

more insights into and control over educational issues (Boostroom, Jackson, & Hansen, 1993).

A further solution could be modifying the academic reward system (Mehrani, in press). As an example, for our context we can envision an academic reward system that would maintain a focus on theoretical research, while also promoting practical studies. Within such a reward structure, researchers would not have to follow only the “publish or perish” policy (Neil, 2008) but, for example, they would be paid for working with teachers on producing new educational insights and sharing research findings with teachers, administrators, parents and students (Gore & Giltin, 2004). Or alternatively, researchers’ academic profile would be evaluated, among other things, based on how much “off-campus grants” they annually receive. Tenured positions in academic centers could be given to those who are engaged in solving practical problems. These and similar changes in our academic reward structure would encourage university professors and educational centers to negotiate addressing pedagogical and practical problems.

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and the use of technology in language teaching, collectively accounting for about 30% of all research studies. This mirrors one of the main missions of Roshd FLT, which is, improving language teachers' professional qualifications and skills.

On the other hand, teacher-students interactions, emotional aspects of language teaching, error correction and students' assignments are areas characterized by few research studies. A further noteworthy finding is the paucity of research studies on discourse analysis and English for specific purposes. Of course, this can be positively interpreted as some studies on discourse and ESP may not offer pedagogical implications that could be directly translated into teaching practice by teachers who are engaged high schools.

**There is a good research supply on areas such as teacher education, teaching methodology, educational materials, and the use of technology in language teaching, collectively accounting for about 30% of all research studies**

### Conclusion

This analysis revealed that Roshd FLT has been, at best, moderately successful in terms of addressing teachers' pedagogical concerns. Given the absence of comparative investigations into the content of other professional journals in the Iranian context, the researcher cannot comment on how these findings relate to ELT research studies in our national community more generally. Nevertheless,

compared to the findings reported based on investigations into contents of international journals including TESOL Quarterly, and Modern Language Journal (e.g. Benson, Chik, Gao, Huang & Wang, 2009; Lazaraton, 2005) this finding is not surprising and reaffirms that our research is, to some extent, "dysfunctional" (Clarke, 1994) in addressing practical aspects of language education.

A number of suggestions have been proposed in the literature about how to address this problem. For instance, one solution is to promote alternative models of research such as action research, ethnography and teacher research. Influential commentators such as Allwright (1993, 2005), Brumfit (1987, 1997), Burns (1999, 2005), McKay (2006), and Nunan (1997) have variously articulated the advantages of these types of inquiries in applied linguistics. A common theme across these research models is the need to recognize and respect research and teaching as poles of the same continuum and the desire to work toward some form of partnership between teachers and researchers. Such a partnership is something that Bolitho (1987) identifies as the only way to answer some of the key questions about classroom language-learning and teaching.

Another strategy is to change the context of research studies. Shulman (1997) observes that in some educational research a shift in research sites from laboratories to schools and classrooms is evident. This shift of research context involves many changes, including researchers' concerns and priorities, and their conceptions of teaching (Gore & Giltin, 2004). It also entails more collaboration between researchers and practitioners (Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007). When effective, such collaboration helps researchers to obtain

are frequently studied, but it is not easy to capture the complexities involved in pronunciation by simply using tests and questionnaires. Therefore, pronunciation is often put aside. In other words, in addition to their pedagogical significance, the easiness/difficulty of research topics might determine what kind of research to be conducted and with what frequency. This suggests that our research community is probably affected by what Lazaraton calls a sort of “wag the dog” syndrome (Lazaraton, 2005). That is, researchers do not decide what issues to work on, but the procedural easiness/difficulties involved in investigating various issues determine the researchers’ research focus.

**The proponents of problem-based model of research, however, advise that researchers should draw the problems from the realm of practice instead. The underlying assumption behind this idea is that educational research should address practitioners’ research needs (Pieters, & de Vries, 2007)**

As Figure 1 illustrates, Roshd FLT has one-sidedly focused on psycho-cognitive research areas. For instance, socio-cultural aspects of language teaching and more particularly educational policies (for which I found no directly relevant study) are rarely researched. Although a comprehensive discussion of the underlying reasons for a lack of research in these areas is beyond the scope of this paper, this finding can be discussed in the light of three important reasons. First, the multi-dimensionalities and complexities involved in the study of socio-political and cultural issues make these areas very elusive, ones that cannot be easily captured within the so-called scientific research frameworks. On the other hand, the dominance of quantitative-experimental paradigm in the Iranian ELT research holds no more than off-the-point positions for these topics (Samar, et al. 2012). Secondly, in contrast to many other issues such as language skills, grammar, vocabulary, teacher education, etc. which are academically located and have their own theoretical terms, socio-political and cultural issues are rarely documented in discussions of language education. This makes them appear marginal or even non-existent (Moore, 2007). Finally, in the Iranian context, the unanimously acknowledged problem of a lack of unified, well-articulated policy toward social, cultural, and political goals and consequences of foreign language education suspends methodical investigations into these issues (Kiyani, Mirhosseini & Navidinia, 2011).

In terms of research on teachers’ professional development, Roshd FLT seems to have an acceptable record. In fact, there is a good research supply on areas such as teacher education, teaching methodology, educational materials,



## Discussion

The first noteworthy point in the results is an over-emphasis on reading skill. Granted the significance of reading skill in the Iranian schooling system, as it is the only language skill seriously considered and taught in Iranian high schools, one may speculate that devoting a relatively great portion of research space in Roshd FLT to reading skill rightfully reflects teachers' and the educational system's needs for more research in this area. Admitting that this finding can be assumed to have echoed, at least partially, teachers' voice in Roshd FLT, I would however, argue that the considerable discrepancies among the number of studies conducted on other language skills may draw our attention to some disguised, yet decisive, factors that have contributed to this imbalance.

One probable reason for this finding might be the procedural difficulties involved in, and the technical facilities required for doing research on other skills, particularly speaking. As a matter of fact, research on oral skills often necessitates technical equipment

such as language laboratories, professional microphones, recorders and players; it usually involves transcribing audio materials; it is very time-consuming in that research subjects are often instructed, studied and tested in a "one at a time" fashion; it is associated with lots of predicaments for controlling contextual intervening variables; and more importantly, it does not easily lend itself to metric measurement, and quantification. Conversely, studies on reading skill often reflect simple, one-shot research designs; frequent uses of standardized and prefabricated tests; and simple scoring procedures. These differences might be persuasive enough in tempting ELT researchers to opt out oral skills and choose reading skill as their research focus.

The same seems to hold true about language components. For instance, grammar and vocabulary are well-researched, but scarcity of research on pronunciation is obvious. Thanks to the availability of many standardized tests and questionnaires, vocabulary and grammar



The articles were categorized by two raters (the researcher and a research assistant) based on a reading of the articles' abstract and methodology. If there were not an abstract, the raters read the article to determine the primary research area. Because some articles pertained to multiple coding categories, the coding rule was to categorize each article based on the primary topic. The primary category would then reflect the basic "take away," or significance of the article. The pilot study resulted in 73% agreement between the two raters. Based on the pilot study, the coding categories were refined; some topics were added in order to better describe the content of the articles and some topics were deleted because of ambiguity or redundancy. A second pilot study was then conducted with 35 articles which yielded 79% agreement. Overall, these pilot studies suggested that the articles could reliably be coded with respect to the primary content area. This procedure was followed for categorizing all research papers. Inter-rater agreement exceeded 83%, and in those instances when a rater was uncertain about

how to best code an article, the raters jointly discussed the article and made a collaborative decision.

## Findings

Emphasis should be made that some articles pertained to multiple research areas; however, the coding rule was to categorize each article based on the primary topic. Bearing this in mind, the analysis yielded in 23 content categories. Then, the frequency of each research area was tallied in order to calculate a frequency index for each research area. As Figure 1 shows, reading skill appeared to be the most highly researched area, taking 14% of Roshd FLT research space. Teaching methodology, educational materials and vocabulary were also among the most popular topic areas, collectively accounting for 26% of studies published in Roshd FLT. On the other hand, research areas such as students' assignments, speaking skill, error correction, English for specific purpose, emotional issues appeared to have been rarely investigated, with each area accounting for about 0.5% of the research space of Roshd FLT.

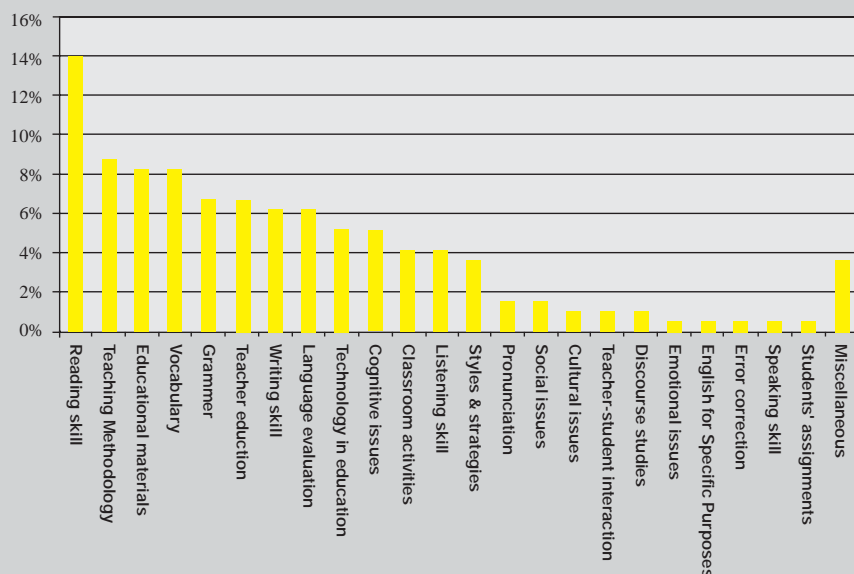


Figure 1. Percentage of published studies on various research areas

devoted to a sparse array of theories, that hardly ever fall into teachers' primary concerns (e.g. Universal Grammar, Minimalism, Connectionism, Processing theories, Differential Item Functioning, Item Response Theory, Genre analysis, etc.) (Block 2000; Han, 2007).

To solve this problem of irrelevancy, the literature suggests a "problem-based model of research" (Ortega, 2005). This model is originally proposed to bridge the gap between research and practice in mainstream education, and it presumes a mutual relationship between researchers and practitioners (Biesta, 2007). It emphasizes that, areas of research and the questions to be investigated should not be determined solely by researchers. Rather, in determining areas of inquiry and formulating research questions, practitioners' research demands should be taken into account so as to ensure the practical relevance of educational research (Bauer & Fischer, 2007). Traditionally, much research is almost exclusively inspired by the scientific state of the art and the literature that reports it. The proponents of problem-based model of research, however, advise that researchers should draw the problems from the realm of practice instead. The underlying assumption behind this idea is that educational research should address practitioners' research needs (Pieters, & de Vries, 2007). It basically envisages the starting and ending points of the research-practice interface. Therefore, its main concerns is defining educational problems and the production chain of knowledge.

Against this general background, the present study intends to examine the extent to which Roshd FLT has undertaken to respond to practitioners' research needs by publishing studies

that relate to teachers' daily practices. In other words, the study intends to examine the extent to which the contributions published in Roshd FLT reflect teachers' research needs. To do so, the following research questions are addressed in this research:

1. What ELT research areas has Roshd FLT addressed during the last 13 years?
2. What is the frequency of published papers in each ELT research area?

## Method

To answer the research questions, this paper presents an analysis of the content of research papers published in Roshd FLT since 2001 (1380). In order to identify what ELT areas are researched in Roshd FLT, and with what frequency, a round of content analysis was carried out. All research articles, published in Roshd FLT during the last 13 years, were analyzed and thematically categorized based on their main area of focus. Within this structure, a number of published articles were excluded from the study. First, articles written in languages other than English (i.e. Persian, French and German) were not included, as these were not assumed to be written by ELT researchers and therefore, did not necessarily reflect Iranian ELT research trends. Second, only data-based articles that reported studies carried out in an Iranian context were analyzed. Book reviews and special edited columns were also excluded. In other words, the main goal was to get an understanding of the "regular" ELT research trends in Roshd FLT.

To carry out the analysis, a provisional list of research areas was first identified. To refine this coding category system, a pilot study was conducted on 30 articles.

“Research is not used as a can opener is used” (Huberman, 1987, p. 589).

## Introduction

During the recent years Iranian English Language Teaching Research (IELTR) has been subjected to a growing wave of criticism for having little, if any, effects on language teaching practice (Mehrani & Khodi, 2014; Samar, Mehrani & Kiyani, 2012). One proposed solution to this problem is that researchers should be advised to publish their works in journals that practitioners probably read. Policy makers and administrators are also recommended to facilitate teachers' access to databases, internet portals, and research directories.

While by no means new, this idea of teachers' easy access to research has been taken up by various research bureaus across the country, as part of a larger attempt known as “knowledge production movement”. As such, dozens of academic English language teaching (ELT) research journals are launched and made freely available to the public. In addition, in line with “localization of science policy” researchers are encouraged to publish their studies in the Iranian local journals. Various research databases (e.g. [www.sid.ir](http://www.sid.ir), [www.isc.ir](http://www.isc.ir), [www.magiran.com](http://www.magiran.com)) are established in order to disseminate research findings among practitioners. Furthermore, numerous ELT-related conferences are regularly held at local, national, and international levels, where applied linguists are given opportunities to share their findings with language teachers.

Although the significance of these diverse and growing initiatives is acknowledged, their actual influence in making Iranian ELT a “research-based

practice” is not easy to admit. In fact, narratives of the field still reflect voices of dissatisfaction with the research-practice gap and the resulting minimal influence of IELTR on teachers' practice (Mehrani, Samar & Behzadnia, 2012). Informal investigations show that in academic meetings, complaints are commonly heard about teachers' lack of interest in academic research findings. Researchers and university professors often criticize educational institutes, and public schools alike, for not being cooperative in getting involved in academic research projects. In addition, the temporal and physical distance between researchers and practitioners in educational meetings, and also the fact that ELT graduate students who have been engaged in the Ministry of Education often leave their jobs upon graduation are further indications of the gap between two communities of research and practice in the Iranian ELT profession.

Perhaps, this has to do with the fact that, thus far, the attempts made to bridge the research-practice gap have, too one-sidedly, focused on how practice can be better linked to research outcomes (Korthagen, 2007). In other words, the emphasis has been on how to push practitioners toward a “research-based practice”. Recent investigations, however, show that teachers' lack of engagement with research is not necessarily due to the inaccessibility of research, but mainly because ITELTR often produces findings which are irrelevant to the practical concerns of teachers (Mehrnai & Khodi, 2014). While teachers' pedagogical activities include a rich mosaic of concerns relating to learning, teaching, culture, language (both source and target), society, technology, and so forth, the majority of research space in ELT journals are

# An Analysis of ELT Research Trends in Roshd FLT

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## چکیده

در جریان پژوهشی که گزارش آن پیش روی شماست، بیش از یکصد و نود مقاله تحقیقاتی منتشر شده در مجله رشد آموزش زبان طی ۱۳ سال اخیر از نظر محتوایی تحلیل شد. نتایج بررسی‌های اولیه نشان داد که بسیاری از مباحث مرتبط با آموزش زبان انگلیسی در قالب مقاله‌هایی در نشریه رشد آموزش زبان به چاپ رسیده‌اند که آن‌ها را می‌توان به ۲۳ حیطه کلی دسته‌بندی کرد. تحلیل فراوانی عناوین به چاپ رسیده نشان داد که تفاوت‌های درخور توجهی در تعداد پژوهش‌های منتشر شده در هر یک از حیطه‌های فوق وجود دارد. برای مثال، ۱۴ درصد از کل پژوهش‌های منتشر شده در این نشریه فقط به بررسی آموزش و فراگیری مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب اختصاص یافته است. در حالی که طی ۱۳ سال اخیر تعداد بسیار اندکی پژوهش در زمینه آموزش مهارت صحبت کردن به چاپ رسیده‌اند. به همین ترتیب، داده‌های این پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که موضوعاتی مانند آموزش معلمان، روش‌های تدریس، و بررسی مواد آموزشی پژوهش‌های متعددی را به خود اختصاص داده‌اند اما جنبه‌های فرهنگی - اجتماعی و نیز سیاست‌های آموزش زبان در مجله رشد چندین مورد پژوهش و بررسی قرار نگرفته است. در ادامه، درباره دلایلی که این ناهمگنی در انجام و نشر پژوهش‌های مختلف سخن به میان آمده است. علاوه بر این، پیشنهادهایی برای کاربردی‌تر شدن پژوهش‌های آموزش زبان در ایران ارائه شده است.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** پژوهش مبتنی بر عملکرد، تحلیل محتوایی، گرایش‌های پژوهشی

## Abstract

In this study, over 190 ELT research papers published in Roshd FLT over a 13-year period of time were content analyzed. The analysis revealed that Roshd FLT's research coverage includes a wide range of areas including 23 general topics. Descriptive statistics, however, showed considerable discrepancies in research space devoted to various research areas. For example, while 14% of research studies published in Roshd FLT are particularly devoted to reading skill, scarcity of research into speaking skill is quite evident. Similarly, while such areas as teacher education, teaching methodology, educational materials are well investigated, socio-cultural aspects of language teaching and more particularly educational policies are rarely researched. The underlying reasons behind these findings, along with a number of suggestions for improving the practicality of research studies in the Iranian ELT context are discussed.

**Key Words :** content analysis, practice-based research, research trends