

Iranian Public School and Private Institute EFL Teachers' Perception towards Self-Initiated Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

To some teachers, professional development is seen as a burden and not as a chance to improve their practice as the reforms have intended. To this end, this study meant at identifying the public school and private institute EFL teachers' perception towards self-initiated professional development in Iran. Using random cluster sampling, Professional Development Questionnaire was filled out by 82 teachers (working either in private language institutions or public schools) to examine the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers toward their professional development. Furthermore, this study aimed to explain what major professional development activities English language teachers perceive as critical to their development as professionals and to what degree they make use of these opportunities. This study also investigated if there is any significant difference between the perceptions of Iranian public school and private institute language teachers with regard to the concept of professional development in terms of their gender. Finally, this study investigated the obstacles that might have caused some problems for public and private English language teachers regarding their professional development. The findings revealed key differences in these two groups in terms of motivational factors, gender inclination towards teaching profession, the obstacles they face and the activities they are engaged at to enhance their professional development. The possible reasons behind these differences have been discussed and implications of the study are presented.

Keywords: ESL/EFL teachers, language centre, private institution teachers, professional development, public school teachers, self-initiated professional development

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) defined professional development for teachers as the following: “Professional development is defined as activities that develop an individual’s skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher” (OECD, 2013). As this definition implies, this development can be achieved formally or informally through in-service workshops, seminars, conferences, class observations, on-line courses, personal learning networks and many more facets that can be either provided by the settings or districts that support it or by eager teachers themselves who plan most or all of their own professional development even without school administrators’ support.

To be effective, however, professional development requires thoughtful planning followed by careful implementation with feedback to ensure it responds to educators’ learning needs (Guskey, 2009). Educators who participate in professional development then must put their new knowledge and skills to work. In many countries, the role and functioning of schools are changing and so this is also what is expected of teachers. Teachers are asked to teach in increasingly multicultural classrooms; to place greater emphasis on integrating students with special learning needs in their classrooms; to make more effective use of information and communication technologies for teaching; to engage more in planning within evaluative and accountability frameworks; and to do more to involve parents in schools. Effective professional development is on-going, and

it includes training, practice and feedback, and it needs adequate timing and follow-up support (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Successful programs involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students, and encourage the development of teachers’ learning communities. There is growing interest in developing schools as learning organizations, and in ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically. Teachers’ perceptions are important and can be expected to influence their behaviour. Also teachers’ views about their development needs are to be distinguished from an external assessment of these needs.

Statement of the Problem

One of the main goals of a sound education system is to raise students’ performance and enhance their progress towards predetermined objectives. Yet, although a great sum of money has been spent on young students’ success, students’ performance has barely enhanced to date (Harwell, 2003). One of the most important reasons behind this failure, it is believed by many scholars, is the little attention that has been given to high-quality professional development (Gersten, Taylor, Keys, Rolfhus, & Newman-Gonchar, 2014; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Kwang Suk, 2011; to name a few). According to Harwell (2003), “We cannot expect students to change what they do if we are content for teachers to continue doing what they have always done.” Due to repeated failures in providing

high-quality professional development opportunities, many teachers today do not even put enough confidence to professional development offerings currently available (Philips & Borg, 2009). Not enough hands-on approaches via demonstrations and modelling and many isolated one-shot workshops, lectures and seminars provided by school districts and administrators have brought about many complaints on behalf of teachers who believe “one-size-fits-all” professional development cannot really address teachers’ specific needs in real classroom settings (Meagher, 2011). Nevertheless, if executed effectively, coherent professional development programs can warrant strong learning opportunities, and appropriately focused learning experiences for teachers who despite their dissatisfaction still value their potential to revolutionize their classrooms. As it was mentioned earlier, since many professional development trajectories have fall short in providing teachers with hands-on, sustainable interventions, it is vital to do teacher professional development need analysis to hear teachers’ voice to identify first their needs and second their challenges to improve their knowledge, skills, and perceptions in teaching.

Although professional development has a great significance in western countries, it has not been given due attention in Asian settings (Khanderooh, Mukundan, & Alavi, 2011). That said, to the best of researchers’ knowledge, only few studies (Khanderooh et al., 2011; Mohammadi, Karimian, & Talebnejad, 2015) have been

conducted concerning teachers’ professional development in such settings. Secondly, while an abundance of researches exist pertaining to school teacher professional development, not many researchers have investigated if there is any significant difference in the perceptions of Iranian public school and private institute language teachers as regard to the challenges and difficulties these teachers often confront. All considered, this study aims to fill the gap by addressing these populations that have a significant role in teaching English to the young minds in Iran. Having uttered the importance of professional development among EFL teachers and the gap existed in the area of professional development in the existed literature, this study, firstly, aimed at examining the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers (working either in private language institutions or public schools) toward their professional development. Furthermore, this study aimed to explain what major professional development activities English language teachers perceive as critical to their development as professionals and to what degree they make use of these opportunities. Then, it is within the scope of this study to investigate if there is any significant difference between the perceptions of Iranian public school and private institute language teachers with regard to the concept of professional development in terms of their gender. And finally, this study investigated the obstacles that might have caused some problems for public and private English language teachers regarding their professional development.

The research questions of the study are as follow:

1. What are public school English language teachers' and private institute language teachers' perceptions toward their own professional development?
2. Is there any difference between public school language teachers' and private institute language teachers' perceptions regarding professional development in terms of their gender?
3. What major professional development activities do public school and private institute English language teachers perceive as critical to their development as professionals?
4. What hinders change and growth in public school and private institute English language teachers?

METHODS

Schools

This section explains about the rationale behind choosing this particular population for this study. Shiraz, the city in which this study has been conducted at, has been divided into ten municipal districts, each with its own Education and Training administrative centres. Since this study was comparative in nature (comparison between the professional development of public school teachers and private language institute teachers), it was imperative to choose all the teachers from one district to

avoid potential socio-economic diversity between classes in various districts which is a very important factor to consider when doing studies on teachers' professional development (Meagher, 2011). Turner (2007) and Whitehead (2006) also reported that teachers who worked at districts where majority of students were less disadvantaged than their more advantaged counterparts were more likely to be less satisfied professionally.

Considering that, random cluster sampling was adopted to choose one district among all districts and at the end district 1 was chosen for this study. Then the researchers approached the public and private institute teachers at this district to collect their data.

Participants

Sample size was determined using NCSS software. To do so, type 1 error, type 2 error, mean and standard deviation of the previous study conducted by Karaaslan (2003) were collected. This study was chosen because as it will be discussed in the next section, the questionnaire that the researchers used for this study was devised and used in the similar study conducted by Karaaslan (2003). According to the provided data (Type 1 error = 0.05, Power = 0.8, mean = 3.75, standard deviation = 1.05), and considering the effect size equal to 20%, the sample size was determined as 31 for each group (public school teachers and private language institute teachers). However, to cover marginal values, the sample size for this study increased to 41

for each group. Therefore, 41 public school teachers and 41 private language institute teachers were chosen randomly from district 1 to participate in this study.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a Professional Development Questionnaire devised by Karaaslan (2003).

At first it was decided to use the English version of the questionnaire for both public school and private language institution teachers. However, since while giving the questionnaire to the first few teachers, the researchers realized that some English teachers cannot thoroughly understand the content of the English version of the questionnaire, the researchers decided to translate the questionnaire to Persian by using translation-back-translation method. Therefore, the proficient bilingual translator translated the English version of the questionnaire to Persian and then the translation was given to another independent expert translator to translate it to English language. Both translators were told that meaning-based approach should be adopted so that the items are not only linguistically appropriate but also valid in substance and meaning. Then the two English versions of the questionnaire were compared and discrepancies were discussed with an English professor and further works were iterated until a satisfactory version was reached. The validity of this questionnaire was still checked by sending the Persian version of the questionnaire to 3 university lecturers using edit, delete and keeping method.

The questionnaire is composed of four sections: The questions in section one are designed to find out the group characteristics of the participants. The second section in the questionnaire includes questions about the perceptions of teachers towards their own professional development. The statements in this section of the questionnaire measure teachers' perceptions towards different themes of professional development such as 'willingness' (item 1), 'initiation of development' (items 2, 3, 4), reflection and own evaluation of teachers for their professional development (items 5, 6), 'collaboration' (items 7, 8 and 9), 'keeping up to date with new ideas and changes' (items 10 and 11). In this section, statements were presented in the form of items for teachers to comment on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Cronbach alpha was used to test reliability of this section of the questionnaire. It showed reliability coefficient of 0.77 ($\alpha = 0.77$) which is within acceptable range and shows a good reliability.

In the third section, teachers were asked about their professional development activities to find out, first, how much they give importance to these activities and second, to what degree they make use of these opportunities. Therefore, the questions were asked in two parts. First, teachers were asked to indicate how important the activities were and secondly, to comment on how often they made use of these activities on two five point Likert-type. In the first part of the questionnaire, the teachers were

asked to identify how important they think the activities are for them through a five point Likert-type scale ranging from “not at all important” to “very important” and then comment on the frequency in which they do these activities presented on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from “never” to “always”.

The original version of this section of the questionnaire had 15 items devoted to the activities that EFL teachers perceive as critical to their development. However, it is worth mentioning that since the above mentioned questionnaire was devised in 2003, the researchers decided to thoroughly read the literature of professional development activities and add more updated activities that might be utilized by EFL teachers. Then the researchers came up with a new list containing 17 items, adding three more items regarding the activities that EFL teachers might think are important in enhancing their professional development. Those three items were adopted from Geijsel, Slegers, Stoel, and Kruger (2009). Then the researchers sent the modified version of the potential activities EFL teachers might get involved in to 15 EFL university lecturers and requested them to review the list and add any possible activities they do that they are not able to detect in the list. Doing that and based on the feedbacks she received from them, she further modified the list and finally came up with 20 activities that not only might be perceived by EFL teachers as critical to teachers’ professional development, but also may be practiced by them.

Based on the new list, EFL teachers’ perceptions and use of collaborative activities were measured with a 7-item scale. Items included in the following: (1) “Taking initiative to follow professional development programs”, (2) “Sharing experiences and problems with colleagues”, (3) “Asking for professional help from colleagues”, (4) “Working on developing new materials with colleagues”, (5) “Working on developing new techniques and activities with colleagues”, (6) “Observing colleagues’ lesson to learn from them”, and (7) “Being observed by heads, administrators, or other colleagues, so that we learn from their feedbacks”. Activities EFL teachers do on research, reflection and practice were measured with a 7-item scale. Items were (8) “Trying out new knowledge, ideas and skills in my lessons”, (9) “Doing teacher initiated classroom investigation (action research)”, (10) Gathering information about one’s own teaching performance (surveys, interviews, teacher evaluation forms to give to my students, etc.)”, (11) “Using students’ reaction in class to improve my classroom teaching”, (12) “Reflecting on my own teaching by keeping a diary/journal”, (13) “Reflecting on my own teaching by audio-taping or video-taping my classes”, and (14) “Following research literature and reading articles related to teaching and learning English”. Professional development through inside and outside resources and opportunities were measured through items 15 to 20. These items were (15) “Attending in-service training programs provided by my own school (workshops, seminars,

etc.)”, (16) “Attending international/national conferences (as a presenter or participant) related to teaching and learning English”, (17) “Attending online courses to improve my teaching skills (e.g. grammar courses, professional development courses, etc.)”, (18) “Viewing/watching educational videos on YouTube, Teacher tube, etc. in order to improve my teaching skills”, (19) “Having a teacher discussion group in my school/institution”, and (20) “Having an online teacher group in What’s up, Telegram, Facebook, etc. to share my problems or feedbacks with other teachers”. Cronbach alpha was used to test reliability of this section of the questionnaire. It showed reliability coefficient of 0.910 ($\alpha = 0.91$) which is within acceptable range and shows a good reliability.

Finally, to answer research question four, 10 items were devoted to the constraints that EFL teachers might have in their professional development process. For this purpose, teachers were given items related to potential constraints and were asked to rate their importance presented in a five point Likert-type scale ranging from “not important” to “very important” in the questionnaire. At the end, again teachers were asked to further reflect on the obstacles they encounter through their professional development process. The following statement was presented as the closing statement for this questionnaire: “If you have any further opinions and suggestions regarding various aspects of professional development activities and problems faced in professional development, please write

in below”. Cronbach alpha was used to test reliability of this section of the questionnaire. It showed reliability coefficient of 0.816 ($\alpha = 0.81$) which is within acceptable range and shows a good reliability. At the end it is important to note that the reliability of the entire questionnaire (41 items) showed reliability coefficient of 0.935 ($\alpha = 0.93$) which was a strong reliability.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed descriptively. For research question number 1, first the frequency distributions were calculated for the statements in section 2 of the questionnaire and then independent sample t-test was run to see if there is a significant difference between the perceptions of public school teachers and private institution teachers regarding professional development. Similarly, to see whether there is a significant difference between public school English language teachers’ and private institute language teachers’ perceptions toward their own professional development, independent sample t-test was run. Likewise, independent sample t-test was utilized to compare the perception of male teachers with the perception of female teachers working at public schools and private institutions. Then to answer research question 3, Friedman test was first adopted to obtain the mean rank of how important teachers perceive these activities for their professional development and how often they make use of them. Then, Wilcoxon signed-rank test was run to see if the difference between the mean scores

of the importance given to the activity and that of actual use of the activities is significant. And finally to find out about the challenges that teachers encounter in terms of their professional development, first the frequency distributions were calculated for the statements provided and then to see if there is a significant difference between the mean scores of all the challenges of public school teachers and private institute teachers, Friedman Test was run.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on any significant differences between public school English language teachers' and private institute language teachers' perceptions toward their own professional development.

To explore English language teachers' perceptions towards their own professional development, first the frequency distributions were calculated for the statements in section 2 of the questionnaire and then independent sample t-test was run to see if there is a significant difference between the perceptions of public school teachers and private institution teachers regarding professional development.

As the results show, in descending order, willingness, collaboration with colleagues, being up-to-date, and teacher reflection are among the most important factors that play part in one's professional development. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that peer observation has been considered the least important one. The comprehensive report for research question 1 can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Degree of agreement with statements about English language teachers' perceptions towards their own professional development

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	uncertain	agree	Strongly agree	mean	N
Q. 1. Teachers should improve their professional skills and knowledge without too much dependence on the institution they work for.							
Private	-	3.2	3.2	41.9	45.2	4.37	39
Public	-	3.2	3.2	58.1	32.3	4.23	40
Total	-	3.2	3.2	50.0	38.7	1.69	79
Q. 2. Teachers should take the initiative and action for their own professional development.							
Private	-	3.2	3.2	41.9	51.6	4.41	41
Public	-	-	3.2	77.4	19.0	4.16	41
Total	-	1.6	3.2	59.7	35.5	1.70	82
Q. 3. A teacher should be free to test any idea or a new technique in teaching.							
Private	-	16.1	32.3	35.5	16.1	3.51	41
Public	-	6.5	45.2	38.7	9.7	3.51	41
Total	-	11.3	38.7	37.1	12.9	2.48	82

Table 1 (continue)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	uncertain	agree	Strongly agree	mean	N
<i>Q. 4. Teachers should be involved in the evaluation of their teaching skills and knowledge.</i>							
Private	-	6.5	6.5	67.7	19.4	4.0	41
Public	-	-	9.7	77.4	12.9	4.03	41
Total		3.2	8.1	72.6	16.1	1.98	82
<i>Q. 5. Teachers should help each other evaluate teaching to identify problems, strengths, and weaknesses.</i>							
Private	-	-	3.2	48.4	48.4	4.45	41
Public	-	-	3.2	61.3	35.5	4.32	41
Total	-	-	3.2	54.8	41.9	1.61	82
<i>Q. 6. Teachers should help each other produce solutions to solve problems.</i>							
Private	-	3.2	-	48.4	48.4	4.41	41
Public	-	-	-	51.6	48.4	4.48	41
Total	-	1.6	-	50.0	48.4	1.54	82
<i>Q. 7. Willingness is an important factor in successful professional development.</i>							
Private	-	-	-	22.6	77.4	4.77	41
Public	-	-	-	48.4	51.6	4.51	41
Total	-	-	-	35.5	64.5	1.35	82
<i>Q. 8. Teachers should be open to new ideas and changes.</i>							
Private	-	-	-	35.5	64.5	4.64	41
Public	-	6.5	9.7	54.8	29.0	4.06	41
Total	-	3.2	4.8	45.2	46.8	1.64	82
<i>Q. 9. Teachers should reflect upon their own practices to improve professionally.</i>							
Private	-	3.2	-	35.5	61.3	4.54	41
Public	-	3.2	3.2	74.2	19.4	4.09	41
Total	-	3.2	1.6	54.8	40.3	1.67	82
<i>Q. 10. Peer observation should be used to gather information about teacher performance.</i>							
Private	-	-	-	38.7	61.3	4.61	41
Public	-	19.4	12.9	51.6	16.1	3.64	41
Total	-	9.7	6.5	45.2	38.7	1.87	82
<i>Q. 11. Teachers should try to keep themselves up to date with changes and improvements in ELT.</i>							
Private	-	-	-	29.0	71.0	4.70	41
Public	-	-	-	58.1	38.7	4.40	40
Total	-	-	-	43.5	54.8	1.44	81

Note: N's vary due to some missing responses

Table 1 presents the frequency distributions of teachers working at public schools, private institutions and all teachers irrespective of their place of work (total).

As Table 1 indicates, regardless of whether teachers belong to public schools or private institutions, all the respondents strongly agree/ agree with the statement underlying the importance of “willingness” as a factor in successful professional development: “Willingness is an important factor in successful professional development” (100%). Equally important are the statements that highlight the importance of collaboration and being up to date with changes and improvements in the field of ELT: “Teachers should help each other produce solutions to solve problems” (98.4%) and “Teachers should try to keep themselves up to date with changes and improvements in ELT” (98.3%). The next one is another statement under the category of collaboration which highlights the importance of collaborative professional learning: “Teachers should help each other evaluate teaching to identify problem, strengths, and weaknesses” (96%). Statements such as “Teachers should take the initiative and action for their own professional development” and “Teachers should reflect upon their own practices to improve professionally” were also the themes that 95.2% and 95.1% of all teachers were strongly agreed/ agreed with respectively. Of all the statements about English language teachers’ perceptions towards their own professional development, peer observation ranked the lowest (83.9%)

after the statement regarding the freedom of teachers in testing new ideas or techniques in practice (50%). In the statement, “A teacher should be free to test any idea or a new technique in teaching”, 38.7% of the respondents were uncertain and 11.3% disagreed with whether being free to test their ideas would really benefit their professional development, while in the statement, “Peer observation should be used to gather information about teacher performance” 6.5% of the teachers were uncertain and 9.7% disagreed with peer observation.

To see if teaching at private institutions or public schools changes the perceptions of teachers working in these places, only the statements that ranked highest and lowest are going to be presented for the following section.

As for the private institution teachers, 100% of the respondents strongly agreed/ agreed with the following statements: “Willingness is an important factor in successful professional development”, “Teachers should be open to new ideas and changes”, “Teachers should try to keep themselves up to date with changes and improvements in ELT” and “Peer observation should be used to gather information about teacher performance”. However, public school teachers strongly disagreed/ disagreed with some of the above mentioned items. For example, while 100% of private teachers agreed that peer observation is a good tool to gather some information about teacher performance, only 67.7% of school teachers strongly agreed/ agreed with peer

observation. The only statement that all public school teachers and private institution teachers agree with is "Willingness is an important factor in successful professional development". Another similarity between these groups of teachers are in the statement "A teacher should be free to test any idea or a new technique in teaching" which ranked the lowest (48.4% agree/strongly agree for public school teachers and 51.6% for private institution teachers) in both groups. In general, in comparison with private institution teachers, there were few statements about perceptions that all public school teachers strongly agreed/ agreed with.

To see whether there is a significant difference between public school English language teachers' and private institute language teachers' perceptions toward their own professional development, independent sample t-test was run and the result can be seen in the Table 2.

From Table 3 we can see that the mean of public school teachers' perception towards professional development is lower than that of teachers at private institutions (45.1 and 3.9 respectively). To see whether this difference is significant, Sig. value (P value) was looked at and the result shows that the Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.003, which is less than 0.05, hence the difference is significant. In general, we can see that private institute language teachers have a more positive perception towards professional development than their counterparts at public schools.

Research Question 2

The second question investigated any significant difference between public school English language teachers' and private institute language teachers' perceptions toward their own professional development in terms of gender. To answer this question, independent sample t-test was utilized to compare the perception of male teachers

Table 2
Difference between public school English language teachers' and private institute language teachers' perceptions toward their own professional development

	School/center	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Perception	public	41	45.1935	3.85936	-3.043	60	0.003
	private	41	48.1935	3.90230			

Table 3
The perception of male and female teachers

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perception	Male	40	47.1786	3.87827	0.971	58	0.336
	Female	42	46.1563	4.22824			

with the perception of female teachers regardless of the place they work at, public schools or private institutions.

As it can be seen in Table 3, the difference between the perceptions of all male teachers and all female teachers is not significant (p -value = 0.336 > 0.05).

However, to see if working at private or public sectors would have a significant effect on teachers' perception working at public schools and private institutions, gender was separated based on the place of work. At first the perception of female teachers and then the perception of male teachers are going to be presented in Table 4.

As it can be seen Table 4, although the mean of female public school teachers' perception is lower than that of female private institution teachers, this difference is not significant (p -value = 0.109 > 0.05).

The same procedure was adopted for male teachers at public schools and private institutions. The result (Table 5) shows that there is a significant difference between male public school teachers' perception and

male private institution teachers (p -value = 0.024 < 0.05).

All in all, we can conclude that although at first, there was not a significant difference between the perceptions of all male teachers and all female teachers irrespective of their place of work, place of work (teaching at public school or private institution) can have a significant effect on the perceptions of only male teachers in terms of professional development.

Research Question 3

The third purpose of this study was to explore English language teachers' perceptions (both public school teachers and private institution teachers) of major professional development activities and to what degree they make use of these activities.

To answer this question Friedman test was first adopted to obtain the mean rank of how important teachers perceive these activities for their professional development and how often they make use of them. Then Wilcoxon signed-rank test was run to see if

Table 4
Differences in perceptions in female public school teachers and female private institute teachers

	School/center	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perception	Public	22	45.2857	3.58170	-1.654	30	0.109
	Private	20	47.8182	4.61027			

Table 5
Differences in perceptions in male public school teachers and male private institute teachers

	School/center	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perception	Public	19	45.0000	9.99111	-2.404	26	0.024
	Private	21	48.3889	10.46688			

the difference between the mean scores of the importance given to the activity and that of actual use of the activities is significant. In order to fully follow the statements covered in the third part of the questionnaire, please refer to the Appendix.

Table 6
Degree of importance given to major professional development activities and degree of actual use of the activities by public school teachers

Third section	Friedman test		Wilcoxon test Sig
	Importance given to the activity Mean rank	Actual use of the activities Mean rank	
S1	13.24	12.19	0.001
S2	11.98	13.11	0.057
S3	11.52	11.73	0.013
S4	12.92	12.41	0.001
S5	12.53	12.84	0.005
S6	9.47	7.79	<0.0001
S7	8.13	6.54	<0.0001
S8	13.66	12.05	0.001
S9	11.74	10.54	<0.0001
S10	8.24	9.00	0.005
S11	13.19	15.14	0.257
S12	6.34	6.96	0.022
S13	5.71	4.68	0.001
S14	14.44	14.25	0.009
S15	11.76	12.18	0.046
S16	6.42	5.68	<0.0001
S17	7.69	7.02	0.001
S18	11.37	11.68	0.008
S19	9.90	10.32	0.166
S20	9.74	10.20	0.013

*Mean scores are based on a five-point Likert scale where 1= not important at all/ never, 2= of little importance/ rarely, 3= somewhat important/ sometimes, 4= important/ often, 5= very important/ always.

As for the activities that public school teachers think are important, Table 6 shows that the most important activities are S14 "Following research literature and reading articles related to teaching and learning English" (14.44), and S8 "Trying out new knowledge, ideas and skills in my lessons" (13.66). It is interesting to say that as for the actual use of the activities, public school teachers think that they make use of the exact same activities but with different order: S11 "Using students' reaction in class to improve my classroom teaching" (15.14), and S14 "Following research literature

and reading articles related to teaching and learning English” (14.25).. Activities that received the lowest rank are: S13 “Reflecting on my own teaching by audio-taping or video-taping my classes” (5.71), and S12 “Reflecting on my own teaching by keeping a diary/journal” (6.34).

To see if there is any significant difference between the mean scores of all the activities that public school teachers think are important and make use of, the result of Wilcoxon signed-rank test was referred to. The results show that except for two items (items 11 and 19), the importance given and the use of all the major professional development activities are significantly different from each other at the .05 level. This indicates that in many cases (statements 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 16 and 17), although public school teachers give importance or somewhat importance to the activities, they do not make use of these activities as much as they should because as it can be seen in Table 7, the mean scores of the importance given to the activities are all higher than the mean scores of making use of the same activities, but the p-values of all the above mentioned items are smaller than 0.05. As for the other items that the mean score of the actual use is higher than that of importance given to the activity (items 3, 5, 10, 12, 15, 18 and 20), again the p values are smaller than 0.05 which shows that based on the importance given, public school teachers make more use of these activities. In other words, for example although public school teachers think using students’ reaction in class is an important tool to improve their

classroom teaching (importance given to activity mean=13.19), in reality, they make more use of students’ reaction (actual use mean score=15.14) than they perceived they would.

As for the private institution teachers, the most important activities are: “Viewing/ watching educational videos on YouTube, Teachertube, etc. in order to improve my teaching skills” (14.15), and “Using students’ reaction in class to improve my classroom teaching” (14.13). When it comes to actually report which activities they make use of, the mean scores in Table 7 show that private institution teachers make use of the following activities the most: “Using students’ reaction in class to improve my classroom teaching” (15.95), and “Viewing/ watching educational videos on YouTube, Teachertube, etc. in order to improve my teaching skills” (13.93). The activities that private institution teachers perceive as not very important are “Attending international/ national conferences (as a presenter or participant) related to teaching and learning English” (5.92), and “Attending online courses to improve your teaching skills (e.g. grammar courses and professional development courses)” (6.58). As for the activities that private institution teachers make the least use of are: “Attending online courses to improve your teaching skills (e.g. grammar courses, professional development courses, etc.)” (3.33) and “Attending international/national conferences (as a presenter or participant) related to teaching and learning English” (3.64).

Table 7

Degree of importance given to major professional development activities and degree of actual use of the activities by private institute teachers

Third section statements	Friedman test		
	Importance given to the activity	Actual use of the activities	Wilcoxon test
	Mean rank	Mean rank	Sig
S1	13.07	12.72	<0.0001
S2	12.68	13.21	0.001
S3	11.43	12.10	0.003
S4	10.92	10.14	0.001
S5	11.32	10.50	<0.0001
S6	10.78	11.09	0.001
S7	11.58	12.22	0.001
S8	12.15	13.83	0.007
S9	8.05	8.81	0.001
S10	8.17	7.81	<0.0001
S11	14.13	15.95	0.008
S12	8.93	8.78	<0.0001
S13	6.88	6.31	<0.0001
S14	12.22	13.52	0.002
S15	11.37	11.38	0.001
S16	5.92	3.64	<0.0001
S17	6.58	3.33	<0.0001
S18	14.15	13.93	0.003
S19	9.90	10.43	0.005
S20	9.77	10.31	0.003

*Mean scores are based on a five-point Likert scale where 1= not important at all/ never, 2= of little importance/ rarely, 3= somewhat important/ sometimes, 4= important/ often, 5= very important/ always.

To see if there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the importance given to the activities and the actual use of the same activities, the result of Wilcoxon signed-rank test shows that in all cases, there is a significant difference between the two mean scores (all p values are smaller than 0.05). Similar to what was reported for the public school teachers, private institution teachers either give more importance to what they actually do for their professional

development than they really do (items 1, 4, 5, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18), or they do the activities more than they really think they give importance to (items 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 19, 20). For example, private institute teachers do not watch educational videos as frequently as they think they do (item 18) and they try out more new knowledge, ideas and skills in their lessons than they think they do.

Research Question 4

The fourth purpose of this study was to explore what hinders change and growth for English language teachers working at public schools and private institutions. Teachers' responses to the statements in the fourth section of the questionnaire and provided data on how important teachers perceive some factors that hinder change and growth. As it can be seen from Table 8, based on the mean scores of 9 items presented in the questionnaire, we can see that for private institution teachers, the most important obstacles for their professional development are "Lack of collaboration among colleagues" (7.13), and "Lack of institutional support for professional development" (7.13). In contrast, the least important obstacles perceived by private institution teachers are "Lack of communication among colleagues" (3.50) and "Educational background" (4).

To see if there is a significant difference between the mean scores of all the items presented in this section, Friedman Test was run and the result shows that p-value is smaller than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$). So it can be concluded that statistically there is a significant difference between all the items representing what hinders change and growth for teachers' professional development.

As for the public school teachers, the most important obstacles are "Personal financial problems" (7.75) and "Lack of self-motivation" (7.75). To see if there is a significant difference between the mean scores of items in the fourth section, Friedman Test was run and the result shows that the p-value is again smaller than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$). So it can be concluded that the most important obstacles for public school teachers in the descending order are items 1 and 7 (equally 7.75),

Table 8
Potential hindrances of change and growth in public school and private institute English language teachers

Section fourth of the questionnaire	total	private	public	Mann-Whitney test
		Mean-Rank		
1. Personal financial problems	5.36	6.88	7.75	0.175
2. Excessive workload	5.91	6.88	6.88	0.122
3. Strict working hours	3.38	4.63	3.75	0.042
4. Lack of communication among colleagues	3.38	3.50	3.13	0.047
5. Lack of collaboration among colleagues	5.06	7.13	4.75	0.002
6. Lack of institutional support for professional development	5.24	7.13	5.00	<0.0001
7. Lack of self-motivation	6.08	5.00	7.75	0.001
8. Educational background	5.63	4.00	5.88	0.508
9. Difficulty in reaching literature in the field	4.56	4.75	4.63	0.309
Asymp. Sig	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001	

2 (Excessive workload), 8 (Educational background), 6 (Lack of institutional support for professional development), 5 (Lack of collaboration among colleagues), 9 (Difficulty in reaching literature in the field), 3 (Strict working hours) and 4 (Lack of communication among colleagues). Regardless of working at private or public schools, EFL teachers' main hindrance are "Lack of self-motivation" (6.08), "Excessive workload" (5.91) and "Educational background" (5.63).

DISCUSSION

One of the main objectives of this study was to find out English language teachers' perceptions towards their own professional development. The results of this objective showed that almost all teachers regardless of working at private institutes or public schools strongly agree or agree to the most important ideas about professional development. For example, one of the themes that ranked highest among all the teachers was "willingness" as an important factor in successful professional development. According to Karabenick and Conley (2011), the more positively motivated teachers participate in professional development activities, the higher the probability to gain benefit from the experience. The result of this study is in line with Karaaslan's (2003) study in which all Turkish teachers believe that willingness is a key factor for adequate professional development.

The results of this study also highlighted the importance of collaboration among teachers in order to make positive sustained

changes to their teaching practice. "Powerful collaboration", according to DuFour (2005), is a "systemic process in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practice" (p. 36). It is within this type of collaborative professional communities that teachers have a chance to discuss student thinking and learning, address common research questions, and prepare teaching materials together (Meirink, Meijer, & Verloop, 2007). When ideas are exchanged in this type of dialogic reflection, teachers will gain the knowledge that would have not been gained if they were in isolation (Cabaroğlu & Tillema, 2011). However, collaborative workplace is not something practiced by many schools and districts. Awarding "Teacher of the Year" or "Staff Member of the Month" highlights the reality of isolated teaching profession in which individualism and isolation are promoted by sending this message that student's success is the responsibility of only one teacher and not all of the teachers involved at this professional learning community (Robbins & Alvy, 2003).

This study also revealed that observing and being observed, peer observation, is considered as one of the least favourable activities that teachers prefer to do in order to improve their teaching practice. This result is somehow paradoxical because it was previously reported that teachers value collaborative teacher professional development. In fact, about 96% of the teachers in this study reported that "Teachers should help each other evaluate teaching to identify problem, strengths,

and weaknesses". And, teacher-to-teacher observation is what Hirsch (2011) believes makes teaching a public matter rather than a private one. This line of thinking more or less is cultivated by organizational contexts at which teachers work at. For example, in a study carried out by Reinhorn, Moore-Johnson and Simon (2015), the findings showed that the teachers who worked at rather traditional organizational structures had more cultural barriers into the practice of peer observation while the teachers who work at contexts in which classrooms, office space, lesson plans and even students (co-teaching) are shared welcomed the opportunity to observe and be observed by their colleagues. This happens to support further results obtained from this study because when the place of working (public or private schools) was considered as a factor by which the perceptions of teachers might change, the findings indicated that public school teachers did not really favour peer observation while all private institute teachers thought peer observation is very important in enhancing their professional development. This has been supported by Pazhouhesh (2014) who reported that state-run schools in Iran followed a more top-down pedagogic theory and practice, still emphasizing on form-focused practices in which teachers had isolated themselves from "the realities of the classroom dynamic".

In contrast, teachers at privately-operated language institutes, Pazhouhesh (2014) reported, were more open to change, adopted a more liberal role, and were less

obliged to stick to the syllabuses. Having such positive perception support another interesting result obtained from this study. The result of the first research question also revealed that private institute language teachers have a more positive perception towards professional development than their counterparts at public schools. This can also be explained by traditional and marginalized role public school teachers might have in many schools. According to Pishghadam and Mirzae (2008), while teaching English to public school students, many teachers still rely on translation techniques, memorization of grammar rules and repetition drills. In contrast, EFL teachers who teach at private institutes usually rely more on "cooperation, interaction, simulation, and role-play" (Pazhouhesh, 2014).

As to the second research question, the findings showed that regardless of their workplace, there is not a significant difference between male teachers and female teachers regarding their own professional development. However, when gender was separated based on the place of work, the result showed that teaching at public school or private institution can have a significant effect on the perceptions of only male teachers in terms of professional development. Looking at their mean value, it could be seen that male private institute teachers had a more positive perception towards professional development than their counterparts in public schools. One explanation for such result is that since male school teachers, once hired, have high job security, they do not fear of losing their job.

According to Gholami, Sarkhosh, and Abdi (2016), “the prospects for promotion seem less promising [for high school teachers]. Taken together, there is little incentive and willingness on the part of these teachers to transform themselves professionally”. By why not such a result is seen among female teachers is perhaps because of the male’s principal economic role—as breadwinner. Although Drudy, Martin, Woods, and O’Flynn, (2005) believed that teaching as a career is less prestigious for men, the idea of women as homemakers and men as breadwinners still persists in many societies. So perhaps in Iran too, male private institute teachers are more compelled to grow professionally in order to keep their job and determine their promotion and career growth.

The results of the third research question revealed that there is a consistency between the activities that public school teachers think are important and the actual use of those activities. While thinking these activities are important for their professional development, public school teachers actually follow teaching and learning English related articles and research literature, try out new knowledge, ideas and skills in their lessons, take initiative to follow professional development programs and finally use students’ reaction in class to improve their classroom teaching. However, when Wilcoxon signed-rank test was referred to in order to see if there is any significant difference between the mean scores of all the activities that public school teachers think are important and actually make use of, the

result showed that except for only one of the above mentioned activities (using students’ reaction in class to improve their classroom teaching), public school teachers are more dependent on their schools to provide professional development opportunities for them, do not really follow teaching and learning English related articles and research literature, and do not actually use new knowledge, ideas and skills in their lessons as they think they would. This result again supports previous results obtained earlier that the organizational settings in public schools are less motivating for public school teachers. One main reason behind this is that since they are state-run schools, there is perhaps less or no competition in these schools to attract more students while the opposite is true for private institutes due to the existence of budgetary constraints in funding these institutes.

Although EFL learners have to pay money to learn English in private institutions, according to Romero and Del Rey (2004), the higher quality private schools attract more students. Affected by behaviouristic approaches to learning, Iranian high school teachers still want to maintain their dominance over the students (teacher-centred styles), and still follow traditional approaches (such as grammar translation method, translation and vocabulary memorization) (Pishghadam & Mirzae, 2008; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; Razmjoo, 2007). However, in private institutes, teachers must create an interactive and communicative classroom (student-centred style), give feedback to learners and enhance

learners' communicative competence besides their linguistic competence (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Since it is not actually practiced in their schools, this perhaps can explain why public school teachers do not actually follow communicative approach related articles and research literature as much or do not actually use new knowledge, ideas and skills in their lessons as much as they think they would. It is interesting to note that in the recent study carried out by Gholami et al. (2016) on the differences exist between the practices of three groups of Iranian EFL teachers, public (high) school, private language institute, and public-private teachers (teaching both in high schools and private language institutes), the results showed that private institute teachers applied more communicative approaches by minimizing the amount of teacher talking time and maximizing students' practice and feedback. Although to a lesser extent, a similar trend could be observed at classes of teachers taught both at the public high school and private institutions. However, classes of the teachers who were teaching only at public schools were the least interactive ones despite sharing some features with classes of public-private teachers (such as duration of pair/group work activities, explicit correction, and rates of repetition). This shows that they are rather contextual factors as well as external factors than teachers' belief and internal factors that negatively affect public school teachers' performance.

According to Nishino (2008), and Philips and Borg (2009), weakness in high school books, de-motivated learners, wash back in its language testing, class size and classroom management difficulties have limited public school teachers' role in scope and have forced them to not act in accordance with their beliefs. It is also worth mentioning that Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) also believed that in many cases, higher quality of private institutions over public schools is not always due to better or newer teaching approaches but because of stricter environment with more class tests, smaller number of students in each class and greater number of teaching sessions.

As for the private institute teachers, among the activities that they think and actually do even more than they think they do are "Using students' reaction in class to improve my classroom teaching", "Trying out new knowledge, ideas and skills in my lessons" and "Following research literature and reading articles related to teaching and learning English". Although the last two items have been discussed thoroughly in the previous sections, it is interesting to note that for both private institute teachers and public school teachers, using students' feedback to improve their teaching performance has been one of the items that they have in common. According to Seldin (1997), students' perception of their learning experience in class can be one of the best sources of information to evaluate and improve teaching effectiveness.

Another activity that both private institute teachers and public school teachers seem to both think unnecessary and even do less for their professional development is "Attending international/national conferences (as a presenter or participant) related to teaching and learning English". Although it is important to acquire knowledge from outside sources, this result is not surprising because traditional, single conference or workshop "offers no sustained program of study and is absent from any type of implementation accountability" (Williams, 2010). According to Elmore (2002), what actually teachers need in conferences, seminars, courses and workshops is immersion in learning opportunities they are expected to provide students. However, it is believed that what teachers usually get out of these conferences is just a certificate rather than a quality professional development.

The result of the fourth research question revealed that for public school teachers "Personal financial problems" and "Lack of self-motivation" were the most important obstacles for their self-initiated professional development while for private institute teachers these were "Lack of collaboration among colleagues", and "Lack of institutional support for professional development". The last item for private institute teachers somehow contrasts with what has been reported by Gholami et al. (2016). According to them private institute teachers are constantly supported by their institutions to attend pre-/in-service teacher training courses

(Gholami et al., 2016). However, since funding at private institutions is highly tied to the tuition EFL learners pay, the degree of support private institute teachers receive from their institutions might actually depend on the district the language centre is located or the number of students enrolled at these institutions. At the end, the result showed that although lack of self-motivation might consider a hindrance for all teachers irrespective of their work place, public school teachers are more de-motivated towards their self-initiated professional development than private institute teachers. This has been supported by many previous mentioned studies (e.g. Gholami et al., 2016; Kazemi & Soleimani, 2013; Moazzam & Jodai, 2014; Pazhouhesh, 2014).

CONCLUSION

All in all, from all the findings of this study we can conclude that although public school teachers were less motivated for professional development, all teachers believe that willingness to change is a key factor for quality professional development. Furthermore, all teachers believed that for continuing professional development, teacher collaboration is an important indicator for education effectiveness. However, this study also suggested that promotion of deep level of conversation among teachers is something that should be encouraged and cultivated by school organizational structures and administrators in order to send this message across that teaching doesn't have to be isolating.

Another interesting finding obtained from this study was that private institute language teachers had a more positive perception towards professional development than their counterparts at public schools. This, is thought, is due to the intense competition that exists between the private institutions and not public schools to attract more students and hence only those teachers who are professionally competent enough can secure their spot in this competitive job market. This study also reported that there is not a significant difference between the perceptions of female public school teachers and female private institute teachers while male private institute teachers have a more positive perception towards professional development than male public school teachers perhaps because of their exclusive role as breadwinners.

The findings of this study also showed that when it comes to the activities that can be followed by teachers for their professional development, public school teachers do not actually use new knowledge, ideas and skills in their lessons and do not follow latest ELT articles in order to stay up-to-date as much as they think they would. Conversely, for private institute teachers, exactly these two items are reported as the most used activities to boost the quality of their teaching practice. The only activity common between private institute teachers and public school teachers was using students' reaction in class to improve their classroom teaching. Something else both groups of teachers thought not very helpful in enhancing their professional development

was attending national or international conferences.

And finally de-motivation and financial strains were reported by school teachers as the main obstacles in the way of their professional development while for private institute teachers, complains were about less institutional support and lack of collaboration and partnership among colleagues as what hinders growth and change in their career.

The Implications of the Current Study

In respect to the research conducted and the results obtained, the following recommendations can be drawn from this study. The results of this study showed that willingness and collaboration are the most important determinants in teachers' professional development. However, these should be cultivated within school context if the positive results are desired. For example, one of the ways in which "willingness" towards professional development can be enhanced is by involving teachers more in not only general administrative decisions but also in specific school decision making such as curriculum and instruction (Hansson & Gamage, 2008). According to Lin (2014), teacher empowerment can transform passive teachers to active ones as long as principals and administrators act as trust-builders in student-teacher, teacher-teacher and most important of all teacher-principal relationships. Furthermore, if such a culture is established at school settings, then teachers do not resent peer-observation and peer-coaching anymore.

The result of this study also showed that both public school teachers and private institute teachers are reluctant to participate in seminars, conferences, workshops, class observations, and on-line courses. These professional development resources are going to be beneficial only if they are not presented at one-time professional development events. According to Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, and Richardson (2009), most teachers attended these kind of seminars and workshops thought they are useless and ineffective. Therefore, it is important to note that here the real issue is not the teachers who are not willing to attend these activities but it is the low quality of these offerings that make the status quo so fruitless. Then, for the high-quality professional development program to be effective, a) duration of professional development must be significant and ongoing, b) teachers' initial exposure to a concept should be active and engaging, c) understanding and learning a new concept should be through modelling presented by experts, and d) the content presented to teachers shouldn't be generic, but instead specific to the discipline (Gulamhussein, 2013). It is also recommended the psychological traits such as emotional intelligence are incorporated in the professional development courses designed for novice teachers so that it contributes to their pedagogical improvement (Hekmatzadeh, Khojasteh, & Shokrpour, 2016).

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APPENDIX

Third section statements

1. Taking initiative to follow professional development programs
 2. Sharing experiences and problems with colleagues
 3. Asking for professional help from colleagues
 4. Working on developing new materials with colleagues
 5. Working on developing new techniques and activities with colleagues
 6. Observing colleagues' lesson to learn from them
 7. Being observed by heads, administrators, or other colleagues, so that we learn from their feedbacks
 8. Trying out new knowledge, ideas and skills in my lessons
 9. Doing teacher initiated classroom investigation (action research)
 10. Gathering information about one's own teaching performance (surveys, interviews, teacher evaluation forms to give to my students, etc.)
 11. Using students' reaction in class to improve my classroom teaching
 12. Reflecting on my own teaching by keeping a diary/journal
 13. Reflecting on my own teaching by audio-taping or video-taping my classes
 14. Following research literature and reading articles related to teaching and learning English
 15. Attending in-service training programs provided by my own school (workshops, seminars, etc.)
 16. Attending international/national conferences (as a presenter or participant) related to teaching and learning English
 17. Attending online courses to improve your teaching skills (e.g. grammar courses, professional development courses, etc.)
 18. Viewing/watching educational videos on YouTube, Teachertube, etc. in order to improve my teaching skills
 19. Having a teacher discussion group in my school/institution
 20. Having an online teacher group in What's up, Telegram, Facebook, etc. to share your problems or feedbacks with other teachers
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