

A Conceptual Analysis of the Factors Affecting EFL Teachers' Professional Performance

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Abstract

EFL teachers' professional performance has a significant impact on students' English performance and on their educational development. Therefore, it is critical to search for the major factors affecting EFL teachers' professional performance. This conceptual paper aims to review the literature relevant to EFL teachers' professional performance and factors that have major effects on the teachers' performance. In particular, it analyzes three factors that play key roles on the teachers' professional performance. It is revealed that EFL teachers' competency, EFL teachers' work motivation, and EFL teachers' job satisfaction have been identified by the theory of performance and the existing literature as the major influential factors which influence EFL teachers' professional performance. The factors outlined in the paper are analyzed using the theoretical framework of the theory of performance. The paper provides some recommendations for future research in this regard as well.

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Keywords: Competency; English as a Foreign Language; Job satisfaction; Motivation; Teacher performance

INTRODUCTION

The performance of students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in any educational institution is affected by the professional performance of their EFL teachers in that teaching is considered as the heart of the learning process (Darling-Hammond, 2010). EFL teachers with a high level of professional performance can give better education to students. Thus, it is essential to improve the level of EFL teachers' professional performance so as to deliver good education to EFL students.

Blank (2003) applauds that teachers' performance has become a major issue in current movements of education reform and school improvement. Various factors contribute to EFL students' achievement and performance, and EFL teachers' performance has been identified as the factor that matters most among school-related factors (Asa'di & Motallebzadeh, 2013). The main task of the EFL teacher is to provide students with the opportunity to learn English language and to make them do things that will lead to learning. Therefore, improving EFL teachers' performance is the key to improve their effectiveness and students' performance and achievements (Shihiba, 2011). If EFL students have low levels of performance and EFL teachers are not effective, there will be an urgent need to look for the reasons behind these issues (Al-Wreikat & Abdullah, 2010). Jimbo, Hisamura, and Yoffe (2010) argue that upgrading and developing teachers is one of the most direct ways of influencing educational practices at the school and classroom level.

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1.1 Problem Statement

There has been a growing concern in the EFL teachers' professional performance. The poor professional performance of EFL teachers is a concern for all stakeholders. Many EFL teachers are having low professional performance due to the insufficiency of the influential factors. This bad or poor level of EFL teachers' professional performance leads to several problems for their students and schools such as students' poor performance in learning English language and bad reputations of a school as well. The issue has been confirmed by many studies in various EFL contexts (e.g. in Jordan, Alkhaldeh (2005) and Al-Wreikat and Abdullah (2010); in Saudi Arabia, Ban (2012) and Alfahadi, Qradi, and Asiri (2016); in China, Xiongyong, Samuel, and Hua, (2012); and in Yemen, Alsofi, 2009 and Al-Qatwani, 2010), but they looked at it from different angles. Generally, they thoroughly discussed many facets of shortcomings in the professional performance of EFL teachers. Therefore, they assured the weaknesses of EFL teachers' performance in their contexts and recommended the necessity of searching for the reasons behind these weaknesses in order to improve EFL teachers' performance. Finally, through the overview of prior research, it is revealed that there is a lack of studies which measure the major factors affecting EFL teachers' professional performance.

For all of that, greater emphasis should be placed on investigating the factors that influence EFL teachers' professional performance. Consequently, the present paper is intended to answer the inquiry question: What are the main factors that influence EFL teachers' professional performance? The answer to this inquiry question will be based on an extended review and analysis of literature.

Therefore, this conceptual paper is significant because it might support a future research design decision. Also, through this paper, the researchers tried to highlight some important factors that may influence EFL teachers' professional performance with the aim of to developing a conceptual framework that explains these influences in order to familiarize readers with such influences. Such a framework would help researchers define the concept, map the research area or conceptual scope, systematize relations among concepts, and identify gaps in literature. After these factors are identified based on the review of the related literature, recommendations for future research will be provided.

THE CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

In the theory of performance, a model of causal patterns of relations between the professional performance and its determinants is presented by Campbell, McHenry and Wise (1990) and Campbell, McCloy, Oppler and Sager (1993). In the model of Campbell et al. (1993), it is supposed that the performance components as a function of three determinants: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and skills, and motivation.

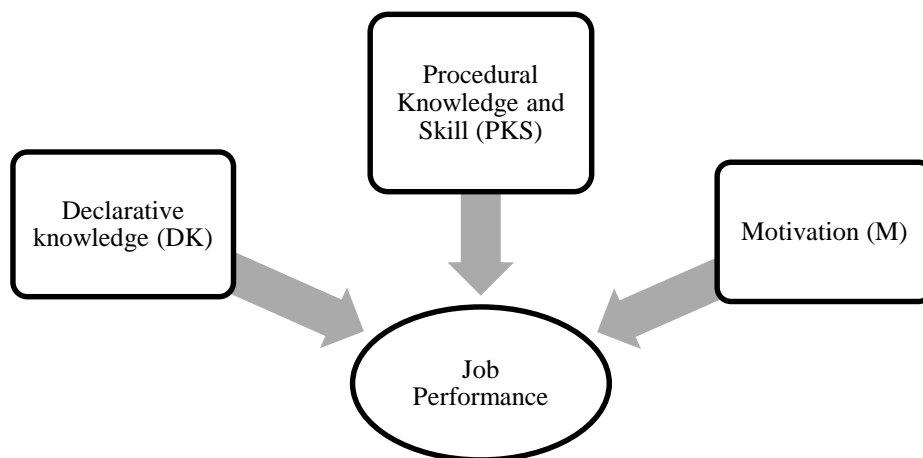


Figure 1. Campbell's Determinants of Job Performance (Model) Campbell et al. (1993).

These are the direct determinants of job performance, which are the focus of the present paper. However, this theory of performance is a general theory which has been used to illustrate the factors affecting the performance in different fields. Therefore, it is necessary to give a conceptual framework specific to the professional performance of EFL teachers. In other words, based on this theory, in order to perform well, EFL teacher needs to know what to do (to be satisfied), how to do it (having the right competency) and possess the desire (motivation) to do it. This model is appropriate for this inquiry because it allows the reader to understand how EFL teachers' professional performance is influenced by some main factors.

2.1 EFL Teachers' Professional Performance

Performance is not the result of behaviors, but rather the behaviors themselves (Campbell et al, 1993). Teacher directly affects the quality of educational processes or procedures (Yelken, 2009). As mentioned earlier, EFL teachers play indispensable roles in providing the opportunities for EFL students to learn well. However, EFL teaching is a complex issue because it is more than teaching a language. It loads EFL teachers with a lot of responsibilities and demands about multilingual and multicultural aspects of EFL (TESOL, 2010).

EFL teachers' professional performance evaluation process aims to assist EFL teachers in the development of their various skills of teaching and the possibility of continuous self-development which must be available to keep up with the developments (Gallant & Mayer, 2012). Also, there are a lot of beneficiaries from the EFL teachers' professional performance evaluation such as supervisors, school administrators, stakeholders, and policymakers in the ministry of education (Delvaux, Vanhoof, Tuytens, Vekeman, Devos, & Petegem, 2013). This process helps them to evaluate the level of EFL teachers' performance, to raise the level of quality of teachers and to follow-up the level of the progress in that performance. It allows them to detect the strengths in the performance of EFL teachers in order to promote and benefit from these strengths (Delvaux et al., 2013). On the other hand, it helps them to identify the weaknesses in the performance of EFL teachers to avoid these weaknesses and develop solutions for them.

Teachers' professional performance evaluation is an essential part of the process of education (Delvaux et al., 2013). Thus it is possible to set ambitious goals, to have good EFL teachers and good materials, and to use innovative ways, and all this will happen in a proper professional framework. However, if EFL teachers' professional performance evaluation has been neglected, all these things will lose much of their effectiveness. Therefore, teachers' professional performance evaluation received much attention in the world due to the active role of the teacher in the development and improvement of the educational process.

Theoretically, Kuhlman and Knezevic (2013) present many EFL professional teaching standards. They stated that the success of the EFL teachers' professional performance depends on how effectively he/she deals with the multilingual and multicultural aspects of EFL. In light of the EFL teachers professional and specialist standards, EFL teachers' professional performance can be defined as what EFL teachers do inside the classrooms among them using effective communication skills, dealing with reflection, integrating English language skills, and using intercultural competence (Zuheer, 2013). Teachers' performance is a complex process that can be influenced by many factors (Nadeem et al., 2011).

2.2 EFL Teachers' Competency

EFL teachers' competency is a factor that contributes to EFL teachers' professional performance (Jimbo, Hisamura, & Yoffe, 2010; Xu & Ye, 2014). Bailey (2006) describes competence as "statements about what teachers are supposed to know and be able to do" (p. 210). Researchers in the field of EFL/ESL teaching defined EFL/ESL teachers' competency as EFL/ESL teachers' knowledge, skills, and abilities that lead to effective EFL/ESL teaching (Richards, 2011). Nevertheless, this classification of EFL teachers' competency is too generic. Therefore, EFL teachers' competency has been categorized clearly and specifically by the three theories of Mulhauser (1958), Richards (1998), and Cross (2003). These three

theories indicated constant domains of what an EFL teacher should know and be able to do (Soepriyatna, 2012).

Mulhauser (1958) classifies EFL teachers' competency into three headings: (1) language competence-oral, aural, reading, and writing; (2) techniques and skills specific to the teaching of foreign language; and (3) cultural background in the broad sense, including civilization, linguistics, and literature. Richards (1998) proposes six domains of EFL teachers' competency: 1) theories of teaching, 2) subject matter knowledge, 3) communication skills, 4) teaching skills, 5) contextual knowledge, and 6) pedagogical reasoning and decision-making. Cross (2003) categorizes four areas of a competent EFL teacher, which are: 1) level of education 2) subject competences 3) professional competences, and 4) attitudes.

Soepriyatna (2012) argues that the three theories of Mulhauser (1958), Richards (1998), and Cross (2003) show an agreement in three domains of EFL teachers' competency: English language competence, content knowledge and teaching skills related to English language teaching. Murray (2010) believes that to be an effective competent EFL teacher requires a combination of professional knowledge, specialized skills, and personal experiences and qualities. Arshad (2009), in light of these three theories, proposes three main domains and dimensions of EFL teachers' competency: knowledge competency, professional competency, and personal competency.

2.3 EFL Teachers' Work Motivation and Job Satisfaction

The concept of teachers' motivation is gradually receiving attention in TESOL nowadays, especially in educational psychology and teacher education (Boset, Asmawi & Abedalaziz, 2017; Tsutsumi, 2014). EFL teachers' motivation is the process that arouses, energizes, directs, and sustains EFL teachers' behaviors and performance (Dweik & Awajan, 2013). In the details of the theory of performance, declarative knowledge includes knowledge about facts, principles, rules, goals, and self-knowledge (Campbell et al., 1993). It is assumed to be a source of the absence of ambiguity which leads to job satisfaction (Yuliandi, 2014). In general, Spector (1997) and Dinham and Scott (1998) define job satisfaction as of how people feel about different dimensions of the jobs they perform. Teachers' job satisfaction is defined as "teachers' affective reactions to their work or to their teaching role" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 1030).

Morgan, McDonagh, and Ryan-Morgan (1995) divide job satisfaction into two types: global job satisfaction, and facet job satisfaction. According to Hadi and Elham (2016), the first type, EFL teachers' global job satisfaction is connected with the holistic level or all levels of their job satisfaction. This type of job satisfaction is open to be criticized because it is simplistic in nature and too generic. It may be said that understanding the holistic level of EFL teachers' job satisfaction goes much deeper than asking a few pointed questions to an EFL teacher. However, the second type, EFL teachers' facet job satisfaction may be considered the structure to determine global job satisfaction.

The job satisfaction facet, the focus of the current paper, relates to the level of job satisfaction an EFL teacher has with specific components of his or her job position or organization. Many studies investigated the level of EFL teachers' motivation and job satisfaction (Afshar, & Doosti, 2016; Al-Siyabi, 2016; Karavas, 2010; Zadeh, 2014; Ozturk, 2015). All the previously mentioned studies have identified a variety of motivation factors that affect EFL teachers' job satisfaction. These factors fall into three main categories/domains: 1) Factors intrinsic to teaching (factors relating to the core business of teaching) 2) Factors operating at the school level (relating to the conditions under which work must be performed). 3) Factors operating at the system level (factors relating to the wider domain of society, the state government and the system) (Dinham & Scott, 1998). This theoretical framework of EFL teachers' motivation and job satisfaction, Three Domain Model, was created by Dinham and Scott (1998) by revising the Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory.

In their theory of motivation, Herzberg (1959) presents job satisfaction as a result of two kinds of motivation factors, intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Karavas (2010) argues that EFL teachers' motivation and job satisfaction are different constructs but inextricably linked as one influences the other. To distinguish between them, Karavas (2010) states that EFL teachers' motivation is an internal drive which

inspires or pushes them to behave in light of a specific context, whereas EFL teachers' job satisfaction equates with how EFL teachers feel about their job and it is a product of a behavior or action in light of a specific context.

2.4 The Relationship between EFL Teachers' Competency and their Performance

In the performance theory, Campbell et al. (1993) state that competency is one of the three determinants of professional performance. A number of studies related to teachers' performance state that EFL teachers' competency is a factor that prominently affects EFL teachers' professional performance since it plays a prominent role in the success of EFL teachers' performance (Arifin, 2015; Richards, 2011; Wetipo, Rante, Wambraw, & Bharanti, 2015; Xu & Ye, 2014).

Richards (2011), in his theory about the relationship between competence and performance in language teaching, argued that if EFL teachers do not have sufficient competencies to teach EFL, they cannot achieve the expected level of performance. Thus, EFL teachers' performance will become poor and not satisfied and students' performance will be decreased. According to Pinder (2008), employees' ability or competency is crucial in determining the effectiveness of job performance. Although EFL teachers have high motivation level, they still cannot perform well during their teaching if they do not have sufficient teaching competency that is required in EFL teaching. For these reasons, in order to have a high level of EFL teaching performance, the teacher has to make sure that he or she has the competency to be an effective EFL teacher.

2.5 The Relationship between EFL Teachers' Motivation and their Performance

Based on the theory of Campbell, et al. (1993), EFL teachers' motivation is one of the three determinants of EFL teachers' job performance. A review of relevant psychological theories offers important insights about the influence of EFL teachers' motivation on their performance. According to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory, EFL teachers have basic needs to be met to guarantee the required teaching performance. Maslow (1954) states that in order to motivate employees (EFL teachers) lower level needs had to be satisfied before the next higher level need. The more needs that are met, the higher performance will be.

In addition, the influence of EFL teachers' motivation on their performance is theoretically supported by Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. The expectancy theory emphasizes that EFL teachers' motivation leads to the effort that encourages EFL teachers' performance which results in positive or negative outcomes. EFL teachers' motivation is fundamental to enhance and drive the interest of EFL teachers to teach actively or achieve organizational goals (Praver & Oga-Baldwin, 2008). EFL teachers' motivation refers to the force that motivates teachers to perform well (Ozturk, 2015). With a high level of motivation, EFL teachers will put their efforts in improving their teaching and thus performance level will be improved (Erkaya, 2013). Christopher (2012) argues that teachers' motivation is a strong determinant of their strategizing, effort, persistence, as well as their subsequent performance. There is a scarcity of studies that have investigated the impact of EFL teachers' motivation on their job performance. However, generally, the impact of teachers' motivation on their job performance has been investigated by some studies (Anhwere, 2013; Nadeem et al., 2011; Nzulwa, 2014; Ondima et al., 2014).

2.6 The Relationship between EFL Teachers' Job Satisfaction and their Performance

Based on the Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action, there is a causal effect of job satisfaction on job performance, as satisfaction is an attitude about the job. In their theory of motivation (two-factor theory), Herzberg (1959) and Herzberg (1966) argue that when an individual is satisfied with his/her job then he/she would perform well in his/her job resulting in maximum production for the organization. Robbins and Judge (2008) assert that "some researchers used to believe that the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance was nonexistent, but a review of 300 studies suggested that the correlation is pretty strong" (p. 24). However, the relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and

performance has received little attention (Afshar & Doosti, 2016).

Literature showed that teachers' job satisfaction has an impact on their professional performance (Afshar & Doosti, 2016; Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2014; Arifin, 2015; Hutabarat, 2015). The findings of all these studies show not only a positive correlation between teachers' job satisfaction dimensions and their performance but also a positive direct effect of teachers' job satisfaction on their performance. Thus, satisfied teachers perform better than those who are dissatisfied.

Specifically, in the EFL teachers' context, according to Afshar and Doosti (2016), EFL teachers' job satisfaction has a significant positive influence on their performance. They stated that EFL teachers with higher levels of job satisfaction are likely to be better performers than dissatisfied EFL teachers. For all of that, the researchers proposed that EFL teachers' professional performance is influenced directly by EFL teachers' job satisfaction.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Based on the analysis of literature review, the following important findings can be concluded. First of all, EFL teachers' competency is one of the major factors affecting EFL teachers' professional performance. The researchers believe that EFL teachers' competency occupies an important place in the modern educational literature due to its relationship with teachers' performance. The quality of EFL teachers' competency plays an essential role in the creation and foundation of the quality of teachers' professional performance and shows the level of professionalism of EFL teachers according to their field. However, there is a lack of studies on this relationship in the field of EFL teachers.

The next important factor mentioned is EFL teachers' work motivation which was also reported to affect the EFL teachers' professional performance. Substantially, what motivates EFL teachers differs from teacher to teacher, from time to time and according to situations, cultural background, individual personality and the success of each motivational technique (Justine, 2011). In this regard, the researchers feel that understanding motivational factors and their effect on EFL teachers' professional performance is very pertinent in attaining significant EFL teachers' performances.

Finally, EFL teachers' job satisfaction was considered to be a factor that had a significant influence on EFL teachers' professional performance. Although there are various models of the relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and performance, one of the aims of the present paper is to focus on the model that proposes the direct effect of EFL teachers' job satisfaction on their performance. This model is the focus of the present paper because it is in line with the paper objectives and it is supported by strong theories and recent literature as mentioned above. Job satisfaction is very important in any field especially in education because it always deals with humans. It is a fact that teachers are the builders of generations and nations, so they need to be satisfied to practice the profession well. It is assumed that the happier the EFL teachers are, the higher their performance will be. In EFL teachers' context, the focus of the present paper, there are very few studies investigating the relationship between EFL teachers' job satisfaction and their performance (Afshar & Doosti, 2016). For all of that, there is an argent need to empirically examine the above-mentioned relationships. It is important to note that this paper deals with the direct influences of these variables on EFL teachers' professional performance. These direct effects are the focus of this paper, as shown in the following conceptual framework.

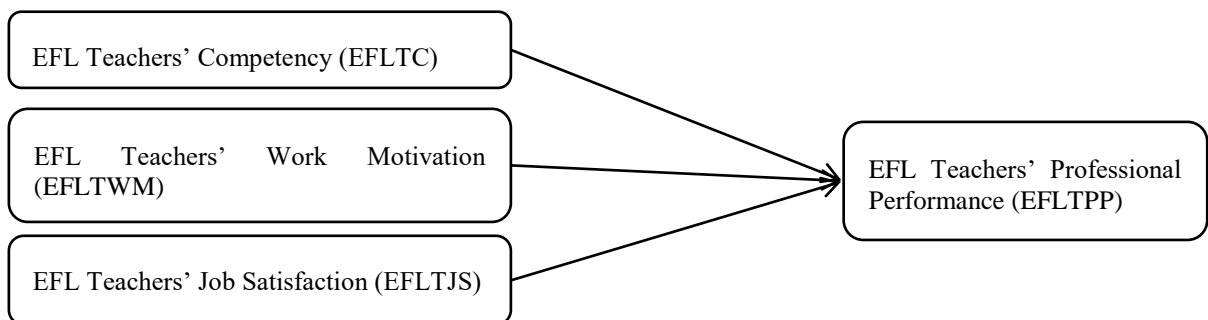


Figure 2. The conceptual framework.

PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For future research, quantitative or mix-method studies might be conducted to obtain data on the factors affecting EFL teachers' professional performance. In addition, the future studies which will adopt the presented conceptual framework, will aim to examine the direct effects of EFL teachers' competency, EFL teachers' work motivation, and EFL teachers' job satisfaction on EFL teachers' professional performance. For this purpose, it is better to use a quantitative method or mix-method because the research design will be correlational. A correlational research design is a quantitative research which provides an opportunity for the researcher to predict scores and explain the relationships among variables (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, in correlational research, the investigators collect data from a single group and at one point in time because they are not interested in either past or future of participants. Further, a mixed-method design can be used by mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in order to gain a deeper understanding of a research problem (Creswell, 2012).

3.1 Target Group

There are three main interrelated steps in the processes of sampling and data collection. The first step is to determine the study population. Based on the context of the study, it can be said that it is an educational research which will be conducted to study two types of population referred to as wider and target population (Creswell, 2012). All EFL teachers in the country will be the wider population of this type of study and EFL teachers in a specific area, stage, or level of education will be the target population. For example, all EFL teachers in Yemeni 22 governorates might be considered as a wider population of a study. Then, the target population will be all EFL teachers, covering both male and female teachers who teach English language at public secondary schools in all these Yemeni governorates, from whom the sample which will be involved in this study will be selected. As this example illustrate, the population can be small or large. So, researchers need to decide what group they would like to study based on the purposes of their studies.

The second step is to determine the study sample/participants and to obtain permissions needed from them. Within the target population, researchers select a sample for a study. According to Welkowitz, Cohen, and Ewen (2006), an appropriate sample size is the indispensable part of the accurate measurements for hypothesis testing. It is known that the sample size should be sufficient in order to represent the population truly. As explained earlier, the sample to be examined in this type of study will be among EFL teachers who teach English language in a specific area, stage, or level of education. For instance, to continue with the above-given example, a sample can be selected from EFL teachers at public secondary schools in specific Yemeni governorates (the sample) from the population of all EFL teachers in all Yemeni governorates (the target population). Alternatively, only EFL teachers in specific governorates or schools can be selected to be the sample of a study. These are two different quantitative sampling approaches. Whereas the first approach is a systematic sampling which is called probability sampling, the second approach is an unsystematic nonprobability sampling. One of these two approaches can be employed in this type of study based on such factors as the amount of rigor and representation the researchers seek for their studies, the characteristics of the target population, and the availability of participants. Also, several types of both approaches are available. The probability sampling approach is recommended for this type of study because the researchers can claim that the sample is representative of the target population and, as such, can make generalizations to the target population.

The third step is to consider the types of data to be collected, select useful data collection instruments, and administer the data collection process to collect data. For future studies, researchers could collect primary and secondary data on the four variables (EFLTC, EFLTWM, EFLTJS, and EFLTTP) in order to investigate the relationships shown in the provided conceptual framework. Therefore, collaboration between ministries of education and interested researchers are strongly needed. With operational definitions for these variables, researchers can identify the types of instruments to be used for data collection. In this type of study, the instrument may be a test, questionnaire, observational checklist, tally sheet, log, inventory, or assessment instrument. For instance, to continue with the previous

example, some instruments can be suggested to collect data from the selected participants and to investigate the relationships presented in the conceptual framework. First of all, EFL teachers' professional performance can be measured through many instruments such as observational checklist, portfolios, or achievement test developed based on Kuhlman and Knezevic's (2013) EFL professional teaching standards. EFL teachers' professional performance is operationally defined in this paper as the behaviors of EFL teachers in classrooms, so it should be assessed by others. In addition, EFL teachers' competency is better to be assessed through a questionnaire developed based on the three theories of Mulhauser (1958), Richards (1998), and Cross (2003) in order to measure the EFL teachers' knowledge competency, professional competency, and personal competency. Additionally, based on their operational definitions, EFL teachers' work motivation and EFL teachers' job satisfaction can be measured through a questionnaire developed based on Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory. These instruments can be administered to the respondents in person to ensure they reach the target participants. Finally, in the mix-method research, these quantitative tools can be combined with other more qualitative tools for obtaining more details or deeper understandings. For these purposes, the collected quantitative data can be triangulated by selecting a small number among the participants and collecting related data from them through qualitative instruments (e.g. open-ended interviews, observations, documents, or visual materials).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In light of the above conceptual analysis, the following recommendations can be suggested to improve EFL teachers' performance. First of all, it is suggested to further investigate the factors that keep EFL teachers more competent. It is also recommended to further investigate the most influential motivational factors that lead to EFL teachers' superior performance. In addition, it is essential to investigate the factors that lead to EFL teachers' job satisfaction. Finally, it is recommended to conduct studies regarding factors affecting EFL teachers' performance in various stages and in both public and private schools separately and then comparative studies should be done as well in this regard.

SUMMARY

The contribution of EFL teachers' professional performance towards producing EFL students with high level of performance cannot be ignored. Thus, it is necessary for the education policymakers, teachers' educators and school management to identify all those possible factors that lead to EFL teachers' good professional performance. However, there are many factors which may not be considered important in some EFL contexts. Therefore, through this conceptual paper, the researchers tried to highlight some important factors influencing EFL teachers' professional performance. The existing literature has identified major influential factors such as EFL teachers' competency, work motivation, and job satisfaction affecting EFL teachers' professional performance. At the end of this paper, a conceptual framework with regards to factors affecting EFL teachers' professional performance has been developed. In addition, recommendations for future research have been provided.

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