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Research Paper

## Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Skills: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract

While there are varying perspectives on the bases of reflective practice within the teaching context, there is a broad consensus that reflection is fundamental to building a teacher's professional identity and improving their development. This study sought to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers. To this end, a grounded theory design was used. Participants consisted of 30 conveniently selected female intermediate EFL learners from a language institute in Mashhad. For data collection, semi-structured interview and written reflective journal were used. Data analysis was done through manual thematic analysis via open, axial and selective coding. The results showed the following perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers: 1. Behaving in a socially acceptable manner; 2. Being able to motivate students; 3. Managing classroom; 4. Attending to students' diversity of needs; 5. Planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies; 6. Thinking skillfully; 7. Thinking critically; 8. Thinking creatively; 9. Being verbally active; 10. Giving and receiving feedback from students; 11. Evaluating one's own teaching; and 12. Making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching. Moreover, according to the results, the least important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers were attending to students' diversity of needs, and being able to motivate students. In addition, the most important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers were evaluating one's own teaching, making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching, thinking skillfully, planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies, and managing classroom. The results have some implications for policymakers, teacher educators, authorities in charge of recruiting teachers.

**Keywords:** Effective Teaching, Reflective teaching, Teaching effectiveness, Teaching reflectivity

### ادراک معلمان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی از مهارت‌های تأملی: پژوهشی کیفی

در حالی که دیدگاه‌های مختلفی درباره مبانی عمل تأملی در آموزش وجود دارد، بر این نکته توافق گسترده‌ای هست که تأمل نقشی اساسی در شکل‌گیری هویت حرفه‌ای معلمان و رشد آنان دارد. این پژوهش با هدف بررسی ادراک معلمان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی از مهارت‌های تأملی معلمان مؤثر انجام شد و از روش تحقیق نظریه زمینه‌ای بهره گرفت. مشارکت‌کنندگان شامل ۳۰ زبان‌آموز زن سطح متوسط از یک مؤسسه زبان در مشهد بودند که به‌صورت دسترس انتخاب شدند. داده‌ها از طریق مصاحبه نیمه‌ساختاریافته و دفترچه‌های تأملی گردآوری و با استفاده از کدگذاری باز، محوری و انتخابی تحلیل شدند. نتایج نشان داد که مهارت‌های تأملی مورد ادراک معلمان شامل رفتار اجتماعی پسندیده، انگیزبخشی، مدیریت کلاس، توجه به تفاوت‌های فردی، برنامه‌ریزی آموزشی مناسب، تفکر ماهرانه، تفکر انتقادی، تفکر خلاقانه، فعالیت کلامی، تبادل بازخورد با زبان‌آموزان، ارزیابی تدریس خود و اصلاحات مناسب در آن بودند. همچنین، کم‌اهمیت‌ترین مهارت‌ها توجه به تفاوت‌های فردی و انگیزبخشی و مهم‌ترین مهارت‌ها شامل ارزیابی و اصلاح تدریس، تفکر ماهرانه، برنامه‌ریزی مناسب و مدیریت کلاس بودند. این یافته‌ها برای سیاست‌گذاران آموزشی، مدرسان معلمان و مسئولان جذب نیرو قابل استفاده‌اند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** تدریس مؤثر، تدریس تأملی، اثربخشی تدریس، تأمل در تدریس

## Introduction

While there are varying perspectives on the bases of reflective practice within the teaching context, there is a broad consensus that reflection is fundamental to building a teacher's professional identity and improving their development (Fatehi Rad & Jalali, 2021; Straková & Cimermanová, 2018). Future teachers must be equipped with reflective skills early in their careers to effectively apply them in their practice. Zulkifar and Mujiburrahman (2017) highlighted that reflective teaching helps teachers articulate their thoughts and reduce stress, positioning it as an essential component of teacher effectiveness in educational contexts. Beauchamp (2015) concurred, stating that reflective teaching is crucial for understanding teaching theories and classroom strategies, making it evident that reflective teaching is integral to effective education.

In a similar vein, Kheirzadeh and Sistani (2018) argued that reflective teaching has the potential to transform novice teachers into highly effective teachers. They noted that students taught by reflective teachers tend to achieve greater success in their learning. Reflective teaching, according to them, supports effective teaching and, by extension which enhances student outcomes. Mathew et al. (2017) also recognized reflective teaching as a facilitative process in effective teaching, as it encourages learners to involve in thoughtful exploration of their practice. This process of self-evaluation is crucial for teachers striving to excel in their profession.

Walker (2008) associated effective teaching with the significant impact teachers strive to have on their students' lives. Effective teachers are committed to motivating and engaging all of the learners in the learning course, rejecting the notion that some learners are beyond help and destined to fail. They firmly believe that every student has the potential to develop in school and go to great lengths to discover methods that will help each student to achieve success. These teachers have high expectations for their students' learning, behavior and their own professional growth. They utilize personalized teaching and recognize that students' progress at varying rates and that each classroom involves a diverse range of skills and abilities. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, they address the individual needs of their students to ensure that no one is left disengaged or struggling (Walker, 2008).

Numerous researchers have highlighted essential traits that define effective teaching within the EFL context (Alzebaree & Ali Hasan, 2021; Lafayette, 1993; Nayernia et al., 2022; Schulz, 2000). Effective teaching qualities can be broadly categorized into three key areas: subject expertise, pedagogical proficiency, and socio-emotional competencies. While some traits of effective teachers are widely recognized, others may vary depending on the specific context. Different groups including teachers and students (Brosh, 1996; Lang et al., 1993), men and women (Witcher et al., 2001; Minor et al., 2002), and high-achieving versus lower-achieving students (Check, 1993; Koutsoulis, 2003) often hold distinct views on what constitutes an effective teacher. However, many of these investigations were conducted outside the field of foreign language education.

Given the unique complexities of teaching foreign languages, it is essential to investigate what makes an effective foreign language teacher (EFLT), rather than simply transferring general educational findings to this specialized area.

Exploring teachers' characteristics could therefore yield significant understandings and improvements in language education, ultimately leading to more effective solutions for language learning challenges. Psychologists have long advocated for language researchers to focus on teacher-related characteristics (Sahragard & Baharloo, 2009), with teacher reflectivity being a great example. This emphasis suggests that many issues faced by learners in EFL contexts could be addressed, at least in part, by exploring and enhancing teachers' reflective practices.



Indeed, one significant shift in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has been the movement from traditional methods toward reflective teaching.

However, based on the researcher's field observations as an EFL teacher in Iran, reflective teaching has not yet gained the prominence it deserves in the country's EFL education system. Specifically, many classrooms still operate with a fixed set of materials, delivered through rigid, conventional teaching methods that lack any element of reflection or adaptability. Regrettably, the researcher's experience has shown that many teachers function primarily as lecturers, rarely attempting to reassess or evolve their teaching approaches. This traditional method of instruction offers little meaningful benefit to either teachers or learners (Freire, 1970).

One possible reason for this gap is that while reflective teaching has been extensively discussed at the theoretical level, there has been little focus on its practical application. The lack of a clear, comprehensive framework leaves teachers uncertain about how to implement reflective practices in their classrooms. More critically, within Iran's EFL teaching system, reflective teaching, as far as the researcher is aware, has not even been explored as a potential approach, much less as a practical method. In Iran, the traditional view persists that teachers are all-knowing authorities, while learners are merely passive recipients of knowledge.

Thus, research on reflective teaching in Iran remains relatively underdeveloped. Specifically, as far as the researcher is aware, the research on the perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers is scarce. To address this research gap, the current investigation seeks to answer the following research questions.

**RQ1.** What are the perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers?

**RQ2.** What are the least and most important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers?

### Literature Review

Akbari et al. (2008) studied the effect of three teacher-related factors such as teaching styles, teachers' sense of efficacy, and teacher reflectivity on student achievement in English Language Teaching (ELT). The study involved 30 EFL teachers from high schools in Ilam, Iran. Students' final exam scores served as the dependent variable. It was concluded that each of these variables significantly predicted student development.

Hosseini Fatemi et al. (2011) addressed the impact of teachers' reflection on their students' writing development. The study, which involved 100 EFL teachers and 1,000 learners from language institutes in Mashhad, used a reflective teaching instrument (developed by Akbari and Behzadpour, 2007) and students' GPA scores for data collection. Analysis using descriptive statistics and correlation tests demonstrated a significant positive effect of teacher reflection on students' writing achievement.

Soodmand Afshar and Farahani (2015) analyzed the interplay between Iranian EFL teachers' reflectivity and reflective thinking, with a focus on gender and teaching experience. They used survey methods and two primary tools: the English Language Teaching Reflection Inventory (Akbari et al., 2010) and the Teachers' Reflective Thinking Questionnaire (Choy & Oo, 2012). Data analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between reflectivity and reflective thinking. Additionally, differences in reflectivity and reflective thinking were observed based on gender and teaching experience.

Dervent (2015) assessed the impact of reflective thinking on the teaching performance of pre-service physical education teachers at Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey. Using a maximum variation sampling method, Dervent selected ten pre-service teachers and employed action research to facilitate continuous examination of their educational practices. Content



analysis of the data showed that reflective teaching enhanced the participants' skill to implement their knowledge effectively, leading to improved professional development in planning, class management, and facility use.

Shahvand and Rezvani (2016) explored Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about effective teaching practices in foreign language classrooms to gain insights into teaching effectiveness in EFL contexts. The study involved a closed-ended questionnaire administered to 90 Iranian EFL teachers. The analysis showed no significant differences in perceived teaching effectiveness with regard to teacher gender and teaching experience. Additionally, the study found no significant association between teachers' views about effective teaching and their actual teaching effectiveness.

Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2017) emphasized the significance of reflective thinking in the professional practices' development within higher education. One prominent scale, the Reflective Thinking Questionnaire (RTQ), was developed and validated by Kember et al. (2000). This instrument includes 16 items that assess four types of reflective thinking: understanding (UND), reflection (REF), critical reflection (CREF), and habitual action (HA). Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh validated the Persian version of the RTQ with 196 EFL university students, examining its role in academic achievement, as measured by GPA.

They also explored the relationship between learners' reflective thinking styles, their educational levels, and gender. The Persian version of the RTQ was translated and its validity was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis, as well as convergent and divergent validity estimates. The findings revealed that, among the reflective thinking factors, UND had the highest mean score, followed by REF and CREF.

Mazandarani and Troudi (2022) employed a sequential mixed-methods approach to address the effectiveness of Iranian EFL lecturers. The study involved two groups of lecturers: one for the quantitative phase (n=43) and another for the qualitative phase (n=14). The research yielded three main outcomes. First, five distinct evaluation measures were identified: students' ratings, student learning outcomes, peer evaluation, self-evaluation, and observation. Second, the study discussed the key attributes of an effective teacher evaluation system. Third, it provided evidence supporting a differentiated teacher appraisal model, advocating for the inclusion of L2-specific features in evaluating L2 teacher effectiveness.

Quan (2022) conducted a study involving 200 students and 22 teachers at a language institution in Vietnam to compare their perspectives on effective teaching. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. It was found that both teachers and students valued subject matter knowledge highly, though their priorities differed. Teachers emphasized pedagogical aspects like subject matter expertise, language proficiency, and teaching methodology, while students valued psychological and motivational factors. Teachers preferred classroom management skills and adaptability in materials, whereas students appreciated a positive teaching attitude, care and understanding, and fairness in treatment.

## Methodology

### Design

In this study, a grounded theory design was used. That is, the content of semi-structured interview and written reflective journal data was exposed to the manual qualitative thematic analysis. In general, grounded theory is a collection of systematic inductive methods for doing qualitative research (Ary et al., 2019).



## Participants

The participants involved in the study consisted of 50 EFL teachers, evenly split between 25 males and 25 females. These participants were qualified, holding either M.A. or Ph.D. degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), with over five years of teaching experience at various private language institutions across Fars Province, Iran. They were selected using a convenience sampling method through virtual platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram, necessitated by the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants were native Persian speakers, and their ages ranged from 30 to 65 years. To observe research ethics, they were aware of the purposes of the study and ensured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information.

## Instruments

### Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview was designed and taken from 50 EFL teachers to explore their perceptions of the reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers so that a model of reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers could be developed. To design this interview, the researcher consulted similar studies and her supervisor. The interview consisted of 5 open-ended questions addressing the participants' perceptions of the way reflectivity can be used in EFL teaching, what effective EFL teachers do in classroom, what they think of the reflective skills of effective EFL teachers, and the characteristics of reflective effective EFL teachers. It was implemented by the researcher in English with no time limitation.

To observe protocols of Covid-19 pandemic, it was taken and audio-recorded by the researcher in a one-to-one format in WhatsApp and Telegram. To ensure the credibility and dependability of the data, member checks and low-inference descriptors were employed. Low-inference descriptors involved presenting direct quotations from the interviews which allowed the readers to engage with the participants' perspectives through their own words (Ary et al., 2019). Member checks were utilized by the researcher to enhance accuracy and respect for the participants. This process involved sharing interpretations of the data with the participants to prevent miscommunication, recognize any inaccuracies, and give participants the opportunity to review what had been written about them. By obtaining feedback, the researcher ensured that the participants' responses were correctly understood and accurately reflected in the study (Ary et al., 2019).

### Written Reflective Journal

To triangulate the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, the interviewees were asked, one week after the initial interview, to audio-record their spontaneous thoughts regarding their feelings, attitudes, mental images, free associations, and other reflections on their perceptions of the reflective skills of effective Iranian teachers. No time limit was imposed on these recordings. This method, known as audio-reflective journaling, is a participatory research technique that encourages individuals to express their perceptions through creative expressions, self-reflection, and active participation. This is different from interview in the sense that that they can write whatever comes to their mind without being limited by a set of questions and without the natural boundaries felt by individuals in any interview or questionnaire. The participants were then instructed to send their audio-recorded reflective journals to the researcher via social networks, including Telegram and WhatsApp. To ensure about dependability and credibility of journal data, the same procedures mentioned for interview data were followed.





## Data Collection Procedure

At the beginning of the study, the sample of the study was selected and informed of the main objectives of the study, taking research ethics into consideration. That is, they were conveniently selected and voluntarily asked to participate in the study. Furthermore, they were ensured about the anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information.

Then, the main phase of the study started wherein a semi-structured interview (described above) was piloted and taken from the participants of the qualitative phase of the study (i.e., 50 EFL teachers) to identify their perceptions of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers. All interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format by the researcher through social networks, including Telegram and WhatsApp. The researcher then transcribed these interviews to produce verbatim written data for analysis. To further triangulate the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked, one week after the initial interview, to audio-record their thoughts on their feelings, attitudes, mental images, free associations, and other reflections regarding their perceptions of the reflective skills of effective Iranian teachers. No time constraints were imposed on these recordings.

Then, the transcribed version of the interview data and the data collected through the written reflective journal were subjected to thematic analysis through MAXQDA software. To guarantee the dependability and validity of the interview and reflective journal data, low-inference descriptors were used. That is, the researcher used direct quotations from the interviews and reflective journals which provided readers to experience the participants' world and see the actual words of the respondents (Ary et al., 2019). Moreover, member checking was used by referring the extracted themes to the interviewees to ensure the correctness of the interpretations.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis involved manual thematic analysis of the interview and reflective journal data. To this end, the interview and reflective journal data were thematically analyzed through open, axial and selective coding.

## Results

### Results of the First Research Question

In order to answer the first research question 'What are the perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers?', through thematic analysis of the transcribed interview data as well as the reflective journals, the following themes were extracted as the perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers:

#### 1. Behaving in a socially acceptable manner

This theme shows that as perceived by EFL teachers, effective teachers should have a socially acceptable behavior.

As said by teacher 4:

*"Teachers should behave well socially. They should have a good behavior in social aspects. Their behavior should be prestigious."*

Teacher 18 stated:

*"Teachers should know that their behavior reflects their character and personality. Their behavior is judged by students. This is very important for teachers to have a good behavior."*

Teacher 15 said:

*"Teachers should be careful about their behavior. Behavior of teachers is as important as their knowledge. Even it is more important than knowledge in some cases. Good social behavior is a big advantage for teachers."*

According to teacher 26:

*"Teachers should act in a socially good and standard way. Many students are dissatisfied with teachers' behavior. However, behavior is not just a uni-dimensional concept. It consists of diverse dimensions which should be taken into account by teachers."*

## **2. Being able to motivate students**

As hidden in this theme, reflective teacher effectiveness is equal, among other things, with the capability to motivate students.

Teacher 17 said:

*"Teachers should be able to encourage students' motivation. If they increase motivation of students, they will be helped in learning process. Teachers should pay heed to motivating students."*

Teacher 35 discussed:

*"Motivation is of a key role in language learning. Therefore, teachers should motivate students in different ways."*

Teacher 43 stated:

*"Teachers should use different motivational techniques. This leads to students' learning and success. When students learn better, teachers feel more satisfied in their work."*

As stated by Teacher 46:

*"Teachers are needed to make students motivated. Loss of motivation is a big problem for many learners. If teachers can achieve the goal of learner motivation, students can learn English more easily."*

## **3. Managing classroom**

This theme indicates that teachers should be skillful in classroom management.

According to teacher 29:

*"Unfortunately, crowded classes are common in Iran. In such situations, classroom management is a big art for teachers. Teachers should make their best to generate balance in the classroom so that the time of classroom be devoted to useful things."*

Teacher 10 stated:

*"Classroom management is a concern for both novice and experienced teachers. Even teaching experience cannot reduce the difficulties of classroom management for teachers. There exist different models of classroom management which can make teaching easier for teachers."*

Teacher 42 said:

*"Students learn more effectively in a setting where everything is rightly placed and paced. This is technically called classroom management. Over attention to something and ignoring other things do not make teachers successful."*



Teacher 35 stated:

*"Teachers should know how to manage the classroom effectively. It is a really embarrassing task for new teachers. If classroom is well managed, higher teacher effectiveness can be expected."*

#### **4. Attending to students' diversity of needs**

As understood from this theme, effective teachers can recognize needs of students.

Teacher 50 said:

*"Teacher effectiveness cannot be separated from fulfillment of students' needs. Students have a variety of needs in English learning, which should be met by education. The first step in need fulfillment is need recognition. This is teachers' duty to recognize needs of students to fulfill them."*

Teacher 27 stated:

*"Effective teaching is not achieved just by going to the class and present some instructions to the students. But it involves other matters which are important in the process and outcomes of teaching. Students have their own needs and these needs have provoked them to be present in English classes. Teachers should be aware of these needs and attempt to meet them."*

As stated by teacher 39:

*"Teachers' success is tied to students' needs. Even if they teach skillfully with the best teaching methods, if they are indifferent to students' needs, they do not gain remarkable results. Students feel disappointed if their needs are not dealt with by the teacher."*

Teacher 40 mentioned:

*"Goal setting is a direct result of having needs. Students, like any group in the society, have their own needs which are worth probing by teachers. This gives meaning to learning. Otherwise, they will be uninterested in language learning."*

#### **5. Planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies**

As felt by this theme, effective teachers should benefit from appropriate methods of teaching and evaluation.

Teacher 44 said:

*"Whether we like it or not, teaching or evaluation methods are the main parts of English teaching job. In fact, teachers are known for their teaching/evaluation methods. After some years of teaching, some teaching and evaluation methods are fixed in teachers. If teachers use appropriate methods of teaching and evaluation, they can be known as effective teachers."*

Teacher 36 stated:

*"Effective teaching, whatever definition we assign to it, takes place in companionship with teaching strategies and methods. Students regard certain methods as more effective than others. They do not think about robustness of theories behind teaching methods used by their teachers. They judge methods based on their own understanding of them."*

In the perceptions of teacher 20:



*"Teaching and evaluating students are the part and parcel of teaching job. But we know that not all methods of teaching and assessment are equally effective. Teaching is not a linear job wherein a specific method works for all settings and all students. Each context calls for a specific method. What makes teaching success is the utilization of appropriate teaching methods. Moreover, teachers should use appropriate methods to evaluate students' knowledge."*

## **6. Thinking skillfully**

Thinking skillfully, as a theme extracted from the data, is reflective of the matter that teachers are effective when they can think skillfully in different situations.

Teacher 43 said:

*"Thinking appropriately in different conditions requires a high level of aptitude in teachers. Teaching and thinking are intermingled. Teachers should be smart thinkers of different teaching conditions."*

Teacher 31 stated:

*"A teacher should think about problems and challenges to which they face in teaching. This requires a high intelligence. Technical thinking is not possible without intelligence. Good intelligence increases the level of teaching success."*

Teacher 29 said:

*"English teachers should use their mentality dexterously in different aspects of teaching. As a demanding work, teaching English needs thinking skill. There are various unexpected things in teaching dealing with which is not practical without high thinking ability."*

Teacher 6 stated:

*"We are busy with a job whose main part is mental. Accordingly, we should think masterfully. There are various unexpected things in teaching dealing with which is not practical without high thinking ability."*

## **7. Thinking critically**

According to this theme, teachers should be capable of thinking critically.

According to teacher 19:

*"Critical thinking is a feature of good teachers. Teachers, I think, should not obey and accept everything. They should criticize problematic affairs and try to change them. Criticality is an art for teachers."*

In the sayings of teacher 46:

*"Students should be educated in a way that can express their own ideas in the society. To be so, their teachers should teach them critical thinking. To teach critical thinking, teachers themselves should think critically."*

Teacher 30 stated:

*"If teachers can question the existing matters, they will be more successful. It is true that governments do not like questioning, but we should accept the power of it. It is criticizing that makes you powerful. If teachers do not criticize, they are nothing but yes-sayers with no power."*

## 8. Thinking creatively

The perception expressed by this theme is that teachers should think in creative ways.

Teacher 14 said:

*"It is necessary for teachers to see things creatively. This eventually open new ways for them in teaching, solving the problems, and so on. In some cases, thinking like others do not work. It is a good strategy to think newly."*

As perceived by Teacher 47:

*"You know these days, students have considerable differences with students of previous periods. They are more intelligent. They like novelty and strangeness. In such situations, teachers are required to think in novel ways."*

Teacher 33 stated:

*"Teachers should try new ways of thinking to see whether they are effective or not. Old thinking may not be effective in all scenarios with which teachers are confronted. Teachers should resort to new thinking ways to find the best ways to teach."*

## 9. Being verbally active

It is perceived from this theme that teachers should have a high verbal skill.

According to teacher 21:

*"Some jobs are closely interrelated to verbal abilities. Teaching is among these jobs. English teachers should speak well. They should be verbally competent to teach the materials clearly and vividly."*

As stated by teacher 28:

*"Verbal skill plays a paramount role in teaching. I myself, when a student, had a teacher who was not that much knowledgeable. But he talked very well. I always taught that he is very knowledgeable. I want to say you how much verbal skill is important for a teacher."*

As put by teacher 17:

*"A teacher should be verbally proficient. All teaching activities are done through speaking. It is why speaking is significant in success of teaching. Clarifying the issues for students is best done verbally. Fortunately, verbal skills are learnable and this is promising for teachers with low verbal abilities."*

As teacher 44 perceived:

*"Although teaching goes beyond talking in class, we cannot ignore the dominance of this ability. no matter what teaching methods are used by a teacher, he or she should teach by talking. Different types of intelligences are important in teaching. Verbal intelligence is one of these intelligence types with high importance in teaching."*

## 10. Giving and receiving feedback from students

This theme shows that teachers should give feedback to students and receive feedback from them.

According to teacher 50:

*"Feedback is a concept all of us know and use in teaching. Teachers are to make students aware of their strengths and weaknesses by corrective feedback. Without feedback, students are confused about their performance."*

As stated by teacher 48:

*"An indispensable feature of effective teachers is giving corrective feedback to students to inform them of their errors. Corrective feedback is an effective way to prevent students from commitment of the same error. They learn the erroneous things and do not use them again. Besides, teachers should also take feedback from students about their teaching quality. Students see problems to which teachers may be blind."*

As perceived by teacher 37:

*"Teachers should seek to upgrade their teaching effectiveness by asking the students to give them feedback. Some believe that it is a negative point to tell the students to comment on our teaching. But it is wrong. Students' feedback encourages us to progress in our job."*

As teacher 9 perceived:

*"Giving feedback appropriately is a gain-gain game for both teachers and students. It improves learner's performance and at the same time, makes teacher vigilant to learner's level of performance. Teachers can use this strategy in an attempt to increase their teaching effectiveness."*

## **11. Evaluating one's own teaching**

This theme states that teachers should self-evaluate their performance.

According to teacher 40:

*"Teachers ought to evaluate their teaching problems and shortcomings. Inattention to one's shortcomings reduces the teaching quality in long run. Surveying students is one way to do this. There are other ways to do this, including peer evaluation."*

As stated by teacher 38:

*"Reflecting about one's teaching is a must for teachers. Teachers who regard themselves as free and independent from evaluation do not experience astonishing improvements in their working life. Evaluation of oneself is a way to guarantee improvement in work."*

As perceived by teacher 46:

*"Regular self-assessment through various techniques including asking from colleagues, students, and even parents of students, can enlighten teachers about their small or big faults. It also reveals teacher achievements. Anyway, teachers who are effective try to assess their performance."*

## **12. Making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching**

According to this theme, teachers should modify their teaching appropriately.

According to teacher 13:

*"A disadvantage of many teachers is that they are fixed in their teaching. For instance, they follow the same teaching method for years. This makes them boring. Diversity should not be ignored. Successful teachers are those who seek diversity in different dimensions of teaching."*



As stated by teacher 30:

*“If teachers do not make changes in their class management, teaching methods, dressing style, and other things, their class is turned into dark rooms devoid of motivation. Students do not like monotonous classes.”*

As perceived by teacher 43:

*“A teacher should be able to modify his usual way of doing things. Being accustomed to routine procedures is a debilitating factor in teaching job. Instead of sticking to routine things, teachers are better to utilize new methods in teaching. When teachers attempt to remain up to date, naturally, their effectiveness in teaching is enhanced.”*

As teacher 49 suggested:

*“Although we Iranian people are resistant to change, we should put a side this trait in whatever possible way. Students compare us with other teachers, discuss about us with their mates in other places, and expect us to be like other new teachers. They, contrary to us, are proponents of modifications. We should modify our teaching otherwise we are nothing but old teachers who have remained in 50 years ago.”*

In order to answer the second research question ‘What are the least and most important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers?’, the frequency and percentage of the above themes were calculated. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the extracted themes.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency and Percentage of the Extracted Themes*

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
behaving in a socially acceptable manner	28	56
being able to motivate students	25	50
managing classroom	39	78
attending to students' diversity of needs	21	42
planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies	40	80
thinking skillfully	42	84
thinking critically	31	62
thinking creatively	30	60
being verbally active	28	56
giving and receiving feedback from students	32	64
evaluating one's own teaching	45	90
making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching	43	86

As indicated in the Table 1, the lowest frequencies and percentages were related to attending to students' diversity of needs (42%), and being able to motivate students (50%), respectively. Therefore, they can be enumerated as the least important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers.

Moreover, the highest frequencies and percentages belonged to evaluating one's own teaching (90%), making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching (86%), thinking skillfully (84%), planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies (80%) and managing classroom (78%), respectively. Accordingly, these are the most important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers.

## Discussion

The first research question sought to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers. Thus, thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and written reflective journals was conducted. Via this thematic analysis, the following perceptions of EFL teachers of reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers were extracted: 1. Behaving in a socially acceptable manner; 2. Being able to motivate students; 3. Managing classroom; 4. Attending to students' diversity of needs; 5. Planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies; 6. Thinking skillfully; 7. Thinking critically; 8. Thinking creatively; 9. Being verbally active; 10. Giving and receiving feedback from students; 11. Evaluating one's own teaching; and 12. Making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching.

The second research question was concerned with the least and most important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers. According to the results, the least important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers were attending to students' diversity of needs, and being able to motivate students. In addition, the most important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers were evaluating one's own teaching, making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching, thinking skillfully, planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies, and managing classroom.

The findings are in line with the findings of Aho et al. (2010), Kaboodvand (2013), Khojastehmehr and Takrimi (2008), Reynolds et al. (2021), Ramos-Rodríguez et al. (2022), Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), Starkey (2010), Wichadee (2010), and Zein (2017) in the skills that are common among effective teachers. However, the factors of giving and receiving feedback from students, evaluating one's own teaching, and making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching were unique to this study.

The concept of pedagogical knowledge mentioned by Starkey (2010) conforms the concepts of planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies, attending to students' diversity of needs, thinking skillfully, thinking critically, thinking creatively and being able to motivate students found in the results of the first research question in this study, in that it entails a varied range of knowledge of context, audience, subject matter, and teaching methods which distinguishes a teacher from a subject expert. In the same line, in the research by Ramos-Rodríguez et al. (2022), Zein (2017), and Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), verbal skills were considered as serving a key role in teachers' effectiveness.

Similarly, motivational strategies were found as having a paramount role in reflective teaching (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Smet, 2022). The findings do also support Zein's (2016) study wherein class management skills were recognized as among the strengths of effective teachers. Furthermore, in the studies by Choy and Oo (2012), Kaneko-Marques (2015), Le and Do (2012) and Silver (2015), critical thinking and effective teaching were reported as connected to each other significantly. Additionally, Dibapile (2012) and Khany and Ghoreyshi (2013) referred to knowledge of teaching and evaluation methods as good correlates of effective language teaching.

To justify the findings, it is worth noting that EFL teaching is like a kaleidoscope which cannot be coped with in the absence of a variety of domains of knowledge and skills whose role in reflective effective teaching should not be under-estimated. In fact, effective teaching with the reflective orientation is under the influence of a diverse set of knowledge, skills and abilities. Thus, reflective effective teaching cannot be taken as a simple and easy-to-achieve notion which takes place in the vacuum. But it transcends the defined and certain scopes recognized for it by novice teachers. In sum, reflective effective teaching entails a series of basic knowledge and skill, subject matter knowledge, behavior in the classroom context, and teaching methods which make teaching remarkably different from many other professions.





According to the results, it seems that ignoring some skills (such as those extracted in the present study) is a block for reflective effective teaching. Certainly, it does not mean that without such skills, no teaching is shaped, but the bottom line is that reflective effective teaching passes through the channel of these skills. Therefore, much heed should be paid to these skills if teachers seek to reach reflective effective teaching.

Moreover, it can be argued that since reflective effective teaching is intermingled with high complexity and difficulty, it seems reasonable that some reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers are conceived as more important than other skills or vice versa. The rationale behind this argument is that one specific skill cannot comprehensively and broadly reveal the nature of a complex notion such as reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers.

It is through an un-balanced collection of different skills that reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers are formed. That attention to needs of students and motivational skills have been perceived as less important than other skills may be attributed to the public view that some skills can be taken for granted in reflective effective teaching. In other words, it can be due to the fact that some skills are so versatile and generally-accepted in EFL teaching that their importance does not show itself prominently.

In contrary, teaching effectiveness and reflectivity by nature entails some degrees of evaluation, modification, change, transformation, and management of affairs. This reasonably accounts for the participants' emphasis on evaluating one's own teaching, making appropriate modifications in one's own teaching, thinking skillfully, planning appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies, and managing classroom as the most important reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers. To put it differently, some skills are naturally perceived as more congruent with reflectivity in and effectiveness of EFL teaching. Therefore, it is not strange that the people view them as more important than other skills in enumerating reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Based on the results obtained for the first research question of the study, it can be concluded that first, Iranian effective teachers should have a good social behavior. Second, they should motivate students in different ways. Third, they should have a concept of appropriate classroom management. Fourth, they should be attentive to various needs of students. Fifth, they should be able to plan appropriate teaching and evaluation methods and strategies. Sixth, they should be equipped with such abilities as thinking skillfully, thinking critically, and thinking creatively. Seventh, they are required to be verbally active. Eighth, they should be capable of giving and receiving feedback from students. Finally, they should do evaluation of their own teaching and making appropriate modifications in their own teaching.

According to the results of the second research question, it can be concluded that Iranian EFL teachers do not regard all reflective skills of Iranian EFL effective teachers equally important. But they assign different weights to different skills in terms of their importance. Evidence for this conclusion is that some skills were more frequent than others in the quotations of the participants. The other conclusion that can be put forth in this regard is that motivational skills of teachers and paying attention to students' needs are valued at a lower level of importance than other skills according to the views of high portion of EFL teachers. In contrast, skills related to classroom management, modification of teaching, and planning teaching/evaluation methods are over-valued than the other skills by EFL teachers.

The outcomes of the present study can enlighten the practice and mindset of various stakeholders in the realm of language education, including policymakers, teacher educators, authorities in charge of recruiting teachers, to take appropriate measures to increase pre and in-



service EFL teachers' reflectivity and teacher effectiveness literacy and, as a result, encourage the implementation of the emerged model of reflective skills of Iranian effective teachers in the Iranian EFL contexts. Firstly, given that teaching quality is a fundamental component of an education system which is healthy and that stakeholders make top-down decisions affecting educational quality, language policymakers can benefit from the findings of this study. By incorporating reflectivity into the responsibilities of quality teachers, policymakers can promote the enhancement of EFL teachers' reflective practices.

Additionally, those responsible for designing curricula and content for EFL teacher preparation programs should recognize the importance of incorporating reflectivity-oriented training courses. It is essential to integrate reflective teaching concepts into the instructional materials they develop to ensure that future teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective reflective practice.

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