Developing a Contextualized Teaching Competency Framework for ELT Teachers: Insights from Iranian Head Teachers

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Abstract

The present study aimed to develop a teaching competency framework for Iranian English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers by conducting interviews with 30 teachers and head teachers in the field of ELT across multiple regions in Iran. The study utilized MAXQDA 20.2.1 to conduct a thematic analysis in three phases. Intercoder reliability (ICR) testing demonstrated a significant level of agreement. The findings indicated that an effective contextualized teaching competency framework for ELT teachers should consist of six key components: professional attributes focusing on teaching-specific characteristics, skills representing practical teaching abilities, knowledge encompassing subject-matter expertise, general qualifications including foundational requirements, personal attributes, and goals and values. Fifty-nine indicators were identified and strategically linked to established reference frameworks for ELT teacher competencies. The developed framework contributes to a novel organization of ELT teaching competencies. Key findings revealed that linguistic competency, inclusivity, student bonding, pedagogical knowledge, organizational skills, and teaching passion emerged as critical indicators within the Iranian ELT context. The framework's strength lies in its systematically developed structure based on expert insights and comprehensive literature analysis that offers brevity in design while maintaining comprehensiveness. These features would make it particularly applicable for Iranian ELT settings while providing a replicable model for broader international contexts. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to understand the changes that transpire over time. Moreover, integrating the perspectives of English language learners and high school students could enhance the practicality and applicability of these frameworks.

Keywords: Contextualized Teaching Competency Framework, ELT Teacher Professional Attributes, Contextualized Teaching, Educational Standards

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English language teaching (ELT) is undeniably one of the world's most significant and ever-evolving professions, as it is indispensable in facilitating and fostering cross-cultural communications, political affairs, businesses, education, and almost every aspect of individuals' daily lives. As English continues to grip its status as the lingua franca, the demand for effective ELT teachers is significantly felt.

In the realm of ELT, the term 'effective ELT teachers' has been a case of ample discussion and research. Researchers such as Arikan et al. (2008), Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011), Aliakbari and Malmir (2017), Nugroho (2018), Derakhshan et al. (2020), Khodadady (2010), and Bogale & Wale (2024) have attempted to identify the qualifications and characteristics of effective ELT teachers. Although it is generally agreed that teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, a number of practical skills, and some personal attributes are important, the term effectiveness seems to be complicated. In an endeavor to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness, Derakhshan et al. (2020) and Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) identify the qualifications of a competent ELT teacher, including their knowledge, skills, and personality traits; however, they view the effective teacher as successful teachers. In other words, in qualifying a successful teacher, they focus on the outcomes of teaching rather than the process of teaching itself or a combination of both.

The understanding of the effectiveness of ELT teachers falls under the broader concept of teacher competencies. The umbrella term 'teaching competency' covers a vast array of theoretical foundation or knowledge, practical teaching abilities or skills, professional attributes and qualifications, personal traits, and values (Hidalgo et al., 2020; Langelaan et al., 2024; Marzoughi et al., 2021; Nurhidayat et al., 2024; Penn-Edwards, 2010; Richards, 2011). Because a great value has been placed on education in the 21st century driven by economic, political, and social developments of nations (Hidalgo et al., 2020), educational systems have been trying to develop new teaching competency frameworks, adopt state-of-the-art frameworks, or update a previously validated one.

Notable examples of teacher competency frameworks in ELT are the British Council CPD framework (2011), the Cambridge English Teaching Framework (2015), Eaquals Language Teaching Framework (2016), and in general education one can refer to the General Competencies for Teaching Profession developed by the Turkey Ministry of Education (2017), the Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework, (2018) and Preference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers (2021) developed and validated by Quebec Ministry of Education.

Unlike countries such as Turkey, England and Canada, Iran's educational system lacks an official framework for explaining and determining the professional qualifications of ELT teachers; however, ample research has been conducted by Iranian Scholars to develop and validate teaching competency frameworks for teaching in general (Fooladi et al., 2015; Dibaei et al., 2016; Rezayat & Sadeghbeygi, 2018; Rezaei, 2022) and English language teaching in particular (e.g., Zand-Moghadam et al., 2021; Aghajanzadeh Kiasi, 2022; Rezai et al., 2022).

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The field of ELT in Iran encounters a significant challenge in defining and developing a teaching competency framework that effectively guides and assists Iranian ELT teachers in their professional growth. Existing frameworks may not adequately capture the contextualized needs and requirements of Iranian ELT teachers, resulting in a gap between the expected competencies and the actual skills possessed by teachers. Furthermore, the evolving nature of teaching competency frameworks entails continuous research and refinement to ensure their alignment with the changing needs of teachers, learners, educational systems, and society.

The existing Teaching Competency Frameworks for ELT (English Language Teaching) teachers in the Iranian context present several challenges and gaps (e.g., Zand-Moghadam et al., 2021; Aghajanzadeh Kiasi, 2022; Rezai et al., 2022). These include a lack of alignment with the specific needs and requirements of the Iranian educational system, a potential mismatch between the framework and the cultural and linguistic context of Iran, and a need for further incorporation of technology-related competencies. Additionally, there are gaps in addressing the diverse needs of English language learners in Iran and a need for greater emphasis on inclusive and differentiated teaching practices. Furthermore, the frameworks may not fully consider ELT teachers' professional development and ongoing support needs in Iran. These gaps highlight the necessity for a more contextually relevant and comprehensive Teaching Competency Framework for ELT teachers in the Iranian context.

In order to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of ELT teachers' teaching competency frameworks, it is essential to conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on the existing frameworks and guidelines developed within the field globally and in the Iranian context.

Literature Review

In this section, three prominent language teaching frameworks will be reviewed and discussed: the British Council CPD framework (2011), the Cambridge English Teaching Framework (2015), and the Eaquals Language Teaching Framework (2016). Also, some recent studies related to Iran will be meticulously investigated. These frameworks provide valuable insights into the stages, practices, categories, and descriptors that shape the ELT teacher's professional development.

British Council CPD framework (2011) is a booklet published by the British Council that can be downloaded on their official website. The CPD framework includes four stages of development and 12 professional practices. The booklet first presents the flowchart of the framework and then continues to elaborate on each stage and practice. The stages of development are awareness, understanding, engagement, and integration.

On the other hand, the Cambridge English Teaching Framework (2015) encompasses five categories and several subcategories. The main categories of this framework are Learning and the learner, Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Language ability, Language knowledge and awareness, and Professional Development and Values. Despite their credit and

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comprehensiveness, the authors did not mention how each stage, practice, category, or subcategory emerged.

Finally, Eaquals Language Teaching Framework (2016) is probably the most comprehensive language teaching framework, and it comes in four categories and several descriptors. An international board of contributors from Turkey, Ireland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Poland, and Romania developed the framework. The main areas of the framework are Planning Teaching and Learning, Teaching and Supporting Learning, Assessment of Learning, Language Communication and Culture, as well as the Teacher as Professional, which have been organized across three phases of development, namely knowledge, skills, and values. It also comes with scenarios for the assessment of teachers or self-assessment.

In the Iranian context, several ELT competency frameworks have been developed. Rezayat and Sadeghbeygi (2018) conducted mixed-method research in Persian to identify Iranian high school teachers' competencies in public schools. In the qualitative phase, they interviewed 23 teachers using purposeful sampling, conducted thematic coding, and employed the Delphi approach in analysis. In the quantitative phase, they surveyed 350 teachers by employing a researcher-made questionnaire to develop and validate a general teaching competency framework. Their study revealed that Iranian high school teachers' competency model consists of 71 competency components that, based on their importance coefficient, fall under eight factors of knowledge, skills, abilities, moral qualities, personality traits, attitudes, credit, and insight. They concluded that abilities and skills are the most important factors for teachers to perform their jobs effectively. Although they followed a rigorous approach in identifying teacher qualifications, there seems to be overlapping concepts or an imbalance in the categorization of factors. Some of these factors can fall under broader categories. Of such overlapping concepts, one can refer to skills and abilities, personality traits and credit, as well as attitudes and insights.

In the field of ELT, Rezai et al. (2022) surveyed 330 EFL teachers. Also, they interviewed 25 high school teachers using random sampling to determine correlations between EFL teachers' professional competencies and their job performance. They employed an EFL Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire, an EFL Teachers' Professional Competence Questionnaire, and a reflective written statement and analyzed the retrieved data using Pearson correlation analysis, a multiple regression analysis, and a standard thematic coding analysis. Although the findings in the study by Rezai et al. (2022) yielded a positive correlation between EFL teachers' job performance and their professional competencies, the finally loaded framework of teachers' professional competencies consisted of only three factors of skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Formerly validated frameworks of English language teaching competencies included more categories and were seen as more comprehensive (e.g., British Council CPD framework, 2011; Cambridge English Teaching Framework, 2015; Eaquals Language Teaching Framework,

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2016). These international frameworks provide valuable structural and methodological insights; however, their direct application to the Iranian context may be limited due to specific cultural, educational, and systemic requirements of Iran's ELT environment. Reviewing these established frameworks helps identify both universal teaching competencies and areas where contextualization is needed for the Iranian setting.

Several Iranian researchers have investigated ELT teachers' competencies, but their approaches have had limitations. Some studies focused on individual dimensions of teaching competencies, resulting in fragmented models that created overlapping concepts when combined. Others examined correlations between specific competencies and variables like job performance but did not develop comprehensive frameworks. For example, Ghavidel & Valipour (2020) explored teachers' pedagogical competencies and their personal and professional backgrounds, while Sazideh et al. (2020) focused on the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their teaching competency. While valuable for specific aspects, these narrow focuses have not produced the holistic framework needed for Iranian ELT teachers.

In another attempt to validate a framework of ELT teachers' pedagogical competence, Aghajabzadeh Kiasi (2022) developed a seven-construct framework of teachers' pedagogical competence: preparation, management, teaching, subject mastery, assessment, attitude, and belief. His work exemplifies the trend of research focusing on specific components of ELT teachers' competencies - in this case, pedagogical competence - rather than developing a comprehensive framework. These constructs might fall under separate categories in a broader framework such as the Eaquals Language Teaching Framework (2016). Yet, together, these seven constructs can only form a pedagogical competency model.

Considering the educational context in Iran, especially in the field of ELT, there is a lack of more comprehensive frameworks based on global standards. This gap led to the question of what categories and elements a contextualized teaching competency framework for Iranian ELT teachers can include. Such a framework should balance local educational needs and cultural context while incorporating relevant aspects of established international frameworks. This balance ensures both local applicability and alignment with global teaching standards. Additionally, the framework needs to encompass the general and specific qualifications of Iranian ELT teachers and address the evolving needs of English language teachers and learners today. Based on these gaps in the literature and the need for a contextualized framework in Iran's ELT context, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most critical competencies (foundational knowledge and practical skills) required for English language teachers to perform their roles effectively?
2. What professional attributes (specific actions, conduct, and personal characteristics) are essential for Iranian English language teachers to be effective in their profession?
3. How can Iranian English language teachers foster a positive and inclusive classroom environment that supports students from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and identities?

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4. What core components should a contextualized teaching competency framework for Iranian ELT teachers include at a general level (broad, higher-level competencies applicable to all teachers) and at a specific level (detailed, job-specific competencies unique to English language teaching)?

Method

The current study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research objectives of defining and developing categories and elements of a contextualized ELT teacher competency framework. The researchers explored participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and perspectives to provide rich and detailed insights into the research topic. The following sections provide detailed descriptions of the steps taken.

Participants and Sampling procedures

A purposeful sampling was conducted to fulfill the goals of the research. Twenty-one provincial and local ELT headteachers and 9 ELT teachers with over 10 years of English language teaching experience in public high schools or private language institutes across multiple regions in Iran were asked to answer four questions (See the Appendix). The headteachers were chosen from the English Language Secretariate. This board supervises English language teaching and learning in the country and is directly linked to the Ministry of Education with missions such as identification and explanation of the goals of the upcoming educational year, the coordination of teachers in line with the national curriculum, and the implementation of the goals of the Fundamental Transformation Document. The remaining teachers who participated in the interview as teachers were introduced and acknowledged as qualified by the head teachers.

The larger proportion of participants from Ilam was due to the researchers' location and established professional network in that province. Other participants were selected through the Language Secretariat Online group, which represents a national network of ELT head teachers. This combination allowed for both deep local insights (from Ilam) and broader national perspectives (from other provinces). Table 1 below summarizes the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1

Participants' Background Information

No.	Residential location	Position	Number of participants	Years of experience	Gender and number	
					M	F
1	Ilam	Headteacher	4	18,17,17, 17	2	2
2	Ilam	Teacher	8	12,13,15,15,17,17,18,27	2	6
7	North Khorasan	Headteacher	1	18	-	1
8	Mazandaran	Head teacher	2	21, 27	-	2

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No.	Residential location	Position	Number of participants	Years of experience	Gender and number	
9	Esfahan	Head teacher	3	18, 20, 21	2	1
10	Esfahan	Teacher	2	14, 18	-	2
11	Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	Head teacher	2	11, 16	2	-
12	Hamedan	Headteacher	2	24, 34	2	-
13	Tehran	Headteacher	1	22	-	1
14	Tehran	Teacher	1	15	-	1
15	Fars	Headteacher	2	14, 19	2	-
16	Kerman	Headteacher	2	12, 16	2	-
			Total = 30	M= ⌊18.1⌋	Total = 14, 16	

As shown in Table 1, a total of 30 teachers and head teachers, including 10 PhD holders, 7 PhD candidates, and 13 Master graduates in the field of ELT from 9 provinces in Iran, volunteered to participate in the interviews. 14 male and 16 female teachers participated in the study. The average years of experience was 18.

Data collection procedures

Since the majority of the participants resided in different locations, direct and in-person interviews were not possible. Options such as telephone interviews and Skype interviews were considered for conducting the interview. However, the researchers offered a three-day deadline to the participants to receive more comprehensive and detailed answers instead of condensed and repeated ones. It also allowed participants to search for up-to-date academic information in case they needed more information or if they desired to familiarize themselves with the questions at their disposal. They were then asked to type their responses or voice-record them and send them via WhatsApp, Telegram, Email, or Shad (an Iranian educational platform launched after the COVID-19 pandemic). This type of interview offered several advantages, including:

1. Convenience and flexibility: using messaging Apps eliminated the daunting task of scheduling and allowed for more flexibility for both the interviewer and the interviewee.
2. Variety in responses: it generated a combination of participants' opinions and scientific research. Also, the quality of the responses could improve and hopefully be in line with the research objectives.
3. Reduction of bias: searching for up-to-date information would minimize potential bias and provoke more objective responses.

However, the possibility of receiving plagiarized responses was considered. Responses were checked by the online plagiarism checker on www.scribbr.com. Only one response was eliminated from the thematic coding for being totally AI-generated.

Data Analysis

The retrieved data was then coded in three stages: open, axial, and selective. To ensure the rigor and reliability of the data analysis process, an MA graduate in ELT with expertise in thematic coding was recruited to assist in the coding and analysis of the collected data. The two coders first conducted a pilot thematic analysis of ten responses using MAXQDA 20.2.1, and then an intercoder reliability analysis was performed using SPSS 24. The results of this pilot coding were transformed into numbers in an Excel Sheet, using '1' for agreement and '2' for disagreement. The first screening measure of agreement yielded a Kappa of 0.267, indicating a weak level of agreement.

The two coders then discussed the discrepancies in coding labels and code segments, with the aim of achieving substantial agreement, if not a perfect one. Several labeling modifications were made, such as refining definitions and clarifying ambiguous terms. Additionally, code-segment movements were implemented to ensure more accurate categorization. A second pilot measure of agreement was then conducted, which yielded a Kappa value of 0.807. According to Landis and Koch (1977), this Kappa value falls within the range of substantial agreement.

The process continued, and 20 other participants' responses were added to the coding process. Each coder separately performed the coding, and the final results were once again analyzed to ensure the coding process's reliability. The coders discussed the discrepancies and controversial codes to reach a higher level of agreement over labeling codes and categorizing coded segments through meticulous investigations of published articles and previously established ELT competency frameworks. The final intercoder analysis yielded a Kappa value of 0.859, as shown in Table 2 below. A Kappa value between 0.81 and 1.00 is considered an almost perfect agreement.

Table 2

Final intercoder agreement results

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error[a]	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.859	.068	7.156	.000
N of Valid Cases		69			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Results

After receiving the interview responses from the participants and analyzing their content using MAXQDA 20.2.1, as well as consulting previously validated global frameworks, the two coders concluded that all the extracted code segments could fall under six main categories: knowledge, skills, professional attributes, personal attributes, general qualifications, as well as values and goals.

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The purpose of comparing the thematic analysis results with the previously validated global frameworks was threefold. Firstly, the coders aimed to find similarities in patterns of thoughts and world views between Iranian ELT teachers and teachers in other parts of the globe. Secondly, the coders sought to ensure the inclusion of the most practical aspects within a comprehensive framework. Lastly, the coders referred to these frameworks as points of reference when discussing discrepancies and when not much information was discerned from the web search results.
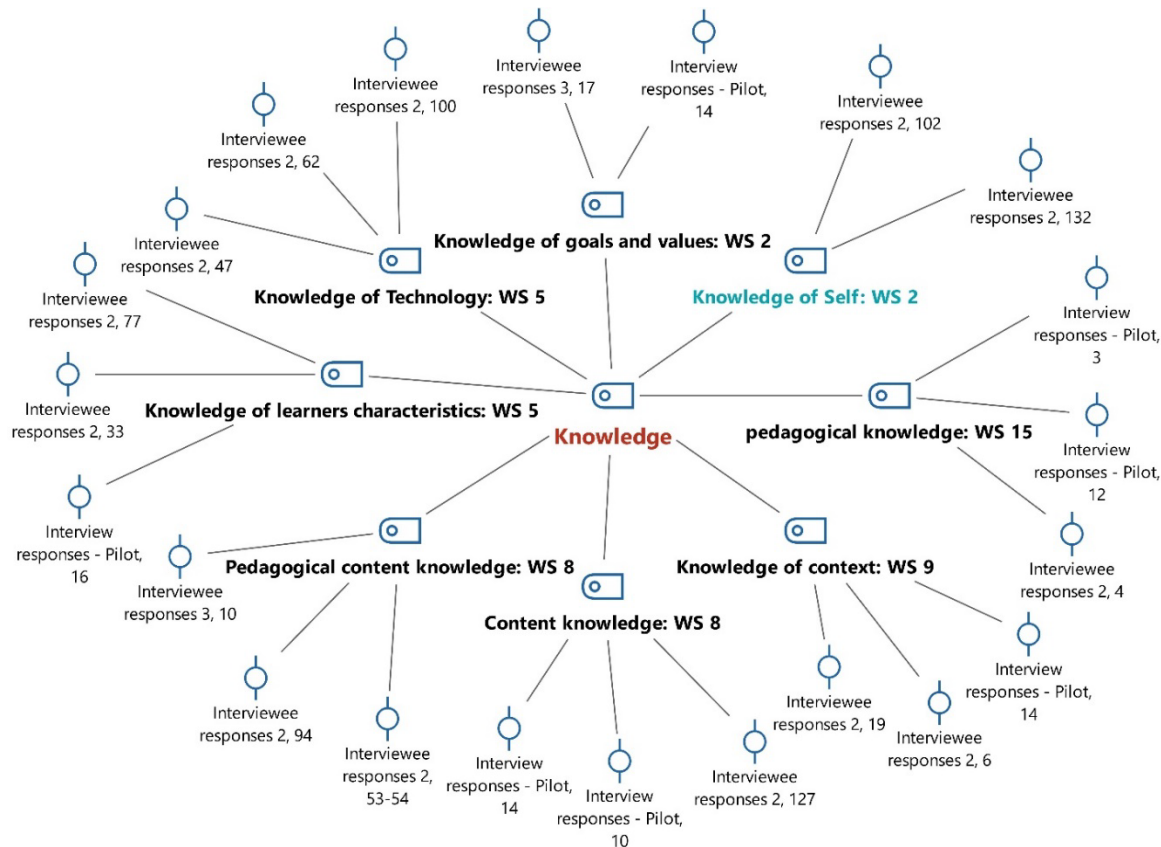
Before presenting the results, it is essential to briefly clarify the main six categories. In this study, knowledge refers to familiarity, understanding, and expertise in an area or field that enables teachers to perform their teaching practice effectively (Shulman, 1986). On the other hand, skills in teaching refer to practical abilities that enable teachers to implement instructional strategies driven by their knowledge of teaching successfully. (ISCED, 2011). The next category, professional attributes, can be defined as a set of qualities and competencies directly related to an ELT teacher's role. This is while personal attributes and general qualifications are defined as personal characteristics that contribute to the teachers' overall effectiveness and the foundational requirements that identify individuals as teachers per se. Values and goals are fundamental principles, beliefs, and desires that inform and shape teachers' approaches to education (Adebiyi et al., 2017).

Knowledge Category

The first category to emerge was the knowledge category. This category was mainly in line with the classifications and taxonomies first introduced by Shulman (1987) and later extended by Mishra and Kohler (2006). The Knowledge category includes content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, context knowledge, and technology knowledge. However, a new knowledge indicator emerged from the interview responses: knowledge of self. Figure 1 below represents this category's indicators, along with their weight scores (WS). A weighted score is the number of times participants mentioned or referred to an indicator.

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Figure 1

Knowledge Code-Subcodes Segments Model

As shown in Figure 1, pedagogical content knowledge received the highest WS (15). Three instances of where participants referred to this type of knowledge were also shown: 'interview responses file pilot, line 3 and line 12' and also 'interview responses file 2, line 4'. The code-subcode segment model generation was set to only 3 levels of subcodes to enhance the figure's readability. Also, Table 3 represents a sample of interview responses received for each knowledge indicator.

Table 3

Sample interview responses identifying knowledge indicators along with their weight scores

Knowledge Indicator	Weight Score	Sample Response
Pedagogical Knowledge	15	A good English language teacher should be familiar with various teaching methodologies and approaches (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 4)
Knowledge of Context	9	And the next is the ability to respond to the context, to the cultural requirement of the context (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 102)
Content Knowledge	8	Effective ELT teachers are knowledgeable about the subject matter that he is going to teach (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 10)

Knowledge Indicator	Weight Score	Sample Response
Pedagogical Content Knowledge	8	We have pedagogical content knowledge in which we are supposed to contextualize or establish the content, transfer the content to the knowledge (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 14)
Knowledge of learners' characteristics	5	Being aware of the learners' needs and features (to be familiar with psychology required for teachers) (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 2)
Knowledge of Technology	5	Teacher should have sufficient knowledge about technology and E-content (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 136)
Knowledge of Goals and Values	2	Then we have the knowledge of the ends and values and the goals of the teacher, or course, or the curriculum. (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 14)
Knowledge of Self	2	[…] awareness of strength, weakness and potential as a teacher, (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 102)

Skills Category

The second category that emerged was teachers' skills. This category contained 11 subcodes: interaction skills, technological skills, material selection and development skills, adaptation skills, lesson planning skills, lesson presentation skills, assessment skills, organizational skills, needs identification skills, leadership skills, and pedagogical application skills.

Among these subcodes, organizational skills received the highest weight score of 12. The concept can be used to cover a wide range of teachers' professional behavior, such as classroom arrangement, time management, sophistication in planning and presentation, and keeping track of students' portfolios and records of achievement. Figure 2 below shows the skill category indicators, which have been arranged based on their WSs, and it also shows how participants perceive their importance. The lowest weight score, on the other hand, was 1 for leadership skills.

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Figure 2

Skills Code-Subcodes Segments Model

This indicator was mentioned in the interviews only once. This WS does not imply that the indicator is of less value but pinpoints that participants mainly referred to management competencies more often than leadership skills.

The model shows that organizational, assessment, adaptation, lesson planning, lesson presentation, technological, material selection/development, and interactional skills make up the most repeated skill indicators. A sample reference of each indicator is provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Sample interview responses identifying skills indicators along with their weight scores

Skill Indicator	Weight Score	Sample Response
Organizational skills	12	Being organized is crucial for managing classroom activities, assignments, assessments, and resources effectively (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 18)
Assessment skills	9	An English language teacher should be able to assess students' progress accurately (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 11)

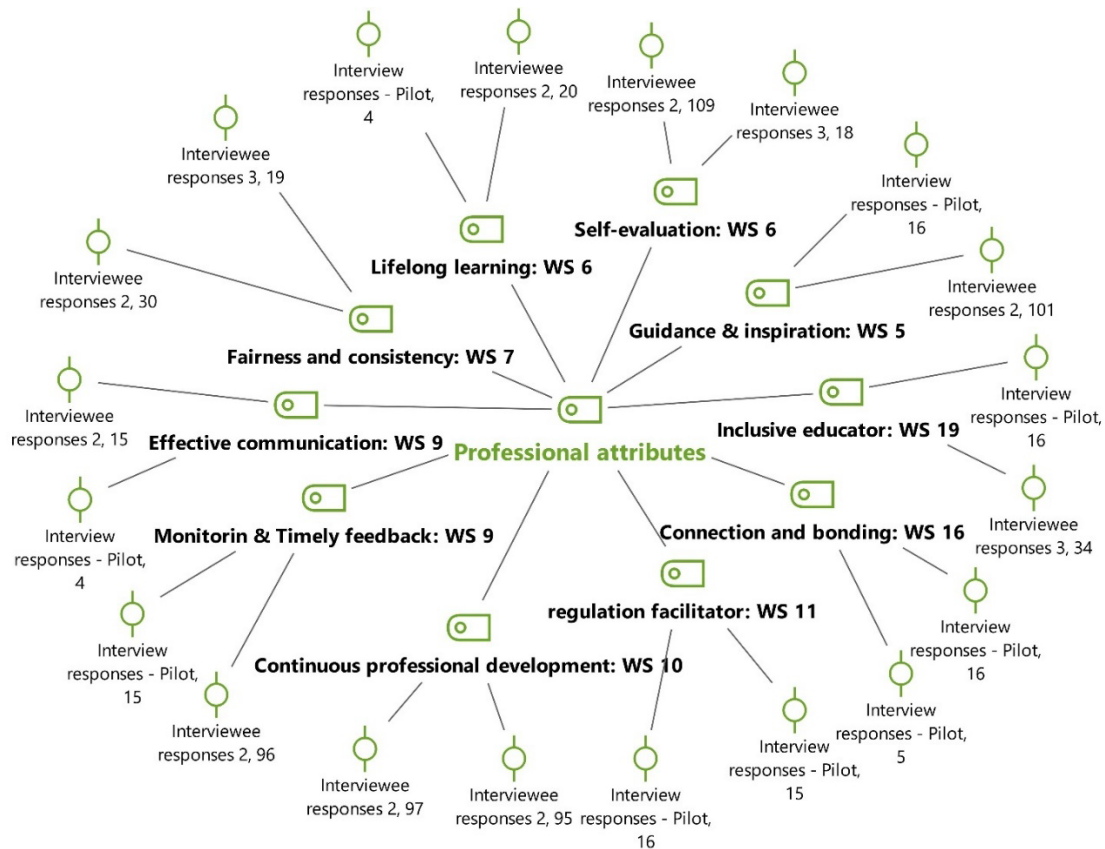|	Teaching English as a Second Language Quarterly (TESLQ) (Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills) 44(3), Summer 2025, pp. 1-26	**13** Mohsen Beigi

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Skill Indicator	Weight Score	Sample Response
Lesson planning skills	7	And about the specific language competences, I should say that first of all, a teacher should have a well-designed a well-structured lesson plan (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 12)
Adaptation skills	7	Educators should be able to adjust their teaching styles and create engaging and effective lessons. (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 4)
Material selection & development	6	Also, he tries to create his own teaching material to get better feedback from learners. It actually helps learners to boost their creativity and put their knowledge to test (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 8)
Lesson presentation skills	6	They need some strategies to open the lesson, open or introduce the topic matter, or how to setup learning arrangement or how to evaluate students' understanding or a students' development. (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 99)
Technological skills	4	Teachers should possess digital literacy skills and effectively integrate technology into their profession for enhanced learning experiences (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 47)
Interaction skills	4	The first thing that I can say the framework must include [is] having interaction and communication in the classroom (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 6)
Needs identification skills	2	We need to identify and specify different needs of the learners, their abilities, their disabilities and things like this. (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 14)
Pedagogy application skills	2	[…] particularly knowing how to put theory into practice that is very important in the world of TEFL (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 3)
Leadership skills	1	An effective teacher is one who possesses leadership skills (Interview responses file 3, Pos, 70)

Professional attributes category

The category of teachers' professional qualities was extensive, but because the term can also cover an array of essential skills, knowledge, personal traits, as well as values and goals (İlğan et al., 2022), it was a serious point of discussion for coders of the study, leading to abridgment of the subcodes through merging items or reorganization of codes. The final output of the coding is shown in Figure 3 below. Since the teachers' professional attributes category was extensive, making it hard for the readers to follow, the authors set the model generation to 10 most frequent codes, 2 levels of sample segments, and the largest segment size. The full list of emerged codes can be seen in Table 5.

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Figure 3

Professional Attributes Code-Subcodes Segments Model

The figure's results suggest that an educator's inclusivity is the most significant quality in professionalism. In other words, the participants mostly referred to the fact that teachers must create a safe and supportive environment for learners, provide positive reinforcements, and model inclusive behaviors. Also, connection and binding with learners were brought to attention by its weight score 16. Friendliness, firm yet friendly rapport building, keeping a trusted relationship, and confidentiality were among the terms they used to describe a genuine teacher-student connection. Regulation facilitator and continuous professional development were the second two highly mentioned indicators of professionalism. Table 5 presents a total of 19 indicators of professional attributes. The weight scores signify the importance of each indicator in teachers' perceptions.

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Table 5

Sample interview responses identifying professional attributes indicators along with their weight scores

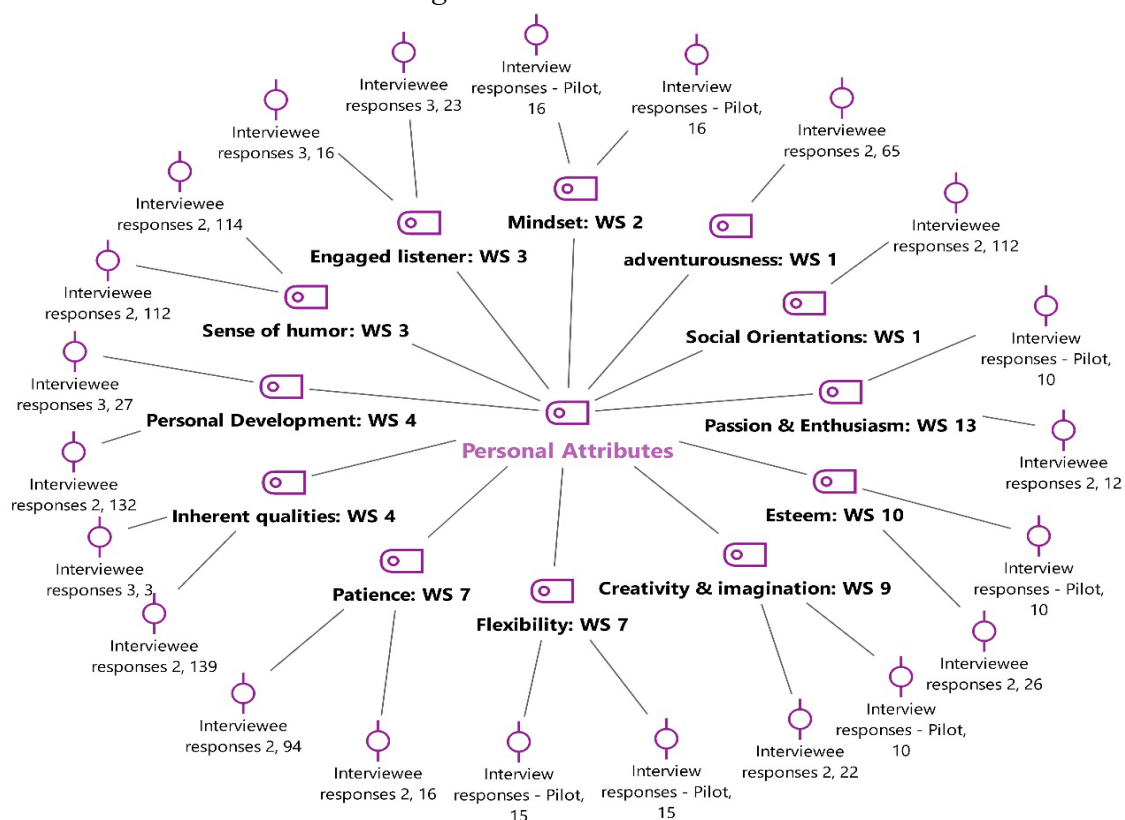| Professional Attributes Indicator	Weight Score	Sample Response
Accountability	1	So, we can refer to showing accountability (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 143)
Professional conduct	1	They are directly linked to their personality and their workplace behavior (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 107)
Professional appearance	1	being well-dressed, being a visually attractive person. I don't mean having like perfect beauty. I mean like being well-dressed, clean (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 95)
perseverance	3	Being energetic and motivated no matter what (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 79)
empowerment	3	to create an inclusive classroom, encourage students to be curious about languages, and teach them about various world events, cultures and perspectives (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 123)
Continuous professional development	10	She should try to update herself with the newest trends and changes in knowledge since it is expected for the modern teacher to be multidimensional (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 17)
Fairness and consistency	7	an English teacher needs to promote diversity and fairness (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 101)
Learning facilitator	4	One more thing is [to] pay special attention to those students or learners that show least inclination or interest towards class participation (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 16)
Monitoring and timely feedback	9	[…] provide constructive feedback. (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 11)
Team work	5	Well today in every field, team work is more acceptable than individual work even in teaching. (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 14)
Guidance and inspiration	5	Research shows that students respond better when they feel that their teacher has faith in their abilities (Interviewee responses file 2, Pos. 101)
Preparation	5	and is prepared for every class to win and maintain his students' respect (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 10)
Self-evaluation	6	She is better to reflect on her way of teaching and modify or change some approaches. (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 18)
Efficiency	2	The second one I think is effective teaching and you know that as a teacher's job is to teach effectively. (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 6)
Regulation facilitator	11	set clear behavior standards for students (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 35)
Inclusive educator	19	They should empathize with their students' struggles and provide support and encouragement. (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 16)
Connection and bonding	16	they need to make a kind of rapport with students (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 100)
Effective communication	9	She should try to make herself clear and understandable (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 18)
Lifelong learning	6	A willingness to learn from your students (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 32)

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Personal attributes category

This category is mostly referred to as personality traits in the related literature which characterizes teacher's behavior. Since teachers' behavior may derive from their beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets towards themselves and the world, the general term personal attributes was chosen. In this study, 12 indicators of personal attributes emerged from participants' responses. Figure 4 below represents these indicators arranged based on 2 level segment codes.

Figure 4

Personal Attributes Code-Subcodes Segments Model

All indicators of personal attributes are shown in Figure 4 as well as Table 6. Passion and Enthusiasm received the highest weight score and were frequently referred to by participants as a crucial attribute for teachers to be able to go beyond what is expected of them and to show genuine interest in teaching and supporting students with their mental and emotional growth.

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Table 6

Sample interview responses identifying personal attributes indicators along with their weight scores

Personal Attributes Indicator	Weight Score	Sample Response
Inherent qualities	4	According to the first category, we can expect a teacher to be a potentially one (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 139)
Personal development	4	[…] the ability to work well under pressure (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 27)
Social orientations	1	Effective English teachers may be introverted or extroverted with various aspects of teacher personality (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 112)
Adventurousness	1	[…] is risk taking (Interviewee responses file 2, Pos. 65)
Patience	7	The second thing that I think most teachers need as a kind of effective skill, they need to be patient (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 100)
Mindset	2	Teachers with very weak, poor or negative mindsets cannot be successful in dealing with such environments (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 16)
Flexibility	7	This flexibility can be applied to different areas, for example sometimes you may make a change even in your teaching method (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 15)
Engaged listener	3	She should also be able to listen carefully and patiently to her students (Interview responses file 3, Pos. 16)
Esteem	10	Furthermore, having a clear level of morality in class makes everyone perfect (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 142)
Sense of humor	3	humorous teachers greet students by name, smile frequently, encourage students to approach with any issues (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 114)
Creativity and imagination	9	Effective English language educators use innovative techniques such as games, role-plays, multimedia resources to make lessons interesting and interactive (Interview responses file 2, Pos. 22)
Passion and Enthusiasm	13	An effective English language teacher is enthusiastic and passionate about the material and curious about students (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 10)

General qualifications category

This category specifies the general qualifications of teachers. By general qualifications, we mean the characteristics that every teacher, regardless of the field of teaching, is advised to possess. However, some of the indicators are specific to language teachers' general qualifications. The indicators in this category included classroom management competencies, linguistic competencies, approaches to language teaching and learning, and experience.

Classroom management competency has three subcategories, namely strategic classroom management, learner engagement management, and critical incident management, which were

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obtained from the interviews' content analysis. After the two coders' discussion over the categorization of these indicators as well as the review of the reference frameworks, it was decided that they can be included in the category of general competencies.

Figure 5

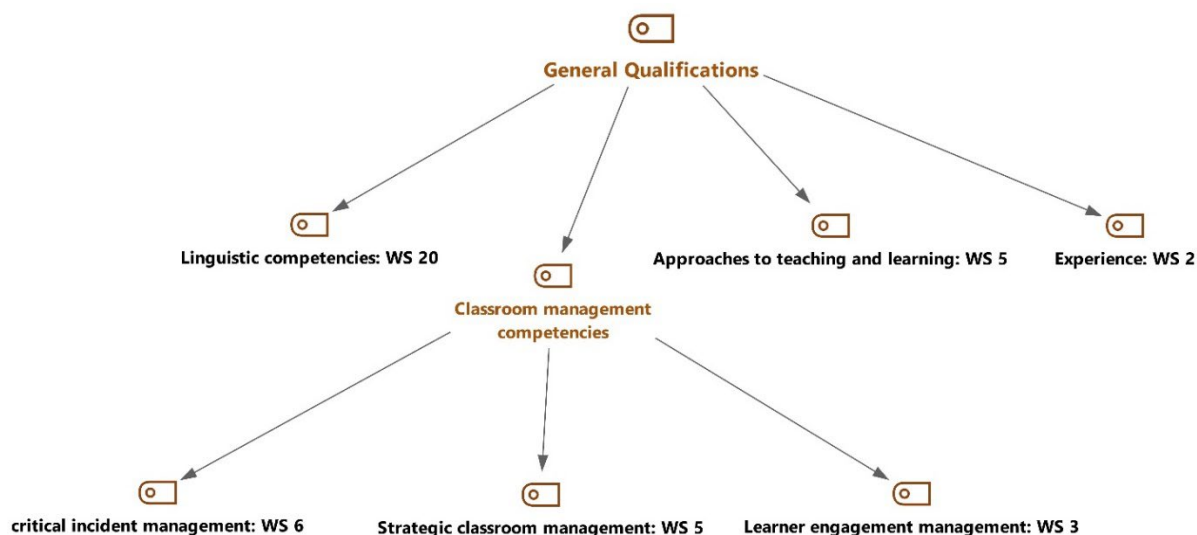*General Qualifications Hierarchical Code-Subcodes Model*

Figure 5 represents the four indicators of general competencies. As shown, participants expressed firmly that a competent language teacher must first gain linguistic competencies. This indicator was mentioned both in responses to question one and question four of the interview questions. It refers to teachers' knowledge of micro and macro skills such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, speaking, and pragmatics, as one respondent maintained:

> Teachers should have the most important competence which means linguistic competence and have enough knowledge of syntax, semantics, [and] pragmatics which are sub-branches of micro linguistics. They should know the way to use the above knowledge mentioned and to put them into practice.

Interviewee 13, responses file 3, Pos. 8:

Linguistic competence was seen as a general qualification because the two coders concluded that an ELT teacher can be highly competent linguistically but lacks the necessary teaching skills, knowledge, and professional attributes.

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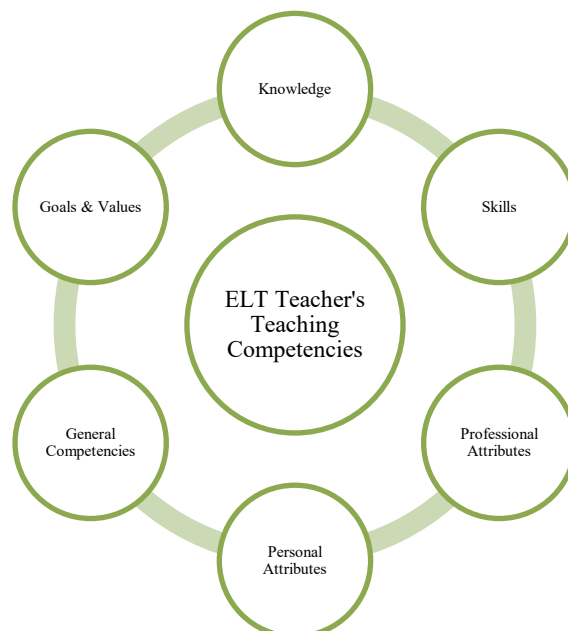
Goals and Values Category

Although this category was mentioned only by one of the participants (interviewee 15) and possessed only two code segments, any researcher's mission is to state the facts regardless of their mindsets, presuppositions, theories, and assumptions. The participant referred to this category by enumerating a list of components that an ELT teacher's competency framework must include. Among the indicators were commitments to 'school development' and 'student development'. This can be seen as the ultimate goal of education and the fundamental principle to which an individual can be committed.

Discussion

The following section presents a thorough discussion and analysis of the results obtained from the study. The findings are also examined in light of the research objective -that of identifying the components of an ELT teaching competency framework that can provide the latest practical standards rather than mere theoretical ones- to explore the implications, patterns, and relationships that emerged from the data. This discussion aims to provide a deeper understanding of the research topic and address any discrepancies or unexpected outcomes. The instrument used to collect data was an interview file containing four questions, which can be found in the Appendix below.

Question one asked the participants to elaborate on the most important competencies that ELT teachers must possess. This question assisted the researchers in outlining the main components of the framework, which ultimately led to the extraction of our main categories of knowledge, skills, professional attributes, personal attributes, and general competencies, as well as goals and values. Most previous frameworks, including the British Council CPD framework (2011), the Cambridge English Language Teaching Framework (2015), Eaquals Language Teaching Framework (2016), and the Reference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers (2021), cover only a number of these competencies. They mostly refer to knowledge competencies, 21st-century teaching skills, and a set of mixed personal and professional attributes with no boundary between them. The current study attempted to specify a new organization of a 21st-century ELT teacher's competency framework. Figure 6 below represents the conceptual model derived from the thematic analysis of the interview responses.

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Figure 6

The Conceptual Model of ELT Teacher's Teaching Competencies

Question 2 specifically asked the respondents to elaborate on key professional attributes of effective ELT teachers. The results of the three-phase coding delineated a wide range of features that were in line with recent literature on ELT teacher's competencies. Al-Seghayer (2017) and Langelaan et al. (2024) identified a number of key variables that contribute to the promotion of teachers' performance and professional development, namely cognitive knowledge, subject matter knowledge, English language proficiency, personality characteristics, and other relevant variables such as being involved in the field, using effective teaching, and undertaking individual initiatives. His findings provide valuable insights into developing an ELT competency framework; however, the factors and attributes he delineated need reorganization. Also, Al-Seghayer's study (2017) was merely a theoretical discussion of the key variables.

One problem noticed during the two coders' discussions to achieve an acceptable level of agreement was the labeling and categorization of components in previous studies. Different researchers have labeled the components differently, but the labels effectively convey their intended messages (see Marzoughi et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the factors they listed are either limited in number or belong to a broader category. The authors attempted to minimize the stated problems in the current study. The results of the current study yielded 19 indicators of professional attributes that could only fall under the category of teacher professionalism. See Table 4 for more on these indicators.

In question three, the participants were asked to explain how English language teachers can create a positive and inclusive classroom environment for their students. Cantos et al. (2022) refers to equal opportunities and non-discriminatory approaches in teaching to introduce

the concept of inclusive teaching and teaching environment. While the participants were expected to mention such characteristics, they were also expected to state how teachers can create this inclusivity in language teaching and create a positive and supportive classroom environment.

Participants believed that an ELT teacher needs to possess or know about a number of factors that heavily influence the creation of inclusive language environments, such as knowing how to bond and connect with students, identifying and facilitating regulations, having effective communication, monitoring students' activities and progress inclusively regardless of who the learners are, considering both continuous professional development and lifelong learning, extending their categories of knowledge, and possessing, at the very least, the most important personal attributes such as passion and Enthusiasm, esteem, flexibility, and creativity.

Finally, participants were asked in question four to elaborate on or enumerate any general and specific components they believe could be included in an ELT teacher's language teaching competency framework. In fact, the purpose of the last question was for the participants to come to a conclusion and mention if something was missed. However, the question clearly stated that the components they name must be either general or specific. By adopting this method, the researchers conducting this study can more easily classify the components and cross-reference them with existing literature.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop a contextualized ELT teacher's teaching competency framework by interviewing thirty ELT head teachers and teachers residing in different cities in Iran. The proposed framework yielded six main categories and fifty-nine indicators of teaching competency. The results indicated that the proposed framework is in line with most aforementioned reference frameworks, such as Cambridge English Teaching Framework (2015) and Eaquals Language Teaching Framework (2016). Moreover, it offers novelty in research approach, brevity in framework design, and practicality in implementation, making it a straightforward framework for other researchers across multiple regions to analyze and replicate, for interested readers to follow, and for Iranian ELT teachers to refer to as a 21st century Iranian ELT language teaching competency framework. See Figure 7 below.
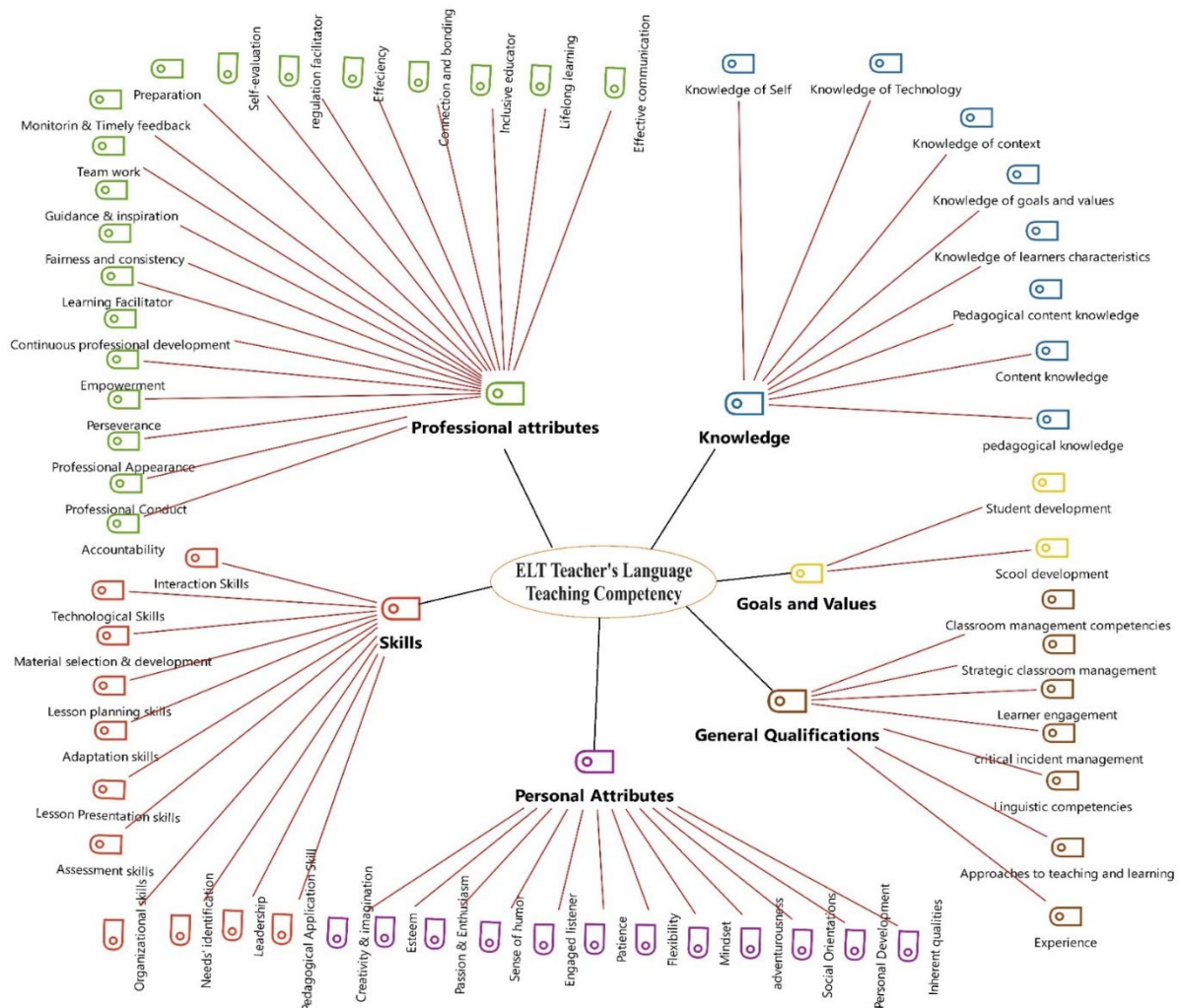
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Figure 7

ELT Teacher's Teaching Competency Framework as Perceived by Head Teachers

Figure 7 represents the full model framework, including six major categories: professional attributes with 19 indicators, personal attributes with 12 indicators, skills with 11 indicators, knowledge with 8 indicators, general qualifications with 7 indicators, and goals and values with 2 indicators. According to the results of the study, linguistic competency seen as a general qualification, inclusivity and bonding with students specified as professionalism, pedagogical knowledge, organizational skills, as well as passion and Enthusiasm seemed to be the most important indicators of ELT teacher's teaching competencies among all the indicators as perceived by ELT teachers.

The findings from this study contribute to the ongoing discussions on ELT teacher competencies and provide valuable insights for teacher education programs and professional development initiatives. The new organization of the competency framework proposed in this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the skills, knowledge, attributes,

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qualifications, and attitudes necessary for effective English language teaching. These findings have implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and policy development in the field of ELT across the globe.

As all research comes with limitations, the current study included a limited sample size. Similar studies could be conducted with a large-scale sample size so that the researchers can extend the generalizability of the findings. Also, in-person interviews may yield potentially varying responses, leading to the identification of different indicators of teaching competencies. Future research can also benefit from longitudinal studies by exploring the development and changes in such frameworks over time to observe how ELT teachers' competencies evolve during their careers. Students' perspectives on ELT teacher's teaching competencies are also suggested to be integrated into future research.

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Appendix
The Interview Questions

The researchers solicited respondents' opinions based on the following interview questions:

1. What do you consider to be the most important competencies for an English language teacher to possess? (By competencies, we mean the skills, knowledge, and abilities that are required to perform the job effectively.)

2. What are some key professional attributes for effective English language teachers? (By professional attributes, we mean specific actions or conduct and personal characteristics or qualities that are expected of ELT teachers.)

3. How can English language teachers create a positive and inclusive classroom environment for their students? (By positive and inclusive, we mean an environment that is supportive for all students, regardless of their background. culture, or identity.)

4. What do you think an English language teacher competency framework must include? General and specific. (By general and specific, we mean the different levels of detail that should be included in the framework, including broader, higher-level competencies that are required for all, as well as more detailed, job-specific competencies that are required for English language teachers.)