



A Feasibility Study of Implementing EFL Teachers' Individual Development Plans at Iranian Public Schools: A Mixed-Methods Study

Mohammad Ali-Akbari 

English Language and Literature Department, Ilam University, Iran
M.aliakbari@ilam.ac.ir

Sara Haghi (Corresponding Author)

English Language and Literature Department, Ilam University, Iran
sarihaghi@gmail.com

Ali Yasini 

Educational Administration Department, Ilam University, Iran
A.yasini@ilam.ac.ir

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Abstract

The current study investigates the feasibility of implementing EFL teachers' Individual Development Planning at Iranian public schools. It further explores the underlying reasons for the (imp) possibility of practicing this program and seeks the teachers' suggestions to improve the schools' condition. To this end, data were collected from 180 EFL teachers using a researcher-made questionnaire and a follow-up semi-structured interview. The results of one-sample t-tests revealed a slight possibility following the interviews which indicated 14 underlying reasons for the insufficient grounds at public schools. Participating teachers also argued that equipping a room with necessary technological tools, allocating monetary resources, assigning specific teachers time to practice IDP, taking advantage of head teachers, changing the school administration delegation, and performing advocating cultural acts can provide a ground for IDP implementation. The findings demonstrate the necessity of creating changes by policymakers, school principals, and EFL teachers so that they can all benefit from this program.

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Introduction

Individual Development Planning (IDP) refers to a tool used for gathering and documenting information about an individual's current competencies and planning to further develop them in the near future (Rothwell, 2010). The implementation of this assessment tool has not been restricted to the appraisal cycle of a specific professional working system. That is, it has been applied within education-related contexts (Haghi et al., 2023; Hirsch, 2014) and business-oriented working milieus (Coopersmith, 2022; Gholipour et al., 2018).

With regard to the significant effect of teachers' professional development on students' achievement and the educational system's overall success (Aliakbari & Sadeghi, 2022; Cirocki & Farrel, 2019; Ha & Murray, 2020), practicing in-service programs like IDP was proven to bear plenty of fruitful results (Beigi & Gholipour, 2016; Eisele et al., 2013). A thorough review of the previously published articles on practicing IDP in an educational context has enlightened the researchers about the positive consequences that this program brings about for teachers, learners, and organizational performance.

Considering teachers in mainstream education, research has shown that implementing IDP would enable teachers to seek realistic developmental goals on the basis of their current competencies (Eisele et al., 2013), help them set malleable plans for nurturing their weaknesses (Kivimaki & Meriluoto, 2018), and ameliorate their expertise to the instructional practices they perform (Beigi & Gholipour, 2016).

Practicing IDP is also connected with learners' achievement. More specifically, students taught by teachers who have pursued developmental programs like IDP are more likely to attain better learning results (Abili et al., 2014), be exposed to high-quality instruction in correspondence to the latest educational findings (Jafari et al., 2017), and enhance their skills in an educational framework (Khoroushi, 2015).

Successful implementation of IDP also has an impact on the teachers' working milieu. For example, pursuing IDP would foster a collegial aura among colleagues at schools (Haghi et al., 2023), schools would turn into dynamic organizations moving toward developmental goals (Hasanzadeh & Shahrani, 2005), and they would experience an unprecedented promotion among their contenders (Beigi & Gholipour, 2016).

Needless to say, EFL teachers are an integral part of the education system who provide pupils with necessary instruction for about seven years at schools. Thus, holding in-service developmental courses for them is of primary importance (Hashimoto & Nguyen, 2018). However, antecedent research findings indicate the inefficiency of traditional Teacher Professional Development (TPD) courses in that they do not catch up with the ever-changing nature of inclusive learning (Nishimura, 2014). Alternatively, previous research findings indicate the positive effect of applying IDPs in mainstream education (e.g., Ghorbanian et al., 2020; Hirsh, 2014), a substantial area, EFL teachers' IDP implementation, has remained under-researched.

Therefore, in the current study we made an attempt to address this lacuna by identifying the potency and contrivance of schools for accomplishing IDPs. To further clarify the present

research path, providing some background information about the condition of teaching English at high schools in Iran is indispensable.

The context of the study

Learning English is possible in public schools or private language institutes in Iran. Public schools are supposed to follow a nationwide curriculum authorized by the Ministry of Education in the country. As mentioned by the Secretariat of the Higher Council of Education, teaching English at public schools aims to enable the pupils to communicate with people from other nationalities at a survival level (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009). In the face of this illustrative goal, we have not been able to achieve a gratifying outcome since classes are filled above capacity, there are not enough facilities available to both teachers and learners, students are not assessed based on their communicative skills, and teachers are not proficient users of English themselves.

While recruiting the workforce for public schools, applicants ought to take part in a norm-referenced paper and pencil test first. In case they succeed in passing the initial exam, they take part in an interview session with at least three assessors evaluating their mental health, religious beliefs, current sociopolitical affairs, and teaching methodology expertise. Provided that the applicants' cumulative score exceeds those of their contenders, they will be employed in the Ministry of Education. However, after passing the two stages mentioned above, the novice teacher should successfully pass a pre-service teacher training course ranging from 3 months to 2 years under the scrutiny of the Ministry of Education.

While pre-service courses provide an entry level proficiency, teachers also need to take in-service courses based on the teaching and learning challenges they face at school to complement their expertise (Lee, 2007). Nonetheless, in-service teacher training courses contain a compact 3 to 4-hour theoretical instruction presented to all teachers regardless of the subject matter they teach (Kazemi & Ashrafi, 2014). Since these programs are not developed for a specific target group and teachers' ideas are not sought for the arrangement of these prepackaged courses' content, teachers are not motivated to attend them (Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2010).

As Kazemi and Afshari (2014) asserted, in-service teacher training courses in Iran are not efficient because their content coverage does not satisfy individual teacher's needs. Moreover, these courses are also presented by the trainers who have not been selected based on pertinent factors. That is, they are taught by experienced instructors who are not updated with the latest theoretical and practical findings of pedagogical domains. In addition, the theoretical foundation of these programs does not practically help teachers improve their instructional skills, like classroom management. This is why teachers have not been able to experience any changes in their actual performance.

Literature review

Individual development planning

As averred by Beusaert (2011), IDP is an assessment tool probing into an individual's current qualifications with the aim of providing further prospective developmental opportunities in a specific working milieu. This future-oriented, reflective instrument is engrossed in individuals'

former experiences to detect their educational needs and design a proper plan accordingly. Researchers (e.g., Beausaert, 2011; McMullan, 2003) who have defined IDP in various working contexts have alluded to the main features of this tool discussed below.

IDPs look back and forward to the individual's competencies. In order to be a hoped-for future jobholder, individuals should attempt to identify their strengths and weaknesses by responding to questions like, where am I now? where do I like to be? and how am I going to get there? Successful practitioners of IDP act like reflective learners (Schon, 1987) who can critically analyze their prior experiences and amplify their cognition on that accumulated expertise.

As the responses to the queries above are gathered, a disparity might be found between the expertise an individual possesses and the skills they need to be equipped with. This is the stage in which further learning is stimulated (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, bridging this gap is facilitated through the accompaniment of a skilled mentor. These superintendents would provide relevant feedback at any stage and motivate the teachers to further their learning. IDPs are also known to serve various purposes, like approaching the organizational goals previously set and making decisions about an individual's promotion (Beausaert, 2011).

As Patel et al. (2013) stated, proper implementation of IDP within a workplace has several benefits. First, individuals would be able to consciously criticize and challenge themselves and identify their pluses and minuses. Second, it would pave the way for symmetric growth within the individual and the workspace. Third, individuals would be able to recognize their learning style along with effective teaching-learning strategies to deal with the demands of the constantly changing world.

EFL teachers and IDP

Though attractive to other discipline and other countries, the number of studies investigating the issue of IDP in relation to EFL teachers' individual development is really scant in Iran. Our inspection of various databases conceded several studies that pursued IDP as their line of inquiry. These studies were primarily conducted in mainstream education, except for two articles (Eslami, 2016; Haghi et al., 2023) being conducted in the domain of EFL teacher education. Talking about the application of IDP within mainstream education, it should be noted that it entails teachers' direct cooperation in boosting their competencies to deal with the constantly changing demands of the educational context (Abili et al., 2016; Van der Van, 2017).

Jafari and colleagues (2017) explored the organizational and contextual factors that are more likely to affect elementary school teachers' IDP working at exceptional schools through a mixed-methods research study. Participants in the qualitative and quantitative stages of the study were 15 experts and 200 teachers, respectively. The results indicated that factors like learners and their needs, colleagues, workplace rules and regulations, organizational culture, curriculum development, national and local policies, financial resources, society, and school administration have impacts on IDP implementation. What seems to be questionable in this research is identifying only two practical aspects of organizational and contextual factors. However, it could be comprehensively investigated from various facets.

In another study, Hirsch (2014) reported elementary school teachers' challenges while performing IDPs. To this end, the content of 15 interviews was analyzed from the activity theory perspective. The results revealed a discrepancy between trusting teachers' professionalism and the external control exerted. What distinguishes this study from the studies in Iran is that there already exists an IDP for elementary school teachers in the former. At the same time, IDP has not been introduced, designed, and practiced by teachers, specifically EFL teachers in Iran.

Among the other studies conducted in mainstream education (e.g., Gorbanian et al., 2020), the most pertinent research was carried out by Eslami (2016), who investigated the possibility of administering IDPs in private language institutes in Iran. The results of this study displayed the importance of providing specific individual and organizational factors for the worthwhile employment of these programs. Given that IDPs are context-specific and entail the individual's and organization's mutual agreement (Beasaert et al., 2013), the necessary condition for the use of this program needs to be examined in public schools in Iran as well. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to address this research paucity and investigate the possible grounds for implementing IDPs at Iranian public schools. In particular, concentrating on the use of IDP for the professional development of EFL teachers, the present study aims at answering the following research questions.

1. How feasible is implementing IDPs for the professional development of EFL teachers at Iranian public schools?
2. What factors do EFL teachers attribute this feasibility to?
3. What do teachers propose for fostering the implementation of IDPs in Iranian public school?

Methodology

Participants

A total of 180 EFL teachers (74 males and 106 females) were selected through convenience and snowball sampling from across the country. They were all teaching English at various public high schools at the time of the research. Their age ranged from 24 to 56, with a mean of 45 years ($SD= 9.4$ years). With regard to their academic credentials, 102 EFL teachers had undergraduate degrees in English-related studies (e.g., Teaching English as a Foreign Language or English Literature), and 78 of them mentioned that they held postgraduate certificates. Their teaching experiences varied from 3 to 26 years ($M= 17.5$, $SD= 7.35$). Respondents were notified that they might be called on for a follow-up interview. In addition, they were assured that their participation in the study was not compulsory and they could withdraw at any stage without any aftereffects. Participants' background information is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Public teachers' background information

Public teachers	Gender		Age		Academic degree		Experience	
	Male	Female	M	SD	under graduate	post graduate	M	SD
	74	106	45	9.4	102	78	17.5	7.35

Design of the Study

To answer the research questions, the study followed a sequential complementarity mixed-methods design (Riazi & Candlin, 2014). In this regard, a questionnaire aiming at inspecting the feasibility of implementing an IDP was distributed among the participants. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first part was outlined to collect the respondents' biodata (e.g., gender, age, academic degree, and teaching experience). The second section encompassed a 24-item researcher-made questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). The so-called instrument measured the possibility of employing IDPs for EFL teachers in public schools with six main domains: technological equipment, financial support, rules and regulations dominating schools, supplying professional human resources, school principals' support, and organizational culture (4 items for each) (See Appendix A). In order to answer the second and the third research questions, participants' attitudes on the underlying factors of the feasibility of implementing IDPs were explored using six interview questions.

Instrument

We perused 50 IDP-related articles (e.g., Abili et al., 2016; Beausaert, 2011; Coopersmith, 2022; Eisele et al., 2013; Hirsch, 2014) to construct the questionnaire's items. This brought about an initial draft comprising 38 items. Two well-versed university professors in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) were asked to read the incipient questionnaire and comment on its content. Based on the feedback they provided, reiterative and off-the-subject queries were eliminated, and the total number of items was reduced to 24 constituents. Following this, the ultimate draft was distributed among 63 EFL teachers from the same population. The respondents were asked to provide the necessary information required for each question and further look into the precision and intelligibility of the items. Some trivial modifications were made based on the feedback they provided. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated via Cronbach's Alpha ($r = 0.97$), yielding a highly acceptable measure.

So as to help the participating teachers to express their ideas openly, an interview guide encompassing open-ended queries was initially constructed and handed to two TEFL university professors to inspect it meticulously and provide necessary feedback on its content. In addition, two pilot interviews were conducted with EFL teachers outside the main study sample. Finally, modifications were made based on the comments received from both experts and teachers on the interview questions (see Appendix B).

Procedure

The researcher-made questionnaire was sent to 600 EFL teachers working at public schools across the country online (via Google form). They were pled to respond to the items carefully and not hesitate to email one of the researchers if they faced difficulty filling out the questionnaire. Altogether, 180 properly filled questionnaires were received (30%). However, 13 questionnaires were initially removed from the study because they were either inattentively filled (not answering all the questions or ticking one box for all the queries) or participants concurrently taught at public schools and private language learning institutes.

During the second complementary stage of the study, 6 participants were randomly selected to take part in the semi-structured interviews. Four of the interviews were conducted in Google Meet room online, and two of them were carried out on the phone since the researcher did not have direct access to the participants. The process of interviewing was kept on until the contact researcher reached a point where no new data was added to the already obtained information, hence the notion of theoretical saturation of data (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Interviews proceeded in the participants' native language. Before starting the interviews, participants were informed about recording their voices, and their consent was received. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Data analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires was fed into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 21. Cronbach's alpha and Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) tests were used to ascertain the reliability and normal data distribution. When the data met the pre-assumptions of conducting a parametric test, six sets of one-sample t-tests were carried out to gauge the possibility of implementing IDP plans for EFL public teachers.

In the following stage interview transcriptions were analyzed inductively by reading them iteratively and segmenting them into meaningful units like one sentence or several sentences (Merriam, 2009). The obtained expressive components disclosed the factors that teachers attributed the existent feasibility to and sought their recommendations for improving the current situation.

Finally, the extracted themes were sent back to the interviewees to check for any possible mismatch between what they were destined to mention and what the driven concepts express. Accordingly, the notion of member checking was followed. In order to keep the identity of the participants confidential, pseudonyms are used throughout the study.

Results and discussion

Quantitative analysis

As Tables 2. and 3 illustrate, Cronbach alpha indices range from 0.71 to 0.88, showing that participants' answers to the questionnaire's items had a high internal consistency. In addition, all the p-values of KS tests are greater than 0.05, indicating that the data collected are normally distributed.

Table 2. *The reliability of item responses*

	Overall feasibility	Technological equipment	Financial support	Rules and regulations	Professional human resource	Principal's support	Organizational culture
Alpha	0.88	0.71	0.72	0.82	0.73	0.71	0.73

Table 3. *The normal distribution of items' responses*

	Technological equipment	Financial support	Rules and regulations	Professional human resource	Principal's support	Organizational culture
Mean	2.59	2.62	2.76	2.56	2.41	2.52
SD	0.47	0.51	0.41	0.52	0.46	0.49
K-S	0.91	0.92	1.31	0.87	1.25	0.94
Asymp. Sig.	0.37	0.36	0.06	0.42	0.08	0.33

Since all the presuppositions for conducting a parametric test on the obtained data were fulfilled, six sets of one-sample t-tests were used to examine the likelihood of the presence or lack of the necessary ground for implementing IDPs at public schools.

Table 4. *The results of one sample t-tests*

Variable	M	T	df	Sig.	Mean difference
Technological equipment	2.59	-11.63	179	0.000	-0.408
Financial support	2.62	-9.92	179	0.000	-0.379
Rules and regulations	2.76	-7.68	179	0.000	-0.235
Professional human resources	2.56	-11.12	179	0.000	-0.436
Principal's support	2.41	-16.83	179	0.000	-0.585
Organizational culture	2.52	-12.71	179	0.000	-0.471

Table 4. shows that the significance level for all the six variables ($0.000 \leq 0.05$) yields a meaningful difference between $M = 3$ and the factors' means ranging from 2.41 to 2.76. Moreover, all the obtained t-statistics ranging from -16.83 to -7.68 are smaller than the t-index (1.96). In addition, the mean scores in all subcomponents of the questionnaire are smaller than 3, with the mean differences ranging from -0.585 to -0.235. Thus, with correspondence to the factors measured, the context of Iranian public high schools is not still amenable to the implementation of IDPs. These measures indicate a considerable shortage in each variable reported by the participants. That is, from the instructor's point of view, the Ministry of Education and school authorities have not been able to provide a proper context for putting the IDP into practice; hence the feasibility of taking advantage of this program in the present-day condition of the Iranian public schools is low unless necessary alterations are made. Similar findings were echoed by Eslami (2016) in the context of private language institutes. This study correspondingly yielded incapacities in proper management, technological equipment, and the dominating cultural aura.

Qualitative analysis

The data obtained from the interviews complemented and corroborated the quantitative findings of the study. Inspecting EFL teachers' insights into the prior causes of improbability in each domain led to the identification of 14 segments out of the interview transcripts. All these segments are grouped under six main categories based on the questionnaire's measuring scopes.

While previous research findings have signified the critical role of technology in IDP accomplishment (Beigi & Gholipour, 2016; Eslami, 2016; Haghi et al., 2023), all the interviewees believed that schools are not equipped with these innovative devices. Participants frequently cited that this shortage results from not allocating sufficient budget by the ministry

of education to equip at least one room for teachers' educational affairs at public schools. Hamed's comment is clearly illustrative of this paucity:

There is no separate room where teachers can use a computer with full access to the internet to search about an educational issue. In fact, if we come up with a question, we should ask the principal's associate whether we are allowed to use his/her system or not.

According to the respondents' assertions, teachers do not tend to employ technological tools at schools because they are unfamiliar with how they work. They are either senior instructors who are unacquainted with technology usage or teachers who are not likely to risk their faces and ask how they can take advantage of these tools. Maryam's comment is compelling in this regard:

Most of our teachers are used to the traditional way of teaching and prefer to avoid challenging themselves with learning new topics.

However, as stated by the majority of interviewees, lack of explicit training in this regard has been one of the major causes of this reluctance.

Financial resources provided by the ministry of education were perceived to be the prerequisite for implementing IDPs (Ghorbanian et al., 2020; Jafari et al., 2017). However, lack of financial support was mentioned by all the participants as a deterrent factor in EFL teachers' IDP accomplishment. The most remarkable cluster within this category was teachers' dissatisfaction with the salary they receive per month. They mentioned that with this "hand to mouth" income, they were mainly involved in teaching in other private language institutes in their spare time so that they could come up with their basic needs. Thus, they were dissuaded from investing time in their professional development knowing that there would be no job prospects ahead of them. As Ahmed put it:

Teaching is a low-paying job, and we are always thinking about what we can do to make more money and have a better life. Some of us have two or three jobs at the same time.

Another related concept mentioned was the insufficient budget for teachers' developmental activities. This alludes to the issue that the ministry of education has not allotted a reasonable sum of money to the teachers' developmental practices. That is, if teachers tend to undergo some progressive courses, they need to pay for them on their own. In addition, in case they have been able to fulfill a developmental course, neither their teaching grade would promote nor their salary would increase. Sanaz's words are illuminating in this regard:

Whether or not I take an IDP, I receive the same income. why we should challenge ourselves in an educational system that does not change our monthly salaries to motivate us?

Respondents hold the idea that there is no room for any extra plans in instructors' teaching schedules. This category has to do with the compact instructional program's teachers are supposed to perform at school. According to the interviewed teachers, the educational framework of schools has no free time and space to be allotted to teachers' developmental

activities. They further mentioned that schools' teaching time has no flexibility for adding a new program since the school authorities have preplanned it. In the same vein, Jafari et al. (2017) mentioned that limitations are imposed on the way of practicing IDPs by the rules and regulations dominating schools. Reza clearly pointed out to this issue:

*We start our classes at 8 a.m. and finish at 1 with just 15 minutes break time.
How can we manage to do any developmental tasks in such a short time?*

Another cluster within this category is concerned with teachers' beliefs regarding the necessity of performing a developmental task. Although taking IDPs would help teachers create constructive, developmental behaviors (Anseel et al., 2009), they initially hold the idea that they are not responsible for fulfilling them during their career path. Most of the interviewees attributed their reluctance toward professional development courses like IDP to not being propelled to undertake them in regular time intervals. These concepts are demonstrated in the following excerpt from Zahra's interview:

When we were about to be employed in the ministry of education, we took some preservice courses about the basics of teaching. Nothing was mentioned about the necessity of improving our knowledge and updating our performances during work.

Although the significance of being accompanied by an expert mentor in the way of IDP completion was highlighted by prior research (Haghi et al., 2023), the interviewees mentioned the inability of the ministry of education to recruit professional workforces. This category accounts for a notable lacuna in the ministry of education planning. That is, in the high-ranking decisions made by the authorities, job opportunities have yet to be defined as teacher trainers or mentors not only for EFL teachers but also for the other instructors. However, according to the instructors' comments, teachers known as head teachers do some limited educational activities from time to time. Hirbod's comments are illuminating in this regard:

We are all tied up with our teaching program that we can't meet up with our head teacher once in three months. However, there is not any schedule for gatherings and planning for teachers' further learning.

The second cluster within this category was the attitudes held by the authorities working at the ministry of education. The interviewed teachers mentioned that officials are not concerned about instructors' educational improvement, and this has obstructed the way of recruiting human resources (e.g., teacher educators). This is best illustrated in the following comments made by Hamzeh:

The issue of students' learning has always been the authorities' primary concern. They have never had a developmental attitude toward teachers.

The third cluster in this category alludes to the disinclination of authorities to enlist any teacher trainer or mentor from outside the organization because of the need for more budget. Most teachers believed that the authorities in the local organization asserted that they could not pay to invite professional human resources. That is why they refuse to hire any new members. Fardid's comments show the importance of this cluster:

Our country's ministry of education is known as a poor organization with the lowest budget allotment. Budgets are supposed to be spent on the problems that are more vital for the student's learning affairs.

Notwithstanding the crucial role played by the school principals in EFL teachers' IDPs, school administration is delegated to individuals on the basis of factors except for pertinent knowledge and experience (Eslami, 2016). Almost all interviewees mentioned that school principals are chiefly elected based on their teaching experience, meaning that the more years of experience they have accumulated, the more likely they are to be an administrator. However, they are not assessed on the basis of holding relevant academic credentials like educational administration. Mehri's comments are compelling in this regard:

School principal appointment is not fair in our schools. I mean, they are not selected based on their expertise. They mostly have irrelevant university degrees and are not aware of managing a school from different aspects.

Another critical segment mentioned by the teachers in this regard was school principals' attitudes toward teacher development. In spite of the fact that the prior research (Ghorbanian et al., 2020; Jafari et al., 2017) averred the facilitative role of school principals, interviewees unanimously were of the opinion that principals do not adhere to the TPD courses, like IDP, since they do not believe in the efficiency of these programs. They further claimed that principals' concerns do not comply with those of the instructors. With respect to the school principals, the following excerpt by Ali is compelling:

School principals should support their teachers to pursue sublime educational goals. However, most are either against teachers' development or at least show reluctance to their attempts.

The importance of the principal's adherence to the teachers' developmental acts is best illustrated in the following excerpt by Ahmed:

When a school principal is concerned about his teachers' progress and dynamism, he will invest the school's time and financial resources in this way. Otherwise, all these resources would be spent in some superficial domains having nothing to do with the student's achievement.

The incongruity between teachers' IDP implementation and the cultural aura dominating public schools in Iran was another factor hampering EFL teachers' professional development. This category comprises three clusters, with the first focusing on teachers' demotivation in taking up IDPs step by step. According to the comments made by the teachers, if they get involved in such a developmental program, they will not receive any emotional and financial bonuses from the ministry of education and the school principals they are working with. This is discordant with what has been pointed out as the favorable ground for implementing IDP. As stated by Beausaert (2011), individuals should be able to reflect on their past experiences enthusiastically and be amendable to receive and internalize new training tips (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Reza's assertions are enlightening in this regard:

Whenever I want to take a constructive step and promote my teaching practices, I come to the conclusion that I am not supposed to be promoted in this system.

The second segment within this category refers to the lack of support from peers. This segment is concerned with colleagues' unwillingness toward and condemnation of each other if one intends to take such a developmental task that is not being entailed in their defined responsibilities. This common trend against teachers' professional development would discourage them from putting more effort into promoting their current performance. This is well reflected in Sara's interview excerpt:

My colleagues will criticize me if I take a developmental course like IDP. This is because they think we should spend more time at work than required and receive nothing in response.

The third segment within this cluster alludes to the inability to identify teachers' weaknesses and strengths. As stated by most interviewees, since there are no synergic gatherings for teachers, they do not have a chance to know about their educational deficiencies. This is why they simply keep on with what they have been doing since they were recruited. This is clear in the words of Elaheh:

As colleagues, we cannot have a preplanned meeting in which we can talk about our concerns and share our experiences. I think this would enlighten us in our way toward betterment.

Improving public school conditions for implementing IDP

Taking the criticisms leveled at the incapacity of public schools for the implementation of IDP into account, interviewees made some constructive suggestions for the improvement of the schools' current conditions. These recommendations were clustered under six main categories corresponding to the questionnaire's item order.

Most of the participants believed that policies in the ministry of education should approve equipping schools with the latest technological tools. Accordingly, they mentioned that a specific budget needs to be allotted to fulfill this lacuna so that all teachers can have direct access to a computer system connected to high-speed internet. Otherwise, they will fall behind the contemporary educational approaches followed by instructors all around the world. Ali, for instance, mentioned that:

If teachers have a specific room at every school with a particular system for their use, they will feel encouraged to take advantage of technology for their ample performance.

However, most interviewees were primarily concerned about knowing how to use technological tools. They suggested that teachers should be trained about using these devices when the schools are equipped.

With regard to the financial support, all the interviewees recommended that government and the ministry of education need to allot a considerable budget to accomplish this goal. They further explained that teachers and their mentors would be motivated to keep up with the IDP

stages if they received financial aid. They claimed that being financially backed up would bear some fruitful results for the instructors involved in the program, like creating a solid motivation and hoping to achieve lofty job prospects. As Maryam put it:

If I know that I am not doing something futile and am paid for it, I feel more responsible and will persist in completing my IDP course.

A couple of alternative suggestions were made to improve the prevailing rules and regulations at schools. First, in addition to the time spent instructing the pupils, a schedule needs to be set, based on the teachers' time preferences, to trigger teachers' professional development. As mentioned by Fatemeh:

It's impossible to add any new teacher training courses to our current instructional schedule unless necessary alterations are made to the hours we are supposed to be at school.

Concerning compensating for the lack of professional workforces to accompany teachers from the early stages up to the final level of IDP accomplishment, interviewees made some conducive recommendations. Firstly, participants believed that head teachers can act like a mentor if they are appointed based on their expertise and relevant experiences in the field. Secondly, the additional time and effort the mentors put into improving teachers' performances should be financially rewarded. Reza, as a head teacher, made a clarifying example in this regard:

When I was offered to be a head teacher, I was unwilling to accept since I knew I should spend my free time doing unpaid tasks.

The participating teachers proposed a complementary stage for head teachers as well. They recommended that if head teachers interact with the university professors in ELT regularly, they would be able to update their knowledge and transfer their information to the instructors. As Sahar put it:

If head teachers do not take some steps for their development, how can they expect so for the teachers connected to them?

Some basic suggestions were made to rectify the school principals' incapacities in corroborating EFL teachers' IDP practice. Participants primarily suggested that school principals should be selected based on their competencies. They hold the idea that administrators should not have academic credentials that are impertinent to management. There needs to be a set of predefined criteria like expertise, related experience, and affable personality traits based on which qualified individuals can be delegated to this position. Hamed's experience clarifies this point:

I have worked with principals who were selected based on the political parties they belonged to. This led to wasting students' instructional hour on some unnecessary celebrations at school.

As stated by the participants, school principals should be informed about the importance of paying attention to the teachers' educational needs and investing sufficient time and finances

in this issue. When powerful authorities hold dynamic views, they will compel their staff to strive to gain more.

Suggestions made for the modifications of cultural norms dominating the school atmosphere were known to be initially concerned with altering the extant attitude toward the public education system from a consumer unit to a productive center. As stated by the interviewees, governmental authorities would be more willing to apportion an adequate budget to this organization when the idea toward education changes. As Zahra explained:

We have never been well-paid since authorities think we are not producing anything for the country. Thus, we can be paid less.

In addition, participants believed that if teachers could have a chance to convene and talk to their head teacher about their common concerns and listen to the importance of holding IDP courses, they would be eager to persist in their improvement. Moreover, attempts should be made to establish a developmental aura among school teachers. If teachers who have succeeded in performing IDP receive public praise and promotion, other instructors will be motivated to take the same steps. The suggestion made by Mohammad in this regard is quite convincing:

I need to be appreciated and praised first by my supervisor, school principal, and then my colleagues. This would empower me to keep on with my attempts.

Conclusions and implications

Three major conclusions were drawn corresponding to the research questions of the study. Firstly, the possibility of implementing IDPs in light of technological equipment, financial support, rule and regulations, professional human resources, principal's support, and organizational culture was considered to be low in Iranian public high schools at the time of the research. Deficiency in these contriving factors can be attributed to policymakers and educational authorities' unfamiliarity with the importance of holding courses like IDP for EFL teachers. Provided that authorities in the ministry of education are informed about the benefits of this program and policies are developed for its implementation, teachers and schools would both take advantage of them (Patel et al., 2013).

Secondly, the data obtained from the interviews verified the underlying causes of these incompetencies in each factor. For example, the lack of technological tools was attributed to the dearth of financial resources to equip a specific space for teachers and the instructors' unfamiliarity with the device's operations. All the 14 reasons obtained, more or less accrue to the high-stake decisions made for the teachers in the ministry of education. However, planning for teachers' professional development has no specific place in these settlements, and teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge are only assessed at the time of recruitment. Thirdly, teachers' suggestions to obviate the barriers to implementing IDP were sought. In line with teachers' perceptions of the existing shortcomings and the recommendations made for improving the current conditions, authorities in the ministry of education, policymakers, and school principals are suggested to:

- Specify a room equipped with technological tools to the teachers and hold training sessions to enable them use those devices.

- Negotiate for specifying certain amount of budget to teachers' developmental practices.
- Plan for allotting a specific time to the fulfillment of IDPs within EFL teachers' instructional hours and make teachers' regular attendance a necessity.
- Recruit or invite professional workforces in the field of EFL teacher training to accompany the instructors in their developmental path.
- Appoint the school principals based on their relevant academic credentials, experience, and their attitudes toward teachers' role in learners' achievement.
- Create a cultural atmosphere which favor teachers' professional development at schools.

Like any other study, the current research has had some limitations. First, we collected the data via a researcher-made questionnaire to seek the teachers' ideas, while future researchers can collect data from other participants involved in the country's education system. In addition, EFL teachers' opinions on the reasons for the present incapacities were sought from a few teachers. As this section of the study was qualitatively conducted, care should be taken in generalizing the findings. Subsequent researchers can collect data from a larger sample.

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Appendix A. Individual Development Planning Questionnaire

The present questionnaire examines the possibility of establishing an Individual Development Program (IDP) for EFL teachers at Iranian public schools. In fact, IDP is a supportive, structured process that individuals are responsible to act it out. During this process, people can increase their capacity to review, plan and take responsibility for their learning. Since the application of the mentioned program can have a significant impact on the career success of teachers, students' learning and the improvement of schools, so please give us your honest answers in the way of identifying the executive capacities of this program in the education system.

Demographic information

- Gender:** 1. male 2. Female
- Age:** 1. 20-30 2. 31-40 3. 41-50 4. above 51
- Degree:** 1. BA 2. MA 3. Ph.D.
- Job experience:** 1. below 5 2. 6-10 3. 11-20 4. above 20

Direction: please indicate the extent of the following conditions' presence on the five-point Likert scale below (very poor= 1, below average= 2, average= 3, above average= 4, excellent= 5).

		1	2	3	4	5
1	To what extent is it possible to use technical resources to implement IDP?					
2	To what extent is it possible to provide new technologies?					
3	To what extent is it possible to equip schools with modern technologies?					
4	To what extent is it possible to provide teacher training based on new technologies?					
5	To what extent is it possible to provide sufficient financial resources to support IDPs?					
6	To what extent is it possible to allocate sufficient funds from the Ministry of Education for IDP in different schools in the same way?					
7	To what extent can the education organization provide necessary financial support for teachers performing IDPs?					
8	To what extent is it possible to increase the salary of teachers fulfilling IDP?					
9	To what extent do the school rules and regulations at school facilitates learning general and specialized skills?					
10	To what extent is it possible to include an IDP as an in-service teacher training program at schools?					
11	To what extent do the existing rules and regulations in the school enable the trainers to perform IDP?					
12	To what extent do the current developmental frameworks have the potential to introduce IDP?					
13	To what extent do the senior managers support the provision of specialist staff for the IDP?					
14	To what extent is it possible to provide specialist personnel from outside for IDP?					
15	To what extent is it possible for mentors to cooperate with teachers in the stages of implementing IDP?					
16	To what extent is it possible to create learning networks among workforce to achieve IDP purpose?					

17	To what extent is it possible for administrators to support IDPs?					
18	To what extent do the managers appointed in schools have developmental attitudes toward teachers?					
19	To what extent are school administrators aware of the importance of IDPs?					
20	To what extent do school administrators emphasize on teachers' professional development?					
21	To what extent does the culture in schools lead teachers toward self-development?					
22	To what extent do you consider the organizational culture in schools ready for the IDPs?					
23	To what extent does the prevailing organizational culture support the implementation of IDPs?					
24	To what extent does the current cultural framework consider teacher development as one of its priorities?					

Appendix B. Interview questions

1. Is the technological equipment at school sufficient for the implementation of IDPs? Why? Why not?
What are your suggestions for improving this situation?
2. Is the amount of financial support provided for the implementation of developmental programs like IDP sufficient? Why? why not?
What are your suggestions for ameliorating this condition?
3. Do the rules and regulations at school facilitate or hinder the implementation of IDPs? Why? why not?
How do you think we can improve the current condition?
4. Are the school principals supportive of IDPs? If yes, how? If no, why?
Do you have any suggestions for improving this situation?
5. re professional trainers available for the accompaniment of teachers during IDPs? If yes, how? If no, why?
How do you think we can solve this shortage?
6. Does the existent organizational culture favor the implementation of IDPs? Why? Why not?
Do you have any suggestions for improving the current condition?