

# The Impact of Religionism of Iranian Muslim Collage Students on Learning EL Reading

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**Abstract.** Although the weakness of ELT, in such Islamic countries as Iran has been partly attributed to the people's religionism, the present paper is an attempt to differentiate between two types of religionism and their impact on ELT in Iran. It is going to prove that a kind of man-made religion, named institutionalized religion is a crucial factor preventing Muslim collage students from learning English in general and such receptive skills as reading in particular. So the ELT weakness in Iran is not the matter of "interiorized religion" but that of "institutionalized one".

**Keywords:** Interiorized religionism, and institutionalized religionism.

## 1. Introduction

The present study is an attempt to compare the impact of "institutionalized religionism" and "interiorized religionism" on ELL in general and the reading (as a receptive skill) of Iranian Muslim students in particular. Throughout the study, this issue was examined with observation, interview, data gathered from some teacher-made questionnaires and T-test.

The research was done among the college students of Jahad Daneshgahi university of Arak, in Iran which is a popular English-language Institute too.

The research was done from the beginning of April to the end of June on the year 2011. It was done on 67 male students. They were easily available.

It revealed that those students who had greater mistrust in English-speaking governmental policies promoted less in reading compared to those who had more flexible ideas about this.

## 2. Statement of Problem

Although all important religions, including Islam, encourage their followers to be tolerant of different ideas, still there are instances where religious prejudices promote the distance between people. Those who think of religion as overtly influential in their lives may have a higher rate of prejudice than those who make a balance between the real life and religious orders.

Others believe that religionism has a positive effect on all aspects of the life of individuals. To justify this controversy, Davidio, J, et al (2005), differentiated between two types of religionism. "Institutionalized religionism", on one hand, which is when one, focuses more on the social and political aspects of religious events. These people are more prone to religious prejudice. On the other hand, The "Interiorized religionism", which is when one, devotes him or herself more to his or her beliefs. These people are less in danger of religious prejudice.

There is a serious absence of studies that examine the quality of Institutionalized religionism on Reading skill in ELT classes. Then, the major purpose motivating this study is to clarify the subject. It was interested to seek answers for the following questions.

1. Which one of the above-mentioned types of religionism is commonly observed among the Muslim Iranian college students?
2. How does this kind of religionism affect ELT in Iran?

Ignoring this subject, Iranian ELT principles usually keep one of the two extremes. They may either look for pure Islamic ELT or absolutely non-Islamic ELT. To prevent this problem, institutionalized religionism is differentiated from Interiorized religionism in the present paper.

### **3. The Significance of the Study**

#### **3.1. ELT and It's Necessity in Iran**

So far, English seems to have found its way right into the heart of Iranian society. Just as with the outer world, English is the dominant language of foreign trade, international conferences, for air traffic in international airports, and sea navigation. The government's policy for promoting the export of non-oil products made companies and exporters take advantage of this medium to introduce their goods and products to the world market. The Iranian national TV has started broadcasting authentic foreign programs. Iran's cooperation with UN, Islamic conference relations, ECO, OPEC, and other regional and world organizations has made English an important thing. (Aliakbari, 2004)

#### **3.2. Importance of Reading in ELT**

The most typical use of reading in a foreign language class is to teach the language itself. "In this way, vocabulary, structures, and other things can be learnt through reading in a foreign language and to extend command over that particular language (Nuttall, 1982, p. 19).

Elley and Manghubai (1983) write that the pupils, which in their study, were exposed to wider reading progressed in reading and listening comprehension at twice the normal rate.

### **4. Review of Literature**

#### **4.1. Iran's Relations with English-speaking Countries**

- Iran's relations with US:

The poor relations between the two countries are partly attributed to the conflict between the Islamic revolution and the American arrogance and partly to the recent fears of America about the nuclear activities of Iran. (Iran-United States relations-the free encyclopedia)

- Iran's relations with UK:

During Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hossein acquired metal tubes from firms in the United Kingdom. However intercepted and although the suppliers asserted that the intercepted products were to be used for a pipeline project, Still the ire of the Iranians got intensified against England.

A year after the re-establishment of the British embassy in Tehran, Ayatollah Khomeini issued the infamous Rushdi fatwa.( Iran-United Kingdom relations-the free encyclopedia)

These were the two very important events which muddied the waters of the relations between Iranians and British.

#### **4.2. ELT in Islamic Nations**

However, some have gone too far to claim that more English , less Islam (Pennycook, 1994), A 2000 study of 409 Kuwait undergraduates suggests that generally speaking , Kuwaiti Muslim students possess positive attitudes toward learning English and English language speakers.

Glasser (2003) asserts that in contrast to Saudi Arabia, in which the number of classes in Islamic religion has recently increased at the expense of English instruction, these familiar cultural subjects have been cut in order to increase the time given to English curriculum in Qatar.

Aliakbari (2004) showed that 53 percent of the high school English books in Iran dealt with general, culture free passages. Texts with deleted reference (28 percent) were second in rank. English speaking countries, Islamic tradition cross cultural comparison formed only 3 percent of the content of each.

### **5. Methodology**

Out of 180 college students passing the general course of English in Jahad daneshgahi university (also a well-known English Language Institute), 130 homogeneous ones were chosen based on the English part of their entrance exam.

Via observation and interview, 67 students who were assumed to have stronger religious inclinations and even prejudices were selected.

Through a self made questionnaire, the first group of 67 was divided into two subdivisions, each with 32 members. Group A included the institutionalized religious members (those who chose “**absolutely agree**” or “**agree**”, facing such statements as “Iran is absolutely right in its nuclear challenges with US” and “ Our government should never trust in either American or British policies”) and group B , the interiorized religious ones( those ones choosing “**not sure**” as the fifth choice or choosing no choices at all).

To make sure about the homogeneity of the two groups, they took Top Notch standard reading test (Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher, 2006), as a pretest and their scores were submitted to a t-test. The difference between the means of the two groups and the value of **t** weren't statistically significant. So, the pretest approved again the homogeneity of the two groups.

The students received 5 non-censored reading passages per week and they were assigned to answer the multiple-choice questions following every passage and submit their assignments to the instructor office easily available throughout the week or during the weekly sessions.

After three weeks, the same standard reading test was again given to the same students as a posttest. The difference between the mean scores of the two groups and the value of **t** were statistically significant. On the posttest, therefore, the interiorized religious group performed better than the institutionalized religious one.

To strengthen the positive attitude of the students to these assignments and decrease the possibility of cheating, the students were ensured that this is done only for improving their EL reading skill.

## **6. Results**

### **6.1. Results of the questionnaire**

Out of 67, 35 chose the choice “**absolutely agree**” or “**agree**”, facing the statements as “Iran is absolutely right in its nuclear challenges with US” or “America and England did deliberately support Iraq in its 8-year war against Iran”. Out of these 35, 33 had pointed to their parents, teachers and Psychologists, as the only ones helping them to shoot their troubles. Out of these 67, 15 had chosen the fifth choice,” **not sure**”, coming to the above-mentioned statements, 17 had chosen none.

### **6.2. Results of descriptive statistics and t-tests**

The comparison of the mean scores of the institutionalized group(16.81)and that of interiorized group(17.00) didn't indicate any meaningful difference, while the difference of the mean scores of their posttests(17.43 and 20.78) was meaningful. Again, the calculation of the t-test at the confidence level 95% indicated that t-observed of the pretests of the two groups (0.264, p.793) wasn't statistically significant. This approved the homogeneity of the first group. However, that of the posttests of the two groups ( $t=5.587, p=.000$ ) was significant.

## **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

Although Ratnawati (2005) has referred to English and Islam as two absolutely different ways of looking at the world and its effect on ELT, Karmani (2005) pointed to the political relations of countries and its effect on ELT as a more influential factor.

In line with Karmani, Aliakbari (2004), pointed to the culturally poor educational materials as the major reason of weakness of EL reading of Iranian high school students.

The present study led to the result that religion as a subdivision of culture doesn't have so great an influence on FL or SL reading skill as do the political factors.

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