



**A Critical Examination of Western and Islamic Orientations to English Language Education in Iran: A Call for Dialogue across Various Perspectives in a Non-Native Context**

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**Abstract**

Overviewing the current literature on Western and Islamic orientations to English language education and illuminating the advantages and challenges of each orientation, this study endeavored to critically examine English language teaching in the context of Iran. In effect, this study elaborated on modernist, postmodernist, and Islamic orientations to language teaching. In tandem, this critical examination initiated from the modernist orientation because this orientation constituted the basis of contemporary academic disciplines. The findings revealed that there exists a strong similarity between postmodernist and Islamic orientations, when Islam is studied as an educational paradigm rather than a political issue. Moreover, the critical examination of the relevant studies on the context of Iran showed the prevalence of the native speaker ideology, systematicity, and standardisation as manifestations of the modernist orientation leading to unequal Englishes. In reality, unequal Englishes can be considered as a colonial enterprise illegitimizing non-native speakers and downplaying local varieties. Analyzing the concept of unequal Englishes, we have also argued that there is a real need to establish a dialogue across postmodernist and Islamic orientations to challenge power relations and foreground knowing as an act of identity. Accordingly, we called for an ontological turn in English language education in Iran, which revolves around super-diversity and perceives language as a practice situated in a social-cultural-historical context.

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## Introduction

Examining a range of non-Western orientations to educational practices, Reagan (2018) recognizes that the leading paradigm of education principally focuses on Western orientations leaving out other teaching and learning approaches. In line with the argument, Enslin and Horsthemke (2015) believe that Western orientations to teaching and learning are the center of colonial and even neo-colonial teaching practices. They also argue that such orientations have rested at the core of the cultural concerns of colonialism, in programs of study that took on the veracity and major significance of Western outlines of knowledge, degrading and demoting purported native epistemologies and scholastic customs. However, as Reagan (2018) contends, the current paradigms of teaching that centre on Western thoughts and traditions need to be challenged and even deconstructed to put things in order for understanding the reality of indigenous experiences and diversities.

Therefore, as it seems, in the world of globalization moving towards alternatives and diversities, there is a real need to critically study non-Western instructional-learning contexts to examine how educational practices are shaped and reshaped in contexts such as Iran through the lens of the current orientations to teaching and learning. As Reagan (2018) states, understanding non-Western orientations to teaching may offer new possibilities for a deeper understanding of the current values as well as the acceptance of different viewpoints concerning the important educational issues. We believe that the examination of non-Western instructional-learning contexts not only uncovers the ways Western orientations are adapted in non-Western educational contexts but also fosters the opportunity for knowing non-Western orientations, which may be utilized in such educational contexts and are generally unknown in the dominant discourse.

The aforementioned argument on education also applies to English language teaching because, as Pulverness (2011) remarks, the origin of educational practices, thoughts, and even changes in English language teaching curricula is direct reflections of the dominant orientations to teaching or challenges to those orientations. Likewise, he contends that the orientations behind language teaching are unknown to many teachers. He states that English language teachers are functionally prepared for the classroom practice, while they have little sense of what streams of thought brings about that practice, which implies that language teachers are not most likely cognizant of the educational orientations behind their language education practices. By the same token, Canagarajah (2016) maintains that there is a strong need for conducting historiographical studies to explore the development and challenges of English language teaching and learning situated in the shift in educational orientations. Hinting at the extensive studies done in the United Kingdom and Europe, he suggests that, to counter the ascendancy of Western narratives in the writings of history, there is a need for more local research that takes into account the record of teaching languages in different contexts.

Nonetheless, as Crooke (2009) says, few studies have sought to examine the way the current orientations to English language teaching and learning (universalist orientations of modernism, postmodernism, or even Islamic and indigenous orientations) could shape teaching practices during the history of English language teaching. Thus, this study undertook a critical

examination of the straddling between Western and Islamic orientations to English language teaching in the non-Western context of Iran by summarizing the prevailing orientations of English language teaching, describing Islamico-Iranian orientations, and critically reviewing the current literature on teaching the English language in Iran. As a result, our study focused on modernist, postmodernist, and Islamic orientations. It is of note that this examination of orientations to language teaching starts from the modernist orientation because these orientations constituted the basis of contemporary academic fields of study (Canagarajah, 2016).

### **The Modernist Orientation to English Language Teaching**

Illuminating the modernist orientation to English language teaching, Crookes (2009) propounds this idea that modernism revolves around empirical exploration and rational thinking and aims at acquiring the absolute knowledge of language. Referring to modernism in language education, Canagarajah (2005) states that the modernist orientation was founded on values such as standardisation and systematicity whereby the absolute knowledge of language can be acquired. In a similar vein, Canagarajah (2016) contends that an empirical enquiry and scientific method searching for causation and objectivity are the characteristic features of modernist views in teaching the English through which valid and objective findings can be obtained. More specifically, he points out that, according to the modernist orientation, the deeper one went underneath surface-level constituents, the more one discovered the fundamental principles and standards that mattered.

In essence, such a movement towards standardization and universal rules of learning the English language brought about the emergence of the native speaker ideal or native-speakerism as a prevailing ideology in English language education, which regarded the native English-speaking teachers as the ideal models of the English teaching methods (Holliday, 2005). Moreover, addressing the modernist dichotomy of native/non-native speakers, Holliday (2015) states that such a dichotomy is neutral and refers to the innocence of English language teaching. Additionally, Canagarajah (2016) maintains that the modernist tradition in English language education seeks for the proper method of teaching covering universal stages and processes of language learning, which will be meaningful in different instructional-learning contexts. Indeed, as Author 1 (2014) acknowledges, such a quest for the best method of teaching led to the emergence of various methods in a competing race, one seeking to compensate for the deficiencies of the other. As the concept of the method seemed to be ubiquitous, it spread to different areas of applied linguistics, including syllabus design, curriculum development, language teaching, language testing, and research. As a result, the audio-lingual method, discrete-point testing, and quantitative research become prevalent, respectively.

But, Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues against the aforementioned methods and asserts that the predetermined methods ignore the "local knowledge sedimented through years and years of practical experience" (p. 165). Canagarajah (2016) also states that methods ignore students' diversities and locations. Besides, Holliday (2008) believes that the ideology of native-speakerism, as a real manifestation of the modernist orientation to language education, encompasses speakerhood or ethnicity as standards for English language teaching and learning. He points out that such standards cannot evaluate what individuals can professionally do and

cannot take into account students' culture and context. In his radical critique of the native speaker ideal, Holliday calls for standards that respect diversity and provide a space for inclusion. In effect, he strongly asserts that standards should allow those who imagine themselves in the margin to adopt key role. They need to be multiethnic, periphery, expert, merited, esteemed and erudite.

Unlike Holliday who looks for standards that favor marginalised perspectives, Williams and Sewpaul (2007) take a negative attitude towards standards and remark that standards are deeply rooted in a grand discourse against which the legitimacy of other discourses is evaluated or challenged. In reality, as Williams and Sewpaul indicate, standards are particular criteria stemming from a grand discourse such as native-speakerism, which aim at regularising professions through the specification of codes and desired outcomes. Accordingly, standards avoid the emergence and development of alternative discourses because the specification of global criteria and standards in the form of ideals is a reductionist orientation that causes the reduction of alternatives or other discourses to a meta-discourse. However, as Canagarajah (2016) asserts, social changes and internalizations necessitated a deeper understanding of the diversity of cultures, languages, and communities. Along these lines, in the world of globalization and multilingualism, there is a strong need for traditions and practices that could consider the existence of personal and social particularities rather than focusing on characteristic features such as speakerhood and ethnicity as established standards. In this regard, a new orientation, that is, postmodernism was developed in the twentieth century in reaction to modernist standardization to recognize the emergence of alternative discourses.

### **The Postmodernist Orientation to English Language Teaching**

Modernism was subjected to dramatic changes in the twentieth century under the umbrella term of postmodernism. Although, as Boland (2005) asserts, postmodernism cannot be identified as a coherent theory, Lyotard (1984) conceptualized the term postmodern as *incredulity toward metanarratives* (p. xxiv). In their book entitled *Postmodernism and Education*, Edwards and Usher (2002) argue that, in educational contexts, the postmodern view seems to be an opposition to epistemology and disciplines. They also believe in postmodernism's incredulity to metanarratives and speak of the value of local narratives, as vehicles for self-representation in education, through which local knowledges are built as cultural constructs and the positions of storytellers in the community are shaped. As a matter of fact, in instructional-learning settings, postmodernism offers clues to an ontological turn whereby being, identity, and local narratives come to attention and knowledge is assumed to be collectively and contextually shaped in and through discourse. Taking a postmodernist stance, Barnett (2004) refers to an ontological turn in educational contexts as a movement toward constructing a pedagogy of human being that revolves around human qualities rather than knowledge or skills.

Being in line with the aforementioned argument, Akbari (2008) points out that postmodernist orientations to language teaching challenged and questioned metanarratives or grand theories behind language teaching methods, which could not take into account the local narratives of language classes across various times and spaces. He shows that postmodernist orientations to language teaching led to the disappearance of methods due to the emergence of postmethod debate, which helped "teachers theorize their practices by including their voices in

its tenets, not speaking on their behalf from a purely theoretical perspective" (p. 650). As Kumaravadivelu (2001) mentions, based on the postmethod orientations to language teaching, teachers can develop their own personal theories by examining the professional theories with regard to the real context in which they are working. Considering the postmodernist orientation to teaching English, Kumaravadivelu (2001) coins the term postmethod pedagogy to cover not only classroom evaluation techniques, educational materials, and strategies but also social, cultural, and political experiences, which play a role in constructing each class's reality. He also acknowledges that postmethod pedagogy is "sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu" (p. 538). Accordingly, he objects to the predetermined procedures and principles of language teaching and focuses on the important role of the educational contexts toward relevant and meaningful teaching practices.

In a similar vein, Author 1 (2014) suggests that, in language classes that are shaped based on the postmodernist orientation or postmethod pedagogy, learners and teachers construct knowledges of language in the classroom by sharing their own experiences. He argues that the postmodernist orientation led to the emergence of "cooperative learning, participatory approach, and task-based instruction" (p. 79). Furthermore, with regard to the evaluation system, he explains that in language education, the postmodernist orientation led to the replacement of testing by assessment as an act of reflection whereby teachers search for students' different perspectives and make it possible for them to play with various possibilities. On the other hand, regarding research methodologies, the postmodernist orientation provided a window into qualitative research through which new methods of data collection such as dialogic texts or auto-ethnographies were developed, reflection on the role of the researcher was encouraged, and traditional realist interviews were reconstructed to address missing and marginalized voices (Travers, 2006).

Additionally, Canagarajah (2016) believes that the postmodernist orientation to English language teaching led to the deconstruction of dichotomies and borders such as native/non-native speakers, which were rooted in the dominant discourse of native-speakerism and standardization. He explains that postmodernism perceives differences and diversities as a norm and questions the validity of predetermined methods of teaching by searching for alternatives. Searching for alternatives for methods, referred to as post-method pedagogy, focuses on understanding personal epistemologies formed by teachers in the actual instructional-learning contexts, empowering teachers and learners of minority groups to challenge their status quo, and making the learning process relevant to the particular needs of a particular group of learners. Most importantly, Canagarajah indicates that postmodernism in English language teaching redefines concepts such as the knowledge paradigm, community, and language as emergent and contextual constructs that are frequently recreated in situated communication from the variegated resources individuals convey to exchange ideas. As Canagarajah argues, in postmodernism, "it is contact and not homogeneity that is the norm. All spaces are contact zones. They are meeting points of diverse people with different languages and values" (p. 14). Indeed, we perceive the postmodernist orientation to language teaching as a turn towards multilingualism because multilingualism is a tendency toward diversities of indigenous communities, which considers language as a resource for communication, rather



than a fixed entity that is constructed through social practices and contact zones of languages or resources whereby relations and identities are negotiated (May, 2019; Meier, 2016; Moraru, 2020).

Nevertheless, as Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues, there are obstacles to the actualization of post-method teaching. Referring to the ideological obstacle, he draws our attention to the ambiguity of what can be considered as valid knowledge. Moreover, he hints at pedagogical obstacles and speaks of the existing models and methods of English language teaching revolving around the transmission view of knowledge, which are transferred from teacher educators to classroom teachers and prescribe predetermined rules and standards for teaching. Akbari (2008) also refers to the process of self-marginalization through which 'teachers' practical knowledge does not find the space and the scope to be regarded as visible, and consequently, fails to become part of the recognized knowledge of the discourse community' (p. 645). Furthermore, in its ontological turn towards education, as Shang and Troudi (2020) suggested, the post-modern orientation regards identity as a constant process of self-social formation based on individuals' willingness and ignores the key role which is played by external factors such as power or history. To provide an example, Shang and Troudi refer to the competition between native English speaking and non-native English-speaking teachers for jobs that leads to the marginalization of non-native English-speaking teachers only based on their linguistic background.

### **The Islamic Orientation to English Language Teaching**

In his paper on the nexus between English and Islam, Karmani (2005b) states that the success of the expansion of English in Islamic nations "is to a large degree contingent upon pacifying the political force of Islam" (p. 87). To elaborate, he refers to the ideology of modernization behind the expansion of English in Islamic nations, which aims at incidentalizing traditional structures and identities of these nations as barriers to economic growth and prosperity. To Karmani, such a dominant perception of English language teaching, which forces Muslim societies to break free of their underdevelopment by adopting English, 'to a very large degree implies a substantial curtailment of a lot of what represents Islamic culture' (p. 98). Accordingly, he calls for locally based policies for English language teaching in Islamic nations whereby Islamic values are acknowledged and respected. In a similar vein, Karmani (2005a) asserts that, we, English language teachers, "need to be perpetually aware of how our current language teaching paradigms relate to the political, cultural, and economic aspirations of the host culture in which we find ourselves" (p. 266). Of course, he acknowledges that the contestation between English and Islam has not received enough attention within the mainstream literature of applied linguistics, whereas English language teachers should take cognizance of the power of English in replicating global ideologies, which may be in contrast with Islamic values.

On the other hand, exploring the nature of the English language as it is used in the Muslim country of Pakistan, Mahboob (2009) makes mention of the power of new varieties of Englishes such as Pakistani English for representing Islamic values, cultures, and ideologies. He argues that the English language used in the Islamic country of Pakistan or Pakistani English "has been linguistically and culturally adapted to local cultural and religious norms. These

adaptations reflect a form of linguistic resistance that has recast the English language to carry a Pakistani Muslim identity" (p. 187). In effect, he introduces the English language as an Islamic language, when it is localized and indigenized.

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

Some Islamic thinkers like Mulla Sadra focused on the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) manifested in various modes of being in their Islamic theory of knowledge. And, as Huda, Yusuf, Azmi Jasmi, and Nasir Zakaria (2016) point out, Islamic theory of knowledge lays the foundations of Islamic education. In fact, as Sheykh Rezaee and Hashemi (2009) maintain, in Islamic theory of knowledge, epistemology was identical with ontology and knowledge was defined as "a mode of being which is identical with presence" (p. 24). Accordingly, Sheykh Rezaee and Hashemi believe that Islamic theory of knowledge is different from the existing Western theories of knowledge in higher education whereby epistemology is distinct from ontology. Reviewing the existing higher education research literature, Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007) also state that ontology is subordinated to epistemology in the conventional higher education programs, which concentrate on the acquisition of decontextualized knowledge and skills rather than the process of learning and knowing embedded in a specific social and historical setting. However, they (2007) highlight the importance of the ontological turn and explain that such a turn can lead to the transformation and pluralization through which "knowledge has come to be seen as situated and localized into various 'knowledges', that are socially constructed in relation to specific knowledge interests" (p. 680). Moreover, calling for the ontological turn in higher education, Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007) state that such an approach to education whereby being and knowledge are integrated can enhance students' self-awareness, provide the possibility for learners to be actively engaged in the process of knowing, transform students as members of a society, and establish rich opportunity for the integration of knowing, being, and acting. In tandem, it seems that Islamic education foregrounds the question of being to integrate three processes of knowing, being, and acting.

Addressing the interrelation between epistemology and ontology in Islamic theory of knowledge, Sheykh Rezaee and Hashemi also refer to "an 'onto-epistemology', according to which truth and being are two sides of the same coin" (p. 19). Furthermore, elaborating on Islamic theory of knowledge, they hint at the unity of the world in which there exists only one being. But they assert that the world has multiplicity because its unique being can be presented in various modes of being. Likewise, Kamal (2016) argues that onto-epistemology is 'the sum of the multiplicities of being grounded on the principle of unity' (p. 46). Indeed, it can be inferred that Islamic theory of knowledge speaks of knowledges, different ways of beings, and

multiplicities. Such a perception of multiplicity and diversity in education is different from the constraining idea of the communicative approach in language teaching, which centers on using authentic or real language in language classrooms and revolves around the native speaker ideal. As Alptekin (2002) explains, authentic language in the communicative approach is defined as 'the parochial milieu and the fuzzy notion of the native speaker. As such, the multiplicity of uses of English around the world involving encounters between not only native speakers, but also nonnative speakers and nonnative speakers, is not even recognized' (p. 61). Nevertheless, considering English as a lingua franca, Alptekin indicates that it is highly important to improve language learners' knowledge of diversities by providing them with linguistic and cultural behaviors for effective communications with others and boosting their intercultural insights. In this regard, challenging the validity of the native speaker-based communicative approach in language teaching, he directs our attention to the value of intercultural communicative competence for understanding multiplicities.

Moreover, as we mentioned above, Islamic education foregrounds ontology or being in the educational setting. Barnett (2007) defines each student's being as her dynamic stance in relationship with her educational context and speaks of each student's feelings, anxieties, understandings, attitudes, and values. He also considers each student's ontology, that is, her willingness to learn, herself, and her being, as the basis for her knowing and believes that "without a self, without a will to learn, without a being that has come into itself, her efforts to know and act within her programme of study cannot even begin to form with any assuredness" (p. 70). Additionally, he asserts that students are supposed to know things, but their process of learning should not be limited to the mere acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, respecting the multiplicity of identity, Barnett refers to learners' personal understandings and insights that can turn knowledge into the process of learning. However, in English language teaching, the multiplicity of English language learners' identities, stories, and insights has not received enough attention (Norton, 2016). In fact, foregrounding language learners' ontology or identity is highly important in the process of language teaching because "language is not only a linguistic system of words and sentences, but also a social practice in which identities and desires are negotiated in the context of complex and often unequal social relationship" (Norton, 2016, p. 476). Of course, as Watson-Gegeo (2004) mentions, the dominant scientific epistemology of language teaching, that is, Anglo-Euro-American epistemology was challenged by researchers from the third-world communities under the inspiration of third-wave feminist thinkers, which resulted in the emergence of a cultural model of language teaching centering on local epistemology and cultural identities. Defining local epistemology as processes of constructing knowledges through relationships and under local conditions, she argues that there is a strong need in language teaching for a deeper understanding of the ways our perceptions of the world are shaped based on our cultural ontologies and knowledges. She explains that, through these ontologies and epistemologies, "we are all socialized in the course of learning our first language(s) and culture(s) (however hybridized they may be); and then (re)socialized or partially (re)socialized in the process of learning a second or third language and culture" (p. 342).

Furthermore, examining the works of some Islamic thinkers, Mir (1999) explains that Islamic theory of knowledge focuses on knowledge by presence rather than knowledge by



correspondence as the building block of the Western epistemology represented in modernism through which the object and subject are distinct. Actually, knowledge by presence means that there is no distinction between the subject and object, that is, the knower and the known or knowledge and self. In their paper on presence in teaching, Rogers and Raider-Roth (2006) explain that "to be present is to come into relation, into connection, with students, their learning, subject matter and oneself" (p. 284). They regard teachers' presence as teachers' ability to be responsive to students' needs and understand the requirements of the existing educational context through which they can establish a trusting atmosphere and empower their students to share their own experience. In effect, Rogers and Raider-Roth indicate that the teacher's role will change from the knowledge transmitter to a collaborator who constructs knowledge in the classroom with students in a given context through the process of learning. Actually, it seems that Islamic education derived from Islamic theory of knowledge is in harmony with the postmodern orientation in education with regard to its focus on multiplicities, the process of knowing or integration of first-hand experience and knowledge, and the ontological turn.

### **English Language Teaching in the Context of Iran**

Examining the educational system in Iran with regard to the two sources of the constitution and the course of practice in educational institutions, Bagheri Noaparast (2016) points out that education in Iran "is expected to be profoundly Islamic in spirit. Religious education, in particular, aims at developing the Islamic faith in students" (p. 8). In fact, he regards commitment to God as the key assumption of the Islamic orientation to education and believes that there is a theoretical contrast between the Islamic orientation to education and liberal education revolving around the individual's right and freedom. Although he considers Islamic values and identity as the bases of education in Iran, he admits that there is a new movement in education toward neoliberalism, which insists on the marketisation of education rather than the cultivation of Islamic values. To elaborate further, he explains that:

The tragic point in the case of Iran is that the discourse of neoliberalism is embraced by Iranian official documents. This discourse includes concepts such as stakeholder, entrepreneurship, accountability, competence, parks of science and technology, knowledge economy, and slogans such as marketization of knowledge and transformation of knowledge into wealth." (p. 8)

In English language teaching, neoliberalism equates to the increasing demand for the improvement of oral communication skills and commodification of language teaching and learning processes as standardised sets of skills (Shin, 2016). Expounding on the main tenets of neoliberalism in English language education, West (2019) hints at the instrumentalization of language skills as sets of skills, the essentialization of language teaching practices as sets of standards, and the reduction of language testing to discrete skills of language. Accordingly, the neoliberal English language teaching in Iran refers to the standardization of language teaching and testing practices, which can be regarded as one of the main features of the modernist orientation to English language education. Examining English language teaching in Iran, Fahim and Pishghadam (2011) also believe that modernism, as one of the Western educational paradigm, is the dominant paradigm for language teaching in Iran, which overlooks the value of learners' diversities and differences, supports the use of high stake tests, and encourages

students to conform to the standards and predetermined rules. But, they point out that "we witness no vestige of postmodernism in all levels of education in this country. The country has a conservative, centralized educational system" (p. 47). Actually, this movement toward the modernist orientation to language teaching is the result of the recent education policies in Iran, which favors globalization. Referring to the globalized education policies in Iran, Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) acknowledge that, within the discourse of globalism, "English as a language of opportunity will possibly turn into the language of power and prestige" (p. 60). They also assert that assigning such a prestigious status to the English language leads to the inequality between various social classes in Iran because it can only serve the interests of the social class, which has access to the existing resources and repertoires for learning English.

However, analyzing English language teaching throughout the Islamic republic reign in Iran, Rassouli and Osam (2019) state that English language education is based on the Islamic orientation to education and aims at constructing a perfect person whose Islamic-Iranian identity is cultivated. Hinting at a fundamental reform in education in Iran, they also speak of "materialization of Hayate Tayyebah (an idealistic Islamic life)" (p. 3) as the main purpose of education in Iran and argue that "the main purposes of foreign language teaching are 'cultural exchange' and 'transfer of human knowledge' but within the framework of Islamic values' (p. 4). Being in disagreement with Rassouli and Osam, Author 1 (2014) argues that English language teaching in Iran as an example of a non-native context centers on Western EFL theories, practices, teaching methodologies, and assessment techniques, which are "quite alien to the EFL context of Iran in terms of their theoretical foundations" (p. 81). Actually, he asserts that English language teaching in Iran is training-centered rather than education-oriented as it is based on Western orientations rather than orientations of its own and maintains that the Islamic orientation is unknown in the educational context of Iran. He argues that English language education in Iran was based on the imported modernist-oriented ELT curricula and materials focusing on native-speakerism and standardization, although it has recently been stimulated by the shift toward postmodern/constructivist paradigm of education. To conclude, Author 1 (2014) strongly believes that English language teaching in Iran is completely free from the Islamic orientation to education and blindly practices the Western theories and orientations to the teaching of the English language.

Similarly, Fatemi, Ghahremani Ghajar, and Bakhtiari (2018) refer to the prevalence of Western theories, paradigms, and methods in the English language teaching in Iran. They argue that Islamic or even cultural values are marginalised in the Iranian educational system, which mostly focuses on the use of authentic materials prepared by native speakers of English rather than the materials that can reflect the actual life of Iranian people or texts that are excerpted from Persian literary works.

### **Conclusion**

Elaborating on Western educational paradigms of modernism and postmodernism as well as Islamic orientations to English language teaching, this study endeavored to critically examine English language teaching in the context of Iran. Reviewing the existing literature on English language teaching in Iran through the lens of Western and Islamic orientations indicated that

there is a movement towards modernism and even neoliberalism. Likewise, it was revealed that English language teaching in Iran is based on the prevalent ideology of native-speakerism. In this section, we will further elaborate on the consequences of such a movement toward the modernist orientation to English language education in the non-native context of Iran based on our review of the major themes of educational orientations.

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

However, addressing the unequal power relationships between the central and peripheral communities, Pennycook (1989) asserts that there is a dire need in English language teaching to reexamine the existing positivist theoretical frameworks that revolve around standardised curricula and serves the interest of the Western male-oriented academy. In fact, he perceives the tendency toward standardization, the metanarrative of method, objectivity, and consequently unequal Englishes as a move that 'threatens all openness and diversity in education and ignores questions of class, race, or gender difference' (p. 612). Moreover, Pennycook invites the teachers of the peripheral communities to challenge the legitimacy of the grand-narrative of method by valuing their own practices, reflecting on the existing theories, and integrating professional theories and personal practices. He explains that teachers should take the complexities of learning contexts into account and appreciate local forms of knowledges about language and teaching in order to challenge hierarchical power relationships illegitimizing non-native speakers.

Appreciating cultural diversities and considering Iran as one of the culturally and linguistically colonised countries in which the native language and culture are marginalized in language education, Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012) also state that language education in Iran cannot be restricted to materials produced by the native speakers in the West. In addition, they call for national textbooks and materials through which Iranian teachers can control what is happening in their educational contexts. Accordingly, underpinning diversity and localization as the main assumptions of postmodernism, they believe that it is time to turn toward postmodern approaches to English language teaching and point out that the emergence of

English varieties and the development of the Iranian version of language teaching can be considered as 'an antidote to the harshness of all marginalization Iranians have suffered for centuries' (p. 68). While Pishghadam and Zabihi speak of a postmodern turn in language teaching in Iran, Author 1 (2014) and Fatemi et al. (2018) hints at a turn to the Islamic orientation to English language teaching to get rid of drawbacks of colonial modernism in language teaching in Iran. We, authors of the current study, advocate the burgeoning post-colonial orientations to language teaching, whether through postmodern approaches or through the Islamic approach to language teaching. Identifying the main tenets of postmodernism and Islam as an educational orientation rather than a political issue in the present study, we could shed some light on the pre-assumptions of these two approaches, such as the value of lived experiences, multiplicity, situated knowledges, and the turn to ontology. In language teaching, the afore-mentioned pre-assumptions can draw our attention to the replacement of testing by assessment, the emergence of qualitative research, task-based instruction and the participatory approach to language teaching, and the legitimacy of non-native English-speaking teachers. Furthermore, both orientations focus on the relations in the classroom. Of course, as we discussed in the present study, the postmodernist orientation to language teaching addresses self-other relations and highlights the importance of criticality and authenticity in order to deconstruct the stereotyped cultural or epistemological borders, whereas the Islamic orientation speaks of relations with other members of a community, context, content, and oneself through which needs and requirements can be identified.

Additionally, in the present study, it was revealed that both postmodernist and Islamic orientations highlight the importance of diversity and foreground knowing as the integration of self and knowledge or as "an act of identity and a claim to ownership" (Barnett & Coate, 2004, p.59). DallAlba and Barnacle (2007) also argue that knowing is located within a given socio-cultural-historical context. In a similar vein, Kumaravadivelu (2012) believes that knowing is the result of the personal inquiry of the knower and explains that 'it is about reflection and action. It is about the result of the dialectical relationship between reflection and action. That is to say, reflection informs action, and action informs reflection' (p. 21). Consequently, addressing English language teaching in Iran, we call for an ontological turn that revolves around super-diversity, reflection, and action and regards language as a social practice, which is situated in a particular context and belongs to the language user in a given context (Gurney & Demuro, 2019; Meier, 2016).

Moreover, contrary to Fatemi et al. (2018) who perceived Western-oriented teaching as the main cause of marginalisation of Islamico-Iranian identity and referred to the gap between Islamic education and western education, this study hinted highlighted the similarities between postmodernist and Islamic orientations to English language teaching. And, we believe that it is time for creating a new possibility of dialogue across various educational orientations to English language teaching in order to go beyond the existing boundary between native speakers and non-native speakers.



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