LANGUAGE LEARNERS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS:
BRIEF REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE AND FRAMEWORKS

Seyyed Behrooz HOSSEINI
IAU South Tehran Branch
Iran Language Institute
Tehran, IRAN

Delaram POURMANDNIA
IAU South Tehran Branch
Tehran, IRAN

ABSTRACT

Learning a language is influenced by a variety of factors. Two of the most important of which are the learner's attitude and perception toward the target language. These are the concepts which have been the focal points of sociolinguists as far as learner behavior is concerned. Therefore, this study was conducted in an attempt to provide an account of the previous studies conducted on attitude and perception and their impacts on learners' learning abilities. Motivation, as a determining factor in learning, in relation to language performance is going to be discussed as well. Additionally, different frameworks for the classification of learners' belief will be discussed and relevant conclusions will be drawn.

Key Words: Attitude, Perception, Belief, Motivation, Integrativeness.

INTRODUCTION

In order to get a deeper insight into the minds of language learners there is no more certain way than to study their beliefs. As in the area of language teaching, there has recently been an increasing emphasis on the styles and variables of learners. Additionally, learners' attitudes and beliefs are to join the growing body of research in the field. When learners step in a language classroom, they bring all their personality features including their beliefs, attitudes, and language styles to the learning environment. Almost all of the scholars admit that how successful people are in learning a language is exactly and directly influenced by what they think and how they evaluate the target language, the target language speakers, culture, and of course, the learning setting. Though merely investigating the attitudes and beliefs of learners may not guarantee any success, they, in turn, can be the guidelines for the next steps taken, as learners play the main role in any learning environment.

The concept of learners' attitudes has been the focus of attention in explanation and investigation of human behavior offered by social psychologists. Attitude is usually defined as a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing such as an idea, object, person, or situation. Students have positive or negative attitudes towards the language they want to learn or the people who speak it. Having positive attitude towards tests is also claimed to be one of the reasons which make students perform better on the tests (Malallaha, 2000). A large number of studies have also investigated the relationships between attitude and proficiency in the language (Bachman, 1990; Malallaha, 2000; Coleman, Strafield, & Hagan, 2003). Additionally, Gardner (1985) believes that attitude and other affective variables are as important as aptitude for language achievement.

Attitude and Language Learning
One core aim of education is to convey factual knowledge about subjects, but another is to encourage students' interest in these subjects. To further encourage mastery of factual knowledge and skills, education

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systems rely on examinations. However, research has raised the possibility that exams could have the unintended side effect of undermining the other core aim of education, that of encouraging student interest.

Research has shown that people's goals can powerfully influence how they react to a task (Lamb, 2004). Therefore, fulfilling a task can be inextricably related to the goal of the participants in that matter. Furthermore, students may wish to take proficiency tests because of their practical benefits, for example finding a job, or the possibility of living in a foreign country. Some applicants of these kinds of proficiency tests may only wish to assess their mastery in a foreign language. Barron and Harackiewicz (2000), for example, have summarized research on college students which suggests that individuals with mastery goals are more likely to enjoy a task, while individuals with a performance goal are more likely to do well at it. However, these differences are not absolute. Under some circumstances, performance goals can actually lead to greater interest than mastery goals (see for example, Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001).

The reaction and attitude toward a task can also be determined by the degree of the participants' motivation (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). According to Holmes (1992), in learning a foreign language, students can be motivated by the people who speak the language or the context in which the language is spoken. The Amount of the anxiety of the learners in foreign language learning situations may account for the changes in motivation of language learners (Johnson & Johnson, 1998) and ultimately changes the students' positive attitudes. According to Brown (2000), second language learners, benefit from positive attitudes, and negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation. Nevertheless, he believes negative attitudes can be changed, often by exposure to reality for example, by encounters with actual persons from other cultures. Positive attitudes on the part of language learners can cause the development of an integrative motivation and this can consequently facilitate second language progress.

Berwick & Ross (1989) assessed the motivation of university students at the beginning and end of their freshmen year. Their analysis indicated a limited development of an orientation towards personal growth through widening of their horizons and a desire to study abroad. While they supported the idea that it was difficult to bring students back from the pressure of exam. They also maintained that the curriculum was at fault, by not being relevant to learners' needs and motives for language study. They contrasted this *motivational vacuum* with the extraordinary interest in language learning among adults in Japan and emphasized that universities must do much more to motivate students in this direction and make the students more relieved toward the concept of university examinations.

In a comparative study, Okada, Oxford and Abo (1996) found that the motivation of American learners of Japanese was far greater than that of learners of Spanish and concluded that motivation must be higher when one tries to learn a more difficult language because greater persistence and determination are needed to cope with the stress of a difficult situation. Conversely, EFL learners in Japan consider English as a difficult language to learn and so, such persistence and determination must also be present in order for language learning to be successful. In Japan everyone has to learn English, so teachers have to search for ways to motivate these less able students.

The type of task is also a determining factor with respect to the formation of attitudes and reactions towards the tasks. The students who sit for school or university exams would display lower motivation in comparison to students who learn the material without any assessment and test at the end of the curriculum. Test anxiety is a crucial factor in testing circumstances which results in lower motivation in pre-test conditions. Anxiety theorists have suggested that test anxiety is caused by individuals' perception of the test as a form of pressure to do well. These theorists further suggest that test anxiety is determined by individuals' personal interpretation or cognitive appraisal of the situation (Sarason & Sarason, 1990). The anticipation of a forthcoming exam is likely to be de-motivating for most students because it directs their attention towards the consequences of being graded rather than the inherent interest of the subject (Harackiewicz, Manderlink, & Sansone, 1984). According to Vallerand and Reid (1984), motivation can be boosted after the exam if the students receive positive feedback on their performance. They suggest when individuals learn in order to achieve grades; the information they process is likely to be seen as useful only for that specific task. Thus, after the test is

completed, the materials will no longer warrant retention. In their study, Grolnick and Ryan (1987) asked children to learn material in order to be tested on it; others were asked to learn the material simply for the sake of learning. When the students subsequently reported on their experiences, those who had learned in order to be tested, reported feeling more pressure. In addition, they recalled less information and showed less conceptual understanding (see Benware & Deci, 1984). Grolnick and Ryan (1987) referred to the lack of integration and recalling of material as an unwelcomed phenomenon in which material is forgotten when it is no longer functionally relevant. Extending this analysis in terms of ongoing motivation, it could be assumed that when individuals are immersed in a task where there is considerable pressure to perform well, their motivation is high, but as soon as the task has been completed, this motivation would be lost. Peacock (1997) examined the effect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners. His research described a classroom research project to investigate whether authentic materials increased the classroom motivation of learners, a claim often made but rarely, if ever, tested. A definition of motivation relevant to teachers was adopted-learner interest, persistence, attention, action, and enjoyment. Two beginner-level EFL classes participated, and both used authentic and artificial materials alternately. Results from two observation sheets and a self-report questionnaire indicated that while on-task behavior and observed motivation increased significantly when authentic materials were used, self-reported motivation only increased over the last 12 of the 20 days of the study. However, learners also reported authentic materials to be significantly less interesting than artificial materials.

To substantiate the theoretical assertions about the relationship between attitude and language learning, extensive studies have been carried out to examine the effect of attitudes on language learning and the relationship between attitudes and language success. Truitt (1995) found in a study regarding the attitude of language learners that students' beliefs and attitudes towards language learning may vary based on cultural background and previous experiences. Thus, it can be argued that positive or negative attitudes do not develop accidentally but have some reasons for their emergence. Malallaha (2000) investigated the attitudes of Arab learners towards English language and discovered that they have positive attitudes towards the English language and their proficiency in tests was positively related to their attitude towards English.

Perception and Belief

The recognition of the role of learners' epistemological beliefs across various disciplines has contributed to a growing body of evidence which suggests that they play a central role in learning experience and achievements (Schommer, 1990) and have a profound influence on learning behavior and learning outcomes (Weinert & Kluwe, 1987). Interdisciplinary research shows how one's belief systems, social cognitions and metacognitions are a great force in intellectual performance (Schoenfeld, 1983), and that learners may be directly influenced by their perception of success in learning and levels of expectancy with realistically high expectations helping to build confidence, and low (or unrealistically high) expectations leading to de-motivation and disappointment (Puchta, 1999).

The study of perception and beliefs in both foreign and second language acquisition is important, as it has been noted that successful learners develop insights into beliefs about language learning processes, their own abilities and the use of effective learning strategies in the classroom and the context beyond that (Oxford, 2003). It has been argued that while some beliefs may have a facilitative effect on learning, others can hinder it. Supportive and positive beliefs help to overcome problems and thus sustain motivation, while negative or unrealistic beliefs can lead to decreased motivation, frustration, and even anxiety (Puchta, 1990).

Therefore, it can be claimed that an awareness of learners' beliefs is central to EFL classroom pedagogy. In an attempt to better understand the nature and role of beliefs in EFL context, various studies have taken up different approaches to their investigations. These can be more generally categorized as *cognitive* and *sociocultural* approaches. The main goal of these research efforts has been to identify psychological characteristics of individuals, such as their valuing and expectation of success and their orientation to their goals, and to try to quantify the relationship of these identified qualities to academic achievement.

For instance, Pintrich (2003) makes clear that as students move to higher levels of education, their motivation in study drops. Wigfield, Eccles, and Rodriguez (1998) attribute these changes in motivation to the perceptions of students about ability and intelligence. Students, in developmental stages, conceive that ability and intelligence are immutable. Therefore, they become less intrinsically motivated and they have lower expectation of success. There is also increasing consensus that these changes result from the interaction between developmental processes and institutional contexts, for example, the way that larger classes and fewer individual task-based lessons in schools conflict with young adolescents' need for more control over their lives, with negative consequences for their low academic motivation (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Lamb (2004) carried out a study on the motivation of Indonesian adolescents towards learning English. His study aimed to track changes in students´ reported motivation and learning activity and to identify internal and external factors which might be associated with the changes. It was found that the learners' initially very positive attitudes towards the language and expectations of success were maintained over this period, whereas their attitudes toward the experience of formal learning tended to deteriorate. He attributed the findings of the study to the cognitive and developmental perceptions of the students towards the concept of formal learning.

Yang (1999) carried out a study to investigate the relationship between EFL college students' beliefs about language learning and their use of learning strategies. The study found that language learners' self-efficacy beliefs about learning English were strongly related to their use of all types of learning strategies, especially functional practice strategies. Also, learners' beliefs about the value and nature of learning spoken English were closely linked to their use of formal oral-practice strategies. The results of this study suggested cyclical relationships between learners' beliefs and strategy use and their final success in learning English.

Horwitz (1988) investigated the beliefs of a number of first semester foreign language learners at the University of Texas. The students were from different nationalities. Her learners appeared to somewhat underestimate the difficulty of language learning; 43 percent of them said that if you spent one hour a day learning a foreign language, you would become fluent within two years, and a further 35 percent that it would take three to five years. 50 percent believed in the existence of foreign language aptitude, and 35 percent said that they had that aptitude. Horwitz (1988) proposed that these gaps between teacher and learner beliefs probably result in "negative [language-learning] outcomes" (p. 292) for learners. Horwitz also suggested that a gap between teacher and learner beliefs can lead to reduced learner confidence in and satisfaction with the class and to unwillingness to participate in communicative activities (p. 290). In her final conclusions, she asserted that "Teachers will likely encounter ... many unanticipated beliefs, some enabling and some truly detrimental to successful language learning ... foreign language teachers can ill afford to ignore those beliefs if they expect their students to be open to particular teaching methods and to receive the maximum benefit from them" (p . 293).

Mantle-Bromley (1995) investigated the beliefs of 208 seventh grade middle school students taking first-year French and Spanish in Kansas. Mantle-Bromley's results indicated that some of her students' beliefs about language learning differed from commonly held teacher beliefs. In her study, learners believed in the existence of foreign language aptitude.

In the following sections, frameworks for the classification of learners' beliefs will be discussed.

FRAMEWORKS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF LEARNER BLIEFS

Byram's (2004) Resultative and motivational hypothesis
According to Byram (2004), studies on the connection between attitude and language learning yield two viewpoints: resultative and motivational hypothesis. The resultative hypothesis claims that "experience of success influences attitudes to language, country and people" (p.53).

Byram in his encyclopedia of language teaching and learning refers to a study conducted by Savignon (1972) on an 18-week French course at an American college which tried to evaluate the efficacy of different methods of teaching. Savignon asserts that "it is achievement which influences attitudes towards French study" (p.54).

Byram continues that deterioration in learners' attitude can be the result of language exercises in the settings "bereft of content, i.e. without information about the target language culture" (p.54).

A viewpoint taking the opposite stand to resultative hypothesis is motivational hypothesis which considers successful language learning a result of attitudes "as stable of, motive-like constructs" (Byram, p.55). Motivational hypothesis is then of two orientations: integrative and instrumental. The former is the interest in the other group and the latter is a concern with usefulness of a professional or subject-related kids. Cooper and Fishman (1977, cited in Warrington and Jeffery, 2005) mentioned a third type of motivation called "developmental motivation". They asserted that developmental or personal motivation is related to personal development or personal satisfaction. This is about activities such as watching movies and reading books in English.

Byram reports on the findings of two studies on Indian learners of English (Lukmani, 1972) and Chinese students living in USA (Oller, Hudson, & Liu, 1977b). As the studies reveal, marking integrative orientation, above instrumental, as the first concern in the priorities list of the learners, is a problematic issue.

Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model

The controversial views on the interrelationship between success and attitude ended in the emergence of socio-educational model. Gardner's socio-educational model is based on the idea that L2 learning is "acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community" (Gardner, 1979, p. 193 cited in Ellis, 2004). The proponents of the model believe that the relationship between learners' attitudes and their proficiency is an indirect one, unlike that between integrative motivation and proficiency which is described as more direct and, therefore, stronger.

Gardner believes that the learner's attitude towards L2 and their integrativeness have the strongest impact on the level of motivation. To Gardner, motivation can be divided into three components: the effort to achieve a goal, the desire to learn a language and satisfaction with the task of learning that same language.

The most recent version of Gardner's socio-educational model is presented in Masgoret and Gardner (2003). The model draws dividing lines between attitudinal and motivational variables. Integrativeness and learner's attitude towards the learning situation are categorized as attitudinal factors, differentiated from motivation, integrative, and instrumental orientation. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) define integrativeness as openness to identify, at least to some extent, with other language communities. They also claim that high levels of integrativeness increases learners' motivation. They believe that a learner's attitudes towards the learning situation can be elicited through their evaluation of the course, the teacher, the materials and/or teaching environment. To elaborate on motivation, they call it a goal-directed behavior and again consider it as a combination of three components: expanded effort, the desire to be proficient in the foreign language, and the affect experienced when learning the language. Here again, the proposed division for motivation clearly echoes the three components distinguished by Tremblay and Gardner (1995), except for the "satisfaction" element that was changed into "affect", a broader term. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) also confirm Tremblay and Gardner's observation that the learner's integrativeness and attitude towards the learning situation have a great impact on their motivation and consequently also on their achievements.

Though Gardner (1985) puts great emphasis on the importance of learners' attitudes toward the target language community, there is a more moderate view that rejects the idea of attitude as an unchangeable, fixed trait but states that attitude can develop within complex elements.

Ellis (2008) claims that one of the ways social settings can influence L2 acquisition is through affecting learners' attitudes. Learners take different attitudes towards "the target language, target-language speakers, the target-language culture, the social value of learning the L2, particular uses of the target language, and themselves as members of their own culture" (p. 287). Regarding the resultative vs. motivational hypothesis, Ellis holds a middle view and believes that "learner attitudes have an impact on the level of L2 proficiency achieved by individual learners and are themselves influenced by this success" (p. 287).

Baker (1988) described attitudes as follows:

1. 1. Attitudes are cognitive (i.e. are capable of being thought about) and affective (i.e. have feelings and emotions attached to them)
2. Attitudes are dimensional rather than bipolar – they vary in degree of favorability/un-favorability.
3. Attitudes predispose a person to act in a certain way, but the relationship between attitudes and actions is not a strong one.
4. Attitudes are learnt, not inherited or genetically endowed.
5. Attitudes tend to persist but they can be modified by experience (Ellis, 1994, p. 199).

Brown's (2007) ideas about attitudes are not very different from those of Baker's (1988). He believes that attitudes "develop in early childhood and are the result of parent's and peers' attitudes, of contact with people who are different in any number of ways, and of interacting different factors in the human experience" (p. 193). He touches on Gardner and Lambert's (1972) extensive studies on the effect of attitudes on language learning; "they defined motivation as a construct made up of certain attitudes" (p. 193). To elaborate on the issue, Brown points to the large-scale studies that John Oller and his colleagues (1977b) conducted on the relationship between attitudes and language success. In their studies, the relationship between Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican students' achievement in English and their attitudes towards self, the native language group, the target language group, their reasons for learning English, and their reasons for travelling to the United States were investigated. The findings enabled the researchers to categorize "a few meaningful clusters of attitudinal variables" that showed positive correlation with proficiency. Brown continues that "each of the three studies yielded slightly different conclusions, but for the most part, positive attitudes toward self, the native language group, and the target language group enhanced proficiency" (Brown, 2007, p. 193).

However, Wenden (1985, cited in Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009) presented a more inclusive definition of the term "attitudes". According to him, "attitudes" encompasses three components: *cognitive, affective,* and *behavioral.* "The cognitive component is related to the beliefs and ideas or opinions about the object of the attitude. The affective factor is about the feeling and emotions that one has towards an object, likes or dislikes, with or against" (p. 33). And finally, the behavioral component is made up of one's consisting actions or behavioral intentions towards the object. Regarding Wenden's theory of attitudes, Van Els et al. (1984, cited in Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009) claims that "it does not really matter whether all or only one of the three components are measured; the relationship between the components is so close that sufficient information on an attitude can be obtained by measuring only one component, no matter which" (p. 33).

Attitudes can be measured indirectly through measurements such as the Semantic Differential Techniques or directly using self-report questionnaires (Ellis, 1994).

The learners' attitude towards learning a particular L2 is shaped by the intersection of their attitudes about their own ethnic identity and those about the target-language culture. These attitudes influence (and definitely not determine) both L1 maintenance and L2 learning. Eliss (2004, p. 320) summarizes learners' attitudes in the following table.

Table 1: Learners' attitudes

	Attitudes towards native culture	Attitudes towards target culture
Additive bilingualism	+	+
Subtractive bilingualism	-	+
Semilingualism	-	-
Monolingualism	+	-

Key: + = positive attitudes   - = negative attitudes

Kumaravadivelu (2006) refers to social psychologists ideas about attitudes, they believe that attitudes are a matter of individual differences, in other words, different individuals have different attitudes towards "the

same stimuli" (Eiser, 1987 cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 39). In addition, attitudes are considered to be a social factor, that is, they are influenced by the events in the external world.

Attitude is clearly an individually-driven trait but as Malcolm (1987) asserts at least two external factors contribute to its development: environmental and pedagogic. The environmental factor includes "social, cultural, political and economic imperatives that shape the L2 educational milieu" (p. 39). The pedagogic factor refers to how the interaction between teachers, learners, and the learning situation develop positive or negative attitudes in the learner. Tucker and Lambert (1973) claim that L2 development is influenced by teachers' attitudes more than parental or community-wide attitudes. Most of the scholars in the field conclude that "a positive attitude to language learning is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success" (p. 39).

Lightbown and Spada (2006) define motivation as "a concept that explains why people behave as they do" (Csizer & Dornyei, 2005, p. 20).

Robinson and Ellis (2008) believe in a modern aim of cognitive describing a speaker than the traditional model of describing language system. As they put it, linguistic theory and description, which were sent to isolation by structuralism, will receive more attention at the beginning of the twentieth century. Linguists' concern at that time was language structure, and they excluded external factors such as world-view or level of civilization of the speakers from their studies. By the end of the century, though, the language systems were replaced by speaker's cognitive system. Robinson and Ellis believe that the new trend will be developing language theories with "L2 and internal variation at their centers" (p.91) and the most important point to them will be linguistic attitudes – "the feelings that different language and attitudes evoke" (p.91). They believe that, despite the great deal of empirical data about attitudes, we still cannot place attitudes into a cognitive model with the rest of language structures.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998): Process Model of L2 Motivation

Dörnyei (2001) proposed a process-oriented model of motivation consisting of three phases. The first phase is "choice-motivation" which refers to getting started and to setting goals. The second phase is "executive motivation" and is about carrying out the necessary tasks to maintain motivation. The third phase "motivation retrospection" is about students' appraisal of and reaction to their performance.

As Dörnyei and Ottó elaborate on their motivation model, they, partly inspired by Heckhausend and Kuhl's (1985) Action Control Theory, developed Process Model of L2 Motivation. The model is designed to explain both the dynamics of motivational change in time and to synthesis many of the most important motivational conceptualizations to the date (1998). As they report, some previous theories on motivation have gone through a reductionism paradigm and have selected certain motivational variables as the main components and then placed some other factors in within their subsumed areas. Among the theories, as cited in Dörnyei and Ottó's article, are Expectancy value theories which "assume that motivation to perform various tasks is the product of two key factors: the individual's *expectancy* of success in a given task and the *value* the individual attaches to success in that task" (p. 44). This framework includes several sub-theories which try to elaborate on cognitive processes that shape the individual's expectancy: attribution theory refers to how an individual processes past achievements experiences; self-efficacy theory is related to people's judgment of their abilities to do certain tasks; and self-worth theory believes in the highest human priority as the need for self-acceptance.

However, before presenting the process-model of L2 motivation, Dörnyei (1994) developed a completely different classification of motivation. Dörnyei divided motivation into three factors: learner-related factors, subject-related factors, and classroom-related factors. The *learner-related factors* are about a learner's anxiety and self-efficacy, "his/her self-perception of his/her accent in the second [or foreign] language and causal attributions" (p. 9). He labels integrativeness, extrinsic, and intrinsic motives as *subject-related factors*. And the *classroom-related factors* refer to learners' opinions about class objectives, teaching styles, feedback, student roles and learning strategies.

Yang (1999): Metacognitive Versus Motivational Beliefs

Yang (1999) distinguishes metacognitve from motivational beliefs. Metacognitive beliefs are made up of three elements: what learners know about *themselves*; what learners think about the *task*; and their knowledge about learning strategies. Motivational beliefs also consist of three components: a learner's belief about their *ability* and *expectation* about learning the foreign language; the *goals* set by the learner and their *interest* in the language learning task; and the learner's *emotional reactions* to learning the foreign language.

Yang's sub-classification is based on Pintrich's (1989) classification model of motivational beliefs. Pintrich analyzed the concept motivation within the realm of expectancy-value theories which identify motivation as a combination of certain beliefs about the outcome of actions with the value placed upon those outcomes.

Long before Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) put forward their dichotomy of motivation (expectancy and value), Pintrich (1989) presented his subdivision of motivation with three components: expectancy (beliefs about one's own ability), value (learning goals and importance, utility and interest attributed to learning the target language), and affect (emotional reactions to the task). Additionally, clear similarities can be drawn between Pintrich's original discussion of motivation and the model developed by Yang.

As Brown (2007) reminds us, teachers need to bear in mind that everyone has both positive and negative attitudes. Negative attitudes usually emerge from one's indirect exposure to a culture or group through books or media and they often can be changed by exposure to reality.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the aforementioned research studies in this paper, it became evident that attitude and perception play significant roles in enabling learners to learn effectively. As it was stated, learners' motivation, the type of task at hand, cultural background and previous experiences are all contributive to the way learners behave toward and perceive learning strategies and their ability in maintaining higher levels of learning. Regarding teachers, it is noteworthy to state that, they need to have a clear understanding of the language being taught and student beliefs, because learners with realistic and informed beliefs are more likely to behave productively in the class, work harder outside the class, and (crucially) persist longer with language study; this must be taken into consideration particularly due to the fact that when students' beliefs and performance do not match, they become frustrated and disappointed with the class and with themselves resulting in hindrance in the intake of the material. Therefore, it can be concluded that having positive or negative attitudes towards a certain language and the way learners perceive that language can exert considerable influence upon their performance on the language itself.

BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESSES OF THE AUTHORS

Seyyed Behrooz HOSSEINI holds an M.A. in TEFL from IAU South Tehran Branch. He also holds a B.Sc. in software engineering. He has published numerous articles on language learning and teaching at international journals. He has been teaching English as a foreign language in Tehran for many years. He is currently teaching at the ILI. His areas of research interest include assessment, testing, learner attitude and perception, CMC, CALL, e-learning, and related fields.

Seyyed Behrooz HOSSEINI
IAU South Tehran Branch
Iran Language Institute
Tehran, IRAN
E. Mail: sbehroozh1970@yahoo.com

Delaram POURMANDNIA holds an M.A. TEFL from IAU South Tehran Branch. She has been involved in teaching English in various language institutes in Tehran such as Safir, Shokouh, etc for at least 8 years in different proficiency levels. She is interested in teacher education, second language acquisition and dynamic assessment.

Delaram POURMANDNIA
IAU South Tehran Branch
Tehran, IRAN
E. Mail: d_pnia@yahoo.com

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