

The relationship between Iranian English Language Instructors' Pedagogical Competences and Their Personal and Professional Background

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Research Paper

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Abstract

It is widely accepted that EFL teachers' pedagogical competence improves their teaching performance, which itself plays a key role in facilitating and enhancing student learning. The present study investigated the relationship between Iranian English language instructors' pedagogical competences and their personal and professional backgrounds. In so doing, the construct validity of an initial 33-closed-ended questionnaire comprising four constructs of pedagogical competence, namely teaching attitudes, teaching skills, assessment strategies, and knowledge mastery was established through exploratory factor analysis was after being administered to 175 university instructors in Gilan, Iran. Next, to measure the relationship among the instructors' personal and occupational characteristics, namely age, gender, fields of study and university degrees with the constructs of pedagogical competence, the newly validated questionnaire was administered to 48 practicing university instructors at Islamic Azad and State universities. It was revealed that there were positive correlations among the constructs of teaching attitudes, teaching skills, assessment strategies, and knowledge mastery. Moreover, the results revealed significant positive correlations (strong, moderate, or low) among the four constructs concerning the instructors' gender, age, fields, and degree of study. Pedagogically, as teaching quality is a crucial factor in promoting effective learning, it would be truly beneficial if the instructors' perceptions of pedagogical competence are known for the purpose of making educational developments.

Keywords: English Language Instructors, Pedagogical Competences, Personal Background, Professional Background, Correctional Study

1. Introduction

It is generally believed that developing pedagogical competence of EFL teachers involves examining and developing their attitudes about learning and teaching based on their own experience of language classrooms. It is also argued that an effective teacher plays a significant role in enhancing students' performances that may end up in their success (Feiman-Nemser, 2008). Teachers have pivotal roles in influencing students' attitudes and motivations to language learning (Orhon, 2012). They facilitate learning environments by providing opportunities for learners to explore their talents and convert them into abilities on the way to language learning.

Teachers' effective pedagogical practices promote the achievement of students and build up the self-confidence of the teachers in teaching, thus a significant cause for the gap in pedagogical practices can be attributed to the lack of pedagogical competence. Pedagogical competence is about the ability to manage students' learning and center actions on teachers' ways of building their professional identities through reflecting on their activities and adjusting them to fulfill the needs of their learners.

Pedagogical competence is defined by Madhavaram and Laverie (2010) as "the ability of an individual to use a coordinated, synergistic combination of tangible resources (e.g., instruction

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materials, such as books, articles, and cases of technology, such as software and hardware) and intangible resources" (p. 5) to achieve efficiency and/or effectiveness in pedagogy. Rychen and Salganik (2003) define competence as the "ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of psychosocial prerequisites" (p. 43). Rahman (2014) also argues that teachers' pedagogical competence consists of their skills in managing learning, including planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning outcomes of learners. All teachers should own these competencies in order to achieve success in learning and teaching.

As Abdel-Halim (2008) states, pedagogical competence acts as the bridge connecting where EFL teachers are now and where they need to be to encounter the new challenges in order to guide the learners in their learning achievements. Noora (2008) asserts that there are limited opportunities for teachers to have their say about their perceptions of a professional and effective teacher. Studying the features of an effective English language teacher from the teachers' point of view is valuable because it is a type of needs analysis that can greatly help teachers improve their teaching aiming to meet teaching and learning needs of their students.

One important issue that is not paid attention to in the Iranian EFL context is English teachers' attitudes to teaching, learning, and their role, which, according to Feiman-Nemser (2008), affects the way teachers choose, evaluate, and comprehend the knowledge acquired, as well as the way they benefit from this knowledge in practice, as this very practice is shaped by that knowledge. Surely, the preparatory formal training does not cover the whole scope of the components of pedagogical competences (Kosnick, Cleovoulou, Fletcher, HARRISA, McGlynn-Stewart, & Becka, 2011; White, 2014). To date, there exists no clear-cut criterion based on which the teachers' pedagogical competence can be measured in the Iranian EFL setting.

The importance of an adequate knowledge base for teaching has also been ignored fully by higher education administration. It has neither received much emphasis since the Ministry of Higher Education does not organize appropriate pre-service and in-service training for teachers (Noora, 2008). Similarly as Pettis (2010) argues, EFL teachers are expected to update their pedagogical competence, and more importantly, to continue this updating through their in-service pedagogical development. Furthermore, there is a national standard for Iranian EFL teachers' evaluation (Aliakbari, 2002; Riazi, 2005), English teachers are evaluated the same way as other teachers, such as chemistry teachers, are evaluated (Atai & Mazlum, 2013).

Given the points mentioned above, it could be argued that investigating the pedagogical competence of EFL instructors could be of a paramount importance since the findings might help instructors obtain knowledge about those characteristics identified as good and favorable in order to equip and fine-tune themselves with such qualities and put them into effect in their teaching. In view of that, the purpose of current study was to explore and evaluate what competences have been used and covered among Iranian EFL instructors and examine the relationship between instructors' personal and professional characteristics with those competences to recognize the existing situation of teaching English language at the university level.

2. Literature Review

The concept of the competence-based approach in curriculum design and pedagogical practice has been studied in numerous studies and is considered a heated debate in the previous decade (Luo & Dappen, 2004; Eken, 2007; Štefanc, 2006; Stojanović, 2007). In the field of English language teaching, the issue has often been related to the question of teachers' pedagogical competences and their professional development (Korać, 2012; Marinković & Kundačina, 2012; Muršak, Javrh, & Kalin, 2011). Many researchers (Stojanović, 2008; Vranješević & Vujisić-Živković, 2013) assert that these days teacher education and teacher professional development programs have to base their curriculum on pedagogical competence, not only because it trains the future teachers with regard to the methods and goals of teaching which are essential in practice (Ermenc, Vujisić, & Spasenović, 2015), but also because it shapes the practicing teachers' unique method of teaching and increases their ability to constantly adjust to the changing needs and shifting realities of teaching (Buchberger, Campos, Kallos, & Stephenson, 2000).

The literature indicates that different kinds of pedagogical activities and strategies are required to develop the attitudes and skills needed for reflective action on the part of teachers (Mintrop, 2001). The components of pedagogical competence in the current research consist of a solid grasp of language teaching skills and strategies, language assessment strategies, teaching attitude, and content mastery as certified by Brown (2000), Ryegård, Apelgren, and Olsson (2010) and Richards and Rodgers (2001).

It is generally accepted that assessment is a competence that requires teachers to be well qualified in using a variety of assessment strategies and tools to enhance students' learning. According to Polk (2006), teachers' assessment of their students is one of the basic characteristics of effective teachers. Teachers' practice of teaching can be manifested via students' performance represented through teachers' assessment strategies and techniques. Historically, majority of educators have regarded assessment as a tool of measuring the learners' outcomes, and this is realized via summative assessment (Black & William, 1998). Educators, however, have started to broaden their scopes of assessment to cover both students' learning outcomes at the end of course period to judge learners' passing or failing situation, and to augment learning by modifying instruction in the classroom (Rabinowitz, 2010) referring to the formative assessment or assessment for learning that aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning and use assessment results to enhance students' learning.

Skills of teaching are demonstrated in the ability of teachers to teach in a way that actively supports students' learning. Moreover, many teachers are traditionally appreciated for their teaching skills by students, colleagues, and administration. According to Thomas (1987), teaching is described as abilities in imparting language in its various facets to learners. As Witcher (2003) argues, instructional or teaching competence includes the teacher's ability to create student-centered classrooms, provides sufficient content knowledge, and maintains a pedagogical demeanor. Teachers' understanding that instruction should be tailored to meet each learner's needs plays a paramount role in this regard. In the present study, teaching skills, as Jay and O'Conner (2005) note, addressed teachers' classroom practices shaped by a wide range of interacting factors mediated by teaching to teach in a way that actively supports student learning

Abdel-Halim (2008) believes developing pedagogical competence of EFL teachers involves examining and developing their attitude about learning and teaching based on their own experience of language classrooms. Prabhu (1990) also points out that there was a strong and positive relationship between characteristics of EFL teachers with positive attitudes and enthusiasm and their rapport with students, and this appears to promote productive learning. The construct of teaching attitude finds its importance specifically when teachers have high expectations for their students and insist on promoting all students (Malikow, 2006; McBer, 2000). In the present study, the construct of attitudes consisted of teachers' commitment, confidence, trustworthiness, respect, dispositions towards democratic values, towards collaboration with colleagues for shared educational aims, and towards maximizing the learning potentials of every student.

Enjoying adequate knowledge base for teaching has long been acknowledged by teacher educators (Bullough, 2001). Knowledge mastery refers to the teachers' familiarization with the science and the different dimensions of the related subject. It also refers to the knowledge of subjects the teacher is going to impart to students in a certain class (Zvorych, 2013). Shulman (1992) defines pedagogical content knowledge as the knowledge that provides a basis for language teaching. The knowledge base, as a precondition to effective teaching, as Shulman (1987) has conceived it, is an amalgam of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that underlie the capacity to teach effectively. In the current study, knowledge mastery was regarded as the mastery of the actual subject matter that is to be learned or taught and the knowledge of explanatory frameworks, as Shulman (1992) verifies, that organize and connect ideas and knowledge of the rules of evidence and proof.

A large number of studies have identified effective teachers' characteristics (e.g., Borg, 2006; Rahimi & Hossini Karkami, 2015; Schulz, 2000; Soodmand Afshar & Doosti, 2014;

Tajeddin & Adeh, 2016; Velez-Rendon, 2002). These characteristics have been found to include several fundamental constructs ranging from the knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogical and socio/affective skills to identity, class management skills, discipline issues, etc.

Bell (2005), adopting a Likert-scale questionnaire, studied the attitudes and behaviors of 457 foreign language teachers of German, French and Spanish. He found the respondents agreed with most of the items in the questionnaire related to characteristics of foreign language teachers, overall attitudes towards and the behaviors related to communicative theories of foreign language teaching, the significance of negotiation of meaning and 'small group work', and finally 'assessment.

Similarly, Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2014), investigating characteristics of effective EFL teachers from both teachers and students' perspectives, found both teachers and students stressed teacher pedagogical qualities (e.g., subject matter knowledge, ability to impart knowledge, etc.), 'interpersonal relationships' and classroom management-related qualities (e.g., involvement of all students, regular assessment of students' learning process, etc.) as paramount characteristics of effective EFL teachers although they differed in the degree of significance they attached to these qualities. What lacks in their study is that they tried to explore the status quo of being effective teachers among the teachers, and explore the existing situation through gaining perceptions.

As Aghajanzadeh Kiasi, Maftoon, and Birjandi (2016) note, effective pedagogical practice promotes the achievement of students and builds up confidence of the teachers in teaching, and the major cause for the gap in pedagogical practices may be attributed to the lack of pedagogical competence. Their study examined high school English Language teachers' perception of pedagogical competence with regard to the teachers' age, gender, fields of study, university degrees, and years of teaching. Regardless of the difference in settings of their study, it did not explore the relationship between the teachers' personal and professional background with pedagogical competences.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

To run the pilot study and ensure the validity of the closed-ended questionnaire, 185 university instructors were selected from Gilan Province, Iran. The demographic characteristics of the instructors who answered the questionnaire correctly were as follows: thirty-nine percent were women and 61% men; 24% had a M.A. degree, 40% were Ph.D. candidates, and 36% had a Ph.D. degree; 37%, 29%, 22%, 13% were at age-ranges of 25-35, 36-45, 46-55, and over 55, respectively. Fifty-two percent had English Language Teaching major, 24%, English Linguistics, 5% English Language Translation, and 18% English Language Literature.

The next group of participants who were selected for the purpose of conducting the correlational part of the study consisted of 48 practicing university instructors with the same personal and educational background with the exception that the fields of study in this group were English Language Teaching (54.1%), Linguistics (27.1%), English Language Literature (18.8%). The field of English Language Translation was excluded from the study due to the very limited number of participants in this group. Male and female instructors consisted of 62.5% and 37.5% respectively. The participants were M.A. holders, Ph.D. candidates, and Ph.D. holders with 16.7%, 37.5%, and 45.8%, respectively. Regarding the age, 37.5%, 27.1%, 20.8%, and 14.6% of the participants were at the age range of 25-35, 36-45, 46-55, and over 55, respectively.

The participants were at the time of research practicing teaching at Islamic Azad and State universities, PNU, non-profit universities, and educational complexes. The participants were chosen based on convenience sampling as one of the main types of non-probability sampling methods.

3.2. Questionnaire

A researcher-developed questionnaire of 5-point Likert scale, namely strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree was used. The items of the questionnaire were formulated on the principles of using complete sentences to avoid abbreviations and two-edged items, and avoiding negative items. It needs to be mentioned that the questionnaire was developed through Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) explained in the procedure below.

3.3. Procedure

In the first phase, for the purpose of developing questionnaire and gaining construct validity, the researchers first asked for six experts' opinions on the questionnaire, through distributing the questionnaire among eight instructors practicing TEFL at Islamic Azad University and State University, but two of them did not respond.

The reliability of the questionnaire was also ensured through a pilot study that was conducted with a representative sample of 25 instructors. The purpose was to eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording and trying out the coding /classification system for data analysis. The internal consistency of the items was calculated through Cronbach's alpha. The value of Cronbach's alpha was .92, which indicated that the instrument was internally reliable as the minimum recommended level of internal reliability is 70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, cited in Panayides & Walker, 2013). In addition, the average mean scores and the standard deviation of the total items were 4.22 and 0.652, respectively.

Next, in order to gain the construct validity of the developed questionnaire, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. One hundred and eighty five English instructors were asked to respond to a 33 close-ended questionnaire. However, 175 respondents gave their answers back to the on-site researchers correctly. Before the onset of factor analysis and factor extraction, the sampling size and adequacy of items and respondents were gained. As a 33-item questionnaire (33 variables) was administered to 175 participants, the analysis was $33/175 = 5.3$ respondents for each variable, which conformed to the sampling size criterion. Nevertheless, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) were calculated as well. The KMO sampling adequacy test statistic for all 33 variables was 0.798, which was large enough for further analysis and higher than the threshold value of 0.5. The BTS statistic was 4142.573, well over 0.05. Thus, the test results supported that the variables had satisfactory characteristics to conduct factor analysis.

In the next phase, having developed the questionnaire of instructors' pedagogical competence based on the four constructs of teaching attitudes, teaching skills, assessment strategies, and knowledge mastery via EFA, the researchers tried to estimate the relationship between and among the constructs. The questionnaire was piloted with a sample representatives 20 instructors, and the reliability of the developed questionnaire was measured through Cronbach's coefficient Alpha. Next, the developed questionnaire was distributed to the second group of the teacher participants (N = 48).

4. Results

It appears that the variables intended to form the construct of assessment strategies loaded to the first component with approximately similar factor loadings (.936 and .917 for variables 1 and 26). Variable 8 also loaded .820 substantially higher compared to other remaining variables. Moreover, the second component showed high loadings for the 10, 15, and 22 variables with .707, .721, and .750 loadings. Further, on the third component, variables 6 and 30 measured the construct of assessment strategies with .707 and .756 loadings.

The variables related to the construct of teaching skills loaded on 4 components. Variables, 2, 9, and 17 had a loading of .724, .596, and .740 on the third component. Also, variable 9 loaded .545, .596, and .532 on the first, third, and fourth components, respectively. Variable 27 loaded .696 only on the first component, and variable 31 had a loading of .732 on the second variable.

Variable 25 showed the highest variable on the first component. However, variable 3 and 19 did not load on any of the four components, which resulted in its removal from the analyses and collection of variables supporting the teaching skills construct.

The variables forming the construct of knowledge mastery loaded on the fourth component with a loading of .558 for variable 5. In addition, on the third component, variable 7 had a low loading of .524, but high loadings for variables 16 and 20 that were .879 and .793, respectively. The second component also showed loadings of .608 and .788 for variables 5 and 11. Variable 13, however, did not load on any components, and that resulted in its removal from the eight variables leaving only 7 variables to measure the construct of knowledge mastery.

Regarding the construct of teaching attitudes, the first component had an approximately high factor loading (.820) only on variable 32. In addition, variables 14, 24, and 28 showed loadings of .669, .523, and .595, respectively on component one. However, the third component showed high loadings for the variable 4 (.803), and lower loading for variable 33 (.684) (see Appendix A for detailed factor loadings of the variables). Based on the results gained from the analysis of factors in the constructs of the developed questionnaire via EFA, it was found that the total number of variables supporting the four constructs of the questionnaire remained to be 30 from the initial 33 variables.

4.1. The Relationships Among the Constructs of Pedagogical Competence

According to the reliability of the developed questionnaire measured through Cronbach's coefficient Alpha, all the variables of the constructs enjoyed an accepted alpha coefficient of over .80, and the total alpha was found to be .82 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cronbach Coefficient Alpha for Each Factor

Factors	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Assessment strategies	Q1, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q15, Q26, Q30	.823
Skills of teaching	Q2, Q9, Q17, Q21, Q25, Q27, Q31	.824
Teaching attitudes	Q4, Q12, Q14, Q18, Q24, Q28, Q32, Q33	.812
Knowledge mastery	Q5, Q7, Q11, Q16, Q20, Q23, Q29	.828
All factors	Total items 30	Total alpha .821

Table 2 presents correlations among all dimensions of instructors' pedagogical competences of assessment strategies, skills of teaching, knowledge mastery, and teaching attitudes. According to the table, the strongest correlation existed between instructors' assessment strategies and their skills of teaching (.87), while the lowest correlation was between the construct of teaching attitudes and the construct of assessment strategies (.61). It is worth mentioning that the construct of teaching attitudes had the lowest correlation coefficient with other constructs.

Table 2: Correlation of Dimensions of Instructors' Pedagogical Competences

Constructs		Assessment strategies	Skills of teaching	Knowledge mastery	Teaching attitudes
Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	48			
Teaching Skills	Pearson Correlation	.878**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	48	48		
Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.858**	.828**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	48	48	48	
Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.612**	.742**	.649**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	48	48	48	48

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The instructors' Pedagogical competences with regards to their gender, age, degree and fields of study were analyzed using Pearson Correlation at significant ($p < .05$) level.

4.2. The Relationships Between Instructors' Gender and the Dimensions of Pedagogical Competence

Table 3: Relationship between Dimensions of Instructors' Pedagogical Competences and Gender

Gender		Correlations				
		Assessment strategies	Skills of teaching	Teaching attitudes	Knowledge mastery	
Male	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	30			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.579**	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001			
		N	30	30		
	Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.664**	.559	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.051		
		N	30	30	30	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.590**	.502	.585**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.591	.001	
		N	30	30	30	30
Female	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	18			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.619**	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006			
		N	18	18		
	Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.816**	.772	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.128		
		N	18	18	18	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.637**	.558	.794**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.302	.000	
		N	18	18	18	18

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 3, in the correlations between instructors' gender differences and the pedagogical competencies, the strongest correlation was ($r = .66$) for male ($r = .81$) for female instructors between the constructs of assessment strategies and teaching attitudes. The poorest but positive correlation was also approximately the same for male ($r = .50$) and female ($r = .55$) instructors between the constructs of skills of teaching and knowledge mastery.

4.3. The Relationships Between Instructors' Age and the Dimensions of Pedagogical Competence

As shown in Table 4, with regard to instructors' age, in the first age-range of 25-35, two highest correlations belonged to teaching skills and knowledge mastery $r = 0.76$, $n = 18$ $p = .001$, two-tailed and teaching attitudes and knowledge mastery $r = 0.76$, $n = 18$ $p = .001$, two-tailed. The positively moderate correlations were also found among other constructs in this age group.

Table 4: Correlation of Dimensions of Instructors ' Pedagogical Competences at different Age Groups

Age			Correlations			
			Assessment strategies	Skills of teaching	Teaching attitudes	Knowledge mastery
25-35	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	18			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.548*	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.019			
		N	18	18		
	teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.552	.675**	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.060	.002		
		N	18	18	18	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.693	.760	.761	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.107	.298	.296	
		N	18	18	18	18
36-45	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	13			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.561*	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.046			
		N	13	13		
	Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.920**	.698	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.323		
		N	13	13	13	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.741**	.576**	.894**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.805	.000	
		N	13	13	13	13
46-55	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	10			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.549	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.193			
		N	10	10		
	Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.743*	.546	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.688		
		N	10	10	10	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.711*	.512	.756*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.557	.011	
		N	10	10	10	10
55+	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	7			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.597	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.157			
		N	7	7		
	Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.834*	.681	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.542		
		N	7	7	7	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.583	.533	.669	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.770	.911	.897	
		N	7	7	7	7

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In the second age group (36-45), there was a highly positive correlation between assessment strategies and teaching attitudes $r = 0.92$, $n = 13$ $p = .001$, two-tailed. Other highly and moderately positive correlations were also found among other constructs and the second age group. In the third

age group, 46-55, two highly positive correlations were found between teaching attitudes and subject mastery and assessment strategies and teaching attitudes ($r = .75$, and $r = .74$), respectively. The other correlations between the constructs and the third age group were moderately positive. In the last age group, 55+, a highly positive correlation was reported between assessment strategies and teaching attitudes $r = .83$, $n = 7$ $p = .001$. Moreover, three moderate correlations were also reported between assessment strategies and skills of teaching $r = .59$, assessment strategies and knowledge mastery $r = .58$, and teaching attitudes and knowledge mastery, $r = .66$.

4.4. The Relationships Between Instructors' University Degrees and the Dimensions of Pedagogical Competence

With regard to the instructors' university degrees in three different categories of M.A. holders, Ph.D. candidates, and Ph.D. holders, Table 5 shows the correlations between each category and pedagogical competence analyzed separately.

Table 5: Correlation of Dimensions of Instructors' Pedagogical Competences and Degree

			Correlations			
Degree			Assessment strategies	Skills of teaching	Teaching attitudes	Knowledge mastery
M.A.	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	8			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.661	1		
Sig. (2-tailed)		.074				
	N	8	8			
Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.770*	.629	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.289			
	N	8	8	8		
Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.709*	.509	.917**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	.620	.001		
	N	8	8	8	8	
Ph.D. Can.	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	18			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.504*	1		
Sig. (2-tailed)		.033				
	N	18	18			
Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.713**	.659	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.143			
	N	18	18	18		
Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.513*	.797	.576*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.701	.012		
	N	18	18	18	18	
Ph.D.	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	22			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.622**	1		
Sig. (2-tailed)		.002				
	N	22	22			
Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.700**	.639	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.123			
	N	22	22	22		
Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.691**	.509	.633**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.350	.002		
	N	22	22	22	22	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Among the M.A. holders, a highest positive correlation was found between teaching attitudes and knowledge mastery $r = .91$. However, the lowest correlation was found between and skills of teaching and knowledge mastery ($r = .50$).

Based on Table 6, in the second category (Ph.D. candidates), two approximately high positive correlations were reported between skills of teaching and knowledge mastery ($r = .79$) and teaching attitudes and assessment strategies ($r = .71$). The lowest correlation was found between assessment strategies and skills of teaching $r = .50$, $n = 18$ $p = .001$.

In the third category (Ph.D. holders), the outmost positive correlation was between teaching attitudes and assessment strategies $r = .70$. The lowest correlation, however, was found between skills of teaching and knowledge mastery ($r = .50$).

4.5. The Relationships Between Instructors' Field of Study and the Dimensions of Pedagogical Competence

The correlations among the constructs of teachers' pedagogical competences were also analyzed in three fields of study, namely English Language Teaching, English Linguistics, and English Language Literature (see Table 6).

Table 6: Correlation of Dimensions of Instructors' Pedagogical Competences and Fields of Study

Field		Correlations				
		Assessment strategies	Skills of teaching	Teaching attitudes	Knowledge mastery	
Teaching	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	26			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.595**	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001			
		N	26	26		
	Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.585**	.574	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.175		
		N	26	26	26	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.538**	.508	.512**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.307	.007	
		N	26	26	26	26
Linguistics	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	13			
	Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.653*	1		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.015			
		N	13	13		
	Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.837**	.605*	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.028		
		N	13	13	13	
	Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.680*	.533	.743**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.444	.004	
		N	13	13	13	13
Literature	Assessment strategies	Pearson Correlation	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N				

	N	9			
Skills of teaching	Pearson Correlation	.568	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.111			
	N	9	9		
Teaching attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.833**	.549	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.518		
	N	9	9	9	
Knowledge mastery	Pearson Correlation	.657	.552	.865**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.054	.794	.003	
	N	9	9	9	9

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Regarding the instructors in Teaching field, the correlations between skills of teaching and assessment strategies, teaching attitudes and assessment strategies, and knowledge mastery and assessment strategies were ($r = .59$), ($r = .58$), and ($r = .53$), respectively. Furthermore, the correlations reported between knowledge mastery and skills of teaching ($r = .50$) was the lowest.

In the field of Linguistics, there was only one highly positive correlation between assessment strategies and teaching attitudes $r = .83$, $n = 13$ $p = .001$, two tailed. The moderate correlations between assessment strategies and knowledge mastery, assessment strategies and skills of teaching, skills of teaching and teaching attitudes were ($r = .68$), ($r = .65$), and ($r = .60$), respectively.

In the field of English Language Literature, as shown in Table 6, two very high correlations were reported between teaching attitudes and knowledge mastery ($r = .86$) and assessment strategies and teaching attitudes ($r = .83$). However, one lower correlation was found between skills of teaching and teaching attitudes ($r = .54$).

5. Discussion

The inter-correlational analysis within the constructs showed how the variables within the groups of variables were measuring the same trait. As the correlations were approximately high among them, it was assumed that the variables within the groups were measuring the same underlying trait of instructors' pedagogical competence. Besides, the results revealed positive correlations (strong, moderate, or low) among the four constructs with regards to the instructors' age, gender, university degree, and fields of study.

In an earlier study done by Feldman (1993) on the instructional characteristics considered particularly important to good teaching and effective instruction, it was found that the points such as teachers being intellectually challenging, motivating students and setting high standards for them, and encouraging self-initiated learning were ranked as significant factors.

The findings of Brosh's (1996) investigation of the characteristics of good language teachers support the findings found in the present study. In Brosh's study, the knowledge and command of the target language (knowledge mastery, in present study), being able to organize, explain, and clarify (skills of teaching, in present study), as well as to arouse and sustain interest and motivation among students, and being available to students (teaching attitude, in present study) were found the desirable characteristics of an effective language instructor.

In a similar vein, the results of Bell's (2005) questionnaire-based study indicated that teachers' attitudes towards the communicative theories of foreign language teaching, the significance of negotiation of meaning and assessment was the same among the teachers to a high extent as it was found in the current study. In addition, Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2014), investigating the features of effective EFL teachers from the viewpoints of both teachers and students' endorsed the findings of the current study as they also found teacher pedagogical qualities (e.g., subject matter knowledge, ability to impart knowledge, etc.), interpersonal relationships and

classroom management (e.g., involvement of all students, regular assessment of students' learning process) as paramount characteristics of effective EFL teachers.

The study carried out by Aghajanzadeh Kiasi, Maftoon, and Birjandi, (2016) also endorse the findings of the present study, as they found that teachers with different demographic features generally enjoyed positive perceptions of pedagogical competence despite some opposing views teachers had on pedagogical competence regarding their age and experience. Supporting the findings of the present study, Park and Lee (2006) in a study on the characteristics of effective English teachers as perceived by teachers and students in high schools in Korea through a self-report questionnaire, found that the teacher's perceptions of characteristics such as English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills are important for an English language teacher to possess with English proficiency as the highest in rank.

The investigation of the characteristics of academic disciplines is a recognized field of study in schooling and psychology (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Teacher characteristics can be regarded as qualities which are measurable using tests or they might be derived from the teachers' academic or professional background. Instructional competence divided as personality, and teacher-student relationship (Witcher, 2003) is highly important as it is the teacher's ability to create student-centered classrooms, provide sufficient content knowledge, and maintain a pedagogical demeanor

Ashton (as cited in Soodmand Afshar & Hamzavi, 2017) holds that the characteristics can comprise qualities which are referred to as personal (e.g., gender, mental ability), or experiential (e.g., educational records, teaching experience, or certificate status). As Ashton adds, there are some characteristics which are combinations of both personal as well as experiential qualities (e.g., the performance of candidates on tests designed for teachers, certificates, etc.).

6. Conclusion and Implications

As teacher pedagogical competence is a vital element playing a crucial role in promoting and enhancing effective teaching that ends up to effective learning, it is valuable if teachers know what is perceived as the characteristics of effective teachers. Moreover, being aware of the pedagogical competence and practicing accordingly helps teachers create an emotionally positive and academically productive atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers need a deep knowledge of how to teach their specific subject (Shulman, 1992), as pedagogical knowledge is connected with students' learning (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005). This pedagogical awareness will help teachers understand what the students expect from them and enable them to develop themselves accordingly. As found in the present study, the construct of teaching attitudes had the lowest correlation coefficient with other constructs. It means that the intervention of teaching attitudes in developing curriculum shall be taken into account to boost teachers' pedagogical competence.

English language teachers are by no means an exception and their key role in effective language learning cannot be overlooked. Special attention must be paid to this link between teachers and learners in countries like Iran where language learning happens mainly in formal classroom settings (Kariminia & Salehizadeh, 2007), and teachers, as the main source of comprehensible language input (Krashen, 1985) to students, affect their learning directly. Special attention must be paid to this link between teachers and learners in countries like Iran where language learning happens mainly in formal classroom settings (Kariminia & Salehizadeh, 2007), and teachers, as the main source of language input to students, affect their learning directly.

In light of these findings, it seems even more important to conduct studies where all the relevant constructs related to teaching practices in the current research are integrated simultaneously. This would enable us to specifically determine whether the professional competences would discriminately explain the quality of instruction that tries to leverage the potential of all the competences.

Teachers' recognition of the capacities of professional competences in teaching and conducting research projects is of critical importance. The lack of this recognition causes anxiety and concern in them and hinders them from using it in their academic activities. Due to the fact that

instructional competences and novelty potentially affect teachers' educational practice and experience, the present study tried to raise a kind of awareness among university instructors on the extent of having incorporating their competences in teaching the materials they are supposed to impart to the students.

Furthermore, improving the field of foreign language teaching and learning without improving the qualities of EFL instructors may seem impossible. Teacher educators need to serve their profession and its development through leadership and scholarly work; they need to provide leadership at the local, state, and national levels in developing, implementing, and evaluating the components of pedagogical competence and the practice of the components for high-quality education. The present study suffered from some limitations and delimitations. Regarding the number of participants and the setting, it was limited to only 48 participants in Gillan, Iran. Instructors from other provinces would end up with much more comprehensive findings. In addition, this study was also limited to only university instructors. Other school and institute teachers can also be investigated with regards to their professional competences.

With regard to the instructors' fields of study, it is worth mentioning that due to the limited number (only two) of M.A and Ph.D., holders of English Language Translation, this field was crossed out from the study in the second phase of the study although instructors in this field were present in the first phase of developing the questionnaire. Concerning the competences investigated in the present study, they were limited to only four competences of teaching attitudes, skills of teaching, knowledge mastery, and assessment strategies. Other competences such as technological, technological-pedagogical, and management can be explored in future studies.

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Appendix A

Rotated component matrix of the constructs

Items (variables)	Component			
	1	2	3	4
1. I regularly provide feedback to students on their performance.	.936			
2. I am able to organize a teaching-learning process around language learning objectives.			.724	
3. I use technology to support language learning.				
4. I take part in the in-service training courses offered by institution.			.803	
5. I update my English knowledge of subject matter very often.		.608		.558
6. I encourage learners to monitor their own performance.			.634	
7. I am able to demonstrate a sound English knowledge while teaching the subject.			.524	
8. I am aware of various kinds of tests such as diagnostic, achievement, and proficiency tests.	.820			
9. I help learners develop writing skill at different proficiency levels.	.545		.596	.532
10. I model self and peer-assessment techniques in the class.		.707		
11. I own knowledge of the English language tasks and exercise.		.788		
12. I have a plan to develop myself based on my needs and interests.		.635		
13. I have various strategies of developing my understanding of English grammar & vocabulary.				
14. I have critical attitudes to my own teaching (examining, discussing, questioning practices).	.669			
15. I am able to assess learners' knowledge of language components; i.e. grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.	.721			
16. I have sufficient knowledge about English.			.879	
17. I plan, manage, and coordinate my teaching.			.740	
18. I make students familiar with basis of critical thinking in order to enable them make appropriate decisions regarding absorbing or rejecting target cultural norms.		.597		
19. I study the latest research papers and use their findings in my teaching.				
20. I provide comprehensive review of most important content concepts.			.793	
21. I use internet and its different facilities to teach English.		.714		
22. I help learners to do self-peer assessment in the classroom.		.750		
23. I use different sources (books, internet, articles, and newspapers) to design the content of the English course.		.737		
24. I collaborate with other teachers in order to improve my own abilities in teaching.	.523			
25. I help learners develop reading skill by using reading strategies.	.858			
26. I assess individual learners' language skills including reading, writing, speaking, and listening.	.917			
27. I am familiar with different teaching methods and use them appropriately in my classroom based on the needs of my students.	.696			
28. I have a sense of self-efficacy.	.595	.631		
29. I am able to demonstrate a sound English knowledge while teaching the subject.		.616		
30. I use criterion-referenced assessment to measure learners' language skills.			.756	
31. I help learners develop speaking skill by practicing formal and informal language.		.735		
32. I take part in scientific conferences of TEFL held in Iran and overseas.	.820			
33. I have commitment to promote the learning of all students.			.684	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

Note: Rotation was converged in 10, 9, 7, 4, 8, 7, and 5 iterations.