-to-face comments (feedback), especially when there are a lot of changes that need to be made. A similar concern was expressed by Liu & Sadlar (2005), who claimed that face-to-face peer feedback practised in typical classrooms is considered "face-threatening." They further argue that some students with an inferiority complex and who are not confident in their language abilities will not only hesitate to give comments and suggestions, but also feel embarrassed when getting feedback from their friends.

This paper describes the results of a study that was aimed at: 1) finding out the students' perceptions toward having their own blogs and the teachers' perceptions of the utility of the blog in teaching writing and 2) investigating the potential of the weblog in facilitating the development of writing skills among Malaysian ESL students through peer feedback; as this online medium provides EFL/ESL students with non-threatening opportunities to explore many challenging topics and to be engaged in discussion (Ernst, 2005).

Literature Review

For its theoretical framework, the study used Vygotsky's Socio-cultural theory of learning in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which is a theory of learning that explains the mental process of knowledge-building in terms of social mediation and pre-existing schema (content of knowledge), all of which are shaped by cultural values and personal experience through social interaction (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Daniels, 2007, as cited in Kelley, 2008). From Vygotsky's perspective, content and social interaction are central to language acquisition; and meaning and knowledge are socially constructed and comprehended when

the learner is interacting with his or her peers and society. Lantolf (2000) claims that interaction in SLA is a form of social mediation through which learners construct new forms and functions collaboratively; and they learn and master their new knowledge through social interaction. The underlying concept used in this theory to develop the students' writing skill is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners are interacting and collaborating to complete a task that they are unable to do when performing alone (Ellis, 1999). One of the strategies that can be used is scaffolding, where the learner's knowledge is constructed in a layered manner, with each level of instruction building upon another layer (Oxford, 1997). Scaffolding helps to develop students' ZPD when they undergo the process of redrafting and revising their writing before producing the final product. The implementation of the scaffolding strategy requires the students to collaborate in exchanging feedback when they work together in checking and editing each other's written drafts.

With regard to blogs, its potential uses in education has evolved to include classroom learning because it is considered an ideal platform for students' writing. For example, a study by Abdulaziz (2011) on the use of blogs and their effects on students' writing proficiency and attitude revealed that students perceived blogs as a useful tool for the development of their English writing proficiency. The students felt that blogging provides the opportunity and freedom for self-expression in English. It also allowed them to write for both a local and global audience; create active interaction in social exchanges in blogs; and maintain an interactive relationship with a real-time readership. He suggested that blogs can be a potential platform for language teaching as it provides the motivation for students to develop their writing skills.

In another study, Lou et al. (2010) examined the effect of using blogs on Chinese language composition in a vocational high school in Taiwan. The findings of this quasi-experimental study revealed that the participants had a positive attitude towards the instructional model used in the study and their achievement in learning writing. Also, the use of blogs in second language writing classrooms has been found to be effective in developing the writing skills of low proficiency ESL students (Nadzrah et al., 2010). This study found that the use of blogs had generally enhanced the students' reading and writing skills, developed their self-confidence, improved their communication skills, and reduced their anxiety. Nadzrah et al.'s (2010) findings extended the findings of another study conducted by Kirk (2009), which examined the use of blogs as a knowledge management tool in 22 classes for a period of 3 years at the University of South Florida, where he found that students are comfortable using the Internet when interacting with peers as the format is easy to use and

accessible to hyperlinks to journals or other blogs. These findings support the findings of other researchers on the pedagogical effectiveness of blogs in teaching and learning writing in an authentic environment and a real-life situation (Huffaker, 2005; Betts & Glogoff, 2004; Beach et al., 2008), and further the evidence on the potential of blogs in the higher learning environment.

Methodology

The research we conducted was a case study of a class of 25 tenth-grade secondary school students and their class teacher on their perceptions on the use of blogs in the learning and teaching of writing. The English proficiency of the students ranged from intermediate to good, based on the results they obtained in English in the national examination that they took at the end of grade nine. The data were gathered using the Students' Perception Questionnaire adapted from Nadzrah et al. (2010) and the class teacher's reflective teaching log. All the students had had some experience in the use of blogs.

The 25 students involved in the study were divided into groups of three. They were introduced to the steps toward creating a blog, which was then linked to the class blog that was created by the teacher, who was also a researcher. The students were given a few online lessons on process writing and blog interaction, as well the important aspects of writing such as content, organization, vocabulary, and grammar. They were then asked to write their drafts and publish them in their blogs, after which their group members would give comments and provide feedback. They then had to read the feedback and correct their drafts. The teacher's role was to monitor the students' interaction and intervene when the students took a longer time than necessary to give feedback or publish their essays. The teacher monitored the class blog throughout the semester and recorded her reflections of her teaching after every lesson. The questionnaire on the students' perceptions toward blogging was distributed after they had completed the last blog interaction. Their responses were then analyzed using descriptive statistics while the teacher's reflective log used Nunan's (1995) keyword analysis.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we discuss the students' perceptions toward blogging and online peer feedback, and the class teacher's perceptions toward using blogs in teaching writing to Malaysian ESL secondary school students.

Students' Perceptions on the Use of Blogs for Developing Writing Skills

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the students had positive views about using blogs. 60% of the students said that they liked blogging, 88% agreed that blogging is useful for language learning, and 96% felt that that it helped them to improve their English. In addition 88% of the students felt that blogging promotes collaborative learning *and* that it gave them confidence in using and communicating in English compared to face-to-face communication. It is also interesting to note that 68% of them did not worry about what their friends would think of their English when they were blogging.

Table 1: Students' Perceptions toward Blogging

	Section A	NS	D	SD	A	SA
1	I like blogging.	24	16		40	20
2	I feel that blogging is a useful tool for learning English.	12			64	24
3	I am more confident communicating in English through blogging than through face-to-face communication.	12			52	36
4	I think blogging has built my self-confidence in using English.	20			60	20
5	I don't have to worry about what my friends would think of my English when I am blogging.	20	12		52	16
6	Blogging promotes collaborative learning.	4	4		56	32
7	Blogging helps me to improve my English.				64	32
8	Blogging motivates me to participate in activities posted by the teacher.	4			52	20

The study also sought to discern the students' perceptions toward blogging as a means of developing their writing skills. As shown in Table 2, a majority—88% of the students—were happy to discuss their drafts with friends through their blogs, and felt that blogs allowed them to be creative in expressing their ideas. All of them (100%) agreed that blogs provided them with the opportunity to express their ideas and to improve their writing. Hence, as felt by a majority of the students (88%), writing in blogs was a very positive experience for them as they did not feel shy about receiving comments on their writing. However, despite the positive views they had of blogs, fewer students (44%) preferred to learn writing through blogs than through a normal, face-to-face class. When asked about this, those that preferred classroom interaction said that through the latter, they could receive their feedback from their

peers faster than through blogs. This was because some students took more than the time specified by the teacher to post their feedback.

Table 2: Students’ Perceptions toward Blogging and Writing.

	Section B	NS	D	SD	A	SA
1	I am happy to discuss my drafts with friends.	12			60	28
2	Through blogging:					
	I learn to write better in English.				64	36
	I can express my ideas freely.				68	32
	I can be more creative in expressing my ideas.	8	4		68	20
	I am more confident of my writing ability.	24	4		48	24
	I can write longer essays in English.	4			56	40
3	I don’t feel shy about receiving comments on my writing	12			60	28
5	I prefer to learn writing through the use of blogs than through face-to-face classroom lesson.	32	24		24	20
6	I learn to correct my drafts better through blogs than through face-to-face interaction.	16	12	4	56	12

Finally, on the issue of online peer feedback (Table 3), 84% of the students reported that they felt comfortable about giving feedback online and *disagreed* that that giving online feedback is difficult for them (56%), not useful for revising one’s draft (60%), or that the feedback given online is confusing (50%). Quite a substantial percentage—between 16% to 28%—were not sure of how they felt about online peer feedback.

Table 3: Students’ Perceptions of Online Peer Feedback

	Section C	NS	D	SD	A	SA
1.	Online peer feedback is not useful for revising	24	52	8	16	

	one's draft.					
2.	I feel relaxed and comfortable when giving feedback online.	16			68	16
3.	I feel that feedback given online is confusing.	16	48	2	28	4
4.	I do not like to give feedback online because I cannot talk to my friend in person when giving comments.	24	48	4	20	4
5.	I feel that it is difficult to give feedback online.	20	44	12	24	
6.	I do not like to receive feedback online because I have to wait for my friend to post his or her feedback to me.	28	36	8	12	16

The Teacher's Perceptions of Blogging

As part of the study, the teacher was asked to record her observations of her students' blogging activities, her reflections of how her writing class went, and what she felt about the use of blogging as a tool in the teaching of writing. On the students' blogging activities, the teacher observed that they did not face many difficulties because most of them were computer and blog-savvy. This finding supports Kirk's (2009), who found that students are comfortable using the Internet when interacting with peers as the format is easy to use and accessible to hyperlinks to journals or other blogs. The teacher also observed that students who were generally passive in face-to-face classroom activities were active in the blog interactions, and made efforts to write and publish. Being "invisible" to other peers, the teacher said that the students felt less threatened about expressing their thoughts in writing and responding to the writings of others. They also felt comfortable about not having to pay too much attention to their grammar, and hence, were able to focus more on sharing their knowledge of the content.

Apart from enabling the students to write without much stress, the teacher also felt that blogs allow students to read their friends' writing and benefit from their writing styles. The drafts were arranged sequentially in the blog posts, and they could read these posts at any time since they are on the Internet. In traditional classroom learning, it is not easy for students to read their friends' writing as it is quite troublesome to borrow everyone's books for the purpose of sharing drafts. Simsek (2009) asserts that through blogs, students could easily

examine their peers' drafts since they are on the Internet, and there is no time restriction compared to the regular classroom.

In short, the teacher found many benefits to using blogs. However, she felt that there are also several aspects that need to be considered. One of these is to take into account students' language competency. In this study, students that were not very proficient in English also actively took part in giving feedback online. However, one of the problems identified from their blog interaction was that the weaker students often gave inaccurate or erroneous feedback on grammar. Hence, in such circumstances, which is commonplace in the ESL and EFL contexts, it is important for the teacher to give students additional vocabulary and grammar lessons before and while blogging to enhance their linguistic and lexical knowledge (Wu, 2006). In addition, the teacher should also monitor and read the students' feedback to check on their drafts and give suggestions for correction if needed. Another aspect that needs to be given due consideration is the time the students spend on blogging and giving feedback. In this study some students took more than the required time given by the teacher to publish their writing or feedback. Here, the teacher needs to intervene and remind them frequently to publish their writing and give their feedback in a timely manner.

Conclusion

The impact of technology on teaching and learning can no longer be denied. The issue at hand, however, is the extent to which the available technological tools such as blogs can assist teachers in teaching and learning in general and in harnessing various language skills in particular. The findings suggest that blogs can be used successfully as a platform for developing writing skills among ESL or EFL students. However, several aspects need to be considered. Firstly, teachers should introduce writing tasks gradually. They should start with simple or short writing assignments as this would enable them to monitor the types and quality of feedback offered. The individual blogs should be linked to a class blog to allow students to 'congregate' and discuss openly each other's work. In this way, the students' and teacher's comments can be viewed by all. With regard to online peer feedback, the teacher may want to provide the students with clear guidelines at the outset—for example, that students focus on content or organization and give short and straight-to-the point comments, and not focus so much on grammatical accuracy. The teacher may also wish to consider providing a combination of peer and teacher feedback to allow the students the experience of expressing their views of their peers' work as well as to benefit from teacher comments.

In short, blogging is a potentially powerful tool for developing students' writing as it allows teachers to provide their students with meaningful, online writing experiences that would motivate them to write. However, how successful it will be in developing writing skills will depend on whether students get into the habit of using them. Hence, the teacher's role in maintaining student interest and developing them into writers is crucial; as teachers are the ones who plan for instruction, who motivate the students to write, and who strive to sustain that interest through careful planning. Technology is a very useful tool in teaching and learning, but it is the teachers that would determine whether it would work.

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