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Exploring EFL Learners' Beliefs toward Communicative Language Teaching: A Case Study of Iranian EFL Learners*

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Abstract

Although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely advocated by a considerable number of applied linguists and English language teachers, its implementation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts has encountered a number of difficulties. Reviewing the literature suggests that one of the reasons for unsuccessful implementation of CLT may be neglect of learners' beliefs in the process of learning. Using a Likert-type scale, the current study was undertaken to explore 242 Iranian EFL learners' beliefs towards six core tenets of the CLT approach: namely, the importance of grammar; the use of group work and pair work; the role and contribution of the learners; the role of the teachers in the classroom; the quality and quantity of error correction and assessment; and the role of the learners' native language in EFL classes. Analysis of the data revealed that although in some cases learners had viewpoints that opposed CLT principles, a considerable percentage of the respondents appreciated and had a high perception of CLT principles, indicating a welcoming atmosphere toward the implementation of CLT in Iran.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Learners' beliefs, questionnaire development and validation

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Introduction

Reacting against the perceived inadequacy of Chomsky's (1965) distinction between competence and performance, Hymes (1972) was the first to coin the term '*communicative competence*'. Despite the major role of communicative competence in creating the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and shaping numerous language pedagogies, this concept still arouses researchers' curiosity (Savignon, 2007). After diligent searching, applied linguists found that language users need not only a knowledge of the language, but also active engagement in using and putting this knowledge into practice in authentic communicative contexts (Chung & Huang, 2009). Nonetheless, there is constant ambiguity in English language teachers' and learners' understanding of the concept of communicative competence and of CLT in particular (Savignon, 2007). Needless to say, successful incorporation of a new teaching approach to the English language classroom chiefly relies on teachers' and learners' beliefs. Given that CLT is considered a learner-centered approach, it is ironic to ignore learners' beliefs towards its principles. Respecting the crucial role of learners in the language learning process, Savignon (1997) claims "if all the variables in L2 acquisition could be identified and the many intricate patterns of interaction between learner and learning context described, ultimate success in learning to use a second language most likely would be seen to depend on the attitude of the learner" (p.107). Recapitulating the importance of students' perceptions, Littlewood (2010) states, "if the kind of teaching that the teacher offers to the students creates opportunities for the kind of learning that the students feel is worthwhile and enjoyable, then the students will be more ready to engage with what is taking place and learning will be more effective" (p. 47). In spite of the evidence that learners' perspectives on classroom pedagogy frequently differ from those of teachers (Horowitz, 1990; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004; Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, Son, 2005; Matsuura, Chiba, & Hilderbrandt, 2001; Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012; Sarfraz, Mansoor, & Tariq, 2015; Schulz, 1996), there have been few if any studies probing Iranian EFL learners' beliefs in this area.

In an attempt to let learners' voices be heard, this study shed light on Iranian learners' beliefs towards six core elements of CLT: the

importance of grammar; the use of group work and pair work; the role and contribution of the learners; the role of the teachers in the classroom; the quality and quantity of error correction and assessment; and the role of the learners' native language in EFL classes.

Literature Review

The satisfactoriness of application of CLT principles in EFL contexts has been disputed during the last few decades. As Li (1998) claims, effectiveness/ineffectiveness, and difficulties in implementing CLT have been mainly investigated through teachers' perception on communicative language teaching so far (e.g. Anani Sarab, Monfared, & Safarzadeh, 2016; Jafari, Shokrpour & Gutterman, 2015). There have been few number of studies exploring learners' views in general (e.g. Loewen et al., 2009), and fewer still focusing on learners' beliefs towards instructional practices in particular (Savignon, 2007). And yet, as Horwitz (1988) proposes, contradictions between classroom realities and learner expectations about learning may disappoint learners, and consequently interfere with the achievement of the desired learning outcomes. To solve this problem, Nunan (1993) argues, "teachers should find out what their students think and feel about what they want to learn and how they want to learn" (p.4).

Findings from empirical research (e.g., Aubrey, 2010; Chung & Huang, 2009; İnceçay & İnceçay, 2009; Savignon & Wang, 2003) on EFL learners' beliefs have reported some contradictory results toward CLT in different EFL contexts, suggesting, therefore, the advantage of a combination of both communicative and non-communicative activities for learners.

To explore learners' beliefs, Rao (2002) investigated thirty Chinese EFL undergraduates' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities using mixed method research. Results showed participants' openness to both communicative (e.g., student-student interaction, group/ pair work activities) and non-communicative tenets (e.g., drills, teacher's direct explanation of grammatical rules, and teacher's authority). As a result, integration of both activity types was highly recommended. Likewise, in another study conducted by İnceçay and İnceçay (2009), thirty Turkish EFL university students were surveyed and their beliefs toward communicative and non-

communicative based activities were investigated. Results revealed learners positive inclination to support both communicative activities (e.g., whole-class discussion, pair/group-work tasks) and non-communicative ones (e.g., traditional error correction strategies and audio-lingual drills). Accordingly, the researchers recommended an adjustment that would incorporate both activity types.

Savignon and Wang (2003) explored Taiwanese EFL learners' beliefs and perceptions regarding the classroom practices known as primarily meaning-based and form-focused. Results indicated a discrepancy between learners' needs and preferences and their reported experience of classroom instruction. About 88 % of the learners expressed their preference for communicative-based English learning. However, their experience of instructional practice were described as generally form-focused in nature along with the predominance of grammar-translation and audiolingual methods in English language teaching classes. Chung and Huang (2009) also interviewed 24 Taiwanese senior high school learners in order to investigate their beliefs toward the classroom leaning experience concentrating on CLT. The results obtained showed that in spite of the attempts of the Ministry of Education to implement CLT, and learners' positive views toward it, language teaching stressed rote memorization, deductive grammar teaching, and translation to meet exam requirements. Additionally, they reported difficulty in intermingling CLT with traditional teaching methods that had been long established. Exploring the contributing factors in increasing learners' willingness to communicate in different sized classroom (a one-on-one classroom, a small group classroom, and a large group classroom), Aubrey (2010) conducted a study with 22 Japanese EFL learners. It was found that the CLT approach has a considerable role in increasing learners' willingness to communicate, suggesting that developing learners' positive attitudes toward CLT increases their desire to communicate in EFL settings.

Since teaching for communicative competence appears to be the appropriate guiding pedagogical principle for English teaching in settings such as Iran where learners and the society as a whole respect and value communicative skills, in line with similar studies done in other EFL and ESL contexts, the present study attempts to address this

lack of attention by shedding light on Iranian EFL learners' beliefs toward major principles of CLT.

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study were 242 intermediate and advanced English language learners selected through convenience sampling. According to Dörnyei and Csizér (2012), convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the subjects are selected only if they "meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, or easy accessibility" (p.81). They, further add this type of sampling is never totally 'convenience-based'; rather, it is also to some extent purposeful, i.e., in addition to accessibility, the participant must also enjoy some specific "characteristics related to the purpose of the study" (p.81). In this research, the criteria to select the participants were their being EFL learners learning in communicative-based institutes such as Safir Goftehan, and Kish, moreover, their proficiency levels being intermediate or higher. It is noteworthy to mention that since the focus of this study was on the current learning situation of the EFL learners, their previous English learning experience was beyond the scope of the present study and hence not enquired. Table 1 provides the demographic information for the participants.

Table 1 Demographic Information of the Participants

Category	Subcategory	Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	151	62.4
	Male	91	37.6
Proficiency level	Intermediate	141	58.3
	Advanced	101	41.7
Location	Tehran	88	36.4
	Mazandaran	154	63.6

Instruments

A questionnaire, initially composed of thirty items (22 favorable and 8 unfavorable), was developed and evaluated to serve as the instrument of the study. It included six major principles of communicative language teaching: namely, the role of the learner, the role of the teacher, group/pair work, quality and quantity of error correction and

evaluation, the place and importance of grammar, and the role of the learners' native language in EFL settings. In order to generate new items for the study, the best way was to review the literature and then generate the items. After reviewing the literature e.g. Brown, 2001; Celce-Murcia, 1991; Nunan, 1993; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), the researchers strived to generate simple and short items using natural language away from any loaded and ambiguous words. Moreover, double-barreled questions, i.e., questions asking two or more questions in a single item were avoided. It was also attempted to minimize bias in questions. Moreover, the questions were arranged in a logical order, i.e. similar questions were grouped together by separating each section with an appropriate title.

• *Validity of the questionnaire*

After generating the items in English language and translating them into Persian so that the learner participants with different language proficiency levels would be able to complete the survey, a panel of experts in applied linguistics was asked to check the items in terms of content validity, ambiguity, and appropriateness. Afterwards, the questionnaire was piloted with 300 English language learners similar to the target population for which the questionnaire was designed. Having collected the data, the researcher conducted analysis to calculate the validity coefficients in terms of Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

a. *Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)*

To check the factorability of the data, two options of Bartlett's test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure provided by SPSS V23 were examined.

Table 2 Results of KMO and Barlett's Test

KMO and Barlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.857
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4026.288
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

As presented in Table 2, Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded significant ($p = .000 < .05$). Likewise, the KMO measure which should be above 0.6 (Pallant, 2007) was also regarded as a significant one

(KMO = 0.857). After assuring the factorability of data, factor analysis was performed using SPSS V23 and the following six factors were determined. For more information on the indices of the six factors in terms of factor analysis see Appendix A.

1. The role and contribution of the learners (6 statements)
2. The role of the teacher (5 statements)
3. Group/pair work (4 statements)
4. The place and importance of grammar (5 statements)
5. The role of learners' native language (3 statements)
6. The quality and quantity of error correction and assessment (7 statements)

b. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In order to inspect the relationship of the latent variables with the observed variables, a CFA was performed using LISREL software. According to Straub (1989), gain factor loadings should be more than 0.5 or ideally more than 0.7. In the present study, 0.5 is regarded as the standard factor loading. Since a standard factor loading of 0.5 is acceptable, questions 6 and 23 were eliminated because their factor loadings were less than 0.5 ($Q_6 = 0.41$ & $Q_{23} = 0.43$). Overall, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of 28 statements (21 favorable and 7 unfavorable) which followed the Likert technique of scale construction. Appendices B and C provide the data of the CFA's first and second steps.

• *Reliability of the Questionnaire*

The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by utilizing Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The result of coefficient alpha is a number between 0 and 1 and the closer the number is to 1, the better the instrument is in terms of internal reliability. In this regard, Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) postulates that the reliability Index below 0.60 is regarded as weak, and above that is an acceptable measure for the reliability index of the questionnaire.

In the present study, the results of the Cronbach's Alpha showed that the internal consistency of the whole questionnaire was 0.77 and

for the six subscales (i.e. the six principles of the CLT approach), the following values were obtained.

Table 3 Reliability Indices of the Questionnaire Factors

Components	Reliability
1. The role of the learners	0.81
2. The role of the teacher	0.74
3. Group/pair work	0.77
4. The place and importance of grammar	0.78
5. The role of learners' native language	0.72
6. The quality and quantity of error correction and assessment	0.82

Data Analysis

The remained twenty-eight items were categorized into six thematic groups of the role and contribution of the learners (statements 1,2,3,4,5), perspective on error correction and assessment (statements 6,7,8,9,10,11,12), the role and importance of grammar (statements 13,14,15,16,17), the role of the teacher (statements 18,19,20,21), the role of the learners' native language (statements 22,23,24), and the role of the group/pair work (statements 25,26,27,28). Since, the questionnaire consisted of favorable and unfavorable statements (shown by asterisk), the coding of the data followed the given pattern. For the positive statements, participants' responses were coded as follows: *strongly agree* = 6, *somewhat agree* = 5, *agree* = 4, *somewhat disagree* = 3, *disagree* = 2, and *strongly disagree* = 1. For the negative statements, the point values were reversed. Thus, the higher the score, the more positive the belief toward CLT. Finally, the data gathered through language learners' questionnaire were subjected to descriptive statistics utilizing mean, frequency, and percentage of each statement.

Results

Table 4 illustrates the distribution of the participants' answers to the first group of research questions that deals with learners' beliefs toward their roles and contribution to the learning process.

Table 4 Learners' Beliefs on the Role and Contribution of the Learners

Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	6*	
	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	
1. It is the learner who plays a great role in the process of learning.	52 21.5	65 26.9	90 37.2	29 12.0	6 2.5	0 0	4.53
2. Learners are expected to interact with each other either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writing.	121 50.0	93 38.4	28 11.6	0 0	0 0	0 0	5.38
3. Learners need to have freedom to choose their language use rather than practicing what they are told to say.	138 57.0	88 36.4	11 4.5	4 1.7	1 .4	0 0	5.48
4. Learner's own personal experience should be regarded as an important contributing element in language classrooms.	55 22.7	89 36.8	85 35.1	13 5.4	0 0	0 0	4.77
5*.The learner is not in a position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for him/her.	66 27.3	62 25.6	52 21.5	35 14.5	22 9.1	5 2.1	2.59
Total Mean: 4.55							

According to the collected data, the majority of the respondents (85.5%) showed their agreement with the point that learners play a great role in the process of learning. Likewise, all the learners agreed that they are expected to interact with each other either through pair/group work or in their writing. As for items 3 and 4, a great portion of the respondents (i.e., 97.9% & 94.6% respectively), indicated strongly positive beliefs that they need to be given freedom to choose their language use and their personal experience should also be counted as an important contributing factor in the learning process. However, in response to item 5, 74.4% of the participants expressed agreement with the view that they are not in a position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for them. This implies that a notable percentage of EFL learners prefer teachers to dictate classroom activities and materials. In general, the results report that a considerable percentage of the respondents, based on a mean value of

4.55, highly believe in the importance of their roles in having a successful learning.

Table 5 Learners' Beliefs on Error Correction and Assessment

Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	6*	
	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	
6*.For evaluating learners' progress in communication, their vocabulary and structural knowledge should be assessed.	23 9.5	56 23.1	56 23.1	50 20.7	42 17.4	15 6.2	3.32
7. Errors are seen as a natural outcome of the development of the communication skill and are therefore tolerated.	127 52.5	90 37.2	25 10.3	0 0	0 0	0 0	5.42
8*. Because of the learners' limited linguistic knowledge, they should not be allowed to correct each other's errors.	7 2.9	32 13.2	55 22.7	70 28.9	55 22.7	23 9.5	3.84
9. It is better to evaluate learners' performance in communicative based activities such as role-play.	11 4.5	25 10.3	40 16.5	75 31.0	57 23.6	34 14.0	2.99
10.Constant error correction is unnecessary and even counter-productive.	36 14.9	47 19.4	83 34.3	49 20.2	20 8.3	7 2.9	4.04
11*. Good evaluation is carried out when the focus of evaluation is on accuracy.	81 33.5	90 37.2	64 26.4	6 2.5	1 .4	0 0	5.01
12. Correction from teacher should happen only when there is a communication breakdown.	10 4.1	29 12.0	60 24.8	81 33.5	44 18.2	18 7.4	3.28
Total Mean: 3.98							

In response to items 6-12 (see Table 5), which deal with learners' beliefs toward error correction and assessment, about half of the respondent (55.7%) expressed agreement with the statement that learners' progress in communication should be evaluated through assessing their vocabulary and structural knowledge. Additionally, a great majority of the participants (97.1%) agreed that "good evaluation is carried out when the focus of evaluation is on accuracy" (item 12).

With regard to the error-treatment set of items, all learner participants unanimously showed their agreement that errors are a natural feature of learning a new language. Similarly, in response to item 10, 68.6% of the respondents agreed that constant error correction is not only unnecessary but also counter-productive. In total, learners with an average mean value of 3.98 expressed rather favorable beliefs toward CLT principle in terms of the way they prefer to be corrected and assessed.

Table 6 Learners' Beliefs on the Role and Importance of Grammar

Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	1* f/p	2* f/p	3* f/p	4* f/p	5* f/p	6* f/p	
13*. Direct instruction of language rules leads to effective communication.	24 9.9	45 18.6	79 32.6	59 24.4	23 9.5	12 5.0	3.19
14. Less attention should be paid to the overt presentation and discussion of grammatical rules.	8 3.3	27 11.2	33 13.6	72 29.8	64 26.4	38 15.7	2.88
15. Language forms should be addressed within a communicative context and not in isolation.	10 4.1	35 14.5	51 21.1	74 30.6	51 21.1	21 8.7	3.24
16*. The most important part of learning English is practicing grammatical patterns.	0 0	6 2.5	11 4.5	50 20.7	74 30.6	101 41.7	5.05
17. Learners seem to focus best on grammar when it relates to their communicative needs and experiences.	14 5.8	32 13.2	63 26.0	79 32.6	37 15.3	17 7.0	3.40
Total Mean: 3.55							

For the group of items dealing with the role and importance of grammar in EFL classroom settings (see items 13-17 in Table 6), data analysis suggested that learners are mostly in favor of direct presentation of grammatical rules. Moreover, 71.9% of them rejected the idea that less attention should be paid to the overt presentation and

discussion of grammatical rules. However, among 242 participants, 41.7%, 30.6%, and 20.7% of the learners selected "strongly disagree", "disagree", and "somewhat disagree" respectively in response to the point that practicing grammatical patterns is not the most important part of learning English. Dealing with item 15, 60.4% of the learners expressed their disapproval of presenting grammatical rules within a communicative context. As for item 17, 54.9% of the participants declared their disagreement with the idea that "learners seem to focus best on grammar when it relates to their communicative needs and experiences". All in all, since the overall mean is 3.55, it can be concluded that EFL learners have a moderately positive belief toward traditional grammar instruction.

Table 7 Learners' Beliefs on the Role of the Teacher

Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	6*	
	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	
18. The teacher should set an environment that is interactive and not excessive formal.	138 57.0	92 38.0	12 5.0	0 0	0 0	0 0	5.52
19. The teacher should facilitate communication process and advise learners during task performance.	103 42.6	96 39.7	43 17.8	0 0	0 0	0 0	5.25
20*. The teacher's role is to act as 'authority' in the language classroom	38 15.7	64 26.4	70 28.9	36 14.9	27 11.2	7 2.9	2.88
21. Teacher should help learners in any way that motivates them to work with language.	162 66.9	80 33.1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	5.67
Total Mean: 4.83							

Table 7 deals with inspecting EFL learners' beliefs toward the teacher's role in foreign language classes. As is clear from above table, except item 20 in which a considerable percentage of language learners (71%) revealed their tendency to favor the traditional view of language teaching which puts the language teacher as authority and the center of classroom, in response to items 18, 19, and 21 learners were totally in line with CLT by accepting that the teacher should establish an interactive and not excessive formal classroom setting (item 18), they

should facilitate communication process (item 19), and should help learners in any way that increases their motivation or meaningful interaction (item 21).

Table 8 Learners' Beliefs on the Role of the Native Language

Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	1* f/p	2* f/p	3* f/p	4* f/p	5* f/p	6* f/p	
22. Judicious use of learner's native language is acceptable when feasible.	87 36.0	103 42.6	46 19.0	6 2.5	0 0	0 0	5.12
23*. Learners' native language should be a vehicle for communication in language classrooms.	0 0	0 0	0 0	18 7.4	80 33.1	144 59.5	5.52
24*. Teachers must provide directions of homework, class work and test directions by using learners' native language.	16 6.6	38 15.7	76 31.4	67 27.7	29 12.0	16 6.6	3.43
Total Mean: 4.69							

For the group of items dealing with learners' beliefs toward the role of their native language in EFL classroom settings (see Table 8), the results reflect that a considerable portion of the respondents, with mean value of 4.69, have favorable views toward utilizing the target language as a means of communication. As Table 7 depicts, 97.6% of the participants showed agreement with the statement that judicious use of learner's native language is acceptable. In a similar vein, all the participants (with 59.5% in strong disagreement, 33.1% in disagreement, and 7.4% in average disagreement) expressed their disagreement with using their mother tongue as a medium for communication in foreign language classes. However, in response to item 24, 53.7% of the participants favored the idea of using their native language for giving homework and examination directions. The results of this part of study is consistent with Gamal and Debra's research (2001) done in Egypt in which the Egyptian learners believe that language teachers in Egypt are considered as sole knowledge- holders who are supposed to act as authority in language classes.

Table 9 Learners' Beliefs on the Role of Group/Pair Work

Statements	6	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	6*	
	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	f/p	
25. Group/pair work activities can lead to more developed ideas, and therefore greater confidence and more effective communication.	76 31.4	86 35.5	57 23.6	19 7.9	3 1.2	1 .4	4.87
26. More emphasis should be given to active and effective modes of learning such as pair or group work.	86 35.5	79 32.6	47 19.4	25 10.3	5 2.1	0 0	4.89
27*. Group/pair work tasks can never be replace the whole class formal instruction.	38 15.7	54 22.3	48 19.8	40 16.5	37 15.3	25 10.3	3.56
28. Group/pair work activities provide knowledge and skills which lead to greater success in undertaking tasks.	85 35.1	91 37.6	56 23.1	8 3.3	2 .8	0 0	5.03
Total Mean: 4.58							

Concerning learners' perspective on the role and importance of incorporating group/pair work activities in EFL classrooms (see Table 9), data analysis revealed that although learners have strong positive belief on the constructive role of group/pair work tasks on developing ideas, increasing their knowledge, skill and even confidence in maintaining a meaningful negotiation, yet, they do not overlook the significance of traditional whole class formal instruction in learning a new language. Table 10 presents a clearer picture of the results focusing on the major principles of CLT.

Table 10 Summary of Weighing of Learners' Beliefs Regarding CLT Principles

Principles	W	F 4.34-6	RF 2.67-4.33	UF 1-2.66
Grammar Role	3.55		√	
Teacher's Role	4.83	√		
Learner's Role	4.55	√		
Group/pair Work	4.58	√		
Native Language Role	4.69	√		
Error correction and Evaluation	3.98		√	
Total	4.36	√		

The results presented in Table 10 indicate that the six core tenets of the CLT are evaluated either as favorable (teacher's role, learners' role, group/pair work, and native language role) or as rather favorable (grammar role and error correction and evaluation). As such, it can be construed that CLT principles are moderately welcomed by the English language learners in the EFL context of Iran.

Discussion

The current study examined Iranian EFL learners' beliefs toward six main principles of communicative language teaching approach. The views expressed by learners in this study clearly indicates Iranian language learners' favorable beliefs toward developing communicative competence in English. The results of this study echo those from previous studies where learners' beliefs to CLT were reported to be positive (for example, Asassfeh, Khwaileh, Al-Shaboul & Alshboul, 2012; Gamble et al., 2013; Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012; Raissi, Mohamad Nor, Aziz, Zaniel, & Saleh, 2013, and Savignon & Wang, 2003).

The study also lends support to Schulz's (1996) study in which post-secondary foreign language learners' beliefs were investigated towards effectiveness of explicit grammar teaching. In general, the findings revealed learners' favorable beliefs towards the explicit focus on form and error correction. Moreover, in line with Savignon and Wang's (2003) study in which Taiwanese EFL learners' beliefs and perceptions regarding the classroom practices known as primarily meaning-based and form-focused were scrutinized, the findings of the current study

revealed that EFL learners in Iran are positively inclined towards communicative-based English learning.

The finding of the study also corroborate with Incecay and Incecay's (2009) case study in which the perception of 30 Turkish college students regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of communicative activities in their classes were investigated. The participants' responses were indicative of their preference to the combination of communicative and non- communicative activities. In other words, the same as the current study, they favored the mixture of CLT with traditional teaching activities.

However, the findings of this study are inconsistent with researches conducted by Nunan (1988), Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004), and Matsuura, Chiba, and Hilderbrandt, (2001) in which students' preferences were highly associated with solid traditional and teacher-centered ELT approaches.

In addition, the findings reflect increasing awareness among Iranian learners that for successful communication, they need not only to develop knowledge of the language but also to communicate in English so that they can improve their cross-cultural communication along with international relations. However, due to living in a so-called expanding circle country in which speaking English is mostly restricted within the classroom walls (Kachru, 2005; Sharifian, 2010), Iranian EFL learners have insufficient English-based communication skills (Ettelaat Daily, 2011; Dorshomal *et al.*, 2013). To compensate for the absence of an English-speaking environment, teachers need to create a non-threatening and lively classroom atmosphere that allows learners to enjoy English use and to make trial-and-error attempts toward developing their communicative ability. In other words, teachers are regarded as one of the main players in any effort to encourage innovations in syllabus design. Nonetheless, there are several powerful factors which are likely to influence adopters' implementation of an innovative approach. In this regard, Rogers (2003), considered as one of the pioneer authorities on the '*diffusion of innovations*' theory asserts that five stages deal with this decision-making process. These demands potential adopters 1) gaining information about an innovation, 2) being convinced of its value, 3) making an initial decision to implement the

innovation, 4) putting their decision into practice, and 5) confirming their decision to continue using the innovation.

Another factor that may to a great extent accounts for the unsuccessful implementation of CLT is the lack of congruence between learners' desire to communicate and the current examination system of Iran which leads to radical changes in implementing communicative-based instructional materials and practice. High-stakes English language examinations in Iran - such as the university entrance exam which has a determining role in the whole program- normally attempt to assess learners' linguistic rather than their communicative competence. Suffering from the negative wash-back of the traditional examination system, English classrooms in Iran tend to be more grammar-based in their real essence. Such traditional examination methods oblige teachers to pay most attention to vocabulary and grammar. Accordingly, as long as the situation does not change, focusing on communicative skills is liable to be neglected, leading to frustration and lack of motivation among language learners (Li, 2001).

The other factor militating against the effective implementation of CLT is the incompatibility between the EFL home culture and that of western countries in which CLT was originated. As Rogers (1971) declares, one of the factors improving the chances that an innovative approach will be accepted is its demonstrated consistency with the existing values of the home culture. In that vein, the results of this study lend support to Savignon's (2002) claim that theory and practice are often at odds. For instance, opposed to CLT, in the EFL settings such as Iran, the centrality of the teacher is the culturally and socially sanctioned basis of teaching. The teacher is viewed as the sole purveyor of knowledge, the learners' guardian, and the one who must be honored, so that learners must passively listen to him/her. These cultural concepts of teachers in Iran prevent genuine communication to take place, thus making it a hindrance in effective implementing of CLT.

One of the other problems most often recognized is the fact that since CLT places increased demands on the teachers, EFL teachers are usually reluctant to accept following the communicative approach. Due to their student-centeredness, communicative-based classes are to a great extent unpredictable. Teachers have to accept additional

responsibilities both prior to and during the class compared to traditional teacher-dominated classrooms. Moreover, it may be expected that non-native teachers of English could have a great deal of difficulty if the aim of the class is to improve learners' speaking skill (Koosha & Yakhabi, 2013). This reaction stems from the perception that a very high level of language proficiency is needed in order to communicate with ease and to cope with a broad range of unpredictable situations than teachers may not be accustomed to. At the end, it should, however, be admitted that some other constraints may also contribute to explaining the unsuccessful implementation of CLT in the EFL context of Iran, such as large class size, limited class hours, the paucity of materials for communicative activities and lack of congruence between educational policies and realities of the teaching context (Anani Sarab, Monfared, & Safarzadeh, 2016).

Conclusion

In keeping with the view that perceiving learners' beliefs is quite essential for the effectiveness of any language teaching approach, the present study was designed to delve into Iranian EFL learners' beliefs toward six core tenets of CLT. The views expressed by learners were either strongly consistent with the CLT principles with regard to learners' roles, teachers' roles, learners' native language role, and the role of group and pair work tasks, or at least relatively consistent concerning the role of grammar and error correction and evaluation of the language learners. Given these results, what is needed could probably be directing educators' efforts toward improving EFL methodology or specifically speaking, paving the way toward communicative language teaching approach in Iran. To smooth the way, some changes need to take place, the most significant of which is to reform the examination system in Iran. Although, because of economic and technical challenges, there is still a long way to go before this can be thoroughly accomplished, it is an objective toward which Iranian teachers and change agents should plan to move.

The implications of the present study would be more powerful if the results are corroborated with additional research. Replication of the study is highly recommended mainly because of the limitations of the reported results. One of the limitations in the current study is the lack

of cross-validation of the learners' responses with for instance their teachers' beliefs. Moreover, the quantitative analysis of Likert-scale data does not give us clear insights into the exact nature of participant beliefs. Further research might employ a more qualitative approach by using interviews to generate data that could provide richer accounts of learners' perspectives.



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Appendix A

	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
V8	.726					
V7	.704					
V10	.697					
V9	.654					
V12	.638					
V11	.623					
V13	.533					
V1		.844				
V2		.733				
V3		.728				
V4		.706				
V5		.671				
V6		.448				
V14			.779			
V15			.745			
V16			.739			
V17			.625			
V18			.560	.733		
V27				.720		
V28				.664		
V30				.635		
V29				.302		
V19					.612	
V21					.565	
V20					.539	
V22					.530	
V23					.476	
V25						.789
V24						.779
V26						.562

Factor 1: Learner's role, **Factor 2:** Error correction and evaluation, **Factor 3:** The role of grammar, **Factor 4:** Teacher's role, **Factor 5:** The role of native language, **Factor 6:** Group/pair work

Appendix B

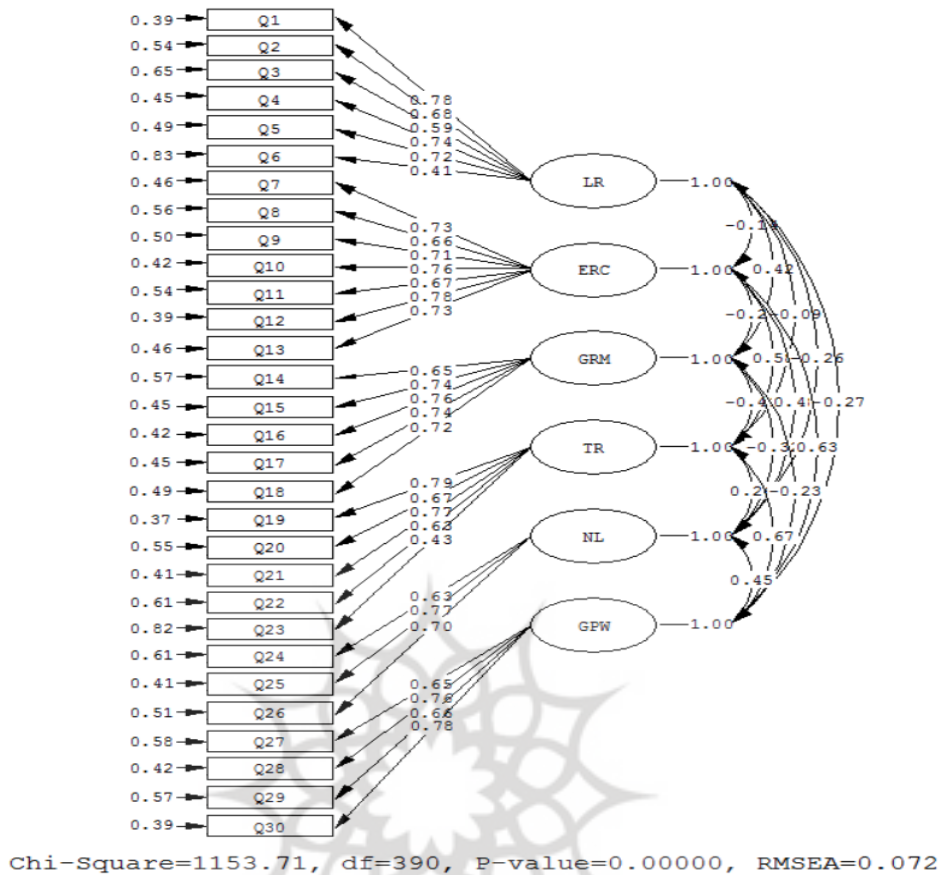


Figure 1 Measurement Model of Research Variables in Case of standardized Solution

LR: Learner's Role; **ERC:** Error Correction and Evaluation; **GRM:** Grammar; **TR:** Teacher's Role; **NL:** The Role of Native Language; **GPW:** Group/Pair Work

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Appendix C

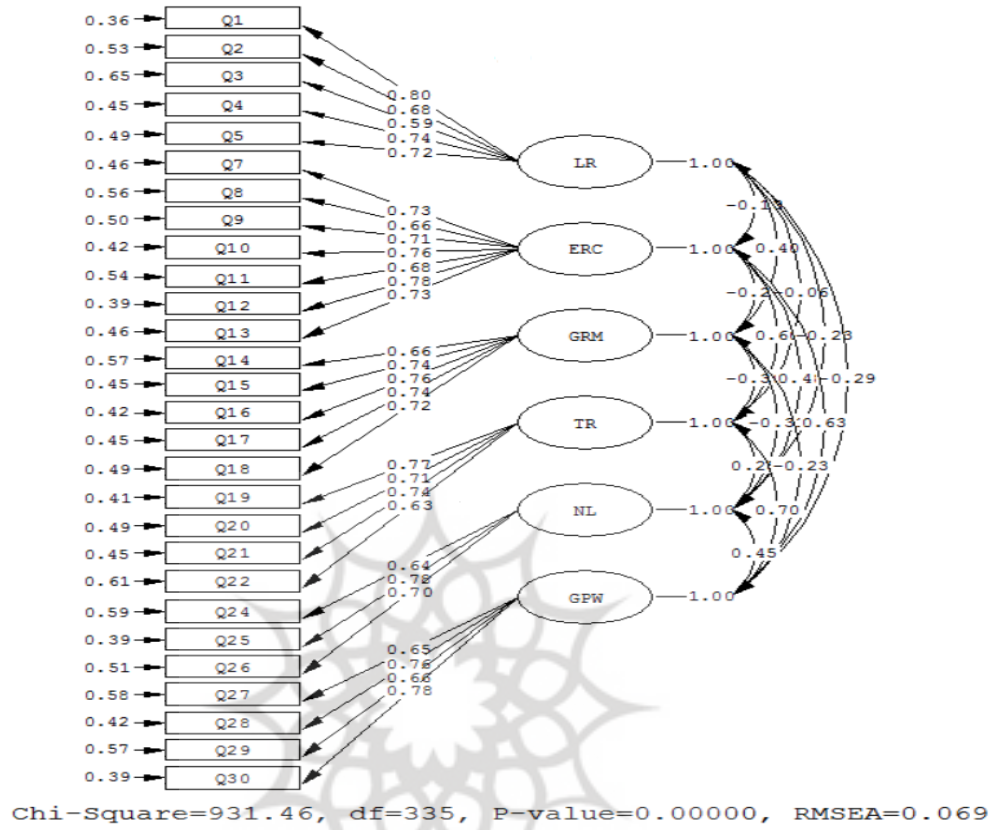


Figure 2 Measurement Model of Research Variables in Case of Standardized Solution (After Removal of Inappropriate Items)

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