EFL Teacher Education: Where Do Trainers' and Trainees' Criteria Match?

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ABSTRACT

Despite chronic and widespread concerns about professional abilities of EFL teachers and the success of teacher education programmes, surprisingly little attention is paid to how these abilities are being evaluated and whether trainers and trainees agree upon shared evaluation criteria. Elsewhere, it is often observed that EFL teachers at different levels of elementary, high school and university are being evaluated in entirely different ways, ranging from a strict interventionist evaluation often in case of elementary school teachers to an empowering autonomy in favour of university instructors. This work, therefore, intended to make a descriptive study of the current state of affairs in how evaluation takes places in EFL teacher education programmes in Iran and to collect and categorize pre-service trainees' feedback to evaluation, in an attempt to shed light on some major mismatch areas between EFL trainers and trainees. Results indicated that many trainees were evaluated not by how they trained to be effective teachers, but by how they performed during training sessions as students. The required data were obtained from a variety of qualitative resources, including interviews and questionnaires, in a teacher education programme held at Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch-Iran in 2011.

Keywords: Teacher education, EFL, evaluation, feedback, trainers, trainees

INTRODUCTION

English as Foreign Language (EFL) teacher evaluation takes place before, during and after pre-service education; all regarded as common types of assessing the degrees of course achievement and the current means of ensuring quality in teaching education profession. As a result, it is expected that

strict admission criteria are established to make sure that only eligible candidates will be selected (Lyons, 2006). In addition, concise and calibrated evaluation criteria are the prerequisites to standardize the coursework and teacher preparation methodology which meet trainee-trainers' needs. There is also a need for establishing explicit criteria to evaluate trainees' practicum experience supported by follow-up diagnostic feedback to help them overcome their weaknesses and consolidate their strengths. Evaluation does not, therefore, stop with graduation but continues throughout the professional life of the trainees to minimize chances of stagnation, to constantly improve their teaching skills, to infuse feedback into the profession, and to reconstruct the current trends (Pollard, 2006).

Pre-service teacher evaluation can be described and examined in terms of three stages: (1) evaluation before formal teacher preparation, (2) evaluation during the course of teacher training programme, and (3) evaluation at the end of the teacher training programme. Every stage can be divided into several phases. Phase I is the period before the programme starts, and this includes trainees' self-evaluation, career evaluation and evaluation in terms of admission to the programme. Phase II is the period during the programme in which trainees are required to produce professional coursework and collect clinical experience in order to meet the evaluation criteria. Finally, Phase III starts immediately after the teacher education programme ends up and encompasses all the upcoming evaluations by the stage of

employment (Scottish Educational Research Association, 2005).

The process of career evaluation begins long before a career decision is made and continues long after teaching. Cowan (2006) notes that teaching is highly visible to children due to the day-to-day nature of contact between teachers and children. This supports his idea that prospective teachers form definite ideas about teaching early on. As Phase I in evaluating prospective teachers occurs during their admission to a teacher education programme, surveys indicate that there is a considerable variability in the criteria observed in selection process. The commonly used criteria to evaluate applicants are their grade point average (GPA), submitted recommendations, English proficiency, and interview results. In 1972, in a study on 180 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) member institutions, it was reported that 48 percent of the institutions were using 2.0 as the criterion level for admission, and 93 percent had a criterion level between 2.0 and 2.5 (Lunenberg & Willemse, 2006).

Although it is assumed that prospective teachers weigh the strengths and weaknesses of taking up a career in teaching before enrolling, experience shows that this is not often done objectively and rationally. Noticed by Waller (1932) as early as the 1930s, prospective teachers' career decisions are described as distorted by wishful thinking, altered to conform to prevalent stereotypes, and coloured by fancy. The logic of impulses finally determines the choice. The concepts underlying teachers and teaching have

undergone radical changes since Waller's time. Relevant literature, as well as public opinions, considers a variety of motives behind selecting a teaching profession.

Largely, people have been attracted to teaching by their desires to help others learn. Those who have been fascinated by role models in their lives aspire to become role models themselves. In addition, as Arreman (2005) notes, many have been drawn to teaching as an opportunity to act upon their natural tendencies to be playful with young and energetic learners. Others may have opted for teaching as a compromise and insurance against inability to find *better* jobs in other more promising fields such as, law, medicine, business, and so on.

Other than that, the decision to enter a teaching position has often been influenced by parental advice and expectations. Surveys indicate for a time at least teaching has been viewed as a viable career choice for children. In two referred studies conducted with an interval of twelve years, four out of five parents said that they would encourage a daughter to enter teaching, and half reported they would do the same for a son (Arreman, 2005). Periodic surveys on teachers themselves point to a desire to work with children as the main objective for becoming a teacher. Other reasons frequently mentioned for choosing a teaching career are the perception of education in society as a significant value and the relevant job security associated with such profession (Loughran, 2006). However, the desire to join the teaching workforce is being increasingly overshadowed by the growth

in alternative opportunities thus making teaching one among many choices available (Murray & Mate, 2005).

It is however interesting to see that Boyd, Harris and Murray (2007), Koster and Dengerink (2008) report that only around 20 percent of institutions use standardized examinations in teacher evaluation. In addition, not only do the criteria tend to be minimal, but also they are used with no assurance that they relate to teaching effectiveness. One final remark regarding admission to trainees' evaluation is that applicants can be encouraged to reapply to the final examination.

As Murray (2008) states, primarily the trainers inspired with exceptions across departments do the evaluation of trainees in teacher training programmes. Authority given to trainers in higher education in order to plan courses and to evaluate trainees makes it difficult to come up with a certain class of criteria on which pre-service trainers are held accountable for how they are evaluating. The core in evaluation is mostly to retain and comprehend material extracted from readings and lectures, and there is no doubt that a few of trainers are willing to depart from such traditions. Increasing complaints from teacher education graduates support the fact that their coursework does not match their future needs (Murray, 2008).

Swennen *et al*. (2008) consider trainees' teaching practice as the most valuable educational opportunity in teacher education programmes. A rather interesting means to know what is being evaluated in trainees' teaching practice is to ask for their own

definition of success in the programme. On the same line, Velzen *et al.* (2008) have asked a group of trainees about what they would recommend their best friends do to get a grade "A" from their trainers. Based on examinees' responses, Velzen *et al.* came up with the following conclusions:

- Two trainees planning to teach similar subjects under supervision of different trainers might be taught quite differently, even inconsistently, the teaching methods and principles.

- The professional course contents and the activities are mostly wide apart.

- A trainee's grade in practicum depends highly upon whether he/she is matched or mismatched with his supervising trainer.

- Training practice does not appear to provide a theoretical framework for planning and evaluating trainees' own instructional activities.

Murray and Mate (2005) divide pre-service teacher evaluation into three types: *explicit* (intentional), *implicit* (unintentional), and *null* (missing). Explicit evaluation for admission to a teacher education programme is largely a matter of considering grade point averages, scores on aptitude and English proficiency tests. In teacher education programmes, what is explicitly evaluated includes trainees' general knowledge and verbal abilities. When other methods are used such as observation of clinical experience during training, however, the objective is mostly to follow the trainers' own criteria for good teaching.

Implicit evaluation is by nature difficult. Considering the congruency of the evaluation methods with course objectives, however, it is possible to monitor whether the predisposed criteria are met. Nonetheless, where evaluation is done implicitly, success is largely defined in terms of trainees' capacity to conform to the tacit expectations of the trainers (Boyd *et al.*, 2007). It seems surprising to notice that most often their expectations do not match trainees' level of competency; some trainers attempt to make *scholars* out of their trainees, while others tend to teach trainees to make a bulletin board of dos and don'ts for every occasion.

Identifying null or missing criteria for evaluation is a process of considering both sets of explicit and implicit criteria which are not usually observed in evaluation. For example, trainers do not seem to assess how trainees *learn*, and how they evaluate their own abilities to process information and make decision. Giving feedback to trainees regarding how they view teaching and learning is minimal. Similarly, the trainees' ability to be independent in collecting data and making sound judgments to address real world problems is seldom evaluated by the trainers (Boyd *et al.*, 2007).

Evaluation plays a key role in teacher education though in most teacher education programmes a little space is normally given to how pre-service and in-service trainees are evaluated. As already mentioned, the professional practice is also rife with

incongruence where trainees at different levels are evaluated differently (Lougharn, 2006). Although trainers most often produce a checklist of criteria they take into account in evaluating pre-service trainees, the actual evaluation is often carried out on the basis of trainers' personal preferences, such as compliance of trainees to trainers' preferred style of teaching, classroom respect and obedience, conformity, and so on.

The main objective in this study, therefore, is to investigate the ways trainers and trainees view evaluation and the criteria they agree upon to evaluate. Literature shows that there are mismatches between trainers and trainees not only on methods of evaluation but also on criteria for evaluation which sometimes lead to confusion and dissatisfaction on both parts. The study intends to shed some light on these thorny issues by making inquiries into and collecting surveys of the opinions and practices of those involved whether as trainers or as trainees. In order to achieve the objective of the study, a teacher evaluation checklist comprising of 10 items was designed and administered among 24 trainers and 44 trainees at Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch, Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The participants in the study were randomly sampled from the population of EFL teacher training students at Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch (n=107) and EFL instructors (n=61). Two samples in this study were: (1) 44 Iranian teacher training undergraduates, ranging from 20 to 34 years of age of both genders, who were taking a course on language teaching methodology in spring 2011 at Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch-Iran, and (2) 24 Iranian EFL instructors of both genders, all professional in language teacher education, who had been teaching 4-unit methodology courses in Spring 2011 at Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch-Iran.

Procedure

In this study, a 5-point Likert scaled EFL teacher evaluation questionnaire was developed by the researcher and separately administrated among 24 trainers and 44 trainees. Inspired by ample related literature (Daneilson & McGreal, 2000; Boyd *et al.*, 2007, to name a few) and the researcher's years of personal experience, a 10-item questionnaire was supposed to ask for ratings given to a number of criteria for teacher evaluation, with 1 for *completely disagree*, 2 for *disagree*, 3 for *No idea*, 4 for *agree*, and 5 for *completely agree*. The researcher's main objective was to investigate the possible mismatches in priority given to the criteria by both the trainers and trainees. The questionnaire was initially piloted with 25 language teacher education undergraduates and 5 teacher trainers, similar to the main subjects in nationality, age and teaching experience. The first draft of the questionnaires was rated and revised by two teacher education experts two weeks before the final administration on March 20, 2011. The checklist was examined for internal

reliability, so Cronbach's alpha=0.947 was obtained. Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire also included a section, designed for the trainees and trainers, in which they could write down as many as five suggestions for "how to obtain a grade 'A' on a course of teaching methodology".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The obtained qualitative data and graphics are summarized in this section based on the items in the Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire.

As illustrated in Table 2, both the trainers and trainees allocated high importance to replicating the trainer's style of teaching in the overall evaluation of a trainee's

TABLE 1
EFL Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	*Trainees should imitate their trainer's teaching style.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item rates the tendency to see their trainer as a role model.					
2.	*Peer evaluation is as important as trainer's evaluation.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item evaluates the tendency to receive feedback by the trainees from a variety of sources.					
3.	*Trainees' performance – not merely competence – should be evaluated.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item rates the approval of performance-oriented nature of evaluation.					
4.	*Trainees' performance on a battery of tests should be evaluated.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item rates the tendency towards an integrative evaluation with a variety of test types.					
5.	*Trainees' ability to develop materials should positively be evaluated.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item rates the priority given to trainees' ability to recognize their own needs interests, and priorities.					
6.	*Trainees' EFL verbal proficiency should positively be evaluated.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item rates the emphasis put on verbal proficiency over reading or writing proficiency.					
7.	*Trainees' ability in preparing portfolios should positively be evaluated.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item intends to rate the tendency to include portfolio as a process-oriented method in evaluation.					
8.	*Trainees should develop questionnaires and observation checklists in different courses.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item rates the trainees' tendency to become research-oriented.					
9	*Trainees' personality is as important as his performance on evaluation.*	1	2	3	4	5
	This item rates the tendency to include personality factors, such as behavior, body language, and authority in evaluation.					
*10.	*Trainees' communicative skills should positively be evaluated.*	1	2	3	4	5
	*This item rates the tendency to include the ability to establish rapport with classmates and school masters in evaluation. It taps a particularly important fact that trainees need to have an opportunity to realize their practicum in a real-world situation.					

performance; while around 45% of both the groups (n=31) allocated a rating of 4 to this item, and the trainees outnumbered the trainees by 10 in assigning a rating of 2 to replicating the teacher's style in their evaluation of pre-service teachers.

TABLE 2
Item 1: Trainees should imitate their trainers' teaching style.

item1 * subjects Crosstabulation

| | | subjects | | Percent |
		Trainees	Trainers	
item1	1	4	0	5.9
	2	12	2	20.6
	3	5	0	7.4
	4	16	15	45.6
	5	7	7	20.6
Total		44	24	100.0

As displayed in Table 3, there is a mismatch between how the trainees and the trainers attached the importance to peer evaluation. Meanwhile, the trainees enormously outnumbered the trainers (45%, n=20) in assigning rating 4 to peer evaluation, 50% of the trainers were more in favour of assigning a rating of 5 to this particular item (n=12).

TABLE 3
Item 2: Peer evaluation is as important as trainer's evaluation.

item2 * subjects Crosstabulation

| | | subjects | | Percent |
		Trainees	Trainers	
item2	1	10	3	19.1
	2	4	3	10.3
	3	6	0	8.8
	4	20	6	38.2
	5	4	12	23.5
Total		44	24	100.0

Another mismatch was also observed in how the trainers and trainees perceived practicum. As demonstrated in Table 4, over 60% of the trainers (n=15) assigned a rating of 2 to the trainees' performance, and 64% of the trainees (n=48) were clearly divided into two ratings of 2 or 3 over how significant practicum should be in their evaluation.

TABLE 4
Item 3: Trainees' performance – not merely competence – should be evaluated.

item3 * subjects Crosstabulation

| | | subjects | | Percent |
		Trainees	Trainers	
item3	2	12	5	25.0
	3	14	15	42.6
	4	14	2	23.5
	5	4	2	8.8
Total		44	24	100.0

As shown in Table 5, around 50% of the trainees (n=20) placed high importance on written exams in their evaluation of the trainees. Around 75% of the trainers (n=18), however, believe in the effectiveness of tests in their own evaluation by a rating of 5. This may largely conform to the nature of the overall atmosphere in Iranian schools and universities, where paper-and-pen exams are frequently given credit in students' evaluation.

Table 6 reveals more mismatches between the trainers and trainees, particularly in the way they regarded the ability to develop instructional materials. Around 60% of the trainees (n=24) and over 37% of the trainers (n=9) designated a rating of 4 to this item, 37% of trainers (n=9) as compared to 20% of the trainees

(n=9) regarded material development as of the highest importance in the evaluation of student teachers by a rating of 5.

TABLE 5
Item 4: Trainees' performance on a battery of tests should be evaluated.

Item 4 * subjects Crosstabulation

		subjects		Percent
		Trainees	Trainers	
item4	1	7	0	10.3
	2	20	6	38.2
	3	9	0	13.2
	4	8	18	38.2
Total		44	24	100.0

TABLE 6
Item 5: Trainees' EFL verbal proficiency should positively be evaluated.

Item 5 * subjects Crosstabulation

		subjects		Percent
		Trainees	Trainers	
item5	1	2	3	7.4
	2	4	3	10.3
	3	10	0	14.7
	4	24	9	48.5
	5	4	9	19.1
Total		44	24	100.0

As shown in Table 7, there is a match between the trainers and the trainees' expectations regarding the importance of language proficiency in teacher evaluation, that is, 75% of the trainees (n=33) compared to 83% of the trainers (n=20) gave ratings 3 and 4, respectively. The result could be interpreted as the emphasis laid on language proficiency throughout the programme as well as its significance in the university entrance examination wherein the highest value is attached to the applicants' English language ability.

TABLE 7
Item 6: Trainees' ability to develop material should positively be evaluated.

item6 * subjects Crosstabulation

		subjects		Percent
		Trainees	Trainers	
item6	1	0	2	2.9
	2	6	0	8.8
	3	11	0	16.2
	4	22	20	61.8
	5	5	2	10.3
Total		44	24	100.0

As shown in Table 8, the reactions to portfolio writing as a criterion in the trainees' evaluation were positive and rated as 3 and 4 by the trainees (60%, n=25) and to a more degree by the trainers (83%, n=20). In this study, very few trainers required trainees to write portfolios; however, the trainees found the idea more appealing and therefore out-numbered trainers in assigning a wide range of importance to portfolio writing.

TABLE 8
Item 7: Trainees' ability in preparing portfolios should be evaluated.

item7 * subjects Crosstabulation

		subjects		Percent
		Trainees	Trainers	
item7	1	8	4	17.6
	2	2	0	2.9
	3	9	16	36.8
	4	17	4	30.9
	5	8	0	11.8
Total		44	24	100.0

As demonstrated in Table 9, the majority of both the trainees (81%, n=36) and trainers (83%, n=20) matched in attaching

similar significance (ratings 3 and 4) to the trainees' ability to design questionnaires and observation checklists in order to collect feedbacks from their peers and students in their practicum sessions.

TABLE 9
Item 8: Trainees should develop questionnaires and observation checklists in different courses.

item8 * subjects Crosstabulation

		subjects		Percent
		Trainees	Trainers	
item8	1	0	2	2.9
	2	4	2	8.8
	3	14	10	35.3
	4	22	10	47.1
	5	4	0	5.9
Total		44	24	100.0

Table 10 clearly demonstrates that both the trainers and trainees matched in finding personality factors valuable in evaluating the trainees. Overall, 36% of the trainees (n=16) and 50% of the trainers (n=12) believe that appearance deserves a value of 4. Teachers are generally expected to be well-behaved and maintain good appearance, so it is not unusual to see that both the trainers and trainees converge on attaching similar importance to personality as one of the important factors in trainees' overall evaluation.

As shown in Table 11, to 50% (n=22) of the trainees, rapport with school masters and their classmates was an asset and they out-expected the trainers by giving rating 3 to communicative skills in their evaluation, while around 75% of the trainers (n=18) assigned rating 2 to the trainees' ability in

maintaining a friendly relationship with students and colleagues.

TABLE 10
Item 9: Trainees' personality is as important as his performance in evaluation.

item9 * subjects Crosstabulation

		subjects		Percent
		Trainees	Trainers	
item9	1	4	0	5.9
	2	8	0	11.8
	3	8	2	14.7
	4	16	12	41.2
	5	8	10	26.5
Total		44	24	100.0

TABLE 11
Item 10: Trainees' communicative skills should positively be evaluated.

item10 * subjects Crosstabulation

		subjects		Percent
		Trainees	Trainers	
item10	2	6	0	8.8
	3	8	18	38.2
	4	22	6	41.2
	5	8	0	11.8
Total		44	24	100.0

In addition to the obtained data, the following trends were extracted from the Suggestion Section of the Trainees' Questionnaire. The suggestions were listed based on their degree of importance given by the trainees and trainers.

• Majority of the trainees believe that being active in class, i.e., expressing themselves and partaking in class discussions, has the highest impacts on their evaluation by their trainers.

• The second most important suggestion is to advise fellow trainees to prepare

lessons beforehand so that they can answer the trainer's questions during class time.

- Being punctual and attentive such as listening to the trainer, taking notes during his or her lectures, regular attendance, and avoiding speech with classmates during class is another common suggestion.

- Giving lectures and presentations is recommended by trainers to their trainees. This is because it can improve the trainees' visibility and hence positively influences their evaluation in the eye of the trainer.

- Many trainees also suggest that their peers should establish good relationships with their respective trainer to ensure his/her good evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The data collection procedure and the relevant results revealed a number of trends and attitudes that are worth mentioning. On the one hand, there is a positive reaction to this research, particularly on the side of the trainees who were excited to see their feedbacks and beliefs regarding their own evaluation being looked into. On the other, clear differences were observed in the perceptions of the trainees and trainers of the evaluation process which were also indicative of the different levels of emphasis they put on course components.

In brief, more trainees than trainers were inclined to replicate their instructors' style of teaching and therefore expecting it

to be highly considered in their evaluation. The trainers, on the other hand, were more inclined to encourage the trainees to observe their peers and use their feedbacks and comments in their own appraisal. As for the practicum and paper-and-pen exams, it was evident that the trainees expressed similar reaction to both the components while the trainers treated them significantly differently by laying much greater emphasis on the trainees' scores on written exams than their performance during practicum. The Iranian system of education is by far exam-oriented and it is not surprising to see a large number of trainers reflected this orientation.

Another trend that emerged from this study was the participants shared attitude towards trainees' language proficiency. Through the researcher's experience and informal interviews with other professionals, it is safe to say that teachers' good language proficiency is a significant factor in their evaluation in the eyes of their students; so much as their inadequacies in teaching styles may be overlooked. In addition to linguistic abilities, teachers are also evaluated by their manners and appearance. Finally, there seemed to be a general match between the trainers and trainees regarding trainees' rapport with school authorities, with trainees out-valuing trainers.

The qualitative data derived from the Suggestions Section of the Trainees' Questionnaire also indicated that evaluation is largely based on trainees' observation of class protocol, memorizing lessons, keeping a high profile, and being on good terms with the

trainer. Such results are indicatives that many trainees are being evaluated not by how they train to be effective teachers, but by how they perform during training as students. The evaluation also seems to be in favour of the more outspoken trainees who not only tend to appear more active in class but also manage to establish better rapport with their trainers.

Accordingly, Daneilson and McGreal (2000) state that the principles of EFL teacher education show that when trainees' self-assessment and self-directed inquiry in their professional development, they are more likely to sustain their learning in more disciplined ways, than when outsiders impose professional development requirements. Teacher evaluation system, therefore, should include opportunities for self-evaluation so that a provision is made for professional conversation – among trainees and between trainers and trainees (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

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