Perceptions of Iranian High School EFL Teachers and Students toward Teaching and learning Reading Skill

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ABSTRACT

Following Chacón's (2005) contention that research on teachers' beliefs and their impact on teacher cognition has prevailed over the last four decades as an important filed of enquiry, this study attempted to find out how Iranian EFL teachers and students perceive the teaching status of reading skill in Iran's high schools. The study was conducted in West Azerbaijan, Iran. One hundred and seventy one EFL high school teachers as well as 200 students were given separate questionnaires with both fixed-response and open-ended item. Qualitative and quantitative statistical techniques were used to analyse the data elicited. The findings revealed that both teachers and students agree that reading skill is highly paid attention to. The findings also revealed that books' shortcomings, lack of necessary equipment, and inappropriate assessment techniques are among the major problems that render high school EFL programs inadequate and undesirable in teaching reading. EFL teachers and policy makers are hoped to be in a better position to reflect on their current practices as a result of knowing the findings of this research.

Keywords: attitudes; EFL; evaluation; Iranian context; language skills; reading skill

INTRODUCTION

Beliefs about language learning have been one of the research focuses of recent years, presumably based on the assumptions that beliefs govern people's behaviors (Puchta 1999). In addition, according to Borg (2007), little research has been conducted in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), regarding teachers' perception of their classroom practices. Besides, according to Stevick (1980), w*hat goes on inside* learners, which includes learners' beliefs, also seems to have a strong impact on learners' learning during the language learning process.

For more than six decades now, as Brown (2001) states, research and practice in English language teaching has identified the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as of paramount importance. So, there is a great emphasis on learning the four skills of English in most foreign language contexts. As far as the Iranian context and most other EFL contexts are concerned, reading is the skill authorities and syllabus designers attempt to integrate into the materials they develop, and it is accordingly important to examine whether this intention is really implemented in practice or not. This study was accordingly an endeavour to look into the current situation of teaching reading skill in Iranian high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs. The research was aimed to find out the way EFL teachers and students approach teaching and learning of *reading* skill and compare their perceptions with each other. To this end, this study tackled the following major research questions:

1. How do teachers approach teaching *reading* skill in Iran's high schools?
2. What are the students' perceptions of teaching *reading* skill in Iran's high schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning a language including EFL requires the mastery of its skills (including reading) and sub-skills. A balanced language program in a communicative setting usually focuses on all language skills to more or less the same extent (Nation 2009, Nation & Newton 2009). Based on such a framework of language teaching and learning where an equal emphasis is put on all language elements, teachers are required to manage the course syllabus in a way that all skills will be covered to the right extent. While observing this framework is a target in most language teaching institutes across the world, in public schools in Iran (including junior high school and secondary school), there is an imbalance in the amount of time and focus devoted to different language skills. Although the authorities and curriculum developers are attempting to incorporate a communicative syllabus at public schools, what is commonly delivered to students is at best a traditional course where the focus is primarily on reading comprehension (Razmjoo & Riazi 2006) and the sub-skills of grammar and vocabulary (both of which are instrumental for the development of reading skill). Despite failing to foster oral communication skills in learners, such reading-oriented programs may be justifiable in EFL contexts where most learners will use the language they learn for furthering their subject areas at university rather than for face to face interactions with speakers of the same language.

Such skill-based programs have been investigated from different perspectives. İnceçay (2011), for instance, explored the effects of pre-service teachers' language learning beliefs on their practice teaching. Two randomly chosen pre-service teachers were recruited in the study (one male, and one female). The research mainly adopted a qualitative approach using a structured interview, philosophy statements, field-notes during observations, and the reflective journals of the participants. The findings revealed that beliefs about language learning had effects on the pre-service teachers' instructional practices in the aspects of creating language learning environment, roles of teacher and learner within the language classroom, and providing learners with necessary strategies when they have difficulty. These effects were all related to the pre-service teachers' stated beliefs which were about ideal language learner, ideal language teacher, ideal language classroom, difficulties they come across during the language learning process, and how to overcome these difficulties.

Hafeez (1998), in an attempt to explain how English teaching in Pakistan schools can be improved, states the objectives of teaching English in Pakistan as follows:

a) Students need to learn the language to use it for communicative purposes.
b) They need to develop their listening skills so to understand instructions from their superiors if they are doing jobs, and they need to be able to understand lectures, etc. if they are studying in a situation where medium of instruction is English and so on.
c) They need to develop their speaking skills so that they are able to speak English with some confidence while being interviewed for jobs, and if they are studying in English medium institutions, they can speak to their teachers and discuss different things with them in English and may have to speak English in other situations.
d) They need to develop their reading skills to comprehend different types of texts.

e) They need to develop their writing skills so that they can write different things such as writing reports, etc. if they are in job, and taking notes, attempting question papers for which they need to describe and narrate things and so on. (p.28)

Hafeez (1998) also states that teaching English in schools of Pakistan is conducted just through using grammar-translation method, the purpose of which is not to develop students' skills but to prepare them for their exams. He further adds that Pakistani students learn grammar rules and acquire limited reading and writing skills but are hardly able to use English for different purposes, as is the case with most students graduating from a public high school in Iran.

Working in a similar EFL context, Fareh (2010) investigated the challenges encountered in teaching English in the Arab World countries. He found that teaching is teacher-centered rather than learner-centered. Teachers talk most of the class time and they rarely give students a chance to speak or ask questions. As a result, students get bored and less motivated to learn, and thus they become passive listeners. He argued that these pedagogically erroneous practices are detrimental to the development of language skills that can be better promoted through practice rather than remaining idle and silent in class. Furthermore, this study revealed that the reading sub-skills are usually neglected in teaching as well as in testing. As far testing reading skills is concerned, he found that emphasis is often on testing explicitly stated information, predicting the meaning of certain lexical items from the context and one or two test items on the cohesive device of reference. The ability to infer implicitly stated information, the ability to evaluate things, the ability to distinguish opinions from facts, the skill of identifying cohesive devices, in addition to problem solving and critical thinking are just examples of the neglected reading skills in both teaching and testing.

In an Iranian context, Dahmardeh (2009) conducted a study to investigate the status of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Iran as well as the extent of its compatibility with communicative pedagogy. He found that while the newly designed curriculum document is to a great extent compatible with communicative pedagogy, the materials being used by teachers, as well as the current ELT program, are mainly structurally based and cannot be considered as communicative.

As far as desirable characteristics of a good ELT teacher are concerned, Babai Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) attempted to characterise qualities of an Effective English Language Teacher (EELT) as perceived by Iranian English language teachers and learners. The results indicated significant differences between teachers' and learners' views on some characteristics of EELTs. Teachers seemed to agree more strongly than students that an EELT should assign homework and integrate group activities into the classroom. Other areas of significant difference in opinions included preparing the lesson well, using lesson plans and assessing what students have learned reasonably.

Kolaç, Ulaş, Sevim, and Mutlu (2010) investigated the opinions of the students of the Department of Turkish Language Teaching on the status of teachers' usage of basic language skills and on the lessons in the curriculum. The opinions of 235 students, attending the Department of Turkish Language Education during 2009-2010 were checked, and a survey form was used as the data collection instrument. The results of the data analysis revealed that teacher candidates find teachers very sufficient in listening skill, insufficient in writing skill; and that teacher's use speaking skill most in the lessons.

According to Dahmardeh (2009), it could be argued that while principles of CLT emphasise presenting all language skills, the textbooks in Iran have not included anything besides reading, within the Iranian ELT program. Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) further asserted that ELT curriculum in Iranian schools mainly focus on teaching reading skill.

Regarding the ELT approaches which are practiced in Iranian schools, Rahimi (1996) demonstrated that Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was used in 1950's all over the country. This being the case, one can find enough evidence for the practice of this method even to the present time. Saadat (1995) stated that in 1960's Audio Lingual Method (ALM) was put into practice in English language classes in Iran, similar to those of other countries. Rahimi (1996) mentioned that ALM was not successful in Iranian English classes because of the shortage of qualified teachers, teaching aids, time, etc. Besides, Ghorbani (2009) states that before the 1990s, English education focused on reading skills in order to help students read and translate materials written in English. The curriculum in general, thus, was aimed at promoting students' grammar knowledge in reading and translation. The text books were also developed and published in congruence with this trend in language teaching. Consequently, high school English teachers essentially used grammar translation to meet the expectations of the national curriculum. In this sense, the first and the most frequently mentioned reason for the shortcomings of the high school classes is associated with the curriculum in general and the textbooks in particular. Thus, the importance assigned to the skill of reading in the Iranian state education system as well as lack of research on teaching language skills in Iran can be good motivations for conducting a study in this regard. While recent research in Iran has focused on course and materials evaluation with the main conclusion that the materials currently used do not serve communicative purposes, no research has investigated the way teachers approach the teaching of language skills and the way learners perceive this. This study was accordingly meant to fill an existing gap regarding how learners and teachers approach the skill most favored in Iran's state school education, that is, the skill of reading.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

This study employed EFL teachers and learners coming from Iran. Both teachers (N=171) and students (N = 200) were both male and female from different schools, either public or private in almost all cities and some villages of West Azerbaijan, Iran (see table 1). The mother tongue of most of the learners was Turkish and Kurdish. They were from all four grades of high school and were within the age range of 14 to 19. The mother tongue of most teachers was also Turkish and Kurdish. They had almost the same experience of learning English at Iranian schools as their students, and most of them studied the same English books, because according to Azizifar, Koosha, and Lotfi (2010) Iranian EFL school textbooks have not changed since 1965.

TABLE 1. Demographic information of the participants

		Students	Teachers
Total	-	200	171
Gender	Male	119	83
	Female	81	88
First language	Azeri	131	120
	Kurdish	59	47
	Persian	7	4
	Armenian	3	-
District	Urmia district no. 1	41	26
	Urmia district no. 2	38	21
	Silvana	30	8
	Nazlu	31	5
	Sumay Bradust	20	6
	Chaypareh	40	8
	Mahabad	-	7 *Continued*

Continued	Poldasht	-	5
	Shot	-	6
	Bukan	-	21
	Maku	-	9
	Chaldran	-	3
	Sardasht	-	6
	Khoy	-	11
	Shahindezh	-	4
	Tekab	-	8
	Oshnavieh	-	7
	Salmas	-	10
Age	Years	15.43	-
Teaching English	Years	-	14.23
	Hours per week	-	26.58
High school	First	60	-
	Second	58	-
	Third	62	-
Degree	Fourth	20	-
	BA	-	141
	MA	-	28
	PhD	-	2

INSTRUMENTS

Two paper and pencil questionnaires were developed by the researchers after a careful study of already existing teacher evaluation questionnaires. In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaires, a few experts and a number of teachers were consulted. The questionnaires used were in two sections. The first section was a cover page introducing the questionnaire and asking the participants some demographic information. The other section included some fixed-response (i.e., multiple choice and Likert scale), and open-ended items about teaching *reading* skill. The language used in the questionnaires was Persian. Moreover, the questionnaires were revised several times, before being used, in a pilot study meant to investigate the clarity of the items and to add or drop faulty items. As a result, item 5 was added to teacher questionnaire and item 3 to student questionnaire. The reliability of the items estimated through Cronbach's alpha for multiple choice items was 80.03 (teacher questionnaire) and 82.14 (student questionnaire), and for Likert scale items was 81.05 and 80.26, respectively. These figures are considered as good levels of reliability.

PROCEDURE

The questionnaires were distributed by the researchers and sometimes with the help of the authorities in the Department of Education in March, April, and May 2012, and were collected some weeks after distribution. They were collected and archived for later analysis to find out ideas about the way reading skill is taught in Iranian high schools.

DATA ANALYSIS

The first section of the questionnaires was meant to find out the demographic information about the participants. In the other section which concerned approaches to teaching reading skill , the answers to the fixed-response items were counted up for each item and the frequency of the responses were calculated. Besides, the answers to the open-ended items were studied and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The researchers also made use of triangulation by checking the accuracy of teachers' claims against data coming from

students. The results of the analyses as well as the relevant discussions are presented in the following sections.

RESULTS

This section presents the results and the statistical analysis of the collected data. First, the quantitative analysis of fixed-response items is presented. Then, themes arising from the qualitative analyses of the open-ended items are stated. Next, some issues arising from the findings are discussed.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The quantitative analysis of fixed-response items is going to be presented here. First, the data coming from teacher questionnaire will be analysed. Then, the corresponding data from student questionnaire are put under analysis.

TEACHERS

The analysis of fixed-response items of teacher questionnaires related to reading skill is going to be presented in the following paragraphs. The first item of this section asked the way the teachers organise their reading class (see table 2).

TABLE 2. Class organization in teaching reading

Organization	Always or almost always	Often	Sometimes	Never	No response
I allot special time to work on students' reading ability.	64.32 %	12.86 %	6.43 %	0.00 %	2.33 %
I teach reading as a whole-class activity.	29.82 %	32.16 %	24.56 %	11.69 %	1.75 %

As the table indicates, the answers given to the item in the first line of the table reveal that most of the teachers *always* allot special time to teaching reading skill in their classes. Besides, next line shows that most teachers *often* or *always* teach reading as a whole class activity. These two findings imply that they pay attention to this skill as an important part of their teaching activity.

Item number 2 attempted to find out what teachers use as a resource of instruction in teaching reading (see table 3).

TABLE 3. Resources of teaching reading

Resources	Every day or almost every day	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Never or almost never	No response
Textbooks	49.12 %	21.63 %	17.54 %	9.94 %	1.75 %
Materials written by students	4.67 %	18.12 %	41.52 %	33.91 %	1.75 %
Workbooks or worksheets	12.28 %	35.08 %	35.08 %	16.37 %	1.16 %
Children's newspapers and/or magazines	0.58 %	3.50 %	21.05 %	73.09 %	1.75 %
Reading material on the Internet	4.09 %	9.35 %	23.39 %	61.40 %	1.75 %
A variety of children's books (e.g., novels, collections of stories, non-fiction)	1.16 %	12.28 %	29.82 %	55.55 %	1.75 %

As it is shown in table 3, textbooks are the most commonly used materials by teachers. On the other hand, materials written by students are not so much favored by the teachers as a teaching resource. Work books are also commonly used resources.

Interestingly, the status of other lines of the table is very much similar to each other, and the low percentages of them imply that they are not used so much in teaching; besides, it can be said that most of the teachers *never* use these resources. In general, it is implied by the answers provided for *textbooks* and *workbooks or worksheets* that teachers often make use of textbooks or work books, and other materials are not usually utilised.

The third item asked for the materials used by the teachers. The data are shown in table 4. As it is clear from the table, boards and then pictures are the tools most of them use, whereas other tools are not utilised by many teachers. Generally speaking, it can be said that the percentages of users, except for boards are very low. So, it is implied that the use of materials by teachers is not high.

TABLE 4. Materials for teaching reading

Materials	Users	No response
Computer	33.33 %	1.75 %
Video projector	31.57 %	1.75 %
TV set	6.43 %	1.75 %
CD or DVD player	30.99 %	1.75 %
Whiteboard or blackboard	74.26 %	2.33 %
Charts	22.80 %	2.92 %
Pictures	57.30 %	2.33 %

Item number four asked for the number of hours teachers have spent in workshops or seminars (in-service/professional development) that dealt directly with reading or teaching reading (e.g., reading theory, instructional methods) in the past two years. The data shown in table 5 indicate that most of the teachers have *never* been to such sessions in this period, and the others have passed very short hours, except for a small percentage of them.

TABLE 5. Workshops or seminars on reading

	Never	Less than 6 hours	6-15 hours	16-35 hours	More than 35 hours	No response
Number of hours spent in workshops or seminars	46.78 %	17.54 %	18.12 %	9.94 %	5.84 %	1.75 %

STUDENTS

The analysis of fixed-response items of student questionnaires related to reading skill is going to be presented in the following paragraphs. Table 6 shows the result of the answers given by students to items number one and two of reading section in the students' questionnaire.

TABLE 6. Statistics on the reading skill regarding teacher and class

	Very much	Much	Somewhat	A little	Little	No response
Teacher's attention to reading skill	54.50 %	35.00 %	10.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.50 %
Usefulness of reading class	36.00 %	39.50 %	15.50 %	7.00 %	1.00 %	0.50 %

As it is shown in the table, most of the students are highly pleased with their teachers' attention to teaching reading and the efficacy of their reading class.

Item number three sought to find out whether the students have access to English reading books from a library in their school. The item also asks the students to give their frequency of using the books if they have access to. The data indicate that only 21.50 % of

them have access to such a facility, and unfortunately most of these students do not use library books *much* (see tables 7 & 8).

TABLE 7.Access to a library of English books

Having access	Students
No response	2.00 %
No	76.50 %
Yes	21.50 %

TABLE 8. Frequency of using English books in the library

Frequency	Very much	Much	Somewhat	A little	Little
Students using the library books	1.50 %	3.00 %	5.50 %	4.00 %	7.50 %

QUALITATIVE/QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative results of open-ended items are going to be presented here. First, the themes arising from teacher questionnaires will be analysed. Then, the common themes arising from student questionnaires will be presented. The fact that these categories are also analysed in terms of their percentages of occurrence makes the following analysis following a mixed methods procedure.

TEACHERS

In this section the qualitative results of open-ended items from teachers' reading questionnaires are going to be presented. The themes arising from each item are presented in separate tables.

Item number 5: How do you test the students' reading skill? (Explain each point you choose.)

TABLE 9. Testing method of reading

Methods	Teachers	Providing explanation	Explanations
No response	2.92 %	74.32 %	
Orally	46.78 %	9.35 %	summary telling, reading with correct pronunciation, speed of reading, reading comprehension, translation
On paper	2.92 %	0.00 %	
Long term activities	2.92 %	0.00 %	
Other tools	2.33 %	0.00 %	
Orally and on paper	21.05 %	9.35 %	reading comprehension, summary telling, recognizing grammatical points, fluent reading, new words' meaning, summary writing, pronunciation
Orally and long term activities	8.18 %	1.16%	fluent reading, learner's activities
Orally and other tools	2.33 %	0.00 %	
On paper and long term activities	1.75 %	1.16 %	reading comprehension
Orally, on paper, and long term activities	5.26 %	3.50 %	fluent reading, reading comprehension, summary telling, making sentences, recognizing grammatical points

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174

Continued

Orally, on paper, long term activities, and other tools	1.16 %	1.16 %	giving reading hand outs as homework, summary writing, answering oral questions
Orally, on paper, and other tools	1.75 %	0.00 %	
Orally, long term activities, and other tools	1.16 %	0.00 %	

This item asked the teachers to explain each method they chose, but unfortunately, 74.32 % of them did not provide any explanations for their choices. As it is shown in table 8, most of the teachers test students' listening skill orally. According to the explanation provided by 9.35 % of them, they ask the students to read the passage and tell a summary of it, while they also pay attention to their correct pronunciation and the speed of reading the text; they also ask for the meaning of the passage in Persian. Besides, they ask comprehension questions. After that *orally and on paper* (21.05 %) has the highest percentage which again includes oral testing. Other choices do not have high percentages. The results for all the options are presented in table 9.

Item number 6: What are your goals for teaching reading?

TABLE 10. Goals for teaching reading

Goals	Teachers
No response	2.33 %
Reading comprehension	36.25 %
Correct pronunciation	31.57 %
Fluent reading	16.95 %
Vocabulary meaning and usage	7.60 %
Improving speaking	3.50 %

Table 10 shows that 36.25 % of the teachers teach reading skill in order to help the students gain the ability to comprehend texts better. However, a careful look makes it clear that 48.52 % of the teachers have insisted on oral reading features; that is, being able to read with fluency and correct pronunciation. Learning the meaning for the new vocabulary and getting familiar with their usage in sentences, and improving students' ability to speak English are other commonly expressed goals.

Item number 7: Do you think that the textbook you are using to teach reading is appropriate for this purpose? If not, what is your suggestion?

TABLE 11. Teachers' ideas about textbooks regarding reading

Ideas	Teachers	Suggestions	Teachers
No response	2.33 %		
Proponent	39.76 %	No suggestion	1.75 %
Opponent	59.06 %	Updating and changing	50.87 %
		Making more interesting	22.22 %
		Decreasing volume	13.45 %
		Applicable to real life situations	11.15 %
		Complementary books for reading	5.26 %

The data revealed through this item show that 39.76 % of the teachers are satisfied with reading section of the book. However, the percentage of those who are not pleased with the book (59.06 %) is higher. They mentioned some suggestions regarding what they think the problem is. As it is presented in table 11, most of them have recommended the authorities

to change and update the books. They (22.22 %) also mentioned such suggestions as making the book more interesting for the students, for example by using pictures or the kind of texts which attract students more. The big volume of the book which cannot be covered perfectly in small number of sessions was another point mentioned by 13.45 % of the teachers. Others (11.15 %) suggested that reading section should be in a way that students can take use of their learning in real life situations. A small percentage of them (5.26 %) also recommended the use of complementary books for teaching reading.

<div align="center">STUDENTS</div>

The qualitative results of open-ended items from students' reading questionnaires are going to be presented next. The themes arising from each item are presented in separate tables.

Item number 4: What effective points have you acquired from teaching reading?

<div align="center">TABLE 12. Effective points of reading class</div>

Themes	Students
No response	2.00 %
Fluent reading	24.00 %
Reading fast	5.50 %
Pronunciation	30.00 %
Vocabulary meaning and usage	7.50 %
Reading comprehension	13.00 %
Learning English language	3.00 %
Grammar	2.50 %
Writing	2.00 %
Speaking	3.50 %
Good points from the theme of the passages	1.00 %
Motivation to learn English	1.00 %
Translation	0.50 %
Nothing	4.50 %

As it is presented in table 12, what students mainly get from reading classes is pronunciation and fluent reading (54.00 %). This result is in line with the claim of 48.52 % of the teachers who stated their aim of teaching reading is to improve students' pronunciation. On the next step, they (13.00 %) mentioned reading comprehension, but the percentage is not high; whereas 36.25 % of the teachers claimed that their aim of teaching reading is to enhance students' reading comprehension. Other points are mentioned in low percentages by the students. Besides, 4.50 % of the students stated that they learn nothing from their teachers teaching reading.

Item number 5: What are the weak points of your teacher in teaching reading?

<div align="center">TABLE 13. Teachers' weak points in teaching reading</div>

Themes	Students
No response	2.00 %
Reading fast	12.50 %
Having mistakes in reading	4.50 %
Not allowing the students read while teaching	10.50 %
Not translating	14.50 %
Punishment	8.50 %
Nothing	47.50 %

The data from this question show that most of the students (47.50 %) are pleased with their teachers teaching reading. Some students (14.50 %) argued that their teachers do not translate the text they read. Nearly the same percentage of the students (12.50 %) expressed

that their teachers have a high speed while reading the passage. Other less frequently mentioned points include, punishing the students for not being prepared for the day's work and teachers' mistakes while reading (see table 13).

Item number 6: Is your English book satisfactory in helping you gain reading skill?

TABLE 14. Students' ideas about textbooks regarding reading

Ideas	Students	Suggestions	Students
No response	2.00 %		
Proponent	68.50 %		
Opponent	29.50 %	No suggestion	22.50 %
		Providing complementary books	10.00 %
		Providing story book	8.00 %
		Providing CDs or DVDs	6.50 %
		Making the books easier	3.50 %
		Updating the passages	12.50 %
		Making the passages more interesting	11.50 %
		Reducing book volume	12.00 %

Table 14 shows that most of the students (68.50 %) are satisfied with reading sections of the book. Anyhow, 29.50 % of them were not pleased, and 77.50 % of them provided some suggestions. Their most frequent suggestions include: providing complementary books, updating the passages, making the passages more interesting, and reducing the books' volume. Interestingly, all these suggestions are in line with the suggestions of the teachers regarding the textbooks. Others have suggested providing story books, CDs or DVDs, and making the books easier.

DISCUSSION

The data from student questionnaires revealed that 75.50 % of the students believe that their reading class was *very much* or *much* useful for them. This shows that, in general, most students are pleased with teaching status of reading skill. Furthermore, students' claims on the weak points of their teachers revealed that 47.50 % of them believe that their teachers have no weak points in teaching reading. This again shows that their satisfaction with their teachers is acceptable.

One of the influencing elements in the teaching-learning process is the kind of resources teacher uses to bring about motivation and sense of creativity to the classroom and, as a result, enhance learning. The results of the research regarding this issue revealed that most of the teachers make use of textbooks in teaching reading. Other commonly used resources were workbooks or worksheets, but their use was not to the same amount as that of textbooks. It was found that teachers' use of other resources mentioned in the questionnaires was very low. This result is admitted by Azizifar, Koosha, and Lotfi (2010) who believe that in Iran, in practice, textbooks serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that takes place in the classroom. For the EFL learners, the textbook becomes the major source of contact they have with the language apart from the input provided by the teacher.

According to Shafiee Nahrkhalaji (2012), ELT textbooks can be motivating for the learners and can enhance the teachers' effectiveness; nevertheless, they may have some disadvantages. ELT course book is not a panacea for all learning and teaching problems. The textbooks are not designed for a particular group of learners with specific needs. Blind adherence to a textbook is the very mistake that many teachers make. The most important one, she believes, is that they easily become the master of the teacher and the curriculum in

the classroom and the teacher begins to use the textbook as a crutch. This especially occurs where the teachers have to follow the texts' sequence, methodology and pacing due to the will of the program administrators or the goals that managers of the language institutes strive for and in order to provide stability for learners. As a result, the needs of the learners are subjugated to the limitations and framework of the textbook.

Moreover, the results of the research regarding the materials used in EFL classrooms revealed that most EFL teachers (74.26 %) commonly used whiteboards or blackboards. The other commonly used material is pictures (57.30 %). The results also indicated that other materials are not used by most of the teachers. This can be because of lack of such equipment or materials in most high schools. This situation is apparent in the findings of the items related to other issues of the questionnaires. Teachers insistently asked for the provision of equipment and language laboratories in order to enhance students' learning.

As Shafiee Nahrkhalaji (2012) stated, evaluation of the ELT materials highlights the importance of utilizing ELT materials by the teachers as a means of re-skilling themselves. They should concentrate on using their creative skills and exploring innovative ideas hidden within the framework of the textbook heading off the textbooks to deskill them.

In addition, according to Daloglu (2004), teachers' continuing professional development is important for the well-being of schooling and quality improvement in teaching. However, the results of research concerning the amount of time teachers spent in workshops or seminars (in-service/professional development) that dealt directly with reading skill or teaching reading in past two years were not satisfactory. It was found that 46.78 % of the teachers *never* attended reading workshops or seminars in this period. So, the situation found was bad. This reveals that Iranian school EFL programs suffer from lack of professional development programs on teaching reading skill for their teachers.

Furthermore, a successful individual in today's world has the characteristics of using what he learned in real life situations, communicating accurately, being sensitive to the natural and social problems, etc. Educational systems' teaching individuals with these characteristics has become important. This changing understanding in educational system has affected the measurement and assessment process closely (Kutlu, Karakaya & Doğan 2008, cited in Kutlu, Yıldırı & Bilican 2010). In addition, Ak and Güvendi (2010) stated that implementers of educational programs at schools are the teachers. If the students' success on a certain subject area is to be evaluated, the most authorised person to do this is the teacher of that subject who has assessment and evaluation skills. Careful effort is needed for the teachers to know their students very well and direct them accordingly. However, the results of this study regarding the testing methods which teachers use in assessing reading skills' learning revealed that 46.78% of the teachers assess the students *orally*. Other technique favored more was *orally and on paper* with 21.05 %. This shows that most teachers' testing method is oral; however, a comprehensive evaluation should make use of different methods to ensure the validity of its findings. Insisting on one method does not seem to bring about good results. Furthermore, this way, individual differences of the students are neglected. Additionally, the results of the research regarding teachers' goals of teaching reading revealed that reading comprehension (36.25 %) and fluent reading and correct pronunciation (53.20 %) were what most EFL teachers expected their students to acquire. Although the data from students stating the efficient points they got from teaching reading shows that 54.00 % of students mentioned acquiring correct pronunciation and fluent reading, whereas only 13.00 % of them mentioned the acquisition of reading comprehension ability. This reveals two things: first, EFL reading classes mostly improve students' oral reading ability; this can also be consistent with most teachers' method of testing, as well, which was oral. Second, since the percentage of the teachers who hope to improve students' reading comprehension ability is

more than the students who claim they acquired this ability, it is implied that, their teaching does not reach the goals they set.

The research, moreover, searched for the state of satisfaction with the textbooks available in high schools. The findings revealed that 59.06 %of the teachers are dissatisfied with the books' attention to reading skill. Besides, students' data revealed that 29.50 % of them are dissatisfied with the books' attention to this skill. It is evident that most of the participants are not pleased with the books' concentration on all this skill. Furthermore, most of them suggested changing and updating of the books and making the books more interesting and motivating. In addition most students asked for the provision of complementary books.

In an evaluation of two series of ELT textbooks used for teaching English language in Iranian high schools from 1965 to 2010, Azizifar, Koosha, and Lotfi (2010) found that no significant changes has happened to the books in this period. Considering the changes which have happened in teaching approaches from grammar-translation to communicative, this period seems to be very long for not updating the books.

Besides, according to Shafiee Nahrkhalaji (2012), the general impression, technical quality and appropriateness of the in-house textbooks (i.e. edited by Ministry of Education) have been *always* under fierce debate and criticism in Iran. She believes the materials are considered to work for a nation so their designers should make decisions as to the content and framework of these textbooks regarding a wide scope of expectations and needs. Whereas, many students attend language classrooms in language institutes and study global materials besides the in-house textbooks taught at school. Moreover, they buy some supplementary textbooks designed by local writers and teachers to make up for the shortcomings of in-house textbooks.

CONCLUSION

This study gives an important feed back to the Ministry of Education, teachers, students, as well as researchers in the field of English language education. Moreover, it has raised important issues in the field of English language education and has implications for curriculum design, materials development, text book design, and assessment methods. It can also reveal the pitfalls in EFL teaching regarding reading skill in Iran and help improve the situation. In addition, it can avoid the wastage of costs and increase the effectiveness of EFL programs. Besides, it can reveal the importance of making changes in the courses, methods of teaching, and methods of assessment. Finally, theoretically speaking, this study contributes to the current understanding of program evaluation as well as the nature of the curriculum.

To sum up, it was revealed through this study that Iranian EFL teachers pay high attention to teaching reading skill, but there are some problems in this regard. First of all, most teachers do not make use of different resources and materials in teaching reading and often adhere to textbooks and boards. On the other hand, the results of this study and other researchers' studies revealed that the textbooks suffer from many problems. Another major finding was that teachers do not use different testing methods, and this can be regarded as a pitfall in EFL programs.

Following this study, some changes can be suggested to the current situation of teaching reading in Iranian high schools. Authorities in the educational system are invited to revise and update the books used in teaching English so as to pay enough attention to teaching this skill, and be more motivating for students as well as to teachers. Necessary equipment and materials needed to teach reading should be provided at every school. Additionally, the researchers would like to draw teachers' and authorities' attention to the importance of making changes in the procedures of evaluation ongoing at schools, which do

not actually evaluate students' achievement in reading skill. A recommendation is also made for authorities to develop more communicative-oriented syllabi and materials where an equal emphasis is put on all language skills.

Finally there are some limitations which may be addressed in future studies.First, the data were collected at one point in time in Iran, and as the nature of research in social settings entails, the views of English teachers and learners towards teaching language skills could change over time. The findings are therefore open for confirmation through replicating the research and more in-depth quantitative as well as qualitative analyses. In addition, in fact each of the open-ended questions could be a separate research question and worthy of more inspection and investigation.

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