



Non-Native EFL Teacher Educators' Recruitment and Professional Development: Policies and Strategies of Language Institutes' Managers

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Abstract

Recruiting efficient EFL teacher educators (TEs) is crucial for language institutes as it can directly affect the quality of language instruction and, consequently the success of language institutes. Nevertheless, language institute policies for employing TEs and strategies for their professional development have not been well-documented. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted in this qualitative study to investigate 30 language institute managers' recruitment policies and professional development strategies for employing non-native English TEs in the Iranian EFL context. The participants' answers to interview questions were transcribed and analyzed based on the three levels of the open, axial, and selective coding process. The results revealed that job experience, academic/educational competencies, and digital literacy are the most important features implicating the recruitment of TEs. As for professional development strategies for TEs, the main ones included holding regular meetings for TEs, asking TEs to take part in professionally relevant seminars, workshops, and webinars, and encouraging them to make peer observations of teacher education courses. These findings have implications for language TEs' recruitment and their professional development.

Keywords: Language Institute Managers, Non-native English Teacher Educators, Professional Development, Strategies, Teacher Educator Recruitment

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Language teaching has undergone rapid transformations over the past decade, which has obviously impacted different aspects of language teacher education, including the recruitment of teacher educators (TEs) (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019). There have been shifts in the roles of language TEs due to radical changes in the characteristics of good second language (L2) teachers and their ideas about teaching and learning. Over time, there have been growing demands on TEs to be efficacious, reflective, and self-directed to upgrade language teachers' expertise and teaching quality to help them develop professionally and be acquainted with novel ideas and teaching strategies (Lunenberg et al., 2014). TEs are also expected to help teachers become critical thinkers, not simple conveyors of information and ideas. Hence, TEs are supposed to stay in close contact with research findings, policies, and practices pertaining to their roles (Lunenberg et al., 2017). In addition, relevant research results will affect the quality of teacher education in return (Davey, 2013). Accordingly, in line with the requirements of the technological world today and the reinventing role of technology-based language instruction, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic (Riazi & Rezvani, 2021), language institutes need TEs who can design, develop, and introduce online modules and courses and educate teachers who can work effectively in such an educational context (Madsen, 2020). TEs are supposed to demonstrate high ability in e-learning systems and convey their expertise to pre-service and in-service language teachers.

Despite the significant role of TEs in the process and effectiveness of teachers' L2 instruction, scant research has been carried out to shed light on the main issues affecting the recruitment and performance of TEs in various L2 educational contexts and curriculums. Research in this regard has mostly focused on factors related to general pedagogical principles. For instance, some studies have investigated how TEs can improve teaching methodologies (e.g., Ping et al., 2018), teaching strategies (e.g., Kidd & Murray, 2020), national policy measurements for TEs and teachers (e.g., Lunenberg et al., 2017), TEs' self-efficacy (e.g., Çelik, 2011), TEs' identity (e.g., Avidov-Ungar & Forkosh-Baruch, 2018), and social justice advancement in language teacher education programs (e.g., Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020). Accordingly, given the importance of language TE programs in educating highly effective teachers on the one hand and the lack of sufficient research on the role of recruitment and professional development policies by curriculum designers and institute managers on the other hand, this study aimed to investigate TE recruitment and professional development policies from the viewpoints of language institute managers in the Iranian EFL context.

Literature Review

Teacher Educator Recruitment Policies

With the rapid spread of L2 instruction programs in academic and institutional contexts around the globe, discussions about how efficient L2 teacher education programs can enhance the quality of language instruction have broken out in international educational discourses (Kessler & Hubbard, 2017). In this regard, Johnson and Golombek

(2020) argued that to address current and future L2 teachers' needs in this diverse, technology-bound, globalized world, greater attention needs to be paid in the academic context to the design, implementation, and consequences of language teacher education programs. They further maintained that teacher development is associated with educational practices, policies, and methods that provide teachers with required content knowledge, attitude, behavior, instructional approaches, and methods as well as the necessary skills they need to teach efficiently in schools, institutes, and universities to improve students' learning achievements. Several lines of evidence acknowledge that the quality of L2 teacher development programs resulting from meticulous recruitment policies plays a crucial role in the context of language instruction and learners' overall achievements; consequently, policymakers have highlighted the need to enhance the quality of language TEs to increase the quality of teaching (Ellis et al., 2020; Sancar et al., 2021). In effect, in the history of teacher development, teacher quality has been regarded as a key concept, including factors such as how nations or educational institutes select, recruit, prepare, cultivate, support, evaluate, and retain effective TEs. In addition, teacher education quality is not merely considered as teachers' preparation; rather, it deals with educational departments' organizational climates and cultures, effective support and feedback, teachers' beliefs about themselves, and ongoing professional development (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). Teacher education policy documents frequently underscore the significance of adjusting various components of both initial and continuing language teacher preparation programs to the needs of language curriculums and syllabuses, teachers, and learners (Mirhosseini et al., 2021). Çelik (2011) explored the standards of quality considered for teacher educators and found some international standards such as (a) being a good teacher, (b) creating new practical (i.e., learning materials and curricula) and theoretical (i.e., research and publication in professional journals) knowledge, (c) providing support for teachers, and (d) participating in ongoing professional development.

The role of teacher educators in enacting such changes has also come to be acknowledged in the European L2 context. For example, the European Commission (2013) noted the importance of teacher educators in creating a better educational environment by generating knowledgeable and competent instructors. Thus, the committee recommends giving them regular and ongoing chances to advance their professional skills. According to this policy document, teacher educators are the "linchpins in educational reforms" (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 3) and need more unified and extensive professional development as a group (Lunenberg et al., 2014). Teacher educators also require a national benchmark against which to measure progress and plan future professional development (Dengerink, 2016).

Teacher Educator Professional Development

TEs should conduct ongoing action research to improve the ability of their pre-service teachers to be effective in the classroom context (Davey, 2013; Lunenberg et al., 2017). They are expected to keep up with the latest research, policy, and practice in

teacher education to be professionally developed (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Considering the content of TEs' professional development programs, Murray and Male (2005) maintained that gaining experience, expanding pedagogical knowledge, developing and enhancing scholarship through classroom instruction, and publishing research outcomes are necessary features for TEs. In the same vein, Madsen (2020) argued that the majority of seasoned teachers also need to attend in-service teacher-training courses to get acquainted with new ideas and research results presented by TEs to enhance their expertise.

Çelik (2011) maintained that extensive literature had been developed on defining and validating the nature of teaching and the qualities of a good teacher and designing the best strategies to enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, and qualifications to bring improvements in students' achievements. However, there is still less emphasis on the characteristics and competencies a qualified TE should possess. In addition, the role and qualifications of a teacher educator are never clearly defined, and various factors influence their definition. Moreover, MacPhail et al. (2018) reported that as there is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of teachers' professional development for enhancing the quality of education, TE recruitment and deployment policies can play an important role in addressing this issue. In other words, effective and equitable policies for TE recruitment can lead to improvements in the supply of qualified TEs and teachers.

At the undergraduate and graduate levels, TEs are in charge of educating aspiring teachers in a range of subjects (Davey, 2013). In addition, institutes and teacher education centers expect TEs to update their knowledge of effective teaching strategies and convey the same to the teachers they educate (Loughran, 2014). TEs should enhance their abilities in teaching technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) to in-service language teachers (Philipsen et al., 2019). Moreover, TEs are expected to broaden their knowledge regarding the new L2 teaching methodologies and use them in educating teachers. Hence, language TEs are required to increase their teaching abilities and knowledge by participating in in-service training courses and acting as dynamic members of professional communities of TEs (Tondeur et al., 2019). Besides this body of knowledge and abilities, the rise of technology-enhanced language education requires TEs to gain mastery over different technologies used in the language classroom to familiarize teachers with the related knowledge and concepts. Accordingly, TEs are assumed to know how to benefit from social media in the educational context to teach the pre-service teachers how to use them effectively in the EFL classroom. As such, they are expected to know how to make use of TPACK and convey the same information to the pre-service teachers (Habibi et al., 2019; Ifinedo et al., 2020; Tondeur et al., 2019). They are supposed to welcome new challenges in terms of teaching various teachers, know how to encourage both pre-service and in-service teachers to think positively about their job (Çelik, 2011), help teachers develop some strategies to confront their burnout, and motivate teachers to develop some strategies to feel financially satisfied (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). It is also believed that a TE should know how to develop and take

online exams by employing technologies and teaching this skill to teachers attending a teacher education course. In this respect, professional learning frameworks can encourage TEs to articulate pedagogical and technological practices (Sims et al., 2021). Another aspect of TEs' professional development is their mastery of testing and assessment techniques, as they are supposed to upgrade EFL teachers' knowledge in this respect (Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020) because the mastery of assessment literacy and testing abilities is of crucial importance for language teachers in public and institutional organizations as well (Alavi et al., 2022).

Through their research, TEs can bridge the gap between what their programs aim to accomplish and what their pre-service and in-service teachers' perceptions of their professional learning are (Ping et al., 2018). Those who put in the time and effort to educate themselves independently about the teaching profession know well that it is far more complicated than what students in formal teacher education programs would assume (Ifinedo et al., 2020; Ping et al., 2018). By collecting information that might question and encourage reconsideration of long-held ideas, self-study helps bridge the all-too-familiar chasm between aspirations and accomplishments (Lassonde & Galman, 2019; Russell, 2010). Moreover, to develop professionally, TEs should actively take part in workshops, webinars, and seminars related to teacher education research (Koster et al., 2008), dynamically and continuously study new books related to teacher education policies (Lassonde & Galman, 2019), and keep updated through studying new articles related to their teaching profession (Lunenberg et al., 2014). Some researchers also advise taking part in qualification/degree programs for TEs to enhance their ability (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Madsen, 2020). Likewise, there are some accounts of TE professionalism, such as being a permanent member of a specialized network or association of teacher educators and periodically publishing articles on teacher education, which are emphasized in the literature (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; Johnson & Golombek, 2020). In addition, TEs should improve their ability to a high degree of critical reflection and self-assessment (Lunenberg et al., 2017).

Some scholars have emphasized that TEs should adapt existing teaching strategies in teacher education courses to develop their professionalism. For instance, Tondeur et al. (2019) argued that TEs need to have a step-by-step personal plan based on their experiences to develop their level of professionalism. Also, EFL teacher educators are required to consult with other teacher educators (Churchward et al., 2019). A TE is expected to be a team person when it comes to teaching collectively with other TEs. Moreover, to run a teacher education course, a TE should know how to perform a needs analysis and recognize the teachers' necessities (Çelik, 2011). It is also suggested that the development of a professional identity be part of L2 professional development programs for TEs in ESL and EFL contexts (Yazan, 2019), though the ideologies of TEs' in the EFL context may affect their imagined identities (Davey, 2013), in turn affecting the way they develop identities in their teacher education classroom.

Some studies have pointed out that language teachers' professional development should occur in their workplace context (e.g., Murray & Male, 2005). Likewise, that is

why TEs are expected to participate in the peer observation of other TEs to enhance their mentoring capabilities. Likewise, they are expected to participate in professional development courses to improve their professionalism (Koster et al., 2005) and know how to make teachers constantly develop strategies for their autonomy (Louw et al., 2016). In addition, TEs need to improve their classroom management to help language teachers develop their classroom management skills (Eisenman et al., 2015; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; Wolff et al., 2021). Being adaptive to micro- and macro-policies for the relevant educational authorities is another aspect of teacher educators' professional development (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018).

As the preceding literature review shows, a rich body of research on different aspects of teacher education exists. However, the policies for recruiting non-native English TEs and strategies for professional development have not been well-documented in the literature. The following research questions were formulated in this study to narrow this gap:

1. What are language institutes' policies for the recruitment of non-native English TEs?
2. What are language institutes' strategies for the professional development of non-native English TEs?

Method

Participants and Setting

The study participants were 30 (11 females, 19 males) Iranian language institute managers aged 28-70 who ran language institutes in the Iranian EFL context. They were from various educational backgrounds ranging from B.A. in other majors (e.g., Mechanics, Engineering, Accounting) to Ph.D. degrees in English Teaching and Translation. They were selected based on the snowball sampling method out of a total of 52 language institute managers in Tehran and other cities who were initially asked to participate in the study. The target language institutes were selected based on their national popularity as successful, effective educational centers among both students and teachers. Concerning the ethics of the study, the participants were informed of the study's objectives and were ensured that their personal information would be kept private while their perceptions and opinions would be used in the research project. Table 1 represents the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants

Gender	N	English Teaching Experience	N	Educational Background	N
Males	19	10-20 years	10	B.A. in English-related fields (Literature, Translation, TEFL)	9
Females	11	Above 20 years	8	M.A. in TEFL	4
		No experience	12	Ph.D. in TEFL	3
Total	30			Other majors	14

Data Collection

To collect the data, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to tap into language institute managers' perceptions and beliefs about TEs' recruitment policies and professional development. In general, the interview questions aimed to investigate language institutes' policies for recruiting non-native English TEs and strategies employed for the professional development of such teachers. Relying on a thorough literature review, the researchers developed an interview guide with five core questions revolving around criteria for choosing TEs, necessary qualifications and characteristics of TEs, strategies for TEs' professional development, and policies for the recruitment of TEs. Then, the interview guide was developed and piloted with five EFL institute managers. Based on the feedback from the pilot study, some modifications were made: two questions were omitted and one was added. In line with Creswell (2018), the validity and credibility of the interview guide were confirmed through expert judgment with the help of two Ph.D. holders in Applied Linguistics.

To conduct the interviews, Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach was used. That is, the researcher started interviews with general questions and gradually moved toward more specific questions to obtain pertinent information about the phenomenon. Thirty interviews (19 in-person and 11 online) were conducted and audio recorded. The interviews were conducted individually with each manager and lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in Persian as the research has shown that informants are more willing and able to communicate their knowledge using their native language (Hatch, 2002, p. 98). The recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim and back-translated into English. A professional translator was requested to check the accuracy of the translations.

Data Analysis

MAXQDA software was used to analyze the data. To this end, the recorded interviews were transcribed and translated, and 30 datasets were inserted and sorted out in the software. Data analysis was carried out through content analysis; iterative reading of the transcripts was done following three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In addition to the coded data, MAXQDA software also has a field for memoranda which can record the researchers' innermost thoughts and emotions while playing a crucial role in summarizing and organizing the data for the subsequent stage. The program also aided the researcher in deciphering what a given code represents.

During the open coding, transcriptions of the interviews were segmented into keywords and phrases concerning the recruitment of TEs and professional development strategies. Some of the codes found at this stage were TEs' (1) international certificates such as DELTA, (2) M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, (3) training experience, (4) excellent general English, (5) good communication with institute managers, (6) friendly relationship with teachers, and (7) cultural understanding. In the next step, the researchers developed categories (axial codes) by identifying interconnectedness between the

extracted concepts in the open coding phase. In the final stage, selective coding was done as the final integration of the data and themes such as job experience, interpersonal communication skills, educational and academic competencies, etc. were derived. Some measures were taken to determine the dependability of the data. The researchers separately checked different aspects of the phenomenon under investigation through constant comparison, enlisted significant points, and finalized them through the cooperation of a colleague with a Ph.D. degree in Applied Linguistics.

Results

This section presents the main themes showing the participants' viewpoints on TEs' recruitment and strategies used for the professional development of TEs. Findings are categorized based on the managers' priorities. Interview extracts are incorporated to support each theme.

Policies for Recruitment of Non-native TEs

Concerning the priorities of language institutes in recruiting EFL TEs, job experience, academic and educational competencies, and interpersonal communication skills were highlighted in the interviews. Table 2 summarizes the recruitment policies of TEs based on the participants' assertions.

Table 2

Derived Themes and Categories Related to Recruitment Policies of Non-native TEs

Theme	Categories
Job experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having more than 10 years of experience 2. Having accredited certificates 3. Graduate degrees in TEFL 4. Teaching various training courses 5. Experience teaching in different institutes 6. High job satisfaction
Academic and educational competencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High language proficiency 2. Mastery of e-learning 3. Mastery of testing and assessment techniques 4. Identifying teachers' and students' needs
Interpersonal communication skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having effective communication with teachers 2. Paving the ground for the institute's reputation 3. Making connections with stakeholders 4. Observing ethical and cultural issues

Job Experience

Institute managers mostly emphasized teaching experience as a major criterion for recruitment. They believed that TEs with more than 10 years of experience are more trusted. Their justification for this criterion was that teachers with such experience are no longer novices and are familiar enough with teaching practices and challenges. Moreover, they have a high command of classroom management, which they can convey to other teachers. According to the managers' assertions, as the years of teaching increase, the

possibility of teaching different levels and various textbooks increases. The importance of this issue is reflected in the following extract:

People's capabilities are different, but to consider a specific standard, I must say that it is better to recruit TEs with more than 10 years of experience in related activities because they have taught some textbooks and levels at different times and have become experts. [M3]

Most managers asserted that they prefer to invite TEs with the experience of teaching in different institutes, especially famous ones. Teaching in different institutes can allow the TEs to teach various textbooks, levels, and learners. Moreover, they considered teaching in well-known institutes either as a teacher or a teacher educator, an important feature as these institutes have high standards for employing people. Another reason mentioned by some participants was that a famous TE can attract more teachers and increase the credibility of a training course. The importance of this issue is reflected in the following two extracts:

I think the TEs who have taught EFL teachers at different levels are more helpful than those who focus only on advanced levels. [M15]

I usually prefer to employ TEs who have offered teacher training courses in famous institutions because I am sure this person brings many teachers with them so I pay money with no worries. [M4]

Another important criterion pointed out by the majority of the participants was certification, such as TESOL, TEFL, DELTA, or CELTA. They believed that TEs with these certificates are more familiar with the latest teaching strategies and practices and are concerned about updating their knowledge and teaching techniques. The following extract shows the importance of this issue:

I mainly rely on TEs with international certificates such as DELTA or CELTA. These courses are very effective in improving teachers' strategies. [M9]

Some managers asserted that they tend to recruit TEs who claim higher job satisfaction. They stated that TEs are not able to transfer their knowledge, expertise, techniques, and experience unless they are highly motivated and satisfied with their job. In addition, satisfied TEs can convey their satisfaction to other teachers. The importance of this issue is reflected in the following extract:

I usually employ those teacher educators who not only are famous in their careers but also enjoy their job and show motivation in their careers. [M24]

Another category pinpointed by some managers was that TEs should have postgraduate degrees in language teaching fields. They maintained that M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in TEFL equip graduates with the latest theories, methodologies, and scholarly articles related to teaching language. TEs with M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in TEFL

understand issues such as learner needs, sociocultural aspects, and research methods. The following extract represents the importance of this issue:

Teacher educators with Ph.D. or M.A. degrees are familiar with concepts that graduates of English translation or English literature do not have any idea about. For example, critical thinking, individual differences, and learner autonomy. [M12]

Academic and Educational Competencies

The academic and educational abilities of TEs were the second theme of recruitment highlighted by language institute managers. All the participants acknowledged the significance of high language proficiency in choosing TEs. They believed that grammar, pronunciation, speaking, vocabulary, and accent knowledge is very important as most teachers consider TE models in their practices. Besides, TEs are considered a dependable source, especially for novice teachers. Some managers emphasized that good general English is a prerequisite for successful TEs. The importance of this issue is shown in the following extract:

I recruit TEs with high command of the English language. I think a high level of language proficiency is a must for TEs. [M15]

The participants conceded that they prefer to recruit TEs who are skillful and professional in online learning. That is, they should deeply understand online learning and teaching, know about technologies facilitating language learning, and introduce, design, and develop online courses. They should also have the tendency and skill to train teachers to work effectively in such courses. Most managers believed that after the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning and platforms have become an indispensable part of learning, which should be taken into account by the institutes and TEs. Some managers maintained that TEs should follow social media to find popular and useful accounts for teaching and learning English because most students and teachers spend a lot of time on and are affected by social media platforms. The following extract represents the significance of this issue:

I prefer to recruit teacher educators who can design and develop online modules and courses and train teachers so that they can work effectively in such courses. [M26]

Most institutes have a business account on Instagram, where they share regular posts. A TE should check this application and even be active. [M4]

Having mastery over testing and assessment techniques was another category mentioned by most institute managers. They maintained that TEs should have knowledge and information about designing tests and quizzes. Also, they should know how to evaluate and assess students during the term. Moreover, they believed that TEs should be able to equip teachers with various testing and assessment techniques and strategies. This issue is highlighted in the following extract:

TEs must be able to design and select effective testing and teach the same to language teachers to increase and apply their knowledge. [M22]

According to the interview results, institute managers tended to recruit TEs who could identify teachers' and learners' needs. Most of them believed that, besides teaching recent teaching and learning theories, technologies, practices, and effective strategies, TEs should consider the teachers' needs, challenges, and available facilities. The next step for TEs is to be able to adjust the existing theories and practices to specific contexts and raise teachers' awareness of this matter. The following extract shows the importance of this policy:

A TE must create a safe learning environment for teachers and identify their needs as a significant part of teacher education. [M30]

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Being able to make connections with individuals and organizations was another important theme derived from the interviewees' assertions. Participants posited that TEs should have the ability and capacity to communicate effectively with the stakeholders of the institutes. Moreover, they are supposed to build rapport with teachers of teacher education courses to promote their sense of belonging and increase their enthusiasm for learning. Managers asserted that TEs should guide teachers in a friendly, not authoritative manner. The presence of a strong connection among teachers, teacher educators, and institute officials could pave the ground for the institute's progress and success. The importance of this criterion is reflected in the following extract:

I think social networking and being able to make connections with individuals and organizations seem to be among the important abilities of language teacher educators. My experience says that this connection helps organizations' success. [M7]

The findings disclosed that following ethics and ethical issues is another important criterion for the recruitment of TEs. TEs should know and observe the ethical issues of the teaching context, the institute, and society. In addition, they are expected to familiarize teachers, especially novice ones, with ethics and encourage them to follow ethical issues. These issues, as raised by the participants, were mainly dress code and treatment. Paying attention to sociocultural aspects of language teaching and helping in-service teachers learn about intercultural understanding and intercultural sensitivity are among the priorities of managers while recruiting TEs. The following extract shows the importance of ethics:

TEs themselves should follow ethics because they are role models for student teachers..... I expect a TE to dress neatly and attractively but not to break the norms of society or an educational setting. [M9]

Strategies for TEs' Professional Development

The institute managers highlighted the strategies that language institutes employ for the professional development of non-native English TEs, holding regular academic meetings, taking part in academic seminars, workshops, and webinars, and peer observation of teacher education courses. Table 3 summarizes the strategies for the professional development of TEs based on the managers' statements.

Table 3
Themes and Categories Related to Language Institutes' Strategies for Non-native TEs' Professional Development

Theme	Categories
Regular academic meetings	1. Learning various teaching strategies and practices 2. Dealing with the challenges of teachers 3. Developing professional learning by sharing experiences
Peer observation of TE courses	1. Cooperating and obtaining knowledge from one another 2. Enhancing class management techniques 3. Increasing institute quality and reputation
Seminars and conferences	1. Attending workshops, seminars, conferences, and webinars 2. Being an active member of professional communities

Regular Academic Meetings

All the participants maintained that they hold regular meetings with teachers and teacher educators to improve TEs' professional development. Through holding monthly academic meetings with teachers, TEs can learn about the concepts teachers need to know and understand the challenges of different teachers; consequently, they can update their knowledge and practices to meet their colleagues' needs. Regular meetings persuade TEs to search for new and various teaching and motivational strategies and techniques for teachers to improve their teaching. Moreover, monthly meetings with other TEs in the same institute or different institutes help TEs share their ideas and beliefs to enhance their professional development. Professionalism can also be updated by TEs sharing their experiences and challenges and paying attention to their work's positive and negative aspects. This strategy is represented in the following two extracts:

Teacher educators come to know how to motivate teachers to develop teaching strategies. They also learn about dealing with new challenges in terms of teaching various teachers. [M9]

TEs are advised to attend regular professional development sessions to learn new and varied strategies and best practices. [M24]

Peer Observation of Teacher Education Courses

Most institute managers conceded that peer observation is a very effective strategy for the professional development of TEs. According to the interviewee's assertions, TEs are encouraged to observe teacher education courses of other TEs as it is an influential experience to enhance their awareness of effective teaching practices. Likewise, TEs can

improve their classroom management abilities through peer observation of each other's classes. TEs are also advised to learn from each other to promote their social skills. Moreover, they can provide feedback on each other's courses, which consequently promotes the institute's quality of instruction and overall reputation. This strategy is reflected in the following extract:

Through peer observation, TEs learn to cooperate and gain knowledge from one another and develop into better educators. They can work together to enhance the institute's overall reputation and quality of instruction by creating a safe and productive learning environment for all learners. [M22]

Academic Seminars, Workshops, and Webinars

Another major strategy the institute managers employ to expedite TEs' professional development is encouraging them to attend educational seminars and workshops. This includes attending seminars and being an active member of professional communities. Institute managers argued that they ask TEs to attend seminars, workshops, and webinars to keep their knowledge updated. They also advise TEs to attend conferences to get familiarized with recent research and international trends in theories and practices of language teaching, learning, and teacher education. In addition, some managers expected a TE to be an active member of professional communities in their city, country, or even international online communities. The following extract points to this strategy:

Language TEs should dynamically and continuously update their knowledge by studying new books and participating in academic conferences. [M6]

To be successful, TEs should be active in communities of teacher educators. [M5]

Discussion

Concerning policies of language institutes for non-native EFL teacher educator recruitment, the present study found that language teacher educators' job experience, academic and educational competencies, and interpersonal communication skills are among the priorities of institutes while recruiting TEs. These policies represent the elements of professionalism in TEs and thus are in line with Wang and Lin's (2013) EFL-speaking teachers' recruitment policies reported about the four countries of Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. It seems that, in addition to high instructional abilities, language TEs are expected to have taught in different language institutes offering teacher education courses. This finding also resonates with the findings in other studies (e.g., Coenders & Verhoef, 2019), stressing the value of relevant teaching experiences of educators themselves in teacher education programs. Likewise, other factors related to TEs' qualities, such as their accredited certificates, many years of job experience, and high job satisfaction, have been underlined in some other research carried out in different countries (e.g., Churchward & Willis, 2019; Cochran-Smith et al., 2018). Interestingly, although native-speaker teachers may seem preferable for at least language learners in the Iranian EFL context (Shobeiry et al., 2023), the findings of this study generally showed that for institute managers, target language nativity does not seem to be a significant factor

for recruiting the teachers' TEs probably due to the lack of their abundant presence in Iran.

Academic and educational competencies of EFL TEs, based on the present study's findings, consist of their high language proficiency, e-learning skills, the ability to design, develop, and introduce (online) educational modules and courses, self-awareness, high competency in designing or selecting and administering effective testing and assessment methods, focusing on pre-service teachers' needs, and commitment to educational and professional development. These findings, though rather unique to the Iranian EFL context, agree with the issues reported by Koster et al. (2005) as qualities of teacher educators, such as being familiar with the latest teaching methods, online educational context, and assessment methods. Similarly, as Klecka et al. (2008) proposed, employing teacher educators should be based on their academic and workmanship abilities. The findings reported above also agree with Habibi et al.'s (2019) results in terms of the needs of future EFL teachers for effective technology integration and what TEs are expected to be informed of to prepare future EFL teachers for the language classroom.

TEs' interpersonal skills were also pointed out as a significant priority in their recruitment in Iranian institutes. One of the categories of this priority was the ability to make a connection with individuals and organizations. In addition, factors such as paving the ground for the institute's progress and success and developing professional identities can support the findings of some previous studies (e.g., Dinkelman, 2011), indicating that in addition to developing their professional identity continuously, TEs need to know how to implement a needs-analysis, recognize in-service teachers' identity construction problems, and help them develop a coherent professional identity. This finding also accords with the studies that consider the development of professional identity as part of professional development for foreign language TEs (Çelik, 2011). It is, of course, argued that EFL TEs' ideologies might affect their imagined identities (Dinkelman, 2011).

Effective communication with pre-service or in-service teachers and being aware of cultural aspects of language teaching were also considered as other notable points in the recruitment of TEs. As Davey (2013) argues, TEs' beliefs and cultural knowledge affect their practices. Moreover, as Çelik (2011) says, maintaining proper communication with the teachers attending a teacher education course is of prime significance in providing them with a model for effective teaching. Based on the interview results, it was also found that for their professional development, TEs should learn varied and new strategies and the latest practices while they attend regular professional development sessions. Through professional meetings of TEs, they can promote their abilities to articulate pedagogical practices and pay attention to their work's positive and negative aspects. This finding is in line with Çelik's (2011) study results in terms of the standards of TEs in the Turkish context. Similarly, this finding supports the findings of previous studies asserting that TEs are required to participate in professional development courses (e.g., Koster et al., 2005).

Regarding TEs' professional development through taking part in professional seminars, conferences, workshops, and webinars, findings from the present study support

Murray's (2005) findings, highlighting the role of experience and pedagogical knowledge, developing and enhancing scholarship through classroom instruction, and publishing the research results as necessary features for TEs. By the same token, Madsen's (2020) view is that taking part in in-service training courses is necessary for TEs to both get acquainted with new advancements in their field and exchange ideas in this respect. As active English language teaching community members, TEs are expected to enhance their professional development by increasing their personal and professional abilities (Eisenman et al., 2015). The managers interviewed emphasized peer observation of teacher education courses by TEs. This is supposed to pave the way for TEs to improve their professional abilities by learning to cooperate and gaining knowledge from one another, enhancing the institute's overall reputation, learning collaboration, and becoming a team person while emphasizing autonomy. This last point substantiates findings from the studies that found teacher educators constantly need to develop strategies for their autonomy (Louw et al., 2016). Similarly, from observing the performance of other colleagues, TEs might learn how to enhance their management abilities and update their knowledge about new L2 teaching methodologies. Some researchers argued that TEs must improve classroom management to help pre-service and in-service teachers develop classroom management skills (Eisenman et al., 2015; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; Wolff et al., 2021).

In general, the findings indicated that the recruited TEs who educate language teachers in Iranian language institutes are expected to be experienced and knowledgeable, proficient in teaching different skills, and aware of the cultural and social norms of the target community of teachers. In addition, they are expected to provide institutes with attractive modules to enhance their income while preparing teachers to be as effective as possible. Institutes are expected to provide spaces for the professional development of such educators by asking them to participate in seminars, conferences, and webinars, observe each other's TTCs, and hold weekly or monthly meetings to share their experiences and professional achievements.

Conclusion

This qualitative study investigated major priorities that institutes' managers consider to recruit efficient non-native English TEs in the Iranian EFL context. Generally, all 30 managers emphasized that the appropriate recruitment process directly or indirectly impacts their success. The results revealed that the most important criteria for recruiting TEs are (1) job experience, (2) academic and educational competencies, and (3) interpersonal skills. Moreover, it was found that language institutes have long-term strategies for the professional development of their TEs. Based on the managers' perspective, the most prominent factors considered in TEs' professional development are (1) holding professional meetings for teacher educators, (2) asking TEs to take part in academic seminars, workshops, and webinars, and (3) encouraging TEs to make peer observations of teacher education courses are.

This study has some implications. First, language institutes are recommended to apply specific standards for the recruitment of TEs. It is important to recognize that the field of education itself necessitates a set of specialized competencies and knowledge. Therefore, more research should be conducted to explore TE's abilities, expertise, and knowledge. Second, enhancing the economic status of TEs is necessarily important. The burnout phenomenon is a common issue among TEs, which could be the consequence of financial problems and lack of job security. Finally, language institutes need to hold education courses for TEs and encourage them to achieve social skills before starting their profession. Growing consciousness of TEs about professionalism helps them have a clearer perspective on developing strategies to enhance the quality of their job.

Regarding the limitations of the study, a relatively small sample of participants has been used in this study, which may decrease the probability of generalizing the findings to similar contexts. Future studies with large sample sizes can be conducted to compensate for this issue. Further studies can be carried out using a mixed-methods design to better understand TEs' recruitment process. In addition, future studies can investigate the TEs' perceptions of their professional development and recruitment.

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Appendix

Interview questions with 30 language institute managers

- A. How many teacher educators do you have? (It is a preliminary question)
- B. What procedure do you follow for teacher educators' recruitment?
- C. What kinds of policies do you consider for teacher educators' recruitment?
- D. What kinds of qualifications, knowledge, and cognition should a teacher educator possess?
- E. What are your plans for the professional development of teacher educators?