

## **Pros and Cons of Dancing in the Dark: Enhancing EFL learners' oral proficiency in an unplugged learning community**

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### **Abstract**

Recent thrust of research has focused on non-conventional classrooms for teaching to EFL learners. Amongst the newly developed models, Unplugged Classroom Model (UCM) is the most debated one as textbooks are aside and the syllabus is based on conversation-driven activities. This study sought to determine the pros and cons of unplugged teaching for enhancing EFL learners' oral proficiency. From a pool of 317 intermediate and upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners, 120 intermediate and upper-intermediate learners (60 each) were selected based on SPEAK NOW 1-4 Interview Placement Exam and were divided into conventional and non-conventional classrooms at each proficiency level. The participants in the non-conventional classrooms received unplugged instruction; whereas, their counterparts in the control group (conventional) classrooms were taught according to their textbook's instruction. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to measure learners' performances before and after instruction through paper-based exams and interviews. Participants' perspectives and viewpoints in the non-conventional classrooms were analyzed using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) questionnaire and the instructor's observations, respectively. The findings revealed that not only did the UCM participants enjoy collaborative learning but also enhanced their learning ability to produce more orally proficient utterances and to expand their gained knowledge in order to scaffold their classmates' conversation.

**Keywords:** Unplugged Classroom Model (UCM), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Community of Inquiry (Co I), oral proficiency, non-conventional instruction

### **Introduction**

For the past few decades, English language teaching (ELT) has entered the era of growing more orally proficient learners with the hope of finding learners who speak English language more fluently and accurately. Meanwhile, Dogme English Language Teaching (ELT) has gained credence as an innovative method for enhancing EFL learners' communicative abilities and training independent language users (Antonysamy, 2020). The dogme-like nature of this newborn method as Thornbury (2017) explains, chronicles the teaching scene as the rapports between learners and teacher in the absence of recorded and printable materials. The godfather of Dogme ELT, insists on the free mainstream of the relationship between learners and teacher for triggering learners' interest and encouraging the "people in the room" or simply the learners in the classroom (Rion, Kakamad & Fatah, 2018; Thornbury, 2017; Thornbury, 2005). As Thornbury (2005)

mentions, conversation-driven activities in real classroom situation with real learners' needs forces the teachers to put the textbooks on the shelves and focus on interactivity and creativity. Textbooks shortcomings, on the other hand, may exhort syllabus designers and teachers to adopt a dogme-like policy for saving the classrooms. It is even a recommended rescuing measure for saving ELT to record real learners' voices for listening activities rather than using the recorded CD-ROMS and printed packs (Rion et al., 2018). In addition, Thornbury added ten principles to the concept of Dogme ELT as follows:

a) Materials-mediated teaching is the 'scenic' route to learning, but the direct route is located in the *interactivity* between teachers and learners, and between the learners themselves. b) The content which is most likely to *engage* learners and to trigger learning processes, which is already there, is supplied by 'the people in the room'. c) Learning is a social and *dialogic* process, where knowledge is co-constructed rather than 'transmitted' or 'imported' from teacher/coursebook to learner. d) Learning can be mediated through talk, especially talk that is shaped and supported (i.e. *scaffolded*) by the teacher. e) Rather than being acquired, language (including grammar) *emerges*: it is an organic process that occurs given the right conditions. f) The teacher's primary function, apart from promoting the kind of classroom dynamic which is conducive to a dialogic and emergent pedagogy, is to optimise language learning *affordances*, by, for example, directing attention to the features of the emergent language. g) Providing space for the learner's *voice* means accepting that the learner's beliefs, knowledge, experiences, concerns and desires are valid content in the language classroom. h) Freeing the classroom from third-party, imported materials *empowers* both teachers and learners. i) Texts, when used, should have *relevance* for the learner, in both their learning and using contexts. j) Teachers and learners need to unpack the ideological baggage associated with English Language Teaching materials - to become *critical* users of such texts. (Thornbury, 2005, p. 3, italics in original).

Recent thrust of related literature introduces unplugged classroom as a way of life rather than a teaching script through which, learners and teachers are able to reconstruct the meaning in an unplugged, text-free zone of language learning (Mohamed, 2019; Sarani & Malmir, 2019; Thornbury, 2017). As Parry (2012) held, unplugged teaching has its roots in the history of language teaching with respect to eclectic methods. The big picture envisioned by unplugged teaching, on the other hand, is taken from a number of known methods which are still at stake (Thornbury, 2010 cited in Parry, 2012). Moreover, it is worth demarcating the terms approach, method and technique and defining them as a range of concepts, praxis and procedures, respectively (Brown, 2010; as cited in Parry 2012). For the supporters of Thornbury's new method of language teaching, unplugged teaching based on the mottos of Dogme ELT is simply purifying the teaching process from any kind of colorful textbook that obstructs the way of interacting with the learners (Antonysamy, 2020; Marashi & Rahimpanah, 2019). In his theoretical perspective, Thornbury (2010) encourages revision and reconstruction of syllabi for satisfying learners' real communicative needs by future language teachers. As Worth (2012) puts it, a Dogmed-directed classroom demands more academic experience to break new horizons and pave the way for learners and teachers. It is worth noting that the forerunners of dancing in the dark are not the opponents of textbooks, rather, they prefer the mutual interaction between learner and teacher over any type of photocopiable text (Thornbury, 2010; Thornbury & Meddings, 2009). Unplugged classroom as Rodriguez et al. (2016) puts it, is communicative-oriented and needs learners to actively participate in the interactions during the class time. Therefore, interaction and connection lead to motivation for both the learner and the teacher in the learning community.

In other words, the teacher's role is to hear learners' voices and to consider the outstanding effectiveness of learner-centered instruction as an asset for satisfying learners' immediate needs. Moreover, it was Thornbury's (2000) idea to apply unplugged teaching to English learning communities by putting the textbooks aside and asking learners to decide for the materials to be presented in the classroom. Under the umbrella term Dogme ELT, he juxtaposed the terms approach, method and technique by defining his method as a conversation-driven, material-light, emergent-based model of instruction for the language learners (Thornbury, 2005). So far, however, there has been little disagreement over the priority of the type of pedagogy to enhance EFL learners' oral proficiency (Marashi & Rahimpanah, 2019). Regarding the importance of speaking skill, an ongoing concern for material developers is to find an efficient procedure to engage EFL learners in orally proficient tasks. On the other hand, unplugged teaching based on the principles of Dogme ELT demands more experience in Iranian EFL community.

To identify the positive and negative aspects of teaching unplugged for Iranian EFL learners, more research needs to be carried out in this regard. Needless to say that although Dogme ELT pushed many researchers and teachers towards learner-centered syllabi, unplugged classroom has a long journey in the EFL context (Marashi & Rahimpanah, 2019; Mohamed, 2019; Sarani & Malmir, 2019). Therefore, this paper assays to show the nature of an unplugged classroom for Iranian EFL learners on account of oral proficiency in intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. To do this, unplugged instruction was adopted for both intermediate and upper-intermediate learners in order to compare learners' perception and viewpoints towards unplugged instruction at different proficiency levels. Another objective pertains to reporting EFL learners' ongoing concern and problems with unplugged learning community. It is a common sense to reflect teacher's observations during the class time for checking the feedback in the unplugged process. Significance of the selected study includes the implementation of unplugged classroom based on Thornbury and Meddings' (2009) model for running the unplugged steps and the investigation of learners' perspectives and viewpoints towards text-light, communication-driven classrooms. Moreover, this study may raise intriguing questions regarding unplugged instruction's forte as well as caveats for EFL learners. The findings of the present study will hopefully give insightful ideas for running future unplugged classrooms to enhance EFL learners' other language skills. This study provides some suggestions and recommendations for EFL teachers, course designers, material developers and other stakeholders to revise and reform their instruction and materials in favor of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners' communicative needs.

## Literature Review

### Unplugged Classroom Model (UCM) and Dogme Era

Thornbury (2001), as one of the pioneers of unplugged classrooms, presented his theory of language learning in the "Dogme" era. The concept, however, was taken from Dogme 95, a filmmaking movement with the motto of focusing on the real story instead of the showy details. The story of Dogme in language teaching as Thornbury (2000) narrated, focuses on learners' exigent need for communication at the expense of paying less attention to the printed books. Later on, Thornbury and Meddings (2009) explained that there are three prerequisites for making a classroom a real unplugged experience. In other words, "Dogme ELT" is a) conversation-driven, b) materials-light, and c) based on emergent language. Care has been placed over the interaction zone in the classroom which is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Vygotsky's (1987) Socio Cultural Theory (SCT). The assumption is that learners participate in social events created in the classroom and learn how to convey their messages in the English language via constructive interaction in the supportive zone of

classroom. Therefore, they will be able to create social networks for themselves (Meddings, 2017; Thornbury, 2017; Thornbury & Meddings, 2009; Thornbury & Slade, 2006). The unplugged classroom is light in material which means learners are not exposed to printed textbooks. Contrarily, the teacher is supposed to bring conversational-driven materials, such as topic-related pictures and podcasts for discussions in the classroom. Learners, on the other hand, are responsible for running the discussions in the classroom and practicing the conversation-driven drills based on their communicative needs instead of following the textbook commands. Therefore, the contents are not delivered in a linear order; rather, they will be delivered according to learners' ongoing communicative needs.

Dogme ELT is based on emergent language. Emergent language was formerly proposed by Brown (2001). In the unplugged era, learning emerges according to learners' exigent needs and the presentation of printed material postponed to the end of instruction as an extra resource for learners. This implies that teaching phases are inextricably linked to the syllabus to be presented (Thornbury, 2017, 2005, 2002). Unplugged teaching does not claim that it is the ideal method for teaching EFL learners as there are several other techniques and procedures that exerted positive impacts on learners' knowledge. Not even when the chastity of ELT is concerned are teachers and researchers able to deliver a pure syllabus to satisfy all the learners' exigent needs. Contrary to expectations, unplugged instruction requires an incremental effort and devotion on the side of the teacher and the learners to gain satisfactory results (Thornbury, 2017).

As Thornbury (2001) stated, the most challenging aspect of unplugged classroom for EFL learners and teachers is learners and teachers' incredibility to the effectiveness of conversation-driven instruction over textbook-driven syllabus. To put an end to this dilemma, Thornbury (2001) recommended that teachers not be too much dependent on the course book; instead, they need to rely on the voices, the individuals, and learners' needs by practicing the conversations to find about the soothing effect of this dialogic model as a remedy for the traditional methods' shortcomings. Moreover, according to McCabe (2005), the conversational contexts are the materials that have been extracted from the most authentic and rich sources of references including learners, their immediate needs, and the teacher. To put it simply, Dogme ELT is a reflection of learners' voices to be heard and their exigent needs to be met not by the textbook but by teacher's support (Ramos García, 2010 as presented in Banegas, 2012).

According to Thornbury's (2005) explanations on Dogme ELT, the dancing in the dark aspect of unplugged classroom will turn to dancing in the light with more emphasis on interactivity, teaching based on emergent language, and using the least expensive material, which is completely different from lavish high-priced ELT textbooks. Ushioda (2011) explained that Dogme ELT puts emphasis on conversations among the learners and teacher in real-life situations controlled by the learners. Other studies on unplugged teaching referred to the prominent role of the teacher in the Dogme era (Banegas, 2012; Bryndal, 2014; Sketchley, 2012, 2011).

Akca (2012) stated that to teach unplug, it is advisable to consider individual differences. Other researchers pointed to the architecture of unplugged instruction and its effectiveness for EFL learners when textbooks become boring for them. The most obvious outcomes of unplugged instruction pertain to its impact on learners' collaborative tasks. Based on the action-research-studies, some researchers (e.g., Jeyaraj, 2017; Chong, 2016; Parry, 2012; Sketchley, 2011; Xerri, 2012) came to a consensus that an obvious advantage of implementing unplugged teaching is for learners to interact with their classmates and receive teacher's feedback when work in pairs. To take a vow to chastity of ELT with respect to Thornbury and Meddings' (2009) principles of "Dogme ELT", this study sought to adopt an Unplugged Classroom Model (UCM) to elevate EFL learners' oral proficiency. In doing so, three characteristics were adopted for Unplugged



Classroom Model (UCM) including a) less dependence on the textbooks, b) elimination of the printed materials and working on conversation-driven activities and c) attention to learners' exigent needs.

Numerous studies have attempted to explain the whole scenario regarding unplugged instruction. In a recent study, Antonysamy (2020) focused on unplugged inspired activities in the classroom to escalate learners' abilities in terms of creative writing. The findings of this study revealed that Dogme-inspired tasks can facilitate learners with the opportunity to express themselves. More importantly, there was a remarkable difference between the performance of learners who were using the textbooks and learners who were free to use Dogme-mediated materials for boosting their writing skill. Current evidence, however, suggests that to implement a successful unplugged classroom learners and teachers have to be aware of the fact that the experience is based on the cheapest and most available materials. Marashi and Rahimpanah (2019) in their Dogme-based study for a group of EFL learners came up with the idea that the material-light aspect of Dogme ELT pushes the learners towards being autonomous and awakens learners' inherent learning skills. Therefore, no clear printed textbook or expensive instrument for running the classroom is needed. An academic unplugged experience, as Thornbury (2005) explains, consists of teacher, learners and blackboard. Together, these studies provide important insights into the effectiveness of unplugged instruction in the EFL context (Antonysamy, 2020, Rion et al., 2018; Jeyaraj, 2017).

Concerning EFL learners' unplugged experience a broader perspective has been adopted by Mohamed (2019) who argues that the free style of teaching based on Dogme ELT increases learners' self-efficacy to work on their learning process inside and outside the classroom. Many writers have challenged the claim that unplugged classroom cannot be applicable for learners at lower proficiency levels (Sarani & Malmir, 2019; Jeyaraj, 2017). Just as an example, Sarani and Malmir (2019) in their study reintroduced Dogme-oriented instruction for rectifying EFL learners' problem of willingness to communicate. The findings of their study demonstrated that unplugged instruction was only useful for advanced EFL learners' willingness to communicate. More importantly, intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners' tendency to communicate did not dramatically increase by Dogme-based instruction in their investigation. The key problem with this explanation is that most of EFL teachers cannot teach based on light-materials and they need to refer to the textbooks time and again for having a well-established and printed syllabus. Advanced learners, on the other hand, have a good vocabulary and are mostly familiar with the textbooks' instruction. Therefore, teaching based on text-free materials may not seem a difficult job even for inexperienced teachers as learners are able to orchestrate the class more independently. Overall, these studies highlight the need for teachers' awareness concerning learners' probable barriers and problems regarding implementation of unplugged instruction.

### **Oral Proficiency in the EFL Context**

Some scholars consider speaking as the most complicated skill when it comes to teaching as a foreign language. However, speaking has been considered as a global means of communication among foreigners in every workplace (Kim, 2017). Several definitions for speaking skill have been put forward thus far. For instance, as Florez (1999) maintains speaking is a process through which meaning is constructed. Speaking is usually spontaneous; however, in the majority of interactions it is somehow predictable. Speaking in second language plays a crucially important role because it is simply a prerequisite to other language skills and sub skills. In the same fashion, a host of language learners claim that speaking is one of the most challenging skills (Hung, 2015). This issue may attest the fact that many ostensibly proficient

language learners are not contented with their speaking skill. Therefore, they lay too much stress on improving this skill by one way or another (Kim, 2018). Since obtaining oral mastery is a yardstick for measuring other language skills, it is often addressed by students and teachers as a substantial element in the domain of language teaching (Palmer, 2010).

Miscellaneous techniques are being sought for honing students' speaking skill. According to Ebrahiminejad et al. (2014), short stories can provide a tailwind on account of developing speaking skill. It should be put that teaching on the basis of critical thinking may lay the foundation for boosting speaking skill. Accordingly, learners are required to possess an in-depth insight towards the concept of communication in the classroom to convey their message correctly via interaction. Triggering such a scenario implies tapping the concept of critical thinking. In conjunction with the aforementioned concepts and the importance of speaking skill, Sedaghat and Biria (2016) has taken a giant stride toward enhancing EFL learners' level of oral proficiency by integrating innovative techniques and strategies. The upshot of their study revealed a positive impact on students' speaking skill. This view is supported by Kim (2018) who writes about voice and text blogging as beneficial techniques for improving learners' oral proficiency. In his study, Kim (2018) divided the participants into three groups including the control group, the voice blogging group and the voice and text blogging group. The results of Kim's study demonstrated that these supportive techniques increased learners' motivation and incentive in terms of participating in speaking skills with more confidence. However, Kim (2018) found that compared to the learners in the voice blogging group, and the control group, the voice and text blogging group had a more successful performance.

To better understand the mechanisms of boosting learners' oral proficiency via teaching techniques and their probable effects on learners' performance, Namaziandost et al. (2019) analyzed the significance of cooperative learning on intermediate EFL learners' oral proficiency. It has conclusively been shown that cooperative learning can be a supportive asset, if not a comprehensive method of instruction, for teachers to manage learners' process of learning. Using cooperative learning as a technique for intermediate learners can increase learners' motivation in that learners will have more opportunity in classroom to practice their speaking skill. Furthermore, the application of up-to-the-minute technological gadgets for honing learners' proficiency has been taken into consideration in other studies. In a recent study, Wichadee (2017) assessed the importance of technological gadgets and their probable impact on learners' oral proficiency on account of strengthening collaborative learning skills, and propelling learners towards participating in on-line learning groups. Moreover, Saito (2019) sifted through the efficacy of foreign language learning towards lexical improvement and came to the conclusion that intensive foreign language instruction results in gaining a thorough knowledge of vocabulary. By drawing on the concept of speaking, Saito (2019) has been able to show that learners are able to use various vocabulary lists via their oral performance more aptly. Through assessment of the influence of technological gadgets on learners' language proficiency, Young and West (2018) revealed that asynchronous multimedia-based communication (AMOC) is extremely substantial for improving learners' accuracy, fluency and pronunciation. More importantly, Zuo and Tu (2018) clarified that the interaction among the three variables (complexity, accuracy, and fluency) in learners' oral proficiency is non-linear and is affected by variables, such as learners' attitudes and motivation. Collectively, the studies presented thus far provide evidence that learners' oral performance can be affected by many other environmental factors. Moreover, cooperation and collaboration on the side of learners for mutual interaction may lead to remarkable changes in learners' performance (Saito, 2019; Namaziandost et al., 2019; Wichadee, 2017).

Based on the aforementioned issues, this study was conducted to seek answers for the following central research questions:

RQ1: Does unplugged instruction have any significant impact on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' oral proficiency?

RQ2: Does unplugged instruction have any significant impact on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' oral proficiency?

RQ3: What are the unplugged participants' overall perception and viewpoints towards learning English through unplugged instruction?

## Methodology

### Design of the Study

The study took divergent sources to collect data with a quasi-experimental design and random selection of participants from intact classes. It was based on pretest-posttest design and the application of both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Figure 1). At the quantitative level, learners performances before and after instruction were analyzed using IELTS™ Style Interview test besides a Paper-based Exam to test learners' listening ability, vocabulary, and language function or use.



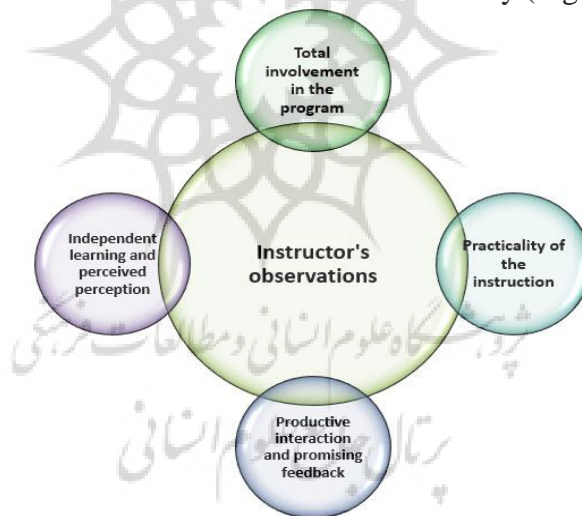
Figure 1. Design of the study

### Instruments

Four instruments including Paper-based exams, IELTS™ Style Interview test, CoI questionnaires, and Instructor's observations were employed in the present study. The first instrument was applied to assess learners' abilities in terms of the use of vocabulary and the use of language in learners' speaking skill through measuring learners' listening ability, vocabulary, and language function. According to Zhang (2009) focusing on listening lays the foundations for improving pronunciation and more authentic speaking ability. Since the Paper-based Exam used in the current article contained some listening parts, it has been used as a complementary source for checking learners' oral performance. The second instrument in the present study was IELTS™ Style Interview test. The inter-rater reliability of the IELTS™ Style Interview was measured based on Krippendorff's alpha at 0.93, showing a strong reliability for the present study (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The Paper-based exams' overall reliability was evaluated based on

Cronbach's alpha value at 0.87, demonstrating a high level of reliability. Moreover, an independent scoring was adopted for IELTS™ Style Interview. The scoring rubrics were adapted from Richards and Bohlke (2012a) consisting of four categories including: (1) Pronunciation and Intonation, (2) Lexical Control, (3) Grammatical Accuracy, and (4) Spoken Fluency, and the rankings from 0 with no mastery to 3 with mastery. As mentioned by Richards and Bohlke (2012a), both the IELTS™ Style Interview and Paper-based Exam enjoyed high levels of content validity. For the posttest, learners' performances were measured based on IELTS™ Style Interview final exam and the Paper-based final exam.

The CoI questionnaire (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010) with five rating scale intervals (1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree) together with instructor's observations was applied to measure UCM learners' perception and viewpoints. To determine internal consistency reliability, the questionnaires were piloted with 20 intermediate and 20 upper-intermediate learners in other classes and calculated to find out Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach's alpha with the internal consistency among the three presences greater than 0.90 which shows a good level of reliability with the Cronbach's alpha values of 0.90, 0.89, and 0.91 for teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence respectively. The range of instructor's observations was according to the following parameters: 1) Total involvement in the non-conventional program, 2) Practicality of the instruction, 3) Productive interaction and promising feedback, and 4) Independent learning and perceived perception. Instructor's observations scale was adopted from Wu, Hsieh, and Yang (2017) with a set of alterations to accommodate the demands of the current study (Figure, 2).



**Figure 2.** *Instructor's observations in the current study*

### Participants

The participants of this study were randomly selected from a pool of 317 Iranian EFL learners including 173 males and 144 females with the age ranges of 15 to 35 learning English in Raaz language school in Isfahan, Iran. The participants had passed Richards and Bohlke's (2012b) FOUR CORNERS Level 1 and some of them had experienced divergent English courses at school and at other institutes. However, to select intermediate and upper-intermediate learners and to guarantee the homogeneity of the classrooms for the present study, all of the participants were tested based on the SPEAK NOW 1-4 Interview Placement Exam ranging from easy (SPEAK NOW Level 1) to difficult (SPEAK NOW Level 3) questions presented by Richards and



Bohlke (2012a). Accordingly, 120 learners including 60 intermediate and 60 upper-intermediate learners were randomly assigned to one conventional (control group) and one non-conventional (unplugged) classroom at each proficiency level (30 each).

### **Procedures for the Conventional Instruction (Control Group)**

The general procedures to tap the purpose of the study included the textbooks based on institute's recommended chart including SPEAK NOW Level 1 for the intermediate and SPEAK NOW Level 2 for the upper-intermediate level. SPEAK NOW series is completely useful for the learners to work on their fluency, and accuracy while speaking appropriately. To accomplish learners' communicative needs, based on learners' opinions four mostly useful and interesting topics were selected by the learners. The topics for intermediate participants included "Greetings", "Describing people", "Asking what someone is wearing", and "Talking about food" selected from SPEAK NOW Level 1. On the other hand, based on upper-intermediate learners' interests four topics including "Starting a conversation", "Asking about personalities", "Style and fashion", and "Sharing experiences with food" were chosen based on SPEAK NOW Level 2. Every topic in the SPEAK NOW series features (1) Vocabulary, (2) Conversation, (3) Language booster, (4) Pronunciation, and (5) Speak with confidence. The teachers in the control group classrooms were asked to follow the textbooks' activities and learners could measure their progress using self-assessments and role-play situations plus "Can-Do" sentences of the Common European Framework (CEFR). Besides, learners' performances before and after instruction were tested using IELTS™ Style Interview pretest and posttest in addition to Paper-based Exam pretest and posttest (See Figure 3). To correct learners' errors, instead of immediate error correction, the teachers at both intermediate and upper-intermediate levels adopted delayed error correction in order not to break the flow of conversations. As Jeyaraj (2017) discussed, learners' fluency may be negatively affected by the teacher's instant and intrusive error correction. Therefore, learners' errors were regarded as a sign of learning unless errors hindered communication. In this particular situation, recasts were employed by the teacher. In the intermediate level as learners were not aware of some communicative tactics for monitoring and contextualizing, the teachers were responsible for checking pronunciation and grammar. Moreover, intermediate learners' errors were dealt with by the teachers at the end of conversations.

### **Procedures for the UCM Instruction**

The procedures for the non-conventional (UCM) instruction were adopted based on the three interdisciplinary features including a) less dependence on the textbooks, b) elimination of the printed materials and working on conversation-driven activities and c) paying attention to learners' exigent needs. Like the participants in the control group classrooms, learners in the UCM classrooms were equipped with the same textbooks but the textbooks were used at home to give learners extra information about the topics of discussion in the classroom. For classroom discussions, the same topics were chosen for the intermediate learners jointly. On the other hand, other similar topics were selected for all the upper-intermediate learners. With respect to the viewpoint of Thornbury and Meddings (2009) for running the unplugged classroom, learners were asked to put the textbooks aside and the classrooms were presented on the basis of the light-materials with three consecutive steps including "Set it up", "Let it run", and "Round it off" (As shown in Figure 3). More importantly, the teacher uploaded some pictures related to the topics in the set it up phase for the learners to set the scene and encourage learners to talk about the related vocabulary. Like the performances of participants in the control group classrooms, UCM learners' performance before and after the instruction were measured through IELTS™ Style Interview

pretest and posttest and Paper-based Exam pretest and posttest. Similar to the control group classrooms at both intermediate and upper-intermediate levels, the type of error correction was a delayed error correction. However, in the upper-intermediate level, communication breakdowns were less likely to happen as learners were able to use more cognitive and interactive strategies including monitoring and cooperating with others. As such, upper-intermediate learners enjoyed self-correction and peer-correction most of the times. While, accuracy errors were tapped at the end of each conversation task by the teachers or quick learners.

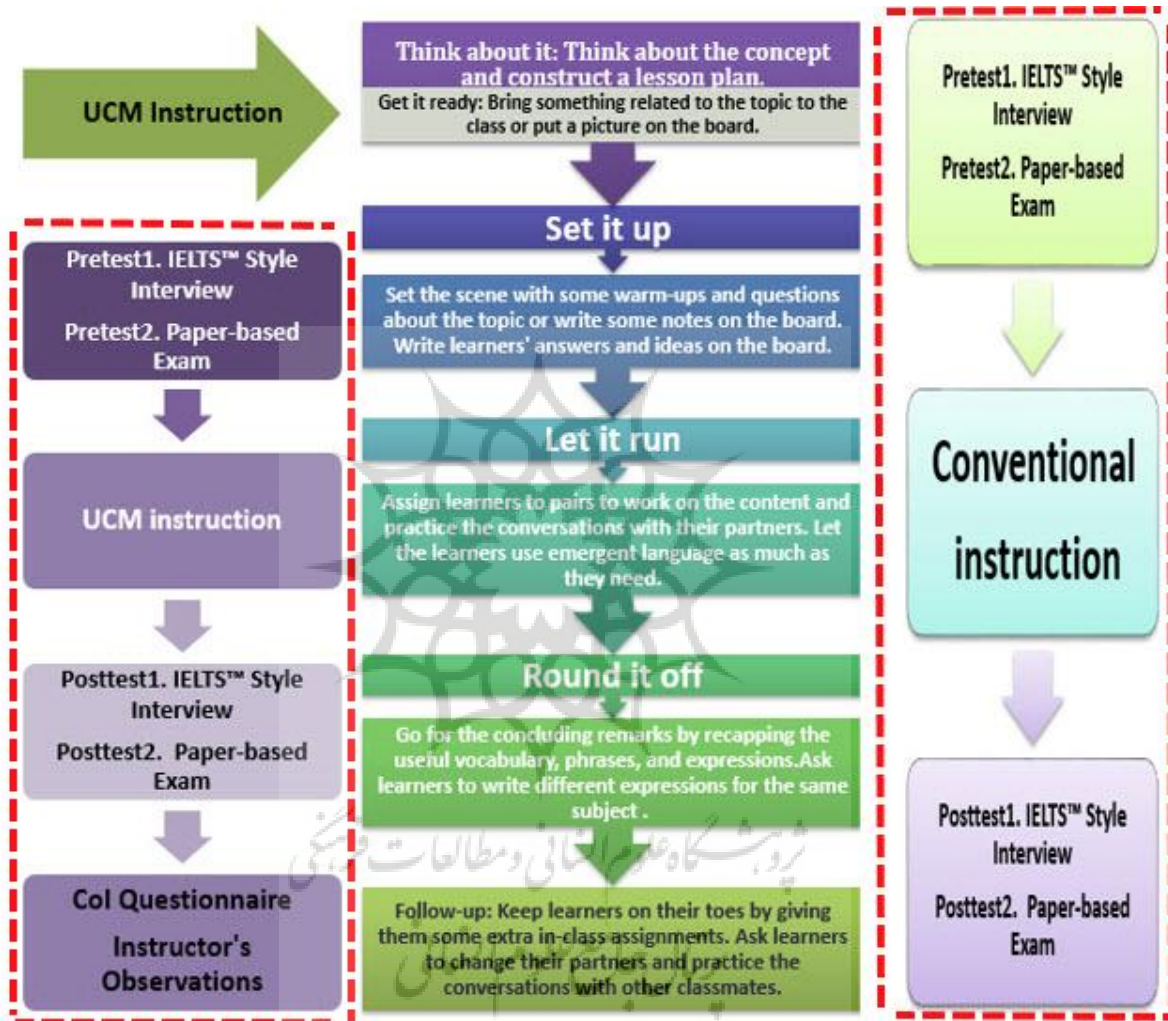


Figure 3. Procedures of the study

### Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

This study took a 12-week treatment and the data for all the classrooms including the conventional and non-conventional classrooms were gathered on the basis of the pretest and the posttest. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to compare differences among groups. Two IELTS™ Style Interviews and two Paper-based Exams were applied and adopted to find answers to the first three research questions. To answer the last research question, the data for the non-conventional classrooms were also gathered from other sources including the

outcomes of the CoI questionnaire in addition to the instructors' classroom observations (Figure 2). At the qualitative level, however, the unplugged learners' overall experiences and viewpoints towards the UCM instruction were reported based on instructor's observations.

### Results

To assess the groups' differences, changes in intermediate and upper-intermediate learners' scores from the pretest to the posttest were compared using inferential statistics based on One-way ANOVA. For the randomized design based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov<sup>a</sup> test, assumptions associated with One-way ANOVA and normal distribution of data were inspected applying a normality test (Kolmogorov, 1933; Lilliefors, 1967; Smirnov, 1936). The results indicated that the scores in all groups were not normal ( $p < 0/05$ ). Thus, the mean could be dramatically affected by the changes in the distributions' tails and the median could better demonstrate the center of distribution. Therefore, the nonparametric tests have been used in the present study.

#### The First Research Question

The results of the IELTS™ Style Interviews' pre- and posttests in the intermediate level were summarized in Table 1. The results of the IELTS™ Style Interviews illustrated that learners' posttest interview scores have meaningfully increased compared to their pretest. The analysis of the interviews in the posttest indicated that UCM learners' performance was significantly better than control-group learners' performance. Although the maximum scores of the control-group and non-conventional (UCM) classrooms were the same in the pretest, the maximum score of the UCM participants was absolutely higher than that of the control group learners in the posttest. Comparing the minimum scores, the minimum scores of control-group learners and the UCM learners were the same in the pretest while the minimum score of the UCM learners in the posttest interview was higher than that of the control group learners.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of intermediate learners' IELTS™ Style Interviews' pre- and posttests

	Group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Statistics (Z)	Sig.
Control	Pre test	30	1.40	1.70	1.48	.09	-4.841	<.001
	Post test	30	1.80	2.10	1.90	.11		
UCM	Pre test	30	1.40	1.70	1.51	.10	-4.798	<.001
	Post test	30	1.90	2.40	2.16	.13		

The comparison of learners' performance from pretest to posttest shown in Table 1 demonstrated that according to the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, in both of the instructions, interviewees in their posttests performed meaningfully better than their pretest ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, the results of their posttests' performance indicated that the UCM group outperformed the control group. Needless to say that both of the instructions were successful in implementing and elevating learners' oral proficiency, although the results of learners' interviews in the posttest declared the significant effectiveness of unplugged instruction over the control group instruction.

The assessment of learners' pre- and post Paper-based tests in the intermediate level according to Table 2 showed that learners' Paper-based performances in the posttests have been dramatically enhanced compared to their pretests. These findings buttress the efficacy of the instructions. However, by comparing the performance of the UCM learners in the posttest with that of the control group classroom, the results indicated UCM learners' better performance as a result of more exposure to the conversation-driven practices in the classroom. The findings supported the positive effect of UCM instruction over the control group instruction. Following the disparity of the maximum scores of the UCM learners and control group's learners in their pre- and posttests, the results proved UCM learners' better Paper-based performance in the posttest over Control group's learners.

**Table 2.** *Descriptive statistics of intermediate learners' Paper-based pre- and posttests*

Group		<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	<i>Std.</i> Deviation	Statistics ( <i>Z</i> )	<i>Sig.</i>
Control	Pretest	30	1.50	1.80	1.61	.10	-4.824	<.001
	Posttest	30	1.90	2.30	2.02	.11		
UCM	Pretest	30	1.50	1.80	1.63	.10	-4.801	<.001
	Posttest	30	2.00	2.50	2.29	.14		

The results of the Paper-based test based on the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, revealed that the UCM learners outperformed the control group learners in their posttests. On the other hand, the results of the Mann-Whitney test according to Table 3 indicated that in pair-wise comparison of mean differences there was an excessively meaningful difference between the performance of the UCM and the control group classrooms.

**Table 3.** *Pair-wise comparison of intermediate learners' mean differences between IELTS™ Style Interviews' pre- and posttests*

Group	Mean Difference	Statistics	<i>Sig.</i>
Control - UCM	-.24	-32.117	< .001

Learners' performances in the intermediate level manifested that the UCM instructions led to a more collaborative interaction in the zone of dogme ELT. The UCM instruction resulted in producing more authentic utterances based on learners' active presence and participation in dyadic and grouped conversations. The Mann-Whitney test of learners' performance based on Table 4 showed that UCM instruction was outstandingly more successful than the control group instruction. The findings of the pair-wise comparison of the score differences with reference to Table 4 proved the significant disparity of learners' performances after getting UCM and control group instructions.

**Table 4.** *Pair-wise comparison of intermediate learners' mean differences between Paper-based pre- and posttests*

Group	Mean Difference	Statistics	<i>Sig.</i>
Control - UCM	-.24	-33.300	<.001



### The Second Research Question

For the purpose of comparing learners at two different levels, the same tests were given to the upper-intermediate learners, including IELTS™ Style Interview and Paper-based test. The results of the upper-intermediate learners' IELTS™ Style Interviews' pre- and posttests indicated that interviewees' posttest scores were remarkably higher than their pretest scores in the two groups. As shown in Table 5, the instructions in the two groups were efficacious but not exactly with the same rate. Based on the results of interviewees' minimum scores in the pretest in Table 5 the minimum scores were identical for both groups, while in the posttests the control group interviewees were not as successful as the UCM interviewees. On the other hand, the UCM interviewees were to some extent more successful in producing utterances. Comparing the maximum scores, the findings revealed that both of the groups had the same maximum score in their pretest. Besides, the maximum score of UCM classroom in the posttest was not considerably higher than the maximum score of the control group classroom.

**Table 5.** *Descriptive statistics of upper-intermediate learners' IELTS™ Style Interviews' pre- and posttests*

Group		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Statistics (Z)	Sig.
Control	Pretest	30	1.80	2.10	1.92	.114	-4.811	<.001
	Posttest	30	2.20	2.50	2.31	.104		
UCM	Pretest	30	1.80	2.10	1.94	.114	-4.799	<.001
	Posttest	30	2.30	2.60	2.49	.104		

All in all, based on the findings of Table 5 and the results of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, the upper-intermediate learners' performance in IELTS™ Style Interview was normally higher in the posttests than their performance in the pretests ( $p < 0.05$ ). This revealed that both of the instructions were effective and contained proficiency-oriented materials. On the bases of interviewees' performances, it could be inferred that the UCM techniques and procedures were more useful compared to conventional techniques. The findings indicated that in the upper-intermediate level both of the instructions had almost the same effect. The analysis of the upper-intermediate Paper-based pre- and posttests with reference to Table 6 demonstrated that the paper-based pretests' minimum score in UCM and the control group classrooms were identical; however, in the posttest, the minimum score of UCM was to some extent higher than the minimum score of the control group classroom. The results proved identical maximum scores for the two groups in the pretest, but divergent maximum scores in the posttests. Moreover, there was a slight difference between the maximum scores of the control group classroom and UCM.

**Table 6.** *Descriptive statistics of upper-intermediate learners' Paper-based pre- and posttests*

Group		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Statistics (Z)	Sig.
Control	Pretest	30	1.90	2.40	2.13	.16	-4.675	<.001
	Posttest	30	2.30	2.60	2.46	.10		
UCM	Pretest	30	1.90	2.40	2.12	.16	-4.801	<.001
	Posttest	30	2.40	2.70	2.60	.10		

The assessment of the data according to Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test showed the improvement of upper-intermediate learners' Paper-based scores in the posttest as a result of the impact of instructions. According to the pair-wise comparison of the upper-intermediate learners' mean differences in IELTS™ Style interviews (as shown is Table 7) and based on the Mann-Whitney test's results, there was not a meaningful discrepancy between learners' performance in the conventional and non-conventional classrooms.

**Table 7.** *Pair-wise comparison of upper-intermediate learners' IELTS™ Style Interviews' mean differences between pre- and posttests*

Group	Mean Difference	Statistics	Sig.
Control - UCM	-.15	-43.283	<.001

The pair-wise comparison of the mean differences in the Paper-based test, based on the Mann-Whitney test (see Table 8) demonstrated that the mean difference between the unplugged classroom and the control group classroom was quite insignificant. Likewise, the mean differences between the performances of the unplugged learners and the control group learners in the upper-intermediate level put emphasis on learners' inclination towards non-conventional instructions over the textbook.

**Table 8.** *Pair-wise comparison of upper-intermediate learners' Paper-based tests' mean differences between pre- and posttests*

Group	Mean Difference	Statistics	Sig.
Control - UCM	-.15	-37.717	<.001

The results of the Mann-Whitney test considering the pair-wise comparison of mean differences demonstrated that in the Paper-based posttest there was a slight difference between the performances of the control group classroom and the UCM. Based on the findings, it could be inferred that the upper-intermediate learners enjoyed both instructions almost equally.

### **The Third Research Question**

To answer the third research question, UCM learners' perception and viewpoints towards the unplugged instruction were analyzed at two levels. At quantitative level, UCM learners' perception was analyzed based on a modified version of the CoI questionnaire. At qualitative level, UCM learners' viewpoints concerning unplugged classroom's experience were reported on the basis of instructor's observations.

### **Learners' Perception Based on CoI Questionnaire**

On the basis of the CoI questionnaire results, learners' perception towards unplugged instruction was scrutinized in terms of teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. In teaching presence phase, UCM participants were asked to rate the unplugged instruction based on design and organization, facilitation, and direct instruction. In social presence step, UCM participants had to rate the unplugged instruction according to affective expression, open communication, and group cohesion. Finally, for cognitive presence, UCM participants were required to rate unplugged instruction with regard to triggering event, exploration, integration and resolution.

**Table 9.** *Descriptive statistics of three presences in the intermediate and upper-intermediate levels for UCMs*

Group	Scale	intermediate		upper intermediate		Statistics ( <i>U</i> )	Sig.
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation		
UCM	Teaching Presence	62.37	2.25	50.00	3.92	3.500	<.001
	Social Presence	43.23	1.59	37.47	3.51	65.000	<.001
	Cognitive Presence	55.30	1.78	49.30	2.52	11.000	<.001

### Teaching Presence

From the data on the basis of the Mann-Whitney test in Table 9, it is apparent that intermediate respondents' reaction to the teaching presence was not the same as their counterparts in the upper-intermediate level. What is striking about the mean scores of the intermediate UCM participants in this Table is that the intermediate learners were too much convergent in terms of concurring with a clear design and organization for the direct conversation-driven, material-light, and learner-centered instruction. To sum up, the participants' perspectives at two levels, as Table 9 set out participants' mean score was meaningfully more remarkable comparing the upper-intermediate learners' mean score. The most surprising aspect of the data collected from UCM learners in the upper-intermediate level, however, was that divergent comments on the effectiveness of UCM instruction have been recorded.

### Social Presence

The social themes identified in the survey for the UCMs at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels provided an overview of participants' perspectives towards the affective experience, open communication, and group cohesion in the zone of unplugged development. From the data presented in Table 9 it can be seen that the intermediate participants in the UCM found a sense of belonging in the course and felt comfortable conversing in the unplugged environment. The Mann-Whitney test findings obtained from the preliminary analysis of participants' social presence in the UCMs pictured that the intermediate participants experienced a sense of collaboration while their points of views were acknowledged by other participants. Overall, these results indicated that the mean score of the intermediate participants was evidently higher than the mean score of the upper-intermediate participants in the social presence phase.

### Cognitive Presence

Regarding the triggering event, exploration, integration and resolution, in the cognitive presence some of the participants in both intermediate and upper-intermediate levels reported that in the classroom they had the ability to apply the knowledge created in the course to other areas of their activities whilst some others argued that they could not generalize the solutions to the raised problems and extend them to other areas. Based on the upper-intermediate participants' comments, the oral proficiency of the learners appeared to be unaffected only by unplugged practices. Therefore, learners in this group needed other sources of proficiency oriented activities to enhance their oral performance. However, their counterparts in the intermediate level reported their classroom as beneficial in terms of expanding their cognitive ability. In other words, as

shown in Table 9 based on the Mann-Whitney test the mean score of the intermediate participants was statistically higher than the mean score of the upper-intermediate learners in the cognitive presence.

### **Learners' Viewpoints Based on Instructor's Observations**

The allocated time for the unplugged instruction based on learners' comments sounded quite reasonable. In contrast to control group instruction and based on the suggested time for the textbook activities, in the unplugged classroom learners had the autonomy to spend more time on the activities that needed more practice. Moreover, as the teacher was responsible for managing the time for running the UCM phases in an ordered fashion, the time was divided according to three main goals of dogme implementation including setting the sense for presenting the topic, letting the communication run and rounding the topic off through recapping the key points. Intermediate participants on the whole reported, "We had enough time on the "*Let it run*" stage, so that we could practice the conversations once with our partner and once with other classmates or sometimes chorally as the whole class with more focus on the accuracy of our pronunciation." Other participants reported that "The stages were quite dynamic to the extent that we could improve three aspects of our oral proficiency".

The upper-intermediate learners on the other hand, stated that "In the "*Set it up*" stage the focus was on presenting the topics, and since there was no limitation for using our textbooks, some of the learners had memorized some prefabricated patterns of the book before the classroom and as a result the "Set it up" stage did not bring anything new for them. Some others explained that "In the "*Let it run*" after practicing on the accuracy of the utterances they had plenty of time to maneuver on the fluency and complexity of the utterances."

In contrast to the control group instruction, in both the intermediate and upper-intermediate UCM classrooms, concerns were mostly expressed about the possibility of too much stress on the light materials with less attention to the textbook's instruction. A variety of perspectives were expressed in the survey hinged upon a sense amongst participants that whether or not the course topics and the course objectives were fully tapped in accordance with learners' communicative needs. One intermediate participant argued, "The first sessions of the classroom were very confusing for me as I was worried about learning with less reference to the textbook or sometimes remote from the textbook, but after some passage of time, I discerned the effectiveness of in-class conversations in the light of the well-organized stages." One upper-intermediate participant commented, "I felt more confident as I could interact with other learners more accurately and fluently than before. I particularly enjoyed the bottom-up authentic materials offered by the teacher at the beginning of the class to enhance my learning process." The most divergent and often conflicting debate emerged from being too much learner-centered at the intermediate level, as they were not able to categorize their immediate needs, however, one individual stated, "Although I was unaware of the priority of my communicative needs, I have benefited from practicing divergent patterns and models for expressing the same ideas so that I got to know the communicative preferences."

A variety of perspectives were expressed under the umbrella term of participants' "exigent needs". Some upper-intermediate participants argued that they couldn't come to the consensus towards the effectiveness of their unplugged attempts within the communicative zone, while others were of the idea that the unplugged tasks solved most of their unnoticed accuracy conflicts completely in line with their proficiency-oriented needs. In the upper-intermediate level, on the other hand, opinions differed regarding giving the feedback on their classmates' discussions in the "Let it run" or the recapped practices of their partners in the "Round it off" phase. As uttered by



one of the upper-intermediate participants, "In the *"Let it run"* and *"Round it off"* I receive effective feedback and I was able to correct the mistakes more confidently." Most of the intermediate learners recurrently indicated that although they were unable to recognize the erroneous areas in their speech production, interacting with other learners gave them the chance to correct their communication breakdown. As one intermediate participant noted, "I felt more aware of how to select the correct forms in my dialogues with my partner and as the teacher or other classmates were giving immediate and authentic feedback, I was able to revise my utterances and pay more attention to the correct usage in my conversation." The participants in the unplugged zones learned to scaffold other learners' interaction and gradually grew in escalating communication by their own bootstraps. One intermediate participant commented, "I really enjoyed teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions as I was able to work on my language at different situations. Because the classroom was not based on textbooks, we had the chance to ask questions in the problematic areas of our conversation." Some of the upper-intermediate participants stated, "The conversation-driven activities were very useful in terms of finding our weak and strong points." "Having the whole class practice different utterances in identical authentic situations, taught me divergent ways to express myself for conveying meaning," noted by one upper-intermediate participant. Accordingly, the unplugged community resembled the authentic interaction which resulted in increasing learners' confidence and forced intermediate introverted learners to collaborate with more confidence.

### Discussion

This study set out with the aim of determining the effectiveness of unplugged instruction in an EFL learning community for intermediate and upper-intermediate learners. The present study found that both UCM and control-group learners had a better performance in their posttest compared to their pretest. The observed increase in learners' posttest scores might be explained by the positive effect of instruction on learners' performance. However, at the intermediate level UCM learners' oral performance at posttest was dramatically better than their counterparts in the control group. Intermediate UCM participants concurrently argued that light-material classroom freed up more space for meaningful learning based on group-conversations. To be more precise, learners' speaking ability was an index of collaborative interaction and group-discussions. These findings are in agreement with those of other studies which showed the importance of cooperation and collaboration on the side of learners in focused-group conversation for escalating learners' speaking skill (Saito, 2019; Namaziandost et al., 2019; Young & West, 2018; Jeyaraj, 2017; Wichadee, 2017)

Whilst a minority of intermediate learners mentioned that a textbook-based instruction could better push them towards organizing and orchestrating the newly-learned concepts, all agreed that implementing a Dogme-based instruction was a constructive attempt for exhorting introvert learners to participate more confidently in conversations. These findings are consistent with the results of Mohamed's (2019) study that revealed the salience of unplugged classrooms on expanding learners' speaking skill and ameliorating learners' speaking self-efficacy. Moreover, it is encouraging to compare these results with the findings of other studies. As mentioned in the literature review, prior studies have noted that intermediate learners' desire to participate in communicative tasks may not be influenced by Dogme-oriented instruction (Sarani & Malmir, 2019; Jeyaraj, 2017).

In contrast to previous studies, however, the findings of this research revealed that unplugged instruction was highly effective in terms of encouraging class participation and authentic learning at intermediate level. Another important finding of the present study was that

intermediate UCM learners spent more time on collaborative conversations in the supportive zone of unplugged instruction. Therefore, they learned to use more socio-cognitive strategies in terms of managing the time and scaffolding their classmates' conversations whenever possible. These factors may explain the relatively good correlation between teachers' implementation of conversation-driven instructions and learners' successful application of learning strategies. These results match those observed in Marashi and Rahimpanah (2019) study. In their Dogme-based experience they came up with the idea that the material-light aspect of Dogme ELT guides learners towards being autonomous and awakens learners' inherent learning skills and strategies.

One unanticipated finding; however, was that upper-intermediate learners' oral performance did not dramatically improve over the application of light-material conversation-driven instruction. The observed difference between UCM and control-group learners' posttests in upper-intermediate level was not noticeably significant. Contrary to expectations, the outcomes demonstrated that upper-intermediate learners' inclination towards unplugged classroom did not dramatically increase by the end of the instruction. This result may be explained by the fact that upper-intermediate learners were more textbook-dependent compared to intermediate learners. While intermediate learners benefited unplugged classroom's light-material and conversation-based strategies, upper-intermediate learners found UCM instruction devoid of an organized learning structure for anchoring new concepts to their previous knowledge for better subsumption. Following the observed contradictions in upper-intermediate level, the results indicated a slight difference between UCM and control-group learners' performance in the posttest. However, these results did not explain the occurrence of adverse influence of UCM structure on upper-intermediate learners' perception. Surprisingly, this finding corroborates the ideas of Sarani and Malmir (2019), who suggested the implementation of unplugged instruction for advanced learners as a fruitful asset for encouraging them to communicate.

The investigation of UCM participants' perception towards unplugged instruction has shown that in terms of teaching presence the upper-intermediate learners' perception towards design and organization of the unplugged classroom, facilitation of the light-material and direct instruction significantly varied from each other. In response to the question of the efficacy of unplugged classroom for boosting oral proficiency a range of responses was elicited. Just over half of those upper-intermediate learners surveyed reported that in the first session of UCM instruction they had no idea about the objectives of instruction. Only a small number of upper-intermediate respondents indicated that learning with textbooks being used occasionally could facilitate cooperative learning. When the participants were asked to rate the significance of social presence with respect to UCM instruction the majority of upper-intermediate learners commented that group cohesion was the key success for collaborative learning. On the other hand, some upper-intermediate learners felt that the whole scenario in the unplugged classroom resembled an open-discussion course according to which the teacher was responsible for keeping learners on their toes for the chain of conversation. Therefore, the present study provides additional evidence for the structure-based nature of unplugged classroom with respect to the fact that being an unplugged learner does not specifically mean being left unnoticed (Rion et al., 2018; Meddings, 2017; Thornbury, 2017; Thornbury & Meddings, 2009; Thornbury & Slade, 2006).

However, concerning the cognitive presence, a common view amongst upper-intermediate interviewees was that unplugged classroom felt short in terms of escalating learners' exploration, integration and resolution. Although these results differ from some published studies (Sarani & Malmir, 2019; Jeyaraj, 2017; Chong, 2016; Parry, 2012), a recurrent theme between this study and previous lines of research in the realm of Dogme ELT is the outstanding aspect of participant-driven syllabi. A possible explanation for these results may stem from the unknown

aspect of light-material instruction. Using less material at the expense of paying more attention to real voices for creating social networks among the participants leads to a better rapport in the zone of proximal growth. Therefore, this research extends our knowledge of collaborative learning based on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). As unplugged participants in this study concurrently commented, UCM-based instruction is vitally utile for cooperative learning in the zone of unplugged classroom. More importantly, these results support Vygotsky's (1987) Socio Cultural Theory (SCT) as most of UCM participants indicated that having a conversation-driven instruction, they were able to extend their socio-cognitive strategies. Furthermore, these outcomes provided reliable grounds for the findings relevant to previous studies (Antonyamy, 2020; Rion et al., 2018; Thornbury, 2017).

The results of the instructor's observations demonstrated that although the first sessions of the UCM were confusing for the intermediate learners, the instruction was notably useful in terms of giving the learners instructive commands and enough time to work on their language while focusing on messages they had transferred in their conversation. Previous research implemented on the structure of unplugged classroom has substantiated the same upshots (Bryndal, 2014; Banegas, 2012; Worth, 2012; Sketchley, 2012; Thornbury & Meddings, 2009). Unplugged instruction drew intermediate learners' attention to the salient role of conversation-driven activities for fostering and satisfying communicative demands. After the instruction, intermediate learners were able to relate the topics of discussions to their life frames via speaking their daily routines using the classroom patterns. These findings corroborate the ideas of Marashi and Rahimpanah (2019), who suggested teachers and syllabus designers adopt a dogme-based instruction as a beneficiary model of language learning to encourage learners in terms of being socially and dialogically autonomous users of English language.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that as the approach of UCM was learner-centered and learners' individuality was counted, intermediate learners gained more confidence in expressing their ideas and sharing their feeling in the classroom. Moreover, collaborative problem solving resulted in enhancing intermediate learners' ability to produce more error-free utterances. Conversation-driven activities made intermediate learners participate in discussions with more competence and scaffold their classmates whenever needed. The intermediate UCM participants revealed their engagement towards the perception of unplugged zone of instruction in all its aspects including the teaching, social and cognitive presence. The CoI questionnaire's findings revealed that the UCM participants' oral proficiency was remarkably improved as a result of practicing the conversation-oriented tasks in the classroom. Concerning the pros and cons of UCM classrooms, one of the advantages of putting the textbooks aside and focusing on the learners' ongoing needs was that learners were able to experience learning in an authentic and stress-free environment. Group-conversations and dialogues in the small groups led to diverse outcomes.

In brief, these findings will doubtless be much scrutinized, but there are some immediately dependable conclusions regarding the implementation of Dogme-based instructions for learners at different proficiency levels. Surprisingly, unplugged experience was highly popular in the intermediate level. Spending plenty of time on the conversation-driven tasks, focusing on instructor's bottom-up materials rather than the materials presented by the book, and concentrating on learners' immediate needs, led to cultivating collaborative and autonomous learning. This study has shown that compared to control group instruction, UCM classroom was extremely effective in terms of giving learners the possibility to apply newly learned materials to real-life settings. The unplugged experience for both intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL

learners produced results regarding the effectiveness of face-to-face interactions in textbook-free zone of learning.

Taken together, the evidence from this study suggests that to be finely tuned in the UCM classroom, it is vital to develop UCM syllabus before the class and follow its steps to successfully tune it in. It is highly recommended to be aware of learners' communicative needs. This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that the input for unplugged classroom comes from the learners so that learners' immediate needs determine the subjects of discussion in this classroom. Unplugged classroom is a snapshot method in that it gives teachers a fast overview of their textbook-free attempts to enhance learners' knowledge. The key strength of this study is its successful implementation of unplugged classroom for changing the belief of teachers and syllabus designers about the substantial role of the textbooks together with recorded and printed materials.

To conclude, one of the issues which emerges from these findings is that UCM learning community is one of the easiest ways to adopt a non-conventional instruction for growing learners' social networking and increasing their motivation for textbook-independent learning. This is an overstatement if teachers claim that teaching without a textbook is impossible. These findings may help us to understand that having the seeds of unplugged instruction planted well results in cultivating and flourishing learners' productive skills including speaking and writing. This research extends our knowledge of implementing innovative methods in the EFL context. To take a vow to the chastity of ELT, considerably more work has to be done by the teachers and researchers in the EFL context. Further research should be done to investigate the impact of UCM on learners with different English backgrounds and in divergent learning communities. The challenge now is to fabricate more UCM learning communities and compare learners' other skills including their listening, reading and writing.

Finally, a number of important limitations need to be considered. First, the present study did not consider the perception and viewpoints of participants based on their gender differences. Secondly, the generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the current study has only examined some Iranian EFL learners in a language school in city of Isfahan. Other EFL learners with divergent needs in different learning communities need to be acknowledged. Thirdly, the sample size was relatively limited to a small group of EFL learners in Isfahan. Hence, caution must be exercised regarding the fact that these findings might not be transferable to other learning communities with larger populations. This research has thrown up many questions regarding Dogme ELT in need of further investigation. Further works need to be done to chronicle whether unplugged instruction is more appropriate for female or male learners. In a broader sense, unplugged implementation is a decision for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners who do not enthuse over textbooks and boring teaching methods.

Concerning the possible theoretical and empirical implications, a theoretical implication of these findings is the possibility that this research may extend EFL researchers, syllabus designers, material developers and teachers' knowledge in terms of implementing an unplugged classroom model. As another theoretical implication, these results can provide further support for the hypothesis that UCM-based instruction expands Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD to an innovative zone of proximal growth where learners' ZPD scaffolds them towards being autonomous users of the language irrespective of their level of language proficiency.

With respect to practical implications, these findings may help us to understand the probable problematic areas on the way of teaching in a Dogme-oriented learning community. This study makes several noteworthy contributions to the policy makers, material developers, and other stakeholders in terms of considering EFL learners' emergent needs in the classroom context



as an apriority and revising the syllabi for teaching English worldwide. Unplugged classroom learners unanimously declared that without the printed materials they had the chance of paying more attention to their speaking and spending more time on the questionable aspects of their own conversations during the class time.

The present study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the problems on the way of teaching in an unplugged learning community with respect to learners' perceptions and viewpoints. Further work is required to establish unplugged classroom for learners' other language skills including receptive skills that need learners' exposure to more authentic materials. On the other hand, a further study with more focus on different group of learners and divergent learning (dis)abilities with respect to different unplugged communities of instruction is therefore suggested to investigate the efficacy of Dogme ELT for these groups of learners. However, more research on the type of light-material procedures for learners with special needs have to be undertaken before the implementation of unplugged instruction.

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