



Content list available at www.urmia.ac.ir/ijltr

*Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research*



Urmia University

An investigation into the characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers of senior secondary schools and language institutes

Hassan Soodmand Afshar ^{a,*}, Raouf Hamzavi ^a

^a *Bu-Ali Sina University, Iran*

ABSTRACT

The present study explored the characteristics of 147 Iranian EFL teachers teaching at senior secondary schools (N= 62) and those teaching in private language institutes (N=85). Data were collected through a Likert-scale teacher characteristics questionnaire mainly adapted from Borg (2006). Also, for data triangulation purposes, 20 teachers from each group (i.e. 40 in total) were randomly selected and attended a semi-structured interview. The results of Independent Samples t-test indicated, overall, there was a significant difference between the characteristics of senior secondary school teachers and those of language institute teachers. Moreover, the results of Chi-square analysis and content analysis of interviews revealed that EFL teachers of language institutes and senior secondary schools were significantly different regarding some specific characteristics commonly ascribed to successful teaching including good command of aural-oral skills, 'being disciplined and punctual', 'being open to criticism', 'respecting the personality of students', 'listening to students' opinions and letting them express themselves', and 'showing interest in students and their learning'. The findings of the study might prove fruitful for syllabus designers, teacher educators and pre-service EFL teachers as discussed in the paper.

Keywords: teacher characteristics; senior secondary school teachers; language institute teachers; successful teaching; Iranian EFL teachers

© Urmia University Press

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 10 May 2016

Revised version received: 26 Aug. 2016

Accepted: 3 Dec. 2016

Available online: 1 Jan. 2017

* Corresponding author: Department of English Language, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran
Email address: soodmand@basu.ac.ir

Introduction

As stated by Orhon (2012), teachers play a significant role in today's schooling processes. They facilitate learning environments by providing opportunities for learners to explore their talents and convert them into abilities on the way to self-actualization. Teachers are also expected to encourage learners to become inventive individuals in society. Wayne and Youngs (2003) argue that "learners learn more from teachers with certain characteristics . . . Teachers differ greatly in their effectiveness, but teachers with and without different qualifications differ only a little" (pp. 100-101). Given this, it could be argued that exploring the characteristics of teachers in general and EFL teachers in particular could be of paramount importance and worth investigation since the findings might help pre-service teachers get acquainted with those teacher characteristics defined and identified as good and favorable in order to equip and fine-tune themselves with such qualities and put them into effect in their teaching if they intend to achieve a better and more successful outcome. Thus, the present study explored comparatively the distinctive characteristics of senior secondary schools language teachers and private language institutes teachers, both considered as teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in two basically different foreign language teaching contexts.

Review of the related literature

Teacher characteristics

The investigation of the characteristics of academic disciplines is a recognized field of study in schooling and psychology (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Biglan, 1973; Hativa & Marincovich, 1995). Teacher characteristics can be regarded as qualities which are measurable using tests or they might be derived from the teachers' academic or professional background. Ashton (1996) holds that the characteristics can comprise qualities which are referred to as personal (e.g., gender, mental ability), or experiential (e.g., educational records, teaching experience, or certificate status). Ashton adds, there are some characteristics which are combinations of both personal as well as experiential qualities (e.g., the performance of candidates on tests designed for teachers, certificates, etc.).

Furthermore, Richardson (1997) maintains that teachers transfer the truth, convey the knowledge, and illuminate the doubts. Dewey (1938) holds that a successful teacher is not only able to transmit knowledge to the learners, but he/she can also behave in a way that learners understand what is right or wrong. Year (as cited in Chen & Lin, 2009, p. 223) claimed that "The mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher demonstrates, the great teacher inspires". That is, successful and effective teachers not only have high knowledge and impart that knowledge to their students skillfully and successfully, they also give them the confidence, desire and enthusiasm necessary to set and follow up their educational goals as well as to build a strong personality.

Several studies have been conducted in order to identify and provide a list of teacher characteristics. A list was presented by Girard (1977), for instance. Girard's list of teacher characteristics, as perceived by language learners, included such features as making course interesting, teaching good pronunciation, explaining clearly, speaking good English, showing the same interest in all the pupils, making the pupils participate and showing great patience.

Another list of teacher characteristics was presented by Prodromou (1991). The list included several characteristics seen as significant by students including behaving in a friendly manner, providing good notes, and playing games.

Effective teacher characteristics have also been discussed in the investigations of foreign language teacher education since the goal of teacher education is to create quality teachers (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Hammadou & Bernhardt, 1987; Velez-Rendon, 2002).

Despite the fact that experts in the field have a tendency to agree that teacher characteristic is regarded as a significant decisive issue worth further investigation and exploration, there is little consensus on the existence of a strong association between particular teacher credentials (e.g., degree level and experience), characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, race, and age) and their effectiveness. That is, the teacher characteristics (i.e. experience level, degree, and certification status) usually used for qualifications, employment, screening, and teacher selection have been found not to be necessarily associated with learners' achievement (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Hanushek, 1986).

However, although learner achievement is influenced by many other variables including community, extracurricular activities, family life, and the conditions of the school, teachers still seem to be one of the most important elements in education and are held responsible for forming the learners' academic achievement (Aronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007; Rockoff, 2004). Thus, it is important to explore teacher characteristics and identify those characteristics which are more concerned with learners' achievement. Furthermore, identifying the characteristics which develop the learners' achievement more might help the curriculum developers and program administrators to find the ways for improving the learners' achievement using the available teacher resources.

Studies on teacher characteristics

In the field of foreign language teaching, a large number of studies have identified effective teachers' characteristics (e.g., Borg, 2006; Koutsoulis, 2003; Lowman, 1996; Mollica & Nuessel, 1997, 2002; Rahimi & Hossini Karkami, 2015; Schulz, 2000; Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2014; Tajeddin & Adeb, 2016; Velez-Rendon, 2002; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie & Minor, 2001). These characteristics have been found to include several fundamental constructs ranging from the knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogical and socio/affective skills to identity, class management skills, discipline issues, etc.

Borg (2006), in a triangulated study, investigated distinctive characteristics of 200 practicing and prospective teachers teaching in a range of foreign language contexts. His findings indicated foreign language teachers were different from subject specialist teachers in various aspects including methods, materials and activities, the nature of language, the teaching content, relationship with learners, teacher behaviours and personalities and non-native issues. That is, the findings of Borg showed that the foreign language teaching methodology was more diverse aiming at maximizing communication and student involvement; that language was more dynamic than other subjects and was practically more relevant to real life; that language was more unique in scope and complexity including a multitude of factors such as culture learning and communication skills; that language teachers had closer relationship with learners and, as a result, more communication occurred between them; that language teachers were more flexible and enthusiastic and that language teachers were often compared to native speakers of the language.

Within the same lines, Bell (2005), adopting a Likert-scale questionnaire, studied the attitudes and behaviors of 457 foreign language teachers of German, French and Spanish. The findings indicated an 'emerging professional consensus' on some teacher behaviors and attitudes concerning foreign language teaching. Bell also found the respondents agreed with most of the items in the questionnaire related to characteristics of foreign language teachers, overall attitudes towards and the behaviors related to communicative theories of foreign language teaching, the significance of negotiation of meaning and 'small group work', and finally 'assessment' (Bell, 2005, p. 266).

Similarly, Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2014), investigating characteristics of effective EFL teachers from both teachers and students' perspectives, found both teachers and students stressed 'teacher professional qualities' (e.g., subject matter knowledge, ability to impart knowledge, etc.), 'interpersonal relationships' and 'classroom management-related qualities' (e.g., involvement of all students, regular assessment of students' learning process, etc.) as paramount characteristics of effective EFL teachers although they differed in the degree of significance they attached to these qualities.

Significance of the study and statement of the problem

Despite the fact that a large number of studies have been conducted on teachers' characteristics in general schooling, only a few investigations have been conducted in order to discover the EFL teachers' characteristics (e.g., Brosh, 1996; Molica & Nuessel, 1997). This is acceptable since foreign language teaching seems to lag far behind general education regarding research into effective teachers and teacher education. Also, to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of foreign language teaching, we should first identify qualities of effective teaching in *various contexts* and settings (Bell, 2005; Schrier & Hammadou, 1994). In other words, as Borg (2006) rightly puts it, (effective) language teaching is not a "monolithic phenomenon", rather, it is a phenomenon constructed socially and defined differently in various contexts.

Attempts were thus made in the present study to compare the characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers teaching in senior secondary schools and private language institutes since they are usually considered to be two different EFL teaching contexts with their own unique features. That is, EFL teaching at (state-sector) schools in Iran is still basically traditionally-oriented and grammar-translation-based. However, in (private-sector) language institutes, the instruction is more communicatively-oriented in nature and follows more modern trends towards EFL teaching which might imply EFL teachers in these two different micro-contexts might have varying characteristics.

Thus, given what was stated above regarding the paucity of research on the issue under investigation and considering the significance of context in determining effective language teaching as well as taking the researchers' special interest in the topic into account, the following research questions were postulated for the present study.

1. Overall, is there any statistically significant difference between characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers of senior secondary schools and those of private language institutes?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between specific characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers of senior secondary schools and those of private language institutes?

Methodology

Participants

A total of 147 Iranian EFL teachers from private language institutes and public senior secondary schools in two provinces of Kermanshah and Hamedan participated in the study. From among these participants, 62 teachers were teaching in senior secondary schools and 85 teachers were teaching in language institutes. They were of different ages (20-50) and experiences (1-25). The sampling strategy adopted in the present study was convenience sampling. Out of 147 participants, 40 teachers (20 teachers from each group) were randomly selected and interviewed whose informed consent was also obtained.

Instruments

In order to identify the characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers of senior secondary schools and language institutes, a five-point Likert-scale teacher characteristics questionnaire mainly adapted from Borg (2006) was administered (See Appendix A). The questionnaire included 46 statements on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (See Appendix 1). The instrument was piloted with 73 teachers similar to the participants of the study and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were run to ensure its validity. The results of KMO (0.703) and Bartlett's test ($P=0.000$) indicated the questionnaire enjoyed an acceptable validity rate. Using Cronbach's Alpha consistency measure, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be high enough ($\alpha=0.91$).

Besides, for the purpose of data triangulation and validation, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 40 teachers as mentioned earlier (See Appendix 2). The researchers followed a preplanned interview schedule focusing on specific points to be covered closely with every interviewee. Furthermore, the interview questions were screened by two experts in the field for validity purposes.

Procedure

Recognizing the potential benefits of utilizing a mixed-method design in investigating the teachers' characteristics, the researchers combined both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) measures to capture Iranian senior secondary school and private language institute teachers' characteristics. The researchers believe that a mixed-method approach is more appropriate for investigating a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon like teacher characteristics.

The data for the study were collected from private language institutes and public senior secondary schools in two provinces of Iran. Firstly, the questionnaire of the study was expert viewed. Secondly, the questionnaire, after being piloted as mentioned earlier, was administered to the participants of the study, the administration and completion of which took approximately 30 minutes. It is worth mentioning here that the EFL teachers' scores on the questionnaire as a whole were regarded as indicting their characteristics *overall*, whereas their responses to each individual item of the questionnaire were regarded as indicting *specific* teacher characteristics. Thirdly, the interview questions were expert viewed by two experts in the field. Finally, 20 senior secondary school and 20 language institute teachers, selected randomly from among the participants of the study, were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in English and each interview took nearly 10 minutes.

Data analysis

The statistical analyses were conducted by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Regarding the first research question, an Independent Samples t-test was run in order to compare, *overall*, the characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers teaching in senior secondary schools and those teaching in private language institutes. Chi-square analyses were conducted in order to answer the second research question of the study (i.e. to compare the two groups in terms of *specific* teacher characteristics as measured by the individual items of the questionnaire of the study). Furthermore, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and subjected to content analysis. That is, the common patterns of the responses were identified, coded, subjected to frequency analysis and finally tabulated.

Results

Questionnaire results on teacher characteristics overall

To investigate the first research question of the study as to whether, overall, there was any statistically significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers of senior secondary schools and those of private language institutes with regard to their characteristics, an Independent Samples t-test was run, the results of which are summarized in Table 2. However, the descriptive statistics are first summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Characteristics of Senior Secondary School and Language Institute Teachers

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Senior Secondary School Teachers	62	105.20	18.73	2.37
Language Institute Teachers	85	145.70	21.93	2.37

Table 2
Independent Samples t-test Comparing Senior Secondary School and Language Institute Teachers on their Characteristics Overall

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	6.96	.009	-11.74	145	.000	-40.49	3.44	-47.31	-33.68
Equal variances not assumed			-12.03	141.36	.000	-40.49	3.36	-47.14	-33.84

As indicated in Table 2 above $t(141.36) = -12.03, p = .000 < .05$, overall, the two groups (i.e. senior secondary school and language institute teachers) significantly differed with regard to their characteristics; that is, language institute teachers ($M=145.70, SD = 21.93$) were found to have significantly different characteristics from their senior secondary school counterparts in the study ($M=105.20, SD = 18.73$).

Regarding the second research question of whether there was any statistically significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers of senior secondary schools and those of private language institutes with regard to their *specific* characteristics, Chi-square analyses were run, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Chi-square Analyses Comparing Senior Secondary School and Institute Teachers on Specific Teacher Characteristics

No	Title of the characteristic	Percent		Pearson Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
		Institute teachers	Senior secondary school teachers			
1	I understand spoken English well	57% Strongly Agree	56% Agree	30.65	1	.01
6	I pronounce English well	52% Strongly Agree	43% Agree	30.52	1	.01
26	I am available for students	51% Agree	52% Neither agree or disagree	43.85	1	.00
28	I listen to student's opinions and let them express themselves	48% Agree	40% Agree	42.51	1	.00
34	I show interest in students (by remembering students' names) and their learning	50% Strongly Agree	16% Strongly Agree	40.81	1	.00
37	I am polite and respect the personality of the students	57% Strongly Agree	56% Agree	35.41	1	.00
38	I am disciplined	46% Strongly Agree	10% Strongly agree	36.54	1	.00
39	I am punctual	39% Strongly Agree	10% Strongly Agree	29.96	1	.03
40	I am open to criticism	40% Strongly Agree	5% Strongly Agree	37.48	1	.00
42	I am attentive in the class	50% Strongly Agree	40% Agree	36.91	1	.00
43	I am interested in my career	40% Strongly Agree	37% Agree	40.21	1	.00
44	I don't lose temper and get angry	35% Strongly Agree	2% Strongly Agree	43.51	1	.00
45	I stick to administrative rules and regulations	55% Agree	51% Neither agree nor disagree	38.65	1	.00
46	I assess my work regularly	44% Agree	40% Agree	37.51	1	.00

As indicated in Table 3, significant differences were found between the two groups in only 14 items (i.e. items 1, 6, 26, 28, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, and 46) out of the whole 46 items of the questionnaire each focusing on a specific teacher characteristic. The rest of the items were found not to be significantly different between the two groups which are thus not naturally dealt with in the paper.

Interview results

As mentioned earlier, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 40 language institute and senior secondary school teachers (20 from each group) who were selected randomly from among

the the study sample. The participants' responses were audio-recorded, transcribed, scrutinized and subjected to content analysis to find the common themes and recurring patterns which were then coded and 'quantitized' (Dörnyei, 2007). That is, their frequency of occurrence was identified and counted and the results were finally tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4
Language Institute Teachers and Secondary School Teachers' Common Patterns of Responses to the Interview Questions

No.	Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
1	Language institute teachers understand and speak English better.	26	65
2	Language institute teachers have got better pronunciation.	24	60
3	Language institute teachers are more enthusiastic and show more interest in their job.	23	57.5
4	Language institute teachers have closer and better relationship with their students.	23	57.5
5	Language institute teachers have more variety in their teaching techniques and classes.	20	50
6	School teachers are better at explaining grammatical rules.	19	47.5
7	Language institute teachers have more up-to-date knowledge of assessment and assess students more often.	18	45
8	Language institute teachers are more disciplined and punctual.	17	42.5
9	Language institute teachers are better prepared for their teaching and have plans for that.	15	37.5

Discussion

The primary purpose of the study was to examine the possible differences between (state-sector) senior secondary school teachers and (private-sector) language institute teachers in terms of their overall and specific characteristics. As the results of the Independent Samples t-test indicated, statistically significant differences were found between the characteristics of the two groups of the study overall. Moreover, as the results of Chi-square analyses applied on individual items of the questionnaire corroborated by the findings of the interview indicated, language institute teachers showed significantly different specific characteristics that were more ascribable to success in language teaching and to effective language teachers compared to their senior secondary school counterparts.

One reason or justification for this might be the fact that language institute teachers, who are typically young and energetic, are possibly more motivated towards and more interested in language teaching, since interest in language teaching could be regarded as one of the most significant features of effective and successful English language teachers. According to Korthagen (2004), six levels of effectiveness of successful teachers include mission, belief, competencies, identity, behaviors and finally environment. As argued by Korthagen (2004), enthusiasm for the mission is the first step to be an effective English language teacher, a factor of paramount importance, lack of which might result from various sources including financial problems and economic pressures,

stiff atmosphere of the school, etc. Supporting this viewpoint, one of the teachers interviewed stated,

I once used to teach at a school contractually. I was never able to adapt myself to the stiff environment of the school which killed my creativity and enthusiasm.

Another justification might lie in the fact that language institute teachers are more up-to-date and seemingly try more to improve their characteristics than their senior secondary school counterparts, whereas (senior secondary) school education in Iran is too static and inflexible which might cause the teachers to be static, as well.

As the results indicated, senior secondary school teachers seemed not to show characteristics attributable to effective language teaching compared to their institute counterparts. This could be due to the problems of the Iranian educational system implementing inappropriate teaching and learning policies in the schools, lack of effective in-service teacher training programs in Iran, and lack of motivation among Iranian senior secondary school teachers that seems to mainly result, in turn, from 'students' lack of motivation to learn English' which was found by the Authors (2015) to be a source of demotivation for senior secondary school English teachers in Iran.

Another possible explanation might be that teachers in senior secondary schools are not paid sufficient attention, both financially and mentally, which might be directly translated into their commitment to work. Another reason might be that there is rather satisfactory supervision and monitoring of the teachers in the language institutes which is almost lacking in schools. Additionally, the owners of private language institutes would urge their teachers to be enthusiastic, punctual, always at their duty posts and good-looking, as these characteristics would attract more so-called 'customers' to their private-sector language institutes.

This might also be due in part to the different educational contexts of senior secondary schools and language institutes in which teachers serve different roles. Generally speaking, in the Iranian context, senior secondary school classrooms are more teacher-centered relying on traditional teaching methods, whereas institute classrooms are mostly communicative in nature providing students with more opportunities to use language. In other words, in senior secondary school context, the students are not given opportunities to communicate with both the teacher and each other. Therefore, many senior secondary school students might not be motivated to learn because of the non-interactive nature of their foreign (English) language classes.

The current study also explored the differences between Iranian senior secondary school and language institute teachers concerning their specific characteristics. The results of the questionnaire, as shown in Table 3, revealed that there were significant differences between language institute teachers and their senior secondary school counterparts in understanding spoken English well, pronouncing English well, being available for students, listening to students' opinions and letting them express themselves, showing interest in students and their learning (by remembering students' names, establishing rapport, and so on), being polite, disciplined, punctual, open to criticism, attentive in the class, interested in their career, not losing temper and getting angry, sticking to administrative rules and regulations, and finally assessing their work regularly. That is to say, the differences were found to be significant in only 14 items (e.g., items 1, 6, 26, 28, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, and 46) out of the whole 46 items of the questionnaire. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the bulk of the results of the questionnaire in this regard were supported by the findings of the interview as shown in Table 4. In other words, language institute teachers interviewed stated they a) understood and spoke English better, b) had better pronunciation, c) were more enthusiastic and more interested in their job, d) had closer and better relationship with their students, e) had more variety in their teaching techniques and classes, f) were better at

explaining grammatical rules, g) had more up-to-date knowledge of assessment and assessed their students more often, h) were more disciplined and punctual, and finally, i) were better prepared for their teaching.

Since the two groups mostly differed in teacher-student relationship and their personality, it is deemed quite crucial for language institute teachers to develop a sincere and caring relationship with English learners and also provide sufficient opportunities to communicate and interact with English learners. Corroborating this stance, one of the interviewees, a language institute teacher, pointed out,

My students, who are mostly energetic school-age teenagers, often keep saying they always enjoy language institute classes much more than their school English class in which they believe the class atmosphere is 'stiff' and boring and the interaction is mainly teacher-centered.

According to Brosh (1996), effective and successful language teachers would pay great attention to teacher-student relationship and interactions due to the fact that learning and teaching are regarded as a two-sided communication process, a belief which was found in the present study to be commonly practiced by language institute teachers who are usually regarded as being more proficient in spoken language, and consequently focus more on understanding and speaking the language and thus involve students in more interaction compared to their school counterparts.

In line with the findings of the present study, Park and Lee (2006), investigating the characteristics of effective English teachers as perceived by senior secondary school teachers and students, found that such teacher characteristics as speaking proficiency, arousing students' interest in learning English, and building students' self-confidence and motivation were considered important by both students and teachers. Similarly, Brosh (1996) regards such features as knowledge and command of the target language, ability to arouse and sustain interest and motivation among students, and availability to students as desirable characteristics of effective language teachers which corroborate the findings of the current study.

It is thus recommended that Iranian EFL teachers in general, and senior secondary school English teachers in particular, try to improve their overall proficiency in English, especially their listening and speaking skills, teach English through English, and create an atmosphere of confidence, motivation and enthusiasm in their classes.

Another area in which language institute teachers in the study were found to be different from their school counterparts was assessment. That is, language institutes teachers reported they 'assessed their work more regularly' and mostly during the term, a finding which is indicative of the use of formative and alternative forms of assessment as stated by one of the interviewees, a part-time institute teacher who happened to be a full-time school teacher as well,

I regularly administer quizzes and mid-term to my students in the language institute in addition to always observing and assessing their class participation, which is almost absent at school although recently some actions have been taken in schools to adopt some sort of alternative assessment by adding a criterion for evaluation called 'continuous assessment'.

Conclusion and implications

This study compared the characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers teaching at senior secondary schools and those teaching in private language institutes and studied the differences between these two groups in terms of overall as well as specific teacher characteristics. The findings indicated that

overall, the two groups showed significantly different characteristics of foreign language teachers. Also, there were significant differences between the two groups in 14 out of 46 items of the questionnaire focusing on specific characteristics.

From the above discussion, it would seem that certain teacher characteristics are necessary for a teacher to be successful in teaching an L2. That is, in this study, language institute teachers showed that they were significantly different from teachers of senior secondary schools in certain characteristics usually ascribed to effective language teaching as discussed above. This being the case, it is not surprising to see how far more proficient language institute students are in their L2 compared to their senior secondary school counterparts. However, further research needs to be undertaken to shed more light on the issue.

It is, therefore, necessary to make senior secondary school teachers conscious of those teacher characteristics which are seemingly paramount factors influencing language learners' achievement and success in learning an L2. That is, since teacher education is heavily context-specific (Borg, 2006), an understanding of the characteristics which contribute to effective language teaching would be of high practical value to teacher educators. Thus, in light of the findings of the present study, state-sector (i.e. school) teacher educators in Iran, and plausibly in most other contexts where English is treated as a foreign language, should take into account and highlight in their teacher education programs those characteristics of language institute teachers found in the study to be linked to successful and effective language teaching.

To sum up, it is worth noting that language institute teachers show characteristics more ascribable to success most probably due to such factors as regular teacher supervision, frequent class observation and strict monitoring system (all being instances of continuous professional development), which are already in place in such language education contexts as private language institutes. Teacher education and development programs in the Ministry of Education should thus come to terms with this new trend and provide English teachers with continuous professional development opportunities if they intend to achieve better results. Also, senior secondary school pre-service teachers should be made aware of and positively encouraged to focus more on certain teacher characteristics which command interest, respect and achievement of EFL learners in this era. Lastly, senior secondary school practicing teachers are recommended to reflect upon their qualities and teaching practices in order to make more improvement in their teaching.

References

- Aaronson, D., Barrow, L., & Sander, W. (2007). Teachers and student achievement in the Chicago public schools. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 25(1), 95-135.
- Ashton, P. (1996). Improving the preparation of teachers. *Educational Researcher*, 25 (9), 11-22.
- Becher, T., & Trowler, P. R. (2001). *Academic tribes and territories*, (2nd edition). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bell, T.R. (2005). Behaviors and attitudes of effective foreign language teachers: Results of a questionnaire study. *Foreign language Annals*, 38 (2), 259-270.
- Biglan, A. (1973). The characteristics of subject matter in different academic areas. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 57, 195-203.

- Borg, S. (2006). The distinctive characteristics of foreign language teachers. *Language Teaching Research, 10*(1), 3-31.
- Brosh, H. (1996). Perceived characteristics of an effective language teacher. *Foreign Language Annals, 29*(2), 25-38.
- Chen, Y. J., & Lin, S. C. (2009). Exploring characteristics for effective EFL teachers from the perceptions of junior high school students in Taiwan. *STUT Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2*, 219-249.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: McMillan.
- Freeman, D., & Johnson, K., (1998). Re-conceptualizing the knowledge-base of language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly, 32*(3), 397-417.
- Girard, D. (1977). Motivation: The responsibility of the teacher. *ELT Journal, 31*, 97-102.
- Goldhaber, D., & Brewer, D. J. (2000). Does teacher certification matter? Senior secondary school teacher certification status and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 22*, 129-145.
- Hammadou, J., & Bernhardt, E. (1987). On being and becoming a foreign language teacher. *Theory into Practice, 26*, 301-306.
- Hanushek, E. A. (1986). The Economics of schooling: Production and efficiency in public schools. *Journal of Economic Literature, 24*(3), 1141-1178.
- Hativa, N., & Marincovich, M. (1995). *Disciplinary differences in teaching and learning: Implications for practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Korthagen, F. A. J. (2004). In search of essence of a good teacher: towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*, 77-97.
- Koutsoulis, M. (2003). *The characteristics of the effective teacher in Cyprus public senior secondary school: The students' perspective*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
- Lowman, J. (1996). Characteristics of exemplary teachers. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 65*, 33-40.
- Mollica, A., & Nuessel, F. (1997). The good language learner and the good language teacher: A review of the literature and classroom applications. *Mosaic, 4*, 3-16.
- Orhon, G. (2012). The effect of teachers' emotional and perceptual characteristics on creative learning. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 46*, 3074-3077.
- Prodromou, L., (1991). The good language teacher. *English Teaching Forum, 29*, 2-7.

- Rahimi, M., & Hosseini Karkami, F. (2015). The role of teachers' classroom discipline in their teaching effectiveness and students' language learning motivation and achievement: A path method. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 3(1), 57-82.
- Richardson, V. (1997). Constructivist teaching and teacher education: Theory and practice. *Constructivist Teacher Education: Building a World of New Understandings*, 5, 3-14.
- Rockoff, J. (2004). The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Economic Review*, 94(2), 247-252.
- Schrier, L.L., & Hammadou, J. (1994). Assessment in foreign language teacher education. In C. Hancock (Ed.), *Northeast conference reports. Teaching, testing and assessment: Making the connection* (pp. 211-234). Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co.
- Schulz, R. (2000). Foreign language teacher development: MLJ perspectives-1916–1999. *Modern Language Journal*, 84, 495–522.
- Soodmand Afshar, H., & Doosti M. (2014). Exploring the characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers from students' and teachers' perspectives. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 6(1), 205-230.
- Tajeddin, Z., & Adeh, A. (2016). Native and nonnative English teachers' perceptions of their professional identity: Convergent or divergent? *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 4(3), 37-54.
- Velez-Rendon, G. (2002). Second language teacher education: A review of the literature. *Foreign Language Annals*, 35(4), 457-467.
- Wayne, A. M., & Youngs, P. (2003). Teacher characteristics and student achievement gains: A A review. *Review of Educational Research*, 73(1), 89-122.
- Witcher, A., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Minor, L. C. (2001). Characteristics of effective teachers: Perceptions of pre-service teachers. *Research in the Schools*, 8, 45–57.

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to the participants of the study who kindly completed the questionnaire and attended the interview. Our thanks also go to the anonymous reviewers of the paper whose helpful suggestions and constructive criticism improved the quality of the work.

Hassan Soodmand Afshar (the corresponding author) is an Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language, Faculty of Humanities, Bu- Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran. He teaches MA and PhD courses and has published extensively in international journals (e.g., *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *The Language Learning Journal*, *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *Research Papers in Education*, *Issues in Educational Research*, *e-FLT*, *IJLTR*, etc.) and Iranian journals. His research interests include psychology of language education including emotional intelligence, critical thinking, critical pedagogy and reflective teaching, ESP/EAP, learning strategies, oral language assessment and teacher education.

Raouf Hamzavi holds an MA in TEFL from Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan. He has published articles in international and Iranian journals and has presented papers in major national and international conferences. His main research interests are critical and reflective thinking, reflective teaching, and teacher education.

Appendix 1 Teacher characteristics questionnaire

Please read the following list carefully. For each statement, select the response that best represents your Agreement or Disagreement. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 stand for Strongly Disagree, Disagree, No Idea, Agree and Strongly Agree, respectively.

As an English teacher I:		1	2	3	4	5
1	Understand spoken English well					
2	Know English culture well					
3	Read English well					
4	Have a senior secondary level of proficiency with English vocabulary					
5	Write English well					
6	Pronounce English well					
7	Speak English well					
8	Am fully familiar with English grammar					
9	Prepare the lesson well					
10	Follow syllabus tightly					
11	Use particular methods and techniques in teaching					
12	Manage the class time well					
13	Assign homework					
14	Integrate group activities to class					
15	Am up-to-date (e.g. use internet and recent technologies in teaching)					
16	Teach how to learn English outside the classroom (teach language learning strategies)					
17	Use lesson plans					
18	Teach English adapted to students' English proficiency levels					
19	Maintain good classroom atmosphere using authority, if necessary					
20	Teach English in English					
21	Teach English in Persian (students' native language)					
22	Assess what students have learned reasonably					
23	Provide opportunities to use English through meaningful tasks and activities					
24	Provide activities that arouse student's interest in learning English					
25	Am helpful to students in and outside the classroom					
26	Am available for students					
27	Alleviate students' anxiety in English class					
28	Listen to student's opinions and let them express themselves					
29	Help students to develop self-confidence in order to learn English well					
30	Am friendly to students					
31	Have a good sense of humor					
32	Don't discriminate between students and treat them fairly					
33	Arouse students' motivation for learning English					
34	Show interest in students (by remembering students' names) and their learning					
35	Am neat and tidy in appearance					
36	Pay attention to the personal needs of students					
37	Am polite and respect the personality of the students					
38	Am disciplined					
39	Am punctual					
40	Am open to criticism					
41	Am flexible					
42	Am attentive in the class					
43	Am interested in his/her career					
44	Don't lose temper and get angry					
45	Stick to administrative rules and regulations					
46	Assess my work regularly					

Appendix 2

Semi-structured Interview

What do you think are the major characteristics of language institute EFL teachers and senior secondary school English teachers? How do you think they differ?

Please elaborate on your responses especially with regard to language skills and components they are proficient in, language assessment, variety in teaching techniques and activities, discipline and punctuality, lesson planning and class management, teacher-student relations and interaction, teacher's enthusiasm and interest in teaching, etc. You can also talk about any other characteristics you think apply to each group of these teachers.

Thank You