



---

**Research Article**

**Iranian EFL Teachers’ Perceptions of Professional Development, Creativity and Reflectivity**

**Mehdi Abbasi<sup>1</sup>, Fatemeh Behjat<sup>2</sup>, Mohammad Sadegh Bagheri<sup>3</sup>**

1. PhD Candidate, Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

2. Department of English, Abadeh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadeh, Iran

3. Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

\* Corresponding author: Fatemeh Behjat; Email: [fb304@yahoo.com](mailto:fb304@yahoo.com)

---

ARTICLE INFO

**Submission History**

Received: 2023-03-30

Accepted: 2023-05-03

**Keywords**

Teacher Education  
Professional Development  
Creativity Reflectivity

---

ABSTRACT

*Teachers are generally believed to be one of the most important elements in the success of any educational scheme. Therefore, it is vitally important that teachers be well-prepared when they begin teaching and continue to improve their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Despite the plethora of studies in teachers’ professional development, there is uncertainty about the relationships between teachers’ professional development and their capacity for creative and reflective thinking. Additionally, how these elements might fit into the larger context of teachers’ professional lives is under question. The present study was designed to explore the Iranian EFL teachers’ perceptions towards professional development, creativity and reflectivity. To do so, 10 EFL teachers were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The results indicated that teachers’ professional development, creative and reflective thinking contribute to developing language learners’ language proficiency and motivation. The findings of this study assist teacher educators when these factors are included in language teacher education programs, it helps second/foreign language learners promote their proficiency in different areas of language learning.*

---

**Introduction**

Teacher education programs include a knowledge base (e.g., linguistic knowledge and language learning theories) and the practical component that is drawn from language teaching methodology, linguistics, and second language acquisition (Richards, 1996). Although it can be simply stated that having a well-qualified teacher in

every classroom is the most important feature of education, applying strategies for its accomplishment is more complicated. In recent years, stakeholders have paid increasing attention not only to the quality of educator preparation programs but also to how to hold schools of education accountable to prepare high-quality educators. The pedagogy of teacher education is

determined by two main factors: (a) describing the essential qualities of a good teacher, and (b) how to make people good teachers. However, since students' success is not only affected by their teachers, finding precise measures for their educational achievement in education reform is difficult. (Crowe, 2010).

Investigating the development of teacher professional development can be very helpful in better understanding the way in which teachers learn to teach, as well as how they plan and implement teaching in their classrooms. In its early stages, teacher preparation allows the teacher candidates emerging teacher identities to shape how teacher candidates respond to theoretical and practical knowledge. They become familiar with teacher education courses and practicum. Based on the type of teacher they aspire to become in the future, prospective teachers set specific priorities concerning what competencies they deem they are required to develop or gain (Keiler, 2018). Besides, learning to teach allows for the evolution of their teacher identities, in particular through professional interactions, practice teaching, and self-reflection. Furthermore, starting their teaching careers, teachers come into contact with different contexts as they engage in interactions with their colleagues, students, as well as parents. The type of teacher they are or they wish to become specifies how they behave in those contexts, the responses they provide to varying issues, and the degree to which they are impacted by those issues and contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

EFL learners may need different types of support to develop their language skills just like the learners who learn the language in a supportive setting through engagement and practice. This support could be achieved by well-trained teachers in terms of professional abilities. Very scarce studies have investigated the role of teachers' professional development, creative and reflective thinking in the classroom. Since developing learners' language proficiency is the most prominent purpose of EFL learners, it seems that the present study could fill the gap in the literature by providing a more comprehensive picture

concerning the teachers' professional development, creative and reflective thinking. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to find the interplay among Iranian EFL teachers' professional development, creativity and reflective thinking.

## Review of the Literature

### Teachers' Professional Development

Teachers' professional development includes a body of accumulated and shared knowledge of the profession even though it may lack universal acceptance (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). The professional development of teachers has been studied in many different ways. Understanding that professional development is about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' development has been always at the core of their attention. According to Avalos (2011), "teacher professional learning is a complex process, which requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively" (p. 10).

It is needed to make a distinction between 'teacher professional development and 'teacher training'. Wallace (1991) defined training as the activities "presented or managed by others" (p. 3). The word 'others' refers to authorities including teacher trainers and educators who generally make decisions for teachers in the design and presentation of training courses.

In educational literature, the terms teacher education, teacher training, and teacher professional development are often used instead of each other, but from a technical perspective, there are some differences between these terms. These differences are important and should be considered in the process of designing a program for teachers. Teacher education is an umbrella term that includes both training and development. According to Freeman (2001), teacher education is the sum of experiences and activities through which

individuals learn to be language teachers. These experiences could be achieved in formal or informal contexts, in undergraduate, pre-service, or in-service activities.

Freeman (2001) believed that teacher training consists of compulsory and formal activities through which people learn to teach language. It has external content that includes phonology, applied linguistics, second language acquisition, methodology, and testing. This content could be presented through lectures, readings, projects, and case studies. Teacher training is a short-term program and is evaluated by trainers or by trainers and trainees together. Freeman (1989) mentioned that the main purpose of teacher training is to provide separate dimensions of skills and knowledge that will enhance teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. Head and Taylor (1997) stated that teacher training is mainly concerned with the knowledge of the subject matters and methods for its teaching. Teacher training focuses on classroom skills and techniques. Teacher training has a specific goal which is preparing students for a particular function or profession. While teacher training is known as a pre-service strategy, most in-service programs have both training and developmental strategies together (Freeman, 2001).

Broadly speaking, professional development refers to the development of employees in their professional roles. Professional development consists of informal experiences such as reading professional publications or watching professional videos related to the job and formal experiences such as participating in conferences, workshops, meetings, and so on (Ganser, 2000). The term professional development is broader than career development that is identified as the growth acquired as a result of the professional career cycle (Glatthorn, 1995).

From a more specific point of view, teacher development refers to "activities that provide continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal change and growth of teachers" (Lange, 1990, p. 205). These activities are fulfilled voluntarily and individually (Freeman, 2001). Wallace (1991)

emphasized that development could not be dictated, managed, or presented by others; it can be done only by the teacher. In other words, it is the teacher that feels the need for development and decides to develop his/her profession.

Teacher development is the professional growth that a teacher attains based on his/her own experience and systematic examination of teaching methodology (Glatthorn, 1995). The basis of teacher development is on teachers' experiences, attitudes, and cooperation with other teachers which is realized as a process by which teachers share their experiences and attitudes and interact individually or in groups for their professional development (Freeman, 2001).

Several studies have maintained that teachers' desire to enhance professional ability has a positive effect on different aspects of their teaching (Bullock, 2009; Shulman, 1987). Teachers' professional ability and their knowledge of the content and teaching methods is also a very significant factor in determining the shape of teachers' professional life and, by extension, their students' achievement (Loughran, 2005; Murray & Male, 2005). Both of the above factors are also very much related to how accountable teachers' decisions are and how well a teacher's performance in the classroom can be justified (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2000). However, despite the importance of such factors in determining the success of teachers, students, and educational systems, little is known about their inter-relationship. In other words, we are not sure of how teachers' professional ability, their creative and reflective thinking are linked together and how these factors can fit into the big picture of teachers' professional life.

EFL learners may need different types of support to develop their language skills just like the learners who learn a language in a supportive setting through engagement and practice. This support could be achieved by well-trained teachers in terms of professional abilities. Very scarce studies have investigated the role of teachers' professional ability, creative and reflective thinking in the

classroom. Since developing learners' language proficiency is the most prominent purpose of EFL learners, it seems that the present study could fill the gap in the literature by providing a more comprehensive picture concerning the teachers' professional ability, creative and reflective thinking.

Roe (1992) stated that since language teaching is a career for life, teaching development is a life-long process. In addition, continuing professional development could help teachers to be more effective in learning while teaching, to be notified by the latest developments in teaching, to share and even generate new ideas, to receive and give feedback by interaction with colleagues.

Fullan (1982) believed that professional development is all formal and informal learning experiences that a teacher experiences from pre-service teacher education to retirement. Inquiry, collaboration, and reflection are the basic components of professional development. A combination of these elements and skills provides more effective teacher education.

Reynolds (1992) highlighted that constant teacher development can solve the problems of a novice teacher during his/her first year of teaching experience. It is a necessary contributor to teachers' success and satisfaction in professional work today and other professions: materials writer, trainer, author, and researcher. Thus, teacher development is not for a certain point of teaching period; it can start at a very early period in the profession and continue until a very late period.

### Teachers' Reflective Thinking

As technology is changing, EFL teaching is becoming more fundamental in schools, universities, and institutes. In this regard, EFL teachers' reflective thinking and creativity are more influential than different methodologies, since successful teachers can use their own teaching methodologies besides the existing methods. Today, teachers have a great role in increasing language learners' efficiencies. They try to increase their teaching quality using their talents and

creativity to turn students into learners. It does not happen unless the traditional definition of EFL teaching is changed.

Reflection is the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, as cited in Senese, 2017, p. 9). Reflective thinking begins with a state of doubt and hesitation focuses on the act of searching to find material that will resolve, clarify, or otherwise address the doubt. This may consist of experience or relevant knowledge, neither of which necessarily leads to reflective thought: "To be genuinely thoughtful, we must be willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt which is the stimulus to thorough inquiry" (as cited in Senese, 2017, p. 16). Moreover, Dewey believed that thinking was natural but that reflective habits of mind needed to be taught. Attitudes play an important role in acquiring reflective habits. Attitudes that should be cultivated include open-mindedness, "freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and such other habits as close the mind" (p. 30); whole-heartedness, "genuine enthusiasm" and responsibility, "to consider the consequences of a projected step and to be willing to adopt these consequences when they follow reasonably from any position already taken" (p. 32). The teacher's role is significant to sustain the reflective thought of individual students. Dewey claimed that reflection benefits individuals by giving them more control over the experience and thereby increasing the value of experience. We assume that "more reflective teacher actions will lead to greater benefits for the teacher and all of his or her pupils" (Zeichner & Liston, 1987, p. 25).

Reflective thinking, according to Boyd and Fales (2013, p. 110), is the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and makes sense of the meaning of the self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective. Reflective thinking is the key element in learning from experience. Reflective thinking emphasizes the self as the source of learning and is, therefore, an individual and interactive process.

Studies that examined the effects of specific interventions on the quality of reflective thinking in journals include Stahlhut and Hawkes (2017), who compared the effects of different tools (written journals, telecommunications, personal conferences) on reflection. They found that pre-service teachers tended to reflect on issues of personal self-worth and professional performance and that they used each tool for different purposes (e.g., they used telecommunications for urgent issues).

Loughran (2017) investigated how his modeling of reflection through think-aloud and journal sharing affected student teachers' reflection. He claimed that these strategies helped pre-service teachers better understand the process. According to Loughran's work, Freese (1999) used a three-part framework, journals, and videotape analyses to help prospective teachers reflect on their lessons. She found that "an organizing framework can assist pre-service teachers in evaluating their experiences and making sense of their teaching" (p. 907).

In another study, Chirema (2017) investigated the use of reflective journals in promoting reflection and learning in post-registration nursing students. He found that students' writing reveals if they were thinking reflectively. It also shows that reflective journal writing can encourage reflection and make students aware of their learning achievements.

Williams (2018) examined the use of reflective journal writing in an 8th-grade classroom. The study revealed that journal writing led to greater class participation, stronger academic achievement, and a better opportunity for students to connect with the subject matter.

Galvez-Martin, Bowman and Morrison (1998) used experimental and control groups to determine the impact of training on reflection. They found that pre-service teachers who received training in reflection were more reflective, but they did not achieve what the researchers defined as the highest level of reflection.

## Teachers' Creativity

As happens with the concept of creativity, people tend to have their images of the meaning of creative teaching, which do not necessarily coincide with the specialized literature. Fryer and Collings (1991), for example, reported that, in a study with more than 1,000 British teachers, from various educational levels, the vast majority tended to view creativity as "divergent thinking", and only a tenth recognized that it also involved convergent thinking. Fryer (as cited in Stein, 2014) also pointed out that people tend to see creativity as arts-related, not science-related, and that if the respondents to the questionnaire had been provided with a definition of creativity, "the differences in the way the various groups of teachers perceive creativity would not have become apparent" (p. 34).

When looking in the literature for definitions of creative teaching, the majority of the authors who write about it avoid providing such a definition, preferring to list series of behaviors, approaches, or strategies that characterize creative teaching. Torrance (1998), one of the main researchers in this field, never provided such a definition, but only of creative learning, "to help the students learn new material in ways that will enable them to transfer what they learned to new problems" (p. 205). Another definition is related to the development of students' cognitive abilities, as in Whitman's (1983) definition, "teaching students to use strategies for representing and processing new information in ways that lead to problem-solving transfer" (p. 5).

Osborn (2006) defined creative teaching as "the type of teaching which causes students to think as they learn" (p. 51). A definition directed to relational and emotional aspects is provided by Slabbert (1994), "creative teaching is to be sensitive to the individual's conception of himself and his role in the classroom" (p. 23). Bozik (2017) defined creative teaching, in close relation to the classroom environment, as "to make classes contemporary and stimulant; innovation, variety, and challenge must be apparent; or to be able to identify needs, read a situation, preparedness to take risks and

capability in monitoring and evaluating events” (p. 42).

Giannouli (2018) made an effort to clarify the views of a sample of aspiring teachers in Greece while also assessing their familiarity with and attitudes towards creative thinking. The findings showed that respondents lacked practical experience and the necessary skills in the areas of creative thinking and reflective teaching during their formal university education.

Catalana (2020) investigated three factors that pre-service teachers who showed advanced reflective practice on their fieldwork experiences shared in common: (a) creative capacity; (b) honesty in addressing preconceived notions about the teaching profession; and (c) fieldwork in foreign environments. Using the Framework of Four Levels of Reflection for Teacher Education developed by Harland and Wondras (2011), reflective papers from 42 pre-service teachers were submitted. These papers were qualitatively analysed and assessed for reflective abilities. The findings showed that High Reflectors generally had higher creative potential than Low Reflectors, with a significant difference ( $p .05$ ) in mean scores on the subscale measuring the abstractness of titles. High Reflectors openly challenged prior educational beliefs and described their field experiences as being foreign to their own educational experiences.

In the context of Iran, the impact of teachers' reflection and experience on their creativity in language institutions was examined by Rezaei Fard et al. (2017). In order to do this, 80 teachers were chosen at random from various language institutes based on the following factors: level of teaching, degree, and gender. Throughout the study, the participants were required to complete two sets of common questionnaires. The results of data analysis and statistical calculations showed a significant correlation between the teachers' ability to reflect and their capacity for innovation. Along with teachers' years of experience, there was a significant correlation between reflectivity and creativity.

Azimifar and Abedini (2018) discovered a statistically significant association between instructors' creativity and classroom management. There was, however, no statistically significant difference between males and females in the association between Iranian teachers' creativity and classroom management. Soodmand Afshar and Hosseini Yar (2018) discovered a significant positive relationship between Iranian EFL teachers': a) reflective teaching and job performance, b) self-efficacy and job performance, and c) attitude towards professional development and job performance in another study. According to the findings, Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy was a better predictor of their job success. Furthermore, the qualitative data analysis of the interviews revealed that self-efficacy, professional development, and reflective teaching could lead to Iranian EFL teachers' better job performance.

This study might support teachers by encouraging the use of surveys to determine what motivates and reaches each student in the classroom through creative and reflective teaching while improving the related knowledge and strategies. This study, therefore, aimed at examining the Iranian English teachers' perceptions of their reflective thinking, creative thinking, and professional ability. It should be noted that the Iranian context could be much different from teaching contexts in other countries in terms of the available development opportunities, institutional restrictions, and also teachers' freedom in making and standing by different educational decisions. Therefore, the findings of the present study could shed light on the relationship between and among our variables.

- What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of their reflective thinking, creative thinking, and professional ability?

## Method

### Participants

To conduct the study, 10 Iranian EFL teachers participated in this study. Regarding academic achievement, it should be mentioned that two

participants held a doctorate, four had a master's degree, and four had a bachelor's degree in one of the English-related majors of universities in Iran – English literature, English teaching, English translation, and linguistics. The sample enjoyed a great diversity of demographic features. The participants' age range varied from 20 to 45, and their teaching history also covered a scope of between 2 to 15 years. They were selected based on convenience sampling. Teachers also had different degrees of education. They were deemed qualified to teach English by the conventional standards of private English institutes in Shiraz as they had all successfully passed a teacher training course, and their performance had been evaluated through several rounds of demos by the supervisors of the institutes they worked in.

### Design of the Study

The design of this study is qualitative. This design is characterized by qualitative data collection and analysis. To this end, this study used two semi-structured interviews which dealt with collecting information to answer the research question of the study.

### Data Collection Procedure

Ten participants who were available to the researcher were selected to take part in the interview. To seek out how the participants conceptualize their professional ability, they were interviewed face-to-face by the researcher. Qualitative interviewing “is based on conversation, with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents' answering” (Rubin & Rubin, cited in Warren, 2002, p. 83). In this method of interview, interviewees are considered as “meaning-makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers” (Holstin & Gubrium, as cited in Warren, 2002, p. 83).

The interview questions for professional development were as follow:

1. To what extent is innovative teaching important to teachers?
2. Why is a training plan for teachers so important?

3. How are students' behavior and discipline important to them?
4. What changes in work responsibilities make the job attractive?
5. How does feedback help teachers with teaching?
6. How does feedback would lead teachers to job satisfaction?
7. What kind of class atmosphere is needed for effective teaching?
8. How do the teachers facilitate students' inquiry?
9. To what extent do the teachers agree with students learning through finding solutions to their problems?
10. Name the worthiest things you accomplished.
11. Do you consider yourself as an effective or good teacher?
- 12.

The interview questions for creative thinking were as follows:

1. Talk about creative thinking when it comes to their mind.
2. Does working with people put stress on them?
3. Do you encourage students to ask questions and think independently?
4. Did you influence your students' lives and how did it happen?

The interview questions for reflective thinking are described as follows:

1. Do you use video and audio recording, writing, drawing, and photography in your classroom teaching? If yes, what benefits do you see from these practices or tools?
2. Have you ever asked yourself the same questions with the following questions about a particular teaching episode?
  - a. Please explain why?
  - b. What have I been doing? / What am I doing?
  - c. What has happened? What is happening?
  - d. What led up to this?
  - e. And why?

3. Do you think team working can support your teaching? What benefits do you see in team working?
4. Could you describe the strengths and the weaknesses of your teaching methods? What are your suggestions to improve the weakness?
5. When you face a problem in the classroom setting, how do you solve the problem?

The kind of interview conducted in this study was a semi-structured one. In this type of interview, the whole process of interviewing changes throughout the continuum of highly-structured to highly unstructured in that the predetermined questions were not necessarily asked in a fixed order but rather in a more flexible manner. Moreover, the answers were not pre-determined in the form of any response category. During interviews, the interviewees were allowed to answer the questions and proceed in their way in an informal manner (Flick, 1998). It should be noted that the interview questions came from an extensive review of the related literature pertinent to teacher education. To assure the content validity of the questions, two experts were consulted. To this end, the initial list of questions was reviewed by two Ph.D. holders in the field of TEFL and due revisions were carried out.

## Results

The qualitative analysis of the data includes the analysis of the 10 teachers' responses to a semi-structured interview. The teachers were interviewed on teachers' reflective thinking, creative thinking, and professional development.

### Results of the Interview on Reflective Thinking

The reflective thinking interview questions revolved around five main skills of reflective thinking consisting of observation, communication, judgment, decision-making, and team working. These skills were based on Mirzaei, Phang, and Kashefi's (2014) reflective thinking measurement. Therefore, the purpose was to find out whether

EFL teachers use these skills in their classes. It consists of five questions, the first of which introduces the concept of reflective thinking, teachers' reflective thinking abilities, and ways in which instructors use these abilities in the classroom (Question 1). A question (Question 2) is then asked to help the reader comprehend that these abilities come from teachers' training or experience. The purpose of Question 3 is to highlight the differences between the reflective thinking abilities of new and seasoned instructors and the abilities they must use in the classroom. The final two questions (Question 4 and Question 5) in the open-ended survey seek to understand how to close any gaps and the significance of experience in developing reflective thinking abilities.

First, the teachers' responses to the reflective thinking variable were studied. Regarding *observation skills*, all the respondents stated that they apply observation instruments such as video and audio-recording, writing, drawing, and photography for recording classroom teaching. They perceived these practices beneficial for their teaching in the classroom. Concerning the assessment of their teaching process, two teachers mentioned that they assess their successes; three stated that they assess their weaknesses; three of them assess their difficulties and two teachers assess their strengths. All of them believed that the assessment helps them to improve their teaching quality.

The teachers' *communication skill* deals with reflective thinking instruments such as journal learning, diary or professional portfolio in the classroom. Eight teachers stated that they do not have any lesson plan, portfolio, or diary. All of them believed that these tools help them improve their teaching. Four teachers mentioned that asking learners about their teaching method would help them improve their teaching while six others did not believe in this. Seven teachers stated that they have communication with their colleagues regarding their teaching methods and they added that this communication helps them improve their teaching by studying their weaknesses and



strengths. Nine teachers stated that direct question and answer is the best way to communicate with their students about their challenges in different situations. One teacher believed that other communication tools such as text messaging could be more useful for communication with the students.

Another skill of reflective thinking is the *team working*. All teachers responded that they did not work together with other colleagues. Just two teachers believed that team working could support their teaching. No teacher experienced co-teaching. Moreover, no one did action research in the classroom.

In the *judgment skill* of reflective thinking, EFL teachers should understand the circumstance that happens unprejudiced in the classroom and explain and inquire why the occasion happened and interpret the circumstance. In this part, six teachers thought about evaluating their teaching method. In addition, all teachers stated that they asked themselves about their teaching methods. Eight teachers mentioned that they could describe the strength and weaknesses of their teaching methods. Just 4 teachers stated that they like students or another teacher to evaluate their teaching method. Besides, four teachers believed that evaluating their teaching method by the students or other teachers could help them improve their teaching method.

Finally, in *decision-making skills*, teachers said they can solve the complexities of the teaching process by utilizing different types of reflective practice strategies decisions. The participants of the interview were asked how to solve their problems in the classroom setting, five teachers stated that they try to use their past experiences. One teacher stated that he prefers to stop the process and think about the problem and find a way to solve it. Two teachers stated that they ask the students to help them and finally, two teachers stated that they skip and try to think about it outside the classroom in

their free time. EFL teachers were asked how they dealt with emotional problems. One of them said by creating a close relationship and talking to students, they could be able to deal with the emotional problems; four teachers said that any emotion had an opposite side, so they focused on the opposite to neutralize the problems. Five others said that the teachers could do nothing since it was the students' job to help themselves.

The teachers were asked how they dealt with students' problems effectively, Six of them told by encouraging students to talk to them and have a close relationship in order to find suitable solutions. Four teachers said they attempted to expand their views to find a solution, create positive authentic behavior, and keep them away from problems.

Regarding teachers' thinking about the *teaching-learning process*, six teachers stated that they always think about their teaching process after class hours. All teachers believed that their awareness of teaching weaknesses and strengths helps them to make decisions for future actions. Finally, all the participants stated that they tested their decision-making.

### Results of Interview on Creative Thinking

The next variable, which was studied in the interview, was teachers' *creative thinking*. First, teachers were asked to talk about creative thinking when it comes to their minds. Here are some direct responses by teachers:

*"We can develop students' skills to think in a creative way with the current pieces of equipment"*.

*"Creative students are successful. Creative thinking is based on the free transmission of knowledge and information"*.

*"Individual assignments based on problem-solving would stimulate creativity". "Content knowledge is not enough; we need critical*

*thinking and problem-solving skills to provide creativity”.*

*“The classroom should be a place where the students feel safe and develop self-confidence away from criticism”.*

The most important points from the teachers' responses are that creative thinking is based on the free transmission of knowledge and information, and that individual assignments based on problem-solving would stimulate creativity. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are needed to provide creativity, and that the classroom should be a place where students feel safe and develop self-confidence away from criticism.

In the second question, they were asked whether working with people put stress on them or not, the responses were different, one teacher answered positively and said, *“I got stressed especially when people bring negative emotions to work”.*

The rest answered negatively because they liked their job.

All the teachers responded positively when they were asked whether they encourage students to ask questions and think independently. All teachers believed that they ask questions to encourage the students to think deeply about the topic during discussion. Most of the teachers (eight out of 10) said that they inspire their students to find more than one solution to a problem and at the same time prepare questions for the students to answer by themselves. All the teachers stated that they allow their students to exchange ideas and opinions. Five teachers stated that they use a range of communication technologies in their class. Eight teachers said that they reward originality and creativity.

EFL teachers were asked whether they influenced their students' lives and how it happened, five of them said yes and mentioned the

ways such as making the students happy, and creating a positive atmosphere by behaving well, on the contrary five of them said no. Finally, all teachers believed that creative thinking is an essential skill to be nurtured in schools.

### **Results of the Interview on Professional Development**

Finally, the teachers' *professional development* was the subject of the interview with teachers. The results are provided as follows: In the first question of professional development, teachers were asked to what extent innovative teaching was important to them. All of them replied a lot. Besides, four teachers said that it made students more interested in learning, three of them said that by innovative teaching, students are surprised, and three of them said that it shows teachers' productivity, gets students' attention, and provides effective learning.

Then, the teachers were asked why a training plan is so important, three teachers said that it makes the teaching attractive that leads to attracting students' attention; two of them said that it is a good way for teachers to face new ideas, tips, and useful hints for teaching well. The rest answers were related to increasing teachers' creativity and knowledge.

The participants were asked how students' behavior and discipline are important to them; all of them said that both of these issues are so important because nothing can be reached the destination without these two factors, they are essential for improving and controlling the classroom.

Next, EFL teachers were asked about the changes in work responsibilities that make the job attractive. Generally speaking, the answers were the same; they all acknowledged that changing materials such as books, decoration of the class, and new methods and utilizing technology make their job more attractive. The teachers were asked

how feedback help them with teaching. Six teachers said that it helps them with improving and changing the weak points of teaching into positive points; four teachers mentioned that it helps them to build up their later skills, and affected their job improvement. They were also asked how feedback would lead to job satisfaction; two teachers expressed that it was done just by students' exam results; eight teachers replied that by eliminating the weak points and changing the teaching methodology.

The teachers were asked what kind of class atmosphere is needed for effective teaching. They all supported a friendly, alive, competitive, and academic atmosphere plus an energetic class. The teachers were asked how they facilitate students' inquiry: three teachers said by providing examples; four teachers said by knowing students' needs; three teachers said by listening to their demands and paving the road for progress.

The participants were asked to what extent they agreed with students learning through finding solutions to their problems; all of them said one hundred percent. One of the participants said a proverb 'easy come, easy go'. The rest of them confirmed that this type of learning made students independent, stronger, and capable to pave the difficulties of the road; they added that problems without solutions are like books wrapped up with papers.

The interviewees were asked to name the worthiest things they accomplished. Three of them replied 'achieving their goals'; two said that observing the students' progress; two mentioned getting experienced with different behavior; three teachers said being academic; teaching enthusiastically, being friendly, getting familiar with different aspects of science such as sociology, philosophy, psychology and at last teaching them to communicate.

Finally, teachers were asked whether they considered themselves effective teachers or good

teachers. Four teachers did not consider themselves as good teachers because they believed that they need much more knowledge and creativity, but six others considered themselves effective teachers since they found their students successful in their exams and received positive feedback from the students. They also added that they always try to freshen their knowledge of English and use new methods of teaching.

## Discussion

The results of this study supported the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' professional development, creative and reflective thinking. It can be inferred that Teachers' professional development is influenced by a number of factors that have a dramatic effect not only on the success or failure of the students but on different aspects of their own teaching profession. These factors include knowledge of the subject matter (the command of English in case of English teachers), the ability to skillfully translate it into easily comprehensible teaching materials and activities and transfer it to students, and the creativity and reflectivity for updating such knowledge and abilities are some of the key factors in getting to know about the backbones of teachers' decisions. These findings can support previous similar studies such as Catalana (2020), Rezaei Fard et al. (2017), Azimifar and Abedini (2018), and Soodmand Afshar and Hosseini Yar (2018).

The results of interview on professional development showed that EFL teachers believed that they somehow describe the language system, plan, manage and implement instruction and do assessment tasks. It was found that most of the teachers were flexible enough to change their ideas and at the same time provide different ideas to affect their students.

On the other hand, teachers' desire for ongoing professional development is partly indicative of their motivation for helping students learn. It is, possibly, this motivation that pushes teachers to learn about teaching. It can also encourage teachers to get involved in educational trials and errors in order to find out what is most suitable for a particular context (Krim, 2009).

Ongoing professional development means a non-stop desire to learn about the specificities of any given teaching context. This ongoing learning is not an added benefit to teachers' classroom practice but a defining element since teachers are continually required to work in several settings with quite different, if not contradictory, standards (Head & Taylor, 1997). Knowing about such context-specificities, which can be part of professional development, is, therefore, a prerequisite to context-wiseness and higher teacher capacity.

The present finding is in agreement with the findings of Elmore (2002) who believes that professional development plays a significant role in high-quality performance. He suggests that Professional development acts as a capacity-building device to the extent that it is linked and makes a relationship among the three portals (teacher, student, content) of teacher capacity.

According to Jones and Moreland (2004), the increase in the contents of pedagogical knowledge resulted in enhanced teacher's professional development including the nature of professionalism, enhanced teacher-student interaction, refinement of appropriate learning outcomes, critical decision-making, improved teacher confidence, and enhanced student learning. The results of the present study also approved the findings of Jones and Moreland (2004).

The results of this study also confirmed what Adediwura and Tayo (2007) found in their study. They investigated the relationship between Nigerian students' perception of teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, attitude to work, and teaching skills on students' academic performance. The result showed that students' perception of teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, attitude to work, and teaching skills have a significant relationship with students' academic performance.

The results from Shulman's (1986) study were interpreted as meaning that a teacher's pedagogical knowledge is important in student's success. Furthermore, there is a relationship between

student's perception and their motivation. This is the point that was significantly showed in this study.

## Conclusion

The results of the qualitative analysis using semi-structured interviews showed that, concerning reflective thinking, EFL teachers believed that they applied observation and assessment tools, communication skills, decision-making skills in the classroom. Furthermore, their awareness of teaching weaknesses and strengths helped them to improve their teaching quality. However, they were not able to use team working or co-teaching and judgment skills.

The participants of the study perceived creative thinking as one of the necessities of their language classroom, but their attempts to provide conditions to apply it was not enough. Regarding teachers' professional development, the results of the interview revealed that most of the EFL teachers mentioned that innovative teaching methods, teachers' creativity, and knowledge are important to them. Furthermore, they added that changing materials such as books, decoration of the class, and new methods and utilizing technology make their job more attractive, they tend to make their class friendly, alive, competitive, and academic atmosphere plus an energetic, and they always try to freshen their knowledge of English using new methods of teaching.

The findings of the present study can have implications for several groups. The present results can be part of a bigger jigsaw puzzle of the teacher personality map. Such a map can help educational systems in different ways. It can help teacher education programs in helping improve the professional development of the teachers. These findings in combination with the findings of similar studies can also help policymakers to develop a realistic picture of what and how much burden can be put on teachers' shoulders and how much should be expected from them.

Such studies will also be of use in teacher recruitment procedures by shedding light on different aspects of the teacher decision-making process and knowledge. The insights gained through such kinds of studies can also be included

in designing pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

The sampling used in this study was convenient sampling. Therefore, the data which have been obtained in the present study cannot be generalized to the whole population, since randomization is not included during the sampling and selection process. due to different factors such as lack of time, fatigue, and the act of saving one's image, and so on, only semi-structured interview was conducted. Even though the researchers attempted to minimize this limitation by giving full explanation and clarification on some of the concepts, some teachers might not have responded based on the learning concepts the items represented. The present study was undertaken among EFL teachers. Other researchers could make a comparative study between EFL and ESL teachers or between EFL and native speaker teachers.

## References

- Adediwura, A. A., & Tayo, B. (2007). Perception of teachers' knowledge, attitude and teaching skills as predictor of academic performance in Nigerian secondary schools. *Educational Research and Reviews, 2*(7), 165-171.
- Avalos, B. (2011). Teacher professional development in teaching and teacher education over ten years. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*(1), 10-20.
- Azimifar, R., & Abedini, F. (2018). Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Creativity and Their Classroom Management. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research, 5*(3), 218-230.
- Boyd, E. M., & Fales, A. W. (2013). Reflective learning: Key to learning from experience. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 23*(2), 99-117.
- Bozik, M. (2017). Teachers as creative decision makers. *Action in Teacher Education, 12*(1), 50-54.
- Bullock, S. M. (2009). Learning to think like a teacher educator: Making the substantive and syntactic structures of teaching explicit through self-study. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice, 15*(2), 291-304.
- Catalana, S. M. (2020). Indicators of impactful reflection in pre-service teachers: A case for creativity, honesty and unfamiliar experiences. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 14*(1), 1-12.
- Chirema, K. D. (2017). The use of reflective journals in the promotion of reflection and learning in post-registration nursing students. *Nurse education today, 27*(3), 192-202.
- Cohen, D. K., Raudenbush, S. W., & Ball, D. L. (2000). *Resources, instruction, and research: A CTP working paper*. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2020). Accountability in teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education, 42*(1), 60-71.
- Elmore, R. F. (2002). Bridging the gap between standards and achievement: The imperative for professional development in education. *Secondary lenses on learning participant book: Team leadership for mathematics in middle and high schools, 313-344*.
- Flick, U. (1998). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Freeman, D. (1989). Teacher training, development, and decision-making: A model of teaching and related strategies for language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly, 23*(1), 27-45.
- Freeman, D. (2001). Second language teacher education. *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages, 72-79*.
- Freese, A. R. (1999). The role of reflection on preservice teachers' development in the context of a professional development school. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15*(8), 895-909.
- Fryer, M., & Collings, Y. (1991). British teacher views of creativity. *Journal of Creativity and Behavior, 25*(1), 7-14.
- Fullan, M. (1982). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Galvez-Martin, M. E., Bowman, C. L., & Morrison, M. A. (1998). An exploratory study of the level of reflection attained by preservice teachers. *Midwestern Educ. Res, 11*(2), 9-18.
- Ganser, T. (2000). An ambitious vision of professional development for teachers. *NASSP bulletin, 84*(618), 6-12.
- Glatthorn, A. A. (1995). *Content of the curriculum*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 (Stock No. 195207; \$18.95).
- Head, K., & Taylor, P. (1997). *Readings in teacher development*. Heinemann.
- Holstein, J. A. (2002). *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*. Sage.
- Jones, A., & Moreland, J. (2004). Enhancing practicing primary school teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in technology. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education, 14*(2), 121-140.

- Keiler, L. S. (2018). Teachers' roles and identities in student-centered classrooms. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 5(1), 1-20.
- Krim, J. S. (2009). *Critical reflection and teacher capacity: The secondary science pre-service teacher population* (Doctoral dissertation, Montana State University-Bozeman, College of Education, Health & Human Development).
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. Routledge.
- Lange, D. (1990). A blueprint for teacher development. In Jack Richards and David Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education*. CUP: New York.
- Loughran, J. (2005). Researching teaching about teaching: Self-study of teacher education practices. *Studying teacher education*, 1(1), 5-16.
- Loughran, J. (2017). Foreword. In R. Brandenburg, K. Glasswell, M. Jones, & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Reflective theory and practice in teacher education* (pp. iv-vi). Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Mirzaei, F., Phang, F. A., & Kashefi, H. (2014). Measuring teachers reflective thinking skills. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 141, 640-647.
- Murray, J., & Male, T. (2005). Becoming a teacher educator: Evidence from the field. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(2), 125-142.
- Osborn, M. (2006). Changing the context of teachers' work and professional development: A European perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 45(4-5), 242-253.
- Reynolds, A. J. (1992). Grade retention and school adjustment: An explanatory analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 14(2), 101-121.
- Rezaei Fard, Z., Talebinezhad, M. R., & Eghlidi, M. (2017). The effect of teachers' reflection and experience on their creativity: A case study of language institutes in Eghlid and Abadeh cities. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 4(7), 132-140.
- Richards, J. C. (1996). Teachers' maxims in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(2), 281-296.
- Roe, P.J. (1992). Career pathways for teachers: The way ahead. In A. Daventry, A. J. Mountford, and H. Umunç (Eds.), *Tradition and Innovation-ELT and teacher training in the 1990s*. Ankara: British Council
- Senese J. C. (2017). How do I know what I think I know? Teaching reflection to improve practice. In R. Brandenburg, K. Glasswell, M. Jones & J. Ryan (Eds). *Reflective theory and practice in teacher education. Self-study of teaching and teacher education practices*, 17. Springer, Singapore.
- Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1-23.
- Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4-14.
- Slabbert, J. A. (1994). Creativity in education revisited: Reflection in aid of progression. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 28(1), 60-69.
- Soodmand Afshar, H., & Hosseini Yar, S. (2019). Investigating the relationship between attitude towards professional development, reflective teaching, self-efficacy, and job performance of Iranian English as a foreign language teachers. *Teaching English Language*, 13(2), 147-179.
- Stahlhut, R. G., & Hawkes, R. R. (2017). *An examination of reflective thinking through a study of written journals, telecommunications, and personal conferences*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Teacher Educators, Washington, DC, USA.
- Stein, M. I. (2014). *Stimulating creativity: Individual procedures*. Academic Press.
- Torrance, E. P. (1998). *The Torrance tests of creative thinking norms—technical manual figural (streamlined) forms A & B*. Bensenville, IL: Scholastic Testing Service, Inc.
- Wallace, W. (1991). Foreign policy and national identity in the United Kingdom. *International Affairs*, 67(1), 65-80.
- Warren, CA (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J. G. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 83-99), Sage.
- Whitman, N. (1983). Teaching problem solving and creativity in college courses. *AAHB-ERIC/Higher Education Research Currents*, 2-7.
- Williams, S. (2018). Developing the capacity of culturally competent leaders to redress inequitable outcomes: Increasing opportunities for historically marginalized students. *Administrative Issues Journal*, 8(1), 5.
- Zeichner, K. & Liston, D. (1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 23-49. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.57.1.j18v7162275t1w3w>