Effective Language Teachers' Characteristics as Perceived by English Language Private Institutes' Administrators in Iran

Negar Yazdanipour
Sheikhbahaee University, yazdanpour.negar@yahoo.com

Mehrnoush Fakharzadeh
Sheikhbahaee University, mehrnooshana@gmail.com

Effective Language Teachers' Characteristics as Perceived by English Language Private Institutes' Administrators in Iran

Abstract

Recruiting wisely from the available supply of teachers is one of the instructional roles of school administrators. Their hiring and retaining decisions, among other things, can influence learners' achievements. The number of studies examining the features of effective language teachers in the eyes of administrators is limited. Therefore, the present study was designed to examine how effective language teachers are perceived by administrators of English Private Language Institutes in Iran. To this end, 27 male and female administrators were selected and interviewed. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the narrative data. The results of coding revealed several characteristics of effective language teachers, which were categorized and grouped under seven themes: teacher's appearance, personal traits, business-related traits, love of the profession, professional competence, work experience, and interpersonal relationship. The perceptions of this group of stakeholders were then compared and contrasted with the features mentioned in the literature and interpreted in view of the commercialization of education. The study concluded that the administrators gave lower priority to learning outcomes and educational concerns. For the administrators, teachers' appearance and their traits are more important than some job-related features. These features are assumed to be closely related to the third dominant theme of business-related characteristics. The results, overall, might reflect the teachers' obligation to adjust their practices to the administrators' expectations, which are, in turn, influenced by the primacy of commercial interests over learning and teaching interests. The findings of the study may have implications for teacher educators, teaching candidates and working teachers.

Keywords

Creative Commons License

Effective Language Teachers' Characteristics as Perceived by English Language Private Institutes' Administrators in Iran

Negar Yazdanipour and Mehrnoush Fakharzadeh
Sheikhbahaee University, Baharestan, Isfahan, Iran

Recruiting wisely from the available supply of teachers is one of the instructional roles of school administrators. Their hiring and retaining decisions, among other things, can influence learners' achievements. The number of studies examining the features of effective language teachers in the eyes of administrators is limited. Therefore, the present study was designed to examine how effective language teachers are perceived by administrators of English Private Language Institutes in Iran. To this end, 27 male and female administrators were selected and interviewed. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the narrative data. The results of coding revealed several characteristics of effective language teachers, which were categorized and grouped under seven themes: teacher's appearance, personal traits, business-related traits, love of the profession, professional competence, work experience, and interpersonal relationship. The perceptions of this group of stakeholders were then compared and contrasted with the features mentioned in the literature and interpreted in view of the commercialization of education. The study concluded that the administrators gave lower priority to learning outcomes and educational concerns. For the administrators, teachers' appearance and their traits are more important than some job-related features. These features are assumed to be closely related to the third dominant theme of business-related characteristics. The results, overall, might reflect the teachers' obligation to adjust their practices to the administrators' expectations, which are, in turn, influenced by the primacy of commercial interests over learning and teaching interests. The findings of the study may have implications for teacher educators, teaching candidates and working teachers. Keywords: Effective Language Teachers, Language Institution's Administrator, Perception, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

In an educational institution that embeds a foreign language in its program, a range of individual and collective stakeholders are involved, including administrators, teachers, school staff, students, parents, local businesses, teacher unions, cultural institutes, and school boards. The stakeholders might have diverging interests, motivations, attitudes, and perceptions, but they unanimously expect their works to yield schooling effectiveness and success. Among those agents involved in the efficacy of a school and the success of its students are teachers and school administrators. Teachers are at the core of each educational system. Not only can they facilitate achievement by providing opportunities for students to fulfill their full potentials (Borg, 2006), they can also promote learning by teaching them how to be life-long learners. Teachers' characteristics affect the learning environment and learners' motivation, not to mention their achievements (Borg, 2006). What teachers do in classrooms partly originates from their belief, attitude, and cognition about teaching and learning (Farrell, Dyson, Polat,

Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007) and partly reflects what they are expected to do in their context of education (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

Administrators, on the other hand, have leadership responsibilities. They set standards for achievement level of the learners, manage school resources, and select and implement programs that work better; they engage with parents as well as teachers and school staff, evaluate teachers and students, foster professional development and, last but not the least, have a voice in employing teachers (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

Yet, the recent trend of commercialization in education worldwide has brought about changes in teachers' mission to meet educational expectations and stakeholders' perceptions of teachers' efficacy (Crichton, 2010). According to Porfilio (2009), "… the commercial involvement in schooling has had a profound influence on how educators, students, and the general public view the purpose of schooling, on the state's role in relationship to its citizens and institutions, and on the nature of life inside classrooms" (p. 145). The trend has attached commercial values to education and, among other things, reshaped stakeholders' perceptions, expectations, and practices. For example, today, administrators prioritize commercial interests over educational outcomes through drawing up strategies to attract more and more students and retain the current ones. As a potential result, teachers might perceive increased pressure to put students' satisfaction before their learning and progress. It appears that teachers and administrators are currently experiencing the challenge to strike a balance between their professional missions and the commercial interests of their organizations (Crichton, 2010; Porfilio, 2009).

English language teachers are expected to have some distinctive characteristics since they teach English as the subject matter, which is also the means of instruction (Borg, 2006; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995). Although there is a rich body of literature on what makes a language teacher a "good teacher" (e.g., Darling-Hamond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012), what is conspicuously lacking from this body of research is how the local settings might significantly determine the contributing factors in perceptions about teacher effectiveness. To put it differently, the context and the influence of social, economic, political, and cultural values cannot be ignored.

Most of the research conducted in school effectiveness has focused on the characteristics of effective teachers from the teachers or students' perspectives (e.g., Borg, 2006; Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2014). There is a paucity of information on other stakeholders' perceptions of what defines a "good teacher." As Hall (2011) emphasizes, stakeholders' understanding may provide better insights into what happens in classrooms. Given that administrators' actions, expectations, and perceptions might affect the desired educational outcome, the present study aims to explore the characteristics of effective language teachers from the administrators' viewpoint. We intend to examine how the administrators of foreign language institutes in Iran perceive an "effective language teacher."

Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the following question:

How do the administrators of English Language Private Institutes in Iran perceive effective language teachers?

The literature relative to the defining features of effective teachers in Iran and other contexts was reviewed. What is not yet clear is how effective language teachers are defined by the administrators of private language institutes who have leadership as well as instructional roles. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews with 27 administrators of English language private institutes (ELPI, henceforth), this study looks at how this group of stakeholders perceive effective language teachers.

English Language Teaching Context in Iran

English is a compulsory subject for the Iranian state school curriculum. The focus is mainly on the explicit teaching of grammar rather than communication skill (Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009). In the state school system, teacher employment, qualification, evaluation, and methodology are defined by The Ministry of Education, and the textbooks are developed and prescribed by the Ministry. The minimum teaching requirement is holding a BA and increasingly, MA degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL, henceforth) (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015).

There are also ELPIs where students can learn English. In fact, in the Iranian context, the young generation has been showing an increasing interest in learning English for the last two decades. This can be a consequence of Iranian society placing a high value on English (and can be demonstrated by the proliferation of ELPIs) in Iran in recent years (Mohammadian & Norton, 2016; Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). These institutions are also required to follow the dictated rules of the Ministry of Education and other governmental organizations concerning, for example, the tuition fee and the allocation of single-sex classes to boys and girls. However, they have more freedom in choosing the books, the methodology, and their skill focus. Moreover, "these institutes can choose their own teachers and in some but not all of them there are modern facilities such as language laboratories and computers available to be used as teaching aids" (Kaboodvand, 2013, p. 29).

Unlike the public schools, in the private language institutes, the administrators are the omnipotent decision-maker. Administrators formulate regulations and see to their implementation, draw up timetables, and prepare statistics and reports for the owners of institutes and the concerned officials. They decide on whether teaching training courses are required, and vacancies have occurred; they recruit language learners after placement tests are taken, and they liaise with students and their parents. The administrators might have the final say in the teacher's basic pay.

To take the language teaching job, the applicants submit their application forms to the institutes or directly refer to the institute to ask about an open teaching position. The minimum teaching requirement, though, is fluency in English. The applicants without an academic degree in TEFL can take the job if they are fluent enough. Despite the significant role of administrators in the ELPIs in Iran, the researchers who endeavored to deal with teacher efficacy have rarely included the administrators' perspectives in their studies.

In the literature, several studies can be found in identifying effective teachers' traits from the teachers' perspective (e.g., Borg, 2006; Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2014; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, & Minor, 2001). Still, other studies addressed the issue through the eyes of learners (e.g., Chen, 2012; Faramarz Zadeh, 2016). Parents' viewpoints towards effective teachers have also received some attention (e.g., Liu & Meng, 2009; Qureshi, 2013; Tompson, Benz, & Agiesta, 2013). A few researchers (e.g. Çakmak & Akkutay, 2016; Parpala & Lindblom-Ylanne, 2007) studied the perceptions of teacher educators. Juxtaposing the results of all the studies reveals two things. First, all the traits of good teachers, in general, and those of English teachers, in particular, can be classified into either soft skills or hard skills. Soft skills are those personal characteristics which enable the teachers to interact with others, for example, kindness, enthusiasm, and interpersonal relationship. Hard skills are the job-specific skills and knowledge which are acquired through training or education, such as pedagogical knowledge and class management skills. Second, although teachers, learners, and parents have converging perceptions of effective teachers, learners and parents are more likely to weigh soft skills while teachers place a high value on hard skills.

It is not clear whether effective English teachers for administrators or principals are defined by the same set of characteristics that are enumerated in the literature from the perspective of teachers, parents, and learners. What drives the researchers of the present study to address the ELPIs administrators' perception of good language teachers is their involvement with the problems faced by working English teachers in the institutes and English teacher applicants. The first author of this study, who intended, for her MA thesis, to identify the attributes of effective English teachers from the perspective of two groups of stakeholders, parents and administrators, in Iran, has experienced the pressures of recruitment bias on the part of ELPIs' administrators and insecure employment. The second author is a faculty member of a Foreign Language Department in one of the universities in Iran and involved in teacher education at BA and MA levels. Working in teacher education context convinced her of the need to study administrators' perception because effectiveness of teacher education, teaching, and teacher is determined in relationship with the real stakeholders' expectation, which is, in turn, dominated by broader socio-cultural context.

In point of fact, the justification for exploring administrators' perception is two-fold. First, since the formal education sector in Iran has proved unable to meet the communicative needs of language learners (Maftoon, Yazdani Moghaddam, Gholebostan, & Beh-Afarin, 2010; Mohammadian & Norton, 2016; Sadeghi & Richards, 2015) the learners mostly attend ELPIs to acquire the outcomes they expect. However, these ELPIs failed to effect the expected change in the outcomes; they are not effective in teaching English (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015; Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). Second, proliferation of these institutes have faced Iranian English teacher applicants with challenges because having teacher certificate, subject matter knowledge, and teaching and learning knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2006), which are viewed as requisites for effective teaching, do not seem to be the legitimate criteria for teaching in the ELPIs in Iran.

Knowing that administrators are the recruiting agents in such institutes, it could be hypothesized that studying their underlying beliefs and perceptions about what are the defining characteristics of effective language teachers might help both teacher educators and TEFL graduates in fulfilling the requirements of teacher labor market in Iran.

Methodology

The administrators' perception of effective English teachers was investigated employing in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews. With this approach, the researchers were able to look for rich information, experiences, and facts about the interconnection between the participants' perception and the real context (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It was also used because while a set of guiding question is prepared, the interview still enables the researchers to make expansions and include new avenues (Silverman, 1993).

Participants

A total number of 27 administrators (15 males and 12 females) from 27 different language institutes in three cities, Isfahan, Shahrekord, and Shiraz, participated in this study. In Iran, the license to establish a private language institute is granted either by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance or by the Ministry of Education. Private owners who might also be the administrators or supervisors own the institutes. Administrators have leadership as well as instructional responsibilities. The administrators enjoy full autonomy and power in their hiring decisions and selecting and retaining teachers, who have a prerequisite role in the learning outcomes. Having a degree in English teaching is not compulsory for the administrators in the ELPIs.

The adopted sampling strategy was availability sampling. They all shared Persian as their first language and were of different ages (29-53) and educational backgrounds: 11 participants majored in TEFL, 5 in English literature, 8 had a degree in a subject other than TEFL, English literature or translation, and 2 had no university degree at all. Their work experience ranged from 4 to 15 years.

Data Collection

To answer the research question, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. Two faculty members of the Foreign Language Department of Sheikhbahaee University, Isfahan, Iran, who work as teacher trainers reviewed the first draft of questions to check the careful formulation of the items. They were asked to evaluate the questions for meaning clarity and wording so that none of the questions "puts words into the mouths" of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 122). The revised interview questions were then piloted on a Ph.D. TEFL candidate and a high school English teacher who was also the administrators of English language institutes in Isfahan and Shiraz, respectively.

It is worth mentioning that, in Iran, Institutional Review Boards (IRB) do not monitor research projects in social and behavioral sciences with minimal risk where participants do not include participants from vulnerable populations. Such studies, like the present one, are considered "IRB-exempt projects that include questionnaires and interviews involving non-sensitive topics in projects that are not supported by funding agencies" (Teddlie, & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 199). It also should be noted that this study is part of a larger research project, an MA thesis on the Parents and Principals Perception of Effective English Teachers, Sheikhbahaee University.

The site of the interviews was the institution where each participant was in charge; each interview took between 45 to 60 minutes. At first, informed consent was obtained from the participants, and the aim of the study was described by one of the researchers who was also the interviewer. Saturation point was gained by 27 interviews. The participants were interviewed in their native language (Persian). Confidentiality of the obtained information was ensured by using pseudonyms for the administrators and their institutes. Data obtained from the interviews was closely transcribed, analyzed, and then translated, by the first author, into English for this manuscript.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the narrative data gathered through interviews. To this end, the six-phase analysis identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used.

The first researcher immersed herself in the data; the whole set of data was read and re-read before coding. It was through examining and re-examining of the data that specific patterns and meanings in the writings gradually emerged. She started taking notes for coding about interesting

information on the transcripts. Next, a preliminary list of ideas related to the data was created. The data was organized into significant groups and the initial codes to the data were given. The codes were explicit or implicit meanings that were related to the most basic part of the data or even raw information. Then, the themes were sought from the long list of different codes. Gradually, similar codes were brought under a set and a name was given to each set and a concise explanation for that name was provided. Some codes formed themes. The data inside the themes was checked to see if they were related to each other and if the themes were explicitly differentiable. The researcher referred back to the extracted codes of each theme to see whether the codes formed a consistent pattern. For naming some themes, the researcher

needed to be guided by referring to the related literature. Although the analysis was data-driven, the researcher could not free herself of the "theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12). Then, the researcher closely examined the themes to see whether all of them were really theme and had enough supportive data and to be sure that the themes were not merged with other themes due to overlap.

To take care of subjectivity involved with the coding process in thematic analysis, and to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness in this approach, the researchers invited another researcher as a "disinterested peer" into the analysis procedure (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 295). She had knowledge of the phenomenon under study and knowledge of qualitative methodology and was asked to probe into interpretation and analysis of data. Data and inference quality were further improved by having a part of the raw data, transcripts of 10 interviews, be analyzed by the second researcher (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The researchers then compared the themes that emerged from the analysis of the first and second researchers. Inconsistent categories were omitted with the agreement of the researchers.

Limitations

This study had some limitations, which indicate further research. First, the sample in this study only involved 27 private language institutes administrators and may not represent the whole population. Therefore, the generalization of the results must be restrained. Second, although interview results provide information on what the administrators of ELPIs in Iran look for in teaching candidates and how they evaluate them, a survey could have confirmed the information and reveal how the administrators' preferences vary by their characteristics such as their academic background. The researchers planned to employ a questionnaire to triangulate the interview data yet the majority of administrators who were asked for participation in the study were reluctant to do so. Therefore, the number of the sample was limited to 27. Moreover, the researchers intended to use observation to see how the teachers' practice conforms to the administrators' defining features of good English teachers in classes. However, the administrators' permission could not be obtained.

Results

The data analysis procedure yielded a variety of initial codes regarding characteristics of effective English language teachers. Upon examining the codes, seven dominant themes were extracted (Table 1). The results are presented in order of the priority given by the participants.

Table 1

Characteristics of effective language teachers as perceived by language institutes' administrators in Iran

Themes	Sub-themes	In-vivo codes
Appearance		● Countenance ● Clothing ● Physique
Personal traits		● Being creative ● Being kind

		● Being patient
		● Being flexible
		● Being extrovert
		● Being confident
		● Being supportive
Business-related traits		● Being obedient
		● Being able to satisfy the customers
		● Having a good reputation
		● Being able to give the students a sense of accomplishment
		● Being disciplined
Love of the profession		● Having a passion for teaching
		● Being a dedicated teacher
Professional competence	Linguistic knowledge	● Having language knowledge
		● Being a language model
	Being updated	● Being pedagogically updated
	Pedagogical skills & knowledge	● Creating attraction and enthusiasm
		● Making motivation
		● take care of individual differences
		● Tailoring teaching to student needs
		● Holding English only classes
		● Assigning homework
		● After-class reflection
Work experience		● Having teaching experience
		● Having observed many classes
		● Having a certificate in teacher training courses (TTC)
Interpersonal relationship	Teacher-student relationship	● Knowing the learner's name
		● Being able to communicate with the learners
		● a good relationship with parents
	Teacher-staff relationship	● sharing ideas with other teachers
		● Getting advice from administrators and colleagues

Teacher's Appearance

This theme was mentioned by 19 participants. As shown in Table 1, it contains the teachers' countenance, their clothing, and their physique. The administrators stated that an essential factor for them is the teachers' appearance since it is what the parents and their children can see in the first place. For example, Alavi mentioned that:

You know…., we select our teachers according to strict criteria among which physical appearance is an important one. Even their height matters to us, well…, any female candidate shorter than, um…., say, 160 cm (5 feet 3 inches), and male ones shorter than…. 175 cm (5 feet and 9 inches) are not even invited for interview; a teacher should be attractive.

Some administrators insisted on the teachers clothing. For example, Rezaee noted:

We expect our teachers to be smartly dressed, I mean their clothes should always be neat, um….; we ask our female teachers to wear make-ups; their outward appearance matters a lot, that being said, we ask them to dress up in a way that is appropriate for a teacher.

When asked about the reason, most of them stated that ordinary-looking teachers could not attract their students' attention. For instance, Javidee said:

Here, we have a large number of young learners, … their parents bring them to the institute; the appearance of the teachers is important because they are looking for something to make their children interested in learning English. They do not want their children to hate English lessons and classes; if language teachers are good-looking they are more probable to be loved by the learners.

The identification of teachers' appearance as a significant factor is similar to the unanticipated finding of Kaboodvand's (2013) study of English teachers' effectiveness from the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents.

Personality traits

Personality traits of Teachers are comprised of seven categories: teachers' creativity, kindness, patience, flexibility, and extroversion, mentioned by 18 participants, and their confidence and supportiveness stressed by 17 of them. The following comment, for example, touched on creativity and supportiveness under the theme of "Personality trait of Teachers":

You know, the point is that English teachers are expected to have a caring personality, they should care for the way their students feel, they should relate to them and, um… so that their student believe they are welcomed; they should be creative, I mean, they need to create fun and try new ideas rather than stick to the traditional teaching classes. Students love those teachers who are encouraging and supportive, moreover, and above all, they should know that students are of different types and personalities; sometimes they need to be careful about the differences, some students like some activities more than others and you know….

Extroversion and confidence were other frequently mentioned characteristics. Khademi said:

…no one can even imagine a shy teacher in English classes;… they need to be energetic and sociable, having and developing friendly relationships with everyone within and out of the classroom.

With regard to patience, Riazee, for example, mentioned that:

… our teachers should not flip out and get upset with the students, you know they need to be patient.

In the studies done by Chen (2012), Kourieos and Evripidou (2013), Khojastehmehr and Takrimi (2009), Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), Whichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012), and many others, teachers' personality has been found as one of the qualities of an effective language teacher. Among the reported personal attributes, having a sense of commitment, patience, and flexibility were the most frequently mentioned ones in the literature (Liu & Meng, 2009; Lowman, 1996; Stronge, 2007).

Business-Related Traits

More than half of the administrators (15) related at least one of the characteristics, being obedient, enjoying a good reputation, pleasing the so-called customers, being disciplined and giving the students a sense of accomplishment, to the success of their institute and business. For example, about reputation, Saeedi pointed out:

We preferably employ those teachers who have worked in other language institutes and have established their reputation as good English teachers; you know, lots of our customers want to have classes with those who are university instructors; they even wait for months to take their English classes with these teachers. Business-wise, it sounds reasonable to employ reputable English teachers.

Tompson et al. (2013) also reported reputation as a feature of effective teacher from the perspective of parents. Naseri's comment is an instance of "giving a sense of accomplishment" and "pleasing the customers":

We ask our teachers to get along with the students, even naughty ones, since we do not want to lose them for the next quarter, you know, they (the students) should be satisfied with us, with their teachers, to enroll for the coming quarters; moreover, and in the end, what makes them motivated enough to come here, to our English classes, are the final results, their grades,… if they feel, I mean a lot of them, feel incompetence and frustration, just because they could not pass their final exam, or they believe that they have not achieved anything, well, in fact, we lose a lot of our customers.

Ravi added:

…we even recommend that teachers should not fail more than a couple of their students in each class." Interestingly, among the characteristics connected to the profit of the institutes, the teachers' obedience was mentioned more frequently (n=7).

For example, Dadvand stressed that:

We, as administrators, prescribe things and we expect them to be followed, for example, we have some pre-planned syllabus, ok, … they should teach based

on what we give them, or; as another example, you know, they take TTC courses, and they should implement what they have learned there in their classes.

Sadeghi and Saeedi pointed out that all the administrators set rules which they expect to be followed by the teachers and that teachers have to realize what they expect from them in terms of their job or behavior.

Love of the Profession

About half of the participants mentioned a teacher should love teaching. Sade, for instance, commented that:

A teacher, especially an English teacher, should enjoy every teaching moment to the fullest. If they do love their job, they can handle their classes, I mean, for example, challenging students. A good teacher is passionate about teaching. I know that teaching is demanding, but teachers need to be happy with their job all the time.

An example of focus on teachers' dedication for the job is Shaker's comments:

If a teacher willingly gives time and energy to teaching English, s/he never leaves things to the last minutes. Only those who love their job can be fully prepared for teaching in a class.

The administrators related good teachers' passion for teaching to their learners' success because they believed that their love is directly reflected in their methods of teaching, which, in turn, influences their students' learning.

"Love of profession" was also found to be a defining feature in the studies done by Dozza and Carvini (2012), Qureshi (2013), and Tompson et al. (2013), and passion for teaching was reported as one of the critical qualifications from parents' perspective.

Professional Competence

Professional competence of teachers implied three subthemes: linguistic knowledge, being updated, and pedagogical skill and expertise. Having a good command of English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, being a language model, holding an academic degree in TEFL were mentioned concerning their linguistic competence.

Almost half of the administrators (n=14) stated that a good language teacher should be a language model, otherwise they cannot evaluate their students' abilities. Ramazani commented:

...not only should a language teacher be interested in language and language teaching but also be knowledgeable; I mean, knowledge is like a possession of language teachers to be transferred to students. If there is no knowledge, or if the knowledge is not enough, what does a teacher have to pass to their students? As far as I know, this is challenging since not many English teachers in Iran are knowledgeable enough in grammar, vocabulary, everyday conversation, and so on. They cannot be a good language model, and their students need to copy what they listen to learn from their teacher.

The administrators expected the teachers to have complete mastery of grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and other nuances of English. Among these areas, grammar was more frequently and emphatically mentioned. Zare stated that:

> Here we test them for having a good command of English grammar and correct pronunciation; we expect them not to transfer incorrect information, and I mean, not to make students confused by making mistakes.

Saeedi explained that: "… for teaching advanced levels, the teacher candidates should have IELTS score of, at least, 7." They insisted on a teacher's responsibility to be a correct and complete language model for the students and not exposing them to incorrect language instances. Six administrators pointed out that their teachers are expected to update their skills and knowledge, and as the following quotation from Reshadvand reveals, do not stick to old and inflexible methods of teaching:

> …. we ask them (the teachers) to read as many articles and papers as they can, develop themselves as a teacher by reading lots of books. Good teachers should improve their teaching skills by getting more information from as many sources as they can, attending refresh courses and programs. You know, new ways of teaching English can make their classes more fun and more enjoyable…

The administrators also emphasized that, although all teachers need to know the art of teaching, English teachers need to be more skillful. Creating attraction and enthusiasm, realizing individual differences in terms of personality and needs, adapting their method to the learners and holding English-only classes, assigning homework, and after-class reflection were the codes under the cover theme of pedagogical skill and knowledge. They stated that English teachers who are equipped with pedagogical knowledge and teaching skill could be good creators; they can attract the attention of learners; they radiate a good vibe in the class.

Good English teachers attract the students toward the class and the English language by making use of new ideas, by surprising them, by using games, you know,….by keeping them engaged and focused. I think teaching is about making the lessons easy to learn, and in fact, their (English teachers') linguistic knowledge needs to be coupled with their teaching skills. It is about the knowledge of teaching know-hows (Rezaee).

A few administrators (n=4) acknowledged that teaching knowledge involves accommodating individual differences and needs and that caring English teachers realize that all students can learn English in their own ways. Dadvand explained that:

> Good teachers can make unwilling students interested in English. How? By, for example, being a skillful instructor, by their art of teaching, by knowing that they should tailor their teaching methods to their students' needs, by understanding that they should select appropriate materials for appropriate students.

Another stated feature of a good English teacher, as the following narrative shows, was holding English-only classes (i.e., not to use Persian at all). Sade and Saeedi stated that if students want to use Persian, the teacher should stop them; the teacher also should not use Persian for teaching or anything. As noted by Naseri: "Assigning homework and allocating a certain time for checking them can be effective." She went on to say that: "thinking about what

went well and what did not, and what they should do next time helps them overcome their weaknesses."

"Pedagogical knowledge," a characteristic which is classified under the theme of "professional competence," was also found to be an essential characteristic of a teacher. It is mentioned repeatedly in the related studies, for example, by Brosh (1996); Clark (1995); Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, and James (2002); Park and Lee (2006); Shishavan (2009); and Whichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012).

As far as "professional competence" is concerned, the findings of this study are consistent with the literature since effective language teachers are defined by a set of job-related characteristics including profound competence in the target language (Delaney, 2009; Faramarz Zade, 2016; Kaboodvand, 2013; Khojastemehr & Takrimi, 2009).

Fostering interest and enthusiasm in students is also reported by other researchers such as Lowman (1997), Brosh (1996), Park and Lee (2006), and Zamani and Ahangari (2016) as a requirement of effective teachers. For the administrators, a stress-free, student-centered, and authentic environment was perceived as significant. The environmental dynamic has been reported in the literature by other researchers such as Kaboodvand (2013) and Kalebic (2005).

Having Enough Teaching Experience

Ten administrators mentioned this theme. The administrators, who regarded teaching experience as necessary, believed that teaching experience could be achieved by teaching a variety of courses in a variety of contexts. Moreover, some of the administrators (n=8) mentioned that attending teacher training courses or even observing English classes might also work as experience. They also believed that an experienced teacher could deal with teaching issues more effectively. What was said about this theme can be shown in the following quotation from Javidee:

> When we interview the applicants, we ask them about their teaching experience or if they have attended any teacher training course. I think an experienced teacher is different from a novice teacher, at least, in that s/he knows the do's and don'ts; s/he knows what s/he needs to work on. You see, experienced teachers are more effective. Take the class size, for example. This might seem an unimportant issue, but experienced teachers know how to teach in a big, busy class, or what to do when a class gets loud.

A couple of the administrators stated that they prefer to hire those teachers who are currently teaching at universities. They added that this group of teachers is more popular with students and their parents and more sophisticated.

Quality of Interpersonal Relationships

The last theme, quality of interpersonal relationship, was further divided into two subthemes: teacher-student relationships and teacher-staff relationships. Five administrators gave prominence to the role of teacher-student relationship. Moreover, the same administrators also perceived the quality of teachers' relationship with the students' parents as equally important. Alavi and Khademi raised the issue that the teachers' relationship with students and their parents do shape their attitudes. Khademi added:

> Good teachers establish a good relationship with their students; I do not mean beyond the socially and institutionally accepted conventions and etiquette. It

means that, for example, they know the first name of their students, try to know their personality, match with every group of students.

Getting along well with the students and their parents seemed imperative by some administrators because it can attract many students towards English and English classes. According to the narratives of the participants, an English teacher should develop a close interpersonal relationship with his/her students; still, it is imperative to have effective and willing interaction with the institution staff, including the colleagues and the administrator. Some (n=5) added that an effective teacher should collaborate with his/her colleagues and get some advice from the institution's administrator to improve his/her teaching. Naseri said:

We can't accept a teacher who comes, teaches, and leaves the institute. I mean being isolated is not right, neither for him/herself nor for us. They need to connect with other teachers here to get aware of their ideas and what they do in their classes.

Bakhshi emphasized that:

I think it is super for teachers to be independent, um….but we encourage them to relate with other teachers and colleagues, you know, because they spend a lot of time here, so why not taking advantage of the situation, I mean, it brings synergistic effect talking and sharing ideas with other teachers.

Teachers' ability to invest in developing a close friendly relationship with students confirms findings of other studies such as Barnes and Lock (2010), Faramarz Zadeh (2016), Koutrouba (2012), and Moradi and Sabeti (2014).

Discussion

The present study aimed to identify the features of good English teachers as perceived by ELPIs administrators. Seven major themes emerged from the participants' reports: English teachers' appearance, personal traits, their business-related features, love of the profession, professional knowledge, work experience, and their interpersonal relationship. Interestingly, it was found that this group of stakeholders places a high value on the physical attractiveness of their teachers.

The results of this study differ from previous work in that: (a) for the participants, teachers' appearance was on the top of the list, (b) business-related characteristics emerged as an unexpected theme, (c) good teachers are also defined by their up-datedness, and (d) sharing ideas with other teachers and developing a close relationship with other staff are regarded as important for effective language teachers.

The significance of the themes for the administrators can draw our attention to the fact that some of the features mentioned, like physical attraction, might be associated with the requirements to keep the institutes' current students satisfied and still attract new ones. That for the administrators, physical attractiveness is on the top of the list might imply that this feature can be used as a selling point by the institutes' owners and administrators, particularly given that they know how their students and their parents perceive the teachers' appearance.

What was mentioned, in turn, may imply this group of stakeholders has a tendency to prioritize financial interests over teaching interests. This can particularly be inferred from the fact that some administrators with a TEFL degree also clearly stated and emphasized physical appearance, business-related features, and personality traits. Mentioning these features,

particularly the business-related features, might suggest the administrators' tendency to prioritize their learners (i.e., the customers' contentment over meeting their language achievements). Apparently, according to Crichton (2010, p. 9), "when a student has purchased a course from an educational organization, the debt of satisfaction owed by the organization is then paid in part by the student's teacher." While the extraction of business-related feature might seem justifiable in the era of commercialized education, its appearance as the third in the list can signify the teaching situations in the private institutes in Iran. We may infer that English teachers are "pulled in opposing directions by the competing interests that shape the practices in which they are engaged" (Crichton, 2010, p. 9).

An important characteristic mentioned by the participants in this study was the necessity of being updated. Although this aspect is not much discussed in the literature, in studies done by Liu and Meng (2009), and Aflaki (2014) continuous professional development was reported necessary for language teachers in today's changing world

Moreover, by analyzing the administrators' views, some salient features stood out in the reports of the administrators who had an academic degree in TEFL. This group of participants was concerned about the mental processes involved in learning a second language and emphasized the reflection teachers should have after their teaching. These two factors can make differences in the quality of teaching, but they were acknowledged only by those who had expertise in TEFL. Despite the importance of these two factors, they were not reported in the literature. The only study which found reflection as essential for effective teaching was Kruse (1997), that mentioned teacher's use of his/her reflective abilities as one of the characteristics of an effective teacher.

Analyzing and reflecting more on the administrators' responses, the researchers speculated that all the features of effective teachers could be viewed as a network of construct that might finally assist the administrators in achieving their goal, the financial outcome. Moreover, as it was mentioned earlier, the administrators' views toward language teaching and learning, regarding teachers' appearance as a criterion for hiring, insisting on holding English-only classes or evaluating teachers by students' achievements all might have roots in viewing teachers as "teachers as marketers." This also can justify why TEFL graduates become vulnerable English teachers experiencing discriminatory recruitment practices. That professional knowledge appeared in the fifth rank in the list of effective English teachers, can strongly imply the requirements defined by the administrator, as the leaders of the Private institutes, which are themselves enforced by the pressure imposed by the commercialized education.

Furthermore, except for those who had expertise in TEFL, all of the administrators did not seem to regard teaching English as a profession. One of them said: "it is not important for me to employ just those who have TEFL degree since I can teach my teachers all university courses which should be passed in TEFL courses, condensing the four-year education in 20 sessions of TTC." On the other hand, when they were asked about their preference about employing a teacher who has the expertise or the one who is a native/fluent speaker of English, they asserted that the native/fluent speaker is their choice if he/she is also capable of class management and knows teaching methodology. Even though some of them had some unsuccessful experiences of working with native speakers, they did not relate this to the native speaker's lack of professionalism. Given that teachers' practice shapes and is shaped by a combination of factors, the results may reflect the dominant role of commercialization of education in general and that of ELT in particular. However, this study may justify the condition TEFL graduates have faced in the last two decades due to the financial concern of the private language institutes in Iran. The results can provide important contributions to the process of teacher education. They may also be used by the researchers interested in the area of professional development and teachers' agency.

References

Aflaki, I. M. (2014). Professional development in English language teaching: A teachers' view. *British Journal of Education*, 2(7), 32-49. Retrieved from http://www.eajournals.org

Baleghizadeh, S., & Farshchi, S. (2009). An exploration of teachers' beliefs about the role of grammar in Iranian high schools and private language institutes. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning, 1*(212), 17-38

Barnes, B. D., & Lock, G. (2010). The attributes of effective lecturers of English as a foreign language as perceived by students in a Korean university. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 35*(1), 139-152. http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2010v35n1.2

Borg, S. (2006). The distinctive characteristics of foreign language teachers. *Language Teaching Research, 10*(1), 3-31. https://doi.org/10.1191/1362168806lr182oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brosh, H. (1996). Perceived characteristics of the effective language teacher. *Foreign Language Annals, 29*(2), 125-138. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb02322.x

Çakmak, M., & Akkutay, Ü. (2016). Effective Teaching in the Eye of Teacher Educators: A Case Study in a Higher Education. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(12), 2349-2364. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss12/11

Chen, J. (2012). Favorable and unfavorable characteristics of EFL teachers perceived by university students in Thailand. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 2*(1), 213–219. Doi**:** 10.5539/ijel.v2n1p213

Clark, J. (1995). *Suggestions for effective university teaching*. Retrieved from http://ion.uwinnipeg.ca/~clark/acad/teach/effteach.html

Crichton, J. (2010). *The discourse of commercialization: A multi-perspectived analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.

Darling-Hammond, L., Amrein-Beardsley, A., Haertel, E., & Rothstein, J. (2012). Evaluating teacher evaluation. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93(6), 8-15.

Delaney, J. G. (2009). How high school students perceive effective teachers. *The Morning Watch, 36*(3-4), 1-16. http://www.mun.ca/educ/faculty/mwatch/win09.html

Dozza, L., & Cavrini, G. (2012). Perceptions of competence: how parents view teachers. *Social and Behavioral Sciences. 46*, 4050–4055. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.06.195

Duckworth, A. L., Quinn, P. D., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2009). Positive predictors of teacher effectiveness. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*(6), 540-547. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760903157232

Faramarz Zadeh, R. (2016). EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions about an effective English language teacher. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research, 3*(2), 148-156.

Farrell, P., Dyson, A., Polat, F., Hutcheson, G., & Gallannaugh, F. (2007). The relationship between inclusion and academic achievement in English mainstream schools. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 18*(3), 335–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450701442746.

Fink, E., & Resnick, L. (2001). Developing principals as instructional leaders. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82, 598-606.

Hall, G. (2011). *Exploring English language teaching: Language in action*. London: Taylor & Francis

Kaboodvand, M., R. (2013). *Perceptions of effective language teaching in Iran*. Thesis for the

degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education (TESOL). University of Exeter.

Kalebic, S. C. (2005). *Towards the development of standards in foreign language teacher preparation*. Paper presented at 30th ATEEA (Association for Teacher Education in Europe) Annual Conference Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Khojastehmehr, R., & Takrimi, A. (2009). Characteristics of effective teachers: Perceptions of the English teachers. *Journal of Education & Psychology, 3*(2), 53-66.

Kourieos, S., & Evripidou, D. (2013). Students' perceptions of effective EFL teachers in university settings in Cyprus. *Canadian Center of Science and Education, 6*(11), 1-16. Doi: 10.5539/elt.v6n11p1

Koutrouba, K. (2012). A profile of the effective teacher: Greek secondary education teachers' perceptions. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 35*(3), 359-374. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2011.654332

Kruse, S. D. (1997). Reflective activity in practice: Vignettes of teachers' deliberative work. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 31*, 46-60. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ557652

Liu, S., & Meng, L. (2009). Perceptions of teachers, students and parents of the characteristics of good teachers: A cross-cultural comparison of China and the United States. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability, 21*, 313–328. https://aquila.usm.edu/fac_pubs/1107/

Lowman, J. (1997). Teaching concern. *Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants, 21*, 22-27.

Maftoon, P., Yazdani Moghaddam, M., Gholebostan, H., & Beh-Afarin, S. R. (2010). Privatization of English education in Iran: A feasibility study. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language,* 13(4). http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume13/ej52/ej52a8/

Minor, L. C., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Witcher, A., & James, T. (2002). Pre-service teachers' educational beliefs and their perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers. *The Journal of Educational Research, 96*(2), 116-127. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27542420

Mirhosseini, S. A., & Khodakarami, S. (2015). A glimpse of contrasting de jure-de facto ELT policies in Iran. In C. Kennedy (Ed.). *English language teaching in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Innovations, trends and challenges* (pp. 23-32). London: British Council.

Mohammadian, F., & Norton, B. (2016). The role of English language institutes in Iran. *TESOL Quarterly, 51*(2), 428-438. Doi: 10.1002/tesq.338

Moradi, K., & Sabeti, G. (2014). A comparison of EFL teachers and EFL students' understandings of highly effective teaching, *Social and Behavioral Sciences, 98*, 1204-1213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.535

Park, G. P., & Lee, H. W. (2006). The characteristics of effective English teachers as perceived by high school teachers and students in Korea. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 7*(2), 236-248. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ752344

Parpala, A., & Lindblom-Ylanne, S. (2007). University teachers' conceptions of good teaching in the units of high-quality education. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 33,* 355-370.

Phipps, S., & Borg, S. (2009). Exploring tensions between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. *System, 37*(3), 380-390. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ849429

Porfilio, B. (2009). Commercialization of schools. In E. E. F. Provenzo & A. B. Provenzo (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of the social and cultural foundations of education* (pp. 145-147) Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage

Qureshi, M. Z. (2013). The good teacher: A qualitative analysis of perceptions of Asian American parents. *Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*. Paper 91. Minnesota State University – Mankato. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED564870

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sadeghi, K., & Richards, J. C. (2015). Teaching spoken English in Iran's private language schools: Issues and options. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique, 14*(2), 210- 234. Doi: 10.1108/ETPC-03-2015-0019

Shishavan, H. B., & Sadeghi, K. (2009). Characteristics of an effective English language teacher as perceived by Iranian teachers and learners of English. *English Language Teaching, 2*(4), 130-143.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage Publications.

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. doi: 10.22111/IJALS.2014.1997

Sternberg, R. J., & Horvath, J. A. (1995). A prototype of expert teaching. *Educational Researcher, 24*, 9-17.

Stronge, H. J. (2007). *Qualities of effective teachers* (2nd ed.). Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED509061

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tompson, T., Benz, J., & Agiesta, J. (2013). *Parents' attitudes on the quality of education in the United States*. The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Whichadee, S., & Orawiwatnakul (2012). Characteristics of effective language teachers as perceived by low and high proficiency students. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, *3*, 425-438.

Witcher, A. E., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Minor, L. C. (2001). Characteristics of effective teachers: Perceptions of pre-service teachers. *Research in the Schools, 8*, 45-57. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2002-10403-005

Zamani, R., & Ahangari, S. (2016). Characteristics of an effective English language teacher (EELT) as perceived by learners of English. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching & Research, 4*(14). http://jfl.iaun.ac.ir/article_563432.html

Author Note

Negar Yazdanipour received her MA in TEFL at Sheikhbahaee University in 2018. Please direct correspondence to yazdanpour.negar@yahoo.com.

Mehrnoosh Fakharzadeh is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Sheikhbahaee University, Isfahan, Iran. She teaches BA and MA courses in TEFL and translation studies. Her areas of interest include reception studies, Information literacy, quantitative translation studies, AVT, and lexicology. She has published articles in national as well as international journals, such as *3L*, *IJAL*, *The Journal of Persian Language and Literature*, and *Language and Translation Studies*. She has also translated books into Persian, such as *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research.* Please direct correspondence to mehrnooshana@gmail.com.

Article Citation

Yazdanipour, N., & Fakharzadeh, M. (2020). Effective language teachers' characteristics as perceived by English language private institutes' administrators in Iran. *The Qualitative Report, 25*(8), 3111-3128. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss8/16