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Research Paper

A Reflection on How EFL Teachers in Iran Feel About Their Education: A Modular Model (KARDS) Perspective

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Abstract

This research reports on how EFL teachers feel about their education based on knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing (KARDS) modular model. The researcher employed convenient sampling to choose 15 teachers. Due to the closure of schools in the pandemic era and the online nature of courses, English teachers are only available online or in meetings at the university. A KARDS questionnaire was used to record the teachers' views. The questionnaire was researcher-made and it was either handed in the meetings or sent via e-mail or other routes. The data gathered showed that though the English teachers had the knowledge necessary about their jobs, most of them lacked the necessary insight required in terms of the 5 modules of education in L2 teaching. The data seem to imply that ELT education programs in Iran are mostly oriented towards teacher training, rather than teacher education.

Keywords: *KARDS, Language Education, Teacher Cognition*

Introduction

Language teacher cognition or what is also known as teachers' pedagogical knowledge, has contributed significantly to our understanding of teacher education. Johnson (2006) suggests that many factors have advanced the field's understanding of L2 teachers' work, but none is more significant than the emergence of a substantial body of research now referred to as teacher cognition. Despite the different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches that researchers take, the consensus is that the impact of teacher cognition not only sheds light on the issues in developing effective pedagogy and improving student learning, but also promotes understanding of classroom instruction at a microlevel, as well as contributing to teacher learning (Li, 2017). Research in the last 30 years or so in language teacher cognition has been prolific, and



this level of interest confirms that the field has changed from a relatively new and undeveloped area into an important and well-researched field of inquiry (Li, 2017). The focus includes all aspects of teachers' lives, including the study of teachers' beliefs, interactive decisions, teacher knowledge and conceptions, teacher identity and emotions, and so on. Typical work includes investigations of the match between learners' and teachers' beliefs and beliefs about microlevel classroom practices such as grammar teaching (e.g., Borg, 1999, 2003).

In the field of teacher education, the role of teachers is conceptualized and recognized as participants of a learning community, learners in teaching activities, and agents who constantly develop and construct identity in professional contexts. Teachers' professional knowledge, understanding, and beliefs are shaped by the professional contexts they are in and the lived experiences they may have. To this end, Johnson (2009) calls for a social paradigm shift in teacher education which emphasizes the importance of teacher learning in communities and how their experiences can help them develop professional thinking and understanding.

Discursive psychology views cognition as a social action, which is changing, developing, and evolving in the social acts of people, and is not a static object which exists in the minds of individuals (Potter & Edwards, 1999). A discursive psychological perspective of teacher cognition is put forward by Li (2017) who claims teacher cognition is not "a fixed entity but involves thinking, knowing, understanding, conceptualizing, and stance-taking" (p. 191). But the main turn in teacher training was that of Kumaravadivelu in his knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing (KARDS) modular model about language teacher education for a global society. In this model, he suggests that "all systems of teacher preparation have to rethink their core assumptions and processes in the new global context" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 2). In justifying the main driving force for jotting down his book, *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society: A Modular Model for Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing, and Seeing*, Kumaravadivelu (2011) argues that although myriads of studies have been carried out in connection to teacher education, what is clearly missing in this discipline is a complete, unifying, and coherent model that functions as the missing link to integrate the findings of all these studies. He, then, explains that such a model needs to be modular (not linear) entailing two basic components: five globalized perspectives and three operating principles. He, then, illuminates the five globalized perspectives (i.e., postnational, postcolonial, postmodernism, posttransmission, and postmethod perspectives), as well as the three operating principles (i.e., principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility). Having discussed these subcomponents, he, then, clarifies the interrelationship by elucidating that the three principles function like a thread interweaving the five main global perspectives. As such, within the next section, attempt is made to look at these five global perspectives and, then, review the results of this qualitative inquiry research done in Isfahan (Iran) on how teachers of English felt about their education based on the KARDS framework.

Literature Review

Kumaravadivelu (2006) maintains that teacher education should underline the development of more reflective, independent, analytical, and transformative teachers who can create and think of local solutions for local problems. It is quite essential for language teacher education to change its fundamental principles because of globalization (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Adopting a posttransmission approach to teaching, he suggested a modular model for preservice teachers leading to the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom. On the basis of the sociocultural epistemology, preservice teachers should think about their own personal teaching styles and

cultural ideologies rather than a specific methodology that has been effective for others in the past (King, 2013). Using ideas from posttransmission and postmethod epistemologies, Kumaravadivelu presented three principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility to make his modular teacher education model operational. According to Kumaravadivelu (2012), local contextual factors should determine both the goal and materials of teacher education programs, and local pedagogues should face the challenge, construct a suitable model, and change the current ways of carrying out language teacher education.

KARDS is a five-module of the model. Knowing enables teachers to learn how to construct a base for their professional, personal, and procedural knowledge. Analyzing concerns how to investigate learner needs, motivation, and autonomy. Recognizing is about how to identify and acknowledge one's own identities, beliefs, and values as a teacher. Doing underscores how to teach, construct theories, and talk to/with other teachers or colleagues. Seeing underlines how learners, teachers, and observers view one's teaching. These modules are nonsequential, independent, interdependent, symbiotic, and synergistic in their interactions.

As it was expressed earlier, the ways scholars view teacher function, teacher role, and teacher professional identity (TPI) in teacher education programs have changed with the advent of different schools of thought. It was within the age of constructivism and later in critical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical approach to language teacher education that TPI came into vogue and gathered momentum. TPI deals with teachers' definition of themselves as teachers, teachers' assessment of their pedagogical abilities and skills, teachers' motivation and responsibility with respect to their profession and factors influencing their motivation, teachers' definition of different facets of their job, and teachers' attitude on their career progress (Kelchtermans, 1993).

TPI, complex, dynamic, and never-ending in nature has significant impacts on teachers' growth and performance (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Even from a sociocultural perspective, learning how to teach is not a matter of acquisition of knowledge, but it is mostly a process of professional identity construction (Nguyen, 2008; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005) and a priority in teacher education programs (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004). Therefore, it is believed that teacher education leads to positive shifts and these changes are contingent on the identities teachers take with them to language classrooms and how they are recreated during teacher education (Singh & Richards, 2006).

Seeing teachers as "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1992, p. XVIII) and "cultural workers" (Freire, 2005, P. VII) has been reflected in several studies including critical and transformative teacher education (Hawkins & Norton, 2009) effect on student teachers' critical awareness of the formation and function of power relations in society (Hawkins, 2004), encouragement of future teachers' critical thinking on their own identity and status in society (Stein, 2004) and kinds of pedagogical connections between teacher educators and prospective teachers (Toohey & Waterstone, 2004).

Despite these studies, the contributions of KARDS to teachers' professional identity reconstruction has rarely been investigated in EFL/ESL contexts, to the best knowledge of the present researcher. Dearth of research in this specific area in the context of Iran, the big amount of weight given to the process of professional identity reconstruction in teacher education, and the globalized exigency to revolutionize teacher education programs drove the researchers to carry out a research on the effects of a critical, sociocultural, sociopolitical, and transformative teacher education course (i.e., KARDS) on Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity (re)construction in the context of language institutes. A stronger reason behind this study is the fact that EFL teacher education in Iran is largely transmissive and does not care teachers' voices, beliefs, and ideas.



The present study aimed to address the following questions:

- Q1.** What are the characteristics of English teaching education programs in Iran against KARDS criteria?
Q2. To what extent does KARDS model contribute to TEFL education in Iran?
Q3. Is postmethod pedagogy relevant to and applicable in Iranian ELT context?

Method

To collect the data the following procedures were followed.

Participants

The respondents were in-service English instructors at different levels in different language learning settings (high school, language institutes, and universities). They were selected based on convenience sampling procedures because, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all schools are closed and English courses are offered only online. The researcher had only access to volunteers available online and willing to share their ideas with the researcher.

There were 15 participants in this study, and each had varying levels of teaching experience ranging from 2 years to 21 years. They did not share a similar teacher education background: some were TEFL graduates, others only hold a degree in related fields (either English literature or English translation majors), and some did not peruse any official university degrees in English and instead participated in ELT programs held by language institutes. This diversity helped the current researcher to represent the voice of different people within this study.

Instrument

This study is descriptive in nature and used a set of questions for data collection. The interview guide and questions were researcher-made and were evaluated by two experts in the field and modifications were made based on their comments and recommendations.

Procedures

The interviews (i.e., face-to-face, on the phone, by e-mail, and through WhatsApp or Telegram chats) were held between the researcher and the respondents inter alia.

In the face-to-face interviews, the questions were handed to the teachers, and after recording the responses using a phone, they were transcribed. In the telephone conversations, the questions were, first, sent to the respondents via e-mail or in other manners, but their responses were collected through phone calls. In the case of the e-mail, both questions and responses were exchanged through e-mail. Also, in other communication manners such as WhatsApp and Telegram, all the correspondences were exchanged through the same apps.

As the questions were based on the KARDS modular model, each question was, first, introduced by telling the respondents what was meant by each part of the model because the teachers were not familiar with the model. Thus, the researcher started the data collection by, first, briefing the respondents on the subject and, then, going on with the questions.

After the data were collected from all the participants, they were classified based on their reaction to the questions put forward, and afterward, the raw data were coded thematically to reveal broader themes. One of my colleges went through the codes and themes to ensure that there was no inconsistency when different labels were assigned to certain segments of the data. Also, after interpreting and coming up with themes, the results were shown to the participants to

ensure that what the current researcher had captured within the study was the true representation of their ideas.

Within the following section, first, each question is reintroduced and, then, the overall evaluation is presented.

Results

Knowing

Knowing in Kumaravadivelu's (2012) models refers to such constructs as professional knowledge, knowledge about language, language learning, and language teaching, procedural knowledge, knowledge of classroom management, and personal knowledge. It also refers to the individual endeavor of the teachers before, during, and after their official education to develop and grow professionally. As such, the following questions were formulated:

1. Do you think you received adequate knowledge (content and specialized as well as class management) during your studies?
2. Do you find yourself knowledgeable enough about what you are teaching?
3. Do you find yourself capable of managing the classroom?
4. Do you feel comfortable with what you do in the classroom?

Most participants did not seem to see this area as problematic. They thought that their education gave them the necessary knowledge applicable within the classroom. For example, participant # 1 asserted that she saw "no problems with the collective knowledge of the field (professional & procedural)." One of the participants (i.e., # 5) believed that even though her education did not prepare her in some areas, "in terms of personal knowledge, it will emerge over time through experience."

Analyzing

According to Kumaravadivelu (2012), *analyzing* has to do with learner needs, learner motivations, learner autonomy, and the teachers' ability to perceive them and help to actualize them within the classroom. To explore this idea, the following questions were presented to participants:

1. Did your educational program provide you with the knowledge and skills necessary to analyze and understand learner needs, motivation, and autonomy?
2. What is your own attitude about these concepts?
3. Do you ever analyze your students' needs, motivations, or autonomy?

The instructors did not seem to understand or able to fully implement these concepts within their classrooms. According to participant # 10, "theoretically speaking, yes! But we never realized how that should be put into practice!" She, further, explained that "while there is a rudimentary understanding of these terms within the teachers' community, the application is rare." Participant # 9 went a step further and explained that it is not just a matter of not knowing how to implement these concepts practically, but rather the fact that "we are not allowed to do so; even if we were allowed, we had no time!" Many teaching environments in Iran follow fixed curriculums that do not grant any freedom and autonomy in the classroom, and participant # 9 was overall skeptical that such opportunities could become available in the classroom as the result of the current system.

Recognizing

Teachers' identity, as well as their values and beliefs, are part of the *recognizing* construct (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Using the following questions, the perception of the participants towards themselves was investigated:

1. Did your educational program encourage and enable you to reflect seriously on your "teaching self"?
2. How do you recognize yourself as an English language teacher?
3. What is your personal disposition toward your professional life?
4. Do you teach in the way that you believe is in the best interest of students?
5. In the globalizing world of today, English teachers may unknowingly play a role in the service of global corporations and imperial powers or may contribute to promoting Foreign cultures or lifestyles. Have you ever thought about yourself as such before?

Unfortunately, most participants did not have a positive perception of their role. One of the participants (# 12) asserted that "we don't take pride in our job." Participant # 3 talked about how they did not have much choice in their life and basically being forced into this career route, "We didn't have much choice; we were admitted to the major. If we had a chance for another try, we'd choose something else!" Two of the participants talked about the systematic problems that had caused them to have difficulty having a positive relationship with their professional self; for example, participant # 5 mentioned that "as breadwinners of our family, our first top priority is earning money; and the current economic climate does not leave room for such thoughts," implying that the current financial system strips teachers away from their professional identity. Participants # 9, again, mentioned the restrictions imposed by the institutes and the educational system, "we are under tension between personal beliefs and institutional constraints."

Doing

Doing refers to the teachers' ability to engage in theorizing, dialogizing, and the praxis of teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Questions below all address this construct:

1. Did your educational program provide you with insight to enable you to theorize from your practice and to practice what you theorize?
2. How do you maximize learning opportunities in your classes?
3. How often do you take a meeting and ask the opinion and advice of your informed colleagues?
4. Do you collaborate with your colleagues as members of the same community of practice to enhance your knowledge and enrich your experience? How often do you self-reflect on your teaching behavior?

The participants mentioned that in terms of theorizing, they lacked confidence as the programs that they did participate in did not prepare them for this task or provide them with the competence to do so. As for teaching issues, lack of teacher autonomy/agency, lack of motivation, Lack of time, and constraint of textbooks and materials were mentioned by different participants.

Most teachers believed that dialogizing was impossible because of the dominant competition culture that would not allow for collaboration.

Seeing

This construct of *seeing* is about the representation of different perspectives within the classroom, whether they are coming from teachers, students, peers, and other stakeholders. The questions regarding this construct are as follow:

1. Did your educational program put more emphasis on technical aspects of language teaching or classroom acts and activities?
2. Do you ever improvise based on the unfolding classroom discourse?
3. Which one would you consider as superior: materials, techniques, and discipline-specific analyses or what goes on inside and between people in the classroom?
4. Do you candidly welcome peer evaluators/observers in your class and then ask them for feedback?
5. To what extent do you base your teaching on students' feedback and observers' comments?

The participants did not have a positive attitude toward including different perspectives within the class. Participant # 2 mentioned, "students' expectations in class is an obstacle and not as a starting point. If you want to play it by ear, it'll end up in a chaos." Some thought that the competitive-cultural milieu does not allow for it, although it is very useful. Participant # 7 said, "Peer observation is beneficial and we are willing to participate if certain conditions exist."

Themes

Analyzing the participants' responses gave the current researcher an insight into why and how EFL education in Iran goes against the KARDS framework and why, at least as of now, the implementation of the postmethod principles has not been successful. Table 1 is the summary of these themes with their frequency counts and the percentages of their reoccurrence within the data:

Table 1

Summary of Themes Extracted From the Data

		Frequency	Percent
Systematic Issues	1. Ideological Barriers	4	17.4
	2. Pedagogical Barriers	7	30.4
	3. Real-Life Barriers	12	52.2
	Total	23	100.0
Issues Associated With Teacher-1. Conceptual Flaws Training Programs	2. Structural Flaws	10	71.42
	Total	14	100.0

"Systematic Issues" refer to the overarching sociocultural issues that plague the language education system. When, for example, participant # 9 talked about how the current system would not allow the teachers to have autonomy and follow a plan that suits their class and the need of the students, she was concerned with these systematic issues. According to the participants, systematic issues can manifest themselves in three way: "Ideological Barriers" (e.g., lack of belief in teachers ability to be active members of the educational system), "Pedagogical Barriers" (e.g., the inflexible curriculums), "Real-Life Constraints" (e.g., the unfavorable economic situation that has especially affected teachers and the working middle class).

"Problems Associated With Teacher-Training Programs" were also the points that were constantly brought up by the instructors. "Conceptual Flaws" refer to the lack of underlying

postmethod-supporting theories within the educational system. For instance, participant # 5 mentioned that, in their programs, they had encountered such concepts as need analysis or autonomy, but in practice, they fell short to help teachers understand and apply them at the level of praxis and practice. That is because the underlying idea behind these programs is that teachers are unable to act as educational professionals and make appropriate decisions based on their classes, stripping them away of their critical and active role within the teaching community. The source of complication which is “structural” has to do with how these programs solely rely on discreet points and fixed educational outcomes that may or may not come in handy in the real-life situations.

Discussion

After analyzing the data, it seems that the following points are worth discussing before any conclusions can be drawn. The current system of language teacher education in Iran is flawed both conceptually and structurally:

1. The system is conceptually flawed because it aims at transmitting a generic set of predetermined, preselected, and presequenced body of knowledge from teacher educators to prospective teachers without taking into account their specific needs, wants, and situations: (1) training teachers to passively model the master teacher, rather than creatively master the teaching model, and (2) turning teachers into consumers of knowledge, rather than producers of knowledge
2. The system is structurally flawed because most of the current programs offer prospective teachers a series of discrete courses in areas such as linguistic theories, second language acquisition (SLA), pedagogic grammar methods, curriculum, and testing, usually ending with a capstone course in practicum or practice teaching. Such a formulation hardly presents a holistic picture of learning, teaching, and teacher development. Therefore, it is generally left to student-teachers to see the pattern that connects in order to make sense of it all.

The next point is that if postmethod pedagogy is relevant to Iranian teachers. Postmethod condition builds on the followings:

1. An alternative to method rather than an alternative method,
2. Teacher autonomy,
3. Principled pragmatism (a substitute for eclecticism; a bridge between theory and practice; informed teaching and critical appraisal), and
4. Critical pedagogy (social justice and social transformation through education).

Then the challenges of postmethod pedagogy in Iran are the followings: It seems that postmethod pedagogy has turned a blind eye to the social, political, and cultural realities of L2 teaching and learning for the following reasons:

- Ideological barriers
 - Social marginalization of teachers
 - Self-marginalization of teachers
- Pedagogical barriers
 - Inflexible, top-down administrative systems
 - Textbooks
 - Tests
- Real-life barriers
 - Financial constraints
 - Occupational constraints

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to see how EFL instructors in the context of Iran judge their training programs and experience as teachers against the KARDS framework and postmethod principals, in general. After accumulating the answers against each criterion, we came up with two themes (i.e., systematic and teacher-training issues) to describe why today's educational climate in Iran is different from the ideas put forward by these ideologies.

It seems apparent that any sort of change in the system should, first, happen at the level of society, and how we tend to see teachers for the current atmosphere to transform (Johnstone, 2009). The belief that teachers can be professionals responsible for guiding their classes (Kohonen, 1997), rather than agents of fixed methodologies, must be established to see a reform in teacher training programs. Teacher-training programs should also advocate the growth of critical abilities in instructors by letting them find their unique identity and voice, as well as focusing on the concrete application of the common theoretical constructs known to be involved in higher-quality learning and teaching practices.

Given the grave importance of instructors' professional identity, future researchers can focus on this area more and investigate the teacher's identity development from a discursive dialogic view.

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