Returning to our SELF, Cultivating Transformative Learning: Rumi's Stories in English Classes

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Abstract

English globalization intermingled with cultural and linguistic imperialism encompasses hegemonic influences, endeavoring to stealthily spread ideologies and values of the West into local cultures. English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts are academic spheres in which such forces are tangibly conceived as the curriculum and English materials can become footpaths of this monopoly whereby students and teachers (sub)consciously capitulate to oppressive colonization. However, a focus on nurturing and promoting local enriching cultures and classical literature can be a step which counterbalances such furtive movements and releases students' potentiality in learning. As such, in this participatory action research, the researcher attempts to transcend the top-down imposed curricula and embrace a non-linear curriculum inspired by Rumi's stories and philosophies. The participants involved 18 female English learners who participated in this transformative journey. Thematic analysis of triangulated data gathered through participant observation, semi-structured interview, field notes, and journaling unveiled themes illuminating students' de-marginalization from governing ideologies, their roles as insiders within the curriculum, evolution of morality, spirituality, and wisdom, and critical awareness and reflective thinking growth.

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Volviendo a Nuestro SER, Cultivando un Aprendizaje Transformador: Historias de Rumi en Clases de Inglés

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Resumen

La globalización inglesa mezclada con el imperialismo cultural y lingüístico abarca influencias hegemónicas y se esfuerza por difundir sigilosamente las ideologías y valores de Occidente en las culturas locales. Los contextos de enseñanza de la lengua inglesa (ELT, por sus siglas en inglés) son ámbitos académicos en los que tales fuerzas se conciben de manera tangible ya que el plan de estudios y los materiales en inglés pueden convertirse en senderos de este monopolio por el cual los estudiantes y los maestros capitulan (sub)conscientemente a la colonización opresiva. Sin embargo, fomentar culturas locales y literatura clásica puede ser un paso que contrarresta tales movimientos furtivos y libera la potencialidad de los estudiantes en el aprendizaje. Como tal, en esta investigación de acción participativa, el investigador intenta trascender los planes de estudio impuestos de arriba hacia abajo y adoptar un plan de estudios no lineal inspirado en las historias y filosofías de Rumi. Las participantes fueron 18 mujeres aprendices de inglés. El análisis temático de los datos recopilados a través de la observación participante, la entrevista semiestructurada, las notas de campo y los diarios revelaron temas como la marginación de los estudiantes de las ideologías gobernantes, sus roles como expertos dentro del plan de estudios, la evolución de la moral, la espiritualidad y la sabiduría, y conciencia crítica y crecimiento del pensamiento reflexivo.

Palabras Clave: aprendizaje transformador, trabajos clásicos, potencialidad nómada, historias Rumi, currículum de inglés

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I n recent years, cultural and linguistic hegemony and supremacy of English have severely come under scrutiny (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). This might partially be due to the empowering forces of globalization which have tremendously boosted and facilitated connections among different nations and cultures of the globe, and to a vital resolution on the part of language policymakers and politicians to harbour local languages, identities, and cultures against Europeans' "ideas, brands, and ideologies which are the means to create domination upon non-Europeans" (Sharma, 2018, p. 105). The prevailing influences of linguistic and cultural imperialism of the West through English hegemony as a living and kicking process in Phillipson's (2012) sense cannot simply be taken for granted as the coloniality and marginalization of English language education can be one of the deleterious upshots of this hegemonic process. The footpaths of this educational monopoly can be found in English syllabus, curriculum, manufactured instructional materials, marketed textbooks, and standardized tests whereby Western ideologies and values are stealthily spread without any resistance and reluctance from English teachers, educators, and students toward this status quo and oppressive colonization.

This academic monopoly roots in English language as a tool of dominance and power in educational spheres (Fatemi, Ghahremani-Ghajar, & Bakhtiari, 2018) so that as Asante (2012) and Bhatt (2005) believe a sense of subordination, triviality, and inferiority has been formed towards local sources, wisdom, and knowledge. It is worth mentioning that dominant linguistic, cultural, and political influences maintain their belligerent expansion and dominance by exercising power in obscure and abstract ways (Gramsci, 1971). One instance of the imperialistic thoughts and hegemonic forces can conspicuously be examined in the dichotomy between native and non-native speakers/teachers. The biases, discrimination, and preconceptions about this issue have led to passivity, oppression, and marginalization of non-native English speakers/teachers to be incredulous of their own knowledge and resources. Accordingly, Holliday (2005) has shown how pervasive ideologies such as native speakerism has favoured native speakers and marginalized non-native speakers in issues which are concerned with language teaching and learning. In educational settings, these ideologies are so ubiquitous that native teachers are considered to be

much better regarding their fluency, speaking skill, competency, negotiation of meaning, and even their pedagogic performances (Safari & Razmjoo, 2016). The furtive movement towards de-skilling and discrediting non-native English teachers is to the extent that they themselves contribute and capitulate to this domineering process as their discourses encompass the traces of hegemonic influences of English language along with its veiled ideologies (Safari, 2017). For instance, they (sub)consciously debate over the better and more prestigious English accent, American or British despite any consideration of English as a global language that can be used by any nation to promote their own local cultures, knowledge, and identities. Or even, the blind-folded contention is centred on the best types of teaching methods, pedagogic acts, theories, and marketed materials while all these have been imposed and imported in a top-down manner from the West. These prepackaged center-published materials and center-based methods (Kumaravadivelu, 2016) as the dominant forms of colonial education take control of the situatedness of language teaching and convert English teachers into passive robots and knowledge consumers lacking any agency, subjectivity, and autonomy. This domineering process indeed accentuates the marginality of the majority and immobilizes their thoughts, understandings, and reason.

The hegemonic power and ideological schema of the West can be disrupted if the community of the periphery including non-native English speakers/ teachers takes steps toward their emancipation through enhancement of their critical consciousness, critical thinking, and self-reflection. According to Kumaravadivelu (2016), the community of non-native speakers is viewed as a subaltern community that can unsettle the power foundations and hegemonic structures through embracing de-colonial choices which demand result-oriented actions. That is, each teacher can act as a de-colonizer who through resorting to emancipatory acts can professionally and politically challenge and uproot the formidable institutional power structures and discriminatory agendas.

In Iranian EFL contexts of private language institutes, marketed instructional English materials are the best imperialistic tools by which one can examine the traces of knowledge colonization, ideological domination, and mind suppression smothering the local knowledge, interests, values,

and culture of students. The prevalence and pervasiveness of American culture, concepts, lifestyle, ideologies, and values through the textbooks are in the form of hidden curriculum (Safari & Razmjoo, 2016). These imported English textbooks encompass the materialistic and secular beliefs and thoughts of Eurocentric countries, aiming at promoting concepts such as individualism, capitalism, consumerism, and neo-liberalism (Abdollahzadeh & Baniasad, 2010; Baleghizadeh & Motahed, 2010; Keshavarz & Akbari Malek, 2009; Koosha, Talebinezhad & Taki, 2004). For instance, Iranian culture is religiously bound, and families operate based on their religious beliefs and values especially in the case of an important issue like marriage. In Iran, just through marriage, a man and a woman as a couple can live with each other and have children. There is no such thing like being girlfriend or boyfriend. Even if it exists, it does not reflect Iranian culture. However, through the marketed textbooks, these concepts become so common that students are unconsciously affected and internalize and integrate them into their own culture.

To counter and shake the hegemonic structures of the West which have found a comfortable home in EFL contexts, each teacher as a member of the subaltern community can take decolonial choices and meaningful actions. As Kumaravadivelu (2016) stresses the choice demands act and without acting, the discourse becomes banality. In this study, I tried to associate both decolonial option and pedagogical praxis through operationalizing a type of curriculum which embedded the classical works and enriching Persian literature delivered in English. This curriculum was meaningful as it highlighted the historical, cultural, and educational aspects of Iranian students' lives. The concepts of classical literature in the form of narratives and quotes, in fact, familiarize students with their valuable roots and heritages. It resembles a route through which each student can travel to reach a full understanding of their culture, self, and identities which opposes to trivial issues encountered in American/ British English textbooks.

This kind of language learning and knowledge construction was significant as it according to Oladi (2016), inspires students to be involved in the process of critical analysis, reflection, and transformation of the world surrounding them (Oladi, 2016). This participatory action research is

a response to the urgent demand that each and every member of non-native English teachers' community in the unending process of becoming and professional development can act as a transformative intellectual to emancipate themselves and their students from the boundaries that the top-down curriculum has created for them. Thus, through this study, I tried to explore the unfolding events and the results of a bottom-up curriculum incorporated in my English class as opposed to the curriculum comprised of American and European literary texts and materials. Without a shadow of a doubt, the results of this research can be enlightening for English teachers, curriculum developers, materials writers, and educators to take steps towards the development of materials, curricula, and pedagogy which are sensitive to local culture, knowledge, and concepts.

Status of English in Iran: Before and after Islamic Revolution.
This qualitative research took place in the EFL context of Iran, a country which is famous for its rich civilization and culture dating back to thousands of years ago. In Iran, during the Shah dynasty (1925-1979), English was much more highlighted in educational centers and public schools due to the political, social, economic, and cultural relationships that existed between this country and the West (Safari & Rashidi, 2015). The emphasis on this issue was to the extent that even American native speakers were employed to teach English in schools, institutes, and universities and hence, Americanization and Westernization of education and culture were the straight upshots of that policy. In fact, through this era, English was known as "the language of Modernity" (Parsaiyan et al., 2014, p. 94), assumed to be a tool for development and prosperity of the country through "pro-Western policies" (ibid) and close relationships with the Western countries.

    After Islamic Revolution in Iran, due to the hegemony of religion and revolutionary beliefs, English was first considered to be the language of the enemies of Islam (i.e. America and Britain). Thus, any attempt towards authorizing this language in educational centers was severely resisted and repelled on the part of radicals and revolutionary people. These bigotries were so influential and powerful that in early years of Islamic Republic, the

field of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) became absent from the list of fields offered by the universities (Safari & Rashidi, 2015).

However, after many years, the policies of the government towards English language have undergone drastic changes as the policy makers believe that through English as an International Language, it is possible to disseminate revolutionary beliefs, philosophies, and even "the Islamic revolution to the rest of the world" (Sharifian, 2010, p.139). It was also perceived that in order to develop the country, access to the latest technology, science, and knowledge through communication and interaction with the world is urgent and thus, English can fulfil this vital need. This necessity along with a need to revive the local culture, Islamic values, and beliefs, motivated policymakers to promote a reform in language program of schools which previously suffered from lack of attention to localization. However, this new program was also confronted with deficiencies which unlikely seemed to prepare students to cope with the challenges of the modern age. The evidence for this inefficiency can be the registration and participation of students in private language institutes to compensate for the weaknesses of the language program presented in schools.

In Iran, private language institutes work under the supervision of the ministry of education. However, the selection of English teachers, the textbooks, curricula, and pedagogy are based on the top-down policies of each language institute. Most of the teachers who teach English are native speakers of Persian and proficient in English as a foreign language. They are chosen from a pool of candidates and graduates of universities in the field of TEFL, Translation, or English Literature and hence, considered the best teachers as they have been filtered several times with respect to the criteria defined in each language institute. Communicative Language Teaching, Task-based Method, and Audio-lingual Method are the most famous methods which prescribe the ins and outs of teaching and pedagogy in language institutes. The curriculum is centered on the presentation of instructional materials which are the marketed published American or British textbooks. Each teacher is required to pursue the guidelines and hints provided in the teacher's guidebook to teach the contents accordingly.

Methodology

This study was a participatory action research which investigated my departure from a preselected and prespecified curriculum embedded with hegemonic values to move towards an innovative pedagogy based on my own agency, subjectivity, and autonomy aiming at creation of a critical and meaningful space in language class. This critical endeavor was an integral constituent of my actual teaching in the natural milieu of my English class as I was the participant, the teacher, and the researcher at the same time. Also, the discussions and naturally occurring incidents in my class constituted data which were included in this research. This undertaking was in fact "a quest for knowledge about how to improve" (Ferrance, 2000, p. 2) my pedagogic practices and skills in order to enhance students' meaningful learning and participation in classroom activities. Accordingly, Noffke and Stevenson (1995) argue that action research is used by classroom teachers as an instrument to promote their professional development and to create a reform in educational settings. This critical adventure took into account the unfolding of my students' interpretations and perceptions of Rumi's stories and quotes as well as their reflections on their selves, daily experiences, and world based on the respective materials.

My Role and Relationship in this Action Research: From Theory to Practice

In this action research, I, as an English teacher and a member of the subaltern ELT community attempted to de-marginalize my SELF from the top-down imposed curricula and transform my role into a de-colonizer and critical intellectual. In so doing, I made an effort to exercise the act of decoloniality through designing supplementary context-specific materials and strategies which took into account the meaningful facets of the Iranian EFL students' lives and worlds. Through this alternative role, I was the designer, and developer of curricula, pedagogic knowledge, and skills rather than being passive and subjugated consumer of flamboyant prepackaged materials. Doing so made me liberated from what Kumaravadivelu (2006) debated as self-marginalization and inferiority imposed by dominating groups.

In my English class occurring in one language institute of Iran, I developed and designed English materials based on what Kachru (1999, p.148) called "new literatures" or "colonial and post-colonial literature". This type of language pedagogy reflects the literary works and literatures of non-native speakers and enlivens their indigenous cultures, values, and exigencies. Here, I avoided focusing on the monocultural literary works of the Eurocentric countries and rather, redefined the contents and literary texts based on stories and quotes of Jalal Al-Din Rumi (1207-1273 AD) known as one of the greatest Persian poets, philosophers, and Sufi Muslims. Story telling as a pedagogic action was also crucial as according to Egan (1997, p. 343), they can be used as "rich sources of wisdom, imagination, creativity, and comfort". Through this transformative journey, I envisaged my role as an activist scholar who through self-governing and autonomous agency endeavored to set my students on a path to release what Oladi (2016) calls as nomadic potentials, a term that is used in Rumi's texts. As my field of study was ELT, I consulted with one academic whose major was Persian literature. So, through several sessions, I became familiarized with the concepts, meanings, allegorical speech, and figurative structure which existed in the Persian texts. Then, we selected a list of Rumi's stories and quotes expected to figure in my English class. The criteria for selecting the literary texts were based on their simplicity, clarity, interpretability, length, their relevance to students' living experiences and worlds, thought and moral provoking potentiality, and their fascination and captivation to my students. As the next step, I translated and simplified them all in English to be used for pedagogic practices. Depending on my class time and how long the discussion lasted, I introduced one or two stories and quotes each session.

Given the nature of the narratives embellished with mystical and philosophical concepts, meanings, and interpretations, I could observe shaping and reshaping of not only my students' identity and self but of my own through this itinerary. Inspired by Rumi's educational and philosophical texts, at first, I worked on myself to take a counter hegemonic stance towards the prevailing power agendas and structures embedded in the language education. So, I initially tried to develop a critical SELF which was constantly in flux and was indeed far average from the neutral self I

possessed. In other words, this evolving self-enabled me to criticize and de-naturalize the status quo including my impartial self. In the nomadic zone of learning provided by Sufi wisdoms and trainings, my students and I came to know a broader portrait of our inner selves and who we have been, are, and will become in the world. This type of becoming and transformation which was discursively constructed and reconstructed was in stark contrast with the linearity imposed by the circumscribed space of the top-down curricula.

Context and Participants

This study took place in one private English language institute in Yazd, a traditional city at the central part of Iran. As an English teacher, I had been teaching in this language institute for 5 years. I as one of the participants of the study was a PhD holder of ELT (English Language Teaching) and had the experience of teaching for 18 years in different language institutes, universities, and schools. In this language institute, a supervisor who was an English teacher holding M.A. in ELT was in charge of determining the curricula and instructional materials, observing classes, doing workshops, and conversing with the teachers about their pedagogical problems and whether their classes were on track based on the policies and agendas of the institute. Top Notch and Summit series (Saslow & Ascher, 2017) as the marketed textbooks were used for different student levels in this institute. The books were associated with teacher preparation materials which precisely designated what steps teachers needed to pursue for high quality teaching. Summit series involved two textbooks which had been determined for advanced levels of 1-5. The supervisor also decided on the selection of English teachers for different levels. That is, the university degree, amount of English proficiency and competency, knowledge, and quality of teaching determined which level an English teacher could teach. As I had the necessary qualifications, I was assigned advanced levels. This action research was implemented in an advanced class including 18 female students of 14-29 age range who for three semesters I was their English teacher.

Instrument

To achieve thick rich data and ensure the validity of the findings, I used different data gathering tools to obtain triangulated data from various sources. Weyers et al. (2008) contend that the researchers compare different data gathered from different techniques and procedures to disclose incongruencies and similarities. The strong similarities are considered to be indicative of the validity of the data. Here, I applied participant observation, semi-structured interview, field notes, and journaling to gain the comprehensive data from the participants.

Procedure

In view of my pedagogical experience, theoretical understanding, and background knowledge in innovative approaches and recent insights to language teaching and learning, I decided to create a transformatory and critical space in my English class. Before doing this action research, I was the author of twenty papers and most of them addressed the critical issues in the EFL context of Iran. Pursuing the works of great critical scholars such as Paulo Freire, Peter Mclaren, and Henry Giroux, I was very keen to operationalize what I read as theories and concepts in the learning and teaching EFL contexts. In the realities of pedagogic practices of my class, I realized that there was a need to bridge the incoherence between theory and practice or what was understood as theory-practice gap (Rafferty, Allcock & Lathlean, 1996). I found that the nomadic characteristics of students for further learning could allow me to travel from theory towards practice.

As I had studied a number of papers on the issue of hegemony in the EFL contexts (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; 2005; Crystal, 2003; Gramsci, 1971; Kanpol, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Pennycook, 1995, 2007; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Safari & Razmjoo, 2016), the necessity for the insertion of classical works into the curriculum (e.g. Parsaiyan et al., 2014; Parsaiyan et al., 2016; Fatemi et al., 2018) as well as philosophies of Rumi about learning (Enteshari, 2011; Oladi, 2016), I was equipped with deep understanding and insights about theoretical underpinnings and conceptual frameworks. Hence, I decided to design a transformative language program in which Rumi's literary works were replaced for the soulless topics of Top Notch book, Western short stories, reading texts, and novels. In so doing, I

omitted the novel in the linear curriculum and instead of too much maneuvering on the contents of the book, I devoted half an hour of a whole session time which was one hour and forty-five minutes to the stories and quotes of Rumi. It is worth noting that before embarking on this critical project, I got permission and content from the supervisor in order not to face with any impediments on the way of doing this undertaking.

So, at the outset of the semester, I elucidated the aims and purposes of the emancipatory curriculum through dialoguing with my students in a warm and friendly atmosphere. In order to determine the contents of the critical and transformatory curriculum inspired by Rumi's literary works, my students were furnished with an opportunity to voice their views. This is a crucial point as it has been argued by Shor (1987) that critical intellectual needs to engage students in the co-creating of the curriculum. Thus, one of the students was expected to create an online group via Telegram App to smooth cooperation and interaction among members of the class. Through our mobile numbers, all of us were added to this online group by which I could share the stories and quotes for each session. The students could share their ideas, views, perceptions, and interpretations about the materials through this virtual group. In the real context of my classroom, students were expected to read the stories and quotes in advance and narrate it to the class. All their discussions, narrations, and interpretations were recorded by my mobile and used as the data for this study. At the end of this project, I interviewed the students to elicit their attitudes, perceptions, and perspectives regarding the use of Rumi's stories in class.

Data Analysis
In this action research, I employed Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative method to analyse all the gathered qualitative data. Pursuing three stages of this method comprised of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, I could achieve the themes and findings for the study. At the open coding stage, I concentrated on coding the transcripts and produced as many frequently recurring concepts and ideas as possible. For axial coding, I found the relationships among these concepts through connecting them with categories. Then, through selective coding, the core

categories or the themes which developed the overall grounded theory of the research were identified.

Key Findings

Emancipation from Top-Down Imposed Values

"You need not go anywhere, journey exists within yourself, enter a ruby mine and bathe in the glory of your light". (Rumi). In response to the interpretation of this Rumi's quote, Arefe as one of my students said:

> I think if we travel within ourselves, we can find very valuable things and something that is prevalent in our culture is self-knowledge. By travelling within ourselves, we can achieve something valuable and that is self-knowledge. I think Rumi wanted us to pay attention to inner abilities that humans have. We have nice things in ourselves, but we should think exactly and discover great things that we have…

This student's interpretation and meaning making shows how this class has affected their thinking mode and de-marginalized them from learning about Western values embedded in the books and top-down linear curriculum. Top Notch textbooks focus on trivial and superficial issues based on the Western values (e.g., romantic love between boyfriends and girlfriends, wealth, style, fashion, fame, musical moods, body image, actors/actresses, flat jokes, Western proverbs, European heroes, etc.) which stealthily dominate students' culture and change them into marginalized beings that resort to imitating and gradually become bereft of thinking and acting power. On the other hand, Rumi's literary stories as classical literary works cultivate critical and transformatory learning and fulfil nomadic potentiality of students to search for their real self and becoming. Within the created emancipatory space, students perceive the new possibilities for seeking knowledge and insights through the constant process of self-reflection and change. One of my students expressed her voices as follows:

> This class was different from other classes because it gave me this chance to speak about the things which gave me a good feeling, not to think about unimportant things like fashions, the European actors or

actresses as the models, hair styles, and other materialistic issues which try to influence our thinking and behaving. Now, I feel I have more power to be myself. In other classes, when teacher asked us about the book, we responded to the questions. But here, I think I'm another person who can think and do something in the world and in my life. I can say and talk about my real world and what is meaningful in my culture. This is the meaning of freedom from the imposed materials based on the Western values. Participant 13#

Another student said:

Why should we care for American culture when we have our rich culture full of lessons and insights? Through stories of Rumi, I feel strong enough not to be influenced by other cultures. I think I enter into another world in which I can change and discover new things. This world is not comparable with the rigid atmosphere of other classes in which I was silent and accepted what the teacher said. Participant 10#

These quotes show students' transformation and movement from an oppressed person towards an emancipated being who has the ability of thinking, discovering, creating, and doing. It means this is a revolutionary move from being to be becoming or from a neutral, silent, and immobile state towards a nomadic, self-shaping, and self-defining existence. This transformative and nomadic learning is the fulfillment of what Freire (1994) calls as oppressed students' yearning to search for transcendence in domineering situations.

Students as Insiders within Curriculum
Through the critical and transformatory curriculum, students can become "fully involved as insiders in the learning culture of their classrooms" (Woodward & Munns, 2003). They are not uncanny towards process of their own learning and what occurs in language classroom as seen in most of the classes harnessed by the top-down curriculum. Students in the nomadic curriculum have a quest for further exploration, engagement, meaning making, and creation. They cannot be sedentary and silent any more but are "ongoing beings" (Freire, 1994) and the key elements in the

pedagogical practices who construct the pedagogy and curriculum. Through this critical project, students not only participated in idea sharing and caring, but also showed an earnest inclination towards being involved in curriculum and syllabus design and becoming an active member in the language pedagogy.

For instance, they became volunteered to bring some other texts related to Rumi's life, his poems, and stories to language class. One session, Sara told me, "teacher, I have surfed the net and found a story about Rumi and Shams, can I share it with class?" and then through its narration, plenty of discussions and meanings was created. In the pursuing sessions, some students suggested they provide posters by the use of Rumi's quotes and hang on the classroom walls. They said doing so could lead to their further understandings, critical thinking, and learning. Another session, Sahar told me that it was better to have a Rumi virtual group through Telegram App. So then, she herself constructed the group so that everyone could share any narrations, interpretations, and ideas regarding Rumi's philosophies and thoughts. Role playing some stories of Rumi was also another self-initiated activity on the part of students which brought about joy, change, and life to the context of English language learning.

This kind of transformation which promotes students towards becoming insiders of the curriculum according to Oladi (2016) disrupts mechanisms of control and oppression in language classes and aims to disconcert the neoliberal ideologies that have pervaded educational spaces. This enlivening and liberating experience attained from the restless attempts of nomadic students who seek for adventures, quest, and evolution is indeed contrasted with their tranquil and passive roles in the banking model of language education which presumes learners to be in lack of any autonomy, agency, and self. Here, language curriculum is constructed through the provision of opportunities for students to "unleash the nomadic potential" (Oladi, 2016, p.193) in themselves.

Evolution of Morality, Spirituality and Wisdom

Rumi's stories furnished the opportunity for students' spiritual and intellectual growth. In Rumi's stories, the focus is on morality, inner self, soul, ascetism, piety, purity, and love, and evading the malicious deeds and

sins like greed, lust, arrogance, duplicity, deception, and lie. As an instance, one of Rumi's moral stories titled as the snake hunter and the serpent involved the symbolized concepts of self and soul. This story was about a snake hunter who went to the mountains in order to hunt a snake in winter. He thought he could gather money through catching the serpent and showing it to the people in town. On a snowy mountain, he could find a ferocious-looking snake which was frozen and apparently dead in the cold winter. He thought he would show it to the people of the town and tell them he himself had killed it. He bundled it up in a cloth and took it to the town. The people of the town gathered around him to see the big snake which resembled dragon. However, when the weather became hotter, the life started to revive in the dragon which was in the frozen state. Then, it began moving and coming out of the bundle. The people became very terrified and escaped. The dragon moved quickly and ate everything on its way including the hunter.

This story conveys lessons and insights concerning morality, soul, connection to eternal and spiritual life and almighty, as well as consequences of misdemeanours, too much attention to the materialistic aspect of life, and ignorance of spirituality. Students interpreted this story and (co) constructed the meanings, understandings, and knowledge as follows: Niloofar referred to one of humans' misconducts:

> Being greedy devours all the life of the people. We should be convinced with what we have. We shouldn't be greedy to get more. In this story, the man was too greedy and because of this bad characteristic, he destroyed himself and his life.

Accordingly, Sara said: "This man was so greedy. In our life, we need to be convinced. Otherwise, what we have gathered will become our enemy." Sahar also added as:

> The serpent and snake hunter are symbols in this story. Snake hunter is the symbol of human being, but the serpent is the symbol of sensual soul. Because the human being pays too much attention to sensual soul, this negative and destructive soul causes him or her to be destroyed.

Maryam talked about the distinction between sensual soul and divine soul:

> Actually, they are opposite to each other. Divine soul makes people become closer to God and helps them become perfect, but sensual soul is about materialistic world and doesn't let people grow and become perfect. In difficult situations, all the people think about God and become closer to God. But when they are in a good situation, they forget God. In this story, snowy mountain is the difficult situation where we grow our divine self and approach God. But the sunshine is a good situation for the growth of sensual soul and here, sensual soul completely controls the man because he has forgotten God.

In addition, Orly quoted as:

> Teacher! I think in our life we shouldn't trust anyone or any speech. In this lesson, the snake catcher trusted in dragon and then in the sunshine, when the dragon became awake, it ate the man and trust in this story was at the cost of loss of man's life.

Najmeh, another student, mentioned the following moral and wise point about the lesson: "When we try absurd things in our life and create a base for the development of the sensual soul, we fail and can't gain the desirable results which attach to divinity and spirituality." Also, Yeganeh opined as:

> When we think about money all the time, we cannot consider the dangers that might surround us. Sometimes, money becomes everything in our life so that we will forget in which dangerous situation we are. I think money robbed the ability of thinking from the man as he wanted to catch the snake which is the symbol of a dangerous situation at the cost of getting money. In my opinion, in our life, money and materialistic things shouldn't become everything for us.

At the end of the transformatory curriculum, when I interviewed my students about their views regarding Rumi's stories and quotes, they confessed that they were morally and spiritually transformed and that they

had become wise human beings who could thoughtfully apply the ethical rules in their lives. This kind of spirituality and wisdom which they obtained through Rumi's works was the basis for their further evolution, becoming, and also as Oladi (2016) believes exploration of their personal ethical codes. Accordingly, Elaheh said:

> Teacher, I believe I have changed a lot through this course. Before attending this class, I paid little attention to spiritual aspect of my life. But now, I am another person, I mean, spirituality and paying attention to morality have become an integral aspect of my life. I have accepted and understood them through my heart and soul. The experience with Rumi class gave me wisdom and experience to act as a wise person in my life and apply all the ethics and lessons I have learned in my daily activities and deeds. Yet, I need to change more to become a perfect individual I have always wished.

Critical Awareness and Reflective Thinking Growth
The transformatory and nomadic space created by this critical adventure and action research gave enriching opportunities to the students who up to that time, were apathetic and insensitive towards the status quo, inequalities, injustice, and unethicality within the society. This fulfilling journey promoted their consciousness awareness to think and talk critically and connect their learnings to their lived experiences and activities outside the walls of language classroom. Here, as Fowler-Amato (2015) believes critical awareness positions students to operate as experts to make connections between their language practices in academic arena and their social activities. According to Freire (1998 as cited in Darder, 2015, p.7), human critical awareness is an unfinished effort considered as an evolutionary undertaking "whose openness enlivens our dialectical relationship with the world and beckons us toward emancipatory futures".

In fact, Rumi's works resemble a bridge which fills the gap between students' inner worlds and outer worlds as well as activities and events inside the class and those occurring outside in the larger society. The outcome of critical thinking and reflective understanding can be engendered in the form of discourses constructed through students' profound engagement with critical interpretation and meaning making which in turn

enhance "learners' awareness of social injustices and play a counter hegemonic role" (Oladi, 2016, p.76) against the institutionalization of education and power relations. The critical awareness is indeed "a longing for what is not and an envisioning of what is absent in our schools, in our teaching, and in our learning" (Liston & Garrison, 2004, p. 71).

Through Rumi's lessons and teachings, my students as nomadic individuals could step on unexplored routes which bestowed them new experiences, visions, and insights. Their involvement with uncovering the unknowns hidden in Rumi's stories and quotes helped them apply their critical abilities and power and seek valuable knowledge and understandings through (re)shaping of meanings. This type of meaningful learning which was the direct outcome of their transformation and critical awareness and thinking was in stark contrast with the superficial accumulation of knowledge obtained through transmittive instruction which is a prominent feature of banking model of education. The pursuing Rumi quote and students' interpretations illustrate how each of them approached the issue through her critical lens: "I visited temples, churches, and mosques but I discovered the divine inside my heart". For example, Mina said: "In this quote, we understand that all the religions and the people all over the world are equal. The final aim is the same. So, we should avoid hostile behaviours towards other nations." Zahra also added as:

> Here, it is emphasized that what is important is God and the divine which exists in our hearts. So, it is necessary to respect religious minority groups who live in our society and sometimes, their rights are violated by the official bodies and government.

In addition, Sara expressed her interpretation as:

> We live in a society in which inequality and injustice can be seen a lot. We need to promote this idea that different religious minority groups are equal. By divine, it means that the end is the same for all the people and it makes no difference to which religion you belong. Unfortunately, in our society, we can see biases and discrimination against minority groups and also against other nations. For instance, at universities, many of them are not allowed to study or job vacancies

and working conditions do not exist for them even after graduation from universities. So, they have no way but to migrate to other countries.

Regarding the development of critical awareness and critical thinking, my students also expressed their views. Accordingly, Zahra said:

Through analysing and interpreting Rumi's works, I think I transformed my SELF to become a critical thinker who acts against status quo. Now, I'm a person who is critically conscious about different issues which are related to society, education, politics, history, and so on.

Mahsa also stated as:

In previous English classes, we were just listeners and passive as a large amount of useless information related to the West was transmitted into our empty minds. But through Rumi's learning materials and insights, we were transformed so much. I can claim that Rumi's lessons in this class, gave me an ability to think critically. It was a kind of skill which increased my awareness concerning the different educational, social, political, and cultural issues deeply and critically and not to simply accept anything imposed on us.

It is said that as Kumaravadivelu (2016) believes, the probable cultural and ideological damage created through the West produced English textbooks in periphery countries can be mitigated by the resistance of both teachers and students. Oppositional stance can be taken provided that open spaces in classroom are furnished in which students' critical awareness is sharpened and evolved. This can be done through insertion of local materials and classical works which emphasize the history, culture, and identity of the nations while at the same time, they equip students with critical skills to act upon and disrupt the top-down power, ideologies, and dominance.

Conclusions

The ideological agendas, domineering hegemonies, and authoritative forces associated with English language education has changed it into an industry in peripheral countries, leading to teachers' marginalization and subordination. Hence, English teachers as the subalterns of hegemonic process of ELT monopoly need to "exercise their agency to transform their subordinate status by challenging and changing the ensemble of relations that marginalize them" (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 76). Teachers can deconstruct decoloniality of the West and their hegemonic structures and practices by resorting to counter-hegemonic actions and pedagogic acts.

In the case of Iranian language institutes, one can see the influences and forces of decolonization and imperialism in the form of marketed English textbooks and curricula. One way to resist against the hidden imposed ideologies can be the adoption of classical works of Persian which profoundly root in Iranian people's heritage, identities, cultures, values, and beliefs. Through this action research, I attempted to move away from the top-down linear imposed curriculum and reconstruct an innovative one inspired by the works of Rumi as an Iranian poet and philosopher. Accordingly, the interpretive and meaningful space created by the adoption of rich literary works of Rumi gave rise to the unfolding of language events in language classroom whose results were students' demarginalization from top-down imposed values, their transformation into insiders of curriculum, the change of class atmosphere into a spiritual and moral space, as well as the students' critical awareness growth.

In alignment with the findings of the present research; Garcia, Gairal, Munté, and Plaja (2017, p. 1) also illuminated "that reading classic books, such as Dickens' Oliver Twist, deeply influenced their feelings and self-conceptions and created new and exciting meaning in their lives". In another research, Cheng and Winston (2011, p. 541) included Shakespeare in a high school English course and found that "student participants in this research achieved high levels of personal and emotional involvement and were stimulated by the verse, the plots and the pedagogy into complex, reflective engagement with the themes, issues and above all the language of the plays". So, engagement of English language learners with enriched

literature is totally advised both for ESL and EFL context. In our case, inclusion of Persian literature which is translated into English provides an opportunity for language learners to confront with materials based on their own everyday life and culture. In this regard, the transformatory curriculum in my English class resembled what is called third way (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 176) in the decolonisation of language education by which "periphery students will become insiders and use the language in their own terms according to their own aspirations, needs, and values … not as slaves, but as agents … creatively and critically".

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that as postmodern curricula are characterized by plurality, spontaneity, uncertainties, and difference, infusion of local cultures and classical works into the curriculum can fulfil students' transformative potentiality for learning and sharpen their critical consciousness to annihilate hidden imperialistic forces while at the same time, respond to unanticipated challenges in postmodern era. The results of this study can be enlightening for English teachers, educators, and researches as capitalizing on familiar rich literary inheritance and native literature of students can lead to the construction of a decolonised curriculum in which students learn a type of knowledge based on the norms and values of our society while at the same time they grow spirituality, morality, as well as critical and intellectual skills in themselves.

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