Construction, Validation, and Application of a Teacher Status Scale (TSS): A Case of Iranian Junior High School Teachers

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Abstract

The role of teachers in the educational context could go beyond simply teaching the subject matter. It is not uncommon for some students to be greatly influenced by certain teachers and even consider them as their role models. An interesting and novel way of inferring the impact a teacher has on the students is through revealing the status of the teacher as perceived by the students. The present study pursued two goals: first, to construct and validate a teacher status scale (TSS); and second, to reveal the relative status of English language teachers as compared to other school teachers in students' perceptions. Regarding the first goal, an 18-item teacher status scale was designed and, using the data collected from 200 students, its construct validity was substantiated through Rasch model. As for the second goal, 650 junior high school students rated their 300 teachers. The data was then analyzed using Chi-square test. In addition, 135 students participated in short interviews and a total of 530 minutes of recorded interviews constituted the qualitative data. Based on the results, English teachers were found to have the highest status of all school teachers as perceived by the students. Finally, statistical results were discussed, and implications were provided for English language teaching in the formal context of education.

Keywords: teacher status, Rasch model, validation, English language teacher

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INTRODUCTION

An undeniable fact in education is the great effect the teacher has on the students' progress (Rice, 2003; Swandee, 1995) and sometimes the teacher's effect on students' learning is larger than that of the actual subject being taught. It is, however, naïve to consider such an effect to be unilateral and confined only to the learning faculties of the students. Clearly enough, a teacher can influence a student's whole worldview and identity, and this is not an uncommon experience. We all have had teachers who have, to different degrees, changed our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Seemingly, when it comes to language teachers, the issue of teacher's influence becomes of still higher importance because language is closely interwoven with culture and identity (Norton & Gao, 2008).

In Iran, there are two foreign languages taught in the formal system of education: Arabic (as the language of religion) and English (as the language of international communication). Out of these two, English has for long been looked up to as the language of modernity, technology, and prestige; and has over years gained a quite unique status in this country (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011a). The unquenchable thirst of Iranians for learning English evident in the relatively great portion of the population who either have mastered or are learning it in spite of the fact that it is just a foreign language to them alludes to this special status. In addition to the unique status of English language per se, the special nature of English classes in Iran as an EFL context is worthy of attention. This issue was first brought to light by Pishghadam (2011) in his article "Introducing Applied ELT as a New Approach in Second/Foreign Language Studies". For him, English language classes in EFL settings have certain features which are not shared by any other subject classes and are exclusive to them. These unique features of private language schools are: discussing a large number of social, scientific, and political topics; holding pair work and group work in class; comparing two cultures; having a funny friendly atmosphere for learning, etc. The unique status of English language in Iran's sociocultural context together with the special nature of English classes in such an EFL setting might be important reasons why English teachers seem to have a higher status (the social position a teacher may obtain in the eyes of students) than other school teachers in students' perceptions.

Therefore, language teachers in general (due to teaching a new language and culture), and English language teachers in Iran in particular (due to the special status of English language and special nature of English classes), tend to be very influential in the personality and identity formation of the students. Still, another noteworthy point is the critical time English language is introduced to students in the formal system of education –it is included in the school curriculum from grade 6 on, i.e. age 13. Clearly enough, teen ages are the critical moments in a person's identity formation, and accordingly, this timing can intensify the effects of the likely changes in the learner's identity and worldview caused by a new language and culture contact.

All in all, the higher status of English teachers in students' perceptions would result in two possible scenarios: one is that English teachers, more than anyone else, could lay the foundations for the deculturation and loss of identity of their students by highlighting, praising, and imitating English culture and thus acting, even though unintentionally, as agents of linguistic imperialism. Unfortunately, the status quo in Iran especially in the informal context of education testifies the high likelihood of this scenario (Pishghadam & Navari, 2009; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011b). An alternative scenario, on the other hand, could be what Applied ELT (the application of ELT in other sciences) argues for (Pishghadam, 2011). That is, making most of such special merit (high status and influential position), English teachers could act as conscious agents of change and use it for their own benefit by enhancing life qualities, especially national and cultural identities of the learners in their classes. The importance of possible ramifications of each of these two scenarios reflects the need for a body of research to investigate English teacher's status and calls for great attention to be devoted to appropriate, conscience-raising, pre and in-service teacher training courses.

To our knowledge, no studies have been conducted in Iran examining this issue. Therefore, the present study is aimed at revealing the relative status and influentiality of English teachers compared to other school teachers in Iranian junior high school students' perceptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The roles and expected duties of language teachers have always been controversial (Brown, 2007) and in each era they have been defined from

the perspective of the mainstream ELT. In this section, we first take a look at the evolution of the role of language teacher since the recognition of ELT, as a legitimate field of study, up to now. Next, we discuss the place the Iranian English teachers stand.

Theoretical Background

Before the 20th century, language teaching was in fact teaching literature mainly through difficult literary texts. However, when applied linguistics, which was then synonymous to language teaching (Strevens, 1992), managed to gain the stance of a scientific field of study in the 1950s, the heavy dominance of literature in ELT was replaced by that of linguistics (Pishghadam & Mirzaee, 2008). This shift defined the role of the first generation of language teachers as complete conformers to the linguistic findings and standards and sheer consumer of their theories. Thus, linguists would form theories and teachers would precisely apply them in their classes (Schmitt, 2002) so that the same theory would be applied in a variety of different local teaching contexts. Playing such a mechanical and passive role in following the prescribed initiatives by linguistics, the teacher was supposed to know the 'whats' and 'hows' of teaching while having no idea about the 'whys'.

By the end of the 20th century, however, a new wave in applied linguistics started to change the common view on the expected duties of language teachers. In an attempt to give more autonomy and freedom to the teacher, this new trend called for reversing the direction of the movement from theory to practice in which the role of the teacher was confined to blindly applying linguistic prescriptions and instead, urged teachers to reflect on their teaching forming their own educational theories (Halliday, McIntoch, & Strevens, 1964). Such a dramatic change of view on the impact of teachers reached its prime with the proposition of the idea of the death of methods and the advent of postmethod era (Allwright, 1992; Brown, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1990). This claim was mainly on the grounds that methods were prescriptive and top-down, which minimized the role of the individual teacher. Postmethod condition, as the dynamic teaching of language through a set of principles, rather than through a method, took into account not only the linguistic factors but the psychological and sociological factors as well (Brown, 2002). Such inclusion of other disciplines in ELT had great

impact on and defined new assumptions of the role of the second generation of language teachers.

First, teachers were given a sense of plausibility, with two aspects of having freedom to make local decisions and to take the responsibility for the decisions they made (Prabhu,1990). In addition, teachers were supposed to be reflective, meaning that they needed to reflect on a teaching activity before and after they did it – self-observation – and also while doing it in the class – self-monitoring (Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Schon, 1983; Williams & Burden, 1997). In this sense, reflective teaching demanded teachers to constantly evaluate and criticize their own teaching practice. What is more, teachers were considered as researchers and theorizers (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Gordon & Schwinge, 2009; Hui & Grossman, 2008; Noffke, 1997; Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). That is, they were expected to observe their own teaching and local context, and through conducting action research, develop educational theories and, hence, act as practitioners of their own – rather than others' – theories. All in all, this second generation of language teachers represented informed and enlightened teachers whose knowledge transcends the 'whats' and 'hows' of teaching, including an awareness of the 'whys' as well.

It is noteworthy that such great emphasis on and extension of the role of teachers was not quite welcomed by the promoters of the first generation and provoked a great deal of criticism. The most striking of these criticisms was perhaps the one set forth by Swan (2009) under the name of *We do need methods*. In his article, after downgrading the whole notion of postmethod condition as an offshoot of communicative approach and a kind of "centrifugal muddle" which led to making language teaching "move further and further from the linguistic center" (p. 121), he striped the attitudinal goodness totally away from this paradigm by noting that expecting so much from a normal teacher was not only against the common sense but too unrealistic, advising "we need perhaps to bring our feet back into contact with the ground" (p. 133).

Nonetheless, despite all such criticisms, the second generation of language teachers evidently made its way in ELT. The great body of literature written by ELT practitioners justifying and promoting this approach clearly testifies such a claim (Altrichter, Posch, & Chamot, 1995; Curry, 1996; Cutforth, 1999; Kincheloe, 1991; Kumaravadivelu,

1999, 2003; Mena-Marcos, Sanchez & Tillema, 2011; Schmuck, 2006; Wallace, 1993).

Finally, a new wave in ELT (Douglas, 2012; Fox, 2012; Ghadiri, Tavakoli, & Ketabi, in press; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012; Pishghadam & Adamson, 2013) which seems to have quite recently been set in motion by Pishghadam's (2011) controversial theory of Applied ELT promotes a third generation of language teachers. Claiming that ELT, as a full-fledged and independent field of study, has the potentiality to be applied to other fields, Applied ELT calls for *educational* language teachers as its practitioners. The argument is that during postmethod period, a confluence of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies were conducted by ELT researchers resulting in the expansion of the domain of ELT. The findings of these studies in fact injected to ELT a bulk of fresh ideas from other disciplines appropriated and modified for ELT and this way they broadened its perspective and led to the formation of lots of new theories in language teaching and learning. This trend has over years enriched ELT in theory and practice so much that it can now announce both its independence from applied linguistics and its readiness to be applied to other domains of knowledge and, hence, take on a more contributing role.

It is also noteworthy that applied ELT was expanded further by introducing the notion of 'life syllabus' (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012). Going beyond the typical linguistic syllabus, life syllabus aims at enhancing life qualities alongside teaching language. Accordingly, not only does it make ELT more efficient but it can function as an effective resort against the cultural and linguistic imperialism which, according to Phillipson (1992), is inevitably purveyed through teaching English.

As mentioned, throughout the evolution of the role of language teacher, the passive consumer teacher of the first generation gave way to the autonomous reflective teacher of the second generation. That is, with a dramatic increase in the teacher's duty and responsibility, the transmitter evolved into the transformative teacher. Similarly, in an attempt to gain more sense of agency and take on the role of a contributor, the third generation teachers need to move beyond reflective teaching towards extending their professional identities by trying to improve other domains of knowledge which, directly or indirectly affect learners' lives. As with the previous change in teacher's role, this change puts even more emphasis on the teacher's role and makes their duty still more demanding. In other words, applied ELT demands that language

teachers become *educational language teachers* who, in addition to having a thorough command of language, are at the same time educational experts with sufficient knowledge of the non-linguistic features of learners which can be improved through language teaching, of the domains these features belong to, and of the possible ways to do it. In fact, language learning seems to be more than just learning a language, emanating from life interactions, and so it can be heavily interwoven with life issues. The transdisciplinary knowledge gains more importance here since the teacher who so far appropriated the findings of other fields such as linguistics, sociology, psychology, neurology, etc. for ELT is now expected to reverse this direction and repay to these fields by playing the role of a producer and trying to contribute to them through language teaching (Pishghadam, Zabihi, & NorouzKermanshai, 2012). It goes without saying that accomplishing such a role cannot be expected from a typical teacher on his/her own and that it calls for appropriate teacher training courses. These training courses would empower teachers to gain expertise, constructing professional identities in different other disciplines they wish to enrich and in so doing, become more of an educational teacher, a critical and proactive educator rather than merely a language instructor. Seemingly, an educational teacher can improve the quality of life for language learners, leading them to be more successful in life and education. Table 1 presents the main changes in the role of language teacher across the three generations of ELT.

Table 1: role of language teacher across the three generations of ELT

First generation of ELT	Second generation of ELT	Third generation of ELT
Consumer	Autonomous	Producer/contributor
Transmitter	Transformative	Agent of change
Passive	Reflective	Educational

All in all, today on the grounds that the role of language teacher has evolved to a conscious agent of change, the present study argues that accomplishing this role can be significantly facilitated if the language teacher is found to have a high status in the learners' perception. Relying on this high status which in fact denotes their influential position, such teachers would more effectively be able to enhance life qualities alongside teaching language, on the one hand, and on the other, to avoid linguistic and cultural imperialism.

Iranian Formal System of Education

To better understand the role of English teacher in the Iranian educational system, we present an overview of the nature of the system itself and its ELT. The formal system of education in Iran is a conservative centralized system with "a one-size-fits-all policy" (Pishghadam & Mirzaee, 2008, p. 103). This policy is evident in the exertion of the prescribed textbooks all over the country, the administration of national tests, and demanding full conformity from teachers in an attempt to unify their instructions and, hence, the students from all around the country. Therefore, the system gains itself the control over not only the input, through the prescribed curriculum, but the output, through the national testing scheme (Ostovar-Namaghi, 2006).

English teaching in this system in all levels of schools seems to pivot around one central policy, i.e., developing and enhancing the reading skill at the expense of the other three skills. Such trend of English instruction is implemented via two factors: textbooks, and exams. Textbooks, according to Sheldon (1988, p. 237), "represent the visible heart of any ELT program". The appropriate design or selection of textbooks is crucial in the success of any ELT program and it often reveals an underlying administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial, and political investment. On the same grounds, the above-mentioned central policy can be clearly observed in the Iranian English textbooks (Allami, Jalilifar, Hashemian, & Shooshtari, 2009; Ghorbani, 2009; Hosseini, 2007; Jahangard, 2007; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). That is, the materials which are primarily aimed at developing the reading ability constitute a big share of these books. The listening skill, on the other hand, is hardly ever addressed and one can rarely find exercises particularly designed to enhance the listening ability. The productive ability, i.e., speaking and writing skills, is taken into account peripherally through isolated sentence production activities in a decontextualized and sterile milieu of communication. Moreover, alongside the reading skill which constitutes the first priority in the design of the books, a large portion of the lessons is devoted to the explicitly stated grammatical rules and various grammar drills as well as long lists of vocabulary and their poor contextualization (Jahangard, 2007). Regarding the incomprehensiveness of the textbooks, one might argue that, still, it is the duty of the teachers to strike a balance between creative instruction and being a slave to their texts (Garinger, 2002).

However, there is another problem which impedes the teachers' freedom to do so and that involves the second factor. One point which needs to be mentioned is that the system of language education has just started to change towards more communicative classes, focusing more on enhancing all skills of language proficiency. In this regard, new textbooks are being developed for the students in junior high schools to meet the aforementioned aims.

The other factor guaranteeing the implementation of the educational systems' policies is an external pressure in the form of the administration of national examinations. The importance of such exams lies in the great negative washback effect they produce (Ghorbani, 2011; Jahangard, 2007; Ostovar-Namaghi, 2006). That is, by focusing basically on grammar, vocabulary, and reading, such exams, in practice, promote a trend of English instruction in the formal system of education which puts a premium on these areas of language knowledge and disregards the other skills which are equally important. So, due to the common view which considers a high score equal to high achievement, the grade pressure from students and parents gains the upperhand and leads the way for the process of English instruction in schools. This situation leaves teachers no choice but to surrender, mostly despite their will and standards of teaching, to the strong negative washback effect of such exams and shape their teaching practices based on the demands of these exams.

Therefore, the role of English teachers in such a centralized educational system seems to be much like that of the first generation in the sense that they are expected to act as passive implementers of the prescribed initiatives and total conformers to the rules and regulations. In other words, to guarantee the unification of their instruction, any attempt on the part of the teacher to move beyond what the texts and tests demand is unwelcomed. Accordingly, teachers are not supposed to make local decisions or do any kind of classroom-oriented action research and, in most cases, they are not even familiar with the ABCs of reflective teaching. All in all, the system discourages teachers' autonomy and sense of agency and calls for passive transmitters of knowledge. That is why ELT in the formal system of education is still in line with what the first generation promoted and has not unfortunately moved past it towards the second and third generations.

However, if English teachers are found to have special status in students' perceptions, the system can easily use such merit at the service

of the right education by making a paradigm shift towards applied ELT and training *educational* English teachers. With that in mind, the present study seeks to present a vivid picture of the status of the English teacher as compared to other school teachers at junior high school.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to first, construct and validate a teacher status scale (TSS) and second, reveal the relative status and influential stance of English teachers as compared to other teachers in Iranian junior high school students' perceptions. It, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Does the designed Teacher Status Scale (TSS) enjoy an acceptable index of reliability and validity?
2. Is there any significant difference between the status of English language teacher and that of other school teachers in junior high school students' perceptions?

METHOD

Participants

This study was conducted on 650 female students who rated their 300 teachers in Mashhad, Iran. They studied at junior high school and their ages ranged from 12 to 15 years old. Approximately, one fifth of these students (135 participants) were randomly selected to be interviewed. The 300 teachers whom our participants rated were all female teachers of junior high school – in Iranian school system there is no male teacher in junior high schools for girls – aged between 20 and 50 (M = 25) with a range of between 2 to 27 (M = 12.5) years of teaching experience.

The rationale behind choosing junior high school out of the three school levels of Iranian educational system – primary, junior high, and high school – was that English is first included in the school curriculum at this level. So, the learners' first formal experiences of familiarity with English language and culture and, also, the basis of their attitudes toward English language and its teacher are formed here. Furthermore, in order for the data to be as representative as possible, it was collected from three educational districts of low, middle, and high social classes. In each of

these districts, three schools, and in each school, three classes–with distinctive English teachers – were selected for the data collection.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study: 1. Teacher Status Scale. 2. Structured interview.

Teacher Status Scale

The first instrument was a status scale designed and validated by the researchers. The intended meaning of the term *status* in developing this questionnaire was the relative position and rank one holds in others' perceptions; thus, the higher this position, the more being looked up to and also the more likelihood of being consciously or subconsciously adopted as a model to follow. Naturally, then, one's status in other's perceptions alludes to how much that person can be influential for them. Having this sense of the word in mind, the researchers hold the view that one's status is affected and determined by at least three types of identity, i.e. personal (personality types), cultural (social issues), and educational (professional issues) identities. Accordingly, the teacher status questionnaire was built on these three categories.

The scale consisted of 12 columns each devoted to a subject teacher (e.g. English teacher, mathematics teacher, history teacher, etc.) and 18 rows each containing an adjective belonging to the mentioned categories (see appendix). The scale was in Persian and for the sake of clarity it was translated into English. The personal identity was represented by adjectives such as kind, intelligent, friendly, etc.; the cultural identity by open-minded, high-class, well-dressed, etc.; and the educational identity by knowledgeable, well-educated, consultable, etc. To disambiguate the items and to ensure the content validity of the scale, the scale was piloted by two experts in TEFL and a group of 20 students as a result of which two adjectives that were difficult for the students to understand were replaced by simpler ones (Influential and Trustworthy).

Structured Interview

In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the teachers' status, students' qualitative evaluation of them was also taken into account through conducting a number of short structured interviews. The

interviews consisted of one main question, namely, "If you were to be a teacher, what teacher would you choose to be?" and some follow up questions asking them to explain the reasons for their choices.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection took place in the last month of school year (May) 2012. It took an average of 20 minutes for each class to answer the scale. Before starting to answer, and in order to unveil what they truly thought of their teachers, the students were assured that their answers were confidential and that none of the school staff would get to see them. The instruction asked the students to mark the adjectives which were more prominent for each teacher. There was no limitation in marking so that students could mark all or none of the adjectives for each teacher and it totally depended on their view about the teacher.

In the process of collecting the data, first, the study was conducted on 200 students in order to assess the construct validity of the scale. Next, an additional 450 students rated their teachers and the whole data (gathered from 650 students) was then used in revealing the relative status of each teacher as perceived by the students.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, Rasch measurement was utilized to substantiate the construct validity of the scale. Rasch analysis was conducted using Winsteps version 3.74. The entire dataset with 18 items and 200 persons was subjected to Rasch analysis to evaluate the fit of data to the model and assess the unidimensionality of the instrument. If these tests are satisfied and the assumptions hold, the scale is a unidimensional. Moreover, Chi-square (using SPSS version 19) was employed to see whether the differences between the statuses of the teachers were significant.

In addition, after collecting the questionnaires in each class, a number of students were chosen randomly to be interviewed. The interviews, each taking an average of 4 minutes, were recorded and then transcribed to be analyzed for the possible common themes.

RESULTS

Teacher Status Scale

With regard to the first research question, Rasch measurement was utilized to substantiate the construct validity and reliability of the scale. As the results in Table 2 show, the separation index of the persons is 1.40. Person strata index indicates the number of distinct ability levels which can be identified by the test (Stone & Wright, 1988). A reliability index of at least 0.50 is required for a separation index of 1. It should be noted that the moderate reliability (.73) separation, and strata indices for this test is due to the low standard deviation of person abilities. If another sample with a wider spread of abilities were to be tested, these statistics would improve.

Table 2: summary of 200 measured person

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-------------------------------------------------------------

     SUMMARY OF 200 MEASURED (NON-EXTREME) PERSON
-------------------------------------------------------------
|          TOTAL                        MODEL      INFIT
OUTFIT    |
|          SCORE    COUNT   MEASURE   ERROR    MNSQ   ZSTD
MNSQ   ZSTD |
|-------------------------------------------------------------
|
| MEAN       6.3     18.0     -.71     .57     1.00    .1
.99    .1 |
| S.D.       3.5      .0      .02      .10      .11    .6
.17    .7 |
| MAX.      17.0     18.0     2.92    1.03     1.37   2.9
1.45   2.9 |
| MIN.       2.0     18.0    -2.16     .48      .75  -2.2
.62   -2.2 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------
|
| REAL RMSE    .59 TRUE SD    .83  SEPARATION  1.40  PERSON
RELIABILITY  .73 |
|MODEL RMSE    .58 TRUE SD    .84  SEPARATION  1.44  PERSON
RELIABILITY  .74 |
| S.E. OF PERSON MEAN = .07
|
-------------------------------------------------------------
```

As Table 3 demonstrates, the reliability for the items is relatively high (.86). That is, the chances that the difficulty ordering of the items be

repeated if the test were given to another group is extremely high. This is because there is a wide spread of difficulty in the items as the standard deviation of item difficulty estimates is .46 logits and the separation is 2.51.

Table 3: summary of 18 measured item

```
---------------------------------------------------------------
|          TOTAL                          MODEL        INFIT
OUTFIT   |
|          SCORE     COUNT    MEASURE   ERROR     MNSQ    ZSTD
MNSQ   ZSTD |
|-------------------------------------------------------------
|
| MEAN      71.7     200.0        .00     .17      1.00     .0
.99   -.1 |
| S.D.      17.1        .0        .46     .01       .08    1.1
.13    1.2 |
| MAX.     114.0     200.0        .72     .19      1.14    1.9
1.32    2.5 |
| MIN.      47.0     200.0      -1.07     .16       .86   -2.5
.80   -2.4 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------
|
| REAL RMSE    .17 TRUE SD    .43  SEPARATION 2.51  ITEM
RELIABILITY  .86 |
|MODEL RMSE    .17 TRUE SD    .43  SEPARATION 2.55  ITEM
RELIABILITY  .87 |
| S.E. OF ITEM MEAN = .11
|
---------------------------------------------------------------
```

Moreover, as the results of fit statistics show, all items fit the Rasch model following the criteria suggested by Bond and Fox (2007). Items which do not fit the Rasch model have infit mean square (MNSQ) indices outside the acceptable range of 0.70-1.30. Misfitting items are signs of multidimensionality and model deviance. Fortunately, the results of Table 4 show that there is no misfitting item in the scale, alluding to its unidimensionality.

Table 4: item estimates and fit statistics

Item	Estimate	Error	InfitMNSQ
1	-.30	.05	.86
2	.20	.05	.99
3	-.05	.05	1.11
4	-.03	.05	1.00
5	.01	.05	1.14
6	.20	.05	.97
7	.20	.05	1.25
8	-.05	.05	.96
9	.20	.05	.96
10	-.05	.05	1.01
11	.01	.05	.94
12	-.05	.05	1.06
13	.20	.05	.94
14	-.59	.05	.78
15	.20	.06	.93
16	-.05	.05	.98
17	.30	.05	.96
18	-.03	.05	.97

The Item-person map (Figure 1) indicates that the items are spread over the entire range of the scale; i.e., all parts of the construct are well covered by the scale. Numbers on the right indicate items and # on the left indicate persons. Items and persons placed on top of the scale are more difficult and more competent, respectively. As one goes down the scale, items become easier and individuals become less able. As one can see, all individuals are clustered towards the center of the scale and the items are spread all over the scale. The map shows that there are enough items in the region of the scale where the persons lie and this part of the scale is pretty well covered by items.
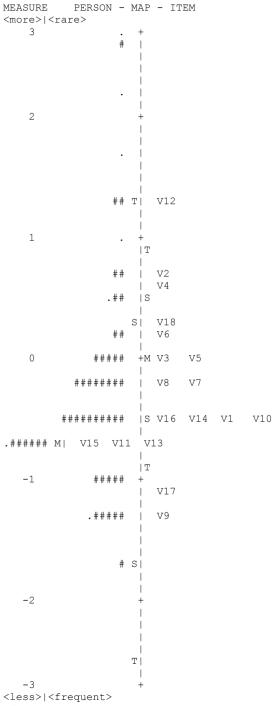
```
MEASURE     PERSON - MAP - ITEM
<more>|<rare>
    3              .  +
                   #  |
                      |
                      |
                      |
                   .  |
                      |
    2                 +
                      |
                      |
                   .  |
                      |
                      |
                      |
               ## T|  V12
                      |
                      |
    1              .  +
                     |T
                     |
               ## |  V2
                  |  V4
             .## |S
                  |
                S|  V18
             ## |  V6
                  |
    0        ####  +M V3   V5
                  |
          ########  |  V8   V7
                  |
                  |
        #########  |S V16  V14  V1   V10
                  |
.###### M|  V15  V11  V13
                  |
                  |T
   -1        #####  +
                  |  V17
                  |
          .#####  |  V9
                  |
                  |
                  |
              # S|
                  |
                  |
   -2              +
                  |
                  |
                  |
                  |
                T|
                  |
   -3              +
<less>|<frequent>
```
Figure 1: map of trait distributions and item parameter estimates

All in all, the above-mentioned Rasch statistics reveal the fact that the newly-developed scale is valid for determining the status of teachers at junior high schools, and this scale can be employed for gathering data accordingly.

To answer the second research question based on the quantitative data, a Chi-square test was run on the data. As illustrated in Table 5, there is a significant difference between the status of school teachers as rated by the students (x^2= 2921.407, p<.05). Table 5 also revealed that English teachers are perceived by the students as having the highest status (n=3883) and the second and third ranks are those of science (n=3761) and math (n=3604) teachers. The ranks of other teachers are evident in the table and the lowest status rank belongs to social sciences teacher (n=1369).

Table 5: results of the chi square test for the status of teachers

Teacher N	English	Science	Math	Persian	Theology	Vocation	History	Physical education	Culture	Arabic	Art	Social sciences
Observed N	3883	3761	3604	2860	2532	2519	2445	2284	2175	1807	1605	1369
Expected N	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570	2570
df : 11	Chi-Square : 2921.407[a]				Sig. : .000					P < .05		

Interviews

The second research question was also addressed using the qualitative data collected through interviews. The interviews which were based on one major question and some follow-up questions targeted at corroborating the outcomes obtained via the questionnaire. The analysis of the interview data indicated that, once again, it was the English teacher whom the students most looked up to. This is evident in the fact that, in response to the first question, English teacher occupied the first rank with 27% of the students favoring to be one. The second and third ranks belonged to the math (20%) and science (18%) teachers. Table 6 illustrates the ranks of teachers based on the answers to the first question of the interview, namely, "If you were to be a teacher, what teacher would you choose to be?"

Table 6: results of the major interview question

Teacher / Total	English	Math	Science	Theology	Persian	P. E.	History	Vocational	Art	Culture
135	36	27	24	19	11	7	4	3	3	1
100%	27%	20%	18%	14%	8%	5%	3%	2%	2%	1%

The explanations students provided for their choices could all be encapsulated into two categories: teacher-related and subject-related reasons. The gist of the teacher-related category, which constituted more than 75% of the reasons, may well be observed in the statements such as "*because I love our teacher and want to be like her*" and "*since I want to be just as nice as my teacher*". The other 25% of the reasons belonged to the subject-related group and was expressed through such statements as "*because it is a very important subject and is very useful in life*" and "*because I am very good at this subject and I like it a lot*". All in all, these explanations further confirm and illuminate the superiority of the status of the English teacher from the perspective of the students.

DISCUSSION

As already mentioned, this study set itself two goals: first, to construct and validate a teacher status scale (TSS); and second, to reveal the relative status of English teacher as compared to other school teachers from the perspective of students.

With regard to the first goal, an 18-item scale aimed at investigating the relative status of school teachers in students' perceptions was designed. Further, since Exploratory Factor Analysis generally comes up with over-factoring, making the interpretation cumbersome, Rasch model was employed to substantiate the construct validity of the scale in the context of junior high schools. The results demonstrated that the scale has acceptable item and person reliability and all the items meet the unidimensionality criterion laid down by the Rasch model. On such grounds, it can be claimed that TSS can be considered as an efficient scale in revealing teachers' status as perceived by the students, and it is our hope that this newly-made scale can be utilized to shed more light on the status of teachers at different levels of education.

As for the second goal, the results of the quantitative data were indicative of the fact that English teachers are perceived by students as having the highest status of all school teachers. Also, the qualitative results were quite in line with those of the TSS in indicating that the teacher who is most likely to be looked up to as a model, whose words carry most weight, and who can be most influential for the students is the one who is, in turn, most under the influence of English language and culture. This finding is quite remarkable in the Iranian educational system since it subtly unveils a discrepancy between the expected conditions and the actual status quo. In this system, there are certain subjects (such as theology and culture) the reason behind whose inclusion in the curriculum is to provide students with the culturally and religiously desired ideology and way of thinking and behaving. So, based on the purpose of these subjects, their teachers are more or less supposed to be agents of change and the requisite to accomplishing this role is to possess a high status and be influential for the students. So, the system expects and claims these teachers to have the most influential stance among students. But, surprisingly enough, TSS and interview results revealed that this position is in practice occupied by English teachers whose role as defined by the system is quite different and the ranks of theology and culture teachers are not even close to that of the English teacher in the status scale. This discrepancy alludes to the important fact that the system has apparently invested in the wrong teacher for the stated purpose.

Be that as it may, the possible reasons for such high status of English language teachers in the Iranian students' perceptions are worthy of attention and can be discussed at both global and local levels. Globally speaking, the first reason coming to mind is perhaps the unique status of the U.S. in the world today due to its being a superpower and dominating the international business and markets, science, information technology, etc. and also due to its promoting a fascinating picture of western culture through the media it dominates. Therefore, it would come as no surprise that English language teachers are associated with the English culture and civilization, attracting more attention on the part of students. This claim is in line with Pishghadam and Sadeghi's (2011) findings, which indicate that English language teachers are inclined towards the English culture, trying to mirror it in their classes.

At the local level, the reason which makes this finding of particular importance in the context of Iran could be the country's anti-western

policies. That is to say, it seems that the country's main policies against the U.S. and its culture have not achieved the expected results. This contrast calls to mind Bakhtin's (1981) distinction between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse (Lin & Luke, 2005). Based on this distinction, authoritative discourse, as the name suggests, is the "language or discourse imposed on person", and internally persuasive discourse, is the one "hybridized and populated with one's own voices, styles, meanings, and intentions" (Lin & Luke, 2005, p. 93-94). As for the case in point, the anti-American authoritative discourse in this country has apparently resulted in an opposite internally persuasive discourse for the students. In this regard, the findings of this study seem to be in line with Pishghadam and Saboori's (2011b) findings denoting the fact that most Iranian teachers and learners highly appreciate American accent, looking up to its native speakers inwardly.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As the outcomes of this study demonstrate, English language teachers are perceived by students as more influential and prestigious, and having more credit than the other junior high school teachers. This implies that students prefer to follow their English language teachers. In fact, English language teachers seem to be very effective at school and their words carry more weight among students.

All in all, the main finding of the study – English teachers occupying the highest rank in the status scale as rated by students – can have some noteworthy implications. First, it shows that English language teachers` words carry more weight at schools comparing with other teachers, and this fact should not be ignored by the authorities. This ignorance, however, is going to come at a cost especially due to the current ELT practices of the country. Recent research on ELT in Iran (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011a) has shown that most teachers highlight American and British cultures along with teaching the language, and consider it as an important part of teaching English so that ELT in this country seemingly acts as a "Trojan horse for the cultural values of its native speaker community" (Timmis, 2007, p. 125). Also, such research has revealed both learners' and teachers' great emphasis on conformity to the American and British varieties of English, high positive attitude towards these accents, and great efforts to sound native-like while, according to Kirkpatrick (2007), "accents are closely bound up with feelings of

personal and group identity" (p. 37) and thus such a view among Iranian learners is in fact a threat to their local identity (Pishghadam & Kamyabi, 2008; Pishghadam & Navari, 2009). Therefore, it becomes evident that ignoring the great influence English teachers have on the students and leaving this source of power unsupervised is, in effect, using it at the service of linguistic imperialism, though unintentionally, through fostering cultural derichment and fading local identities. A second way of dealing with this potential source of power, on the other hand, could be taking it under control and using it to the benefit of the educational purposes. That is, having acknowledged this special merit of English teachers, the system can make most of it by using it both to resist linguistic imperialism, which is integral to teaching English (Phillipson, 1992), and at the same time to enhance life qualities in students and thus educate them for life. To this end, the system needs to make a paradigm shift in its ELT towards Applied ELT and redefine the role of English teacher –from passive transmitter of the first generation to the conscious agent of change of the third generation –through training *educational* language teachers.

In the end, it is recommended that future research further evaluate and improve the instrument developed in this study. Other studies can use factor analysis and structural equation modeling to further validate the instrument, discovering the observable and hidden factors of the scale. Furthermore, this scale can be used in combination with qualitative measures of interview and observation in order to help researchers assert more confident conclusions about the status of different teachers in different contexts. And also, due to the nature of private language institutes in which there is more freedom on the part of teachers, it seems English teachers in these settings seem to have even higher status in the learners' perceptions and future research can investigate this issue by extending the scope of investigation to include the informal educational setting as well. Finally, another study can be conducted to reveal the status of English language teacher within different social classes and with respect to gender differences.

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this research would not have been possible. Besides, we announce the study has been a part of research which has been conducted in Mashhad, Iran, in 2012.

Bio-data

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Appendix

Teacher Characteristic	Vocation	Science	Art	Social sciences	Theology	Persian	Physical education	History	Arabic	Culture	Math	English
Kind												
Open-minded												
Knowledgeable												
With a sense of humor												
Patient												
Intelligent												
Trustworthy												
Respectable												
High-class												
Well-educated												
Honest												
Polite												
Well-dressed												
Entertaining												
Influential												
Friendly												
Good speaker												
Consultable												