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Exploring the Characteristics of Iranian EFL Teachers from the Perspectives of Educators, Teachers and Learners

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Abstract

Research on the characteristics of effective EFL teachers integrates many constructs, which are treated independently in most cases. Consequently, the present study aims to explore the perspectives of teacher educators, teachers, and learners with regards to teacher effectiveness as an attempt to reduce the mismatches. To meet this aim, 34 teacher educators, 39 teachers, and 161 learners engaged in the context of university and language institute were selected on the basis of convenience and criterion sampling to respond to the 30 items on a 5- point Likert- scale questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of items related to subject matter knowledge, teachers' personal and interpersonal aspects, and approaches to language teaching. While the English questionnaire was distributed among the teacher educators and teachers, the Persian version of the questionnaire was handed over to the learners in the institute to be returned within a week's time. Moreover, the questionnaire was available online to enrich the data collected. The ANOVA results indicated that the perceptions of teacher educators and teachers were quite similar, but were significantly different from the perspectives of the learners. Additionally, based on MANOVA analysis, it was revealed that the differences existed mostly in the category of 'subject matter,' whereas there was a strong agreement regarding 'personal and interpersonal features' of effective EFL teachers. The findings of the study may be fruitful for EFL curriculum developers, administrators, teacher educators, teachers and language learners.

Keywords: educational perspectives, effective EFL teachers, teacher educators, teachers' beliefs, learners' beliefs

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1. Introduction

Due to the noticeable expansion in trends in education, attempts have been made by a large number of researchers to provide guidelines with the aim to improve the standards of teaching for better learning outcomes. While earlier work focused on defining the characteristics of learners, attention gradually began to shift towards characterizing teachers. The characterization of teachers flourished to a great extent after the concept of *post method condition* put forward by Kumaravadivelu (1994) and researchers began to notice and investigate the characteristics of teachers as being equally important as other education-related variables (Cohen, 2010; Johnston & Ahtee, 2006).

Teachers have a significant role in an educational system, as they are entrusted with a great responsibility of students' achievement and provision of different opportunities for their learners to both discover their talents and abilities to obtain the necessary skills on the path of self-actualization (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004). The need to distinguish English language teachers from those teaching other subjects has been pointed out by many researchers, such as Borg (2006), Brown (2001), and Lee (2010). The results of their studies have documented the distinctive characteristics of English as a unique subject and teachers teaching English as a foreign language. Additionally, emphasis in the post-method period has shifted from static methodological packs towards the teachers' professional knowledge, understanding, experience, learners and administrative needs and conditions (Richards, 2002).

Kumaravadivelu's (2006) emphasis on the need of change in teacher education from a transmission model to exploratory one can be reflected in his statement of "the postmethod condition enables practitioners to construct classroom-oriented theories of practice" (p. 29). Therefore, it can be concluded that not only do foreign language teachers need to be characterized on the basis of the subject they teach, but also the context in which they are situated. They cannot simply be presented with a set of procedures and methodology to be carried out in their classrooms in order to achieve successful outcomes. Besides, this matter needs to be investigated through different lenses of its members, as the beliefs and perceptions of the teachers, students, and teacher educators regarding the term 'effectiveness' may vary accordingly.

1.1 Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

Examining teachers' qualitative features has become an interesting trend in education (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004) leading researchers to consider several variables, such as the teacher's knowledge (Akbari, Behzadpoor, & Dadvand, 2010; Freeman, 2002; Mullock, 2006) and emotions (Hargreaves, 2005; Reio Jr., 2005). Teachers' effectiveness is considered to be the most important aspect of high quality education affecting the educational and career aspirations of children, and an urgency is felt to better understand the characteristics of effective language teachers with respect to learners in a particular institutional and sociocultural context (Borg, 2006; Day, 2012).

Most of the research studies in this realm explored the characteristics of effective EFL teachers from the perspectives of one of the three groups, namely teacher educators (Skelton, 2004), teachers (Korkmaz & Korkmaz, 2013), or learners (Buskist, Sikorski, Buckley, & Saville, 2002; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011) and few studies examined the perspectives of two of the above-mentioned groups (Park & Lee, 2006; Ramazani, 2014; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; SoodmandAfshar & Doosti, 2014). In spite of the abundant literature focusing on one of the groups, not much research has focused on all the three groups of participants. i.e., teacher educators, teachers, and learners (Ramazani, 2014; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009). Since context has a prominent role in shaping the perspectives (Borg, 2006; Day, 2012), and such type of study was not found to be conducted in the context of Iranian universities and EFL institutes (Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009), it becomes essential to conduct a study that considers the perspectives of teacher educators, teachers, and learners collectively in the Iranian university and institute contexts. Any kind of knowledge relevant to teachers' characteristics can help scholars realize their effects on students and teaching processes (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004).

Following the above-stated reasons, the current study aims to investigate the perspectives of the supervisors, teachers, and learners at Yazd University and an institute in Yazd regarding the characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers and to investigate their perceptions. It further attempts to examine the perceptions with respect to the subscales of effectiveness, namely subject matter, personal and interpersonal features, and approaches to language teaching.

1.2 Research Questions

To examine the above-mentioned aims, the following research questions were formulated for the current study.

Q.1 To what extent does any significant difference exist regarding the characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers from the perspectives of educators, students, and teachers?

Q.2 To what extent does any significant difference exist regarding the subscales (subject matter, personal and interpersonal features, and approaches to language teaching) of characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers from the perspectives of educators, teachers, and learners?

2. Review of the Literature

The concept of "teacher effectiveness" has gained a lot of attention in education and the impact of effective teachers on student achievement gains has been supported by various studies (Brownell, Billingsley, McLeskey, & Sindelar, 2012; Demiroz & Yesilyurt, 2015; Rivkin, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). In order to provide empirical evidence on the distinctive characteristics of effective language teachers, examination and evaluation of various features were performed by different researchers (Bell, 2005; Borg, 2006; Mullock, 2003; Park & Lee, 2006). Mullock (2003) concluded that language proficiency, cross- cultural knowledge and skills are language specific. Furthermore, Borg (2006) categorized effective teachers' characteristics into three main domains of knowledge, skills, and attitude towards learners. Within these areas, he offers a number of prevalent characteristics of EFL teachers, such as creating interesting classes, good pronunciation, offering clear explanations and speaking English well.

The results of Borg's study were supported by a study carried out by Chen (2012), who grouped the teacher's characteristics into two broad categories relating to personal trait-related and classroom teaching-related ones. Later, Mahmoud and Thabet (2013) maintained that although effective teachers share a number of similar qualities irrespective of their subject matter, there are several vital differences between effective EFL teachers and others. They stated that important characteristics among EFL teachers include having a good command of English, correct pronunciation, and involvement of students in classroom activities. This has led various researchers and educators in the field to consider different approaches and variables to reach conclusions that may or may not be similar.

With regard to teacher educators, Bullough (2002) stated that the teachers in his study believed that although educators are well informed of theories and methodologies, these high qualifications may not be helpful to them unless they have a considerable amount of experience in teaching EFL in different contexts. In similar veins, a study carried out in Thailand (Kwangsawad, 2017) revealed that school administrators perceived EFL teachers' professional features to be the strongest element, followed by interpersonal skills and pedagogical approaches. They also emphasized the acquaintance and involvement of teachers in different educational organizations, conferences, webinars, empirical research and courses in methodology. Due to these reasons, it has become important to take into consideration the educators' perspective regarding the characteristics of effective teachers.

Moreover, the emphasis on teacher behaviors without considering teachers' own beliefs and attitudes has been criticized, arguing that these deeper structures are more important to teaching quality than their immediately observable behaviors (Campbell, Kyriakides, Mujis, & Robinson, 2004). Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, and Gu (2007) and Day et al. (2008) suggest that teacher effectiveness cannot be viewed as an isolated characteristic of the teacher; it is rather affected by a great number of interacting factors. Relatively few studies have specifically compared and contrasted individual teacher's perception of effective teaching practices with those of students. Some researchers attempted to explore and identify the effective language teacher features from university and teachers' point of view (Brown, 2009; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Kourieos & Evripidou, 2013; Ramazani, 2014), while others were interested in comparing high school students and teachers' perceptions (Park & Lee, 2006).

In the Iranian context, Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) investigated the qualities of an effective English language teacher as perceived by the English language teachers and learners from universities, high schools, and language institutes that reflected the significant differences between the views held on some of the characteristics. The findings showed that the teachers emphasized the importance of assigning homework and integrating group activities in the classroom, whereas using the mother tongue (Persian) as the medium of instruction was the most prominent factor for the students. Other factors such as mastery of the foreign language, sufficient knowledge of pedagogy, the use of particular techniques, preparing the lessons well, using lesson plans, and assessing students reasonably were appreciated by the teachers, yet the students gave prime importance to their behavior towards students.

In a more recent study conducted to explore the Iranian teachers' beliefs of effecting teaching, it was found that creativity influences the amount of their teachers' effectiveness. The seven subscales of creativity that were found to have a significant relationship with teaching effectiveness were Originality and Elaboration, Fluency and Flexibility,

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Person (Teacher), Press (Environment) and Materials, Motivation, Independent Learning (Autonomy), and Brainstorming (Khodabakhshzadeh, Hosseinnia, Moghadam, & Ahmadi, 2018).

Concerning learners' beliefs, some studies revealed that there are some overlapping and diverging beliefs on effective teachers' characteristics. Park and Lee (2006) claimed that the high school students in Korea significantly ranked pedagogical knowledge followed by the teacher's ability to motivate students and build their self-confidence. In a similar vein, Barnes and Lock (2010) examined students' beliefs about the attributes of effective EFL lecturers in Korean University Students and emphasized the prominence of the language teachers' friendly and supportive personality, which contributes significantly to reducing fear and anxiety.

Furthermore, studies carried out by Kourieos and Evripidou (2013) and Badawood (2015) indicated that teachers and students held contrasting views concerning the approaches and skills needed for English language classrooms. Similarly, Hismanoglu (2019) studied the qualities of effective teachers from perspective of Turkish EFL learners and found that enthusiasm, liveliness, interest in the job, a sense of responsibility, creativity, spontaneity, self-confidence, and a loud and clear voice were considered to be the prominent personal traits of effective EFL teachers. The findings also revealed that the majority of the students considered the teachers' level of linguistic knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and communication skills to be important.

A more recent study conducted by Tarajová and Metruk (2020) on Slovak EFL students revealed that the teachers believed considerable the teachers' expertise in the subject matter, deep interest, and passion for this profession, ability to use various methods and strategies flexibly, and proficiency level were the most important characteristics of effective teachers. However, the students held different views and considered personality traits of the teachers to be of utmost importance in addition to the teacher's ability to provide simple, natural explanations.

A number of studies exist in which emphasis was laid on the characteristics of effective EFL teachers; however, much work is to be done to explore the perspectives of three groups (the educators, teachers, and learners) to examine this topic and the results of the study would help portray a better picture of effective EFL teachers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

Quantitative method of research was used in this study. Accordingly, the study employs a questionnaire to extract needed data from the three groups of participants (teacher educators, teachers, and learners). This study focused on the characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers as perceived by all the participants. The collected data were analyzed quantitatively through using ANOVA and MANOVA tests.

3.2 Participants

The participants were selected using two kinds of sampling strategies (convenience and purposeful sampling strategies) because the participants were easily accessible and cooperative, and these strategies would enable a quicker process of data collection. In this study, the total number of participants included 34 teacher educators, 39 teachers, and 161 learners from Yazd University and Iran Language Institute, from which 93 were males and 143 were females.

In the category of teacher educators, there were 7 university professors (five males and two females) and 27 expert teachers (14 males and 13 females) at the institute having a teaching experience of minimum ten years in their respective organizations. The second group of participants, the teachers were university instructors and institute teachers based on the criteria of teaching experience of five to nine years. This group consisted of four male and eight female university instructors, and eight male and 19 female institute teachers.

The third and final category of participants included 161 EFL learners, out of which 74 were university students (15 males and 59 females) majoring in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and 87 advanced level EFL learners (47 males and 40 females) in the institute. The rationale for considering the advanced level was to ensure the uniformity between participants at the institute and university in terms of maturity and beliefs about effective EFL teachers.

3.3 Instrument

The major data collection tool utilized in the study was a five Likert- scale questionnaire consisting of 30 items divided into three sub-categories, i.e. the first seven items concentrated on the subject-matter knowledge, eleven items focused

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on personal and interpersonal aspects of teachers, and twelve items focused on approaches to language teaching. The items in the questionnaire were developed mainly based on "Teacher Behavior Checklist" (TBC) (Buskist et al., 2002) and an "Effective English Language Teacher" (EELT) questionnaire adapted from Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009). The reliability of the modified questionnaire was found to be 0.84 (Cronbach's Alpha value) for the entire questionnaire, and the reliability for its three subcategories, namely subject matter, personal and interpersonal features, and finally approaches to teaching English were 0.75, 0.73, and 0.70 respectively.

3.4 Procedure

The questionnaire adopted in this study begins with a brief description of the purpose of the study. The anonymity of all the participants was guaranteed and it was clearly stated that the data collected would be used strictly for the present research purposes. It further emphasized that no answers would be considered as right or wrong, and that the main objective was to tap their beliefs, attitudes, and feelings regarding the concepts under investigation. Reflecting on the scope and objectives of the study, the participants were asked to express their opinions for each item using the five option Likert-Scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' The participants were requested to provide a short demographic description regarding their age, gender, teaching/ learning experience in years, and their present institution or university in order to ensure that they meet the criterion taken into account.

The "Characteristics of Effective EFL Teachers" questionnaire was distributed to the professors, instructors, and students in the TEFL department at Yazd University, and was collected within a week's time, providing sufficient time for the participants to answer the questionnaire. Furthermore, it was distributed among the teachers and advanced learners in four classes (two male and female) of approximately 20 students in each class at the Iran Language Institute and was gathered the next session. The estimated time for completing the questionnaire was 15 minutes. While the rest of the participants answered the English version of the questionnaire, it was translated into Persian for the learners by the professionals and later reviewed by two professors in the English translation field in order to avoid ambiguity and to ensure that students face no problems in understanding the items.

3.5 Data Analysis

For the purpose of answering the research questions, the quantitative data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and inferential analyses through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 24. In order to examine the existence of any difference regarding the dependent variable "effectiveness" of EFL teachers, three independent variables, i.e. teacher educators, teachers, and learners, were considered. The data were analyzed through an ANOVA test. Furthermore, three subscales of "effectiveness", i.e. subject matter, personal and interpersonal features, and approaches to language teaching were considered as dependent variables. A MANOVA test was run to investigate the perceptions of the three groups of participants for the respective subscale.

4. Results

Before proceeding with data analysis, the assumptions of multivariate normality were met and Mahalanobis distances were calculated to detect cases that have a strange pattern of scores across the three dependent variables (subject matter, personal and interpersonal features, and approaches to language teaching). The maximum Mahalanobis distance for the present study was 18.554, which was above the appropriate critical value for three independent variables (16.27) provided by Pallant (2016). Besides, the maximum value for Cook's distance was .032 <1, suggesting no major problems.

Table 1. Tests of normality between the groups and effectiveness

Group		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Effectiveness	Educators	.088	34	.200*	.977	34	.670
	Teachers	.129	39	.104	.981	39	.736
	Learners	.066	161	.083	.990	161	.324

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The Kolmogorov- Smirnov values obtained supports the normality of the distribution of scores for the educators (Sig. =.20), teachers (Sig. =.10) and learners (Sig. =.08) with p> 0.5.

In order to answer the first research question concerning the characteristics of effective Iranian teachers from the perspectives of educators, students, and teachers, the data gathered from the teacher educators, teachers, and learners were analyzed using ANOVA test. Table 2 provides the relative descriptive information for the three independent variables, i.e. teacher educators, teachers and learners, and the dependent variable effectiveness.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics between the groups on effectiveness

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation
Educators	121.41	11.98
Teachers	120.58	9.46
Learners	126.61	10.75

Having 95% confidence interval for mean, the mean and standard deviation values obtained for the groups of educators, teachers, and learners were 121.41, 11.98, 120.58 and 9.46, and finally 126.61 and 10.75 respectively.

A one-way between- groups' analysis of variance was conducted to explore the differences on the perceptions held by three groups (teacher educators, teachers, and learners) about the characteristics of effective EFL teachers, the results of which are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Comparison between groups and effectiveness using ANOVA test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1611.264	2	805.632	6.987	.001
Within Groups	26635.795	231	115.306		
Total	28247.060	233			

Post-hoc comparisons tests were run using the Tukey HSD test in order to identify the source of difference, the results of which are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Post Hoc tests: Multiple comparisons between and within the groups for effectiveness

(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Educators	Teachers	.82202	2.51951	.943
	learners	-5.20314*	2.02671	.029
Teachers	Educators	-.82202	2.51951	.943
	learners	-6.02516*	1.91645	.005
Learners	Educators	5.20314*	2.02671	.029
	teachers	6.02516*	1.91645	.005

With reference to Tables 3 and 4, it can be seen that a statistically significant difference was observed with regard to effectiveness scores for the three groups: F (2,231) = 6.98, p=.001, as the significance level was p < .05. The effect

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size, calculated using eta squared, was .057~ .06 which according to Cohen's (1988) classification indicates a medium effect. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test, as seen in Table 4, indicated that the mean score for the learners' group (*M* = 126.61, *SD*= 10.75) differed significantly from the groups of teacher educators (*M*= 121.41, *SD*= 11.98) and teachers (*M*= 120.58, *SD*= 9.46), whereas there was no significant difference between the groups of teacher educators and teachers.

The second research question aimed to explore the subscales (subject matter, personal and interpersonal features, and approaches to language teaching) of characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers from the perspectives of educators, teachers, and learners. To this end, a MANOVA was run as "it 'controls' or adjusts the increased risk of a Type 1 error" due to the number of dependent and independent variables (Pallant, 2016, p. 289).

Descriptive statistics were run with respect to the subscales of effectiveness, i.e. subject matter, personal and interpersonal features, and approaches to language teaching. The corresponding values for each of the variables were: educators (M= 28.91, 47.91, and 44.58), teachers (M= 27.46, 48.17, and 44.94), and learners (M= 31.02, 47.74, and 47.84) respectively. Furthermore, in order to ensure equal variances between the variables, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was studied. The significant values obtained for subject matter, personal features, and approaches to language teaching were .024, .090, and .082. As a conclusion, all the variables, except the subject matter, satisfied the equality of variance. However, due to the moderately large sample of participants, the comparatively low value of subject matter is not considered a threat. Hence, the conventional .05 alpha level was modified to a more conservative level for that specific variable (Pallant, 2016). The Multivariate tests table indicates the differences among the groups on a linear combination of the dependent variables are statistically significant.

Table 5. Multivariate tests between groups of educators, teachers, and learners

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.989	6765.065[b]	3.000	229.000	.000	.989
	Wilks' Lambda	.011	6765.065[b]	3.000	229.000	.000	.989
	Hotelling's Trace	88.625	6765.065[b]	3.000	229.000	.000	.989
	Roy's Largest Root	88.625	6765.065[b]	3.000	229.000	.000	.989
Group	Pillai's Trace	.229	9.906	6.000	460.000	.000	.114
	Wilks' Lambda	.774	10.436[b]	6.000	458.000	.000	.120
	Hotelling's Trace	.289	10.965	6.000	456.000	.000	.126
	Roy's Largest Root	.276	21.124[c]	3.000	230.000	.000	.216

a. Design: Intercept + group

b. Exact statistic

c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.

As evident from Table 5, Wilks' Lambda value of .774, p = .000 is obtained, reflecting a significant difference between the groups of teacher educators, teachers, and learners in terms of the subscales of effectiveness. Besides, the value obtained for partial eta squared is .12, indicating a relatively medium effect according to the guidelines provided by Cohen (1988). With the aim to specifically locate differences, the between- subjects table is examined.

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Table 6. Examining the differences between groups and subscales of effectiveness

Tests of between-subjects effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model							
	Subject matter	457.078[b]	2	228.539	19.696	.000	.146
	Personal features	6.112[c]	2	3.056	.158	.854	.001
	Approaches	473.860[d]	2	236.930	8.738	.000	.070
Intercept							
	Subject matter	124680.725	1	124680.725	10745.418	.000	.979
	Personal features	337702.004	1	337702.004	17447.663	.000	.987
	Approaches	308072.169	1	308072.169	11362.258	.000	.980
Group							
	Subject matter	457.078	2	228.539	19.696	.000	.146
	Personal features	6.112	2	3.056	.158	.854	.001
	Approaches	473.860	2	236.930	8.738	.000	.070

a. R Squared = .057 (Adjusted R Squared = .049)

b. R Squared = .146 (Adjusted R Squared = .138)

c. R Squared = .001 (Adjusted R Squared = -.007)

d. R Squared = .070 (Adjusted R Squared = .062)

In order to examine the differences between the three groups of participants with regard to the subscales, Bonferroni adjustment was first applied by dividing the alpha level .05 by 3 (number of dependent variables) to set a higher alpha level i.e. .017 for the present study in order to reduce the chance of Type 1 error (Pallant, 2016). Accordingly, Table 6 indicates that there was a significant difference between the variable group and subject matter, and teaching approaches (sig. = .000) respectively. However, no significant difference was noticed between the variables group and personal features (sig. =.854). Additionally, the partial eta squared value of .146 for subject matter reveals that it had a large effect on the differences observed between the variables, followed by a moderate effect of approaches to language teaching (partial eta squared=.07). In order to address the second question, i.e. to examine if there is any significant difference regarding the subscales of the characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers from the perspectives of educators, teachers, and learners, Table 7 is dedicated to multiple comparisons between the variables needs to be investigated.

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Table 7. Comparison of three groups for subscales of effectiveness

Multiple comparisons

Dependent Variable		(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Subject matter	Bonferroni	supervisors	Teachers	1.4502	.79924	.213
			Learners	-2.1131*	.64291	.004
		teachers	Supervisors	-1.4502	.79924	.213
			Learners	-3.5633*	.60794	.000
		learners	Supervisors	2.1131*	.64291	.004
			Teachers	3.5633*	.60794	.000
Personal features	Bonferroni	supervisors	Teachers	-.2677	1.03226	1.000
			Learners	.1664	.83035	1.000
		teachers	Supervisors	.2677	1.03226	1.000
			Learners	.4341	.78518	1.000
		learners	Supervisors	-.1664	.83035	1.000
			Teachers	-.4341	.78518	1.000
Teaching approaches	Bonferroni	supervisors	Teachers	-.3605	1.22175	1.000
			Learners	-3.2565*	.98279	.003
		teachers	supervisors	.3605	1.22175	1.000
			learners	-2.8960*	.92932	.006
		learners	supervisors	3.2565*	.98279	.003
			teachers	2.8960*	.92932	.006

*The mean difference is significant at the .025 level.

For the purpose of investigating group differences for characteristics of effective EFL teachers, a one way between groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed. Three dependent variables were used: subject matter, personal features, and approaches to language teaching. The independent variable groups was subcategorized as educators, teachers and learners, and preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate, and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted. There was a statistically significant difference between the groups on the combined dependent variables, F (6, 458) = 10.44, p = .000; Wilks' Lambda = .77; partial eta squared = .12. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, the differences to reach statistical significance, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .012, were subject matter, F (2, 231)= 19.7, p = .000, partial eta squared= .001; and approaches F (2, 231) = 8.73, p = .000, partial eta squared = .07. An inspection of the mean scores presented in Table 7, indicated that for the dependent variable of subject matter, there was a very slight difference between educators (M= 28.912, SD= .584) and teachers (M= 27.462, SD= .545), whereas for learners the values

obtained were (*M*= 31.025, *SD*= .268). Similarly, for approaches to language teaching, the means were quite close for teacher educators (*M*= 44.588, *SD*= .893) and teachers (*M*= 44.949, *SD*= .834), while the means for learners (*M*= 47.845, *SD*= .41) differed to a greater extent.

The results showed that teacher educators (94.2%) and teachers (89.7%) emphasized on the fact that an effective EFL teacher should possess a good knowledge of English grammar, while the learners placed emphasis on the most on effective teachers' accuracy in English pronunciation (98.7%). Knowledge of English grammar was the third most important factor for learners, as they strongly agreed. Amazingly, all the participants strongly agreed that helping students to develop self confidence in using English was the most prominent feature in the subcategory of personal and interpersonal features. As for the items in approaches for language teaching, setting activities which require students to interact with each other in English was considered as the most important factor by the teacher educators (97.1%). For teachers (97.5%), the most significant factor was preparing the lesson well, and learners (94.4%) prioritized both setting activities which require students to interact with each other in English and manage class time well as the prominent features of effective EFL teachers.

5. Discussion

The present study primarily aimed to investigate the perspectives of teacher educators, teachers, and learners on the characteristics of effective Iranian EFL teachers and to compare their beliefs with respect to three subscales of teacher effectiveness, namely subject matter, personal and interpersonal features of teachers, and approaches to language teaching.

Concerning the first research question, the results of ANOVA indicated that although the perspectives of teacher educators and teachers on the characteristics of effective EFL teachers were similar to a great extent, the perspectives of the learners differed significantly from both the teacher educators and the teachers. In particular, the perspectives of learners and teachers differed more significantly from the perceptions of the learners and teacher educators. The similarity between the perspectives of teacher educators and teachers may be due to the deeper knowledge and understanding of what is meant by effective teaching based on the theories and previous studies that the teachers are aware of. However, the learners may lack this awareness and judge effectiveness merely on the basis of their feelings. Moreover, reasons such as disregarding learners' opinions and needs in designing the syllabus, gathering the materials, or the techniques employed in teaching may be additional reasons for the discrepancy between the perceptions of learners and those of the teacher educators and teachers.

Regarding the second research question, the findings of the MANOVA test revealed a significant difference between the three groups of participants and the subscales of teacher effectiveness. Significant differences were noticed between the perceptions for the subscales of subject matter and approaches to teaching, with the subject matter subscale having a stronger effect than approaches to language teaching. Furthermore, there was an extremely strong agreement regarding the personal and interpersonal features of EFL teachers based on the perspectives of teacher educators, teachers, and learners. Furthermore, the examination of the multiple comparisons between the dependent and independent variables revealed that the perceptions of learners and teachers differed more significantly from those of learners and educators for the subscale of subject matter. Regarding the subscale dedicated to approaches to teaching, the differences between learners and supervisors were more significant than those of learners and teachers.

Furthermore, it was found that there was a strong agreement regarding the attributes of the personal and interpersonal features of effective teachers from the point of view of teacher educators, teachers, and learners. The participants belonging to the three groups strongly agreed that helping students to develop self confidence in using English is the most prominent feature in the subcategory of personal and interpersonal features. Amongst the other qualities, teacher educators gave importance to treating students fairly and praising their effort. However, the teachers believed that effective teachers have passion for teaching and provide useful feedback to the students. Being friendly to students and treating them fairly were the next prominent personal and interpersonal features for the learners. Surprisingly, all the three groups agreed upon the availability of teachers to help students outside the classroom as the least important factor. The outcomes obtained were broadly consistent with the reports in literature. As an example, in a study conducted by Chen (2012), the participants strongly agreed on the personal traits of effective language teachers possessing kindness, fairness, and responsibility. However, the features prioritized in the current study were not quite similar to those of Witcher et al's (2003) in which the participants favored features such as patience, understanding, having a warm relationship with their learners, and their willingness to get to know their learners.

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Significant differences were observed in the perceptions of the participants for the dimension of subject matter. The teacher educators and teachers emphasized an effective EFL teacher's good knowledge of English grammar, whereas the learners highlighted the effective teachers' accurate pronunciation. For learners, knowledge of English grammar was the third most important factor. While both teacher educators and teachers placed emphasis on the accurate pronunciation and broad English vocabulary as the next prominent features, the students accentuated the teacher's English competence in all skills, and sound knowledge of English grammar. These results are in line with the results obtained in the Cypriot setting where the learners focused on the language proficiency and language competence especially the oral skills as qualities of effective language teachers (Kourieos & Evripidou, 2013). On the other hand, the teacher educators gave the least importance to teachers having a native- like accent unlike the teachers and learners who agreed that effective EFL teachers do not need to be well acquainted with the English culture.

Additionally, the perspectives of teacher educators, teachers, and learners differed with regard to the approaches to language teaching. While teacher educators and learners believed effective EFL teachers need to set activities which require students to interact with each other in English, teachers believed in preparing the lesson well. The high value placed on student interaction might indicate that a more communicative approach in teaching English is favored. On the other hand, managing the class time well was the second most important feature of effective EFL teachers for the teacher educators, teachers, and learners. Moreover, teacher educators and learners believed that an effective teacher should prepare the lesson well, whereas the teachers highlighted the need to teach students to think critically. Also, teacher educators believed in correcting students immediately when students make a mistake, whereas teachers and learners confirmed that following the syllabus rigidly were the least favorable characteristics of effective EFL teachers.

On the whole, features related to the approaches of teaching for effective teachers such as preparing the lesson and managing the class time well, using lesson plans, unbiased assessment of students, integrating group activities to class are supported by the research studies conducted by Kalebic (2005), and Park and Lee (2006). Interestingly, the results portrayed that the learners insisted on the avoidance of use of Persian for teaching English more than the teachers and the teacher educators which is in complete contrast with the result obtained in a similar research by Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009). The reason could be that the learners who participated in the current study either were proficient enough in the English language to be able to communicate efficiently or they strongly believed that in order to learn a target language, the use of mother tongue needs to be avoided or at least minimized to a great deal.

6. Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that teacher educators, teachers, and learners may have overlapping or divergent perceptions on the essential qualities of effective EFL teachers. The present research has demonstrated that the teacher educators, teachers, and learners hold strong beliefs regarding the personal and interpersonal attributes of effective EFL teachers giving utmost prominence to enabling students to develop self confidence in using English. Additionally, factors such as treating students fairly, being friendly to them, praising students' effort, being passionate about teaching, and providing useful feedback to the students were amongst the closely agreed characteristics, which were in conformity with Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, Al-Siyabi, and Al-Maamari (2015), Bell (2005), and Borg's (2006) findings.

More attention is needed to examine issues related to the items in the subject matter category as this subcategory was noticed to differ significantly from the other subcategories. Factors such as language proficiency, accuracy in pronunciation, profound knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and using English competently in the productive and receptive skills were appreciated to a great extent. Since teachers are the main source of language available to students in the EFL setting, their richer knowledge and proficiency in the target language can assist learners to enhance their communicative skills, and be more confident and enthusiastic in participating in group activities. Surprisingly, none of the participated groups considered the knowledge of English culture as being an important feature of effective language teachers, with English being considered solely as a means of communication and not as a transmission of the English culture by the participants. This result is in contrast with the findings in the study conducted by Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) where both the teachers and learners indicated that the most important factor to distinguish English language teachers was their familiarity with a foreign culture.

As a final conclusion, in order to make teaching more effective, teachers need to not only discover and follow the features favorable by their peers, theories or teacher educators, but also consider their students' needs and preferences. Besides, the teacher educators need to be more aware of the desirable qualities of effectiveness as perceived by the teachers and learners in order to better understand the environment in which the learning and teaching processes takes

place. Since a high level of learner outcome is a prominent factor in the educational system, learners need to grasp the notion of effective teaching through a knowledgeable understanding of effective teachers to increase motivation and interest in learning English as a foreign language.

6.1 Implications

The findings of this study can be implied primarily to the authorities in different educational settings in the Iranian context and for English language teachers. Since teacher education programs are heavily context specific, an urge is felt to invest more than before on the perspectives that influence and shape the practices in the classrooms and consequently re-design the initial preparation programmed for the teachers. It has been concluded that most models of foreign language teacher preparation transfer a predetermined body of knowledge from the teacher trainer to the teachers, which need to be changed to an exploratory model enabling teachers to reflect on their own practices, and decide according to their teaching context and students' needs.

As for the teachers, these findings can be used as a yardstick for the better understanding of the perceptions and needs of their learners. The implication is those teaching techniques and strategies must be employed which are perceived as the most suitable and compatible with their students' needs. Justifying and explicating to the students the rationale behind their practices, or adapting them according to what is considered as principles of effective language teaching and learning can reduce the existing mismatches. As a conclusion, the findings can be helpful in pedagogical implications for EFL curriculum developers, teacher educators, teachers, and language learners. They can also be fruitful for disciplines such as sociology and psychology that are interested in studying human behavior within their specific environment.

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