4. Reflection

In order to be sure about what we have found, we decided to check out findings through statistical analysis through running one sample t-test. The results revealed that the LOA students outperformed at the end of the study in comparison with their performance at the beginning of the study ($p < 0.05$) in terms of acquiring the grammatical points. Therefore, we can conclude that the learning oriented assessment used in the present study has been effective in assisting learners to go beyond their normal achievement levels. This may have happened because LOA students are the ones who are to learn new points and solve their own problems through asking for assistance from teachers. In addition, in all of the steps, the presence of the instructors and the care that was given to students' full understanding as well as providing them with better assistance for deeper understanding were considered the potential advantages of LOA. Therefore, we believe that if teachers teach grammar to their students through LOA, it may help them manage the difficulties that might otherwise be overlooked in traditional classes which impede learners' full understanding. Likewise, the purpose of the exams is adapted to the needs of the students and test results would be of higher utility.

Taken together, in the present study we examined how grammar instruction could be improved. For that purpose, we used learning-oriented assessment which was examined through the implementation of an action research framework. Our main purpose of using LOA was to improve the instruction process and enrich our assessments with learning and teaching goals. Our findings showed that implementing LOA had a significant effect on the acquisition of grammar by intermediate learners of English. It seems that giving priority to learning in language assessment would significantly improve the quality of both assessment and teaching. Since testing and teaching are two sides of the same coin, utilizing one to improve the other is highly suggested and the same was confirmed by the findings of the present study.

Finally, we recommend that more studies be carried out to see if what we found as the effectiveness of LOA is limited to grammar, or it has similar facilitating effects in other contexts and for other skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary) among learners of different proficiency levels. We will similarly try our best to implement LOA in classes of different skills and also with different students and we will share our findings with those who are interested in integrating language instruction with language assessment for achieving better results.

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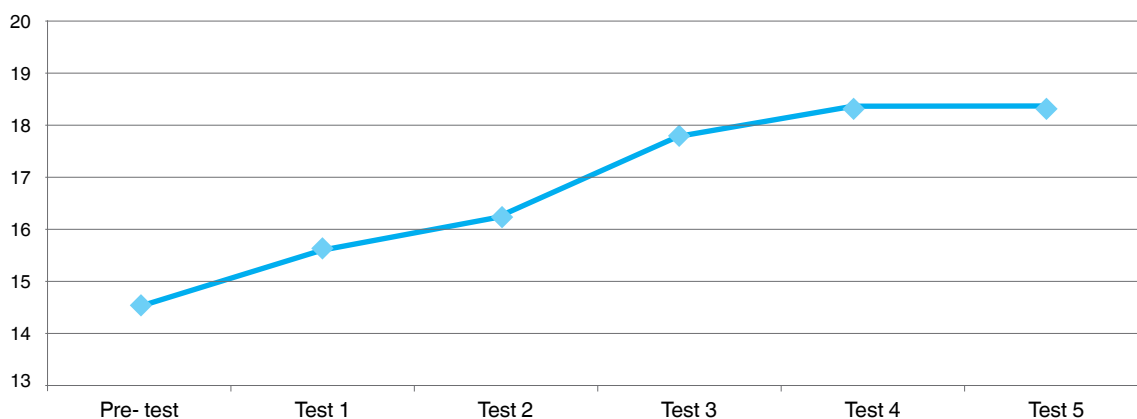
Figure 1. Graphical representation of learners' performances at different intervals

The results of the examination showed that the students of all classes were at the same level prior to the study while after their participation in grammar classes, they all progressed. It was also found that the amount of the development for the students in LOA classes was more than the rate of development in the traditional group (mean difference=1.25). It is worth noting that the participants in two LOA classes had very similar patterns of performance on the final test (mean difference = .25).

3. Observation

Based on our purpose to implement this new method for grammar instruction and in order to examine the usefulness of LOA, we assessed students longitudinally, and the results were in high correspondence with the teachers' overall qualitative assessment of the class progress. Overall, through providing our students with appropriate feedback during instruction, they became more active, motivated and meticulous in employing grammar rules. Thus, the possibility of better achievements in the new instruction and testing method was increased.

2. Action

In order to address the queries that we posed on the grammar instruction, we decided to choose three of our own classes in which the students for the first time were exposed to grammar rules. There were more grammar classes that could be used in this study; however, we opted to focus on our own since we had more control over the procedure of instruction, and also we already knew most of the students. This enabled us to interact more effectively with the students who were struggling with the acquisition of grammar and the stress of the exams.

Accordingly, we had the chance to work with 65 intermediate English learners who were our students and were studying English language and literature. Thus, we decided to present some of them with the new method of instruction that was called LOA and keep the rest receiving the regular instruction. To that purpose, collaboratively we designed a lesson plan where we could teach five grammatical points in each session. The points included modals (e.g. should/could would), tenses (e.g. present, past), pronouns, conditional sentences, and types of sentences (e.g. complex, compound). For the instruction and assessment procedures in two classes that we consider them LOA groups, we took certain steps namely, presenting learning tasks, student involvement in self and peer evaluation, and receiving feedback as feed-forward (Black & William, 1998) while the other class had undergone the regular instruction.

By the continuation of the semester, and the implementation of both methods in different classes, we had the chance to see how much our new method was successful in improving students' achievements and our instruction quality. During the study, we told the students to use our feedback for their further activities and consider our suggestions as complementary comments, not merely as a simple judgment of their performance. If they considered the points in their performance, we would change the next feedback they received (a different feedback), and if they made the previous mistakes again, we would re-present our previous feedback to make sure they have learnt it. It was expected that the received grammatical feedback would turn into feed-forward and would give them the proper consciousness that they need.

In the LOA method, we assessed the students repeatedly, and learners continuously received feedback whereas the assessment of students' learning in the traditional group was merely conducted at the end of the semester. Participants' performances was assessed six times: One session prior to the study; four sessions during the study; and one more session after the study. These tests accommodated 6 open- ended questions covering the content of the lessons that were instructed to learners up to the time of the administration. That is, each test covered all lessons before its administration cumulatively. Learners' mean scores on these tests at different intervals are presented in Figure 1.

Our main purpose of using LOA was to improve the instruction process and enrich our assessments with learning and teaching goals

the level of learners' engagement in them is not equal, and the purpose for which they are used are basically different.

Recently, a tendency towards a shift occurred in the summative assessments that aimed at learning and testing simultaneously (Green, 2017). In other words, in formative assessment the priority was given to tasks that were conducive to stimulating appropriate student learning approaches. This happened due to the fact that many teachers assumed that they were unable to utilize the test and its properties for the betterment of students' learning; thus facilitating students' learning was considered as a priority not only in instruction that needs immediate tasks but also in assessment procedures that need substantive content knowledge (Keppell, Au, Ma, & Chan, 2006). This has been achieved through learning-oriented assessment that is defined as assessment where the primary focus is on the potential to develop productive student learning processes (Careless, 2007; Keppell & Carless, 2006; Leung & Berry, 2007). Generally, the main challenge that teachers like us have always been struggling with is how to bring external assessment (i.e. exams) into a systemic relationship with assessments that happen during classroom interactions (via learning-oriented assessment). This is considered important due to the fact that both learning and testing aspects of instruction could be considered simultaneously, and the proper planning could be made for eliminating the shortcomings of the instruction and improving students' understanding and performance (Lee, 2007).

In the definition of learning oriented tasks, it is suggested that task completion should be scaffolded, that there should be an interactive questioning procedure,

and that immediate and learning-focused feedback should be available to the students (Hamp-Lyons, 2017). Subsequently, through the implementation of this method, a dynamic and productive relationship between teaching/learning and assessment would occur. Subsequently, this would be characterized as the assessment for learning rather than solely the assessment of learning (Harlen, 2006). We conducted this study while we were teaching intermediate students of English language and literature at a university in the northeast of Iran. The fact that students were going under routine methods of grammar instruction which mainly failed to address their needs and difficulties properly as well as the fact that the results of the assessments that learners sat for were rarely used for further instructional uses stimulated us to employ LOA method in our grammar classes. Therefore, we aimed to find if integrating language testing with the language instruction process can ameliorate the negative aspects of grammar instruction in a way that both teachers and learners benefit from it simultaneously.

> **Many teachers assumed that they were unable to utilize the test and its properties for the betterment of students' learning; thus facilitating students' learning was considered as a priority not only in instruction that needs immediate tasks but also in assessment procedures that need substantive content knowledge (Keppell, Au, Ma, & Chan, 2006)**

چکیده

در این پژوهش کوشیده‌ایم با به کارگیری اصول و قواعد اقدام‌پژوهشی به بررسی تأثیر «سنجش یادگیری-محور» در فراگیری قواعد دستوری زبان انگلیسی در بین زبان‌آموزان با سطح متوسط بپردازیم. در کلاس‌هایی که ما در آن‌ها مشغول به تدریس دستور زبان انگلیسی بودیم با این موضوع مواجه شدیم که برخی از دانشجویان نه تنها در فراگیری نکات آموزشی و دستوری زبان انگلیسی با مشکل مواجه‌اند بلکه در به کارگیری آن نکات نیز توانمندی اندکی دارند. بدیهی است که به‌طور کلی در کلاس‌های تدریس دستور زبان ابتدا نکات آموزشی ارائه می‌شود و سپس به حل تمرین پرداخته می‌شود؛ اما از آن‌رو که عملکرد دانشجویان به‌طور مستقیم نیز از شیوهٔ تدریس تأثیر می‌پذیرد تصمیم گرفتیم تا با بهبود و ارتقای روش تدریس به افزایش کیفیت آموزش بپردازیم. نحوهٔ انجام پژوهش بدین ترتیب بود که در یکی از کلاس‌هایمان بخش‌هایی از گرامر را که مدنظر بوده به صورت مرسوم تدریس کردیم و سپس به حل تمرین پرداختیم، اما برای برخی دیگر فراتر از تدریس، همزمان آنان را سنجیدیم و اگر ابهام یا نقطهٔ ضعفی در عملکردشان دیده می‌شد به آنان بازخورد مناسبی ارائه می‌کردیم تا عملکرد خود را بهبود بخشند. این پروسه تا فراگیری کامل قواعد مدنظر نیز ادامه داشته است. در مراحل ابتدایی به کارگیری این روش، تفاوت چندانی در عملکرد دانشجویان مشاهده نشد اما پس از گذشت مدت زمان اندکی (حدود ۵ جلسه) نشانه‌های بهبود در یادگیری و استفاده از نکات تدریس شده را مشاهده کردیم. افرادی که به‌صورت معمول و سنتی آموزش زبان خود را ادامه دادند همچون گذشته با سرعت یادگیری کمی در کلاس‌ها حاضر می‌شدند در حالی که افرادی که برای ایشان با استفاده از سنجش یادگیری - محور مطالب را ارائه نمودیم توانمندتر بودند و با انگیزهٔ بیشتری به یادگیری پرداختند. در گام آخر دریافتیم که به کارگیری سنجش یادگیری-محور به‌صورت اساسی می‌تواند در بلند مدت عملکرد زبان‌آموزان را ارتقا بخشد.

کلیدواژه‌ها: سنجش یادگیری محور، دستور زبان، فراگیری، اقدام‌پژوهی

1. Planning

For years, both theoretical and practical aspects of language assessment have been considered important concerns in psychometric research. The new advancements in the implementation and development phases of language tests (e.g., validation studies and innovation in item development as well as the process of examination) have addressed the major shortcomings of the previous methods along with the major goals of language pedagogy. For instance, one of the new approaches of language testing is using formative (rather than summative) assessment. Although these two forms of assessing performance have their own capacity to present authentic assessment,

Teaching and Testing Grammer through Learning Oriented Assessment: An Action Research

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Abstract

As an influential area of education, language teaching has undergone various changes in its theoretical and practical frameworks during the last decades. The common purpose of all research studies has been to optimize the instruction process. Since language learning does not happen in vacuum, and some information is required for examining its quality, language tests are used. Yet, the question still remains as to whether language tests are just simple tools for assessing the content of materials that have been instructed or they can be used for formative goals as well. In the present study, we attempted to examine the utility of language tests in enhancing students' grammar acquisition. The action research reported in this paper sought to investigate whether and to what extent the implementation of Learning-oriented Assessment (LOA) can facilitate the acquisition of grammar by intermediate second language (L2) learners. In our classes at a university in the north east of Iran, where we were both teaching grammar to students of English Language and Literature, we faced students who were struggling not only with the acquisition of the grammar points but also the actual use of what they had learnt in the grammar exams.

Typically, in grammar classes, we teach a set of grammar items in their book through using examples and performance tasks during the semester. Having the fact in mind that students' performance is highly dependent on the method of our instruction, we tried to use new methods for improving their learning output. In the beginning stages of our trial for teaching grammar innovatively, we observed little change in the learners'' performance while gradually by the continuation of the new instructional method students' performance showed a significant improvement as a results of our LOA grammar instruction. Pedagogically, the findings of our study call for a shift in the assessment procedures that provide simultaneous learning and testing opportunities.

Key Words: grammar, intermediate English learners, learning- oriented assessment, longitudinal investigation

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Guidlines for Publishing in Action Research

We have recently specified a special column in *Roshd FLT Journal* for publishing small-scale research studies that teachers conduct in their own classes. We intend to publish at least one action research report in each issue of *Roshd FLT Journal*. Thus, we encourage you to submit the reports of your classroom research to be published in our "Action Research Column".

We accept papers on the basis of their relevancy to our readers, simplicity, readability, and freshness of viewpoint. Your papers do not have to follow the standards of scholarly, academic research papers. We do not use complicated statistical analyses, technical terms or footnotes. Thus, write in a simple, plain and easy to understand manner. Please cite all of your sources within the text, and provide a list of references at the end of your article. When writing your paper, please include the following information in your report:

- Your research questions and your plan for answering the research questions
- The actions that you did over a period of time in order to answer the questions
- Your evaluation of the effects of the actions and any evidence that support your evaluation
- Your conclusion and suggestions for other teachers

To be accepted for publication, your articles need to:
- Be maximum 2500 words, including references
- Be on a topic of relevance or interest to Iranian language teachers
- Include an abstract of no more than 200 words, and a list of references

We are looking forward to your action research reports. Should you have any inquiries about how to prepare a report of your action research, you can send an email to Dr. Mehrani at the following address: meh.mehrani@gmail.com