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Putatively Quintessential Behavioral-Pedagogical Conditions Reinforcing the Maintenance of EFL University Instructors

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This investigation attempted to explore the necessary conditions to maintain and satisfy university instructors in the EFL context of Iran. To this end, 35 EFL instructors from diverse universities were interviewed, and then, based on the received ideas, a 29-item questionnaire on EFL instructor maintenance was designed and submitted to 48 other EFL instructors. To classify and choose a group of frequent ideas and decline the inessentials, the qualitative codings, i.e. open, axial, and selective coding, were applied. The results of the analysis revealed two major themes, i.e., behavioral and pedagogical, derived from six core categories, i.e., minimizing confrontations, promoting positive attitudes, reinforcing criticality, naturalizing blatantness, encouraging learning-centeredness, and inducing reflective-teaching learning, as six putatively quintessential conditions for the maintenance of EFL Instructors. Finally, this study suggested some pedagogical implications.

Introduction

Attrition rates among the Iranian EFL university instructors imply that newly-recruited instructors should be provided with appropriate conditions to feel secure in their professional circumstances. Instructors need to be adequately supported by the university administration before the time when their maintenance would become a serious problem (Kersaint *et al.*, 2005). Richards (2004) emphasizes the crucial behaviors to temper the university obligations while maintaining an instructor. However, research indicates that approximately half of all instructors come up with job dissatisfaction within the first five years of working (Ingersoll, 2003). Maintenance is specifically crucial for newly-recruited instructors. Taking into account the conditions to maintain instructors, rather than to avoid their burnout, might comprise the justification for their stay as they enter the profession. The behaviors such as trust, confidence and faith in their students and in their subject matter can entail an enduring sense of hope and possibility, the rewards of positive relationships, and the knowledge that they are bringing about a sort of change (Nieto, 2003; Williams, 2003). The increasing complexity of instructors' demands can be justified through several points such as higher social expectations and lower social recognition, greater accountability to parents and policy-makers, increasing rate of pedagogical and curricular changes, the necessity of technological competence, high demands beyond the pedagogical tasks, cultural diversity among students, and more administrative work (Dussault, Deaudelin, Royer, & Loiselle, 1999; Goodlad, 1984; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Lortie, 1975; McLagan, 1999; Nias, 1989). While these pressures are true for all instructors, the condition for newly-recruited instructors is even worse. There are many studies that relate these pressures to high attrition rates among beginning teachers, reportedly as high as 50% within the first five years in some jurisdictions in the United States (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Morey & Murphy, 1990; The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 2002). Harris (2004) reported that in the United States, more teachers leave the profession than join it and two studies make the startling claim that there are some districts where the teacher dropout rate is actually higher than the student rate (Fulton, Burns, & Goldenberg, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). A recent study in Illinois (DeAngelis & Presley, 2007) concludes that the problem in that state is over-estimated, but supports earlier claims that the leavers "are among the brightest and best" (see for example,

Schlecty & Vance, 1981, or more recently, Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000). If these beginners are identified as especially able, why do they leave teaching? According to the president of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future: "They leave for many reasons, but lack of support is at the top of the list" (Carroll, 2005, p. 199).

Since Robert Schaffer's classic paper, Job Satisfaction as Related to Need Satisfaction in Work (1953), there have been numerous articles and books discussing job satisfaction in general (e.g. Arnold, Cooper & Robertson, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Argyle, 1987) and job satisfaction among teachers in particular (e.g. Avi-Itzhak, 1988; Borg, Riding & Falzon, 1991; Chaplain, 1995; Evans, 1992,1998; Kloep & Tarifa, 1994; McManus, 1996; Nias, 1981,1989; Rodgers, Jenkinson & Chapman, 1990). Not only are we losing veteran teachers, we are losing beginning teachers at an alarming rate as well (Konanc, 1996). According to McCoy (2003) beginning secondary teachers are leaving because of low salary, job demands, stress, immense workloads, and school working conditions including a lack of administrative support. Teacher recruitment and retention are receiving a lot of attention. Additional reasons that make this study inherently important to educators, administrators, professors, Boards of Educations, policy makers, parents and state pre-service programs include: teacher shortage issues, retirement issues, turnover issues and increased enrollment issues (Broad, 1999). However, based on some studies, such as Cuckburn (1999) and Kersaint *et al.* (2005), the retention and recruitment of teachers is an increasingly serious problem in many countries. Therefore, doing such a study can be a good clarification of the point in the Iranian context. Accordingly, this investigation seeks to specify the putatively quintessential conditions that reinforce the maintenance of Iranian EFL university instructors in their working environment. In particular, this study attempts to answer the following research question:

1. What putatively quintessential conditions can reinforce the maintenance of Iranian EFL university instructors?

Method

A crucial qualitative method that has been utilized regularly in educational and social research is Grounded Theory, which "is designed to develop a theory based on the field data collected in a study" (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2006, p. 33). In the same vein, Mackey and Gass (2005) state that Grounded Theory "involves developing theory based on, or grounded in, data that have been systematically gathered and analyzed" (p. 179). Grounded Theory, which is inductively derived from the phenomenon, represents and meets four criteria: fit, understanding, generality and control (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The number of participants in the first phase involved in the study consisted of 35 university instructors working in different universities or institutions were selected and interviewed. Then, in the second phase, i.e. the questionnaire, 48 other instructors from various universities were selected as well. Moreover, a number of administrators of these universities were consulted with in order to gain a better understanding of the recruitment and maintenance processes in Iranian universities. The first instrument utilized in this study was a semi-structured interview, which is the primary method of data collection in grounded theory (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2006). Through the interviews, the researcher tried to extract the quintessential conditions reinforcing the maintenance of instructors. Moreover, some questions and hints were given during this session to explore the necessary and motivational conditions for maintenance. The questions of this phase included the conditions that were presented for language learning in the literature review and the taxonomies developed by Carroll (2005, p. 199), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2006), Ingersoll (2001), Ingersoll & Smith (2004), Morey & Murphy (1990), The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (2002), and Harris (2004). A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 29 items was extracted from the interview data. The items of the questionnaire included necessary behavioral and pedagogical conditions as that EFL instructors suggested. The reliability of the questionnaire was computed through Cronbach's Alpha. The results showed an acceptable reliability index of 0.74 for the questionnaire. As for validation, exploratory factor analysis was run. The participants of the study, i.e. the second phase including 48 instructors, filled out the questionnaire. Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin's Measure of sampling adequacy revealed a good value of 0.69, and Barlette's test of sphericity's result was significant, yielding an acceptable value ($p<0.05$). Accordingly, six factors or conditions were extracted for the 29 items.

Data Collection and Analysis

Through an interview, the maintenance conditions proposed by the first 35 participants were studied. The questions were predetermined since the interview was goal-oriented, making the conditions suggested by the instructors known as well as revealing the commonalities among the instructors and ignoring those rare conditions suggested by special participants. Additionally, in order to reduce misconceptions between the researcher and interviewees, the interview was done in Persian, but technical words and expressions were used in English.

The researcher transcribed and then codified the proposed conditions, benefiting from three types of codification, namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The outcome was a university-instructor maintenance model. A questionnaire

on maintenance conditions was developed based on the results obtained in the former phase. This researcher-made questionnaire was given to 48 other instructors to determine to what extent they endorse each condition. Furthermore, the analysis began with the identification of the sub-categories emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). During open coding, the researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the observed phenomena were grouped. The goal was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories which formed a preliminary framework for the analysis. The next stage of analysis involved the re-examination of the sub-categories, technically referred to as axial coding, i.e., systematically relating them to other categories, validating their relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to identify the core categories or the quintessential conditions of maintenance. The final stage of analysis dealt with selective coding or thematization, where the process of deducing the central themes occurred (Ary *et al*., 2010).

Results and Discussion

Written data from field notes or transcripts were conceptualized line by line. The researcher came to a very wide range of codes in this step out of which some were reduced later. Then, the pieces of data related to the same topic were brought together and some categories were formed and came to surface. The categories that appeared to be salient in the participants' statements were as follows. The first one dealt with *minimizing confrontations*, i.e., minimizing the conflict between instructors and administrators as one of the most crucial conditions leading to instructors' maintenance in an educational system. This may include conflicts on particular teaching philosophies and institutional rules or expectations. For instance, the following utterance is the transcription of what one of the instructors mentioned in this regard:

> *... Professors should be respected… I know this comes from our educational system, but just students' evaluation is not a good criterion. I think it's not important if the scores are low; what is important to me is learning. But unfortunately this fact is not concerned here…*

In fact, some of the instructors believed that leaving the institute is the only solution for them since they were not respected and their viewpoints on different occasions were not considered as something important. Another teacher stated as follows:

> *... I have my own style in teaching. I consider my job as an artistic way of transferring knowledge to my students… I told them about the way I act and I have my own reasons, but they don't care… they just told me "this is the way it is… this is the rule… you must obey."*

In fact, these instructors became perplexed when they could not understand why their effective teaching was ignored by the administrators. Even some of them stated that the administrators do not hold any TTC classes or workshops, and they expect a lot from the instructors in all aspects of teaching. In other words, the teachers are expected to know how to manage everything devoid of any training on the part of the university.

Moreover, the second concept dealt with *promoting positive attitudes*; the instructors stated that the atmosphere of some universities where they work is uncomfortable. They cannot express their views or objections easily. In fact, the atmosphere implies a sort of fear or disempowerment for the instructors. This feeling has created a sort of obstacle between the instructors and the administrators in the university. The following example stated by one of the instructors in the interview deals with this issue.

> *… The professors are not free enough to express their ideas about their own problems… it's as if they are scared or, let's say, uncomfortable… they're afraid of talking to the administrators… I think the problem is not with the professors …*

As explained above, the instructors might be scared of the administration. This fear can result in a sort of inactivity on the part of the instructors. This passivity does not only pertain to their classroom, but also germane to university rules, policies, and practices. In other words, the instructors are not allowed to have a contribution in the policies and practices of the university. This feeling of restriction brings about a sense of disempowerment in the instructors, so that they indirectly feel disrespected by their administrators. In the same vein, one instructor mentioned,

> *… I need to be respected when I have a suggestion… why do professors feel scared? Why do they lose their confidence as they want to criticize a policy for example? Is it because of the administrators' position or power?!*

Furthermore, *reinforcing criticality* was another extracted concept. Based on the questionnaires and some viewpoints in the interview, some instructors are treated unequally on the part of the administrators. In fact, they take this sort of treatment

into consideration as the violation of appropriate conditions for their maintenance. Since there is a sort of affinity between a number of instructors and the administrators, some instructors are paid much attention and some of them are not. So, as the oppressed instructors feel this inequality, they immediately tend to be demotivated. In this regard, one of the instructors commented as follows.

> *… They are treated unequally and I can't see why… I think that's why some professors get demotivated. So, they get annoyed with that and want to go to a place where they will be appreciated and treated respectfully…*

Therefore, this demotivation makes some instructors disappointed as they observe some teachers or their colleagues regularly receiving favors from the administrators. This problem surely has a harmful effect on their teaching manner in the university. In other words, they are not provided with enough opportunity to criticize the situation.

> *… They act as if they are a band. There are 5 or 6 instructors here in our department who always share everything with the administrators… They are a sincere group always talking about other colleagues, some of the students, about everything… Every semester those who are most appreciated by the administrators are among the members of this band… I think this wrong treatment is on the part of the administrators that must be put under question by the professors…*

In their interviews, these instructors specified a number of crucial elements germane to the criticizing the authority tenor of their administrators that would hurt their maintenance. For instance, their particular way of thinking, their style of speaking to the instructors and their tenor of making decisions are conducive to feelings of frustration for instructors. Actually, the instructors stated that the administrators' concentration is on what they observe, rather than the instructors' knowledge of students themselves. As an example, a participant in the interview said,

> *… We get stressful when we have a test. I always ask myself, "Are my students going to show me as a capable or incapable teacher?" … You know, they're so fond of appearances… I think we lose our characters in this way …*

In fact, some instructors say that they need to have a critical conversation with the administration but they are afraid, and they never really have a personal reason why. One of the biggest areas that the instructors need to work on is critical communication.

In addition, another essential condition related to instructors' maintenance is *naturalizing blatantness* in conveying decisions and, more predominantly, the lack of shared decision making. An instructor commented in this regard:

> *… I think there are some decisions they can respect the opinions of the faculty members more. … We need more getting of opinions of the people who have experience in the areas before the decisions are made completely… It is disrespectful, in my opinion, not to come to the professor who has taught for many years …*

Such comments portray the frustration resulting from the apparent lack of give-and-take between professors and administrators. In other words, the instructors become embarrassed when they observe that they are treated as just some practitioners in the university and the administrators are not honest with them. In fact, they expect more than just being an instructor there.

Besides, the participants mentioned another quintessential condition germane to the students' manner of learning, i.e. *encouraging learning-centeredness*. Score-based learning means to study just for the sake of the score you will get in the exam. In the view of these instructors, since this type of learning is deviated from the nature of their teaching, it diverts the students' attention from the communicative aspect of learning. In other words, these learners are reluctant to participate in communicative tasks which are not included in the tests. This would also make the instructors reluctant, too. In fact, dealing with such passive students would result in instructors' frustration. For instance, below is one of the instructors' viewpoints in this regard:

> *... In Iran, the students are told to get better grades from the very beginning when they start school. For example, at high school they are recommended to have high averages in order to enter a good university… In our culture, we think the professors who can raise the students' grades are good instructors. This is not our ultimate goal …*

Therefore, with this system of learning in Iranian students, teaching would be a frustrating job for the instructors. In fact, this condition has been considered as a very general condition by the instructors and many of them has emphasized the impact of this point on their teaching process.

Also, another quintessential condition dealt with *inducing reflective-teaching learning*. Many of the interviewees claimed that they have attended several workshops in the past. However, they stated that the workshops did not meet their needs; they believed that the university workshops should focus on the practical implementation of teaching rather than the theories of teaching. Therefore, this condition hinders their practice and is regarded as a lack of support on the part of the universities which would, all in all, lead to the instructors' demotivation. Below is an instance of such a claim.

> *… university workshops do not usually show real activities in the class. Teachers cannot promote optimal skills … I believe we should be free… to express our ideas on how to use theories in different conditions… Actually, the professors do not feel less frustrated in their classes when they attend such workshops.*

Accordingly, practice in the real classroom needs experience. Just taking the principles into account is not enough. In fact, workshops should be a place for instructors to learn how to design lesson plans and how to teach the lessons in practice, rather than theoretically.

The categories in the previous stage were more reduced into two broader themes, namely, *behavioral* and *pedagogical*. These issues were concluded in relation to the instructors' challenge with different aspects of their profession. By the first aspect, the researcher intended to reveal those conditions that were germane to the behavioral activities in the teaching profession. By pedagogical issues, it means the ideologies that can accelerate or qualify the job of instructors. Figure 1 illustrates this model for the maintenance of university instructors more clearly.
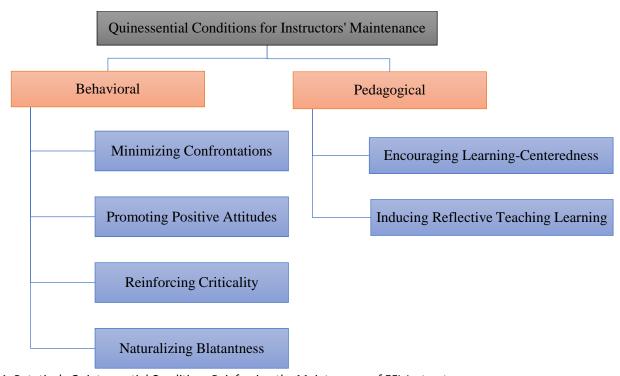

Figure 1. Putatively Quintessential Conditions Reinforcing the Maintenance of EFL Instructors

Conclusion and Implications

The extracted conditions from the questionnaire and the interviews were presented in the form of a model of instructors' maintenance. This model consists of two major themes: behavioral and pedagogical. The behavioral theme includes four quintessential conditions for instructors' maintenance. These four behavioral conditions include minimizing confrontations, promoting positive attitudes, reinforcing criticality, and naturalizing blatantness. The pedagogical theme contains two quintessential conditions for instructors' maintenance, i.e. encouraging learning-centeredness, and inducing reflective-teaching learning. Administrators, educators, and instructors need to consider maintenance as an inherent and crucial condition, where all instructors are at risk. Administrators are poised to reduce this risk and maintain instructors by applying the model in their ongoing leadership practices. Additionally, it may be possible to use the model as an intervention at some critical stages of education so as to ameliorate the behavioral and pedagogical conditions. An administrator should consider the congruency of instructors' expressed beliefs and relational needs. Instructors appearing to have a best fit may be more

likely to be motivated at the university. When already hired instructors begin to show signs of discontent with the university policies and practices, administrators should attend to their behavioral and pedagogical needs and allow flexibility in teaching and learning philosophies. Empowering instructors in such a way may promote professional satisfaction. Finally, for accomplished instructors who have been demotivated, an administrator should invite critical dialogue to uncover domains of low congruence. Addressing mismatches may prompt instructors to be motivated. In recommending that administrators intentionally use the model, it is important to study its efficacy. Researchers might explore its applicability at all stages of higher education. There is a need for more understanding about the nuances of each condition as well as the utility of the model in different contexts. In fact, drawing instructors to and keeping them in hard-to-staff universities require the collective commitment of stakeholders to meet, discuss and promote this model. Probably, this means developing new partnerships and letting go of past missteps, or in other words, moving forward and working together.

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