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## **The Effect of Dogme Language Teaching (Dogme ELT) on L2 Speaking and Willingness to Communicate (WTC)\***

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### **Abstract**

Dogme Language Teaching (Dogme ELT) is an innovative learner-centered methodology and a movement for teaching English (or any other L2) that primarily focuses on face-to-face interaction between teacher and learners and among the learners themselves (Thornbury, 2009) without using any preplanned and established instructional materials, syllabuses, or preset activities. Despite many claims by the proponents, research evidence for Dogme ELT is very limited; accordingly, this sequential explanatory mixed-method study sought to examine the effect of Dogme ELT on L2 speaking and willingness to communicate (WTC) across different proficiency levels among Iranian EFL learners at a private language institute. Participants included 14 intermediate, 12 upper-intermediate, and 12 advanced level learners from both genders in three intact classes as the experimental groups. Three other intact classes comprising 13 intermediate, 13 upper-intermediate, and 11 advanced level learners, respectively were selected as control groups who received the mainstream communicative language teaching (CLT) for their L2 instruction. The treatments continued for two subsequent semesters including thirty 1.5-hour sessions. Quantitative data analysis using two-way ANCOVA revealed that Dogme ELT was more effective than CLT only for the advanced but not for the intermediate and upper-intermediate learners' speaking and WTC. Qualitative data analysis revealed that most advanced and only some upper-intermediate learners had positive attitudes about Dogme ELT. The findings of the current investigation suggest that Dogme ELT should be used for advanced EFL levels and its application should be done with more caution.

**Keywords:** Dogme ELT, CLT, L2 speaking, language proficiency, willingness to communicate (WTC)

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### **Introduction**

Dogme Language Teaching (Dogme ELT) is a new creative approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), methodology, or a movement (Meddings, 2004) for teaching and learning English (or other L2s) that was originally proposed by Thornbury (2000, 2005, 2009, 2013) in a series of papers and studies. Thornbury (2000) claimed that Dogme ELT is a communicative approach for L2 that predominantly relies on various types of face-to-face interaction between teacher and learners and learners themselves during the classroom practices. It does not follow any predetermined and conventional instructional course books, lesson plans, syllabi, or even technological advancements. Thornbury (2009) outlined the principles of Dogme ELT as interactivity, learner engagement and empowerment, authentic interaction, scaffolded conversation, and least use of light materials if at all. Dogme ELT, in essence, has tried to virtually centralize the language instruction around the wants, needs, and interests of language learners themselves through chains of authentic interaction in a nonthreatening classroom that does not adhere to preset materials that can be outdated or less inspiring and encouraging for the learners. Meddings and Thornbury (2002), for instance, argued that detaching L2 classrooms from boring, demotivating, and old-fashioned coursebooks can foster learners' enthusiasm and augment their eagerness to participate in conversations with peers and their own teacher.

The founders and proponents of Dogme ELT have strongly backed the effectiveness of this approach or perspective for learning an English as the so-taught/learned L2. Thornbury (2005), for example, advocated the application of Dogme approach as a drastic remedy to lackluster and unfruitful unadventurous and conventional course-based classrooms where the learners have no role in arranging the syllabus and its instructional content. He fervently pointed out that his innovative Dogme ELT can substantially promote target language communicative competence, though he did not document his claims on any empirically-done study through a robust theoretical framework. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) believed that the implementation of Dogme ELT positively alters L2 learners' views and abilities through a linguistically

rich environment decided and shaped by learners' choices and interests. Thornbury has adamantly supported the benefits of using Dogme ELT; however, his claims have still remained in the realm of theoretical speculations and personal experiences and Dogme has received considerably less empirical attention in the existing literature. In fact, the true potential of Dogme ELT has not been empirically investigated through methodologically sound procedures and scientific experimentation. In an effort to fill this research gap, the current study was conducted to examine the real latent potential of Dogme ELT in improving Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability and their willingness to communicate in English in comparison with the effect of the predominantly employed communicative language teaching (CLT) method across three proficiency levels.

### **Literature Review**

Dogme Language Teaching or briefly Dogme ELT as branded by its founder, Thornbury (2000) is an approach (Thornbury, 2005), a method (Christensen, 2005), or a perspective (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) for teaching English or other foreign/second languages without using any preplanned syllabuses, textbooks, workbooks, tapes and other technology-driven gimmicks, or specified instructional content. According to Meddings and Thornbury (2009), the term 'Dogme' is a term in film industry (Dogme 95 film movement initiated by Lars von Trier) referring to playing a role by an actor without earlier rehearsal or written dialogues and transcripts. Meddings and Thornbury used the term to introduce this pioneering approach to foreign and second language learning by an analogy with the meaning of 'dogme' in film making industry. They suggested that teachers and learners can embark upon learning an L2 without any preplanned text or instructional syllabus. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) advocated their method, arguing that "teaching should be done using only the resources that the teachers and students bring to the classroom- i.e. themselves and what happens to be in the classroom" (p. 18). Richards Rodgers (2014) mentioned that Dogme ELT enjoys a central design in its orientation toward language teaching, asserting that this approach is "based on the idea that instead of basing teaching on a preplanned syllabus, as set of objectives and published materials, teaching

is built around conversational interaction between teacher and the students themselves” (p. 371).

As Smith (2004) held, Dogme ELT is a “textbook free zone” (p. 3) that aims at returning back the main agent of the learning, i.e., the learner himself who has been driven to margins by an unnecessary multitude of printed or technological texts and files. Dogme ELT purported to make the language learning more pleasant and free the learner from the conundrum of being overburdened with agonizingly tedious materials that were externally preset. By reducing the cognitive encumbrance, Dogme seeks to recuperate the affective, social, and emotional dimensions of the learners (Thornbury & Meddings, 2001a). By adopting such anti-establishment approach toward language curriculum and specified content, Dogme method supports a more humanistic and whole person stance and pursues more educational equality in learning English or other foreign languages. Although the rejection of the published materials and new technologies has been mentioned as the peculiar advantage of Dogme by its pioneers and proponents (Meddings & Thornbury, 2002, 2003, 2009; Thornbury, 2005, 2009, 2013), the very same feature has received much criticism from its opponents (e.g. Christensen, 2005; Gill, 2000; Smith, 2004).

Thornbury (2005) has discussed ten strikingly significant attributes of his Dogme ELT as follows. First, interactivity between learners and teacher and among learners themselves which is a very functioning route of language internalization and communicative competence growth. Second, learners’ total engagement in classroom events because the instructional materials are not externally imposed rather they are created by learners. Another feature is the dialogic and social nature of language development processes that are mandatory for reconstruction of linguistic knowledge in the cognitive structure of the individual learners. Fourth, language learning evolves via scaffolded conversations under the nonthreatening role of teacher and his ubiquitous support. Besides, communicative and grammatical competences emerge from the learning processes without imposition and hurry that cause shallow and fossilized knowledge. Moreover, teacher makes diligent attempts to optimize L2

development affordances by focusing students' attention to the emergent language system. Seventh, the learners' voice, attitudes, feelings and preferences are clearly heard and attended to. The three remaining features are related to the use of light materials or absence of the orthodox commercial instructional materials. These materials if used at all should empower the learners, get their attention and represent their sociocultural and ideological tendencies. The employed light materials should also have total relevance to language learners' needs and should enhance their critical faculties. As mentioned by Thornbury and Meddings (2001b), Dogme ELT does not oppose the use of materials at any costs nor does it have any anti-technology orientation, rather it prescribes these two when they do not exert an adverse influence over L2 learning in a learner-centered environment based on the mainstream classroom needs and events.

Having formulated the ten aforementioned key principles, Thornbury (2005) deduced three major percepts for his Dogme ELT methodology: conversation-driven teaching, the use of light materials, and natural emergence of L2. Dogme method emphasizes the language at suprasentential discourse level and supports language learning through ample authentic conversations and adheres to the motto that learning an L2 means conversing in it and vice versa. Through a light materials approach, Dogme method tries to be a pro-learner methodology, claiming that the use of conventionally predetermined instructional materials and technology can block true learning due to the problems such as availability, affordability, cultural bias, and digital literacy requirements though it sometimes gives the learners and instructors the choice of light materials in case these materials are needed and positively employed. The target language competence cannot be acquired; rather, it should naturally emerge itself via engaging in plentiful collaborative conversations and creative use of the target language. The teacher can facilitate the emergence of the communicative competence through rewarding learners' successful dialogues, repeating the conversations, and reflecting on/reviewing the class interactions.

Thornbury (2012) pointed out that Dogme ELT views language teaching as an experiential and holistic process through which the target L2 competence is jointly reconstructed in nonthreatening sociocultural interactions. He also considered L2 competency as an emergent process that proceeds and incrementally evolves based on the communicative needs and social requirements of the learners. Teachers and learners' joint engagement and interaction progressively shapes the content of Dogme method and the communicative abilities of the learners will emerge as a consequence. Teachers should also consider themselves as equal as the learners without insinuating any omniscient and authoritative roles for themselves. As stated by Richards Rodgers (2014), in Dogme ELT "the syllabus or language focus is not preplanned, and language and content emerge from the processes of interaction and negotiation that the teacher initiates" (p. 371). Dogme ELT, in essence, was a reaction to the dominance of course books in CLT and an attempt to refurbish its communicative dimension to its rightful place. According to Thornbury (2013), another unique characteristic of Dogme method is its compatibility with the principles of reflective teaching and macro strategies proposed by post-method condition paradigm. Albeit in the absence of any research-based findings, he has also talked about the resemblance between his creative method and task-based language teaching (TBLT), claiming that both methods share rather similar learning principles that can lead to effective pedagogical outcomes.

Some serious criticism and concerns have been leveled against Dogme ELT, its principles, and its claims by opponents (e.g., Christensen, 2005; Gill, 2000; McIver, 2009; Online ELT Forum Report, 2005; Smith, 2004). The first sharp criticism is about the total rejection of the previously published materials and preplanned syllabuses. The abandonment of published instructional materials puts a heavy burden on teachers' shoulders that should manage the classes just by eliciting interesting and encouraging topics for conversations from their students (Smith, 2004). This topic elicitation and then the involvement of all learners in interaction to exchange their intended meanings is not an easy task. Moreover, even if learners fully cooperate with the teacher by providing their favorite

topics for conversation, finding common topics equally favored by a heterogeneous amalgam of different learners with their own cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural idiosyncrasies is a perplexingly difficult if not impossible job. In addition, as maintained by Tomlinson, (2012), using published materials, well-developed syllabi, and technology-based input for learning a foreign or second language is an indispensable cornerstone and a vital prerequisite that has been amply verified nearly by all methodologies derived from the communicative approach.

As cited by Christensen (2004), the “vow of chastity” (Thornbury, 2013, p. 111) not to use materials is a misleadingly deceptive myth that should be overlooked and that L2 teachers should at least utilize light materials in their efforts to help learners internalize the target language. As declared by Richards (2010), not using written materials puts seriously dire constraints on both teachers and learners. Not following any externally preset syllabus or instructional resource is more seriously felt when dealing with L2 learners who want to take formal exams or standardized tests needed by language centers, high schools, colleges, and universities especially when these target exams have their relevant syllabi and content.

Another inadequacy of Dogme ELT is its cultural bias for it is a more appropriate for the Europeans and North Americans. As commented by Christensen (2004), its implementation in other EFL/ESL contexts, for instance in Asia and Africa, encounters myriad demanding challenges. As pointed out by McIver (2009), Dogme ELT is not easily adopted and welcomed by L2 communities in some countries with traditional presuppositions about the role of teacher, learners, syllabus, and classroom practices. Christensen (2004), for example, criticized Dogme ELT for not being totally practical and productive in Japanese EFL context partly due to its disregard for the sociocultural preconceptions of Japanese learners about the optimal L2 classrooms that primarily hinges on textbooks and syllabuses.

Moreover, it sounds logical that learners should at least be familiar with the basic grammatical rules and very high frequency words to feel themselves adequately capable and confident for taking part in conversations in English. Neither the founders of Dogme ELT such as

Thornbury and Meddings, nor the advocates of Dogme ELT have argued about such a threshold level of the linguistic competence for those who enroll in Dogme classes. Beginner language learners including both young and adult learners may feel dumbfounded and frustrated upon arrival in Dogme ELT classrooms because starting to converse in English is easy said rather than practically done when learners are not even familiar with the alphabet and writing system of the target language especially when orthography system of their own mother tongue is radically different from that of English (McIver, 2009).

Finally, no time framework or developmental schedule have been proposed for the emergence of the communicative competence among English language learners by Dogme ELT founders and devotees. It seems unlikely that learners' communicative and conversational skills blossom very straightforwardly and naturally without employing form-focused instruction using textbooks or materials to instill the core grammatical knowledge in the mind of the learners. Previous research has indicated that without deliberate form-focused instruction, the emergent communicative competence can suffer from serious fossilized items in its grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatic aspects (see Ellis, 2008; Mithchell & Myles, 2004).

Contrary to all adamantly provided support and claims by pioneers and proponents of Dogme ELT and all skeptically mentioned criticism by its opponents, the number and scope of the empirical studies conducted by each side of the debates are handful and to the best of the researchers' knowledge, the effectiveness of Dogme ELT is an under-researched issue that needs further research. On the other hand, Thornbury (2000, 2005, 2009, 2013), Thornbury and Meddings (2001b), and other supporters of Dogme ELT have persistently claimed that their innovative method can specifically promote L2 learners' speaking ability and conversational skills and can encourage and motivate L2 learners of English to feel more willing and self-confident to talk in English. The latter claim means that Dogme ELT can give a boost to learners' willingness to communicate in English. Accordingly, the present study was launched to empirically investigate the effectiveness of Dogme ELT in comparison with its



mainstream predecessor and ancestor, i.e., communicative language teaching (CLT) on the Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability and willingness to communicate in English. It was also hypothesized that language proficiency could moderate the probable effect of the adopted methodologies and, as a result, it was incorporated in the current study. Furthermore, deciphering the attitudes of the participants who received Dogme ELT instruction, was of invaluable importance for the purposes of the current investigation. Considering these goals, the three research questions that guide this study are as follows:

- 1) Does Dogme Language Teaching (Dogme ELT) have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill across different proficiency levels?
- 2) Does Dogme Language Teaching (Dogme ELT) have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) across different proficiency levels?
- 3) What Iranian EFL learners' attitudes toward the effectiveness of Dogme Language Teaching (Dogme ELT) for enhancing L2 speaking and willingness to communicate (WTC)?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A convenience sample of 82 students from six intact classes including two intermediate ( $N=30$ ), two upper-intermediate ( $N=27$ ), and two advanced level ( $N=25$ ) classes at a private language institute in Karaj was used in this study. In each level of language proficiency, one of the classes was randomly selected as the experimental group (Dogme ELT) and the other one as the control group (CLT). However, a total of 75 of these learners ended up participating in all sessions in the quantitative phase of this study: 28 intermediate, 24 upper-intermediate, and 23 advanced level students. Experimental groups ( $N=38$ ) included 14 intermediate, 12 upper-intermediate, and 12 advanced level learners and three other intact classes comprising 13 intermediate, 13 upper-intermediate, and 11 advanced level learners, were the control groups ( $N=37$ ). Almost all intermediate participants had completed at least 2 years of English language learning

based on their GPA on previous semester report cards. This language learning experience was from 3 to 5 years for the advanced participatory students. Participants' age ranged from 14 to 28 ( $M=20.3$ ,  $SD= 4.5$ ) and they were mostly high school or BA/BS university students from different study majors. The co-gender sample comprised 26 males and 49 females. Their mother tongues were mostly Persian and in a few cases Turkish and Kurdish. For the qualitative phase of the study, only participants in the experimental groups (38 learners) took part in the oral interviews after the treatment and about half of them volunteered to attend two focus-group discussions based on their own volition.

### **Instruments**

The instruments utilized in this research included a TOEFL IBT speaking section as pre- and posttest to assess L2 speaking ability, an L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) questionnaire, semi-structured oral interviews, and focus-group discussions (FGDs).

#### ***TOEFL IBT Speaking Test***

The TOEFL IBT speaking test includes 6 tasks that are rated from 0 to 4. Then, the total score is converted to a scaled score of 0 to 30 based on the ETS-certified guidelines by qualified TOEFL raters (suggested by EST website, 2018). The first two tasks are called independent tasks (tasks 1 and 2), the learner receives a prompt about a common topic and he should explain his opinion about it in 45 seconds. As for the second two integrated tasks (tasks 4 and 5), the participant should talk about a campus situation or academic subject matter in 60 seconds after reading the text or listening to an audio track. Tasks five and six have also an integrative nature and the student must provide his answers for the prompts after listening to an audio file in 60 seconds. The speaking section of TOEFL IBT has proven its reliability (beyond .85) based the reports of EST center. This speaking test were used twice for the purposes of the current study: once as the pretest and the other time as the posttest after the treatment. The learners' speaking performances were rated by the researchers with the help and cooperation of a qualified TOEFL rater.

#### ***Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire***

The used WTC questionnaire was adapted from MacIntyre et al. (2001) and sought to elicit EFL learners' attitudes and feelings about their willingness to communicate in English by choosing the time frequency they tend to speak in English in 27 real world situations. To answer the 27 items on the questionnaire, learners could choose on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1= Almost never willing to 5= Almost always willing). But, since this questionnaire was originally developed for second language learners of English (ESL), some modifications were added and the questionnaire was piloted with a group of 28 EFL learners at the aforementioned language Institute. As a result of the pilot study and the following data analysis, three items of the questionnaire were deemed to be either poor or irrelevant for the participatory EFL students and hence they were deleted. The Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the modified questionnaire including 24 items turned out to be .93. It took from 15 to 20 minutes for the learners to complete the questionnaire that was used both as a pretest and a posttest to gauge Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language.

#### ***Semi-structured Oral Interview***

The semi-structured oral interview procedure was applied for tapping into the participants' attitudes about the effectiveness, usefulness, advantages, disadvantages, and their desire to continue their English language learning using Dogme ELT. After the treatments, learners in three classes that received the Dogme ELT instruction were orally interviewed by one of the researchers and their answers were audio-recorded. The length of these oral interviews varied from 10 minutes to half an hour on the basis of the participants' own volition and to the point that their cooperation was informative.

#### ***Focus Group Discussion (FGD)***

In addition to the oral interview, focus group discussions were also utilized by the researchers to obtain more insightful qualitative inquiry into the learners' attitudes toward Dogme ELT and its merits and the merits. According to Andrew and Jonathan (2006), FGD is a reliable quantitative data inquiry instrument that helps the researchers to better delve into participants' attitudes, feelings, and thoughts in a more nonthreatening and

friendly environment with the cooperation of other participants and detached from the tensions of attending individual oral interviews. Focus group discussion (FGD) have demonstrated their efficiency, reliability, and validity in qualitative research (see Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018). One of the researchers was the manager of the FGDs and acted as the facilitator and assistant during the two focus group discussions each lasting about 1.5 hour. The purpose of these focus group discussions was to complement the qualitative data gathered through oral interviews in a relaxed atmosphere that participants could retrospectively reflect about their learning experience and had much more time to ponder upon different facets of the implemented methodology and how much learners could gain from the treatment. Almost all of the participants were present in these focus group discussions that were held just for their proficiency level class. It is worth mentioning that these two sessions were both audio-recorded and filmed for each of the intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced level classes.

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

A total of 75 EFL learners from six intact classes including two intermediates, two upper-intermediated, and two advanced proficiency level classes who enrolled in a private language institute in Karaj were the participants of the study. One class from each level was randomly selected as the three experimental groups who received Dogme ELT instruction and other three groups served as the CLT groups (control groups). Then, IBT TOEFL test of speaking and the WTC questionnaire were given to learners to gauge their initial speaking ability and their willingness to communicate in English at the outset and prior to the treatments. The Dogme ELT and CLT were implemented to the related groups for two successive educational semesters including thirty 1.5-hour sessions. Afterwards, the IBT TOEFL speaking test and WTC questionnaire were administered again as the post treatment measures. This larger experimental and quantitative phase of the study was followed by a smaller qualitative phase during which participants in the Dogme ELT groups were orally interviewed by the researchers and finally the learners took part in two

succeeding focus group discussions (FGDs) to retrospectively express their attitudes about the quality of the treatment they received.

### Research Design

The present research has a sequential explanatory mixed-method design including a larger quantitative phase followed by a smaller qualitative phase as outlined by Creswell (2014). The quantitative data were gathered through an IBT TOEFL speaking test and a WTC questionnaire. During the successive smaller qualitative phase, most students in the Dogme ELT groups were orally interviewed and participated in the focus group discussions. It should be noted that no explicit theoretical lens influenced the experimentation and data collection procedure in this study. The ultimate data triangulation and interpretation of the study findings were done through using both types of data analyses. The following figure can provide a vivid schematic picture of the used research design:

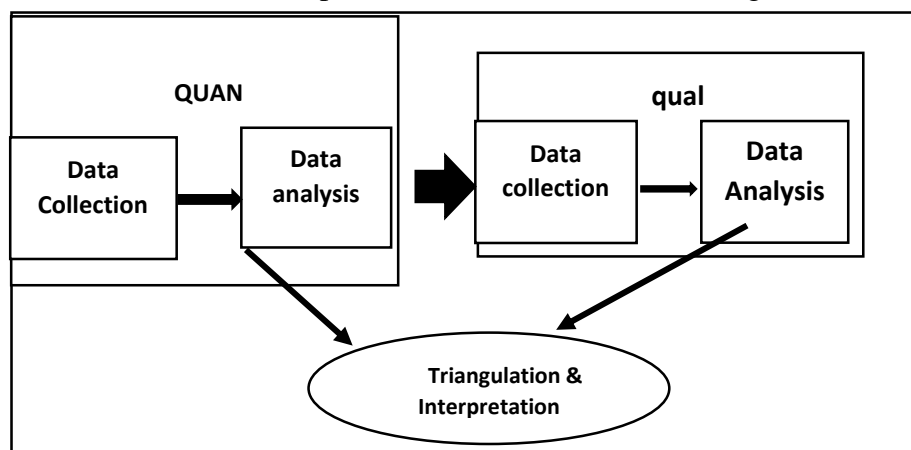


Figure 1. Sequential Explanatory Mixed Method Design

(Adapted from Creswell, 2014)

### Data Analysis

A 2 by 3 between groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was applied twice to answer the first and second research questions based on the data gathered in the first quantitative phase of the study. MAXQDA qualitative software (2018 version) was utilized for transcribing, coding, and sorting the oral interviews and focus group discussions. MAXQDA has proven its effectiveness and strength by some qualitative researchers (e.g.

Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). MAXQDA can take input in various formats including text and audio files and is capable of sorting, analyzing, writing, editing, and coding the data based on content similarities and predefined themes. Afterwards, qualitative descriptions/interpretations and descriptive statistics including mean, frequency, and percentage were employed for qualitative data analysis; nonetheless, the final conclusions were based on the joint quantitative and qualitative data analyses and interpretations.

## Results and Discussion

### Quantitative Results

The first research question aimed to examine the effect of Dogme ELT and CLT on L2 speaking improvement. Descriptive statistics for the performance of the participants on the speaking posttest are displayed in the following table:

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Learners' Posttest Speaking Scores*

Groups	Proficiency Level	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Dogme ELT	Intermediate	15.57	2.065	14
	Upper-intermediate	23.42	2.610	12
	Advanced	28.50	1.567	12
	Total	22.13	5.850	38
CLT	Intermediate	17.15	2.035	13
	Upper-intermediate	23.23	2.488	13
	Advanced	25.36	1.690	11
	Total	21.73	4.080	37
Total	Intermediate	16.33	2.166	27
	Upper-intermediate	23.32	2.495	25
	Advanced	27.00	2.256	23
	Total	21.93	5.025	75

The mean score for intermediate learners in the CLT group is larger than the Dogme group and the upper-intermediate groups have rather the same mean scores; however, the advanced learners in Dogme group show a larger mean score compared with their counterparts in the CLT group.

A 2 by 3 between-groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of Dogme and ELT methods in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' speaking across three proficiency levels while controlling for their initial speaking ability differences as the involved covariate. Preliminary checks were carried out to examine that the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate prior to the treatments were not violated. All these requirements were met and no meddlesome violations was observed. The results of the applied two-way ANCOVA are presented in Table 2:

**Table 2**

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Dogme and CLT Groups' Speaking*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1855.998 <sup>a</sup>	6	309.333	1660.399	.000	.993
Intercept	16.790	1	16.790	90.121	.000	.570
Speaking Pretest	297.222	1	297.222	1595.393	.000	.859
Groups	2.537	1	2.537	13.620	.000	.167
Proficiency Level	2.744	2	1.372	7.364	.001	.178
Groups * Proficiency Level	92.982	2	46.491	249.549	.000	.880
Error	12.668	68	.186			
Total	37949.000	75				
Corrected Total	1868.667	74				

a. R Squared = .993 (Adjusted R Squared = .993)

After adjusting for the pretest scores that were determined via a TOEFL IBT speaking pretest, a significant interaction effect ( $F(2, 68) = 249.549, p < .05$ ) was found between the method used and the language proficiency level with a large effect size (partial  $\eta^2 = .88$ ). Both of the main effects were statistically significant as well (method:  $F(1, 68) = 13.620, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .16$ ; proficiency level:  $F(1, 68) = 7.364, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .17$ ). The covariate could also significantly account for 85.9 percent of the variation of posttest speaking scores ( $F(2, 68) = 1595.393, p < .05$ ,

partial  $\eta^2 = .859$ ). The next table presents the estimated marginal means whilst removing the effect of the covariate:

**Table 3**

*Estimated Marginal Means for the Dogme and CLT Groups' Posttest Speaking Scores*

Groups	Proficiency Level	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Dogme	Intermediate	20.369	.167	20.036	20.701
ELT	Upper-intermediate	21.925	.130	21.665	22.184
	Advanced	24.115	.166	23.783	24.446
CLT	Intermediate	22.477	.179	22.119	22.834
	Upper-intermediate	22.058	.123	21.812	22.304
	Advanced	20.765	.174	20.419	21.112

Generally, the same patterns reported for the means of the posttest scores are observed here. In order to locate the exact differences, simple main effects or interaction contrasts can be calculated and reported; nevertheless, most statisticians have advocated the dependability of using simple main effects (e.g. Faraway, 2015; Jaccard, 1998; Keppel & Wickens, 2004; Kinnear & Gray, 2010; Maxwell & Delaney, 2004). Therefore, simple main effects were calculated using the estimated marginal means as summarized in the table below.

**Table 4**

*Simple Main Effects for the Dogme and CLT Groups' Speaking Scores*

Mean 1: Dogme ELT	Mean 2: CLT	t, p	d <sup>2</sup>	Explanation
Intermediate	Intermediate	t(25)= 8.6216, p=.000	.86	large/significant
Upper-intermediate	Upper- Intermediate	t(23)= 0.7436, p=.464	.15	small/insignificant
Advanced	Advanced	t(21)= 13.9326, p=.000	.94	large/significant



As deciphered from the two earlier tables, it can be decided that intermediate learners who received CLT treatment significantly did better on the IBT TOEFL test in comparison with those learners who attended the Dogme ELT classes ( $t(23)= 8.621$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d^2=.86$ ). The two used methods had rather the same effect on upper-intermediate learners' speaking improvement without any differential significance influence ( $t(23)= .743$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $d^2=.15$ ); however, Dogme ELT could significantly improve advanced learners' speaking competence compared with CLT ( $t(23)= 13.9326$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d^2=.94$ ).

The second research question targeted the comparative effectiveness of Dogme ELT and CLT on EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Table 5 encompasses the descriptive statistics for participants' performance on the WTC questionnaire.

**Table 5**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Learners' WTC Posttest Scores*

Groups	Proficiency Level	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Dogme ELT	Intermediate	63.14	7.594	14
	Upper-intermediate	65.58	4.660	12
	Advanced	70.08	6.748	12
	Total	66.11	6.986	38
CLT	Intermediate	64.77	6.521	13
	Upper-intermediate	65.77	3.563	13
	Advanced	68.91	6.877	11
	Total	66.35	5.879	37
Total	Intermediate	63.93	7.011	27
	Upper-intermediate	65.68	4.039	25
	Advanced	69.52	6.680	23
	Total	66.23	6.421	75

As shown in the table, the mean scores for WTC performances of learners are greater for the advanced learners in the Dogme; whereas, intermediate and upper-intermediate students in the CLT group outdid their counterparts in the Dogme group. After checking the required assumptions and verifying their availability, another 2 by 3 between-

groups ANCOVA was applied to investigate the effect of Dogme and CLT on L2 learners' WTC scores across three proficiency levels. See Table 6 below.

**Table 6**

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Dogme and CLT Groups' WTC Scores*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2940.811 <sup>a</sup>	6	490.135	302.072	.000	.964
Intercept	64.748	1	64.748	39.904	.000	.370
WTC pretest	2514.737	1	2514.737	1549.839	.000	.858
Groups	49.092	1	49.092	30.255	.000	.308
Proficiency Level	532.554	2	266.277	164.107	.000	.828
Groups * Proficiency Level	153.346	2	76.673	47.254	.000	.582
Error	110.335	68	1.623			
Total	331999.000	75				
Corrected Total	3051.147	74				

a. R Squared = .964 (Adjusted R Squared = .961)

A significant interaction effect existed between groups and proficiency level ( $F(2, 68) = 47.254, p < .05$ ) after purging the effect of the covariate (WTC pretest scores) with a rather large partial  $\eta^2 = .582$ . Both proficiency level ( $F(2, 68) = 164.107, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .828$ ) and group, i.e., methodology type, ( $F(2, 68) = 30.255, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .308$ ) were significant contributors to the participants' WTC scores after receiving the treatments. Furthermore, learners' performance on the WTC before the treatments could significantly explain about 80 percent of the variance in the WTC posttest scores ( $F(1, 68) = 1549.839, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .858$ ). The estimated marginal means for the study groups' WTC posttest scores from various proficiency levels were calculated after detaching the effect of the covariate as reported in Table 7.

**Table 7***Estimated Marginal Means for the Dogme and CLT Groups' Posttest WTC Scores*

Groups	Proficiency Level	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Dogme ELT	Intermediate	63.723	.341	63.043	64.403
	Upper-intermediate	64.731	.368	63.996	65.466
	Advanced	73.070	.375	72.321	73.820
CLT	Intermediate	64.110	.354	63.404	64.815
	Upper-intermediate	65.254	.354	64.549	65.960
	Advanced	67.230	.386	66.459	68.001

Removal of the covariate effect revealed that learners in the Dogme groups had only outperformed their CLT counterparts in the advanced proficiency level but not in the other two levels. Intermediate and upper intermediate learners who received CLT treatment showed higher willingness to communicate in English. As aforementioned for the first research question, simple main effects were measured for the estimated marginal means to examine the significance of such apparent differences. The results of the post hoc calculations can be seen in the next table.

**Table 8***Simple Main Effects for the Dogme and CLT Groups' WTC Scores*

Mean 1: Dogme ELT	Mean 2: CLT	t, p	d <sup>2</sup>	Explanation
Intermediate	Intermediate	t(25)= 0.7874, p=.438	.15	small/insignificant
Upper-intermediate	Upper- Intermediate	t(23)= 1.0242, p=.316	.20	fair/insignificant
Advanced	Advanced	t(21)= 10.8445, p=.000	.92	large/significant

Based on Table 8, no significant difference was viewed for the effect of the adopted methods on intermediate ( $t(25)= 0.7874$ ,  $p> .05$ ,  $d^2 =.15$ ) and upper-intermediate learners' ( $t(23)=1.0242$ ,  $p>.05$ ,  $d^2 =.20$ )

willingness to communicate; however, advanced level learners ( $t(21)=10.8445$ ,  $p<.05$ ) in the Dogme ELT group indicated more willingness to communicate in English in significant ways than their counterparts in the CLT classes. The effect size for the role of Dogme ELT in boosting advanced level learners' willingness to communicate was very large ( $d^2=.92$ ).

### Qualitative Results

Qualitative data analysis using MAXQDA software, showed that advanced learners who received Dogme ELT had more satisfaction with the used method, its effectiveness, and ten of these 12 advanced learners (92 %) desired to continue their next term classes using this method. The advanced learners' attitudes about the merits and demerits of Dogme ELT are summarized in the following table:

**Table 9**

*Advanced Learners' Attitudes about Dogme ELT*

Participants' Attitudes	N(P)
<i>Merits:</i>	
Dogme ELT was very effective for authentic interaction and meaning negotiation.	10 (92%)
Dogme ELT could enhance our speaking fluency and stream of talking.	10 (92%)
Dogme ELT could foster our speaking accuracy and complexity.	9 (75%)
Dogme ELT could motivate us to talk and interact with classmates more than before.	9 (75 %)
Dogme ELT encourages us to better activate our vocabulary and grammar knowledge.	9 (75 %)
We did not feel any anxiety before and during our interactions.	8 (67 %)
Dome ELT could help us get rid of the books that had not new thing for us.	8 (67 %)
In Dogme ELT, the teacher is our partner for interaction not an authority who gives scores or judges our performances.	7 (58 %)
<i>Demerits:</i>	
The rejection of syllabus and use of instructional materials is not always fruitful for language learning.	7 (58 %)
The materials and content decided by learners maybe poor with regard to many language aspects.	6 (50 %)

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Learners may not have ideas for some conversations especially in the middle of the course.	6 (50 %)
Some introvert students may less participate in the interactions.	5 (42 %)

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Upper-intermediate learners were more skeptical about the efficiency of Dogme ELT for improving their speaking and conversational skills. Nearly half of the learners supported the use of the method for their next semesters; however, the other half of the students expressed their concerns over the benefits of the adopted methodology. The advocates asserted their satisfaction over the ample interactions whose topics were determined by learners themselves. However, some other learners mentioned that they did not feel themselves capable enough to put aside their books and converse freely, claiming that coursebooks or at least light materials chosen by mutual agreement between teachers and learners were more fruitful for learners than just conversing in English. Dorsa (all the names are pseudonyms), one of the upper-intermediate students, for instance, said that “...when we do not have any coursebook or syllabus, we do not know what functions we are going to learn and what kinds of words and structures are required for successful interaction. Therefore, I think the method our teacher used,... as you called it Dogme method, is not appropriate for us because we still need to learn much from books and audio components. I do not like to be in this class if the method does not change to previous one like our earlier classes.”

Another reproof raised by upper-intermediate learners against the Dogme ELT was that Dogme could not teach them new things. Shayan, for example, told that “without a coursebook, I do not know what I should learn.....I think I am lost in my pursuit to master the grammar and vocabulary of English. I think that this method cannot help use learn new things...new words, collocations, gambits and frequent patters, we just repeat our current knowledge of English. I think during our classes I just got some fluency over my speaking abilities without much new learning. That’s it”.

The majority of intermediate EFL learners who took part in the oral interviews and focus group discussions opposed the use of Dogme ELT in

their class for the upcoming educational semester and only three of the students in this class supported the effectiveness of the used method, primarily arguing that they could not learn much without the course books, workbooks, and audio/video components. They said that trying to learn English without using the lesson plans and course coursebooks is fruitless and a waste of time and energy. Parisa (a pseudonym), a student that during the course was always nagging about this new method condemned the use of Dogme ELT, saying that *“I could not learn anything new... When I don't know much of English vocabulary and its grammatical knowledge, how can I try to improve my English just by talking and talking? Frankly speaking, I got bored and frustrated during the course. Moreover, I think I have got lazier this semester compared with previous semesters that I did exercises, read passages, and listened to audio files of the book every other day during the semester.”*

### **Discussion**

Based on the data analysis, some important findings of the study are as follows. First, CLT could significantly help intermediate learners improve their English speaking better than those learners who attended the Dogme ELT classes. There was no significant difference between the effects of two used methods on upper-intermediate learners' speaking; however, Dogme ELT could significantly improve advanced learners' speaking competence compared with CLT. Unfortunately, no earlier empirical study has been done on the current topic; nonetheless, this first finding can be justified on the grounds that lower level English learners including intermediate and perhaps some so-called upper-intermediate EFL learners whose interlanguage competences have not fully developed are more coursebook and syllabus-oriented and yet they are not capable of freely conversing in English. This urgent need of lower proficiency level EFL learners for following preset syllabi and externally preplanned materials has been supported by previous research (e.g., Bell & Gower, 2011; Hawrwood, 2014, 2016; Richards, 2010; Tomlinson, 2012). Hawrwood (2016), for instance, asserted that books and instructional materials are indispensable parts for teaching at elementary and intermediate EFL/ESL classes, saying that *“a textbook is an integral part of the course and the*

syllabus – indeed, in many classrooms the book functions as a *de facto* syllabus, and institutional and national exams may be partly or wholly constructed around it” (p. 263). So, it seems that lack of syllabus and course book as the backbone of the instruction was a serious cause of less speaking improvement in the Dogme ELT classes at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels.

Second, although the mean scores on the posttest WTC questionnaire were slightly greater in favor of the CLT groups, Dogme ELT and CLT had not significantly different effects on both intermediate and upper-intermediate learners’ willingness to communicate in English; however, advanced level learners in the Dogme ELT group significantly indicated more willingness to communicate in English in comparison with their counterparts in the CLT group. Previous research has indicated that CLT can increase EFL learners’ willingness to communicate in significant ways (see Ellis, 2008; MacIntyre, et Al., 2001) across all proficiency levels; however, no previous study to date can be referred to regarding the impact of Dogme ELT on EFL learners’ WTC. As aforementioned for the first finding of the study, Dogme ELT heavily relies on conversation based on its principles of interactivity, ample dialogue, and learner-centered nature; yet, it may be efficient when learners have previously acquired the basics of lexical and grammatical components and their communicative competence has partially emerged. As Smith (2004) criticized Dogme ELT, this creative method has motivational inspiration only for advanced learners but it will lead to frustration and anxiety for those learners who still are not ready to talk freely on their own without teachers constant scaffolding. McIver (2009) has also maintained that Dogme method is demotivating for lower proficiency level students and can decrease their desire to converse in English in the absence of coursebooks.

Third, most advanced EFL learners and about half of the upper-intermediate learners advocated the implementation of Dogme ELT and had positive attitudes about its effectiveness and value. They reported that interacting via English language about their favorite topics and interests under the guidance and maintainable scaffolding of the teacher can enhance their speaking fluency, accuracy, and complexity. These mostly

advanced learners mentioned that freeing the classroom from the burden of books and other types of imposed materials could trigger more conversation and foster learners' willingness to use English for the exchange of ideas and intents. Conversely, nearly most intermediate and half of the upper-intermediate learners did not support the application of Dogme method in their conversation classes, holding that leaning English exclusively through engagement in conversations and in the absence of pre-developed coursebooks and instructional materials or technological aids was not possible. They also expressed their concerns that lack of syllabus and books can be demotivating and makes the classroom boring after a short while. These groups of learners held that ELT classroom without books and instructional materials is unacceptable for their language learning efforts and feelings.

Again, such results are particular to the current research and only few studies can be referred to which have empirically investigated the EFL learners' attitudes about Dogme method partly due to its rare implementation in L2 teaching and its exotic claims. Christensen (2002) studied the Dogme in language teaching in Japan and reported that most Japanese EFL learners had negative attitudes about Dogme ELT and did not advocate its use at all. Christensen mentioned the main criticism of the method as the sociocultural and educational bias, arguing that Japanese EFL learners' mindset was against a language class without using any coursebook or other types of instructional materials. Nonetheless, he has pointed out that some of learners whose English language competence was copiously developed liked the idea of learning English through conversation and interaction without following an imposed syllabus or coursebook.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The current study achieved some main conclusions. Firstly, Dogme ELT could only enhance advanced EFL learners' speaking and willingness to communicate but it could not foster intermediate and upper-intermediate learners' speaking skill and inclination to communicate in English. Secondly, the mainstream communicative language teaching (CLT) method was more effective in promoting intermediate EFL learners' oral



ability and willingness to communicate better than Dogme ELT; however, both CLT and Dogme ELT had not significantly differential effects on upper intermediate learners speaking and WTC though CLT led to slightly better speaking gains. Thirdly, the results of the quantitative and qualitative phases converged in that in the most advanced EFL learners expressed positive attitudes about the effectiveness of implementing Dogme ELT for the conversation classes, whereas upper-intermediate EFL learners considered it mediocly suitable for developing their oral skills and were hesitant about accepting or rejecting it in their pursuit of achieving communicative competence. However, intermediate EFL learners reported negative attitudes about Dogme ELT, its principles, qualities, its lack of syllabus or preplanned instructional materials and they preferred learning English through the prevalent communicative language teaching method that utilized more efficient course books, workbooks, well-designed instructional materials, and technology-based audiovisual complementary components.

Finally, it was concluded that Dogme ELT claims were not verified as supported by its founders and supports specifically for intermediate and upper-intermediate learners. It seems that Dogme ELT is more suitable for those EFL learners who have achieved a threshold level in different aspects of their communicative competence and for those learners who can convey their meanings without lexical and grammatical difficulty. On the basis of these conclusions, the implementation of Dogme ELT is cautiously recommended for advanced EFL classes in which the speaking fluency and willingness to communicate are the goal of teaching and learning practices. Of course, the findings of the current study suggest that Dogme ELT should at least use light instructional materials and a flexible general syllabus. However, its application to lower EFL proficiency level classes where students' interlanguage system is still in its incipient stages is not recommended. In conclusion, it should be noted that it is one of the first experimental studies about the application of Dogme ELT for enhancing EFL learners speaking and WTC. This study suffered from some limitations such as the small sample size, inadequate learners in each study group, negligence of learners age, gender and other learner variables and

further research is required to authenticate the effectiveness of Dogme ELT for improving EFL speaking and WTC and to determine its advantages and disadvantages.

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