

Research paper

## From Good to Great: Exploring the Traits of Successful EFL Teachers with a Focus on Professional Development and Social Emotional Competence

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### **Abstract**

Language teaching has gained a significant consideration in the current era due to the global interconnections. Most of the studies done in this field have focused on the methodologies of teaching and less emphasis has been put on language teachers' attributes and characteristics which can make them exceptional. Accordingly, the present study investigates professional development and social emotional competence among successful teachers within a mega planning framework and through employing a sequential/ explanatory descriptive mixed method design. The initial stage involved the participation of 628 EFL students assessing their teachers' success. For the quantitative phase the 72 selected teachers as successful participated. Also, 8 randomly chosen teachers participated in the qualitative phase. Key findings through the descriptive analysis revealed that self-awareness was the most significant aspect of social-emotional competence, while staying updated through reading was the top priority for professional development. Most successful teachers indicated a positive self-assessment in both areas. Thematic analysis revealed seven themes in professional development, with preparedness and being up-to-date being the most frequent, and seven themes in social emotional competence, emphasizing understanding students and fostering relationships. The findings of the present study can benefit novice teachers through suggesting more sophisticated and understandable criteria for their improvement on the way of success. Results can also help teacher trainers in focusing on the areas of strength in successful teachers when providing professional development.

**Keywords:** Language Teacher, Professional Development, Social-emotional Competence, Success;

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## **Introduction**

Language teaching has gained a significant consideration in the current era due to the global interconnections which are increasing progressively. Most of the studies done in this field have focused on the methodologies of teaching and less emphasis has been put on language teachers' attributes and characteristics. Due to the important role the teachers play, the characteristics and skills of effective teachers have drawn substantial attention from educators as well as researchers to be delivered to less exceptional and less effective teachers. Though the distinction between "good teachers" and "great teachers" may seem to be subjective, there are universal sets of qualities that can distinguish exceptional and successful teachers from others.

Effective and successful teaching includes a variety of dimensions and often extends beyond the simple procedures of lesson planning or delivering the lessons. One of the vital competencies for teaching success is social emotional competence (SEC) that entails self-awareness, awareness of social contexts, management of relationships, decision-making, and self-management (Zins et al., 2004). Many research studies have connected SEC to performance. It is also maintained that deficits in these competencies can bring about various challenges (Eisenberg et al., 2006; von der Embse et al., 2023) and is central for both students and educators (Greenberg et al., 2003; Mansfield et al., 2016; Stark & Koslouski, 2024). SEC is also closely related to emotion management and educational researchers emphasize the critical role of managing one's emotions and understanding others' emotions for the purpose of effective teaching (Belay et al., 2023; Colomeischi, 2015; Dreer, 2024). As a critical factor, SEC is essential in language teaching contexts as teachers may encounter diverse populations of students with different cultural and emotional backgrounds. This paper will explore the components of social-emotional competence,

including self-awareness, empathy, and social skills, and how these patterns are prevalent in successful teachers to the benefit of effective teaching.

According to the Casel (2008) framework which is the model used in this study for SEC, social-emotional competence contains several essential skills for the recognition and managing own emotions and also empathizing to form relationships (Zhou & Ee, 2012). The model differentiates between intrapersonal skills such as self-awareness and emotion regulation, as well as interpersonal skills that include understanding others. CASEL's five-dimensional model embraces self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, as well as responsible decision-making (Palomeraa et al., 2017). Self-awareness refers to the understanding of one's feelings and emotions that can lead to increased self-confidence (Beland, 2007; Forcina, 2012). Self-management as the next component entails the abilities of controlling emotions and adapting feelings leading to personal and academic goals and reduced burnout (Zhou & Ee, 2012; Sutton & Harper, 2009). Social awareness is the act of empathizing with others to understand diverse perspectives which also entails recognizing emotions (Payton et al., 2008). Relationship management focuses on building and maintaining healthy relationships and resolving conflicts (Ee & Chang, 2010; Palomeraa et al., 2017). Finally, responsible decision-making includes considering ethical concerns in everyday academic and social situations settings which enables individuals to rationally contribute to their communities (Zhou & Ee, 2012).

Moreover, professional development is indispensable for educators in order to adapt to the persistent changes in education as well as technology which highlights the need for continual improvements (Churchill et al., 2024; Karaaslan, 2003). It is known as a continuous process through which teachers can grow (Johnson & Golombek, 2011) and in improve in their professional roles (Bailey et al., 1998; Evers et al., 2016). Early definitions focused on the

provision of recent knowledge related to skills (Gall & Renchler, 1985); while more recent ones focus on career building actions (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017). Professional development is linked to teaching effectiveness (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Mizell, 2010). Through professional development teachers can learn effective student engagement strategies to meet educational standards (Collinson et al., 2009). It can entail components such as reading and engaging in training (Shiri et al., 2023), reflecting, and collaborating Kwakman (2003), experimenting (Benson, 2010), reflecting (Marcos et al., 2011; Gross, 2020) and collaboration (Aguilar & Vina, 2024; Nilson, 2016; Evers et al., 2016; ).

It can also act as a fundamental aspect of the transition from being a good to a great language teacher. Numerous studies have referred to effective professional development practices as a path of success to language teaching (Wati, 2011; Wichadee, 2011). The ongoing training which can happen through professional development programs can increase collaboration and self-reflection and will lead to the refinement of language teachers' skills and teaching strategies (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017). In this study, the definition of professional development as presented by Evers et al. (2016) is employed, wherein professional development is conceptualized as the process of acquiring professional learning, while professional learning itself is defined as the actual process of learning or learning activities. This definition is derived from the work of Hoyle and John (1995), who designated professional development as a process through which different aspects such as knowledge, skills, and values of teachers are improved.

To address these important variables effective in teaching success, the present study employs Mega Planning, a strategic framework designed to enhance educational organizations, as its theoretical basis. Mega Planning connects educational objectives with societal outcomes and highlights the necessity of planning that focuses on social contributions (Kaufman, 2003). Mega

planning is a basic dimension of successfully defining, prioritizing, and accomplishing useful educational outcomes (i.e., societal and network outcomes, payoffs, and results). It is defined by planning where the essential client and recipient is society, now and in the future. This type of planning perspectives people and associations as means to societal goals, and starts by characterizing the results that an institution commits to add to society. Although there has been widespread research on SEC as well as professional development, the specific patterns of these elements in successful teachers have not been thoroughly investigated. This research study aims at providing insights for the professional development of novice language teachers. Thus, the researchers attempt to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the patterns of social emotional competence among the successful Iranian EFL teachers?

RQ2: What are the patterns of professional development among the successful Iranian EFL teachers?

RQ3: What are the successful Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions in terms of professional development?

RQ4: What are the successful Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions in terms of social emotional competence?

## **Methods**

### **Design**

The present study employed a descriptive survey with a sequential/ explanatory descriptive mixed method design. Through this design, data were gathered using three questionnaires and an interview. SPSS was used to analyze data and descriptive analysis (frequency and percentage) was run.

**Participants**

This study is comprised of a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase. Each of these phases had its own participants with their distinct characteristics. In the quantitative phase of the study, two different samples participated. The first sample included 811 EFL students. Among them 628 EFL students reported the successfulness of their teachers. To collect data for this phase, the researchers approached several private language institutes. The students were English language learners from different language proficiency levels, different ages, both genders, and various educational backgrounds. The respondents for this phase included 351 female and 277 male learners. Their age varied from 13 to 38 (M=25.54 SD=7.19).

To collect data from successful teachers for the quantitative phase of the study, the researchers selected 72 successful teachers from among 81 teachers. These EFL teachers were from different ages, both genders, with various years of teaching experience. The successful teachers included 38 female and 34 male teachers. Their age varied from 23 to 50 (M=28.22 SD=3.65) and their years of teaching experience varied from 2 to 15 (M=6.54, SD=3.41). Table 1 shows the Demographic Information of successful teachers participated in the present study.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Information*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Years of Teaching Experience</i>	0-5	15	20.83
	6-10	41	56.4
	11-15	16	22.22
<i>Gender</i>	Male	34	47.22
	Female	38	52.77
<i>Age</i>	20-30	51	70.
	31-40	11	15.27
	41-50	10	13.88
<i>Educational Status</i>	BA	58	80.55
	MA	14	19.44
	<i>Major</i>	Teaching	39
Literature		5	6.94
Translation		7	9.72

	Others	21	29.16
<i>Total Participants</i>		72	100

As Table 1 displays, 72 ELT teachers, 34 males (47.22%), and 38 females (52.77%), were the participants of this study. They had different academic majors including 39 English Teaching (54.16%), 5 Literature (6.94%), 7 Translation (9.72%), and 21 other fields (29.16%). Teachers possessed varying levels of teaching experience (15 (0-5), 41 (6-10), and 16 (11-15)). Furthermore, they belonged to varying age groups (51 (20-30), 11 (31-40) and 11 (40-50)). For the third phase (Qualitative Phase), random sampling was utilized. The participants for this phase were 8 Iranian EFL teachers chosen in the last phase of the study. They were 5 females and 3 males whose age varied from 27 to 50 ( $M=32.47$ ,  $SD=4.52$ ).

### **Instruments**

#### *Quantitative Measures*

EFL teachers' teaching Success was assessed through the administration of a questionnaire validated by Moafian and Pishghadam (2009). The 47-item questionnaire measures the teachers' success through the students' assessment of teachers. The questionnaire has a 5-point likert scale. The scale includes 12 sub scales of accountability, interpersonal relationships, attention to all, examination, commitment, learning boosters, creating a sense of competence, teaching boosters, physical and emotional acceptance, empathy, class attendance, and dynamism.

The present study employed the Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ) designed and validated by Zhou and Ee (2012). This scale includes 25 items. Each item of the scale is based on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 6 (very true of me). The designers have reported a reliability coefficient of .72, .77, .73, .71, and .76 for self-

awareness, social awareness, relationship management, self-management, and responsible decision-making, respectively (Zhou & Ee, 2012).

To assess EFL teachers' Professional Development, a questionnaire developed and validated by Evers, et al. (2016) was employed. This scale includes 21-items with a 4-point rating scale which assess teachers' participation in activities contributing to professional development. In order to validate this scale, the designers used Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. It has six sub-constructs: 1) Experimenting, 2) collaborating school, 3) keeping up-to-date work related training, 4) Reflecting and asking for feedback, 5) Collaborating lessons, and 6) Keeping up-to-date reading. Designers reported acceptable to good Cronbach alpha reliabilities of all the six sub-constructs.

#### *Qualitative Measure*

A semi-structured interview was used for the assessment of teachers' perceptions in terms of professional development as well as social emotional competence. In this part two main open-ended questions were asked from eight participants of the study (How do you see yourself as a successful teacher in terms of professional development? And how do you see yourself as a successful teacher in terms of social emotional competence?). Each interview took about 8 to 12 minutes. Five interviews were done through face to face meeting and three interviews were done through recording and sending voice. In order to analyze the interview questions, thematic coding was employed. Thematic coding is one of the most popular types of analysis for qualitative data (Guest, 2012). According to Stemler (2001), there are two approaches for thematic coding of the qualitative data. In emergent coding the codes are derived from the data; while in the pre-specified coding codes are predefined and then applied to the data. In the present study, the three researchers coded the data. The researchers used emergent coding and themes were drawn from analyzing the

transcriptions of the interviews. To ensure inter-coder reliability, as an important concept in analyzing qualitative data, the multiple coders including the researchers of the present study coded the data independently and then level of agreement was assessed.

## **Procedure**

The study was conducted during two months at private institutional level. In this study, both teachers and students participated for the quantitative phase. First, the participants were ensured that all of the obtained information is kept confidential and only used for the purpose of the present study. Then, the students who agreed to participate were asked to fill out the success questionnaire. After analyzing the questionnaires, successful teachers were selected. Among 81 EFL teachers, 72 teachers who were successful from their students' point of view were selected. Then, successful teachers filled out two questionnaires (social emotional competence and professional development questionnaires). After analyzing data, the patterns of social emotional competence and professional development among successful teachers were reported. Finally, in the second phase of the study (Qualitative phase) eight teachers were randomly selected to answer the open-ended questions of the interview.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics related to the sub-constructs of Social-Emotional Competence Scale. The possible range of score for all the subscales of Social-Emotional Competence Scale with 5 items (6-point Likert type) is between 5 and 30.

### **Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics for Social-Emotional Competence Scale*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Awareness	72	13.00	30.00	23.51	3.74
Social Awareness	72	13.00	26.00	21.58	3.40
Self- Management	72	8.00	27.00	20.47	4.43
Relationship-Management	72	11.00	26.00	22.13	3.06
Responsible Decision-Making	72	10.00	25.00	21.36	3.72

As can be seen in the fourth column, among the five subscales of Social-Emotional Competence, Self-Awareness has the maximum mean (23.51) with a standard deviation of 3.74 and Self- Management has the lowest mean (20.47) with a standard deviation of 4.43.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics related to the sub-constructs of professional development questionnaire. The range of scores for Experimenting with 5 items is between 5 and 20, for Collaborating School and Reflecting and Asking for Feedback with 4 items is between 4 and 16, for Keeping Up-to-Date Work Related Training with 2 items is between 2 and 8, and for Collaborating Lessons and Keeping Up-to-Date Reading with 3 items is between 3 and 12. In order to account for the varying number of items within each subscale of the questionnaire, an average item score was calculated for each sub-construct, yielding scores ranging from 1 to 4.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Professional Development Questionnaire*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean per item
Experimenting	72	6.00	20.00	13.66	2.39	2.73
Collaborating School	72	4.00	13.00	10.50	2.13	2.62
Keeping Up-to-Date Work Related Training	72	2.00	8.00	5.25	1.63	2.62
Reflecting and Asking for Feedback	72	8.00	16.00	10.88	1.77	2.72
Keeping Up-to-Date Reading	72	4.00	11.00	8.31	1.37	3.21
Collaborating Lessons	72	4.00	12.00	9.65	1.87	2.77

As can be seen in the last column (mean per item), among the six subscales of Professional Development, “Keeping Up-to-Date through Reading” has the maximum mean score (3.21) and

“Collaborating with colleagues with the aim of improving school development” and “Keeping up-to-date: participation in training related to work” have the lowest mean (2.62).

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics for the Teacher Success questionnaire (47 items with a 5-point Likert response scale) for the main phase of the study, with scores ranging from 47 to 235. For the purpose of this study, participants who obtained scores above 117.5 (i.e., greater than half of the maximum score) were classified as successful teachers.

**Table 4**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Success*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.
Teacher Success	628	119.00	229.00	190.71	17.58

As depicted in Table 4, 628 students provided reports on the success of their teachers, with a mean score of 190.71 (SD = 17.58). The findings suggest that, overall, teachers were rated as successful by their students.

Table 5 shows the frequencies and percentages of the 25 items of the social emotional competence.

**Table 5**  
*Frequencies and Percentages of the Items on the Social Emotional Competence*

Item	NT		UM		SUM		STM		TM		VTM	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Q1	0	0	3	4.2	11	15.3	7	9.7	24	33.3	27	37.5
Q2	0	0	0	0	5	6.9	18	25	29	40.3	20	27.8
Q3	0	0	2	2.8	6	8.3	16	22.2	32	44.4	16	22.2
Q4	0	0	2	2.8	5	6.9	20	27.8	32	44.4	13	18.1
Q5	0	0	6	8.3	14	19.4	16	22.2	21	29.2	15	20.8
Q6	1	1.4	8	11.1	13	18.1	14	19.4	28	38.9	8	11.1
Q7	0	0	2	2.8	15	2.8	17	23.6	36	50	2	2.8
Q8	3	4.2	2	2.8	3	4.2	22	30.6	36	50	6	8.3

<i>Q9</i>	1	1.4	4	5.6	20	27.8	22	30.6	21	29.2	4	5.6
<i>Q10</i>	0	0	1	1.4	9	12.5	16	22.2	30	41.7	16	22.2
<i>Q11</i>	3	4.2	3	4.2	12	16.7	6	8.3	43	59.7	5	6.9
<i>Q12</i>	2	2.8	8	11.1	24	33.3	17	23.6	19	26.4	2	2.8
<i>Q13</i>	0	0	8	11.1	26	36.1	20	27.8	15	20.8	3	4.2
<i>Q14</i>	1	1.4	6	8.3	7	9.7	13	18.1	40	55.6	5	6.9
<i>Q15</i>	1	1.4	5	6.9	9	12.5	17	23.6	34	47.2	6	8.3
<i>Q16</i>	0	0	2	2.8	8	11.1	22	30.6	28	38.9	12	16.7
<i>Q17</i>	1	1.4	0	0	9	12.5	29	40.3	25	34.7	8	11.1
<i>Q18</i>	0	0	2	2.8	3	4.2	28	38.9	33	45.8	6	8.3
<i>Q19</i>	1	1.4	2	2.8	2	2.8	32	44.4	29	40.3	6	8.3
<i>Q20</i>	0	0	3	4.2	13	18.1	22	30.6	34	47.2	0	0
<i>Q21</i>	0	0	4	5.6	14	19.4	24	33.3	14	19.4	16	22.2
<i>Q22</i>	1	1.4	3	4.2	9	12.5	29	40.3	30	41.7	0	0
<i>Q23</i>	2	2.8	8	11.1	7	9.7	42	58.3	13	18.1	0	0
<i>Q24</i>	0	0	6	8.3	11	15.3	9	12.5	40	55.6	6	8.3
<i>Q25</i>	1	1.4	1	1.4	8	11.1	13	18.1	36	50	13	18.1

As Table 5 indicated, the majority of the successful teachers selected “Somewhat true of me” and “True of me” for all items of the Social Emotional Competence. Among 25 items, item 1 (I know what I am thinking and doing.) which is related to self-awareness sub-scale had the highest percent of “very true of me’ (37.5%). Moreover, item 11 (I can stay calm in stressful situations.) had the highest percent of “True of me “(59.07%). Furthermore, item 23 (I weigh the strength of the situations before deciding my action) had the highest percent of “Somewhat true of me “(58.3%). Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores obtained for each sub-construct of Social Emotional Competence as reported by successful teachers.

Based on figure 1, among the five sub-constructs of Social-Emotional Competence Scale, self-awareness had the highest mean score and self-management had the lowest mean score among successful teachers. Table 6 shows the frequencies as well as the percentages of the 21 items of the professional development.

**Table 6**  
*Frequencies and Percentages of the Items on the Professional Development*

<i>Item</i>	<i>HE</i>		<i>S</i>		<i>FO</i>		<i>O</i>	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
<i>Q1</i>	4	5.6	14	19.4	20	27.8	34	47.2
<i>Q2</i>	3	4.2	3	4.2	28	38.9	38	52.8
<i>Q3</i>	1	1.4	18	25	27	37.5	26	36.1
<i>Q4</i>	8	11.1	38	52.8	12	16.7	14	19.4
<i>Q5</i>	4	5.6	20	27.8	34	47.2	14	19.4
<i>Q6</i>	6	8.3	28	38.9	27	37.5	11	15.3
<i>Q7</i>	2	2.8	24	33.3	44	61.1	2	2.8
<i>Q8</i>	2	2.8	36	50	22	30.6	12	16.7
<i>Q9</i>	2	2.8	29	40.3	30	41.7	11	15.3
<i>Q10</i>	2	2.8	11	15.3	46	63.9	13	18.1
<i>Q11</i>	3	4.2	19	26.4	42	58.3	8	11.1
<i>Q12</i>	2	2.8	39	54.2	25	34.7	6	8.3
<i>Q13</i>	7	9.7	32	44.4	26	36.1	7	9.7
<i>Q14</i>	0	0	8	11.1	43	59.7	21	29.2
<i>Q15</i>	5	6.9	8	11.1	52	72.2	7	9.7

<i>Q16</i>	7	9.7	29	40.3	30	41.7	6	8.3
<i>Q17</i>	4	5.6	4	5.6	53	73.6	11	15.3
<i>Q18</i>	14	19.4	31	43.1	27	37.5	0	0
<i>Q19</i>	9	12.5	11	15.3	51	70.8	1	1.4
<i>Q20</i>	16	22.2	9	12.5	27	65.3	0	0
<i>Q21</i>	6	8.3	8	11.1	21	29.2	37	51.4

Based on the analysis, it is observed that the majority of the successful teachers selected fairly often for all 21 items of the professional development questionnaire. Among the 21 items of the professional development questionnaire, item 2 (Visiting educational sites on the Internet.) which is related to keeping up-to-date through reading had the highest percent of “often” (52.8%). Furthermore, item 17 (Making agreements with colleagues about the pedagogical practices.) (73.6%) which is related to Collaborating with colleagues with the aim of improving lessons, had the highest percent of “fairly often”. Figure 2 shows the mean score of the different sub-constructs of Professional Development among successful teachers.

As figure 2 demonstrates, among the six sub-constructs of “keeping up-to-date through reading” had the highest mean score and “keeping up-to-date through participation in training related to work” had the lowest mean score among the successful teachers.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the interview questions thematic coding was employed. Furthermore, the overlap of these themes with previous sub-constructs of the questionnaires were mentioned. Table 7 illustrates the recurrent themes, sub-themes and frequency of each of these findings for the professional development.

**Table 7**  
*Emergent Codes for the Professional Development*

<i>Sub-Constructs of the Questionnaire</i>	<i>Recurrent Themes of PD</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>f</i>
<i>Keeping up to date</i> <i>Items 1, 2, and 14</i> <i>Learning boosters</i> <i>Item 37</i>	Preparedness	1) Studying 2) Using Internet 3) Asking the colleagues (learning from colleagues)	7
	Pre-planning	1) Having a lesson plan 2) Searching about the best strategies and thinking about the age and the level of the students and their gender	2
<i>Reflecting and asking for feedback</i> <i>Experimenting (trying out new things)</i>	Being flexible and adoptable based on the needs of the students	1) In method 2) In syllabus	6
<i>Reflecting and asking for feedback</i> <i>Items 11,13, 14, and 15</i> <i>Keeping up to date</i>	Being creative (Thinking out of the box)	1) Finding new strategies	6
	Being reflective	1) Thinking of the weak points 2) Evaluating ourselves 3) Trying to improve profession 4) Thinking about our method 5) Asking for feedback	4
	Being up-to date	1) Using technology 2) Using new methods 3) Taking training courses and participating in conferences and workshops	7

Analysis of data revealed six recurrent themes of the Professional Development from the interview phase including: 1) Preparedness, 2) Pre-planning, 3) Being flexible and adoptable based on the needs of the students, 4) Being creative (Thinking out of the box), 5) Being reflective, and 6) Being up-to date. As Table 4.8 indicates, keeping up to date themes had the highest frequency among the successful teachers: Preparedness (f=7) with three sub-themes (Studying, Using Internet, and Asking the colleagues (learning from colleagues)) and Being up-to date (f=7) with three sub-themes (Using technology, using new methods, taking training courses and participating

in conferences and workshops). Table 8 illustrates the recurrent themes, sub-themes and frequency of each of these findings for the social emotional competence.

**Table 8**  
*Emergent Codes for the Social Emotional Competence*

Sub-Constructs of the Questionnaire	Recurrent Themes of social emotional competence	Sub-themes	<b>f</b>
Social Awareness	Understanding the students' feelings and emotional status	1) Looking at their face and body language 2) Understanding what they are talking about 3) Considering their reactions 4) Asking them about their moods and problems 5) Finding a way to make their mood good 6) Not pressurizing them to do things 7) Helping them know their feelings 8) Helping them distract their minds from their problems	8
Relationship Management	Having a good relationship with the students	1) Paying enough attention to their problems 2) Being reliable for them 3) Not being judgmental 4) Trying to understand them and accepting them 5) Managing behavior 6) Making the class fun for them	7
Responsible decision making	Making them interested in learning	1) Making suitable decisions 2) Using different strategies 3) Making learning enjoyable for them by real tasks 4) Making learning exciting for them	4

Relationship management	Trying to handle the challenging situations	1) being patient 2) Not reacting a lot 3) Using different strategies	4
Self-management	Controlling and managing our feelings as teachers	1) Always trying to smile 2) Not conveying negative feelings to class 3) Focusing just on our work 4) Being patient and staying calm with them	6
Social awareness	Recognizing the students' personality (Their personal characteristics)		2
Teaching boosters	Having discipline and reacting to their misbehaviors	1) Hinting 2) Being more serious 3) Making sure that students follow the rules 4) Reacting to students' behaviors 5) Asking students to make it up	4

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Analysis of data revealed seven recurrent themes of Social Emotional Competence from the interview phase including: 1) Understanding the students' feelings and emotional status, 2) Having a good relationship with the students, 3) Making them interested in learning, 4) Trying to handle the challenging situations, 5) Contracting and managing our feelings as teachers, 6) Recognizing the students' personality (Their personal characteristics), and 7) Having discipline and reacting to their misbehaviors. The themes except one (Having discipline and reacting to their misbehaviors) overlap with previous themes of the Social Emotional Competence questionnaires. As Table 8 indicates, "understanding the students' feelings and emotional status" recurrent theme which overlaps with social-awareness sub-construct of the questionnaire, has the highest frequency (f=8) among successful teachers. This recurrent theme has eight sub-themes including:

- 1) Looking at their face and body language
- 2) Understanding what they are talking about
- 3) Considering their reactions
- 4) Asking them about their moods and problems

- 5) Finding a way to make their mood good
- 6) Not pressurizing them to do things
- 7) Helping them know their feelings
- 8) Helping them distract their minds from their problems.

Furthermore, results of the emergent coding revealed that there is a new recurrent theme entitled as “having discipline and reacting to their misbehaviors”. This recurrent theme (f=4) has five sub-themes including:

- 1) Hinting
- 2) Being more serious
- 3) Making sure that students follow the rules
- 4) Reacting to students’ behaviors
- 5) Asking students to make it up

## **Discussion**

The present study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative analysis, to examine patterns of professional development and social emotional competence among successful teachers. Regarding the patterns of social emotional competence among successful teachers, results of the quantitative data revealed that among five sub-scales of the social emotional competence questionnaire, successful teachers reported self-awareness as the most important factor with the highest mean score (23.51) and self- management as the least important factor with the lowest mean score (20.47). Besides, most of the successful teachers selected two agree choices of “Somewhat true of me” and “True of me” for all 25 items of the questionnaire. Among 25 items, item 1 (I know what I am thinking and doing.) which is related to self-awareness sub-construct had the highest percent of “very true of me’ (37.5%).

Analysis of qualitative data through emergent coding revealed six recurrent themes of social emotional competence. Findings showed that “understanding the students’ feelings and emotional status” recurrent theme which overlaps with social-awareness sub-construct of the questionnaire, has the highest frequency ( $f=8$ ) among the successful teachers.

The finding of the present study is in agreement with the study by Zych, et al. (2018) who reported the importance of self-awareness variable which is correlated positively to overall emotional intelligence. Prior research has stressed the significance of self-awareness abilities, including the ability to recognize and understand one’s strengths and weaknesses, emotional responses, as well as their possible influence on success (Beland, 2007; Zins & Elias, 2006). Zins and Elias (2006) have argued that self-awareness, as a cognitive skill, marks an important milestone in the development of the individual’s self. Accordingly, individuals who possess self-awareness are liable to engage in reflective thinking, by this means gaining clarity about their emotional responses and the primary reasons for these responses which is essential in the context of language teaching.

Regarding the patterns of professional development among successful teachers, findings of the questionnaires demonstrated that among six sub-constructs of the professional development questionnaire, “keeping up-to-date through reading” gained the highest mean score (3.21) and “Collaborating with colleagues with the aim of improving school development” and “Keeping up-to-date through participation in training related to work” gained the lowest mean (2.62). Furthermore, item 2 of the questionnaire (Visiting educational sites on the Internet.) which is related to “Keeping up-to-date through reading” had the highest percent of “often” (52.8%).

In addition, analysis of qualitative data through emergent coding revealed 7 recurrent themes of professional development. Results of interview supported quantitative findings and

demonstrated that keeping up to date themes had the highest frequency among successful teachers: Preparedness (f=7) with three sub-themes (Studying, Using Internet, and Asking the colleagues (learning from colleagues)) and Being up-to date (f=7) with two sub-themes (Using technology and Using new methods).

This finding is in agreement with previous studies. For instance, Evers, et al. (2016). reported that keeping up-to-date through reading gained the highest mean score. This indicates the importance of this variable in professional development of successful teachers. Moreover, Crandall (2001) in “Keeping Up to Date as an ESL or EFL Professional” insisted on the significance of keeping up-to-date in order to be a successful teacher for teaching English as a second or foreign language. Furthermore, Harris et al. (2009) reported the importance of teachers’ keeping up-to date for their effectiveness. The findings of the present study are also supported by Badri, et al. (2016) who emphasize that a successful teacher requires to be an active learner by keeping up to date and be a coherent part of other well-organized professional development activities. Furthermore, different studies stress that to be a successful teacher, they need professional development by improving teaching and learning though keeping up-to date (Richardson, 2003; Santagata, et al., 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The concern of this study was to explore the patterns of professional development and social emotional competence among successful teachers. In order to investigate the patterns, the researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative data. In the first place, the present study demonstrated the patterns of professional development and social emotional competence among successful teachers. The findings of the current study provide a perspective on the area of these two variables in Iran by understanding successful English language teachers’ perceptions of their

own professional development and social emotional competence. In the second place, using emergent coding, the present study found the recurrent themes for both professional development and social emotional competence. These themes mostly had overlaps with previously introduced sub-constructs of the questionnaires. However, a new recurrent theme termed as “Having discipline and reacting to their misbehaviors” was found through the interview data. It can be concluded that other researchers can expand the social emotional competence questionnaire using this recurrent theme.

In general, from the findings it can be concluded that, unsuccessful teachers should rethink their professional development activities and improve their social emotional competence. They can follow the patterns of successful teachers which were found in the present study. For instance, they can focus on self-awareness factor which was found as the most important sub-construct of the social emotional competence. In other words, in order to be successful they should firstly recognize and improve their awareness about their own emotions and feelings and then transfer it to their students. Moreover, ineffective teachers should develop professionally by keeping up to date though reading and searching the latest knowledge and methodologies to improve their teaching. The obtained results of the present study may basically help increase knowledge about social emotional competence and professional development, which can help novice instructors to improve professionally in their work. Other researchers are recommended to focus on other personal traits and features as well as other variables that can affect success in language teaching.

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