

Accounting for the Discrepancies in the New Iranian EFL National Curriculum from the Professional and Practical Standpoints

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Abstract

Purpose: The present investigation is an endeavor to scrutinize the Iranian EFL professors' and teachers' viewpoints towards the status quo as well as the constituents of the current Iranian EFL national curriculum. Two questionnaires based on teachers and experts' focus groups and study's objectives were designed. **Methodology:** The participants of the study included 306 Iranian EFL teachers and 13 Iranian EFL professors. The teachers' questionnaire was analyzed through SPSS version 21 and the professors' questionnaire was analyzed through coding. **Findings:** The findings revealed that both teachers and professors do not have positive attitudes towards the new curriculum. In spite of the educational reform in Iran and writing the new curriculum and the new textbooks, time allotment, load of skills in each English book, and untrained teachers hinder the new curriculum to reach its target, i.e. communication with the world. **Discussion:** Therefore, to fulfill the objectives of the new curriculum, Educational Department of Iran should remove the difficulties.

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1. Introduction

Curriculum specialists, theoreticians, and practitioners proposed several definitions of the term “curriculum.” Yet, there is no agreed-upon definition of the term. Marsh and Willis (1995) define curriculum as “an interrelated set of plans and experiences that a student undertakes under the guidance of the school” (p. 15). On the other hand, scholars like Nation and Macalister (2010) avoided a direct definition of curriculum, worked on curriculum design and defined it, instead. They introduced a model, including evaluation, principles, needs, environment, content and sequence, format and presentation, monitoring and assessment, and goals as the heart of it. Accordingly, the obvious point is that the curriculum is more than a simple instruction and it considers the whole-part of the educational system in itself, which can be divided into different sectors. Each of them works on one particular field of study or subject of education at schools, for instance English curriculum or mathematic curriculum. Thus, each curriculum has a specific framework as “a group of related subjects or themes, which fit together according to a predetermined set of criteria to appropriately cover an area of study” (Marsh, 2004, p.19). Each framework contains specific subsequent sections, which should be followed at schools and implemented by teachers and students. Therefore, developing a new and innovative curriculum is not a convenient task. In fact, curriculum development is an integral part of the educational system and it can be explained as a “value-laden process of determining what ‘should’ be taught within the institutions of schools, given the social, cultural, political, and environmental influences upon this curriculum development process” (Lauridsen, 2003, p. 1). In Richards’ (2001) words, curriculum development pertains to determining the type of knowledge that students learn at schools, the type of experience that brings about learning, and the way teaching and learning can be planned and measured.

2. literature Review

A curriculum can be developed by policy makers, schools’ administrators or teachers. Each country has its own policy in the process of curriculum development and most of the curricula are designed by the governors and educational policy makers. However, even in the governor-made curricula, teachers’ central role cannot be ignored and teachers would be instructed through some guidelines and workshops. In other words, in implementing a new curriculum, teachers’ understanding of the principles of new curriculum is crucial. “At the management level of the curriculum innovation, a modification of the teachers’ teaching behavior accompanied by a fundamental change in their beliefs is needed. Teachers, therefore, need to be supported to help them adapt and accommodate new ideas into their instructional practices” (Kirkgoz, 2008, p. 1860). Consequently, teachers “play a key role as facilitators of learning processes and experiences, and that their tasks have become more complex” (Amadio, Opertti, & Tedesco, 2014, pp.3-4). However, Leithwood (as cited in Marsh, 2004) maintain that teachers are only the ones who are involved in dealing with the gaps, and constantly mediating between the curriculum and its instigated conditions within the class. “Although teachers are the main agents of implementation of these legislative mandates, they remain absent in this debate and their voices continue to be relegated to a lesser rank in the design and implementation of educational reforms” (Adomou, 2011, p.1). Popa and Bucur (2015) stress that teachers “need to be given enough time (almost an entire educational stage) to be able to internalize change and thus to really help their students achieve the objectives of the formal curriculum” (p. 102).

To fill the gap of teachers’ voice in new curriculum in different countries, Altaieb (2013), as a Libyan researcher, centered his study in this field. “In the case of Libya, however, little research has been conducted on teachers’ perceptions of the new English language curriculum in Libyan high schools. Thus, teachers’ voices have not been examined or heard regarding this issue in the TEFL field” (p.4). Romanian curricular reform was the other example of curriculum, which contained “lack of coordination between teacher

training for managing curricular change and the other aspects of curricular reform” (Popa and Bucur, 2015, p. 96). Bonner (2001) believed that “three constructs are believed to be influential in curriculum implementation: educational beliefs, pedagogical knowledge and perception of the curriculum” (p. 3). In Tanrtverdi and Apak’s idea (2014), teachers’ perception in curriculum referred to their philosophy and understanding of curriculum, and their mutual understanding of students. “The teacher’s role is to plan the curriculum in a sequential and orderly manner by specifying a list of sequential objectives with tests that demonstrate the students’ mastery of each objective” (p. 843). To consider problems, which a new curriculum confronts, Tilfarlioglu and Öztürk (2007) searched for teachers’ perceptions in this regard. Remarkable numbers of teachers were not pleased with teaching English in elementary schools therefore great percentage of them find themselves unsuccessful. Lack of enough in-service training and book-based teaching were the main reason of unsuccessful teaching in Turkey. Finally, besides teachers’ idea in curriculum analysis, experts’ viewpoints were the center of study in a search by Bird, Mortel, Holt, and Walo (2015). “Conventional curriculum design and review processes may not suffice in meeting” curriculum’s challenges. They state that “in other disciplines and subject areas, innovative models of continuous and collaborative curriculum design processes are responding to these challenges” (p. 18).

Iran is one of the countries whose policy makers developed a curriculum and held workshops and training courses for teachers. In spite of the importance of changing the new curriculum and the teachers’ presence in such a change, in Iran, it seems that teachers are not a crucial part of the curriculum development process. They just stress their difficulties with the new books based on the new curriculum after it was announced, and after the respective books were published and used at schools. In this sense, they can be considered as passive in the process of curriculum development. Besides, the Iranian experts who have worked on different curricula, analyzed them, and published many articles in this field, were ignored. Alavimoghaddam and Kheirabadi (2012), to defend the new Iranian curriculum, declared that the new curriculum contains some advantages such as changing books and importance of four skills. Changing language curriculum, then adopting English textbooks based on new designed curriculum leading a reform in English language teaching in Iranian national curriculum, it is time to consider teachers’ and experts’ standpoints in new National English Curriculum. However, there is not any study in teachers and experts’ role in curriculum developing and implementing in Iran. To fill the gap, i.e. ignoring teachers and experts’ perceptions in curriculum development, the present study searched to find out the teachers’ and experts’ overviews of the new implemented curriculum in Iran. In other words, the present study is an attempt to analyze the Iranian EFL experts’ and teachers’ perceptions on the EFL national curriculum. In particular, the following research questions were attempted to be answered.

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of the planned curriculum?
2. What are experts’ perceptions of the planned curriculum?

3. Methodology

The study benefited two groups of participants: teachers and experts. Both teachers and experts were divided into two groups of primary and intended participants. The primary group of participants took part in focus groups in order to make questionnaires. Initial teachers group was made of five English language teachers who have been working more than 15 years as an English language teacher. Moreover, primary group of experts was made of two scholars to organize experts’ questionnaire. Much variation was taken into account to include a large number of teachers in the study. The criteria for such variation consisted of being in-service (male and female), level of education, experience, and workplace (rural, urban). The primary group of teachers, as focused group, included four females and one male with the teaching experience of more than fifteen years. According to research objectives and focus-group interviews, which were performed for two sessions each lasted more than an hour, the teachers’ questionnaire was developed

and distributed among 92 teachers to pilot it. Then, some revisions were made and the final questionnaire was distributed to 450 English language teachers in terms of cluster sampling. As 144 teachers failed to complete it or did not send it back, so that the remnant 306 filled questionnaires were collected. A large number of teachers were female (254 teachers) and 52 teachers were male. The participants also included some experts or professors who instruct TEFL at the universities of Ahwaz, Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran, and Kerman. They teach some courses such as teaching methodology, curriculum analysis, language testing, research methodology, and second language learning.

To benefit a qualified questionnaire, professors' focus-group interview was conducted in one session about an hour with a focus on the new curriculum. The developed open-ended questionnaire was about new textbooks and new methodology behind them, goals of the new curriculum, and the remains pointed to the governmental documents. Then, it was handed to 14 professors from different universities of Ahwaz (Chamran State University, Islamic Azad University, and Payamnoor University), and was emailed to 16 professors in the other cities mentioned. Among the 30 professors, 13 returned the questionnaires. It is worth mentioning that the questionnaires were validated through factor analysis, and their reliability was checked through Cronbach's Alpha, yielding indices of .86 and .83, respectively. Teachers' questionnaires were quantitatively analyzed based on the descriptive data, i.e. frequency distributions, percentages, means and standard deviations, through SPSS version 21. Moreover, the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions in the experts' questionnaires were analyzed through grounded theory starting with the tabulation of sensitizing concepts and in vivo codes (Ary, et al., 2010). Open coding was the next step of data analysis applied to develop core concepts, categories, and properties. After the open coding, axial coding was employed to develop core categories by connecting sub-categories, and also to specify the range of their properties and dimensions. The next phase was selective coding which was applied to provide a general explanation of the processes or schemes apparent in relation to particular conceptual relationships. Selective coding was considered as a mechanism of integrating and presenting grounded theory or the proposed model in this study.

4. Findings

In response to the first research question, the findings revealed that receiving support from colleagues and administrators was the most frequent response mentioned several times by the teachers, emphasizing the need for working in a cooperative environment. In other words, %99 of the teachers shared their ideas in this regard and %63.7 of them (195 teachers) agreed that their colleagues and administrators should support them in accomplishing their duties. Moreover, most teachers in small towns mentioned that the schools lack facilities, such as language labs, computers, internet, and technology equipment, to teach the listening and speaking skills, so that they do not tend to teach the listening and speaking sections of the books. All the participants answered the respective item, i.e. 171 teachers, illuminating the cruciality of the issue and the fact that the schools do not provide them with appropriate and sufficient facilities. Furthermore, 129 teachers believed that the EFL curriculum benefits different kinds of appropriate instructional methods such as hands-on activities, and %36.3 of teachers agree with the new curriculum as a well-organized package. However, the findings were also indicative of teachers' standpoints stating that there are some problems with the new curriculum, and the fact that ignoring well-defined educational need is one of the issues of paramount importance. The findings revealed that 108 teachers disagreed if curriculum meets a well-defined educational need. Teachers approved that there were few opportunities for in-service training. According to the obtained results, %50 of the teachers approved that they need more in-service training and workshops to be more beneficial to their students. Additionally, multimedia today is one of the main instruments in teaching and it becomes an inseparable part of educational system in most parts of the world. As the Iranian curriculum was changed, it was important to know if it was based on new changes in the world or not. The findings showed

that 114 teachers pointed that multimedia learning was ignored in the new curriculum. The importance of multimedia learning was supported in different researches (Ayvaci & Deveciolu, 2010; Donmus, 2010; Peterson, 2010; Jacob, 2009; Collier & Scott, 2009).

Also, preference for process learning instead of prescribed learning was an issue which was mentioned in the teachers' interviews several times. To do so, teachers found several festivals for their students to use their learned language. To know if it was true for other teachers, it was included in the questionnaire and the results illuminated that %40 of teachers disagreed with prescribe teaching. Therefore, it was proved that there is a shift from prescribed learning to process learning in the new curriculum. Another crucial issue is that to have an appropriate and precise teaching, teachers should have comprehensive understanding of the curriculum. To find out how well they comprehend it, the teachers were asked in this regard, and it was witnessed that 126 agreed that the new curriculum benefits clear objectives and philosophy. In other words, they claimed that they understand it clearly and try to follow it. Making students autonomous is another subject that teachers in focus-group interviews believed in. They stated that the new curriculum help students in this regard. In other words, 108 teachers agreed that according to the new curriculum students could become autonomous. Moreover, if good teaching was rewarded, teachers had positive viewpoints toward teaching and worked more eagerly. Therefore, it was stated in the questionnaire, and the responses demonstrated that 31.4 percent of teachers were in agreement with the statement, which considered teachers' rewarding based on the new curriculum. Furthermore, another important issue is that language cannot be taken away from culture. Consequently, it should be raised in the new curriculum as well. As teachers stated in the focus group, cultural awareness was not dealt with in the new curriculum. To have an effective communication and clear presentation, cultural knowledge is necessary (Genc & Bada, 2005; Lantolf, 2000; Kramsch, 1991). "Second language learning involves the process of transferring cultural patterns of the source language to the target language. Learning a new language required an understanding of the cultural setting of the language" (Trivedi, 1978, p.92). However, the findings demonstrated that 147 teachers believed that the new curriculum ignored the English culture.

One of the main changes that teachers agreed on was students' active presence in classrooms. To know if students are active, the questionnaire asked this issue and %50 of the teachers responded that the new curriculum encourages students to be more active and to negotiate meaning. Besides, teachers maintained that students should discover knowledge to improve their learning and analyze data more effectively. In this respect, 177 (%57.8) teachers approved that the new curriculum allows students to discover knowledge themselves. Previously, teachers admitted that the new curriculum change students to be active. The next question in this regard was that if they were allowed to contribute to knowledge as well. The findings revealed that %52 of teachers agreed that the new curriculum allowed students to contribute to knowledge. In addition, little time for teaching was the most and critical problem that almost all teachers in focused group admitted. Actually, 174 teachers (%56.9) declared that they have little time to cover materials in classrooms. Also, logical flow of materials helps teachers to teach effectively and helps student to learn better. As the new curriculum was changed, textbooks changed, too. The teachers' ideas were asked in this regard and the results indicated that %47 of the teachers disagreed with it. In other words, the teachers did not find any logical flow among lessons.

Besides, 129 teachers agreed that the content is technically sound in the textbooks. Also, the results revealed that 195 teachers considered teacher's role as central and as knowledge transmitter based on the textbooks' guidelines. In fact, teacher-centered vs. student-centered class was the aim of this item to know to what extend teachers' centrality at the classrooms has been changed. Rote memorization of conversations and expressions was under question and teachers stated their ideas under it. In fact, the results indicated that guidelines of the new textbooks led teachers to ask students to repeat and memorize conversations. 117 teachers admitted that. Moreover, changes in the new curriculum caused publishing the new textbooks. Most of teachers were not familiar with the new methodology. Therefore, guidelines were published to help

teachers in this regard. The results showed that %33.3 of the teachers believed that the guidelines were not complete and were not easy to follow. Guidelines were published to help teachers. Effective teaching was the main aim of the guidelines. To know if it helped teachers in assessing students as well, teachers were asked in this regard and their viewpoints showed that teachers were against guidelines about their effectiveness in assessing students. Preparing students for academic study was another important aim mentioned in the new curriculum. The findings demonstrated that teachers did not have positive attitude in this regard. 123 participants rejected the effectiveness of textbooks in academic preparation. Furthermore, learning the language is not only grammar and vocabularies. Language is not separate from its culture. To see to what extent the new English textbooks follow this attitude, teachers were asked and the outcome was that %52 of the teachers had the same ideas about the fact that the new textbooks have ignored English culture. In other words, the new textbooks' language is based on the Persian culture in English vocabularies.

In line with the previous item, conversations' themes were under question. The results approved that 138 teachers agreed with the item. In other words, %45.1 of the teachers had the same ideas on the fact that instead of introducing English culture, conversations improve Iranian beliefs and customs. Additionally, the students who studied the new textbooks were 12 to 14 years old. Therefore, language of the new textbooks should be appropriate in their age. Teachers' idea about it were asked and the outcomes presented that %42.2 of the participants accepted the appropriateness of the language of textbooks for the intended audiences. As textbooks were published for teenage students, their content should be interesting to them. The outcomes of participants' overview showed that %50 of the teachers admitted that the new textbooks contain interesting and inspiring content. Finally, the result of learning a language is using it appropriately and successfully. To found out if the new textbooks are effective, the teachers were asked and their standpoints showed that the textbooks' contents are not helpful. In other words, %52.9 of the teachers disagreed that the textbooks help students to communicate successfully. Indeed, most of the respective researches are also in line with the present findings. For instance, in Razmjoo, Ranjbar, and Hoomanfar's (2013) viewpoint, the new curriculum has acted inefficiently in this regard. It was the language institutes that fulfilled the students' lack of knowledge and helped them to communicate effectively (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010).

To answer the second research question of the study, an open-ended questionnaire was designed based on the focused-group interviews and other experts' ideas towards the new curriculum. As the new curriculum was adapted, it contained new purposes. If the new purposes faced serious changes, the educational system can be faced with a revolution in education as well. They can be used as the start point in changing books and teaching methodology and as a result the whole educational system revolutionized. Most experts maintained that the main objective of the new curriculum is communication regardless of the learners' unequal levels of proficiency. "Communication" as it was mentioned in the new curriculum is that students be able to speak with other foreigners in English. In other words, they can make themselves comprehensive and understand whoever speak in English. There is "regardless" in the above statement, which reminds a problem with the aim of the new curriculum. It is the ignorance of the different levels of students in each classroom. As Iranians believe in the importance of English language in their life, most children even at the kindergarten age attend to English classes. Therefore, students at school have "unequal levels of proficiency." In this case "one size fits all" cannot be a successful strategy in teaching, and as the book should be taught in the classrooms based on the guidelines in a "limited time," (based on teachers' point of views) reaching to success is hard to get.

Moreover, some of the experts stated that the aim of the national curriculum is "Hayat e Tayebe". It means treat people who can live honestly and love God and obey Islamic rules. "Hayat e Tayebe" which was asserted by some of the scholars is the exact expression mentioned in the new curriculum. It means "treating" people according to Islamic rules which shows the religious attitude toward teaching students in Iran. Therefore, to fulfill the main goal students should learn at school in a way to "live honestly and love God".

Learning English should follow this expression as well. Furthermore, it was emphasized that the objective is that students learn English language to fulfill their personal needs and educational needs. The stated idea raised some other purposes; personal and educational needs. By personal needs, the experts meant students' needs which, as they emphasized, were not fulfilled according to the new curriculum. By educational needs, they meant "Hayat e Tayebe" and communication. The next point mentioned by the professors was that the time allocated for English in junior high school schedule is one 100 minutes session a week. It doesn't match to basics of CLT. In fact, "Time," which was mentioned several times, was regarded as a serious problem in teachers' and scholars' idea even when the question is not about it. Seven of the scholars agreed that CLT needs proper time to present materials in the classrooms while the allocated time was not suitable. The old curriculum allocated two sessions a week for English lesson while in the new curriculum, it was reduced to only one session and according to teachers, holding an extra session would be illegal even at private schools.

As a result, most of scholars rejected the usefulness of CLT in the Iranian schools because of lack of time and mentioned that "it does not match to basics of CLT." They stated that the teacher in CLT should be fluent enough in four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing to develop student's skills by communicating in the classroom and facilitate their learning and creating situation for communication. But in the new national curriculum nothing has been done for teacher development based on CLT. Teachers just pass a 3-day course in the traditional way of in-service courses. In other words, the teachers' knowledge toward CLT was under question. Teachers should be fluent in four skills and be able to present materials in the class according to CLT methodology and guidelines. The problem among Iranian English language teachers is their fluency in English. Because students attend language institutes and their knowledge is even more than some English teachers. On the other hand, few of them who are fluent in English are not familiar with CLT methodology, entirely. The other problem that scholars mentioned several times was the "load" of skills in the book. As in CLT the four skills are important, one skill should not be hindered till the other improves. The load of four skills is not balanced. CLT uses an integrated approach and develops the four skills. In some parts, they should teach grammar and the load of grammar is so heavy and the exercises are not based on CLT. In fact, the load of the four skills in a book should contain a balance among all the four skills while it is not observed in the new textbooks. Unequal presentation of the materials in the classroom means ignoring one skill in favor of the other, which is contradictory to CLT methodology. In line with this result of the study, Azizifar, Koosha, and Lotfi (2010) stated that the textbooks lack the basic features, which are necessary for the Iranian educational system.

Another issue was that the new curriculum is far from the aims of CLT because no consideration has been paid to actual social interactions in these settings. Culture is noticed in CLT methodology as well because learning a language is not separated from its culture. In other words, list of vocabularies and grammatical structures are fruitless without knowing how and where they can be used. It should be mentioned here that culture does not have any specific meaning and it can be observed in different things such as clothes, specific expressions in specific situations, and body language. In other words, culture can be known as knowledge (ideas, custom, social behavior) shared by a group of people. Conversation is a part of the books that helps students to know about culture while in Prospect 1, 2, and 3 even pictures do not follow the western culture. Time, serious problem that was mentioned several times, does not allow going beyond and finding other issues in this regard. Conversations, speaking, and listening are needed to communicate with the world. The problem is that the allocated time is not sufficient to help students to learn more about communication. Until now, the objectives of the national curriculum have not been achieved at junior high schools. They said the Prospects will develop student's English to A2 level in 4 skills. But it is not obvious. And it is predictable that the new national curriculum may not be able to achieve the aim by these books, time and teachers. Junior high school was the first destination to change English textbooks named as Prospect. Their aims are improving students' level at all skills known as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They claimed that Prospect was written according to CEFR and its specific levels, but professors

did not recognize it. To understand how far the new textbooks followed CEFR, the new textbooks have been reviewed. Lack of grammar in prospect 1 and 2, high grammar load in Prospect 3, speaking and heavy load of listening in prospect1, and the ignorance of the other skills. Therefore, how the new textbooks can improve students' skills altogether is still vague.

There is an extra criteria mentioned by the experts: teachers and headmasters' behavior at schools. To reach to glory and wisdom, innovative curriculum and textbooks are not enough. Students should observe and comprehend it around themselves as well. Therefore, educational system of Iran should attend to teachers and other staffs' behavior at schools in order to notice if there is any discrepancy between what curriculum and science roadmap asked them and what should be employed by the teachers and staffs. The professors made examples of the staffs' behavior at schools stating that they behave students as children without any discipline. Students' "dress and appearance" were examples of such discrepancies between staffs' behavior and the teaching glory and wisdom at schools, because in such situations they even ruin the students' characters, then teach and expect them to be a glorious person in her/his life. In addition, the vocabularies covered in the books are neutral regarding glory and wisdom. Different levels of thinking are not covered in the materials. Interaction with the world based on glory, wisdom, and expediency principles requires cross-cultural ties. It is only possible via the implementation of more deliberate and explored curriculum. All related aspects should be reflected in the text materials which were ignored. In other words, the university professors believed that the new textbooks according to the new curriculum do not include any conversation referring to glory and wisdom. The only part, which can refer to this issue, is the Persian culture, which is the basis of writing the new books. Glory is indicative of the importance of a country in the world in the past and present; only in some political cases such as Persian Gulf and nuclear energy, the glory of country was taken into account.

So, in such conditions, does the new curriculum allow cultural communication? Cultural communication may be enhanced through using multimedia and audio-visual aids. Using modern technological techniques may be much more effective. The new textbooks were presented to students with an audio CD while the lack of language laboratory, technological means at classrooms, time, and familiar teachers with technology did not allow reaching to the multimedia learning. In fact, the governmental desired culture can be communicated through the materials covered in the books. However, the students' own culture and needs cannot. There is a difference between the governmental desired culture and student's own culture. In other words, students' needs (as teachers' stated it before) were not given special attention by the book developers. As a result, part of culture, which is in line with governmental concerns, was mentioned and the remain, which presents students' culture like their local culture, different cities and schools' pictures, and so on, were not accentuated. Another important point is that teaching a foreign language at Iranian schools starts at the 7th grade (13-year-old students), teaching the four skills and familiarizing students with the skills of communication. However, the question is whether grade 7 is a proper level to start English. In this respect, most of the professors and teachers used short answers to this question because, in their idea, and also scientifically speaking, it is conspicuous that learning a second language is recommended to start so much sooner than such ages. When they were asked about the best time to start learning the second language, the professors named it critical age, an optimal period for language acquisition, ending at puberty. There is popular evidence that children as L2 learners are 'superior' to adults (Scovel, 2000), that is, the younger the learner, the quicker the learning process and the better the outcomes. There are searches in this regard to find out which age is the best time to learn the second language.

Also, with regard to order of the skills, the new textbooks were written in a way that in the first book, Prospect 1, the listening was the main skill while in the third book it shifts to grammar. This approves lack of balance among the skills presented to students. As a result, teachers face with several problems presenting materials to the learners. In addition, the professors disagreed with what was considered in the new textbooks as the necessary means to have a successful conversation. In fact, they believed that learning

vocabulary in context is much more effective than memorizing and focusing on them out of context. In other words, contextual learning was emphasized over learning lists of vocabulary because students do not know how and where to use their vocabulary knowledge. On the other hand, learning grammar without discovering them in the text could not be internalized. Albeit the new textbooks solve this problem in Prospect 1 and 2, Prospect 3 focuses on grammar more than the other skills. It should be mentioned here that sometimes lack of time forces teachers to ignore the CLT methodology, and consequently, they merely teach vocabularies and grammar. In other words, time is the main problem in presenting materials following imbalanced introducing materials and skills in the new textbooks. While the new curriculum and the new textbooks bring in the new methodology, lack of time enforce teachers to use GTM to translate vocabularies and to present the materials with little time to understand the meanings and to discover the rules at the classrooms. As mentioned above, the writers of these books have claimed that they follow CEFR. If the course books are compared with the guideline of CEFR, mismatches and discrepancies can be easily recognized. Warschauer and Whittaker (1997) stated that “guidelines emerge and they can assist teachers in successful planning and implementation” (p.27) while it is not the case regarding the guidelines of the English textbooks in Iran. In the guidelines, it is stated that language use includes the actions done by the individuals as social agents who develop a range of competences in various contexts, conditions, and constraints to become involved in language tasks in order to produce and receive language through activating some strategies appropriate for accomplishing the tasks (CEFR, 2001). Therefore, it is obvious that not only vocabulary and grammar are not the mere means to communicate, but also they are the small portion of tools for communication. Also, areas of linguistics for communication include phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. What were mentioned in the new curriculum ignored pragmatics, phonology, and real syntax. In the new curriculum, communicating with world based on Iranian culture means ignoring the pragmatics in the western culture. On the other hand, the knowledge of vocabulary cannot be restricted to its meaning. Learners need to know the correct pronunciation, parts of speech, and the proper context to use vocabularies.

Moreover, the professors explained that the textbooks cannot cater for all the needs and wants of the learners and teachers. They emphasized that some of the students’ needs were attended such as listening, role-play, and multimedia learning. However, the subjects of role-plays and conversations can be significant as well. The professors raised some examples of the sections in the books which were inconsiderate of the students’ age in presenting the materials. Therefore needs of students were not wholly noticed. Needs of students include speaking in another language, but, as formerly stated several times in the study, the imbalanced presentation of the skills, lack of time, and teachers proficiency in English do not allow students to fulfill their needs. Teachers’ needs include facilities to teach, comprehensive guidelines, and allocated time. Again, most schools lack required devices to teach and present materials. Teachers in their questionnaires stated that guidelines were not comprehensive enough and the allocated time is the critical issue which was mentioned before. Complexity level of books was another issue mentioned by the professors which refers to the students’ level of proficiency and the level of difficulty of the new textbooks. Based on the new curriculum, writers tried to present materials to students according to CEFR, while other professors and teachers believed that the writers were not successful in this regard.

In general, the advantages and disadvantages of the new textbooks were asked. The participants maintained that the appearance and the physical shape of the books are fine but not all the teachers pass the in-service training courses to cope with the educational goals of such books. It reveals the new textbooks benefit a better design than the previous one acceptable in experts’ views. Also, they believed that there were not enough workshops and in-service training courses. Therefore, they were puzzling over how handling the new textbooks. This issue can be in line with the study conducted by Altaieb (2013) who presented various kinds of obstacles that teachers faced with them in the classrooms and it is their level of training which helps them to tackle with these obstacles. Also, Tilfarlioglu and Öztürk (2007) confirm the

findings of the present study; they announced lack of enough in-service training as one of the main reasons of unsuccessful teaching in Turkey. Additionally, they stated that changing the traditional course books, choosing standards like CEFR and CLT are among the advantages. However, they elaborated on the fact that the books do not follow the CLT and CEFR guidelines. In addition to this, untrained teachers, lack of time and facilities at schools were considered as the disadvantages. The time allotment for the new English textbooks is two hours a week. Many scholars believe that this is not enough to present new materials and rehearse previous knowledge in a class. They stated that presenting a new item takes 2 sessions at least. In this regard, reviewing the last items is neglected and focusing on the new items in 2 hours per a week without effective results is considered. Almost all the professors intensified the problem of time and showed that insufficient time is a serious problem in educational system with regard to the English course at schools. In comparison with other researches (Altaieb, 2013, Gunal & Engin-Demir, 2012, Alwan 2006), time allotment is the critical problem just in Iran. It was revealed that in other countries, they attend to methodology, and present the materials to the students properly, while in Iran the infrastructures may still have problems.

Teachers' knowledge was another crucial issue which was under question by almost all the experts. They believed that before asking them to teach, they should take part in different workshops and pass different training courses. According to CLT, teachers are able to present material in a communicative method instead of teaching an item in mother tongue and prescribe it to students. Teachers should help students to learn not prescribe materials. In Iran, most of teachers cannot speak in English and do not pay attention to the process of learning. For instance, in the focused group of teachers, some of them were curious about discovering the rules and they did not know how they followed it in their classes. It showed the lack of English teachers of CLT methodology. So, it was obvious why almost all the experts criticized English teachers' knowledge and even one of them suggested English tests as a permission to teach English at schools. Furthermore, many of the professors maintained that the package produced by the Ministry of Education is not comprehensive enough for developing the desired competency as envisioned by the curriculum developers. The participants made a comparison between the new curriculum and the ELT standards, i.e. CEFR standards. The experts were on the idea that the new curriculum and the new textbooks were weak and had many drawbacks. They believed that the package did not consider all the communicative competencies. By communicative competency, they pointed to the students' needs in learning the English language. Communicative competency was mentioned in the new curriculum as well but in reality it cannot be put into practice due to diverse disadvantages mentioned previously such as time and teachers' proficiency. Therefore it can be inferred that the new package tried to improve but it was not acceptable in experts' viewpoints.

5. Discussion

According to teachers, they receive support from their colleagues and administrators that is spiritual because they do not benefit sufficient funding or school facilities. To teach properly teachers need some facilities such as language laboratory or at least auditory system in each class while most teachers lack the basic facilities. English language teachers believed that the new curriculum is well-organized and uses a variety of appropriate instructional methods but it ignores educational needs. In teachers' ideas, educational needs of teachers and students do not meet in the new curriculum such as the load of grammar parts and conversations which are not beneficial to the students. Multimedia learning is another need, which does not take any notice in the new curriculum. Although in the new curriculum good teaching would be rewarding, teachers do not know how perfectly deal with the new curriculum and the new textbooks. They approved that because of lack of enough training courses and workshops, although they understand curriculum's objectives and philosophies, they cannot present them in the classrooms.

Moreover, the new curriculum tries to make the students independent or autonomous leading them to understand intermediate texts, write short articles, and be able to communicate in the foreign language. It attempts to help them communicate effectively with the world and present themselves clearly, which is in the line with Iran's 20-year vision plan and teachers approved it. However, the present findings may not be fully indicative of such claims. Furthermore, teachers believed that prescribed learning is not focused in the new curriculum anymore and how to learn is the positive side of it, because students should be negotiators of meaning, discoverers of knowledge, and contributors of it. Accordingly, students are changed to be more active agents in comparison to what was in the past, and are allowed to speak in the class and assist their classmates efficiently. It is the ideal that teachers have accepted it but they cannot implement it in their classrooms due to shortage of time which is the critical problem mentioned in the study for several times. According to the teachers' overviews, English cultural awareness is not dealt with in the curriculum; the curriculum focuses on the Iranian beliefs and customs, while learning language is not separated from culture. The new textbooks, in a general view, do not contain a logical flow, which makes a serious problem for teachers. They believed that Prospect 3, for instance, contained a high load of grammar and it inhibited the logical load of materials among the lessons. Therefore, content was not technically sound in their eyes. English language teachers approved that the language of textbooks is appropriate for the intended audience and there is not any confusing jargon. However, half of the teachers who answered the questionnaire declared that content of the new textbooks is not interesting in students' eyes. They study English to communicate successfully and continue their education at universities, while the new textbooks are not successful in these regards. With regard to the teachers' guidance, it was revealed that the teachers are central, they are regarded as the knowledge transmitters, and they should focus on rote memorization and repetition. Such results are in contrast with the claims of the new national curriculum, stating that the students are the knowledge transmitters and the process of learning should be emphasized. Therefore, it can be inferred that there was a gap between the theoretical aims and the practical destination. In theory, students have different roles while in reality they are passive beings as before.

A remarkable number of teachers were not pleased with the guidelines of the textbooks since they are not complete and easy to follow and they do not lead to proper assessment of the students. The overall results of the study showed that nearly all of the participants (both teachers and experts) had a negative view on the new curriculum and the new textbooks. Time allotment was considered as the main barrier to the new curriculum's aim. All of the participants named time as the critical problem to the implementation of the new curriculum. In the view of the experts and writers of the new textbooks, teachers' proficiency was the second obstacle to implement the new curriculum. In teachers' view, unbalanced presentation of the skills in the new textbooks was the main problem after the time. Then, insufficient training courses for teachers was the next crucial problem because teachers do not know how to teach some parts of the books and as a result, they

face with several difficulties in this regard. However, later in the study, the teachers declared that the new textbooks are more effective than the previous ones. They believed that if time allotment increases to at least two sessions in a week and the textbook writers bring minor changes to the new textbooks, the new package would be more beneficial than the previous one. Also, the experts maintained that if the problem of time is solved, teachers can manage it. Otherwise, the grammar sections still cause problems and teachers cannot handle them. The experts, besides time, pointed to teachers' proficiency as the other obstacle to the implementation of the new curriculum. They stated that teachers need more in-service training courses, and taking part in workshops should be obligatory. They called teachers as untrained teachers who do not know English proficiently and the few proficient teachers do not know how to teach CLT. However, the experts were against the new package, because it does not consider all the communicative competencies. Moreover, it was claimed that the new textbooks were written according to the CEFR guidelines while the experts believed that the textbooks do not follow the CLT and CEFR guidelines. Furthermore, the facilities to present the materials in the classrooms were mentioned as another obstacle to the implementation of the new curriculum. Nearly no school in Iran benefits a language laboratory and most schools do not have any proper device to teach the listening sections. Therefore, the listening sections of the new textbooks are ignored. As a result, one of the four skills, i.e. listening, is not properly presented to the students.

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