Exploring the Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Professional Competence and Job Satisfaction: A Mixed-methods Study

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Abstract

Although it has been over three decades that teachers' professional competence has gained considerable attention, its relationship with and effects on job satisfaction has remained unexplored in the EFL context of Iran. Thus, the present mixed-methods study aims to explore the correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' professional competence and job satisfaction. To this aim, a total of 290 EFL teachers, including males (n=164) and females (n=126) for the quantitative part and a sample of 21 EFL teachers, entailing males (n=11) and females (n=10) for the qualitative part were selected using a random sampling method. The participants completed an EFL Teachers' Professional Competence Questionnaire and Teachers' Job Satisfaction Questionnaire, as well as participated in semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and content analysis. The findings evidenced a moderate positive correlation between the EFL teachers' professional competence and job satisfaction. Additionally, the results documented that the EFL teachers' job satisfaction was affected by knowledge, attitudes, and skills factors related to professional competence. Furthermore, the complementary qualitative results yielded four recurring themes, including 'increased job motivation', 'improved teaching self-efficacy', 'promoted student learning', and 'effective organizational performance'. The study ends with presenting a range of implications and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: Professional competence, Job satisfaction, Iranian EFL teachers, Content analysis approach

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, education is one of the crucial building blocks of a nation. It is a systematic, character-building process to empower an individual such that they can satisfy the requirements of life (Barrichello et al., 2020; Bhardwaj, 2016). In other words, as Brighouse (2006) notes, it is a concerted, human-conscious effort to raise individuals who are cognitively, affectively, and physically healthy. In a sense, the primary purpose of education is to generate capable, rational, intelligent, and responsive individuals who can face and understand life's realities and are willing to work for a better future.

In Iran, the modern education system aims to meet the present and future needs of individuals, society, and government by raising individuals who have a multi-developed personality of citizens (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). These individuals are supposed to adapt themselves to the social, political, economic, and cultural changes, self-educating, self-improving, and starting productive employments. It is evident that the Iranian education system cannot make these invaluable objectives realized unless it privileges competent teachers. A certain guarantee of reaching these goals is teachers who are knowledgeable, skilled, motivated, and satisfied. Without competent teachers,

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quality education cannot occur since they are qualified teachers who can facilitate student learning through the design and implementation of productive teaching tasks. The quality of an education system, as Darling-Hammond (2000) notes, is closely tied with the existence of teachers who are professionally competent, committed, motivated, and satisfied with their job. A competent teacher makes educational objectives realized if they are satisfied with the work conditions (Afshar & Doosti, 2016; Akram, Malik, Sarwar, Anwer, & Ahmad, 2015; Celep, 2000).

In the 21st century, English teachers need to obtain the required professional competence (PC) through academic study and practice. A professionally competent teacher is equipped with 'disciplinary content knowledge' and 'pedagogical content knowledge' (Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018). Disciplinary content knowledge refers to the knowledge, including the nature of language, language teaching, and language learning. However, pedagogical content knowledge treats an extensive repertoire of practical teaching strategies/skills, making teaching contextually effective and appropriate. According to Doğançay-Aktuna and Hardman (2018), along with 'disciplinary content knowledge' and 'pedagogical content knowledge', teachers should believe in classroom-based research and reflective activities. In this way, they make correct connections between 'disciplinary content knowledge' and 'pedagogical content knowledge', as well as discover their beliefs about teaching and learning processes.

A review of the literature of the field on the topic discloses that teachers' PC and teachers' job satisfaction (JS) have been widely researched. However, the relationship between teachers' PC and their JS has remained unexplored in the EFL context of Iran. As EFL teachers are the key factor to fulfill the objectives of English learning in the Iranian high schools, the need to explore their PC and its correlation with and effects on JS receives priority. It is essential to examine if professionally competent English teachers are more satisfied with their job or vice versa. Hence, the present study purports to investigate the correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' PC and JS quantitatively and qualitatively.

2. Literature Review

2.1. EFL Teachers' Professional Competence

The term PC has gained widespread popularity over the last decades. With the emerging educational reforms worldwide, teachers' PC has been used in relation to educational settings (Mousavi, Atai, & Babaii, 2016; Mulder, 2007). According to Bailey (2006), PC for teachers is defined as a "statement about what teachers are supposed to know and be able to do" (p. 210). In another definition by Soepriyatna (2012), teachers' PC is considered the required knowledge, skills, and behaviors to handle teaching tasks, obligations, and challenges. In this regard, Rinantanti (2015) argues that nobody can be called a teacher unless they have gained a range of basic knowledge, professional skills, and personality traits.

In educational settings, PC can be viewed from two perspectives: theoretical and operational (Lengkanawati, 2015; Westera, 2001). From the theoretical perspective, PC is considered as a cognitive structure facilitating some particular behaviors. However, from the operational perspective, it is viewed as a range of higher-order skills representing the capabilities of handling complex situations (Koster & Dengerink, 2008; Widodo, 2021). In this way, it can be implied that teachers' PC comprises knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

For second language (L2) teachers, the knowledge part entails content knowledge, pedagogic knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, and support knowledge (Aghajanzadeh Kiasi, 2020; Day, 1993; Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Content knowledge refers to the subject matter, the literary and cultural aspects of English, and the linguistic information of English. Pedagogical content knowledge deals with the knowledge of generic teaching principles and procedures, such as designing a quality lesson plan and managing classes. Pedagogical content knowledge is concerned with specialized knowledge on how to teach the subject matter. Support knowledge includes the knowledge of other disciplines, such as linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and research methods that inform the discipline of

Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2021, 10(4), 69-85   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

applied linguistics. For Richards (1998), the area of knowledge for L2 teachers entails teaching skills, L2 teaching theories, subject matter knowledge, communication skills, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and pedagogical reasoning.

About the skills part, as Khodamoradi and Maghsoudi (2020) note, an L2 teacher with a high PC is skilled at doing small-scale research in the class, designing and implementing assessment practices, managing courses, cooperating with others, coordinating (organizing teaching elements to work well together), making data-driven decisions (deciding based on data and evidence), motivating students, language skills (listening, speaking, reading, & writing), managing material/resource (using the available resources well), pedagogical (applying theories in a natural context), solving problems, reflecting and self-evaluating, technological uses, managing time, and planning lessons.

With respect to the attitudes part, according to Kartal and Başol (2019), a professionally competent L2 teacher believes in cooperation and collaboration, diversity and individual differences, innovation and personal improvement, life-long learning, reflective teaching (getting feedback from learners for improvement), shows care and concern for all students, has commitment and feeling responsible, has right attitudes towards teaching and learning, shows concern about professional ethics (following moral rules and principles), and understands students' feelings and problems (empathy). Hence, L2 teachers' PC is a very complex notion, affecting L2 teachers' effectiveness, motivation, satisfaction, and intention to make the educational objectives realized at schools.

2.2. EFL Teachers' Job Satisfaction

JS has been considered as an influential factor in various fields due to its direct effects on individuals' effectiveness, commitment, vitality, and burnout in an organization (Hagedorn 2000; Smerek & Peterson, 2007). JS is defined as "a positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Aziri, 2011, p. 2). In other words, as Oshagbemi (2000) notes, JS is a positive affective reaction in an individual when the actual outcomes match with those they have deserved, desired, and anticipated. JS should be viewed as a multi-dimension notion since an individual may feel satisfied with one dimension (e.g., payment) but, at the same time, feel dissatisfied with another dimension (e.g., job security) (Olsen 1993; Oshagbemi, 1999).

The theoretical foundation of JS concept has been rested on the needs-based Theory of Motivation (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). In line with this theory, there is a distinction between motivators (satisfiers) and demotivators (dissatisfies). The motivators are related to the immediate organizational climate, such as salary, working conditions, supervision, interpersonal relationships, and organizational policies. However, demotivators leading to job dissatisfaction include recognition, achievement, responsibility, advancement, and the work itself. Later, based on Herzberg et al.'s theory, two factors that may affect JS were verified, namely 'agents' and 'events' (Lock, 1976). The factors making an event take place are called 'agents'. They can be managers, colleagues, supervisors, and clients. In contrast, the factors causing an individual to feel satisfied and dissatisfied are named 'events'. They include promotion/demotion, payment, success/failure, and working conditions.

In another perspective, the determining factors of JS may fall within three factors: the workplace, job field, and actual task (Johnson, Hall, Ford, Mead, Levine, Wang, & Klag, 1995; Volkwein, Szelest, Cabrera, & Napierski-Prancl, 1998). As every workplace has its unique organizational climate, an employee's satisfaction with the workplace is of paramount importance. An employees' feelings and emotions toward their job status are called the job field. And, the actual task satisfaction is the current work that the employee is doing (Oshagbemi, 1999). As Olsen (1993) stressed, to determine the overall JS of an employee, all these three factors should be considered. Additionally, Hezberg (1966) listed fourteen significant factors exerting potential influence on JS: the work itself, achievement, responsibility, recognition, the possibility of advancement, payment, job security, the possibility of growth, personal life, work conditions, technical supervision, interpersonal relations, and agreement with company policies.

Concerning the educational contexts, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) define teachers' JS as "teachers' affective reactions to their work or to their teaching role" (p. 1030). A few studies have been conducted to verify the determining factors of teachers' JS. For example, in the Chinese context, Chen (2010) found that middle school teachers' JS was positively affected by opportunities for collaboration, leadership, and working conditions, as well as adversely affected by workload and stress, payment, and development opportunities. Within the same lines, Kassabgy et al. (2001) discovered that in Egypt and Hawaii, English teachers' JS were more affected by intrinsic and altruistic factors, such as having good relationships with school stakeholders, making the way for their students' learning, and actualizing their potentials in teaching. Additionally, Soodmand Afshar and Doosti (2016) found that Iranian EFL teachers' JS is shaped by motivating factors, such as having an internal desire to teach, serving the society, and imparting knowledge to others as well as demotivating factors, like inadequate salary, students' lack of motivation to learn English, principals' inattention to the teachers, low occupational and social status, and not being encouraged to seek professional development.

2.3. Related Studies in the Literature

Regarding the correlation between teachers' PC and JS a few studies have been conducted till now. We review them critically to lay the groundwork for the present study. In the research by Akram et al. (2015), the correlation between secondary teachers' competence and JS was investigated. They found a significant positive correlation between the teachers' competence and their JS. Within the same lines, Arifin (2015) investigated the effects of high school teachers' competence, motivation, and organizational competence with JS and job performance in Indonesia. A part of their findings evidenced that the teachers' competence highly affected their JS. Additionally, Jung and Shin (2015) examined the impact of job competency on JS among administrative staff in a Korean research University. The results evidenced a significant positive correlation between the participants' job competency and JS. In addition, the findings revealed that each dimension of job competency (e.g., ICT skills, problem-solving, organizational understanding, interpersonal skills, and global competency) affects JS differently. Besides, Bashir (2017) explored the relationship between secondary school teachers' JS and professional commitment in India. The results indicate that the participants' JS was significantly correlated with their PC. Finally, Supriyanto et al. (2021) scrutinized the effects between teachers' competence and JS in the city of Surabaya, Indonesia. The results documented that the participants' competence acted as a powerful predictor of their JS.

As can be implied from the above-alluded studies, there are some notable limitations with them. First, they have been purely quantitative and the qualitative aspects of the effects of teachers' PC on JS have remained unexplored. Second, although they have addressed the relationship between teachers' competence and JS and vice versa, the factors of teachers' PC that may determine their JS have been left disregarded. Third, the EFL teachers' PC's correlation with and effects on JS are under-researched in Iran. Hence, the present study attempts to fill up these gaps by exploring the correlation between EFL teachers' PC and JS both quantitatively and qualitatively in the EFL context of Iran. The following research questions were investigated to meet the present study's objectives:

Research Question One: Is there any significant correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' professional competence and job satisfaction?

Research Question Two: Which professional competence factors determine Iranian EFL teachers' job satisfaction?

Research Question Three: In which ways Iranian EFL teachers' professional competence can impact their job satisfaction?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The current study's design is considered mixed-methods since the researchers gathered the required data through two questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The underlying reason to collect both

Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2021, 10(4), 69-85   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

qualitative and quantitative data was reaching triangulation. As Mackey and Gass (2016) note, triangulation allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the topic under the research by approaching it from different perspectives and using different research methods. Therefore, to disclose the correlation between the EFL teachers' PC and JS in the Iranian EFL context, a mixed-design was used.

3.2. Setting and Participants

The current study was conducted in two cities of Lorestan Province (e.g., Khorramanad City and Borujerd City), Iran, in spring 2021. The researchers selected 290 high school English teachers through a random sampling method at 45 high schools. According to Riazi (2016), a random sampling method gives an equal chance to all individuals in a population for participation in a study. The primary reason for the selection of the participants was their availability to the researchers. The participants comprised males (n=164) and females (n=126) and their ages ranged from 23 to 61. They held B.A. (n=198), M.A. (n=77), and Ph.D. (n=15). The researchers did not control the participants' years of experience owing to logistical limitations. For the qualitative section, the researchers selected 21 EFL teachers through a random sampling method. They included males (n=11) and females (n=10) and aged from 25 to 54, and held B.A. (n=14), M.A. (n=5), Ph.D. (n=2).

The first researcher referred to the education offices of Khorramanad City and Borujerd City to access the participants. He explained the present study's objectives for the Vice Presidents of Education and asked if they could achieve the English teachers. They admitted to giving him the phone numbers of the English teachers. The researchers contacted the English teachers one by one, introduced themselves, detailed the present study's objectives, and invited them to participate in it. The English teachers who accepted to participating in the survey willingly shared their email addresses, Whatsapp IDs, and Telegram IDs with the researchers. It is worth noting that the researchers informed the English teachers that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study as they wish. Further, the researchers assured the confidentiality of the English teachers' responses and they would share the final findings with them at the end of the study.

3.3. Instruments

The researchers used three instruments to collect the required data. The first instrument was the EFL Teachers' Professional Competence Questionnaire (ETPCQ), designed and validated by Khodamoradi and Maghsoudi (2020) (See Appendix A). ETPCQ, assessing the EFL teachers' professional competence included two parts. The first part asked for the EFL teachers' gender, age, academic degree, and years of experience. The second part gauged the participants' PC in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The knowledge factor entailed 12 items (*e.g., I believe that learners knowledge (awareness of learners' needs, their prior knowledge, ...) is important.*), the skills factor included 14 items (*e.g., I believe that classroom management skill is important.*), and the attitudes factor consisted of 10 items (*e.g., I believe in innovation and personal improvement.*). The items were developed in a five-point Likert scale from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5).

The second instrument was the Teachers' Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ), designed and validated by Spector (1985) (See Appendix B). TJSQ was used to measure the participants' JS and contained 36 items. TJSQ addresses different dimensions, including colleagues and communication (*e.g., I like the people I work with.*), supervision (*e.g., my supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job*.), working conditions (*e.g., many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.*), work itself and operating procedures (*e.g., I have too much to do at work*.), payment and benefits (*e.g., I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.*), contingent rewards (*e.g., I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be*.), and advancement/promotion (*e.g., There is really too little chance for promotion on my job.*). The items were designed in a five-point Likert scale from highly dissatisfied (1) to highly satisfied (5).

The third instrument was a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview, as Mackey and Gass (2016) note, served two-fold objectives: to evaluate the accuracy of the quantitative data and to disclose the issues that might not have been well-addressed by the questionnaires. Before

Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2021, 10(4), 69-85   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

the semi-structured interviews, the researchers designed some questions in line with the content of the questionnaires:

1. How may your professional competence affect your job satisfaction?

2. How may your knowledge affect your job satisfaction?

3. How may your skills affect your job satisfaction?

4. How may your attitudes affect your job satisfaction?

5. Is there anything else you may want to express about the effects of your professional competence on job satisfaction?

The researchers invited the participants to a comfortable place. After having a warm greeting and explaining the study's goals briefly, the first researcher started the interview by asking this question: "How may your PC affect your job satisfaction?" Then, he continued the interview by asking the other questions. During the interview, the researchers provided points when needed so that the participants could deal with all the dimensions of the topic under question. The semi-structured interviews were run in Persian to let the participants express their perceptions with greater ease. It should be noted that the researchers recorded carefully the participants' voices to transcribe and analyze them later.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The researchers followed some steps to conduct the current study. First, they recruited two professional translators to translate the questionnaires into Persian. Next, they measured the reliability of the questionnaires by piloting them on 74 high school English teachers. The Cronbach alpha for ETPCQ and TJSQ was calculated $\alpha = 0.92$ and $\alpha = 0.88$, respectively, which were found acceptable for this study's objectives. Then, they invited two university professors at applied linguistics at the University of Ayatollah Ozma Borujerdi to evaluate the face and content validities of the questionnaires. The university professors examined the questionnaires with aspects of content, wording, question sequencing, and bias. Some minor modifications were made based on the university professors' comments. Afterward, the researchers invited nine high school English teachers to complete the questionnaires and report if their items were understandable enough. In line with their reports, some items were modified by replacing simpler words. Next, the researchers sent the digital format of the questionnaires to the teachers through email, Whatsapp, and Telegram. The questionnaires started with written consent and if the participants agreed with their contents they were led to the items of the questionnaires. The researchers sent a voice podcast through which they illuminated how the questionnaires could be completed. The EFL teachers' responses were stored in a digital database used for the data analysis later. Finally, the researchers administered the semi-structured interviews.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Since the collected data were both quantitative and qualitative, they were analyzed in line with these two approaches. For the quantitative data, using SPSS version 23, the descriptive statistics, such as mean and slandered deviation were calculated and inferential statistics, such as Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were run. To disclose the kind and amount of the correlation between the EFL teachers' PC and JS, the Pearson correlation analysis was used. Also, to unveil how much of the variance in the EFL teachers' JS was determined by the factors of PC, the multiple regression analysis was employed.

Concerning the qualitative data, the EFL teachers' responses were subjected to a content analysis approach. In a sense, the researchers extracted and classified the recurring themes by following three stages: *open coding*, *axial coding*, and *selective coding*. This was an inductive content analysis recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). In the open coding stage, the first researcher read and re-read the participants' responses to fully understand them. Then, he started coding the responses carefully to verify the particular concepts germane to the topic under the research. Based

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on the similarities and differences, he extracted 95 codes (e.g., PC predicts job motivation.). He did not stop coding unless any more new themes were extracted from the data and ensured that the codes were sufficiently coherent and meaningful. As the coding process was non-linear (Glaser, 2011), the axial coding was done concurrently with the open coding. During this phase, the first researcher reviewed the previous codes to see any meaningful relationships among them. In the selecting coding stage, the first researcher extracted the most recurring themes by reducing and combining the codes. In total, for the extracted themes, including *Increased Job Motivation theme* (29 codes), *Improved Teaching Self-efficacy* (26 codes), *Promoted Student Learning* (22 codes), and *Effective Organizational Performance* (18 codes) were calculated. It is worth pointing out that the researchers measured the consistency and credibility of the findings. For the consistency, the researchers recruited two code analysts to analyze the collected data independently. The result of their inter-rater reliability was $\alpha=0.87$. Regarding the credibility, the researchers used a member checking strategy. In doing so, they invited 4 EFL teachers to examine if the extracted themes and excerpts represented their intended meanings adequately. They reported a high correspondence between the extracted themes and excerpts and their intended meanings.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Results

The first research question investigated if there was any significant correlation between the Iranian EFL teachers' PC and JS. Prior to running the Pearson Correlation, the researchers checked out the normality assumption through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The findings of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the normality assumption for collected data related to the EFL teachers' PC scale ($KS_{(290)} = .093, p > .05$) and their JS scale ($KS_{(290)} = .091, p > .05$) was met.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the EFL Teachers' PC and JS

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Professional competence	290	3.215	0.717
Job satisfaction	290	3.248	0.842

Next, the researchers calculated the descriptive statistics of the EFL teachers' PC and their JS, reported in Table 1. As seen, for the EFL teachers' PC, $\bar{X}$ (3.125) and SD (0.717), and for their JS, $\bar{X}$ (3.248) and SD (0.842) were calculated, respectively. The correlation between the PC and JS of the EFL teachers is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between EFL Teachers' PC and JS

		Job satisfaction
Professional competence	Pearson Correlation	0.656
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	290

As observed in Table 2, there was a moderate positive correlation between PC and JS of the EFL teachers with the coefficient of 65.6% ($r = 0.656, p < 0.01$, N= 290). This implies that the more professionally competent the EFL teachers were, the more satisfied they were with their job.

The second research question explored how much of the variation in the EFL teachers' JS can be determined by their PC factors. To this aim, the researchers ran a multiple regression analysis. Before proceeding with the main analysis, the researchers checked the data for the assumptions. At first, to assess for outliers, they compared the value of the Mahalanobis distance against a critical value through a chi-square table. The maximum value of Mahalanobis distance (9.256) was less than the critical value (16.266), displaying no outliers. To check the assumption of linearity, they checked the relationship between the sub-components of PC on the scatterplot matrix, and they did not observe a curvilinear relationship. Additionally, they used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to examine the normality of the collected data from the sub-components of the PC scale. The calculated results were *knowledge* (KS = .058), *skills* (KS = .067) and *attitudes* (KS = .064) which were all above the significance level ($P > .05$). Thus, this assumption was also met. After checking all the assumptions,

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Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2021, 10(4), 69-85   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

they run the multiple regression analysis to assess the effects of the EFL teachers' PC factors on their JS.

Table 3: The Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis on the Effects of PC Dimensions on JS

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	R	R^2
Regression	88.872	3	29.624	72.949	.000	.658	.433
Residual	116.143	286	.406				
Total	205.015	289					

As reported in Table 3, ANOVA analysis reveals that the regression model in this question reaches statistical significance (F = 72.949, $p < 0.001$). Further, the value of R^2 (0.433) is significant, implying that 43.3% of the variance in the Iranian EFL teachers' JS can be accounted for by their PC dimensions. The succeeding step was to determine the factors which highly contribute to the prediction of the EFL teachers' JS.

Table 4: The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for PC Dimensions

Dimensions	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.756	.173		4.377	.000
Knowledge	.302	.053	.313	5.719	.000
Skills	.231	.054	.240	4.273	.000
Attitudes	.243	.054	.247	4.485	.000

Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction

As observed in Table 4, concerning the Beta values of the EFL teachers' PC sub-components, the teachers' JS was mainly affected by *Knowledge* (β = .313, $p < .001$), *attitudes* (β = .247, $p < .001$) and *Skills* (β = .240, $p < .001$) factors, respectively.

4.2. Qualitative Results

The third research question explored in which ways the Iranian EFL teachers' PC could impact their JS. The results of the content analysis yielded four overarching themes: 'increased job motivation', 'improved teaching self-efficacy', 'promoted student learning', and 'effective organizational performance'. These themes and the related excerpts are detailed below.

Increased Job Motivation

The first recurring theme emerging from the data was 'increased job motivation'. The participants pinpointed that as they were equipped with a high level of PC, they had higher willingness to make a concerted effort in doing their job duties. In this regard, one of the EFL teachers underlined:

> *"Our success to meet the educational objectives is highly tied with our professional competence. When I have the required knowledge and skills to handle my teaching obligations and challenges, I get more motivated to enter new challenging situations like using a different strategy to teach language skills. This, accordingly, makes me feel more satisfied with my job."*

In corroborating with the previous statement, the participants pinpointed that without a high PC, it is not possible to facilitate students' learning. The following excerpt clearly shows this:

"What I can say is that my job satisfaction relies heavily on my professional competence. For one, as I am not proficient at language skills, I cannot expose my students to sufficient input. And, this lack of sufficient input has failed my students to improve their communicative competence. Therefore, as I cannot achieve my intended teaching goals, I am not satisfied with the current status quo."

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Improved Teaching Self-efficacy

The next theme catching the participants' attention was "improved teaching self-efficacy". The EFL teachers' stressed that their PC positively affects their teaching self-efficacy, leading to an increased JS. That is, the EFL teachers with a high PC believe in their capabilities to handle effectively teaching demands. In this respect, one of the EFL teachers commented:

"As my professional competence improved during my study at university, it makes me feel competent to adapt to different working conditions. For example, as I am skilled at implementing both cooperative and individual learning tasks, I can adapt my teaching activities to my students' needs and wants. In this way, I get more promising results, making me feel satisfied in my job."

Within the same lines, the participants highlighted that with a high PC, they can feel confident in his/her abilities to make connections between theories and practices. This, in turn, causes them to gain a better understanding of the work itself and the operating procedures. To advocate this, one of the EFL teachers remarked:

"I believe that having a good understanding of both theoretical and operational aspects of applied linguistics is of paramount importance. As such, an English teacher knows the foundations of instruction and the operating procedures and can make a bridge between theories and practices to provide useful opportunities for students' learning. This creates pleasing feelings in him/her toward the job."

Promoted Student Learning

The other theme that received considerable attention from the participants was "promoted student learning". The EFL teachers noted that when they are professionally competent, they can more effectively meet their students' learning needs and promote their achievements. The following excerpt represents this clearly:

"It is a reality that a sufficient professional competence enables me to improve my students' learning. For instance, I believe in the field-independence and filed-dependence cognitive style as an individual difference among my students. Thus, I teach grammar both inductively and deductively to let all my students benefit from my teaching. I feel proud of myself when I see that I am doing well with my job".

Resonated with the previous statement, one of the participants remarked:

"*Nobody can deny that students' learning is geared with teachers' professional competence. To support my words, let me give you an example. Last summer, I participated in a workshop on second language testing and assessment. There, I learned a lot about alternative assessment methods like peer-assessment. Now, I design and implement the alternative assessment in my classes, bringing positive wash-back to my students' learning. At the end of the academic year, when I see my students had passed the course successfully, I feel that I never worked a day*".

Effective Organizational Performance

The final theme extracted from the data was 'effective organizational performance'. The EFL teachers opined that when they can act professionally within the school settings, the organizational performance of schools, including the actual results against its intended results significantly improve. In this respect, one of the EFL teachers expressed:

"One of my colleagues lives in around the school. She knows the neighborhood well and has good contextual knowledge. So, she is very skilled at creating positive relations with students and parents. The school principal acknowledges that she is very helpful to make realized the educational objectives of schools. I think that's why she is very happy with her job."

In consistent with the before statement, another participant quoted:

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Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2021, 10(4), 69-85 (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

"As I believe in cooperation and collaboration with other school stakeholders, I usually participate in joint works. This allows me to benefit from others knowledge and skills to actualize the educational objectives and, accordingly, improve the organizational performance of my school".

5. Discussion

The first research question investigated if there was any significant correlation between the Iranian EFL teachers' PC and JS. The results evidenced a moderate positive correlation between their PC and JS in the Iranian context. The findings indicated that the more EFL teachers are professionally competent, the more satisfied they are with their job fields. Based on the study's findings, it can be argued that the EFL teachers' PC is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that may have directly exerted effects on their JS. The present study's findings are largely in consistent with those of the previous studies (Akram et al., 2015; Arifin, 2015; Bashir, 2017; Jung & Shin, 2015; Supriyanto, Kusmaningtyas, & Nugroho, 2021), reporting a positive correlation between teachers' PC and their JS.

The second research question examined which PC factors can determine the Iranian EFL teachers' JS. The results disclosed that all the PC factors (i.e., knowledge, attitudes, and skills) exerted effects on the EFL teacher's JS. The findings evidenced that as the EFL teachers have improved their PC, they might have gained feelings of pleasure toward their job. In alignment with Khodamoradi and Maghsoudi (2020), the findings can be explained from this perspective that the EFL teachers who were equipped with sufficient knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes might have shown more abilities to perform duties, making them gain positive feelings. The study's findings are in congruent with those of the previous studies (Chong & Cheah, 2009; Kosni, 2017), indicating that teachers' PC is comprised of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.

The third research question explored in which ways the Iranian EFL teachers' PC can impact their JS. The findings of the content analysis yielded four overarching themes, namely 'increased job motivation', 'improved teaching self-efficacy', 'promoted student learning', and 'effective organizational performance'. Based on the study's results, it may be argued that PC might have acted as the key facilitator for the participants' job motivation, teaching self-efficacy, student learning, and organizational performance. These findings are in line with the previous studies, revealing that PC is a crucial factor in determining teachers' job motivation (Kunter, 2013), teachers' self-efficacy (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012), students' learning (Kunter, Klusmann, Baumert, Richter, Voss, & Hachfeld, 2013), and teachers' organizational performance (Emita & Sugeng, 2021).

The study's findings can be explained from this perspective that the EFL teachers who had a good command of knowledge and skills might have promoted schools' competitiveness and effectiveness, resulting in more promotions and rewards. This, accordingly, may have made them feel satisfied with their job (Volkwein & Zhou, 2003). This argument receives support from the previous studies (Sekaran 1989; Tharenou & Harker, 1982), reporting that job competency is a strong predictor of JS. Additionally, the study's results may be discussed from this view that the EFL teachers who privileged positive attitudes toward teaching professions might have kept updated their knowledge and skills to handle the teaching tasks changing rapidly over time. In the same line, it might be argued that the EFL teachers who stayed current with digital literacy and know how to use it in their workplace effectively, they might have designed and implemented more learning tasks for their students. This all might have contributed to their advancement in their profession, a key factor to achieve a higher JS (Rice & Miller, 2001).

Another line of discussion for the findings may be ascribed to the self-efficacy of teachers. Along with Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1989), it may be argued that the EFL teachers who felt competent in their professional abilities may not have avoided the challenging situations in their workplace. They might have entered these tough situations and by handling them, they might have created a higher satisfaction. Furthermore, to justify the study's results, the Self-determination theory

(Deci & Ryan, 2000) may be a great help. According to this theory, it may be argued that the EFL teachers' psychological needs might have acted as a significant resource for the EFL teachers' JS. That is, as the participants' needs of competence (i.e., feeling of self-efficacy), elatedness (i.e., feeling related to the outside setting), and autonomy (i.e., feeling of control) might have been fulfilled adequately, they might have put more effort and energy into doing their job duties. This, in turn, might have led to more promising results and JS. This argument gains support from the findings of Aziz et al. (2014), documenting that teachers' JS and motivation increased as their psychological needs like competence were gratified. In addition, the study's findings may be explained from this perspective that the EFL teachers who were satisfied with their jobs might have gained problem-solving competency. That is, as Jung and Shin (2015) argue, the EFL teachers with high problem-solving competency might have had more flexibility to cope with changes and find reasonable solutions by using the available time and resources effectively.

Finally, based on the study's results, it may be argued that the EFL teachers' interpersonal skills might have affected their JS at schools. That is, as there was not a performance-based evolution for the EFL teachers in the ministry of education in Iran, the EFL teachers who had better social networks with others might have been promoted and rewarded more easily. In other words, being considered a good performer does not mean that an EFL teacher gets promotions or is rewarded fairly. It is being well-networked with school principals and education officials that might help them to get a promotion. Hence, the EFL teachers with good interpersonal skills might have been highly satisfied with their jobs. This argument presented to justify the study's findings receives support from the previous studies (e.g., Vathanophas, 2007).

6. Conclusion and Implications

As pointed out above, this study explored the correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' PC and JS quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings documented a moderate positive correlation between the EFL teachers' job performance and JS. Additionally, the results revealed that the EFL teachers' JS was affected by knowledge, attitudes, and skills factors. Furthermore, the qualitative results yielded four recurring themes, including 'increased job motivation', 'improved teaching self-efficacy', 'promoted student learning', and 'effective organizational performance'. The EFL teachers who were professionally competent were more satisfied with their job fields. In other words, the EFL teachers equipped with high knowledge, skills, and attitudes were more likely to get gratified with the teaching profession in the Iranian EFL context. Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that as EFL teachers' PC is a core factor in their JS, it is crucial to know how to recruit professionally competent EFL teachers, how to motivate them, and how to evaluate and reward them.

Based on the study's findings, some implications are presented. First, the policy-makers in the ministry of education should recruit only teachers who have a university degree and the necessary PC. That is, they should ensure that the teachers employed are equipped with the required PC. Second, the syllabus designers in Teacher Training Centers and Universities need to assign some credits to teacher education issues. In these credits, the teacher-students are supposed to be taught and informed well about diverse teacher education matters such as PC and teacher's JS. Third, the education officials should hold pre-service and in-service teacher training courses for EFL teachers across the country. In these courses, EFL teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes should be raised sufficiently to handle teaching tasks, challenges, and obligations. For example, in these teacher training courses, EFL teachers can be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills in research such that they can do research on teaching problems and find practical solutions. Fourth, the education officials need to design and develop standards locally appropriate to manage, evaluate, and reward EFL teachers' PC. In this way, EFL teachers may be encouraged to develop and upgrade their PC. Finally, EFL teachers need to initiate themselves into professional communities to sustain their long-term PC. They should attend teacher training courses held around the country, join online discussions forum, and use free online resources like open-access journals.

In light of the limitations imposed on the present study, a range of suggestions for further research is presented. As the participants of this study were limited to two cities in Iran, further

research is needed to be conducted in other cities across the country to increase the generalizability of the findings. Besides, since the sample of the present research did not include English teachers at private institutes, future studies can explore the relationship between PC and JS in that context. Moreover, as the school contexts are quite different from higher education contexts, the interested researchers can scrutinize if university teachers' PC has any relationship with and effects on their JS. Further, a study can be carried out to disclose if the design and development of local standards to guide, evaluate, and reward EFL teachers' PC can positively affect the development of their PC. Likewise, further research is required to examine the correlation between EFL teachers' PC with their job effectiveness, job motivation, and job burnout. Finally, as the current study was cross-sectional, a longitudinal study is needed to unveil how EFL teacher's PC affects their JS over time.

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Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2021, 10(4), 69-85   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

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Appendix A: EFL Teachers' Professional Competence Questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

The present questionnaire aims to measure your professional competence from your perspectives. Please read the items carefully and check your response. We are thankful for your cooperation.

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly disagree
1. I think action research skill (doing small-scale research in the class) is important.					
2. I think assessment tool design skill (designing tests) is important.					
3. I think believing in cooperation and collaboration is important.					
4. I think believing in diversity and individual differences is important.					
5. I think believing in innovation and personal improvement is important.					
6. I think believing in life-long learning is important.					
7. I think believing in reflective teaching (getting feedback from learners for improvement) is important.					
8. I think child development/psychology knowledge is important.					
9. I think classroom management skill is important.					

10. I think content area knowledge is important.
11. I think contextual, institutional, organizational knowledge (knowing the context) is important.
12. I think cooperative skill (school-environment relationship skill) Is important.
13. I think coordinating skills (organizing teaching elements to work well together) is important.
14. I think curriculum development and syllabus design knowledge is important.
15. think data-driven decision-making skill (deciding based on data and evidence) is important.
16. I think educational knowledge (historical, philosophical, sociological knowledge) is important.
17. I think enthusiasm generation skill (motivating students) is important.
18. I think having care and concern for all students is important.
19. I think having commitment and feeling responsible is important.
20. I think having right attitudes towards teaching and learning is important.
21. I think ICT knowledge (computer literacy) is important.
22. I think language skills (listening, speaking, reading, & writing) is important.
23. I think learners knowledge (awareness of learners' needs, their prior knowledge,…) is important.
24. I think linguistic knowledge (vocabulary and grammatical knowledge) is important.
25. I think material/resource management skill (using the available resources well) is important.
26. I think pedagogical content knowledge (using pedagogical knowledge in a specific situation) is important.
27. I think pedagogical knowledge (knowing theories, approaches, methods in general) is important.
28. I think pedagogical skill (applying theories in a real context) is important.
29. I think problem-solving skill is important.
30. I think reflective and self-evaluative skill is important.
31. I think research knowledge is important.
32. I think Showing concern about professional ethics (following moral rules and principles) is important.
33. I think Strategies and technique knowledge is important.
34. I think Technological skill is important.
35. I think Time management/lesson plan skill is important.
36. I think understanding students' feelings and problems (empathy) is important.

Appendix B: Teachers' Job Satisfaction Questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

The present questionnaire aims to measure your job satisfaction from your perspectives. Please read the items carefully and check your response. We are thankful for your cooperation.

Items	Strongly dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Undecided	Satisfied	Strongly satisfied
1. I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.					
2. There is really too little chance for promotion on my job.					
3. My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.					
4. I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive.					
5. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.					
6. Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.					
7. I like the people I work with.					
8. I sometimes feel my job is meaningless.					
9. Communications seem good within this organization.					
10. Raises are too few and far between.					
11. Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.					
12. My supervisor is unfair to me.					
13. The benefits we receive are as good as most other organizations offer.					
14. I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.					
15. My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.					
16. I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of people I work with.					
17. I like doing the things I do at work.					
18. The goals of this organization are not clear to me.					
19. I feel unappreciated by the organization when I think about what they pay me.					
20. People get ahead as fast here as they do in other places.					
21. My supervisor shows too little interest in the feelings of subordinates.					
22. The benefit package we have is equitable.					
23. There are few rewards for those who work here.					
24. I have too much to do at work.					
25. I enjoy my coworkers.					
26. I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the organization.					
27. I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.					
28. I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.					
29. There are benefits we do not have which we should have.					
30. I like my supervisor.					
31. I have too much paperwork.					
32. I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be.					
33. I am satisfied with my chances for promotion.					
34. There is too much bickering and fighting at work.					
35. My job is enjoyable.					
36. Work assignments are not fully explained.					