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Research Paper

Lesson Plan Preparation and Implementation: Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions in Focus

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Abstract

A good lesson plan will most probably end up in effective teaching performance. Despite the positive role of planning lessons in the success of any teaching and learning experience, it has not been fully addressed in the Iranian EFL context, and many teachers consider it an impractical or challenging performance. Hence, the present survey study aimed at investigating what EFL teachers conceived of lesson planning and implementation. Furthermore, the role of a series of demographic variables, namely, gender, teaching experience, and educational degree, were also considered. The study participants included 120 EFL teachers working at universities, schools, and language institutes of Sirjan, Iran. The instrument used for data collection was a closed-ended questionnaire developed by Ramaila and Ramnarain (2014). The results from descriptive as well as inferential statistics, including the independent samples *t*-test, one-way ANOVA, and one-sample *t*-test, demonstrated the EFL teachers' moderate willingness toward lesson plans in general and its different aspects in particular. It was also revealed that the participants' perceptions of lesson planning did not differ, considering their demographic features. Educational administrators and authorities can utilize the obtained outcomes of the present study to take sound measures in this regard leading to better achievement of all language learners and even all learners in general.

Keywords: *EFL teachers, Lesson planning, Lesson plan implementation, Lesson plan preparation, Perceptions*

تهیه و اجرای طرح درس: تمرکز بر درک معلمان زبان انگلیسی ایرانی

یک برنامه درسی خوب به احتمال زیاد منجر به عملکرد آموزشی موثر خواهد شد. علیرغم نقش مثبت برنامه ریزی دروس در موفقیت هر گونه تجربه تدریس و یادگیری، در زبان انگلیسی زبان ایرانی به طور کامل به آن پرداخته نشده است و بسیاری از معلمان آن را عملکردی غیرعملی یا چالش برانگیز می دانند. از این رو، مطالعه پیمایشی حاضر با هدف بررسی دیدگاه معلمان زبان انگلیسی از برنامه ریزی و اجرای درس انجام شد. همچنین نقش یک سری متغیرهای جمعیت شناختی یعنی جنسیت، سابقه تدریس و مدرک تحصیلی نیز در نظر گرفته شد. شرکت کنندگان در مطالعه شامل 120 معلم زبان انگلیسی شاغل در دانشگاه ها، مدارس و موسسات زبان سیرجان، ایران بودند. ابزار مورد استفاده برای گردآوری داده ها، پرسشنامه ای بسته بود که توسط رامیلا و رامناراین (2014) تهیه شد. نتایج حاصل از آمار توصیفی و استنباطی شامل آزمون *t* نمونه های مستقل، آنالیز واریانس یک طرفه و آزمون *t* تک نمونه ای نشان دهنده تمایل متوسط معلمان زبان انگلیسی نسبت به طرح درسی به طور عام و جنبه های مختلف آن به طور خاص بود. همچنین مشخص شد که ادراک شرکت کنندگان از برنامه ریزی درسی با توجه به ویژگی های جمعیت شناختی آنها تفاوتی نداشت. مدیران و مسئولین آموزشی می توانند با استفاده از نتایج به دست آمده از مطالعه حاضر، اقدامات درستی را در این زمینه انجام دهند که منجر به پیشرفت بهتر همه زبان آموزان و حتی به طور کلی همه زبان آموزان شود.

واژگان کلیدی: معلمان زبان انگلیسی، برنامه ریزی درس، اجرای طرح درس، تهیه طرح درس، ادراکات

Introduction

Planning is necessary for all stages of human life. It is a kind of schedule that directs humans to do their works step by step without wasting time, leading them to achieve their aims more effortlessly. Teaching is not an exception in this regard; teachers also need to plan in the teaching process to gain the aims of a course and get better learning outcomes. To teach an effective lesson, a lesson plan (LP) is a crucial factor (Amuei et al., 2017; Richards & Bohlke, 2012; Ur, 2012).

Lesson plans are a crucial part of the daily classroom routine. “They provide beginners with security because with a carefully prepared plan; a beginning teacher can walk into the classroom with the confidence gained from having developed a sensible framework for that daily instruction” (Kellough, 1996, p. 94). In general, lesson planning is a way through which teachers gain expertise (Purgason, 2014). By using lesson plans, teachers can optimize things, and without them, an adequate lesson cannot be produced (Haynes, 2010). There are many advantages to preparing lesson plans. For instance, they enhance the teachers’ self-sureness and sense of confidence and reduce the feeling of self-doubt and uncertainty. This sense of confidence can inspire students with a mutual feeling of confidence, and they can feel the consistency of the objectives and the succession of the lesson (Woodward, 2001). In addition, a lesson plan shows the students how knowledgeable, professional, and skillful their teacher is. It provides a variety of activities that meet the needs of students with different abilities. Additionally, a lesson plan's practice and application components assist learners in using the new skills and knowledge in the educational process (Harmer, 2001) and are considered an important part of teachers’ professional development (Yazdanifar & Khazaenezhad, 2020).

Despite the importance of LPs, it seems that some teachers are not still thoroughly familiar with their values and regard them as impractical, and some others consider their preparation challenging or time-consuming. It is most unfortunate when teachers, as the foundation of the educational system, do not prepare LPs and insist on teaching based on just what spontaneously happens in the classroom (Taghipour, 2013). This situation may result in a worthless educational system. A teacher who is not well-planned or poorly prepared becomes objectless and deficient in teaching the given content and cannot correctly guide students to achieve the lesson objectives. As one of the most crucial elements in successful teaching, lesson planning is the mental readiness of the teacher to present a vital and practical lesson (Aggarwal, 1996).

Consequently, it is imperative to examine to what extent teachers value LPs and how they prepare and use LPs in their classrooms. However, research on lesson plans has focused chiefly on their preparation, utilization, and its effect on classroom management and students’ learning in different fields such as English, physics, medicine, etc. (e.g., Asfaw, 2000; Hanane, 2016; Kamran & Sharghi, 2011; Kibret, 2016; Shahrokhi et al., 2018). Moreover, in the Iranian context and the field of language teaching, it seems that Heidari has been the only one investigating this issue by conducting a series of studies on the same 93 participants in Ilam. She considered the role of participants’ gender, length, and place of teaching. The only difference in the participants’ views was regarding the role of gender, demonstrating that females were more interested in using lesson plans than males (Heidari et al., 2015; Heidari & Heidari, 2020; Jamali Nesari & Heidari, 2014). Nevertheless, it seems that the three mentioned studies are all conducted on the same group of participants and are minimal and trivial in their statistical analysis. Furthermore, the data are examined only descriptively, and the reader is not provided with sufficient and in-depth knowledge of the participants’ views on different aspects of LPs. Thus, due to the limitation of recent studies on lesson planning in the Iranian context, the constant need to conduct studies on this subject for different courses (Shahrokhi et al., 2018), and as suggested by some researchers (e.g., Kamran & Sharghi, 2011; Saberian et al., 2003), further investigation on this matter seems



necessary. Accordingly, the present study was an attempt to take a closer and more comprehensive look at the EFL teachers' views on lesson planning and its implementation and to consider the influence of different demographic variables such as gender, teaching experience, and educational degree through the following research questions:

Q1. What is the perception of Iranian EFL teachers working in schools, language institutes, and universities of Sirjan about LPs and their different aspects?

Q2. Are there any significant differences among the Iranian EFL teachers working in schools, language institutes, and universities of Sirjan in their perceptions of LPs in terms of their gender, experience, and educational degree?

Literature Review

Since a lesson plan is a valuable tool for the teaching and learning process, many researchers have studied and defined it differently. McMahon (2011), Spratt et al. (2005), and Farrell (2002) similarly defined the lesson plan, stating that a lesson plan is a unit/series/outline of what and how a teacher should teach. McMahon (2011, p. 4) defined it as “an organized outline for signal instructional periods; it tells the instructor which teaching method is to be used for the lesson, what is to be taught, and in what sequence to present information. Spratt et al. (2005) stated that the lesson plan is a series, of course, plans that direct the teacher to what kind of materials should be taught and how to teach them. In addition, Farrell (2002, p. 30) considered a lesson plan as “a unit in which it is a sequence of correlated lessons around a particular theme, or it can be specified as a systematic record of a teacher's thoughts about what will be covered during a lesson.”

One of the scholars who has discussed the issue of lesson planning in his books several times is Harmer. The definition of the lesson plan in the current study is in line with his ideas. Harmer (2007) views a lesson plan as a preparation developed according to the teacher's thoughts and beliefs about what will be appropriate for the student's level and what the syllabus or curriculum expects them to do. He furthermore pointed out that a lesson plan is “the art of combining a number of different elements into a coherent whole so that the lesson has an identity which students can recognize, work with and react to” (2001, p. 308). Therefore, each lesson plan should include some essential elements ranging from the time dedicated to the learner's level and the material used, ending with the homework and objectives.

Kyriacou (2007) presented five main functions for lesson planning. First, it leads teachers to think exclusively and clearly about the kind of learning they like to occur during a specific lesson. Second, it decreases the teachers' thinking during the teaching process when the lesson is in progress. Third, it paves the path for teachers to think about the content and structure of the lesson. Forth, by planning, all the resources and materials required for a lesson will be prepared with less effort. Fifth, planning provides teachers with a valuable record of their following plans.

As mentioned above, research on lesson planning has been conducted in different fields such as medicine, English, and physics, focusing on its preparation and utilization as well as its role in classroom management. For instance, Kamran and Sharghi (2011) examined the attitude and knowledge of Ardabil University of Medical Sciences instructors toward lesson planning. They showed that although the participants did not thoroughly understand lesson planning, their attitudes toward it were categorized as good. Shahrokhi et al. (2018) tried to determine the extent of implementing lesson plans of specific nursing and midwifery courses at Qazvin University of medical sciences. In this study, 149 students completed a checklist, and the outcome demonstrated a perfect implementation of the announced lessons plans in both groups. In another study, Asfaw (2000) investigated teacher-made lesson plans for grade seven English class and their actual application in the teaching process. The results indicated that most participants

included the different components of lesson plans when preparing them; however, most instructional information was missing from them. Hanane (2016), focusing on the role of lesson planning on classroom management, hypothesized that a well-prepared lesson plan could lead to a well-managed classroom, and the results confirmed this assumption. In a qualitative study conducted by Kibret (2016), four physics teachers were interviewed and asked to develop five lesson plans for their classes, and 215 students provided feedback by answering a questionnaire. The results indicated that the participant teachers did not consider the variety of students' knowledge and skills and did not consider differentiating teaching to accommodate students with different abilities. Furthermore, the cognitive activation of students did not receive enough attention.

With regard to the role of lesson planning among the Iranian EFL teachers, a series of studies were conducted by Heidari and her colleagues. Jamali Nesari and Heidari (2014) distributed a questionnaire among 93 high schools and institute EFL teachers in Ilam, Iran, to investigate their attitudes toward lesson planning. The results were presented in a frequency table indicating the number of times each of the five Likert-based answers were selected. It was concluded that the participants believed in the importance of lesson planning. One year later, Heidari et al. (2015) examined the role of gender on the attitude of the same participants on the attitude toward lesson planning. The outcomes revealed that females had a more positive attitude toward lesson planning than males. More recently, Heidari and Heidari (2020) investigated the role of experience and place of teaching on attitudes toward lesson planning on the same participants as the two previous studies for which the results did not show any significant difference in the 93 teachers' views concerning the selected variables. Considering the limitation of studies on Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives on lesson plans, more thorough and comprehensive research seemed indispensable, and the present study planned to take a closer and in-depth look at the perception of the EFL teachers on lesson planning and its component in the Iranian context.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The present study was an attempt to examine the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers toward writing and implementing LPs. To reach this aim, a quantitative design and, more specifically, a survey research method was used to gather information. The survey questionnaire is among the widely used data collection instruments in sociology, psychology, and education through which people's beliefs, opinions, and characteristics are investigated (Ary et al., 2019).

Participants

The population of this study were EFL teachers working at schools, universities, and language institutes of Sirjan, from which 120 participants were selected based on purposive sampling with respect to their familiarity with the concept and implementation of LPs. The participants were from both genders and included 43 males and 77 females. Their age ranged from 19 to 42, and most of them had BAs ($n= 44$) and MAs ($n= 52$) in TEFL. Twelve teachers had a Ph.D. degree, and 12 of them had graduated from private institutes. Their teaching experience varied from 1 to 24 years.

Instrument

The questionnaire developed by Ramaila and Ramnarain (2014) was used to collect data in the current study. The questionnaire's objective was to investigate the participants' views on the importance of lesson plans, how to write and perform lesson plans, exchanging ideas with colleagues about preparing lesson plans, using the Internet and textbook as resources for

planning, and the time required for planning. The outline of the questionnaire consisted of two parts: part (A) delved into the participants' demographics such as age, gender, educational degree, and experience; part (B) consisted of 34 questions. However, a total of six questions were omitted due to a lack of coordination with the Iranian educational system and content (e.g., items regarding different ethnic backgrounds of learners or the conditions experienced by the new curriculum).

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of two subsections: questions 1 to 15 investigated teachers' ideas about the role and performance of lesson plans, and questions 16 to 28 explored their attitudes toward lesson plans. The answers were based on a five-level Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree in the first section and Never to Very often for the second part. Some of the items (2, 5, 12, 13, 19, and 24) were scored negatively. The total score showed the extent to which the participants agreed with writing and using lesson plans.

The content validity of the items was established by two experts (faculty members) from the Islamic Azad University of Sirjan. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire was piloted involving thirty subjects similar to the subjects of the main study using Cronbach's alpha. The obtained results indicated a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

Data Collection Procedure

Before starting data collection, the authorities or heads of schools and institutes were informed of the subject and goal of the research. Some of them agreed to cooperate, letting their teachers attend the survey. The teachers themselves also had the choice of whether to participate in the study or not. The questionnaire was emailed to school and language institute teachers rather than distributed in person since most of their classes were held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The heads of schools and institutes provided the authors with the email addresses of their teachers. However, the questionnaire was directly distributed at universities among the EFL teachers as they were present at least one day a week at their offices, and most of them agreed to complete it.

A total of 135 questionnaires were emailed or distributed, from which 120 were filled. In comparison to schools, institutes had better cooperation, and as in some institutes, writing lesson plans were obligatory, their teachers seemed to have good knowledge about it. Moreover, the participants were assured that all their answers were strictly confidential and were only used for research purposes. The process of data collection lasted about four weeks.

Data Analysis Procedure

After collecting the data, the descriptive statistics, including the statistical measures, such as standard deviation, mean, and variance, were conducted, and the frequency tables were drawn. Furthermore, the inferential statistical analyses, including independent sample *t*-test, one-way ANOVA, and one-sample *t*-test, were utilized to investigate teachers' perception of the sub-factors of the questionnaire, like the importance of lesson plans, the way of writing and performing lesson plans, exchanging ideas with colleagues about preparing lesson plans, using Internet and textbooks as resources, the time required for planning as well as the participants' perception toward lesson plans considering their gender, experience, and educational degree.

Results

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of LPs

The questionnaire included 28 items that asked EFL teachers' perceptions about the different aspects of lesson planning (See the Appendix for the descriptive statistics of each item). The

results showed that the mean for the items ranged from 2.17 to 4.33. The highest mean score (4.33) belonged to the items referring to the usefulness of writing LPs, the learning outcome of LPs (4.27), and considering learner involvement when planning (4.22), respectively. The lowest means belonged to questions 13(2.17), 19(2.72), and 25(2.94), referring to their feeling of isolation during the lesson planning, following a lesson plan grid presented by officials, and having a discussion with teachers of other subjects regarding planning lesson. The participants generally showed a moderate optimistic viewpoint on lesson planning with a total mean of 3.55, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perceptions Toward Lesson Plan

Total	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
LP	120	3.5579	.38252	.03492

To better understand the results, a one-sample *t*-test was conducted (see Table 2) to compare the mean of EFL teachers' attitudes toward lesson plans compared with the test value 3.

Table 2

One Sample T-test Regarding Teachers' Perception of the Lesson Plan

Test Value = 3						
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Lesson planning	15.976	119	.000	.55788	.4887	.6270

It was demonstrated that the sample average is significantly different from the assumed mean of 3 ($M=3$), with the 95% confidence interval estimate. Consequently, the participants' moderate positive attitude toward lesson planning is confirmed.

To better understand the participants' views, the items were further investigated in five subcategories, including: 'General Attitude' (items 1, 2, 5, 12, and 21), 'Role of Community and Collaboration' (items 3, 13, 25 and 27), 'Rules of Execution' (items 4, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 15), 'Role of Officials' (items 6, 7, 8, 19, and 28), and 'Process of Planning' (16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24 and 26). Each category involved items with similar objectives.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Subcategories in the Questionnaire

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation		Skewness	Kurtosis			
				Statistic	Std. Error		Statistic	Std. Error		
1. General Attitude	120	3.40	3.8629	.06361	.69677	.485	-1.136	.221	1.362	.438
2. Role of Community and Collaboration	120	3.00	3.1361	.06079	.66587	.443	-.184	.221	-.031	.438

3. Rules of Execution	120	2.50	3.7156	.03944	.43205	.187	-.786	.221	1.030	.438
4. Role of Officials	120	3.00	3.3176	.04947	.54193	.294	-.311	.221	.278	.438
5. Process of Planning	119	3.25	3.6073	.05631	.61423	.377	-.735	.222	.564	.440
Valid N	119									

As presented in Table 3, the outcomes showed a mean of over 3 for all categories ranging from 3.13 to 3.86. To get a more comprehensive account of the obtained means, a series of one-sample *t*-tests were conducted, and the mean of each category was compared to the expected mean of the population, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
One Sample T-tests of Subcategories of the Questionnaire

	Test Value = 3					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. General Attitude	13.567	119	.000	.86292	.7370	.9889
2. Role of Community and Collaboration	2.239	119	.027	.13611	.0157	.2565
3. Rules of Execution	18.142	119	.000	.71556	.6375	.7937
4. Role of Officials	6.421	119	.000	.31764	.2197	.4156
5. Process of Planning	10.786	118	.000	.60729	.4958	.7188

The obtained *t* values for categories 1 to 5 were 13.56, 2.23, 18.14, 6.42, and 10.78, respectively. As all the categories had *p*-values lower than 0.05, a significant difference was demonstrated between the mean of each factor and the assumed mean of 3 ($M=3$). Hence, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and the participants demonstrated a moderate positive point of view toward different aspects of lesson planning as well as the concept in general.

Perception of LPs and the Demographic Variables

To investigate the second research question, the teachers' perceptions of lesson planning were examined based on their demographic features, including gender, teaching experience, and educational degree. Table 5 shows that females with a mean score of 3.57 have reported a slightly higher positive attitude toward LPs compared to males with a mean score of 3.52. However, the independent samples *t*-test ($t=.61$, $p=.53$) demonstrated that this difference is insignificant (see Appendix).

Table 5
Teachers' Perception of LPs in Terms of Their Gender

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
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Lesson planning	Female	77	3.5740	.39277	.04476
	Male	43	3.5289	.36617	.05584

Due to the significant role of teachers' experience in the learning process, this quality was also examined. 'Teacher experience' in this study is considered as the number of years a teacher has taught. Accordingly, the participants were divided into three groups: 'no experience,' '1-3' years of experience, and 'more than three years of experience. However, since no participants had less than one year of teaching, only two groups were presented.

Table 6*Teachers' Perception of LPs in Terms of Their Experience*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1 to 3 years of experience	47	3.6033	.27540	.04017	3.5224	3.6842	2.82	4.04
More than 3 years of experience	73	3.5286	.43722	.05117	3.4266	3.6306	2.04	4.50

Based on Table 6, the mean score for teachers with lower experience levels (3.60) is slightly higher than the highly experienced group (3.52). However, with regard to the gender of the participants, the results of ANOVA for this variable ($F=1.09$, $p=.29$) did not show any difference in the attitude of the EFL teachers toward LPs (see Appendix), and it can be inferred that experience did not play a significant role in teachers' perception of lesson plans.

The last demographic variable being investigated in this study was teachers' educational degrees. The educational level in this study refers to the highest academic degree obtained by a teacher. Considering this variable, the participants were divided into four groups of having private education ($N = 12$), BA (Bachelor's degree) ($N = 44$), MA (Master's degree) ($N = 52$), and Ph.D. ($N = 12$).

Table 7*Teachers' Perception of LPs in Terms of Their Educational Degree*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Private education	12	3.6897	.42065	.12143	3.4224	3.9570	2.92	4.50
BA	44	3.6053	.41386	.06239	3.4795	3.7312	2.04	4.14
MA	52	3.4637	.34908	.04841	3.3665	3.5609	2.56	4.00
PhD	12	3.6600	.30025	.08668	3.4693	3.8508	3.04	4.11

Table 7 displays a mean score of the above three for all four groups with a slight difference. The teachers who graduated from private education had the highest mean (3.68), while the teachers with an MA degree had the lowest (3.46). Nevertheless, the ANOVA results ($F=2.09$,

P=.10), like the other demographic variables being investigated, did not demonstrate any significant difference among teachers with different educational degrees (see Appendix).

Discussion

Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of lesson plans were examined to answer the first research question. Based on the outcomes, the participants with a mean score of 3.55 (Table 1) demonstrated a moderate positive insight toward lesson planning. Although some teachers did not prepare lesson plans before their classes, they did not disapprove of planning for lessons. Most of the participants believed in the importance of lesson planning in the quality of their teaching, which was also confirmed by item one (asking about the usefulness of lesson plans in teaching), receiving the highest mean score of 4.33. A closer look at the mean score of different categories (Table 3) confirms the findings that show a positive attitude toward various aspects of lesson planning from development to execution.

Most participants believed that even experienced teachers need to write LPs and that a lesson plan acts as a guide when they teach. This reflects their awareness of the essential role of lesson plans in managing their work, students' learning, and the educational system. Planning allows teachers to think about where they are going, gives them time to have ideas for tomorrow and next week's lessons, and reminds them of what they intend to do (Harmer, 2001).

It seems that the role of collaboration with other teachers is also essential to the participants of this study. While they showed a lower desire for this factor than the other ones, the obtained mean shows a moderate inclination. The participants agreed that they would discuss and exchange ideas with their colleagues when planning lessons. However, they preferred to do this with teachers of the same subject rather than a different one. When teachers work together, it helps them achieve a shared vision and effectively make changes in the instructional practice. "In collaborative working environments, teachers have the potential to create the collective capacity for initiating and sustaining ongoing improvement in their professional practice, so each student they serve can receive the highest quality of education possible" (Pugach & Johnson, 2002, p. 6).

Furthermore, the participants believed that they should be allowed to design their own lesson plans according to their own needs. It can be interpreted from teachers' responses that a particular lesson plan cannot be generalized to different classes with students who are not equal in their learning levels. Although no unique lesson plan can be recommended for all classes and all subjects, it seems that there is an agreement about the vital formative role of an effective lesson plan. Teachers know the class and learners' needs and can plan the lesson according to these requirements. However, students learn differently, and to respect and understand those differences, there need to be alternatives in the teachers' instruction in a way that those differences are addressed (Naimie et al., 2012). The process of lesson planning as a complex activity demands a series of activities on the part of the teacher, including designing lessons. When creating the lessons, teachers need to consider learners' prior knowledge and needs, anticipate students' required activities, plan how to support individual learners, and assess the outcomes of implemented instructional plans according to students' levels (Oser & Baeriswyl, 2001).

The study's findings also demonstrated that the EFL teachers believed lesson plans should be prepared due to their own beliefs, not forced by managers or based on other reasons such as the authorities' control. Although prepared lesson plans presented by those in charge and specific committees can act as facilitators, teachers should be the ones making the final decision, which shows the significant role of teachers in preparing and performing a lesson plan (Taghipour, 2013). If teachers believe that designing a lesson plan is their responsibility, they prepare it with contentment, and consequently, the result will be more fruitful and beneficial. However, if they

do not believe in the value of a lesson plan and prepare it just due to the coercion of administrators or managers, there is less chance to achieve a good result.

Digging more deeply into the questionnaire's content and the outcomes of the subcategories demonstrates that the Iranian EFL teachers' ideas regarding lesson planning are in line with the arguments presented by Woodward (2001). She believes that lesson plans help teachers develop a personal style and ideas about the kind of lesson they will teach, think about the materials to use beforehand, and keep a permanent record of their work. In addition, setting goals and planning lessons from the beginning would help the students to gather their thoughts about the lesson before class. Finally, by planning, the teacher would not be confused to answer the students' questions.

Considering the 'rules of execution,' teachers agreed that deviating from their written lesson plans is acceptable because executing a written lesson plan word by word is not always possible. Teachers are not able to control all the decisions they make during the planning process. There are influences outside the teacher's control that may constrain decisions and shape the lessons that are planned because of the situated nature of the planning within the larger institutional context (Cobb et al., 2003). Teachers also agreed that any lesson should always have a learning outcome. Students' learning should be the most crucial purpose of a lesson plan. Teachers had a moderately positive attitude about having some activities in the lesson plans that involved students. This shows their awareness of the fact that learning goals will be achieved when students are involved in the teaching process. Teachers also believe that it is necessary to have an assessment task in mind when planning a lesson. Assessment is one of the essential components of a lesson plan. Assessing tasks can show the teachers how much time they need to spend in the current lesson or the previous one or when they can start the next lesson (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007).

What is more, although teachers agreed that the curriculums help tell them about the depth at which they must teach a topic, and the curriculum documents in English education guide them in their lessons, they wished they could use a more straightforward grid to plan their lessons and wanted to be allowed to design their own lesson plan grids according to their own need. They also declared using the Internet and textbooks in planning lessons to get ideas on how to teach and that they deliberately searched for challenging questions to ask their students when planning. The reason can be that asking such questions provides the condition for the students' collaboration and helps them stay focused. The teachers expressed their tendency toward active involvement of the students in lessons by looking for examples related to their life experiences and considering asking various questions at different levels of thinking during the class. Franke et al. (2009) argued that when teachers asked the individual students questions, they would elaborate on their ideas. On the other hand, when teachers did not ask the students questions, they would not have the opportunity to get involved. However, the amount of elaboration from the students depends on the type of question teachers plan to ask the students.

According to the obtained results, it can be concluded that they were aware of the importance of lesson planning and the necessary subjects and contents that should be involved in the lesson planning process regardless of the method of teaching they use. The second research question examined the role of three demographic variables of gender, experience, and level of education on EFL teachers' perception of lesson planning. The participants showed no difference in their perceptions of LPs in terms of these variables. Nevertheless, a series of studies (e.g., Heidari et al., 2015; Kamran & Sharghi, 2011; Taghipour, 2013) have found otherwise. Different factors might lead to male and female teachers' indifference of attitudes, such as being in the same context, having a similar curriculum in teaching, and having the same level of experience and knowledge.

Teachers' educational levels and experience, the two main attributes of teacher quality, have gained attention and have been the focus of many investigations. Addressing the role of experience and educational level on teachers' perception of LPs, both the highly experienced teachers and low experienced teachers with any degree moderately agreed on the significance of lesson plans in teaching. Although some experienced teachers might not believe in writing lesson plans, a plan gives the lesson a framework and establishes a road map for instructors of what has been taught and what needs to be taught. Furthermore, it provides the class with a variety of activities that meet the needs of all the learners, which will facilitate the students' learning (Harmer, 2001). Scrivener (2005) advises inexperienced teachers, saying that if they cannot prepare a plan, they should imagine the class, the student's behavior, skills, and attitudes and try to think of the plan first before writing it down. The lack of any difference regarding the EFL teachers' perception of LPs in terms of their experience and educational level can be considered in line with what Wenglinsky (2002) has suggested that a teacher cannot be determined to be qualified by checking his or her education level, years of experience, or teaching certificate. Teachers influence students through their interactions with them, especially in the classroom. Thus, although necessary, a teacher's educational level and experience only represent a portion of the ability to manage the classroom efficiently and promote the students' achievement.

In contrast to the outcomes of the present study, in the study conducted by Behzad (2013), most of the teachers having eight or more years of teaching experience were not so fond of using lesson plans and highly valued their own experience compared to the use of lesson plans. Although it could be possible for experienced teachers to teach without actually writing LPs, most of them might have a kind of unwritten form in their minds. He also found out that some less educated teachers considered preparing lesson plans a waste of time. He concluded that it could be because less-educated teachers are less exposed to the training on the importance and preparation of lesson plans.

Conclusion

This study attempted to reveal a comprehensive picture of the EFL teachers' perceptions of lesson planning. The obtained data showed a moderated positive attitude toward LPs among the participants. Besides, no significant difference was observed in the participants' perceptions regarding their demographic qualities. This research provided some new insights into the preparation of LPs from the point of view of the Iranian EFL teachers showing that the majority of the participants had an interest in making lesson plans and believed in the role of lesson planning in improving the quality of teaching and learning. They also agreed that lesson plans had an influential role in guiding teachers while teaching and helping them think about the lesson they would like to introduce.

Although most participants agreed that collaborating and exchanging ideas with other teachers can be helpful, they were not very interested in preparing their plan by the community. Furthermore, some teachers stated that the curriculum documents presented by various institutions could guide them. Still, most of them believed that they should be allowed to write their own lesson plans according to their own needs.

Having an awareness of the knowledge and attitudes of EFL teachers toward lesson planning can have a vital role in the educational process. This awareness can lead the administrators and authorities to focus on this element and examine the type of teacher education offered to the teachers or pre-service teachers. For instance, in case of negative attitudes, the administrators and authorities can look for the reason and make new decisions to reexamine the content and how it is conveyed in teacher training. On the other hand, when there is a positive attitude toward LPs, administrators and authorities can support teachers to have better planning and, consequently, more effective lessons. In such an educational system, students benefit more because they are

trained in a purposeful system that all stages of the teaching process are planned by teachers who are controlled and supported by administrators and authorities to achieve the fruitful result that is students' achievement.

Whereas the present study results might have shed some light on the perception of the Iranian EFL teachers regarding LPs and their development, further research on this topic, including a larger population and comparing EFL teachers and teachers in other fields, seems to disclose more information on the subject.

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Appendix**Table 1**
Descriptive Statistics for the Items of Questionnaire

	N	Minim Maxim			Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis				
		Range	Minimum	Maximum									
q1	120	3.00	2.00	5.00	520.00	4.3333	.06625	.72568	.527	-1.143	.221	1.668	.438
q2	117	4.00	1.00	5.00	442.00	3.7778	.09795	1.05953	1.123	-.914	.224	.198	.444
q3	117	4.00	1.00	5.00	434.00	3.7094	.09008	.97432	.949	-1.092	.224	1.047	.444
q4	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	361.00	3.0593	.08620	.93637	.877	-.183	.223	-.867	.442
q5	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	423.00	3.5546	.10035	1.09465	1.198	-.733	.222	-.263	.440
q6	117	4.00	1.00	5.00	388.00	3.3162	.08202	.88716	.787	-.218	.224	-.662	.444
q7	107	4.00	1.00	5.00	332.00	3.1028	.09289	.96088	.923	-.144	.234	-.671	.463
q8	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	470.00	3.9496	.08341	.90991	.828	-1.204	.222	1.804	.440
q9	117	4.00	1.00	5.00	500.00	4.2735	.07245	.78371	.614	-1.291	.224	2.525	.444
q10	117	4.00	1.00	5.00	400.00	3.4188	.09184	.99342	.987	-.335	.224	-.715	.444
q11	117	3.00	2.00	5.00	476.00	4.0684	.06276	.67882	.461	-.925	.224	2.116	.444
q12	120	4.00	1.00	5.00	471.00	3.9250	.09026	.98870	.978	-1.015	.221	.758	.438
q13	111	4.00	1.00	5.00	241.00	2.1712	.11366	1.19753	1.434	1.183	.229	.702	.455
q14	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	462.00	3.8824	.08454	.92220	.850	-1.081	.222	1.352	.440
q15	106	4.00	1.00	5.00	381.00	3.5943	.09266	.95397	.910	-.376	.235	-.200	.465
q16	113	4.00	1.00	5.00	424.00	3.7522	.10098	1.07347	1.152	-.811	.227	.172	.451

q1 7	118	4.00	1.00	5.00	423.0 0	3.5847	.1044 6	1.1347 4	1.288	-.588	.223	-.325	.442
q1 8	115	4.00	1.00	5.00	385.0 0	3.3478	.1018 8	1.0925 9	1.194	-.444	.226	-.383	.447
q1 9	112	4.00	1.00	5.00	305.0 0	2.7232	.1143 0	1.2096 4	1.463	.084	.228	1.032	.453
q2 0	114	4.00	1.00	5.00	353.0 0	3.0965	.1093 2	1.1671 7	1.362	-.157	.226	-.783	.449
q2 1	115	4.00	1.00	5.00	426.0 0	3.7043	.0956 5	1.0257 6	1.052	-.568	.226	.002	.447
q2 2	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	503.0 0	4.2269	.0830 6	.90607	.821	-1.093	.222	.764	.440
q2 3	117	4.00	1.00	5.00	452.0 0	3.8632	.0978 0	1.0578 6	1.119	-.744	.224	.070	.444
q2 4	116	4.00	1.00	5.00	380.0 0	3.2759	.1043 2	1.1235 5	1.262	-.191	.225	-.868	.446
q2 5	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	350.0 0	2.9412	.1062 7	1.1593 0	1.344	-.116	.222	-.853	.440
q2 6	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	439.0 0	3.6891	.1017 9	1.1104 1	1.233	-.640	.222	-.163	.440
q2 7	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	435.0 0	3.6555	.0958 0	1.0450 6	1.092	-.490	.222	-.237	.440
q2 8	119	4.00	1.00	5.00	410.0 0	3.4454	.0890 7	.97161	.944	-.492	.222	.114	.440
V ali d	73												

Table 2

T-test Results for Difference Between Teachers' Males' and Females' Perceptions of Lesson Planning

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
Lesson planning	Equal variances assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
	Equal variances assumed	.074	.786	.618	118	.538	.04512	.07301	-.09946	.18971
	Equal variances not assumed			.631	92.262	.530	.04512	.07157	-.09701	.18725

Table 3

ANOVA Results for Difference of EFL Teachers' Perceptions of LPs in Terms of Their Experience

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.159	1	.159	1.091	.298
Within Groups	17.253	118	.146		
Total	17.412	119			

Table 4

ANOVA Results for the Difference in EFL Teachers' Perceptions of LPs in Terms of Their Experience

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.894	3	.298	2.092	.105
Within Groups	16.518	116	.142		
Total	17.412	119			

