Mapping the Landscape of Iranian Language Teaching Research: A Corpus-Study of the Titles of English-Language Research Articles

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Abstract

Describing the trends and developments in language teaching practice and research has been of considerable interest to the practitioners and researchers involved in the field. This study sought to provide a rough outline of Iranian language teaching research by analyzing a large collection of titles from language teaching research reports of Iranian researchers published in English-language academic journals. The 2612 titles came from articles published from winter 2006 to summer 2016. The main source of the articles was 21 journals published in Iran or international journals which featured a considerable number of Iranian authors. In several exploratory rounds of content analysis, the article titles in five language teaching journals were examined to identify their topic areas. Then, by collapsing some of the topics, a final list of topics was prepared. Then, the titles in all journals were examined and the topic area or areas which each covered were tallied. To triangulate this subjective analysis and furnish another frequency report for the topic areas of research in language teaching, the titles were submitted to the text-analyzing software AntConc 3.3.5w (Anthony, 2012), which put out two lists: a frequency-tagged list of two- to seven-word chunks, and a frequency-tagged list of key conceptual words. The subjective content analysis and the machine-based analysis together demonstrated how different sub-fields of language teaching were emphasized and received attention in Iran. The findings help researchers become more informed about the Iranian context and set better priorities. The limitations and weaknesses of the study and some caveats are also discussed.

Keywords: Applied Linguistics, Iranian Language Teaching Research, Language Teaching, Research Areas

1. Introduction

It seems a good idea for a field of inquiry or practice to take stock of what was done in that field, what is being done, and what prospect there is for the future inquiries and practices. In fact, two major bodies which play an important role in giving identity to the ELT profession have made attempts, sometime in their recent histories, to outline the research trends and emphases and set agendas for future researchers or to show how English teaching has developed over the years. The British council (1972, 1977) published two volumes of article titles published in its official journal from 1946 to 1977. The two volumes cover subject areas ranging from spoken English to literature teaching. The TESOL International Association periodically puts forward a research agenda to "reflect the changing nature of the discipline and its research priorities". It commissioned task forces in 2000 (Brindley et al., 2000), 2004 (Borg et al., 2004), and 2014 (The TESOL International Association, 2014). The charge of the teams was to foreground research trends and raise the awareness of people involved about what should be researched in the field of TESOL.

The purpose of this research was to show what areas of language teaching have been investigated in Iran and which areas have attracted a larger number of studies. This goal involved accessing and reviewing a representative body of research reports, having developed a list of categories and generic topics and ascribing each research report to one or more categories or topics. Such an endeavor seemed fraught with many practical and theoretical problems. Collecting data from sources which were sometimes not quite well organized, defining criteria for what is or is not about language teaching, deciding about categories and how fine-tuned they should be, reviewing a large body of text, the tedious course of examining a large number of article titles one by one, the non-determinate nature of the data categorization and ascription process, and the inherent subjectivity with this review were enough to inhibit a researcher from undertaking this job. However, there were several balancing reasons which solidified, reinforced and encouraged the significance of such a study, when the researcher was ready to give up perfectionist tendencies and be satisfied with tentative findings, which, provided rough guidelines and shed some light, however dim, on the Iranian language teaching research landscape.

Iranian TEFL seems to be in a consumer relationship to Anglo-American applied linguistic and mainstream applied linguistics researchers (Mirhosseini & Ghafar-Samar, 2015). In such a state of affairs, the availability of a language teaching research profile such as the one attempted by the present study makes it possible to know how this relationship is reflected and realized in its research output. In other words, the findings can help inform us if the dependence has been faithfully maintained or there are

traces of avant-garde or localization, although a quite reliable and methodologically sound answer to such curiosity requires a comparative study.

This study has no claim as to being a comprehensive survey of the Iranian applied linguistics and language teaching research landscape. However, in spite of inherent gaps and holes, it may reveal what has been going on in the field, what was under-researched, what was, presumably, over-researched and repetitive and redundant, and to what extent the local needs were responded to. Thanks to the light shed, researchers can find cues to fill the gaps and avoid repetition and research policy makers can receive hints in how their guidelines and incentive schemes should be revised.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Attempts to Map the Field

Coordinated with the global trend, research in applied linguistics and language teaching/learning has been quite active in Iran for a while. So, it well stands to reason to know the research which has been done and is being done in Iran so that, among other things, we have a clear idea as to the extent that the research done reflect the needs of this nation. However, there seems not to exist much research report and literature about types, methods, domains, and frequencies of language teaching research in Iran. The few surveys that try to portray the realities of the ground mostly deal not with a meta-analysis of the research having been done but are surveys or descriptions of the practice of applied linguistics and language teaching, language planning and language-in-education (e.g., Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010). They review policies and the curriculum (e.g., Ataee & Mazloom, 2013), or deal with the macro-considerations of foreign language education policies in Iran (e.g., Borjian, 2013; Kiany, Mirhosseini, & Navidinia, 2010).

Some of these studies also refer to cultural, social and political realities which impact on Iranian applied linguistics and language teaching. For example, Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2014) and Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015) review the current and emerging developments and trends in the field of applied linguistics in general and English language teaching in particular in Iran and attempt to highlight the main factors which contribute to and shape the field as well as catalogue its weaknesses, and promises. Moreover, they criticize the disorientation and a lack of clear educational policy in Iranian ELT and emphasize the need for studying the roles and functions of English in the Iranian context. Kiany, Mirhosseini, and Navidnia (2010) review foreign language education policies and evaluate them in the context of existing social realities. Dahmardeh (2009) makes an attempt to depict the overall state of the art of ELT in Iran. Elaborating on the

incidence of ELT across different age groups and settings, he decries the neglect of English teaching in the formal system of education.

Borjian (2013) analyzed the history of English teaching and recognized four phases in the light of the socio-political situation of post-revolutionary Iran: The Revolutionary Period (1979–1988), The Period of Reconstruction and Privatization (1989–1997), The Period of Global Outlook (1997–2005), Returning to Revolutionary Roots (2005–Present). Farhady, Sajadi, and Hedayati (2010) reviewed foreign-language education in Iran to provide information about the Iranian educational system before the Islamic revolution and described foreign-language education of the country after the revolution. Additionally, they discussed a number of problems in English teaching and suggest solutions.

The British Council volume of review articles by Iranian applied linguistics researcher edited by (Kennedy, 2015) is a compendium of articles on the situation of Iranian ELT. The articles cover cultural and socio-economic factors in language teaching, syllabus and materials design, needs analysis, methodology and training. As the editor states, "the ELT trends described in this collection derive from higher-order socioeconomic and political developments occurring in Iran and in the wider world." (p. 5) The general conclusion of the editor is that there are "tensions between traditional practice and more recent pedagogical thought, issues around the need to be sensitive to the promotion of English language teaching and potential effects on local culture and identity." (p. 7)

2.2 Reporting on Iranian Research

There seems not to be much systematic meta-research on what has been carried out in Iran in the field of language teaching. This is in spite of the fact that there have been frequent and continuous calls for developing a comprehensive cataloguing and indexing system so that information about the research done by Iranian researchers is accessible in an organized and efficient way. What currently exist are a number of indexing services such as *ISC*, *SID* and *Magiran* or the databases maintained by Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IRANDOC). The indexing services do not index topics and research areas but journals or theses and dissertations. IRANDOC

> is an institute affiliated with the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology… [whose mission includes] information research activities, collecting and dissemination of scientific Information and documentation for the purpose of meeting the information needs in this area and attempting for the development of a scientific information network. To achieve this goal, this institute has so far developed various scientific databases and meets different information needs of its users (IRANDOC, 2013).

But, not all universities, research centers, and researchers adequately respond to IRANDOC's calls. And, it mainly catalogs theses and dissertations. In fact, it seems the attempts to document and index research reports topic-wise are very primitive, to say the least.

An attempt to catalogue research done in the fields related to linguistics and some areas of applied linguistics was undertaken by Naseh (2007), who surveyed theses and Ph.D. dissertations projects carried out during 50 years in Iran. He was motivated by the conviction that it is important to inform the research and academic community of what research has been done in different academic areas, particularly linguistics. He refers to the rapid developments in language studies and related disciplines and bemoans the lack of adequate effort to portray a revealing picture of the landscape and what has been done or is being done. Naseh (2007) presented 2530 theses' abstracts and introductions from 30 universities. Among them, 1080 abstracts were in the field of general linguistics and the rest were about Persian literature, teaching Farsi language to non-native speakers. Other inventories of thesis and dissertations that he shared with the academic community, sometimes repetitiously, dealt with Persian script and orthography (Naseh, 2004), speech therapy (Naseh, Yadegari, & Bakhtiari, 2007), and Persian literature (Naseh, 2006). These surveys provided statistics for theses and dissertations from specified fields and sub-fields during particular time spans. For example, Naseh, Yadegari, and Bakhtiari (2007) surveyed 145 theses and dissertations in linguistics, psycholinguistics, psychology, and speech therapy written from 1970 to 2005 and outlined their distribution across these years. They also offered more fine-tuned frequency distributions for theses and dissertations in some sub-fields of the targeted academic disciplines.

Javandel-Somesarai (1995) collected about 3000 thesis abstracts in linguistics from six universities in Iran from 1966 to 1972 without any further analysis, classification, or comments. Kaveh (2000) carried out a study entitled "the descriptive bibliography of modern linguistics in Iran" in his MA thesis. He presented a descriptive list of the linguistic books and articles. He reported that the number of works in theoretical linguistics (337) were almost twice the number in applied linguistics. According to his report, grammatical issues, sociolinguistics, and dialectology ranked the highest, while contributions on Persian orthography, lexicography, translation, computational linguistics, and speech pathology had the lowest counts.

2.3. Titles

2.3.1. Significance of Titles

Arguably, the title is the most important element of a manuscript (Paiva, Lima, & Paiva, 2012). The titles of research articles, in spite of being

very brief beside the main body of the text, are good sources of information about the form and content of the articles and play a major role in attracting the attention of readers. They are attempts to condense the sense of an article in order to carry over its bottom line and attract potential readers (Haggan, 2004). Experienced authors of empirical research reports incorporate the main variables of their research in the title. So, "title is the proof of identity of any academic work without which the work would hardly find space in the intended discourse community" (Jalilifar, 2010, p, 29). In fact, "with increasing diversification of research, a research article depends much upon the title to encapsulate its distinctive content" (Cheng, Kuo, & Kuo, 2012, p.1).

2.3.2. Characteristics of Good Titles

According to Maria Grant, a journal editor and an information scientist, article titles should be concise, informative, and, where appropriate, give details of the research design (Grant, 2013). For one thing, if a title is not informative, it cannot be indexed in the proper databases (Haggan, 2004).

Some academic textbooks and style manuals have described the general characteristics of good research article titles (e.g., "the requirements of a good article title" suggested by Swales and Feak, 1994, 2004). For example, Swales and Feak (2004, p. 278) specified three requirements for decent research report titles: (1) the title should indicate the topic of the study; (2) the title should indicate the scope of the study; (3) the title should be self-explanatory to readers in the chosen area. Day (1998) defined a good title as including "the fewest possible words that adequately describes the contents of the paper" (p. 15).

2.3.3. Title Studies

Previous works on titles have focused on different issues such as their length (e.g., Haggan, 2004; Yitzhaki, 1994), informativeness (Yitzhaki, 2002), generic differences (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 1987; Soler, 2007), memory friendliness (e.g., Hartley, 2005, 2007), and structure and make-up (e.g., Haggan, 2004; Soler, 2007; Wang & Bai, 2007). The results of studies which focus on the classification of titles can be a good help in organizing databases and preparing indexes and catalogs.

Haggan (2004) analyzed 751 research article titles in linguistics, literature, and science, classifying the titles into three categories: full-sentence titles, compound titles, and the remaining title structures. He found similar patterns and syntactic forms in the titles across the three academic disciplines. Soler (2007) examined titles in research and review papers in two contrasting fields – biological sciences (biology, medicine, and biochemistry) and social sciences (linguistics, anthropology, and psychology) and identified

four types of structures: noun phrases, questions, compound structures, and full-sentences.

Jalilifar (2010), who believed that studies on titles from the perspectives of applied linguistics or genre have not been adequately explored, emphasized the need for more empirical investigation of the generic characteristics of titles because, he thought, such research could raise awareness of generic conventions of writing, which, in turn, could help people communicate more effectively and to the genre. He focused on the 1871 titles of theses and articles in applied linguistics and categorized and compared them according to their structure and content. Thesis titles showed more uniformity and informativeness while article titles showed greater structural variation.

Cheng, Kuo, and Kuo (2012) examined the syntactic structures and functions of research article titles in applied linguistics. They used a corpus of 796 titles from four journals in the Social Sciences Citation Index and identified five syntactic structures: compound, nominal, full-sentence, V-ing phrase, and prepositional phrase. They further divided these into sub-types according to their internal structures and provided quantitative details about the occurrence of each type and sub-type in the article titles of applied linguistics. More than half of the occurrences were compound titles followed by nominal titles, the other three types comprising a very small percentage each.

However, the present study was not concerned with the formal structure of titles, nor with their cognitive load or eloquence; it was interested in article titles as a telling source of information about the contents of articles, as emphasized above. Considering the purpose of the research, i.e., providing an outline of the issues and topics which have been researched in recent decades, titles of articles reporting language teaching research were used as reliable indicators of the contents of their respective texts. The following question initiated and guided this research:

How is the research on language teaching in Iran distributed across its well-known subfields?

3. Method

3.1. The Corpus

The databank for this study comprised 2612 article titles from 22 language teaching journals, published in English language from winter 2006 to summer 2016. Most of the titles came from years after 2010 though. Table 1 (Appendix 1) presents information about the source journals of the database, including the publishers, the time span of the titles, the number of

titles collected from each journal, and the total number of words in the titles from each journal.

These journals were accessed from magiran.com or were separately searched using the Google search engine. The author also accessed journals which frequently published reports by Iranian researchers, e.g, *Iranian EFL Journal* and *System*. All the article titles in these journals which reported research on language teaching/learning in Iran, were targeted for collection. The names of journals were not the ultimate yardstick in choosing a relevant title to this study because, in many cases, these journals, even those with applied linguistics and language teaching in their titles, included reports of research in other fields such as literary criticism, translation, or descriptive linguistics, which were excluded from the database.

Using the copy-and-paste procedure, the researcher collected the titles from the journals websites for convenience, as they were the same as those in their print versions. In the end, an electronic corpus of 2612 titles in Microsoft Word format including 33065 words (See Table 1 for statistics for each journal) were counted from the articles in 22 journals.

The collection of titles was then reviewed several times to remove misspellings, using the Find function and the WordPerfect spellchecker set on the American-English mode, although the software used allowed for spelling variants of both American and British English. The Word file was then converted to .txt format to make it compatible with the intended data analysis software, that is, AntConc 3.3.5w (Anthony, 2012).

3.2 Data Analysis, Data Summarizing, and Data Organization

The database thus formed was analyzed in two stages. In the first stage, it was content-analyzed by the researcher. The goal was to specify major themes and areas of language teaching and determine their frequencies of occurrence in the bank of titles. This stage involved much subjectivity because the researcher decided on the areas and topics.

To carry out the first stage, a tentative but pretty comprehensive list of language teaching themes was drafted based on the tables of contents in major textbooks introducing the principles of language teaching. Specifically, Brown (2007), Nunan (1999), and British Council (1977) were consulted (see Table 2). This was a working list to serve as a point of departure for the content analysis of the titles in the databank.

Then, a pilot analysis was conducted on one part of the database and more categories were added to the list of categories gleaned from textbooks. Some categories, being thematically similar, e.g. Materials, Syllabus and Curriculum Development, were merged. When the researcher was sure that the categories were inclusive enough of main language teaching concepts and

issues, the whole bank of titles was content-analyzed (See Table 3 for the final categories which are represented in the databank). If an issue or topic was found not to be in the list of categories during the counting process, it was added on the spot. Not surprisingly, there were cases of overlap across categories. The researcher tried to be generous in including categories as belonging to language teaching-- if he was in doubt, he did not exclude the category from the count, because over-inclusion of titles in the list did not seem to be a problem; if an unrelated or remotely related category was counted, it just stood by others without harming the reliability of the information for the relevant categories. The researcher was cautious not to leave out or underestimate the incidence of categories and issues because, while most titles yielded only one topic count, some titles could encapsulate two or more variables from the same or different domains.

Of course, mere use of a word in the title did not cause inclusion in a particular category; for example, the word 'translation' could indicate teaching technique or translation studies. In many cases, the researcher referred to the main text or the related abstract of the article if there was doubt or ambiguity about the category relevance of the title. The titles were analyzed for content; so, language errors therein did not affect the results. The final list of categories and their frequencies are presented in Table 3. The second stage was the analysis of the corpus by machine. Using AntConc 3.3.5w (Anthony, 2012), two lists were extracted from the databank: 1) a list of words with their frequencies in the bank (Table 4); and 2) a list of lexical chunks ranging from two to seven words with their frequencies in the bank (Table 5).

Because these lists were too long to report and included non-telling items, they were reviewed in several rounds to remove items which were not significantly descriptive or did not match the goal of the study. For example, to shorten the first list, function words and general words were removed. To shorten the second list, general chunks and chunks which did not display a syntactic units or phrases were removed.

Compound words, such as *metacognitive, non-formulaic*, when separated by hyphen, were considered two words by AntConc and they were manually transferred from the list of chunks to the list of words. When there were two or more derivatives of the same word, they were merged and their frequencies were added up unless each individual derivative conveyed a significance of its own. When in doubt about the usage or significance of a derivative, the researcher referred to the bank of titles to remove uncertainty.

Table 2

Major Language Teaching Issues and Topics according to Basic Textbooks on Language Teaching

1.	Language components (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation)
2.	Teaching methods and techniques
3.	Instructional Materials
4.	Teacher Training
5.	Learners' motivation and attitude
6.	Teachers' motivation and attitude
7.	Learning Processes
8.	Learners awareness and perceptions
9.	Teachers awareness and perceptions
10.	Describing language
11.	Linguistic factors in language teaching
12.	Age and language teaching
13.	L1 and L2 teaching
14.	Interference
15.	Socio-cultural factors
16.	Communicative competence
17.	Discourse studies and pragmatics (classroom and society)
18.	Learning styles
19.	Learning strategies
20.	Text and genre analysis
21.	Personality traits
22.	CALL
23.	Teaching Aids
24.	Literature teaching
25.	Materials, syllabus and curriculum development
26.	Homework, out of class activities and input
27.	The context of learning
28.	Learners background
29.	Learners internal variables
30.	Communication strategies
31.	Testing and assessment
32.	Research methods
33.	History of ELT
34.	Learners' needs
35.	The four skills
36.	Leaners autonomy
37.	ESP and EAP
38.	Class management
39.	Learner language

4. Results and Discussion[*]

The words in the bank of titles were 2125 families or lemmas, 3693 types, and 33065 tokens. *Of, the, and, in, EFL, on, Iranian, learners, a, language, English, learning, effect, reading, students, writing, study, comprehension, Persian, between* were the most frequent 20 words in the titles. They included function words, words expressing research method, and words related to the topic of the research. The line-up of function words here is different from the order in well-known general corpora (e.g., Brown Corpus: the, of, and, to, a, in; Cobuild General Corpus: the, of, and, to, a, in; the BNC: the, of, and, a, in, to; the GSL: the, be, of, and, a, to), which is indicative of the generic effect of this type of text. For example, the prepositions *on* and *between* can easily be expected to have frequent incidence in the title of research reports. Likewise, examining the content words guide the minds as to either the nature of the study concerned or the topic of the research, e.g., *effect* and *writing*, respectively.

However, the concerns of this study were neither formal-structural nor methodological ones; they were 1) obtaining an outline of the kind of topics which Iranian researchers have explored in recent years and 2) the frequency with which these topics have been researched. Table 3 presents the categories of research areas along with their frequencies, which were tallied from the pool of titles. The categories are arranged in frequency order to give a quick sense of how attractive they have been to Iranian researchers.

Table 3 encapsulates 46 categories of issues and topics researchers explored in Iran since winter 2006 up to summer 2016. Comparing these areas of study with the areas distilled from language teacher education textbooks (see Table 2), we can have some clues about the degree to which different issues are emphasized and what areas are totally absent in the map of the territory. *Mode of delivery* and *language skills* are among the most explored. *Studies on genres, texts, assessment*, and *learner characteristics* are very frequent. And the frequency of *literature for language teaching/learning*, *non-CALL technologies*, and *class management* are abysmally low. Another under-investigated area is *translation* as a teaching tool and task. It is worth mentioning that some categories such as *teacher burn-out* and *software design* which are not frequent in the titles do not come from mainstream ELT books but were added during the counting process.

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[*] The tables in this section present a broad range of data. For reasons of space, most data are left to the reader to examine and interpret and only a selection of them are discussed. The decision in favor of inclusive presentation of data in the tables was made because these data may be quite enlightening in a pretty obvious way while it is not practical to itemize and discuss them all.

Comparing Table 2 (language-teaching issues and topics) and Table 3 shows that there is a considerable overlap between the two in the sense that most of the categories identified in the books occur in Table 3. However, this representation should not only be considered in terms of occurrence but also frequency. For example, *learner language* has an occurrence of only three, while a large body of text is devoted to it in the textbooks. The reason for this imbalance can be explored. One can tentatively mention ease of research design, bandwagonism, conceptual load of topic, and local and cultural contextual support, among other things, as likely reasons.

Not surprisingly, *teaching techniques* and *styles*, *language skills*, and *language components*, *assessment*, and *learners' strategies* and *characteristics* have been explored by many researchers. *Vocabulary* has attracted more research than *grammar*, while *pronunciation* lags much behind. Studies on *reading* and *writing* outnumber those on listening and speaking. This may be explained by the fact that written language is more emphasized in higher academic settings, which are the main sites of research by university teachers, and graduate students.

The higher frequency of research on *writing* in comparison with *reading* despite the apparent popularity of *reading* in universities is a moot point subject to several explanations, including the practicality of eliciting written data, the ease of applying control on the variables, and *writing* yielding itself to more analytical and metalinguistic investigation. The same justifications can be mentioned about the contrast between *genre and text studies* on the one hand and *discourse analysis and pragmatics* on the other hand. The weak attention to spoken language is more extreme in the case of *classroom talk* and *pronunciation* which show a very large gap with similar areas in the written domains. It is acknowledged that g*enre analysis*, *text analysis*, *discourse analysis*, and *translation* are areas which are more associated with linguistics than language teaching. But, it should be mentioned that it has been tried to include only titles of research reports done in language teaching contexts.

It may be promising and auspicious, in general, to have more research and description of language learners than of language teachers, as it indicates a possible propensity for learner-centeredness. However, some areas of teacher description like teachers' personality traits, perception, beliefs, attitudes and ways of thinking regarding language learning and teaching, which lag well behind those of learners, may not be less important than those of learners. This need can be mentioned even more emphatically about teachers' – and learners'-- general *classroom behaviors*.

Table 3

The Frequency of Key Language Teaching Topics in the Sample of Article Titles Published by Iranian Researchers

No.	Topics	Frequencies
1.	Modes of delivery (methods, techniques)	511
2.	Writing	279
3.	Assessment & testing	274
4.	Teaching and learning reading	272
5.	Vocabulary	271
6.	Genre and text studies	254
7.	Personality and dispositions of learners	254
8.	Context and background of learners/learning	193
9.	Discourse analysis and pragmatics	176 (97+79)
10.	Grammar learning/teaching	165
11.	Learning strategies	166
12.	Learners' perceptions and awareness	121
13.	Translation and translation studies	113 (100+13)
14.	CALL	99
15.	Speaking	92
16.	Listening	91
17.	Textbook analysis and material studies	89
18.	Processes of SLA	88
19.	Learner's cognitive styles	88
20.	Motivation of learners	87
21.	Feedback	83
22.	Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and awareness	81
23.	Teacher personality and emotions	77
24.	ESP/EAP	73
25.	Theoretical notes	62
26.	Describing language	62
27.	Curriculum & syllabus studies	52
28.	Attitude of learners	41
29.	Communication strategies	39
30.	Memory studies	38
31.	Cultural studies & issues/teaching culture	38
32.	Classroom talk	25
33.	Error studies	24
34.	Research methods	22
35.	Teacher education	21
36.	Pronunciation	21
37.	Non-linguistic achievements	19
38.	Teacher practices and classroom behavior	17
39.	English and ELT in Iran	17
40.	Learner behavior and participation in class	16
41.	Teacher burn-out	10
42.	Literature for language teaching/teaching	10
43.	Technology (non-CALL)	8
44.	Learner language	3
45.	Class management	2
46.	Attitude towards English norms	1
47.	Software design	1
47.	Creativity	1
49.	Lateralization	1

In fact, attention to classroom and treatment has been limited to methodological issues and teaching techniques; but, there are many aspects of teachers' and students' behavior which are not covered by these domains, in spite of the fact that they may be as relevant to the success of language teaching/learning endeavors. Related to learners' actual behavior and teachers' actual practice, one can mention the notions of engagement and collaboration, which have not received much attention.

There are some other noticeable lacks in the research on language teaching issues. One such issue is instructional technology. Traditional educational technologies are practically absent from research in language teaching. Although CALL has a frequency of 99, this is not proportionate to the recent and current excitement about modern educational technologies

Another under-attended area in language teaching research is *teacher education*. While in many diagnostic discussions of Iranian language teaching problems, the major causes and "root" solutions are suggested to lie in teacher education, the hint has not proportionally prompted researchers to carry out research on issues which fall in the domain of teacher education.

Learner burnout is another example of issues neglected in Iranian language teaching research. It is akin to *demotivation*, which logically falls under the category *motivation*, but a search in the bank of the titles showed only seven cases of this term. This is expectable because, as was mentioned above, Iranian language teaching research is heavily dependent on mainstream applied linguistics research and 'learner burnout' and 'demotivation' do not feature prominently there, either.

Considering the big role which is attributed to *memory* and other *psychological processes*, these issues seem comparatively under-investigated. True, the category *SLA processes* has a frequency of 88, and other cognitive categories such as c*ognitive styles* and *feedback* have been investigated almost as frequently, but considering the fact that these are very general categories, one feels some imbalance in the research done when one juxtaposes these categories next to less cognitive ones such as vocabulary, some skills categories, and assessment.

Another "Cinderella" area is literature as only 10 titles could be designated as related to the use of literature for language teaching or learning. While literature and its many sub-areas seem to be great resources for foreign language learning, especially in a foreign context, where authentic materials may be not so abundant, their potentials and the ways they can be exploited seem to be left unexplored in Iran.

It is true that all the investigated issues are related to Iranians and the Iranian context, and this fact is frequently stated in the titles, but this does not prove that the topics were born out of a genuine analysis of local needs.

Moreover, even if most classic issues of language teaching and learning have been investigated frequently enough, what is seriously lacking is studies which target specifically Iranian language teaching problems at different levels of methods, techniques, teacher education, curriculum, textbooks, technology, policy, etc.

It is expected that some local color should emerge; but, the same topics and ideas which are explored everywhere else around the world are mimicked. We need some localization and moving away from what originates in center countries by taking new and local exigencies into account (Kumarvadivelu, 2012). Iranian researchers seldom explore issues out of the box, which is a continuation of the widespread problem of "academic autism", i.e., a disturbed perception of and relationship with the context and other disciplines. In other words, the good thinking is to think globally but solve problems locally.

Important questions many researchers have failed to ask include: What should determine the choice of topics? What are the local exigencies and demands? What do our educational and social realities demand?

The picture which emerges in Table 3 is based on a subjective analysis of the titles by this researcher and his decisions to ascribe the concepts and issues targeted in the titles to relevant categories. In order to triangulate this highly subjective procedure and see how the picture compares with a different type of analysis, the bank of titles were fed into AntConc concordance program. Two set of items and their frequencies were obtained: 1. a list of words and their frequencies, and 2. a list of word chunks and their frequencies. Function words and words which were not revealing much about the content of the studies were removed to make the list more practical and illustrative. In most cases, words from the same family were merged and the frequencies of respective words were added up. Words with frequencies smaller than 20 were not included. However, if low frequency words from the same families together amount to 20, they were reported. Table 4 presents this selection of the most frequent words in the bank of titles in descending order.

Some content words in Table 4 (Appendix 2) represent methodological words in the titles, e.g., *effect, impact, study, analysis, investigation, performance, role*. Some refer to the participants or the context of the study, e.g., *Iranian, student, intermediate, university, school*. Some can either convey the topic and goal of the research or express its circumstances, e.g., *classroom, academic, Persian, task*. These ambiguities notwithstanding, there are enough indications in the output in Table 4 as to the focuses of Iranian language teaching research and hints at the extent to which the subjective analysis is born out. In fact, an examination of the table shows a

high degree of correspondence with the manual analysis and the ranked categories reported in Table 3. It should be acknowledged, however, that many words in Table 4 are hard to interpret and ascribe to an ultimate area in the field of language teaching.

As another attempt at triangulating the qualitative content analysis of the titles, and to provide a solid, fact-based reference next to the results of the subjective analysis, a list of informative lexical chunks of two to seven words was prepared by submitting the bank of article titles to the software AntConc. The chunks not comprising grammatically correct phrases were removed to obtain a shorter list of chunks which revealed the content and character of the studies represented by the titles. Table 5 (Appendix 3) presents these selected lexical chunks with frequencies larger than four along with their frequencies. This table is laid out in a way that less space is required than conventional formats.

This list of edited word chunks can be a good source of information about Iranian language teaching research. When different chunks are juxtaposed with each other along with their frequencies, one gets a general impression of the relative weight of major language teaching concepts, issues, and areas in the research done by Iranian researchers. A cursory examination of the items and comparing them with the list will also reveal a close correspondence with the information in Tables 3 and 4, supporting the reliability of the manual and machine counts. However, the list is lengthy and the length may stand in the way of its ultimate purpose, i.e., giving a general picture of the relative importance that different topics and issues have received. So, to give the reader an additional picture about the frequently occurring themes in Iranian language teaching research in the frame of Table 5, the items in this table were juxtaposed with those in Table 3 to identify a more whittled-down array of chunks. These chunks or parts of chunks which are shared with key terms in Table 3 are highlighted in Table 5. It is worth noting that those items whose similarity is only nominal (e.g., research method vs. teaching method) are considered in their own right.

The majority of the items which are frequent in Table 3 are also frequent in Table 5, and so are the majority of the infrequent items in Table 3. Mode of Delivery (Method, Technique) and Speaking, are almost missing from Table 5, in spite of their high frequency in manual counts. But, most of the other items, such as Pronunciation, Context and Background of Learners, Literature for Language learning, Teacher Burnout, and Technology, which are missing from Table 5, have very low frequencies in Table 3, which is based on manual counts. The small mismatch between the two tables may be due to the inherent use of indirect, non-explicit language in the titles, which the text-analysis software could not handle. However, this should not be taken as the complete corroboration of the manual counts by the machine

counts as many items in Table 5 are not covered by Table 3. This means that for a more complete map of Iranian language teaching research one should only rely on the output of the machine counts as displayed in Table 4, and more preferably, Table 5, which presents more informative items rather than single words.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This research can give a rough picture of where we need to go as well as where we have been going and where we are. It is easy to see a high incidence of certain issues and topics being investigated while some other topics and issues are widely and largely neglected. For example, such issues as vocabulary, language skills teaching, mode of delivery, and learners' personality traits have received much attention but such themes as ecologically and socially responsible language teaching, meaning vs. form, political and socio-economic implications, teacher-student relationship and a wide range of unexplored psychological issues which have not found their ways into mainstream ELT books, are virtually absent from the studies. Thinking about the reasons for this situation, the intuition flies to explanations such as "academic autism" (research for the sake of research, while being dumb to calls from the context and society, which, in turn, may be a consequence of "Orwellian discourse" in language teaching (Waters, 2015)), following the West *a la* bandwagonism or as a symptom of linguistic imperialism, research not being motivated by social responsibility, ease of following a model or template already established, just filling the blanks without being bothered with new conceptualizations or analyses in terms of new contextual factors.

As there is obvious correspondence between the results of this analysis and the topics focused on in ELT textbooks (see Tables 2 & 3), it seems that Iranian researchers are influenced by books marketed and reprinted in Iran. They are lagging behind the state of the art, as a cursory comparison with a small sample of titles from international journals of applied linguistics mays show. In fact, a comparative study can be designed to determine the relative standing of Iran next to certain other countries regarding different areas of research in language teaching.

Identifying research categories and their frequencies and arranging key frequent words and chunks and juxtaposing them with standard ELT concepts and issues can pinpoint gaps in our research, in that, it can tell us what areas are neglected, and what areas deserve more attention than they have received. Current and future researchers interested in explorations in applied linguistics and language teaching will have a clearer vision about the areas which are over explored, underexplored, or totally uncharted and unmapped. They can also get hints as to areas which have been frequently-touched but chances are that the explorations have been nominal or skin-

deep. For example, the notion of 'critical thinking' has widely been explored but few of those studies have truly delivered the expectations the label implies, although verifying such conclusions may take a bit of hunch, some familiarity with local realities and direct experience on the ground. The frequency-tagged output of this study can be regarded as feedback indicating what topics need to be fine-tuned and taken a step further and what topics can still be playgrounds for the interested researcher.

One limitation of this analysis was the absence of clear delimitations and demarcations for the categories which were targeted by the content analysis. The categories which were drafted are very loose and coarse-grained. While for meaningful discussion we need more detailed information about each category. For example, it is pretty obvious that *teaching techniques* are studied by some applied linguists and language teaching researchers regardless of location. What may be different and location-specific are the fine details, the exact techniques, and the manner in which the issues and problems are dealt with. This is a big hurdle to the interpretation and further discussion of the results, which arose due to the design and purpose of the research, i.e., a general profile of Iranian language teaching research; but, later steps can go beyond a general look and consider the state of, and gaps in, specific areas and fields.

The indeterminacy of the categories is not always an artifact of the purpose and design of this study but inherent in the categories themselves. It is sometimes hard to say if one should put a title in one or another category. For example, the role of CBI in motivation, should this go to *syllabus design* or *mode of delivery/treatment* as well as *motivation*? The ideas of language teaching, like those in other branches of humanities and social sciences overlap a lot. In this study, different overlapping concepts are included. For example, communicative competence overlap with *learning process* or the idea of *strategy* is sometimes difficult to keep apart from *process*. Some general concepts are technically inclusive of more specific concepts; but this issue is treated loosely and they are considered as parallel, e.g., *writing skill and communicative competence*. Part of the blame in this case should go to lack of specificity in the original research report.

Moreover, this research was limited to research reports published in English, which means that language teaching research reports published in other languages, particularly Persian, were excluded from analysis. However, it is hoped that this research, despite being coarse-grained and suffering from weaknesses, will provoke more elaboration, refinement, and fine-tuning. Replication studies, which do not suffer from these shortcomings, can give more force and reliability to the results of the present one as well as shedding new light.

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Appendix 1

Table 1

Journals Used for the Corpus of Research Article Titles

	Journal Title	Time Span of the titles	Publisher	No. of Article Titles	No. of Title Words
	Ferdowsi Review / Studies in Applied Linguistics	Summer 2010-winter 2011	Ferdowsi University	17	205
	International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching in the Islamic World	Fall 2013-winter 2016	International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching in the Islamic World	33	420
	Iranian EFL Journal	Winter 2008-winter 2016	Iranian EFL Journal	683	8350
	Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics	Spring 200-fall 2015	Kharazmi University	140	1735
	Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies	Summer 2009-winter 2015	Sistan and Baluchistan University	102	1270
	Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research	Spring 2013-summer 2015	Urumieh University	34	472
	Iranian Journal of Language Testing	Fall 2011-fall 2015	Tabaran Institute of Higher Education	26	371
	Iranian Journal of Research In Language Teaching	Fall 2013-fall 2015	Islamic Azad University, Khoragan Branch	36	472
	Iranian/international Journal of Language Studies	Winter 2007-fall 2015	International Journal of Language Studies	85	873
0	Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning	Fall 2011-fall 2015	Tabriz University	61	860
1	Journal of Language and Translation	Spring 2012-summer 2014	Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch	50	681
2	Journal of Language Teaching and Research	Winter 2010-fall 2014	Academy Press	289	3787
	Journal of Research in Applied	Spring	Shahid Chamran	75	960

3	Linguistics	2010-winter 2016	University		
4	Journal of Teaching English Language and Literature Society of Iran	Winter 2006-summer 2015	Teaching English Language and Literature Society of Iran (TELLSI)	143	1797
5	Journal of Teaching Language Skills	Summer 2009-winter 2016	Shiraz University	135	1820
6	The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research	Fall 2012-summer 2016	Islamic Azad University, Najafabad Branch	87	1106
7	The Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Translation Studies	Winter 2012-winter 2014	Sheikhbahaei University	24	340
8	The Modern Journal of Language Teaching Method	Fall 2013-spring 2014		83	1076
9	Theory and Practice in Language Studies	Winter 2011-fall 2014	Academy Press	420	5429
0	Applied Research on English Language	Winter 2012-winter 2015	Isfahan University	48	575
1	System	Fall 2007-winter 2015	Elsevier	20	235
2	RELC	Spring 2006-spring 2016	SAGE Publications	21	231

Apendix 2

Appendix 3
Table 5

Selected Frequent 2-7 Word Lexical Chunks in the Titles of Language Teaching Articles in Order of Frequency

EFL learners 548
the effect of 270
Iranian EFL learners 262
reading comprehension 158
the relationship between 146
language learning 107
the impact of 100
the role of 91
EFL students 85
EFL teachers83
foreign language 79
the case of 91
the effects of 68
listening comprehension 61
vocabulary learning 61
English language 56
learning **strategies** 55
critical thinking 53
intermediate EFL learners 53
language proficiency 52
English and Persian 49
language teaching 48
high school 46
case study 45
university students 44
a case study 42
a comparative study 42
self-efficacy 40
Iranian EFL teachers 37
applied linguistics37
Iranian EFL students 37
emotional intelligence 36
Iranian intermediate EFL learners 36
a comparative study of 35
strategy use 33
corrective **feedback** 32
EFL context 32
EFL learners **writing** 32
language learning **strategies** 32
discourse analysis 31
research articles 31
writing performance 31
learners **reading** 30
multiple intelligences 29
critical **discourse** analysis 27
language learners 27
in English and Persian 26
learners of English 25
speech act 25
dynamic **assessment 24**
EFL learners **reading** 23
high school students 23
the acquisition of 23
language acquisition 22
writing ability 22
Iranian students 20
EFL learners **reading** comprehension 19

vocabulary knowledge 19
acquisition of English 18
learning styles 18
teaching English 18
communication strategies 17
comprehension of Iranian EFL learners 17
contrastive study 16
critical thinking and 16
high schools 16
Persian and english16
second language acquisition 16
a contrastive study 15
academic achievement 15
contrastive analysis 15
male and female 15
reading strategies 15
consciousness raising 14
Persian **translations** 14
proficiency levels 14
elf-**assessment** 14
self-esteem14
the effectiveness of14
academic **writing** 14
c-test 13
extensive **reading** 13
genre analysis 13
Iranian EFL learners **writing** 13
learners **vocabulary** 13
learning strategy 13
reading comprehension of Iranian EFL 13
students **writing** 13
task complexity 13
written corrective **feedback** 13
comprehension ability 12
EF learners **vocabulary** 12
English language teaching 12
Iranian EFL context 12
Iranian EFL university students 12
vocabulary learning **strategies** 12
advanced EFL learners 11
computer mediated 11
Iranian learners 11
Iranian universities 11
language institutes 11
meta-**discourse** markers 11
teachers beliefs11
textbook evaluation 11
vocabulary retention 11
discourse markers 10
EFL learners **speaking** 10
English teachers 10
foreign language classroom 10
Iranian high school students 10
learners performance 10
learning strategy use 10

native speakers 10
oral proficiency 10
reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners 10
vocabulary acquisition 10
willingness to communicate 10
a qualitative study 9
cooperative learning 9
critical pedagogy 9
cross cultural 9
foreign language learning9
grammatical accuracy 9
Iranian context 9
Iranian EFL learners **listening** 9
Iranian university students 9
junior high school 9
language anxiety 9
metacognitive **awareness** 9
Persian EFL learners 9
portfolio **assessment** 9
pragmatic competence 9
qualitative study 9
speaking skill 9
speech acts 9
students **reading** 9
teachers attitudes 9
a contrastive analysis 8
classroom anxiety 8
EFL **textbook**s 8
English speakers 8
graduate students 8
implicit and explicit 8
incidental **vocabulary** 8
Iranian advanced EFL learners 8
Iranian EFL learners **listening** comprehension 8
Iranian EFL learners **reading** 8
language achievement 8
language classroom anxiety 8
learners acquisition 8
learners attitudes 8
learners **writing** performance 8
learning and retention 8
performance of Iranian EFL learners 8
proficiency test 8
reading comprehension ability 8
relative clauses 8
self-regulated 8
strategy instruction 8
teaching **reading** 8
writing tasks 8
chaos complexity **theory** 7
complexity **theory** 7
comprehension performance 7
computer assisted language learning 7
computer mediated communication 7

construct validity 7
critical thinking ability 7
different proficiency levels 7
EFL **reading** comprehension 7
EFL students **writing** 7
EFL **textbook**s 7
EFL **vocabulary** 7
English language proficiency 7
English **translation** 7
entrance exam7
error analysis 7
ESP courses 7
explicit instruction 7
foreign language classroom anxiety 7
foreign language learners 7
gender based 7
gender differences 7
genre based 7
grammar learning 7
learners **writing** ability 7
oral communication 7
oral performance 7
Persian learners of English 7
politeness **strategies** 7
reading ability 7
reading strategy 7
self-regulation 7
speaking ability 7
test anxiety 7
thinking ability 7
vocabulary instruction 7
a case of Iranian EFL learners 6
analysis of English and Persian 6
applied linguistics research 6
beliefs about language learning 6
cognitive style 6
comprehension of EFL learners 6
comprehension test 6
culture specific items 6
differential item 6
differential item functioning 6
EFL classes 6
EFL classrooms 6
EFL learner6
EFL **learners attitudes** 6
EFL learners in Iran 6
EFL learners performance 6
EFL learners **writing** ability 6
EFL **teachers beliefs** 6
English language learning 6
English majors 6
English **textbook**s 6
entrance examination 6
error correction 6
ESP learners 6
ESP reading 6
foreign language anxiety 6
input enhancement 6
intermediate learners 6
Iranian EFL learners **reading** comprehension 6
Iranian junior high school 6
language learning strategy 6
language learning strategy use 6
learners autonomy 6

learners beliefs 6
learners perception 6
learners proficiency 6
learning style 6
lexical inferencing 6
lexical knowledge 6
linguistics research 6
medical students 6
metacognitive **strategies** 6
mixed **methods** 6
Persian speakers 6
personality traits 6
phrasal verbs 6
proficiency of Iranian EFL learners 6
Rasch model 6
reading anxiety 6
reading comprehension performance 6
reading performance 6
reading proficiency 6
reading tasks6
self-regulated learning 6
speech act production 6
systemic functional 6
teaching and learning 6
the case of Iranian EFL learners6
use of language learning **strategies** 6
using computer 6
vocabulary learning and retention 6
vocabulary size 6
washback effect 6
writing assessment 6
writing classes 6
writing proficiency 6
academic EFL learners 5
applied linguistics research articles 5
argumentative **writing** 5
assessment on EFL learners 5
breadth of **vocabulary** knowledge 5
classroom interaction 5
comparative analysis 5
comparative effect 5
consciousness raising tasks 5
effect of portfolio 5
EFL contexts 5
EFL learners acquisition 5
EFL learners autonomy 5
EFL teachers attitudes 5
EFL **vocabulary** learning 5
English teaching 5
ESL learners 5
ESP reading comprehension 5
first language acquisition 5
foreign language proficiency 5
foreign language teaching 5
higher education5
idiomatic expressions 5
improving **reading** comprehension 5
incidental **vocabulary** learning 5
instruction on EFL learners 5

interlanguage pragmatic 5
Iranian junior high school students 5
junior high school students 5
knowledge of Iranian EFL learners 5
language **assessment** 5
language proficiency test 5
language **testing** 5
learner autonomy 5
linguistics research articles 5
listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners 5
metacognitive strategy 5
mixed **method**s approach 5
non native English 5
paragraph **writing** 5
personality type 5
personality types 5
pre intermediate EFL learners 5
reading achievement 5
reading comprehension test 5
sentence **writing** 5
task based instruction 5
task based language teaching 5
teacher efficacy 5
teacher talk 5
teachers and students 5
teaching **reading** comprehension 5
translation quality 5
translation students 5
translation studies 5
university entrance examination 5
writing accuracy 5
writing strategies 5
written **discourse** 5
academic motivation 4
academic research4
academic research articles 4
after the Islamic revolution 4
age and gender 4
among EFL teachers 4
among Iranian EFL students 4
article introductions 4
classroom discourse 4
classroom management 4
cognitive linguistics 4
collaborative output 4
comprehension and production 4
computer assisted language learning **call** 4
critical **reading** 4
critical thinking skills 4
cross **cultural study** 4
effect of task based language teaching 4
English language learners 4
English newspaper 4
English Persian dictionaries 4
English proficiency 4
equation modeling 4
equation modeling approach 4
explicit knowledge 4
expository texts 4

expository **writing** 4
female EFL learners 4
field of study 4
focus on form instruction 4
formative **assessment** 4
functional **grammar** 4
grammar instruction 4
grammatical knowledge 4
grammatical structures 4
grounded **theory** 4
group work 4
implicit and explicit knowledge 4
Iranian EFL **learners attitudes** 4
Iranian EFL students **writing** 4
Iranian EFL **textbook**s 4
language and **literature** 4
language **curriculum** 4
language learning beliefs 4
language teacher 4
language teaching and learning 4
language use 4
learners knowledge 4
learners multiple intelligences 4
learning style preferences 4
listening comprehension ability 4
meta-**discourse strategies** 4
negative evidence 4
oral **communication strategies** 4
oral production 4
peer **assessment** 4
peer **feedback** 4
Persian dictionaries 4
Persian research articles 4
planning time 4
post **method** 4
pragmatic **awareness** 4
pre **reading** 4
pre task 4
pre-university students 4
predictive validity 4
processing instruction 4
public schools 4
reading   comprehension
questions 4
research article abstracts 4
research article introductions 4
speaking strategies 4
structural equation modeling 4
structural   equation   modeling
approach 4
style preferences 4
systemic functional **grammar** 4
target language 4
task type/s 4
teacher cognition 4
teacher education 4
teacher **feedback** 4
teachers and learners 4
teachers **perception** 4
teaching critical thinking 4
teaching styles 4
test taking 4
test taking **strategies** 4
thinking skills 4
top notch series 4

translation strategies 4
use of communication **strategies**
4
working **memory** 4
writing achievement 4
writing fluency 4
writing instruction 4
contrastive analysis of English
and   Persian   3

Bibliographic information of this paper for citing:

Farjami, H. (2019). Mapping the landscape of Iranian language teaching research: A corpus-study of the titles of English-language research articles. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies, 6*(4), 31-58.