A Comparative Analysis of English Language Teaching in Three Different Educational Systems: A Paradigm Shift towards Critical Language Education through Nativised Teaching

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A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T
	Reviewing the existing themes on English language education in Iran, this study sought to examine English language teaching in three educational systems: public schools, private language institutes, and universities. We used systematic literature review method. Data consisted of journal articles published from 2010 to 2023. The thematic synthesis process using the MAXQDA software was utilised to analyse articles. Four themes were extracted: a reductionist approach to language teaching in schools, a modernist orientation to teaching English in institutes, a shift towards critical language teaching in universities, and a call for localisation and Islamisation of English language teaching. Findings showed that teaching English in Iranian schools has failed, which resulted in the popularity of language institutes, although the native speaker ideology promoted in institutes led to unequal Englishes ideologically intertwined with a colonial enterprise. Findings revealed that there is a need for a shift towards critical language education through nativised teaching. That is, it was revealed that there is a dire need for English language material developers in Iran to prepare localised and nativised materials considering Iranian-Islamic identities.

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1. Introduction

Understanding the core elements of the mainstream paradigms in English language education across the world - including modernist, postmodernist, and even Islamic orientations-, sheds light on the possibilities as well as challenges of teaching and learning the English language in each particular context. As Canagarajah (2016) points out, examining the main paradigms in English language education from the modernist to postmodernist orientation helps us "to chart the directions we have taken as we move toward the future" (p. 2). Likewise, Pulverness (2011) remarks that the origin of all educational practices, thoughts, and changes in English language teaching curricula is a direct reflection of the dominant orientations to teaching or challenges to those orientations.

From among the three orientations mentioned above, the modernist orientation mainly searches for a master idea, metanarrative, or single true knowledge. That is, this orientation revolves around the standard, objectivity, and causation. The tendency towards standards led to the dominance of the standardised and discrete point items in testing such as multiple choice questions. Moreover, in research, the need for objectivity resulted in the predominance of quantitative studies. More importantly, Holliday (2005) believes that modernity in English language education led to the emergence of native-speakerism since native speakers are the representation of the Standard English in its two forms, that is, Standard American English and Standard British English. While Bylin and Tingsell (2022) introduce the native speaker concept as a legitimising ideal in education whereby native speakers' accent and cultural representation are socially privileged, Lee (2023) asserts that the native speaker ideal damages English language learners' confidence as they should become completely like a native speaker in terms of their language, cultural values, and life styles.

Moreover, post-colonial and post-structural movements in education offered a space for the emergence and evolution of post-modernist orientations in education in general and English language education in particular. In language education, this orientation sparked the movement from native-speakerism towards multilingualism due to the fact that all grand narratives were challenged to respect and acknowledge the local narratives of non-native speakers (Akbari, 2008). According to Canagarajah (2016), "scholars adopting the postmodern orientation would perceive thinking and knowledge as mediated by language, values, and social relationships. In other words, they would consider all knowledge paradigms as *constructs* that are socially and linguistically shaped" (p. 7). That is, language teachers and scholars moved toward qualitative methodologies in their research projects and, in the process of evaluation, testing techniques were replaced by

assessment procedures. Moreover, as Moradian (2014) explicates, with regard to the teaching practices, teachers took the participatory approach, promoted collaborative activities, and utilised task-based instruction.

In addition to the two above-mentioned western orientations, the Islamic orientation to English language education is worthy of attention. Mahboob (2009) maintains that the Islamic country of Pakistan focuses on teaching Pakistani English as a variety of world Englishes through which the English language is no longer a lingua franca but a vehicle for teaching and transmitting Islamic values and cultures that constitute a Pakistani Muslim identity. That is, through the localisation and nativisation of the English language, some of the Islamic countries transform English into an Islamic language. In such contexts, teachers prefer to use materials prepared and formulated by non-native English speaking scholars rather than authentic materials, which are written by native speakers and are founded on the superiority of the culture of English native speakers.

As mentioned above, analysing paradigm shifts in language education highlights the dominant trends and practices in teaching and provides an opportunity to probe into possibilities and challenges. These points specifically apply to the context of Iran where teaching the English language has undergone a paradigm shift from the Islamic revolution in 1979 to the present time. Nonetheless, as Crookes (2009) mentions, few studies have sought to probe into the way the existing paradigms in English language education could shape teaching practices in non-western geographical contexts, one of which is Iran. According to Pulverness (2011), the paradigms behind language teaching practices are unknown to many teachers, especially in non-western contexts. He argues that, due to the teachers' lack of knowledge of the language teaching paradigms, which are dominant in their teaching contexts, they will be functionally unprepared for the classroom practices, since they have little sense of what paradigm brings about that practice. This argument indicates that language teachers are not professionally knowledgeable concerning the educational orientations behind their language education practices in the majority of non-western contexts, including Iran, leading to their inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the process of language teaching.

Reviewing the existing relevant studies indicated that research studies analysing the paradigm shift in language education in the west are confined to only few studies. In 2019, Reagan and Osborn studied the educational paradigms dominant in the United States for teaching the foreign languages specifically in schools. In their critique of traditional orientations used in America for teaching the foreign languages, they pointed out that such traditional trends pave the way for the dominance of bilingualism, whereas there is a dire need for a movement towards multilingualism to hear the voice of learners coming from various cultural and linguistic contexts. Critically examining

EFL teachers' certification and teacher training in the context of Colombia, Le Gal (2019) argued that the predominant paradigm of English language teaching in Colombia centres on a top-down approach whereby theories and methods formulated by western scholars or native English speaking researchers are used in the social reality of classrooms. But, Le Gal indicated that there should be a shift from such a top-down approach legitimising native speakers to a critical approach that is highly context-sensitive and acknowledges learners' local needs and concerns. Analysing the existing paradigm of language education in the European Union (EU), Bessie (2018) pointed out that, the acknowledgement of linguistic diversities in European countries resulted in the dominance of multilingualism in EU through which learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds are respected as capital to be used in the classes for the purpose of facilitating the process of meaning making and communication.

Broadly speaking, English language education in Iran is confined to the three contexts of public schools, private language institutes, and universities that are different regarding the approaches taken for teaching English. Thus, to bridge the gap mentioned above, the present study, using systematic literature review method, sought to examine English language teaching in the above-mentioned three educational systems that are different regarding the approaches taken for teaching English.

2. Research Method

In this study, systematic literature review method was used to explore English language teaching in three different educational systems: public schools, private language institutes, and universities. Data consisted of journal articles selected through search from EBSCO, ERIC, Sage and Taylor and Francis databases, and Iranian journals devoted to English language education. After initial examination, it was revealed that 19 articles (3 Persian and 16 English articles) were specifically about Iran. While 15 articles, focusing on various aspects of an educational context such as material development, textbooks, policies, or methods of teaching and learning, explored English language education in all three educational contexts (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017; Chamani, 2023; Ekstam & Sarvandy, 2017; Fahim & Pishghadam, 2011; Farhady, Hezavehi, & Hedyati, 2010; Fatemi, Ghahremani Ghajar, & Bakhtiari, 2018; Ghafar-Samar, Mokhtarnia, Akbari, & Kiani, 2013; Iranmehr & Davari, 2018; Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2019; Kiany, Mirhosseini, & Navidnia, 2011; Mirhosseini, Tajik, & Bahrampour Pasha, 2023; Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022; Mokhtarnia, 2011; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012; Sohrabi, Keyvanfar, & Beh-Afarin, 2022), three research studies specifically addressed the English language education in schools (Atai, Babaii, & Mazlum, 2012; Atai

& Mazlum, 2013; Banaruee, Farsani, & Khatin-Zadeh, 2023). Furthermore, the study conducted by Rassouli and Osam (2019) only examined English language education at Iranian universities. The point worthy of attention is that the selected sources were composed of papers published in peer-reviewed journals published by well-known publishers. All sources examined English language education in Iran, addressing one or all of the three contexts: schools, private language institutes, and universities.

In order to analyse the data, the thematic synthesis process adopted from Creswell (2007) was used. The aforementioned thematic synthesis process involved the initial reading and examination of the relevant studies chosen for the purpose of the present study, identification of particular sections of the texts, coding the identified sections, categorisation of codes into larger themes, and development of higher-order themes. To this end, after our initial reading of or immersion in the selected sources, especially the sections devoted to the introduction, results, interpretation of results or discussion, and final conclusion, we highlighted the segments of the texts that could provide relevant information with regard to our topic of enquiry, that is, methods of and orientations to teaching English in the three contexts: public schools, private language institutes, and universities.

Next, taking a hybrid approach, we used descriptive labels to code the highlighted segments. Taking the hybrid or integrated approach for coding and theme development, both bottom-up and top-down approaches to analysing and interpreting the highlighted segments were used. That is, we not only took the existing literature or our prior knowledge of the topic of enquiry into account but also utilised concepts and categories that were strongly data-driven. Accordingly, the top-down analysis of the data was guided by our topic and theoretical interests, while the bottom-up analysis focused on the concepts and notions that were used by the authors of the reviewed studies. The extracted codes were then subsumed into more abstract themes based on their similarities. Finally, the identified themes were refined, re-analysed, and re-categorised. This stage led to the development of the higher-order or overarching themes of the study. In the section devoted to the discussion of the present study, the relationship between themes across the reviewed studies are discussed and compared to shed light on why and how western or Islamic orientations to teaching are used in the ELT context of Iran. It should be mentioned that the MAXQDA software was utilised to analyse the data. That is, the initial codes were entered into the software. Data were then compared based on their differences and similarities and classified into larger categories called themes. To calculate the inter-coder reliability, some articles from the data set were randomly selected and inductively coded by each of these two researchers. Then, the number of agreed codes

was divided by the total number of codes and the result revealed that there existed about 80% agreement between the two researchers.

3. Findings

On the whole, four overarching themes were identified based on the context in which the English language was taught: a) a reductionist approach to language teaching in public schools, b) a modernist orientation to English language teaching in language institutes, c) a shift towards critical English language teaching, and d) nativisation of English language education. The first theme mentioned above was related to the context of schools, while the second theme revolved around private language institutes. Furthermore, the last two themes were mainly about teaching English at universities in Iran, as is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The four overarching themes and their corresponding sub-themes

Overarching themes	Sub-themes
A reductionist approach to language teaching	• The Islamic government's attempt for minimising the intrusion of English • Restricting teaching English to reading, translation, vocabulary, and grammar • Opposition to the use of authentic materials • The absence of real world dialogues • Outdated textbooks with traditional roles for women • The limited cultural scope of textbooks
A modernist orientation to English language teaching	• The communicative approach to teaching • Native speakerism • Teaching the foreign published textbooks • Ignorance about diversity • Existence of a single absolute knowledge • Standardisation
A shift towards critical language teaching	• Noticing marginalisation and self-marginalisation practices • Questioning the innocence of the English language • Recognition of the value of the local culture • Considering the teaching of English as a political activity
Nativisation of English language education	• Enrichment of Iranian-Islamic identities • Real life syllabus developed based on learners' religious and cultural needs and wants • Considering learners' real life experiences, Persian literature, local culture, and the Quran and Hadith as rich sources of teaching

The four overarching themes and their corresponding sub-themes are explicated below.

A Reductionist Approach to Language Teaching in Iranian Schools

The first overarching theme extracted from reviewing the selected sources was a reductionist approach to English language teaching that was composed of the following sub-themes:

- The Islamic government's attempt for minimising the intrusion of English
- Restricting teaching English to reading, translation, vocabulary, and grammar
- Opposition to the use of authentic materials
- The absence of real world dialogues
- Outdated textbooks with traditional roles for women
- The limited cultural scope of textbooks

Several scholars (e.g. Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017; Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2019) state that the textbooks that are taught in Iranian schools, are outdated and focus on teaching discrete components of language, including vocabulary and grammar, while the English language remained the main foreign language taught in Iranian schools even after the Islamic revolution. Besides, they maintain that language teachers in Iranian schools mostly use the traditional methods of teaching and speak to their students in their mother tongue. It can be said that language teachers in Iranian schools do not seek to improve language learners' communicative competence for interacting with the global world.

In line with the above-mentioned argument, Kiany, Mirhosseini, and Navidinia (2011) acknowledge that language teaching in Iranian schools takes a reductionist approach to teaching English and restricts the teaching of this language to the reading skill and grammatical points, although this approach "cannot satisfy the needs of students in this new world. Students need to obtain, as well, a good command of speaking, listening, and writing of English" (p. 64). As Iranmehr and Davari (2018) explain, the public sector in Iran uses traditional methods of English language teaching such as the Grammar Translation Method since the aim is the teaching of reading comprehension, memorization of vocabulary items, improvement of the translation skill, and deductive instruction of grammatical points. So, in the public sector, there is no place for real-life conversations and dialogues.

However, Ekstam and Sarvandy (2017) indicate that the textbooks taught in Iranian schools are mostly limited in their cultural scope because they do not try to familiarize language learners with L2 cultural aspects and the limited cultural contents covered in these textbooks cannot broaden language learners' cultural awareness. As there is no place for cultural dialogues, diversities, and contacts, these books are not successful in improving language learners' intercultural competence. Approving the aforementioned argument, Rassouli and Osam (2019) refer to the approach taken by the Islamic government of Iran that regards English as a threat to the Islamic identity. The extremely negative attitude of the Islamic government towards English is observed in its opposition to the use of authentic materials in the Iranian schools.

Generally speaking, it is confirmed that teaching English in Iranian is restricted to general guidelines (Atai, Babaii, & Mazlum, 2012; Atai & Mazlum, 2013). One of these guidelines is about the examinations at the end of the academic year and their gradation, which Atai and Mazlum call Barombandi. This guideline focuses on dictation, reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary. Atai and Mazlum also demonstrate that the textbooks that teachers are supposed to teach in schools are incompatible with students' affective and cognitive needs. In their attempt for illuminating the reason of such a reductionist approach to language teaching in Iranian schools, they argue that the key problem is the lack of need analysis research to start the process of planning for language teaching that leads to the incongruence between school textbooks and students' worlds. For this reason, many Iranian families send their children to private language institutes where their children have the possibility to improve their communicative competence. Rassouli and Osam (2019) maintain that Iranian people generally view the English language as the language of literacy and prestige.

A Modernist Orientation to English Language Teaching in Private Language Institutes

The second overarching theme, that is, a modernist orientation to English language teaching, is mainly about the private language institutes or the private sector, although it can apply to Iranian universities as well. This theme involved the following sub-themes:

- The communicative approach to teaching
- Native speakerism
- Teaching the foreign published textbooks
- Ignorance about diversity
- Existence of a single absolute knowledge
- Standardisation

In their article, Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) point out that in the second decade of the Islamic revolution in Iran, private English language institutes, including the Iran-America Society, whose name was changed to the Iran Language Institute (ILI), began work across the country and gradually "came to be known as a lucrative industry and big business"(p. 53). Language institutes use communicative methods of teaching and strongly support the native speakerism as a prevailing ideology in English language teaching in Iran (Ghafar-Samar et al. 2013; Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022). Native speakerism, as a term coined by Holliday (2005), considers the native English-speaking teachers as the ideal models of the English language and teaching methods. According to Aghagolzadeh and Davari, private language institutes in Iran utilize materials and textbooks written by native English-speaking scholars that are loaded with western cultural issues. Following the globalised education policies, language institutes that regard the English language as a lingua franca assign a prestigious status to English as the language which offers a new possibility of communication with the global world of technology.

Similarly, Iranmehr and Davari (2018) mention that the private sector of language teaching in Iran takes a communicative approach. They argue that this sector focuses on teaching the foreign published textbooks enjoying high face validity and reputation rather than on locally developed books. Accordingly, Mokhtarnia (2011) regards the distinction between private and public sectors of language teaching in Iran as a sight of clash of identities between two cultures. The private sector generally encourages assessment based on communicative principles that require students to use the target language in the real world contexts. This point was also addressed by Fatemi, Ghahremani Ghajar, and Bakhtiari (2018) in their analysis of English language educators as customers of the imported materials, methods, and techniques of language teaching, representing western norms. Consequently, the English language becomes the language of power, prestige, and opportunities. As Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) explicate, the western culture transferred through the English language becomes the dominant culture, English language teachers try to conform to the Standard English, and English language learners across the world try to mimic the native-like accent. They believe that, in Iran, private language institutes aim at promoting the above-mentioned ideas about learning English that result in the marginalisation of Iranian-Islamic culture.

Likewise, Fahim and Pishghadam (2011) talk about the modernist trend as they argue that Iranian language students are supposed to memorise what they receive from their teachers or books largely written by native speakers as the true knowledge and are not expected to share their own ideas. They acknowledge that "the book used for teaching English is uniform for all students around the country, and teachers have no right to select the materials which they think are apt for

their students" (p. 49). They assert that Iranian language learners and teachers are encouraged to follow the standards and "are there just to conform to the expected rules and regulations; in fact, there is no room for them to make their voice heard" (p. 47).

Fahim and Pishghadam (2011) further suggest that English language teaching in Iran supports the use of high-stakes tests and multiple-choice questions that measure language learners' knowledge of discrete components of language and seek for a correct response for each item. In addition, they explain that one book is suggested for a particular course in all parts of a great country like Iran because of the centralised educational system, which is strongly controlled by governmental authorities. Similarly, Farhady, Sajadi Hezaveh, and Hedayati (2010) argue that language teaching in Iran is based on positivist and modernist orientations due to the prevalence of the grammatical syllabus, discrete point approach to testing, and pre-established rules or modes of knowledge.

It can be inferred that Fahim and Pishghadam (2011) along with Farhady et al. (2010) mostly refer to the standardisation and existence of a single absolute knowledge, which have overwhelmed the English language teaching in Iranian language institutes. As a result, the teaching of English in these contexts ignores the value of learners' diversities and differences due to its overreliance on the one-size-fits-all policy, which causes the marginalisation of all local or alternative varieties. Except for the studies conducted by Fahim and Pishghadam and Farhady et al., which generally talk about English language teaching in Iran, the rest of the studies showed that this point mostly applies to the private sector.

A Shift towards Critical English Language Teaching in Iranian Universities

The third overarching theme hints at a recent shift towards critical perspectives on language teaching observed at Iranian universities and involved the following sub-themes:

- Noticing marginalisation and self-marginalisation practices
- Questioning the innocence of the English language
- Recognition of the value of the local culture
- Considering the teaching of English as a political activity

Analysing the current status of English language teaching in Iran, Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) refer to the absence of the name of Iran in the recent series of English textbooks entitled *World English 3* written by Johannsen and Chase in 2011. They point out that the censorship of the name of Iran in the textbook that is designed to be taught in the Middle East leads to the

marginalisation of the Iranian-Islamic culture, while Iran is one of the most influential countries in the Middle East. Furthermore, Pishghadam and Zabihi warn Iranian researchers in the field of English language education against the process of self-marginalisation in which Iranian language learners and teachers are engaged due to the native speakerist ideology promoted by private language institutes. They assert that an overemphasis on target language and culture "limits people's creativity in using the language and does not let them express their way of thinking and present their culture through language" (p. 65). Therefore, as they indicate in their article, there is a dire need for a critical shift towards English language education in which the innocence of the English language is questioned, English language teaching is regarded as a political activity, and the value of the local culture of Iran in language classes is recognized. Banaruee et al. (2023) called for improving language learners' cultural awareness to expand the circle of world Englishes. Also, Chamani (2023) stated that local language and culture should be acknowledged in language education in Iranian higher education systems.

Elucidating the above-mentioned argument on the critical lens in English language teaching in Iran, Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) remark that language teachers working at Iranian universities have recently given their attention to critical aspects of language education while they work and establish a close cooperation with private language institutes in their attempts for promoting the modernist orientations. Hence, despite the dominance of the native speakerist ideology in language teaching in Iran, Aghagolzadeh and Davari contend that "Iranian ELT community has experienced a kind of critical intellectual shift with the appearance of dozens of critical works, indicating that this discourse is drawing considerable attention" (p. 57). Overall, they refer to a shift towards critical English language teaching at universities through which the teaching of English is regarded as a political process.

In a similar vein, Fatemi, Ghahremani Ghajar, and Bakhtiari (2018) refer to the post-colonial and critical perspectives on language teaching as a new lens in teaching English in Iran. They maintain that, through such a critical lens, English language teaching is regarded as a political and ideological practice, which marginalises and colonises the local languages, cultures, and identities by assigning dominance to the norms, linguistic behaviors and practices, and life styles of native English speakers. They remark that such a new perspective enables teachers and scholars to address a wider social and political context of language teaching and challenge the authority of native speakerist ideology whereby all local and alternative varieties are silenced.

A Call for Nativisation of English Language Education

The last theme was a call for nativisation of English language education that was composed of the following sub-themes:

- Enrichment of Iranian-Islamic identities
- Real life syllabus developed based on learners' religious and cultural needs and wants
- Considering learners' real life experiences, Persian literature, local culture, and the Quran and Hadith as rich sources of teaching

In their argument on the shift in English language education in Iran, Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) speak of the nativisation of English language teaching in order to liberate language education in Iran from the colonizing bonds of the modernist trend, which revolves around native-speakerism. They underscore the key role that non-native scholars can play in creating materials based on learners' real world by taking their religious, cultural, and social needs and wants into deep consideration. Mirhosseini, Tajik, and Bahrampour Pasha (2023) also called for prioritising Islamic values in language education in Iranian universities.

Blaming Iranian experts for their marginalisation of language education and even Islamic education due to their ignorance about the local knowledges, Fatemi et al. (2018) also call for the Islamisation and localisation of English language education in Iran as the only option for the de-colonization of English teaching. They draw our attention to the value of language learners' real life experiences, Persian literature as the representation of Iranian people's local culture, and the Quran and Hadith as rich sources of Islamic civilization. Accordingly, they explain that recognising the interweaving bond between the Islamic religion and Iranian culture and identity equips Iranian language teachers and scholars with new sources for revisiting and restructuring the imported principles and methods of teaching in order to find their own true selves and positions.

4. Discussion

Comparing English language education in three different educational systems, that is, public schools, private language institutes, and Iranian universities, the present study sought to examine the way western or Islamic orientations to education are adopted or utilised in the context of Iran, as an example of non-western contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. The findings of the study showed that the modernist orientation, based on the prevalent ideology of native-speakerism, is the dominant orientation at language institutes, while some studies referred to the dominance of the reductionist approach to English language education in Iranian schools. Due to

the failure of the reductionist approach in fostering Iranian students' communicative competence, Iranian families show their growing approval and acceptance of private language institutes, where there is a space for the improvement of English language proficiency.

As Canagarajah (2005) points out, modernism is a movement toward systematicity, objectivity, and standardisation whereby diversities of linguistic lives are suppressed and local knowledges are denigrated. Furthermore, as Rubdy (2015) indicates, "the supremacy of standard English and the dominant discourse of native speaker authority, which places non-native speakers in a position of deficit competence are the root of unequal Englishes" (p. 43). From this perspective, it can be said that English language teaching in Iranian language institutes revolves around the concept of unequal Englishes, through which Englishes are contested in unequal ways As Tupas and Rubdy (2015) remark, unequal Englishes are "the unequal ways and situations in which Englishes are arranged, configured, and contested" (p. 3). They acknowledge that an overemphasis on the standardised form of English, which downplays local varieties and differences is part of the colonial endeavor to avoid "more symmetrical understandings of the pluricentricity of English" (p. 6). By the same token, Rubdy (2015) believes that the issue of unequal Englishes, which is ideologically intertwined with a colonial enterprise, regards non-standardised varieties as imperfect or corrupt and perceives non-native speakers as illegitimate and inferior.

Considering the unequal power relationships between the central and peripheral communities, Pennycook (1989) asserts that there is a dire need in English language teaching to reexamine the existing positivist and modernist theoretical frameworks that revolve around standardised curricula and serve the interest of the western male-oriented academy. Generally speaking, he regards the tendency towards standardisation, the metanarrative of method, objectivity, and consequently unequal Englishes, as were observed in language education in Iranian language institutes, as a move that "threatens all openness and diversity in education and ignores questions of class, race, or gender difference" (p. 612). Inviting the peripheral communities to challenge the legitimacy of the grand-narrative of method, Pennycook encourages non-native English language teachers to value their own practices, reflect on the existing theories, and integrate professional theories and personal practices. He explains that teachers should take the complexities of learning contexts into account and appreciate local forms of knowledge about language and teaching in order to challenge hierarchical power relationships illegitimizing non-native speakers. The third theme of this study, that is, a shift towards a critical lens for teaching the English language in the context of Iranian universities reflects the new attempt made by Iranian scholars and teachers in

the field of English language education to dismantle the colonising structure of unequal Englishes through the localised and Islamised education, as was revealed in the present study.

In fact, the dominant scientific epistemology of language teaching, that is, Anglo-Euro-American epistemology was challenged by researchers from the third-world communities, which resulted in the emergence of a cultural model of language teaching centering on local epistemologies and cultural identities. There is a strong need for a deeper understanding of the ways our perceptions of the world are shaped based on our cultural ontologies and knowledges. She explains that, through local ontologies and epistemologies, "we are all socialized in the course of learning our first language(s) and culture(s) (however hybridized they may be); and then (re)socialized or partially (re)socialized in the process of learning a second or third language and culture" (p. 342).

Appreciating cultural diversities and considering Iran as one of the culturally and linguistically colonised countries in which the native language and culture are marginalised in the process of English language teaching, Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) state that language education in Iran should not be confined to teaching instructional materials produced by the native speakers in the west. They call for national and localised textbooks and materials which are reflections of Iranian local cultural norms. Accordingly, underscoring diversity and localization as the main assumptions of postmodernism, they believe that it is time to turn towards postmodern approaches to English language teaching in Iran and point out that the emergence of English varieties and the development of the Iranian version of language teaching can be considered as "an antidote to the harshness of all marginalization Iranians have suffered for centuries" (p. 68). That is, they regard the postmodern orientation to language teaching in Iran as an opportunity for the cultivation of a local epistemology and cultural identity to question the dominant epistemology of native speakerism.

Similarly, Edwards and Usher (2002) argue that, in educational contexts, 'the postmodern perspective is a confrontation with epistemology and deeply embedded notions of foundations, disciplines and scientificity' (p. 3). They focus on postmodernism as incredulity to metanarratives and speak of the value of local narratives, as vehicles for self-representation in education, through which local knowledges are shaped as cultural constructs and the positions of storytellers in the social community are formed. In educational contexts, postmodernism offers clues to an ontological turn whereby being, identity, and local narratives come to attention, and knowledge is assumed to be socially and contextually constructed in and through discourse. Taking a postmodernist stance, Barnett (2004) refers to an ontological turn in educational contexts as a movement towards

constructing a pedagogy of human beings that revolves around human qualities rather than knowledge or skills.

While Pishghadam and Zabihi speak of a postmodern turn in language teaching in Iran as an antidote to unequal Englishes, Fatemi et al. (2018) hint at a turn to the Islamic orientation to English language teaching to get rid of drawbacks of colonial modernism in language teaching in Iran. In his paper on the nexus between English and Islam, Karmani (2005) states that the success of the expansion of English in Islamic nations "is to a large degree contingent upon pacifying the political force of "Islam"' (p. 87). To elaborate further, he refers to the ideology of modernisation behind the expansion of English in Islamic nations, which aims at incidentalizing traditional structures and identities of these nations as barriers to economic growth and prosperity. To Karmani, such a dominant perception of English language teaching, which forces Muslim societies to break free of their underdevelopment by adopting English, "to a very large degree implies a substantial curtailment of a lot of what represents Islamic culture" (p. 98). Accordingly, he calls for locally based policies for English language teaching in Islamic nations whereby Islamic values are acknowledged and respected.

On the other hand, exploring the nature of the English language as it is used in the Muslim country of Pakistan, Mahboob (2009) makes mention of the power of new varieties of English such as Pakistani English for representing Islamic values, cultures, and ideologies. He argues that the English language used in the Islamic country of Pakistan or Pakistani English "has been linguistically and culturally adapted to local cultural and religious norms. These adaptations reflect a form of linguistic resistance that has recast the English language to carry a Pakistani Muslim identity" (p. 187). In this way, he introduces the English language as an Islamic language, when it is localized and indigenized.

Being in agreement with Karmani, we, two Muslim authors of the present study who work as English language teachers at an Iranian state university, believe that the creation of a fertile atmosphere for teaching the English language in Islamic nations requires the acknowledgement of Islamic values and cultures. However, we suggest that the reduction of English language teaching in Islamic contexts to a political issue arises from our unfamiliarity with main tenets of Islamic education as an educational paradigm. Indeed, we strongly believe that improving our knowledge of Islamic education may provide the possibility to resist the modernisation theory of language teaching by offering our own Islamic onto-epistemology and engaging into dialogues with native English speakers as diverse but not different persons. Addressing the interrelation between epistemology and ontology in Islamic theory of knowledge, Sheykh Rezaee and Hashemi (2009)

refer to "an 'onto-epistemology', according to which truth and being are two sides of the same coin" (p. 19). Furthermore, elaborating on Islamic theory of knowledge, they hint at the unity of the world in which there exists only one being. But they assert that the world has multiplicity because its unique being can be presented in various modes of being. Likewise, Kamal (2016) argues that the Islamic onto-epistemology is "the sum of the multiplicities of being grounded on the principle of unity" (p. 46). Indeed, it can be inferred that Islamic theory of knowledge speaks of knowledges, different ways of beings, and multiplicities. Such a perception of multiplicity and diversity in education is different from the constraining idea of the native speaker ideal, which is prevalent in the modernist orientation to teaching in general and English language teaching in particular

Moreover, as Sheykh Rezaee and Hashemi (2009) maintain, Islamic education foregrounds ontology or being in the educational setting. Similarly, Barnett (2007) defines each student's being as her dynamic stance in relationship with her educational context and speaks of each student's feelings, anxieties, understandings, attitudes, and values. He also considers each student's ontology, that is, her being, as the basis for her knowing and believes that "without a self, without a will to learn, without a being that has come into itself, her efforts to know and act within her programme of study cannot even begin to form with any assuredness" (p. 70). Additionally, he asserts that students are supposed to know things, but their process of learning should not be limited to the mere acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, respecting the multiplicity of identity, Barnett refers to learners' personal understandings and insights that can turn knowledge into the process of learning. However, in English language teaching, the multiplicity of English language learners' identities, stories, and insights have not received enough attention (Norton, 2016). In fact, foregrounding language learners' ontology or identity, as is suggested in Islamic education, is highly important in the process of language teaching because "language is not only a linguistic system of words and sentences, but also a social practice in which identities and desires are negotiated in the context of complex and often unequal social relationship" (Norton, 2016, p. 476). Overall, it seems that Islamic education derived from Islamic theory of knowledge is in harmony with the postmodern orientation in education with regard to its focus on multiplicities, the process of knowing or integration of first-hand experience and knowledge, and the ontological turn, which can be actualised through localisation and Islamisation of English language teaching.

5. Conclusion

To examine the way western or local-Islamic orientations to language education are used in Iran, the present study sought to compare and analyse the main themes of English language

education in various educational contexts in this country. Contrary to Fatemi et al. (2018), who perceived western-oriented teaching as the main cause of marginalisation of Islamico-Iranian identity and referred to the gap between Islamic education and western education, the interpretation of the findings of our study revealed that there exists a similarity between postmodernist and Islamic orientations to English language teaching. And, we believe that it is time for creating a new possibility of dialogue across various educational orientations to English language teaching in order to go beyond the existing boundary between native speakers and non-native speakers. In fact, our study advocates the burgeoning post-colonial orientations to language teaching, whether through postmodern approaches or through the Islamic approach to language teaching, considering the main tenets of postmodernism and Islam as educational orientations rather than political issues, such as the value of lived experiences, multiplicities, situated knowledges, and the turn to ontology. These findings were in line with the findings of the similar studies conducted in the west (Bessie, 2018; Le Gal, 2019; Reagon & Osborn, 2019), as these studies also called for context-sensitive language teaching addressing the local needs of English language learners. In language teaching, the above-mentioned pre-assumptions refer to the replacement of testing by assessment, the emergence of qualitative research, task-based instruction and the participatory approach to language teaching, and the legitimacy of non-native English speaking teachers. Furthermore, in agreement with Iranmehr and Davari (2018), findings of the present study indicated that there is a shift towards localised English materials in order to address Iranian-Islamic culture and value instead of promoting western culture and ideology. This finding was also in line with the results of the study conducted by Fatemi et al. (2018).

It is noteworthy that both postmodernist and Islamic orientations highlight the importance of diversity and foreground knowing as the integration of self and knowledge or as "an act of identity and a claim to ownership" (Barnett & Coate, 2004, p.59). As Dall'Alba, Barnacle (2007) argue, knowing is located within a given socio-cultural context. In a similar vein, Kumaravadivelu (2012) believes that knowing is the result of the personal enquiry of the knower and explains that "it is about reflection and action. It is about the result of the dialectical relationship between reflection and action. That is to say, reflection informs action, and action informs reflection" (p. 21). Consequently, addressing English language teaching in Iran, we call for an ontological turn that revolves around diversity, reflection, and action. That is, there is a dire need for English language material developers in Iran to prepare localised and nativised materials addressing Iranian-Islamic identities.

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