Input Enhancement through Using Author's Biography: The Impact on Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Ability across Gender

Ayda Rahmani

Comprehensive University of Applied and Practical Sciences, Culture and Art, Unit 2, Nowshahr, Mazandaran, Iran

Abstract—**This study aims to investigate whether enhancing input through author's biography affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension ability across gender or not. To answer, a proficiency test of OPT was administered to a total of 120 male and female learners. Then 60 homogenous subjects, with the same English proficiency, were selected. The 60 participants were assigned into 4 groups randomly i.e. experimental male, experimental female, control male, control female. The study includes a pre-posttest design with 4 groups. The female and male experimental groups went through the treatment and finally the four groups were given a posttest. Finally, descriptive and inferential statistics (A paired- samples t-test and a two-way ANOVA) were applied to analyze the statistical data. The findings indicated that input enhancement through author's biography does affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension ability and male participants outperformed female participants.**

Index Terms—**author's biography, EFL learners, gender, input enhancement, reading comprehension**

I. INTRODUCTION

Developing EFL learners input and fluent reading is challenging and time-consuming. English learners' input enhancement through being exposed to effective context as well as improving their reading comprehension is not just a matter of teaching them some strategies. The content and the contexts of reading materials are very influential in enabling EFL learners to read in an effective manner and to read between the lines to find out what the author is really saying. There are reasons for L2 reading and we read for different purposes. As a result, our reading manners change due to the purposes e.g. we may scan, skim, read to learn, read to enjoy, etc. Thus, a rich command of input paves the way for EFL learners' fluent reading and comprehension. Reading refers to the readers' engagement in a number of processes such as phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and monitoring and discourse. It is the process of receiving and interpreting information via the medium of print. L2 readers do not have the same language resources as L1 readers; they do not share all the social and cultural knowledge. Also, L1 and L2 readers are different in their background knowledge about how the world works. L2 learners have different reasons for learning al L2; for example, they may want to integrate in the L2 society, to build an educational base, find a job, etc. These differences indicate that the results of L1 reading research cannot be applied to L2 reading research. In addition, these differences show that L2 readers may go through different cognitive processes that are different from those of L1. This study considers the importance of using author's biography to increase input enhancement. It can be regarded as one of the practical methods towards input enhancement. The finding of his study indicate that author's biography can be useful in helping EFL learners develop and enhance their knowledge of English as a second language.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Carrell (1991), L1 students usually know thousands of words of their native language before starting to read. Also, they implicitly know most of the basic grammatical and syntactic structures of the language but this is generally not true about L2 readers. L2 students usually come from different languages with different orthographies which may cause differences in the way the print is processed. L2 students develop and use a bilingual mental lexicon; they engage in bilingual processing of language and semantic interpretations. They also learn their L2 at different times in their lives and they experience different degrees of interdependence between the two languages. L2 learners come to reading tasks with various levels of proficiency which is reflected in their abilities to carry out different reading tasks successfully. The degree of guessability in L1 is more than L2. This is because L1 is genetically determined. Learners should be taught to guess the meaning of words instead of checking the dictionary all the time. The context in which the sentences are produced and the cohesive and coherent organization of the sentences can help learners to guess the meaning of words.

As Koda (1996) stated, one of the important and significant phenomena in second language reading is word recognition. L2 word recognition depends on the amount of L2 orthographic processing experience, the distance

between the orthographies of the L1 and the interaction between L1 and L2 orthographic knowledge. Learners with different amount of L2 experience have different word recognition efficiency and skill.

According to Pressley and El-Dinary (1992), strategy awareness helps to improve comprehension as well as efficiency in reading. Researchers have suggested that teaching readers to use strategies should be a prime consideration in the reading classroom. Alderson (2000), believed that reading comprehension consists of two variables: the reader and the text variables.

As has been shown by Ediger (2001), reading ability has been emphasized in recent years because it is not only an important skill for second language learners in academic environments; but a large number of learners, all over the world, are learning English as a second or foreign language also. Today, portable books and reading materials over the Internet are widely available. As a result, reading is becoming a valuable source of language input. When second language learners read a text, they interpret and construct meaning through an interaction with the written material. Here, the learners' past experiences, their language background and culture are influential in the way they interpret the text. The whole process of reading includes six different components such as 1.automatic recognition skills, 2.vocabulary and structure knowledge, 3.formal discourse structure, 4.content/ world background knowledge, 5. synthetic and evaluation skills and 6. Metacognitive knowledge. When skilled readers read, they engage in all the mentioned components. Experienced readers use their general background knowledge to make sense of the written text. They combine the syntactic, semantic information in the text with their personal knowledge to form a logical idea of what they are reading. However, second language learners have different language backgrounds. When children start reading in their first language, they have oral ability but this is not always the case with second language learners. As a result, while reading in L2, second language learners may face new vocabularies, cultural gap and gaps in their knowledge also. The variability of L1 backgrounds, academic backgrounds, the level of language proficiency, and prior knowledge in second language learners suggests that teachers should use and employ various teaching approaches and techniques with second language learners. Teachers should use appropriate ways and methods to activate the L2 learners' schemata i.e. their background knowledge, past experiences or mental schema which help us to navigate our way in life.

Nunan (1999) found that reading is an active process and it is something that not all individuals learn to do. While reading, readers get involved in bottom-up and top-down approaches. In a bottom-up process, readers decode written clues or signposts linearly; in other words, they move from language to meaning. So readers have to interact with the text because readers need to match the clues provided in the text to their own background knowledge. Schema theory is linked with bottom-up and top-down processing. In top-down processing, readers use their prior knowledge to make sense of the reading material. Based on schema theory, the process of interpretation is directed or guided by some existing schema.

According to Shishehsaz (2006), genre-based instruction is argued to be a facilitative approach and activity in reading comprehension and recall of information through providing the reader with background knowledge. The result of his study showed that there is a significance difference between reading comprehension ability of the experimental group who took part in genre-based reading instruction and the control group who did not receive such an instruction. This means that explicit genre teaching improved reading comprehension ability of the experimental group significantly.

Mousavian (2005) suggested that reading comprehension is a cognitive process and various cognitive strategies can be employed to facilitate reading comprehension. His study aimed at exploring one of these techniques called "brainstorming" and its impact on the reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. The result showed that reading comprehension ability of the experimental group enjoyed an improvement as a result of the brainstorming treatment. So, brainstorming as a pre-reading activity has positive impact on the reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners.

Sheikh Hassan (2002) conducted a study according to which presenting Iranian EFL learners with collocations of reading texts leads to their reading comprehension improvement. He examined the role of collocations in reading comprehension of seventy students who were selected and classified into two groups: one control group and one experimental group. The control group was presented with synonyms, antonyms, and definitions of key words of collocations whereas the experimental group was presented with the collocations of the same reading texts as well as exercises related to them. The study had a pre-posttest design. The results of the study were analyzed by the statistical technique of one way ANOVA. The findings of the study indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group and they proved to be more proficient.

Marzban (2003), found that L1 reading skills contribute differentially to L2 reading performance depending upon the amount of exposure to the second language. Also, advanced readers can flexibly employ and transfer the Persian language reading strategies while reading texts in English. However, this was not observed among low-proficiency or inexperienced readers. Based on the findings of Marzban's study, a threshold level of L2 language ability is necessary before L1 reading ability transfers to L2. This indicates that second language learners need to acquire some basic linguistic knowledge before they are able to read in second language.

According to Zohoorian (2005), there is not any relationship between EFL' learning styles and their achievement in reading comprehension. She examined the relationship between EFL language learning styles and strategies and achievement in reading comprehension. The findings of her study revealed that there is no relationship between the

EFL's strategies used and their achievement in the reading comprehension. Also it was found that there is a relationship between the strategies and the styles used by EFL learners.

Input Enhancement

Manipulation of input is one of the important functions of language teaching. That is teachers are able to provide different degrees of explicitness in the input. The notion of input enhancement refers to the ways input can be made salient to learners. Input enhancement is related to the concept of noticing i.e. drawing learners' attention.

Theoretical Background

This study tries to provide input enhancement through authors' biographies. In this paper, knowledge in L2 and input could be improved by using authors' biographies. This paper is written to highlight the importance of authors' biographies for developing EFL learners' reading abilities. There are various strategies or techniques that can be used to make input salient. The examples cited by Sharwood Smith (1993) include color coding, boldfacing, using error flags, stress, intonation, and gestures, as well as pointing out and explaining a construction using metalinguistic terminology. These techniques have been widely used both in learning language. Nevertheless, Sharwood Smith cautioned that input enhancement could come in many different forms. 'Author's biography' is the key notion in this study which is considered to have effect on another notion which is reading comprehension ability and it plays a significant role on EFL learners' input enhancement.

Statement of the problem

Iranian EFL learners have problems in English reading comprehension according to Toraghi (2008), Hashemi(2003), Shokri (2008), Shishehsaz (2006), Mousavian(2005), the researcher's own experience and etc. A major difficulty facing Iranian EFL learners is understanding and decoding what they read. Not knowing sufficient vocabularies and words affects learners' ability to comprehend; however, sometimes learners have difficulty comprehending texts because the material is beyond the learners' reading skill. Also, Iranian learners have limited prior knowledge or limited vocabulary knowledge. As a result, they do not understand the most important elements and the connection between different parts.

There are a number of issues that indicate the significant role of vocabulary knowledge for L2 reading abilities; for example, the number of words needed to read L2 texts, the role of context in L2 vocabulary acquisition, the role of different kinds of dictionaries, the role of extensive and pleasure reading and the role of vocabulary instruction. Several researchers have addressed the question of how much vocabulary is needed for L2 reading. According to Laufer (1989), 95 per cent of words must be known words and concluded that L2 readers had a significantly higher chance of being a 'reader' if they understood 95 percent of the text's word tokens. Hu and Nation (2000), found that the percentage might be closer to 98 per cent. Hazenberg and Halestijn (1996) first assessed the representativeness of more than 23,000 words taken from a dictionary to cover a 42 million-word corpus of contemporary written Dutch.

Another problem for failing to understand a text is being unfamiliar with prefixes and suffixes which help learners in guessing the meaning of a word. According to the conducted studies, the existence of reading comprehension problem in Iranian learners cannot be denied. Iranian Learners fail to connect ideas in a passage. They cannot distinguish significant information from less important ones; as a result, they may skip key words and key sentences on which the meaning of the text relies. Another problem may be "lack of competence". That is the learners' linguistic competence and language knowledge about TL is not enough. Without comprehension, reading a text is nothing more than tracking symbols on a page with eyes and sounding them out.

Toraghi (2008), stated that in spite of so many attempts, Iranian university students still have problems in understanding ESP reading texts. The researcher made an effort to examine the effects of text adjunct on ESP learners' reading comprehension. He selected 65 students after administrating the CELT who were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups with 33 and 32 students respectively. The findings of the study showed that the text adjuncts increased remarkably ESP learners reading comprehension ability.

Based on the research conducted by Akhgar (2004), observations on the performance of foreign language readers and their confrontation with unknown vocabulary have highlighted the important role of vocabulary to the researchers, as a predictor of overall reading ability. In certain contexts, a sentence or even an entire paragraph might become incomprehensible due to occurrence of even a minimal number of unknown words. Akhgar carried out a study to explore relationship between the reading task, readers' profile, and unknown word processing. The subjects of the study were 128 female Iranian students of English as a foreign language, at upper intermediate level. The results of the study suggest that the word treatment strategies are dependent on the type of reading, task and also to some extend on the readers' reading profile.

Hashemi (2003) claimed that, there is no relationship between inferential and referential questions in reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. The purpose of her study was to investigate two different techniques for testing reading comprehension questions. To answer the referential questions, the reader is required to move beyond the level of sentence comprehension and understand the relationship among the sentences. Hashemi studied different views towards teaching and testing reading comprehension, techniques and factors meticulously; then, based on these features, some suggestions have been made for an effective reading comprehension classroom.

According to Shokri (2008), except for the significant correlation between intermediate learners' self-assessment and teacher assessment, there revealed no other significant correlation between the variables. During the researcher's teaching experience, many Iranian EFL learners with reading comprehension problems were observed. In many cases,

they failed to get the gist of texts even after giving them the Farsi equivalents of the unknown English words. Teaching them the common prefixes and suffixes has been helpful but it does not make much difference. The researcher also used English short stories and English lyrics in order to help Iranian EFL Learners to progress in reading comprehension. In spite of many attempts, Iranian EFL learners still have problems in understanding reading texts. In this regard, the proposed study is going to examine whether author's biography affects Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension ability and whether input enhancement through author's biography is effective.

According to Mohabat (2001), there is a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' aptitude and their vocabulary learning strategies. Mohabat conducted a study to investigate the relationship between vocabulary learning strategies and Iranian EFL learners' aptitude according to which L2 learners who have high aptitude use vocabulary learning strategies more than those with low aptitude. Also, the high aptitude L2 learners used more memory strategies such as association and elaboration. Low aptitude L2 learners used dictionary strategies, memory strategies such as repetition and metacognitive strategies.

Significance of the study

The significance of this research is the influence which it could have on the way input will be enhanced. There is a consensus of opinion among Iranian of all walks of life on the need to improve the standard of English in Iran. Efforts are being made to improve the teaching and learning of the EFL learners in Iran and this present study seeks to find out a way to help Iranian L2 learners. The findings of this study will serve as a data-base for teachers, text-book writers and EFL teachers towards input enhancement. EFL learners need to be exposed to authors' biographies to improve their L2 input. The findings of the present study will assist the teachers in maximizing the knowledge of Iranian EFL learners' by using authors' biographies. Based on this objective, two research questions were conducted.

Research questions

The article addresses the two following questions:

Q1: Does enhancing input through author's biography affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension ability?

Q2: Is there any difference between the mean scores of male and female EFL learners' reading comprehension test as a result of exposure to author's biography?

Hypotheses

H1: Enhancing input through author's biography does not affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension ability.

H2: There is no difference between the mean scores of male and female EFL learners' reading comprehension test as a result of exposure to author's biography.

III. METHOD

Subjects

The participants of this study were 60 homogenous EFL learners who were studying at Tabarestan University, Chalus, Iran. Their ages were about 18-23. Their average exposure to English was about 7 years. Based on a placement test and an interview, they were considered intermediate learners. Since they were studying English in Iran only, they were described as foreign language learners.

Procedures

The participants of this study were assigned into 4 groups: experimental male, experimental female, control male, control female. The participants were all given a pretest. Then the treatment groups received the treatment in the form of being exposed to biographies of different authors (D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Toni Morison, Thomas Hardy, Mark Twain, and Emily Bronte) during ten sessions. Finally, the participants were given a posttest. Then, the result of a paired samples t-test and a two-way ANOVA became the subject of data analysis.

Research Design

The schematic representation of the design of the study is as follows:

Week 1: pretest

Week 2-9: application of the treatment of the study on reading proficiency (authors' biography).

Week 10: posttest

IV. RESULTS / DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

TABLE1.
GROUP STATISTICS

Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
posttesttreat	Male	15	8.2667	3.73146	.96346
	Female	15	4.9333	3.63449	.93842
posttestcontro	Male	15	3.4667	1.99523	.51517
	Female	15	3.9333	3.69298	.95352

As it is indicated in Table 1, the number of participants was 15 in each experiment (N_{PRE}=15, N_{PRE}=15, N_{POE}= 15, N_{POE}=15) and there has been no missing value (missing value= 0.00) which means that all the selected subjects took part

in the experiment. According to the results in Table 1, the mean scores of the posttests of the treatment groups are higher than the mean scores of the posttests of the control groups. This may give an image of participants' posttest scores more heterogeneous after conducting the treatment of the study (using authors' biographies).

TABLE2.
ANALYSIS OF THE POSTTEST SCORES OF THE TREATMENT AND CONTROL GROUPS.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
posttesttreat	Equal variances assumed	.028	.867	2.47828		.019	3.33333	1.34495	.57833	6.08834
	Equal variances not assumed			2.478	27.981	.019	3.33333	1.34495	.57824	6.08842
posttestcontrol	Equal variances assumed	1.337	.257	-.431	28	.670	-.46667	1.08379	-2.68671	1.75338
	Equal variances not assumed			-.431	21.531	.671	-.46667	1.08379	-2.71715	1.78382

As it is indicated in Table 2, sig (2-tailed) is .019 in the treatment groups i.e. it is less than .05. The obtained t-observed (T_{obs}=2.478) is higher than the critical value of t in the control groups with the level of significance of .6.70 and 6.71. As a result the null hypothesis is rejected because t-observed is more than t-critical.

TABLE3.
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE POSTTEST SCORES OF THE TREATMENT GROUPS I.E. MALES AND FEMALES.

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: posttesttreat

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	8.2667	3.73146	15
Female	4.9333	3.63449	15
Total	6.6000	3.99655	30

According to Table 3, as for the standard deviation obtained for the treatment groups, there seems to be more variability among the posttest scores of the male treatment group.

TABLE4.
OUTPUT OF TWO-WAY ANOVA

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: posttesttreat

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	83.333[a]	1	83.333	6.143	.019	.180
Intercept	1306.800	1	1306.800	96.324	.000	.775
Gender	83.333	1	83.333	6.143	.019	.180
Error	379.867	28	13.567			
Total	1770.000	30				
Corrected Total	463.200	29				

a. R Squared = .180 (Adjusted R Squared = .151)

Estimated Marginal Means of posttesttreat
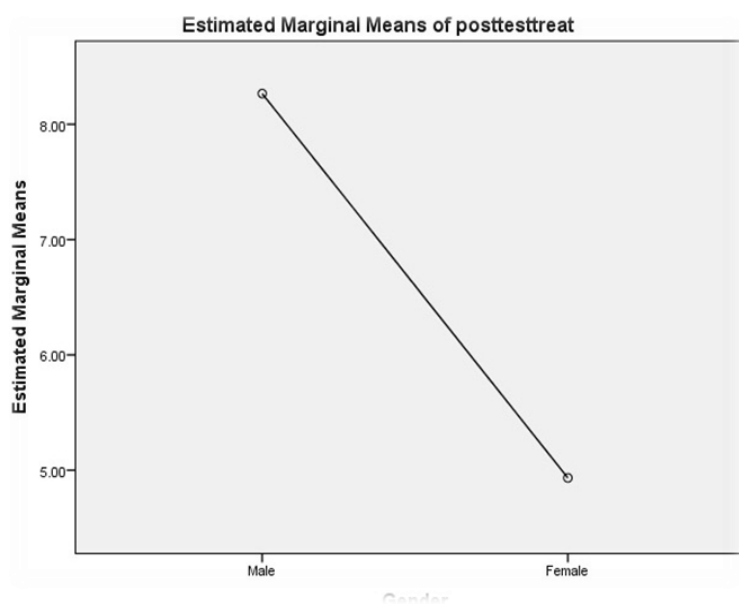
As table 4 and the above graph show, there has been a significant gender difference between the results according to which male participants did better.

V. DISCUSSION

The study reported here has made an attempt to discover that Input enhancement through author's biography does affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. The analysis of the study reveals that male participants gained more proficiency than did the female ones. An OPT (Oxford Placement Test) was administered among 100 subjects 60 of whom were selected for the aim of this study. The subjects were randomly divided in four groups i.e. experimental male, experimental female, control male and control female. For 10 sessions, the experimental groups received treatment in the form of working on author's biographies and the control group received a placebo. A pretest was administered prior to the application of treatment and placebo. Then a subsequent posttest was administered at the end of the duration of the teaching. Then the scores were analyzed through SPSS using a Two-way ANOVA, a Paired-sample t-test and Descriptive Analysis. The results revealed that and there is a significant difference between the mean scores of male and female EFL learners' reading comprehension test as a result of exposure to author's biography. Thus the two null hypotheses were rejected which indicate that the treatment of the study was effective and the subjects in the experimental group outperformed the ones in the control group.

REFERENCES

[1]   Akhgar, N (2004). The Relationship Between Reading, Task, Reading Profile and Processing Unknown Words. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.
[2]   Alderson, J. (2000). Reading Assessment. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
[3]   Carell, P.L. (1991). Second Language Reading: reading ability or language proficiency? *Applied Linguistics* 12:159-179.
[4]   Carrell,J. Devine and D.E Eskey. (1988). Interactive Approaches to Second Language Reading. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[5]   Ediger, A., and Palvic, C. (2000). Reading Connections: Intermediate. New York: Oxford University Press.
[6]   Ellis, R. (1994). The Study of Second Language Acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[7]   Gass, S.M. & Selinker, L. (2008). Second Language Acquisition. Third Edition. Routledge.
[8]   Genesee, F., Upshur, J. (1996). Classroom-based Evaluation in Second Language Education. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
[9]   Grellet, F. (1981). Developing Reading Skills. New York: Cambridge University Press.
[10] Hashemi, A (2013). On the Relationship Between Inferential and Referential. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.
[11] Kamali, Z (2010). The Relationship Between Critical Thinking Ability of Iranian EFL Learners and their Resilience Level Facing Unfamiliar Vocabulary. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.
[12] Koda, k. (1996). L2 Word Recognition Research: a Critical Review. *Modern Language Journal*, 80:450-460
[13] Laurita (1972). A Technique for Improving Reading Comprehension   New York: Learning Centre.
[14] Lin, Z (2002). Discovering EFL Learners' Perception of Prior Knowledge and its Roles in Reading Comprehension. Australia: University of Ballarat.
[15] Marzban, A. (2003). The Interdependence Between The Process and The Product of Reading in English and Persian. Tehran: Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch.
[16] Mohabat, F. (2001). The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Iranian EFL Learners' Aptitude. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.

[17] Mousavian, H. (2005). The Effect of Brainstorming on the Reading Comprehension Ability of the Iranian EFL Students. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.

[18] Murica, M. (2001). Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. Third Edition. Thomson Learning. America.

[19] Nunan, D. (1999). Second Language Teaching & Learning. Heinle & Heinle Publishers. U.S.A

[20] Pressley. (1992). Beyond Direct Explanation: Transactional Instruction of Reading Comprehension Strategies. University of Maryland.

[21] Pressley, M. (1998). Reading Instruction That Works. New York: Guilford.

[22] Schmitt, N. (Ed). (2002). An Introductory to Applied Linguistics. Arnold Publication, London.

[23] Sharwood Smith, M. (1993). Input Enhancement in structured SLA: theoretical bases. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 15, 165-179.

[24] Sheikh Hassan, A. (2002). The Effect of Integrating Collocations on Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension. Tehran: Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch.

[25] Shishehsaz, A. (2006). The Effect of Explicit Genre Teaching on EST Students' Reading Comprehension. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.

[26] Silberstein, S. (1994). Techniques and Resources in Teaching Reading. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[27] Shokri M. (2008). The Relationship Between Self-assessment, Level of Reading Proficiency, and the Reading Achievement of Iranian EFL Learners. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.

[28] Toraghi, N. (2008). The Effect of Text Adjunct on ESP Learners' Reading Comprehension. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.

[29] Urquhart, S., Weir, C. (1998). Reading in a Foreign Language: Process, Product, and Practice. New York: Longman

[30] VanPatten, B. (1996). Input processing and grammar instruction. Theory and Research. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

[31] Wong, W. (2005). Input Enhancement: From Theory to Research to the Classroom, McGraw Hill Higher Education.

[32] Zohoorian, Z. (2005). The Interrelationship between EFL Language Learning Styles & Strategies and achievement in Reading Comprehension. Tehran: Islamic Azad University.

Ayda Rahmani was born on 21 of March in 1985 in Nowshahr, Iran. During B.A, she studied English Literature at Islamic Azad University, Rasht Branch, in Iran. She graduated in 2007 and went to India for further studies in the same field. She got her M.A in English Literature from Nowrosjee Wadia College in Pune, in 2009. She studied M.A English, Teaching branch at Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch in Iran.

She started teaching English in Iran since 2009. She has been a TEACHER since 2009. Her interest lies in English language research and English literature.

Mrs Rahmani compiled a book on general English for Iranian EFL learners. The title is: Simple Short Stories for EFL learners: Stories, Grammar and Communication. She also published an article titled "The Investigation of Authentic vs. Pedagogical Tape Scripts on Listening Comprehension Ability of Tourism Students" at IJALEL in November 2014.