Exploring Change in EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development

Mohammad Mohammadi and Khaled Moradi
Urmia University, Urmia, Iran

Abstract

Continuous professional development (CPD) is important for teachers in attaining sustainable education. Accordingly, exploring teachers' perceptions could be a significant endeavor as teachers' beliefs impact their classroom practices, thereby, impacting student learning and, thus have educational implications. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate this fundamental issue via establishing professional development workshops to train teachers in order to promote sustainable professional growth. It examined 86 EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward CPD before and after attending workshops for professional development. The data were collected through a questionnaire and a follow-up interview. Paired-samples t-tests were run to measure differences between responses of pre and post surveys. Moreover, raw frequencies and percentages were calculated in order to prioritize the items the teachers selected in each variable. The findings demonstrate that beliefs about CPD can change. Survey data collected before and after professional development workshops revealed a statistical significant shift in EFL teachers' beliefs. This finding was also supported by semi-structured interviews. In addition, the results also revealed that the participants perceived customized professional development programs with professional development framework as a beneficial tool to be included in the professional development programs. The study may have some pedagogical implications to be utilized in the educational process directed at sustainable professional development.

Keywords: belief change, professional development, sustainable professional growth, teachers' perceptions.

Introduction

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) is subject to rapid changes. Professional development can contribute to the effectiveness of ESL/EFL teachers by providing continuous individual and collective improvement that is necessary to adequately address the heightened expectations for improving student learning outcomes (Elmore, 2002; Fullan, 2007). The ideas of Teachers' Professional Development emphasize that teachers are individuals with marvelous potential and sustainable development; it requires teachers to become learners, researchers, and cooperator; it prompts teachers to reflect on their

teaching practices more rationally, improve professional standards, manifest sustainable professional quality, and realize professional ideal (Jiang, 2017).

Knapp (2003) points out that professional development is a critical link to improve teaching. Therefore, teachers need regular opportunities to update their professional knowledge and skills. The complex organizational nature of educational centers, accompanied by evolving pedagogies, requires multiple professional development strategies to effectively address needs, respond to emerging trends in teaching and learning and facilitate improvements. There is, thus, a constant need, in dealing with teachers' professional development, to study, experiment, discuss and reflect on teachers' perceptions of professional development, the educational needs of their student populations, and learning opportunities that are open to them.

Recent changes in society, economy and politics have had a huge effect on education. The changing roles of teachers, the growing demands and expectations of the society and policy makers require high quality teacher education and professional development programs. English teachers are also challenged daily with a diverse range of students they face in their classrooms. Moreover, teacher education programs may not meet the rising expectations evoked by the authorities, parents and learners. Hence, teachers should continue their learning while they are working (Borko, 2004; Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll 2005; Gusky, 2002; Mann, 2005). Recent studies have explored teachers' beliefs about professional development (e.g. Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Chang, Jeon, & Ahn, 2014; Hung & Yeh, 2013; Kumba & Nkumbi, 2008; Powell, Terrell, Furey, & Scott-Evans, 2003; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Tang, Lee, & Chun, 2012). Yet, the beliefs of EFL teachers about CPD have been largely ignored (Gholami & Qurbanzada, 2016; Pipere, Veisson, & Salite, 2015).

The current study addresses this gap in more practical research by examining EFL teachers' beliefs about CPD before and after engaging them in workshops and activities related to professional development. This study could be beneficial to the field as it informs teacher educators, supervisors and educational officials about their teachers' beliefs. It goes without saying that if teachers' beliefs are effectively targeted, we can pave the way to better prepare teachers in teacher education programs to promote educational success for their sustainable professional development.

Literature Review

The professional development of teachers is studied and presented in a myriad of ways in the literature. Numerous studies point to the effectiveness of professional development in the field of ELT (e.g. Jiang, 2017; Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Lier, 2002; Mann, 2005; Salite, 2015; Wharton, 2003; Yadav, 2011; Yoo, 2016).

Teacher beliefs is defined as teachers' "implicit assumptions about their students, classroom, learning, and the subject matter to be taught" (Kagan, 1992, p. 66). Teachers' beliefs include a variety of different aspects of beliefs about English as a subject and its teaching and learning, as well as the perceived professional growth, the satisfaction of the participating teachers, and the teachers' opinions, values, etc. (Jiang, 2017; Leder, Pehkonen, & Torner, 2002). Teachers' perceptions are generally considered to have a powerful impact on teachers' cognition and practice. A teacher's beliefs impact his or her behavior, thereby impacting student learning. (Borg, 2003; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Tang, Lee, & Chun, 2012). The way in which teachers come to conceptualize themselves

as teachers and develop explanations for their own classroom practices tends to be filtered through their beliefs (Johnson, 1999). Teachers' beliefs about good teaching are reflected in their everyday teaching practice and affect their decision-making in the classroom. This is why no new curricula would ever be implemented if teachers do not support them. Therefore, it is necessary to determine if EFL teachers are mentally ready to implement the changes needed to achieve the educational goals of a modern society (Akbari & Tajik, 2012; Gao & Ma, 2011).

Different scholars define CPD in different ways. But, they express similar ideas. The term

> *continuing professional development is a planned, continuous and lifelong process whereby teachers try to develop their personal and professional qualities, and to improve their knowledge, skills and practice, leading to their empowerment, the improvement of their agency and the development of their organizations and their pupils* (Padwad & Dixit, 2011, p. 7).

Participation in professional development programs is believed to have some impact on the teachers' ability to acquire and critically develop the knowledge, skills, and emotional intelligence essential for good professional thinking, planning, and practice with their students and colleagues through every phase of their teaching profession (see Borko, 2004; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Day, 1999; Gabriel, Day, & Allington, 2011; Poskitt, 2005). Due to the role of English as a global language, examining professional development programs and teachers' beliefs about CPD seems to be an essential issue. Providing adequate professional development programs depend on insights into the beliefs of ELT teachers. These beliefs are critical due to their impact on teachers' sustainable behavior.

The sustainability of professional development for teachers has become one of the key priorities in the field of teaching. Obviously, an analysis of sustainable effects is crucial too (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, & Hewson, 1996). Hargreaves and Fink (2003) stated, "Sustainable improvement requires investment in building long term capacity for improvement, such as the development of teachers' skills, which will stay with them forever, long after the project money has gone" (p. 3). Our use of the term sustainability in professional development for English teachers refers to the capacity to achieve durability in effective teaching practice. Our primary consideration of sustainability is from the perspective of achieving shifts in knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to lasting change in quality teaching and learning practices.

Like other countries, English teachers in Iran are provided with opportunities for professional development in different forms. However, they have been far from satisfactory when it comes to opportunities to take part in extended and collaborative professional development. Furthermore, EFL teachers in Iran do not participate in well-designed professional development programs. The English teaching profession in Iran is characterized by inadequate and ineffective pre-service education, poor teacher preparation, and lack of professional development support (Jamshidi & Sadeghi, 2014; Nargesy, 2012; Shahmohammadi, 2012).

The review of teacher professional development literature shows that there is some concern and movement towards improving the quality of teaching by engaging teachers in professional development activities (Kennedy, 2005; Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston,

2009). In the realm of second language teacher education, despite much work in professional development, only a few studies have dealt with this particular issue in the Iranian context. Thus, attempts were made to investigate the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward professional development activities as well as their perceptions of possible barriers to the implementation and evaluation of CPD. The research was guided by this question: How do EFL teachers' pre-existing beliefs about professional development change following CPD workshops?

Focusing on the importance of professional development in ELT and EFL teachers' perceptions about it, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1) Are there any significant differences between teachers' perceptions about the underlying reasons toward professional development before and after attending workshops?
2) Are there any significant differences between teachers' perceptions about different types of professional development before and after attending workshops?
3) Are there any significant differences between teachers' perceptions about engagement with professional development activities before and after attending workshops?
4) Are there any significant differences between teachers' perceptions about constraints teachers face in their professional development before and after attending workshops?
5) Are there any significant differences between teachers' perceptions about the facilities they prefer to receive for effective professional development before and after attending workshops?
6) Are there any significant differences between teachers' perceptions about the evaluation criteria they prefer for professional development before and after attending workshops?

Methodology

Context of the Study

English teacher education in Iran subsumes initial teacher education, which embodies the main part of the teacher education program, and in-service training, which is a limited scheme. English teachers in private language schools also attend teacher training courses (TTC) at private language centers. The importance of teachers' professional development is fully recognized by the Iranian authorities, and in recent years, there have been some activities and programs for teachers' development (Jamshidi & Sadeghi, 2014).

Private language schools in Iran provide both intensive and extensive English language courses based on the principles of communicative approaches. Typically, English courses are taught by non-native English-speaking teachers who hold university degrees (e.g., BA/MA) in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). The main objective of these courses is to enable students to communicate with others in English in both oral and written modes. Preparatory courses for international tests, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language

(TOEFL) Internet-based Test (iBT), are also offered. The language schools where this study was conducted offer English conversation courses for all proficiency levels.

Participants

The participants, 86 non-native English-speaking teachers, were selected out of teachers teaching English classes in private language schools through stratified random sampling. Out of the selected participants, 22 also participated in the interview phase of the study. The subjects were male and female teachers whose age ranged between 22 and 45 years. The sample was selected from 16 top English language teaching schools in Iran. All teachers had a Bachelor's Degree in teaching EFL and had attended pre-service teacher training courses at private schools. The participants' first languages were Kurdish and Persian. The teacher participants' experience varied from less than two years to 15 years, and they were teaching low-intermediate to advanced levels of proficiency courses to both male and female adults with different ages.

Instruments and Procedures

To design a survey that would accurately measure EFL teachers' beliefs, we first interviewed 43 English teachers and examined the relevant PD course books and activities. Based on that information, we adapted a questionnaire from Chang, Jeon and Ahn (2014). Taking the Iranian context into account, we made some modifications with regard to the survey items for CPD forms and activities from Foord (2009). Three experts from the field checked the modified version of the survey. The survey was piloted with a small group of EFL teachers. The participants provided feedback and instrument was revised accordingly. The questionnaire had three sections. The first section was designed to collect background information about the teachers, including their gender, university degree, and teaching experience. The second section asked the teachers about their attitudes toward current PD situation and, the section aimed to elicit information about the constraints and supports about PD. Based on the survey results seven interview questions were constructed to complement the quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of the workshops to look more deeply at the concepts addressed in the survey.

One of us administered the professional development Survey at the start of the workshops in spring (2016).

The activities of the workshops took the teachers through a series of varied tasks that progressively developed their knowledge of classroom practice and language. The aim was to motivate the teachers by means of interactive tasks which engaged the teachers in and provided an appropriate level of cognitive challenge. The tasks were logically staged and took the teachers through a complete learning sequence. The materials covered a range of levels from pre-service to experienced teachers to explore professional development in more depth. The main activities of professional development sessions were hands-on activities, interactive tasks, collaborative work, reflections, and discussions, self-monitored practice. The strategies we employed incorporated teacher networks, collaborations, action research, mentoring programs, and peer coaching, as we believe these address complex and multifaceted needs, including that of sustainable teaching practice.

The participants were informed that their confidentiality would be strictly observed. During the last week of the sessions, depending upon the workshop schedules, the same professional development survey was administered again. Data collection among all of the teachers resulted in 97 surveys. However, only the participants that completed both the pre and post surveys were included in the study. In total, 86 surveys met the inclusion criteria. The qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to exemplify and provide external validation for the beliefs expressed in the surveys. In this section, 22 teachers were randomly selected and invited to participate in the interview, which was conducted in Persian and English. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed by the researchers. The interviews were conducted by one of us and held in a small, quiet room in private language schools. Each interview took 25 minutes. It should be noted that the teachers did not know the interview questions in advance.

Data Collection and Analysis

To find answers to our research question (Do EFL teachers' pre-existing beliefs about CPD change following PD workshops?), we first needed to establish what beliefs the teachers held prior to the workshops. We achieved this goal through a descriptive analysis of the questionnaire, administered before the participants attended the workshops. Content analysis and descriptive analysis were also used to analyze the results of the interviews. After ensuring that the collected data met the assumptions of the t-test and that the questionnaire data, enjoyed an acceptable level of reliability (0.88), paired-samples t-tests were run for pre and post scores to indicate any change in the teachers' beliefs. The alpha level was set at $p < .05$ for the t-tests. Moreover, raw frequencies and percentages were calculated in order to prioritize the items the teachers selected in each variable. The qualitative data from the interviews were also integrated to support the survey findings. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data, which is one of the merits of mixed methods design, further ensured the validity of the collected data. All the statistical analyses were done through using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 22.

Results

This study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of non-native EFL teachers about CPD. As the first question, the teachers were requested to check the most important reasons to pursue CPD. The results in this regard are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The Differences Between Teachers' Perceptions about the Underlying Reasons to Pursue PD Before and After Attending the Workshops

Variables	Group	Mean (SD)	T	df	Sig.
ALL	Pre survey	0.58 (0.094)	3.516	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.51 (0.148)			
being assigned to a new task	Pre survey	1 (0.001)	16.22	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.24 (0.432)			
improving teaching effectiveness	Pre survey	0.38 (0.489)	-11.684	84	0.001
	Post survey	1 (0.001)			
meeting requirements for promotion	Pre survey	0.92 (0.275)	14.2	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.19 (0.391)			
meeting requirements for a higher annual salary	Pre survey	0.76 (0.432)	14.83	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.02 (0.152)			
competing with newly appointed teachers	Pre survey	0.69 (0.467)	1.424	84	0.156
	Post survey	0.58 (0.496)			
meeting needs in society	Pre survey	0.28 (0.451)	-12.078	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.94 (0.235)			
preparing for future education	Pre survey	0.33 (0.471)	-11.268	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.95 (0.212)			
Other	Pre survey	0.33 (0.471)	1.728	84	0.086
	Post survey	0.21 (0.409)			

Table 2
Prioritizing the Most Important Reasons for Continuing Professional Development

Variables	Group	Frequency (%)	Priority
being assigned to a new task	Pre survey	86 (100)	1
	Post survey	21 (24.4)	5
improving teaching effectiveness	Pre survey	33 (38.4)	5
	Post survey	86 (100)	1
meeting requirements for promotion	Pre survey	79 (91.9)	2
	Post survey	16 (18.6)	7
meeting requirements for a higher annual salary	Pre survey	65 (75.6)	3
	Post survey	2 (2.3)	8
competing with newly appointed teachers	Pre survey	59 (68.6)	4
	Post survey	50 (58.1)	4
meeting needs in society	Pre survey	24 (27.9)	7
	Post survey	81 (94.2)	3
preparing for future education	Pre survey	28 (32.6)	6
	Post survey	82 (95.3)	2
Other	Pre survey	28 (32.6)	6
	Post survey	18 (20.9)	6

We also prioritized the reasons the teachers had for continuing professional development. Table 2 shows that, in the pre-survey, "being assigned to a new task" was the first priority, while, in the post-survey, the first priority was "improving teaching effectiveness".

The second question targeted the teachers' perception about forms of CPD and asked them to rate the effectiveness of each form. Table 3 shows the teachers' responses to the question: '*What forms does your own CPD take and how effective is each form?*'

Table 3
The Differences Between Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Types of CPD Before and After Attending the Workshops

Variables	Group	Mean (SD)	T	df	Sig.
ALL	Pre survey	0.93 (0.14)	-30.818	84	0.001
	Post survey	1.68 (0.173)			
PD activities you do alone	Pre survey	2.37 (0.595)	-10.33	84	0.001
	Post survey	3.42 (0.727)			
PD Activities with your students	Pre survey	1.74 (0.689)	-22.474	84	0.001
	Post survey	3.73 (0.445)			
PD Activities with your colleagues	Pre survey	0.92 (0.578)	-26.187	84	0.001
	Post survey	3.3 (0.615)			
PD Activities with your school	Pre survey	1.51 (0.851)	-16.284	84	0.001
	Post survey	3.26 (0.513)			
PD Activities with your profession	Pre survey	1.34 (0.745)	-19.632	84	0.001
	Post survey	3.5 (0.699)			
volunteer activities	Pre survey	0.05 (0.212)	-2.971	84	0.003
	Post survey	0.36 (0.957)			
Other	Pre survey	0.52 (0.878)	-0.397	84	0.691
	Post survey	0.58 (1.034)			

Table 4
Prioritizing the Most Effective Forms of Professional Development

Variables	Group	Frequency (%)	Priority
PD activities you do alone	Pre survey	86 (100)	1
	Post survey	86 (100)	1
PD Activities with your students	Pre survey	81 (94.2)	2
	Post survey	86 (100)	1
PD Activities with your colleagues	Pre survey	66 (76.7)	5
	Post survey	86 (100)	1
PD Activities with your school	Pre survey	67 (77.9)	4
	Post survey	85 (98.8)	2
PD Activities with your profession	Pre survey	76 (88.4)	3
	Post survey	86 (100)	1
volunteer activities	Pre survey	3 (3.5)	7
	Post survey	12 (14)	4
Other	Pre survey	24 (27.9)	6
	Post survey	22 (25.6)	3

After the teachers answered this question, we were also able to prioritize the most effective forms of professional development. Table 4 presents the results in this regard.

The third question was designed to elicit the teachers' perceptions about their involvement in professional development activities. Table 5 shows the teachers' responses to the question: '*What kind of activities are you involved in for each form of CPD?*'

Table 5
The Differences Between Teachers' Perceptions about Engagement with PD Activities Before and After Attending the Workshops

Variables	Group	Mean (SD)	T	df	Sig.
ALL	Pre survey	1.66 (0.307)	-63.155	84	0.001
	Post survey	4.03 (0.164)			
activities you can do independently to develop yourself and your teaching	Pre survey	1.73 (0.434)	-48.305	84	0.001
	Post survey	4.14 (0.162)			
Activities you can do and which involve your students	Pre survey	1.94 (0.445)	-36.898	84	0.001
	Post survey	4 (0.260)			
Activities you can do in collaboration with your fellow teachers	Pre survey	1.68 (0.361)	-55.415	84	0.001
	Post survey	4.12 (0.190)			
Possible development actions & opportunities involving you in the wider context of your school	Pre survey	1.53 (0.328)	-54.226	84	0.001
	Post survey	3.99 (0.263)			
Possible PD actions & opportunities	Pre survey	1.4 (0.240)	-56.798	84	0.001
	Post survey	3.9 (0.328)			

Table 6
Prioritizing Teacher s' Involvement with Different Forms of Professional Development

Variables	Group	Mean (SD)	Priority
activities you can do independently to develop yourself and your teaching	Pre survey	1.73 (0.434)	2
	Post survey	4.14 (0.162)	1
Activities you can do and which involve your students	Pre survey	1.94 (0.445)	1
	Post survey	4 (0.260)	3
Activities you can do in collaboration with your fellow teachers	Pre survey	1.68 (0.361)	3
	Post survey	4.12 (0.190)	2
Possible development actions & opportunities involving you in the wider context of your school	Pre survey	1.53 (0.328)	4
	Post survey	3.99 (0.263)	4
Possible PD actions & opportunities	Pre survey	1.4 (0.240)	5
	Post survey	3.9 (0.328)	5

Similar to the previous question, we also prioritized the activities the teachers stated they were involved in for each form of CPD. The results in this regard are provided in Table 6.

The next section of the questionnaire dealt with the constraints and supports for CPD.

The first question in this section asked the teachers to check the major constraints in pursuing CPD and other means of improvement.

Table 7 shows the teachers' responses to the question: '*What are the major constraints in pursuing CPD and other means of improvement?*'

Table 7
The Differences Between Teachers' Perceptions about Constraints Teachers Face in PD Before and After Attending the Workshops

Variables	Group	Mean (SD)	T	df	Sig.
ALL	Pre survey	0.71 (0.094)	8.172	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.57 (0.124)			
teaching load	Pre survey	1 (0.001)	8.011	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.57 (0.498)			
lack of customized CPD programs	Pre survey	0.66 (0.476)	-5.833	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.98 (0.152)			
lack of cooperative development with colleagues	Pre survey	0.65 (0.479)	-.16	84	0.873
	Post survey	0.66 (0.476)			
obligation to meet criteria university evaluation	Pre survey	0.58 (0.496)	-3.213	84	0.002
	Post survey	0.8 (0.401)			
pressure from promotion or contract	Pre survey	0.64 (0.483)	5.657	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.24 (0.432)			
other	Pre survey	0.74 (0.439)	8.529	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.2 (0.401)			

As indicated in Table 7, the maximum mean in the pre-survey is related to "teaching load", while, in the post-survey, "lack of customized CPD programs" has the maximum mean.

Table 8
Prioritizing the Main Constraints for Continuing Professional Development from Teachers' Perceptions

Variables	Group	Frequency (%)	Priority
teaching load	Pre survey	86 (100)	1
	Post survey	49 (57)	4
lack of customized CPD programs	Pre survey	57 (66.3)	3
	Post survey	84 (97.7)	1
lack of cooperative development with colleagues	Pre survey	56 (65.1)	4
	Post survey	57 (66.3)	3
obligation to meet criteria university evaluation	Pre survey	50 (58.1)	6
	Post survey	69 (80.2)	2
pressure from promotion or contract	Pre survey	55 (64)	5
	Post survey	21 (24.4)	5
Other	Pre survey	64 (74.4)	2
	Post survey	17 (19.8)	6

As Table 8 shows, in the pre-survey, "teaching load" was the first priority, and, in the post-survey, "lack of customized CPD programs" was the first priority.

The next question asked the teachers to check the supports they preferred for effective CPD.

Table 9 reveals the teachers' responses to the question: '*What support would you prefer for effective CPD?*'

Table 9
The Differences Between Teachers' Perceptions about the Supports they Preferred to Receive for PD Before and After Attending Workshops

Variables	Group	Mean (SD)	T	df	Sig.
ALL	Pre survey	0.66 (0.136)	4.759	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.57 (0.101)			
teaching load lessened	Pre survey	1 (0.001)	7.823	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.58 (0.496)			
CPD as optional not obligatory to all	Pre survey	1 (0.001)	0.001	84	0.999
	Post survey	1 (0.001)			
building up learning community	Pre survey	0.59 (0.494)	-4.331	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.87 (0.336)			
officially authorized leave for CPD	Pre survey	0.52 (0.502)	8.109	84	0.001
	Post survey	05 (0.212)			
customized CPD programs	Pre survey	0.63 (0.486)	-1.824	84	0.07
	Post survey	0.76 (0.432)			
other	Pre survey	0.24 (0.432)	0.544	84	0.587
	Post survey	0.21 (0.409)			

The maximum mean in the pre-survey is related to both "teaching load lessened" and "CPD as optional not obligatory to all" while, in the post-survey, only "CPD as optional not obligatory to all" has the maximum mean.

Table 10
Prioritizing Different Supports the Teachers Preferred for Effective Professional Development

Variables	Group	Frequency (%)	Priority
teaching load lessened	Pre survey	86 (100)	1
	Post survey	50 (58.1)	4
CPD as optional not obligatory to all	Pre survey	86 (100)	1
	Post survey	86 (100)	1
building up learning community	Pre survey	51 (59.3)	3
	Post survey	75 (87.2)	2
officially authorized leave for CPD	Pre survey	45 (52.3)	4
	Post survey	4 (4.7)	6
customized CPD programs	Pre survey	54 (62.8)	2
	Post survey	65 (75.6)	3
Other	Pre survey	21 (24.4)	5
	Post survey	18 (20.9)	5

As Table 10 shows, in the pre-survey, both "teaching load lessened" and "CPD as optional not obligatory to all" were the first priority, and in the post-survey, only "CPD as optional not obligatory to all" was the first priority.

The last question in this section targeted the teachers' attitudes toward the criteria they would prefer for evaluation of CPD. Table 11 shows the teachers' responses to the question: '*What criteria would you prefer for evaluation of CPD?*'

Table 11
The Differences Between Teachers' Perceptions about the Criteria they Preferred for Evaluating PD Before and After Attending Workshops

Variables	Group	Mean (SD)	T	df	Sig.
ALL	Pre survey	0.58 (0.104)	-1.317	84	0.019
	Post survey	0.61 (0.143)			
training sessions for professional learning	Pre survey	0.66 (0.476)	-6.576	84	0.001
	Post survey	1 (0.001)			
teacher evaluation by student	Pre survey	0.79 (0.409)	11.609	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.13 (0.336)			
research and publication	Pre survey	0.69 (0.467)	2.358	84	0.02
	Post survey	0.51 (0.503)			
participating in academic associations	Pre survey	0.21 (0.409)	-10.213	84	0.001
	Post survey	0.83 (0.382)			
self-evaluation	Pre survey	0.94 (0.235)	-1.666	84	0.013
	Post survey	0.99 (0.108)			
other	Pre survey	0.23 (425)	0.181	84	0.857
	Post survey	0.22 (0.417)			

As indicated in Table 11, the maximum mean in the pre-survey is related to "self-evaluation", while, in the post-survey, "training sessions for professional learning" has the highest mean.

Table 12
Prioritizing Different Evaluation Criteria the Teachers Preferred for Evaluation of Effective Professional Development

Variables	Group	Frequency (%)	Priority
training sessions for professional learning	Pre survey	57 (66.3)	4
	Post survey	86 (100)	1
teacher evaluation by student	Pre survey	68 (79.1)	2
	Post survey	11 (12.8)	6
research and publication	Pre survey	59 (68.6)	3
	Post survey	44 (51.2)	4
participating in academic associations	Pre survey	18 (20.9)	6
	Post survey	71 (82.6)	3
self-evaluation	Pre survey	81 (94.2)	1
	Post survey	85 (98.8)	2
other	Pre survey	20 (23.3)	5
	Post survey	19 (22.1)	5

As Table 12 shows, in the pre-survey, "self-evaluation" was the first priority, while, in the post-survey, it was "training sessions for professional learning" which was the first priority.

Discussion

The present study aimed at exploring if EFL teachers' beliefs could change through professional development workshops. The teachers, in this study, were asked about different aspects of CPD, such as its types, activities, facilities, constraints, evaluation criteria, and the appropriate implementation of them. The findings revealed that there were significant differences between pre and post surveys. Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicated a positive overall change in the alignment of the teachers' beliefs with the current research and professional development workshops.

The study found that after the workshops, the teachers showed greater acceptance of customized CPD programs. This finding aligns with that of Chang et al. (2014). It was revealed that the participants perceived the customized CPD programs as beneficial tools to be included in professional development programs. The participants further reported several serious barriers to the application of professional development activities as well as the evaluation criteria and use of its result in the Iranian professional development courses.

The study revealed that successful professional development and changes should start from teachers and with an acknowledgement of their educational needs, their teaching context in which CPD is to be implemented as well as within an understanding of the socio-cultural context. This appears to be one of the key ingredients in the success of CPD. Another important issue is the institutional climate, and whether educational officials provide adequate support for successful professional development. This means that a supportive institutional climate should not be undervalued or neglected by institutional leaders for the sake of short-term goals imposed by the authorities. This finding is in line with that of the literature (Borko, 2004; Pedder & James, 2012; Timperley, 2008, 2011).

Recommendations on how to support the necessary changes involve starting with teachers' current beliefs and practices, allowing each teacher to find his or her own way of incorporating the lessons and ideas that are set out into her or his own patterns of classroom work. If teachers are committed to engaging in problematizing their own practice, seeking evidence to evaluate their practice in order to judge where changes are needed, and then acting on their decisions, they are, thus, engaging in assessment for learning processes with respect to their own professional learning (Black et al., 2003; Hayward & Hedge, 2005; Pedder & James, 2012; Timperley, 2011).

In addition, our triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data shows that the findings are in line with those of Borg (2003), Kagan (1992), Pajares (1992), and Tang, Lee, and Chun (2012). Teacher s' beliefs are generally considered to have a powerful impact on their reasoning and practice. Also, this study showed that the teachers considered CPD as their own responsibility. The common belief about professional development is that teachers know their field best and their CPD can be pursued in isolation too. This supports the teachers' tendency to choose professional development activities they can do alone more in both the pre and post surveys. However, a collaborative professional learning environment is recognized in the literature as a critical component in the success of continuing professional development for any group.

Overall, the change in EFL teachers' beliefs about CPD may be due to the following reasons: Firstly, evaluation of CPD and use of its results is one of the main reasons. The kinds of CPD in which teachers engage are strongly affected by the evaluation criteria

for their professional effectiveness that educational officials have designed. The evaluation system in Iran has had an undesirable wash-back effect on professional development, restricting the forms or activities that EFL teachers pursue for their professional learning. Teaching loads and the amount of teaching hours were also identified as constraints inhibiting successful professional development for the EFL teachers in this study. As the research literature suggests, educational officials should work to remove constraints identified as inhibiting effective professional learning so that teachers could have time and opportunities to reflect on their own practice and to pursue sustainable professional development through sharing their ideas and experiences with their colleagues. Taken together, there is little incentive and willingness on the part of EFL teachers to develop professionally.

Secondly, lack of consistent CPD framework has a major role in pursing CPD based on a guided model. An important part of CPD for English teachers is having a recognized framework of stages and pathways through which they can progress. This way, teachers can identify the stage they are at and compare their skills, behavior, and knowledge to those represented in the framework in order to improve their teaching skills. In this respect, in the CPD workshops, we introduced a CPD model based on this research study. We designed a framework for EFL teacher s' practice which describes the types of professional development practice that should be implemented, when and how often they should be implemented. This was a model of a teacher needs-based professional development program.

Thirdly, school climate and lack of cooperation among the teachers for building up a learning community for co-operative development was another factor. The most direct contextual factor assumed to influence teachers' learning is the learning environment (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Gholami, Sarkhosh, & Abdi, 2016).

Regarding the interviews, the feedback provided was very positive. The teachers believed that interpersonal relationships were strengthened, which made it easier to share experiences, both positive and negative. Elham's comments are the most compelling.

> *The workshops definitely helped us to develop a collaboration spirit among ourselves. I felt like we all stuck together in order to overcome the challenges that each one of us had. The training helped me have a sense of belonging and become integrated into the school. The teachers were given an environment in which they could know each other better and feel comfortable about clarifying doubts with each other, as well as sharing ideas and solutions for issues.* (Elham, EFL teacher, Interview: 11/08/2016)

Another teacher pointed out that "most schools do not have a communication channel where teachers' voices are heard and fed back into the decision making process in teacher evaluation." He added that "most decisions are made by authorities and are handed down to the majority of teachers." (Hamid, EFL teacher, Interview: 11/08/2016)

From these comments we can clearly see the sense of community which was built up during the study. As stated by Ortega and Fuentes (2015), communication skills are very important skills, which are not developed as much as they should be in pre-service teacher education programs. Therefore teachers cannot communicate as effectively as they should. Running the activities in teacher professional development programs in a cooperative way seems to be an effective strategy in promoting the sense of community among the teachers.

Teachers wish to obtain sustainable professional development which helps them to improve classroom teaching. Thus, collaborative learning seems to be a useful approach to gain this kind of development. As an essential constituent in the practical teaching situation, the peers in the situation are rich resources for teachers to acquire professional development. And in that interaction, the cooperation of teachers' reflection can be promoted and maintained.

Another noteworthy finding of the present study was that the teachers found the CPD being optional and not obligatory to all to be the first support in having effective professional development programs.

Finally, this study found that the impact of professional development programs on sustainable teaching practice can also be assessed from the teachers' insight and reflection of what constitute significance in relation to their own personal and professional needs and development. This finding is in line with that of (Powell, Terrell, Furey, & Scott-Evans, (2003) and; Gabriel et al., (2011). The teachers in this study in general believed that certain professional development programs they attended had a significant impact on their development as teachers.

Professional development programs also help teachers to become more knowledgeable in the subject content taught and, thereby, promote sustainable development of teachers in line with the educational reform policies endorsed by the UNESCO (2005). Put another way, participation in professional development programs is believed to have some impact on the teachers' ability to acquire and critically develop their knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to have good professional thinking, planning and practice with their students and colleagues through every phase of their teaching lives (Besong & Holland, 2015; Borko, 2004; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Day, 1999; Gabriel et al., 2011; Poskitt, 2005).

Taking into account all the above-mentioned points, most teachers in this study are aware of the need for CPD and are more active in individual as well as collaborative developmental activities. And, most importantly, most teachers, gained confidence in what they are doing. This is critical in promoting sustainable growth. From many of these comments, it must be clear to the reader that the effective professional development programs can open up a number of pathways to sustainable development.

However, the seeds of a "CPD attitude" and a commitment to career-long sustainable professional development should be established in teachers during pre-service and in-service training. Such programs should be designed to move the teachers from the supervisor- dependency state to a high level of autonomy, which they need in order to face the challenges of full-time teaching. The Teachers in this study realized the change, as evidenced in comments like the one below:

> *This study changed my ideas about PD. I became more autonomous. I found the new way of CPD very interesting and useful for me. I'm much more confident in teaching than before. The CPD workshops helped me to transform the traditional teaching approach to more effective teaching in the classroom. I think this is a milestone in my entire teaching professional career* (Parya, EFL teacher, Interview: 11/08/2016)

The change in pedagogic beliefs and values was welcomed by this group of teachers, but, at the same time, based on some of the interviews that this transition was not easy. Some teachers also stated that PD workshops helped them to prepare more efficiently

and effectively and adapt to the demands of the teaching profession and the institution as is shown in an EFL teacher's comments:

> *I started questioning my beliefs and role as a teacher, and began reflecting on my experiences in the classroom. PD workshops were an opportunity to construct and reconstruct my knowledge of and about teaching and have broader perspectives about language teaching.* (Zohreh, EFL teacher, Interview: 11/08/2016)

More than half of the participants in the interviews mentioned that taking training courses as a means of professional development is not taken into account in teacher evaluation at their language schools. The findings regarding the ways of evaluating professional development among teachers, and how that evaluations are used are in line with those of Chang et al. (2014). In the absence of systematic PD evaluation, there might be a risk that opportunities for professional development will be missed. Language school officials should employ alternative assessments in order to systematically evaluate and review their approaches to CPD.

Conclusions, Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

This study showed that EFL teachers have a need for CPD to meet various demands in in response to the changes and new findings in the field of ELT. The findings also revealed that the ways in which EFL teachers continued their own professional development was strongly influenced by the language school evaluation. We suggest that too much evaluation, works against genuine continuing professional development for any group of teachers. Therefore, there is a clear need for alternative ways to improve professional learning, which see teachers as agents of change in their own professional development. A key learning point from the findings of this study is that officials need to be much less directive and rigid in terms of evaluating teachers' performance in order to engage them in CPD activities.

Teachers' beliefs towards CPD have a major impact on the extent to which teachers engage in such programs. In designing a CPD program then, language schools need to consider not just the kinds of activities that are offered to the teachers, but also their attitudes and beliefs conducive to an effective CPD programs.

This study has some implications for educational practice. In pre-service teacher education programs, teachers should be provided with opportunities for acquiring pedagogical knowledge of CPD and translating it into classroom practice. This knowledge can be crucial for designing powerful environments to foster teacher learning.

Our findings have clear implications for teacher education programs. With the range of English learners and lack of well-designed professional development programs to prepare ELT teachers to teach language effectively, it is highly important to examine the misconceptions of EFL teachers and to bring about positive changes in their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. This study shows that relevant and practical workshops in professional development are a positive step towards preparing English teachers to deal with the challenges they face in their classrooms. We believe those altering teachers' beliefs, and, thus, decision-making processes and instructional practices, is the first step in improving instruction and achievement for English learners. Moreover, providing professional development programs to local contexts offers two significant benefits.

First, it facilitates greater contextualization enabling us to more effectively target and address specific needs. Second, this facilitates customization, combatting the limitations of decontextualized offerings. Also, the potential for cooperative and collaborative engagement within disciplinary-based communities is enhanced, all of which make this a sustainable development.

This study has some limitations, which, in turn, provide some suggestions for further research. First, this study focused only on EFL teachers in Iran. As such, future studies might need to delve into other teachers' perceptions from other nationalities. Second, only some aspects of PD conducive to sustainable and effective teaching were explored in our study with a limited number of participants. Future research can expand this line of inquiry. Another limitation is related to long-term effects of belief change. It is possible that even though the teachers in this study had more positive views of professional development after the workshops, they may fall back into the older ones later in time. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, we cannot claim that the participants' beliefs would change permanently. Future studies should be longitudinal and follow EFL teachers into their classrooms in order to determine whether there are long-term effects. Developing or adapting a more comprehensive questionnaire, and validating the instrument with a large number of random samples of participants can boost the validity and reliability of the instruments and findings. Likewise, in-depth case studies of teachers can also shed more light on teachers' perceptions about and practices in other dimensions of professional development. This may include an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of university lecturers, teacher educators and supervisors about sustainable professional development.

References

Akbari, R., & Tajik, L. (2012). Second-language teachers' moral knowledge base: A comparison between experienced and less experienced male and female practitioners. *Journal of Moral Education, 41(1),* 39–59.

Besong, F., & Holland, C. (2015). The dispositions, abilities and behaviors (DAB) framework for profiling learners' sustainability competencies in higher education. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability, 17*(1), 5–22.

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning: putting it into practice*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching, 36*, 81–109.

Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33(8)*, 3–15.

Bransford, JD, Brown., AL, & Cocking, R. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*, committee on developments in the science of learning, National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington DC.

Buczynski, S., & Hansen, C. B. (2010). Impact of professional development on teacher practice: Uncovering connections. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26(3)*, 599–607.

Chang, K., Jeon, Y., & Ahn, H. (2014). Investigating continuing professional development for teacher educators in South Korea: opportunities and constraints. In D. Hayes (ED.), *Innovations in the continuing professional development of English language teachers* (pp. 271–297). London, UK: British Council.

Clark-Goff, K., & Eslami, Z. (2016). Exploring change in pre-service teachers' beliefs about English language learning and teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research 4*(3), 21–36.

Clarke, D., & Hollingsworth, H. (2002). Elaborating a model of teacher professional growth. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 18,* 947–967.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (2005). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Day, C. (1999). *Developing teachers: The challenges of lifelong learning*. London: Falmer.

Dean, J. (1991). *Professional development in school*. Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Elmore, RE. (2002). *Bridging the Gap between Standards and Achievement: The Imperative for Professional Development in Education*, Albert Shanker Institute.

Farhady, H., Sajadi, F., & Hedayati, H. (2010). Reflections on foreign language education in Iran. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language, 13(4),* 1–18.

Foord, D. (2009). *The developing Teacher: practical activities for professional development*. England: Delta Publication.

Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press and Abingdon: Routledge.

Gándara, P., J. Maxwell-Jolly, & A. Driscoll. (2005). *Listening to teachers of English language learners: A survey of California teachers' challenges, experiences, and professional development needs*. Santa Cruz, CA: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning.

Gao, X., & Ma, Q. (2011). Vocabulary learning and teaching beliefs of pre-service and in-service teachers in Hong Kong and Mainland China. *Language Awareness, 20(4)*, 327–342.

Gabriel, R., Day, J. P., & Allington, R. (2011). Exemplary teacher voices on their own development. *Phi Delta Kappan, 92(8)*, 37–41.

Gholami, J., & Qurbanzada, I. (2016). Key stakeholders' attitudes towards teacher education programs in TEFL: A case study of Farhangian University in Iran. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability, 18(2)*, 5–20.

Gholami, J., Sarkhosh, M., & Abdi, H. (2016). An Exploration of Teaching Practices of Private, Public, and Public-Private EFL Teachers in Iran. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability, 18(1)*, 16–33.

Guskey, T.R. (2000). Evaluating Professional development: Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc Hanushek, Eric A., 2010. "Generalizations about using value-added measures of teacher quality." *American Economic Review* 100, no. 2 (May): 267–271.

Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice, 8(3)*, 381–391.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2003). Sustaining leadership. *Phi Delta Kappan, 84(9)*, 693–700.

Hayward, L., & Hedge, N. (2005). Travelling towards change in assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 12(1)*, 55–76.

Hung, H. T., & Yeh, H.C. (2013). Forming a change environment to encourage professional development through a teacher study group. *Teaching and Teacher Education 36 (2013)*, 153–165.

Jamshidi, A. H., Sadeghi, B. (2014). A comparative study of teacher education in Iran and the UK. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 5(5)*, 1153–1159.

Jiang, Y. (2017). *A study on professional development of teachers of English as a foreign language in institutions of higher education in Western China*. Germany: Springer.

Johnson, K. E. (1999). *Understanding language teaching: Reasoning in action*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishing Company.

Johnson, K. E. (2009). *Second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective*. New York: Routledge.

Kagan, D. (1992). Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist, (27), 65–90.*

Kennedy, A. (2005). Models of Continuing Professional Development: A Framework for Analysis. *Journal of In-service Education, 31(2),* 235–50.

Knapp, M. (2003). Professional development as a policy pathway. *Review of Research in Education, (27)*, 109–157.

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2005). *The adult learner: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development (6th ed.)*. Amsterdam; Boston: Elsevier.

Kumba, W.L., & Nkumbi, E. (2008). Teacher professional development in Tanzania: Perceptions and practices. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education, 11*(3), 67–83.

Leder, G., Pehkonen, E., & Törner, G. (2002). *Beliefs: A hidden variable in mathematics education?* Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Levine, T. H., & A. S. Marcus (2010). How the Structure and Focus of Teachers' Collaborative Activities Facilitate and Constrain Teacher Learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, (26),* 389–398.

Lier, K. (2002). Looking back: looking forward. *Teacher Knowledge Project News*, 4(1). 1–2.

Loucks-Horsley, S., Stiles, K., & Hewson, P. (1996). Principles of effective professional development for mathematics and science education: A synthesis of standards. *NISE Brief, 1(1)*, 1–6.

Mann, S. (2005). The Language Teacher's Development. *Language Teaching, (38)*, 103–118.

Nargesy, H. (2012). The evaluation of a teacher training system: A study on the efficacy of teaching training policy in the last three decades in the field of English Teaching in Iran. *Life Science Journal, 9(4),* 660–663.

Ortega, J.L., & Fuentes, A. R. (2015). Communication skills training in trainee primary school teachers in Spain. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability, 17(1)*, 86–98.

Padwad, A., & Dixit, K. (2011). *Continuing professional development: An annotated bibliography*. Delhi: British Council.

Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research, 62(3)*, 307–332.

Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning: a longitudinal study. *System, 29(2)*, 177–195.

Pedder, D., & James, M. (2012). Professional learning as a condition for assessment for learning. In: J. Gardner (Ed.) *Assessment and Learning*, (pp. 33–48). London: Sage.

Exploring Change in EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development

Pedder, D., & Opfer, V.D. (2011). Are we realizing the full potential of teachers' professional learning in schools in England? Policy issues and recommendations from a national study. *Professional Development in Education 37(5),* 741–758.

Pipere, A., Veisson, M., & Salite, I. (2015). Developing research in teacher education for sustainability: UN DESD via the Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability, 17(2)*, 5–43.

Poskitt, J. (2005). Towards a model of New Zealand school-based teacher professional development. *Teachers' Work Journal 2(2)*, 136–151.

Powell, E., Terrell, I., Furey, S., & Scott-Evans, A. (2003). Teachers' perceptions of the impact of CPD: An institutional case study. *Journal of In-service Education, 29(3),* 389–404.

Rahimi, M., & Zhang, L.J. (2015). Exploring non-native English-speaking teachers' cognitions about corrective feedback in teaching English oral communication. *System, 55*, 111–122.

Rhodes, C., & Beneicke, S. (2002). Coaching, Mentoring and Peer-networking: challenges for the management of teacher professional development in schools, *Journal of In-service Education, (28)*, 297–309.

Salīte, I. (2015). Searching for sustainability in teacher education and educational research: experiences from the Baltic and Black Sea Circle Consortium for educational research. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 6(1), 21–29.

Shahmohammadi, N. (2012). Evaluation of Teachers' Education Programs in Iran (Case Study) *Journal of Educational and Social Research, 2(2).*

Smith, C., & Gillespie, M. (2007). Research on Professional Development and Teacher Change: Implications for Adult Basic Education. Retrieved from *www.ncsall.net/ fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/smith-gillespie-07.pdf*

Stronge, J. H, Thomas J. Ward, & Leslie W. Grant (2011). What makes good teachers good? A cross-case analysis of the connection between teacher effectiveness and student achievement. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62(4)*, 339–355.

Tang, E., Lee, J., & Chun, C. (2012). Development of teaching beliefs and the focus of change in the process of pre-service ESL teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37(5),* 90–107.

Timperley, H.S. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Timperley, H. (2008). Teacher professional learning and development. In *The Educational Practices Series*. Jere, B. (Ed). International Academy of Education & International Bureau of Education: Brussels.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). (2005). Guidelines and recommendations for reorienting teacher education to address sustainability. *Education for Sustainable Development in Action Technical Paper No. 2*, UNESCO Education sector.

Wharton, S. (2003). Defining appropriate criteria for the assessment of masters level TESOL assignments. *Assessment* & *Evaluation in Higher Education, 28*(6), 649–663.

Whitcomb, J., H. Borko., & Liston, D. (2009). Growing talent: Promising professional development models and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education, 60(3)*, 207–212.

Yadav, P. K., (2011). Blogging as a means of professional development for ELT professionals. *Journal of NELTA*, 16(1–2), 123–132.

Yoo, J. H. (2016). The effect of professional development on teacher efficacy and teachers' self-analysis of their efficacy change. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability, 18(1)*, 84–94.

Zhang, L. J., & Rahimi, M. (2014). EFL learners' anxiety level and their beliefs about corrective feedback in oral communication classes. *System, (42)*, 429–439.

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Khaled Moradi, PhD, Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran. Email: moradi.khaled@gmail.com