Original Research

A Sociopsychological Study of Professional Competencies of A 21st Century EFL Teacher

Iranian Evolutionary and Educational Psychology Journal
December 2019: 231-248
© University of Hormozgan Publication 2019
DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1
http://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir

Mansooreh Hosseinnia[1], Hamid Ashraf [*2], Hossein Khodabakhshzadeh[3], Gholam Hassan Khajavy[4]

Abstract: This article reports on a sociopsychological study designed to investigate the components of 21st century teachers' professional competencies in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context in Iran. A total number of 30 members of the English language teaching (ELT) professional community including experienced university teacher educators, supervisors in the private sector, teacher trainers, and EFL teachers in the public and private sectors, participated in this study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. For data analysis, qualitative content analysis was used. An independent coder who was an expert in this field was suggested to code one part of interview transcription randomly. An inter-coder agreement of 94.77% was gained. After analyzing the data, six main categories of professional competencies of a 21st century EFL teacher were identified: personality factors, interpersonal factors, professional factors, factors related to teaching materials, learner factors, and assessment factors. The findings contributed empirical evidence to an understanding of Iranian EFL teachers' professional competencies in their teaching profession in the 21st century that can be utilized as a framework for the improvement of teacher education policy and the design and implementation of teacher-training programs.

Keywords: EFL; Professional competencies; Personality factors; Interpersonal factors; Professional factors; Factors related to teaching materials; Learner factors; Assessment factors

Introduction

Education is the capability to face life's circumstances, it is a character-building process, attracting one's personality and making him/her rational, competent, alert and smart. Twenty first century is illustrated by the surfacing of multiculturalism due to industrialization, urbanization, globalization and disintegration in the family system. It is characterized as the century of stress and strain (Kulshrestha & Pandey, 2013). Since, education is analyzed as a device to expand the cognitive qualities, tolerance and understanding of people, it should organize the younger generation to realize and look into the realities of globalization. Today's societies are putting their challenging demands on teachers, who are tackling with difficulties in their life. In this context, the schools and the teachers have more responsibilities in shaping the character of the students. Thus, the role of the teacher in the society is crucial for its development. The quality of training is a focal subject in education systems. The quality of instruction is progressively judged by concentrating on students' performance, what students actually learn, and how well they learn it (Kulshrestha & Pandey,

1. PhD Candidate, Department of English, Torbat-e Heydarieh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e Heydarieh, Iran,
2. Asst. Prof., Department of English, Torbat-e Heydarieh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e Heydarieh, Iran, *Corresponding author email: hamid.ashraf.elt@gmail.com
3. Asst. Prof., Department of English, Torbat-e Heydarieh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e Heydarieh, Iran
4. Department of Language Education, University of Bojnord, Bojnord, Iran

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

2013). Moreover, accomplishment of instructive plans in each country depends on the teachers equipped with scientific competencies and professional aptitudes (Kumar, 2013). In addition, achievement of educational policy in each country emphasizes teachers with scientific competencies and professional skills.

The concept of competency was first defined at individual level by Drucker (1985), the classic author of management literature. He defined competency as a capacity of an employee to offer superior performance in allocated tasks. Jovaisa (1993) mentioned that perhaps, the most complete characteristic of a person is related to higher quality performance in the occupation or situation; personal characteristic highlighting the versatility of competencies, ensuring sustainability of personality and making predictions for determining behavior of an individual in different circumstances of performance. The concept of competency presented by Carr (2000) states that it is useful implementation of individual capacities characterized by practical skills and attitudes needed to guarantee successful professional performance.

Rahaman (2010) illustrated that teacher's professional competencies incorporate knowing and understanding students' needs and their learning process, subject matter knowledge, curriculum, the education framework and the educator's role. Professional competencies also incorporate abilities such as subject application, classroom strategy, classroom administration, evaluation and recording.

Teacher competency with the intention of development is connected to ongoing professional learning and advancement to enhance teaching and learning linked with a set of professional standards. According to Wright and Horn (2013), education can be improved by enhancing teacher's competency. It seems that competent teachers are effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the personal differences in their classroom's context.

There is general agreement that professional competencies are important features of student outcomes in most, if not all, degree programs. The agreement of what is truly intended when talking about professional competencies is however not as global, nor is there compromise as to how these competencies should be improved or evaluated. Professional competencies are both common and particular to a discipline or specific environment (Ilanlou & Zand, 2011); the extent for the competencies talked in this study is the ELT subject. Although a great deal of consideration has been given to the concepts of teaching and the qualities a good teacher should have, there has been little focus on the particular attributes and competencies that teachers ought to possess in Iran. Significant research endeavors in the past decades have been conducted and added knowledge about teaching and teachers. However, although the growing enthusiasm in trying to reveal the nature of teaching and teachers' work over the years has conveyed attention to teaching and teachers; questions such as "What should EFL teachers in public and private sectors be competent in?" and "What tasks and competencies are EFL teachers expected to possess?" have rarely been explored. The positive role of professional competencies, however, has mainly remained at the level of speculation, with few empirical studies trying to shed light on the components of teachers' professional competencies in Iranian EFL context. This scarcity of research can be partly attributed to the fact that there is no framework of EFL teachers' professional competencies in both public and private in Iran. Motivated by the paucity of research in this area, the present study was an attempt to address the exploring professional competencies among EFL teachers. Lacking from L2 teacher education, however, are in-depth investigations into the components of Iranian EFL teachers' professional competencies.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to provide a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge re-

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

garding the concept of EFL teachers' professional competencies as basis for teacher training courses and professional development practices. Specifically, the researcher looks at the various dimensions of teachers' competencies to find compatible and suitable components of competencies in the context of Iran. Also, in this study, a new framework of EFL teachers' professional competencies is presented and explained.

This investigation, which is a part of a larger qualitative research project, aims to answer the following question: What are the components of teachers' professional competencies in Iranian EFL context?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the components of British council (2003). British council (2003) published English teachers' professional competencies:

1. Professional conduct, 2. Classroom management, 3. Teacher's approach, and 4. Language production.

Professional conduct refers to teachers' alacrity and readiness and punctuality, professional development, and self-reflection and self-criticism.

Classroom management means making a relaxed climate and an intimate relationship, and paying attention to discipline, and firmness.

Teacher's approach means being creative, dynamic and an instance of a proficient organizer and coordinator, setting up the lessons consistently and satisfactorily, and making your lesson agreeable.

Language production refers to circumstances the students in authentic communication circumstances, giving the students each conceivable opportunity to utilize language, making the lesson student centered, teaching the language in suitable social settings, relating the word to a sentence, the sentence to a circumstance and the circumstance to real life, using the teaching media effectively to make the lesson appealing and discerning, utilizing powerful intends to destroy blunders, and being precise in assessing your students' accomplishment and the scores assigned should be in conformity with the real standard of the class.

Empirical Studies

The concept of teacher competency has gained impetus over the previous decade. Westera (2001) believed that the teachers' professional competencies refer to teacher's knowledge in subject matter and in general pedagogy which influence what teachers teach and how they teach.

Shabani (2006) in his study divides professional competencies of teachers into "characteristic and scientific". According to him, characteristic competencies refers to "student-oriented authoritarian, student oriented and intimacy oriented, subject oriented and intimacy oriented, subject oriented authoritarian" and scientific competencies refers to "awareness of psychology, teaching methods, new communication methods, social psychology, teaching psychology and communicating" (p. 1145). Also, according to Taghipourzahir (2010) professional competencies of teachers are personal and vocational. Furthermore, Hasibuan (2013) in his study argued that teachers' competencies are professional competencies, pedagogic competence, personal competence, and social competence obtained by means of professional education. Increased demands on teachers' competence remain to be carried out on a constant foundation with the improvement of science and technology. He also added that teacher who is one of the most significant sections of the learning procedure in schools really need a variety of instruments to enhance the utilization of ICT to give support to their abilities required particularly in the ICT device processes. Eventually, he recommended a model of ongoing professional competency improvement by utilizing ICT in Padangsidimpuan context, Indonesia. Furthermore, Swank and Houseknecht (2019) in their study applied the Delphi method to explore counselor education teaching competencies. They found 4 categories of teaching competencies: knowledge, skills,

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

professional behaviors, and dispositions. Counselor educators and counselor education doctoral students might apply these competencies to develop counselor educator training and teaching effectiveness. El-Madani (2007, p.56) also demonstrates that to teach the language and influence learners intensely, EFL teachers require to have certain significant features and competencies. They need to be able to: 1. communicate clearly, simply and avidly, 2. deal with unforeseen and/or difficult learning/teaching circumstances, 3. establish a culture of trust and a culture of partnership, 4. remember the mission of a leader (i.e. school teacher) and work towards attaining particular goals, and eventually, 5. be inventive, balanced, and reflective always. In addition, Naz (2017) in his dissertation attempted to explore professional competencies of teachers in public Secondary Schools of Muzaffarabad district in Pakistan based on national professional competencies standards for teachers, to determine the relationship between teachers' professional competencies and students' achievement at secondary schools, to differentiate between achievements of female and male students at secondary schools, detect the differences in professional competencies of teachers influencing the achievement of students (students of 10th class during session 2014), and to offer the scales for the development of professional competencies in teachers. The result revealed that male and female teachers had the required professional competencies. Also, male teachers' professional competency scores and female teachers' professional competency scores were significantly different. Furthermore, based on the results, there was difference between male students' achievements scores and female students' achievements scores. It was suggested that instructors may be prepared by professional norms. "IT facilities, libraries, books, helping material, etc." should be supplied for teachers.

In the context of English language teaching (ELT), Richards (2011) in an attempt to conceptualize the nature of competency, knowledge, and professionalism in ELT explored ten competencies that a language teacher is needed to have. The competencies are 1. language proficiency, 2. content knowledge, 3. teaching skills, 4. contextual knowledge, 5. teacher's identity, 6. learner-focused teaching, 7. pedagogical reasoning skills, 8. theorizing from practice, 9. membership of a community of practice, and 10. professionalism. By language proficiency, he argued that a teacher needs to have a native-like mastery of a language to teach it more effectively. Regarding content knowledge, he mentioned that language teachers should know about what they teach. He added that this knowledge consists of disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Richards (2011) defined these two knowledge as "disciplinary knowledge refers to a circumscribed body of knowledge that is considered to be essential to gaining membership of the language teaching profession, while pedagogical content knowledge refers to knowledge that provides a basis for language teaching" (p.3). For teaching skills competency, he referred to the skills required to present and direct their lessons such as actions and procedures for such activities as beginning the lesson, presenting and explaining tasks, starting learning arrangements, controlling students' comprehending, directing students' practice, making change from one task to another, and concluding the lesson. In the area of contextual knowledge, he believed that ELT teachers need to teach in various contexts. By teacher's identity, he commented that a language teacher should know exactly what it means to be an ELT teacher. By the notion of learner-focused teaching, he argued that the main goal of teaching should be improvement of students' learning. By pedagogical reasoning skills, he meant "the special skills that enable English teachers to analyze potential lesson content and identify ways in which it could be used as a teaching resource; to identify specific linguistic goals" (p.5). By theorizing from practice, he said that language teachers need to reflect on their teaching experiences to better find out the nature of language teaching and learning. Of teachers'

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

membership of a community of practice, he meant collaboration and participation in group-oriented activities and solving the problems collaboratively. Finally, by professionalism, he maintained that language teachers should engage in professional development practices and in critical and reflective review of their own practices to improve and develop their competencies. Also, TESOL generally proposed five professional teaching standards which are required to be considered by ELT teachers. These are "language, culture, instruction, assessment, and professionalism" (Kuhlman & Knezevle, 2013). Hol and Aktas (2013) in their study specified some proof about the professional competencies of Non-native English instructors in a state university and assess these competencies by means of various variables in Turkey. Their data revealed that "the general self-perceptions of the instructors is high, however, the departments instructors graduated from and their academic level may affect the self-perception level" (p.1163). In another research, Boset, Asmawi, and Abedalaziz (2017) intended to discover the degree of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' competency and work interest and to examine the association between competency and work interest of EFL teachers at public secondary schools in Yemen. The results exposed that the general level of EFL teachers' competency was high. Additionally, the general level of their work interest was reasonable. Moreover, it is found that there was a statistically considerable, strong constructive association between EFL teachers' competency and their work interest. The results also showed that female EFL teachers had a higher level of competency than male EFL teachers. In comparison, the effect of gender on EFL teachers' work interest was not established. Eventually, outcomes specified that the higher the level of experience, the greater the levels of competency and work interest among the EFL teachers. Also, Panggua, Wello, Jabu and Macdonald (2017) in their study explored and explained the personal competencies needed for EFL teachers for high school in Indonesia as the capability of a stable personality, noble, wise and dignified in addition to being ideal learners.

In the context of ELT in Iran, Mousavi, Atai, & Babaii (2016) developed and validated a questionnaire to assess professional competence of adult-level Iranian EFL teachers in the private sector based on TESOL standards. Finally, Ilanlou & Zand (2011) studied the relationship between professional competencies of Iranian teachers and their perspectives about qualitative evaluation project. Findings showed that there is a significant relationship between teachers' professional competencies and their perspectives about qualitative evaluation.

As it was reviewed, significant research endeavors in past decades have conducted and added knowledge about teaching and teachers, and many researches tried to discover the competencies of a good teacher and have categorized those competencies into various classifications. But there is no research in the Iranian EFL context regarding exploring EFL teachers' professional competencies in Iran. Thus, the current study is going to investigate the components of 21st century teachers' professional competencies in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context in Iran.

Material and Method

Participants and setting

In this study, the participants were 30 experts called members of the ELT professional community in Iran. This sample size is based on saturation principle. This principle is used, because this study is qualitative. We reached saturation when we were no longer learning very much from each next interview with experts.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

Members of the professional community were experienced university teacher educators, supervisors in the private sector, teacher trainers in the public and private sector, and EFL teachers in the public and private sectors. Purposive sampling was used to select the members of the professional community regarding four important features including their status in the private and public ELT community of Iran, academic degree, major as well as their educational status.

Table 1. Demographic information of study sample

Variables	Values	Frequency	Percentage
Years of Teaching Experience	10-15	1	3.33
	16-20	5	16.66
	21-25	5	16.66
	25-30	12	40
	More than 30	7	23.33
Sectors	Public	8	26.66
	Private	6	20
	Both	16	53.33
Gender	Male	14	46.66
	Female	16	53.33
Age	31-40	3	10
	41-50	9	30
	Over 50	18	60
Educational Status	MA	8	26.66
	PhD	22	73.33
Major	Teaching	25	83.33
	Literature	2	6.66
	Translation	3	10
Total Participants		30	100

As Table 1 displays, a total of 30 ELT experts including 14 males (46.66%), and 16 females (53.33%) participated in this study. They taught at different sectors: 8 public sectors (26.66%), 6 private sectors (20%), and 16 at both sectors (53.33%) and had different academic majors: 25 English Teaching (83.33%), 2 Literature (6.66%), and 3 Translation (10%). Teachers had different ranges of years of teaching experience: 1 (10-15), 5 (16-20), 5 (20-25), 12 (25-30), and 7 above 30 years. In addition, they were in different age ranges: 3 (31-40), 9 (41-50) and 18 (Over 50). Moreover, participants had different degrees: 8 MA (26.66%), 22 PhD (73.33%).

Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Participants were interviewed to share their ideas to explore the most compatible and suitable components of 21st century teachers' professional competencies in the EFL context of Iran. The interviews were conducted in Iran and digitally recorded. Also, each interview lasted 65 to 90 minutes depending on the status and working experience of the professional community members. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for content analysis. There were 30 interview transcriptions.

Data analysis

In this study, qualitative content analysis was utilized. The data analysis was a constant process including

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

reading, coding, and revising the codes as more bulks of data were gathered during the research period. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) define content analysis as "a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications" (p. 483). Content analysis allows the researcher to study social behavior without influencing it. Rather than present the details of a message set, the methodology allows a researcher to draw conclusions that can be generalized to other contexts (Neuendorf, 2001). Content analysis can be recognized by the appearance of the codification process, which involves placing coded data into key categories. Once data is converted into key categories a random sample is selected and analyzed. The random sample formed the basis for the content analysis study. Moreover, annotations and memos were used to record our note taking of interviews. The following coding scheme was used as suggested by Krippendorf (2004):

1.The researcher performed a close reading of a small number of interview texts;
2.The researcher identified the presence of key themes;
3.The researcher combined overlapping or duplicate themes;
4.The researcher identified any themes that were not a part of the coding scheme;
5.The researcher made inferences from the most prevalent categories in the interview texts.

In this study, the units of data analysis were "meaning units" that conserve the psychological cohesion and integrity of the idea being articulated (Ratner, 2002). Series of words, sentences, or even paragraphs that demonstrated a unifying meaning were coded as one case. For instance, the comment, "A competent teacher should be a reflective teacher" was coded as one component, "reflective".

Furthermore, an independent coder who was an expert in this field was suggested to code one part of interview transcription randomly. An inter-coder agreement of 94.77% was gained, which exceeded the threshold of 90% proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64).

Results

After analyzing the data, six main categories of professional competencies of a 21st century EFL teacher were identified: personality factors, interpersonal factors, professional factors, factors related to teaching materials, learner factors, and assessment factors. In the parts below, findings are presented at these six categories. Finally, in table 2, all the main categories and their indictors were provided based on the responses received.

Personality factors

The data indicate that teachers' personality is one of the main factors of their professional competencies. Experts shared the belief that teachers should have a positive attitude to their profession. Reflecting on her studies regarding professional commitment, Razieh commented:

"*A teacher should demonstrate commitment to his/ her profession" (Interview, February 16, 2018).*

Khalil who is one of the most influential professionals in ELT teacher training and professional development, shared his ideas that teachers should have ELT professional identity. It means that they should know exactly what it means to be an ELT teacher. He also asserted that teachers ought to be CREAM. The acronym CREAM is stand for creative, reflective, affective, effective, and motivating.

When questioned on the professional competencies of a 21st century EFL teacher, regarding the personality

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

competencies, most participants referred to the certain personality features such as being fair, patient, stable, highly motivated, respectful, confident, active, flexible, an emotional supporter, responsible, punctual, and determined. Furthermore, other features such as having a good sense of humor, sense of plausibility and self-cognition were mentioned. By having sense of plausibility, they believed that teachers need to operate with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to desired learning. Furthermore, Zahra commented:

"In my opinion, a competent teacher is enthusiastic and passionate in teaching to improve" (Interview, February 17, 2018).

A passionate teacher is someone who is in love with the field of knowledge, deeply excited about the ideas that change our world, and closely interested in the potentials and dilemmas of young people who come to class every day (Fried, 2001). Passionate and enthusiastic teachers are committed to create an effective learning context and increase the learning potential of learners (Serin, 2017). Therefore, passion and enthusiasm are important features for teachers.

Three participants referred to some characteristics of post method pedagogy. This belief was reflected in their remarks that teachers should think globally and act locally and intellectually. They also commented that a teacher should be critical, reflective and self-regulated.

One of the participants noted the professional appearance of teachers. She commented teachers needed to be well-spoken and in good mental and physical health. Another participant who was an English institute supervisor referred to the planning and organizing competency of teachers.

Finally, regarding the role of religion and the religious context of Iran, one of the university professors shared this idea that English teachers who are teaching in Iranian context, should have the knowledge of Islamic ethical values and its social life skills.

Interpersonal factors

Compared to personality, the interpersonal factors identified in this study appeared to be linked more closely to the teachers' communicative skills. Interpersonal factors are those which help a teacher communicate well. Lack of this skill was recurrently reported to cause incompetency. The participants expressed effective communication skills are needed for a teacher. Among participants, Mahnaz reflected:

"A teacher should be able to create good interpersonal relationship with students" (Interview, February 18, 2018).

Ability of promoting teamwork also emerged from the data as a salient category. The participants reported that communicative activities such as group-oriented and creative activities are important for students' achievement, and teachers must facilitate the opportunities for these activities. Fatemeh who was a high school teacher, commented that a teacher should master certain social qualities like collaboration, partnership and should be able to solve the problems collaboratively. Furthermore, Shaghayegh stated:

"A teacher should have consideration, a vivid imagination, and leadership while communicating withothers" (Interview, February 16, 2018).

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

Two EFL teachers also referred to the having good communicative skills and ability to interact with parents and colleagues. For instance, Mohamad asserted that a competent teacher ought to establish a wider educational support network like a whole-school behavior policy through cultivating good working relationships with colleagues. In addition, another teacher commented that a successful teacher should have a friendly relationship and interact well and meaningful with students and their parents.

Another interpersonal factor is related to students' freedom in communication. Zohreh reported:

"An EFL teacher should facilitate negotiated interaction in order to give learners freedom to initiate talk and be actively involved in the learning process" (Interview, February 17, 2018).

Professional factors

Professional factors are the main factors considered by the participants. Those are related to their professional knowledge and expertise. One of the frequent variables referred by all the participants was teachers' English language skills. According to the participants, EFL teachers should have mastered English like a highly competent English speaker and communicate with the fluency. In other words, an EFL teacher should be like a highly competent English speaker.

Furthermore, a number of participants referred to the factors of teachers' years of experience, having in-depth knowledge of the subject matter to be taught, and classroom management as professional factors in teachers' professional competencies. For instance, Khalil commented that a competent teacher should be an experienced one and benefit from experiences of other professional members of the community as well. Furthermore, he added that a teacher should have the ability to manage the teaching and learning processes through planning and preparation.

Applying teaching techniques constituted another professional factor. Farideh remarked:

"An EFL teacher should be able to diversify the teaching techniques and strategies according to the learning environment" (Interview, February 19, 2018).

Also, two EFL teachers referred to the ability of creating an enjoyable and positive atmosphere in the classroom. Mehri stated that a teacher should be able to make the lesson enjoyable by creating a fun and relaxed learning environment to achieve full student participation.

Other important factors which were reflected by the participants were related to professional development issues. Professional development is connected to ongoing professional learning and advancement to enhance teaching and learning. The participants commented that a professionally competent EFL teacher should be 1. a competent lifelong learner and continuously develop her/himself professionally, 2. an autonomous teacher and try to theorize from his/her practice, 3. able to do action and classroom research, 4. expert enough to overcome the problems, and 5. interested to do reflection on his/her teaching.

Finally, under this factor, some of the participants also remarked other statements. Azam commented that a teacher ought to employ learners' mother tongue favorably. In addition, one of the participants referred to professional ethics in teaching. Mahdi asserted:

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

"A teacher must comply with ethical standards, and fairness through all stages of professional decision making" (Interview, February 20, 2018).

This important variable was neglected by other participants. Because a teacher is delegated not only with educating students but also with helping them grow and develop as human beings, the real and competent teacher must be not only skillful at stimulating learning, but also a model of ethical behavior.

Factors related to teaching materials

The data reveal that teachers' awareness and skill in preparing and organizing teaching materials is also one of the main factors of their professional competencies. In this respect, professional experts made some statements. They all believed a teacher should study the contents to be taught to ensure its thoroughness. However, they also mentioned that s/he should have the capacity to prepare effective, friendly, trendy and musical audio-visual aids to make the lesson more attractive and perceptive. In addition, involving students in authentic social real-life communication situations for applying appropriate materials was another competency remarked by the participants.

Furthermore, within this factor, one of the participants made a statement about the competency of managing the teaching materials. Maryam who was an EFL teacher as well as the principal of a high school remarked:

"manage learning & teaching materials with appropriate sequencing of activities in a way to have smooth transitions between the distinct parts of a lesson" (Interview, February 21, 2018).

In addition, Hassan commented that a competent EFL teacher should be able to make the lesson plan brief, informative, clear and purposeful including various activities to suit the individual differences in the classroom.

The awareness and the ability of applying recent and innovative educational technologies was one of the most important issues that was mentioned by the participants. Fourteen of the participants asserted that a 21st century EFL teacher should have the awareness and capacity of conducting innovative activities by the usage of new educational technologies. They also argued that s/he should know when and how to use current educational technology (ICT skills), as well as the most appropriate type and level of latest technology from internet sources and social medias to maximize student learning.

Learner factors

Teachers also should possess some skills and competencies in relation to learners. Most of participants highlighted teachers' attention to learners' individual differences. Mona commented that a teacher should be able to diversify teaching strategies for individuals or groups of learners based on their individual differences, such as their level of intelligence, learning styles and background. In addition, three of participants stated that a teacher should have the capacity to identify learners ' needs, cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, motivation, interests, favorite subject areas or specific class content, skills, and abilities. Considering learners' individual differences, some of the participants reflected that a teacher should treat all learners in the same way regardless of their beliefs, gender, etc.

A number of participants mentioned some teachers' duties toward the learners and considered them as competencies. They argued that a teacher should be able to 1. monitor and control learners' behaviours and know how to cope with difficult or challenging learners, 2. identify gains and difficulties pupils are experiencing in learning and performing, 3. motivate learners to learn through by giving contingent,

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

specific, and credible praise and feedback, 4. develop critical thinking, problem solving, and performance capabilities, 5. encourage learners to explore and analyze language by themselves through equipping them with the means necessary, and 6. give them autonomy to self-direct their own learning.

Regarding EFL teachers' professional competencies in relation to EFL learners, Hossein remarked:

"*An English teacher should have the ability to create in the L2 learner an awareness of empathy towards the culture of the L2 community" (Interview, February 21, 2018).*

Also, it was mentioned that teachers should give learners every possible chance to use the language.

Assessment factors

Issues related to teachers' awareness and skills toward proper evaluation and assessment strategies were regarded by the participants as teachers' assessment competency factors. Assessment is considered to be interwoven with a teacher's profession. Moreover, assessment is inseparable part of the education and teaching. Thus, teachers should be skilled in choosing appropriate assessment methods. It was commented by the participants that teachers should be qualified to develop valid learner grading procedures which use learner assessments and also, they ought to be capable of administering, scoring and interpreting the results of both externally-produced and teacher-produced assessment methods.

A number of participants referred to formative assessment which is "a true, dynamic process for placing the teacher's teaching and students' learning into a sheer practice to continuously observe what goes right or wrong in a classroom setting" (Khodabakhshzadeh, Kafi, & Hosseinnia, 2017). Hassan remarked that teachers should be competent in providing continuous assessment of learners. He also argued:

"teachers should inspire assessment strategies that involve learners in self-assessment activities to help them become aware of their strengths and needs and encourage them to set personal goals for learning" (Interview, February 23, 2018).

Two of the participants referred to the importance of communication regarding assessment result with the beneficiaries. Afsaneh commented that teachers should be able to communicate strengths and weaknesses based on assessment results to learners, parents, guardians, other lay audiences, and other educators. It was also reflected that they should clarify and articulate the performance outcomes expected to learners.

Finally, teachers should be skilled in monitoring learner progress toward instructional goals and describing the extent to which each learner has attained both short- and long-term instructional goals in order to inform future instructional planning.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

Table 2. EFL teachers' professional competencies

N	Competencies	Indicators
1	Personality factors	having a positive attitude towards English language teaching knowing exactly what it means to be an ELT teacher demonstrating commitment to the profession being creative being confident having a good sense of humor being enthusiastic and motivated in teaching maintaining a professional appearance
2	Interpersonal factors	solving the problems collaboratively having effective communication skills and being able to create good interpersonal relationship having a friendly relationship with students and their parents mastering certain social qualities like participation in group-oriented activities
3	Professional factors	having mastered English like a highly competent English speaker employing learners' mother tongue favorably being an autonomous teacher being expert enough to overcome the problems doing reflection on teaching complying with ethical standards and fairness through all stages of professional decision making being interested in doing classroom research being a competent lifelong learner and continually develop the profession being able to effectively manage the class making the lesson enjoyable by creating a fun and relaxed learning environment diversifying the teaching techniques and strategies according to the learning environment having in-depth knowledge of the subject matter to be taught managing the teaching and learning processes through planning and preparation being experienced and benefiting from experiences of other professional members of the community
4	Factors related to teaching materials	providing the most appropriate materials to make the lesson more attractive and perceptive managing learning & teaching materials with appropriate sequencing of activities studying the contents to be taught to ensure its thoroughness using authentic social real-life communication situations applying appropriate materials making the lesson plan brief, informative, and clear conducting innovative activities by the use of new educational technologies in the classroom

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

5	Learner factors	considering learners' individual differences such as their level of intelligence, learning styles and background giving learners freedom to initiate talk and be actively involved in the learning processes knowing how to cope with difficult and problematic learners developing critical thinking, and problem-solving capabilities monitoring and controlling learners' behaviours motivating learners encouraging learners to explore and analyze language by themselves giving learners every possible chance to use the language treating all learners in the same way regardless of their beliefs, gender, etc. helping learners gain autonomy to self-direct their own learning identifying gains and difficulties learners are experiencing in learning and performing creating in the L2 learner an awareness of empathy towards the culture of the L2 community
6	Assessment factors	monitoring learner progress toward instructional goals being skilled in choosing appropriate assessment methods inspiring assessment strategies that involving learners in self-assessment activities being qualified to develop valid learner grading procedures providing continuous assessment communicating strengths and weaknesses based on assessment results to learners clarifying and articulating the performance outcomes expected to learners

The Factors of Professional Competencies with frequencies and percentages of appearance in responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Factors of Professional Competencies with frequencies of appearance in responses

Factors of Professional Competencies	Frequency	Percentage
Personality Factors	12	40%
Interpersonal Factors	8	26.66%
Professional Factors	25	83.33%
Factors Related to Teaching Materials	18	60%
Learner Factors	11	36.66%
Assessment Factors	7	23.33%

As Table shows, among six factors of Professional Competencies, Professional Factors have the highest frequency (f=25, p=83.33%) and Assessment Factors (f=7, p=23.33%) and Interpersonal Factors (f=8, p=26.66%) have the lowest frequency.

Discussion

The current findings reveal that the EFL teachers' professional competencies were synergistically influenced by a range of factors. The personality factors, interpersonal factors, professional factors, factors related to teaching materials, learner factors, and assessment factors appear to form teachers' competencies in their teaching profession. Wright (2002) asserted that "becoming a language teacher involves a number of related processes, in particular, learning to create connection between linguistic or content and teaching aspects of language teaching" (p.113).

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

The first category was identified as personality factors. This finding is consistent with Jovaisa's (1993) proposition who mentioned that perhaps, the most complete characteristic of a person is related to higher quality performance in the occupation or situation; personal characteristic highlighting the versatility of competencies, ensuring sustainability of personality and making predictions for determining behavior of an individual in different circumstances of performance. Boset et al. (2017) also referred to the components of their personality and traits as essential EFL teachers' competencies. In addition, Panggua, Wello, Jabu and Macdonald (2017) in their study explained the personal competencies needed for EFL teachers for high school in Indonesia as the capability of a stable personality, noble, wise and dignified in addition to being ideal learners. Therefore, teachers' personality has been considered as important component in their professional competencies.

Interpersonal factors were as the second component of teachers' professional competencies. They were more dealt with the teachers' communicative skills. This finding is in line with McCoy (2001) statement who remarked in his study that a competent teacher should be capable to generate excellent interpersonal relationship. Kiymet (2010) also argued that interpersonal competency required for teachers involves body language, voice, tone of voice, touch, speaking, eye contact, sign language etc. Furthermore, Ross (1992) in an attempt investigated the association between teacher effectiveness and communication with assigned coaches and learner attainment, indicated that in classrooms with teachers who had more contact with their coaches and in classrooms where teachers had better confidence in the efficiency of education, learners' attainment was higher. Taken together, these findings extended the construct of interpersonal and communication competency and contributed empirical evidence to a broader range of antecedents of teachers' competencies in EFL context.

The third category identified in this study were professional factors. Thus, some researchers confirmed the findings of this study and considered professional factors as essential factors of teachers' competencies. According to the findings, EFL teachers should speak English with the fluency and accuracy. This finding corroborates the Richards study (2011) who proposed that a teacher needs to have a native-like mastery of a language to teach it more effectively. In another study, lack of English teachers' excellence in terms of English language subject achievement was considered as incompetency in teaching and learning practice (NCTM, 2000). Teachers' professional development and improvement also has been considered as professional factors (e.g. Davison & Cummins, 2007; Kiymet, 2010; Motallebzadeh, Hosseinnia, & Domsky, 2017; Naz, 2017). In addition, classroom management was identified as one of subcategories of professional factors. In this respect, British council (2003) also proposed classroom management as professional factors and defined it as making a relaxed climate and an intimate relationship, and paying attention to discipline, and firmness. Other researchers referred to it as important component of teachers' competency (e.g. Arshad, 2009; Sengottuvel & Aktharsha, 2015; Panggua, Wello, Jabu & Macdonald, 2017). Furthermore, professional ethics were recognized as professional factor. Kiymet (2010) also considered it important that teachers should adhere to it.

The fourth category was identified as factors related to teaching materials. As in this study, the necessity of the competency in organizing teaching and learning material is also revealed in research studies directed by different researchers (Mini, 2002; Shaik, 1999). It was demonstrated that teachers should be competent in preparing and organizing effective teaching materials. National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in a study considered competencies to develop learning and teaching material as one of ten inter-related

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

competencies a teacher ought to possess. For making teaching more effective, teachers are supposed to search appropriate materials from numerous sources that complement their teaching. Competent teachers will be capable to improvise no cost and low-cost teaching learning material by themselves (Uday, 1999). Self-made teaching and learning materials are established to be a good instrument for making an effective teaching. Moreover, learners display an enthusiasm and motivation in preparing and discovering new materials which assist their learning. While preparing teaching learning materials, numerous components are to be taken in count. The most significant among them are, number of students, age group of learners, individual differences, size of the class, and the content that is to be transacted and goals and objectives that are to be achieved by learning. (Sengottuvel & Aktharsha, 2015).

Learner factors were recognized as the fifth factor of teacher' professional competencies. Under this factor, teachers' attention to learners' individual differences were highlighted. The finding of this study confirms the finding of Kiymet's study (2010) that teachers should have awareness about social cultural background of learners. Quebec's provincial ministry of education (2001) also argued that teachers should be able to adapt their teaching to the needs and characteristics of students. Sengottuvel & Aktharsha (2015) also remarked that it is the teachers' duty to increase learners' motivation in learning. Teachers should also be able to know how students learn and understand the difficulties encountered by the learners (Nur Mustafa, 2013).

Assessment factors were the last factors identified. Assessment and evaluation are irreplaceable instruments for teachers and education system as they help in better planning of the lessons on the foundation of strengths and weaknesses of their learners. Evaluation supports the teachers in understanding how well their learners are doing relative to the national standards. The finding of this study is in consistent with Sengottuvel & Aktharsha's study (2015). They identified competency in evaluation techniques as a teacher competency and defined it as the competency of teachers to accomplish the assessment procedure i.e. judging, valuing and ranking learners by different assessment methods. This kind of competency is also revealed in research studies directed by different researchers (TESOL, 2003; Naz, 2017; Panggua, Wello, Jabu & Macdonald, 2017).

This study provides a full and contextualized understanding of components of 21st century teachers' professional competencies in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context in Iran. This study also provides a framework for assessing and evaluating EFL teachers' competencies in their profession. It can be utilized as a framework for the improvement of teacher education policy and the design and implementation of teacher-training programs. It can also be used by teacher employment institutes such as English institutes, and education and training organization as a framework for employing the most competent EFL teachers. Thus, the findings of this study can guide Iranian ELT professionals to work towards setting standards in assessment field for Iranian EFL teacher professional development in 21st century. The findings may contribute to performing a united system of EFL teacher evaluation system in the Iranian context. In addition, the emerged factors as teachers' competency standards can assure consistency in EFL teachers' quality assurance in Iranian context.

Conclusion

This study provided a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge regarding the concept of EFL teachers' professional competencies as basis for teacher training courses and professional development practices.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

Specifically, the researcher looked at the various dimensions of teachers' competencies to find compatible and suitable components of competencies in the context of Iran. Moreover, in this study, a new framework of EFL teachers' professional competencies was presented and explained. Based on the findings, the EFL teachers' professional competencies were synergistically influenced by a range of factors. The personality factors, interpersonal factors, professional factors, factors related to teaching materials, learner factors, and assessment factors appear to form teachers' competencies in their teaching profession.

Despite scarcity of examination and models of teacher competencies in Iran as an EFL context, promoting EFL teachers' professional competencies is still a pertinent task, given the increasing need for competent English teachers in the era of globalization. High levels of EFL teachers' professional competencies can improve the quality of teaching and teachers. As such, investigating teachers' professional competencies in Iran and other EFL contexts is of paramount significance.

This study was limited in a number of ways. One limitation is related to the issue of one country (Iran), where different countries have different systems of education. Thus, the findings best suit this country. Therefore, this study should be replicated with more participants from various parts of the world and use methods that guarantee a more randomization and at last greater generalizability. This can also set the ground for the cross comparison of the findings. In addition, for gathering qualitative data, just semi-structured interview was used. Further studies can be done by using other instruments such as observation or diaries. Also, based on the explored factors and standards as a framework, a new instrument of evaluating EFL teachers' professional competencies can be developed and validated.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]

[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

Arshad, M. (2009). *Evaluative Study of Secondary School Teachers' Competency in the Subject of English*. Unpublished M. A. Thesis. The Islamic University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

Boset, S. A. A., Asmawi, A., & Abedalaziz, N. (2017). The Relationship between competency and work motivation of EFL teachers at public secondary schools in Yemen. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (4), 212-228.

British council, (2003). *Professional Competency for Teaching English*. Retrieved from https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/professional-competency-1

Buchberger, F., & Byrne, K. (1995). Quality in teacher education a suppressed theme? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 18(1), 9-23.

Carr, D. (2000). *Professionalism and ethics in teaching*. London: Routledge.

Davison, C., & Cummins, J. (2007). *Assessment and evaluation in ELT: Shifting paradigms and practices*. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International handbook of English language teaching* (Vol. 1, pp. 415–420). Norwell, MA: Springer.

Drucker P.F. (1985). *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, London: Pan Books Ltd.

El-Madani, F. (2007). *Leadership and Values in Language Education*. Proceedings of the 27th MATE Annual Conference on a Portrait of the Teacher as a Leader, Publication of the Moroccan Association of Teachers of English (MATE).

Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York: Mc-Graw-Hill.

Fried, R. (2001). *The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hasibuan, S. (2013). A model of continuing professional competency development by using ICT (study at senior high school teachers Padangsidimpuan, north sumatera). *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 5(6), 91-101.

Hol, D. & Aktas, S. (2013). An evaluation of competency perceptions of non-native English instructors. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 1163-1173.

Ilanlou, M., & Zand, M. (2011). Professional competencies of teachers and the qualitative evaluation. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29, 1143 – 1150.

Jovaisa, A, L. (1993). *Pedagogical terms*. Kaunas: Guest.

Kiymet, S. (2010), "Teachers' competencies". *Cultura, International journal of philosophy of culture and Axiology*, VII (1).

Korthagen, F. A. J. (2000). *Teacher educators: From neglected group to spearhead in the development of education*. In G. M. Willems, J. H. J. Stakenborg, & W. Veuglers (Eds.), Trends in Dutch teacher education (pp. 35-48). Leuven: Garant.

Koster, B., Brekelmans, M., Korthagen, F., & Wubbels, T. (2005). Quality requirements for teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(2), 157-176.

Krippendorf, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Kuhlman, N., & Knezevic, B. (2013). The TESOL guidelines for developing EFL standards. TESOL International Association.

Kulshrestha, A. K., & Pandey, K. (2013). Teacher training and professional competencies. *Voice of Research*, 1 (4), 29-33.

Kumar, M. S. (2013). The influence of teacher's professional competency on students' achievement. *IOSR Journal of Engineering*, 3(11), 12-18.

McCoy, R. (2001). Computer competencies for the 21st century information systems educator. *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal,* 19(2). 21-35.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook, second ed. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Mini, J. (2002). Identification and Prevention of certain factors causing Non-utilization of Teacher Competency in Secondary Schools of Kerala' Ph D Thesis Mahatma Gandhi University Kerala.

Motallebzadeh, KH., Hosseinnia, M., & G.H. Domskey, J. (2016). Peer observation: A key factor to improve Iranian EFL teachers' professional development. Cogent Education, 4, 1-12.

Mousavi, M. A., Atai, M. R., & Babaii, E. (2016). Exploring Standards and Developing a Measure for Evaluating Iranian EFL Teachers' Professional Competence in the Private Sector. *Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5(2), 25-42.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). (2000). *Principles and standards for school mathe-*

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]
[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]
[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]

matics. Reston, VA: Author.

Naz, K. (2017). *Effects of teachers' professional competency on students' academic achievements at secondary school level in Muzaffarabad District* (Master's thesis, University of Preston, Pakistan). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/2123/7128

Neuendorf, K. A. (2001). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Nur Mustafa, M. (2013). Factors that Influence Quality Service of Teachers. *International Journal Business & Social Science Research*, 3(1), 32-37.

Panggua, S., Wello, B., Jabu, B., & Macdonald, D. (2017). Self-assessed professional competence of the high school EFL teachers in Toraja Indonesia. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(2), 25- 34.

Preeti Nair, M. S. (2017). *Study on identifying teaching competencies and factors affecting teaching competencies with special reference to MBA institutes in Gujarat*. PhD dissertation. Gujarat Technological University, Ahmedabad.

Quebec's Provincial Ministry of Education, (2001). *"Core professional competencies for the teaching profession"*. Retrieved from www.mcgill.ca/dise/files/dise/competencies_for_web.pdf

Rahaman, O. (2010) *Teacher as a Key Factor Affecting Learning,* Posted: Thursday, http://searchwarp.com/swa596810-Teacher-As-A-Key-Factor- Affecting-Learning.htm

Ratner, C., (2002). *Cultural Psychology: Theory and Method*. Kluwer Academic/Plenum, New York.

Richards, J. C. (2011). *Competence and Performance in Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ross, J. A. (1992). Teacher efficacy and the effect of coaching on student achievement. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 17(1), 51–65.

Sengottuvel, A. & Aktharsha, U. S. (2015). Teacher effectiveness and professional competency in school education. *International Journal of Management*, 6(1), 181-190.

Serin, H. (2017). The role of passion in learning and teaching. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 4(1), 60-64.

Shabani, H. (2006). *Educational Skills*. Tehran: Samt.

Shaik, A. (1999). "*A study of creativity and its impact on professional competency among secondary school teachers of Visakhapatnam district"*, M.Ed dissertation, Andhra University.

Swank, J. M., & Houseknecht, A. (2019). Teaching competencies in counselor education: A Delphi study. *TESOL Quarterly,* 57(3), 162-176.

Taghipourzahir, A. (2010). *Principles of education*. (7th ed). Tehran: Agah.

Uday, K. (1999). *A study of professional competency as a determinant factor is enhancing school effectiveness.* Research paper regional seminar R.I.E Mysore (NCERT).

Westera, W. (2001). Competencies in education: A confusion of tongues. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 33(1), 75-88.

Wright, S. P., Horn, S. P. (2013). Teacher and classroom context effects on student achievement: Implications for teacher evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 11, 57-67.

Wright, T. (2002). *Doing language awareness: Issues for language study in language teacher education*. In H. Trappes-Lomax& Ferguson (Eds), Language in language teacher education (pp. 113-130). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-07]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2019.1.4.2.7]

[DOI: 10.29252/ieepj.1.4.1]