



EFL Teachers' Individual Development Planning Model: A Data-Driven Approach

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Abstract

Despite a strong background in education and human resources, teachers' Individual Development Planning (IDP), as a reflective tool for further learning, has remained untouched in the domain of ELT. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to investigate EFL teachers' IDP in light of the grounded theory approach in an Iranian context. To do so, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 17 expert participants selected through purposive sampling in the field of IDP from all over Iran. Interviews were transcribed and labeled as open, axial, and selective codes. The results led to 9 main categories of EFL teachers' IDP: identifying EFL teachers' current status, identifying EFL teachers' duties, tasks, and educational needs, school and teachers' mutual agreement, setting goals, providing resources, planning for an IDP, implementing an IDP, self-evaluation, and reformative acts. Data also unveiled the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions in the way of developing and implementing an IDP. The findings of the study can have theoretical and practical implications for EFL teachers, school principals, and educational policymakers.

Keywords: EFL Teachers, Individual Development Planning, Grounded Theory, Contextual Conditions, Intervening Conditions

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The issue of EFL teachers' professional development (TPD) has long been the foci of many prominent studies (Cirocki & Farrel, 2019; Ha & Murray, 2020; Soodmand Afshar & Ghasemi, 2018). Being involved in TPD courses would prompt the instructors' learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice (Avalos, 2011). Moreover, former research has alluded to the positive outcomes drawn by implementing in-service developmental programs (Hashimoto & Nguyen, 2018; Wilden & Porsch, 2017; Yasaei & Alemi, 2022) for both teachers and learners. Nevertheless, the already practiced TPD programs seem to be quite traditional; not being able to keep pace with the ever-changing nature of inclusive learning (Nishimura, 2014).

As averred by Okiror, Hayward, and Winterbottom (2017) going through a course pertaining to fostering teachers' growth should not only provide them with the latest pedagogical skills but also needs to precipitate a country's education system progress. However, most of the EFL teachers' TPD courses consider the instructors as passive recipients of knowledge through holding some futile workshops headed by experts who do not have a shared understanding of the teachers' working milieu circumstances (Chan, 2016; Farrel, 2019; Stevenson, 2014). For instance, EFL teachers are invited to arranged conferences (Rahman, 2016) to improve the quality of their classroom instruction and as they leave the venue no supervision is pursued in what they have attained and the changes they are about to make in the teaching (Farrel, 2015).

Taking EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the insufficiency of TPD courses in equipping them to deal with classroom challenges (Amadi, 2013) into account and contemplating upon presenting impertinent issues to the instructors' main concerns (Chan, 2016) would open up a way for undertaking other professional development techniques. In this regard, Individual development planning (IDP) which is known to be an assessment tool would enable the teachers to gather and document information about their competencies and plan to further develop them in the future (Rothwell, 2010). This context-embedded instrument is developed based on the working milieu and would incite teachers' reflection on the knowledge and experience they have already accumulated (Beausaert et al., 2013).

Implementing IDPs in mainstream education would enable teachers to seek realistic developmental objectives based on their competencies (Eisele et al., 2013), set flexible plans for fostering their weaknesses (Kiviaki & Meriluoto, 2018), achieve positive outcomes like amelioration in individual competencies and pedagogical practices (Beigi & Gholipour, 2016), receive significant job promotion, and enhance students' learning (Abili et al., 2014). However, despite the importance of holding in-service courses for

EFL teachers to gain relevant knowledge of their specific subject matter and integrate what they have learned into practice (Crandall & Christison, 2016; Hashimoto & Nguyen, 2018; Sadeghi et al., 2022), IDP, as an analytical, reflective tool for the development of teachers (Ghorbanian et al., 2020) has remained untouched in the realm of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL).

Accordingly, the current study is an attempt to address the above-mentioned lacuna by investigating EFL teachers' IDP from the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) lenses. Probing into this issue would enrich the available literature concerning the main constituents of an IDP tool for EFL teachers' growth. Researchers would also expect to outline a theoretical model of EFL teachers' IDP out of the collected data.

Literature Review

IDP is defined as a tool for providing information and recognizing the qualifications individuals need for further future development in a specific working milieu (Beusart, 2011). This future-oriented, reflective instrument reverberates on the people's past experiences, helps them discern their educational demands, and finally contributes to designing a plan regarding the attempts they require to put forth to achieve the objectives (McMullan, 2003). The already proposed definitions of IDP (e.g. Brown, 1995; Beusaert et al., 2013; McMullan, 2003) in various occupational contexts entail some common features of its concept.

- IDP looks back and forward to the people's competencies. That is, seeking advice from supervisors and mentors at work would enable the individuals to reflect upon their current expertise so that they can identify their weaknesses and strengths. This stage is usually facilitated through contemplating on and providing responses to questions like, "where am I now?", "where am I going?", and "where to go next?".
- When individuals are aware of their present competencies and have a grasp of their workplace's intended aims, they can set achievable goals by taking counsel from their superintendent.
- To bridge the gap between where people are and where they desire to be a structured plan is required. For outlining this plan individuals and supervisors interact cooperatively. When the planning is over, people are not left off, their mentors evaluate their attainment and provide beneficial feedback when required.

What seems to be common among all the aspects of IDP definitions is the weight given to the role of individuals in leading their learning process. Self-directed learning (Poel & Krogt, 2017), in fact, would propel people to plan for and take steps to build up

new capacities within themselves. Observing individuals' dedication to their personal development would also inspire authorities in charge to create further learning opportunities for people (Eisele et al., 2013). In mainstream education, teachers are known to be the leading individuals who can bring about positive changes in classroom instruction, improve schools, and ameliorate students' learning outcomes (Jafari et al., 2017; Khoroushi, 2015; Postholm, 2018). Applied to the teaching context, IDP entails teachers' direct cooperation in boosting their competencies to deal with the constantly changing demands of the education context (Abili et al., 2016; Van der van, 2017).

Previously conducted IDP studies are mostly in mainstream education. In a research conducted by Jafari and colleagues (2017), the organizational and contextual factors affecting elementary school teachers' IDP at exceptional schools were identified through a mixed-method research design. Fifteen professional participants took part in the qualitative stage, while 200 teachers completed the quantitative phase of the study. The results revealed 8 effective factors in this regard, including learners, learners' needs, colleagues, workplace rules and regulations, organizational culture, curriculum development, national and local policies, financial resources, society, and school administration. According to the design of this study and its findings, it didn't hold a comprehensive look at the teachers' IDP and just identified two categories of factors affecting the IDP process.

In another qualitative study conducted by Hirsh (2014), the challenges that elementary school teachers in Sweden were dealing with while completing IDP were explored through content analysis of fifteen interviews. This study was carried out in the framework of activity theory with the results yielding a disagreement between trusting teachers' professionalism and the external control exerted. What seems to differentiate this study from the ones conducted in Iran is that IDP development and implementation is an accepted tool for teachers' progress, while in Iran we intend to introduce this effective technique in our teachers' developmental process.

In another school-based qualitative study in the grounded theory framework, Ghorbanian and colleagues (2020) collected the necessary data from 17 experts through purposive sampling to investigate exceptional school teachers' IDP. Data collection was accomplished by conducting semi-structured interviews and the obtained data were coded through open, axial, and selective coding. The results of this study revealed individual factors, organizational factors, the process of IDP implementation, the strategies for acting the IDP out, and the consequences of employing it.

To the best of our knowledge, almost all the studies available had investigated IDP employment in contexts apart from education (Azizi et al., 2020; Coopersmith, 2022; Gholipour et al., 2018) or in mainstream education (Ghorbanian, 2018; Ghorbanian et al., 2020; Hirsh, 2014; Jafari et al., 2017). Presumably, Eslami (2016) was the only study carried out on EFL teachers' IDP implementation. In this research, the possibility of administering IDPs, as developmental tools for EFL instructors, was investigated in private language institutes in Iran. The findings of the study showed that the presence and the provision of specific individual and organizational factors would pave the way for executing IDPs. However, this study did not identify the main aspects of EFL teachers' IDP phenomenon, the conditions that might impede or facilitate its practice, and the possible consequences of accomplishing it remained uninvestigated.

What still remains lacking in the available literature regarding IDP in the educational contexts is more qualitative studies and the identification of this phenomenon along with its constituents in the domain of EFL. According to this research lacuna and the information we have, this is the first exploratory study approaching EFL teachers' IDP. This investigation aimed at developing a theoretical model of EFL teachers' IDP along with the factors affecting this phenomenon based on the already prospered models in the available literature (e.g. Eisele et al., 2013; Kiviaki & Merilouto, 2018; Ghorbanian et al., 2020) and genuine data collected from well-versed participants in this regard.

The whole process of conducting the study was drawn upon Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory based on which the researcher (s) can approach a phenomenon that is little known about it. The aim of conducting studies in this framework is to develop an explanatory theory uncovering the underlying processes related to a specific area of inquiry. In fact, by following grounded theory investigators can generate a theory that is grounded in the data collected (Tie et al., 2018).

Sampling in grounded theory studies might be quite different, but many employ purposive sampling since they need participants or data sources that can answer the research questions directly (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). Sampling, data collection, and coding procedures are conducted synchronously until a level of data saturation is achieved (Charmaz, 2006). For analyzing the data various stages of coding are taken along with benefitting from techniques like constant comparative analysis and memo writing (Charmaz, 2006).

During coding processes, incidents are recognized and coded initially (open coding). Then, they are compared to one another up until they fall into specific categories (axial coding). As the data collection proceeds, the categories are constantly being revised and

modified. Finally, by the integration of the main codes, the theoretical model emerges (selective coding). The iterative process of contemplating the codes involves the researchers' inductive and deductive thinking simultaneously. They can also benefit from memo writing, a reflective, interpretive act taken by the data analyst while coding the data. (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

The procedures of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory were meticulously followed in the current study since little was known about EFL teachers' IDP and a model was supposed to be formulated based on the collected data. This research is, therefore, guided by the following questions:

1. What are the main components of EFL teachers' IDP?
2. What factors affect EFL teachers' IDP?
3. What are the consequences of implementing IDPs?

Method

Participants

The participants of the study comprised 6 university instructors of TEFL (their research fields were EFL teachers' TPD and teacher education), 4 university instructors in the field of Educational Administration (EA) (their research fields were human resource management and planning IDPs for organizational staff), and 7 seasoned EFL teachers who have completed their MA in English literature or TEFL (attempts were made to include teachers who have already taken teacher training courses and been to TPD courses). The so-called participants were invited to take part in a study through a call or e-mail by the use of a social network. They were chosen by purposive sampling (Buttina, 2015) on the basis of some preconceived characteristics. The total number of participants was 17 because no new theme was found by adding more individuals (a level of data saturation was achieved).

TEFL instructors were currently holding BA and MA courses in universities and had already published articles in accredited journals in their specific research domain (mostly teacher education). Some of them were also leading teacher training courses (TTC) or TPD courses for EFL teachers in private language institutes at the time of the study. This group of participants, 2 females, and 4 males were between 40 and 55 years old with academic experience ranging from 5 to 14 years.

The individuals in the second group of participants were either assistant or associate professors, all male, in their 4th to 15th year of academic instruction. Their age ranged from 37 to 50. Plenty of their publications were pertinent to developing IDPs for

jobholders in different organizations, like banks, and assessing IDP implementation in a working milieu. The third cohort of participants who had between 10 to 15 years of teaching experience was recruited in language institutes after passing an entrance exam and a TTC course. They had also taken some on-the-job training courses throughout their teaching experience timespan. Their age also ranged from 32 to 41 years.

Concerning the ethics of the study, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation. They were assured that they can withdraw from the study at any stage they mind. They were promised that their identity would be kept anonymous. To this end, pseudonyms (e.g. P1, P2, ...) are used for each participant throughout the study. The table below presents the demographic data for each study contributor distinctly.

Table 1.

Participants' Biodata

Name	Age	Gender	Major	Teaching experience
Instructor 1	42	Male	Ph.D. in TEFL	5
Instructor 2	45	Male	Ph.D. in TEFL	7
Instructor 3	49	Female	Ph.D. in TEFL	10
Instructor 4	47	Male	Ph.D. in TEFL	8
Instructor 5	40	Female	Ph.D. in TEFL	6
Instructor 6	48	Male	Ph.D. in TEFL	14
Instructor 7	50	Male	Ph.D. in EA	15
Instructor 8	43	Male	Ph.D. in EA	7
Instructor 9	49	Male	Ph.D. in EA	11
Instructor 10	37	Male	Ph.D. in EA	4
Teacher 1	40	Female	MA in TEFL	15
Teacher 2	41	Male	MA in English Literature	11
Teacher 3	36	Male	MA in TEFL	10
Teacher 4	34	Female	MA in English Literature	12
Teacher 5	39	Female	MA in TEFL	13
Teacher 6	32	Male	MA in English Literature	10
Teacher 7	35	Female	MA in TEFL	11

Data Collection

The data collection tool in the current study were semi-structured interviews (see Appendix) conducted by the participants' prior appointment through Google Meet room (due to Covid-19 pandemic and the first researcher's distance from study contributors). The interview questions (5 in all) were formulated based on the available literature and IDP models designed so far. Then, they were firstly piloted with 5 participants and advice

was sought from professionals in the field of ELT for any necessary refinement. Accordingly, some modifications were made to the order and wording of the queries.

Interviews were conducted following Corbin and Strauss's (1998) funnel-like approach in which the researcher starts by asking general questions and gradually moves toward more specific inquiries to obtain sufficient information concerning various aspects of the phenomenon under study. Questions were designed in a way that they could provide an in-depth understanding of the main features of EFL teachers' IDP along with the identification of causal constructive factors, contextual and intervening conditions, and plausible consequences of accomplishing this self-directed program.

Each interview took approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was audio recorded. All the interview processes were conducted in Persian (the participants' native language) so that probable inadequacy of general English proficiency would not impede their idea expression. The recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim and back-translated into English. To check the accuracy of translations, a professional translator was asked to ascertain their properness.

Data Analysis

Given that the main aim of this study was to provide a theoretical model of EFL teachers' IDP, necessary data were collected and analyzed in the framework of grounded theory based on which theory emerges from the data (Creswell et al., 2007). More specifically, data collection is kept on ceaselessly and comparisons are made sequentially until investigators realize a level of data saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and are able to develop a theory based on the obtained data (Creswell et al., 2007). Data analysis was carried out by reading through the transcripts iteratively and following the three stages of open, axial, and labeling coding introduced by Merriam (2009).

During the first stage, known as open coding, the transcriptions were segmented into units like keywords, phrases, and sentences concerning the main features of IDP and various factors affecting it. Then, the researchers went through axial coding by identifying the interconnectedness of the concepts extracted in the open coding phase. To determine the dependability of the findings supplementary measures like memorandum note-taking, constant comparison, and member checking were utilized.

This stage which is known as the "paradigm model" by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 99) specifies the chief phenomenon in connection with the categories and subcategories attached to it. Finally, through the labeling stage, an "explanatory whole" was derived from the combination of all designated categories to form the ultimate theoretical model

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each of the researchers analyzed the coding procedures (member checking) independently with a coding agreement of over 80%. The disputing areas were resolved through discussion.

Results

This section presents the salient themes depicting the knowledgeable participants' viewpoints about the main features of EFL teachers' IDP and the factors impacting its implementation. Findings are categorized based on the priorities that the interviewees considered for the related concepts and the available literature on the development and implementation of IDP in various contexts. To support each theme, interview extracts are incorporated.

EFL teachers' IDP constituents

According to the obtained themes from the interviews and the available literature concerning IDP models for the professional development of staff in distinct contexts, the identified clusters of this tool should be followed sequentially. That is, the instructors should complete each stage one after another since the former is a prerequisite for the latter. The table below summarizes the arrangement of EFL teachers' IDP based on the 3 groups of participants' assertions.

Table 2
The Succession of Uncovered Themes Related to EFL teachers' IDP Model

Category	Theme	TEFL professors	AE professors	EFL teachers
EFL teachers' IDP	1. Identifying EFL teachers' current status	✓	✓	✓
	2. Identifying EFL teachers' duties, tasks, and educational needs	✓	✓	-
	3. Teachers and schools mutual agreement	✓	✓	✓
	4. Setting goals	✓	✓	✓
	5. Providing resources	✓	✓	✓
	6. Planning for IDP	✓	✓	✓
	7. Implementing an IDP	✓	✓	✓
	8. Self-evaluation	✓	✓	-
	9. Reformative program	✓	✓	-

Note: Ticks (✓) illustrates the corresponding theme was extracted from the target group's interviews, while dashes (-) show lack of them in the contributors' assertions.

Identifying EFL teachers' current status

All the participants acknowledged the significance of identifying the pedagogue's weaknesses and strengths in their practices. They believed that this would help them realize a deeper self-concept and discern the incompetency that is impeding their way to achieving their favorable performance. University professors further emphasized that this phase is a prerequisite for the accurate implementation of an IDP since it would incite the learners to scrutinize their already accumulated body of knowledge and find out about the existing gaps in it.

This is actually a self-directed stage carried out by the teachers themselves as they are reflecting upon their knowledge hoard. However, mentors would guide the teachers' reflection process by persuading them to uncover the underlying layers of their repertoire. They affirmed that and can be fulfilled by teachers. According to the study contributors' assertions, teachers can be encouraged to cogitate about their current expertise by exposing them to questions like, where am I now? what experiences have I accumulated so far? or if I had a chance to live my working life twice, what changes would I make? The importance of this stage is delineated in Instructor 1 comments:

Teachers are not only the individuals who need to change to improve the educational context; they also need to create the change [they should take responsibility for their learning]. An individual development program is achieved through a process in which teachers must first recognize their weaknesses. That is, they should have a critical look on their expertise.

Identifying EFL teachers' duties, tasks, and educational needs

Participants conceded that a responsible teacher is one who is cognizant of his/her job requirements and makes attempts to fulfill them. That is, they should have a deep understanding of the job they are involved in and are making a living out of. They emphasized the necessity of knowing about the duties and the tasks that should be carried out by teachers. The analysis of the interviews demonstrated that this category has to do with classroom management skills, the ability to evaluate the student's learning process, teaching the subject matter, and designing content-related lesson plans.

Regarding classroom management skills, study contributors declared that teachers would not be able to transfer their knowledge of the subject matter unless they could first manage the classroom aura. The importance of this issue is reflected in Instructor 7 assertions:

Proper classroom management can double a teacher's ability. In fact, when teachers follow a student-centered approach and build a good rapport with the learners, they would reinforce learners' motivation and enable them to learn better.

Being able to design a lesson plan and teach the subject matter were other subcategories pinpointed by all the participants. They maintained that teachers should be able to design a content-related lesson specifying the main and subsidiary aims they are following. Besides, they need to know about the primary stages of holding a class so that the content is transferred with the least ambiguity. Furthermore, teachers should have pedagogical knowledge complementing their content knowledge of the topic they intend to teach. In this regard, Instructor 6 shared his illuminating supervision experience as follows:

I have observed EFL teachers' classes who are significantly knowledgeable, but unable to transfer their information to the learners effectively. This is a weakness and they should be informed about it. These teachers need to amalgamate their subject matter knowledge with pedagogical expertise.

Given that teachers should carry out formative and summative assessments, participants gave credence to the instructor's responsibility to take regular tests at certain intervals. According to the interviewees, students would take the classes more seriously and dedicate their time to their studies if they perceive their teachers as diligent individuals who care for their learning. Additionally, 4 of the teachers made an illusion of the fact that some of the teachers have critical problems developing a test. They suggested that complementary courses should be held for them to foster their skills in evaluating students' learning. Teacher 5 made a comment which was quite compelling:

When I was a novice teacher, my nightmare was the midterm and final exams. We actually had to design a test for our class and hand it over to our supervisor for further checking. I really had no idea how I can make sound questions.

EFL teachers' educational needs for meeting their responsibilities were also derived from the interviews' analysis in this section. All the segments placed in this category dealt with familiarity with classroom management, awareness of psychological issues, being informed about office work, and being trained about the latest pedagogical expertise. Given that classroom management can have a great impact on students' achievement, all participants believed that teachers should be trained in the logical steps of maintaining

the teaching pace, receiving learners' feedback recurrently, and dealing with trouble-making students. The importance of this issue is illustrated in Teacher 3 assertions:

As a teacher we all have experienced dealing with a naughty student around the class, making unwelcomed joking, and distorting our teaching. I think we all need to learn about different ways of managing these upcoming circumstances.

Although in different ways, all the study contributors believed that teachers should be equipped with sufficient psychological knowledge like awareness of the impact of internal or external motivation, being extrovert and introverted, and the effect of pleasant or unpleasant previous learning experiences. Knowing about these issues, as mentioned by the participants, would enable the teachers to build up an acceptable rapport with the learners. In addition, 8 of the teachers averred that being distant from academic studies and keeping on teaching for long hours would lead to forgetting the pedagogies in detail. Furthermore, new concepts are being added to the realm of teaching English every day and we need to keep updating our knowledge constantly. Comments made by teacher 8 are illuminating in this regard:

As an active teacher who is spending at least 6 hours a day teaching in classes of all proficiency levels, I need to invest some time in my own learning as well. Sometimes I think that my teaching is getting old and learners will lose interest in me. Therefore, teachers are in urgent need of taking supplementary reminiscent courses.

Teachers' and school's mutual agreement

Almost all the participants claimed that it is substantial for teachers and administrative staff managing their working milieu to agree on the necessity of implementing an IDP. That is, there should be a common understanding between EFL teachers and schools concerning the underlying reasons for practicing IDP and the way to act it out. In support of this view, Instructor 6 stated:

Teachers need to be backed by seasoned school principals in their development process. Such a supportive atmosphere dominating schools can pave the way for instructors' development.

Setting goals

The participants' responses indicated that when incumbent information about teachers' current competencies is documented and the target level at which they are supposed to perform is identified, the teachers can set developmental goals with the

accompaniment of their supervisors. They further acknowledged that these goals are realistic since they have been set based on looking back and forward to the teachers' competencies. In addition, these goals are the teachers' decisions and reflect a critical analysis of their former experiences. Finally, interviewees conceived of the importance of determining a well-designed purpose as a determining factor in the process of IDP. These assertions are exemplified in Instructor 7 comments:

Teachers should know that to maximize the usefulness of any activity, having a plan with its goals clarified is essential and individual development is no exception.

Providing resources

The interviews made it clear that schools are responsible for supplying necessary resources for EFL teachers' IDP. All the 10 experienced teachers declared that the existence of technological and educational equipment would facilitate and pave the way for teachers' betterment. They further pointed out that the working milieu should support teachers' goals monetarily and make an attempt to motivate them by promising job promotion opportunities and giving them pay raises on the condition that they complete their developmental plan. However, as stated by the interviewees, teachers would lose interest and quit the IDP without sufficient financial resources allocated to the process. These assertions are reflected in Teacher 10 comments:

Having the necessary financial resources and facilities effectively develops teachers' educational, scientific, and professional competencies. Otherwise, teachers would not attend the process eagerly.

Planning for IDP

Participants perceived that after setting the goals and allocating necessary financial resources to EFL teachers' IDP, it is time to design a well-staged plan with the direct cooperation of pedagogues. Interviewees stressed that each IDP is unique, belongs to a specific teacher, and is designed based on each teacher's personality traits and learning preferences. As stated by the participants, the planning stage is not completed by the teachers alone. They should take advantage of a mentor's knowledge and experience. Therefore, the presence of an aura of collegiality between teachers and the educational consultant can provide a chance for teachers to go through the learning process enthusiastically. Regarding these claims, Instructor 5 mentioned that:

As teachers seek invaluable advice from an experienced mentor with whom they have strong ties, they will be able to foster their learning practices.

Implementing an IDP

As stated unanimously by all the participants, teachers are supposed to start performing the program after planning stage is completed. Thus, they can improve their knowledge and skills and accumulate relevant experiences for their jobs. Teachers would undergo different learning activities and make use of educational facilities in their workplace to carry out their IDP. At the point that the program is fulfilled, the previously existing gap between teachers' current status and desired stage to be achieved gradually starts to be eliminated, and new opportunities will be created for the teachers. This is reflected in Instructor 4 assertions:

Once teachers have completed their IDP, they feel a high level of self-efficacy, and that is because they have gone through a self-directed learning process.

Self-evaluation

The analysis of the interview transcripts disclosed that after performing the IDP, teachers should evaluate their results. 8 of the instructors further explained that the evaluation stage complements teachers' IDP process. This reflects the suitability of learning activities with each teacher's learning style and the knowledge and skills they have already acquired. They noted that IDP is a continuous process, and if evaluation is properly done, teachers would be able to retarget their goals and move toward growth. This critical analysis of teachers' already accumulated experiences would pave the way for creating necessary changes in their practices. This is well demonstrated in Instructor 9 statements:

During mentoring sessions with teachers, they have a chance to think and talk about [reflection-on-action] their real experiences and share their ideas with their mentors. This would give them insight into their professional development process.

Reformative program

The participants' responses indicated that as soon as EFL teachers evaluate their learning process, they are able to identify the areas of the program that needs modifications. Reformulating the IDP with the aim of betterment and facilitating the process of goal achievement was considered to be the final stage of teachers' IDP. In this regard, Instructor 2 comments are compelling:

A sense of failure is never permanent on this path. It actually motivates the instructors to probe their weaknesses and the program's drawbacks.

According to the analysis conducted and a complete review of the available literature, these 9 procedural stages are known as the chief constituents of EFL teachers' IDP. In the second section of the study researchers intended to identify the factors that may affect the implementation of this developmental tool. After accomplishing the coding process, causal condition (encompassing both individual and organizational factors), contextual conditions (the present circumstances in the working milieu that may affect the IDP), intervening conditions (factors that may come in the way of IDP implementation), and the consequences of succeeding in IDP (individual and job-related) were inferred.

Causal Conditions

According to the interviews' analysis, two clusters are grouped under this category, namely personal and organizational factors. These are facilitating elements that can provide a ground for EFL teachers' IDP. The first cluster encompasses the pedagogue's foresight, critical thinking, flexibility, self-concept, internal motivation, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, hope, job commitment, and self-regulation. With regard to the constructive individual segments, participants believed that by foresight, teachers are constantly keeping their career's future outlook in mind. This would motivate them to take some steps toward developing their job-related skills. As Instructor 6 put it:

EFL teaching is a peculiar profession requiring particular characteristics on the part of the teachers. For instance, while teaching kids and adolescents, they need to think about their future and be concerned about it.

Furthermore, almost all the interviewees hold the idea that teachers who can think critically are not only able to welcome constructive criticism but also can reconsider their practices judgmentally. Flexibility is another compelling factor helping teachers adapt themselves to new circumstances. University instructors stressed that self-concept would be a crucial feature of EFL teachers from the beginning of the IDP. This personal trait would enable the teachers to recognize their strengths and weaknesses thoughtfully. Interviewees further explained that teachers should be internally motivated to start an IDP and stick to it. It implies that they should take developmental steps for growth and progress. Instructor 1 comments exemplify this:

Every job requires some skills, and individuals are supposed to acquire them so that they can perform their duties properly. Therefore, teachers should have the desire to participate in training courses.

Interviewees contended that internal locus of control is another attribute of successful teachers, which has to do with their capability to connect any lack of progress to their impotence. As stated by the participants, another determining individual factor is EFL teachers' self-efficacy. Self-efficacious teachers believe in their abilities and think they can create changes in their practices and help learners achieve better results. This issue was explicitly cited in teacher 6 idea:

I always think that I am able to help my students achieve their goals. I should say that I have the same idea for myself as well. If I know that I can stick a developmental plan and create positive changes in my classroom performance.

Participants acknowledged that keeping a positive outlook toward IDP and hoping for a better future can motivate practitioners and enhance their job commitment on this path. They would take responsibility for their growth and perform all the stages of the program, one after another. This constituting cluster mainly revolves around teachers' personal habits like being self-organized, sticking to the plans they have once set with their mentors, adhering to the principles of their workplace, and feeling dedicated to their profession.

With respect to the organizational factors, most participants first believed that organizational culture plays a vital role in the employees' professional development. In our case, if teachers are busy working in a dynamic, supportive context, they would also be eager to take developmental steps and improve their performance. Teacher 5 commented on the significance of the culture dominating the teaching context and asserted that:

Learning environments need new thoughts and ideas to survive and maintain their constructive role. They can improve if they take new research-based ideas into account.

The majority of participants also acknowledged the effect of managers' capabilities on teachers' IDP. They hold the idea that school principals and supervisors need to prompt teachers' development, cooperate in, and help lead off the IDP implementation. The following interview excerpt from instructor 3 testifies to these assertions:

If schools want to keep their status quo in the ever-changing world of teaching, principals should favor innovative developmental plans like IDP.

All the participants explained that managers' flexibility and logical attitude would positively affect teachers' performance and inclination to developmental activities. Principals' belief is essential for the accomplishment of an IDP. Managers who only care about their own opinion hinder teachers' progress.

Contextual Conditions

According to the obtained data, teachers are inevitably involved in a number of factors in their working context which can directly affect their personal development. This effect can either facilitate or hinder their IDP. These elements include EFL teachers' various roles, technological equipment, the school principal's support, and training courses. Experts believed that dynamic working contexts are the ones in which teachers are not the only individuals who transfer knowledge to the students. Likewise, they act as learners who can receive knowledge from their seasoned colleagues. As 5 of the university professors put it, taking up a learner role or a decision maker at school would enhance teachers' motivation to progress. The following interview excerpt confirms this finding:

When teachers' opinions are respected and welcomed at schools by their supervisors or principals, they would feel highly of themselves and would like to undergo some developmental activities to further express their abilities.

As stated by most of the interviewees, administrators are not only expected to pay attention to the teachers' developmental needs, but they also need to provide the necessary ground for their progress. As stressed by the participants, school authorities should create a teamwork atmosphere where teachers can exchange their knowledge and experience. With regard to these influential factors, instructor 7 mentioned:

The professional development of English teachers should be one of the main concerns of the school principals and other senior administrators of the ministry of education. Because achieving this goal is not possible without their attention and support.

With regard to providing technological tools and holding complementary training courses participants maintained that school administrative staff can hold some training workshops for teachers and lead their pair and teamwork activities with the contribution of experienced teachers training the novice ones. They can also take advantage of virtual learning and add it to the teachers' learning process. Online educational platforms would

eliminate any possible barrier of physical distance between instructors and learners. The following assertions made by teacher 3 are compelling in this regard:

Creating and strengthening teacher-specific training courses should be one of the priorities in education. The advent of technological boost era has caused some worries for teachers that can be eliminated by training them in this regard.

Intervening conditions

According to the interviews' results, factors that may come in the way of EFL teachers' IDP might be either their personal traits or the policies dominating their working milieu. Interviewees stated that teachers having self-confidence and believing in their abilities to deal with a challenging situation can complete their IDP with the least concern. They further emphasized that having a strong belief in increasing their work quality and enjoying a high level of job satisfaction can positively affect their practices. As stated by teacher 6:

I think that teachers should accept that they need to take some steps for their personal development. Otherwise, they would fall behind their colleagues.

As regards educational policies, participants believed that holding non-political approaches in school management, establishing facilitating policies, and delegating authority to teachers can enhance instructors' accomplishment in IDP. In line with the above-mentioned comments are the ideas brought for by Teacher 5; he claimed that:

The kind of policies followed in language learning milieus have a direct impact on the way that EFL teachers perceive their development. If teachers are informed about and involved in the decisions made, they see themselves as valuable members of their workplace and would be encouraged to improve both their personal and professional qualities.

IDP consequences

The extracted themes for the consequences of implementing the IDP program among EFL teachers were categorized into two general clusters, namely individual and work-related aftermaths. Individual factors encompass creativity, resilience, self-actualization, self-esteem, and self-directed learning. Most proficient interviewees believed that those who take part in IDP would foster a dynamic lifestyle caring more for their progress. The following interview excerpt by teacher 7 attests to this issue:

The least positive consequence of an IDP is that it encourages creativity and gets the teacher out of lethargy.

In addition, teachers completing the IDP program would learn to rely more on themselves and do more self-studies. This is well recognizable in teacher 8 remarks:

If IDP is implemented correctly, the teacher will always feel the need to learn new things. Good teachers know there is no stopping time in the ever-changing world ahead of us.

The interviewees also mentioned that implementing IDP would help foster a collaborative atmosphere among the teachers. They tend to be concerned about their colleagues' progress and recommend help when necessary. These are exemplified in teacher 4 interview excerpts:

One of the positive consequences of an IDP is that it prepares the teacher to seek advice from a knowledgeable mentor without feeling any humiliation. That is, a supportive aura would gradually dominate the school.

With regard to the professional consequences of implementing an IDP, experts believed that teachers would grow a deep sense of self-concept, teach the subject matter professionally, feel more satisfied and committed to their jobs, and establish fruitful relationships with their colleagues. Specialists in this field maintained that if teachers want to work skillfully in the EFL domain, they need to improve their knowledge and proficiency. They believed that IDP participation would provide the ground for this progress. This is illustrated in what is asserted by instructor 2:

Whenever people want to be considered a professional in their work, they must have the required qualifications. Basically, becoming a professional in any job has its own rules; the presence and participation of the teacher in an IDP leads to the acquisition of professional knowledge in their work.

Interviewees also pointed out the important aspect of a professional atmosphere in the workplace where everyone is striving to promote his/her occupational status quo. This issue is delineated in teacher 2 explanations:

Every teacher needs to implement an IDP for his / her growth. One of the consequences of personal development is establishing proper and purposeful

communication among colleagues. These connections would help transfer successful teaching methods practiced by other teachers.

Discussion

Adopting the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) lens, the primary aim of this study was to explore EFL teachers' IDP features and identify the factors affecting its implementation in an educational context. The findings of this study led to structuring a theoretical model of EFL teachers' IDP based on the data derived from interviews and the available literature as a whole and the recognition of pertinent circumstances affecting it.

The findings of the first research question which was concerned with the identification of EFL teachers' IDP indicated a procedural definition of EFL teachers' IDP based on which pedagogues need to be cognizant of their status quo to realize their strengths and weaknesses. Following that, they should investigate their profession to discern the duties and tasks that are supposed to be completed by them. After that, teachers could figure out the domains they need to work on further. Participants maintained that once the educational needs are identified, administrative staff and teachers should reach an agreement on them. This consensus would strengthen their developmental decision. During the next stage, teachers are able to set their own developmental goals. Correspondingly, Eisele and colleagues (2013) mentioned that IDP would enable teachers to seek specific goals on the basis of their current competencies.

Following the above-mentioned phases, school administrators are supposed to provide the necessary sources for completing the IDPs. Then, an IDP is planned with a mentor's direct help and advice. The importance of a mentor's presence was also highlighted by Postholm (2018) who asserted that teachers can benefit from experienced peers or colleagues on their developmental path. The existing gap between where teachers are and where they should be bridged by implementing the program. As stated by the participants, teachers should reflect on what they are doing while practicing. This ongoing evaluation of the actions would help them identify the domains they need to reformulate and modify the program.

The obtained findings to the second research question characterized the effect of causal conditions, individual and organizational factors, on the IDP process. The individual personality traits which were known to be foresight, critical thinking, flexibility, self-concept, internal motivation, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, hope, job commitment, and self-regulation would prompt the development favoring tendencies

within EFL teachers. These findings are in line with Abili and colleagues' (2017) and Ghorbanian and colleagues' (2020) studies in which they nominated a number of personal features having a direct impact on IDP completion. For example, Abili and colleagues (2017) highlighted the power of individual characteristics in capacitating teachers to take up and fulfill the program successfully. Additionally, organizational factors were specified as impressive factors in the EFL teachers' IDP process. These factors which were identified as organizational culture, school support, managers' capabilities, authority delegation, and performance management system would motivate the teachers to dedicate as much effort as they can to the accomplishment of the IDP. These findings are in line with what Ghorbanian and colleagues (2020) mentioned as the supportive role of educational centers in teachers' IDP practice.

Contextual and intervening conditions were the next two categories known as bouncing factors that can directly have an impact on the stages of EFL teachers' IDP. That is, their existence or shortage may contribute to or attenuate EFL teachers' IDP performance. Contextual conditions were known as EFL teachers' various roles, technological equipment, the school principal's support, and training courses. The study conducted by Ghorbanian and colleagues (2020) ascertained the importance of technological provision in the workplace and its impact on facilitating IDP practice. With regard to intervening conditions, the current study realized that EFL teachers' personality traits and the educational policies followed by the schools can either distort or precipitate the IDP process. This finding was in line with Hirsh (2014) specifying the influence of administrative attitudes and their perceptions of teachers' developmental practice on teachers' success in IDP practice.

As with the third research question, the consequences of completing the IDPs by EFL teachers were found to be both individual and professional. EFL instructors were perceived to be more likely to experience creativity, resilience, self-actualization, self-esteem, and self-directed learning features. In addition, their teaching practice would also undergo some positive changes like teaching the subject matter professionally, feeling more satisfied and committed to their jobs, and establishing fruitful relationships with their colleagues. Previous research (Ghorbanian, 2020; Jafari et al., 2017) has also demonstrated some positive consequences for teachers' personality growth like self-esteem and self-reliance. These studies further emphasized that sticking to IDPs would foster a collegiality aura at schools. This was also reflected in the current study.

Holding a holistic look at the findings along with the available literature and considering grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) gave birth to the following theoretical model (Figure 1).

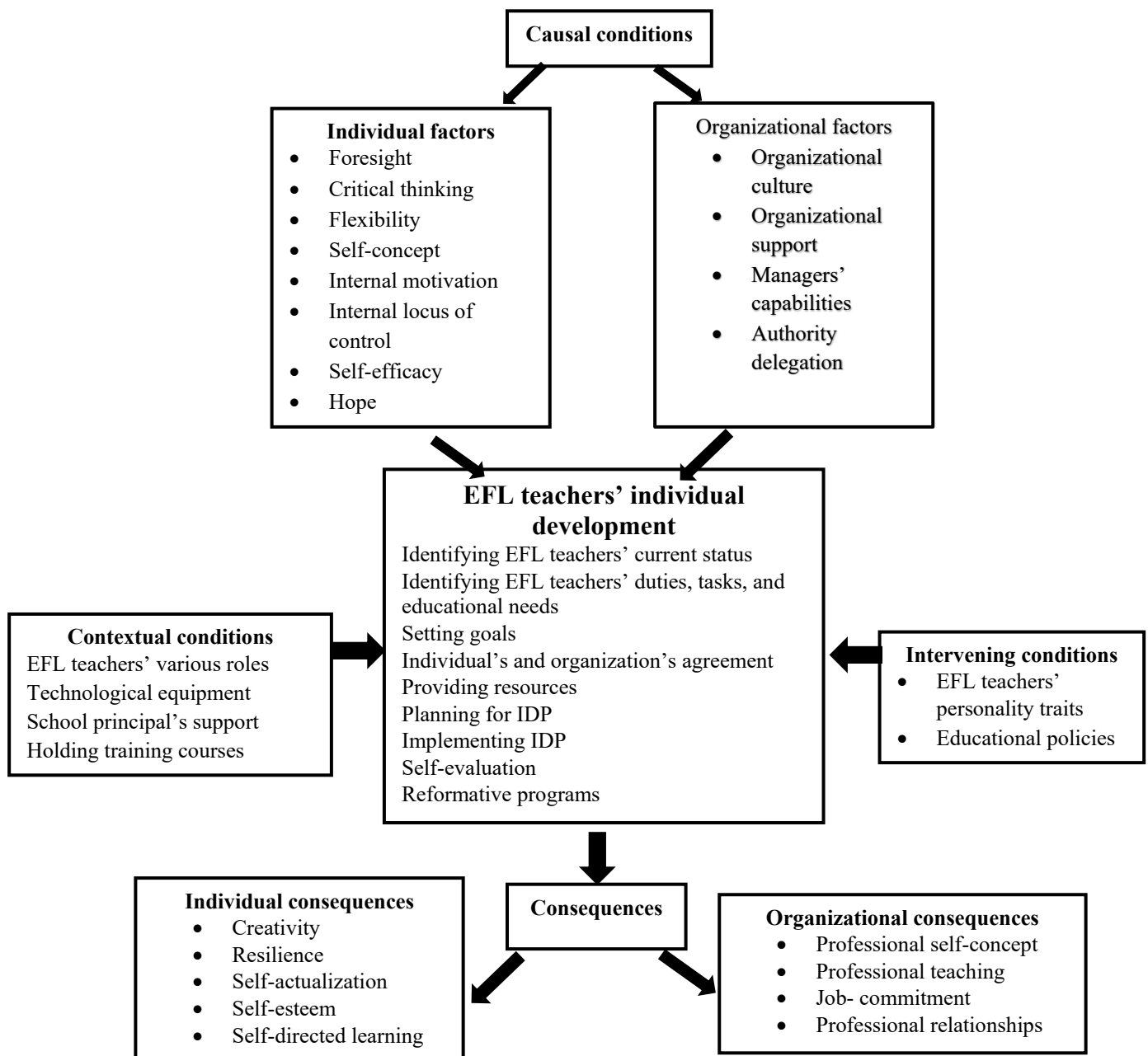


Figure 1
EFL Teachers' IDP Model

This model provides essential information regarding the stages of implementing an IDP for each EFL teacher. It would further fill in the existing gap among the previously conducted studies and suggest a pattern specifically designed for EFL teachers' IDP combined with its dimensions. Taking this framework into account would enlighten EFL teachers' understanding of their development process. The core category (EFL teachers' IDP) is centralized in this model since the researchers have aimed to probe into this phenomenon in the framework of grounded theory. The main clusters of this category are categorized under its heading. Other notions related to this concept are branched toward or out of it based on their effect. For example, since causal conditions entail constructive conditions facilitating EFL teachers' IDP and they lead to the advent of the phenomenon, they are placed on the right side of the core category. On the other hand, personal and job-related consequences achieved by implementing the program are placed on the left as IDP leads to these attainments. Finally, commitment to performing an IDP and accomplishment in fulfilling it is affected by the extant conditions at work and the factors that may step in the process.

Conclusion

This study characterizes EFL teachers' IDP, known as a professional development process in which teachers stick to a self-directed learning plan aiming at bridging the gap between where their current competencies are and the target point they should reach at. The findings of this study resulted in developing a theoretical model of EFL teachers' IDP characterizing a sequence of identifying EFL teachers' current status, realizing their duties, tasks, and educational needs, reaching a mutual agreement between school and teacher, and the teachers' mutual agreement, setting goals, providing resources, planning, implementing IDP, self-evaluation, and reformative steps. More specifically, the researchers came to the conclusion that the primary prerequisites of IDP as a procedural phenomenon are teachers who desire to improve and knowledgeable mentors who accompany them to provide the necessary help.

By the exploration of effective factors on EFL teachers' IDP, researchers found that teachers' workplace, administrative staff, colleagues, and mentors with whom teachers are directly working can have a great impact on the teachers' desire to develop professionally and their commitment to stay within the program until it finishes. The study findings further unveiled that when teachers implement the program, they will feel its individual and career-related effects. In fact, they would be more motivated and

responsible about what they are doing. The quality of their instruction would increase as a result.

The findings of the study have both theoretical and practical implications for EFL teachers and high school administrative staff. Theoretically speaking, the conceptual framework of EFL teachers' IDP put forward would deepen instructors' knowledge of their professional development. It would rather give them insight into the role played by teachers in their improvement. In practice, these self-directed learning plans can be offered to both experienced and novice teachers to help improve their current knowledge level. Moreover, pre-service teachers can benefit from this program under the supervision of a mentor since it helps match their competencies with the job requirements.

Additionally, the model designed in the current research can be used as a point of reference for EFL teachers' IDP. It seems to be necessary to inform school principals, educational policymakers, and authorities in the ministry of education of the factors that can contribute to the process of IDP (constructive causal conditions) and the conditions, contextual and intervening, that can directly affect the implementation of IDP. This would help them create conducive circumstances and remove the barriers in the way of this process.

Talking about the limitations of the study, it should be noted that the small sample of participants in this study decreases the probability of generalizing the results to other similar contexts. However, lack of financial resources can justify this matter. Therefore, future studies can be conducted to compensate for this weakness. Further studies can be carried out to investigate teachers' perceptions of being involved in an IDP process.

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How do you define EFL teachers' IDP?
2. What does an EFL teacher's IDP consist of?
3. What constructive factors do you think can form the process of IDP implementation? Are these factors job-related or pertains to individual teacher's attributes?
4. What factors do you think can affect EFL teachers' performance? Are they facilitative or hindering?
5. What are the possible consequences of implementing an IDP?