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Delving into the Future of Iran's English Language Teaching in Light of Technology

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Abstract

This article examines the prospect of replacing EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers with technology in Iran. It has adopted the approach of Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) to analyze the data collected from interviews with 10 EFL experts in Iran. The four layers of CLA do suggest that it is unlikely that technology will replace EFL teachers in Iran by 2030. Iran, being a hierarchical, collectivist, and restrained society with a normative cultural orientation and preference for avoiding uncertainty, will be reluctant to accept technological innovation so quickly which would replace EFL teachers. Further research covering a time frame beyond 2030 would be needed.

Keywords: causal layered analysis (CLA), English as a foreign language (EFL), English language teaching (ELT), and technology

Introduction

To survive in the age of globalization and cyber-communication, one needs to be fully prepared to face the challenges of this rapidly changing world. Futures Studies (FS), as an interdisciplinary field of study, has been established to anticipate possible future events. Granted the significance of FS in recognizing and shaping future developments, any attempt to predict the future of a professional career is of high value, and the field of language education is no exception in this regard.

For instance, ELT (English Language Teaching) is likely to be influenced by the growth of global Englishes, the shift in employment patterns, and the development of technology among other factors (Warschauer, 2000).

The influence of technology development has been phenomenal in ELT since its early application in the 1960s. The applied technology in language laboratories provided drilled-based practices (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) to improve the aural-oral skills of students. By 2010, technology expanded its role from being

an instructional tool to a provider of content, a learning management tool, and a communication tool (Nunan, 2010). By 2014, it could even support raising language learners' output and feedback (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, & Freynik, 2014).

Many studies had researched on the effectiveness of the application of language learning technology to Second Language and Foreign Language (SL and FL) development. The findings in the study by Grgurovic, Chapelle, and Shelley in 2013 confirm the findings from other studies that technology is helping language teaching to be more effective. Language learning technology includes various fields such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Web-Assisted Language Learning (WALL), Robot Assisted Language Learning (RALL), Virtual World Language Learning, Web 2.0, etc. However, there are very few studies investigating the influence of technology on the future of ELT as there are just too few applications of FSs to the realm of EFL.

Besides, learning English is becoming increasingly popular in Iran as well as the whole world. Some likely reasons are the growing need and enthusiasm to understand texts on modern science and technology, the necessity of having adequate English proficiency in higher education, and Iran's expanding effort to foster closer foreign relations with English-speaking countries (Farhady, Sajadi Hezaveh, & Hedayati, 2010). The 3000 odd language institutions in Iran reflect the huge demand in learning foreign languages (especially English). This has created an increased request for proficient EFL teachers and an increased application of technology to augment the effectiveness of EFL teaching.

However, technology not only helps language learning in classrooms but also provides easy access to enormous amount of up-to-date training materials through the Internet, which would tend to create autonomous learners (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). With technology enabling language learner autonomy and available vast training materials on the Internet, how will technology and the Internet affect the future of EFL teachers? Considering the further challenges the EFL teachers face by the daily improvement of technology, will this profession be impaired or replaced by future technology?

This study will attempt to answer these questions by applying CLA techniques to appraise the views obtained from the interviews of several Iranian EFL experts critically. We hope the findings will help the present and future generations to be aware of the potential impact of technology in ELT. We also hope the Ministry of Science and Education will accept our findings and accordingly modify their recruitment policies for EFL teachers.

Related Literature Review

The effectiveness of technology on language learning has been the focus of different research studies for decades.

Grgurovic, Chappelle, and Shelley (2013) did a meta-analysis on thirty-seven studies dating from 1970 to 2006 to determine the effectiveness of technology computer-supported language learning. It yielded 52 effect sizes. An effect size is a measure that describes the magnitude of the difference between two groups. (More information on effect size can be attained at Cohen (1992)). Their study confirms the positive influence of technology-supported pedagogy in promoting second or foreign language development.

Moreover, the use of language learning technologies in the four areas of speaking and listening, collaborative writing, reading and language structure, and online interaction is discussed in a study entitled "Emerging Technologies for Autonomous Language Learning" by Warschauer and Liaw (2011). They linked speech recognition (EnglishCenrtal) and podcasts to speaking and listening; blogs and wikis along with Fanfiction.net to collaborative writing; reading Companion website, LiveInk, and computer-based concordance to reading and language structure; and finally Multiuser

virtual environments like Second Life and multiplayer games, social network sites, and Chabot's to online interaction. Each of these technologies offers tools and materials for autonomous language learning to every language learner of every age, interest, and requirements.

Beside the changes technology has made in the way a language is taught, humanoid artificially intelligent robots can change the assumed role of EFL teachers as well. Various studies (e.g., Meghdari et al., 2013; Lee, Lee, Lee, Lee, & Noh, 2011; Chang, Chao, Chen, Lee, & Wang, 2010) have confirmed the language teacher robots efficiency. Their favorable characteristics are repeatability, flexibility, digitization, humanoid appearance, body movement, interaction, and anthropomorphism (Chang et al., 2010). "Robots not only have the features and interfaces already being employed in CALL/MALL, but are also capable of autonomous movements, visual/voice recognition, and physical/environmental interactions when equipped with various sensors" (Meghdari et al., 2013, p.67). They can also recognize nonverbal communication like facial expressions, gestures, and actions (Meghdari et al., 2013).

The numbers of studies confirming the effectiveness of technology on language learning are quite extensive. In comparison, there are very few studies on the impact of technology on the future of ELT profession. One notable exception is a study by Futurist Thomas Frey. He believes that education is moving toward a teacherless system. In his lecture at TED xReset Conference in Istanbul, Turkey in 2012, he predicted that over two billion of the jobs existing today would disappear by 2030. These jobs will either become redundant or evolve into some other job scopes or functions. Five sectors will be particularly affected. They are Energy, Transportation, Education, 3D printing, and Artificial intelligent robots. As it is beyond the scope of this study to cover all these five sectors, we will focus only on education.

Frey (2012) stated that educational courses would become increasingly commoditised. E-learning and online courses are designed to be taught once, recorded, and redelivered repeatedly. Thus, the teaching model is progressively replaced by a learning model. Teaching experts will have to become learning coaches. The new education system will be one, which is teacherless.

Methodology

Participants

Two groups of EFL experts were asked to participate in this study. The first group included English language professors of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran (n=eight; one female, seven males). Their major was either Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or English language translation. The second group comprised Ph.D. graduates of English Translation and Linguistics who taught English or operate English language institutions in Mashhad, Iran (n= two; one female, one male).

The rationale behind choosing these two groups was to include only the EFL experts who have sufficient experience and are struggling with the problem of incorporating technology into the teaching curriculum. Also, the participants were chosen from both public and private sectors. They included both genders with an age range of 30 to 65 years. To include different perspectives, participants with different experience levels (ranging from a professor to a language institution teacher), were included.

Procedure

To collect the necessary data, the researchers framed the following interview questions based on the review of the recent literature on English learning technology. A list of suggested questions was developed mainly based on Inayatullah's CLA methodology (four CLA layers explained in section 3.3). After receiving experts' feedback on the items, revisions, and improvements were made.

The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participating experts beforehand. Moreover, the participants were informed that the survey sought their opinions and not the correctness of their views. They were assured of the anonymity of their identity

The response from each participant was recorded and kept separately to pinpoint their individual positions appropriately in the four layers of CLA. Then, alternative futures of the ELT profession were developed.

Questions asked on language learning technology and its development during the interviews concerning the four layers of CLA were:

1. What will ELT be like in 2030? (Litany level)
2. What factors (social, technical, environmental, economic, and political) prompt ELT at the litany level? (Systemic causes)
3. What beliefs and assumptions support and legitimate ELT? (Worldview/Discourse level)
4. What are the popular myths/metaphors about teachers and the concept of future in the Iranian culture? What do they show? (Myth/Metaphor level)

Method of Data Analysis

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of language learning technology on the future of ELT. Thus, this study has adopted CLA as a FSs methodology because of its ability to manifest and interpret the qualitative data by deconstructing and reconstructing the data into separate, specific layers.

CLA is a futures research theory and methodology derived from theories of poststructuralist discourse and developed by Sohail Inayatullah (1998, 2002, & 2004). Inayatullah (1998) mentioned, "CLA is concerned less with predicting a particular future and more with opening up the present and past to create alternative futures. It opens up space for the articulation of constitutive discourses which can then be shaped as scenarios" (p.815). CLA has four main components, and each component thoroughly investigates a level of the subject of the study. Inayatullah (1998) best describes the method as an "iceberg" having different layers with the Litany level at the top, Systemic Causes below it, Worldview level below that, and Myth/Metaphor level at the bottom.

The functions of each layer of CLA are briefly summarized below:

(1) The first component examines the litany level. This most obvious, superficial layer states the problems as they are seen by public eyes (top of the iceberg). It represents related quantitative data and leaves the reader to think about the problem with a feeling of "helplessness, apathy, or projected action" (Inayatullah, 2004, p. 12).

(2) The second component is concerned with systemic causes. It looks beneath the surface for the social, technological, economic, environmental, political, and historical causes underlying the observable data mapped at the litany level. The role of the government and other actors and interests is often explored at this level.

(3) The third component is the worldview level. This level unpacks the belief systems and their respective underlying assumptions that support and legitimize the issue. This layer explores the different discourses on the issue. This helps in drawing the alternative scenarios based on these varied discourses.

(4) The last component is the myth or metaphor level. It deals with "deep stories, the collective archetypes - the unconscious and often emotive dimensions of the problem or the paradox" (Inayatullah, 2004, p.13). Inayatullah (2004) believes that the deep root of the worldviews and discourses are embedded in unconscious myth/metaphors whose nonrational ways of knowing are revealed at this final deepest layer.

Causal Layered Analysis Employed

Litany level

This layer focuses on the experts' views on the alternative futures of ELT profession in the light of present and future development in technology.

This is an issue, which practitioners are interested in and concerned with for some time. For example, Clifford (1998) claims that "computers will not replace teachers,... teachers who use computers will replace teachers who do not" (p.5). Warschauer (2000) states that 'distance education' can be a threat to ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) educators. Beatty (2010) considers the role of the computer as a virtual teacher "or, at least, taking the place of the teacher for some functions at some times as learners increase engagement in autonomous learning" (p.162). His view differs with Williams' (1998) who criticized the metaphor of the computer as a teacher. These diverse viewpoints show the complexity of the issue. Bateman (2014) points to the significant concern of language teachers as their future is threatened by the great improvement of technology in language learning.

These concerns are not without reasons. Many jobs have become redundant or been replaced by technology advances. These jobs range from bookbinders and mail carriers to film processors and typists. In addition, Bill Gates makes a more terrifying claim. He believes that within twenty years, several jobs can be replaced by software automation (Bort, 2014). Frey's (2012) study clearly showed the vulnerability of the teaching profession. He believes that teachers, trainers, and professors would be the "going away" jobs while coaches, course designers, and learning camps would be the "created" jobs.

In this light, the role of EFL teachers is in a very risky position. Language learning no longer means weekly trips to a computer lab. It can be done online whenever and wherever the learners desire. All that is needed is a ready access to a computer or smartphone. Flashcards, programs, software, multimedia, Corpora and concordances, Virtual Worlds, the Internet, and Web 2.0 that includes: image storage and sharing, Social bookmarking, discussion lists, blogs, wikis, social networking, chat rooms, MUDs (Multi-User Domains), MOOs (MUD Object Oriented), and MUVEs (Multi-User Virtual Environments), Podcasting, Audio tools, Video sharing applications, and screen capture tools, Animation tools - comic strips, movies, Mashups, etc. are some of language learning technologies. They allow self-access and autonomous learning of English in every area of language learning (Warschauer & Liaw, 2011).

Furthermore, a new tool for language learning that we have all thought and dreamed about is now in the market: Language Teacher Robots. These robots not only can interact with the learner through speech and movement, but they also can recognize nonverbal communication like facial expressions, gestures, and actions (Meghdari et al., 2013). We need to examine the extent the technology on robotics would advance and the extent these robots would support the roles of a human EFL teacher in the classroom.

Iran's English language learning/ learners

To explain how language learning takes place in Iran, and how technology serves it, language learners are classified into three groups with regard to their purposes and ages. Group one consists of teenagers learning English for General Purposes (EGP). Group two consists of EGP adults, and group three consists of adults learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Young EGP students in Group one normally start learning English in school. Some start learning English at younger ages in private language institutes. Usually, their goals are quite varied, ranging from participating in interactive computer games to browsing the web, and chatting online with foreigners, and getting better grades for English in school.

These children have daily access to computers, smart mobile phones, etc. Even families that may not be financially well-off possess one or more of these devices as a mean to communicate and share the experience with family and friends. Thus, it is possible for these children to have ready access to technological language learning tools, software, or applications. Most language software or courses are designed to teach one or more specific language aspect/skill (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, reading, writing, speaking, and listening) or to cover all the aspects with known methodology. These include software of the likes of Rosetta Stone, TELL ME MORE, Dualingo, Livemocha, and the newly Iranian release under the name of Step by Step. Also, they can be interactive, communicating with native and non-native speakers in the desired language through the Internet and providing feedback on the proper oral and written form of expression. Besides, the availability of language learning in the virtual world, starting in 1990, has played an effective role in creating the inductive and safe environment for the learner to learn the target language in a make-believe world.

The software and applications for children ranging from three to seven years old obviously are basic. They teach the language from scratch using animations, sounds, and objects in colors. It is now possible for a kid to start learning alphabets and names of objects simply by touching the screen. Learning vocabulary and proper construction of sentences can be done at a pace that the self-learner wants.

The second group, EGP adult learners, is varied in terms of age and educational degrees. They are goal-oriented "to advance their studies, to progress up the career ladder, to follow business opportunities, to assist their children with homework, or simply to be successful users of the language". (Smith and Strong, 2002. p.1)

Most adult EFL learners know English to some extent. Therefore, as English proficiency and learner autonomy are interrelated (Mohamadpour, 2013) they can benefit more from the autonomous language learning technology than children. Adults prefer autonomous language learning tools as they offer the convenience of time and place for self-spaced learning to succeed in the age of information (Warschauer & Shetzer, 2000). Autonomous learner in this study refers to self-learning students who take responsibility for their own learning (More information about autonomous learner is discussed by Thanasoulas (2000)). The advantages of autonomous language learning tools are study plans that can be individualized to the need and pace of the learner, anywhere/anytime instruction, step by step tutoring, a safe space to make mistakes, immediate and individualized feedback, and detailed records of achievement (Nunan, 2010). It would be difficult and time-consuming for busy adults to go to English classes three or more times a week over three or four years to learn English. Autonomous learning allows them to sit in front of the computer at home or office at preferred times, to put in any amount of time and to repeat the lesson as often as they like. This group of learners can also introduce English to their children and show them the technology of learning EFL.

The third group, ESP language learners, is more specific. They are likely to be academicians or professions. They can be students aiming to pass the university entrance exam, or those aiming

to pass the international, standardized tests of English proficiency for non-native English language speakers, including the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). They can be students trying to read or write English articles and books in their field of study, businesspersons who need to attend international meetings and conferences or technicians who need to order the required parts through an English catalog. Normally, these people spend a lot of time, energy, and money to learn the desired language skills. The traditional choices available to them in Iran are private EFL teachers, special classes in language institutions, and books. Recently we can add to this list on-line learning through relevant websites, software, and applications that can help this group to learn and practice the language outside the classroom. For example, British Council has introduced a software application to help those taking IELTS to develop and test all the required skills for the exam.

Besides software and applications, ESP students can use the Internet and related websites to become more proficient in the subject matter of their interest and to learn a language by focusing on both content and practice.

Thus, the use of the Internet resources will effectively make students become more autonomous in language learning. They will become less dependent on their teachers and more responsible for their own learning (Warschauer & Liaw, 2011).

However, the transition to high-tech autonomous learning systems will change the role of ESP teachers and the design of their courses. So the main issues confronting EFL teachers will be: How and to what extent would this phenomenon change the role of teachers? How detrimental will this development be on future of their teaching career?

The participants' viewpoints reflect on these. Their overall view is that technology will greatly influence English teaching; however, they believe that technology will not replace English teachers within next 15 years in Iran. The basis for this conclusion is based on the findings in the following layers.

Systemic causes

This level is concerned with systemic causes, including economic, cultural, political, and environmental factors and their roles in language learning technology use. These factors are interconnected but are presented in the order of significant as indicated by the participants.

Economic factors

"Economic factor" was the one pointed out by almost all of the participants as the most influential in determining the usage of technology by language learners. They believed that the use of technology is costly for both the government and families. The costs of hardwares and softwares and their maintenance are high. They believed "*Not everyone can afford the language learning technology*." one stated, "*We should consider every language learner with any financial status, not only the rich ones*." another mentioned.

However, the statistics show otherwise. They suggest that more than half of Iran's population is familiar with the Internet. According to Mehr news agency, the Internet penetration rate in Iran has reached 53.29 percent in June 2014. Out of 75,149,669 people living in Iran, 40,046,787 people use the Internet. Therefore, they have access to technology. This fact can manifest Steve Jobs' prediction in 1985, which came true in Iran. He predicted that, in the future, middle-class families would spend a lot to buy a personal computer to connect to a nationwide communications network (Internet). More than half Iranians use technology to access information and services through the Internet. Therefore, it will not take long for the younger generation to become "digital natives" whom it will be "normal" for to use instant and ready access modern technology including the technology for autonomous language learning.

"Digital natives" is a term coined in 2001 by researcher Marc Prensky. It refers to those who "have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computer's music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age" (Prensky, 2001, p.1). And "Normalization", stated by Bax in 2003, is a situation in which language learning technologies are used in daily classroom work as naturally as a whiteboard or a course book (Bax, 2003).

Demographic factors

Demographic factors are the next important agents mentioned by the participants. University students make up six percent of Iran's population in 2014 (Tansim news agency, 2014). To quote from one participant: "*All these students need to learn and improve their English language skill to perform better in life, but not all of them can learn English autonomously via technology*".

This viewpoint seems even more appropriate in the light of Iranian demographics. According to Tasnim news agency, United Nations' population estimation (2014) reports that Iran's population would reach 91.3 million in 2030. It will remain as the seventeenth overpopulated country in the world. Consequently, it may seem that access to technology to the level of autonomy for everybody is not applicable.

However, it is not the population size but the increase in students or children that matters. According to the same statistics, the number of children aged less than seven will dramatically decrease in contrast to the number of people aged from 30 to 50. The mean age will be 37.5, showing a trend towards an aging society. With the decrease in the number of students, there would be more chance of access of technology. Every family (adults) can prepare the technological needs for their one or two children. Thus, as stated before, the more technology access, the more autonomy of the language learner.

Political factors

Another influential factor is political. Iran's government censorship policy on websites such as Facebook and virtual language learning software (e.g., Second Life) can have an influence on learning English by means of technology. The slow Internet connectivity and international boycotts also hinder the access to helpful modern worldwide technologies in language learning process.

Furthermore, as one participant believed, a country's educational policy toward globalization and relocalization can influence the importation of language learning technology. If a country's educational policy encourages the usage of a foreign language, it will also promote its equipment and technologies to teach the foreign language. It is clear that educational policy makers in Iran decide on this. Related research by Khajavi and Abbasian (2011) has examined the cultural pattern of English language materials (textbooks) taught in Iranian public schools for their suitability to promote national identity and globalization. They found that while the materials are culturally neutral, they do not actively promote globalization.

Personal and social factors

The last, but not the least, are social and personal factors. One participant- pointed out that "*Language learning is a social act. Most People prefer to learn a language in the company of others. They prefer real contact with other learners to virtual contacts*". Different personality types have always been studied and discussed. Language learning ideology, computer anxiety, computer self-efficacy, cognitive abilities, the level of resistance to change, the educational and cultural status of the learner, etc. can all influence one's use of technology in his/her language learning process. These variables are fairly well researched but more need to be done.

Worldview level

This level seeks to understand the belief systems and their underlying assumptions of each participant to explain why they are not fearful of technology replacing the ELT profession in Iran within the next 15 years.

Greet Hofstede's cultural dimension theory (2010) ranks Iran in each dimension as follows: Power distance: 58, Individualism: 41, Masculinity: 41, Uncertainty avoidance: 59, Pragmatism: 14, and Indulgence: 40. Since culture changes very slowly, we assume the scores to be reliable within a contemporary timeframe.

As a result, Iran is a hierarchical, collectivist, feminine, and restrained society with a normative cultural orientation and preference for avoiding uncertainty. An attempt is made to elaborate the five related dimensions here:

Iran is a collectivist society

Iran, with a score of 41, is considered a collectivist society. Iranians like to be group members and hate to be loners. Thus, they prefer to acquire knowledge with classmates in a classroom. This can be counted as the reason for the participants' direct pinpointing to this preference (mentioned in the previous level).

Iran has a normative cultural orientation

Iran's low score of 14 in pragmatism points to strong normative cultural orientation. Iranians prefer to maintain time-honored tradition and norms. They view social change with suspicion. Traditionally Iranians have great respect for teachers and Islam, as the official religion, sanctifies this profession. Therefore, the bias is towards preserving teachers' job in the future.

Iran is a hierarchical society

An intermediate score of 58 on power distance indicates that Iran is a hierarchical society and that people accept a hierarchical order. The sanctity of the teaching profession places the teacher in the center and students (subordinates) expect being told what to do. The ideal teacher is a caring dictator (teacher-centered). One participant plainly stated, "*The role of teachers is essential to guide students through learning process*." A teacher-centric society deters people from envisioning the elimination of the teaching profession. To them, technology will never be considered as a good teacher because of its non-human and non-holy nature.

Iranians prefer to avoid uncertainty

Iran's score of 59 on the uncertainty avoidance dimension shows the nation's high preference for avoiding uncertainty. They uphold rigid codes of belief and behavior and have a high intolerance to new things. Thus, innovation will be hindered and security matters more. It becomes more complicated when technology comes from other cultures, especially from the West. Iranians are suspicious of western technology, and they tend to reject and avoid it more than accept it.

Iran has a culture of restraint

The low score of 40 in the indulgence dimension means that Iran has a culture of restraint. Restraint calls a society to suppress the fulfillment of needs and to regulate it with strict social norms. Social norms in Iran are mainly interpreted by religious leaders. Ninety-eight percent of Iranians are Muslims, and their belief system is driven by their religion. They value and respect their religion in personal and governmental matters.

The entry of technology into Muslim countries, in this case to Iran, has given rise to many controversial debates on the effect of technology on Iran's culture. They believe that western culture

is transmitted through its technology. As a result, some leaders of the country have banned the use of special kinds of websites (Facebook, Twitter) and technological applications like video calls through the phone.

Published books like "Technology and the Following Challenges" (Rezayi & Pishvayi, 2013) promotes an ideology that technology is not good for humanity. Such books cite some writers and journalists' negative views about technology and its effect on humanity. These writers and journalists include Neil Postman, Charles Taylor, Susan Greenfield, Carl Gustav Ung, Jerry Mander, etc. They believe that, not only technological progress will not supply human's solace and comfort, but it would also intensify many people's social problems.

The above-mentioned factors and cultural dimensions culminate in a kind of "Technophobia" among Iranians (participants as samples) that can be referred to as the reason for beholding the mentioned beliefs about the future of technology in ESL teaching in Iran.

However, the uncertainty makes us explore the alternative futures for EFL in Iran. We will envision four scenarios based on Dator's (2009) four generic alternative futures.

Four alternative scenarios of EFL teaching

1. The first possible future is "Continued Growth" when current conditions enhance as they continue into the future. We see the developmental pace in EFL technology has progressed significantly in the last 15 years. Laptops, smartphones, tablets, EFL software, and applications have been developed and made the language learning much easier. This has shifted the role of the EFL teacher from the deliverer of content into facilitators of the learning process. If the pace of progress in technology continues the same, EFL teaching profession will still become less and less relevant not only globally but in Iran as well.
2. The second future is the "Collapse Scenario". This future is the result of failure to sustain "Continued Growth". Economic and political crisis can create setbacks for technology development. Sanctions (e.g., U.S sanction imposed by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control in 1979) and war (e.g. Iran–Iraq War from 1980 to 1988) can cause Iran economic hardships, which contribute to less technology availability to the citizens. The current situation can worsen resulting in learners having less access to the latest technological devices, software, and programs (including EFL technology). Furthermore, hard economic time will reduce the affordability of technological devices and software for language learners. However, Dator (2009) stated that in such circumstances there are always "winners" who can benefit from the collapsed situation. The EFL teaching profession can be a "winner" profession as less EFL technology will result in the increased need for more EFL teachers.
3. The third future is "Discipline" or Disciplined Society" (Dator, 2009). It arises when "Continued Growth" is deemed not desirable due to the belief that natural and traditional ways should surpass the modern ones. This appears to be the preferred future state in Iran. Iranians value culture, traditions, and social norms, which are in conflict with "Continued Growth". The Continued Growth future will supply the society with innovations and technologies whereas when tradition prevails, less technology is used. Thus, teaching career will remain sacred and traditional; it may be even more glorified and respected than now.
4. The last alternative future is "Transformation Society" which "focuses on the powerfully transforming power of technology, especially robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI), genetic engineering, nanotechnology, teleportation, space settlement, etc." (Dator, 2009, p.10).

Huge technology changes and economic growth work together. Iran's recent agreement with the five powerful nations and the U.S (P5+1) may result in lifting Iran's international economic sanctions. Therefore, envisaging a "transformation society" is not impossible. In this future state, AI and robotics will be introduced more than ever. The language teaching profession will be

transformed by the availability of AI services or EFL teacher robots. Thus, the need for EFL human teachers will decrease, and the role of ELT profession will be reduced drastically.

Myth/Metaphor level

In this level, an attempt is made to uncover hidden and explicit mythologies, narratives, symbols, proverbs, and metaphors in Iran about the future concepts regarding the teaching of EFL.

There are three popular Iranian sayings that can reveal so much about society's conception about the teaching profession. Here are the translations:

1. Teaching is the job of the prophets.
2. We get our body from our father, but our spirit from our teacher.
3. The teacher's stick is a flower. Whoever is not punished by it, is an idiot. Moreover, there is another proverb about the future:
4. When tomorrow comes, we will think about it then.

The first saying shows the sanctity of the teaching profession. As mentioned at the worldview level, Iran's culture and religion highly value teachers and their profession. As the duty of the prophets was to guide humanity to the correct path in life, the same duty is placed on the teachers' shoulders. This shows the important role played by religion in people's beliefs about this profession.

The second saying is a translation of a part of a poem. It reveals people's deep feelings that a teacher would guide a man to be moral. Also, it shows that teachers play a more important role than fathers do in shaping one's life. In a hierarchal culture like Iran, it means a lot to put teachers before fathers.

The third saying means that being punished by a teacher is a blessing. It is to make one wiser. Students who are not punished do not become intelligent. This famous proverb approves teacher-centricity with the teacher being at the top of the hierarchy. Although physical punishments are nowadays banned in schools in Iran, it shows the superiority and rights of the teacher in the classroom. This idiom means the same as the proverb "I become the slave of the ones who teach me a word."

The last proverb is age-old, but still, people use it in daily life. It means whenever the future and its troubles come, we will think about the solutions. This point to an Iranian attitude to not consider the non-obvious future, which can be clearly summed up by the response given by one participant "*I have never given any thought about how an EFL teacher's future would be regarding technology*."

To conclude, it is difficult to see the future of ELT profession through people's visions. They value teachers' status in society so much that their extinction is unthinkable to them and they will not accept any harm to this holy profession. In addition, their reluctance to think about the future does not give them the authority to vision the future of ELT profession.

Conclusion

Throughout the past decades, the importance of English learning has resulted in both the abundance of EFL teachers and an explosive growth in facilities that help English learning. Technology has evolved to be one main resource of these facilities, equipping the language learning process by generating autonomous learners (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011) and generating a vast amount of teaching material (Ghasemi, Hashemi, & Bardine, 2011) (level 1). However, it is threatening the future of the ELT profession globally. In a connected world, Iran cannot ignore this trend. We need to give serious thoughts on the question: "Will the autonomy of language learners reach a point when technology replaces EFL teachers?" The purpose of this study was to answer this question in the context of the next 15 years.

By applying CLA to analyze participants' viewpoints, we conclude that the replacement of EFL teachers by technology is not likely to happen by 2030. Iran is a hierarchical, collectivist, and restrained society with a normative cultural orientation and preference for avoiding uncertainty (level 3). Thus, it is unlikely that Iranians will accept technological innovations that can replace EFL teachers in the near term. Despite the population statistics predicting fewer students in the next 15 years and the Internet having made its way through the society already (level 2), the high value put on the teaching profession and its status will persist in this country. Moreover, the myth level reveals that the Iranian culture will change very slowly (level 4).

An implication of this study is the possibility that countries similar to Iran in cultural dimension, status, belief systems, and hidden assumptions, myths and metaphors, educational policy, and the like, will also face this resistance to having technology replace the role of teachers in EFL teaching. In contrast, in countries with different cultures, especially in First World countries, a study like this may show a different result. These possibilities can be subjects for further research and investigations. As well, further studies could expand the time span, for example, to 50 years, to see how the ideas of EFL practitioners would differ inside/outside the country. Also, by including parents and students` worldviews, greater depth of viewpoints could be achieved in further studies. Other emerged questions by the present study could be:

1. If not replaced with, to what extent can language learning technology put at risk ELT profession in the near future?
2. Can we say that ELT profession will be more promising in ESP than EGP in Iran?
3. Can EFL teachers who cope with technology in the classroom, replace those who do not? Do you think it is possible to keep EFL teachers alongside technology at all?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of replacing EFL teachers with technology? (If it happens at all)

Like all other studies, the present study, however, is certainly not without any limitations. This study is primarily limited by its sample size that could be expanded by including TEFL instructors from more universities across the country to gain more data on the topic. This study can serve as a base for future studies about the same issue since, to the authors' best knowledge, it is the first study that CLA, as a futures studies method, has been applied to explore the future status of the English teacher's profession. By finding answers to all the above-mentioned questions in future studies, we can perhaps guide the government and especially EFL teachers to better direct the profession toward the future.

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