



## A Comparative Study of Reflective Experiences of Primary School Specialist Teachers in Iran and Iraq to Explain and Identify Reflective Topics

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<p><b>ARTICLE INFO</b></p> <p>Received: 18 March 2020 Revised: 04 April 2020 Accepted: 10 April 2020 Online: 27 April 2020</p>	<p><b>ABSTRACT</b></p> <p>The purpose of this study is to investigate Reflective experiences of primary school specialist teachers in two Kurdish cities of Paveh (Iran) and Sulaymaniyah (Iraq) in order to identify and explain reflective topics. The research method is qualitative comparative using narrative approach, the level of analysis is "district" and the level of observation is "individual". The strategy of "similar systems, similar outputs" was used to select countries under study and sampling method was convenience sampling. Data collection tool was in-depth interview and data analysis method is thematic analysis. This article is divided into several sections: In the Introduction section, past and current situation of the Iranian educational system, the importance of lived experiences and narratives of teachers, and the reasons for the comparison of the lived experiences of the teachers in these two cities are discussed. In the second part, the research method is explained. The third part refers to the research results. The findings of the research showed that the themes that are the main organizers of teachers' narratives in both societies are largely influenced by the active role of social systems. Also, five universal themes (Cognition, learning, teaching, evaluation, and classroom management) were identified in the deeper narratives of teachers. From a comparative perspective, the research findings showed that the similarities of teachers' lived experiences are high in both communities and minor differences can be ignored.</p>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b></p> <p>Narrative Reflective Lived Experience Primary School Specialist Teachers Iran Iraq</p>	

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## **1. Introduction**

Iran's educational system, like other educational systems in the world, has experienced many ups and downs. These changes have been more rapid during the last four decades, especially after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s. With the fall of the royal regime, the educational system changed in several ways (Keddie, 2003). During the 1980-1990s, Iran was simultaneously plagued by political conflicts and an eight-year war with Iraq. Much of the economic resources were devoted to war and all ministries' budgets were reduced, inflation was rising and purchasing power was decreasing daily, while population growth rates increased from less than 2% to about 3.5% (Dejpasand, and Raoufi, 2008). The number of teachers decreased and the number of students increased as teachers had to teach in two-turn schools. The end of the war provided a better environment for Iran's educational system. Over the next decade (1990-2000), the political system attempted to allocate more funds to the Ministry of Education. New schools were built across the country and more teachers were hired. Meanwhile, compared to quality challenges, resolving the quantitative problems of the education system was a priority for both government and people (Vesal, 2017). For this reason, many new teachers were those who did not attend any teacher training courses and know less about child growth, learners' personality, curriculum, and teaching methods.

With the onset of the new millennium and the reduction of quantitative challenges, the Iran Ministry of Education had more opportunity to address the qualitative problems such as structural problems of the educational system, lack of teachers' professional competences, inadequate teacher education curricula, teacher-student weaknesses and teachers' lack of familiarity with new teaching methods (Yousefi, 2014). During this time, the educational system succeeded in providing better teacher training courses through the establishment of a single university, namely "Farhangian University". Since the establishment of Farhangian University in 2011, one of its key priorities was to develop curriculum contents, new teaching methods, and more attention to increase teachers' efficiency.

The current performance of teachers and the experiences of the Farhangian University over the last few years show that the Iran's teacher education system still needs to evaluate different ways and means to enhance professional quality of teachers. For example, Simin, Falahati,



Qasemipour, and Ebrahimi, 2016 ) found that although the “Fundamental Transformation of Education Document” and the “Document of the University of Farhangian” emphasize on the cultivation of thoughtful and creative teachers, this university has performed poorly in this regard. In fact, Iranian schools are increasingly in need of capable teachers with the emergence of phenomena such as globalization, new information and communication technologies, and drastic environmental changes (Chahardahcheriki, 2012). On the other hand, many teachers do not have a clear understanding of the actual teaching situations, and the teacher training curricula are mainly theoretical and internships are very short. These issues make many teachers lack the depth of experience of teaching climate, teaching and learning techniques, classroom management, effective communication practices with principals, peers and parents, and strengths and weaknesses of school textbooks. To address these challenges and increase teachers' empowerment, one of the approaches - which have been the focus of advanced teacher education systems in recent years - is to pay attention to the valuable experiences of thoughtful teachers and their "deep narratives" on school life. Thinking teachers with their lived experience can be an inspiring resource, always ready and available to their colleagues (Shiesel, Waterspoon, 2003).

The rationale for using teachers' deep-seated narratives is based on the concept of "reflective thinking" - embedded in these narratives. Doing everything requires mental activity. Moon divides mental activity into two groups of reflective and non-reflective activities. Non-reflective actions are routine and habitual, such as driving. While thoughtful action involves at least four layers of normal activity, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection (Moon, 2013). In simple terms, reflective thinking means that sometimes we have to critically evaluate our thinking, words, and behavior. Recall past experiences and have a chance to review our thoughts: A kind of conscious and fair self-examination without any excuse to justify ourselves or condemn others. It is natural that in many jobs, people do not need deep, thoughtful and critical thinking and do their tasks habitually and well. Teaching profession is an exception. The teacher is like a wrestler who faces a new opponent every time he enters the wrestling mat. Even if this is a repetitive opponent, it is not easy to predict his actions, reactions and behaviors. Every classroom and every teaching is a new scene and experience that requires reflective thinking, critical thinking, decision making and new leadership.

From Dewey's perspective, in reflective thinking the teacher critically reviews himself and others (principal, school staff, colleagues, students, parents, school environment, and curriculum), brings ideas to the mind and re-examines them (Reflective Reflection) to find out how it can

improve students' performance and learning (Amani, 2015). When a teacher encounters a unique problem or situation, he / she uses his / her ideas, experiences, and treasures of knowledge to evaluate the new situation and find new solutions (Wongwanicha, Sakolraka and Piromsombatb, 2014). In other words, reflective thinking is output of the knowledge in the teacher's mind (Yuan and Mack, 2018). This thinking leads to a constant understanding of the action for the teacher. It is the result of interacting with other actors reflecting current activities and actors' social and material backgrounds (Rahmat, Wilujeng, & Widowati, 2019). The result of this reflective thinking - that occurs daily inside and outside the classroom - is to acquire a set of motivational, communicative, scientific, and knowledge skills for a teacher who is creative and thoughtful (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2009; Yasin, Rahman and RazakAhmad, 2012).

Years of attending class and school provide teachers with a trove of knowledge that can be called "lived experiences" (Bean and Stevens, 2002; Bintz and Dillard, 2007; Erdogan, 2019). The concept of "lived experience" comes from the work of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. For him, life is not a biological reality shared between humans and animals, but something we experience with all its diversity and complexities. For Dilthey, in addition to being able to experience one's own life and expressing it in his actions, behaviors, speech, and creations, he is also able to be sharing the vital experience of others. In his opinion, human beings share a common identity. So, if one can reproduce someone else's mental space for himself, he can gain a similar understanding of the issues too. In general, the premise of any science is the ability to replace human beings in the mental and inner lives of others. Access to the inner life of human beings through empathetic experience - that means psychological reconstruction of their world - is the only way to understand them (Seghedin 2011). Meanwhile, teachers have a unique life experience. The teacher deals with different students, each with different cultures, behaviors, talents, and learning abilities. At the same time he has to do a lot of things: teaching, keeping students calm and friendly, counseling, building relationships with teachers and parents (Shiesel, Wertspoon, 2003: 12; Blomke, 2007: 58). The result of these interactions is a series of invaluable life experiences that originate from reflective thinking and have transformed the teacher from "ordinary person" to a "thinker".

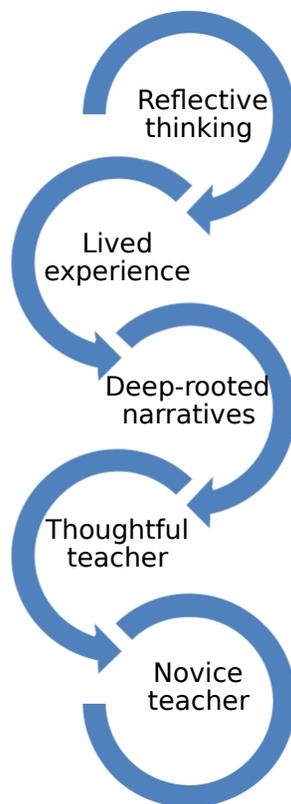
A thoughtful teacher is one who well demonstrates that education is time-consuming, difficult, and at the same time fruitful. In this difficult task, the

thoughtful teacher has a central role and the main server (Mehr Mohammadi, 2000).  
The thoughtful teacher emphasizes the contemplation of

the issues and phenomena. Flexibility, sharing with others, being innovative, questioning, and creativity are the most important characteristics of a thoughtful teacher. Thoughtful teachers begin their education by getting to know the student and are able to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses (Harman et al., 2016). These teachers believe that teaching is a permanent stream of thought (Selmova, Orsenijo, 2014: 1926). They are constantly redefining their relationships with school, class, and student, with a constant rethinking of past experiences. These new experiences are lived experiences that can be shared with young colleagues.

Thoughtful teachers are those who share their reflective thinking - which is a set of lived experiences - through "deep-rooted narratives". Moon (2013) considers "reflection" as a form of mental process that is used to gain a better understanding of relatively complex ideas. In-depth narratives are a valuable opportunity for both thoughtful teachers and young teachers who need these narratives. Thoughtful teacher tries to reflect on past events by telling stories of his professional life (Ahmadi et al., 2015). Novice teachers also - as active listeners - find new insights about complexities of the teaching profession and its need for continuous thinking. The value of these deep-rooted narratives also becomes more apparent when we find that many teacher training curricula are unable to transfer real-life professional experiences to teacher-students because of their emphasis on theoretical knowledge and short internship experiences (Qaderi, 2014). Golkar and Sharifian (2016) also found that in-depth narratives have a positive effect on teacher professional development, enhancing research skills, improving the evaluation process, and reducing the complexity of teaching. As such, one can see a transitional relationship that begins with reflective thinking and then forms a set of lived experiences. These lived experiences are then provided to the school (and especially the teachers) in the form of profound narratives by the thoughtful teacher (Figure 1).





*Figure 1.*  
The process of transferring reflective thinking from thoughtful teacher to novice teacher

Given what has been said, it is clear that taking advantage of the deep-rooted narratives of thoughtful teachers should be seen as a golden opportunity that the Iran educational system - and especially its teacher education system - can greatly benefit from. This is remarkable for two reasons: First, the existence of more than 700,000 teachers in Iran - among whom hundreds of thoughtful teachers can easily be found - with valuable lived experiences based on thoughtful thinking. Second, take advantage of the experiences of teachers in other countries that can help us understand our experiences from a comparative perspective.

This study aims to compare the lived experiences of teachers in Paveh city of Iran and city of Sulaimaniyah in Iraq. Both cities are very far from the capital of their country. This has been the subject of little attention by policymakers and planners to the social development of the two cities over the past decades. There are also strong family ties between the people of the districts and

villages on both sides of the border, which has increased the similarity in their social systems. However, in recent years, due to changes in the political and educational environment in Iraq, there are some differences between the two regions: First, while the similarities between two cities are very high, still Paveh is a small and remote town with a short distance with Iraqi border. On the contrary, Sulaimaniyah has undergone many changes in its political, economic and educational structure since the US occupation of Iraq. Second, the economic situation of teachers in Paveh, like elsewhere in Iran, is at an average level and does not receive high salaries, while the salaries of teachers - with similar experience - in Sulaimaniyah are several times that of Iranian teachers. Third, due to the political changes and the interest of the Kurdish statesmen, the tendency to associate with the world's scientific communities has been increasing in a way that the American University of Sulaimaniyah was founded in 2007 (American University of Sulaimaniyah, 2016). In recent years, the university has played an important role in training human resources for the Kurdish region, including its educational system.

This research could be a good opportunity to learn about the lived experiences of teachers in these two regions and to adopt new policies to prevent the repetition of past bitter life experiences. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to compare the deep-rooted narratives of the teachers of the primary school of Iranian and Iraqi teachers. For this purpose, the main research questions are:

- What are the basic, organizing, and inclusive themes in the teachers' narratives of the two countries?
- What are the similarities and differences between the deep-rooted narratives of Iranian and Iraqi teachers?

## **2. Research Method**

The purpose of this study is to compare deep-rooted narratives of primary school teachers in the Kurdish cities of Paveh (Iran) and Sulaimaniyah (Iraq). The research method is qualitative comparative using narrative approach. Narrative is a representation of an event or series of events and experiences of individuals that are told through the stories (Craig, 2011). According to the Bray and Thomas' cube, the level of analysis is district (city) and the level of observation is individual (Bray and Thomas, 1995). In addition, we have used "most similar systems, most similar

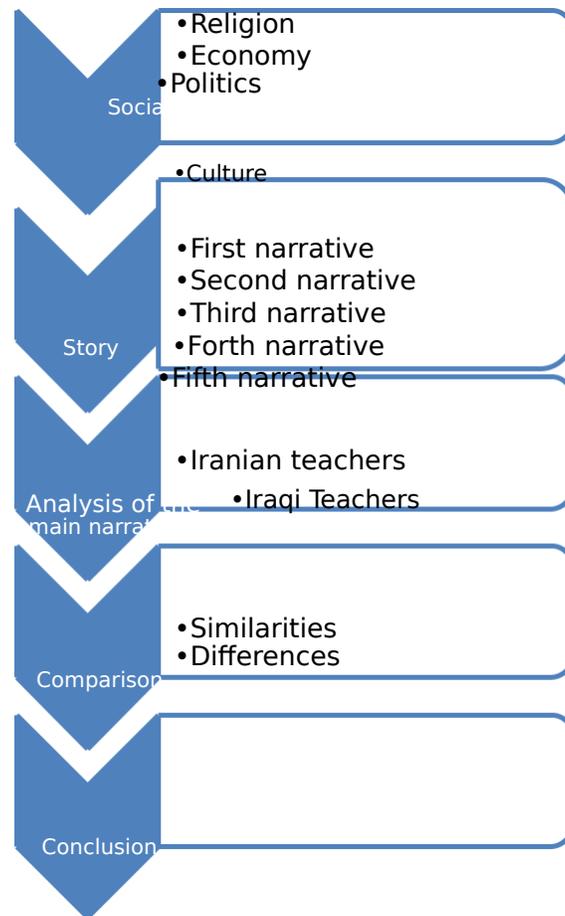
outputs" strategy for selection of communities under study (Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2007). In systems of

maximum similarity, scholars assume that there is maximum similarity between the social systems (language, culture, religion, traditions, race, geography and history) of two societies (Paveh and Sulaimaniyah). To maximize similarity in output, both communities are very similar in terms of phenomena under study (teachers' lived experiences). Statistical population included all teachers of primary schools in both cities and research sample were selected through Convenience Sampling Method. Since in narrative research, the researcher has to find one or more individuals who are accessible and willing to provide information (Creswell, 2007 as cited in Attaran, 2016), the present researchers decided to select primary school teachers with more than 10 years of experience. Therefore, three primary school teachers from Paveh city (Kermanshah province of Iran) and two teachers from Sulaimaniyah city (Iraq Sulaimaniyah province) were selected. In-depth interview was used for data collection and content analysis for data analysis. Content analysis is one of the most common and highly systematic methods of analyzing qualitative data, especially textual data. Also, the themes of the data were analyzed by "inductive" method (Patton, 1990). After examining the teachers' narratives, the common concepts were extracted and then transformed into "basic themes". To determine the validity of the research, the strategy of "long-term involvement of the principal researcher with the research topic" was used (Creswell, 2007). The choice of this strategy seems to be quite reasonable as the principal researcher himself is a primary school teacher with more than 25 years of experience.

### **3. Results**

Given the nature of qualitative comparative research and narrative approach, the results are presented in several stages: First, a brief description of the social systems situations of the two cities is presented. Secondly, personal stories or narratives are provided. The third stage involves a comparative analysis of the stories in the language of the main narrator (principal researcher). The fourth step is to compare the similarities and differences of stories. The fifth step - which forms the conclusion section of the paper - is devoted to presenting the main findings of the research (Figure 2).





*Figure 2 .*  
Results steps

### *Stage One: Social Systems*

As stated in the research methodology section, it is usually possible to reduce the level of analysis to the small geographic areas, i.e. cities, in comparative qualitative research. In the present study we compare social systems of Paveh in Iran and Sulaimaniyah in Iraq. This enables us to gain a better understanding of the social context in which the narrator (teacher) is experiencing his / her professional life, as well as to gain a deep insight about the mood of his or her narratives. As shown in Figure 2, the major social systems are cultural system (including language, race, customs,

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and indigenous traditions), political system, religious system, and economic system. With this introduction we can now take a brief look at the two cities of Paveh and Sulaimaniyah:

### *1. Paveh*

The city of Paveh, with a population of about 60,000, is one of the northern cities of Kermanshah province, adjacent to the Iranian-Iraqi border. Its inhabitants are racially Kurd and speak Kurdish (Horami dialect). Economically, people are more dependent on income from gardening, animal husbandry and tourism. Religiously majority of people are Sunnis, and the political and educational system, are subject to the policies of the central government (Islamic Republic).

### *2. Sulaimaniyah*

The city of Sulaimaniyah, with a population of about 700,000, is located northeast of Iraqi Kurdistan near the Iran border. The people of the city are of Kurdish descent and their common language is Kurdish and Arabic and religiously majority of people are Sunnis. The languages of instruction at American University of Iraq, Sulaimaniyah are Kurdish, Arabic and English. From a political point of view, from 1990 it has been governed by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party. Economically, people earn more from agriculture and tourism.

### *Stage Two: Stories*

Here we get to know the stories of three teachers: two male and one female teacher in Paveh and two male teachers in Sulaimaniyah.

#### *1. Iranian Teachers*

##### *Teacher A (Male)*

“It was late summer of Paveh and the walnut season. Abdullah's mother had prepared all supplies to go to the garden to harvest walnuts. There was nothing left in the morning. His father had made a loud noise to hurry. Out of fear of his father and having no breakfast, Abdullah walked to the garden. Inside the garden and to determine wages, a fight broke out between Abdullah's father and the workers. Abdullah's task was to collect the walnuts that fell into the stream. The next day, he had to go to school.

Abdullah was a third grade student. He had no tidy clothes. Last year's clothes were

torn. He had to wear his brother's pants that were very loose. In the break time, Abdullah clung himself to the corner of the wall and watched other children. To spend class time, the teacher asked kids what job wanted to have in the future. Everybody talks about one job. "All right sir, I want to be a worker in picking walnuts," Abdullah replied. Everyone laughed at him. On the way home, several of the bullied kids mocked Abdullah for his loose pants. Abdullah decided not to go to school anymore, his nerves were severely damaged. At night, his mother told her husband that the children wanted the facilities. Look at the neighboring children, how orderly they are. How long should we live like this, this is not life. Abdullah started crying. Tears streamed from father's eyes. That night he decided to go to Tehran to find better work. "

#### *Teacher B (Male)*

"The pupils were approaching school from the downstairs gardens. After a snowy day, there was no energy left for them who were coming to school on foot. Most kids' clothes and shoes couldn't handle all that cold. The fifth-grade teacher seemed anxious and worried. On the steps of the corridor, the assistant principal asked her to go to class early. One student loudly announced the arrival of the teacher. The kids got up. They stared at him with stunned hair. The teacher said, "Sit down". How are you, your families are good. The class's heater was glowing and smoke was coming out of its body with the sound of fire. The teacher decided to go down from the platform next to the blackboard. Suddenly, the sound of repeated explosions of heater disturbed the peace of the class. The front desk students took refuge behind the classroom. The teacher did not know what to do. He was screaming very loudly. Students were happy that had been given a chaotic environment to not study. Some bullied students had poured a few drops of distilled water into the heater. The teacher threw out a few students who had nothing to do with the subject. His force did not reach the bullied student. Students were approaching the end of the year and the New Year holidays. The kids were not interested in the lesson. He was desperate. "

#### *Teacher C (Female)*

"A few years ago, I had a student with low self-esteem. His self-distrust in all of his work, including reading, answering questions, talking in class, was obvious. This lack of self-confidence provided the opportunity for the other students to make fun of him. So I was determined to solve this student's problem. So I used different methods. For example, whenever I want to teach a new lesson, I always start reading the text so that students can read words in addition to their initial familiarity with lesson. The day before I was teaching the new lesson, I secretly told him to read the text at home several times and prepare himself for tomorrow. The next day, I divided the text into several sections and asked some students to read it. Because the students were unprepared, they had trouble reading, but he read the text very fluently. At the end, I would ask the kids to judge who read the text better and smoother, and, to their surprise, everyone was referring to that student. I also used this method in other lessons.

Little by little, I felt that this student had gained confidence he needed to be present among pupils. I also saw that self-esteem

made students unable to ridicule him. In my opinion, the reasons for school events need to be clarified again. An incident at school - for example, students' learning problems - must be recorded in the memory of the school and the teacher”.

## 2. *Iraqi*

### *Teachers*

*Teacher D*

*(Male)*

“In back row of the old Land Rover, surrounding countryside teachers were sitting. The driver who steep and non-standard road was regular for him - was talking to the other passengers. One experienced teacher - who had gone to the district department of education - had received his new employment order. He was constantly staring at the numbers and calculating how much was added to his salary. He was pondering what he could do with the extra money. Suddenly a car overtook them. The passenger's face was familiar. He saw the logo of the Department of Education on the car. The inspector was going to the village. His joy turned to sadness. Land Rover was moving slowly. The car finally stopped by the school half an hour late. The inspector sat in the school office next to the principal's desk and stared at him. The senior teacher entered fifth grade class. Pupils were greeted with a rather cheerful teacher's day. One student offered him a bunch of wild flowers from the surrounding mountains. A girl read a poem. The teacher immediately informed all pupils the presence of inspector and urged them to behave well. The fear of reprimanded hints made the teacher even more nervous. He quickly moved some lazy kids to the back of class and brought some smarts to the front row. The inspector entered the class with the headmaster and his deputy. Absolute silence prevailed. The inspector suddenly said take out your math book. Teacher thinks with himself why math. Coincidentally, he took one lazy student to the board from the last desk of the class. Then he drew a bad circle on the blackboard and told the lazy student to calculate its area. The student was startled. The inspector said with a grin, "Go and sit." Again he asked few questions from other students. The inspector then left school after completing special form using repetitive sentences and a written reminder. The pleasure of increasing salary vanished and replaced with sadness.

*Teacher E (man)*

It was one of the days of May. I was a primary teacher in a village in the city of Martyrs of Halabja. We went to a beautiful sightseeing with the students. Along the way, the kids started singing Kurdish songs. After an hour of hiking we reached a bungalow. The kids each had fun doing something. Sometime later, I saw few students hiding behind stone walls. I got myself there and told why you got away from the rest of the kids. They pointed to a tree where an old man - who had grazed two cows - lay under its shade and fell asleep. The kids said we wanted to get the cows

away from the old man to see what he was doing when he woke up. I was in a situation where I didn't want to ruin the kids' happy mood with anger and remorse. On the other hand, I didn't want the old man to be ridiculed. In my mind, I prayed to God to help me find the best solution for the kids' fun. Suddenly an idea came to my mind. I suggested to the kids to put few coins in two of his old shoes. The kids laughed at each other and collected money and put inside a plastic bag. We went very slowly over the old man's head and put the money into his shoes.

Then, with all the kids, we hid behind the wall to get the old man to sleep. After a while he woke up and tried to put on his shoes but was surprised to see the money. He was surprised; looked around in amazement but saw no one. Laughed loudly and stood facing the Qiblah and his hands were lifted up into the sky and said, "Thank God." The kids and I saw this scene. Tears flowed from everyone's eyes. Then the kids said, 'Sir, today you taught us a lesson that we will never forget for the rest of our lives, and that hurting others is a very ugly thing'. I told the kids in Islam how valuable it is to make people happy.

### *Stage Three: Analyzing Stories from the Language of the Main Narrator (Principal Investigator)*

The teacher in the classroom and at school deals with new scenes and events every day. Each event targets one aspect of the teacher's job. These events make the teacher think why and how this happened and how to find a reasonable solution to it. That is why every class and every day is a new event requiring different types of thinking (reflective and critical thinking). Thus, each story or narrative is the product of a thoughtful teacher's thinking that has repeatedly experienced similar events and different roles for him. Sometimes he is a psychologist and sometimes a class leader. He/she must be both a planner and an artist. Despite all these roles, there is still a teacher who teaches everywhere. As a psychologist, his role is thinking and re-thinking (Loughran, 2002). Teacher as a leader often deals with the interaction, coordination, organization, leadership, and control of the teaching processes (Liu and Chen, 2019). In the role of planner, he relies on decision-making and evaluation of activities. As an artist, he relies on personal experiences, emotions and values (Seghedin, 2011; Downey and Clandinin, 2010). Finally, in the role of teacher, teaching is a conscious activity (Bawaneh, Moumene and Aldalalah, 2020). All of these roles require at least three types of reflection by the thoughtful teacher: descriptive reflection, comparative reflection, and critical reflection. In the descriptive reflection, teacher describes the event. In comparative reflection, he identifies the problem, and finally in critical reflection, evaluates the solutions (Jay & Johnson, 2002). The result of each story or narrative is a set of narrative propositions that come together in one of the ways of reflection - and in the form of simple words and sentences (the basic theme). These statements then form one or two organizing themes and guide us toward a universal theme. Table 1 shows the basic, organizing and universal themes of the five research stories.



Table 1 . Dimensions of deep narratives of teachers

narrative	Basic theme	Organize r theme	universal themes
1	Poverty Work Family Connections Migration	Economi c - family factors	cognition
2	Personal anxiety Student-teacher academic relationships Poor facilities Emotional behavior National tradition	Educational- cultural factors	Leadership
3	lack of confidence Bullying Student-teacher academic relationships A variety of methods of encouragement and punishment	Individual - skill Factors	Teaching
4	Poor financial resources Poverty of environmental facilities The Rule of Fear in Administrative Relations Humiliation and stress	Economi c - political factors	Assessmen t
5	Local learning opportunities  Leisure time  Poverty Religious values	Religious - economi c- educational factors	Learning

Based on the information in Table 1, all five narratives can be examined separately:

In the first narrative, the main character of the story is a poor rural boy who serves the family economy (labor) and severely impacted by the negative effects of poverty on his education (basic content). The father's blame and his decision to move to Tehran and find a better job also show that the whole story has been influenced by economic and family factors (the organizing theme). The child's fear and humiliation relationship with other students in the school yard and in the classroom also helps the teacher to understand the student's disordered state (universal context).

The second narrative is the story of a teacher who enters fifth grade class with anxiety in the final days of winter, while the children do not take him too seriously. The school's oil heater - as school days close to the end of the year and national and traditional holidays - also comes with the help of kids not paying attention to the teacher (basic theme). This situation causes us to see, in the whole story, the lack of mastery of the teacher and his use of the old and mistaken class control

method of punishing students (the educational factor) by closing the classroom for the New Year holidays (cultural factor). The combination of these factors has led to the universal theme of the lack of class leadership.

In the third story, unlike the previous two narratives, we deal with a female storyteller teacher who defines her lived experience. She does not speak of the time or place of the narrative. The main character of the story is a student who does not have confidence and is ridiculed in class. The teacher is trying in a creative way to boost her spirit. Teacher helps student in secret - while seeming to be a form of discrimination - to solve her problem (basic themes). In this story, the creativity of teacher and student's mental state (individual factors) along with the skill factors - such as teacher's precise understanding of the problem and her comparative reflection - made universal theme (effective teaching).

While the previous storytellers were Iranian, in the fourth narrative we deal with an Iraqi teacher who happily checking new employment order letter on his way back to school - which is in a village. He arrives late to school while the office inspector - with a better and faster car - arrives sooner than him. The joy of raising salaries gives way to anxiety and stress. Again in this story we deal with the influence of economic factors (teacher's lack of money to buy car and village ruined road) and the hierarchical structure of power and authority and centralized educational system (political factors) shape the narrative context. Consequence of this situation is an unrealistic assessment of teacher's performance and behavior (universal context).

The fifth narrative is an Iraqi teacher's story that takes rural school students on a scientific tour in mid-spring. The childish naivety of the pupils coincides with the rest of the poor old man under a tree. New learning starts here. The teacher tries to combine evil with fun, learning and religious beliefs (basic themes). As constructive themes, educational factors (teacher's different view on leisure time and intimate relationship with students) along with economic factors (old man poverty with student money) and religious factors (old man's prayer and teacher's emphasis on Islam's role in recommendation on kindness) made universal theme (deep learning).

*Step 4: Compare the similarities and differences*

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The analysis of the five research narratives illustrates the impact of similarities and differences on the thinking of these five thoughtful teachers in two distinct geographic regions. These similarities and differences can be divided into two general groups of social and educational systems:

## 1. Social

*systems First:*

*the similarities*

- ⊖ Geographic similarities - are very much observed between two cities of Sulaimaniyah and Paveh. Mountainous cities where teachers have worked for many years in various urban and rural areas.
- ⊖ Economic similarity - between two cities - dependence on agricultural economy and horticulture
- ⊖ Cultural similarities - mainly Kurdish language, race, customs
- ⊖ Religious similarity - majority of people are Sunni

*Second: the differences*

- ⊖ Differences in the structure of the political system (in Paveh an Islamic Republic and in Sulaimaniyah , political dominance of the central Iraqi government and the autonomous state of Kurdistan)

## 2. Educational system

*First: Similarities*

- ⊖ Educational: Influence of central government in determining content of textbooks
- ⊖ Space: Of the five stories, four occur in rural and non-urban areas
- ⊖ Time: Three stories in winter, one in spring and one unknown
- ⊖ Most important character of the story: Teacher in three stories
- ⊖ Most important organizing theme: Economic factor in four stories
- ⊖ Space Sharing: Dark and bitter space in 4 stories

*Second: Differences*

- ⊖ Educational: Diverse political influence in Iraq on education system
  - ⊖ Most important character of the story: Student in 2 stories, parent in 1 story
  - ⊖ Role of Religious Factor: 1 story
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#### **4. Conclusion**

The value of teachers' lived experiences - which come from years of work in different schools and classrooms - has received little attention from those involved in the education system - especially teacher education. Many teachers also share their life experiences with colleagues and sometimes improve their professional performance, but the scope of this transition is not large. The experience of teachers is mainly in the field of education and its various dimensions. Understanding thoughtful teachers is based on inquiry and reflection: self-knowledge and knowing learners personality, learning process, teaching, classroom leadership and assessment. But this recognition does not occur in a vacuum. Teacher compares his situation with others with thoughtfulness and comparative reflection, critically reflects, identifies and responds to factors that reflect the role of the social systems such as family, religion, culture, economics, geography, history and politics. The present study also showed that deep-rooted narratives of Iranian teachers and their Iraqi colleagues are strongly influenced by social systems such as economics, religion and politics.

The analysis of the themes of the five teacher narratives showed that in the four stories, the economic system plays a key role. Of course, this factor itself has been strongly influenced by the political system in Iran and Iraq during the last four decades. Over the years, political events have not allowed much economic growth in both Paveh and Sulaimaniyah. As a result, schools have lacked facilities, rural roads are unpleasant, and teachers are under economic constraints. In four stories, the bitter atmosphere prevails, showing that teachers, students, families, schools, and whole community are suffering from numerous financial and material deficiencies. The impact of this factor is so profound that- despite the passage of years - these lived experiences are still alive in minds of teachers. The impact of economic and educational problems has affected the narrative space in such a way that three narratives occur in winter. The choice of winter is not accidental. Narrative teachers have attempted to extend cold, violent, and brutal aspects of nature to bureaucratic relationships, teacher-student inflexible relations, labor-employer's violent relationships, and tragic relationship between husbands and wives.

These narrative findings represent valuable insights to prove that the educational system in two regions - and especially in rural areas - faces challenges

that lead to increased educational inequalities between rural and urban and poor and rich. Education policymakers and planners in both countries can understand how well these narratives - that comes from in-depth dialogue of

two teachers, one in the role of narrator and the other in the role of a researcher who himself has many similar stories - can help them make better decisions and increase their insight about real situation of education in remote areas.

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