

Reflective Teaching through Videotaping in an  
English Teaching Course in Iran

**Saeedeh Kavoshian\***  
PhD Student  
University of Isfahan  
saiedeh.kavoshian@gmail.com

**Saeed Ketabi**  
Associate Professor  
University of Isfahan  
s.ketabi@yahoo.com

**Mansoor Tavakoli**  
Professor  
University of Isfahan  
mr.tavakoli14@gmail.com

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate videotaping as a strategy for EFL teachers' reflective teaching. To this end, eight participants were selected from a language institute in Iran and were under investigation for over a period of one month and a half. The data were triangulated from different sources: videotaping; self-reflection sheets; and semi-structured interviews. The analysis of in situ data suggested that there is a significant difference between teachers' self-evaluations of their own teaching process at the beginning and end of the semester. Results also demonstrated that the contents of reflective teaching can be summarized into a framework including eight categories of communication patterns in the classroom, the affective climate of the classroom, classroom management, error correction, teacher's physical appearance, teaching techniques and strategies, professional development, and teacher's command of English. The current study may have some enticing implications for EFL teachers, materials developers, teacher trainers and syllabus designers.

*Keywords:* reflection, reflective teaching, videotaping, EFL teachers, triangulation, interview, checklist

Recently, researchers have witnessed a growing interest in learning and teaching English in Iran. This growing interest, which is very much reminiscent of considering English as an international language, led to an increasing demand for language teachers and teaching programs. "Teaching is a complicated information exchange process" (Huang & Hsu, 2005, p. 1); it is "replete with intricacies and complexities" and requires change, reflection, and evaluation (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011, p. 121). Put another way, teaching is a complicated process, and excellence in teaching is a really "demanding and absorbing" concern in institutions (Qing, 2009, p. 35). Traditionally, having knowledge of linguistics and language theories would suffice teachers in their teaching process (Liou, 2001; Wallace, 1991), leading novice teachers towards applying teaching approaches and techniques without considering the rationale behind them and also towards doing some routinized activities in the classroom (Wallace, 1991). While a teacher's style of teaching may cope with many of the "routine demands of teaching, it may hinder teacher's professional growth" (Richards, 1991, p. 4).

Under this account, it goes without saying that current and prospective teachers should move beyond those routinized activities towards a higher level of awareness of their teachings, decisions, values, and the results of the instructional decisions (Richards, 1991). For that reason, the idea of reflective teaching came into being.

As a concept that evades definition, reflective teaching "is an approach to second language (L2) classroom instruction in which current and prospective teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection" about their efforts in language courses (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 1).

It is important to note here at the outset that the areas which are of great concern to reflective teachers encompass communication patterns in the classroom, the instructional environment, the affective climate of the classroom, a teacher's self-assessment of growth and development as a

professional, teacher decision making, and ways in which learners apply knowledge (Murphy, 2001).

As Murphy (2001) put it quite aptly, because of the abundant number of topics to be explored by reflective teachers, there are also many different ways to gather information about classroom events. To put it differently, there are different approaches to critical reflection like written accounts of experiences, self-reports, autobiographies, journal writing, collaborative diary keeping, peer observation and recording lessons.

That said, many educational researchers have endorsed the importance of reflective teaching (e.g., Akbari, 2007; Baker & Shahid, 2003; Copeland, Birmingham, Delacruz, & Lewin, 1993; Dewey, 1933; Lee, 2005; Little, 2006; Marsh, 1998; McLaughlin & Hanifin, 1994; Pacheco, 2011; Robinson, 1997; Schon, 1983; Song & Catapano, 2008; Stanley, 1998; Yanping & Jie, 2009; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Following the lines of these researchers, the others have encouraged the fostering and improvement of reflection and reflective teaching by implementation of different tools. For instance, to provide some points of reference, Richards (1991) asserted that the journal or diary can be considered as a valuable tool for fostering critical reflection. Similarly, Ho and Richards (1993) proclaimed that journal writing can be considered as a good way for promoting reflective thinking in in-service teachers. Moreover, Hatton and Smith (1995) put forward that teachers can work together as “critical friends” and approaches for fostering reflection can be collaborative, not individualistic, substantiating the role of peer observation in fostering reflection (p. 41). Last, but by no means the least, a respectable stockpile of research corroborates the value of audiovisual technology in teachers’ reflection process and professionalism (e.g., Burns, 1999; Davis, 1971; Ferdowsi & Afghari, 2015; Harford, MacRuaric & McCartan, 2010; Hewitt, Pedretti, Bencze, Vaillancourt & Yoon, 2003; Marsh & Mitchell, 2014; Rogers & Tucker, 1993; Thomson, 1992).

Simply put, along with the continued recognition of the importance of reflective teaching and with the advent of video equipment in 1960, watching and reviewing videotapes of teaching process have gained

momentum (Wang & Hartley, 2003). Nobody can deny the ubiquitous role of videotaping in this field. Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that videotaping provides teachers with opportunities to focus on the 'moment to moment' process of teaching events happening simultaneously in the classroom (Richards, 1991).

Reasoning along similar lines, a plethora of empirical study areas around the topic of reflective teaching through videotaping filled the annals of literature (e.g., Akcan, 2010; Dymond & Bentz, 2006; Fadde, Aud, & Gilbert, 2009; Guidry, van den Pol, Keeley & Neilsen, 1996; Harford & MacRuaric, 2008; Hsu, 2008; Huang & Hsu, 2005; Huang, 2008; Kwo, 1996; Lee & Wu, 2006; LeFevre, 2004; Orlova, 2009; Perry & Talley, 2001; Powell, 2005; Rich & Hannafin, 2008; Richardson & Kile, 1999; Robinson & Kelley, 2007; Schratz, 1992; Sherin, 2004; Sherin & van Es, 2005; Sturges & Reyna, 2010; Tripp & Rich, 2012).

Nonetheless, it seems that the aforementioned influential undertakings, i.e. reflective teaching by the implementation of videotaping, have left the field of English language teaching in an Iranian context untouched. Little research on reflective teaching by implementation of videotaping is to be found in Iran (e.g., Jalilifar & Nattaq, 2013; Kavoshian, Ketabi & Tavakoli, 2013).

With that in mind, in the present study, the authors took a mixed method approach to analyzing English language teachers' reflections on their own teaching process by implementing videotaping regarding different aspects of classroom such as communication patterns in the classroom, teacher decision making, the affective climate of the classroom, the instructional atmosphere, and teachers' self-reflections of their own development as professionals.

### **The Present Study**

In addition to the inadequacy of the teachers' knowledge of linguistics and language theories and considering the importance of reflection which was mentioned above, the issue is further muddied by the lack of appropriate teaching practices on gaining teaching knowledge, connecting

theory to practice, and developing teaching skills by teachers in teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; McDonough, 2006). Reflection is a key component of teacher development by which teachers can gain an understanding of the teaching knowledge, connect theory to practice, develop teaching skills, and move beyond the level of automatic responses to classroom situations towards a higher level of their teaching practices (Richards, 1991).

Additionally, because of the uniqueness of different teaching situations, and various approaches to critical reflection, teachers may have different behavioral, cognitive, and affective feedback during their reflection process (Huang, 2008) and the contents of their reflections can be quite different. Therefore, the current study is a step toward investigating the contents of reflective teaching by implementing videotaping as a strategy for Iranian EFL teachers.

In addition to the lack of attention to different contexts and approaches of the issue at stake, the literature on teachers' reflections regarding different aspects of teaching and learning process in second language contexts, is not very well-documented either. In this connection, this study is a small step in the direction of exploring teachers' self-reflections on teaching process.

In between, although video plays a significant role in the teacher education programs, scant attention has been paid to its value as a tool for fostering reflection in pre and in-service teacher education programs and teachers' professional development. Moreover, because of the scarcity of such studies in Iran, the investigation of the issue is yet to be explored.

In keeping with such views and in line with the literature on and definition of reflective teaching, this study sought to shed light on the contents of reflective teaching provided by Iranian EFL teachers. Meanwhile, it made an attempt to explore whether or not there was a significant difference between teachers' self-evaluations of their own teaching process at the beginning and end of the semester.

Based on the aforementioned problems and aims, the present study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between teachers' self-evaluations at the beginning of semester and after watching the videotapes at the end of semester?
2. What are some general topic areas explored by Iranian reflective teachers after watching their own videotapes?

### Method

Data were triangulated from three main sources. First, the video-recording of teaching sessions was conducted. The second source of triangulation pertained to self-reflection sheets. The final data-gathering step was through semi-structured interviews at the end of the semester. Through these instruments, this study used a mixed-method approach with a triangulation design focusing on both quantitative and qualitative data.

### Participants

**EFL teachers.** Because of the qualitative nature of the present study, the sample size was bound to eight participants; as Patton (1990) put it quite aptly, qualitative method can be distinguished from quantitative one based on sampling; he maintained that quantitative method focuses on large samples which are selected randomly, while in qualitative method we have small samples which are chosen purposefully. In the same vein, Creswell (1994) went on to argue that "the idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants (or documents or visual material) that will best answer the research question" (p. 148).

Thus, this study was conducted with five male and three female EFL teachers of a language institute, consisting of four experienced and four novice teachers with a mean age of 25 who were purposefully selected by the researchers. They varied in their fields of studies (English Translation, English Literature, TEFL, and Translation Studies). The detailed demographic information of participants is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1  
*Demographic Data of the EFL Teachers*

Participant	Age	Gender	Major	Years of teaching experience	Years of learning experience
Farhad	30	male	TEFL	7	18
Ali	35	male	English Literature	10	10
Farzin	25	male	TEFL	1	6
Reza	29	male	Translation Studies	6	10
Ebrahim	26	male	English Translation	1	8
Maryam	30	Female	English Translation	1	16
Mahboobe	30	Female	TEFL	7	4
Azadeh	30	Female	English Translation	1	11

**Researchers.** In this study, the researchers were the participant observers. They were responsible for videotaping the teaching process, watching the videotapes, designing, distributing and collecting reflection sheets, conducting the interviews, and finally collecting and analyzing the data.

### Materials

As to the purpose of the study, there were two types of materials in this study; treatment materials and testing or assessment materials. It is exceedingly important to note that all the materials were pilot tested with a similar sample.

**Treatment materials.** New Headway Book series (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) were taught in the classes. In this study, some parts of the Elementary, Upper-intermediate, and Advanced books were taught by the participants. It is worth mentioning here that the students were EFL learners at elementary, upper-intermediate and advanced levels.

**Testing/ assessment materials.** Experts evaluated the content validity of the following instruments:

*Videotaping.* In the current study, there were two 90-minute videotapes of the participants' English language teaching process after an interval of one month and a half.

*Self-reflection sheets.* Because of the lack of a comprehensive reflection sheet to capture participants' reflections and evaluations on different facets of reflective teaching, a 43-item reflection sheet (Kavoshian et al., 2013) was designed based on Danielson's Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 1996), Duff's reflection sheet (Doff, 2000, p. 282), and Song and Cataplana's sheet (2008) to capture participants' reflections on their own teaching process.

*Face to face semi-structured interview.* In order to obtain information about the participants' backgrounds and also to explore the contents of reflective teaching through videotaping in the English teaching course, participants attended two face to face semi-structured interviews. The initial interview focused on their demographic data and the second one included 10 questions and lasted about 30 minutes for each participant.

### **Procedure**

In order to capture rich descriptive data, observational techniques like video recordings, self-observations and non-observational techniques like interviews and reflection sheets were used to corroborate the validity and reliability of the information.

To begin with, having given participants' audio/videotape consent forms, the eight participants were told that the data would be kept confidential and would not be disclosed, except for the purposes of the study. Thereafter, the researchers set the dates of the first and second interviews, first and second videotapings, and completion of the reflection sheets. The first semi-structured interview regarding the participants' bio-data lasted about 15 minutes and was audio-taped for further investigation.

Following the initial interviews, videotaping stage was conducted by recording two 90-minute videotapes of participants' English teaching



process. There were two films for each participant; one of them at the beginning of the semester and the other after an interval of one month and a half at the end of the semester. The researchers, who were the participant observers, put different aspects of teaching process like teachers' decision making, communication patterns in the classroom, the affective climate of the classroom, error correction, teacher's physical appearance, and class management, and so forth under close scrutiny.

The researchers cared about the participants' anxiety. Accordingly, having given enough time, the participants were told to be ready for teaching process and also to decrease their anxiety. Without having any cameraman in the classrooms, video cameras which were situated on the corners of ceilings were implemented for video recordings. It is exceedingly important to note that in the current study by the implementation of the above-mentioned cameras, removing the possible effects of video camera on the classrooms' atmosphere, the classes were deemed to be natural. Subsequently, the video-recorded lessons which were copied onto DVDs were given to participants with the combination of reflection sheets to capture the participants' reflections on their own teaching process. As mentioned above, the reflection sheet was a 43-item checklist (Kavoshian et al., 2013) designed by the researchers. It is worth mentioning here that the checklist was divided into five sections consisting of part A on demographic items, part B comprising 12 items on general evaluation of teaching process, part C consisting of seven items on general evaluation of learning process, part D consisting of survey items of teaching practice under Danielson's (1996) domains with domain one on planning and preparation (10 items), domain two on learning environment (4 items), and domain three on instruction (10 items). The last part of the checklist was an open-ended section on teacher's self-reflections.

In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the checklist was .86, and because this value is above .7, so the checklist can be considered reliable with our sample.

Then, the videotapes of the teaching process (New Headway Book series were taught) were watched by the participants through a technique

which is called ‘stimulated recall technique’. To put it differently, by implementing ‘video stimulated recall technique’, the participants viewed different video sequences of their own teaching process and were then invited to reflect on their teaching practices during the videoed event. The films were viewed, reviewed and reflected on by the teachers. Eventually, the participants filled out self-reflection sheets, capturing their self-evaluations of their own teaching process.

After an interval of one month and a half (at the end of the term), the same procedure was repeated to conduct the second videotaping exactly like the first one. The videotapes were viewed, reviewed and reflected on, and checklists were completed by the teachers. Finally, 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants separately. For each participant, the interview took about 30 minutes and was audiotaped to gain better insights into the content of reflective teaching.

### Results and Discussion

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to address the research questions. Firstly, the results of the quantitative analyses and secondly, the prominent patterns identified by the qualitative analyses will be presented.

**Quantitative analysis.** In order to find an answer to the first research question, the data were fed into the computer and then analyzed by The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 19).

**Comparison of teachers’ self-reflection scores at the beginning and end of the term.** As depicted in Table 2, summarizing the descriptive statistics of the teachers’ reflection scores at the beginning and end of the term, it can be concluded that the teachers’ self-reflection scores are different at the beginning and end of the semester with the mean score of the first self-reflections at the beginning of the semester (before watching the videos) being lower ( $M = 165.75$ ) and the mean score of the second self-reflections at the end of the semester (after watching the videos) being

higher ( $M = 176.87$ ). It is also interesting to note that the highest possible score is 213 ( $Max = 213$ ) related to the self-reflection scores at the end of the term.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of the Teachers' Reflection Scores at the Beginning and End of the Term*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
beginning	8	165.7500	25.21196	141.00	203.00
end	8	176.8750	24.42737	150.00	213.00

Then, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to test whether the difference depicted in Table 2 was significant or not. In the output below (Table 3), the z value is -2.54 (rounded) with a significance level of  $p = .01$ . The probability value is less than .05. Therefore, the result is significant. It can be concluded that two sets of scores are significantly different with a large effect size (eta squared= .921) based on Cohen (1988). To put it differently, teachers' self-reflection scores regarding different aspects of their teaching process increased significantly at the end of the term.

Table 3

*Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for Teachers' Self-Reflection Scores at the Beginning and End of the Term*

end – beginning	
Z	-2.536(a)
Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed)	.011

a Based on negative ranks

b Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The second phase of the study comprised the analysis of videotapes and audio-recorded interviews with the eight EFL teachers. The purpose of conducting such analyses was to broaden the researchers' understanding regarding the possible reasons of significant differences between teachers' self-reflection scores at the beginning and end of semester. Also, it sought to shed some light on the contents of reflective teaching provided by Iranian EFL teachers.

**Teachers' self-reflections.** As it was previously mentioned, there were significant differences between teachers' self-reflection scores at the beginning and end of the semester. After watching the self-videos, their self-reflection scores increased significantly. An obvious starting point in the analysis of interviews was figuring out the possible reasons of these discrepancies.

The participants highlighted the idea that watching self-videos increased their awareness regarding their mistakes (pronunciation and grammatical). In much the same way, they did believe that they considered themselves as more capable and self-confident teachers in the second videotaping. An alternative explanation for such a tendency would be that they all took for granted their own capabilities and strengths of the teaching process. To put it differently, before participating in the project, they did teaching as a matter of routine. Furthermore, the increase in reflection scores may pertain to the fact that after watching the second video, teachers envisaged themselves more as qualified teachers.

**Contents of reflective teaching.** The second concern of the authors was to investigate the contents of reflective teaching or some general topic areas which were provided by Iranian EFL teachers. To do so, in-depth observations of the videotapes were done. Then, all the reflection sheets were categorized, read and investigated and semi-structured interviews were transcribed; eventually, all the data were sorted to seek patterns which emerged from the data. A framework including 8 categories of

communication patterns in the classroom, the affective climate of the classroom, classroom management, error correction, teacher's physical appearance, teaching techniques and strategies, professional development, and teacher's command of English was generated (see Table 4).

Table 4  
*Contents of Reflective Teaching*

Content of Reflection	Subcategories
1. Communication Patterns in the Classroom	- Eye contact - Body language - Rapport - Students' relationships
2. The Affective Climate of the Classroom	- Self-confidence - Friendly atmosphere and having fun - Rate of praise
3. Classroom Management	- Students' attendance problems - Students' distraction - Disruptive behaviors
4. Error Correction	- Teachers' indirect correction - Peer correction
5. Teacher's Physical Appearance	- Wearing formal clothes - Being worried about appearance
6. Teaching Techniques and Strategies	- Language use - Manipulating equipment - Use of teaching aids - Teaching procedures
7. Professional Development	- Setting future goals - Recognizing personal growth
8. Teacher's Command of English	- English pronunciation - Grammatical accuracy

In this section, some empirical examples are presented. Articulating the outcomes which are not always tangible or measurable is quite difficult. It should be noted that these excerpts were directly extracted from the in-depth observation of videotapes, reflection sheets, and the transcriptions of interviews.

**Communication patterns in the classroom.** According to Murphy (2001), classroom communication patterns can be considered as one of the most common topics investigated by reflective teachers. Along the similar lines, in the current study, all interviewees unanimously asserted the significance of communication patterns in their classrooms. This category concerns interactions between students and teachers and also interactions among students. It includes eye contact, body language, rapport, and students' relationships.

Take, for example, the following statement provided by Farzin:

*The teacher used body language and eye contact to show his enthusiasm and used behavior management skills to call students' attention when they are out of trade. He interacted with students by greeting and smiling (Self-reflection sheet, February 22, 2012).*

The above-mentioned quote clearly shows that videotaping provided the teachers with opportunities to pay close attention to their kinesics to improve their teaching process. Facial expressions were of utmost significance to the participants. Furthermore, eye contact was implemented as a tool to signal enthusiasm, interest, empathy, understanding and misunderstanding. As Guidry et al. (1996) put it quite aptly, videotaping is "a powerful medium that captures the dynamics of movement, bodily expression, and motion" (p. 52). Moreover, LeFevre (2004) like Perry and Talley (2001) believed in various advantages of using video in teaching contexts; he contended that by using videos, the sense of context and realism may be increased, because a natural source is provided by the video.

On the contrary, Mahboobe reflected on the communication patterns and interactions among and between students and teacher which could not be captured by videotaping; she could not see all the students in the film. She focused on their pair work and group work which could not come under rigorous scrutiny by the implementation of videotaping. This finding may concurs with Sherwin's ideas (2004, as cited in Brophy, 2003) regarding videotaping which was proposed as the fact that "the

information captured by the video camera may be much more limited than if someone was observing in a classroom live” (p. 10). Additionally, Mahboobe’s reflections on this issue may pertain to ‘video’s keyhole effect’ syndrome. According to Sherin and van Es (2005), ‘video’s keyhole effect’ is “the tendency of viewers of a classroom video to focus narrowly on specific events that are prominent in the video to the exclusion of other, equally important events in the classroom” (as cited in Rich & Hannafin, 2008, p. 10). To this regard, in the current study, the main focus of the unmoved camera was on the teachers, encouraging teachers to focus extensively on themselves while reviewing their videos.

Considering body language and eye contact specifically, Ebrahim elucidated that when he reflected on his videos he wondered why he moved his hands and walked a lot! He did not sit straight at all. Additionally, his reflections pivot mostly around physical proximity, or proxemics which is considered by Brown (2007) as a significant communicative category, referring to “acceptable distances for conversations” (p. 239). In the current study, Ebrahim critiqued his too close distances to students while teaching; he did believe that being too much close to students made them stressed and influenced their learning process negatively. Moreover, he did not make eye contact with all the students; sometimes, he ignored some of them; as a result, they were left passive and inactive. It pertained to the fact that he had some eyesight problems. It may be safe here to argue that teachers’ physical status may influence their interactions and communication patterns in the classroom.

In much the same way, Farhad put much more emphasis on rapport and friendly classroom atmosphere:

*First of all, teacher should be friendly with students and make a kind of rapport, a good friendly relationship with the students so students feel relaxed, after that start teaching; when the students are stressed they cannot learn anything (Interview, March 14, 2012).*

According to the following quote, dynamics of the classroom interactions were watched, focused and replayed by the teachers.

Videotaping made them aware of the value of rapport, friendly atmosphere and low anxiety in facilitating learning and improving teaching process. Farhad was a teacher who was famous in the language institute for having friendly relationships with the students. Because of this kind of personality, he reflected mostly on rapport and 'low affective filter' which was considered by Krashen (1981) as the best condition for language acquisition, substantiating the value of stress-free environments in language learning and teaching process.

**The affective climate of the classroom.** The majority of the participants reflected on affective factors in language learning and teaching. This category concerns affective factors like self-confidence, friendly atmosphere, having fun, and rate of the praise.

Self-confidence was considered as the most important factor in this category. Farzin mentioned it three times. First, when the researchers talked about female participants who initially resisted videotaping and analysis, he said that a successful teacher should be self-confident and be ready to be observed and evaluated. Second, he talked about his future plans and said "I am going to provide students with more opportunities for speaking English to increase their self-confidence" (Interview, March 13, 2012).

Third, when he watched his self-videos, his awareness of the strengths of his teaching process increased, leading up to more self-confidence in his teaching. Because as McLaughlin and Hanifin (1994) put it quite aptly, reflective teaching is a valid means towards not only solving problems but also creating positive self-images in teachers.

It is of paramount importance to note that self-confidence was fostered in teachers differently; Farzin became more self-confident by reflecting on his strengths of teaching process. Mahboobe liked her physical appearance while teaching and her self-confidence was built, and Azadeh found herself a qualified teacher after reflecting on the films and discussing with supervisor and peers; she understood that her teaching process was not as bad as she thought beforehand. The supportive and



interactive roles of the peers and the researchers gave rise to increasing self-confidence in Azadeh's teaching process.

Moreover, typical comments by interviewees revolved around issues regarding friendly atmosphere, having fun, and rate of the praise. These are particularly evident in the following statement, expressed by Reza:

*I found myself an interested teacher in the videotapes; affective climate of the classroom was quite important in learning process and it had priority in my class and because my students were emotionally relaxed, they did everything that I wanted in the best way (Interview, March 21, 2012).*

Additionally, in terms of reflections, Azadeh focused on students' mental states, feelings and emotions. This kind of reflection was mainly because of her opinions regarding an English teacher who should be a psychologist and the one who cares about students' feelings and emotions. The friendly relationships between teacher and students accelerate the learning process. Conversely, one of the participants of a case study by Huang (2008) reflected on her authority in the classroom and felt that the teacher should be like a teacher and not like a friend and the relationship between teacher and students is not a friendly one.

Burns (1999) put forward that audio or video recordings are useful in "capturing in detail naturalistic interactions and verbatim utterances" (p. 94). In this regard, videotaping provided Mahboobe with opportunities to reflect on her emotional interactions in the classroom. Her reflections pivot mostly around her understanding of students' feelings, calling them by their first names, and having eye contact with all of them. The major reason of such reflections is related to her sentimental personality, attempting to make spiritual relationships with her students.

**Classroom management.** It is important to note that of a total of eight participants, seven asserted that classroom management is of paramount importance to them. Most notably, novice teachers identified students' attendance problems, distractions, and disruptive behaviors as the factors

that interfered with their teaching. Conversely, scant attention has been paid to these factors by experienced teachers. Furthermore, males were more concerned with classroom management than females.

As opposed to one of the findings of a study by Song and Catapano (2008), in which the majority of the experienced teachers focused on classroom management, in this study, Farzin who was a novice teacher, was much more focused on classroom management than experienced teachers. In terms of reflections, he liked his *classroom management. It had priority in his classes and he did not like chaotic classes. He was told to be a strict teacher. However, he tried to have fun in his classes to keep students interested in process of learning.* In his reflections, he asserted that when he entered the classroom, just one of the students was present and he told him that the other students were coming. It made him really angry and when the students came one after the other, he talked to them in Persian language and told them that they should not be late again. As a teacher, he did believe that students' on-time attendance is one of the great contributors to success of his teaching. Without jumping to conclusions at this juncture, the meticulous analysis of his videotapes prompted the plausible speculation that he was too strict in some parts of his teaching process and it may pertain to lack of enough experiences in teaching process. Teacher's strictness may give rise to low motivation in students, leading towards their attendance problems. However, he tried to solve this problem by revising the rules of his classroom and *having fun in his classes to keep students interested and motivated in the process of learning.*

By taking disruptions into consideration, Farhad talked about students' disruptive behaviors which were ignored by him to suit the special teaching context:

*The student's disruptive behavior in the videotape was ignored by the teacher. Because my students were male teenagers and it was natural to be naughty in some ways. I think teacher should not be too strict in English classes, because one of the main reasons attracting students to language institutes is that the atmosphere of these classes is not like schools or universities; it is informal and*

*friendly, they sit in semi-circle seats and have friendly relationships with each other or the teacher (Interview, March 14, 2012).*

Under this account, reflection was a vital strategy, helping teachers to “synthesize new understanding from the collocation of theory and real life events in classroom” (Baker & Shahid, 2003, p. 4). According to his teaching experiences, Farhad believed that theoretical knowledge of teaching should be applied to classroom based on special teaching and learning context of classes. Interaction with the students and making different decisions can be some telling examples. He talked about different kinds of interactions with different students. He believed that teachers should have a friendly relationship with the students but sometimes keeping a distance between teachers and students seems necessary; it depends on different classes, different students and different contexts. It may be safe here to argue that contextual factors are significant in teachers’ capacity to reflect. As Stanley (1998) put it quite aptly, different personal, professional, and contextual factors are influential in teachers’ capacity to reflect on their own practices. He maintained that reflection occurs “when basic personal, professional and contextual factors are stable and teachers are curious about learning the process of reflecting on their teaching” (p. 587).

By watching self-videos, Farhad reflected on his ignorance of students’ disruptive behavior while teaching. Some of them were talking with each other, telling jokes, laughing and sometimes they paid no attention to his instruction. As mentioned above, he was not bothered by their disruptive behaviors, because he did believe that it was natural for their age and gender and more importantly, he found that ignorance of disruptions led towards weakening and stopping them.

**Error correction.** Error correction received scant or marginal attention by eight EFL teachers and just three participants paid close attention to it in their reflections. They talked about indirect error correction but in their

reflections, they focused on the fact that most of the students' errors were corrected directly and sometimes immediately by the teachers.

For instance, Azadeh elucidated that students' errors should be corrected indirectly, but in-depth observations of her videotapes indicated that she corrected all the students' errors directly and immediately. She did reflect on these contradictions in her teaching process. The possible reasons of these contradictions pertained to her past bad experiences of supervisory visits in which her indirect error correction was criticized by the supervisor. As a result, she asserted that sometimes theories cannot be put into practice because of some restrictions and limitations.

According to Marsh (1998), teachers use their own personal experiences as learners to realize students' behaviors and solve their learning problems. In this connection, Ebrahim reflected on his immediate and direct correction of students' pronunciation errors. Because as an English language learner, he had some fossilized errors in his mind which were not corrected by his teachers and he did not like this bad experience happen to his students. This finding is in the same line with Copeland et al.'s (1993) opinions regarding reflective teaching. They asserted that reflective teachers believed that "a problem situation is merely one of many events on a past-present-future continuum" (p. 349). Thus, it might be safe to argue that EFL teachers as reflective practitioners try to assess the learning and teaching situations based on their past experiences to plan for future activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that reflection is an 'ongoing process', starting from past experiences, moving towards present practices and revealing in future innovations. This finding is validated by Huang's study (2008), in which teachers' reflection was considered as an 'ongoing process', because they reflected on the relationship between past experiences and present teaching practices.

In addition, Ali contended that in his videotapes, students' errors were corrected indirectly by repetition of error in an unobtrusive way. In terms of reflection, he focused on peer correction as the best strategy. Because according to what happens in his self-videos, the interactive and supportive nature of peer correction influenced the learning process positively.

By reflecting on the teaching process, Farzin corrected his own slips of tongue. He believed that all of us are exposed to mistakes, but watching his own mistakes was a great experience helping him correct them in the next session. According to this example and what Robinson and Kelley (2007) put, videotapes may provide student teachers with trustworthy data for their reflections which could be improved by watching videotapes of their own teaching process.

Eventually, it is worth mentioning that novice teachers paid much more attention to correcting local errors particularly pronunciation errors in comparison with experienced ones who mostly cared about global errors blocking communication.

**Teacher's physical appearance.** This category concerns wearing formal clothing and being worried about appearance. The findings of this study brought this fact into stark focus that, female teachers who initially resisted videotaping and analysis were more worried about their physical appearance and how they looked while teaching.

Just one of the male teachers talked about the importance of physical reflexes which were done by him unconsciously. He elaborated on the importance of 'reflection on reflection' and he reflected on the meaning of reflection on teaching, because he has never reflected on his teaching process before; he has just watched it to see how "he looked in the classroom". To put it differently, his 'spontaneous' reflection transformed to 'conscious' reflection. This process also happened to one of the teachers in Yanping and Jie's study (2009), who experienced great changes by moving from 'spontaneous' level of reflection towards 'conscious' level of reflection. In the current study, Reza thought about his teaching process consciously. It is because of the fact that it was not the first time that he watched his teaching process on videotapes and according to Orlova (2009), teachers at first focus on how they are acting and when this "actor's syndrome" (p. 32) regarding how they look, fades away they can focus on the teaching process and interaction with the students. Physically, he acted

according to his expectations. There were some reflexes that he did unconsciously and he decided to set them aside.

One of the female teachers wrote in self-reflection sheets on her worries about how she would seem in videos. She was a bit worried about how she would appear as a teacher in terms of appearance, voice, personality, and other personal characteristics (she was not too worried about the process of teaching). It is mainly because of the fact that she was afraid of seeing herself as an 'outsider' and if she did not like herself as a teacher, she would not be a successful teacher. However, when she watched the videotapes, it changed to a huge relief and helped her like herself more as a qualified teacher.

**Teaching techniques and strategies.** Teaching techniques and strategies might pose a fruitful and important issue in this study. Some points on language use, manipulating equipment, use of teaching aids, and teaching procedures were mentioned in this regard.

The teachers did believe that paying attention to language use, manipulating equipment and teaching procedures may improve their teaching and enhance the learners' learning process. For instance, Farzin was more concerned with using English, not Persian in his classrooms. In his reflection sheet, he criticized his peer's use of mother tongue in the classroom. He could not stand his peer's presentation of the new words by Persian equivalents, resulting in a bad habit-formation in students. He believed that his peer should have presented the new words in English and should have done his best to give English definitions. Along the similar lines, one of the participants of Hsu's study (2008) focused on greater use of English in the classroom as an aspect needed to be improved.

Although he criticized his peer's use of first language in the classroom, in his reflections, he focused on his use of mother tongue in his own classes. Much to his surprise, he mostly used Persian language to call students' attentions. Analysis of his videotapes substantiates the fact that when he was angry with the students, he suddenly shifted to Persian language unconsciously. This finding put much more emphasis on the

effect of teacher's psychological states on their language use in the classrooms.

He also wrote about his peer's teaching procedures and use of language and asserted that most of the time the teacher asked whole-class questions which may have left reserved students passive. In his opinion, he should ask all the students questions in turns in order to give them chance to speak their minds. By this questioning pattern, some of the students were left passive and inactive. It was because of the fact that the teacher was not self-confident enough to address and challenge students individually; as a result, he preferred to ask whole-class questions answered mostly by a limited number of highly active students.

In her reflection process, Maryam paid close attention to some details which were not important to her while teaching. Particularly, she focused on the details of her 'teacher talk' which was much more than the 'student talk'. She was not aware that most of the time she was talking in the classroom not the students. After viewing the first video, she tried to make some modifications in her classes and decided to increase students' group work and their participation in class activities. This finding is validated by Akcan's study (2010), in which it was concluded that videotaping played a vital role in helping teacher candidates pay close attention to the details of their 'teacher talk'.

Furthermore, Farhad critiqued his primary warm-up for reading comprehension as being weak and watery. He did his best to make some changes in warm-up activities. Consequently, he intended to have more supplementary materials at the beginning and end of his classes to enrich the syllabus, meet students' needs and compensate for the inadequacies of the textbooks. He pointed out that in teaching reading comprehension he was going to put students in two separate groups in order to monitor them well.

Considering teaching aids, the teachers all took for granted the importance of using teaching aids in the classrooms. Take, for example, the following statement provided by Reza:

*As to the use of pictures and realia, the material to be taught through the session was not a good context for the inclusion of such items (Self-reflection sheet, April 2, 2012).*

By reflecting on self-videos, Azadeh focused on her too loud voice and too many repetitions in her teaching process. That is because of the fact that she has been teaching English to young children for a long time and she transferred some of techniques of teaching children to adult classes. She did not know that this 'repetition strategy' may have hindered language learners' comprehension of English input and made a sort of boring atmosphere in the classroom. By reflecting on her teaching, she understood that different methods and strategies should have been used in teaching adult and young learners, because the above-mentioned groups may have different reactions to similar activities. However, videotaping helped Azadeh obtain valuable and deeper insights into her teaching process and make modifications thereof. As a result, she revised her teaching process in accordance with students' levels and needs. This finding concurs with Hewitt et al.'s (2003) ideas that by using videotapes teachers can be provided with enormous opportunities and context for making 'on-the-spot' decisions and it may also give them deeper insights into their own classroom practice.

In terms of reflections, Reza focused on students' active participation in classroom activities. He reflected on the students' ebullience to answer the questions voluntarily and without being necessarily asked. They raised their hands enthusiastically. Such a reflection was because of the fact that he was an enthusiastic teacher and his enthusiasm while teaching triggered students' participation and interest. This finding is in congruence with the results of the study by Huang (2008), in which one of the teachers used several activities to trigger students' interests and increase their participation.

As it was mentioned previously, according to Marsh (1998), teachers' personal learning and teaching experiences are significant in their reflections. In the present study, Farzin talked about his learning



experiences which influenced his teaching process. When he was a language learner, he had a teacher who was never sitting in the classroom; he was always moving around the class. He wanted to be energetic and involved in class activities enthusiastically. He always used his teacher's ideas and experiences to improve his own teaching process. As a result, Farzin focused on his own energetic and active way of teaching, substantiating the effects of his learning experiences on his teaching process.

Finally, Farhad did his best and presented a nice teaching based on his own teaching experience getting some hints from theoretical points taught at university. Put another way, he tried to make connections among his ideas, experiences, theories and practices. This finding substantiates Robinson's (1997) ideas regarding the linkage between mental models of teaching and reality.

**Professional development.** Setting future goals and recognizing personal growth were mentioned by all the participants. All the participants admitted that reflective teaching through videotaping helped them develop professionally, because all the participants set up their future goals for a better teaching, their awareness of different aspects of learning and teaching process increased, and they recognized their own personal growth during the project. This finding is in the same line with Huang's (2008) study with the results suggesting that reflective practice through observations, group meetings, interviews, audio recording, and journal writing, fostered teachers' professional development and self-growth.

Maryam might be a telling example who set up her future plans as:

*I should plan for "thinking time" for my students so they can organize their thoughts.*

*I should begin my class with a simple activity and get students work together.*

*I should encourage students to participate in class activities.*

*I should try to reinforce the weak students positively (Self-reflection sheet, March 14, 2012).*

Then, she talked about her personal growth during this project and stated that when she watched the first videotape, she realized that she could learn by watching what she was doing; it made her really sensitive to her teaching and she understood that every part of the teaching is very important. In the first videotaping, she talked much more than the students but in the second videotaping she tried to divide the talking time between students and herself and mostly among the students.

Teachers also changed their knowledge, skills, attitude, and awareness by developing attitudes like open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness and consequently, promoted their own professional development. Farhad would be a telling example of an open-minded teacher, because he considered students' needs, ideas, and feelings to increase their motivation and participation in class activities; he showed the films to his students and they watched the films carefully and the insights obtained from the students' points of view were used to improve the teaching and learning process. Farzin pointed out that his new teaching knowledge base was reconstructed based on his reflections in this study; he maintained that the implementation of videotaping was quite helpful in identifying weak and strong points of teaching process.

Furthermore, teachers' reflections regarding their professional development were consistent with Lee's (2005) three levels of reflective thinking which are recall, rationalization, and reflectivity.

Farhad and Reza's ideas were consistent with the *recall* level of reflectivity, because videotaping helped them recall their lessons and classroom events (Lee, 2005). Farhad liked all parts of his teaching process. In fact, there was not any part in his videotapes that he did not like; he felt that everything was according to what it should be. Likewise, Reza liked all the classroom activities because they were exactly based on the teachers' books and they were routine activities.

Ali, Ebrahim, and Mahboobe's ideas concurred with *rationalization* level of reflective thinking, because videotaping led them towards getting general feedback on strengths and weaknesses of their teaching process (Lee, 2005).

Farzin, Maryam, and Azadeh's statements were consistent with *reflectivity* level of reflective thinking, because videotaping helped them improve their teaching practice (Lee, 2005).

Additionally, the participants of this study experienced different levels of reflection based on personal, professional, and contextual factors. Reza argued that before participating in this study, he did not know that it was possible to think about his teaching process consciously.

Farhad was inspired by some hints of an article entitled "Research in Your Own Classroom" by Taylor (2002). As a result, he used students' ideas in his reflections, and he believed that videotapes helped him be engaged with learners in his reflection process. The teacher and students watched, thought about and reflected on the videos with each other. They focused on different parts of the reading comprehension and searched for ways of improving it. The importance of this issue has been endorsed by Little (2006), who asserted that videotapes help the teachers be engaged with the learners in their self-knowledge and reflection process.

**Teacher's command of English.** Teachers just reflected on the pronunciation, slips of tongue and grammatical accuracy. In the reflections on her peer's teaching process, Mahboobe was surprised by her peer's tone of voice. This reflection was because of the fact that her peer's tone, although audible and understandable, was not quite natural in terms of pace and pitch. His intonation was completely flat without having natural risings and fallings of English language. It seemed that he was speaking English language with Persian intonation.

Moreover, Farzin had slips of tongue such as "Did you did", but he said "that's natural, because we are all exposed to mistakes" (Self-reflection sheet, February 22, 2012). On the other hand, speaking is regarded as the most challenging and complex process, because of the simultaneous monitoring, understanding, thinking and planning (Lazaraton, 2001). To this point, expecting to have some sort of slips of tongue or errors is natural while speaking in first or second language. Furthermore, when he reflected on his videotapes, he thought that his tone

of voice sounded so different and weird. It is possibly because of the fact that recorded sounds and images look differently from the person's expectations of him/herself. Taken together, videotaping helped him evaluate himself critically. This finding concurs with that of Akcan's study in which one of the participants put much more emphasis on the value of videotaping as providing teachers with opportunities to "evaluate themselves more critically as an outsider" (Akcan, 2010, p. 40).

Furthermore, Maryam reflected on her tone of voice which was too soft and not loud enough to be heard by all the students. She believed that she should have used her voice more efficiently to call students' attentions and she could have followed falling and rising intonation while speaking and teaching in English. Her main reflections pivot around her voice because she did believe that voice is the sole significant factor, contributing to effective teaching. This concurs with reflections of a teacher in Akcan's study (2010), in which prominent importance was given to the tone of the voice as 'the most important factor' in teaching.

Taking grammatical errors into consideration, novice teachers had more slips of tongue and made more grammatical mistakes in comparison with experienced teachers. Novices also self-corrected themselves more than experienced teachers.

### Conclusions and Caveats

The findings of this study, based upon quantitative analysis and results of the video-recording of teaching sessions, self-reflection sheets and semi-structured interviews at the end of the course, indicated that there is a significant difference between teachers' self-evaluations of the teaching process at the beginning and end of the term, substantiating the positive effects of watching their own videotapes. The possible reasons of such discrepancy pertained to teachers' awareness of strengths and weaknesses of teaching process, becoming more self-confident teachers, discussing with peers and supervisor, becoming aware of the aspects which were missed while teaching, and liking themselves more as qualified teachers at the end of the term.

Also, the findings have cast light on the contents of reflective teaching provided by Iranian EFL teachers. The contents of reflective teaching or some general topic areas provided by Iranian reflective teachers can neatly be classified into a framework including eight categories of communication patterns in the classroom, the affective climate of the classroom, classroom management, error correction, teacher's physical appearance, teaching techniques and strategies, professional development, and teacher's command of English.

With regards to the communication patterns in the classroom, all the participants unanimously asserted the significance of communication patterns in their classrooms. The main contents of their reflections pivot around interactions between and among students and teachers, eye contact, body language, kinesics, proxemics, rapport, and students' relationships.

Considering the affective climate of the classroom, some of the uniformed responses provided by the majority of the participants revolved around self-confidence, friendly atmosphere, having fun, rate of the praise, students' mental status and their feelings and emotions.

Regarding the classroom management, the overwhelming weight of emphasis of teachers' reflections has been on students' attendance problems, distractions, and disruptive behaviors as the factors that interfered with their teaching.

In the case of error correction which has received scant or marginal attention by the eight EFL teachers, the main focus of reflections was on indirect error correction, peer correction, fossilized errors, and slips of tongue.

Another pattern worth mentioning here concerns teacher's physical appearance, focusing on wearing formal clothes, being too worried about physical appearance, and having physical reflexes.

One much reflected-on pattern in the current study is related to teaching techniques and strategies with the main focus on language use, manipulating equipment, use of teaching aids, teaching procedures, questioning patterns, teacher talk, students talk, primary warm-up,

repetition strategy, students' active participation, and being an energetic teacher.

Professional development is also of paramount importance in this study. In this regard, the contents of reflections can be summed up as setting future goals, recognizing personal growth, changing knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness, developing open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness.

Last but by no means, the least pattern of reflection is related to teacher's command of English by reflecting on pronunciation, slips of tongue, grammatical accuracy and tone of voice specifically.

The implications of the present study for EFL teachers, teacher trainers, materials developers, and syllabus designers are rather tantalizing. In view of this, it seems necessary for EFL teachers to expand their repertoire of information in the field of English language teaching (ELT) in general and reflective teaching and different ways of fostering reflection, in particular. Additionally, curriculum developers and syllabus designers in teacher education programs can expand levels of reflectivity in student teachers by incorporating courses like "reflective training" or "teacher development group meetings" into the teacher education curricula (Liou, 2001, p. 197).

As a concluding remark, it should be said that some caveats and disadvantages need to be noted. Limited sample size, subjective and time-consuming nature of the process of videotaping, watching sixteen 90-minute DVDs, self-reflection sheets, transcription and in-depth analysis of eight 30-minute semi-structured interviews and finally, resistance to videotaping and analysis by female teachers could be some telling examples.

Additionally, an insightful article by Akbari (2007) provides a more sophisticated understanding of disadvantages of reflective practices in L2 teacher education. As he puts it quite aptly, problem identification which lies at the very heart of reflective practice and which is not an automatic process "needs trained eyes, which many teachers, specially novice ones, lack" (Akbari, 2007, p. 199). According to Schon (1983), "professional

practice has at least as much to do with finding the problem as with solving the problem found” (p. 18). To put it differently, improving teaching practices through reflection is sometimes impossible because of the inability of (novice) teachers to find what is wrong with their own practices. To make the matters worse, although teachers can sometimes find the problems by implementing reflective practices, they are unable to take the appropriate actions and solve the problems (Akbari, 2007).

Practically speaking, it is not easy to find published evidence on the beneficial effects of reflective techniques on improving teachers and students’ performance (Griffiths, 2000). In between, there is no guarantee of transferring reflective instruction to real life teaching in future (Akbari, 2007). Finally, the consideration of teachers’ personal characteristics playing a significant role in their reflection process is a neglected area in teacher education literature (Akbari, 2007).

However, future directions regarding considerations of reflective teaching for teacher education programs are suggested. The present study paved the way for a new wave of studies, centering on the investigation of psychological effect of videotaping and analysis on teachers. Furthermore, it can be replicated with larger samples in various contexts to obtain different findings. In the future studies, other kinds of tools like feedback from learners, field notes and classroom ethnographies, teaching journals and teaching logs, audio recordings, and action research can be used in combination with video recording to enrich our understanding of reflective teaching.

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