



Iranian EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards In-Service Professional Development Programs

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Abstract

The present study was developed to investigate the general and specific attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward the current in-service education programs. Two questionnaires regarding the Teachers' Attitudes toward In-service Teacher Education Programs (TAIT) and Teachers' Attitudes toward Professional development (TAP) were used to collect the data. Prior to the main study, the TAIT questionnaire was piloted on fourteen high school teachers of English in order to test its reliability. The questionnaires were administered to eighty Iranian EFL teachers and results indicated that Iranian EFL teachers did not have any specific attitude toward the impact of in-service teacher training on improving their abilities and there was no significant difference among their attitudes toward the efficiency of in-service teacher training programs. According to the results, Iranian EFL teachers believed that the contents of teacher training programs are far from the reality of the actual classroom situations. Generally, results showed that participants were slightly satisfied with in-service teacher education programs. Neither teachers' experience nor gender of participants had any effect on the results of study. **Keywords:** foreign language teaching, professional development programs, in-service teacher training programs, teachers' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed that the role of English in the world is growing rapidly and continuously; therefore, there is an increasing need for EFL teachers (Crookes & Chaudron, 1991; Brown, 1994; England, 1998). Looking back at the recent 30 years, we can see how linguistics, education, psychology and anthropology have had direct or indirect impacts on teaching and learning a new language (Crookes & Chaudron, 1991).

Therefore, as England (1998) states, there is more pressure on EFL teachers because they know much more about learning and teaching processes than before, consequently, their roles have changed and this causes more opportunities for teachers to continue their education. Nowadays, academic work in every field of study is extensively linked to real world professional experience and teaching is not considered as an exception in this case. Thus, if we want to have well-prepared EFL teachers, we should provide real life training program for them.

Teacher development is like a cycle that never ends at any point. Teacher education initiates in pre-service teaching program and it continues up to the time that teacher remains in the profession. Since teaching is a public profession, a teacher is at the center of attention and the society expects a teacher to develop and improve students' learning. This is possible by enabling teachers to renew, adapt and apply their knowledge (Lange, 1990). Teacher's professional development refers to all the activities that a teacher do to improve his performance in his job (Day & Sachs, 2004). Such activities are designed in order to ensue persistent teacher learning. This process would promote teachers towards expertise (Kelly, 2006).

Pennycook (1989), Johnson (1996), and Britten (1998) have observed that when non-native speakers become EFL teachers, despite their having been trained in pre-service training courses, their own experience as learners, their personalities, their social and cultural status and other factors influence their way of teaching.

It has been observed that curriculum development and textbook writing in centralized systems are done with little or no consultation with the teachers and students (Kennedy, 1987; Abdullah & Jacobs, 2004). Therefore, Kennedy (1987) argues that even if new textbooks bring some new ideas with themselves, they may be taught by the old ways of teaching. Usually some rational-empirical strategies may be required for authorities in the form of seminars, newsletters, or in-service programs to make teachers aware of the new developments and their benefits to the society; but little or no change occurs in teacher's methods of teaching. In fact, these programs are not adequate and the teachers have their own beliefs and values; therefore, a deep and long-lasting change is required so that it can increase their understanding of the change.

Richards (1996) points out that regarding the changes in different areas of teaching English as a second or foreign language and based on the ideas of those who are engaged in developing the teacher preparation programs, there is no direct relationship between these programs and the preparation of language teachers. If the goal is to prepare capable teachers, then there should be a theory of effective teaching that can be arrived at through the study of teaching process.

There is close relationship between professional development and language teacher education as it bridges the gap between classroom practice and teachers' knowledge of subject. Freeman (1989) states that the purpose of language teacher education is to create a change in the teacher's decision making process which centers on their

knowledge, skills, attitude, and awareness of themselves, their students, and the innovations in the field. EFL teachers' needs reflect a wide range of variety in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness. In Richards and Nunan (1996)'s view, teachers' needs are changing, different approaches toward language teaching have been proposed, so the field of foreign language teaching is constantly being renewed, there should be a change from teacher training to teacher development. Teacher education programs consist of a knowledge base and a practical component. The first one is based on linguistics, language learning theories (Richards, 1996). Teachers' knowledge and beliefs, their professional lives and sociocultural context of their classrooms (Freeman & Johnson, 1998) and the practical component is drawn from language teaching methodology, linguistics and SLA (Richards, 1996). Richards and Nunan (1996) mentioned that moving from teacher training period to teacher education, the need for teacher educators to change their current position and practices would be more essential. Therefore, the program will be renewed because in teacher training period, attempts were done to make student teachers familiar with skills and techniques of teaching while in teacher education era, teachers are supposed to develop theories of teaching and make strategies for self-awareness and self-evaluation. This movement involves high level of cognitive process that cannot be taught directly, so top-down prescription should be avoided and an inquiry-based and discovery-based approach should be followed.

As Freeman (1996) argues, there are mainly three kinds of intervention a teacher educator can carry out in the process of teacher education. First, the directive option that the teacher educator decides, comment on the student-teachers' teaching, give suggestions for change. In fact, it is the teacher educator who is the class authority. He directs and organizes all the activities; the student teachers should accept and follow the model. Second is the alternative option that the teacher educator chooses a point from the practical teaching and then prepares some alternative ways to handle that point in real situation. The student teachers are free to select one or more options and then express their reasons for accepting or rejecting an option. The purpose is to develop student teachers' awareness of the selections and in making decisions about what and how to teach. Finally, there is a non-directive option that follows the client-centered therapy through which the client discovers and comes to a conclusion. The purpose of non-directive option is to help the student teachers to clarify perception of what they do in the classroom and the teacher educator need not accept or reject it, but they should discuss on it.

It is believed that experienced teachers, who try to develop themselves, will provide more opportunities for their students to benefit from class than those who provide mechanical and boring practices in their classroom procedures. Of course, this development is not necessarily in the form of continuing their education in university but it can be in the form of developing new ideas or changing the way they were used to do (Harmer, 2001). In fact, professional development is a continuous process that takes place during the teacher's whole professional life (Veiga, 2001).

Fortunately, the majority of teachers is intrinsically motivated to develop their professional capabilities and likes to attend the related courses to create a change in their professional lives. Such teachers should be supported because of their efforts; otherwise, they gradually become disappointed and consequently ineffective in their profession (England, 1998).

THIS STUDY

The main purpose of the present study is to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the current in-service education programs. In order to address the purpose of study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any significant difference among EFL teachers' perceptions towards the efficiency of in-service teacher education programs in improving their ability to reflect on their own teaching practices?
2. Is there any significant difference among EFL teachers' perceptions towards the extent to which they apply what they have learned in in-service education programs?
3. Is there any significant difference among EFL teachers' perceptions towards the content efficiency of in-service teacher education programs?
4. Is there any relationship between the EFL teacher's experiences and their satisfaction with the in-service teacher education programs?
5. To what extent does EFL teachers' gender affect their satisfaction with the in-service teacher education programs?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of study were 80 EFL teachers of twenty public high schools located in the city of Zarrinshahr, Isfahan. The participants were 55 female and 25 male teachers. In other words, about 69 percent of participants were female and 31 percent of teachers were male. They held different majors of English language field. Most of EFL teachers (N=54) were studied English language teaching. Literature, Translation and Linguistics were other majors of EFL teachers. The participants' level of education differed from Associated of Arts (AA) to PhD. About 80 percent of teachers had Bachelor of Arts (BA). Twelve had MA and one had PhD. Three cases of AA holders were found among EFL teachers. The EFL teachers' teaching experience was categorized in four groups. Most of the participants (38%) had a teaching experience of 10 to 20 years. The majority of participants had their normal teaching hours. The teachers who were teaching 18-24 hours per week were 54 or 67.5% of all participants. In the department of education in Iran, every field of teaching has one or more supervisors that supervise the trend of language education in different schools during educational year. The participants were asked the frequency of being supervised during one year. It was revealed that about 56 percent of teachers are supervised just once a year and 30 percent are never supervised.

Most of the EFL teachers (37.5%) had lower than 200 hours of in-service teacher training records. The second dominant group of teacher was those who had more than 800 hours of participation in in-service teacher education programs.

Instruments

The materials of this study for data collection were two questionnaires that are described in the following lines.

Two Likert-type questionnaires were adopted in this study in order to measure the attitudes of teachers toward teacher training programs and teachers' professional development.

Teachers' attitudes towards the in-service teacher training program (TAIT) were measured by an attitudinal questionnaire. A Persian version of this questionnaire was used in this study. It was consisted of 15 major questions that the first 6 items asks the general information about the participants. The other 9 questions were consisted of a number of statements. Each statement was followed by a five, six or seven point Likert-type scale: 1= never, 2: rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = usually, 5 = often, 6 = always.

The questions number 7 includes seven statements about the feedback that teachers received from supervisors. Question number 8 consists of 13 statements that ask teacher to evaluate their teaching methodology. Question number 9 had 13 items that asks to find where teachers get their new techniques and ideas for teaching. Questions number 10 and 11 concerned with the strengths and weaknesses of the current in-service teacher training programs with seven point Likert-type scale: 1 = completely agree, 2 = agree, 3 = agree to some extent, 4 = no idea, 5 = disagree to some extent, 6 = disagree, 7 = completely disagree. Question 10 contained 14 statements and question number 11 contained 16 statements.

Question number 12 concerns the extent to which the content of in-service teacher education programs could be applicable to the real classroom situations. Questions number 13 and 14 deals with teachers' evaluation (see Appendix A).

The TAIT questionnaire was pilot studied on 14 EFL teachers for calculating the reliability of items. The result of Cronbach's alpha analysis was proved a satisfactory level of reliability ($r = .83$). In order to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, it was evaluated by three experienced experts in the field of applied linguistics research. They were three PhD holders of applied linguistics with more than 5 years of experience in teaching and research.

Teachers' opinions toward professional development was evaluated by Teachers' Attitudes toward Professional development (TAP) questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire asked teachers to state their level of agreement with five statements about professional development programs: (1) Professional development workshops often help teachers to develop new teaching techniques; (2) If I did not have to attend in-

service workshops, I would not; (3) Professional development events are worth the time they take; (4) I have been enriched by the teacher training events I have attended; and (5) Staff development initiatives have not had much impact on my teaching. It was composed of 5 statements with six point Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = moderately agree, 3 = agree slightly more than disagree, 4 = disagree slightly more than agree, 5 = moderately disagree, 6 = strongly disagree. This questionnaire was used in previous studies (such as Torff, Sessions, and Byrnes 2005; Torff & Sessions 2008, 2009) (see Appendix B). Therefore, it is self-evident regarding reliability and validity.

RESULTS

The data collection procedure was carefully performed and the raw data was submitted to SPSS (16.0) program to calculate the required statistical analyses in order to address the research questions of this study. In this section, the results of different statistical analyses are provided in form of tables, figures, and graphs.

In order to test the first null hypothesis of study, the question number 10 of TAIT questionnaire was analyzed the attitudes of teachers toward the efficiency of in-service teacher training programs. The results showed that participants (30.88%) agreed to some extent that in-service teacher training programs are efficient. The mean of participants' responses to items are provided one-by-one in Table 1.

Table 1. Responses to efficiency of in-service teacher training programs

No	Items	Mean	SD
1	Materials presented in this course are updated.	4.00	1.65
2	These courses lead to establish creativity for teacher.	3.88	1.57
3	These courses are good opportunity to improve teacher's pronunciation.	4.18	1.52
4	These courses are good opportunity to improve teacher's writing skill.	4.31	1.59
5	This course is an opportunity to review the forgotten academic debates.	3.75	1.89
6	This course is an opportunity for discussion with other colleagues.	3.30	1.63
7	These courses are good opportunity for promoting argumentation	4.05	1.73
8	These courses are good opportunity to improve teacher's speaking and listening skills.	3.97	1.50
9	The content of this course is determined based on teachers' needs.	4.02	1.54
10	These courses are the opportunity to develop reading comprehension.	3.88	1.35
11	This course provided a unique opportunity to solve problems in textbooks.	3.51	1.46
12	This course teaches how to solve problems and improve teaching in the classroom.	4.02	1.44
13	This course gives the teacher ability to solve unpredicted problems in classroom.	4.06	1.71

14	Actual condition classes (such as access points, lack of facilities, short courses, and unmotivated students) are discussed in class service.	3.86	1.58
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The participants ($n = 80$) were randomly divided into two groups of 40 and Kruskal Wallis test on four items of TAIT questionnaire was performed. The results, as shown in Table 2, indicates that in all four questions, there is no significant difference (at alpha level of 0.05) among participants in their attitudes toward the potentiality of in-service teacher training programs to improve classroom practice. Therefore, the first null hypothesis of study was not rejected.

Table.2. Kruskal Wallis on teachers' attitudes on the efficiency of in-service program

	SI3 (providing opportunity for pronunciation)	SI4 (providing opportunity for promoting writing)	SI8 (providing opportunity for promoting speaking and listening)	SI10 (providing opportunity for promoting reading comprehension)
Chi-Square	.337	.316	.125	.000
df	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.562	.574	.723	.992

The Twelfth question of TAIT questionnaire addressed this issue. It was "To what extent the contents of teacher training program are applicable in classroom". The scale was 1: not at all applicable, 2: a little applicable, 3: Moderately applicable, 4: To some extent applicable, 5: Completely applicable. Most of the participants (32.5%) agreed that in-service teachers' training programs did not have any impact on their classroom teaching methodology and practice.

In order to investigate the second null hypothesis on whether there is any significant difference among participants in their attitude toward the application of their training in in-service programs to classrooms, the participants were randomly assigned to two groups and they were compared by Mann-Whitney U test. The results are, as provided in Table 3, showed that there is no significant difference among participants in their attitude toward the extent to which they apply what they have learned in in-service education programs at alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the second null hypothesis of study was not rejected.

Table.2. Kruskal Wallis of attitudes on the efficiency of in-service program and Mann-Whitney U-test on attitudes toward applicability of in-service contents to classroom

Application of in-service contents to classroom	
Mann-Whitney U	694.500
Wilcoxon W	1514.500
Z	-1.057
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.291

In order to address the third research hypothesis of this study, the total responses of participants on items that ask attitudes toward the efficiency of teacher training programs were compared to each other. The result of Kruskal Wallis test is provided in Table 4. It indicated that there is no significant difference (at alpha level of 0.05) among participants' attitudes toward the self-efficiency of in-service teacher training programs. Therefore, the third null hypothesis of study was not rejected.

Table 4. The difference between attitudes toward the efficiency of programs

	SI1	SI2	SI3	SI4	SI5	SI6	SI7	SI8	SI9	SI10	SI11	SI12	SI13	SI14
Chi-Square	.00	.00	.00	.21	1.0	.49	1.2	1.4	.85	.02	.99	.28	1.3	.82
Df	3	7	8	7	78	3	65	47	0	8	0	2	92	0
Asymp. Sig.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	.95	.93	.92	.64	.29	.48	.26	.22	.35	.86	.32	.59	.23	.36
	6	5	7	1	9	3	1	9	7	6	0	5	8	5

Regarding the fourth null hypothesis, the satisfaction of teachers toward in-service teacher training programs was evaluated by TAP questionnaire. The item by item analysis of TAP questionnaire is provided in Table 5. The descriptive statistics show that the average attitudes of participants were "agree slightly more than disagree". It indicates that participants were slightly satisfied from in-service education programs.

Table 5. The participants' attitudes on TAP questionnaire

Items	Mean	SD
1. Professional development workshops often help teachers to develop new teaching techniques	3.5250	1.58294
2. If I did not have to attend in-service workshops, I would not.	3.9750	1.43178
3. Professional development events are worth the time they take	3.1000	1.51449
4. I have been enriched by the teacher training events I have attended	3.1625	1.43592
5. Staff development initiatives have NOT had much impact on my teaching	2.9125	1.58469

The relationship between EFL teachers' satisfaction of in-service programs and their teaching experience was measured. The results of Pearson Product correlation analysis showed that there is no significant relationship ($r = -.03$, $p > .01$) between teachers' teaching experience and their satisfaction of in-service teacher training programs. In other words, the fourth null hypothesis was not rejected. Table 6 summarized the correlation statistics.

Table 6. Correlation between EFL teachers' satisfaction of in-service programs and their teaching experience

		TAP	Teaching Experience
TAP	Pearson Correlation	1	-.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.792
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	935.550	-7.100
	Covariance	11.842	-.090
	N	80	80
Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	-.030	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.792	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	-7.100	60.200
	Covariance	-.090	.762
	N	80	80

In order to address the fifth null hypothesis of study about the effect of gender on teachers' satisfaction of in-service program, a Kruskal Wallis test was performed. The results, as Table 7 shows, indicated that in no cases the difference between gender and TAP was significant at 0.05 alpha level. Thus, gender did not affect Iranian EFL teachers' satisfaction of in-service teacher training program, so the fifth null hypothesis was not rejected.

Table 7. The effect of gender on teachers' satisfaction of in-service courses

	Workshop impact on developing new techniques	Workshop impact on improving teaching practice	Value of Professional development programs	Enrichment impacts of development programs	Development program's not having any impact on teaching methodology
Chi-Square	.743	1.043	.037	.239	7.573
Df	1	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.389	.307	.848	.625	.006

DISCUSSION

The present study was developed to detect what attitudes EFL teachers have toward the current in-service teacher training programs in Iran. Data were collected by means of two Likert-type attitudinal questionnaires on 80 Iranian EFL teachers who were employed in Ministry of Education. Statistical calculations were performed in order to test the hypotheses of the study. All six null hypotheses of study were accepted. The results of

study showed that Iranian EFL teachers are not significantly satisfied with the professional development programs administered by Ministry of Education. Their attitudes did not vary by their gender, teaching experience and pre-service teacher training. It shows that they are unanimous in their ideas.

In Freeman's (2001) study, novice and experienced teachers' needs and attitudes were significantly different from each other. The novice teachers needed more practical experiences of teaching while experienced teachers had sufficient training. The results of this study were different from the findings of the present study.

Torff and Sessions (2008) studied the factors that influenced the teacher's attitudes about professional development. It was found that teachers with different experiences had significantly different ideas from each other. In this regard, the results of Torff and Sessions's (2008) study were in contrast to what was found in the present study. On the other hand, it was found gender did not have significant impact on teachers' attitudes. From this view, the results were similar to findings of this study.

In a more recent study by Torff and Byrnes (2011), the attitudes of teachers toward professional development were assessed. The results of study revealed that the attitudes of participants were different among teachers of different subjects, levels. This study was also yielded different results from those of the present study.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward the professional development programs. It was found that although Iranian EFL teachers generally agreed and were satisfied with the efficiency of the current in-service teacher training programs, their attitudes were not significantly positive.

Iranian EFL teachers were significantly homogeneous regarding their attitudes towards the current in-service teacher training programs. Their ideas did not vary across different genders, academic background and teaching experience. In other words, satisfaction or dissatisfaction is what all teachers felt.

The perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers towards the current in-service teacher training programs reflected their needs, and their degrees of interest and priorities regarding professional development and additional training. The results of study provided some theoretical and pedagogical implications that may help EFL teachers, syllabus designers and language policy makers. As a theoretical implication, this study presented professional development programs such as in-service teacher education as the most important professional program to increase the quality of teaching practice, support teachers, and reinforce teachers' knowledge and ability. It also provides situation for teachers to have a new understanding of their teaching materials, update their knowledge and share their teaching strategies to other colleagues.

The findings of this study also suggest some implications for pedagogy. This study revealed some problems and challenges of EFL teachers regarding their participation in in-service teacher training programs. In EFL contexts, there is no or little exposure to target language for both teachers and students out of classroom setting. In-service teacher education programs could help to keep continuous contact with target language.

The results of this study provided insights for teacher educators to improve teachers' understanding of their beliefs about language learning and direct them in order to promote the teaching practices such as the selection of class activities and materials as well as the teaching approaches that match with the goals or the curriculum of the schools.

The present study contains a few limitations. First, due to time limitations, the researcher could not distribute the questionnaire to more teachers. Thus, the size of sample is relatively small and it may affect the generalizability of the results. The participants were selected from teachers of one area. It also makes it difficult to provide a clear picture of Iranian teachers' perceptions of professional development programs. This study could not investigate all factors and variables of TAIT questionnaire because of limitations in focus and purpose of study. Drawing on the limitations of the study and the problems faced during the research that were out of the scope of this study, in this section some suggestions for conducting further research are provided.

It is suggested for future studies to replicate the similar research with larger sample sizes. Also, asking the attitudes of teachers of more diverse areas of Iran could provide a more obvious picture of problems and issues of in-service teacher education programs in Iran. Another study can compare the needs, priorities and attitudes of pre-service teacher training programs to those of in-service teacher training programs and find the differences and similarities. Future studies can investigate other variables of TAIT questionnaire such as teachers' attitudes toward their supervisors, teachers' assessment and evaluation, sources for techniques of teaching, problems and challenges of high school teachers. Regarding the interest of EFL teachers in their own language improvement, a further investigation can be done to examine what the teachers require regarding their language improvement

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