The Effect of Iranian EFL Learners' Gender and Their Learning Styles on Their English Learning Success

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Abstract

Language Learners are affected by many factors in the foreign language learning process. Cognitive styles such as field dependent-independent can be mentioned as one of the factors that affect language learning. The present study was conducted to examine the effect of field dependent-independent (FD/FI) and gender on Iranian EFL Learners' English Success. One hundred and twelve male and female students of English as a foreign language (TEFL) from Farhangian and Shohadaye Farhangi High Schools, in Arak, Iran participated in the study. The instruments for data collection were Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) and an English Achievement Test. At first, the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) was given to the participants in order to identify field dependent/independent groups. Then, the participants were given an English Achievement Test. The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between learning styles and English learning success of the participants. Also, the statistical results indicated that there was no significant correlation between the subjects' gender and their English learning success, that is, Iranian female learners performed the same as Iranian male learners in English achievement test.

Keywords: Learning style, field dependent, field independent, gender, English success

1. Introduction

1.1. Language learning

Language learning has always become an important work-field both in schools and other private sectors dealing with language teaching and learning process. There is no doubt that

learning a foreign language is so complicated that a wide range of different factors should be considered in the process of learning it (Gorjian, Pazhakh and Parang ,ibid).

1.2. Learning Style

On the other hand, Some of the studies conducted on field dependence / field independence cognitive style include investigation of the interaction between field dependent/independent learning style and learners' linguality in third language acquisition (Maghsoudi, 2007; cited in Onyekuru,2015), the influence of the nature of field dependence/field independence construct on academic achievements as well as on the thinking style construct (Lucas-Standard ,ibid), undergraduate students' academic achievement, field dependent/independent cognitive styles and attitude towards computers (Altun and Cakan, ibid), cognitive style (field-dependent/independent) and sex as mediators of biology retention-test performance of students exposed to two instructional modes in Benin City, Nigeria by Adeyemi (ibid), effect of cognitive styles (field dependence/independence) and instructional strategies on students' achievement in social studies (Ndudi and Mkpa, ibid) and the influence of gender and cognitive style (field dependent/independent) on senior secondary two (SS11) students' achievement in physics essay test (Okwo and Otubah, ibid). Bernati & Lloyd (2007) mentioned, that overall males and females held similar beliefs about language learning, with only one item being statistically significant and another one being marginally significant.

1.3. Gender

Recently the topic of the role of gender in second language learning has been researched greatly by ESL and language specialists. When examining the role of gender on the learning of language, one must consider that there are numerous ways in which it can affect language use and development. Gender is a concept that contributes different linguistic strategies to both genders based on context. It means that the concept of gender presents the social and contextual expectations each society put on the part of each gender culturally as well as socially. Susan Hugar (cited in Abedi, 2015) in her article by the title of "The effect of gender on first and second language use and acquisition" stated that gender is a variable that can affect language use and learning as a result of biological differences between the two sexes, psychological effects, or socio-cultural influences.

1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

RQ1: Does Iranian EFL learners' gender affect their English success?

RQ2: Do Iranian EFL learners' learning styles affect their English success?

H1: Iranian EFL learners' gender affects their English learning success.

H2: Iranian EFL learners' learning styles affect their English learning success.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The subjects of this study consisted of 112 Iranian male and female high school students aged between 14 to 15 years old who were in eighth grade .It must be noted that all the participants were from Arak and lived in this city, since the researchers did their best to invite the students from the same socio-cultured context to participate in this study.

2.2 Instruments

The following instruments were employed to collect the needed data:

2.2.1. The Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT), Field dependence / Independence

The Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) was employed to classify subjects' learning styles. The ease of administrating and scoring the test, as well as the evidence given in literature with respect to its reliability and validity, make GEFT a satisfactory instrument in research requiring group testing, and consequently, it was chosen as an instrument for measuring FD/FI in the present study. Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) is developed by Witkin et al. (1971). He reported a Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient of 0.82 for their instrument.

Funk, Nelson and Panek (1980, as cited in Farsi, et al.,2014) reanalyzed data from an earlier investigation to determine the reliability and validity of the GEFT. They found that the GEFT had adequate split-half reliability. The reliability of GEFT was reported by (Elliotte, ibid) to be 0.90.

The GEFT instrument contains three sections with 25 complex figures from which participants are asked to identify eight simple forms (labeled A to H). The first section is for the sake of practice. Participants receive no points in this part. It has seven figures and takes two minutes. Section two and three include nine complex figures each. The respondents are asked to find the simple forms (A to H) in the complex figures and to trace them in pencil directly over the lines of the complex figures. Since the first seven items on the GEFT are not scored, the maximum score (indicating the highest level of field independence) is 18. Each item has one point. Participants are given ten minutes to answer the second and the third part. Each part has five minutes. Section three also scores nine. The higher a student's score, the more field independent he/ she would be (See Appendix 1).

Those whose scores on GEFT are equal to or more than mean are classified as field independent and those whose scores are less than mean are field dependent. GEFT is a perceptual psychological test, in which the subject's task is to locate a previously seen simple figure within a larger complex figure that has been organized to obscure or embed the simple figure. An example of such a simple form hidden in a complex one is presented below in figure 1.

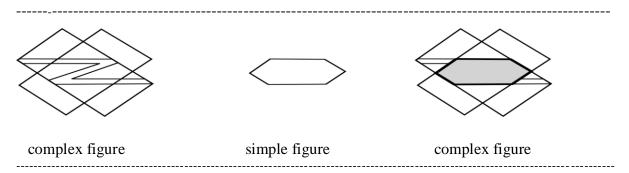


Figure 1.1. A sample item of GEFT

2.2.2. Test of English achievement

Test of English Achievement was composed of 24 items for reading comprehension, language function, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. The reliability of this test was 0.9 based on Kr-21 formula. Also, 60 minutes was allotted for the test (See Appendix II).

2.3. Procedures

The data for the study was collected during different phases and between November 2015 and January 2016 in two high schools named Farhangian and Shohadaye Farhangi High Schools, in Arak (an industrial city in Markazi province). For collecting the data in the current study the following steps were taken.

Phase one:

In the first step, Test of English Achievement was piloted with 12 male and female Iranian EFL learners. This was done to assure the reliability of this material and to determine the allotted time needed for the test. The reliability of the test was 0.9 based on Kr-21 reliability. It was also, proved that 60 minutes would be sufficient for the subjects to complete the English Achievement Test.

Phase two:

This was the main phase of gathering the intended data, therefore lots of care was taken to conduct it. It was hold during four days. On Saturday, January^{16th}, 56 male EFL learners participants participated in this study. They took part in Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT) at 8 a.m. and 56 female EFL learners took part in Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT) at 9:45 a.m. on Sunday, January^{17th}. Then 56 male participants participated in the test of Achievement on Saturday, January^{23th} and 56 female EFL learners took part in the test of Achievement on Sunday, January^{24th}. The time of the Achievement Test was around 11 a.m. In short, all required information was given to the subjects before administering the instruments, information like how to answer the test.

Phase three:

The data was analyzed by the means of the statistical package SPSS. Independent Sample ttest was performed in order to determine whether the possible difference in means between the two groups was significant at the .05 level or not. For the two hypotheses, the mean scores of the two groups (males and females) were computed by Independent Sample t-test and the results were analyzed. Mann-Whitney U and t-test were also utilized for the purpose of data analysis.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Statistical analysis of the effect of gender on Iranian EFL Learners' English learning success

One hundred twelve EFL learners from two high schools named Farhangian and Shohadaye Farhangi High Schools in Arak participated in the current study in the form of two different groups. As it was mentioned earlier the two groups of participants were:

- a) Fifty six EFL male learners from Shohadaye Farhangi High School
- b) Fifty six EFL female learners from Farhangian High School

Table 1.

Test of Normality

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
socres	.120	110	.001	.949	110	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

First, to make sure of the normal distribution of scores, the current researchers employed the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk. Since the sig was less than .05, it could be concluded that the distribution of scores between the Iranian male and female subjects invited to this study was not normal. Therefore, the researchers had to employ a non-parametric test as Mann-Whitney U test for their purpose.

Table 2.

Mean Rank

Ranks

	gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
socres	boys	55	50.07	2754.00
	girls	55	60.93	3351.00
	Total	110		

According to Table 2, the males' mean score is 50.07 whereas the female's mean score is 60.93. Therefore, the females' mean score is higher than the males' mean scores.

Table 3.

Test Mann-Whitney U

Test Statistics^a

	socres
Mann-Whitney U	1214.000
Wilco <i>x</i> on W	2754.000
Z	-1.785
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.074

a. Grouping Variable: gender

As indicated in Table 3, Mann- Whitney U test shows sig=0.074>0.05 and Mann-Whitney U=1214 that it means there is no significant difference between the males' mean score compared with the females' mean score, therefore gender does not affect learners' English learning success and the first hypothesis (Iranian EFL Learners' gender affects their English learning success) is rejected.

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Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics

	Descriptives							
	gender		Statis tic	Std. Error				
socres	boys	Mean	13.0773	.51288				
		Median	14.0000					
		Variance	14.467					
		Std. Deviation	3.80359					
		Minimum	4.00					
		Maximum	20.00					
		Range	16.00					
	girls	Mean	14.1818	.53825				
		Median	15.5000					
		Variance	15.934					
		Std. Deviation	3.99173					
		Minimum	4.75					
		Maximum	19.50					
		Range	14.75					

According to Table 4, the mean score of males' scores is 13.08 and the mean score of female' is 14.18. It shows that gender does not affect the EFL learners' English learning success, therefore the first hypothesis is rejected.

3.2. Statistical Analysis of the effect of learning styles on Iranian EFL learners' English learning success

Table 5.

Descriptive Statistics based on Male's learning styles

		Descriptives ^a		
	group		Statistic	Std. Error
socres	independent	Mean	14.1071	.60002
		Median	14.6250	
		Variance	10.081	
		Std. Deviation	3.17501	
		Minimum	8.50	
		Maximum	20.00	
		Range	11.50	
	dependent	Mean	12.0093	.79936
		Median	11.7500	
		Variance	17.252	
		Std. Deviation	4.15359	
		Minimum	4.00	
		Maximum	17.75	
		Range	13.75	

a.gender=boys

As it was determined by the result of Table 5, the mean score of independent males is 14.11 whereas the mean score of dependent males is 12.01. This shows that learning styles affect the EFL learners' English learning success, therefore the second hypothesis is accepted.

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Table 6.

Descriptive Statistics based on female' learning styles

	group		Statistic	Std. Error
socres	independent	Mean	15.6250	.69490
		Median	17.1250	
		Variance	10.624	
		Std. Deviation	3.25937	
		Minimum	7.50	
		Maximum	19.50	
		Range	12.00	
	dependent	Mean	13.2197	.72885
		Median	14.0000	
		Variance	17.530	
		Std. Deviation	4.18692	
		Minimum	4.75	
		Maximum	19.00	
		Range	14.25	

Descriptives^a

a. gender = girls

According to the result of Table 6, the mean score of independent females is 15.63 whereas the mean score of dependent females is 13.22. Therefore, it is understood that there is a significant

difference between Independent learners' mean score compared with dependent learners' mean score, therefore the second hypothesis (Iranian EFL learners' learning styles affect their English learning success) is accepted.

Table 7.

Test of Normality

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
scores-girls	.144	55	.006	.919	55	.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

First, to make sure of the normal distribution of scores, the current researchers employed the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk. Since the sig was less than .05, it could be concluded that the distribution of scores between the Iranian male and female subjects invited to this study was not normal. Therefore, the researchers had to employ a non-parametric test as Mann-Whitney U test for their purpose.

Table 8.

Group Statistics

Group Statistics^a

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
socres	independent	28	14.1071	3.17501	.60002
	dependent	27	12.0093	4.15359	.79936

a. gender = boys

Based on the males' scores normality Independent Test is suitable to find the effect of learning styles on the learners' English learning success. Therefore, Table 8 shows that the independent males' mean score is higher than the dependent males' mean score and this means that the second hypothesis is supported.

Table 9.

Independent Samples test

			Testfor Variances			t-test fo	r Equality of M	eans		
							Mean	Std. Error	95% Cou Interva Differ	l of the
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Difference	Difference	Lower	Upper
socres	Equal variances assumed	2.619	.112	2.109	53	.040	2.09788	.99465	.10286	4.09290
	Equal variances not assumed			2.099	48.673	.041	2.09788	.99950	.08897	4.10679

Independent Samples Test^a

a. gender = boys

According to Table 9, sig=0.112>0.05, F=2.619, therefore, there is no Equal Variance. On the other hand, sig=0.041<0.05, t=2.099 that means there is a significant difference between the independent males' mean score compared with dependent males' mean score. Hence, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Table 10.

Mean Ranks

	group	Ν	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
socres	independent	22	33.95	747.00
	dependent	33	24.03	793.00
	Total	55		

Ranks^a

a. gender = girls

According to Table 10, the independent females' mean score is 33.95 whereas the dependent females' mean score is 24.03. That is, the independent females' mean score is higher than the dependent females' mean scores, therefore the second hypothesis is supported.

Table 11.

Test Mann-Whitney U

	socres
Mann-Whitney U	232.000
Wilco <i>x</i> on W	793.000
Z	-2.252
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.024

Test Statistics^{a,b}

a. Grouping Variable: group

b. gender = girls

As indicated in Table 11, sig=0.0.024<0.05 and Mann-Whitney U=232 that it means there is significant difference between the independent females' mean score compared with the dependent females' mean score, therefore learning styles affect the learners' English learning success. Hence, the second hypothesis (Iranian EFL learners' learning styles affect their English learning success) is accepted.

According to analyzed data, the second hypothesis was accepted and we found that learning styles affect the Iranian EFL Learners' English learning success. This part of the result of the study was in the same line with some other studies. According to Diupina and Cheremoshkina (2014) the highest intellectual productivity is observed by representatives of mobile field independence cognitive style. In particular, mobile field independence people have higher educational achievement from tests in biology, mathematics and chemistry, more productive in terms of working memory and mental stress. The studies of Goodenough, Karp, Moss and Selivano (cited in Diupina, 2014) also revealed the significant relationships between field dependence - field independence and subtests in Wechsler IQ test.

As mentioned earlier, Mann-Whitney U Test indicated that sig=0.074>0.05 and Mann-Whitney U=1214 that is there is no significant difference between the males' mean score compared with the females' mean score, therefore gender does not affect learners' English learning success and the second hypothesis (Iranian EFL Learners' gender affects their English learning success) is rejected. This result is not in line with some other researches. Kilosmeive and Wilesman in Obioma (2006) reports significant high performance of girls in divergent thinking while boys were found to be higher in convergent thinking. This means that boys are likely to make mistakes in their writing, which requires divergent thinking than their female

counterparts (cited in Fidelia, 2015). Some other studies have shown no significance difference in the performance of males and females in the English language learning. Radin (1991), Balarabe (1994) and Bodunde (2001) found no gender difference in motivation, learning and performance in language (ibid).

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of learning styles and gender on Iranian EFL learners' English learning Success. The result of the study showed that there was no significant difference between the males' mean score compared with the females' mean score therefore, gender does not affect learners' English learning success and the first hypothesis (Iranian EFL Learners' gender affects their English learning success) is rejected. The result of this part of the study was not in line with some other researches that have been mentioned gender as impacting upon speech strategies, isolating female speakers as the marked gender, though this view is also questioned and undermined by many scholars (Connell, 1995; Cameron, 1998; Davies, 1999).(cited in; Jule,2004).

On the other hand, the result of the study revealed that there is a meaningful difference between Independent learners' mean score compared with dependent learners' mean score therefore the second hypothesis (Iranian EFL Learners' Learning styles affect their English learning success) was accepted.

According to Souzandehfar, (2011) the statistically insignificant effect of the learners' cognitive style (FD/I) and their gender on speaking performance, which has been demonstrated in the Iranian EFL situation reveals that at least for this sample of Iranian collegians, the cognitive learning style (FD/I) may not be a factor in interpreting the learners' speaking performance.

4.1. Pedagogical Implication

The findings of this study have some implications for researchers, course designers, educators and EFL instructors and learners. The issue of gender has remained a controversial issue as to whether it influences students' academic achievement or not. This may also affect students' performance in learning language. It is suggested to the researchers that focus their researches to the effect of gender on language learning success and also consider the role of learning styles in language achievement. As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study can have some implication for the academic books providers to take more care about the learners' gender and their learning styles. Also, for the English language teachers who should be sensible to the cultural matters in the teaching process because students with different cultures need special attention to be successful. In other words, considering the learners' gender and learning styles make the English language teachers to choose more practical teaching method so that the students would be more successful in language learning process.

EFL language learners are suggested to have greater exposure to socio-cultural information about the English speaking people and to study about these countries and people to increase their own English knowledge so that they could be more succeed in language learning.

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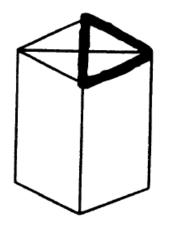
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APPENDICES

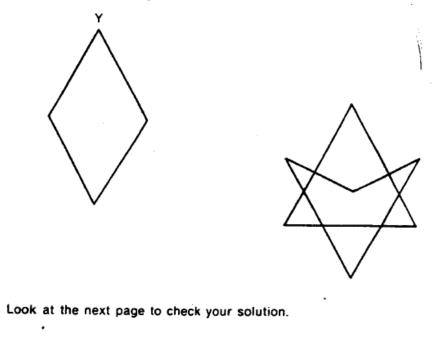
Appendix1

This is the correct solution, with the simple form traced over the lines of the complex figure:

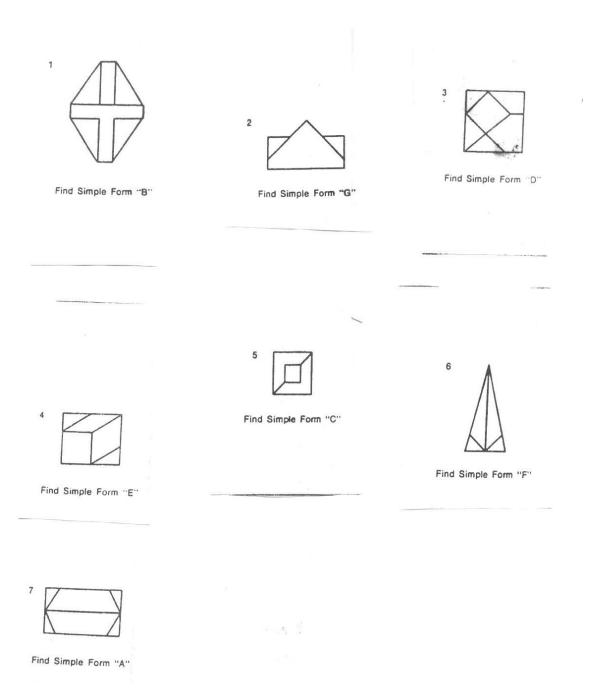


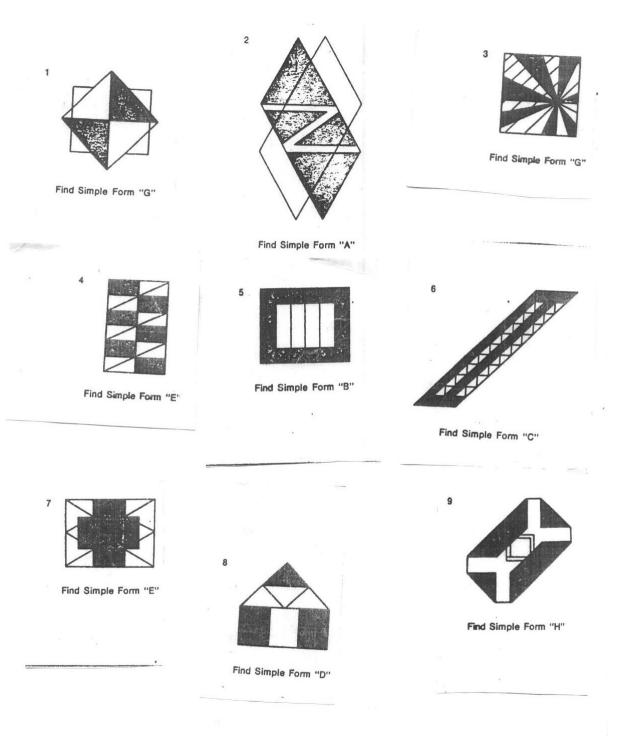
Note that the top right-hand triangle is the correct one: the top left-hand triangle is similar, but faces in the opposite direction and is therefore not correct.

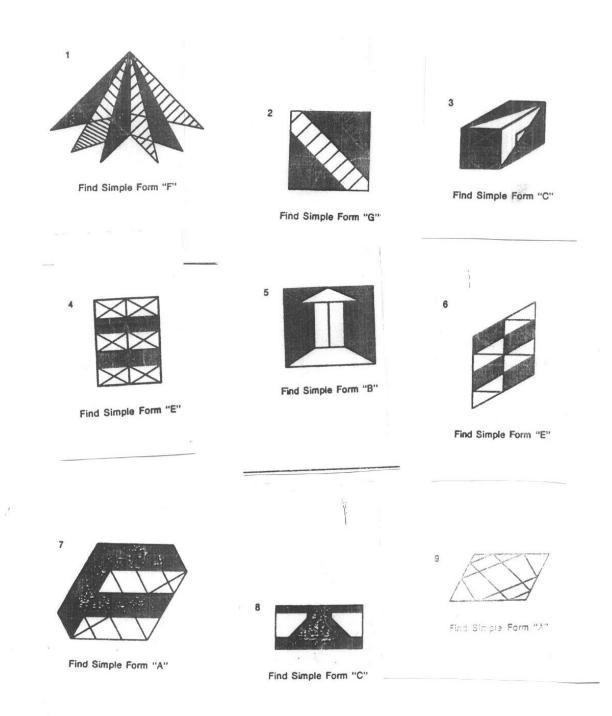
Now try another practice problem. Find and trace the simple form named "Y" in the complex figure below it:



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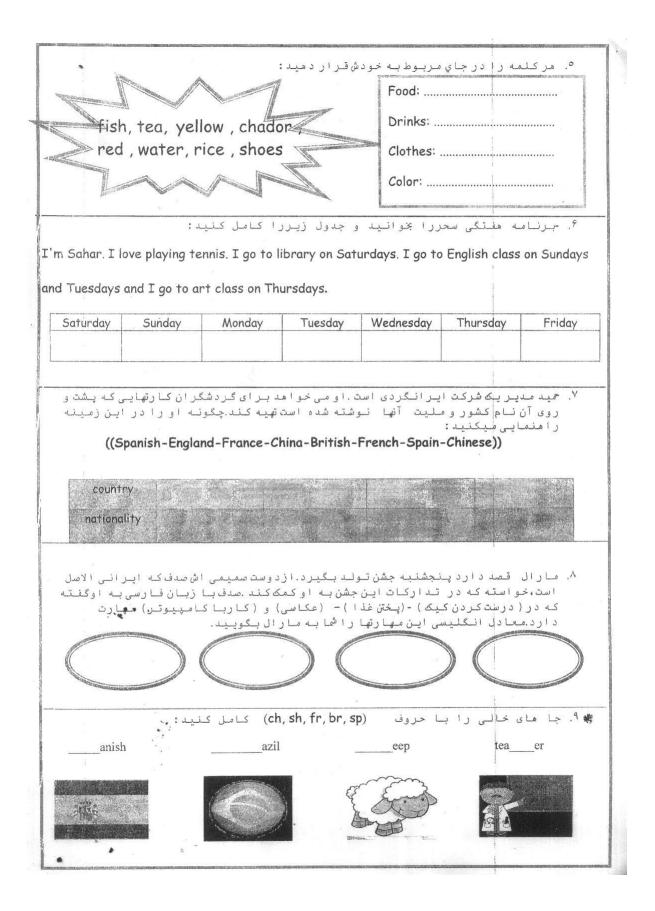






Appendix II

English Achievement Test Name: Prospect 1&2 ۱. با توجه بله تصاویر اسامی افراد را در جای خالی قرار دهید: He is Brazilian. He speaks English. Jairo He is fifteen years old. Name : Jairo Agos 1 11 Livos i Brazilia, Brazil He is from Brazil. 15 Lordon, Briteir دور اسامی آتایان خط بکشید: ٢ ¥ Kaveh _ Moosa _ Akbar_ Akram _ Parisa _ Parastoo _ Peyman 🔻 ۳. مشاور مدرٰسه از شما خواسته است تا برنامه روزانه خود ر! به طور مختصر برایش بنوٰیسید. ساعت ها و برنامه های روزانه بهم ریخته است.آنها را بهم وصل كنيد 1. eat lunch a. at 7:30 a.m. 2. get up b. at 6:00 p.m. 3. eat dinner c. at 10:30 p.m. 4. do my homework d. at 1:30 p.m. ؛ دوست شما می خواهدبراي دريافت ماهانه روزنامه انگليسی زبان عضو شود ولی در پر کردن فرمش مشکل دارد. شما با توجه به اطلاعات داده شده به او کمک کنید اطلاعات را به انگلیسی وارد فرم مورد نظر بکنه: First name نام :مينا نام خانوادگی :امینی Last name نام پدر :علی Father's name سن: ١٢ Age کشور :ایران شهر :اراک Country di li e di 09171234567 شماره تلفن City Phone number آدرس :خيابان حافظ Address



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۱۰. در سفر ، یکی از توریست ها بیمار می شود و به پزشک مراجعه می کند.او شرح بیماریش را می نویسد و ازشما میخواهدتا معادل فارسی کلماتی را که مشخص کرده برایش بنویسد تا به پزشک نشان دهد معادل فارسی این کلمات را بنویسید: This morning, I had a headache and a sore throat. Now I have a runny nose .I have an earache, too. Is it flu or cold? 3..... 1 4..... 2..... ۱۱. در هتلی که نیما اقامت دارد، فرمی به آنها داده شده تا ورزش مورد علاقه شان را. مشخص کنند .با توجه به تصاویر داده شده جملات زیر را در فرم کامل کنید: Joe Emily Helen Hans . 2 1. Emily: I can 2. Hans: I'm good at.... 3. Joe: I 4. Helen' I'm ۱۲.مهسا تعدادی کلمه انگلیسی را روی یک کارتنوشته و می خواهد آنها را از نظر موضوع دسته بندی کند .به او کمک کنید تا کارتها را دسته بندی کنند و در جا های مشخص شده بنويسيد: (Wednesday - Brazil - Ride a horse - Play ping pong - Korea - Monday) Days of the week Ability Country

و متن آن را تکمیل First Name: <u>Azar</u> Last Name:	۱۳.طبق اطلاعات داده شده کارت کنید:
LIBRARY CARD	A: Hi. What's your? B: Hello. My is Azar. A: And your last name?
FIRST NAME:	Hi. My name is Ali Mohammadi. My first name is Ali and my last name is Mohammadi
ییر مـورد نظر بـنویـسید؟یـک کـلمه اضافی است	۱۴.کلمات داده شده را زیر تصو
(sneeze-backache-drugstore-stomac	hache-headache)
() ()) ()
ل کنید:	
Ali and Reza are classmates. Reza is to is 14.Today Ali is sick. He has a temper doctor. Reza has a toothache and he s	erature. He should see a
Name • Health problem Ali Reza	advice
بریزید و یک کلمه جدید بسازید اسم یک بدست می آید.	۱۶ ۴. اگر شما ترتیب حروف کلمه "INHCA" را بهم
city O country O	sport O animal O

١٧.جدول زیر بلرنامه اوقات فراغت شما را نشان می دهد ،پاسخ سوالاتی که در یک پرسشنامه از شما پرسینده شده است را بدهید. Saturday Wednesday Sunday Monday Tuesday Thursday Friday 1. What days do you watch TV?..... 2. What do you do on the weekend? 🗚 ۱۸.یک کلمه مشترک را پیدا کنید که اگر به آخر کلمات داده شده زیر اضافه شود،کلمات جدیدی ساخته می شوند. (آن را در نقطه چین بنویسید.) tooth..... stomach..... head back..... ♥ ۱۹.چند دانش آموز عضو کتابخانه ای شده اند. قرار است دختران در شیفت صبح و یسران در شیفت عصر از کتابخانه استفاده کنند. اسامی آنها را به ترتیب حروف الفبا در دو لیست زیر به انگلیسی بنویسید: (گلناز - سیمین - الهام- هادی - کیمیا - محسن- کریم - صالح) Girl's name Boy's name ۲۰ 卷 ۲۰. خانم آذری حدود پنج سال است که ازدواج کرده است، شما برای صدا زدن وی کدام یک از القاب زیر را به کار می برید؟ جملوی جواب درست تیک بزنید. A) Mrs. Azari B) Mr. Azari C) Miss Azari

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قت بخوانيد و	۲۱. مکالمه زیر گفتگوی بین پر هام و یک توریست است برای درک بهتر محتوای آن ابتدا مکالمه را با د
	سپس با کلمات داده شده آنر ا کامل کنید. (یک کلمه اضافی است)
	(good - where -nationality - wrong - speak)
Parham:	Hello, I'm Parham. What's?
Tourist:	Hi. I don't know this address. Can you help me?
Parham:	Oh, sure are you from?
Tourist:	Italy. Can you Italian?
Parham:	No, I'm not at it.
Tourist:	No, problem! I can help you with your Italian.
Parham: My name	Oh, thanks. Let's go to your address now. ۲۲. متن زیر را بخوانید و به سوالات آن پاسخ دهید. Is Reza. I'm from Fordo: Fordo is a mountain village. It's in the south of
	do is very famous for it's fields. There are a lot of people in Fordo.
They wor snowy in I	k on farms and raise animals. Fordo is cool and rainy in spring and winter.
1 Where	is Fordo?
	the people's job in Fordo?
	the weather like in spring?
	*

