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The effect of adopting an English name at EFL Iranian elementary schools

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ABSTRACT

Having a nickname or an English name in English classes in Iran is common. In this qualitative research the participants are 112 elementary pupils, only nine percent of which hasn't adopted an English name. Based on a questionnaire which was selected in this study most of the names of the pupils are chosen by the students themselves and by the help of their English teacher at school. Some of them choose unusual names like HI or HELLO even girls choose male names. Having an English name gives them a great interest when their teacher or their classmates call them with their English names. Even though those who had an English name were not aware of the meaning of their names or the reason of choosing the names, they like to have nickname. The students believe that having an English name and in some percentage knowing its meaning motivates them to learn better.

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Introduction

A nickname is "a familiar or humorous name given to a person or thing instead of or as well as the real name." (Wikipedia, 2011). However, sometimes the pronunciation of foreign names is difficult, but because of animosity learners like it. In Iran, choosing an English name is common in language schools in different levels, but at schools just for fun the low level classes choose English names. When asking the students about the meaning of their names they cannot answer it but they are pleased about having an English name. Most of the students even cannot spell their names and some of them choose some strange names like HI, HELLO and BERRY but they enjoy having these names.

In this research, we want to study the effect of an English name on the Iranian EFL learners at the elementary level and see if there is any relationship between choosing the names and the learning English.

Literature Review

There are different factors in choosing a name and the chosen names are people's identity in the society (Chatterjee, 2003; Liu, 2001). Some of the students select a name after the famous person such as actors or actresses, athletes or others (Chatterjee 2003; Mc Pherron 2009). Some take names that are similar to their mother tongue (Chatterjee, 2003; Edwards, 2006). Even some select a name which is easy to pronounce and retain (McPherron, 2009; Wang, 2009). For the others the meaning of the name is important and they pick a name because its meaning is likable. In adoption of an English name learners have conceptions. Some of them chose the name just for a short time to use it in class and after a while they neglect the name (Chatterjee, 2003).

As Chatterjee (2003) interviewed a student about the English name, he replied that he is going to continue using the English name because it has been a long time that he has used this name and everyone knows him with this name. Even one of the students expressed that having an English name gives her a sense of autonomy and she feels safe by using the English name. Wang (2009) has done a survey about the English name, and some of the participants claimed that their English name is a kind of social investment for them.

In (2003) Chatterjee suggested that the teachers should spend some times on selecting the name for the students so that the students will have a suitable name for themselves. In (1996) Blau wanted the students to write down their names and even write stories about their names.

The above-stated studies focused on how adopting an English name effects on the EFL learners. In this study, we focused on the effect of the nickname or the English name on elementary students. Also, we revile whether the students in low levels enjoy utilizing English names or not.

Method

Participants:

The participants in this study are 112 EFL learners, which are randomly selected among the elementary schools in Zanjan, Iran. Among 112 learners, 45 are the first graders, 20 are the second graders, 21 are the third graders, 16 are the fourth graders and 10 are the fifth graders. All of them have the experience of being in English classes for at least one year. The subjects have two sessions of forty five minutes of English classes during the week at school.

Instruments:

The instrument which is used in this qualitative research is a questionnaire which includes 15 questions about having a nickname. From 15 questions some are yes/no questions, some are fill in the blanks and the last five are Likert scale. In Likert scale subjects should choose the best possible answer according to their language learning situation. As you can check it in the appendix the choices are totally disagree, disagree, ok, agree and totally agree.

Results:

Out of 112 students in this study, 102 students have English names which are around 91 percent of the participants. In the first grade only two of the students could spell their English names and their spelling is not correct. In the other grades they misspelled their names and only six students could spell their English name correctly.

Some students picked some strange or unusual names such as HI, HELLO, PINK, HEART, LOOK, APPLE, BERRY and even male names like Taylor.

Following table shows the most usual names among the students:

	Top One	Top Two	Top Three
Names	Rose (5)		Annalisa (2)
	Alice (5)	Ermica (3)	Liza(2)
			Jennifer (2)

The participants, mostly choose their English names themselves (53 percent) or the teacher at school (around 30 percent) selects their name. Also less than 6 percent of the learners' parents help them to have an English name, by other like the family members or friends (around 7 percent) and by their teachers at language schools (around 4 percent). The following chart shows the percentage of the distribution of those who help the students to have an English name.

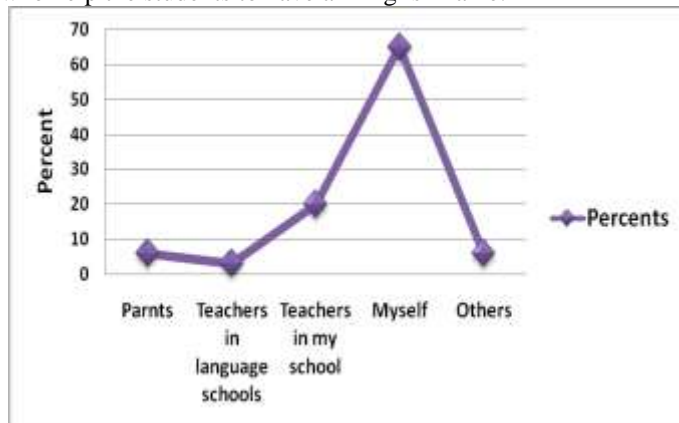


Figure 1: The percentage of people who help the students to have an English name

Most of the students don't know the meaning of their names. In the first grade the learners are interested to know the meaning of their names and they believed that knowing the meaning of their name will help them to learn English better. 60 percent of the participants who do not have an English name wished to have one like their classmates. The students who own a nickname like their names and wanted to continue using the names but some of them in higher grades express that they like to change their names.

Regarding item eleven, "knowing the meaning of my English name motivates me to learn English well." around 50 percent of the students totally agree or agree that to know the meaning of their name will motivate them, while 25 percent of them had no idea. From the fifth graders, 30 percent totally agree that it motivates them to know the meaning of their names. In the fourth grade, 37.5 percent, in the third grade, 52 percent, in the second grade, 40 percent and in the first grade 51 percent agree or totally agree with this statement. As the result proves the younger the students are the higher their interest in knowing the meaning of their English name is.

The result of the twelfth question is almost the same as the result of the eleventh question. The lower the levels of the students are, the more satisfied they are with having an English name. Around 54 percent of the students answer this question to agree or totally agree. Around 18 percent of the participants totally disagree or disagree that "Having an English name makes them feel like a native speaker. It was unusual that the fifth graders totally disagree or disagree that because they have a nickname they are like natives. Fifth grade students totally agree that when the teacher or the classmates call them with their English name they feel good. Overall, 95 percent of the students like their teacher call them with an English name and with some degrees of change (88 percent) like their classmates call them with their English name, too. The least degree in these two questions is related to the second grade which is 70 and 55

percent. It means that they like the teacher call them with English name more than their classmates.

The interesting point is about the third graders that the degrees of these two are equal. The students' interests for being called by the teacher or the classmates are equally the same (90 percent).

In the following chart we can see the different degrees of distribution in answering the questions in the questionnaire.

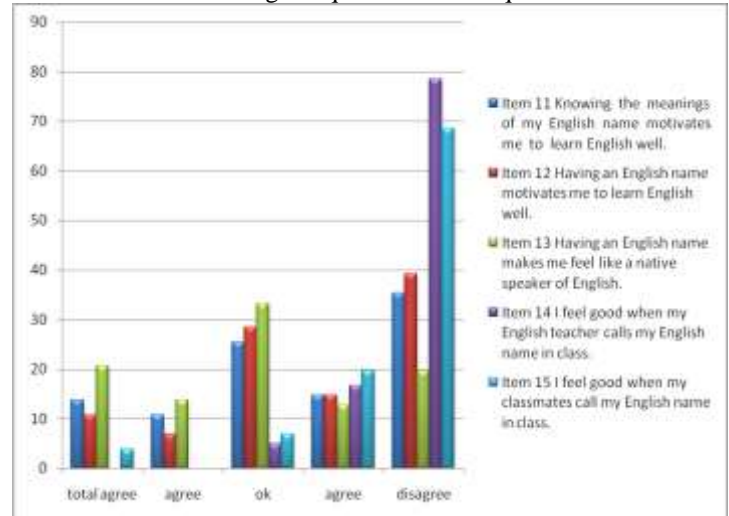


Figure 2: degrees of distribution in answering the questions

Discussion

Based on analyzing the data the following topics will be discussed according to the topic of the paper; *using an English name, choosing an acceptable English name, the learner's knowledge of the English name, the connection between nick names and learners' personality and the relationship between names and learners' out-look.*

Using an English name

Choosing an English name is one of the common events among the foreign language learners in Iran, but maybe at higher grades it is not that much customary as it is in the elementary schools. The result of this research shows that around 91 percent of the students had chosen an English name and 60 percent of those who don't have, like to have an English name.

The students' nick names, mostly were given to them by themselves (53 percent) or by their teachers at their school (30 percent). A few number of the students not only used the English classes at school, but also they participate in language schools and they have chosen the names there (around 4 percent). In some cases even the parents (6 percent) or others like family members (7 percent) have chosen a name for the students.

Choosing an acceptable English name

A person's name is something that we use to call him/her. In this research some of the female students have chosen a male name and they don't like to change them because they insist that they like their names. Two of the common names are Rose and Alice. By being serious about why the students have chosen these names, the conclusion reveals that these are the names that students have acquainted in their books. Even some of the students used names like HI, HELLO, PINK, HEART, LOOK, APPLE and BERRY. These names are mostly chosen in first and second grades because their information is not enough to know that they are not suitable names. Students are not aware of their names or the meaning of their names, but based on Nicholaisen (1984) a person's name is a person's identity so the teachers should be careful in the students' selection of a name.

Learners' Knowledge of English name

When choosing English name students do not notice about their English name and their meaning. Based on Liu (2001) choosing an English name for some people is rebirth and that new name attaches something new to that person. For example, one of the students chose Jennifer as her English name that it associates her with a famous singer Jennifer Loupes or the other one chose Dorothy which it reminds a cartoon character.

A very limited number of the students could spell their name and most of them couldn't even spell their name properly. Students should be able to pronounce and spell their name properly so that they can use their name but most of them couldn't.

Connection between nick names and learners' personality

Based on Peter Sercombe (2014) there is an interrelated role between nicknaming and the context of students' lives. But in this study as a whole around 30 percent of the students have a positive opinion about "Having an English name make them like native speaker", especially fifth graders insisted on this. By ranking the grades fifth graders totally (100 percent) agreed that their teacher and their classmates call them with their English name. In the second rank was the third graders that they like their classmates and their teacher call them with the same percentage (90 percent). As a whole students like the teacher and their classmates call them with an English name but the degree differs in different levels. By calling English name they feel like a native speaker and they are motivated.

Relationship between names and learners' out-look

In the lower grades students agreed that having an English name motivates them to learn English easily. Approximately 50 percent of the first, second and third graders agree or totally agree with this idea while in fifth grade only 30 percent of them had a positive opinion about this statement. In fact, as the children get older they realize more about English and they are expected more, but in lower levels they consider English as a fun and something new that is why they think having an English name can incite them.

Conclusion

Using an English name is usual in Iran in elementary schools. As the outcome of this qualitative research reveals 91 percent of the students have an English name and 60 percent of the students who do not have an English name like to have one. Most of the students don't experience the significance of their name and don't know how to spell them. Their name was generally selected by the students themselves or by teachers at their school or house.

This research focused on the elementary schools. It can be done at higher levels and at language schools instead of the ordinary schools.

Appendix: Questionnaire

1. I have an English name. Yes No
2. My English name is
3. I don't have an English name, but I want to have an English name. Yes No
4. I know the meanings of my English name. Yes No
5. The meanings of my English name is

6. The person who gave me this name is

My parents Teachers in language schools
 Teachers in my school
 Myself others (places specify).....

7. The person who gave me this name told me the meaning of my English name.

Yes No

8. The person who gave me this name told me why he/she gave me this name.

Yes No

9. I want to know the meaning of my name.

Yes No

10. I will continue to use this English name.

Yes No

Read the following five statements and choose 1-5.

1 total disagree 2 disagree 3 OK 4 agree 5 total agree

11. Knowing the meanings of my English name motivates me to learn English well.

12. Having an English name motivates me to learn English well.

13. Having an English name makes me feel like a native speaker of English.

14. I feel good when my English teacher calls my English name in class.

15. I feel good when my classmates call my English name in class.

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