Understanding Professional Challenges Faced by Iranian Teachers of English

Seyyed Ayatollah Razmjoo[1] & Rahele Mavaddat[1]

[1] Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

Correspondence: Seyyed Ayatollah Razmjoo, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran. Tel: 98-917-700-5234. E-mail: arazmjoo@rose.shirazu.ac.ir

Abstract

The objective of the present study is to understand professional challenges faced by Iranian high school teachers of English through exploring their viewpoints. To this end, it benefits from both qualitative and quantitative modes of inquiry. First, grounded theory method was used to conduct some interviews with 20 EFL teachers and members of educational groups in the Education Organization, Shiraz, Iran. After coding the obtained data, a number of concepts and categories were identified and a model was developed. Next, a questionnaire was designed out of the findings of grounded theory procedures. It was filled out by 130 EFL teachers and the collected data was subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results confirmed the existence of educational, social, economic and temporal challenges in the profession. They further revealed that variables of gender, years of experience and educational districts had no significant effects on teachers' viewpoints. Generally, the current EFL situation has led to teacher burnout. In order to improve the situation, some modifications seem necessary. With regard to this, a number of solutions have been offered at the end of this study.

Keywords: teachers' viewpoints, grounded theory, educational challenges, social challenges, economic challenges, temporal challenges

1. Introduction

Every year different countries spend a lot of time, money, and energy on learning English as an international language. But the results have not been so much good. This has led to conducting many studies in the realm of EFL/ESL issues in order to find out the problems. Many studies have been done on learners, tests, textbooks, and methods. However, teachers have been unfortunately ignored in most of these studies as the researchers have mainly focused on learners. İnceçay & İnceçay (2010) believe that "need analysis has mostly taken learners as the core of the research" (p. 317). Persian researchers have been no exception in this regard. Farhady, Sajadi Hezaveh, & Hedayati (2010) state that "within the world of learner significance, almost all facilities are directed towards the learners at the cost of ignoring teachers" (p. 15).

However, the role of teacher in the learning process, if not more significant than the learner's role, is as significant as it is. Teachers, apart from the contexts in which they teach, the materials, and the methods they use, are central in the learning process (Cheng & Wang, 2004). It is obvious that amongst the most important sources of input to students are textbooks and teachers. However, "EFL textbooks are used in many different ways, depending on a wide spectrum of factors amongst which teacher seems to be the most important one" (Wen-Cheng, Chien-Hung, & Chung-Chieh, 2011, p. 92). Furthermore, Ornstein & Hunking (as cited in İnceçay & İnceçay, 2010) claimed that a teacher is the only one who can decide which aspects of the newly developed or ongoing curriculum should be implemented or stressed in a particular class and thus he is the most powerful implementer of the curriculum. Therefore, teacher can be named the main source of input to students. In addition, a teacher's actions and qualities have a significant role in learners' final achievements (Babai Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009).

Obviously, another reason for a necessity to put emphasis on investigating teachers' problems is the learners themselves. According to Sakai & Kikuchi (2009), the results of many studies on demotivating factors in language learning indicate that teachers have, if not the most significant, a very significant role in motivating their students. Thus, it is clear that students are the first who benefit from the findings of research on identifying teachers' professional problems and the efforts to solve those problems.

All the above entail a greater emphasis on teachers, their problems and needs within the domain of research into EFL issues. Otherwise, ignoring teachers may have some negative consequences. According to Cheng and Wang (2004), it leads to "teachers' lack of interest to implement new curriculum; teachers' passive involvement in the teaching activity; teachers' low motivation to improve in terms of pedagogy; and teachers' resistance to innovation" (p. 3).

Within the domain of research into EFL issues, many Iranian researchers have investigated the effectiveness of English textbooks as well as English testing in the educational system of Iran (Azizfar, Koosha, & Lotfi, 2010; Ghorbani, 2009; Jafarpur, 2001; Jahangard, 2008; Rahimi & Hassani, 2012; Razmjoo, 2004; Zare-ée Tajareh, 1999, etc.). But, as it was mentioned above, studies conducted on teachers and their challenges in teaching are not many. Of course, there have been some studies on the problems of teaching/learning English as a foreign language in different parts of Iran (e.g., Bakhshi, 1995; Doudman, 2006; Moradi, 1996; Saadat, 1995). Unfortunately however, despite all the benefits that the previous studies have offered, they suffer from some shortcomings. First of all, their primary focus has not been on the teacher. In addition, the findings of most of the above studies are based on employing just a individual method of data collection. However, "by combining methods, advantages of each methodology complement the other and make for a strong research design and result in more valid and reliable findings" (Laws & McLeod, 2006, p. 3).

1.1 Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

As it has been stated above, teachers have an active role in the learning process and their attitudes toward classroom-related issues should be taken into account. Therefore, the focus of this study is on understanding professional challenges faced by Persian EFL teachers. In particular it tries to answer the following questions:

1) What are the professional challenges faced by Persian teachers of English?

2) To which kind of category does each of the identified challenges belong?

3) What kind of framework or model may emerge for the EFL teachers' professional challenges in Iranian high schools based on the identified categories and the emergent themes?

4) What are the effects of these challenges on the performance of English teachers in the EFL classrooms from their own viewpoints? What factors or sub-factors play more important roles in this regard?

5) Do variables of gender, years of experience, and educational districts have any significant effect on teachers' viewpoints?

In doing so, it intends to lead to valuable findings, which are derived from a systematic process of data collection and analysis and are approved by more than one research methodology; i.e. through both qualitative and quantitative methods. In doing all the above, it is attempted to take into account the pitfalls of the previous studies and avoid them. Finally, based on the identified problems, some solutions will be offered.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Grounded theory procedures (GT) have been used in order to conduct the qualitative phase of this study. GT was first introduced by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser in 1967 (Laws & McLeod, 2006) and is "now one of the most influential and widely used modes of carrying out qualitative research" (Strauss & Corbin, as cited in Thomas & James, 2006, p. 2). The key features in definition of GT include the following: obtaining data through investigating participants' real life situations; systematic data collection and analysis; and coding (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Lingard, Albert, & Levinson, 2008).

Coding is one of the main principles of GT and includes open, axial and selective coding procedures. In open coding, a line by line analysis of the transcribed data is done in order to label each identified theme (Gasson, 2002). Axial coding is "the search for relationships between coded elements of the data" (p. 83). Selective coding is the phase in which the categories are integrated and refined. It is when a core category has been formed to which all the other categories are related (Goulding, 1999; Gasson, 2002).

2. Literature Review

The problems which exist in EFL/ESL learning/teaching have been investigated in different parts of the world, such as China (Cheng & Wang, 2004); Arab countries (Fareh, 2010); Japan (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009); Turkey (İnceçay & İnceçay, 2010) and California, the USA (Gándara, 2003). Some of the problems which were identified through these studies can be enumerated as the following: problems related to "the unique centralized examination-driven educational system" (Cheng & Wang, 2004); compartmentalization vs. whole language approach (Fareh, 2010); problems related to learning contents and materials (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009); overcrowded classes (İnceçay & İnceçay, 2010); and inferior curriculum and lack of time to cover it (Gándara,

2003). Accordingly, the researchers have offered some solutions to help overcome those problems.

For many years, the majority of Iranian learners of English have been school students. In Iran, learning English begins from the first year of junior secondary school with an allocated time of three hours per week. It continues in the senior secondary school with a six unit credit course, and in the pre-university center with a four unit credit course (Bakhshi, 1996; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). Also, university students, regardless of their majors, need to take a three unit credit requirement as well as an up to four unit credit course, based on their needs in different majors, in English (Farhady et al., 2010). As a result, there have been many attempts to promote the process of learning English as a foreign language among this group of learners. In line with this, some studies have been done in different parts of Iran to identify the major problems in learning the language. As examining all of these studies is beyond the scope of this paper, in the following, we will review just two of them.

Ostovar Namaghi (2006) conducted a research based on GT analysis. He interviewed five experienced teachers of English. The findings of his study revealed that three macro-structures of "mandated national curriculum", "mandated national testing scheme", and "make the grade pressure" affected teachers' pedagogic practice. The findings of his study also revealed that teachers adopted an instrumental approach in the face of the above macro-structures.

Meshkat & Hassani (2011) investigated the demotivating factors in learning English among Iranian high school students. To conduct their study, they used a 25-item questionnaire and distributed it among 421 high school students. Students were further asked to mention other demotivating factors through an open-ended question. Based on the findings of their study, insufficient school facilities, inadequate learning contents and materials; teachers' lack of competence; and inadequate teaching styles were among the identified problems.

Despite their valuable findings, the previous studies suffer from any of the following shortcomings. As it was mentioned before, the major focus in them has been on learners. And they have been conducted either quantitatively or qualitatively. In addition, there are some problems with regard to the instruments used in them. For instance, the questionnaires were initially designed by the researchers and without taking into account the participants' viewpoints. Furthermore, the questionnaires were mainly constructed based on the nominal scale in that they required the participants to select from among the two options of "yes" and "no". However a nominal-scaled questionnaire can limit the amount of quantitative information (Ross, 2002) and cannot accurately reflect the participants' optimal answers. Overall, the researchers of these studies have provided their readers with a mass of problems which they have tried to describe. In other words, they have not categorized/classified the problems into well-defined categories. Finally, the scope of their findings was somehow limited in that the main theme in them revolved around educational issues. However, as the findings of this study indicate, educational problems are not the only challenges which EFL teachers face.

Considering all the above pitfalls, the present study uses grounded theory procedures to explore EFL teachers' viewpoints on challenges they face in their profession.

3. Method

This study made use of the two approaches to research:

• Qualitative approach in which 20 EFL teachers and members of educational groups in the education organization, Shiraz, Iran, were interviewed based on GT procedures.

• Quantitative approach in which a questionnaire was designed based on the findings of the previous phase of the study and filled out by 130 high school teachers of English.

In the qualitative phase some interviews were conducted based on GT procedures in order to obtain a grasp of professional challenges faced by EFL teachers through exploring their viewpoints and furthermore to achieve systematic results through classification of the obtained data. The quantitative phase was used as a complement to the first phase to see whether the previous findings would be confirmed or not. It was further used to investigate the effects of variables of gender, years of experience, and educational districts on EFL teachers' viewpoints.

3.1 Participants

Participants involved in the qualitative phase were ten members of educational groups in the Education Organization and ten high school EFL teachers in Shiraz, Iran. They included both females and males with an age range of 27 to 60 and the academic degrees of B.A., M.A., or PhD in English majors. The members of educational groups were selected from among members in the four educational districts as well as the Central Education Organization. Teachers were also selected from among teachers in the four educational districts. Their

selection was based on theoretical sampling, a principle of GT in which "sample elements are typical or representative of the population" (Ary et al., 2006, p. 174). The researchers first referred to the most informant participants in the education organization because members of educational groups are usually selected from among the most active and experienced teachers. These participants had mostly MA and some even had PhD degrees. Furthermore, they were regularly visiting EFL teachers, in order to guide and cooperate with them. Therefore, they were aware of the existing problems. The second group of the participants, EFL teachers were also selected from among the most knowledgeable and experienced teachers in the four educational districts. Therefore, the opinion of these two groups of participants could appropriately reflect EFL teachers' viewpoints in Shiraz and even in Iran. And the results of this study will confirm it because, as you will see later, most of the identified problems, such as temporal problems, were not context specific and limited to the context of Shiraz city.

In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was designed and then filled out by 130 EFL high school teachers. The participants included both males and females and their selection was based on convenience sampling.

3.2 Instrument

In order to collect data for the first phase of the study the participants were semi-structurally interviewed based on GT procedures. Semi-structured interview was selected for conducting this study because as Goulding (1999) states:

> With grounded theory, researchers should avoid being too structured in their methods of collecting information....This would defeat the objective which is to attain first hand information from the point of view of the informant.... Totally unstructured interviews, on the other hand, cause confusion, incoherence, and result in meaningless data. ...The art lies therefore in finding a balance which allows the informant to feel comfortable enough to expand on their experiences, without telling them what to say. (p. 8)

Each interview took between 30 to 90 minutes and the researchers continued interviewing the participants until saturation was reached, i.e. no new information was added. In order to obtain valid data, the interviews were recorded. Although the interviews were long, all the recorded data was transcribed so that no information was missed and consistency could be guaranteed through documentation (Ary et al., 2006).

In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was constructed based on the previous findings. It was designed on a five point Likert scale. The first draft of the questionnaire was composed of 85 items. But, a number of items were discarded after it was evaluated for face validity by one Shiraz University instructor as well as one MA graduate in Sociology and four MA TEFL students. Reliability of the questionnaire, after being filled out by a group of teachers, was estimated through using Cronbach's alpha. The results showed a high reliability; 0.88. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis was run to evaluate the validity of the test and to see if the findings of the first phase would be confirmed or not. It was decided to run a confirmatory factor analysis in which the number of factors is decided upon by the researchers because as Pallant (2007) states:

> Exploratory factor analysis is often used in the early stages of research to gather information about (explore) the interrelationships among a set of variables. Confirmatory factor analysis, on the other hand, is a more complex and sophisticated set of techniques used later in the research process to test (confirm) specific hypotheses or theories concerning the structure underlying a set of variable (p. 179).

Based on the findings of this part, most of the items loaded upon the first factor. Table 1 shows the number of statements which were revealed for each type of the factors.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis of the questionnaire

	Factors	No. of statements
1	Educational Factors	41
2	Social Factors	9
3	Economic Factors	9
4	Temporal Factors	5

As shown in Table 1, the final draft was a questionnaire with 64 items. Educational factors had the maximum number of statements, each of social factors and economic factors had nine statements and temporal factors had five statements. The questionnaire also included a few items at the beginning which asked about some demographic factors such as participants' age, gender, and years of experience.

3.3 Procedure

The interviews were scheduled at times and places convenient to the respondents; some of them were interviewed at school and some at the Education Organization. In order to obtain reliable data, the interviews were recorded. Furthermore, the researchers wrote some points when they felt it is necessary. The recorded interviews were listened to and the transcribed data were also examined later on, so that the probable gaps could be identified. Then, based on the gaps in the collected data, the researchers decided for the next interviews. There occurred a few cases when some issues seemed vague. In those cases, the researchers tried to illuminate the point through referring back to the interviewee, asking the next interviewees or asking some other informants. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was encouraged to add anything else he wished.

In the second phase, around 200 questionnaires were distributed among Persian teachers of English in the four educational districts in Shiraz city. They were distributed among both male and female high school and pre-university center teachers. In order to ensure reliable results, the participants were informed that there was no need for them to introduce themselves and their identity would be kept secret. Then, 141 questionnaires were given back to the researchers of which 130 questionnaires went through the next step: data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

After transcribing the data, it was codified. First, the open coding was done and the concepts were identified. Then, in the axial coding, all the similar concepts were grouped together and a number of categories emerged. In the selective coding, the categories were grouped together again and subsumed under a core category. Finally, a model was developed and depicted through a figure so that a better understanding would be achieved.

After submitting the data to the SPSS Version 16 Software, the data was first analysed descriptively and the mean, the standard deviation, frequency, and percentage of the relevant items and variables were estimated. Then the data was subjected to inferential statistics, namely, Independent-Samples t-test and ANOVA to see the relative contribution of variables of gender, teaching experience and educational districts in forming participants' viewpoints. The results will be reported in the following section.

4. Results and Discussion

In this part, the results of both phases of the study are reported. In line with the two phases of the study, the findings will be presented and discussed under the two sections "Phase one" and "Phase two", respectively.

4.1 Phase One

After transcribing the data, the first phase of the coding process, the open coding, was done. The bulky transcriptions were read and re-read line by line and 70 concepts were extracted. The concepts were first written as sentences or phrases below their relevant places. They were derived from the researchers' repertoire of technical terminology or the exact words of the interviewees. For example, one of the concepts which emerged was that the EFL textbooks are not attractive to students. It was extracted based on one complaint which almost all the interviewees had. They claimed that textbooks are not interesting for students. They are not pictorial and if there is a picture within the books, it is not colorful and stimulating. Mahsa, for instance, claimed:

> *My students always complain about the way pictures are presented in the textbooks. They say pictures are not suitable for them because they are in black and white, childish, and (foolishly) funny. This makes students uninterested and motiveless in learning English.*

Next, in the axial coding phase, all similar concepts were grouped together. And in this way a number of categories emerged based on the relationship among the concepts and the relationship between the concepts and the category under which they were subsumed. In the following, all the obtained categories are listed:

1) Problems with materials

2) Problems with methods

3) Problems with testing

4) Teachers not being up-to-date

5) Problems with students

6) Teachers' lack of prestige

7) Problems with the relationship between teachers and others

8) Lack of appreciation and recognition of teachers' role

9) Teachers' financial problems

10) The Education Organization's and school's financial problems

11) Students' financial problems

12) Pre-service education temporal problems

13) In-service education temporal problems

For example, the concept that "EFL textbooks are not attractive" was subsumed under the category of problems with materials. Overall, there were 14 concepts in this category, some other concepts in this category included:

- Textbooks are bulky

- Textbooks are not graded

- Textbooks are not authentic

- Textbooks are not up-to-date

- Teacher's manual is not available.

In selective coding, similar categories were further grouped together. The following indicates the four broader categories or themes which emerged out of this phase.

- Educational challenges

- Social challenges

- Economic challenges

- Temporal challenges

For example, the category of "problems with materials" mentioned above was further subsumed under the broader category of "educational challenges". The following shows all the other sub-categories/sub-factors of "educational challenges".

- Problems with materials

- Problems with methods

- Problems with testing

- Teachers not being up-to-date

- Problems with students

It should be mentioned here that the final four categories/factors were directly related to the core concept of this study, professional challenges faced by Persian high school teachers of English. After the four factors were subsumed under the core category, a model was developed. Figure 1 in the next page depicts the developed model for a better understanding
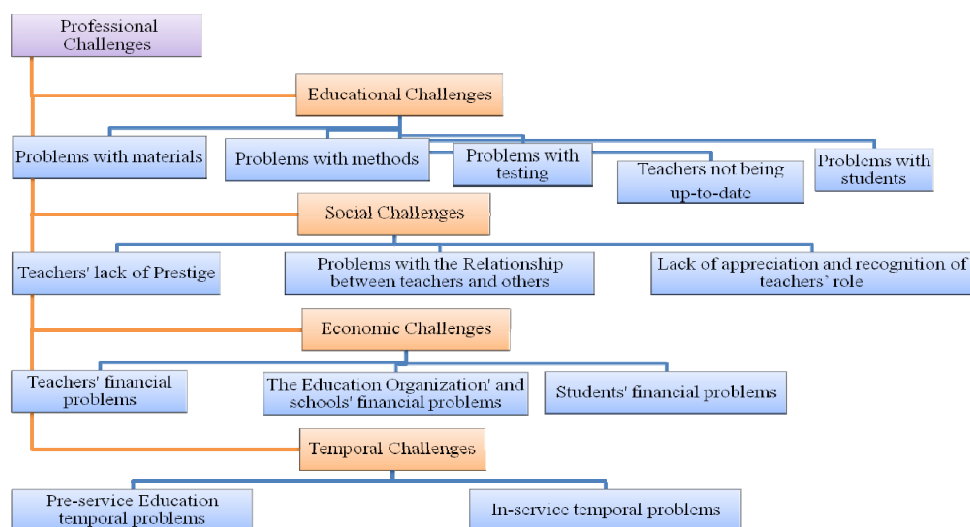

Figure 1. Persian EFL high school teachers' professional challenges model

4.2 Phase Two

In this part, the emerged factors and sub-factors will be presented in their order of significance according to teachers' viewpoints. We will further investigate the effects of some independent variables on teachers' viewpoints.

4.2.1 Emerged Factors in Their Order of Significance

In order to understand which factors or sub-factors were the most challenging ones in teachers' viewpoints, descriptive statistics was run. The factors were examined through estimating the frequency for each selected option: Strongly Disagree (SD=1); Disagree (D=2); Neutral (N=3); Agree (A=4); and Strongly Agree (SA=5). However, in presenting the results, the first two options and the last two options were combined so that a better understanding would be provided for the reader. Figure 2, which depicts factors in their order of significance, has been formed with regard to the selection percentage of options "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" for each of the items of the questionnaire. Participants who have selected theses options, have agreed that there are some educational, economic, temporal, and social problems in the EFL teaching profession.
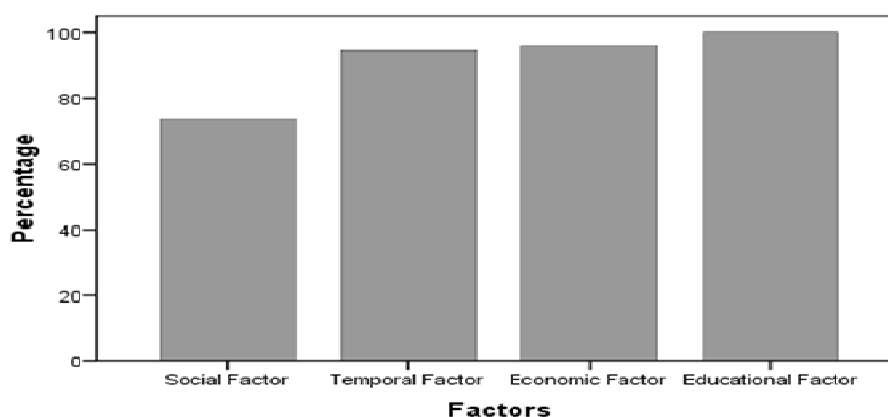

Figure 2. Factors weighted by their frequency

The results indicated that the educational factor was the most challenging one. It was directly related to the learning context and had the maximum number of sub-factors "5" and concepts "41". Furthermore, all the participants had confirmed the existence of such challenges. The economic factor was the next problematic one and more than 96 percent of the participants agreed that there were some economic challenges. It had three sub-factors and nine concepts. The next challenging factor was the temporal factor. It had two sub-factors and five concepts and more than 94 percent of the participants confirmed that such problems existed. Finally, the social factor was revealed as the least challenging one. It had three sub-factors and nine items and about 79 percent of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the specified social challenges existed.

4.2.2 Emerged Sub-factors in Their Order of Significance

This part will present the emerged sub-factors in their order of significance, as the results of the study indicated.

4.2.2.1 Educational Sub-factors

It is obvious that educational factor can have a significant effect on an EFL teacher's degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Of all the educational problems, those related to materials and students were given the highest priority. The next problems in order of significance were problems with methods, teachers' not being up-to-date, and problems with testing. With regard to this factor, this study has some findings in line with the previous studies. This will be discussed in the following.

Considering textbooks, some findings of this study are in line with Jahangard (2008). However, he stated that textbooks can be somehow regarded as authentic. Yarmohammadi (2000) investigated the contextualization of two components of the language; pronunciation and language functions within the textbooks. His findings are in line with the findings of this study in that textbooks are not authentic and do not pay attention to such sub-skills as pronunciation. According to Rahimi & Hassani (2011) EFL textbooks are interesting and comprehensive with regard to language skills. However, this is in disagreement with the findings of the current study.

Concerning the method, the findings of this study are in line with the findings obtained by Razmjoo & Riazi (2008) in that traditional methods are used in language classrooms. They are further in line with the findings obtained by Manafi (1997); Meshkat & Hassani (2011); and Nouhi Jadesi (2010).

Based on the results of this study, teacher's evaluation and the way it is done have a direct impact on his performance. Teachers should increase students' passing rates and to achieve this, they should stick to textbooks, select the traditional methods of teaching and teach in a way that students would be able to have a good performance in their final exams. These findings are in line with Ostovar Namaghi (2006, 2010); and Razmjoo (2004).

The findings of this study, especially with regard to the second phase, also confirmed the results of the studies done by Bagheri (1995); Manafi (1997); Meshkat & Hasani (2011); and Nouhi Jadesi (2010) in that teachers are not up-to-date, competent and knowledgeable.

Heterogeneous classes and students' lack of motivation are among other findings of this study which are in line with the findings of Bagheri (1995); Rashidi (1995); and Zanganeh (1995).

4.2.2.2 Economic Sub-factors

The second problematic factor was economic factor and from among the economic sub-factors, emerged in the present study, the most challenging one was teachers' financial problems. The sub-factors of students' financial problems and the Education Organization's financial problems took the next places.

With regard to economic factors, the previous studies enumerated some problems as lack of educational aids in high schools (Doudman, 2006; Meshkat & Hassani, 2011; Rahimi, 1996), teachers' low salary (Moradi, 1995, Nouhi Jadasi, 2010; Rashidi, 1995; Saadat, 1995), and overcrowded classes (Rahimi, 1996; Saadat, 1995). The findings of this study also confirm these. However, it should be mentioned that the number of students in each EFL class in Iran is still less than that of countries such as China (Cheng & Wang, 2010) and Turkey (İnceçay & İnceçay, 2010). Saadat (1995) reported that the number of students in most of EFL classes were from 30 to 40. But the results of this study show that this has decreased to 28 students per class. Nevertheless, this can still impose a great burden on EFL teachers' shoulders. In addition, as descriptive statistics of the participants revealed most of teachers were from TEFL majors. This can be promising and can indicate that nowadays we need not worry about non English majors teaching English in our schools as before. Our main concern is now preventing teachers from other branches of English than TEFL to teach the course. The findings of the second phase of this study also revealed that more than 96% of the teachers did not take a second job or if they did, the job was related to teaching. This is unlike the findings of Nouhi Jadesi (2010) and can show that EFL teachers' main concern is still teaching despite all the existing problems.

4.2.2.3 Temporal Sub-factors

The third challenging factor faced by EFL teachers was temporal. With regard to it, the sub-factor of in-service education temporal problems was the most challenging one confronted by EFL teachers. The other sub-factor was pre-service education temporal problems.

Concerning the temporal factors, this study has revealed a package of problems. To the researchers' knowledge, a few of them are mentioned for the first time. For example, the participants stated that lack of time prevents teachers to play their role as coach or the time which is allocated to Textbook Analysis Course in pre-service education is not enough. However, the other findings in this category are in line with the findings of the previous studies. For example, based on their findings, Rashidi (1995) and Saadat (1995) had previously reported that Iranian students would be better start learning English in primary school. The participants of the current study had the same opinion, too. This is due to the fact that based on the Critical Period Hypothesis, learning a second language after the age of 12 or 13 can be a challenging task, especially with regard to mastering the sub-skill of pronunciation and a native-like accent (Brown, 2007).

4.2.2.4 Social Sub-Factors

From among the four types of challenges confronted by EFL teachers, social challenges were the least problematic ones. Social sub-factors in their order of significance were lack of appreciation and recognition of teachers' role, teachers' lack of prestige, and problems with the relationship with others.

Concerning the social factor, the result which indicated that teaching is not considered as a prestigious job by EFL teachers confirms the findings of Nouhi Jadesi (2010). Furthermore, according to the participants of this study, teachers are considered as educational means to achieve some goals. This has been reported by Ostovar Namaghi (2006). In addition, Nouhi Jadesi (2010) had stated that teachers are not respected by their students.

Most of the participants of this study also confirmed that they are not respected by students. However, they stated that they are respected by students' parents and school principals. There are some other findings not revealed in the previously mentioned literature, for example teachers reported that the Education Organization is indifferent to improve teachers' knowledge and proficiency level.

4.2.3 The Effects of Teachers' Gender, Years of Experience and Educational Districts on Their Viewpoints

To the researchers' knowledge the effects of Iranian high school teachers' gender, years of experience or the educational districts on their viewpoints on EFL teaching/learning problems have not been investigated in the previous studies. In the following these issues are discussed.

To examine the effect of gender on EFL teachers' viewpoints, first descriptive statistics was run. Descriptive statistics of the participants based on their gender revealed that male EFL teachers had a bit higher mean value (4.32) than female EFL teachers (4.26). In order to see whether the mean difference between the two groups was significant or not, Independent-Samples t-test was run.

Table 2. Independent-samples t-test results on the effect of gender on the participants' viewpoints

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	34	4.32	.47	.560	.282
Female	56	4.26	.44		

The results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between female and male teachers in their viewpoints (Sig. $0.282 > 0.05$, t=0.56). It can indicate that the EFL teaching situation is basically the same for the both groups.

To determine the effect of teachers' years of experience on their viewpoints first descriptive statistics and then ANOVA were run. The experience range of EFL teachers was from 1 to 34 years and the comparison of the mean values for teachers' viewpoints indicated that the least experienced teachers were more satisfied with the situation. However, to see whether the difference was statistically significant or not, ANOVA was run.

Table 3. One-way ANOVA results on the effect of years of experience on participants' viewpoints

Source of Variance	D. F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	3	1.183	.394	1.960	.126
Within Groups	86	17.306	.201		
Total	89	18.489			

Table 3 shows a low level of significance (Sig. $0.126 > 0.05$, D. F. = 3, F = 1.960) and it can be concluded that teachers' years of experience had no effect on their viewpoints.

The participants of this study were doing their service in any of the four educational districts in Shiraz, Iran. To examine the effect of the educational districts on teachers' viewpoints, descriptive statistics was run and it was revealed that the mean values for the participants' viewpoints were almost the same. The results of One-way ANOVA also confirmed it.

Table 4. One-way ANOVA results on the effect of educational districts on participants' viewpoints

	D. F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3	.668	.223	1.075	.364
Within Groups	86	17.821	.207		
Total	89	18.489			

The ANOVA results revealed a much lower level of significance for the effect of educational districts than the probability value (Sig. $0.364 > 0.05$). This meant that teachers from the four educational districts were not different in their viewpoints. Teachers are sometimes transferred from one educational district to another. Therefore, most of them have an experience of teaching in different educational districts. This might justify why they are not different in their viewpoints.

However, as the sample size was not so much large, one should be cautious in interpreting the above results of

the effects of gender, years of experience and educational districts on teachers' viewpoints.

5. Conclusion

The problems EFL teachers face are of four different types: educational; economic; temporal; and social. Teachers as other professionals need to meet both their individual and social needs. Individually, they should be satisfied with different aspects of their profession, aspects such as their workloads and their salaries. Socially, they need to play their role as the authority within the classroom. They should be accepted and respected by students, students' parents, and the school principal. Furthermore, their performances should be valued both by students and the authorities in the Education Organization. However, teachers cannot feel satisfied because they cannot decide over the syllabus and the materials which they should teach. Even their test construction has to follow the proposed directives from the Education Organization. Still, if they decide to perform in the way they like, time limitations would not allow them.

The effects of all the above problems will lead to a situation in which teachers feel they are no longer the authority in the classroom. Teachers become motiveless and cannot perform effectively in the classroom. This phenomenon is professionally known as "Teacher Burnout". It refers to as "A tendency that teachers evaluate themselves negatively as well as a general feeling that they are no longer doing a meaningful and important job". (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, p. 1060)

All the above problems lead to teachers' job dissatisfaction and thus their desire for an early retirement age. According to the participants:

> A retired teacher can have the opportunity for a new job and even if he or she decides to pursue the teaching profession in some private institute(s), he or she will be able to decide over the syllabus and the materials.

Therefore, a teacher can meet some of his or her individual, economic, and social needs by being retired. In order to remove the current situation, some modifications seem inevitable. To help overcome the current problems, some suggestions have been provided below:

(1). EFL teachers should be given the right to be the authority in the classroom. They, themselves, should select the materials to be taught or the methods of teaching. This way the learning contexts can be taken into account and both teachers and students can be motivated.

(2). Teachers should be provided with more in-service education training classes. They should be offered paid sabbaticals and should benefit from sabbatical programs. This can increase teachers' level of knowledge and proficiency. It can motivate them, too.

(3). Good teachers should be encouraged and their works should be valued.

(4). Teachers should be given the opportunity to perform their role as a coach. For example, teachers can take part in some after school programs and provide students with their consultations. In turn, they can be paid so that their economic problems will be solved to some extent.

(5). Teachers should also be given the opportunity to make use of different methods, techniques and arts in their profession.

(6). The number of hours teachers work should depend on factors such as the number of students within the classroom and the amount of time which they should spend on evaluating students (Manshore Hoghogh, n.d.).

(7). Teachers should not be under pressure because of the lack of time in the classroom. They should be given the appropriate amount of time; opportunity, in order to make the best use of their knowledge

(8). And finally, until realization of the ideal situation, teachers can develop some strategies to overcome the problems. For example, they can equip themselves with well designed lesson plans to compensate for time limitations in the classroom.

5.1 Implications

The results of the present study showed that challenges that exist in EFL teaching profession in Iranian high schools are not only of the educational type. There are also economic, temporal and social challenges. Therefore, attributing the existing problems to an individual factor which may play a role in students' learning is unwise. No one is to blame now because everyone; from students and their parents to the high officials in the country, has somehow a hand in creating the situation. Understanding this point can be effective for all the ones who are connected to EFL issues. If this occurs and if everyone tries to do his share in removing the challenges, the situation will be optimal soon. With regard to this point, the findings of this study can have several implications

among which are the following:

Obviously, the first group who can benefit from the results of this study are EFL teachers. When they are consciously aware of the challenges in their profession, teachers feel more satisfied, efficient, and confident in what they do. Because they know that they are not to blame for the existence of problems over most of which they have no control. Furthermore, by knowing about all these challenges, they can equip themselves with some strategies in order to remove some of the challenges. They can also learn some strategies to adjust themselves to some other challenges which may take a long time to be removed. The results can be especially of help for those teachers who have recently entered the profession. They can be informed of the realities of the profession and prepare themselves to face such realities.

The next group who can benefit from these findings are the applicants for the position of EFL teaching in Iranian high schools. They can evaluate the situation to see whether this is their dreamed job and whether they are capable of confronting all the problems in an appropriate way or not. Clearly, if they make a wrong decision, this is they who would probably be deemed to tolerate a work life of troubles and dissatisfaction. And of course, students would be the next sacrifice of their lack of interest in the job.

Then, conscious awareness of these problems can help students, parents and school principals have a better appreciation of EFL teachers and adjust their expectations to reality. Each of them can develop some strategies in order to deal with the problems and create the optimal situation.

The next who can benefit from the results are the members of educational groups in the Education Organization. They can help teachers to deal with some of the educational and social challenges through holding more in-service training classes. Furthermore, they can transfer the ideas of teachers, students and parents to the higher authorities.

The findings of this study can also help material developers have a better understanding of some of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the current textbooks from teachers' viewpoints. They can also do their share and benefit from teachers' ideas by taking the necessary measures.

In addition, the Supreme Council of Policy Making in the Education Organization can notice that it is time for paying attention to all the shortcomings. Every year, millions of dollars are spent on various educational projects. It should ask itself whether it has sufficiently benefitted from the findings of these projects or not.

Finally, the findings of this study can be of benefit to EFL teachers and researchers in other countries where the learning/teaching situation is similar to that of Iran.

Future studies can be done through investigating opinions of the authorities in the Supreme Council of Policy Making in the Education Organization, the material developers, and the syllabus designers. The views of school principals, students, students' parents, and even EFL teachers in other parts of the country can also give better insights about the current situation of TEFL in Iran. Future studies can benefit from more participants and other methods and instruments such as observation and case study.

References

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A., & Sorensen, C. (2006). *Introduction to research in education* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson.

Azizfar, A., Koosha, M., & Lotfi, A. H. (2010). An analytical evaluation of locally produced Iranian high school ELT textbooks from 1970 to the present. *English Language Teaching*, *3*(4), 132-141. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v3n4p132

Babai Shishavan, H., & Sadeghi, K. (2009). Characteristics of an effective English language teacher as perceived by Iranian teachers and learners of English. *English Language Teaching*, *2*(4), 130-143. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n4p130

Bagheri, H. (1995). *A profile for teaching and learning English in pre-university schools of Sistan and Baluchistan: Problems and solutions*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Shiraz University, Shiraz.

Bakhshi, A. (1995). *Teaching and learning English in pre-university education in the Hamedan Province: Problems and possible solutions*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Shiraz University, Shiraz.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). New York: Pearson Education.

Cheng, L., & Wang, H. (2004). Understanding professional challenges faced by Chinese teachers of English. *TESL-EJ*, *7*(4), 1-20. Retrieved from http://tesl-ej.org/ej28/a2.html

Doudman, M. (2006). *Investigating the problems of teaching/learning English in high schools of the Hormozgan*

Province. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Shiraz University, Shiraz.

Fareh, S. (2010). Challenges of teaching English in the Arab world: Why can't EFL programs deliver as expected? *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *2*, 3600-3604. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.559

Farhady, H. (2001). *Research methods in Applied Linguistics*. Tehran: Payame Noor University Press.

Gándara, P. (2003). English learners in California schools: Unequal resources, unequal outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *11*(36), 2-54. http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v11n36.2003

Gasson, S. (2003). Rigor in grounded theory research: An interpretive perspective on generating theory from qualitative field studies. In M. Whitman & A. Woszczynski (Eds.), *Handbook for Information Systems Research* (79-102). Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing.

Ghorbani, M. R. (2009). ELT in Iranian high schools in Iran, Malaysia and Japan: Reflections on how tests influence use of prescribed textbooks. *Reflection on English Language Teaching*, *8*(2), 131-139. Retrieved from http://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/research/relt/files/Vol8_2/131-139mohdreza.pdf

Goulding, C. (1999). *Grounded theory: Some reflections on paradigm, procedures and misconceptions*. Working paper series, WP006/99, Wolverhampton: Wolverhampton Business School, University of Wolverhampton.

İnceçay, G., & İnceçay, V. (2010). A case study on needs assessment of English language teachers. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *2*, 317-321. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.017

Jafarpur, A. (2002). Barkhi kastihaye azmone zaban englisi konkor va pishnahadhaie baraye rafe anha [Investigating the problems in the English section of the UEE and some solutions to remove them]. *Procedeeings of the Conference on investigating the problems of the UEEs* (pp. 63-76)*. Isfahan, Iran.

Jahangard, A. (2008). Evaluation of EFL materials taught at Iranian high schools. *Iranian EFL Journal*, *1*, 130-150. Retrieved from http://www.iranian-efl-journal.com/February_2008.pdf

Laws, K., & McLeod, R. (Eds.). (2006) *Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference of the System Dynamics Society* (pp. 1-25). Oxford, UK.

Lingard, L., Albert, M., & Levinson, W. (2008). Qualitative research: Grounded theory, mixed methods, and action research. *Practice*, *337*, 459-461.

Manafi Anari, S. (1977). *The amount of learning English in the Iranian high schools*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, National University of Iran, Tehran.

Manshoore Hoghogh va masooliathaye Moaaleman. (n.d.). Chart of teachers' rights and responsibilities. Retrieved from http://www.rasatous.com/amoozeshi/dabirestan/index5.html

Meshkat, M., & Hassani, H. (2011). Demotivating factors in learning English: The case of Iran. *Procedia-Social and Behaveriol Sciences, 31,* 745-749. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.134

Moradi, F. (1996). *An Investigation into the problems of teaching and learning in Tehran Province*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Shiraz University, Shiraz.

Nouhi Jadesi, N. (2010). *A SWOT analysis of junior high school English program in Iran.* Unpublished M. A. thesis, Shiraz, Shiraz University.

Ostovar Namaghi, S. A. (2006). Forces steering Iranian language teachers' work: A grounded theory. *The Reading Matrix*, *6*(2), 90-105. Retrieved from http://www.readingmatrix.com/archives/archives_vol6_no2.html

Ostovar Namaghi, S. A. (2010). Parameters of language teaching in the context of high schools of Iran: A data-first approach. *Asian EFL Journal*, *12*(2), 213-234. Retrieved from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/PDF/June-2010.pdf

Pallant, J. (2007). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS for version 15* (3rd ed.). London: Open University Press.

Rahimi, M. (1996). *The study of English language instruction at the secondary schools of the Isfahan Province*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Shiraz University, Shiraz.

Rahimi, M., & Hassani, M. (2012). Attitude towards EFL textbooks as a predictor of attitude towards learning English as a foreign language. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *31*, 66-72. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.018

Rashidi, N. (1995). *Teaching and learning English in guidance and high schools in Kurdestan: Problems and suggested solutions*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Shiraz University, Shiraz.

Razmjoo, S. A. (2004). The impact of English section of the University Entrance Exam on the teaching of English in pre-university centers in Shiraz. *Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities of Shiraz University*, *21*(1), 56-76.

Razmjoo, S. A. (2006). A content analysis of University Entrance Examination for English majors in 1382 (ISC). *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities of Shiraz University*, *46*(1), 67-75.

Razmjoo, S. A., & Riazi, A. M. (2006). Is Communicative Language Teaching practical in the expanding circle? : A case study of teachers of Shiraz high schools and institutes. *Journal of Language and Learning, 4*(2), 144-170.

Ross, K. C. (2002). In T. R. Renckly (Ed.), *Air University sampling and surveying handbook: Guidelines for planning, organizing, and conducting surveys.* Maxwell, Alabama. Retrieved from http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/edref/smpl-srv.pdf

Saadat, M. (1995). *An investigation into the problems of teaching and learning English in the guidance and high schools of Fars Province*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Shiraz University, Shiraz.

Sakai, H., & Kikuchi, K. (2009). An analysis of demotivators in the EFL classroom. *System*, *37*, 57-69. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.09.005

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2010). Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: A study of relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*, 1059-1069.

Thomas, G., & James, D. (2006). Re-inventing grounded theory: Some questions about theory, ground and discovery. *British Educational Research Journal*, *32*(6), 1-29.

Wen-Cheng, W., Chien-Hung, L., & Chung-Chieh, L. (2011). Thinking of the textbook in the ESL/EFL classroom. *English Language Teaching*, *4*(2), 91-96. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n2p91

Yarmohammadi, L. (2000). Reflections on the treatment and contextualization of pronunciation practices and language functions in the pre-university EFL textbooks in Iran. *Journal of Teaching Languages*, *1*(3), 1-21.