

## The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Gender and their Pedagogical Success as Evaluated by Learners

Saeed Ghorbani<sup>1\*</sup>, Omid Akbari<sup>1</sup>, Behzad Ghonsooly<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Dept. of English Language, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran.

2. Dept. of English Language and Literature, Ferdowsi University, Mashhad, Iran.

\* Corresponding Author's Email: Saeed.Ghorbani90@gmail.com

---

**Abstract** – The current research study investigated the relation between gender and pedagogical success of EFL teachers in Iran. The participants of the study included 79 English language teachers and 602 learners who were all the students of the aforementioned teachers. All the participants of the study were teaching and learning English language at intermediate and upper intermediate levels. To obtain EFL teachers' success, Characteristics of Successful English Language Teachers Questionnaire was used. Independent samples t-Test revealed that there is no significant difference among female and male Iranian EFL teachers regarding their pedagogical success as perceived by their learners.

**Keywords:** gender, success, EFL teacher, Iran, English

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

Sanders and Rivers (1996, as cited in Ghaemi & Taherian, 2011) believed that the only important factor affecting learners' achievement is teachers. Maybe it was because of this reason and other similar findings that teachers and their related issues have been researched for a long time. Among all the factors and issues related to teachers, the issue of success and successful teacher has drawn the attention of many researchers. Some scholars (Brookfield, 1995; Ur, 1996; Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2003) have tried to define this concept and some other researchers (Tamblyn, 2000; Haskvitz, 2007; Walker, 2008) have provided the body of knowledge with a list of characteristics of such a teacher. So, success in teaching is a concept investigated by many scholars in various ways.

Brown and Marks (1994), stressed that pedagogically successful teachers have a constant research on their own teaching and also the teaching of others and therefore become more informed about the strengths and weaknesses of their own teaching process (as cited in Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011). Brookfeild (1995) introduced a successful teacher as a person who gets right down to business, uses various instructional strategies, teaches at an appropriate fast pace but has regular stoppages to check students' understanding and engagement, this kind of teacher concentrates on the topics and their instructional objectives, and takes the advantage of humor in keeping with their individual styles. Lowman (1996) stressed that "exemplary teachers are those who are likely to promote high levels of learning in their students while also creating the positive memories of learning" (as cited in Ghanizadeh and Moafian, 2011, p. 254). Tamblyn (2000, as cited in Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2010) has identified seven qualities for successful teachers, most of these

characteristics focus on teachers' personality traits and attitudes. These seven characteristics include: Subject competence; having ability in motivating learners through positive reinforcement; being flexible and having expertise in adapting the materials to the students' needs; willingness to take risks and make mistakes; respect for all learners; having warmth, possessing a caring attitude and a sense of humor; and finally, self-esteem, satisfaction with the profession, and a willingness to go the extra mile. In an interesting study to obtain the characteristics of effective teachers, Walker (2008), a professor of Alabama state university, wanted his participants to write a composition on the question of "What were the qualities of the most memorable teacher who encouraged you to teach?". After analyzing the compositions of all these participants who were in service and pre service teachers, twelve personality characteristics were obtained which are as follows: Preparedness, maintaining positive attitude, holding high expectations, showing creativity, fairness, displaying personal touch, having a sense of belonging, being compassionate, having a sense of humor, respecting students, being forgiving, admitting mistakes. Walker has worked on this topic for about 15 years and the abovementioned characteristics is in fact the result of his efforts during all these years. In Walker's opinion, personal characteristics of teachers are more important than their academic qualifications for in service and pre service teachers.

The issue of teachers' success has also been paid attention to in the area of second or foreign language teaching by many Iranian and non-Iranian researchers such as Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) and Huang (2010). That's why various characteristics have ever been proposed for a successful and effective language teacher. Features of successful teachers have always been discussed in the foreign language education since the goal of teacher education is to produce quality teachers (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, as cited in Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). Taking the related research findings into account makes it clear that having pedagogical and subject matter knowledge does not suffice to recognize someone as an effective or successful teacher. In other words, a pedagogically successful teaching depends on the teacher's attitudes, emotions, motivation, critical thinking, self-efficacy, etc. as discovered by Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010), Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2011) etc. The interpretations for a successful teacher have also been widespread and different. Behaviorists, for example, took a product-oriented point of view and proposed a list of behaviors based on which the success of a teacher was examined. Cognitivism, on the other hand, had a process-oriented point of view and evaluated a teacher's effectiveness based on learning and teaching processes. According to Monshi Toussi, Boori, and Ghanizadeh (2011), these different and widespread movements and developments led to the incorporation of various effective, cognitive, and social characteristics to the definition of effective teaching (as cited in Dordinejad & Porghoveh, 2014).

Discovering salient features of the effective and successful language teachers was the main focus for some of the researchers concerned with the discipline. Among the existing literature in ELT context one can mention Brosh (1996) who believed having knowledge of the target language, having the ability to organize and explain and also clarify the points, motivating students, being fair, and being available are all an effective language teacher's characteristics (as cited in Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009). Based on what was found by Vadillo (1999), effective language teachers have not only profound competence in the target language

but also possess a set of personal traits such as warmth, tolerance, and sensitivity. According to Harmer (2008) providing a definition for a successful teacher is difficult because different teachers are often successful in various ways. "Good teachers are able to absorb the unexpected and to use it to their and the students' advantage" (Harmer, 2008, p. 25).

The issue of language teachers' success has also been taken into consideration in Iran's EFL context. Pishghadam and Moafian (2008), for example, carried out a research study in which the main objective was to investigate the role of Iranian EFL teachers' multiple intelligences in their success in language teaching at private language institutes. In the second place, this study was trying to investigate the role of gender and the most effective intelligences of teachers in their teaching success. Employing Pearson Product moment correlation, it was revealed that there is a significant correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' success and their musical, kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences but there are no significant correlations between teachers' success and their other intelligences. In other words, successful EFL teachers are those in whom kinesthetic, musical, and interpersonal intelligences are more active than other types of intelligences. Furthermore, no significant differences were found between multiple intelligences and gender with respect to teaching success. Justifying that emotional intelligence has not much been dealt with in the areas related to teachers, Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2009) tried to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and professional and pedagogical success of EFL teachers in Iran. Analyzed data revealed that there is a significant correlation between EFL teachers' success and their emotional quotient (EQ). Finally Ghanizadeh and Moafian concluded that "there was a significant positive relationship between EI and teachers' success. The size of this correlation indicates that the higher the teachers' EQ, the more likely they are to be successful in their profession" (p. 429). In another study conducted by Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010), the kind of relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking ability and their professional success was explored. The result section of this study revealed that these two variables are significantly positively correlated. The size of this correlation showed that high levels of critical thinking are related to high levels of teacher success as evaluated by EFL learners. Finally, Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010) concluded that "the better critical thinkers turned out to be better EFL teachers" (p. 141). Among the other recent researches in which teachers' success was a main variable, one can refer to the study conducted by Ghaemi and Taherian in 2011. Ghaemi and Taherian (2011) tried to discover the possible correlation between critical thinking and EFL teachers' success. The researchers found that the more critical thinker the EFL teacher is, the more successful he or she is in his or her teaching career. In fact, the findings of Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010) were confirmed one year later by Ghaemi and Taherian (2011). Another more recent research is that of Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2011). In this research study, it became clear that there is a significant correlation between EFL teachers' self-efficacy scores and their success. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between teachers' success and three subparts of self-efficacy, student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management (Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011). Dordinejad and Porghoveh (2014) investigated the relationship between Iranian English teachers' gender and their success based on which no

significant difference was found among female and male English teachers regarding their success.

### **A. Purpose and Significance of the Study**

As it was seen above, English language teachers' success was investigated alongside with different variables. In fact, each researcher, based on his interests and guesses, has tried to explore an influential factor on English teachers' pedagogical success. In line with these studies, the current study, also, tried to explore a variable alongside with pedagogical success of Iranian EFL teachers. The researchers believed that some factors such as teacher's gender may be effective on or in relationship with performance of the teacher, so the main purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' pedagogical success and their gender.

Except for the study carried out by Dordinejad and Porghoveh (2014), few studies, to the researchers' best knowledge, have specifically focused on Iranian EFL teachers' gender and their success as perceived by EFL learners. The current research study, therefore, tried to fill this gap and it aimed at investigating whether EFL teachers' success can be considered as a gender based factor and whether there is any significant relationship between EFL teachers' gender and their success as perceived by their learners. In this perspective, therefore, the present study gained significance as its results can shed more lights on the relationship between pedagogical success and gender of all EFL teachers in general and Iranian English teachers in particular which may be useful for other researchers or practitioners in the field. This study is also significant as its focus is on English language teachers only and it ignores teachers of other disciplines

### **B. Research Question.**

Considering the above purpose, this study sought answer to the following question: *Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' pedagogical success and their gender?*

## **II. METODOLOGY**

### **A. Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of two groups. The first group included 79 EFL teachers teaching in 24 foreign language institutes in Mashhad, a city in Iran's northeast. This first group of participants provided the researchers with some time to distribute their questionnaire at the English classes. These English teachers (38 female and 41 male) were selected based on the stratified random sampling, were teaching at intermediate and upper intermediate levels, and their age varied from 22 to 43 (Mean: 27.24). Most of these teachers were majoring or majored in four fields of English teaching, English translation, English literature, and Linguistics and only 10 of them had a major not related to English. This first group of participants were holders of BA (N: 56) and MA (N: 23). The second group of

participants consisted of 602 EFL learners who were all students of the aforementioned teachers. These learners (298 female and 304 male) formed the second group of participants and their age ranged from 13 to 52 (Mean: 20.56). This group of participants were majoring or majored in different fields of study and their degrees varied from pre-university, diploma, above diploma, BA, MA, to doctorate and PhD. It should be noted that both groups of participants were different in terms of social, economic, and educational backgrounds.

## **B. Instrument**

"Characteristics of Successful English Language Teachers' Questionnaire" was the only instrument used in this research study. This instrument which was employed to measure EFL teachers' success contained 47 items and it had been designed and developed by Pishghadam and Moafian (2008). This questionnaire was shaped based on the opinions and comments of university professors, EFL teachers, and EFL learners and also existing teacher success questionnaires such as that of Suwantee (1995). This questionnaire consisted of two parts: The first part asked some information about learners' gender, degree, age, teacher's name, and proficiency level and the second part included 47 statements about learner's English teacher which took about twenty minutes to be filled. Pishghadam and Moafian's principle axis factoring of the items produced 12 factors: Teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 which accounted for 48% of the variance. Also, the results of reliability analysis exhibited that the total reliability of the questionnaire is high (Cronbach's alpha= 0.94). It should be noted that Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010) also reported the same reliability in a study that investigated the relationship between critical thinking ability and professional success of Iranian EFL teachers. Items of this questionnaire developed specifically for an Iranian context were followed by a five point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

## **C. Procedure**

**Data Collection and Analysis.** The process of data collection started in July and ended in September 2014. This study was carried out at the intermediate and upper intermediate classes of 24 foreign language institutes in Mashhad. Characteristics of successful English language teachers' questionnaire, the research instrument, was distributed among learners of the EFL teachers. The learners of the 79 EFL teachers were asked to answer the questionnaire around the end of the semester in order to be able to comment on their teachers' qualities better as the items of the questionnaire required the learners to comment on different qualities of their teacher. Administration of the study's instrument was took place with the presence of one of the researchers and during the class hour by prior arrangement with the institutes' supervisors and instructors. The researcher was present to offer clarifications on the probable misunderstandings on the part of learners. Researcher's availability was necessary because his presence and explanations solved problems and

misunderstandings with which some of the EFL learners had encountered. To attain a reliable evaluation, the purpose and the confidentiality of the study were also explained to all the respondents. Moreover, the researcher tried to make a connection with the developers of the questionnaires in order to get their viewpoints on the right way of data collection. The obtained data was then fed into SPSS 18 and a t-Test was run to investigate the relationship between EFL teachers' gender and their pedagogical success as evaluated by their learners.

### III. RESULTS

T-Test analysis between pedagogical success of female and male English teachers' can be found below.

Table 1  
*Independent Samples t-Test*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	d.f	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Success	Equal Variances Assumed	1.147	.288	.037	77	.971	.00244	.06617	-.12933	.13421
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			.037	74.269	.971	.00244	.06647	-.12999	.13487

The researchers tried to discover whether EFL teachers' success can be considered as a gender-based factor and whether gender can affect pedagogical success of Iranian English teachers or not. For this purpose the obtained data was entered into SPSS and it was analyzed as mentioned above. Independent samples t-Test results indicated that there is a *trivial* difference among female and male EFL teachers regarding their pedagogical success as perceived by their learners. This difference was less than 0.01, so it could not be referred to as a significant one. In fact no significant correlation was found between pedagogical success and gender of Iranian EFL teacher. The details of the t-Test results between pedagogical success of female and male teachers are found in the above table.

Using Levene's Test, the assumption for variance equality was first examined and it was revealed that the significance level of equal variances was 0.288 which was higher than 0.05. It was concluded that variances are equal, therefore.

According to the above table, the mean scores for the female's and male's pedagogical success are 4.20 and 4.19 respectively and the significance level of the test equals to 0.971 which is higher than 0.05 ( $\text{Sig} = 0.971 > 0.05$ ). It, thus, revealed that there is no significant difference between female and male EFL teachers regarding their success as perceived by

their learners. It also became clear that gender cannot be considered as a determinant factor for pedagogical success of EFL teachers teaching in Mashhad's foreign language institutes. In fact an EFL teacher's pedagogical success cannot be described a gender-based quality. According to female and male mean scores, however, it can generally be claimed that females are a bit more successful than male teachers. The bar chart of pedagogical success for each sex can be seen below.

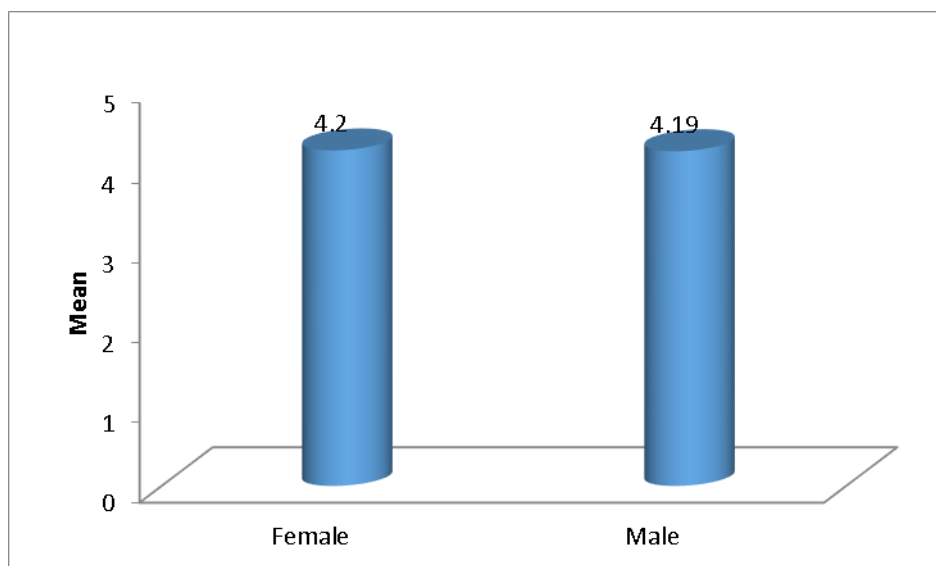


Figure 1. Mean score of pedagogical success for each gender type

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicated no significant difference between female and male English teachers regarding their pedagogical success though there was a trivial difference between female and male mean scores. It can therefore be concluded that factors other than teacher's gender are considered important by the EFL learners when they are making judgment on their English teacher's performance.

It can be said that shaping positive mentality toward the language teacher, foreign language, classroom atmosphere, and the learning materials will make the learners more successful and this success will lead them to view their language teachers as more successful ones. This idea has partial contrast with behaviorism's product oriented view of teacher success which was presented in the introduction section. Therefore, as it was mentioned by Dordinejad and Porghoveh (2014), incorporation of social and cognitive characteristics forms the definition of a successful or effective teaching. In other words, when one intends to discover the reasons for a teacher's pedagogical success, he had better to concentrate on things and factors such as teacher's interactions, motivations, attitudes, etc. rather than teacher's gender. In fact, the findings of this research study endorsed what had been discovered by Dordinejad and Porghoveh (2014) as they also found no significance difference between Iranian English teachers' success and their gender.

## V. CONCLUSION

As it was revealed above, there is no significant difference between female and male English teachers regarding their success. However, female teachers may be claimed to be a little more successful as their mean score was obtained to be a little higher than male ones. In fact, it can be claimed that an EFL teacher's gender cannot determine his pedagogical success as evaluated by his learners. There are some factors which seem to be more effective on teachers' success than their gender. Many of these factors have been discovered by many Iranian and non-Iranian researchers. Among many of which Pishghadam and Moafian (2008) proposed 12 factors which include: Teaching accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism. Including these and other factors discovered by other researchers in teacher training courses will help the educational system to have more effective and successful language teachers. It can also be concluded that English teachers' success depends upon lots of factors rather than the single factor of gender.

Although the role of several individual variables has been investigated in relation to Iranian EFL teachers' success, the role of gender seems to be less touched in some aspects. The results of the present study can guide educators and researchers to continue exploring the way gender can affect the performance of EFL teachers in a classroom.

The findings of the present study are of value to all those involved in foreign language teaching, research, and education. The findings have numerous implications for research and practice in teacher education and would be useful for institutes' supervisors, administrators, and teacher evaluators. Being aware about the success of English teachers will also be useful for material developers, teachers, and supervisors. The findings of the study would be of great value for EFL teachers themselves as the evaluation has been done by their learners.

The same research can be done with more participants in the same city and also other Iranian cities in order to make a wider generalization of the results. The same research can also be done among English teachers teaching at Iranian public schools as the present research study investigated the situation only in private foreign language institutes. Replication of this study in public schools seems to be important, since there are some differences between teachers of private language institutes and those of the public schools in Iran. To the researchers' best knowledge, a few researches of this kind have been conducted in Iran's context, so before generalizing the inferences obtained from this study, further investigations need to be conducted.

## REFERENCE

- Birjandi, P., & Bagherkazemi, M. (2010). The relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' critical thinking ability and their professional success. *English Language Teaching*, 3(2), 135-145.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Effective teaching*. Sanfrancisco: Jossy-Bass.



- Brosh, H. (1996). Perceived characteristics of an effective language teacher. *Foreign Language Annals*, 29, 25-38.
- Brown, T., & Marks, J. (1994). *Inside teaching*. New York: Macmillan.
- Cruikshank, D. R., Jenkins, D. B., & Metcalf, K. K. (2003). *The act of teaching*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Dordinejad, F. G., & Porghoveh, T. (2014). The relationship between EFL teachers' gender and their success as perceived by learners. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 599-603.
- Freeman, D., & Johnson, K. E. (1998). Reconceptualizing the knowledge-base of language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(3), 397-417.
- Ghaemi, H., & Taherian, R. (2011). The role of critical thinking in EFL teachers' teaching success. *Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 8-29.
- Ghanizadeh, A., & Moafian, F. (2009). The role of EFL teachers' emotional intelligence in their success. *ELT Journal*, 64(4), 424- 435.
- Ghanizadeh, A., & Moafian, F. (2011). The Relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' sense of self-Efficacy and their pedagogical success in language institutes. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 13(2), 249-272.
- Ghasemi, B., & Hashemi, M. (2011). The study of the characteristics of successful English language teachers from the view point of the English language students of Islamic Azad University, Hamedan branch. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 28, 411 – 415.
- Harmer, J. (2008). *How to teach English*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Haskvitz, A. (2007). *Eleven traits of a good teacher*. Retrieved March 2, 2014, from <http://carfamily.wordpress.com/2007/02/18/11-traits-of-a-good-teacher/>
- Huang, Z. (2010). What makes a successful EFL teacher in China? A case study of an English language teacher at Nanjing university of Chinese medicine. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 3(2), 20-28.
- Lowman, J. (1996). Characteristics of exemplary teachers. *New Direction for Teaching and Learning*, 65, 33-40.
- Monshi Toussi, M. T., Boori, A., & Ghanizadeh, A. (2011). The role of EFL teachers' self-regulation in effective teaching. *World Journal of Education*, 1(2), 39-48.
- Pishghadam, R., & Moafian, F. (2008). The relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' multiple intelligences and their successful teaching in language institutes. *Quarterly Journal of Humanities Alzahra University*, 18(72), 102-121.
- Pishghadam, R., & Moafian, F. (2009). Construct validation of a questionnaire on characteristics of successful EFL teachers. *Quarterly Pazhuhesh-e Zabanha- ye Khareji*, 54, 127-142.
- Sanders, W., & Rivers, j. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement*. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from [http://mdk12.org/practices/ensure/tva/tva\\_2.html](http://mdk12.org/practices/ensure/tva/tva_2.html)

- Shishavan, H., & Sadeghi, K. (2009). Characteristics of an effective English language teacher as perceived by Iranian teachers and learners of English. *English Language Teaching*, 2(4), 130-143.
- Suwandee, A. (1995). Students' perceptions of university instructors' effective teaching characteristics. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching Journal*, 5, 6-22.
- Tamblyn, P. (2000). Qualities of success: Lessons from a teacher career. *Education Canada*, 40, 16–19.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walker, R. J. (2008). Twelve characteristics of an effective teacher. *Educational Horizons*, 87, 61- 68.
- Vadillo, R. S. M. (1999). Research on the good language teacher. *EPOS*, 15, 347-361.