

**Original Article****An Exploration of Convergence and Divergence on the Characteristics of Successful Iranian EFL Teachers: Learners' and Teachers' Perspectives**

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**Abstract**

In order to expand the literature on the concept of teacher success and buttress the previous findings in this regard, this study attempted to explore characteristics of successful EFL teachers from EFL learners' and teachers' perspectives. Thirty Iranian undergraduate EFL learners and 30 EFL teachers were interviewed and also responded to the Successful EFL Teachers Questionnaire. The content analysis of the interview data showed a number of themes emphasized mutually by the two groups; among them being knowledgeable followed by being competent at teaching and conveying knowledge were the most frequent themes. Further interview findings uncovered some themes stated exclusively by learners and some others exclusively by teachers. The descriptive statistics also revealed that the 12 subscales of the questionnaire were ranked mostly in the same order of importance by both groups, and the Mann-Whitney U test outcomes evinced significant differences regarding the perspectives of the learners and teachers only for four subscales of the questionnaire. All in all, based on the results, it was concluded that, compared to the teachers, the learners held a more restricted conceptualization of the qualities of successful EFL teachers. Accordingly, pedagogical implications were suggested in the English language teaching and learning context of Iran.

**Keywords:** EFL learner, EFL teacher, Successful English teacher, Triangulation of perspectives

## 1. Introduction

In any educational system, one of the most important roles is played by its teachers. That is to say, the success of teachers within an educational system contributes a lot to the success of the system itself (Coombe, 2020; Pishghadam, Derakhshan, & Zhaleh, 2019). The crucial role of teachers in students' academic life is also undeniable in that teacher success is considered a factor affecting learners' short- and long-term academic success and achievement (Agudo, 2020; Burroughs et al., 2019). Following this premise, many attempts have been made since the early 1920s to define and characterize the notion of teacher success (e.g., Beck, 1967; Demmon-Berger, 1986). Even various models and frameworks have been conceptualized characterizing the qualities of successful teachers (e.g., Danielson, 2007; Stronge, 2007). Yet, till now, no unanimous consensus might have been reached on teacher characteristics resulting in teachers' overall educational success (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008).

To elaborate on some of those classifications, Beck (1967) maintained that successful teachers possess such features as being friendly, warm, and supportive of students. Demmon-Berger (1986) specified elements of teacher success as being well-read, being creative and flexible, holding high self-efficacy beliefs and high expectations of themselves and learners, having management skills, and being available for learners before or after class. Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, and Robinson (2003) characterized successful teachers as those who are knowledgeable, give a sufficient amount of instruction and practice to students, and have expertise in organizing and managing the classroom, students, and activities.

Although there tends to be a set of characteristics distinguishing successful teachers in general, there are some distinctive characteristics shared only by successful language teachers, due to the unique nature of the second/foreign language teaching/learning environment (Bernhardt & Hammadou, 1987; Borg, 2006; Coombe, 2014, 2020; Farrell, 2015; Moafian & Pishghadam, 2009; Richards, 2010).

Furthermore, many empirical studies in the past have sought to identify characteristics of successful teachers as perceived by learners or teachers themselves (e.g., Olson, 2015; Stobaugh, Mittelberg, & Huang, 2020). More particularly, some other research undertakings have focused on delineating features shared only by successful language teachers from language learners' or teachers' points of view (e.g., Alzebaree &

Ali Hasan, 2020; Bremner, 2020; Cakmak & Gunduz, 2018; Chang, 2016). Furthermore, more relevant to the context of the present study, even studies have been conducted in the context of Iran, aiming to uncover features of successful English language teachers (e.g., Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2013; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2019).

In fact, the existence of a large number of studies in this regard gives further credence to the slippery nature of this concept and its characterization which in turn demands sufficient empirical backing for reaching any conclusion on the topic. However, only a limited number of these studies have attended simultaneously to views of both language teachers and learners towards the characteristics of successful foreign language teachers through both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. Therefore, to buttress the previous findings and add to this literature, the present study aimed to, first, explore qualities possessed by successful EFL instructors as perceived by two groups of Iranian EFL learners and teachers, and second, to examine the points of divergence and convergence which may exist between what the two groups attribute to successful EFL teachers.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Theoretical Background**

For many years, researchers have been struggling for reaching a unanimous definition of the nature of successful teaching. Despite the endeavors, no agreed-upon conceptualization has been put forward due to the elusive nature of this multidimensional concept (Farrell, 2015). As hold by Tsui (2009), successful teaching is hard to theorize because it is realized differently in different cultures. Another reason for the slippery nature of the concept is that it is constantly being shaped and reshaped within the educational system by innumerable variables such as syllabi, curricula, stakeholders, learners, supervisors, school issues (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004), teachers' own teaching experiences, and teachers' educational, personal, and cultural backgrounds (Richards, 2015). In spite of the controversies regarding the qualities of successful teachers, it is widely believed that successful teachers are those whose ultimate endeavors result in their students' academic accomplishments (Burroughs et al., 2019).

In the literature, the notion of a successful teacher has been synonymously used with terms such as good teacher (Inan, 2014), professional teacher (Oder, 2014), competent teacher

(Zhao, 2010), teacher with expertise (Richards, 2010), effective teacher (Stronge, 2007), and quality teacher (Hopkins & Stern, 1996). Besides, although good teachers tend to maintain a common set of characteristics, it is widely recognized that the characteristics of academic disciplines largely influence the nature of teaching (Päuler-Kuppinger & Jucks, 2017). In this regard, Bager-Elsborg (2017) also stated that past research has approved that teaching at the level of university can vary within various disciplines. For instance, soft disciplines, including education and the humanities, emphasize good thinking skills, general knowledge, and character development, while hard disciplines like engineering and physics, underscore cognitive goals such as learning facts. Within the area of foreign language teaching, some attempts have been made to identify the qualities of successful language teachers. In this respect, Borg (2006) maintained that successful foreign language teachers have 11 distinctive characteristics with regard to the nature of the subject, the content of teaching, methodology, teacher-learner relationships, non-native issues, teachers' characteristics, training, status, errors, student body, and commercialization.

Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) drew attention to the “unique art of being a foreign language teacher” (p. 305) by highlighting that within the teaching profession, foreign language teaching has many unique characteristics, and for becoming a successful foreign language teacher, in-service language teachers should undergo rather different processes from those experienced by teachers of other disciplines. According to them, these differences originate from the distinctive nature of the foreign language subject matter itself as in this learning context, both the process and content of learning are the same. Coombe (2020) singled out 10 characteristics of highly effective second/foreign language teachers as those with a calling to the profession, professional knowledge, good personality qualities, with-it-ness, instructional effectiveness, good communication skills, street smartness, willingness to go to the extra miles, commitment to lifelong learning, and life outside the classroom.

## **2.2. Empirical Studies**

Following what was mentioned, many studies in the past have attempted to uncover characteristics of successful language teachers across various cultures, languages, and populations as conceived by language students or instructors themselves. For instance, by examining the views of a group of Moroccan English language learners, Zaid (2019)

identified good language teachers as those being enthusiastic about teaching, adopting learner-centered instructional methods, having good classroom management skills and pedagogical knowledge, having a good sense of humor, and having knowledge of different teaching methods in their repertoire.

Prodromou (1991), according to language learners' views, specified effective language teachers to be those who are friendly, have a good sense of humor, help but not push lower-level students, play games, and provide useful notes to learners. Brosh (1996) identified five key attributes of successful language teachers from both language learners' and teachers' standpoints; teacher's good command and knowledge of the target language, the capability to clarify, organize, and explain, as well as to maintain and increase motivation and enthusiasm in learners, treat all learners fairly, and be available to learners. Mullock (2003) uncovered 21 characteristics of expert TESOL teachers by examining the views of 42 postgraduate TESOL learners. Accordingly, such teachers know students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses, know the subject matter, are familiar with various teaching methods and techniques, show empathy, care, respect, and interest toward all students, keep their knowledge up-to-date, motivate students, have a sense of humor, are interested in teaching, and are patient.

Relatedly, Wichae (2010) delineated competencies possessed by competent language teachers emphasized by university students and teachers in Thailand though utilizing a relevant questionnaire. As revealed by their results, students perceived effective language teachers as those being competent at organization and communication skills, while teachers regarded successful language teachers as those with high English language proficiency. Richards (2010) also named teaching skills, specialized cognitive skills, joining a community of practice, learner-focused teaching, professionalism, content knowledge, language teacher identity, contextual knowledge, theorizing from practice, and language proficiency to be the core of successful language teaching. Çelik, Arikan, and Caner (2013) explored the features of competent foreign language teachers mentioned by a group of Turkish EFL learners. They established qualities such as showing fairness in decision-making, showing enthusiasm, teaching pronunciation, reading, writing, and speaking skills well and adequately, decreasing learners' anxiety, having sound knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, judiciously using from students' mother tongue, and being good at classroom management as those attained by quality language teachers.

Cakmak and Gunduz (2018) identified features of successful language teachers as perceived by 192 pre-service Turkish ELT teachers through adopting both questionnaire and interview data collection instruments. The results of quantitative data analysis revealed that being competent, objective, and consistent were the most crucial qualities of successful teachers, and results of qualitative data analysis identified creating a positive learning environment, managing classroom, and getting prepared for the lesson as the most important characteristics of good language teachers. Chang (2016) also explored the characteristics of good language teachers in the context of Taiwan by comparing the perspectives of language learners and teachers by employing both questionnaire and interview instruments. The students valued teachers who tended to show empathy toward students, treat students with respect and courtesy, and treat every student fairly. In contrast, teachers identified good language teachers as those who were able to reflect on their practice, make progress, and had a good command of the target language.

In the ELT context of Iran, Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) sought to identify the qualities of successful English language teachers from 215 learners' and 59 teachers' points of view through employing both quantitative and qualitative means of inquiry. The quantitative results indicated that teachers marked good teachers as those assigning homework, being well-prepared for the lessons, and integrating group activities into the classroom, having lesson plans, and having a reasonable evaluation of students' learning. On the contrary, the most important criterion of a good language teacher for students was teaching English in the students' first language (i.e., Persian). Additionally, qualitative results pertained to the teachers' perspectives revealed factors such as mastery of the target language, employing various teaching methods and techniques, having a good personality, and maintaining a good knowledge of pedagogy. On the other hand, learners found teachers' personality and behavior towards students to be more important factors for teacher effectiveness.

Moreover, through utilizing both interview and questionnaire instruments, Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2013) delineated successful EFL teacher characteristics from 32 teachers' and 376 students' perspectives. The results uncovered that teachers and students held approximately similar opinions as they believed that effective language teachers must possess professional qualities such as knowledge of the subject matter, ability to convey knowledge to learners, have classroom management qualities like involving all students by

giving group/pair work as well as evaluating their progress regularly, and have high level of interpersonal relationships. Last but not least, through employing a mixed methods research design, Tajeddin and Alemi (2019) identified characteristics of effective language teachers as persons by uncovering 25 pre-service and 25 in-service instructors' beliefs. Their outcomes revealed that pre-service teachers regarded personal characteristics such as friendliness, enthusiasm, kindness, strictness, fairness, patience, knowledge, and using reflection to ameliorate instruction to be important, while in-service teachers considered sense of humor, knowledge, friendliness, energy, showing favorable attitudes towards instruction, treating students fairly, and providing a warm classroom atmosphere to be crucial qualities of successful language teachers.

All in all, in order to buttress the findings of previous research, help to reach more conclusive and generalizable findings, and understand points of convergence and departure between the perspectives of teachers and students on the issue, the present study attempted to explore qualities of successful EFL teachers from the perspectives of both language teachers and students within the educational context of Iran. Accordingly, the study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Which characteristics do successful EFL teachers possess from Iranian EFL learners' perspectives?
2. Which characteristics do successful EFL teachers possess from Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives?
3. Are there any significant differences between the perspectives of Iranian EFL teachers and those of Iranian EFL learners?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Design of the Study**

This mixed methods research study aimed to explore the perspectives of teachers and learners toward the characteristics of a successful English teacher. To do so, two datasets were collected through the two instruments of interview and questionnaire. In other words, the qualitative tool of interview and the quantitative tool of the questionnaire were both employed, and the interview data were regarded to be as important as the frequencies or percentages obtained from the questionnaire as both revealed the perspectives of the two groups toward teacher success. To make comparisons between the two sources of the data, both datasets were

presented separately in the result section, and then these findings were put side by side in the discussion section of the study. The present study was conducted in the English language teaching context of Iran, with the hope of exploring the perspectives that teachers and students have toward the characteristics of successful English language teachers.

### 3.2. Participants

Two groups of participants were involved in this study. The first group consisted of 30 EFL teachers (19 females and 11 males) teaching at private language institutes at Gorgan, Iran, chosen based on convenience sampling. At the time of data collection, the age of the first group ranged from 21 to 45. Among them, seven teachers had teaching experience of between less than one year up to four years, 12 teachers between five to nine years, six teachers between 10 to 14 years, four teachers between 15 to 19 years, and one teacher between 20 to 25 years of teaching experience. As to their major, they had studied Teaching English as a Foreign Language ( $n=25$ ), English Language and Literature ( $n=3$ ), and English Translation ( $n=1$ ), and one teacher had been graduated in a major other than English. Regarding their level of education, five teachers had a BA degree, 18 teachers had an MA degree, and seven teachers were PhD holders (See Table 1). The second group was comprised of 30 undergraduate students studying English Language and Literature at Golestan University, Iran, being targeted based on convenience sampling. This sample consisted of 12 males and 18 females, and their ages ranged from 18 to 29.

Table 1.

#### *Demographic Information of the Teachers*

Teachers	Categories	Total = 30
Gender	Male	11
	Female	19
Teaching Experience	Up to 4 years	7
	5 to 9 years	12
	10 to 14 years	6
	15 to 19 years	4
	20 to 25 years	1
Majors	Teaching English as a Foreign Language	25
	English Language and Literature	3
	English Translation	1
	Non-English majors	1



### 3.3. Instruments

An individual semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the participants in both groups. In the interview session, the interviewee was expected to provide answers to a general interview prompting question, asking about how (s)he characterized successful EFL teachers. The question was; From your perspective, what qualities a successful English teacher possess?

In order not to provide any hint regarding the characteristics of successful EFL teachers as represented in the items of the questionnaire used in the study, interviews were held prior to distributing the questionnaire.

Subsequently, the Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers Questionnaire, developed by Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) in the context of Iran, was employed. The scale, written in Persian, consisted of 12 components of teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism. The scale included 47 items measuring the 12 components of the successful EFL teacher construct. The respondents' answers to the questionnaire items could range from 1 "*strongly disagree*" to 5 "*strongly agree*". Moafian and Pishghadm (2009) reported Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.94 for the scale. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha reliability estimate of the scale was found to be 0.95.

### 3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Initially, it was explained to the participants that the nature of their participation in the study was quite voluntary, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of data collection, for any reason, without any negative consequences for them. They were also informed of the general purpose of the current research and specific instructions regarding how to perform in the two phases of the study. They were also ensured that the data they provided to the present study researchers would remain confidential. In this regard, numbers were used instead of the real names of the participants when reporting the results to keep their identities anonymous. Furthermore, the participants were not asked to provide any sensitive data at any stage of the data provision. Each interview session lasted from 20 to 30 minutes.

Moreover, before filling out the questionnaire of the study, the participants were given instructions about how to respond to the questionnaire items. The time required for the participants to respond to the scale was estimated to be less than 15 minutes.

### **3.5. Data Analysis Procedure**

The research questions of the study were answered in two phases, and data analysis pertaining to each phase was done differently and distinctly. Content and thematic analyses were done on the data gathered from the interviews in order to explore the characteristics that the participants attributed to successful EFL teachers in the form of codes and final themes. Following data coding, the inter-coder agreement estimate was used to ensure the credibility of the data. To elaborate on this process, first, the interview data collected from the two groups were coded by one of the researchers of the study, and then an expert in the field independently coded 20% of the data chosen randomly. The results of inter-coder agreement coefficient showed total agreement between their coding. This finding can be justified by mentioning that the participants named the characteristics they thought were important to become a successful EFL teacher, and it was attempted to keep the coding near to the participants' responses as much as possible. In the end, to more easily compare the codes emerged from the two groups, the codes were reported along with their frequencies and percentages for each group in the result section. Subsequently, the data obtained from the participants' responses to the questionnaire of the study were analyzed through the descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation (SD), and percentage, and the inferential statistics of Mann-Whitney U test.

## **4. Results**

As stated before, the study sought to explore English language learners' and teachers' perspectives towards the characteristics of successful EFL teachers. To fulfill this aim, two data sources were gathered through employing both the interview and questionnaire instruments.

### **4.1. Interview Findings**

The content analysis of the interview data resulted in extracting themes indicating the major characteristics of successful EFL teachers as held by the participants. Table 2

indicates the 15 most frequently mentioned qualities of successful EFL teachers by both groups. In fact, due to space limitations, all the qualities stated by the participants could not be dealt with in the content of this paper. Rather, the full list of the qualities mutually stated by the two groups is presented in Appendix A.

Table 2.

*The Most Frequently Mentioned Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers by Both Learners and Teachers in Interview*

Characteristics	Learner (n=30) Frequency/ Percentage	Teacher (n=30) Frequency/ Percentage	Total (n=60) Frequency/ Percentage
Knowledgeable regarding content and the English language	15/50	18/60	33/55
Competent at teaching and conveying knowledge to students	8/27	7/23	15/25
Sociable and high communication skills	7/23	6/20	13/22
Tailor instruction to all students' levels and needs	9/30	3/10	12/20
Patient	3/10	7/23	10/17
Creative	1/3	8/27	9/15
Up-to-date content and language knowledge	3/10	5/17	8/13
Eloquent	5/17	2/7	7/12
Attend to and respect all students equally	4/13	3/10	7/12
Use from new and different teaching methods and techniques	3/10	4/13	7/12
Active and energetic	4/13	2/7	6/10
Sense of humor	4/13	1/3	5/8
Disciplined and accurate	1/3	4/13	5/8
Motivate students to learn	3/10	1/3	4/7
Have empathy toward students	2/7	2/7	4/7

Among the list indicated in Table 2, *being knowledgeable regarding content and the English language* was the most frequently found attribute mentioned by 55% of the respondents in the two groups. But more specifically, 15 learners (50%) and 18 teachers (60%) regarded this characteristic to be crucial for successful EFL teachers. For instance, as Learner 28 stated, "*a good English teacher must have knowledge about language and subject matter beyond what is sufficient in the classroom*". Teacher 19 also believed that "*being knowledgeable is one of the requirements of successful teaching*".

The second theme was *being competent at teaching and conveying knowledge to students* as it was mentioned by eight learners (27%) and seven teachers (23%). Teacher 5 mentioned that "*effective English teachers must utilize the best strategies available to them to convey information to learners and help them learn better*". The next high-frequency

theme was *being sociable and having high communication skills* as it was stated by seven learners (23%) and six teachers (20%). Learner 21 assumed that *"good language teachers must try their best to provide opportunities for communication with students"*. Teacher 12 maintained that *"quality English teachers must know how to communicate effectively with their learner"*.

Besides these factors, nine learners (30%) and three teachers (10%) also claimed that successful EFL teachers should be able to *tailor instruction to all students' levels and needs*. Learner 9 stated that *"successful English teachers should pay attention to levels of all students when they want to teach something"*. Furthermore, three learners (10%) and seven teachers (23%) believed that effective EFL instructors are *patient*. Learner 15 put forward that *"successful English teachers should patiently attempt to motivate learners toward language learning"*.

Similarly, Teacher 25 mentioned that *"it takes forbearance to be a good English teacher"*. Last but not least, among the qualities represented in Table 2, those least frequently mentioned by the participants were *motivate students to learn and have empathy toward students* as three learners (10%) and one teacher (3%) as well as two learners (7%) and two teachers (7%) believed in them, respectively. Learner 29 said that *"good teachers have empathy toward us and help us become successful"*.

Table 3 represents the five most frequently mentioned qualities of successful EFL teachers exclusively by learners. For the whole list of factors expressed by the learners, see Appendix B.

Table 3.

*The Most Frequently Mentioned Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers by Learners in Interview*

Characteristics	(n=30) Frequency	(n=30) Percentage
Provide a relaxing, pleasant, and intimate classroom atmosphere	5	17
Good English accent	3	10
Good-tempered	3	10
Use examples in teaching	3	10
Help students achieve their goals and needs	3	10

According to Table 3, the attribute most frequently stated exclusively by the learners was *providing a relaxing, pleasant, and intimate classroom atmosphere* as five learners

(17%) believed in its significance. For instance, Learner 7 mentioned that *"successful teachers provide a calm and stress-free class environment for their learners to talk"*. Learner 21 believed that *"teachers should allow their students to ask their questions in the warm, intimate, and relaxing atmosphere of the class"*. Other attributes stated by the learners were *good English accent* ( $n = 3$ , 17%) and *using examples in teaching* ( $n = 3$ , 17%). Learner 23 mentioned that *"besides other factors, successful English teachers must attain a good English accent"*. Learner 24 stated that *"for instruction to become more effective, teachers should utilize examples and illustrations in their teaching"*. The learners also evinced that successful EFL teachers should be *good-tempered* and *help students achieve their goals and needs* as these two characteristics were both selected by three learners (17%). Learner 2 suggested that *"such a teacher must have a smiley face in class"*. Learner 16 pointed out that *"successful teachers help us become nearer to what we need to achieve"*.

Table 4 indicates the five most frequently mentioned characteristics of successful EFL teachers exclusively by the teachers. For the full list of the features, readers can refer to Appendix C.

Table 4.

*The Most Frequently Mentioned Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers by Teachers in Interview*

Characteristics	(n=30) Frequency	(n=30) Percentage
Kind	5	17
Motivated	4	13
Attending to emotional and mental aspects of learners and teaching	4	13
Classroom management skills	3	10
Experienced	2	7

As demonstrated in Table 4, being *kind* was the quality most frequently stated by the teachers ( $n = 5$ , 17%). Teacher 24 stated that *"to be successful, teachers must not only attend to pedagogical but also emotional aspects of education. Therefore, besides being knowledgeable, successful teachers must also be kind to students"*. Subsequently, four teachers (13%) mentioned being *motivated* and *attending to the emotional and mental aspects of learners and teaching* as important characteristics of successful English

instructors. Teacher 3 stated that "*for teachers to motivate their students, they should be motivated themselves first*". Teacher 21 also maintained that "*good English teachers must have a thorough knowledge of the personality of their learners to understand how to treat and teach learners who are emotionally, mentally, and behaviorally different*". Furthermore, three teachers (10%) believed that *classroom management skills* must be attained by successful EFL teachers. Teacher 30 said that "*expert English teachers should know how to manage the classroom in the most effective way possible*". Finally, two teachers (7%) believed that being *experienced* is a distinctive characteristic of quality English teachers. Teacher 1 stated that "*having sufficient experience of teaching is a feature of good language teachers*".

#### 4.2. Questionnaire Results

First of all, to check the normality of the data necessary for further statistical analyses, the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run on the data obtained from the participants' responses to the questionnaire. The test is normally used to examine whether the distribution deviates from a comparable normal distribution. In the condition that the p-value is non-significant ( $p > .05$ ), it is said that the distribution of a sample is not significantly different from a normal distribution, and therefore, it is normal. If the p-value is significant ( $p < .05$ ), it means that the distribution is not normal. Table 5 shows the results of the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Table 5.

*The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results*

N		60
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	216.0667
	Std. Deviation	18.16764
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.202
	Positive	.149
	Negative	-.202
Test Statistic		.202
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000 <sup>c</sup>

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

As represented in Table 5, the obtained significant value for the scale was less than .05 ( $p = .00$ ), thus it can be concluded that the data were not normally distributed. Consequently, because the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests could be run for inferential analysis of the data. In fact, non-parametric tests are also called distribution-free tests as they rest on a smaller number of assumptions (e.g., not assuming the normality of the data). Following what was mentioned, Table 6 indicates the descriptive (i.e., mean and SD) and inferential statistics (i.e., the Mann-Whitney U test), relating to the two groups' responses to the 12 subscales of the questionnaire. The descriptive and inferential statistics pertaining to each item of the scale is represented in Appendix D.

Table 6.

*Comparison of Learners' and Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire*

Components	M/SD Learner (n=30)	M/SD Teacher (n=30)	T	Sig.
Teaching accountability	32.57/2.85	32.87/2.47	-.115	.90
Interpersonal relationships	31.10/3.90	32.90/2.45	-2.03	.04
Learning Boosters	27.20/3.26	28.73/1.66	-1.73	.08
Attention to all	22.27/3.48	23.37/2.14	-.77	.43
Teaching boosters	18.30/1.88	19.10/1.35	-2.10	.03
Creating a sense of competence	16.43/2.84	18.37/1.52	-2.84	.00
Commitment	13.50/1.59	14.07/1.20	-1.32	.18
Examination	13.10/1.86	13.83/1.37	-1.56	.11
Empathy	9.23/1.17	9.57/0.63	-.80	.42
Physical and emotional acceptance	9.10/1.24	9.50/0.78	-1.10	.27
Class Attendance	9.37/1.03	9.03/1.10	-1.35	.17
Dynamism	9.00/1.26	9.63/0.67	-2.11	.03

According to Table 6, regarding the mean scores of the two groups for the 12 subscales of the questionnaire, teaching accountability was ranked the highest by both the learner ( $M = 32.57$ ,  $SD = 2.85$ ) and teacher ( $M = 32.87$ ,  $SD = 2.47$ ) groups. The second highly-ranked subscale by both the learners ( $M = 31.10$ ,  $SD = 3.90$ ) and teachers ( $M = 32.90$ ,  $SD = 2.45$ ) was interpersonal relationships. In addition, learning boosters was the

third highly-ranked subscale by both the learners ( $M = 27.20$ ,  $SD = 3.26$ ) and teachers ( $M = 28.73$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ).

In contrast, the learners gave the lowest ranking to dynamism ( $M = 9.00$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ), while the teachers gave the lowest ranking to class attendance ( $M = 9.03$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). In addition, physical and emotional acceptance was ranked as the second-lowest quality by both the learner ( $M = 9.10$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) and teacher ( $M = 9.50$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) groups. Further comparison of the two groups' responses indicated that, among the 12 subscales of the questionnaire, learners ( $M = 9.37$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) only ranked the subscale of class attendance higher than the teachers ( $M = 9.03$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ).

The results of Mann-Whitney U test analysis, employed to explore potential areas of divergence between the learners' and teachers' perspectives toward the characteristics of successful EFL teachers, indicated that only the two groups' perspectives differed significantly regarding interpersonal relationships ( $t = -2.03$ ,  $p = .04$ ), teaching boosters ( $t = -2.10$ ,  $p = .03$ ), creating a sense of competence ( $t = -2.84$ ,  $p = .00$ ), and dynamism ( $t = -2.11$ ,  $p = .03$ ).

## 5. Discussion

This study attempted to explore the qualities of successful EFL teachers from Iranian EFL teachers and learners' perspectives. For analyzing the interview data, content analysis was done, while for analyzing the questionnaire data, descriptive and inferential statistics were run. As the interview outcomes depicted, 24 EFL teacher success characteristics were stated by both the teachers and learners (See Appendix A) by both groups of teachers and learners. One justification for the emergence of this large number of characteristics shared by both groups may be the common educational, linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds experienced by both Iranian language teachers and learners. As stated by Bager-Elsborg (2017), Päuler-Kuppinger and Jucks (2017), Richards (2010), and Tsui (2009), cultural, educational, contextual, and personal histories, among other factors, affect the way teachers and students conceptualize good teaching.

Interestingly, all of the 15 most frequently mentioned characteristics (by both teachers and learners) were among the items of the scale used in the study which gives credence to the claim that, as a questionnaire developed in the context of Iran for examining Iranian EFL teachers' characteristics, Moafian and Pishghadam's (2009) scale



could cover a wide range of teacher qualities perceived to be crucial for teachers' success from the perspectives of both Iranian EFL learners and teachers. As these results indicated, *being knowledgeable regarding content and the English language* was the factor of most importance to both groups of learners and teachers. This finding was in agreement with previous studies in this regard reporting that being professionally competent at content and language is regarded as a crucial factor to become a successful language teacher (e.g., Borg, 2006; Brosh, 1996; Cakmak & Gunduz, 2018; Coombe, 2020; Richards, 2010; Zaid, 2019).

Besides, the teacher success qualities mentioned mutually by the teachers and learners in the present study were in line with what was found in previous studies (e.g., Çelik et al., 2013; Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2013; Prodromou, 1991; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2019; Wichae, 2010). For delineating other examples, it can be referred to the study of Chang (2016) maintaining that teachers who tended to show empathy toward students, treat students with respect and courtesy, and treat every student fairly were successful language teachers. Similarly, Campbell et al. (2003) identified being knowledgeable and giving a sufficient amount of instruction and practice to students as characteristics of successful teachers. Likewise, Coombe (2020) highlighted instructional effectiveness, professional knowledge, and good communication skills as features of competent second/foreign language teachers. Also, Alzebaree and Ali Hasan (2020) reported knowing the subject matter, being familiar with various teaching methods and techniques, showing empathy, care, respect, and interest toward all students, keeping one's knowledge up-to-date, motivating students, having a sense of humor, being interested in teaching, and being patient as essential qualities of effective language instructors.

Further results of interview data analysis revealed some teacher success qualities exclusively maintained by the learners. In this regard, the most frequent ones were *providing a relaxing, pleasant, and intimate classroom atmosphere, having a good English accent, being good-tempered, using examples in teaching, and helping students achieve their goals and needs*. As these characteristics were only stated by the learners, it can be justified that teachers may regard these qualities to be crucial to any instructor, not just successful language teachers, in particular. Furthermore, all these qualities were again among the items of the scale used in the study providing further proof to the overlap between the qualitative results of the study and the items of Moafian and Pishghadam's

(2009) scale. These qualities have been also found in other studies (e.g., Beck, 1967; Bernhardt & Hammadou, 1987; Mullock, 2003; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2019).

The final part of the interview results revealed some teacher success factors held only by the teachers. Among them were *being kind, being motivated, attending to emotional and mental aspects of learners and teaching, being experienced, and demonstrating classroom management skills*. In effect, as these factors were not noticed by the learners, it can be justified that exploring and valuing these factors can be only obtained as a result of the teachers' actual experience of and dealing with the process of foreign/second language instruction. During their teaching, teachers may gain more experience, experiment their theoretical knowledge, theorize from their practice, obtain feedback from colleagues, students, and parents, and supervise other teachers' classes. All these sources of data may help them better conceptualize the qualities that a successful EFL teacher must maintain. In line with other findings of the current study, the qualities uncovered in this section were also found to be included in the scale used in the study. These outcomes were also in congruence with those of previous studies reporting that being experienced, kind (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2019), competent at managing and organizing classroom, instruction, and practice (Campbell et al., 2003; Çelik et al., 2013; Stronge, 2007), motivated to learn life-long (Coombe, 2020), and attending to socio-affective aspects of language education (Zaid, 2019) were essential qualities of good English teachers.

The second part of the data pertained to the employment of the scale developed by Moafian and Pishghadam (2009). The results revealed that teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, and learning boosters were the three subscales ranked highest by both groups. This finding confirms the theoretically rich argument that quality communication between the teacher and students and good rapport between them is very essential for the successful performance of both the teacher and his/her students (Mazer, 2013). On the other hand, dynamism was ranked as the lowest significant factor by the learners, while class attendance was marked as the quality of the least importance by the teachers.

Furthermore, the results of Mann-Whitney U test analyses indicated that among the 12 subscales, learners and teachers had significantly different perspectives toward only the four subscales of interpersonal relationships, teaching boosters, creating a sense of

competence, and dynamism. As few areas of divergence were found regarding the perspectives of the two groups about the characteristics of successful language teachers, it can be concluded that this finding seems to provide promising results. As stated by Williams and Burden (1997), disagreements between learners' and teachers' perceptions can have debilitating effects on learners' academic accomplishments.

All in all, the results indicated that the Iranian EFL learners and teachers have brought many common characteristics into the spotlight. However, there exist some divergences regarding the weight the two groups attributed to being knowledgeable, patient, creative, up-to-date, disciplined and accurate, and using from various teaching methods, as teachers emphasized the above qualities more than the learners.

## **6. Conclusion**

All in all, based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that learners held a more restricted conceptualization of the features of successful EFL teachers, and therefore, named fewer attributes at the expense of other equally crucial characteristics of successful EFL teachers. Such a restricted conceptualization can largely be resulted by the learners' smaller cognitive repertoire, lack of actual experience of language teaching, less familiarity with the psychological, social, cultural, and other equally important aspects of language teaching, and experience as only learners or recipients in the ELT context, which in turn impedes a more thorough understanding of a variety of teacher success qualities. In contrast, teachers' perspectives can rest on a richer repertoire pertaining to the actual experience of giving instruction to learners, classroom observation opportunities which may be provided to them, the feedback they receive from colleagues, students, students' parents, and supervisors among others, peer communication, as well as their educational background, research undertakings, and continuous reflections on their practice (Farrell, 2015).

The results of the present study highlight the significance of attending to both teachers and learners' perspectives toward successful EFL teacher qualities as both groups play crucial roles in the maintenance and effectiveness of a language program. Therefore, none of the groups' perspectives should be taken into account at the expense of those of the other. In addition, the results of the current study can be redounded to the benefit of language school managers and supervisors when they want to enroll new teachers or when they are to evaluate the effectiveness of the teachers teaching in their language programs.

Besides, the findings can be applied in teacher education or teacher training programs in which pre-service or interested in-service teachers are prepared for performing efficiently at their job as an English language instructor. By uncovering learners' and teachers' own perspectives toward successful EFL teaching in such programs, the gap between theory and practice can be lessened by preparing future teachers for what endorsed to be essential for their successful performance in the context of education by not only the relevant theory but also the stakeholders actually involved in teachers' practice (Derakhshan, Coombe, Zhaleh, & Tabatabaeian, 2020).

The outcomes of the present study can also be informative to teachers when reflecting on their practice. In effect, teachers can put their own perspectives regarding their successful practice together with those of learners in the continuous process of reflection happening throughout their career journey to see how much they could flourish in themselves the qualities being important to their success from learners' and teachers' points of view. It should be also noted that by becoming aware of various parties' perspectives regarding the criteria of successful EFL teaching, teachers can develop a more equipped repertoire of factors aiding them in becoming effective teachers.

On the whole, the present research has some limitations that can be addressed in future studies. The study was mainly based on only 30 EFL teachers and 30 EFL learners selected from one province of Iran. Therefore, to reach more generalizable findings, future studies can include a larger sample size targeting participants from various parts of the country. Furthermore, to reach any generalization at the international scale, the findings of this study can be compared against those of others conducted in other cultures. In addition, to collect the required data, only interview and questionnaire instruments were employed. Future researchers may utilize other data collection strategies such as observation, journal writing, and diary writing to find access to other sources of relevant data. Future studies can also take other variables of significance into account such as teachers' or learners' age, field of study, and gender to examine their potential impacts on individuals' conceptions of successful FEL teaching.

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**Appendix A**

**EFL Teacher Success Characteristics Mutually Stated by the Learners and Teachers**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency L/T</b>
Knowledgeable regarding content and English language	15/18
Tailor instruction to all students' levels and needs	9/3
Competent at teaching and conveying knowledge to students	8/7
Sociable and high communication skills	7/6
Eloquent	5/2
Attend to and respect all students equally	4/3
Active and energetic	4/2
Sense of humor	4/1
Patient	3/7
Up-to-date content and language knowledge	3/5
Uses from new and different teaching methods and techniques	3/4
Motivate students to learn	3/1
Have empathy toward students	2/2
Creative	1/8
Disciplined and accurate	1/4
High self-confidence	1/2
Don't waste class time	1/2
Flexible	1/2
Moral behavior	1/1
Set reasonable expectations and responsibilities for students	1/1
Love his job as a teacher	1/1
Come to class with plan and preparation	1/1
Student-centered instruction	1/1
Equal attention to the four language skills	1/1

**Appendix B**

**EFL Teacher Success Characteristics Exclusively Stated by the Learners**



Characteristics	Frequency
Provide a relaxing, pleasant, and intimate classroom atmosphere	5
Good English accent	3
Good-tempered	3
Use from examples in teaching	3
Help students achieve their goals and needs	3
Encourage speaking opportunities in class	2
Use body language	2
Be intimate with students	2
Challenge students	2
Open to criticism	1
Hold appropriate tests in agreement with what was instructed	1

### Appendix C

#### EFL Teacher Success Characteristics Exclusively Stated by the Teachers

Characteristics	Frequency
Kind	5
Motivated	4
Attending to emotional and mental aspects of learners and teaching	4
Commitment and professional responsibility	2
Classroom management skills	2
Experienced	2
Reliable and honest	2
Assess students regularly	1
Know his/her students well	1
Research-oriented	1
Set clear instructional goals and achievement outcomes	1
Familiarity with culture of the target language	1

### Appendix D

#### Comparison of Learners and Teachers' Perspectives of Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers by Their Responses to the Questionnaire

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	Items	M/SD Learner (n=30)	M/SD Teacher (n=30)	t	Sig.
<b>Teaching accountability</b>	13. <u>likes</u> the subject matter he/she teaches.	4.77-0.50	4.60-0.72	-.76	.45
	21. <u>comes</u> to class prepared.	4.77-0.43	4.87-0.35	-.99	.32
	22. <u>answers</u> questions accurately and completely.	4.80-0.41	4.73-0.45	-.60	.54
	23. <u>emphasizes</u> important and key points.	4.60-0.62	4.70-0.60	-.78	.43
	26. is willing to help students in and out of the class.	4.37-0.76	4.50-0.73	-.74	.46
	30. <u>has</u> the ability to make students understand the materials.	4.63-0.61	4.87-0.35	-1.63	.10
	34. is open to criticism and accepts constructive suggestions.	4.63-0.55	4.60-0.62	-.09	.93
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32.57 2.85</b>	<b>32.87 2.47</b>	<b>-.115</b>	<b>.909</b>
<b>Interpersonal relationships</b>	3. makes intimate relationship with the students.	4.03 1.03	4.47 0.86	1.80	.07
	4. respects students.	4.70 0.53	4.87 0.43	1.59	.11
	5. <u>understands</u> students well.	4.53 0.73	4.83 0.46	2.03	.04
	7. is good-tempered.	4.57 0.77	4.60 0.50	.47	.63
	8. <u>is</u> patient.	4.50 0.86	4.77 0.43	.90	.36
	9. <u>has</u> a sense of humor and provides a fun and merry atmosphere in the class.	3.93 0.98	4.63 0.49	3.06	.00
	33. <u>respects</u> different attitudes.	4.83 0.46	4.73 0.52	.95	.33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31.10 3.90</b>	<b>32.90 2.45</b>	<b>-2.03</b>	<b>.04</b>
<b>Attention to all</b>	25. <u>pays</u> attention to every student.	4.40 0.93	4.60 0.72	.88	.37
	38. <u>involves</u> all students in the process of learning.	4.30 0.99	4.67 0.48	1.28	.19
	39. <u>provides</u> equal opportunity for participation of all students in the class.	4.40 0.81	4.77 0.43	1.73	.08
	40. <u>allows</u> students to participate in class discussions and ask questions.	4.50 0.73	4.73 0.45	1.10	.26
	41. <u>does</u> not discriminate between students.	4.67 0.55	4.60 0.72	-.09	.92
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22.27 3.48</b>	<b>23.37 2.14</b>	<b>-.77</b>	<b>.43</b>
<b>Examination</b>	19. <u>holds</u> sufficient and appropriate tests in line with what was instructed.	4.00 0.98	4.60 0.56	2.67	.00
	20. <u>returns</u> answers to tests in time.	4.57 0.68	4.50 0.63	.61	.54
	36. is fair and equitable in evaluation and grading.	4.53 0.68	4.73 0.74	1.81	.07
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13.10 1.86</b>	<b>13.83 1.37</b>	<b>-1.56</b>	<b>.11</b>
<b>Commitment</b>	1. <u>has</u> adequate knowledge regarding what <u>he/she</u> teaches.	4.67 0.61	4.87 0.43	1.62	.10
	2. has up-to-date knowledge.	4.53 0.68	4.73 0.52	1.19	.23
	47. <u>pays</u> attention to students' presence and absence in the class.	4.30 0.88	4.47 0.68	.56	.57
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13.50 1.59</b>	<b>14.07 1.20</b>	<b>-1.32</b>	<b>.18</b>

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Learning Boosters	10. is aware of new teaching techniques.	4.60	0.67	4.77	0.50	.96	.33
	27. encourages students in various ways.	4.37	0.93	4.60	0.56	.64	.52
	35. organizes materials very well for each session and for the whole course.	4.60	0.50	4.83	0.38	1.98	.04
	42. attends to students' educational problems.	4.43	0.82	4.83	0.38	2.15	.03
	43. with regard to course objectives, distributes classroom time appropriately for language skills.	4.67	0.55	4.83	0.38	1.25	.20
	46. improves students' confidence.	4.53	1.01	4.87	0.35	1.16	.24
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27.20</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>28.73</b>	<b>1.66</b>	-1.73	.08
Creating a sense of competence	15. is able to motivate and encourage learners for learning.	4.47	0.90	4.83	0.46	1.88	.06
	16. knows his/her students (weak/strong points).	3.27	1.01	4.17	0.83	2.12	.02
	17. uses from higher level students for the improvement of lower level students.	4.43	0.73	4.60	0.50	3.53	.00
	18. provides sufficient and appropriate assignments to students in line with the instructed materials.	4.27	0.98	4.77	0.43	.66	.50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>16.43</b>	<b>2.84</b>	<b>18.37</b>	<b>1.52</b>	-2.84	.00
Teaching boosters	6. can manage the class.	4.70	0.60	4.93	0.25	1.83	.06
	11. uses from appropriate teaching aids such as flash cards, movies, etc.	4.20	0.85	4.63	0.61	2.17	.02
	12. likes teaching.	4.67	0.66	4.80	0.41	.49	.62
	14. has high self-confidence.	4.73	0.52	4.73	0.52	.00	1.00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>18.30</b>	<b>1.88</b>	<b>19.10</b>	<b>1.35</b>	-2.10	.03
Physical and emotional acceptance	28. talks with clear and articulate pronunciation.	4.70	0.53	4.77	0.43	.36	.71
	29. has neat and orderly appearance.	4.40	0.81	4.73	0.45	1.49	.13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9.10</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>9.50</b>	<b>0.78</b>	-1.10	.27
Empathy	44. avoids belittling students for any reason.	4.80	0.48	4.83	0.38	.05	.95
	45. does not take hard unnecessarily.	4.43	1.01	4.73	0.45	.84	.39
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9.23</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>9.57</b>	<b>0.63</b>	-.80	.42
Class Attendance	31. attend classes on time.	4.77	0.50	4.63	0.56	1.11	.26
	32. leaves the class on time.	4.60	0.62	4.40	0.72	1.12	.26
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9.37</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>9.03</b>	<b>1.10</b>	-1.35	.17
Dynamism	24. is energetic and dynamic.	4.50	0.73	4.83	0.38	1.91	.05
	37. has creativity and diversity in teaching and does not depend solely on traditional methods.	4.50	0.78	4.80	0.41	1.43	.15
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9.00</b>	<b>1.26</b>	<b>9.63</b>	<b>0.67</b>	-2.11	.03