Teachers’ Practice and Language Learners’ Preferences for Form-focused Instruction: Does Matching Work?

Masoume Ahmadi*
( Corresponding author)
Ph.D. Student of TEFL, Yazd University, Yazd, Iran
masoume.n.ahmadi@gmail.com

Maryam Naderi Farsani
M.A. (TEFL), Islamic Azad University, Farsan Branch, Shahrekord, Iran

Naser Sabourian Zadeh
Ph.D. Student of TEFL, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

Abstract

This article reports on a study that has delineated whether matching teachers’ practices in the classroom with their learners’ preferences for form-focused instruction (FFI) contributes to flourishing language learning. The practitioner placed 57 adult EFL learners in three distinct groups (namely integrated FFI (n=19), isolated FFI (n=17), mixed FFI (n=21) through employing the Students’ Preferences Questionnaire. Teacher’s approach to FFI accommodated to learners’ preferences in each class, albeit the teacher selected no exclusive FFI approach for the mixed group. A priori and a posteriori grammar test were given to all participants. The effectiveness of this correspondence was measured by comparing the mean scores of grammar knowledge pretests and posttests across groups through using mixed between-within subjects ANOVA. The results revealed significant differences across groups for grammatical achievement [Wilks’ Lambda=.14, F(2,54) =3.20, p=.001]. The results mainly allowed a general correspondence to be established between what teachers practice and what learners perceive to be effective. The results are discussed in light of this general finding and suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: Form-focused, Isolated FFI, Integrated FFI.
Introduction

English teachers as well as their learners have certain beliefs, preferences, and perceptions about how to learn English. These perceptions are often formed and altered based on their previous learning experiences and their cultural background and influence the strategies which they employ to enhance their learning and teaching positive outcomes (Liao and Chiang 2003). Discrepancies in student and teachers’ belief systems can be detrimental to learning.

Considering the role of grammar, there has been no consensus among applied linguists and practitioners on whether or not explicit grammar instruction is essential or even helpful in learning a new language. These diversities exist not only among teachers and practitioners but also among learners. Schulz (1996) researched the beliefs of post-secondary foreign language learners and teachers with regard to the role of grammar instruction. The result of the study revealed that not only teachers vary considerably in their opinion about the effectiveness of grammar, but also findings indicated that such differences are noticeable when learners’ beliefs and preferences are taken into account. Zhenhui (2001) asserted that an effective matching between teaching and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their learners’ needs, capacities, potentials, and learning style preferences. Horwitz (1987) pointed out when learners’ expectations are not matched with the reality of their classrooms; it leads to negative consequences for learning. It is pointed out by many experts of the field (for example, Wenden 1986; Horwitz 1988; Kern 1995) that students’ beliefs and preferences play a pivotal role in motivation, selection of learning strategies, and learning in general. Hence it is imperative for language teachers to explore their learners’ perceptions with regard to the factors believed to be influential in flourishing the learning of a new language and endeavors to cope with potential conflicts between students’ beliefs and instructional practices (Schulz, 2001). All in all, it seems that teachers are not supposed to leave their learners alone in their struggle of learning a target language. There are ways through which they can facilitate for their learners what seems at first to be too difficult and learners can move toward accurate and automatic language use.

Form-Focused Instruction

Inspired by the growing consensus that a focus on form, in addition to a focus on meaning, is of essence for L2 development (Long & Robinson, 1998), recent professional literature is leaning toward an integration of form-focused and meaning-focused instruction in second language classrooms. There have been many taxonomies of FFI proposed by experts of the field. The most widely-cited taxonomy was put forward by Long (1991). FFI, as he describes, can consist of either a focus on forms which involves preplanned attempts for present segmented linguistic items in an isolated and decontextualized manner, or a focus on form which draws students’ attention to linguistic elements while the overriding focus of the instruction is on meaning or communication. The focus on-form perspective dismisses the traditional focus on forms and it also disaccords with an exclusive focus on meaning, in which no special effort is made to deal with form. Fotos and Nassaji (2007) indicate that Long (1991) further subdivided focus on form into reactive focus on form which occurs in responses to communication problems. Daughty and William (1998) have suggested proactive focus on form. That is, the teacher plans in advance to introduce form-focused Instruction. Later on, Ellis (2001) distinguishes between planned focus
on form, i.e. pre-selection of linguistic structures during a meaning-focused activity, and incidental focus on form, i.e. focusing on linguistic structures while they arise spontaneously during meaning-focused activities. Recently, Spada, et al. (2009) chose two terms isolated and integrated form-focused instruction in order to address that when it is beneficial for learners to draw their attention to form in communicative and content-based instruction.

By Isolated FFI, they mean a type of instruction in which the form is provided separately from the communicative use of language. In other words, isolated FFI can be presented to learners prior to or after a communicative activity. Therefore, the focus on language form is not combined with the communicative or content-based portions of the lesson. In integrated FFI, on the other hand, the form is not separated from the content and is presented to learners within ongoing communicative or content-based instruction. Exchange of meaning is of very focus and attention to form is trifling. Spada and Lightbown (1993) added that focusing on form occurs within a communicative activity; however, “the language features in focus may have been anticipated and planned for by the teacher or they may occur incidentally in the course of ongoing interaction” (Spada, et al. 2009; p.71).

Reviewing the literature reveals that both isolated and integrated FFI can be of very benefit to learners. Dekeyser (1998) favored isolated FFI over integrated one and asserted that grammar should be taught explicitly with regard to skill acquisition theory. Support for integrated FFI is expressed in the work of Long’s (1996) ‘revised interaction hypothesis’, Lyster’s (1998) ‘negotiation of form’ and Swain and Lapkin’s (2002) ‘meta-talk’. Based on these constructions, drawing learners’ attention to form within communicative practice provides them an opportunity to make form-meaning connections and receive information about language form right at the time when they need to express messages. Although there is abundant research on FFI, the dearth of research into investigating learners’ preferences for isolated and integrated FFI and the effect of such preferences on their learning outcome is unfortunate. This is the mission this study is going to take over.

Language Learners’ Perceptions and Preferences

Another line of this study focuses on learners’ preferences and attitudes towards form-focused instruction they are to receive. A lot of research has been conducted to determine the language learners’ attitudes, pinions, beliefs and preferences (Ostler 1980; Saito 1999; Schulz 2001; Obralić & Akbarov, 2012; to name a few). The main research topic of interest is considered investigations of the learners’ perceptions towards the process of EFL learning in an educational setting. The main purpose of such studies is to unravel, analyze, and understand better the learners’ situation and enhance their learning outcomes. Accordingly, learning preferences form the learners’ unique preferences for learning and can influence teachers in planning teaching instructions. Many ESL/EFL teachers experience students’ resistance when they introduce grammar and forms in the classroom. Some of the learners prefer to enjoy opportunities to practice them in free conversation, though it is not the same for others who prefer more emphasis on overt teaching of grammar. In this regard, it is incumbent upon teachers to heed these diverse preferences if they are determined to enhance learners’ motivation, performance, and achievements (Afraz and Ghaemi, 2013). Teachers need to be cautious about these perceptions
and preferences when planning activities, given that these activities should be perceived in learners’ minds as conducive to learning.

The aim of the present study is to help educational practitioners and teacher educators to find an awareness of the EFL learners’ preferences for two types of form-focused instruction. It further investigates whether teachers’ awareness of these preferences and matching teachers’ practices with learners’ preferences leads to better performance and achievement on the learners’ side.

Research Question

The purpose of the investigation was to attempt to address the following general research question:

-Does matching the teachers’ practice with EFL learners’ preferences for form-focused instruction make any difference in the learners’ achievement with regard to gaining grammatical knowledge?

The following is a description of the study and a report of the achieved results.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 57 Iranian male (n=27) and female (n=37) EFL learners studying at intermediate level at Kish Air Institute, Tehran, Iran. They were placed in this level based on a placement test administered by the supervisor of the institute. EFL learners aged 18 to 35, with the average age of 25.3. They all had already had at least 10 months of training in English in the institute. Learners were placed in three classes with approximately 20 learners in each class and they partake in four 30-minute treatment sessions. These three classes represented the three groups of this study. In order to make sure about the homogeneity of the groups, a pretest was given to all the participants on the second session. Hopefully, the results of the pretest showed that there was no statistically significant difference among the groups as far as their knowledge of past perfect and present perfect tenses was concerned.

Instruments

1. Tests

Prior to treatment sessions, a pretest was distributed among participants, which included recognition and production items. The recognition items were comprised of 15 multiple-choice questions examining the ability of participants in recognizing the appropriate choice from among four given alternatives. This section was adopted from Objective tests in English as a foreign language by Bloor, Bloor, Forrest, Laird, and Relton (1970).

Another part dealing with the production of the target forms was a writing a text based on a chain of pictures provided. The task required them to use the past perfect and present perfect tense in accounting about the events which had already taken place up. Each participant was
scored based on the number of instances in which he/she had used the either tenses correctly in her written text divided by the whole number of instances of verbs in either tenses. That is, if a participant used the past perfect tense 12 times, two of which were incorrect, she/he would get a score of 10/12. Then, the obtained score was counted out of a total number of 10. For the recognition part of the test, the number of correct responses was counted and it was out of 15. So, the total score of tests was out of 25.

The posttest was similar to the pretest in terms of format and level of difficulty. However, in order to avoid contaminating the data due to the practice effect from the pretest to the posttest and to ensure the validity of test, the items were modified, meaning that the structures were kept the same, but the context and the vocabulary were changed.

2. Tasks

Four jigsaw cloze tasks were developed to be used in four treatment sessions. The jigsaw cloze tasks were information gap tasks in which each group has a part of information and the members of the other groups were looking for that uniquely held information. Researchers decided to have jigsaw cloze task due to the opportunities for communication it provides. One type of tasks was selected for all treatment sessions due to the effect of task types on grammatical accuracy of specific grammatical items (Storch, 1999). Each jigsaw cloze task contained 18 missing parts which were equal in proportion regarding their need to be filled in with targeted verb tenses. These tenses were chosen because the researchers, as EFL teachers, had observed the most difficulty in their intermediate learners mastering these aspects. Another reason was the need of learners to cover these aspects during that semester based on the institute curriculum. All texts of tasks were constructed by researchers as experienced teachers. The researchers also ensured that texts contained no unknown words for learners. A close attention was also paid to an approximate similarity of texts in the terms of difficulty, length, number of paragraphs, and content. These four tasks were used by the same teacher for all three classes. However, the way the targeted verb tenses were addressed varied.

3. Student Preferences for Grammar Instruction Questionnaire

Another instrument used in this study was The Student Preferences for Grammar Instruction Questionnaire newly developed by Spada, et al. (2009). This questionnaire was to explore second language (L2) learners’ preferences for isolated and integrated form-focused (FFI) instruction. This questionnaire was composed of 3 sections; the first part was some personal questions on sex, country of origins, age, etc. The second part composed of 20 items scored based on Likert scale of 1 to 5. Items 1, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 17, 15, 20 were related to isolated FFI and items 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19 to integrated forms. The third part included a blank space for learners to provide their comments.

Procedure

At the beginning of the study, learners’ preferences questionnaire was distributed among 50 Iranian EFL language learners. Learners were instructed how to fill in the questionnaire in approximately 10 minutes. Collecting the data, the researchers analyzed the data through
comparing the mean obtained for integrated and isolated FFI and placed learners into two classrooms based on their preferences for types of form-focused instruction. Accordingly, 17 learners preferred isolated FFI and 19 learners preferred integrated FFI and the rest were neutral (n=14). All learners except those with neutral preferences were classified into two groups with regard to what form of instruction they preferred. Later on, a control group (n=21) was also included in this study, whose preferences were not investigated. The data needed for this study was collected through tests in these three classes which met four 30-minute sessions. After setting the classes, a pretest was distributed among learners to measure their knowledge on the targeted verb tenses (namely present perfect and past perfect). One teacher was selected to teach all the participants of three groups in order to control the extraneous variables which may threat the validity of the study.

Follow-up tasks will differ across three groups during four sessions. In each session, learners were supposed to carry out a jigsaw cloze task collaboratively in dyads and take part in communication actively. The only difference was the way forms presented to learners. In the isolated FFI class, the teacher provided the targeted forms, i.e. 2 aforementioned verb tenses, separately from the communicative activity. In other words, forms were presented in preparation for communicative task or after it when learners experienced a difficulty in that particular language features. In the integrated FFI class, the teacher provided learners with forms while they were completing the tasks. Learners were provided with explanation of the targeted tenses, when they experienced difficulty within their ongoing communication. No separate explanation on forms was provided in this group. The third group who played the role of the control group received placebo. It means that they were provided with explanation on tenses prior to communicative task, after facing a difficulty, or within their ongoing task (i.e. they enjoyed mixed approaches to FFI). Such approaches were not exclusively employed by the teacher in this group due to the fact that the learners’ preferences had not been measured in advance and the teacher was not cognizant of them. Four sessions of treatment were managed in this way and finally the posttests retested the participants’ knowledge on learning the targeted grammatical features.

**Design of the Study**

This quasi–experimental study had a pretest–posttest design. Prior to the treatment, a pretest was administered to the participants in order to keep a record of their knowledge on verb tenses (past perfect and present perfect) so that it could be compared against their posttest scores later. Next, there were four treatment sessions followed by an immediate posttest.

**Data Analysis**

In order to answer the aforementioned question, mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was run to compare the results obtained from pretest and posttest across groups. The alpha level for all the tests was set at 0.05 (p<0.05), and to analyze the data, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 16 was used for analysis.
Result and Discussion

The current research was carried out to find out the effectiveness of matching teachers’ practice and EFL learners’ preferences for types of FFI across pretest and posttest. Three groups of learners (Isolated FFI class, Integrated FFI class, and Mixed FFI class) participated in this study. The descriptive results, presented in Table 1 below, shows that all participants in this study were regarded as valid participants in pretest (Mean=17.64) and posttest (Mean=20.91).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iso_FFI</td>
<td>11.2353</td>
<td>3.21188</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integ_FFI</td>
<td>11.0526</td>
<td>3.43954</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>12.4762</td>
<td>3.47303</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.6316</td>
<td>3.38922</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iso_FFI</td>
<td>22.3529</td>
<td>2.37016</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integ_FFI</td>
<td>21.8947</td>
<td>2.18314</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>16.7619</td>
<td>2.23394</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20.1404</td>
<td>3.42490</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the descriptive results, the following graph shows that both groups receiving isolated and integrated FFI outperformed the control group.

Graph 1. Mean Score Differences across Three Groups

A mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was carried out to find out if the differences observed were statistically significant. The preliminary analyses showed no homogeneity of
variance (p≥.05) and equality of covariance matrices (p≥.05). As represented in Table 2, there was a substantial main effect of time [Wilks’ Lambda=.14, F=3.20, p=.001]. The partial eta squared was .85 indicating a large effect size. The participants performed much better in posttests. There was also a significant interaction between time and groups [Wilks’ Lambda=.55, F=21.94, p=.001].

Table 2. Multivariate Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Hypothesis df</th>
<th>Error df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>3.20E2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>3.20E2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
<td>5.927</td>
<td>3.20E2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>5.927</td>
<td>3.20E2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Hypothesis df</th>
<th>Error df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time * group</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>21.940</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>21.940</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>21.940</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>21.940</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>54.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Exact statistic
b. Design: Intercept + group
Within Subjects Design: time

Additionally, substantial main effect was also observed for group variable. Indeed, the overall mean scores of the groups significantly differ from each other (p=.006, See Table 3).

Table 3. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>28831.212</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28831.212</td>
<td>2.941E3</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>108.580</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>54.290</td>
<td>5.537</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>529.437</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9.804</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the significant F-value of 5.53 indicated statistically significant differences between the three groups, the post-hoc Scheffe's test was run to locate the exact places of differences across groups. As displayed in Table 4:

A: There is a significant difference between mean scores of participants in Isolated FFI class and mixed FFI class. The Isolated FFI class with a mean score of 22.35 outperformed the mixed FFI class (Mean=16.76) in their grammatical achievement.
B: There is a significant difference between mean scores of participants in Integrated FFI class and mixed FFI class. The Integrated FFI class with a mean score of 21.89 outperformed the mixed FFI class in their grammatical achievement.

C: There is no significant difference between mean scores of participants in Integrated FFI class and Integrated FFI class.

Table 4. Post hoc Scheffe Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) group</th>
<th>(J) group</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iso_FFI</td>
<td>Integ_FFI</td>
<td>.3204</td>
<td>.73917</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>-1.5402</td>
<td>2.1811</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iso_FFI</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>2.1751*</td>
<td>.72236</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.3567</td>
<td>3.9934</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integ_F Mixed FFI</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8546*</td>
<td>.70103</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.0900</td>
<td>3.6193</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this study, though in small scale, confirmed the literature in the support of benefits of recognizing learners’ beliefs, preferences, and opinions in second language acquisition context. It is observed that EFL teachers and practitioners experience their learners’ resistance while introducing an instructional activity in the classroom. Some learners seek for more opportunities to participate in free conversation, expressing their wish towards a more communicatively oriented approach, and learning new forms and instructions in an ongoing communication. On the other hand, there are those who are more teacher-dependent and focus on teaching. Teacher should take into account such learners diversities in choosing the most effective approaches in their classrooms. The EFL learners’ language learning would be improved in the case that the presented instruction is in consensus with what they prefer. Accordingly, it is imperative for teachers and learners to negotiate to be acquainted with each other’ opinion and preferences and exchange ideas. This investigation sought to determine whether matching learners’ preferences for types of FFI and teachers’ practice in their classrooms can enhance learners’ grammatical achievement. Indeed, in the data obtained there were indications of an enhancement of learning and achievement where this matching was observed. Overall, learners’ achievements of new grammatical forms were observed in two classes whose teacher was aware of their preferences for type of FFI they were willing to receive. Interestingly, the mixed FFI group showed improvement in posttest comparing to pretest. However, this improvement in achievement and learning was not as equally significant as it was for other groups. Negeow (1999) has asserted that the more conscious of their learning preferences the learners are, the more they benefit from their learning opportunities. This claim is in line with the findings of the current study as learner’s awareness of their preferences helped them to be provided with the most suitable instruction and learning took place consequently. In a similar vein, a bulk of research findings (Wesche 1981; Spada and Gass 1986; Yorio 1986; Schulz 2001) indicated that a mismatch between instructors’ and learners’ attitudes may lead to conflict that can adversely affect learning. The result of this study refutes the claim maid by Yorio (1986) and Horwitz (1987). They stated that students brought their own beliefs about language learning that might not be consistent with the principles in language learning and
teaching. Beaudry and Angela (2002) asserted that investigations carried over the past decades are indicative of “the positive effects of environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological, and cognitive preferences on the achievement of students” (p. 75). Based on their claim, these preferences are biologically endowed and impose a set of personal characteristics that make “the same teaching method effective for some and ineffective for others” (p. 75). This assertion is in approving of the result of the current study. Learners who received instructional practices in line with their preferences yielded more fruitful results and growth in their achievement due to the fact that the teacher recognized the patterns on which these learners intended to concentrate best.

As an implication of his study, Kendrick (1997) also recommended instructors to engender speaking and pronunciation by preparing motivating materials in a stress-free classroom, with regard to learner preferences. Spratt (1999) discussed the paramount importance of learner preferences in yielding effective results in achievement. Comparing learners' preferred activities with teachers' perceptions of what those preferences were, Spratt in his paper ‘How good are we at knowing what learners like?’ concluded that instructors were successfully able to gauge their learners' preferences with accuracy for 54% of activities; however, no clear pattern for the accuracy of predictions in activity areas (e.g. speaking, writing, listening) or activity types (communicative or non-communicative) was recognized. Hawky (2006) reported the same discrepancies and their negative effects on learners’ achievement. It shows that teachers need to be more cautious regarding their learners’ preferences and do not rely solely on what they perceive they learners tend to focus. Further investigations of learner preferences and tendencies are imperative in order to eliminate such discrepancies of opinion since Peacock (2001) in his study showed that 72% of the learners were afraid of the mismatch between teaching and learning approaches and 76% of those learners said that it affects and impedes their learning destructively. The result of the current study indicated that learners are conscious about what they need and how they can meet their needs. It is recommended to teachers, especially EFL teachers, to provide learners with an environment that is conducive to learning and infuse the curriculum with diverse viewpoints which subsequently act as a means of facilitating the growth of language learning. If a learner feels uncomfortable, unsafe, or not respected, their chances of success in that class dramatically might be decreased or impeded. On the other hand, if they feel respected, it goes visa versa. According to the findings, several concerns would be raised:

- Teachers and teacher educators must be willing to cross traditional personal and professional boundaries in pursuit of enhancing learners’ achievement.
- Teaching a diverse group of learners means recognizing that all the people are unique in their own way. In different ways, each of them needs the opportunity for presenting their talents and learning in ways that work for them.
- Teachers and teacher educators must defer all learners as individuals with socially and culturally defined identities, preferences, and opinion.
- Socially responsive and responsible teaching and learning requires an anthropologically and ethnographically informed teaching stance; teachers and teacher educators must be introduced to and routinely use the tools of practitioner/teacher research (such as the questionnaires, think aloud protocols, diaries, journals, etc.) in order to get informed of what they learners think and what they need to fulfill their duties and tasks.
• Learners bring funds of knowledge to their learning classrooms, and, recognizing this, teachers and teacher educators should incorporate this knowledge and experience into classroom practice.
• Learners possess a right to a variety of educational experiences that help them make informed decisions about their role and participation in language, literacy, and life.

Conclusion

Compared to other studies, the results of the research were not so much striking. Reviewing the literature, it was revealed that there are considerable discrepancies of opinions between learners and their teachers. Learners’ preferences for the various classroom activities in comparison with their teachers’ preferences is an area of research which warrants further investigation and carry firm implications for language teachers and practitioners. In the case of teaching, “whatness” and “howness” of teaching should be made with reference to learners, in order to get them actively involved in the learning process (Nunan 1999). The results from this study can be encouraging news for EFL teachers and practitioners because they can astonishingly flourish their learners’ achievements if they investigate their preferences, attitudes, and beliefs. Looking for materials and choosing suitable approaches to be presented in the classes would be more pleasing for teachers when they know what their customers prefer. However, due to some limitations of this study, namely small number of participants and limited number of attempted items in tests, these findings should cautiously be taken into account. The researchers also were not able to plan an experimental design for the study as random selection of the participants was not possible due to small sample size. Also, this study investigated the issue under question among Iranian EFL learners with intermediate language proficiency level, and this very delimitation makes us more cautious in making generalizations based on the findings of this study to other settings and other levels. Further research can be conducted investigating the lasting effect of this achievement among EFL learners of various proficiencies. In future research, a more detailed analysis of learning different grammatical items should be performed to find out whether they lead to similar results or not. Qualitative analysis can also be used in order to triangulate the findings.
References


