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English Language Teaching and Learning Analysis in Iran

F. Zarrabi, J. R. Brown

Abstract**—**Although English is not a second language in Iran, it has become an inseparable part of many Iranian people's lives and is becoming more and more widespread. This high demand has caused a significant increase in the number of private English language institutes in Iran. Although English is a compulsory course in schools and universities, the majority of Iranian people are unable to communicate easily in English. This paper reviews the current state of teaching and learning English as an international language in Iran. Attitudes and motivations about learning English are reviewed. Five different aspects of using English within the country are analysed, including: English in public domain, English in Media, English in organizations/businesses, English in education, and English in private language institutes. Despite the time and money spent on English language courses in private language institutes, the majority of learners seem to forget what has been learned within months of completing their course. That is, when they are students with the support of the teacher and formal classes, they appear to make progress and use English more or less fluently. When this support is removed, their language skills either stagnant or regress. The findings of this study suggest that a dependant approach to learning is potentially one of the main reasons for English language learning problems and this is encouraged by English course books and approaches to teaching.

Keywords**—**English in Iran, English language learning, English language teaching, evaluation.

I. Introduction

IRAN - officially the Islamic Republic of Iran - is a country in Western Asia. Iran consists of 31 provinces. Its capital and the largest city is Tehran which is the centre for economic issues and culture. It is a multicultural nation comprising numerous ethnic and diverse linguistic groups. Although Persian is the official language, many other local languages exist in different cities of Iran such as: Mazani/Mazandarani, Kurdish, Lori/ Lurish, Balochi, Gilaki, Taleshi, Turkish, and Mashhadi. Although English is used in public signals and education, it is considered as a foreign language (FL).

II. English in Iran

A. English in Public Domain (Media, Organizations, and Businesses) in Iran

First-time visitors to Iran report that Iranian people are kind, hospitable, and are eager to communicate in English [1]. There is a growing interest in English language learning in almost every part of Iran even though English is not spoken as a second language there. Based on an experimental research study by Sadeghi et al. [2], there are many reasons why Iranians have great enthusiasm and motivation for learning English, the international language. Some of the most common reasons are intending to continue their education abroad, to travel all around the world, to speak with native speakers of English, to watch English movies, to live abroad, to find a good job, to earn credit (since English is regarded as prestigious by many Iranians) while others love to learn English because they enjoy listening to English songs, reading English books, or simply because they love their English teacher. Iranian EFL students have revealed that they consider English language learning as either "important" or "somewhat important" to their lives [3], [4]. English is regarded as an essential means of communication with the world beyond Iran's borders and as a tool for providing access to information needed for technical and scientific texts in this globalized digital world [5]. Furthermore, English is viewed as cool and modern (prestigious) in Iran as well as a means of providing information for tourists and visitors who do not understand Persian [2]. This perspective is clearly obvious and reflected in advertisements, trading billboards, clothing items, domestic products (e.g. chocolates, snacks and dairy products), hotels, shops, and restaurants through the use of English words/phrases or the use of letters from the English alphabet to express Persian words. The use of English by uneducated people can result in funny mistakes which appear in social media as jokes. Some English words have become an integrated part of Persian language such as bank, park, hotel, sandwich, jean(s), as well as some techno-words such as laptop, mobile, telephone, tablet and so on. In addition, many in the younger generation use English 'script' for their Farsi text message communications and emails. English graffiti, especially romantic messages, are also found on many walls in Iran. Moreover, English (along with Farsi/Persian) has a strong presence in public life as reflected in street names, traffic signals, and public signs and messages. English language newspapers such as the *Tehran Times* and *Iran Daily*, monthly English periodicals (e.g. VIVA), as well as channel 4 which broadcasts English news programs and documentaries (on wildlife, lives of famous people, landmarks, etc.) are also available in Iran. The audience and readers would typically be foreigners living in Iran and students who enjoy learning English or who are majoring in English and want to expand their vocabulary or develop their reading and listening skills.

Although English is not used as a means of communication - orally or written - in many Iranian organizations, knowledge of English together with computer literacy, is considered as an

Fatemeh Zarrabi is with Monash University, Australia (e-mail: fatemeh.zarrabi@monash.edu).

advantage over other employees in almost all private and public workplaces in Iran. Thus, English is seen as a worthwhile asset for Iran and the Iranians, one that enables people to interact with a wider world, to be educated abroad, to experience living abroad, to earn credits and prestige, to be up-to-date via using techno-gadgets, and to advance themselves in their jobs [2].

B. English in Educational System in Iran

In the official curriculum of public education, English is a compulsory course for primary and high school students [6]. Iranian children start their formal literacy education at the age of seven [7] and start learning English at the age of twelve – Grade 6 - and continue at tertiary education (either General English or English for specific/academic purposes [ESP/EAP]).

Unlike English in school education, there is no fixed course book material and syllabus for teaching English at university. The lecturers can develop their own syllabus and select the most relevant teaching material. Some university lecturers choose the SAMT (the organization in charge of producing educational materials for universities in Iran) publication for English at tertiary level and others choose books published outside Iran. Typically, English courses in universities in Iran focus mainly on reading comprehension and emphasize learning grammar and vocabulary with virtually no attention paid to speaking skills and communicative competence. Most classes are conducted in Farsi/Persian (except those for TESOL, TEFL, and English literature majors) and take up between twenty to thirty hours, and might not be taught by staff from an English department [8], [9]. Majors like TESOL/TEFL, English literature, and Translation exist in many universities in Iran and are taught by academics specializing in these areas.

English has been viewed from three different perspectives in Iran: pre-revolution (before 1978), during revolution (1979-1981), and post-revolution (1982 to present). In the first period, the view towards English language learning was positive with the focus on vocabulary learning; in the second period, which goes back to the Islamic Revolution in 1978, English was described as a "foreign" or "alien" language [10], [11]; in the last period, in contrast to the previous view, English is regarded as an essential tool for progress and communication and should be included in the Iranian school syllabi [12], [2].

III. Evaluation of School English Books

School English course books have been changed four times, two modifications in the pre-revolution series and two in the post-revolution series [6]. Despite these changes, all textbooks are based on a single approach to English language teaching, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM).

A. The First School English Book Series in Iran (Known as Six-volume Series)

A wide variety of English and French as a FL materials produced in English-speaking countries were applied in Iranian schools before 1938 when the Ministry of Culture sponsored a huge project for the development of teaching materials with the contribution of Iranian, American, and English educators and linguists [13]. The first school English book – a six-volume series - was compiled and designed in 1938 by a team of Iranians, native speakers of English, English language teaching (ELT) specialists, and linguists. In other words, it was a joint project under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Culture of the time. It was made available to the schools in 1939 and was in use until the mid-1960s. English was a compulsory course at school from the age of 13 when students were in their second year of junior high school, Grade 7.

> "…The six-volume series follows the Direct Method (DM) and Reading Method (RM) with a variety of topics, but no design format can be observed in the series. The topics range from Persian literature to world literature, history, science, biography and art. No teacher's guide accompanies the series, but each volume provides the teachers with a ten-page introduction with detailed guidelines on classroom management, adopting a humanitarian approach to the teaching-learning process, and emphasizing the importance of spelling and handwriting using appropriate error-correction techniques" [13].

As quoted above, one of the weak points of the lessons in the six-volume series is that they do not follow a fixed and clear design and procedure in all lessons. For instance, one lesson presented a short literary text such as a poem but was neither proceeded by warm-up (as an engagement activity) nor followed by any comprehension check exercises (as an activation), while another lesson contained grammatical points with relevant exercises which might be either related or irrelevant to the proceeding and the following lessons. The books covered a wide range of topics from Persian Literature and literary figures to world literature and writers, to history, politics, geography and several other topics. A bilingual (English-Persian) glossary was also provided at the back of the book to help students with text translations [14]. Although the series was developed based on DM and principles, the general trend in the mid-1960s was Situational Language Teaching (SLT) and Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). The other pitfalls of these books were the lack of workbook and teacher's guide. Despite these disadvantages the 1939 school English book series lasted for 25 years before they were revised and new materials developed based on SLT principles.

B. The Second School English Book Series in Iran (Known as the Graded English Series)

In contrast to the previous series, the new six-volume "Graded English Series" (henceforth: GE) had a clear syllabus with a set of aims and objectives, defined activities, and procedures. These books were developed with the aim that students would achieve the basic knowledge of English necessary for future proficiency [15]. These books were designed on the basis of a contrastive analysis of Persian and English [16]. The lesson and grammar points followed a

principled sequencing and grading. There is debate on structure sequencing of GE; some believe that grammar rules were presented based on their functionality – from high functional load to low - and others claim that the structures were graded from simple to difficult [17], [14]. If a lesson had introduced new vocabulary items, it did not include new grammatical points and vice versa. The reading texts were selected based on the new vocabularies which were highlighted in red in contrast to the black and white version of the old series. Pronunciation in this book is mainly identified with the articulation of individual sounds and, to a lesser extent, with the stress and intonation patterns of the target language [17]. However, it has incomplete presentation of pronunciation (e.g. some consonants, clusters, and vowels are missed). Each lesson contained dialogues, short reading passages followed by a grammar point and relevant exercises. The series followed SLT principles, which was the general trend of the time, the 1960s to early 1970s. The books included more illustrations and were colourful. Each volume was accompanied by a comprehensive teacher's guide and was available to the teachers for free. The teacher's guide provided step-by-step explanations for teaching the language components and skills in each lesson, such as an overview of the whole book including structural patterns and new words, a list of references in linguistics and methodology (from 1954 to 1965) that the authors had used in writing the book(s) and the procedures that should be followed in teaching the book in general and teaching each lesson in particular. Different methods of spelling practice and dictation were also introduced. These books were widely used for approximately fifteen years, up until the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

C. The Third School English Book Series in Iran (Right Path to English and English for School Series)

The new school English textbooks were edited and written by a team of Iranian authors affiliated with the Ministry of Education in 1979 after the Islamic Revolution [18]. These books have been used as school English course books in all junior high schools (3 years) and senior high schools (4 years) – both private and public - in Iran since then. Therefore, the students now start learning English from the age of twelve, in the first grade of junior high school. English is officially taught for one hour and forty-five minutes per week in junior high schools and for two hours and fifteen minutes at high schools but this time is extended in some private schools.

Junior high school English books, "Right Path to English" (henceforth: RPE), introduce the alphabet, numbers, short conversations, and a basic set of vocabulary. RPE course books were revised and developed based on RM principles and GTM but conversational skills received little emphasis. They are colourful books with pictures and each lesson is made up of ten parts. The first part, entitled "Dialogue", has a short conversation with picture. This is followed by "Understanding" which has comprehension exercises (e.g. True/False). Next is "Patterns", which deals with repetition drills. The third part is "Oral Drills" in which students practice substitution drill exercises. The following section is called "Write It Down" in which students answer questions and fill in the blanks according to the grammar structure which they have learnt. "Speak Out" and "Read Aloud" are the last parts. In the former, students fill in the blanks to make sentences for the relevant pictures, answer questions and write questions for the written answers according to the picture. In the latter, the students repeat the words after the teacher to practice the pronunciation of the words with that specific phonetic which is taught through contrastive analysis (CA) of Persian and English sound systems. Some important pronunciation points are missed in RPE series [17]. Each lesson is finished with a list of new words and basic structures which are written in brief in a summary box. On the last page of the book, there is a word list which provides the Persian equivalent of all English words utilized in the lessons.

The teachers usually follow the GTM approach and provide students with the meaning of new words in Persian. The language used in the class is the students' L1 (Farsi/Persian). The RPE book series, which was in use until 2013, had neither a work book nor teacher's guide. Although RPE authors claimed to incorporate the recent improvements in language teaching and learning in RPE, the results of [17] reveal that they failed to do so in some areas. Due to the weak points of the RPE series, many students were unable to communicate in English even after graduating from junior high school. Some of the pitfalls of junior high school English books are the lack of authenticity, having decontextualized conversations, lacking educational AVAs (Audio Visual Aids), and lacking communicative competence skills [19], [20], [15].

The senior high school English book series written in 1979 is still in use. They are all in black and white. The books do not have a workbook or teacher's guide, although there are directions for the teacher throughout. The main principles which govern them are RM and GTM with a touch of communicative competence. Each lesson has 10 parts: new words, reading and comprehension questions, speak out, write it down, to the teacher (grammar point), language function, pronunciation practice, and a list of vocabulary.

Each lesson starts with a section called "New Words". It contains six or seven two-sentence short readings - in which the new words are underlined - with follow up questions. According to the authors of the book (first page of the school English books), its goal is to familiarize the students with new words of the "Reading" through use of realia, gestures, and simple synonyms. Although the book writers have stated - at the beginning of the book - that teachers should use different techniques to teach the meaning of the new words and avoid translation as far as possible, teachers usually ask the students to read the words aloud and translate them into Persian and then answer the questions. The second part, "Reading", has a 5-8-paragraph reading. This part is followed by reading comprehension questions such as True/False (T/F), Multiple Choice (MC), and open (wh-) questions. This section is also taught through translation. However, its goal – based on the authors' comments – is reading and comprehension, not translation. "Speak Out" and "Write It Down" sections are mostly drill exercises (oral and written drills) practising the

grammar, including substitution drills, mechanical drills, and transformational drills. In the next part, "To the Teacher", the grammar point is presented with a few example sentences. According to the authors English grammar, which is presented in this part, is not the aim in itself, but a means to an end (correct writing, reading, and speaking) and the teachers should not expect the students to memorize the rules. After that there is "Language Function" which is for the purpose of practicing short conversations by role-playing. The authors expect the teachers to practice these conversations in an authentic way, not by rote learning. In the "Pronunciation Practice" part, students are familiarized with some phonetics, and some examples of use. In high school English books, the students are provided with nine symbols of vowels and diphthongs, as well as word stress and syllables. However, there are twenty-three vowels and diphthongs and twenty-four consonants. The next part is "Vocabulary Review" which includes fill-in- the-gap exercises for the students to practice learned vocabulary. The last part is "List of New Vocabulary" in which new words from the lesson are presented in alphabetical order; the teacher will read these out loud for the students to learn the pronunciation and translate them into their L1 (Persian).

D. Pre-University English Books in Iran

Grade 4 was eliminated from the high school program in 2003 and was replaced by a new level called "Pre-University" for the students intending to pursue their education to university, while others could graduate from high school after finishing the third grade. The Pre-university English course book has two parts, Book One and Book Two, each with four lessons in a single volume. It is taught in two successive semesters in the same academic year and is developed based on RM principles with no trace of SLT. There are different parts in the book such as "Word Study" which is oral practice as warm up, long reading passages with no guide for the teachers on how to handle this part, "Comprehension Check Questions" (e.g. T/F items, MC questions, essay type questions), "Vocabulary Drill", "Word Formation" which helps the students to recognize the usage of different parts of speech, "Word Definition" which supplies the word in a definition statement, "Close Passages", "Structure and Drills", "Write It Down" in which students practice re-writing sentences with the new structure, "Language Function", and "Pronunciation".

The Pre-University course book underwent fundamental changes in 2009. It is the first high school course book in the history of school English in Iran which has colourful illustrations and incorporates Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles as well as RM principle. Each lesson has ten sections, "Before You Read" which starts with a relevant picture and a short introduction to the topic; "Warm-up Activities" which include essay type questions and argumentative type questions that can be worked on orally in pairs; "Long Reading Text"; "After You Read" which has comprehension check questions (e.g. T/F, MC, essay type questions, discussion questions, and individual check/class exchange); "Sentence Function" which includes grammar in the form of pair work/check; "Reading Skills" which has Farsi/Persian instructions on how to improve the different reading skills and follow-up activities; "Vocabulary Review" in MC item exercises; "Focus on Grammar" which consists of examples as well as confirmation questions on the grammar point (usage of the grammar point); grammar practice in the form of matching, fill-in-the-blanks, sentence writing, and pair work/check exercises; and "Grammar Digest" which is the review of grammar points. There is a "Glossary" at the back of the book where the students should provide the Farsi/Persian meanings. Although the Pre-university English book has had some important revision in terms of CLT and reading strategy skills, it still has some weaknesses such as translation exercises, lack of group work and limited focus on pronunciation. Moreover, reading strategies and some other points are written in Persian.

E. The Fourth School English Book Series (The Prospect and Vision Series)

The school system was changed from 5-3-3-1 (five years elementary school, three years junior high school, three years senior high school, and one year Pre-University) to 6-3-3 (six years elementary school, three years lower secondary school, and three years upper secondary school) in 2011. As a result, lower secondary and upper secondary levels required totally different materials, which were written at the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Ministry of Education. Consequently, school English books were designed and published by the Organization for Educational Research and Planning (OERP) with the CLT approach as the main principle, in contrast to the old school English book series with RM. After twenty-six years of teaching the old English books, the new "Prospect" English book series (Prospect 1-3 for junior secondary school students of Grades 7-9) were written in 2010, ratified in late 2012 and published in 2013 [15]. These books aim to work on both, notions and functions simultaneously and to enable students to, for example, introduce themselves and their families in five minutes after lower secondary graduation [15]. They come with a teacher's guide, teacher's flash cards, workbook, and a student audio CD.

Prospect 1 includes eight lessons which introduce the letters of the alphabet and their sounds and some basic vocabulary together with short dialogues. Each unit is centred on one educational theme and two or three related functions and has seven sections as "Conversation", "Practice 1", "Practice 2", "Sounds and Letters", "Listening and Reading", "Speaking and Writing", and "Your Conversation". In the initial part a conversation is presented followed by a relevant photo. The students listen to the CD and practice the conversation. In "Practice1/2/3", the students listen to a couple of questions and answers, and are asked to practice them with a friend. In the next part which is called "Sounds and Letters", students listen to a conversation and practice it in pairs. In the "Listening and Reading" section, there is usually an exercise with MC items. After that there is a "Speaking and Writing"

section in which students work in groups and do an information gap activity through conversation. The final part is "Your Conversation" in which students fill in the gaps in pairs. A photo dictionary, which comprises eight lessons relevant to the lessons of the book, is also provided at the end of the book; this book is mostly in the form of conversation to improve communicative skills.

Prospect 2 contains further vocabulary items, listening exercises which require short answers, and longer dialogues as well as role-plays. It constitutes seven lessons and each unit has seven parts with a relevant photo dictionary for each lesson at the end of the book. All sections in this book are similar to sections of units in Prospect 1 except "your conversation" which is referred to as "Role-Play" in Prospect 2.

Prospect 3 includes six lessons and the structure and procedure of it is similar to Prospect 2. "Language Melody", "Grammar", and "Short Reading" are added to the units. In "Language Melody", students are familiarized with different sentence and question intonations. Some basic grammar structures and rules are briefly presented in the "Grammar" section followed by a short reading in which the learned grammar is applied. The increased number of fill-in-the-blanks and open questions in Prospect 3 are another distinct difference from Prospect 1 and Prospect 2.

Initially, the teacher's guide to the Prospect series gives the teacher a general overview of the goals in Persian. Then the authors provide the teachers with a comprehensive lesson plan for each unit. Each lesson plan first gives the objectives of the unit, then the session snapshot, and after that a step-by-step explanation of each section with adequate time allocated to each part as well as a teacher reflection section. In some parts, the teachers are encouraged to use Persian in the class as a means of communication and teaching approach.

The senior secondary school English book series, "Vision" 1-3 has not yet been prepared for students of Grades 10-12 (aged 15-17). Therefore, the "English for School" series is still in use in high schools in Iran. The main objective of the "Prospect" and "Vision" series is to work on all four language skills (i.e. listening, reading, speaking, and writing) through interactive self-reliance and communicative approaches which is a localized version of CLT. The national curriculum of Iran intends to pave the way for reception, perception and transmitting cultural messages and human science achievements within linguistic means of communication, interpersonal and intercultural functions [15].

Researchers suggest that English textbooks together with classes should be developed based on the learners' needs and preferences, and should provide enough opportunities for them to practice the language communicatively [17], [21].

Textbooks are important sources of information for teachers with which they can assist students to learn every subject including English. As they are the foundation of school instruction, they should be up-to-date, cover all the essentials, and be accompanied with the pedagogical supplements needed to help the teachers have more effective classes. Reviewing the history of school English books in Iran demonstrates that those features are present in none of the course book materials, although the book contents have been changed several times. The first six-volume English book series was replaced with the GE series after twenty-five years with only a slight change in terms of its approach in line with the language teaching trend of the time. Fifteen years later, RPE came into existence and researchers demonstrated that there was no marked difference between the two course books. The syllabus design of both is fundamentally based on a structural view of language and is not communicative. Thus, another book series was developed called "English for School" which is also form-focused and is still in use in high schools. These books, just like the previous ones, suffer from shortcomings in terms of approach, content presentation, physical make-up, and so forth [22]. Although the "Prospect" series published in 2013, had a pivotal role in changing the approaches used in school English books in Iran, it still has some deficiencies. There are advantages with the "Prospect" series in contrast to other school English books such as applying a communicative approach, accompanying each book with educational supplementary materials (i.e. workbook, teacher's guide, and CDs), including lesson plans and teacher reflection in the teacher's guide, and designing better physical make-up for books. Some of the deficiencies are using Persian in the teacher's guide and encouraging the teachers to speak Farsi in most parts of the lesson plans and writing all the instructions in Persian in the workbook, while ESA (i.e. Engagement, Study, Activation) is absent in the lesson plans.

As aforementioned, there are many pitfalls in the school English books such as lacking authenticity in terms of content and presentation [17], [14], [19], [20], ignoring communication skills – the most basic element of the language teaching/learning process - [23], [13], lacking cohesion and coherence via insufficient use of Discourse Markers (DMs) in reading comprehension sections [24], incomplete presentation of pronunciation [17], focusing on reading and ignoring the other three skills (i.e. listening, speaking, writing), ignoring language learning strategies (except for the pre-university course book which touches on a few reading strategies in Persian!), lacking some essential support materials such as workbook, relevant teachers' guides, officially prepared audio and video CDs, and other standard educational aids [15]. In a nutshell, presenting various exercises – in the form of MC items, fill-in-the-blanks, and alike - might be successful in building the fundamentals of grammar and reading comprehension in students, but they can hardly improve the students' communicative competence since they are limited to disintegrated forms of language usage [14]. Moreover, these books focus merely on reading skills and give priority to accuracy. However, a person learns a language through communication and language is the by-product of using language to communicate [25]. Therefore, the students require both linguistic competence and communicative competence to be able to communicate accurately and fluently in the target language but Iranian students are taught solely through translation, accuracy, grammar (linguistic competence), and reading at secondary and tertiary levels. English books and

classes should not only focus on linguistic competence and reading skills, but should also work on all four language skills (i.e. Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening) and communicative competence (i.e. accuracy, fluency, complexity, appropriacy, capacity) to enable students master the language.

IV. Evaluation of ELT in School Classes

Applying approaches and methodologies like GTM (which is used in all schools in Iran) is not a suitable method of ELT in this post method era since it is an old method of teaching which was conducted in the early nineteenth century. In GTM, teachers utilize their learners' L1 (i.e. mother tongue) to explain meanings of new lexical items, to provide grammatical explanations, and have teacher-centred classrooms [26]. Learners are also asked by teachers to translate sentences or texts into or out of the target language which obviously has no connection with mastering a language and words in one language do not necessarily have an equivalent in another language. As Jespersen [27, p. 54] puts it, "(the) relations between languages are not like the relations between mathematical equivalents ..." Reform Movement members viewed translation as an exercise leading to the learners' L1 'invading the foreign idiom' and leading them to believe in exact equivalents. In addition, in these structure-oriented methodologies (e.g., [28]), learners' own languages cause interference errors which is an obstacle to maximum L2 input. Translation is recognized as a difficult activity for the learners and is a source of errors:

> "In giving the pupil English sentences to translate into the foreign language, we are only artificially creating difficulties. If it is difficult for the pupil to translate into his mother-tongue..., then it must be much more difficult, indeed impossible, to translate into a foreign language where he is not yet quite at home. We ourselves lead the pupil to make mistakes, and then we have to do all we can to prevent his confronting us with a too overwhelming number of them [27, p. 123, 124]".

Applying L1 as a medium of instruction in English language classes makes the situation worse for the learners since they will not be able to think in English which is the first step of fluency in English. Thus, this approach, along with explicit grammar instruction, "GTM", in which learners are typically asked to translate strings of disconnected invented sentences, was rejected by the Reform Movement in the late 1880s because it contradicted the three fundamental principles of the Movement: the primacy of speech, the use of connected text, and the use of oral methodology in the classroom [29]. Sweet [30] also has criticized GTM in terms of having inauthentic and unidiomatic disconnected sentences as practices of a language:

> "...in the practice of exercise writing and translation into the foreign language… (t)he result is to exclude the really natural and idiomatic combinations, which cannot be formed a priori, and to produce insipid and colourless combinations which do not stamp themselves on the memory, many of which, indeed, could hardly occur in real life... [30, p. 7]".

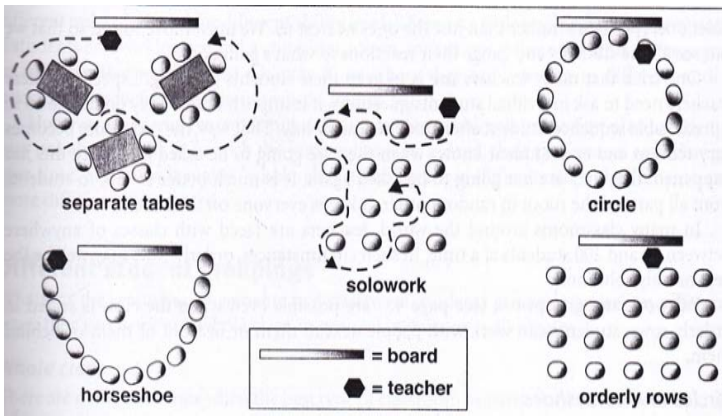

Fig. 1 English classroom seating arrangements [42]

GTM is strongly criticized by members of the Reform Movement, linguists, and educators [31]-[35]. The most outspoken critics of translation were probably Gatenby and Lado. Gatenby [31] believes that L2 learning should, as far as possible, duplicate the conditions of first language acquisition, which means: 'there is, of course, no translation'. Lado [28] asserts that translation is an independent skill, 'more complex than, different from, and unnecessary for speaking, listening, reading, or writing'. According to these scholars, translation is a skill which can only be achieved when the learners have mastered L2.

It is worth mentioning that there has been some research around the world that demonstrates translation (GTM) is appropriate in a small number of cases [35]-[40]. Although they stated that learners' L1 should not be suppressed completely, they all agree on having limited use of L1 especially in a class with students at different levels of L2 proficiency since excessive use of it will have a negative impact [41], [42]. Therefore, based on the result of all these research studies and criticisms, GTM as an ELT method is not considered an appropriate one in the twenty first century. However, different versions of the grammar-translation

method have continued to be used in some parts of the world like Iran [11], [43]-[45].

Another problematic feature of school English classrooms in Iran is seating arrangements which are in orderly rows with the teacher always at the front. However, the most effective seating arrangements for English class are horseshoe, circle, and separate tables (Fig. 1).

V. Private English Language Institutes in Iran

One of the most common beliefs of the Iranians is that a person without the knowledge of computers and English in this digital era, is illiterate even though they are academically educated. The enthusiasm for English is such that it renders other languages, indigenous and foreign, all but invisible. Therefore, there is a high demand for private English institutions in Iran. There are more than seven thousand and eight hundred registered English institutes in Iran (including 4350 for females and 3450 for males) in addition to numerous unregistered ones where the Iranians learn English – either ESP or General English - in order to be able to communicate in English, to pursue education in abroad, to live abroad, to travel to foreign countries, and to take international examinations such as IELTS/TOEFL/GRE (Iran Ministry of Education, personal communication, 16/09/2016). The number of students in various institutes differs in size, ranging from those with 50 students to those with more than 2000 students. Registrations usually double during the summer period. In addition to studying at English institutes, some parents employ private tutors to teach their children at home (based on the author's personal experience). All institute English classes are conducted in English. The teachers in English institutes – either majors in English or not – unlike school English teachers, are fluent speakers of English and teach popular textbooks such as Interchange, True to Life, Headway, and English Result. In the more famous institutes, teachers participate in career development workshops and apply the newest ELT methodologies in their classrooms. These books are accompanied by teachers' guide, workbook, and AVAs (Audio-Visual Aids), as well as other pedagogical tools which are provided by the institutions. Unfortunately, after finishing the advanced level of English at institutes, many learners will not be in touch with English as the opportunities to use English in Iran are few. This situation leads to a decrease in the language proficiency of the students because English, like any other language, is transitory. This is also due to learners' dependence on their English teachers and institutes which stops them from being independent language learners so that they can pursue learning L2 independent of the teacher.

VI. Conclusion

Iran has a fairly traditional, form-focused L2 education with little opportunity to use English for communicative purposes [47]. Inappropriate textbook materials together with a translation and grammar-based approach to ELT which is the norm in schools in Iran, has resulted in the poor English language proficiency of Iranian students.

Based on research by Nunan [48] on the English curriculum of seven Asia Pacific countries including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam, one of the pertinent problems that these countries face is the "disjunction between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality". Research studies have been carried out on ELT in secondary and tertiary education in Iran and concluded that there is incongruence between the stated curriculum objectives and actual classroom practices [5]. Tusi [49] believes that one of the main problems of mainstream ELT material developers in the Ministry of Education is that they simply do not identify learners' needs. In a similar vein, Maftoon et al. [50] argued that, "curriculum developers have almost certainly neglected the students' needs and future demand". In addition, Zarrabi [51] examined the effect of listening strategy instruction through cooperative learning on the listening skill of Iranian EFL learners and the result showed that there is a significant positive impact. In another study, Zarrabi [52] investigated the effect of strategy instruction on the listening skill of different Iranian EFL learner types and it was revealed that the listening skill of all types of learners was improved after the intervention with a slight difference. Therefore, it seems that including language learning strategy instruction in English educational system can improve EFL learners' language skills and make them independent learners [53]-[56]. Researchers have analysed the content organization of school English books and classes in Iran and maintain that there is not an acceptable level of congruence between Iranian learners' increasing needs and ELT practice of the nation [57]-[65], [46]. ELT programs in Iran, aim primarily at fostering students' reading abilities and skills – either in secondary education or in academic courses - since their goal is to enable students to read technical and scientific texts at universities but this is insufficient in accordance with learners' needs and motivations [2]. In addition, a one-for-all recipe is the prevailing approach in school English classes in Iran without considering different language skills and various learner types. As Nunan [66] points out, it has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all.

Poorly prepared school English teachers, physical limitations, as well as an inappropriate age for students to start learning English are all pivotal factors which result in the poor English language proficiency of Iranian students. Appropriate governmental support, such as providing career development courses and workshops, designing classes suitable for ELT, creating ELT organization, and funds for improving ELT are required to progress ELT in secondary and tertiary levels [67]. As long as there is no professional ELT organization in the Ministry of Education to make ELT curriculum decisions, the deficiencies with English secondary and tertiary education will continue to grow.

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