

## A Comparative Study between Iranian and Japanese Students' Conceptions of 'Ideal English Lesson'<sup>\*</sup>

Sakineh Jafari, Saeed Ketabi  
University of Isfahan

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With the shift in language teaching towards a more learner-centered approach, there is now an emphasis on considering learners' views on what goes on in the classroom. Involving learners in selecting and evaluating classroom activities as well as listening to their voices and preferences can be helpful for teachers in planning lesson and designing materials. With this idea in mind, the present study focuses on the tertiary students' perceptions of 'ideal English lesson' in Iran and Japan. 115 Iranian students completed a questionnaire designed by Littlewood (2010). The results were compared with the Littlewood's (2010) study with Japanese students as well as students from three Asian countries (Hong Kong, Singapore, and Mainland China). The findings show that for Iranian students non-communicative activities were regarded as an 'ideal English lesson'. Japanese students expressed generally more conservative preferences than their counterparts in Iran and the three other Asian countries. The results suggest that learners' beliefs about language learning, proficiency level, and future needs may affect their current preferred classroom activities. Implications for lesson planning and curriculum development are also discussed in this paper.

**Key Words:** classroom activities, communicative-oriented lesson, non-communicative activities, learners' preferences

### 1 Introduction

Language learners hold different beliefs about language learning. Some learners believe that learning vocabulary is the main part of language learning. Other learners think learning a language is the same as learning grammar rules. And yet others view language learning as being able to converse in that language. According to Nunan (1995, p. 140), learners come "into the classroom...with different mindsets...different agendas". But what is the actual source of these beliefs? As Horwitz (1985) maintains, learners acquire their beliefs from their previous learning experiences. Willing (1988) proposes that learners' beliefs may reflect their real needs rather than their

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<sup>\*</sup> The phrase 'ideal English lesson' in the title of this study is taken from the title of Littlewood's (2010) study.

preferences. Whatever the source, learners' beliefs affect how they approach learning and the degree of success they gain in language learning (Abraham & Vann, 1987). As Rubin (1975) recognizes, beliefs are important because learners consider them to be true and they guide how they interpret their experience and how they behave. Benson and Lor (1999) suggest that learners' beliefs are contextualized in relation to their experience and situations of learning. They make a comment on Bigg's (1993) study by stating that "beliefs are always contextualized in relation to some learning task or situation" (p, 462).

In relation to the studies of learners' beliefs about language learning and with the shift towards a more learner-centered approach, some studies have focused on learners' attitudes towards which activities they regard as enjoyable or useful for language learning in their classroom. A study by Willing (1988), for instance, surveyed the views of 517 adult immigrant students in Australia on the 'usefulness' of the classroom activities. Both communicative and non-communicative types of activities were included in the 30-item questionnaire. It was found that ESL students generally favored form-oriented or non-communicative activities like pronunciation practice, error correction by teacher, teacher explanation, learning new vocabulary, and studying grammar. Green (1993) too compared the 263 first-year ESL students' perceptions of the 'enjoyableness' and the 'effectiveness' of 17 classroom practices and activities. The questionnaire contained nine communicative/real-world practices and eight non-communicative/form-based practices. The results showed that communicative activities were rated as more enjoyable than the non-communicative ones. For the effectiveness of the activities the same result for enjoyableness was not gained in students responses. Students tended to accept both communicative and non-communicative activities as effective. Overall, effectiveness and enjoyableness ratings tended to be highly correlated in this study.

Barkhuizen (1998) surveyed high school ESL students' perceptions of language teaching/learning activities presented in their classes by means of different methods of data collection including interviews, questionnaire, classroom observation, and students' compositions. The 15-item questionnaire used in this study consisted of communicative and non-communicative activities. The activities were also broken down into macro-skills of writing, reading, language work, and oral activities. The responses of learners to the questionnaire showed that students rated highly more traditional or mechanical aspects of language instruction. One reason for this finding was that in learners' ESL classes, much attention was paid to mechanical aspects of language. Another reason was teachers' lack of experience with communicative language teaching.

Spratt (2001) investigated 997 university students' preferences amongst 48 English language learning activities. The results indicated that activities related to feedback were those most preferred by students, especially those

that involved feedback from peers. In addition, students preferred oral skills to written ones. In terms of the distinction between communicative and non-communicative activities, learners liked communicative activities more than non-communicative ones. Rao (2002) surveyed the views of 30 university students on the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom. The study found that the students favored a variety of classroom activities, but they preferred non-communicative activities more than communicative ones. Students in this study felt that traditional classroom activities like audio-lingual drill, workbook type drill and practice were more effective than other communicative activities. Six out of ten non-communicative activities were favored by two third of the students and four out of nine communicative activities were favored by most of the students.

Savignon and Wang (2003), also, investigated Taiwanese EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions with regard to classroom practices. Unlike previous studies, the findings of this study suggested a discrepancy between learners' needs and preferences and their reported experience of classroom instruction. Learners preferred meaning-based or communicative activities over form-based non-communicative activities. Learners' report on English learning experience indicated that they received more grammar-based than meaning-based instruction and expressed their negative attitudes toward the former and positive attitude toward the latter. Another finding of the study was that although most of the learners in both groups expressed their preference for meaning-based and communicative practices, learners with more English learning experience had a stronger negative attitude toward form-based instruction than those who had just started learning English. Davies (2006) based on a teacher-designed course-specific questionnaire investigated the learners' views on classroom practices. Survey results indicated that learners appreciated opportunities for self-expression via communicative activities. In addition, they requested more interactional task, listening/vocabulary practices, teacher-made materials, and challenging tasks. Learners expressed their dislike toward transactional task types, lecture-style teaching, and textbook-driven instruction.

McDonough (1995, p. 131) maintains that "activities valued by teachers were not the same as activities valued by learners". In this regard, other studies have focused on the degree of correspondence between teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes towards usefulness and enjoyableness of classroom activities. Nunan (1988), for example, found a great mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom activities. In nine out of ten classroom activities the teachers' views differed from the students' views in that the students rated non-communicative activities as more useful than communicative ones. Peacock (1998) investigated the beliefs of teachers and students concerning the useful EFL activities. Data were gathered by means of interview and 11-item questionnaire from 158 EFL students and 30

EFL teachers at Hong Kong University. Like Nunan's (1988) study, the results showed a great mismatch between learners' and teachers' belief. Unlike teachers, learners rated non-communicative activities like error correction and grammar exercise much higher and pair work and group work much lower. In the same line, Spratt (1999) compared learners' preferred classroom activities with teachers' perceptions of what preferences learners held. 997 tertiary level learners and their 50 teachers completed a 48-item questionnaire. The items were categorized into eight areas of writing, reading, speaking, listening, feedback, testing, participation mode, and the type of interaction they required. These activities also categorized in terms of communicative and non-communicative activities. The results revealed 50% correspondence between teachers' perceptions of learners' preferences and learners' reported preferences. The greatest lack of correspondence was in the area of feedback and greater correspondences were in the area of testing, listening, and participation mode. In addition, thirteen out of twenty non-communicative and nine out of twelve communicative activities showed significant difference between learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions of them. All the above studies came to the conclusion that involving learners in selecting and evaluating classroom activities as well as knowing and understanding about learners' opinions and preferences can be helpful for teachers in planning lesson and designing materials. Table 1 summarizes the results of some of the studies on learners' perceptions of usefulness, enjoyableness, and effectiveness of classroom activities.

Table 1. Learners Highly Rated Communicative and Non-communicative Activities in Terms of Their Usefulness, Enjoyableness, and Effectiveness in Different Studies

Study	Students highly rated communicative activities	Students highly rated non-communicative activities
Willing (1988) <i>usefulness</i>	learning by conversation learning in small groups listening to and using cassettes	pronunciation practice error correction by teacher teacher explanation learning new vocabulary
Nunan (1988) <i>usefulness</i>	conversation practice	pronunciation practice explanations to class error correction vocabulary development
Green (1993) <i>enjoyableness</i>	listening to songs small group discussion pair work: questioning teacher-led class discussion singing songs	grammar explanation in English oral transformation drill

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Barkhuizen (1998) <i>enjoyableness</i>	having class debates having class discussion	learning about correct spelling learning about English tenses using a dictionary reading the set books reading poetry learning about nouns, verbs, and adjectives
Peacock (1998) <i>usefulness</i>	learning by conversation listening to and using cassettes learning by pictures, films, video talking in pairs learning by games	error correction by teacher pronunciation practice learning new vocabulary studying grammar teacher explanation discovering own mistakes
Spratt (2001) <i>enjoyableness</i>	working in small groups taking part in discussion listening activities	teacher giving oral/written feedback to whole class, small groups, and individuals feedback from peers
Rao (2002) <i>effectiveness</i>	student-student interaction student-teacher interaction personal response to students response songs	work-book type drill and practice audio-lingual drill dictionary exercise grammar rule explanation by teacher error correction obedience to teacher's instruction
Littlewood (2010) <i>enjoyableness</i>	relax atmosphere use of real life materials active discussion having fun	teacher teaching new language items (vocabulary & grammar) teacher insisting on correct pronunciation

### 2 Rationale for the Present Study

As Nunan (1995, p. 140) asserts, “at the very least, teachers should find out what their students think and feel about what and how they want to learn”. According to Ludwig (1983), if methods match learners’ expectations, the effectiveness of programs can be considerably increased. Also, by understanding learners attitudes and preferences to classroom activities teachers can increase students learning potential. The present study was conducted in order to broaden the scope of studies done in the area of students’ perceptions of classroom activities, and to include Iranian EFL learners who have different profile from previous studies. The context of English language teaching in Iran, especially language teaching in state schools with its emphasis on form-based or non-communicative instruction,

is different from the EFL teaching contexts reported in other studies (e.g., Davies, 2006; Littlewood, 2010; Rao, 2002; Spratt, 1999). Therefore, it will be insightful to see if similar findings will be reached. This study applied a similar methodology used by Littlewood (2010) to investigate the perceptions of tertiary students in Iran about their preferred classroom activities. The findings of the present study will be compared with the data obtained from Japanese students' perceptions of their 'ideal English lesson' in Littlewood's (2010) study.

### **3 Language Teaching in Japan**

According to Gorsuch (1998), the dominant methodology used for English language teaching in Japan is *yakudoku*. In this method word-by-word translation of written English into Japanese is implemented. In addition, grammar teaching is done in native language of the students and students have few chances to vocalize English except in reading practices when they repeat the words after the teacher (Nishino, 2008). Nishino (2008, p. 30) states that "*Yakudoku* has been a favored teaching method used to help students pass university entrance examinations which have mainly evaluated reading skills and grammatical knowledge". As Nishino (2008) maintains, despite some initiatives that have been taken for the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Japanese high schools, the high-stake entrance examinations have hindered the reform of Japanese English education. Some of the reasons given by teachers for the difficulty of implementing CLT in their classes in Nishino's (2008) survey were: number of class hours, class size, textbook, curriculum, lack of teachers' English proficiency, evaluation system, lack of materials for communicative activities, and entrance examinations. These contextual factors according to Borg (2003) can influence teacher cognition as well as his/her practices. Also, as Cogan (1995) observes instructional pattern of Japanese education is a one-way process with the teacher presenting information and students receiving and memorizing it. Japanese students in Saito and Ebsworth's study (2004, p. 118) "sought courses in which they did not have to participate actively. Many EFL students responded negatively to the classroom activities that induced their participation for fear of making mistakes in front of other students". Interview with these students revealed that due to large class size EFL classes were conducted in conventional teacher-centered style. Although communicative approach has been identified as a goal in EFL classes in Japan, in practice the topic and content of the course reflect teachers' expertise rather than students' interest (Bess, 2001).

Similar situation exists in Iran with respect to English language instruction. Teachers in secondary and high school try to prepare their students for University Entrance Exam which mainly focuses on vocabulary, grammar, and reading skill. As a result teachers generally neglect speaking

and listening skills in language classrooms. This leads to having difficulty in mastering these skills in later education. Large class size, content of the textbooks, and low proficiency level of some teachers makes the implementation of CLT somehow difficult in EFL classes in Iran.

#### 4 The Present Study

As presented above, the present study aimed to replicate Littlewood's (2010) research. The ten activities on which Littlewood had elicited learners' perceptions on 'ideal English lesson' therefore became the basis for this study. In his study Littlewood surveyed tertiary students' conceptions of their 'ideal English lesson' in four Asian countries (Hong Kong, Japan, Mainland China, and Singapore). From factor analysis three main types of lesson that different groups of students preferred were identified. Factor 1 was the communicative-oriented lesson, factor 2 the form-oriented lesson, and factor 3 the control-oriented lesson (Table 2 summarizes the findings). This 10-item questionnaire was administered online to 410 tertiary students: 166 were from Hong Kong, 47 from Japan, 101 from Singapore, and 88 from Mainland China. Students in each country (Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Singapore) expressed their preferences mostly for communicative-oriented lessons except Japan. Japanese students showed slight preference towards form-oriented and control-oriented English lessons.

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Students' Responses (Littlewood, 2010)

In my ideal lesson	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<b>The atmosphere is relaxed.</b>	<b>.78</b>		
<b>There is plenty of active discussion.</b>	<b>.69</b>		
<b>Some of the materials used are from real life (e.g. TV, magazines).</b>	<b>.61</b>		
<b>Some time is spent 'having fun' (e.g. singing songs or playing games).</b>	<b>.59</b>		
<i>The teacher teaches new language items (e.g. grammar or vocabulary).</i>		.74	
<i>The teacher corrects most of the grammar mistakes.</i>		.70	(.36)
<i>Some time is spent revising grammar.</i>		.45	
<i>The teacher insists, most of the time, on correct pronunciation.</i>			.64
<i>A lot of time is spent working independently of the teacher, e.g. individually or in groups.</i>	(.36)	(.33)	(.59)
<i>The teacher guides most of what the students do.</i>			.49

In Barkhuizen's (1998) study, students valued traditional or mechanical aspects of language learning rather than communicative activities. One reason behind this preference was due to the learners' past experience with English education. ESL classes of these learners paid much attention to mechanical aspects of language study. Another reason was teachers' lack of

experience with communicative language teaching. In the same line, Japanese learners' preference for non-communicative activities in Littlewood's (2010) study may be attributed to the similar reason. As stated above language instruction in Iran is similar to situation in Japan. This study was conducted to compare EFL learners' perceptions of 'ideal English lesson' in these two countries.

As it is clear from the table, in communicative-oriented lesson-type, (1) the atmosphere is relaxed, (2) there is plenty of active discussion, (3) authentic materials are used, and (4) there is a lot of enjoyment. Unlike communicative-oriented lesson-type, form-oriented lesson-type is characterized as (1) the teacher teaches new language items, (2) the teacher corrects most grammar mistakes, and (3) there is revision of grammar. Finally, in control-oriented type of lesson, (1) the teacher pays a lot of attention to correct pronunciation, (2) the teacher guides most of what the students do, and (3) the teacher corrects most grammar mistakes.

## **5 Methodology**

### **5.1 Participants**

The participants of this study were 115 tertiary EFL Iranian students. The participants in Japanese context (in Littlewood's study) were 47 tertiary students.

### **5.2 Instrument**

To compare the result of this study with the results obtained from students in Japan the same questionnaire designed by Littlewood (2010) was used. The items of this questionnaire were drawn from themes obtained during interview with students. Factor analysis of the items revealed three types of lesson: (a) communicative-oriented lesson, (b) form-oriented lesson, and (c) control-oriented lesson (Littlewood, 2010, p. 54). Respondents were supposed to indicate the extent of their agreement with the statements about their 'ideal English lesson'. A four-point Likert scale format, ranging from *very true* to *very untrue*, was used to obtain students views and opinions about their preferred English lesson.

### **5.3 Interview**

To gain qualitative data, an informal interview was conducted with 23 students at the end of the study in Persian language with Iranian participants. The purpose of the interview was to elicit information regarding students' sources of preferences for their 'ideal English lesson'.



## 5.4 Procedure

All of the participants were asked to complete the questionnaires with the background information regarding their age, gender, years of language study. From 115 participants in the study, in Iran, 23 of them participated in an interview. All of them assured of anonymity. The aim of the interview was to find the rationale behind students' preferred classroom activities.

## 5.5 Data analysis

The participants' answers to questionnaire were analyzed to obtain mean and standard deviation. The interviews with students were transcribed and analyzed to obtain general themes and categories from the statements made by the Iranian participants.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Questionnaire analysis

Table 3 gives the mean and the standard deviations of 115 Iranian students' responses to ten items. The bold items indicate communicative activities and the italics indicate non-communicative ones. As it is evident from the table the mechanical aspects of language learning like learning grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation were regarded as 'ideal lesson' for Iranian students (items 1, 3, 4, and 5). Additionally, they preferred to have a relaxed and secure classroom environment (item 2). The two communicative lesson-types that were rated highly by these participants are item 2 (The atmosphere is relaxed) and item 6 (Some of the materials used are from real life e.g. TV, magazines). The standard deviations, which range from 0.52 to 0.92, reveal a great variation and show the extent of agreement and disagreement among students in terms of their perceptions towards different items.

Table 3. Mean Responses of Iranian Students (N=115)

In my ideal lesson	Mean	Std.Dev
1. <i>The teacher teaches new language items (e.g. grammar or vocabulary).</i>	3.47	0.52
<b>2. The atmosphere is relaxed.</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>0.53</b>
3. <i>Some time is spent revising grammar.</i>	3.28	0.60
<b>4. There is plenty of active discussion.</b>	<b>3.23</b>	<b>0.59</b>
<b>5. Some of the materials used are from real life (e.g. TV and magazine)</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>0.64</b>
6. <i>The teacher corrects most of the grammar mistakes.</i>	3.08	0.60
7. <i>A lot of time is spent working independently of the teacher. (e.g. individually or in groups).</i>	3.02	0.60
8. <i>The teacher insists, most of the time, on correct pronunciation.</i>	3.00	0.57

9. <i>The teacher guides most of what the students do.</i>	2.83	0.74
<b>10. Some time is spent 'having fun' (e.g. singing songs or playing games).</b>	<b>2.82</b>	<b>0.92</b>

The comparison between Table 3 and Table 4 shows that the results obtained from Littlewood's study and the present study are somewhat contradictory. Iranian students tended to rate non-communicative activities higher than communicative ones. Unlike Iranian students, participants in Littlewood's study rated the item 'Some time is spent 'having fun' (e.g. singing songs or playing games)' more highly. This item was the least preferred activity among Iranian students. Interestingly, the item 'The atmosphere is relaxed' attracted the attention of most of the participants in Littlewood's study as well as the present study. Also, what was not appealed to students in these two studies was the item 'The teacher guides most of what the students do'.

Table 4. Mean Responses of All Students in Littlewood's study (N=410)

In my ideal English lesson	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>1. The atmosphere is relaxed.</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>0.57</b>
<b>2. Some of the materials we use are from real life (e.g. TV, magazines).</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>0.60</b>
<b>3. There is plenty of active discussion.</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>0.63</b>
<b>4. We spend some time 'having fun' (e.g. singing songs or playing games).</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>0.73</b>
5. <i>The teacher teaches us new language items (e.g. grammar or vocabulary).</i>	3.13	0.62
6. <i>The teacher insists, most of the time, on correct pronunciation.</i>	2.81	0.79
7. <i>We spend some time revising grammar.</i>	2.79	0.69
8. <i>A lot of time is spent working independently of the teacher, e.g. individually or in groups.</i>	2.70	0.70
9. <i>The teacher corrects most of our grammar mistakes.</i>	2.68	0.77
10. <i>The teacher guides most of what the students do.</i>	2.68	0.63

Through factor analysis three main lesson types were identified by Littlewood: communicative-oriented, form-oriented, and control-oriented lesson-type (Table 2). In his study, unlike Japan, Singapore, Mainland China, and Hong Kong showed preference for communicative-oriented lessons. Table 5 summarizes the results obtained in Littlewood (2010) for four countries. The results of the present study with Iranian students were added to the table.

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Table 5. Students' Mean Responses in Different Countries for Different Types of Lesson (The data of Singapore, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Japan were cited from Littlewood, 2010.)

	Communicative-oriented	Form-oriented	Control-oriented
Mainland China	3.34	2.55	2.68
Hong Kong	3.19	3.04	2.88
Japan	2.94	2.96	2.81
Iran	3.15	3.27	2.97

Comparison between and among countries shows that students in Singapore, Mainland China and Hong Kong showed preference for communicative-oriented lessons. This is not the case for Japanese and Iranian students. Japanese students showed a very slight preference for form-oriented lessons. Among all these Asian countries, Iran showed a high preference for form-oriented lessons. In this study Iranian participants showed preference for communicative activities as well.

### 6.2 Interview analysis

The interview results indicated that participants had various reasons for selecting their preferred classroom activities. The need to pass university entrance examination and school exams, which are mainly based on students knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, were the main reasons for selecting items 1: 'The teacher teaches new language items (e.g. grammar or vocabulary)' and item 3: 'Some time is spent revising grammar'. Moreover, some of the participants believed that learning a language is learning its grammar and vocabulary. For selecting item 2: 'The atmosphere is relaxed', most of the students indicated that their learning potential would be enhanced in a stress-free environment. Although language instruction in Iranian schools are not based on communicative language teaching students selected items 4 and 5 as their 'ideal English lesson'. For choosing item 4: 'There is plenty of active discussion' the students claimed that speaking in the classroom help them to consolidate their knowledge of language. Some students commented:

*"Although we don't have any speaking activity in the class but I think speaking in English help us to learn more".*

*"... Discussion activities can be interesting. We can become familiar with our classmates ideas about different topics".*

*"When we try to speak in English we can understand what we know and what we need to know".*

Participants who have preferred item 5: 'Some of the materials used are from real life (e.g. TV and magazine)' indicated that these materials generate interest in students.

Some items were not selected as preferred English lesson by some of the students. For item 6: 'The teacher corrects most of the grammar mistakes' some of the participants suggested that it would be embarrassing for some students to be corrected in front of others. Additionally, they commented that it would be unnecessary to be corrected by the teacher each and every time students make a mistake. What did not appeal to most students were items 9: 'The teacher guides most of what the students do' and item 10: 'We spend some time having fun (e.g. singing songs or playing games)'. For item 9 one of the students asserted that *"No doubt teacher can help us a lot, but sometimes s/he should let the students do things for themselves"*. Since students in EFL context mainly learn English to fulfill their future needs, like participants in this study, one of the participants commented that *"We don't have enough time in class to spend on games. We have to prepare ourselves to university entrance examination"*. Table 6 summarizes some of the reasons given by the students.

Table 6. Some Factors Affecting Learners' Preference or Non-preference for Form-oriented and Communicative-oriented Lesson-types

	Reasons for preference	Reasons for non-reference
Form-oriented lesson-type	a. Need to pass university entrance exam	a. Teacher correction in front of others may be embarrassing
	b. Need to pass final school exams	b. Dictionary helps in finding new words & checking pronunciation
	c. Holding the belief that learning a language is learning grammar & vocabulary	
Communicative-oriented lesson-type	a. Consolidating linguistic knowledge by using language	a. Insufficient command of language to converse in English
	b. Becoming familiar with others ideas	b. Limited amount of classroom time for having fun& discussion
	c. Using the language helps to discover problematic areas	c. Real life materials are interesting

## 7 Discussion

Although the results of the present study revealed that Iranian students favored non-communicative activities more than communicative ones, this does not mean that they are not tolerant or open to other range of teaching

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and learning styles. Informal interviews with Iranian students uncovered some of the reasons behind selecting non-communicative activities as an 'ideal English lesson'. The reasons given by students were rooted in their beliefs about language learning, their low proficiency level, and their future need to pass university entrance examination which is mainly based on vocabulary, grammar, and reading skill. Students in Iran preferred to have a relaxed and secure atmosphere in their English classes. Additionally, they expressed their willingness towards having active discussions in English, but low proficiency level and non-communicative teaching methodology applied by most of the teachers in schools hindered students from speaking in English in the classroom. Moreover, because of limited amount of time allocated to English lesson at school and students immediate future need to pass university exam 'having fun' or 'playing games' in the classroom were not the preferred activity among these students. As it is stated by Littlewood (2010, p. 57) although students "find communication-oriented teaching more enjoyable, they may still perceive the more traditional types of teaching as more useful" for their future needs.

The common finding of the present study and the study by Littlewood (2010) is that in their 'ideal English lesson' students preferred to have a relax atmosphere in the classroom. This finding suggests that teachers should try to create a secure and non-threatening classroom environment and try to "assign tasks with sufficient scaffolding so that reticent students will feel more secure about participating in class" (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004, p.119). As it has been numerously documented in educational literature, language anxiety can negatively influence the process of language learning (e.g., Gregersen, 2003; Horwitz, 2001; Kitano, 2001; Kleinmann, 1977). Language teachers not only should be aware of the effect of anxiety on the success of their learners, but also should help them to overcome this destructive feeling. Becoming more sensitive to the learners' affective needs not only will enhance students' learning potential but also makes language learning experience more enjoyable to learners.

Japanese students in Littlewood's (2010) study expressed a more conservative preference towards their 'ideal English lesson'. The rationale behind the choice of students was not undertaken in this study. However, as it was stated by Littlewood (2010, p. 57), "the data give no information about the students' previous learning experiences, which are likely, as mentioned earlier, to be an important influence on their current preferences. However, this does not alter the general implication that, whatever the reasons, students are ready to respond favorably to a range of teaching and learning approaches".

The findings of this study suggest that students like both non-communicative and communicative lesson-types. This implies that teachers can adapt an eclectic approach in their daily teaching practice in order to satisfy the general as well as specific educational needs of individual learners.

Moreover, the comparison of the findings with other studies reveals that learners' preferences may vary depending on the context of learning. Undoubtedly, finding out about learners' perceptions and opinions bring real benefits for teachers. As Garrett and Shortall (2002, p. 48) rightly noted, "teachers soon realize that they have much to gain from being aware and sensitive enough to listen to the voice of their learners, know how their teaching is being received, and take (and be seen to take) students' views into consideration when planning and implementing their teaching programs". This not only increases the motivation of students but also creates a favorable and secure environment in which learners gain proficiency and positive experiences in their language learning process (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

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Sakineh Jafari  
Dept of English Language  
Faculty of Foreign Languages  
University of Isfahan  
Hezar Jirib Street, Isfahan,  
81746-73441, Iran  
Phone: 9803117932123  
E-mail: sjafari591@yahoo.com

Saeed Ketabi  
Dept of English Language  
Faculty of Foreign Languages  
University of Isfahan  
Hezar Jirib Street, Isfahan,  
81746-73441, Iran  
Phone: 9803117932123  
E-mail: ketabi@fgn.ui.ac.ir

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