



Opportunities and Challenges of Implementing Locally Developed English Storybooks for Young Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract: As the mainstream English course books on the market written by native speakers include concepts such as exchange students, host family, online dating, and the like not in line with Iranian/Persian culture and moral values, the present study worked on innovatively devising three contemporary storybooks. These storybooks were prepared based on shared moral themes extracted from the didactical Persian classic literature and further administered in practice. The current "classroom-ethnography" research explored the opportunities/challenges of practically implementing the locally devised materials for young learners in the real EFL context in Iran. These strengths/drawbacks were scrutinized through the "triangulation" technique in which the perceptions of the recipients of the storybooks, including the young learners and ten experienced teachers anticipating the process of study before the practical phase of the research were inspected. The researcher/teacher's observation of the study process and the class video recording were also investigated. Then, the common points extracted from the acquired data were classified and coded systematically. The research resulted in some opportunities, such as enhancing the young learners' English proficiency level and improving their critical thinking ability. However, the main challenges are the time restrictions and locating an appropriate English setting for the practical study of such local English materials. In alignment with the novelty of created storybooks and the entrenched moral themes illustrating Iranian moral values, the practical section discussing the strengths and drawbacks of implementing the devised materials in a real EFL context would differentiate the current research from the related literature in Iran.

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Introduction

English is taught to learners from early ages in different parts of the globe ([Bland, 2015](#); [Cameron, 2003](#); [Nafissi & Shafiee, 2019](#); [Razmand, 2013](#)). In this regard, the materials used for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners are mostly restricted to commercialized resources produced by publishing organizations in English-speaking countries such as the UK ([Gray, 2010](#); [Mishan & Timmis, 2015](#)). These English textbooks as “cultural artifacts” have been used for specific purposes ([Gray, 2010, p. 714](#)), mainly embracing American and British values ([Mishan & Timmis, 2015](#)). In other words, these resources, replete with "cultural biases" ([Ndura, 2004, p. 143](#)), are not in accordance with the learners' cultural values ([Floris, 2005](#); [Kazemi et al., 2013](#); [Koosha et al., 2004](#); [Pourdavoodi, 2011](#)). For instance, [Hudson \(2010\)](#) reported that EFL Muslim learners are exposed to English course books filled with points taken from foreign cultural values that sharply contrast with those of their own. He consequently named some concepts such as "beer," "ham," "kissing," and "cuddling" (p. 127) as some cases of the imposed cultural points presented in the ELT books. More specifically, [Kazemi et al. \(2013\)](#) reported that the *Interchange* series, one of the English resources for teaching English in language institutes and academies in Iran, is culturally biased.

As [Shohamy \(2006\)](#) stated, this "hidden agenda" is not an overt process and is mainly sugar-coated. So, most recipients of the English language cannot understand how "cultural imperialism" has penetrated their society ([Tomlinson, 1991](#)).

The discrepancy between the content of English resources and their target learners results from the ideology behind "*Self*" and "*Other*," delineating the relationship between the English language and its enclosed culture and the other non-native nations' languages and customs.

In other words, English is a language that, as [Pennycook \(1998\)](#) believed, can be "racially defined" (p. 4).

To solve this problem, preparing non-native local English resources and concise stories has drawn the attention of researchers and material developers around the world (e.g., [Ghosn, 2011/2012](#); Kachru, 1986, as cited in [Azizi, 2014](#); [Muslim et al., 2009](#); [Rohmah, 2012](#); [Tomlinson, 2013](#)). Incorporating local wisdom and identity into the curriculum of English classes in schools and universities is an issue that has drawn the attention of Iranian researchers, as well ([Azizi, 2014](#); [Ghahremani Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2012](#); [Fatemi, 2019](#); [Karimi & Nafissi, 2017](#); [Masqati Deirestani, 2011](#); [Nafissi et al., 2020](#); [Nourizadeh, 2019](#);

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et al., 2014; Parsaiyan, 2018; Parsaiyan et al., 2020; Poursadughi, 2019; Safari, 2019).

To resist the existing hegemony and cultural imperialism hidden in ELT resources (Ives, 2006), the researcher, as a material developer/teacher, first developed some creative storybooks as local English materials. Indeed, due to the point that Iran is considered as the intended setting to carry out the current study, the Iranian moral values are the aimed local values used in the newly-devised English materials. Having consulted some experts on Persian literature, the researcher figured out that these values could consequently be found repeatedly in the Persian literature. More specifically, since the young learners, as the study's primary recipients, would be acquainted with these moral themes, the didactical classic Persian literary works could be more appropriate to be used as valid sources in the study. So, the locally developed materials illustrated the Iranian's deeply rooted moral values, such as contentment, friendship, generosity, humility, justice, sympathy, truthfulness, wisdom, and the like, embedded in Persian classic literary works, namely *Gulistan*, *Bustan*, *Ghaboosname*, and *Marzbanname*. As the evaluation of newly developed materials is emphasized in the related literature (Yildiz, 2023), the devised storybooks were implemented practically in some real EFL contexts.

So, the strengths and drawbacks of the devised storybooks in practice were evaluated based on the perceptions of the participants of the current research, including the young learners taking part in the study, the informant-teachers teaching the storybooks in classrooms, the researcher/teacher holding one of the classes and observing the classes administered by the other two teachers, and also some other EFL teachers reporting their anticipations regarding the practical implementation of storybooks in the classroom.

In this vein, some features distinguish the present study from the previous research in this field. Despite the point that the recreation of English materials based on the translation of ancient Persian literature was the aim of the related literature, the present study aims to further the cause by creating novel and exciting storybooks as local English resources related to the Persian/Iranian moral values. In other words, the novelty of the created storybooks in line with their entrenched moral themes (i.e., such as contentment, friendship, generosity, humility, justice, sympathy, truthfulness, wisdom, and the like) illustrating the Iranian value system differentiates the current research from the related literature in Iran.

It is necessary to mention, as Tomlinson (2013, 2020) stated, that to develop materials, a framework is required, the "text-driven" approach can be an appropriate framework in this regard (Tomlinson, 2013).

Moreover, as the current research coped with the study of a social phenomenon in an educational setting, exploring the benefits/drawbacks of practically implementing the devised storybooks in real classrooms, "classroom ethnography" ([Abdullah et al., 2020](#)) was considered the determined design.

This exploratory qualitative study, with a focus on implementing the prepared local English materials, attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the opportunities for practically implementing innovative short storybooks as locally developed English materials for young Iranian learners in the classroom?
2. What are the challenges of implementing innovative short storybooks as locally developed English materials for young Iranian learners in the classroom?

Literature Review

The growing recognition of English as a crucial matter in today's interconnected world fuels the global expansion of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). Schools are increasingly prioritizing early English language instruction, integrating it into curriculums at progressively younger ages ([Ghosn, 2002](#)). This trend reflects the understanding that early English proficiency provides young learners with valuable tools for academic success, future career opportunities, and global communication ([Pinter, 2010](#)). Consequently, TEYL is considered a central focus in the educational systems worldwide.

Effective TEFL for young learners hinges on meticulously crafted activities aligned with their proficiency levels. Well-equipped teachers are essential to optimize language acquisition for young learners as they can act as conduits for language learning, crafting environments where children can actively engage and practice the target language ([Nunan, 2011](#)). Literature and art offer promising alternatives in this regard: stories, songs, and poems engage children, draw attention to language concepts, and create immersive learning environments ([Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018a](#)). This holistic approach fosters language development, creativity, and cultural understanding while boosting motivation and making learning enjoyable and memorable ([Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018a](#)). Captivating stories ignite young learners' language journey, fostering positive attitudes toward new languages and cultures ([Ellis & Brewster, 2002](#)). These literary adventures spark vocabulary growth, sentence sophistication, and word-sound awareness through shared experiences and guided discussions ([Winch et al., 2004](#)).

Global textbooks sparking a move towards personalized, localized materials ([Masuhara et al., 2008](#)); "One size fits all" would not be propitious for diverse learners anymore ([Salas,](#)

2004; Tomlinson, 2012). Localization empowers teachers to tailor materials with cultural relevance as championed by scholars like Ghosn (2012). As Muslim et al. (2009) recommended, English should be taught through “local stories”. For instance, they reported that the English textbook writers for Indonesian schools used local stories along with “foreign stories”. Ghosn (2002) was also in favor of teaching English to young learners through literature and specifically reading stories. As another example, the findings of the study by Ghosn (2012) on Arab children learning English demonstrated that learning English based on the story would be more effective and long-lasting. It is necessary to note that what differentiates the current research from the previous literature in other settings of studies is the point that the local English stories devised in the present study were creatively prepared by a non-native English writer based on the most repeated moral themes in the local literature.

This mentioned shift promises a more effective and engaging journey for all interested in developing local materials, including the scholars in this field in Iran, as well (i.e., Azizi, 2014; Ghahremani Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2012; Fatemi, 2019; Karimi & Nafissi, 2017; Masqati Deirestani, 2011; Nafissi et al., 2020; Nourizadeh, 2019; Parsaiyan et al., 2014; Parsaiyan, 2018; Poursaduqi, 2019; Parsayaian et al., 2020; Safari, 2019).

For instance, Parsaiyan et al. (2014) recreated some Persian-literary-based English materials based on Jalal Al-Din Rumi’s *Mathnavi Couplet*, Abolghasem Ferdowsi’s *Epic of Kings*, and Farid Al-Din Attar’s *Conferences of Birds*. She used the prepared materials for EFL adult learners in several English classes at one university.

In another study, Sohrabi (2019) selected Sa’di’s *Gulistan* as the intended classic Persian work, and she recreated some anecdotes as EFL resources for adult English learners. She explained all the challenges that she had confronted. Finally, she reported the viewpoints of some English teachers regarding utilizing the devised materials in real English classrooms.

Nourizadeh (2019) considered the Sublime *Quran* the most essential Islamic source and investigated its language to reach “Hayat-e Tayyebeh” in language teaching, especially in materials development. Based on the language of the Holy *Quran*, she recommended how to use the main Islamic concepts such as “Towhid” (i.e., Monotheism), “Ma’ad” (i.e., Afterlife), and “Hamd” (i.e., Praise) in the development of English materials for EFL learners.

Based on what is reported in the literature, teachers could be ditching generic materials and scripted lessons (Maley & Kiss, 2018). Therefore, they are becoming "coursebook writers" (Block, 1991), crafting socio-culturally relevant lessons tailored to their students (Salas, 2004). Surveys back this shift, with Iranian teachers finding localized materials to

boost motivation, engagement, and learning ([Tavakoli & Rezaei, 2018](#)). Nevertheless, real-life accounts of teacher-developed materials are still required. The educational community must share these teacher narratives, offering vital resources, inspiration, and guidance for others to follow suit. Research shows that integrating Persian literature into English materials boosts learner engagement and understanding. In this way, not only do the young learners experience authentic language and culture, but they also hone critical thinking skills ([Rezamashreghi, 2015a](#)).

Linked to the abovementioned literature, it is necessary to note that since developing English storybooks and further implementing them for young Iranian EFL learners practically in a real EFL classroom were the aims of the present research, the "text-driven" approach was selected as the intended framework in this regard. This framework was frequently used in several workshops and projects for material development in various countries such as "Argentina, Botswana, Brazil, Japan, Malaysia, ..., Singapore and Vietnam" ([Tomlinson, 2013](#)). This framework includes some stages such as "text collection," "text selection," "text experience," "experiential activities," "intake response activities," "development activities," and "input response activities" ([Tomlinson, 2013](#)).

Methodology

Design

Based on the literature, "ethnography" includes the study of different social communities and their enclosed culture ([Ary et al., 2010](#); [Murchison, 2010](#)). Indeed, ethnography, as a "research strategy," has been dedicated to several fields of study like "education" ([Murchison, 2010, p. 4](#)), and in this vein, "classroom ethnography" contains a "family resemblance to ethnography" ([Abdullah et al., 2019, p. 1](#)).

Therefore, as in the present exploratory research, investigating the opportunities/challenges of implementing the locally devised English storybooks in the classroom from the viewpoints of the recipients of these local English materials, including the Iranian young EFL learners and the English teachers was the aim, "classroom ethnography" was selected as the intended design of the research.

Participants

- A purposive sample of 28 female, young learner participants from 10 to 13 years of age at elementary proficiency level in the English language were recruited to acquire English

practically in the real EFL context in the Iranian setting. To do so, after the researcher explained to the participant-learners and their parents what the young learners would experience in general during the forthcoming academic term, they were convinced and the parents allowed their young children to participate in the study.

- A cohort of 10 EFL teachers initially were interviewed and asked to explain their perceptions regarding the point of how the devised materials would work in practice. Then, they evaluated how the devised storybooks were implemented by the researcher/teacher. These female participants were experts in EFL who have taught English in several language institutes for over a decade. Also, in line with the researcher/teacher, two other experienced teachers taught the prepared materials in separate classes.

- The researcher/teacher also practically implemented three local English storybooks for young learners in the classroom.

Instrumentation

Interviews

To evaluate the implementation of the devised storybooks in the EFL context in the classrooms, some interviews, including “informal interviews” and “formal interviews” ([Murchison, 2010, p. 102](#)) with the ten experienced EFL teachers, participating in the research, were conducted. Each face-to-face interview lasted at least 30 minutes. Since the interviews were considered the major source of data collection, they were all recorded, listened to, and transcribed carefully by the researcher. Some of the topics posed in the interviews are as follows:

- The teachers’ perceptions about the illustrations and images used in the storybooks.
- Their perceptions about the storybooks’ topics and contents.
- Their perceptions about the required time for teaching the storybooks in the classrooms.
- Their perceptions about the primary four receptive and productive skills, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are included in each storybook.
- Their perceptions about the amount of vocabulary items presented in each storybook.
- Their perceptions about the number of structural points presented in each storybook.
- Their perceptions about the activities compiled at the end of each storybook.
- Their perceptions about the moral themes in each storybook.
- Their prediction about the perception of the young EFL learners regarding learning English using the devised local English storybooks.

Journal Entries

One of the ways to evaluate the designed course can be by asking the participants to talk about their experiences in the course they have passed ([Nation & Macalister, 2010](#)); the young learners participating in the study were asked to answer some questions posed by the teacher. The questions were about the learners' experience of participating in the study. Then, they wrote their replies in some journal diaries regarding the experiences they acquired during the whole academic semester.

Observation

The researcher collected some methodical notes based on the other participant teachers' classroom observations. To decline the possible effect of observation on the participant-learners acts, the researcher tried to sit behind the students at the end of the class in a way that did not disturb the learners in the process of their learning.

To consider the merits and demerits of the implemented devised storybooks, some sessions of the practical phase of the research (i.e., the first, middle, and last session) held by the researcher/teacher were videotaped ([McDonough et al., 2013](#)) to be observed by the 10 EFL teachers participating in the study. In other words, to decrease the risk of bias by the researcher as one of the three teachers administering the local materials, the aforementioned English teachers monitored the process of implementing the storybooks by the researcher/teacher.

Procedure

The present qualitative study investigated the process of implementing the created English storybooks for young Iranian EFL learners practically in a real EFL classroom. As mentioned in the previous sections, the "text-driven" approach ([Tomlinson, 2013, 2020](#)) was selected as an appropriate framework in this regard. As Tomlinson suggested, because the classrooms are varied from each other, implementing all stages of the framework is optional.

To initiate the first two stages of the framework (i.e., text collection and text selection), the researcher consulted some experts on Persian literature. Based on their recommendations, didactically classic literary works, including Sa'di's works (i.e., *Gulistan* and *Bustan*), Saad ad-Din Varavini's work (i.e., *Marzbanname*), and Unsur ul-Ma'ali Kai-Ka'us ibn Iskandar' work (i.e., *Ghaboosname*) as the intended literary domain of the study were selected.

Then, under the guidance of two Persian literature experts, the researcher went on to extract the common moral values such as contentment, friendship, generosity, humility justice, sympathy, truthfulness, wisdom, and the like deeply imbedded in the mentioned

literary works. Indeed, it took a couple of months to review all these four Persian resources. Figure 1 indicates some of the extracted moral themes from *Gulistan*.

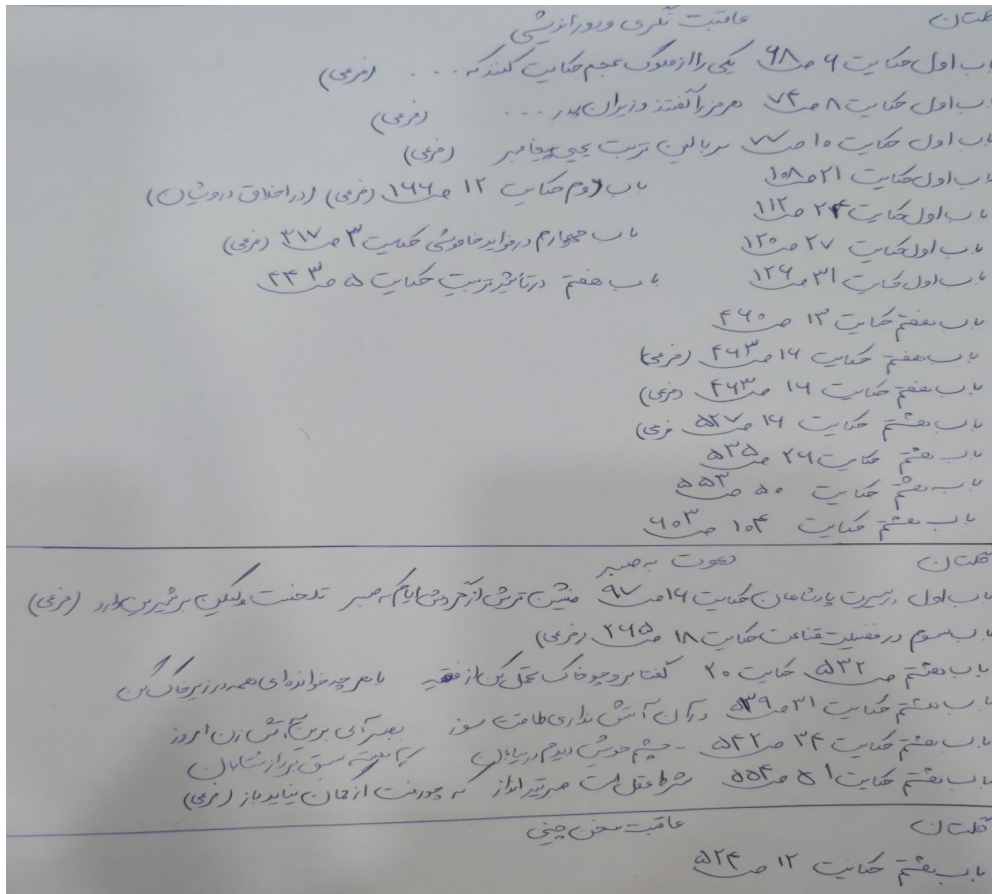


Figure 1. Some of the Extracted Moral Themes out of *Gulistan* Book

Next, three simple short storybooks were developed based on the identified Persian moral themes. Hence, the devised storybooks could also be categorized as didactic literary works. In fact, each storybook was devised in 20 pages. To cover the third stage of the text-driven approach (i.e., text experience) and also to ensure that the storybooks were congruent for young learners at the elementary proficiency level of English, the lexical items and the structural points utilized in the stories were selected based on the ones dedicated in *Family and Friends 3* by [Thompson and Simmons \(2018\)](#). Based on interviews with some experienced EFL teachers with more than a decade experience teaching young learners in English institutes, the *Family and Friends* series was aimed as the basis of lexicons and grammatical points in the storybooks. The series is known among the teachers of young learners in Iran as one of the most prevalent English course books utilized in this field. The mentioned source is complemented by related readers (i.e., storybooks) containing the same structural and lexical points in the student book.

Referring to the researcher/teacher's experience of teaching English to young learners for more than a decade and inspecting the third level of *the Family and Friends* series, the lexical items, including colors, family words, school objects, and animals, were selected for the devised storybooks. Moreover, the grammatical points, such as simple present tense, present progressive tense, simple past tense, past progressive tense, possessive adjectives, and frequency adverbs, were chosen based on scrutinizing the grammatical contents presented at *Family and Friends 3* to be used as the storybooks.

To follow the next stage of the framework (i.e., readiness activities, [Bland, 2013](#)), the storybooks were illustrated so that the pictures corresponded to the events and guided the learners to comprehend the contents of storybooks more thoroughly. A part of the illustrated story of *Color Pencils' Lives* is presented in Figure 2.

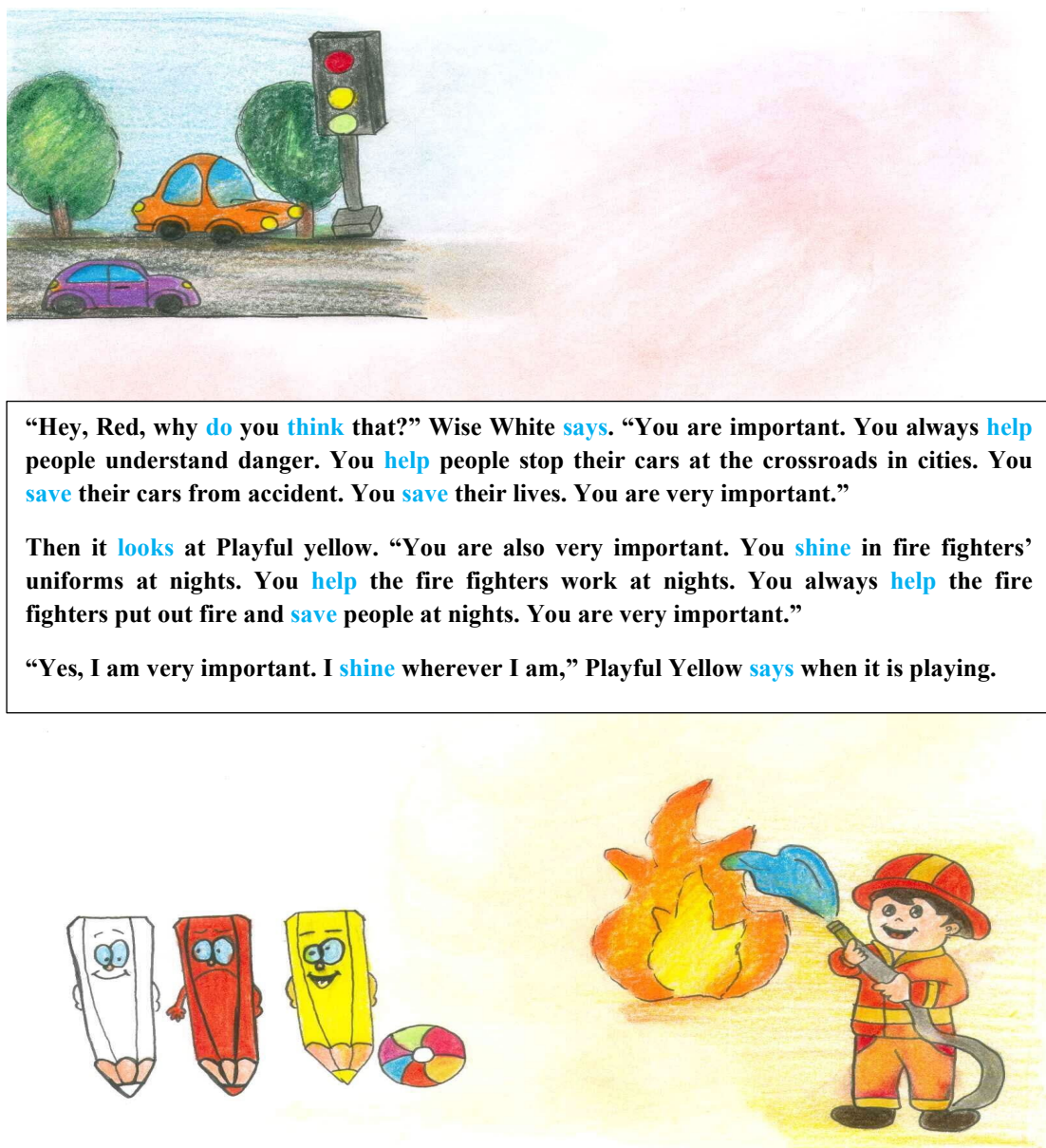


Figure 2. A Part of the Illustrated Story of Color Pencils’ Lives

To cover the following stages, including “experiential activities” and “intake response activities” of the text-driven approach, some related activities denoting the presented language, and the moral themes entrenched in the storybooks, were attached to the end of the books. These activities included matching exercises, fill-in-the-blank activities, vocabulary puzzles, sentence-making activities based on prompts (i.e., pictures from stories), and follow-up questions related to the contents of the stories. The finalized storybooks were audio-recorded by one native youngster. The recorded files complemented the devised storybooks.

The aim, premises, and techniques of implementing the devised textbooks in a natural context were elaborated on in the preface of each storybook. The main language contents of the storybooks were noted at the beginning of the storybooks in a table of contents.

To establish whether the devised materials would be propitious for the intended young learners, the prepared textbooks were sent to 10 experienced EFL teachers. The participant teachers were asked to read the storybooks meticulously to see how the illustrations and images, topics, contents, four receptive and productive language skills, components such as vocabulary items and grammatical points, follow-up activities, and moral points were devised in the storybooks. Then, informal and formal interviews were conducted. After the teachers evaluated the devised materials at this phase, the storybooks were revised based on the perceptions of the participant teachers.

As implementing the devised materials in a real-classroom context is considered necessary to determine their success or failure ([McDonough et al., 2013](#)), in line with the researcher/teacher, the storybooks were taught by two other experienced teachers in the classrooms; the merits and demerits of the devised storybooks were studied practically in the real EFL context. The intended classes were held in three separate institutes in Varamin and in Tehran.

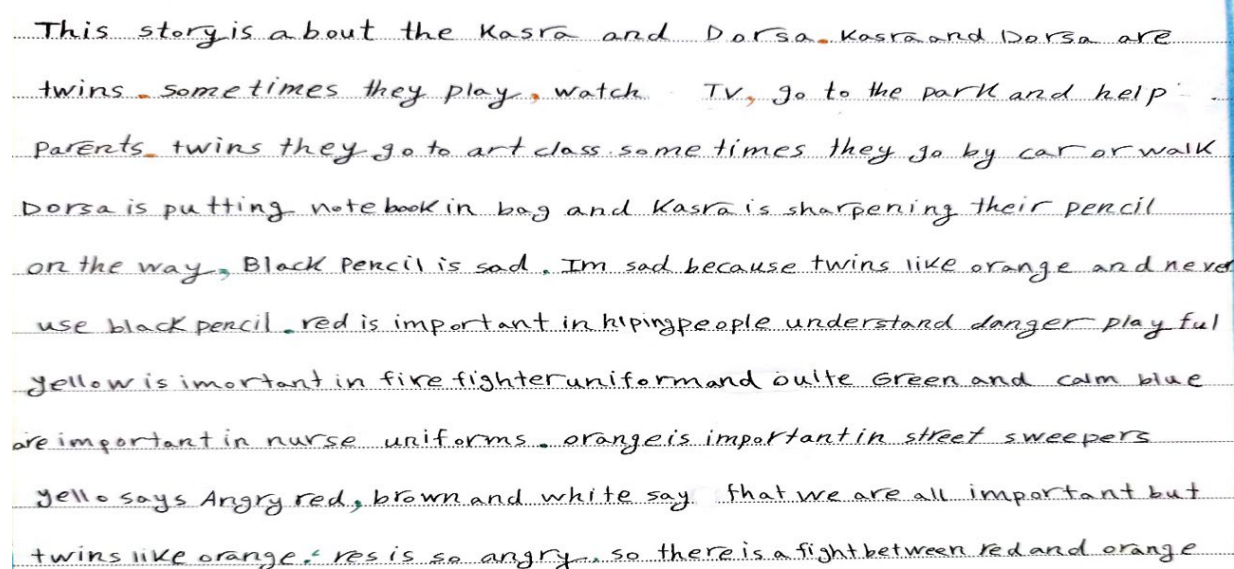
Notably, each class session lasted one hour and a half, and all three classes were held during one academic semester (i.e., 15 sessions). The classes were based on “learner-centered instruction” ([Shawer, 2017, p. 298](#)), in which the learners were responsible for doing the class activities, and the teachers facilitated the process of learning (*ibid*, [2017](#)).

Implementing the storybooks in the classrooms was based on “experiential activities” and “intake response activities” of the text-driven approach. According to [Tomlinson \(2013\)](#), “experiential activities” consist of some reading follow-up activities whose aim would be to “facilitate personal engagement” (p. 103) of the learners. Following the activities in each session, the intended learners acted, predicted some parts of the storybooks, and personalized the events of the storybooks ([Tomlinson, 2013](#)).

To read the storybooks, the young learners first listened to each page of the storybooks separately and then read them with the help of the teacher. The structural points of each story were presented by “input enhancement” ([Sharwood Smith, 1991](#)) conducted through “bolding” the intended points more in the received input ([Abu Radwan, 2005, p. 71](#)). In the present study, each anticipated grammatical manifestation in the story was highlighted by a specific color. So, the learners decoded the intended structural points of each story by noticing the highlighted parts presented repetitively in several lines of the stories. Moreover,

the new lexical items were clarified inductively by focusing on the illustrations of the stories or with the help of the teacher's implicit explanations.

As simple activities such as drawing, coloring, and acting out could help young learners practice the English language (Tongue, 1984, as cited in [Ghosn, 2019](#)), the participant learners of the present study were required to make some English sentences based on the prompts from the stories, write some summaries of the read sections of the story at the end of each session, and draw their inferences from those parts in the class or at the end of their summaries later at home. The excerpts presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4 were selected from the cluster of the learners' summaries.



This story is about the Kasra and Dorsa. Kasra and Dorsa are twins. Sometimes they play, watch TV, go to the park and help parents. twins they go to art class. some times they go by car or walk. Dorsa is putting notebook in bag and Kasra is sharpening their pencil on the way. Black pencil is sad. Im sad because twins like orange and never use black pencil. red is important in helping people understand danger playful yellow is important in fire fighter uniform and quite Green and calm blue are important in nurse uniforms. orange is important in street sweepers. Jello says Angry red, brown and white say that we are all important but twins like orange. red is so angry, so there is a fight between red and orange.

Figure 3. The Summary Written by Young Learner A

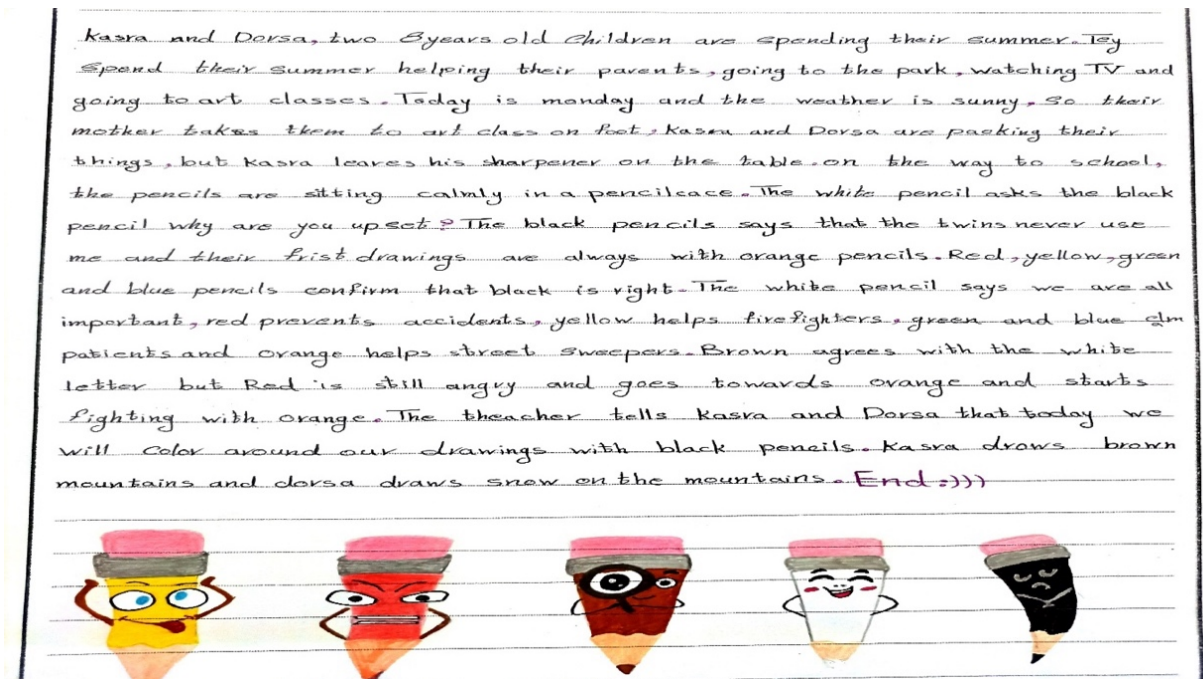


Figure 4. The Summary Written by Young Learner B

According to [Tomlinson \(2013\)](#), since the physical activities would help learners “visualize” the contents of the storybooks, and role-playing would entail the development of learners’ lexicon ([Ghosn, 2019](#)), the productive language skill, i.e., speaking, was attained by asking the learners to act out some parts of the storybooks.

Having read each storybook and done its related activities in class, the learners were required to discover the moral themes embedded in it with the teacher’s help. Presenting related short films or cartoons to young learners can foster their English learning process ([Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018b](#)). So, having read each storybook thoroughly, the learners watched one episode of Sa’di’s animation series directly extracted from *Gulistan* and *Bustan*’s anecdotes containing the same moral theme as the proposed storybook. Then, to implement the last stage of the text-driven approach (i.e., input response activities), the learners discussed the episodes’ moral themes and their similarities to those presented in the storybooks. The teachers helped the learners discuss the mentioned points in the English language. It is necessary to mention that the language of these cartoons was Persian; however, as [Tomlinson \(2013\)](#) claimed, a judicious amount of L1 can be used to prepare the learners for L2 learning. Since the young learners’ activities at this phase of the study were based on their creativity and personal understanding, all their replies were praised as correct answers by the teachers ([Tomlinson, 2013](#)).

Due to the point that the positive effect of story reading on the improvement of language skills and components has been confirmed in the literature (Ghosn, 2019), in the current research, four primary receptive/productive language skills, as noted, were included in the contents, follow-up activities at the end of the storybooks, and in the activities conducted in the classroom.

Since the evaluation of the studied materials is considered a potential “to improve teaching and learning” (Graves, 2008, p. 152) and observation as a helpful way in this vein is used in the classroom to illuminate how learners take the provided chances of learning (McDonough et al., 2013), three sessions of the class (i.e., the first session, mid-term session, and final session) in which the researcher was considered as the teacher was videotaped. Following that, the videos were sent to the 10 participant teachers to analyze the usefulness of the developed storybooks in locally real EFL classrooms based on their experience of teaching English to young learners. Then, the perceptions of EFL teachers as experts in this domain were explored. Besides, the researcher randomly observed ten sessions of the classes by the other two teachers (i.e., 15 hours of observation of each teacher). The following sections report the field notes collected from the observations.

Moreover, as mentioned before, 28 journal diaries were collected at the end of the study. The two documents demonstrated in Figure 5 and Figure 6 were selected from the informant-learners’ journal diaries regarding one of the storybooks.

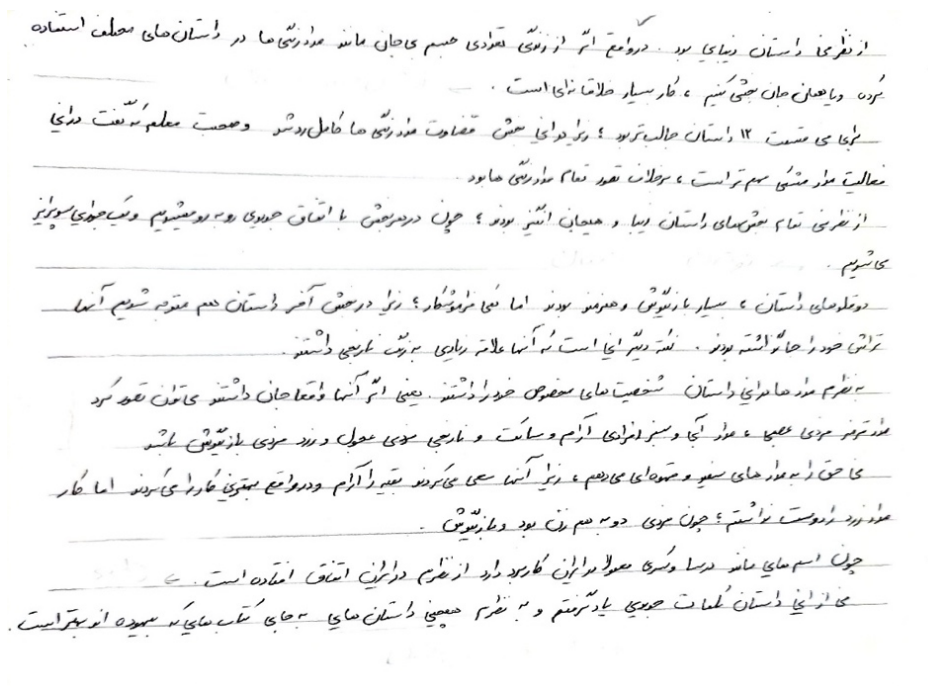


Figure 5. The Journal Diary Written by Young Learner A

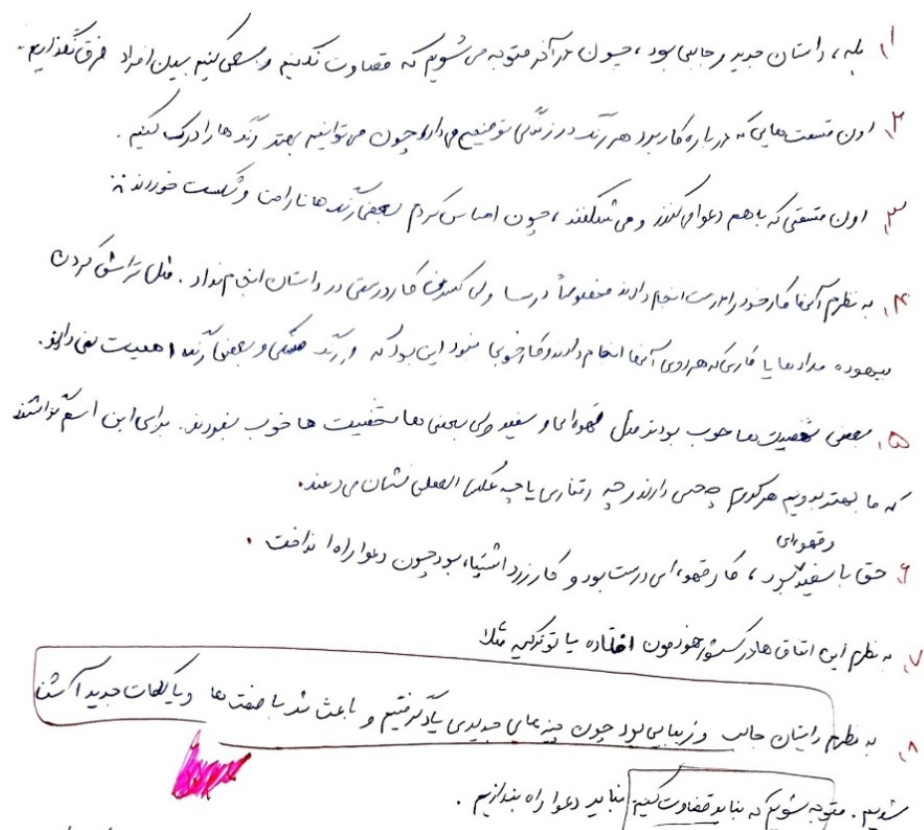


Figure 6. The Journal Diary Written by Young Learners

Results and Discussion

As in the present exploratory research, investigating the opportunities/challenges of implementing the locally devised English storybooks in the classroom based on the perceptions of the recipients of these local English materials, including the Iranian young EFL learners and the English teachers was the aim, “classroom ethnography” was the intended design of the research.

To answer the research inquiries, the written interviews with the young learners (i.e., journal diaries), the transcribed interviews with the teachers, the notes extracted from observations of the researcher by presenting in the classrooms held by the other two teachers, and the videos taken from those classes were investigated thoroughly. Then, the common points were classified according to the related “themes and categories” ([Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007](#)) and then coded systematically ([Dornyei, 2011](#)).

The Opportunities of Implementing Locally Developed Materials in the Classroom

Having analyzed all the data collected, the researcher found the following common points denoting the positive aspects of implementing the devised storybooks.

Elevating the Informants' Language Proficiency Level

The first common point evident in the written interviews (i.e., journal diaries) of the informant-learners was regarding the positive impact of learning English by means of the locally devised storybooks on their English proficiency. As most of the young “informants” (i.e. 86% of them) stated, their language proficiency was boosted at the end of the course period (i.e., 15 sessions of the class). The following excerpts of the young learners' written interviews (i.e., journal diaries) explain this point more.

- *I think these stories were better than our previous course books. They [storybooks] helped us improve our English [proficiency].*
- *The stories were very beneficial for learning English. I liked the highlighted parts of the stories, too. They helped me learn grammar better.*
- *Reading the stories taught me new things, such as new adjectives and [other] new words.*

This statement was likely because the young learners participating in the research could practice listening skills by listening to the audio file related to each story. They worked on reading each page of the stories individually and in their groups. Also, they had some writing activities, including sentence writing, summary writing, changing the plots of stories, and adding more characters to each story. To practice speaking, they discussed each page with the help of the related teacher, and they acted out some parts of each story in the class. Finally, they discussed the moral themes patent in the related episodes of animation cartoons about Sa'di's anecdotes. They compared the moral themes and the characters of the cartoon with those presented to them in the storybooks.

This point was admitted in the interviews with ten teachers before the practical phase of the study. They mostly (i.e., 80% of the teachers) believed that since the four language skills, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing, would be involved in the process of implementing the storybooks in the classroom, the devised materials would help the teachers expand the learners' language knowledge. The study's findings in this part aligned with [Rezamashreghi \(2015b\)](#). She declared that local stories would assist the learners in advancing their English.

The following examples from the transcripts of interviews with teachers clarify this issue.

- *Since [some] specific grammatical points were highlighted in several sentences in each story, the learners would improve the opportunity to learn English.*

- *Presenting these storybooks would guide the young learners to practice several language skills.*

Table 1. The Informants' Perceptions about the Positive Impact of Learning English through the Locally Devised Storybooks on Elevating the Young Learners' Language Proficiency Level

Informants	Level	
	Agreed	Disagreed
Learners	86%	14%
Teachers	80%	20%

Table 1 demonstrates that 86% of learners and 80% of teachers participating in the study approved the point that learning English through locally devised storybooks led to improving the learners' language proficiency level. However, 14% of the learners and 20% of the teachers did not approve it.

Raising the Young Informants' Critical Thinking

The second common point apparent in the collected data was regarding the positive effect of learning English by means of locally devised storybooks on enhancing the young learners' critical thinking. This fact was observed by the researcher and reported by the teachers of the other two classes. Based on the mentioned data, learning English through locally devised storybooks guided the young informants in gradually developing their ability to discuss the moral points entrenched in each story.

As observed, they could merely talk about the story's meaning during the first sessions. However, having confronted the deeper layers of the story (i.e., the non-human characters of the stories resembling the human characters and their traits) with the help of the teachers, the young informants could discuss the moral points themselves.

Besides, the learners personalized the characters of each story and related them to their classmates. Consequently, the young learners drew what they deduced from each story, reflecting on the events, the characters, and their intended traits in the stories. These issues were observed in the video recording of the classes, as well. Some illustrations from the young learners' drawings elucidating their understanding of the storybooks are presented in the following figures.



Figure 7. The Drawing About the Storybooks by the Young Learner A

As the illustrations of the colored pencils in Figure 7 indicate, the children realized what would occur as the result of not having patience and consequently being hasty in replying to others' objections.



Figure 8. The Drawing about the Storybooks by the Young Learner B

As the illustration in Figure 8 shows, the youngsters could figure out what important role each individual could play in society.

Besides, the interviews with the ten teachers denoted this point; about 90% of the teachers anticipated that the prospective young learners would discover more profound layers of meaning, including the moral themes in the stories. The instance below, extracted from the interviews with the ten teachers, shows this point in more detail.

- As non-human characters in each story have a fixed adjective related to human life, the learners could easily understand the moral points presented in each story.

- I think it was a good idea to attach one fixed adjective to characters per story. It causes them [young learners] to realize the moral themes hidden in the relationships among the stories' characters well.

Moreover, more than half of the young informants (i.e., about 70%) participating in this exploratory study pointed to this issue. The excerpts from the written interviews (i.e., journal diaries) exemplify this common point.

- These stories reflected the human roles in the societies. Each character resembled a type of human character.

- Reading these stories could help us learn how to live better.

- These stories taught us not to judge others [as in the story of Little Sunflower Seed], not to be jealous [as in the story of Color Pencils' Lives] and to do our best to help our friends [as in the story of Green Wood]

The research findings in this section were supported by the outcomes of the studies by [Nourizadeh \(2019\)](#) and [Poursaduqi \(2019\)](#). Based on the results of her study, [Nourizadeh \(2019\)](#) stated that the local materials would be "meaningful" to the learners' life experiences. Likewise, [Poursaduqi \(2018\)](#) believed that local materials would advance the process of "critical teaching and learning" (p. 84).

Table 2. The Informants' Perceptions about the Positive Impact of Learning English through Locally Devised Materials on Enhancing Young Learners' Critical Thinking

Informants	Agreed	Disagreed
Learners	70%	30%
Teachers	90%	10%

Table 2 demonstrates that 70% of learners and 90% of teachers participating in the study approved the point that learning English through locally devised materials led to raising

the learners' critical thinking. However, 30% of the learners and 10% of the teachers did not assent to this point.

The Challenges of Practically Implementing Locally Developed Materials in the Classroom

Having analyzed the collected data, the researcher categorized and coded the following common points indicating the drawbacks of practically implementing the devised storybooks.

Time-intensive Process

The foremost challenge of practically conducting the storybooks was related to the duration of administering this study phase. The researcher-teacher experienced this issue, which is evident in the recorded videos of the classes and reported by the teachers of the other two classes. According to the data, teaching stories enriched by moral themes and ambivalent points leading to learning English was time intensive.

Teaching the storybooks this way took a whole academic semester (i.e., 15 sessions) in which 5 sessions were devoted to one of the stories. Likewise, nearly all the ten teachers interviewed before the practical phase of the study predicted that each story would be too long to be taught in one session (i.e., 90% of the teachers). Considering all these points brought about, teaching locally developed materials was the primary source during at least one academic semester.

Interestingly, the same challenge was reported by [Sohrabi \(2019\)](#). The participant-teachers interviewed in her study expressed their worry about the possible time restrictions for implementing such locally devised materials in the classrooms. The following instances were selected from the transcripts of interviews with ten teachers. Also, table 3 shows the perceptions of the teachers in this regard.

- The only drawback of the storybooks is that each story should be shorter to be taught as a supplementary source in one session. So, it would possibly be burdensome for the teachers to cover both the primary source and these stories during one [academic] semester.

- I prefer shorter stories that could be taught as supplementary sources during one session.

Table 3. The Informant-Teachers' Prediction Regarding the Challenge of Time Restriction

Informants	Agreed	Disagreed
Teachers	90%	10%

Table 3 demonstrates that 90% of the teachers predicted that each story would be too long to be taught in one session. While 10% did not predict such a challenge before the practical phase of the study.

It is crucial to note that this issue was because each story contained some specific moral themes extracted from the didactical Persian classic literature. The dialogues among non-human characters illuminated these moral themes, including the colored pencils, animals, and flowers. The characters of each story also contained specific adjectives resembling human traits. The stories further comprised abundant points beneficial for learning English (i.e., lexical items and structural points). Considering all these aspects in one storybook appropriate for Iranian youngsters to learn English led to preparing such long English materials.

Further, not only were the storybooks devised based on the vocabulary items and structural points of *Family and Friends 3*, but also the number of words used in each story was by the word account of the readers of *Family and Friends 3* (i.e., *Pinocchio*, *Sinbad*, *Snow White*, and *the Seven Dwarfs*, & *Two Kites*).

The Outset of Practical Implementation of the Locally Devised Storybooks

On the one hand, the next noticeable challenge experienced by the researcher-teacher was preparing a real EFL context to launch the practical phase of the study. To do so, three English classes whose young learners had passed *Family and Friends 2* and were ready to start *the Family and Friends 3*-course book were required.

Nevertheless, despite the endeavor made by the researcher to convince the principals of some English language institutes to allow the researcher as an intended teacher to carry out the study in one of the classes, they have yet to approve of doing so. As they claimed, the locally devised English materials may not have the prerequisite standards compared with the commercialized resources available on the market. Hence, they could not trust the local English storybooks to be appropriate enough to be taught in the classrooms. Furthermore, they objected to three storybooks being used as the primary sources in an English class. They instead preferred the mainstream course books on the market written by native speakers. Finally, the researcher pinpointed three different educational contexts in English institutes in Varamin and Tehran whose young learners had passed *Family and Friends 2* and were ready to carry out the study practically.

The study's findings at this part were consistent with what [Mishan and Timmis \(2015\)](#) reported. According to them, the materials used for English as a foreign language (EFL) are

mostly restricted to commercialized resources produced by publishing organizations in English-spoken countries such as the UK.

On the other hand, before initiating the study, primarily the youngsters participating in the research and their parents declared their dissatisfaction with learning English through storybooks (i.e., at the beginning, only 18% of the learners intended to experience learning English this way). They asked whether the children would learn grammatical points, work on listening tasks, or possibly practice writing activities during the upcoming semester. Therefore, they preferred the standard course books taught in the institutes.

Nonetheless, they were convinced after the researcher explained what the young learners would experience in general during the forthcoming academic term. They took part in the study process. The exact process was also administered by the reports of teachers of the other two classes.

The discussed challenge corroborated the predicted shortcoming reported by the participant-teachers in [Sohrabi \(2019\)](#). As she stated, one of the reasons halting the teachers in the arena from attempting to produce such innovations is the fear of the negative perceptions of others.

On the contrary, at the end of the study and after learning English using locally devised storybooks, the informant-learners expressed their satisfaction with acquiring English in this way. Hence, in reply to the question of the related teachers about their perceptions regarding learning English through the storybooks, most of them (i.e., more than 80% of the young learners) reported that not only did they enjoy learning English utilizing the storybooks but also, they preferred the locally devised storybooks to the commercialized course books. The instances below were extracted from the written interviews (i.e., journal diaries) of the young informant participants of the study. Also, Table 4 demonstrates how the challenge of learners' dissatisfaction at the beginning of the study settled at the end of the research.

- I would not say I liked studying English by the storybooks before. However, now I learn many things by reading them.

- At first, my mom and I thought participating in this class would waste my time. However, I have learned more things now than in previous terms.

Table 4. The Learners' Perceptions Regarding Their Satisfaction with Learning English through Locally Devised Storybooks

Learners Perceptions	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
At the Outset of the Study	18%	82%
At the End of the Study	82%	18%

Table 4 demonstrates that 18% of the young learners were satisfied and 82% were dissatisfied with learning English through locally devised storybooks at the outset of the study. However, 82% of the same learners were satisfied and 18% were not satisfied with learning English through locally devised storybooks at the end of the study.

Concluding Remarks

As part of a more extensive doctoral dissertation project, the current qualitative study worked on the positive/negative aspect of practically implementing locally devised storybooks for young learners in a real EFL context in Iran. As the findings of this classroom ethnography research revealed, the practical administration of three storybooks, innovatively prepared, would bring about some opportunities, including enhancing the young learners' English proficiency level and improving their critical thinking ability.

However, this process would lead to challenges like time restrictions to practically work on the locally devised storybooks. Further, locating an appropriate English setting for the practical study of such local English materials would be another challenge. Convincing the recipients of these innovatively local English materials, including the intended English learners, to cooperate in the study and participate in the classes whose primary sources for learning English would be the locally prepared English materials would be another drawback.

The findings of this qualitative study bear some crucial implications for future practice. They can be used for the Iranian EFL teachers to know what important role they can play in the ELT context of Iran and how they can apply such local English materials in the classrooms.

These outcomes also suggest that teacher training courses be held in English institutes to acquaint English teachers with administering local classroom resources. Further, the curriculum developers can become familiar with the consequences of using commercially produced textbooks for teaching English to young Iranian learners.

Finally, a number of caveats need to be noted regarding the present study. The most important delimitation lies in the fact that the moral themes considered in the present study

such as contentment, friendship, generosity, humility, justice, sympathy, truthfulness, wisdom, and the like used for preparing the local English storybooks, could be observed in other cultures, as well. However, since they are mostly repeated in Persian literature and more vivid in Iranian culture, they were used as the basis for initiating the study. As the second point, the research was limited by setting; the study was merely carried out in one province (i.e. in Tehran province) in Iran setting. Third, due to accessibility difficulties merely 28 young female learners participated in the study. So with the limited context of the study and the small sample size, caution must be applied to the findings, and more research in this field is required.

Therefore, further studies including more participant-learners of both genders are recommended. Besides, developing local English materials with a focus on other Persian literary sources such as Persian contemporary literature is an important issue for future research.

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