SUMMARY

Reform in education in recent years, led by changing theories of learning and teaching, has included changes in curricula, changes in technology, and changes in assessment practices (Niss, 1993). The importance of assessing and teaching reading of English as a global has been widely acknowledged in English as a Second (ESL) and English as a Foreign language (EFL) as stated by some scholars (Day & Bamford, 1998, 2002), and the use of reading assessment is regarded as being conducive to successful reading comprehension despite the complex nature of the reading process, which invokes both the L2 reader’s language proficiency and reading ability (Hudson, 2007). Quite recently, language assessment has gained a reputation as one of the best tools for assessing learning outcome (Koda, 2005; Brown, 2004; Brain, 2003). A lot of researchers have attached a lot of importance to various assessment techniques and their role in language teaching and assessing (Lunch, 1988; Edwards & Willis, 2005). However, one fails to find adequate research done on the relationship between effective reading tasks and proficiency among Indian and Iranian students. The main aim of this study is to provide an accurate assessment of the language proficiency and reading ability of Indians and Iranians majoring in English-related majors at Indian and Iranian universities through task-consciousness. Thus, the specific objectives of the study are twofold: (1) to investigate the language proficiency of the participants in terms of low language proficiency (LL) and high language proficiency (HL) based on their standard deviation, and (2) to investigate the progress of reading ability of the participants through pre-test, post-test and gain scores.

To achieve this goal, the researcher investigated the effects of different kinds of task-consciousness activities, namely task type treatment written, oral and oral-written on the reading achievement of the Indian and Iranian students of English. The research was carried out on the basis of quasi-experimental research design. A total of 2032 (India=1042 and Iran =990) were selected based on the population of students in India and Iran universities in various programs of the Department of English through a random sampling procedure from different India and Iran universities. The
participants in this study included 1042 Indian male and female students (M=506 and F=536) from three Indian universities, namely Panjab University, DAV college, and Government College for Boys, and 990 male and female Iranian students (M=480 and F=510) at four Iranian universities, namely University of Tehran, Allameh Tabataba’i University, Tarbiat Moalem University, and Islamic Azad University (Roudehen Branch and North Branch). The participants were first-year and second-year students of MA in English Language and Literature as well as BA students majoring in English Language and Literature. The data were collected from Indian participants in the second half of academic year 2008 and from Iranian participants in the first half of academic year 2009. A sample version of a General Training test of IELTS (UCLES, 2007) was used to evaluate language proficiency of the participants and divide them into two groups of LL and HL. This test was taken from Cambridge series of IELTS past exams, Volume 6 (2007), and all four modules of it, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing, were used in this study. The reading module of the same test was used as the pre-test and pos-test.

Factorial ANOVA with a 2x2 design was employed in pre-reading and post-reading stages and one with a 2x2x2x3 design was employed in reading gain section of analysis, to study the reading ability of students with respect to their nationality and gender in the pre-reading and post-reading stages and nationality, language proficiency, gender and treatment type at the reading gain stage for Indian students. The same procedures were gone through for the Iranian students learning English in Iran universities as well. Major findings of the analysis results indicated that Indian students did moderately better than Iranian students in language proficiency. After applying treatment in different groups, students’ reading scores with low level of language proficiency were mostly affected by oral treatment than oral-written and then written treatment, students with high level of language proficiency showed highest interest mostly first in oral-written treatment and then oral treatment in both countries.
CONCLUSION

Regarding low and high language proficiency, Indian students outperformed Iranian students in oral treatment and in written and oral-written treatment groups, while Iranian students were not significantly different from Indian students in terms of reading scores in written treatment. It is worth mentioning that those students’ scores with high language proficiency in oral–written treatment outperformed oral treatment and written treatment in both countries. There is no significant difference in scores on reading comprehension of Iranian and Indian students regarding gender. Based on the results, it can be inferred that students with high language proficiency like to participate in oral-written tasks than written tasks, and they are more active in interactive tasks, while low language proficiency students like to participate in oral tasks because oral tasks by nature is less demanding tasks. Based on the results of this study it can be concluded that not every assessment task is useful for all levels of language proficiency. In sum, the above analyses have shown that the high and low-proficiency students performed differently in different tasks. Overall findings show that some tasks are useful for low language proficiency levels and some for high language proficiency levels. Students with high level of language proficiency are mostly successful in task formats (oral-written) allowing them to create their own response and assessing them as problem-solvers, active learners and critical thinkers (Gipps, 1994; Stiggins, 1991; Bateson, et. al., 1991). On the other hand, students with low level of language proficiency are more successful in oral task or treatment due to less commitment and effort required to produce verbal summarization than written summarization tasks (Forbes, 1996).