Teacher education beyond transmission: Challenges and opportunities for Iranian teachers of English

Parvin Safari and Nasser Rashidi
Shiraz University, Iran

The teacher education field has recently undergone dramatic changes leading to a shift of focus from transmission models towards alternative approaches and theories that emerged in the post-transmission era addressing sociocultural, political, ideological, and critical issues. Despite worldwide changes in teacher education programs, it seems that alternative theories and ideas have had little or no impact on teacher education for English language teaching (ELT) in Iran. This study investigated the applicability of the post-transmission perspectives and theories to the Iranian teacher education context, in addition to the concerns and challenges faced by teachers and instructors working in that context. To this end, the views and beliefs of ten experienced English teachers and three educators were collected using three methods of data collection: collaborative dialogue; currere or reflexive narrative; and, interviews. The data were analysed to identify emerging themes relating to the current status of teacher education in Iran, including impediments, constraints, and concerns in case of any change. The study found that participants believed that policy makers, educators, and teachers needed to adopt alternative theories and approaches in order to improve pre-service and in-service ELT teacher education in Iran. However, given the local context, they indicated that any action taken towards transformation required meticulous consideration on the part of the key stakeholders.

Introduction

Teacher education programs are generally viewed as the most crucial stages in teachers' educational lives through which they can gain skills, expertise, knowledge, and preparation for teaching. For years, the central job of English language teacher education has been to prepare teachers to teach through the transmission of knowledge and information to students (Johnson, 2006). However, the field of English language teaching (ELT) has recently undergone dramatic changes in its conceptualisation (Izadinia, 2012), with a move towards addressing critical, social, and educational issues. These changes, influenced by socio-cultural and critical theories, have altered the focus of language teacher education.

Teacher educators have been encouraged to operate as transformative agents considering issues like social transformation, teachers' agency, subjectivity, self, identity, values and beliefs (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Their mission is to empower teachers and transform them into reflective practitioners confident to cope with language classroom challenges. Teachers' aims are not solely the improvement of students' communicative and linguistic competencies but to create social space and opportunities for them to interrogate, criticise, and analyse the status quo (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2012).

Despite changes in approaches to teacher education from transmission to post-transmission pedagogy in other countries, the focus of teacher education in Iran remains the traditional issues of classroom management, input enhancement, development of

linguistic knowledge, skills, and techniques including the use of interactive activities such as pair and group work in language classrooms. A closer look at the teacher education of Iran shows that changes in the field of ELT and teacher education have not yet found comfortable home in our teacher education programs. There is, therefore, an urgent need for an educational reform aimed at improving our ELT teacher education.

Challenges for ELT teacher education can provide especially important illustrations of educational issues that need to be addressed, because of the emergence of English as the language of first choice for engaging in international, world-wide scholarly discourse. Ideas about and progress towards transformative reform described in this paper are derived from engagement with and participation in this world-wide scholarly discourse. It also needs to be highlighted that without such engagement and participation, transformation may not happen, or happen only at a pace that is too slow to satisfy student and societal expectations. In fact, there is a need for further research in this area to provide policy makers, educators, and teachers with important insights about how to facilitate this process. This paper attempts to identify the challenges and concerns that EFL teachers and educators face in their journey from transmission or instructivist models of teaching and learning, to constructivist or social constructivist models.

A review of related literature

Over the past century, teacher education has been affected by different views of language learning and teaching. For decades, teacher education programs aimed at providing student teachers with instructional programs, pedagogical strategies and specific methods to build security and stability for novice teachers (Mann, 2005).

Historically, teacher education was predicated on the notion that knowledge about teaching and learning could be transmitted to teachers by educators, through theoretical readings, lectures, and workshops occurring external to classrooms (Johnson, 2009). The positivist paradigm actually focused on the notion of transfer to show how knowledge and ideas travelled from one context to another. Kumaravadivelu (2012) believes that transmission models of EFL teacher education have several features. First, teacher educators' role is restricted to that of conduits passing on digestible bits and pieces of pre-selected, pre-determined, and pre-sequenced bodies of information to student teachers. Second, there is a master-pupil relationship between educators and student teachers by which teachers absorb the pedagogic knowledge and skills. Third, these models rarely allow for teachers' autonomy to develop and to construct visions and versions of their own teaching. Fourth, they are based on a top-down hierarchy relying on externally generated professional knowledge. Finally, they create a dichotomy between student teachers and educators; educators are considered the producers of knowledge whereas student teachers are the consumers of knowledge.

The transmission approaches do not give teachers the chance to exhibit any agency or subjectivity except the absorption of pedagogic principles, theories, strategies, techniques, and skills handed down from an expert. Thus, teachers are expected to operate like robots, with no role in developing students' capacity to learn how to learn. Learning as a

means of promoting liberatory autonomy, in Freire's (1972) sense, and as the ultimate goal of education, is given little or no consideration.

In the mid-1970s, as a reaction to Positivism, an interpretive epistemological paradigm drawn from ethnographic research in anthropology and sociology began to emerge (Stenhouse, 1975). This interpretive perspective was based on an assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and emerges from people's participation in social practices (Johnson, 2009). This approach constructs teachers as decision makers rather than doers. Teachers' prior knowledge has a crucial role in their current thinking and educational practices, which in turn shapes their professional knowledge (Freeman, 2002).

Johnson (2009) argues the interpretive stance requires a shift from observational investigations towards ethnographic descriptions based on observation, description and interviews with teachers about why they do what they do, and how they make sense of their own practices. However, despite an acknowledgement of the significance of teachers' mental lives in their formation as reflective and skilled practitioners, many believed this perspective gave too much emphasis to teachers' beliefs, prior knowledge and skills, and paid insufficient attention to students' learning (Izadinia, 2012). It was, therefore, at risk of failing to establish a firm connection between teachers' prior knowledge and students' learning (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

From 1990 to 2000, the interpretive epistemological perspective gave way to a post-modern perspective suggesting a new understanding of the self and the status of knowledge. Kumaravadivelu (2012) claims that teachers are confronted with the challenge of adjusting their teaching selves to the demands of existing realities, while at the same time attempting to go beyond the artificial boundaries imposed on them. As Martin (2007) states, the teacher's self is not characterised by passivity and conformity, but by a socially constructed reactivity that includes agency as an essential characteristic.

Another characteristic of the post-modern perspective is the different way that knowledge is envisioned. Whereas modernism attempts to find a coherent, overarching truth and incorporate all forms of knowledge into a grand narrative, post-modernism acknowledges diversity, difference, a multitude of narratives, and alternative forms of expression and interpretation (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Thus, regarding the post-modern perspective, one expects a multiplicity of voices and narratives reflecting marginalised people's multiple worlds and experiences in educational settings. The emergence of different voices and diverse views results from the liberatory autonomy that the post-modern perspective bestows on teachers which empowers them to become critical thinkers (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

The emphasis of post-modern perspective on issues outlined above led to critical approaches to teacher education (Hawkins & Norton, 2009) referred to as 'critical pedagogy'. The advent of critical pedagogy has influenced teacher education in a number of ways such as creation of new opportunities, roles, and responsibilities for the people working in educational settings. Educators and teachers were no longer seen as the transmitters of taken-for-granted knowledge and information. Rather, they were assumed

to operate as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1989) and critical practitioners. This role gave them the opportunity to liberate themselves from oppressive systems in society by working for educational and professional progress through transformative actions.

Kumaravadivelu (2012) stated that teacher education could transcend the constraints of transmission models by moving beyond the concept of method. That is, in order to transform teacher education and educational settings into social institutions, teachers are required to refuse to become the slaves of methods that demand a rigid application of techniques. According to Pennycook (1989), method characterises a specific vision of the world which is based on the unequal power relations between an expert and teachers. However, the post-method condition calls for the development of an alternative approach, rather than the adoption of yet another method which reproduces the top-down nature of teacher education (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). The post-method pedagogy takes teachers' autonomy into account. That is, it recognises the teacher's potential and capability to know how to know and how to operate autonomously within the restrictions imposed by textbooks, curricula, and institutions (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

The significance of the study

The significant changes to and developments in ELT, involving a shift from transmission models of language learning and teaching to post-modern and post-method perspectives, have had a strong impact on teacher education for ELT throughout the world. Despite this, it seems that changes have not occurred in teacher education in Iran during this period. Accordingly, this qualitative study aims to investigate the applicability of the recent post-modern and post-method perspectives and theories to ELT teacher education in Iran. It also seeks to discover the reasons why Iran has not adopted these recent advancements in its ELT teacher education. The study also sets out to identify and analyse the issues involved and to present insights about ELT teacher education in Iran of relevance not only for other researchers in the area, but also for educators and teachers who are directly engaged in pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

Context

The context of this study is teacher education system of Iran, including pre-service and in-service programs. Teacher education in Iran dates back to 1918, when theoretical and practical courses were taught in a continuum of three to four years in special universities and colleges. These colleges (Marakez-e-Tarbiyat Moalem), established in 1979, became known as Teacher Education University (Farhangiyan University) in 2012. Farhangiyan University currently has 64 branches and 34 affiliated centers throughout the country. Students interested in joining the teaching profession participate in a nation-wide University Entrance Examination.

Currently, pre-service programs are implemented through Farhangiyan Universities responsible for preparing would-be teachers. ELT courses are presented in some of these universities through which ELT students complete a semester of teaching methodology and practicum to get familiar with theoretical and practical principles and techniques of

teaching. For practicum, student teachers observe and teach in school classes once or twice a week. They are supposed to apply the pedagogical theories taught at universities and incorporate teaching techniques gathered during their observations.

In-service classes are held through the Education Organisation which is the main branch of the Ministry of Education in each province. These classes aim to update and refresh teachers' professional knowledge and skills.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that investigates the insights and understandings of teachers and educators regarding the current status of Iranian teacher education for English Language Teaching. The research design involved the collection of data from multiple sources through the use of three data collection instruments: currere or reflexive narrative; collaborative dialogue, and interviews. These three methods were used to obtain triangulated data about Iranian instructors' and teachers' perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes concerning the current status of teacher education in Iran, including the reasons for the stagnation of the educational system and teacher education, and the applicability of new ideas and theories. The use of multiple sources of data and its triangulation was used in this study to corroborate and interrogate the findings that emerged from each separate data source.

Pinar (2004) first introduced currere or reflexive narrative as a data gathering tool. The purpose of using currere was to have a focus on teachers' subjectivity, agency, and narrative voices. Accordingly, currere involves four stages: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. At the regressive stage, teachers' experiences are the focus of attention and reflection. The focus in the progressive stage is on the constraints, problems, and obstacles that might prohibit teachers' future performance. A critical examination of the past and present is done through analytic stage. With the last step, synthetical, insights from past, present, and future are combined in order to transform the social milieu (Sadeghi & Ketabi, 2009).

This method of collecting data is in fact an autobiographical tool, providing a framework for critical reflection and the examination of the problems and constraints in the educational system. Pinar (2004, p. 35) proposed the stages to obtain the desired data as, "retelling the story of ones' educational experiences, imagining future possibilities for self-understanding and educational practice; analysis of the relationships between past, present, and future life history and practice; and new ways of thinking about education." Further, as described by Sadeghi and Ketabi (2009), currere provides teachers and learners with the opportunity of connecting their knowledge and academic content to social, cultural, and historical context.

Collaborative dialogue as the second data gathering tool was used to validate the data. The researchers held separate meetings with the groups of teachers and educators. During these sessions, participants had the chance of discussing and collaboratively dialoguing their ideas and beliefs about the recent trends in teacher education and the current status

of teacher education of Iran. This included the description of the educational system, their positions and roles in the existing teacher education system, their marginalisation by the dominant system and the system of unequal power. In addition, there was discussion and dialogue about problems and concerns associated with the application of alternative models of teacher education in the Iranian teacher education. During collaborative meetings, all the teachers and educators adopted a critical stance towards the respective issues.

Interviews, the third method of data collection in the current study, are one of the most commonly used tools for gaining qualitative data in Grounded Theory. Interviews are utilised to collect data about people's beliefs, opinions, and feelings, in their own words and to obtain people's perceptions of their experiences and the meaning that they make of those experiences (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010). Semi-structured interviews were used in this study, with the area of investigation and questions determined in advance. However, the interviewer was free to modify questions during interviews in order to clarify or gain further insights about participants' responses.

Participants

Three teacher educators (2 males and 1 female) and ten teachers of English (3 males and 7 females) participated in this qualitative research study. The teacher educators worked in the Education Organisation of Yazd, in Iran. Two of them had extensive experience of teaching in teacher education colleges and presenting in-service programs for many years, and the other teacher educator had taught such programs for eight years in Iran and Kuwait. The teachers of English had participated in both pre-service and in-service programs. The selection of these participants, through purposive sampling, was intended to help the researcher to obtain deeply rich data.

For this study, the researchers adopted the ethical guidelines proposed by Christians (2005) for gaining participants' informed consent, refraining from any trick and deception, protecting participants' confidentiality and the privacy of the data collected, and ensuring data accuracy. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, the researchers refer to each participant by number in all parts of the study, thus guaranteeing their anonymity.

Procedure

First, the researchers explained the following to all participants: the goal of the study; the time required for participation in the study; the timetable for participation; the number of sessions; the ethics of the study; and, the participants' rights. Seven investigative sessions were conducted with both groups of participants. The sessions were conducted in Persian (Farsi) and recorded. Recordings were transcribed and then the transcriptions were translated into English by the researchers. Each session lasted one hour and forty five minutes in order to provide participants with sufficient time to reflect critically on the issues, discuss, generate, and narrate their experiences and ideas.

During the first session, the researchers discussed issues in teacher education - the recent advancements, developments, alternative perspectives and theories in the field of ELT with participants. In this session, currere was used as an autobiographical tool for obtaining participants' educational experiences and to discover how such experiences are shaped by their gender, religion, race, and ethnicity on the one hand, and social, political and economic preferences of the dominant groups of the country on the other hand. Subsequently, two additional meetings involving currere were offered to participants to provide them with further opportunities to learn about the nature of currere and to share their experiences of the educational system of Iran. Having obtain participants' critical reflection on the Iranian educational system, we had three sessions of collaborative dialogue to provide them with such a chance to engage in a dialogue with others to find their desired changes they prefer to see in the educational system. To wrap up our data collection procedures, we interviewed our participants to hear their final remarks and reflections concerning raised issues in the first session and previous stages of data collection.

Data analysis

After obtaining the data, the researchers applied 'member checking' to ensure the rigor, quality, or trustworthiness of the data. Member checking is a method of triangulation used at the end of data collection that involves asking participants to review the transcripts of their session(s) for accuracy and giving them an opportunity to clarify and/or commenting further on the text (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010). The researchers then used three steps to analyse the transcripts based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative method: open coding; axial coding; and, selective coding. Open coding was used first to identify major or core categories. Then axial coding was used to develop concepts and categories around the core, as well as to establish any relationships between those categories and concepts. Finally, selective coding was used to synthesise categories and concepts into an overarching theory.

Key findings

The following seven key themes emerged from the analysis of the transcripts:

1.   The prevalence of the transmission model of teaching and learning
2.   Pre-defined roles for both educators and teachers
3.   A shortage of up-to-date and expert educators
4.   The insular nature of the education system
5.   The lack of motivation for updating knowledge
6.   Requirements for the development of critical thinking
7.   The lack of alignment between teachers' updated knowledge and the needs of the system.

These themes indicated educators' and teachers' ideas, beliefs, and experiences regarding the status of teacher education in Iran and the place of approaches, theories, and perspectives beyond the transmission model in current teacher education programs for

ELT in Iran. Each theme is discussed below, beginning with a comment from a participant that addresses the issue (s) raised.

Prevalence of the transmission model of teaching and learning

> Every year, an instructional course is held through the Education Organisation that teachers are required to participate. I think these classes are of no use because all the time an instructor comes and lectures. We as the listeners should note all the things mentioned in the class. We should update our knowledge and use the things mentioned in the course. There is no interaction or participatory works in these in-service classes. (Participant 1)

This quote from a teacher participant vividly shows the prevalence of the transmission model in teacher education programs in Iran. Teachers, as passive recipients of knowledge, skills, information and input, are lectured to by instructors on theory and practice relating to ELT. In fact, this sender-receiver model or as described by Harris (1996), telementation, is based on a concept of language as a fixed code that is transmitted, encoded and exchanged from the knower to the learner. The use of the conduit metaphor emphasises the passivity of teachers, who just receive the input and send it into their brains, which operate as disembodied and independent input crunchers. As another of the teacher participants explained:

> The instructor knows everything, the nuts and bolts of teaching from methodology, methods, theories, and techniques to knowledge of language. If we have some problems, we can gain information from instructors. (Participant 4)

This expert-focused instruction assumes teachers have no ability and authority to take charge of how to learn teaching, and how to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. Teachers' autonomy, self regulation, and critical reflection are totally neglected as it is assumed that teachers' professional knowledge and development are in hands of experts who are at a higher level of competence and knowledge. This process leads to teachers' loss of self-confidence in their own actions and practices, and of their ability to operate based on the sociocultural characteristics of their instructional environment. Indeed, this lack of agency and voice, imposed by the top-down authoritarian system does not allow teachers to become reflective and critical practitioners acting upon and questioning the taken-for-granted teaching information and facts of their own classrooms.

This trend gives rise to teachers' ignorance of the sociocultural, historical, political, and ideological aspects of their lives. They are not able to make a connection between their classroom actions and activities and the wider community in which they belong. Teachers educated through courses based on this model transfer what they have learned about to how they teach in their classrooms. They operate as absolute authorities, not allowing for the development of students' agency, voice, subjectivity, and autonomy. They expect students' identities and selves to be predetermined, fixed, and unchanging as assigned by a hierarchical top down system and community with rigid and unyielding societal norms. As a consequence, this method of instruction and teaching is transferred from one generation

to another (as teachers themselves were once students), perpetuating this malfunctioning system.

Pre-defined roles for both educators and teachers

One of the outcomes of the alternative approaches to transmission models of teacher education entails redefining roles for both students and teachers. The educational system of Iran pursues the banking model education as described by Freire (1970). This model views students as passive, as empty accounts to be filled with an authority figure's knowledge and imparted at the authority figure's discretion. The unequal power between teachers and students is discursively exercised, giving rise to further passivity, submissiveness, and marginalisation of students. When the oppressive system does not allow for students' voices to be heard through the creation of a culture of silence in language classrooms, asymmetrically rigid roles based on inequality and injustice, characteristic of an oppressive society, are maintained. This kind of passivity and oppression prevents students from critically questioning their roles, and encourages them to take the nature of these roles for granted. Accordingly, in the teacher education system of Iran, the roles of instructors and teachers include fossilised power relationships that reinforce the distance between each of the parties and allow no flexibility of action. The instructors exercise power over teachers through the possession of knowledge and information that teachers lack. As a teacher involved in this in this project said:

> The instructors in the pre-service or in-service classes do not give us a chance to speak and discuss. It is the instructor who decides about everything. If we want to speak and criticise something, he or she resists not allowing us to continue. All the time, we are silent. We have accepted our roles as the listeners and the role of the instructor as the speaker and the knower. I think anyone who wishes to disobey his or her own roles based on the pre-determined standards is regarded as a noncompliant person (Participant 3).

Based on this quote, Iranian teachers have adopted the roles predefined by the oppressive system and community. The nature of this system necessitates instructors and experts to impose their knowledge, skills, and information about language, teaching methodology, SLA theories, and concepts on teachers, thereby constraining their liberatory autonomy. In fact, the experts' display of power in the form of assumptions about deep-seated knowledge take away teachers' ability to think, making them like robots that follow whatever direction indicated by the authority figure.

In contrast, alternative approaches such as critical pedagogy promote anti-authoritarian, interactive, and dialogic relationships characterised by equality between teacher and student that lead to shaping and reshaping their respective roles. Students and teachers dialogically learn from each other; the teacher not only teaches but also is taught through this process (Freire, 1993). His or her professional knowledge is developed, since each classroom activity or practice provides a new experience which is socio-culturally different. In fact, both parties contribute to each other's growth, development and transformation. In the teacher education context, instructors operating as transformative intellectuals engage in a process that not only promotes teachers' professional

development, but also their learning by constructing, and refreshing their knowledge and skills through engagement in dialogically based activities. Through this process, both experts and teachers become emancipated from their predefined labels and roles, and are empowered to take charge of their social, political, cultural, economic, and academic destinies (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2012). Instructors' authority no longer conflicts with teachers' liberatory autonomy, but supports their freedom, as each side has a complementary role in enhancing their emancipatory process. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that Iranian teachers and experts could feasibly assume alternative roles, as each is accustomed to the predefined roles imposed on them by our education system.

Shortage of up-to-date and expert educators

Currently, one of the problems from which Iranian teacher education suffers is the paucity of the fully skilled proficient instructors for pre-service teacher education programs and especially for in-service classes. The instructors assigned to teach in-service classes are selected from the teaching staff of each Education Organisation. Their selection is not based on proficiency or competency as teachers of English but mostly on the relationship they have with the authorities in charge of major positions in the system. One of the participants in this study, who had taken part in a recent in-service class aiming at review and examination of the new English books at junior high schools, drew attention to this problem.

> I have participated in a recently conducted in-service class held for the purpose of preparing and familiarising us with the teaching methodology and techniques of the new textbooks for the junior high schools. We actually expected to have a knowledgeable instructor but instead, one of our M.A. classmates whose competency was not higher than any of the teachers in that class handled it and his selection was due to the relations he had in the educational office. He actually had nothing to add to our professional knowledge but the repetition of all the things we already knew. (Participant 11)

In the light of this comment, how can we expect our teacher education system to be a resource for teachers' professional development and to update teachers' knowledge in the latest advancements in the field of SLA when it appears that no care is taken about who is given responsiblity for teacher education programs. How do teachers take steps toward autonomy when the idea of autonomy is not being introduced through such classes? Why are teachers expected to demonstrate effective and responsive teaching while instructors themselves do not know how to teach effectively? And how can we require teachers to be critical thinkers and reflective practitioners while the instructors have no idea of these concepts? Teachers are indeed required to enrich their professional knowledge. This, as Kumaravadivelu (2012) also believes, mostly occurs through participation in professional development provided by experts in the field. These experts should possess knowledge of the intellectual content, concepts and theories of the discipline. In teacher education, this knowledge includes basic concepts of language, and of language learning and teaching.

Kumaravadivelu (2012) states that knowledge about language includes language as a system, language as a discourse, and language as an ideology. Language as a system has a

focus on systems and sub-systems including phonological system, semantic system, and syntactic system. The kind of knowledge mostly presented in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs in Iran is knowledge about one sub-component - language as a system. However, teachers need to have professional knowledge of a number of areas, not just one. A statement made by one of the instructors who participated in this project reflects the narrow perspective of the knowledge needed by teachers:

> The sole thing teachers should know is to increase their understandings about the different sections of their textbooks including the knowledge of grammar in details, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Because students are tested based on these things, why should I waste teachers' time to present the inapplicable information. Actually, discussing about the grammar rules and nuances is much easier for me than reading many papers about theories which I myself have no idea (Participant 9).

This is the reality of the professional learning the teacher education in Iran system provides for teachers. If instructors, as experts and the source of professional knowledge, have no inclination to keep up-to-date with recent developments in the SLA field and update their knowledge of the alternative theories and scientific concepts of the discipline, how can teachers be expected to demonstrate this knowledge and understanding?

Insular nature of the education system

Teacher education in Iran is supervised by the Ministry of Education operating as an independent ministry in charge of selecting competent students from candidates interested in the teaching profession through the university entrance examination, employing and providing financial support for teachers and specifying teachers' duties and responsibilities. The Ministry of Education includes Education Organisations located in each city of Iran that conduct teacher education programs for the enhancement of teachers' professional knowledge. All the responsibilities, tasks, concerns, and decisions related to teacher in-service education are made by people with major positions within Education Organisations.

This system has two major defects. The first is a lack of any relationship with other organisations involved in teacher education. The second is the appointment of people to major positions who do not have adequate or appropriate educational (including language education) qualifications. Some people's specialisation is in a field not related at all to teaching and education. They may or may not have expertise in foreign language teaching.

These shortcomings tend to produce inward-looking attitudes and a lack of openness and responsiveness to new developments. These factors, together with the lack of connection and collaboration with universities and other academically-based communities, educational forums, conferences, seminars, and workshops compound the isolation of people working in the system. Isolation from and lack of communication with the wider scientific community have a negative impact on instructors and teachers by contributing to their ignorance of advancement in the discipline of language teaching. This in turn encourages

further passivity in both teachers and instructors, as their voices cannot be heard by others outside the boundaries of the system. An instructor commented on this issue:

> We live within a system which has no contact with other organisations. Teachers and instructors are not in touch with the experts and knowledgeable people in universities. We live in a world which is strictly restricted and closed. No communication occurs between educational system and universities in order to scientifically be influenced. I think this system robs any novelty from the people … (Participant 12).

Teacher education programs cannot become fruitful sites for renewing, and updating language teachers' professional knowledge unless the programs provide a social space for more communication and collaboration with other educational institutions and universities. To be effective, teachers, as the most crucial component of the system, require regular opportunities to update their skills and knowledge. This can only be achieved by providing opportunities for teachers' to meet and communicate with knowledgeable experts in the field through participation in activities such as language teaching conferences and workshops held by universities.

Lack of motivation for updating knowledge

> I think most of the Iranian EFL teachers have no tendency or motivation to update their professional knowledge and are satisfied with their routinised activities based on their experiences. Actually, any step towards professional development is a matter of cost including time and energy which is not rewarded in the Ministry of Education. It makes no difference whether you are knowledgeable or not, all the teachers receive the same salary (Participant 5).

Implied in this teacher's statement is a belief teachers' commitment to develop professionally is influenced by intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivation. Teachers are more likely to make an effort to professionally enhance their knowledge and skills if they are internally satisfied with their work and externally rewarded and encouraged for their efforts by outside authorities. Intrinsic motivation as a powerful and deciding force in directing people's activities, in the sense used by Kumaravadivelu (2012), includes volition, implying the desire to manage and organise behaviours and experiences and act in a manner congruent with person's integrated self. That is, an internally motivated person has the volition, choice, and self- determination to act and self-organise his or her own activities and experiences. The integration of volition, self-determination, and self-organising experience is related to autonomy. Holec (1981, p. 3) defined autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". This definition was expanded by others to include the exercise and the development of the capacity of independent action, decision making, and critical reflection (Little, 1991). This means that autonomous individuals are expected to take responsibility for their own learning by setting, monitoring, and achieving their goals.

Learners can exercise two types of autonomy: strategy-based or academic autonomy and liberatory autonomy. In the words of Kumaravadivelu (2012), learners are required to exercise academic autonomy to increase their potential learning through the wealth of

information available on learning strategies. In teacher education programs, especially in pre-service classes in which student teachers are just getting familiarised with the teaching course, instructors are required to be sensitive toward the issue of teachers' autonomy and try to use a wide range of strategies to develop them into autonomous and active participants. In the case of liberatory autonomy, Kumaravadivelu (2012) believes that this concept is expanded to embrace issues like the societal context in which learning occurs. This kind of autonomy, which entails the addition of cultural and sociopolitical dimensions, is closely related to the tenets of critical pedagogy suggested by Paulo Freire (1972), which focuses on the transformative roles of teachers and students.

Thus, in order to motivate teachers in our teacher education system, instructors need to develop both types of autonomy. The development of liberatory autonomy is especially important for student teachers. Through liberatory autonomy, they learn how to emancipate themselves from the oppressive labels imposed on them by the system and society. Student teachers act as transformative intellectuals, recognising the cultural and sociopolitical obstacles impeding their progress through questioning taken-for-granted facts and assumptions. Instructors can raise student teachers' awareness of their social positioning and of the sociopolitical issues and ideologies which influence them through the creation of democratic space. This, in turn, paves the way for the development of their voice and agency.

Requirement for the development of critical thinking

One of the instructors made this comment about the nature and relevance of critical thinking in the context of Iranian education:

> I think critical thinking is a culturally bound concept not found a place in our society. I myself have not been taught how to think critically. In educational settings of Iran, students cannot criticise teachers. Actually, teachers hate critically being reprimanded by naughty students. I myself hate my students and teachers to question every aspect of my teaching … (Participant 6).

This instructor's quote shows a misunderstanding of the concept of critical thinking. A possible reason for this is that the concept has not been developed in Iranian educational settings and specifically in teacher education. Iranian instructors and teachers frequently view critical thinking as being unruly student behaviour that needs management and control, when in reality this concept is distinct from students' disruptive behaviour and punishments used to discourage it. A reason for the lack of development of critical thinking in Iranian education could be the prevalence of the banking model of education in which the teacher, as the sole authority, concentrates all his or her energies on making the classroom silent in order to facilitate the transmission of knowledge to students. Thus, effective teaching is regarded as the creation of an environment in which management and control are paramount to facilitating students' learning. Any student voice that is raised is considered to be a distraction from learning that therefore must be silenced. Teachers react defensively and severely toward any critique offered by students, perceiving it as "unruly and rude" and assume that students' intention in offering the critique was to

create annoyance. This response to student critiques reinforces the existing norms and standards of the school and classroom that judge criticism as something inappropriate. It promotes students conformity and actively discourages the emergence and growth of critical thinking.

In order to educate student teachers as reflective practitioners, educators are required to create a democratic space for the enhancement of critical thinking. As Burbules and Berk (1999) put it, a critical thinker takes steps towards emancipation and justice which according to Siddiqui (2007) facilitates the process of how he or she meets up the real world challenges. Critical thinking is associated with critical pedagogy, which encourages individuals to think critically in order to transform not only their social lives, but also those of other people by acting against the inequalities of an oppressive society. Student teachers should be equipped with critical skills and knowledge to question any transmitted information and unfair facts and challenge the maintenance of the status quo. This process transforms them into perceptive individuals who do not automatically accept any declarations, generalisations, and claims regarding ordinary activities and practices.

Thus, there is an urgent need to integrate critical thinking into our education system to allow space for the voices of marginalised student teachers to be heard. For this integration to occur, Iranian educators should, first and foremost, be educated in critical thinking. As Patry (1996) states, books on critical thinking should be freely available. The promotion of critical thinking should be allowed and advocated by responsible authorities in the system through the provision of instructional materials and the allocation time for it in the curriculum.

Lack of alignment between teachers' updated knowledge and the needs of the system

Teachers' updated knowledge not being aligned with the needs of educational settings is considered to be an obstacle to action and implementation of effective professional development. When teachers perceive that the professional knowledge they obtain through active participation in professional development is not applicable in classroom settings, they do not show any interest and enthusiasm in the acquisition of new theories, information, and understanding. In fact, teachers are most likely to improve their teaching performance through developing their knowledge in those areas which are directly related to the realities of language teaching in their classrooms. This was illustrated at an in-service course held through an Education Organisation I once participated in. The course dealt with the innovative teaching methodology of a high school English text book for grade two. The first session lasted six hours and was conducted by the instructor teaching lesson one by reading sentence by sentence from the textbook and explaining the grammatical features of each sentence. This approach shocked me so much that I decided not to continue participating. However, I observed all other colleagues listening and taking notes enthusiastically and with interest. I complained to the instructor that the course was meant to be about innovative teaching methodology, not grammar. The instructor said nothing. But one of my colleagues, who was also a participant in this research, made the following interesting observations:

> Mrs Safari! These are all the things that are applicable in our classrooms. Maybe, a student might have a problem and asks us about these points. What should we do? We have found this instructor's class very useful. Why should instructors teach us teaching theories, concepts, and information that are so difficult for each of us to digest? (Participant 8)

These comments helped me to understand that teachers seek professional knowledge that is linked to the needs of their classroom teaching. As the current approach to ELT officially promoted in Iran focuses on the transmission of knowledge, including the knowledge about grammar, this is what teachers expect in-service classes to concentrate on. Efforts to develop teachers' knowledge and skills in pedagogical approaches that reflect post-modern perspectives are likely to be unproductive until the education system itself adopts and implements these approaches.

Conclusion

In this paper, we reported on a study that examined the characteristics of post-transmission, post-modern, and post-method pedagogy and investigated the extent to which these alternative approaches, concepts, theories and ideas are considered applicable in ELT teacher education of Iran by a group of Iranian teacher educators and teachers. In addition, we reported their views on the opportunities these alternative perspectives offered teachers and educators to move beyond the approach currently promoted by the education system, as well as the impediments, concerns, and challenges they face. In summary, the study found that participants in the study believed that policy makers, educators, and teachers needed to adopt alternative ideologies, theories, and practices in order to improve pre-service and in-service teacher education for English language teachers in Iran. However, any action taken towards this transformation should be given careful consideration as it is socio-politically, culturally, and ideologically bound. In addition, further research should be conducted to identify effective and appropriate ways of introducing and implementing of the approaches advocated in the current study.

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Parvin Safari is a PhD candidate of TEFL at Shiraz University. So far, she has presented and published several papers at national and international conferences and in reputable journals. Her areas of interest include critical pedagogy, critical language testing, ecological language learning, semiotics and the philosophy of language, teacher education, and discourse analysis.
Email: psafari2009@gmail.com

Nasser Rashidi is an Associate Professor of TEFL and the faculty member of Shiraz University. He has presented and published many papers at different national and international conferences and in reputable journals. His areas of interest include the philosophy of language learning, critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, and teacher education.
Email: nrashidi@rose.shirazu.ac.ir