

Iranian Language Teachers' Passion for the Profession: A Qualitative Study¹

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Abstract

To explore Iranian professionally developed English teachers' passion for the English language teaching profession, an interview with 7 open-ended questions was conducted to 14 Iranian professionally developed teachers to discover what factors were at work in their professional growth. Participants included 8 Ph.D. holders, 3 Ph.D. candidates, and 3 M.A. holders in TEFL who had more than 20 years of service in the Iranian context and were chosen by purposive sampling. After interviewing the participants via a standard interview and delving deeply into the emotional aspects of their professional journey throughout their lives, the following factors emerged from the analysis of the transcriptions of the interviews as reasons to have and sustain passion for language teaching profession: acceptance of change, cooperating with colleagues, being a model, establishing relationships, helping the students, meeting personal needs, contributing to the society, and love of learning/language.

Keywords: Professional Learning; Emotions; Change; Cooperation; Relationship; Being a Model; Personal Needs

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1. Introduction

Teachers are of great importance to educational systems and help them to achieve their objectives. Day, Sammons, and Stobart (2007) hold the idea that no educational reform comes to fruition without teachers' commitment and involvement. Teachers are the basis for classroom change and learning (Loughran & Berry, 2005). Being so, they need to develop themselves professionally to reap the fruits of their own performance, in the first place, and see their students' learning, in the second place (Borko, 2004).

All educational systems have the need for professionally developed staff; language education is no exception to this rule. Language teaching, like all sorts of teaching, is a lifelong, ongoing, ever-changing and dynamic process in which teachers need to firmly believe that their competencies are never perfect; they should always do something "to upgrade their command of English, their literacies and skills of teaching methodology and testing, their thinking and philosophy of learning and their attitudes towards their own profession" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 2).

What makes teachers effective, according to Day et al. (2007), is not their content knowledge and pedagogical skills, but "their commitment to their teaching, their students and their learning and achievement" (p. 2). The point here is how such commitments are sustained in the passage of time during a teacher's lifelong career. Emotion has a lot to say in this regard. The ignorance of human emotion and the importance of emotion were nicely depicted by Damasio, Stella, and Helderman (2010):

In the quest to understand human behavior, many have tried to overlook emotion, but to no avail. Behavior and mind, conscious and not, and the brain that generates them, refuse to yield their secrets unless emotion (and the many phenomena that hide under its name) is factored in and given its due. (p. 74)

The same story is the case for educational kingdom. In comparison to research for teacher practical theories, perceptions, and teacher cognition where there is a huge number of research, teacher emotions have only recently been taken into account as a research issue among educationalists (Frenzel, 2014; Pekrun et al., 2007). The realm of language teacher education is mostly preoccupied with the concept of teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006, 2009) and the emotional aspects of teacher learning are ignored research areas. New waves of social aspects of teacher learning have swept over language teacher education in recent years under the banner of the sociocultural theory (Freeman, 2004; Freeman & Johnson, 2005; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011), poststructural, postmodern, and globalization perspectives (Kumaravadivelu, 2012)

and, lately, the emotional parts of teachers' learning have come to the fore (Golombek & Doran, 2014). Because teaching practice is deeply embedded in emotional experiences (Hargreaves, 1998; Nias, 1996), passion is deemed as a driving force for productive professional performance and plays a pivotal part to prevent teacher burnout (Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010). Teaching is an emotionally demanding deed and those involved in teaching feel the need to have passion for learning and assisting the students to learn. Teacher attrition is an unwelcome result of overlooking teachers' emotional needs. Though a lot of factors like school culture and the nature of teaching role are in operation for teacher burnout (Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2016), teachers face emotional exhaustion due to lack of meaningful engagement with their work which can end in their burnout. Freeman (2009) considers research in the area of teacher learning as the "engagement dimension" (p. 18) in the scope of L2 teacher education.

The point here is that passionate teachers must be kept in the classrooms by policymakers, teacher educators, and administrators, and it is extremely exigent to explore the distinguishing features of passionate teachers and enquire into their passion for the profession to see how it can be sustained in the passage of time.

Bearing this fact in mind that teacher development is not fully possible if we do not take into account the emotional aspects of teacher learning, the present study was an attempt to delve deeply into professionally developed language teachers' lived experiences with regard to their emotions for professional development and their passion to learn teaching.

1.1. Emotion and Language Teacher Learning

A large body of research attaches importance to how teachers feel and the consequence of these feelings on teaching performance and student learning (e.g., Acker, 1999; Beck & Kosnic, 1995; Goldstein, 1997; Hargreaves, 2000; Nias, 1996; Stough & Emmer, 1998); however, the incorporation of affective factors in a systematic way in research on teaching is rare. As Norman (1981) highlighted more than 3 decades ago, most educational theorists and researchers prefer to ignore the affective domain and concentrate, instead, on developing information-processing models of purely cognitive systems or examining the role of teacher beliefs (e.g., Borg, 2003, 2006, 2009). There seems to be consensus among scholars that emotion is much more complex and difficult to describe than cognition (Zembylas, 2002).

Hargreaves (2000) asks for the creation of emotional geographies of schooling, focusing on the spatial and experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance in human interactions or relationships within the school. Similarly, Little (1996, 2000) employs the concept of *heightened emotionality* to describe the emotional aspects of teaching in different contexts.

Hargreaves (2000) espouses the idea that education policy and administration are inclined to pay little attention to emotions; this is the case with teacher education and, for the most part, in the climate of standards and performance management that embodies teacher education and development nowadays.

Hargreaves (2000) states that although teaching and learning might not be purely emotional processes, “they are always irretrievably emotional in character, in a good way or a bad way, by design or default” p. (812). Teaching is seen primarily as a rational enterprise: The part played by emotions in teaching and learning is, therefore, lessened in strength and the role of the teacher becomes limited to the sole performance parameters. Developing a professional identity is partly an emotional process. Fisher (2000) sees emotions and mood of great importance in overall job satisfaction.

To Sweeney (2003), professional development needs to build upon what the teacher already knows, and more importantly, build upon their passions and interests. Motivation is just as important for teachers as it is for students, and learner-centered professional development can generate energy for teachers to improve the quality of their practice. Professional development can be a source of energy, rather than an energy consumption. Merriam (2010) sees knowledge construction more than a mere cognitive process of meaning making and believes that cognition has little to do with knowledge construction; learning is mostly about our emotions and our physical body. Cho (2005) even speaks of love and believes that with “the power to inspire students to seek after knowledge, love can unite the teacher and student in the quest for knowledge, and the love of learning can even empower students to challenge knowledge, thereby pushing its limits” (p. 79). Cho (2005) represents passion as a motivational force in the quest for learning.

Some scholars criticize the passionless atmospheres of the educational environments and believe that now formal educational systems have become impersonal and ineffective as a result (Sarason, 1998). Based on their perspectives, teachers as learners of teaching need passion, love, and affective motives to rekindle their knowledge and skills in their developmental pathway.

As far as our review of the literature showed, almost no study was found on the issue of English language teachers' passion for their profession. This study aimed to bridge this gap in the literature by means of a qualitative method.

2. Research Method

This study used experienced teachers as the participants identified based on their educational background, success in their practice, and their popularity in their regions of service. Passionate teachers are considered as *models of wisdom* (Ladson-

Billings, 1997; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988) and their voices are to be heard to gain insights into their lived experiences.

We used the interview questions of Phelps and Benson's (2012) study which were the result of their own intuitions and 60 years of experience. They were used in the context of Iran and in the discipline of English language teaching. The questions covered preservice and in-service sources of learning, and there were some overlaps in the questions to meet internal consistencies and to identify discrepancies of teachers' response. All the questions were open-ended to allow the participants to give detailed accounts of the factors involved in their lifelong passion for the profession. The interviews were conducted between June and September 2017. The same standardized, open-ended interview questions in the same order were used to understand genuine and authentic teachers' viewpoints (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

2.1. Participants

The participants were a group of 14 English language teachers who met the requirements of professional development. To find the participant teachers, their experience, educational status, resumes, and research endeavors were included in the selection criteria. The information was gathered from the educational organization specialists about the professionally developed teachers and, then, they were met if they were willing to be interviewed. They were selected from different provinces of Iran, including Tehran, Fars, Mazandaran, Golestan, Khorasan, Markazi, Yazd, Khoozestan, Azarbaijan, Kerman, and Gilan by purposive sampling.

The interviewed teachers' years of service ranged from 15 to 30. The participants taught at all English teaching levels, ranging from basic to advanced levels in language institutes and junior high schools and high schools in public schools and university courses; their gender was a combination of male and female participants. Purposive sampling was used to find the participants. Each participant was willing to participate; if not, the interview was not conducted, and they were assured that their identities would not be disclosed.

Table 1 shows the demographic information for the participants, indicating their gender, years of service, educational status, and place of service:

Table 1. *Demographic Information of Participants*

Name	Sex	Years of Service	Educational Background	Place of Service
Maryam	Female	30	Ph.D.	Tehran
Fariba	Female	20	Ph.D.	Fars
Nahid	Female	15	M.A.	Mazandaran
Zahra	Female	25	Ph.D. Candidate	Gilan

Mahsa	Female	18	Ph.D.	Azarbaijan
Leila	Female	27	Ph.D. Candidate	Tehran
Fatemeh	Female	22	M.A.	Kerman
Ahmad	Male	25	Ph.D.	Markazi
Kamran	Male	23	Ph.D.	Fars
Reza	Male	30	Ph.D. Candidate	Yazd
Hadi	Male	16	Ph.D.	Golestan
Ali	Male	19	M.A.	Khoozestan
Mehran	Male	28	Ph.D.	Khorasan
Behzad	Male	21	Ph.D.	Mazandaran

2.2. Instrumentation

The interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order at each scheduled session (Hatch, 2002). What follows is the structured interview protocol for each of the components of passion for the profession among the participants:

1. What do you enjoy most about teaching?
2. What keeps you attracted to the profession?
3. How can new teachers preserve their enthusiasm for teaching once they begin their careers?
4. What hurdles do teachers encounter that diminish their passion for the profession?
5. How can teachers share their passion for teaching with others?
6. What can teacher education programs do to ensure that future teachers have a long-lasting passion for teaching?
7. What advice would you give a teaching colleague to help him or her maintain a level of passion?

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Before embarking on the real data collection process, a pilot interview was done on one of the teachers to see the effectiveness of the interview items and it was modified in some cases to meet the needs of the current study. The translated version of the interview was validated by means of checking its content and language by three language teachers and they all agreed upon the content and form of the translated version of the interview items. Then, face-to-face interview sessions were conducted at the participants' career locations to let them have the professional air of their professional context and the interviews lasted approximately between 30-35 min. The language of the interviews was negotiated between the interviewees and the interviewers and based on the opinion of the interviewees the language was chosen, that is, in case the interviewee was not comfortable with English as the language of the interview, Persian was used instead. The interviews were recorded by the interviewers' cellphone as audio files that provided the data to be transcribed. The written transcripts of the interviews provided the main source for the data collection

in this study. When we reached data saturation in our interview, the interviewing process was terminated. We used a pseudonym for each participant teacher and named the audio file and subsequent transcript using the same pseudonym, so as to protect the participants' identities.

2.4. Data Analysis

Content analysis (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994) or meaning categorization (Kvale, 1996) were the main methods of analyzing the interviews by which the transcripts were broken into smaller units for coding.

To analyze the data, an inductive approach was used; the interview questions were the topics of initial categories. The responses to questions of the similar topics were collected and analyzed together. The transcripts were read multiple times with different time intervals by each researcher independently.

Major themes were extracted from the interviewees' verbal responses. The analysis was done independently and in an iterative fashion by researchers and shared patterns and notes were compared to come to recurring and important themes. The commonalities were found in the analyses, and patterns and themes emerged over which we reached consensus over them.

In order to assure the quality of the analyses, two methods were used: member checking and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We took the analysis and interpretation to the participant teachers to draw forth their views and comments. To do so, data analysis and interpretation were sent to some participants that were incorporated in the analysis and confirmed our interpretations and, in some cases, altered our interpretations of the data. As an example, we were to consider two codes of helping the students and contributing to the society under one general code. Two participants highlighted the fact that helping the students in their perspective was different from contributing to the society. To them, helping the students was a matter of professional and career-related duty limited to pedagogical contexts, but contributing to society was a moral and ethical responsibility going beyond the walls of classes and schools. As a result, we assigned them into two different categories.

Peer debriefing was done by discussing the findings with some trusted professional friends who were familiar with our research contexts and methodology and they discussed and commented critically on the analyses (Creswell, 2002). Also, their comments and suggestions were met in our discussion.

3. Findings and Discussion

On the basis of the analyses described above, this study was to explore which factors are at work to make the teachers passionate to be engaged in their professional

learning in the passage of time. Also, the barriers to their passion for the profession were explored. The participant teachers' perspectives were very vast and the recurring themes were selected. What follows were the nine factors that emotionally triggered the Iranian language teachers to sustain their passion in their professional life: love of learning, contributing to society, helping the students, establishing relationships, meeting personal needs, cooperating with colleagues, being a model, acceptance of change, and teaching the English language itself.

3.1. Love of Learning

What the participant teachers frequently revealed about the most enjoyable thing they found in language teaching was their love of learning. They mentioned that they saw themselves as learners and this was the source of their passion for the profession.

In response to the question about the most interesting thing in language teaching, Mehran thought learning was the most interesting thing and he was interested in teaching because he could learn something “new from the students. And of course, teaching English and focusing on a variety of sources are ways through which you can expand your common core knowledge.” The desire to know more was put by Maryam, while adding that it is a need for teachers to transfer this love to learners, “I myself have a desire to learn and make effort to be a model of a person who tries to learn and relearn. I think this makes learners love what they are to learn.”

The other point mentioned by Ahmad in response to what kept him attracted to the profession was his not being stagnant and moving forward for the betterment of his teaching practice, “I always try to learn something new and put it into my practice. Learning something new makes me more energetic and enthusiastic.”

Other teachers believed that teaching was a learning profession and teaching and learning were interwoven. Kamran said that “teachers are always learning and it is really enjoyable . . . with no learning, the first year of teaching would be like the last year of teaching” and the same idea was resonated by Fariba when she advised newcomers to the field of language teaching in this way, “teaching is mostly about learning and when you stop learning, it is time to quit teaching.”

According to Frederickson (2013), having positive emotions like joy, love, and interest can expand one's awareness and incite original and exploratory thoughts and actions, developing skills, and personal resources in the passage of time. Fredrickson (2004) identified five functions for positive emotions that (1) broaden thought-action repertoires, (2) undo lingering negative emotions, (3) fuel psychological resiliency, (4) build personal resources, and (5) fuel psychological and physical well-being.

Also, Pekrun (2009) argued that “enjoyment of learning can positively influence students’ motivation to engage with learning material in creative exploratory ways” (p. 577). Without emotions that unexpectedly arise from classroom interactions and situations, the truth is that very little teaching and learning would take place (Dewaele, 2015). Such emotions seem to be intrinsically linked to professional practices in classrooms, as Ross (2015) reminds us that emotions are dynamic processes in nature that influence behaviors.

3.2. Contributing to the Society

Another recurring theme drawn from the participants’ viewpoints was their contribution to the society and their sense of responsibility for the community for which they had a sense of belonging. It mostly referred to their interpersonal and or social passion. Behzad made the mention of social commitment and hold the view that the most enjoyable thing for him in language teaching was “the sense of commitment” and added that “I am not saying that I am the most responsible person, but I do my best to be committed.”

Reza focused on the responsibility he had in return to the gifts given to him in his own society and stated that it was his turn to do something to make up for the society and he saw all teaching as a social responsibility. Also, he perceived teaching as a value-laden enterprise by which he could play his roles for the opportunities offered to him in his life span. He had a feeling of being integrated with the students and the whole society when he said that, “while I teach, I think of the society in which I live. I really want to do my service for the people among whom I was born, grew up and live. It looks like, believe me, the students are parts of my body or my own sons and daughters.”

Zahra moved one step further by seeing teaching as “a matter of social responsibility.” This responsibility did not end just in her own belief system, but she tried to “work on the social skills of [her] students, for example, by making the students work in groups, communicating effectively, and showing respect for all the members of the society, despite their cultural, religious, economic, and social class.”

Zembylas (2005) believes that teacher emotions are sociopolitically inflected and ideologically driven. Sociologists have regarded emotions as socially constructed experiences in the sense that what and how people feel are conditioned by the sociocultural contexts in which they situate (Barbalet, 1998; Spencer et al., 2012; Stets, 2012).

Teachers may sacrifice their leisure to do the instructional duties in order to maintain their quality of teaching (Tsang 2016; Tsang & Kwong 2016). However, the quality of teaching may not be considered in terms of how teachers influence

students' whole personal growth positively, but in terms of the measured academic results of the students. As a result, teachers need to focus on how to improve their students' academic performance, especially those related to high-stakes examination, instead of how to facilitate students' social, emotional, and moral development (Valli & Buese, 2007).

3.3. Helping the Students

Among the most common themes extracted from the interview data was the teachers' concerns for the students that can be divided into three categories: (1) their success, (2) their learning, and (3) their development in their lives.

When asked about which things kept him attracted to the field of language teaching, Hadi answered students' learning as a result of his teaching and he said the only thing he liked about language teaching was when his students "learn something, they can talk, and express themselves in English."

The most rewarding part of the profession to Nahid was making students develop in their real life and help them learn life and social skills. She aimed at the students' lives and these objectives were far more important than their academic achievement. Her words echoed the responses of other participants, "when you see the impact of what you do on the improvement of your students' lives, when you see the students can use their language skills in the real world and achieve best results, it makes you happy for your whole life."

Ali pointed out that the students' future success was something enjoyable for him. He saw himself as an agent of change who could change the lives of his students for the better. What he wanted was "to make a positive change in the future of" his students and the most glorious idea was to express a sentence like this, "I really want the best things for my students; I do what I can do for them by teaching them because their success is my success."

Loh and Lew (2016) highlighted the issue of helping students by considering the increasing importance of English for students to have access to knowledge and economic power (Graddol, 2006), and they believed the onus is on teachers to make students well-armed with this linguistic capital. They made reference to studies done in settings like the United States (Khong & Saito, 2014), the United Kingdom (Gibbons, 2013), and South Korea (Lui, An, Baek, & Han, 2004), indicating such a major demand.

Helping students is related to the identity of teachers. Studies have shown that teacher self/identity is moral (Hansen, 1998). Teachers may morally define themselves as kind and caring (O'Connor, 2008), supportive and caring teacher (Yuan, 2016), mother of students (Yin & Lee, 2012), warm demander (Yin, 2016),

or something similar, in general (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Yuu, 2010). These kinds of teacher identity imply that teachers see they are or should be the persons who devote themselves to students (Cross & Hong, 2009; Farouk, 2012; Lortie, 1975; Saunders, 2013).

Research has shown that L2 teachers, perhaps more so in East Asia, feel bound to care for and nurture their students. Many L2 teachers, partly when they are new in a system or are nonlocal language experts, report having to suppress negative feelings towards administrators, systems, and official test systems, while simultaneously having to motivate students to learn (Benesch, 2012; King, 2016; Loh & Liew 2016; Xu, 2013). This sense of teachers to help students is a matter of caring on the part of teachers. The same idea was mentioned by Noddings (2005) who stated that teachers get the passion and courage to do whatever they can do as they care genuinely for students.

3.4. Establishing Relationships

Establishing relationships was among the most common recurring themes that caused the participant teachers to sustain their passion for the profession. This relationship was of three types: One was between the students and the teachers, the other was the relationship between the teachers and other teachers, and the third one was the relationship between the teachers and the people living abroad.

Leila believed teaching for her was something “not about books, materials and lessons; it is mostly about students.” She saw the key to this was having friendly relationships with the students and preparing oneself to love them.

Ahmad, in response to the question that what makes him interested in language teaching, replied in the following way highlighting on the social side of the profession and mastering the art of conversation by the teachers themselves, “I am a people person, it has its roots in my personality, I like to be with others, and teaching English gives me the chance to be with others and to build relationship with others. One who teaches English needs to be highly skillful at communication”

The second type of relationship that the participant teachers commonly mentioned and it was a source of keeping and maintaining their passion for the profession in the passage of time was their relationship with their own students. Mehran expressed his interest with language teaching by saying that he enjoyed “just being with students,” and he maintained “he loves being with students.” Also, Mahsa, in response to the question what the most enjoyable thing she felt about language teaching, said that “I always try to have good relationships with my students.” In the same way, Ali mentioned that he sustained his passion for the profession when he “is

dealing with children and learners” and he felt “happy when they [students] learn something.”

When Ahmad was asked whether he enjoyed teaching English, he replied “Exactly.” He focused on the use of the Internet and social media to establish and maintain his relationship with his students, “I feel that I am not the teacher ruler of the class; I am a member of the class and, because of this, we share new applications and files; I can say most of the students have my e-mail address and my telephone number; I have a good virtual relationship with my students.”

The same idea was repeated by Fariba when she revealed that through *Facebook* she and her students “get together,” and added that “thanks to technology these days, there are a lot of ways for the students and the teachers to be in touch.”

The third type of relationship that the teachers can establish by means of their own command of language is a bonus received by their own command of language and learning linguistics that help them to be successful communicators with others. As Kamran cogently mentioned, language teaching “is a very good way to socialize with people” and he added that he was “a very social person, [he doesn't] mind in striking in conversation with people in a bus or on the street. Both virtually and really or in face-to-face conversation, [he] enjoyed talking and being with people.”

Xu (2013) stated that emotional processes are situated in sociocultural contexts and constructed in social relationships in school situations. Nguyen (2014) indicates that ESL teachers respond to their emotional experiences and the challenges they meet within their professional relationships and interactions with the school community that includes students, colleagues, and school administrators. We can see ESL teacher emotions emerge from and within professional relationships with the school community and that such relationships and interactions, in turn, shape the way they do their work.

In Nieto's (2003) study with the teachers in the United States, it was also the emotional stuff and the value of belonging to a learning community that help the teachers keep going forward. As Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) indicated, the process of development often demands a lot of personal investment and is enriched by the support of significant others. Teacher education offers relational help for teachers to encounter the challenges of teaching (Golombek & Doran, 2014).

3.5. Meeting Personal Needs

The participants commonly considered meeting their personal needs out of the professional learning as another source of passion for them. Hadi mentioned that the cultural capital of learning an L2 and “being able to use” it in his daily encounters

was an invaluable gift of English language teaching and he saw English as “a tool by which you can express yourself and your feelings and ideas.” The same idea was put in another way when Zahra held the view that one can have “personal success” when one knows English and she phrased her idea for the cultural capital gained by language as “you do not feel that you are a stranger, even in a foreign country.”

Working with the students made Nasrin believe that when the students believed her, it did not solely mean that they believed in her knowledge, but they believed in her personality and character. To her, professional learning led to her personal development when she stated that “if I can become a good manager in my class, so I am a good manager in my own life.” Behzad revealed another personal gain as a result of teaching and that was achieving self-confidence by uttering, “the more you learn, the higher your self-confidence will be because you know that you are continuing the trend, you are not falling behind.”

Working with human beings and knowing how humans learn was a common concept in the data. It was a repeated idea in the data that teaching required the participant teachers to make themselves familiarize with different knowledge areas like psychology, sociology, and linguistics, and the knowledge gained through these domains influenced their daily lives. Ali worded the idea in the following way, “. . . the insights we gain from these areas can help us in our daily lives as well, so I think my professional learning has a great effect on my life because it can affect different aspects dealing with my social life.”

Teachers have aspirations to be personally good as Giles, McCutchen, and Zechiel (1942) wrote a long time ago:

The first requirement for growth of teachers through any means is that they work under conditions which are favorable to their growth as persons, and that to be a good teacher, one must be, first of all, a good human being. (p. 231)

To Aristotle, the human “substance” is shaped toward the state of eudaimonia, well-being, and the state of flourishing as a human (Freeman, 2000, p. 280). Also, Johnson (1993) deems teacher as a “self in-process that is continually both searching for its identity . . . and is contemporaneously trying to form itself in accordance with its imaginative ideals of what it might be” (p. 149).

King (2016), joining forces with Naring et al. (2006) and Naring et al. (2012), found that language teachers’ long depersonalization in language teaching profession and distancing themselves from their practice causes serious psychological unwelcome consequences, including emotional strain, exhaustion, and burnout.

3.6. Collaborating With Colleagues

The participant teachers held the idea that teachers need to have collaboration and there needs to be this type of outlook when policymakers want to plan, execute, and evaluate teacher education programs. Most participants in response to how they expected teacher education programs to be for them asserted that collaboration and conversation should take the most prominent position in their programs. Fariba's response reflected the idea with regard to teacher education courses, "I think they should encourage teacher-led cooperation and conversation to make it more teacher centered; I mean both training and evaluation should have cooperative nature."

The same idea was resonated by Reza when he criticized the way the workshops were commonly led by the head-teachers or other teacher trainers who were responsible for presenting, selecting the materials, and managing the in-service courses while collaborative methods would be more enjoyable. He was on the belief that "by having some workshops, just talking to colleagues," nothing can actually and practically be done to better teaching practice, but "by cooperating with each other, to be with each other and share and enjoy our knowledge," teachers can go a long way.

Also, Maryam pointed to the real classroom-based problems posed in these courses that can be tackled by means of cooperation among teachers and the sense of practicality that cooperation can arise in the teachers. She entertained the idea that teacher education "courses should promote a sense of collaboration among teachers," and they should "be designed in a way that teachers work together to solve their problems faced in their own classes."

Collaboration was done by means of talking and asking for hints, tips, and techniques by the participant teachers when they faced problems in their teaching practice. To Fatemeh, cooperation was done by "talking with [her] colleagues at break time, solving each other's problems, [and] sharing [their] information and experiences." Mohammad mentioned that the *how* part of his teaching was met by the dialogues he entered into his colleagues and the same is the case when his colleagues had problems in their teaching. Collaboration here was manifested by the way they "talk to colleagues and try to discover how to teach from the dialogues [they] have" and the tips and personal hints they exchanged through those dialogues.

Information exchange and exchange of resources through the Internet and social media caused the teachers to embark on cooperation. Hadi mentioned that "I do try to share my own resources with my colleagues and the same is true with regard to receiving needed resources" using *Telegram*. School was defined by Zahra through the lens of collaboration as a system in which "all the teachers help one another learn"

and “the system works better and more efficiently” when there is an air of collaboration.

Xu (2013) believed that emotional processes are mostly sociocultural, and they are constructed and situated in social contexts and schools are such a context. Interactions and relationships set among colleagues at school lead to their professional development.

Teachers who are alone in the face of their emotional problems, with no noteworthy support from their colleagues, experience isolation that stresses language teachers’ need for protecting their professional beliefs and roles. Therefore, teachers need to receive support and discuss difficult emotions caused by interactional problems, lack of time, and materials and this can aid teacher development (Pappa et al., 2017).

3.7. *Being a Model*

Most participant teachers considered themselves as models of language, knowledge, and life, and this was something enjoyable to them. They thought that a language teacher is a model of language. Behzad mentioned the students “are listening to you, they want to learn something from you, [and] you are a model for them to make better and brush up their general English proficiency. I mean, vocabulary, speaking, grammar, reading, writing, and the subject you teach.”

Other teachers believed that the teachers need to have native or native-like proficiency, due to the fact that a teacher should be the model of perfection and, to Zahra, a teacher should be “a proficient and native-like speaker and knowledgeable person, one who is the best model of the language.”

The other feature added to being a model was for teachers to be a model of learning and teaching. Mahsa stated that she always tried to “be responsible” and be a learner model of language “by improving my own command of language and bringing different books with myself to the class and introducing them to the students; when I have time, I try to study and show the students that I have a study plan.” The teachers here considered their own learning habits or regimes for the promotion of student learning and as a device to teach how to learn. Zahra reflected the same idea by calling teachers as those who are “in search of new knowledge and update their knowledge base.”

When Ahmad deemed himself as a good example of a human being, focusing on being a model of life by pointing to the fact that he did not want to be solely “a knowledgeable person, but an example of a person, simply a good person, a human being, so as to consider other aspects [the students’] emotional aspects and their feelings,” and Bahram echoed the same idea by saying that he had students who

asked “about the path you follow in your life to reach the field of teaching; sometimes, they have dreams about following the same path, so I don’t want to demotivate them. I don’t want to lower their interests. I have to try to do my best to be [a] good model.”

Edge’s (1988) deems three roles for language teachers that are as follows: (1) those of language user, (2) language analyst, and (3) and language teacher. These roles ask for three interrelated competences. The language user role concerns the teacher’s language proficiency and determines that teacher’s adequacy as a model for students. The language analyst role relates to the teacher’s language systems knowledge base and his or her ability to understand the workings of the L2. The third role, that of language teacher, is dependent on the teacher’s familiarity with a range of TEFL procedures and the possession of underlying theoretical knowledge about language pedagogy and involves making appropriate and principled decisions about the use of those procedures.

The role of the teacher as classroom authority and role model has traditionally been regarded as some sort of (Aristotelian) example to others (Arthur, 2010). Thus, the conduct of the teacher is likely to have, for good or ill, some formative influence on young people (Chang, 1994).

3.8. Acceptance of Change

To most participant teachers, the ever-changing nature of the teaching career was a source of joy. These changes range from their own practices to the students’ personalities and how to get to grips with the contextual challenges posed by the classrooms and school environments. Mehran defined teaching as something that is “mostly about making changes” that are “not decorative but absolutely necessary.” The reason behind such a definition to him was “doing teaching as interacting with human beings who are dynamic, meaning the same prescription cannot do a lot to help” all the individuals involved. This dynamicity should be met by establishing different “strategies . . . and presenting appropriate materials” to the students on the basis of the students’ individual differences.

The other factor caused the participant teachers to have interest towards English teaching was the nature of the differences observed among the students and the variety that is the spice of their professional life. Fariba said that the source of enthusiasm for her was “students’ individual differences, social differences, and educational differences.”

The other point frequently remarked by the participant teachers was the change in their moment-to-moment daily practices that was the root to their enjoyment and preserving their enthusiasm. Nahid claimed that she was open to

changes and she took great pains to change her “teaching, thinking, and attitudes” and she hated “repeating the same thing over and over again.”

To Reza, change meant learning and he nicely put it in the following way, “. . . change is the fresh air we breathe . . . we should not stay stagnant and still; all the time we need to make changes in our proficiency, teaching knowledgebase, and [the] other practical parts of the job.”

Gregersen and MacIntyre (2017) highlights the ever-changing nature of language teaching as follows, “language teaching may often seem like a series of serendipitous instances strung together; neither teacher nor learners can say with certainty what will happen next” (p. 33). Larsen-Freeman (2017) put cleverly the concept of change and the innovative nature of language teaching in the following fashion:

Successful language teaching is fundamentally social, interactional, and interpersonal; thus, emotional and social intelligence are core competencies. Teaching requires a commitment to being innovative, open to new ideas, and transformative in the classroom. Language is a semiotic resource, which needs to be regarded and explored as such in the language classroom. (p. 2)

3.9. Teaching the English Language Itself

Another frequent theme seen in the response of the sources of professional learning passion given by the participant teachers was the profession of language teaching itself. Kamran related his attraction to the field by being interested in social sciences, in general, rather than studying “nature or something like that and then English, in particular” became what he wanted to pursue and, at the time of the interview, he was a Ph.D. candidate in TEFL. His reason was more about the ideological aspects of language studies and changes he underwent because of such outlooks. To him, “English was necessarily a medium not a goal to reach to some sort of changing [his] ideology and worldview. So, mostly [he has] been concerned about that part of language learning.”

Some participants stated that they were interested in the educational share of language teaching and did not deem teaching as a profession, but as an art. Reza’s comment on this issue was, “I don’t teach just for money; I love teaching.” Ahmad, in line with other participants, cogently shared his idea about the same issue in the following way, “if you feel you love your job, you will do it quite automatically; you don’t need any extraneous source of pressure. One of the sources of joy is rooted in loving my profession.”

Bullough and Pinnegar (2009) pointed out that teachers who know their subject matters well and enjoy their own intellectual life really long to share it with their students. Averill and More (2004), by reviewing a vast body of empirical research, come to the conclusion that happiness is “the emotional state associated with full engagement or optimal performance in meaningful activity” (p. 664). Happiness is the reward for fully engaged teachers in meaningful activities with students when they see what they do reflects “their best performance, and their fullest expression of the goodness of teaching (Bullough & Pinnegar; 2009, p. 245). Happiness is the end product of performing a job that is “intrinsically rewarding, morally upstanding, purposeful, appropriately challenging, and fully supportive of the learning and development of the people involved” (p. 246).

4. Conclusion

This study delved deeply into the lived experiences of successful language teachers to extract emotional forces behind their professional development. Nine recurring themes were drawn from the analysis of the interviews. This study added some factors to the study of teacher passion done by Phelps and Benson (2012). They found that their interviewed teachers were passionate for their profession due to the following factors: positive attitudes, acceptance of change, embracing collaboration, pursuing professional development activities, and building and maintaining strong relationships with students and parents.



Figure 1. A Model for Passion for ELT Profession

A quick glance at Figure 1 shows that some of the themes were the same with what Phelps and Benson (2012) identified, but this study added love of learning,

language teaching itself, contributing to the society, meeting personal needs, and being a model to the list, which are noteworthy and significant in the Iranian context.

This study is of help for the newcomers to the field of English language teaching. Teachers who are in the middle of their journey to find some reasons to continue their professional learning and development and by being cognizant and making use of these nine factors, they can sustain their passion and enjoy more from what they do. Also, language teacher educators and policymakers can employ the insights obtained from this study to make language teachers aware of these motivators and pave the way for them to enjoy teaching English and be passionate in their lifelong journey of learning.

From the recurring themes, we can come to the conclusion that language teaching is a personal, emotional, social, professional, moral, and dynamic phenomenon that can be a source of joy if it is pleasant and sorrows if it is saddening.

A mixed methods approach can better shed light on the reality of teacher passion and future works should apply quantitative methods of research to give a general picture of the emotional forces behind language teachers' professional development.

Three limitations were seen in this study: First, this study did not use participants whose years of service were below 10 that can give the study some lights over the topic of beginner teachers' passion. The second limitation was the timing of the interviews that were mostly after the participant teachers finished their daily duties and it was the case because of their heavy load of jobs. This might have had an influence in their answering the interview questions. The third problem was the verbal data per se that could not show their facial expressions, feelings, nonverbal information exchanged in interview sessions, and the absence of their passionate ways of expressing themselves in the interview sessions. And, the last limitation was the problem of generalizability that is something about the qualitative studies whose contextual nature makes the study not generalizable to other contexts.

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