

## Professionalism: The Perceptions of Iranian English Teachers of Competence and Performance in Language Teaching

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### Abstract

Professionalism has been generally linked to nations' economic, industrial, and technological developments. Therefore, having a professionally and ethically competent workforce is a necessity in today's changing world. More specifically, L2 teacher professionalism plays a crucial role in economic development too. Given its utmost importance in language teaching, this study intended to investigate how Iranian English teachers would perceive professionalism defined in terms of competence and performance. The participants were comprised of 281 English teachers at junior and senior high schools, language institutes, and universities in Tehran, Fars, Khuzestan, and Qazvin Provinces. The data were obtained through a researcher-made questionnaire, initially consisting of 44 items. However, the final version contained 40 items since four problematic items were deleted. Structural equation modeling was used to develop a three-factor model which lends support to Richards' perspective (2010) derived from his article "Competence and Performance in Language Teaching". The model found three factors, namely competence, performance, and technopedagogical competence that matched the components of professionalism proposed by Richards mostly in theoretical terms. The findings indicated that most of the participants endorsed Richards' perspective at least in theoretical terms. The insights from this study can be used to bridge the gap between competence and performance and improve teachers' practice in the classroom context.

**Keywords:** Professionalism, Teacher education, Teacher knowledge, Reflective Teaching

### 1. Introduction

Language teaching, like many other fields of study, has been influenced by economic, social, political, and theoretical developments throughout history. Language teacher education is not an exception. Positivism, a scientific method mainly influenced by behavioral psychology, "is rooted in the belief that reality exists apart from the knower and can be captured through careful, systematic processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (Johnson, 2009, p. 7). Within this perspective, there was a quest for components of good teaching that focused on what effective teachers do and should do to enhance learning. Teacher education, like learning, was considered to be an entity separate from the mind and sociocultural factors (Johnson, 2009). Teacher training courses mainly included intensive courses which focused on providing prospective teachers with methodologies which would enhance learning through the manipulation of language components and the psychology of learners by reinforcement. Evaluation of teacher effectiveness was product-oriented which would take place through discrete point tests given to language learners. If learners' performance were satisfactory on the test, it would be attributed to the effectiveness of good patterns of teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). It was also believed once these patterns were tested

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through mainly quantitative research techniques, they could be generalized to other teachers, students, and contexts. The positivist research paradigm was criticized on the ground that the generalizability of research findings obtained through meticulously objective experimental designs across contexts, people, and times simply would whitewash the complex social, historical, and political dimensions that influence schools and schooling in a broader social milieu (Shulman, 1986). In the mid-1970s, there was a paradigm shift from positivism to social constructivism in language teaching and learning. Karimnia and Salehizadeh (2010) emphasize that learning is socially and culturally situated and considered “as encompassing a wide variety of factors such as context, participants, curriculum, management, and motivation” (p. 497). This brought about a change in the reconceptualization of knowledge base of language teachers. Freeman and Johnson (1998) argue that this reconceptualization should include “forms of knowledge representation that document the teacher learning within the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which learning occurs” (p. 397). The interpretive research paradigm stood in stark contrast to the positivist one whereby (in the former) teachers’ cognition is regarded as an important factor in the decisions teachers make, the way they teach and do things in the classroom. In this sense, what is dictated to teachers in theoretical terms is not duplicated in the classroom. In fact, teachers act upon those principles and come up with what they think suit the context of teaching (Johnson, 2009).

Despite the paradigmatic shifts in the views to second language teacher education, both the positivist and the interpretive are still fashionable. However, teachers are not to be considered as the sole consumers of the theorists’ products which are mainly obtained through controlled research designs. Teachers actively reflect on such principles, test, and retest their hypotheses and finally revise and refine them. Sandy defines this dichotomy as restaurant and homemade food. While for the former the client has no choice as to the taste and flavor of the food because it is made by the chef, the latter gives them a wider choice despite the fact that the food could contain the same ingredients (“The Professionalism Issue”, 2013).

This study aims to explore the major components of L2 teacher professionalism as perceived by Iranian English teachers and within the perspective of Richards proposed in his seminal article in 2010. Notably, it has certain features which distinguish it from other studies. It has a sound theoretical base (adopted and adapted from Richards’ article titled “Competence and Performance in language teaching”, has a large scope, and makes use of a large sample size and structural equation modeling for analysis purposes. There have been many studies delving into different aspects of L2 teacher professionalism within the Iranian context most of which either take a qualitative approach or are based on library research. A majority of them use a small sample and seek components of professionalism deriving from the beliefs of their participants that are mostly subjective and probably unprofessional (Abedini, Bagheri, Sadighi, & Yarmohammadi, 2018; Moradkhani, 2017; Safari & Rashidi, 2015). However, this study is based on Richards’ perspective in his seminal article in 2010 which relates the components of competence to those of performance based on sound evidence and an accumulation of views from other scholars too. In addition to general insights, specific competence and performance variables directly relevant to language teaching practice are meticulously discussed and explored in this study.

As mentioned before, this study has a large scope comprising of 281 participants and makes use of structural equation modeling that provides an interconnected network of variables and factors. Through establishing inter-correlations between the variables (items) and major factors, we can find out what variables or components of teaching Iranian English teachers perceive are important and gear the courses to their needs and feed teacher education courses, in-service programs, and teachers’ training programs. It is important that teachers develop the ability to relate their abstract knowledge to practicum in a real classroom context.

## 2. Literature review

Ample research has extensively discussed professionalism from the theoretical points of view (Farmer, 2006; Fox, 1992; Humphreys & Hyland, 2002; Leung, 2009; Richards, 2010, 2017; Sachs, 2016). Many researchers have delved into how professionalism is formed and how it is related to politics, public relations, individualism, society, economy, and marketization (Fox, 1992; Sachs,

2016; Vu, 2015). Many other studies have gone beyond knowledge components to include ethical and human dimensions of professionalism (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Palmer, 2007; Richards, 2001; Stronge, 2018; Zehm, Kottler & Kottler, 2005). These studies suggest that teaching cannot be reduced to mastery over content and theories of learning and teaching. Rather, teachers need to develop relationship skills so that learners may accept and trust them. Zehm, Kottler and Kottler (2005) believe that what students learn in terms of content is easily forgotten within a short time span; however, what remains in their memories is the character of teachers. They argue that knowledge can be transferred to students through building up rapport. Stronge (2018) regards teachers as a whole that not only have mastery over content and theories of learning and teaching but they also possess effective humane characteristics and relationship skills.

Comparatively, research on professionalism within the Iranian context can be divided into three types studying both personal and pedagogical aspects of L2 teacher professionalism: 1) a qualitative approach using a small sample, 2) a quantitative approach based a set of questionnaire items, and 3) library research. Nevertheless, a small number of these studies take a mixed method approach. Some seek desirable components of quality teaching while some others discuss language teaching issues within socio-cultural perspectives. In their qualitative study using a thematic analysis, Safari and Rashidi (2015) underscore the undesirable status of English teaching in Iran arguing that Iranian education system is facing the following issues and challenges: 1) the prevalence of the transmission model, 2) a shortage of up-to-date and expert educators, 3) the insular nature of the education system, 3) the lack the motivation to update knowledge, 4) lack of compatibility between the teachers' up dated knowledge and the needs of the system.

Using factor analysis in a large scale study, Moradkhani (2017) found that teacher educators and English teachers have different views on the components of pedagogical knowledge. While teachers believed that the pedagogical knowledge should entail more practice-based courses, teacher educators emphasized theories and methodologies at an abstract level. In a qualitative study based on interviews and a thematic analysis, Abedini, Bagheri, Sadighi and Yarmohammadi (2018) focused on the personal aspects of teacher professionalism and found the following broad constituent elements of collective teacher efficacy: a) teaching capability, b) decision-making capability, c) the ability to cope with difficult situations, d) the ability to communicate effectively, e) the ability to create a positive climate, f) the ability to collaborate with colleagues, and g) the ability to keep discipline.

As mentioned before, many studies are based on library research and simply discuss the history of English teaching and its status in Iran within the wake of different socio-political factors such as power, economy, ideology, and educational policy (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017; Ardavani & Durrant, 2015; Farhady & et. al, 2010; Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015; Riazi, 2005). English teaching has experienced many extreme ups and downs, historical and political events, socio-cultural movements, and technological advances (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2015). After the occurrence of the 1979 Revolution, the reason for the sharp decline in language teaching and learning was mainly attitudinal. English was considered the language of the enemies mainly referred to as the US and the Great Britain (Riazi, 2005). It was publicly inculcated that there was an equivalency between the teaching of English and alien cultural values associated with moral corruption which would alienate Iranians from their own cultural roots and identity. This view was also excessively promoted in the media. Nevertheless, it was implicitly admitted that English would open a window to sciences, technology, and progress. Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) contend that the undesirable status of English teaching in Iran has been considerably rooted in "policy makers' ambivalence towards English education in the public sector" (p. 13). This has led to a great shift from the public sector to the private one where language teaching has been more successful and turned into a lucrative business for some stakeholders.

Hattie (2012) argues that quality teaching is the core (Intel Inside) of change in learning. It is not the hardware (buildings, resources) and the software (the programs in schools) of schooling which make a difference. Given the significant role of teachers in second language education, this study aimed to explore the following questions:

**Research Question One:** What are the major components of professionalism as perceived by Iranian English teachers?

**Research Question Two:** How do the items on the questionnaire measure and verify the components of professionalism, namely, competence and performance in language teaching as defined by Richards (2010)?

**Research Question Three:** How do the components, as proposed by Richards in 2010, match the perceptions of English teachers in Iran?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Design

This study cannot be limited to a single research design. Primarily, it made use of a correlational design where the researcher made an attempt to discover the relationships between certain variables. SEM (EFA/CFA) delivered a model which showed both the major latent factors and their relationships to the relevant predictors. In addition, it included a prediction research design which aimed to identify variables that would predict an outcome or criterion (Creswell, 2012). It took an explanatory approach to data collection and research questions. Data collection was based on a researcher made questionnaire. The researcher sought to answer a number of research questions proposed from the very beginning and made an attempt to analyze the data within an analytical framework. Nevertheless, it can be said that this study also took an exploratory approach because an attempt was made to discover the latent factors that existed in the data.

#### 3.2. Participants

The study sample comprised of 281 English teachers in Tehran, Fars, Khuzestan, and Qazvin provinces in Iran. Since randomization was not a major concern in this study, convenience sampling was used. The participants were characterized by the following variables: age, experience, the context of teaching, education, major, gender, and status. A large sample was selected on the ground that it would cover the variables mentioned in the research question, and that it would be appropriate for the statistical procedure intended for the purpose of the study. SEM requires a large sample (from five to 15 cases for each parameter with overall sample size larger than 150) (Pallant, 2013). The participants were teachers involved in teaching English in junior and senior high schools, institutes, and universities. Their qualifications included BA, MA, and PhD. The demographic characteristics of the participants included such variables as age (from 20-71), experience in years (0-41), the context of teaching, majors (BA, MA, PhD), education, gender (male & female), and status (pre-service, in-service, and retired). The context included teachers in junior high schools, senior high school, institutes, and universities.

#### 3.3. Instrumentation

To measure professionalism, a five-point Likert scale containing categories defined in terms of strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree was constructed. The items were mainly presented in English and derived from an article by Jack C. Richards (2010) titled "Competence and Performance in Language Teaching". About 44 items were constructed and grouped into ten general categories, namely, proficiency factor, content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, practical pedagogical content knowledge, technological pedagogical content knowledge, teacher training, contextual knowledge, learner-focused teaching, theorizing from practice, and membership of a community. Each category contained a number of items believed to measure their relevant categories. These categories are clearly defined by Richards (2010). Enclosed in the questionnaire were the items which asked for information related to age, experience, education, and context of teaching, major, gender, and status. In a tentative study the items were pilot tested by administering to a group of 150 teachers having the same characteristics as the sample of this study. An attempt was made to revise, modify and correct the ambiguous ones. The items were also examined in terms of internal consistency by using SPSS (version 21). The scale's Cronbach value (.86) exceeds .7 that is an appropriate index of reliability (Palliant, 2013),

indicating that the items functioned appropriately. During the analysis, some problematic items were deleted. The final analysis contained only 40 items (see appendix A).

#### 3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The questionnaire was administered to the participants. The necessary instructions were provided for them. No names were required to ensure anonymity and security. Mplus software (version 7.4) was used to analyze the data. According to Muthen and Muthen (2010), Mplus is a statistical modeling program which offers researchers a wide variety of statistical procedures to carry out Exploratory Factor Analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Bayesian Analysis, etc. A unique feature of Mplus is its ability to build models with categorically ordered data ("Mplus Tutorial," 2012) which make up the main corpus of this study. The analysis made it possible to provide a measurement model to specify "the number of factors and how the various indicators are related to the latent factors" (Brown, 2014, p. 51). It also helps figure out if the latent factors matched the ones (competence and performance) proposed by Richards (2010) on the basis of which the scales were made. The results obtained from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis/Structural Equation Modeling analyses will be discussed by drawing upon the relevant literature.

#### 4. Results

Prior to running CFA/SEM, the data was examined to meet the required assumptions. Using SPSS (version 21), the data was checked for normality, multicollinearity, and outliers. Kolmogorov-Smirnov's test of normality ( $D(287) = .042, p = .200 > .05$ ) illustrated that the data was normally distributed. For this test, a non-significant value is required (Yamini & Rahimi, 2016). Nevertheless, Nye and Drasgow (2011) hold that non-normality is very common with categorical data and report studies which suggest the use of WLSMV (weighted least squares mean and variance-adjusted) to analyze categorically ordered data. The indices obtained for collinearity statistics, namely, Tolerance and VIF show values larger than .10 and smaller than 10 respectively, which indicates a lack of multicollinearity in the data. Note that Tolerance values should be higher than .10, and for VIF there should be values smaller than 10 (Pallant, 2013). The data set was also checked for outliers and missing values. There were only a few outliers which had to be deleted to ensure normality. There were no missing values.

Several analyses were run to build a measurement model which would account for the data obtained from the participants. Finally, the model fit information was used to build a three-factor-model. On the basis of the analyses, out of the total ten categories proposed by Richards (2010), some had to be combined into one because they were highly correlated (larger than 1) and seemed to measure the same thing. Items 1, 9, 19 and 42 were deleted because they were low in terms of correlation. Some researchers suggest correlations lower than .30 and .40 for the item deletion process (Pallant, 2013); however, Brown (2014) argues that deletions should be carried out on a sound theoretical basis, and that the main goal of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA & CFA) should not be unruly deletions of items.

The chi square index ( $\chi^2(287) = 1356.009, p = .0000 < .05$ ) shows that the model is not fit, suggestive of the fact that the implied covariance matrix is not equivalent to the observed covariance matrix. Obtaining non-significant values from large samples is often difficult. Besides, they are heavily influenced by non-normality and model complexity (Brown, 2014; Nye & Drasgow, 2011).

RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) estimate shows an index of .054 = [90% CI = .050, .59],  $P = .068 > .05$  which seems to be an appropriate model fit. Values smaller than .05 or .06 indicate a good model fit ("Mplus Tutorial," 2012; Geiser, 2011; Brown, 2014). The 90% confidence interval has an upper value of .059, which is below the recommended cut off value of .06. In addition, it is not statistically significant at .05, which further supports the idea that the model is acceptably fit. Comparative Fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) show an estimate of .825 and .815 respectively. As a rule of thumb, the following values for CFI and TLI have been recommended:  $CFI \geq .95, TLI \geq .95$ . However, these indexes may not be universally

appropriate (Nye & Drasgow, 2011). The values obtained for CFI and TLI are not so good but tolerable.

By comparing the model fit information obtained from several analyses, the factors primarily categorized by Richards (2010) had to be regrouped as follows: 1) community membership, theorizing from practice, learner centeredness, and teacher training, 2) pedagogical content knowledge, practical pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge, proficiency factor, and contextual knowledge, 3) technological pedagogical content knowledge as a separate factor. Combining these factors delivered a parsimonious model with as few factors as possible, which is desirable in Structural Equation Modeling (Geiser, 2011).

In addition to the analysis of confirmatory factor analysis, an EFA was run to test the adequacy of a-one, two, and three factor solutions. The output of the model fit information was compared across the given solution types. Table 1 shows RMSEA values for a-one, two, and three factor model. As can be seen, a three-factor solution is the best. Note that with RMSEA, the values smaller than .05 are preferable (Geiser, 2011).

Table 1: RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)

Number of factors	one	two	three
Estimate	.060	.051	.045
90 percent C.I.	.056 .064	.046 .056	.040 .050
Probability RMSEA ≤ .05	.000	.365	.940

Table 2 shows CFI and TLI for one, two, and three factor solutions. The values for a three-factor model are the most appropriate. Values closer to 1 indicate good model fit.

Table 2: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) / Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)

Number of factors	one	two	three
CFI	.783	.853	.890
TLI	.772	.836	.871

As table 3 illustrates, the SRMR value obtained for a three-factor solution is the lowest, hence, its appropriacy. According to Brown (2014), values smaller than .08 are appropriate.

Table 3: SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)

Number of factors	one	two	three
SRMR	.092	.076	.067

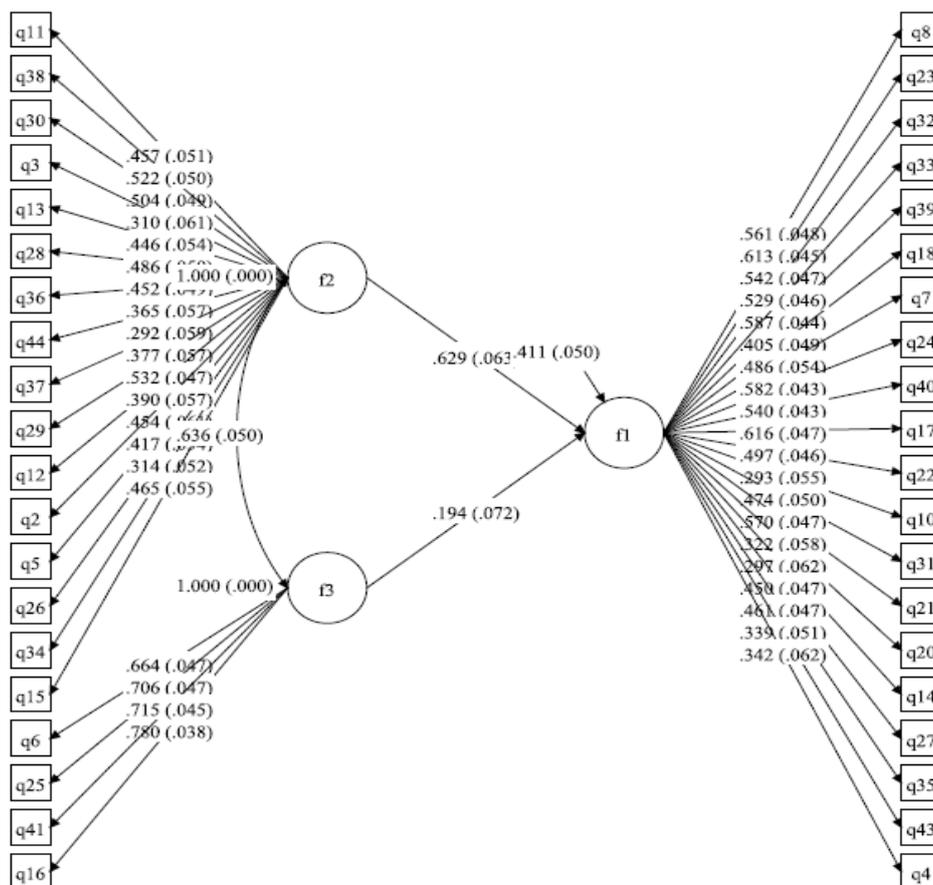


Figure 1: Diagram Output from Mplus

Figure 1 is the diagram output produced by Mplus. The rectangles represent the observed variables (items). The three latent factors are shown by circles. The straight lines that point from the latent variables to the observed ones indicate the causal effects (in our case the correlations) of the latent factors to the observed variables. The curved arrow in the diagram shows the correlation between the latent factors (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006). The estimates given are correlation values and their relevant residuals respectively. As can be seen from figure 1, the latent factors explain a good amount of the variance in their relevant factor indicators. This holds true especially with factor 3 which shows much larger correlation with its observed variables. It is notable that the latent factors, except for factors 1 and 2 (.63), show minimum correlation.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicate that English teachers in Iran agree on the components of professionalism proposed by Richards (2010). The competence factor includes such knowledge types as pedagogical content knowledge, practical pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge, proficiency factor, and contextual knowledge. Performance variables include community membership, theorizing from practice, learner centeredness, and teacher training. In addition to performance and competence, teachers unanimously underscored the importance of technological pedagogical competence. This is obvious from factor 3 highly correlated with the items that was originally purported to measure technological pedagogical competence and the patterns of responses given by the respondents. Mplus version 7.4 provides the univariate proportions and counts for categorical variables. Most of the respondents focused on the fourth category “agree” suggesting that they are in agreement.

All participants appear to agree on two main components of professionalism, namely, competence and performance proposed by Jack C. Richards (2010). However, our model negligibly deviates from Richard’s perspective and adds another major factor (3) which we refer to by its

original designation: “technological pedagogical content knowledge” or “technological pedagogical competence” (the term unanimously agreed on by the researchers). As figure 1 shows, factor 3 is more strongly correlated with the relevant items used to measure technological pedagogical competence. It suggests the importance of technology in education in general and language teaching in particular. Iranian teachers need to develop the required competence to efficiently use technology in teaching. It is noteworthy that many teachers are using different types of technology in their teaching. However, whether or not they use them effectively needs to be explored and further researched. The study was intended to provide us with a general picture of the perceptions of Iranian English teachers of competence and performance in language teaching, which are two major components of professionalism. How they used technology and whether or not they were able to do so is not of concern in this study.

From a theoretical point of view, the dichotomy of competence and performance has been criticized by researchers (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Robson, 2006). Competence is dynamic and keeps changing all the time. Richards (2001) argues that teachers play an important role in learning teaching, that is, they act upon the knowledge they receive, and it is filtered through their own experiences, reconstructed and self-represented. Thus, knowledge keeps getting restructured as it interacts with experience. Robson (2006) contends that codifying teacher knowledge into dichotomies is useful only in granting certification and economic rewards (incentives and salaries). Otherwise, it is difficult to determine the exact boundaries of performance and competence. Bachman (1990), in his full account of communicative language ability model, gives an analogy and underscores the complexity of providing a comprehensive model, as is true with all constructs, and asserts that communication involves a myriad of knowledge types which must also include many performance variables as well. This could also apply to learning teaching.

The second major component includes performance which is validated against its subcomponents, including community membership, learner-focused teaching, teacher training, and theorizing from practice. It seems that teachers think of the aforementioned factors in an idealistic and decontextualized way. Such views are derived from the education that they received at the university or teachers training centers. When involved in studying, they may develop an ideal identity. However, when they start their teaching career, this ideal identity goes through changes to adjust to the needs of the context and students. Teachers may wish to put into practice what they believe. But due to incompatible contextual variables, their efforts may lead to failure and frustration (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Almost all teachers, as is obvious from the CFA/SEM analysis, agreed to these so called performance variables. They unanimously emphasized the desirability of the components and probably wish to materialize them in their classrooms. However, there is often a lack of correspondence between their beliefs and practices (Basturkman, 2012; Borg, 2011). Borg holds that performance variables are widely affected by the context and the group of students.

Related to performance is item 1 (deleted because it did not contribute to the whole equation much (.22) underscores the importance of being a member of a community of teachers to foster collaboration among teachers and improve professional practice and collective capacity. Dobber, et al. (2013) speak of community competence that needs to be formalized and documented in the intended curriculum, practiced in the implemented curriculum, and evaluated by the attained curriculum. Despite its importance, it has largely been ignored. They argue that teaching is still an individualistic activity. Reference to the activity as community competence suggests that competence and performance variables are closely intermingled.

Item 9, which tapped into whether or not teachers gave explanations and instructions using the target language, was also deleted from the model because it did not help with correlation that much (.19). The low correlation indicates that most, if not all, of the teaching takes place within the students' target language or teachers do not feel the need to use the target language due to contextual constraints. As mentioned before, the responses to this item mostly depends on the context of teaching where emphasis on target language use differs.

Item 42 purported to measure whether teachers worry more about language issues than classroom management had to be deleted too because of low correlation (.16) with factor 2. It could suggest that teachers' degree of concern differs depending on the context of teaching. Teachers might be more concerned about classroom management where they have to deal with young learners rather than adults.

Item 10, categorized in factor one (competence), intended to tap into whether or not a native command of the target language was essential. It showed a correlation of .29 which is fairly low compared to other indices. Nevertheless, 54 % of the participants agreed, 21 % were undecided on it, and only 10 percent strongly agreed on it. It could suggest that teachers would still associate native speakerism with the ideal teacher image which gained a lot of acceptance and recognition in the past. They seem to stick to the traditional view that native competence in the language is taken for mastery over all aspects of language teaching and learning. Though language proficiency is important because it gives teachers self-confidence and a feeling of self-efficacy in teaching, it is not sufficient and does not make good teachers. Teachers need to have the pedagogical knowledge to be able to convert content knowledge into forms accessible to language learners (Coniam, Falvey & Xiao, 2017; Richards, 2017). Pasternak and Bailey (2004) emphasize that nativeness in English is not equal to proficiency in English, and that language proficiency "is only one element of professionalism" (p.161). Tsang's qualitative study (2017) demonstrated that there was no strong relationship between a high level of language proficiency and teaching and learning effectiveness.

Item 19, also deleted due to low correlation with factor 1 (.17), was aimed to tap into whether or not teachers would agree to the need of having disciplinary knowledge, of the kind that leads to status and recognition but does not lead to practical skills. The low correlation suggests that they would go for the components of teaching that are more of practical than theoretical concerns. There has been extensive research to investigate the usefulness of knowledge types in language teaching. Relevant to this important issue is the question of whether or not teachers find the research results useful and effective. Research has been inconclusive. Ellis (2011) lists a number of positions on this issue ranging from a super- cautious "don't apply" to a confident "go ahead and apply" (p. 1). Farrell (2016) highlights the fact that there is a separation between teachers' and researchers' activities. Researchers write with a specific group of readers in mind, and the language they use is often arcane and full of statistics, which makes it difficult for teachers to understand the findings.

Item 29 intended to figure out if teachers have developed personal theories as a result of reflection. Only 44 % agreed they have; 33% were undecided on the issue. However, the nature of the theories they claim to have developed is unknown because it was out of the scope of this study. Probably, many teachers are able to mention in detail the theories they acquired during the teacher education programs. Some others might find it difficult to do so. The difficulty lies in the fact that the codified explicit knowledge that they receive from books and teacher education programs turns into implicit knowledge which may differ from the original knowledge because it is filtered through experience. Eraut (2002) considers learning knowledge and using knowledge to be the same process and reiterates that "[t]he process of using knowledge transforms that knowledge so that it is no longer the same knowledge" (p. 25). In addition, when this knowledge turns into practical knowledge through experience, teachers cannot easily say what it is that they know. Often times, teachers unconsciously apply their own personal theories to the classroom context while they may not be able to verbalize them.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

The findings highlighted that a majority of the participants found the technological pedagogical competence to be the most important component of professionalism, that most of the participants disagreed that native-like command of English was an important component of professionalism, and that that competence and performance are closely interrelated. There are a number of criteria which can be used to categorize a group as professional. Malderez and Wedell (2007) hold that a professional group is characterized by the following features: the group have a high social status, receive high salaries, are accountable to clients, belong to a professional body, have had a

considerable period of professionally focused education beyond their first degree in preparation for their role, keep up-to-date with the latest developments in their fields, and are autonomous. To explore the professional status of the English teachers in Iran, interested researchers need to take the aforementioned teachers into account too.

This study could have pedagogical implications. Nowadays, technological advances have made it possible for teachers to update their knowledge and improve their teaching practices. Therefore, courses can be designed whereby teachers can discuss a variety of issues and exchange views within a cooperative and friendly environment. To ensure that teachers are constantly engaged in growth and professional development, there should be online courses whereby teaching materials are presented through a variety of media such as videos, short articles, and external links. Guidelines are also provided so that the participants can use the courses appropriately. There can be a platform where the participants can post messages to interact with the mentors and one another to exchange ideas, make suggestions, and share views, teaching activities and techniques. These online courses can be of both theoretical and practical concerns. There can be a short quiz for the participants at the end of each module. It would give them a chance to assess themselves how well they have benefitted from the courses. The results should not be used as a basis for judgment about teachers or final evaluation. All activities take place online. Therefore, teachers have a wide choice. They can have access to the programs at their own discretion and anytime feeling as comfortable as possible. They do not need to come together in a place where teaching programs are to be held. The participants' views, suggestions, concerns, problems, and points could be used as a platform to trigger discussions. However, there should be mentors competent and sharp enough to appropriately organize the courses and gear them to the needs of teachers. It is notable that online course are cost-effective for the administration that may be concerned about the high costs of such professional development programs.

There were a number of shortcomings which may have affected the quality of the data. For the findings to be valid and plausible, it requires that the participants intended for the study be available and helpful enough to do the required tasks with care. Also, their willingness to participate in the study helps validate the data obtained through the questionnaires. Further shortcomings have to do with the nature of the instruments used in the study. Since it was based on a set of attitudinal surveys, the participants tended to provide socially desirable responses which usually do not reflect the truth (Dornyei, 2007). That is, the respondents' knowledge types at the abstract level could not be interpreted as materializing them in performance. As mentioned by Bachman (1990), ability to put knowledge into practice depends on a variety of performance variables. Contextual constraints play an important role as well. To materialize those knowledge types, the conditions should be conducive to their implementation as well. Furthermore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to a much larger population since the sample was not randomly selected. Nevertheless, the main purpose was to discover the major components of professionalism as perceived by Iranian English teachers in general.

Interested researchers may compare the features of English teachers to those of other professions, namely, doctors, nurses, engineers, and lawyers within the Iranian context. These features could include their professional knowledge, decision making capability, their perceived social and financial status, ethical issues, their genuine and fake emotions and the impact on teaching performance.

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## Appendix A

**What does it mean to be a professional teacher? The following items ask what you think. Please mark your response. I appreciate your kind help.**

1. Being a member of a community of teachers (blogging, workshops, conferences, journals...) can improve our teaching practices.
2. I have derived my teaching practices from theories of language learning and teaching.
3. My classes are student rather than teacher- centered.
4. Social and physical context, the rules, facilities, values, expectations and personal backgrounds affect language teaching and learning.
5. Teachers need to acquire teaching skills by observing experienced teachers through micro teaching and peer-teaching.
6. I'm able to incorporate and integrate technology into my teaching.
7. Understanding learners' needs is essential.
8. It is necessary to have knowledge of language testing and assessment.
9. In my classes, I give explanations and instructions in the target language.
10. A native command of language, using it as well as native speakers, is necessary.
11. Collaboration (working) with the school principals and other staff to improve the quality of our teaching is essential.
12. Reflecting on my teaching practices, I have a better understanding of the nature of language teaching and learning.
13. I have the students reflect on and self-correct their own errors first, and then I give corrective feedback.
14. As my experience in teaching increased, I found the context of teaching (school, people, and values, the students' backgrounds) to be more important than theories.
15. In my classes, I am able to predict problems and have procedures available to deal with them.
16. I'm able to teach with technology.
17. I should know how to plan suitable instructional goals for lessons.

18. I need to learn the specialized terms such as teacher centeredness, learner-centeredness, and learner autonomy... to talk about language teaching and learning (terminology).
19. I need to have disciplinary knowledge, of the kind that leads to recognition and status but does not lead to practical skills (pure knowledge).
20. Teachers should keep using the target language in the classroom.
21. Teachers should be able to comprehend texts accurately.
22. Knowledge of theories in English Language Teaching is essential.
23. I need to have classroom management skills.
24. Teachers should diagnose learners' problems.
25. I'm able to use a certain technology to do things (preparing texts, tests...) related to my teaching.
26. Through teacher training courses, I have learnt to use basic teaching skills fluently and automatically.
27. To be an effective teacher, contextual knowledge of (socio-economic factors, rules, school...) is essential.
28. The students in my classes do most of the talking, engaged in communication.
29. I have developed my own practices which could form theories.
30. I share my views on teaching issues, problems ... with my colleagues.
31. Teachers should provide language models (pronunciation, speaking ...) for students.
32. I need to know how to reflect on my teaching to adapt my approaches to the situation.
33. Teachers should be able to design and adapt tests.
34. I do not rely on ready -made solutions in the classroom but provide solutions when need arises.
35. Teacher-learning involves developing not only the skills of teaching but also the norms of practice expected of teacher in a school, both inside and outside of the classroom.
36. The lessons that I offer at school reflect the learners' needs and preferences.
37. Since I started my teaching, I have been changing my approaches to teaching.
38. Sharing ideas with university teachers on the latest developments can improve our teaching practices.
39. I need to have knowledge of teaching the four skills, listening, reading, speaking, and writing.
40. I should know how to use authentic materials in my classrooms.
41. I'm able to create materials and activities using technology.
42. I worry more about language issues than classroom management.
43. During my studies, I thought (think) theories (are) would be applicable to my teaching context.
44. The lessons I present are connected to the students' life experiences