



Research Article

Investigating the Relationship between EFL Teachers' Accountability and Students' English Achievement: The Case of Iranian English Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceived accountability of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from the perspective of their students. It also examined the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' accountability and students' English language achievement. A sample of 62 EFL students from private language institutes in Shiraz, Iran, selected through convenience sampling, participated in the study. Two primary instruments were utilized: the Teaching Accountability Questionnaire, adapted from Moafian and Pishghadam (2009), and the English achievement tests based on the Top Notch series to evaluate students' performance. Descriptive statistics revealed that the majority of the students expressed a strong agreement that their teachers demonstrated key factors of accountability, such as being interested in their teaching subjects, being well-prepared, and emphasizing important concepts. Additionally, they acknowledged the teachers' commitment to providing thorough answers and support both inside and outside the classroom. The students also believed that their teachers were open to criticism and constructive suggestions. Furthermore, Spearman's correlation analysis demonstrated a significant positive relationship between teachers' accountability and students' academic achievement. These findings suggest that higher levels of perceived accountability among EFL teachers are associated with improved student performance, highlighting the critical role of teacher accountability in fostering educational success in Iranian EFL contexts. Finally, the implications of these results underscoring the importance of enhancing teacher accountability in improving language learning outcomes are discussed.

Introduction

Accountability in governance and ethics refers to the responsibility of individuals to justify their actions and decisions, especially regarding resource management and the attainment of specific goals (Dykstra, 1939). In the educational sector, institutions that receive funding are expected to demonstrate accountability by delivering the anticipated results. It is essential to identify the suitable type and level of accountability model necessary to achieve these outcomes (Paletta et al., 2020). The evolution of accountability has shown different strategies for establishing educational accountability systems. Initially, these models were primarily concerned with ensuring adherence to regulations, but more recent frameworks have shifted focus towards enhancing student performance, as indicated by favorable metrics like improved test scores and graduation rate (Fuhrman, 1999).

Big data and related analytical techniques have had a significant impact on the education sector, with data scientists, technicians, and statisticians playing an increasingly important role in educational practices and policies (Anderson, 2008). Schools are now subject to external accountability measures that rely on and generate new forms of data, such as standardized large-scale assessments to evaluate student and school performance, value-added models to measure teacher effectiveness, and various other quantifying instruments used to assess the absolute and relative quality of an educational system, school, teacher, or student (Williamson, 2021; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2021; Grek et al., 2021). Robust accountability systems are essential for educational institutions to meet their objectives and provide dependable services to the community. These systems ensure that performance aligns with the goals of the organization, making accountability a targeted effort (Dangara, 2016). When educational

accountability is insufficient, it can result in negative learning outcomes for students (Ahmed, 2015). In schools, accountability often relates to managing resources effectively to achieve key objectives. By integrating accountability with management practices, institutions can mitigate issues of indiscipline and enhance overall efficiency within the education system. It is vital for policymakers to acknowledge the importance of accountability in education to prevent subpar school performance, ineffective management practices, and a general lack of accountability (Dangara, 2016).

While there has been extensive research on educational accountability in the United States and Europe, studies focusing on administrative accountability in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Iran are scarce. Traditional teaching methods have hindered English learning in public schools, leading to a rise in private sector education (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). Furthermore, much of the existing research has concentrated on isolated aspects of educational accountability, overlooking other significant factors. Given the critical role that educational accountability plays in the development of schools, further investigation in EFL settings is necessary. Establishing a strong educational accountability framework is vital for enhancing learning outcomes among EFL students. Research indicates that inadequate accountability can adversely affect academic performance in future generations (Ahmed, 2015).

As noted by Pushpanadham (2020), educational accountability is fundamentally about ensuring that educational institutions meet their intended outcomes. Thus, achieving the desired educational results is largely dependent on effective accountability, particularly concerning both teachers and students. Additionally, it is essential that all parties involved in education, including teachers, students, and administrators, are held

accountable for reaching specific goals (Mathison, 2010). Another important consideration is the concept of "quality of classroom life," which has garnered significant attention in educational discussions and is acknowledged as a vital factor in the teaching and learning process (Tahan Shizari et al., 2019).

Kumaravadivelu (2005) defines the quality of classroom life through three key dimensions: a) the satisfaction of both teachers and students with their classroom environment, b) their dedication and engagement with classroom activities, and c) their mutual attitudes and perceptions towards one another. Teacher educators are crucial in fostering aspects such as teacher knowledge and enhancing the quality of classroom life, which are essential for effective teaching and learning (Epstein & McPartland, 1976). The quality and effective characteristics of teachers have been the focus of many studies.

There have been many studies about finding the characteristics of a successful teacher which means that these characteristics have a gate keeping role to separate competent and qualified teachers from incompetent and unsuccessful teachers, there are as well some programs for educational systems to mentor and induct teachers (Clutterbuck, 2022; Clutterbuck et al., 2021; Hartong & Förschler, 2019; Manokha, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Stakeholders in the education system encompass a diverse range of individuals and groups, including students, teachers, parents, support staff, school administrators, and principals. Among these stakeholders, teachers hold a particularly influential role due to their direct interaction with students. While the contributions of teachers to student success are undeniably significant, it is important to recognize that student achievement is influenced by a multitude of factors beyond just the role of teachers (Sheppard et al., 2009).

Accountability is often touted as an integral component of effective teaching practices. One approach to implementing accountability in the classroom is through the use of accountability logs - a teacher-created scaffolding tool that allows educators to discuss personalized improvement strategies with students. The existing body of research on related topics (e.g., Allwright, 2004; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Astuti & Lammers, 2017; Gholami et al., 2016; Guastello & Lenz, 2005; Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Khoshshima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Tahan Shizari et al., 2019; Zarei et al., 2021) has not yet explored the relationship between EFL teachers' accountability and their students' English achievement.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this gap in the literature remains unaddressed. Therefore, the current study aims to contribute to filling this research void. The ongoing era of social development and educational reforms underscores the significance of a high level of accountability in the education sector. From this perspective, stakeholders in educational systems worldwide have focused on teachers' abilities to enhance students' learning outcomes (Berryhill et al., 2009; Fok et al., 2010; Nakpodia & Okiemute, 2011). Considering the importance of teachers' accountability, the current study aimed to explore the relationship between EFL teachers' accountability and their students' English achievement.

Research Questions

The present study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of Iranian EFL teachers' accountability as perceived by their students?
2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' accountability and students' English achievement?

Literature Review

Ryan et al. (2017) highlighted the significant impact of test-based accountability on teacher turnover, stress levels, and burnout. Kraft et al. (2020) indicated that such accountability measures contribute to an increase in unfilled teaching roles and a decline in newly licensed teacher candidates. The potential causes of these outcomes include diminished job satisfaction and security, along with a reduction in teachers' autonomy. Supporting this perspective, Erichsen and Reynolds (2020) noted that the pressures of accountability can undermine efforts to enhance performance and equity in public schools, as they foster teacher dissatisfaction and contribute to higher turnover rates, ultimately hindering student success in underperforming schools. (p. 1).

Roberts and Hill (2020) highlighted the lack of clear guidelines defining teachers' professional responsibilities, leading to a general understanding of their expected roles. To address this gap, the study aimed to develop and validate a comprehensive teacher accountability framework. This was achieved through a two-pronged approach:

1. Theory-driven literature review: The researchers conducted an extensive review of relevant theories and existing literature to identify key components of teacher accountability.

2. Data-driven analysis: The study also incorporated a thematic and content analysis of interviews with various stakeholders, including teachers, students, school leaders, and parents.

This qualitative data provided valuable insights into the practical aspects of teacher accountability from diverse perspectives. By combining the theoretical foundations with empirical evidence gathered from multiple sources, the researchers were able to design and validate a robust teacher accountability inventory. This inventory serves as a valuable tool in clearly defining and assessing the

responsibilities and expectations of teachers in their profession.

The research by Bahrami and Hamzavi (2022) focused on examining the state of educational accountability and the quality of classroom experiences within both public and private English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings in Iran. The study included a sample of 120 EFL students, with 60 from public schools and 60 from private institutions, alongside 80 EFL teachers, evenly split between the two sectors. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 50 and were drawn from various senior secondary schools and private language centers in Kermanshah. They completed relevant questionnaires, while the researchers also carried out semi-structured interviews with 20 EFL students and 20 EFL teachers, ensuring equal representation from both public and private sectors. The results indicated that educational accountability among Iranian EFL teachers and students was relatively high, and the overall quality of classroom life in these contexts was found to be satisfactory. Interestingly, both EFL learners' and teachers' educational accountability was found to be more significant in the private sector context. Furthermore, the quality of classroom life was significantly higher in the private-sector context compared to the public-sector context. These findings can provide valuable insights for EFL teachers, syllabus designers, and material developers, helping them to better understand the dynamics of educational accountability and the quality of classroom life in Iranian public and private sector EFL contexts. The present research delved into the discourses of GCSE teachers surrounding accountability measures and their perceptions of low-attaining pupils.

The research conducted by Yahyaoui (2021) sought to examine how the discourses surrounding accountability either reinforce or challenge the established structures within the educational

system. A focus group consisting of seven Year 11 teachers from a high-performing secondary school was organized for this purpose. The discussions from the focus group were transcribed and analyzed using Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework, a method associated with Critical Discourse Analysis. This analysis involved looking at the data from micro, meso, and macro perspectives, with the macro analysis approached through a Marxist lens. The results identified three primary discourses: the pervasive and overwhelming nature of accountability measures, the perception of low-attaining students as problematic and undervalued, and the avoidance strategies that uphold the existing system. The Marxist perspective indicated that the trend toward marketization in schools has led to the commodification of students, where exam results act as a form of currency. This commodification results in varying levels of worth assigned to students based on their performance data, leading to low-achieving students being viewed as less valuable and unworthy of investment. Moreover, this perspective conflicts with the teachers' own values, creating cognitive dissonance. Nevertheless, to navigate the current educational landscape, teachers feel compelled to minimize this dissonance, ultimately reinforcing the prevailing structures. These findings provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics and tensions that GCSE teachers navigate when navigating accountability measures and their perceptions of low-attaining pupils. The study highlights the need for a critical examination of the underlying structures and assumptions that shape the education system.

Liebowitz (2021) explored the topic of teacher evaluation in relation to growth and accountability, specifically investigating the conditions under which these evaluations can enhance student performance. In the United States, many teacher evaluation frameworks aim to boost student

outcomes by offering developmental support to enhance teachers' skills while also applying accountability measures to encourage greater effort. In this analytical essay, Liebowitz contends that effective policy design requires a careful balance between accountability and the growth aspects of teacher evaluation. He identifies six key conditions that influence the effectiveness of combined teacher evaluation policies in improving student outcomes, evaluating how likely these conditions are to be fulfilled based on existing research from fields such as education, economics, social psychology, and management. The article concludes with suggestions for more clearly defining the accountability and growth objectives of teacher evaluations. Furthermore, it emphasizes that students must take responsibility for applying their learning and choosing to perform well.

Teachers believe it is their duty to ensure students grasp the necessary content, demonstrate progress over time, and adequately prepare for assessments. Educators also feel that parents play a crucial role in providing foundational skills and prioritizing education, which helps children recognize the significance of their assessments. Darling-Hammond (2020) argued that professional standards can drive greater quality in teacher preparation programs if they are incorporated into the policies governing accreditation and licensure. This encourages schools of education to adopt practices that will enable the success of future teachers, such as: teacher assessment strategies, including standards-based performance assessments, which not only measure effective teaching but also help develop effectiveness simultaneously, performance-based accreditation strategies, which incorporate evidence about the preparation experience from the candidates themselves through surveys, and investments in professional development school partnerships that

firmly connect theory and practice, similar to the teaching hospital model in medicine.

To guarantee that all teacher candidates receive high-quality training, Darling-Hammond (2020) emphasizes the need for teacher education accountability policies to incorporate effective strategies for attracting, retaining, and allocating teachers to areas where they are most needed. Expanding on this idea, Zarei et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study using educational accountability as a theoretical lens to analyze how various components—such as objectives, performance metrics, design choices, repercussions, communication, support, and system evaluation—differ between Iranian high schools and English language institutes, as viewed by school principals, English teachers, parents, and students. Their findings revealed a statistically significant disparity in accountability levels across the two EFL contexts, except for the communication aspect, which was nearly identical in both settings. The semi-structured interviews further validated these results.

Abdullahi and Abubakar (2019) investigated the influence of teacher accountability and parental involvement on students' academic performance in history in Kano state using an ex post facto design of quasi-experimental research. Multistage sampling procedure was employed to select participants for the study, for which a total of 223 participants were randomly selected in four Local Government Areas. Three validated instruments were used for data collection: Classroom Interaction Rating Scale, Parents Involvement Questionnaire, and Achievement Test in History. Data were analyzed using inferential statistics. The results revealed that teacher accountability has a significant negative correlation with students' performance in History while parental involvement has a low, positive relationship which was not significant with students' performance in History;

all the variables jointly predict students' academic performance in History while only teacher accountability significantly predicts students' performance in History. Hence, teacher and parental involvement are good factors that enhance students' academic performance in History. It therefore recommends that parents should encourage and give their children adequate academic and moral support towards their academics, while History teachers should endeavour to deliver and teach effectively in order to optimize students' academic performance in History. Similarly, Ubah et al. (2023) found that teacher accountability positively correlates with secondary school students' academic achievement.

The significance of this study lies in addressing a notable gap in the literature regarding educational accountability within Iranian EFL contexts. While previous research has explored various aspects of teacher and learner accountability, there remains a limited understanding of how these factors specifically influence student achievement in language learning settings. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the perceived accountability of EFL teachers as evaluated by their students, thereby highlighting the critical connection between teacher accountability and student performance. By focusing on this relationship, the research not only enhances the discourse on educational practices in Iran but also offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to improve English language instruction and overall educational outcomes.

Methodology

Participants

The sample consisted of 62 students studying English language as their second language in Shiraz private institutes, Iran, being targeted based on convenience sampling. That is, sample selection

followed a type of non-probability sampling in which the researchers' certain practical criteria such as the participants' "easy accessibility", "availability at a certain time", "willingness to volunteer" and "geographical proximity", are followed (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 99). This sample consisted of 36 females and 26 males, and their ages ranged from 18 to 29 ($M = 22.56$, $SD = 2.66$). The participants were studying English at intermediate ($N=21$) and advanced ($N=41$) levels. It is worth mentioning that the participants were assured about the confidentiality of their information.

Instruments

Teaching Accountability Questionnaire

To evaluate the teaching accountability section of a questionnaire developed by Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) including seven items was used as the instrument of the study. It included 5-point Likert items ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). To rate their teachers' accountability, the students were asked to answer the questionnaire. Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) calculated the reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha 94.94 and the construct validity was calculated by the main axial factorization. The reliability of the questionnaire based on the results of the present study estimated through Chronbach's alpha test was satisfactory ($r=.87$).

English Achievement Test

The next instruments included the four English achievement tests. The examinations tested the participants on the materials from Top Notch 2 and 3 series. These tests are the standard tests used by the language institutes designed to assess EFL learners' achievement at the end of the semester.

Data Collection

The data were collected from participants studying English at language institutes. Regarding the questionnaire distribution in classes, consent was obtained from the people in charge in institutes (language institute principals and teachers). The administration phase occurred during class hours by prior arrangement with the instructors. The questionnaire was administered to students in one session and they were asked to fill it out in the class while the researcher was present and could supervise its administration. The presence of the researcher in the class was necessary because the participants might have encountered some problems regarding the clarity of the items, although this took up the time of the class and interrupted the everyday teaching process.

Before administering the questionnaire, the students were informed that they had the right to decline to participate in the study. Also, the participants were informed about the possibility of withdrawing from participation at any time without penalty.

To receive a reliable evaluation, the purpose and confidentiality of the study were also explained to the participants. Moreover, the questionnaires were coded numerically based on the grade sheets of the classes and the learners were asked not to write their names on the questionnaires. The same coding procedure was followed by the teachers for presenting the final exam scores of the English language learners obtained at the end of the term. In order to remove any language problems, the researcher provided the Persian version of the English items in selected questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software (version 27). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured by estimating the reliability of Cronbach's alpha. Next, to explore the

level of Iranian EFL teachers' accountability as perceived by their students, the descriptive statistics was run. Afterward, to examine if there was any relationship between learners' evaluation of their teachers' accountability and their achievement scores, the correlation analysis was run.

Results

The first research question sought to identify the level of Iranian EFL teachers' accountability as perceived by their students. To measure these variables, the Accountability Questionnaire developed by Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) was administered. Tables 1 demonstrates the frequency and percentage of the participants' responses to the questionnaire items.

Table 1

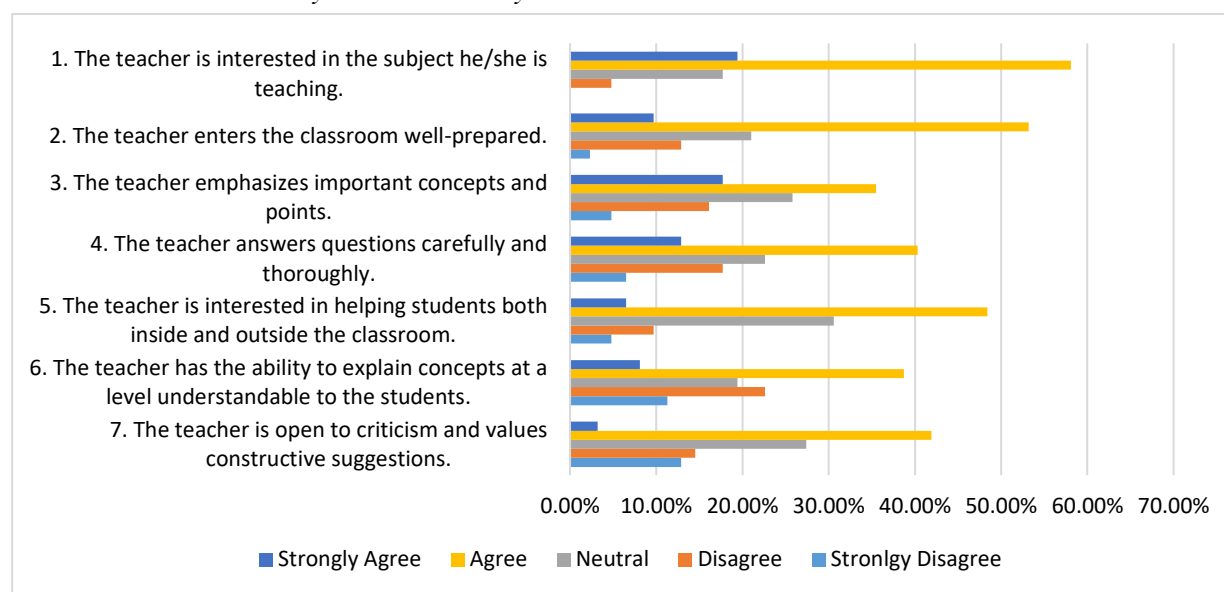
Frequency Results Regarding Teachers' Accountability

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The teacher is interested in the subject he/she is teaching.	0	3 4.8%	11 17.7%	32 58.1%	12 19.4%
2. The teacher enters the classroom well-prepared.	2 2.3%	8 12.9%	13 21%	33 53.2%	6 9.7%
3. The teacher emphasizes important concepts and points.	3 4.8%	10 16.1%	16 25.8%	22 35.5%	11 17.7%
4. The teacher answers questions carefully and thoroughly.	4 6.5%	11 17.7%	14 22.6%	25 40.3%	8 12.9%
5. The teacher is interested in helping students both inside and outside the classroom.	3 4.8%	6 9.7%	19 30.6%	30 48.4%	4 6.5%
6. The teacher has the ability to explain concepts at a level understandable to the students.	7 11.3%	14 22.6%	12 19.4%	24 38.7%	5 8.1%
7. The teacher is open to criticism and values constructive suggestions.	8 12.9%	9 14.5%	17 27.4%	26 41.9%	2 3.2%

The results of the frequency and percentage of the responses to accountability items (Table 1) showed that 62.9% of the participants believed that their teachers enter the classroom well-prepared (Item 2). A high percentage of participants (53.2%) agreed that their teachers emphasize important concepts and points (Item 3) and answer questions carefully and thoroughly (Item 4). More than half of the learners (54.9%) also believed that their

teachers are interested in helping students both inside and outside the classroom (Item 5). Most participants (46.8%) also reported that their teachers are capable of explaining concepts at a level understandable to their students (Item 6). Furthermore, 45.1% of them agreed that their teachers are open to criticism and values constructive suggestions (Item 7). Figure1 shows the frequency of the responses.

Fig. 1

Teachers' Accountability as Perceived by Their Students

In order to see if there is any significant relationship between EFL teachers' accountability and EFL learners' English achievement, the correlation analysis was run. As the assumption of normality was not met, the researchers ran the Spearman's rank correlation as a nonparametric

measure of the strength and direction of association that exists between the two variables (teachers' accountability perceived by their students and the students' achievement). Table 2 depicts the results of the correlation analysis.

Table 2

Spearman's Correlation between Teachers' Accountability and Their Students' Achievement

			Achievement
Spearman's rho	Accountability	Correlation Coefficient	0.347*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006
		N	62

Based on the correlation results (Table 2), a significant and positive relationship was found between teachers' accountability and their students' achievement ($r=.03$, $p<.00$), suggesting that higher levels of teachers' accountability are associated with better academic performance in the students.

Discussion

The research aimed to investigate two primary objectives: first, to assess the level of accountability perceived by Iranian EFL teachers as reported by

their students, and second, to explore the relationship between this perceived accountability and the English achievement of the students.

The findings revealed that a significant majority of students believed their teachers entered the classroom well-prepared and emphasized important concepts during lessons. Additionally, many students felt that their teachers were attentive to their needs both inside and outside the classroom and were open to receiving constructive feedback. The results indicate a generally favorable

perception of teacher accountability among students, suggesting that they value preparedness, clarity in instruction, and support from their teachers.

These results are in keeping with the results of the study conducted by Bahrami and Hamzavi (2022), who found a high level of educational accountability among Iranian EFL teachers working in the private section of Iranian schools and institutes. They attributed teachers' high level of accountability to factors such as systematic class observations, regular teacher supervision, and a rigorous monitoring system implemented within the private section.

Furthermore, a positive correlation was established between the students' perceptions of their teachers' accountability and their academic performance in English. The positive relationship between perceived accountability and student achievement implies that when students view their teachers as accountable, they tend to perform better academically. This relationship highlights the potential impact of teacher behaviors on student learning outcomes. Ahmed (2015) also confirmed that the lack of educational accountability in the education system is naturally demonstrated in poor learning outcomes of students. Furthermore, Abdullahi and Abubakar (2019) and Ubah et al. (2023) found that teacher accountability significantly predicts students' performance.

The justification for these findings can be grounded in the constructivist learning theory that suggests that student engagement and achievement are enhanced when teachers demonstrate accountability through effective teaching practices. When teachers are perceived as responsible for their students' learning, it fosters a supportive learning environment where students feel motivated to succeed. Moreover, the social constructivism perspective emphasizes the role of social interactions in learning. Teachers who are

seen as accountable likely create more engaging and interactive classrooms, which can lead to improved student outcomes.

Generally, these results underscore the importance of teacher accountability in EFL contexts in Iran. By fostering an environment where teachers are perceived as accountable, educational institutions can enhance students' achievement in language learning.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the level of accountability perceived by Iranian EFL teachers as reported by their students and to explore the relationship between this perceived accountability and students' English achievement. The findings of the study revealed that students generally viewed their teachers as accountable, with many believing that their teachers were well-prepared, attentive, and responsive to their needs. Additionally, a significant positive correlation was found between perceived teacher accountability and students' academic performance.

The importance of teachers' accountability in education cannot be overstated. It plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning experiences, as accountable teachers are more likely to foster supportive and engaging environments that promote student success. When teachers are perceived as responsible for their students' learning outcomes, it encourages a culture of trust and collaboration in the classroom, ultimately benefiting student achievement.

The implications of these results are significant for educational practice. Educational institutions should consider implementing strategies such as professional development programs focused on accountability practices, regular feedback mechanisms, and collaborative teaching approaches to cultivate a culture of accountability among educators. This could help

bridge the gap between teaching practices and student outcomes.

However, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 62 students from private language institutes in Shiraz, which can limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on student-reported measures for assessing teacher accountability may introduce bias, as students' perceptions can be influenced by various factors unrelated to actual teaching practices.

Future research should expand on this study by including a larger and more diverse sample of participants from different educational contexts to enhance generalizability. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how perceptions of teacher accountability change or develop over time and their long-term effects on student achievement. Exploring other variables that may influence this relationship, such as teacher training and pedagogical approaches, would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that play roles in English teaching and learning.

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