



## Challenges of Transferring a Japanese Idea to the Educational Context of Iran's Primary Schools: Lesson Study Model

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 07 July 2021 Revised: 31 July 2021 Accepted: 04 September 2021 Online: 02 December 2021	Borrowing modern educational ideas is not an easy process for societies in transition, however, new needs and necessities have made it an inevitable decision for curriculum planners. The purpose of this article is to present the research findings that have been done qualitatively using grounded theory approach. The research population consisted of primary school teachers and the method of sampling was snowball. Unstructured interviews were used to collect data. Data analysis has led to the presentation of a semantic model and the identification of four major groups of cultural, economic, professional and educational challenges for the implementation of the Japanese model of "Lesson Study" in Iran primary schools. Also, contextual and intervening conditions have reduced teachers' interest in this model and increased their attention to competing models such as action research, futures studies and narrative research. To address these challenges and localize Lesson Study model, some of primary school teachers have used three strategies of aggressive, complementary, and diversification.
<b>KEYWORDS</b> Challenges Confrontation Strategies Educational Borrowing Lesson Study	

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## 1. Introduction

In Iran, borrowing educational ideas and models from other societies has been mainly influenced by the inclination of the political system. The modern educational system in Iran was established more than a century ago. Reza Shah Pahlavi was not very interested in expanding British and Russian influences in Iran and therefore in establishing modern social institutions, he valued the experience of countries such as France and Germany (Momen, 2007). For this reason, until the end of World War II, the Iran's educational system followed the French model. Mohammad Reza Shah - unlike his father - was more interested in emulating the educational system of England and the United States (Tamer, 2010). After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in the late 1970s, Muslim revolutionaries vehemently opposed borrowing educational ideas from Western countries (Sajjadi, 2015). They looked at Britain, France, and especially the United States as colonialists who wanted to destroy the religious and cultural identity of Iranians through the education system. The alternative for them was to turn their stare from the West to the East and to the Asian countries.

The first country to be considered for borrowing was Japan, so that some Iranian politicians later claimed that they wanted to turn Iran into an "Islamic Japan" in West Asia (Haddad Adel, 2003). According to them, Japan is an excellent example for Iran because of several reasons: First, the history of Japan's war and enmity with the United States during World War II (as a model of struggle for Muslim revolutionaries); Second, the adherence of the Japanese to their Eastern customs and culture, and third, the progress and success of this country in all socio-economic fields, including education (Nazeri, 2009). Because of these reasons during last four decades, the travel of Iranian politicians, executives of economic organizations, and educational policymakers and planners to Japan to visit various centers and institutions has flourished. The purpose of these visits was to model and implement the ideas and experiences of the Japanese. One of the Japanese ideas in the field of education was "Lesson Study"(LS).

At present, the Iran educational system has more than 15 million students and about 800,000 teachers (IRNA, 2020). As the student population grew in the 1980s, the Ministry of Education hired many teachers. Nowadays and after four decades, more than 40% of primary school teachers have reached retirement years and are leaving the educational system (Hakimzadeh, 2021). The rest of the teachers also have more than 20 years of teaching experience. In this situation, schools face two challenges at the same time: First, the increasing departure of experienced teachers and second, the arrival of young and inexperienced teachers. While students need professional, expert

teachers and practitioners, one solution is to borrow the innovations and experiences of the world's successful educational systems. Thus, today more than ever, Iranian teachers need to increase their scientific and professional competencies, improve their behavior and work culture, and use new methods of communication with their colleagues and students. Based on this thought, "LS" can be one of the alternatives ahead.

During the last two decades, the LS method has been considered by many researchers in educational sciences of different countries (Dudley, 2008, 2011, 2013; Cerbin, & Kopp, 2006; Lewis, Perry, & Murata 2006; Fernandez, & Chokshi, 2002, Fernandez, Cannon, & Chokshi, 2003). A recent study by Skott & Møller (2020) reveals that although LS has flourished in Western countries, there is a cultural gap between these countries and Japan. They found that LS challenged the power relations of Danish teachers, which are largely influenced by their cultural characteristics. Raplayi & Komatsu (2017), referring to the acceptance of the Japanese idea of LS in the United States and with emphasize on important role of cultural differences between the two countries believe that "divergent onto-cultural basis of the Japanese context may be one major factor that helps make Lesson Study successful in Japan but challenging in other national contexts worldwide, perhaps most of all in the United States (p. 1). Chen (2017) tries to examine the LS in the educational context of China from a cultural perspective. His findings also show that "the Chinese teachers enact their understanding of teaching in public lessons through unity of knowing and doing more than conceptual explication (p.1). In Philippine, Ebaegu, & Stephens (2013) emphasized the difficult process of transmitting educational ideas and the important role of cultural differences. Saito & Atencio (2013) also highlighted that it is difficult to change teachers' behavior without breaking the traditional power-based relationship between teachers and students. In fact, this reform requires a change in the teacher's relationship with students, parents and other teachers.

In Iran, research has been done on LS and the issues and problems of its implementation. For the first time, an Iranian professor - who is a faculty member of Nagoya University - introduced this Japanese model to teachers by publishing articles in Persian (SarkarArani, 2011a, b; 2013). Following this action, the Ministry of Education prepared LS manual and sent it to all primary schools of the country (Ministry of Education, 2018). By expanding the use of the LS model and its acceptance, faculty members of departments of educational sciences in various universities have also shown their interest in examining this method as a "new and attractive research topic". For example, Khestvar Kundazi & Anarinejad (2019) showed that LS has contributed to students 'problem-solving ability and development of teachers' knowledge and skills. Namdari Pejman,

Ghanbarian, Ghanbari & Basiri (2017) by studying the effectiveness of LS on teachers professional skills in west of Iran found that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the following cases: Providing learning opportunities, knowledge of theory Learning; use of educational tools & teaching aids; interest in increasing knowledge & job skills and encouraging students to work in a team. Recent research by Yazdanifar & Ghazinejad (2020), Eftekhari & Eftekhari (2018), Motaharnejad (2018), and Jokar, Molaei & Shojaei (2015) reflects their similar findings about the positive effects of LS. These positive effects are as follow: Empowerment of teachers' profession, improvement of teaching, increase of motivation in teachers, increase of group & participatory learning, self-knowledge about own profession of other professions, and institutionalization of problem-solving spirit. Also, the findings of the Kalantari Khanadani & Farrokhi (2016) indicated that professional development is the axis of the formation of the teacher's "professional self" in the LS. Roshan Ghiyas, Aghapour Hosseini, & Javanmard (2014) also emphasize that the LS approach is an effective factor in improving classroom management competencies so that there is a significant difference between teachers in the experimental and control groups. According to Saki (2013), LS increases teacher knowledge, recognizes barriers to teaching, stimulates thought in students and strengthens professional cooperation between teachers.

At the same time, Iranian researchers have pointed out some of the challenges of conducting LS. For example, Emamipour et al. (2019) showed that the implementation of this method faces three important challenges before, during and after the operation. Ignorance of the evaluation criteria and failure to provide appropriate feedback on the course reports is another challenge of the LS (Emamipour & Khakbaz, 2019). Seif & Badper (2018) have mentioned time constraints due to the high volume of textbooks, lack of time for LS during school hours - and the lack of specialized staff to evaluate teachers' performance. Findings of Soleimani & Ahmadi (2017) revealed that organizational factors such as centralized organizational structure, organizational culture, leadership style, technology, internal processes and individual factors - such as teachers' lack of information, teachers' non-commitment and personality type - are among the factors that hinder implementation of LS. According to Bakhtiari & Mossadeghi Nik (2016), some teachers do not have enough knowledge to conduct LS.

Despite the prevalence of LS in Iran's schools as well as numerous studies, so far no research has been done on the challenges of accepting this Japanese idea in terms of educational borrowing

and attention to the educational context of primary schools. According to the main purpose of research and with regards to grounded theory approach, the sub-goals are:

- Identify the main challenges of the LS
- Identifying the intervening conditions and context affecting the implementation of the LS
- Identify strategies to deal with challenges and their implications for LS

## **2. Research Method**

The aim of study was to investigate the challenges of transferring the Japanese model of LS to the educational context of primary schools in Iran. This was a qualitative research using grounded theory approach and research population includes all primary school teachers in Tehran. The choice of grounded theory method was based on the premise that there is no previous theory regarding the transfer of the Japanese model of LS to Iran primary schools. Indeed, the characteristics of grounded theory are suitable for current research because the goal of researchers is to extract an explanatory framework based on qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 24). Data collection tool was a semi-structured interview with 21 participants who were selected using purposive sampling method and criterion-based. The interviews took place in the school office and lasted an average of 54 minutes per interview. Adequacy of the number of interviews was determined based on theoretical saturation. Qualitative data validation has been done through two criteria of validity and reliability using data alignment technique. To analyze the data, content analysis method (including basic, organizing and comprehensive themes) and N-Vivo software were used to form a network of themes of LS challenges.

## **3. Findings**

Demographic findings show that in terms of gender, 14 participants in this research were male and the rest were female. Also, their average age was 32 years with an average of 8 years of service in schools. Findings related to the analysis of the interviews are presented below:

As stated in the introduction, the main question of the research was that “what is the understanding and interpretation of primary school teachers about the current situation of using the Japanese model of LS and the possible challenges of its implementation”. Accordingly, five key questions were raised in the interviews: 1) What is the current state of implementation of the LS model in schools; 2) What are the intervening and contextual conditions affecting the

implementation of the LS; 3) What are the most important strategies for dealing with the challenges of conducting a LS program, 4) What are the important consequences of strategies for dealing with the challenges of conducting a LS program, and 5) What is the core of explaining the current state of conducting a LS? Findings from the interviews indicate that in the open coding stage 26 basic concepts, in the axial coding stage 6 major categories and in the selective coding stage 1 core category can be extracted (Table 1). In the next section, the six main categories are explained in order with reference to the 26 basic concepts to explain how the initial or core concept is formed:

Table 1: Results of the three steps of open, axial and selective coding

Concepts	Categories	Core Concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak culture of participation &amp; teamwork in teachers</li> <li>• Weak position of research in school culture</li> <li>• Weak culture of criticism</li> <li>• Opposition to accepting successful models of other educational systems</li> <li>• Fear and embarrassment of the presence of colleagues</li> <li>• Lack of funds to pay teachers to spend time on LS</li> <li>• Lack of proper classes and equipment</li> <li>• Lack of readiness of managers and parents to cooperate</li> <li>• Low LS compatibility with formal school programs</li> <li>• Ignoring teacher LS activities in evaluation system</li> <li>• Large volume of books and lack of time</li> <li>• Centralized educational structure</li> <li>• Low motivation of teachers</li> <li>• Lack of freedom of action for teachers in educational processes</li> <li>• Teachers are not familiar with the expectations of parents and the needs of students</li> <li>• Lack of cooperation of managers due to lack of belief in LS</li> <li>• Weak knowledge of principals and teachers about LS</li> <li>• Problems related to problem selection</li> <li>• Problems with LS implementation</li> <li>• Data collection problems</li> <li>• Problems of judging and criticizing teaching</li> <li>• Weakness in explaining the duties of members</li> <li>• Perform LS without quality</li> </ul>	Causal Conditions	Gradual Institutionalization

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing LS in a limited number of subjects</li> <li>• Slow and weak sharing of findings and experiences</li> <li>• Lack of attention to the main missions of LS and focus on observing the appearance features</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender of Student</li> <li>• Gender of teacher</li> <li>• Educational level features</li> <li>• Characteristics of political system</li> </ul>	Contextual Conditions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families</li> <li>• Department of Education</li> <li>• Headmaster</li> <li>• School Board of Trustees</li> <li>• Parents and Teachers Association</li> <li>• Teachers' Council</li> </ul>	Interventional Conditions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Future research</li> <li>• Narrative research</li> </ul>	Phenomenon: Entrance of Competitors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive</li> <li>• Supplementary</li> <li>• Diverse</li> </ul>	Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of learning space from each other's experiences</li> <li>• Disappointment with acceptance of new ideas in education</li> <li>• Continuation of traditional teaching method</li> <li>• Decreasing the quality of education</li> <li>• Decreased self-confidence and professional commitment</li> <li>• Reduce group activities</li> <li>• Lack of awareness about disadvantages of content of the lessons</li> </ul>	Consequences	
Number of concepts and categories: 26	6	1

**Causal Conditions:** Considering the data, the interviewees pointed to the fundamental role of factors that were rooted in four cultural, economic, professional and educational domains. Since the main challenges of LS are mainly due to the shortcomings in one of the four domains, these areas are called "causal conditions."

The first domain refers to cultural challenges that do not allow the full implementation of the Japanese LS model in Iran's schools. These challenges include subjects like: Weak culture of participation and teamwork in teachers, weak position of research in school culture, weak culture of criticism, opposition to accepting successful models from other educational systems, and finally

fear and embarrassment of the presence of colleagues. The implementation of LS may not require extraordinary financial and material resources, but teachers are certainly influenced by economic factors. Some of the economic challenges of LS in Iran are lack of time due to teachers' employment in other economic activities to provide living expenses, lack of appropriate classes and equipment, unpreparedness of headmasters and parents to cooperate due to lack of budget. LS professional challenges refer to issues that affect the organizational and managerial structure of Iranian schools. For example, the inadequacy of low LS with formal school curricula, neglect of teacher LS activities in the evaluation system, high volume of books and lack of time, centralized educational structure, low motivation of teachers, lack of freedom of action of teachers in educational processes; Teachers' unfamiliarity with parents' expectations and students' needs; Lack of cooperation of school managers due to lack of belief in LS. The educational challenges of LS are mainly due to the lack of familiarity of principals, teachers and students with this new educational idea. Some of the most important educational challenges are: poor knowledge of principals and teachers about LS, challenges related to problem selection, lesson implementation, data collection, teaching review, weakness in explaining members' duties, poor judgment, performing LS without quality, implementation LS in a only few number of subjects, slow and weak sharing of findings and experiences, and finally less attention to the deep and core missions of LS and only attention to the appearance aspects of the work.

**Contextual Conditions:** These conditions refer to the effect of a set of factors that are sometimes affected by demographic variables and it is not possible to eliminate their effects in the short term. In this regard, we can point to the impact of student gender, teacher gender, academic level and long-standing features of the economic system such as cyclical inflation and recession.

**Interventional Conditions:** These conditions refer to the impact of a set of institutions and individuals factors that in a natural process can accelerate or stop the activities of LS. Interviewees mentioned the positive or negative interventionist role of families, education department of district, school principal, school board of trustees, Parents & Teachers Association, and the teachers' council.

**Phenomenon:** Refers to the introduction of LS competitor educational ideas into schools. The challenges of LS make teachers tired of implementing it and turn to other educational ideas. Currently, three competing LS phenomena are action research, future research and narrative research.

**Strategies:** is to determine continuity of LS method and achieve its goals according to the interaction with causal, contextual, interventional conditions and competitors. These strategies are divided into three groups:

- Offensive strategies: utilizing the potential of the school, utilizing the current capabilities of teachers, and providing them with professional incentives,
- Complementary strategies: expanding teacher training, developing attractive LS opportunities, and preparing a guidance booklet for its proper implementation,
- Diversity strategies: creating new infrastructure in schools, equipping existing school facilities and optimizing ways to use existing resources.

In fact, as is evident from the definition of strategy, the institutionalization of the Japanese idea of LS faces various challenges in the Iran educational environment. We divided these environmental challenges into three groups: causal, contextual, and interventional conditions. The strategy and reaction of LS executors can be divided into conditions as follows:

- Causal conditions: combinatorial strategy includes the application of all three types of offensive, complementary and diverse strategies against four groups of cultural, economic, professional and educational challenges,
- Contextual conditions: supplementary strategy
- Intervention conditions: complementary and diverse strategies

It is clear that the cessation of the ideal is the result of the strong and combined effect of all three causal, contextual, and interventional conditions. This situation could have unpleasant consequences for Iran's schools, as well as frustration with the acceptance of educational innovations in the future.

**Consequences:** refers to the negative consequences of rejecting a successful educational idea and acknowledging the inability of the educational system to accept global educational innovations. Some of the possible consequences of LS failure are: loss of opportunity to learn from each other's experiences, despair and doubt about teachers' professional abilities to accept new ideas, continuation of traditional teaching methods, reduced teaching quality, reduced self-confidence and

professional commitment, reduction of teamwork activities and finally losing the opportunity to be aware of the shortcomings of the curriculum.

**Core Concept:** Relationship between causal, contextual, and interventional conditions, introduction of competing educational ideas for LS, as well as their strategies and consequences, have formed a core concept called "gradual institutionalization" in the minds of primary school teachers about current situation of this Japanese idea in Iran. Gradual institutionalization means that the ideal of LS is now a well-known and somewhat acceptable idea to most Iranian teachers. Many teachers are also more or less familiar with the challenges of implementing this idea. This situation has led us to consider the ideal of LS from a comparative education's perspective as a relatively successful borrowing idea. It is clear that the term "gradual" indicates that Iranian teachers, principals, and curriculum planners still need more time to professionally institutionalize the LS idea and find more creative solutions to overcome the challenges of implementing it (Figure 1).

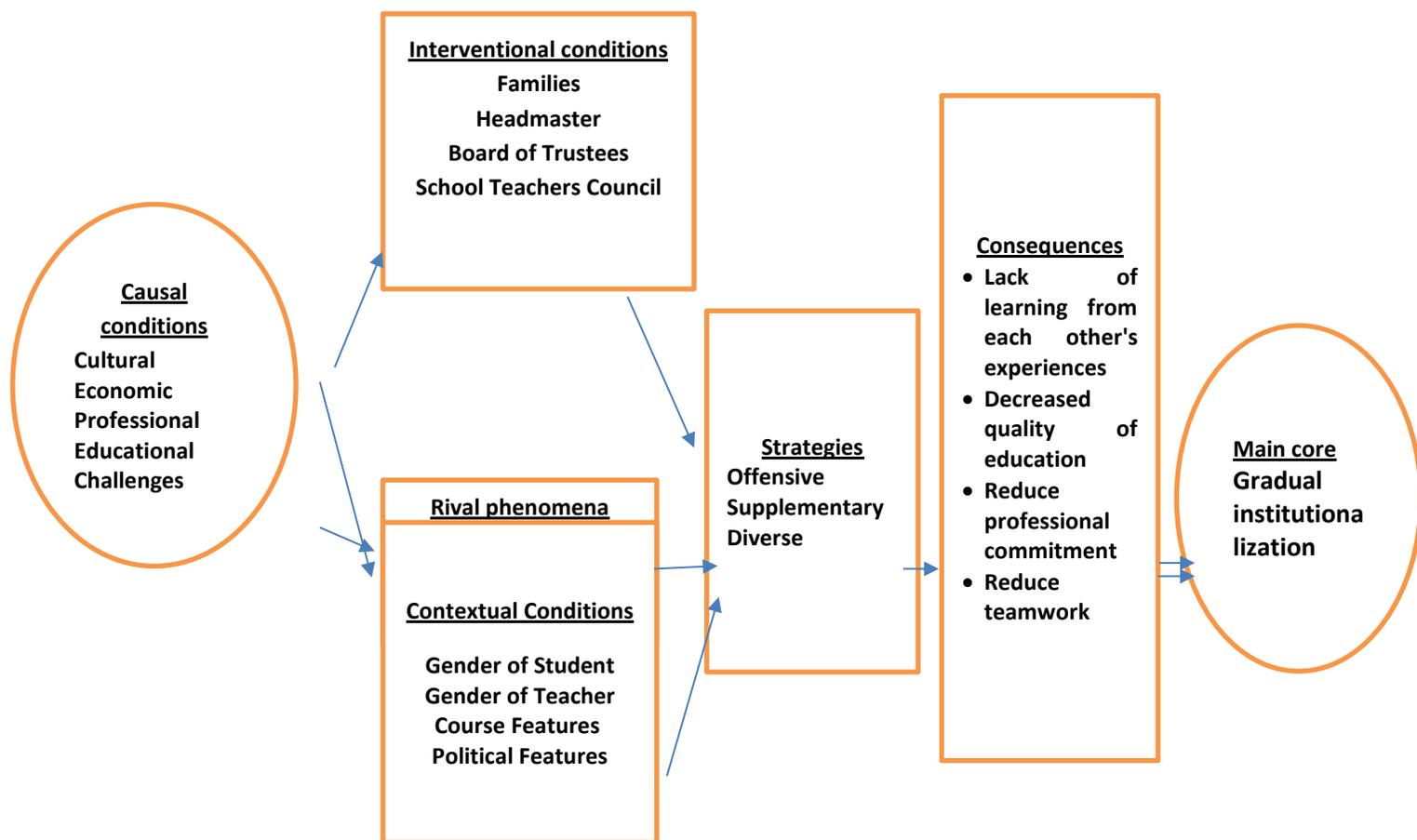


Figure 1: Semantic process model of borrowing challenges of the study model in the Iranian educational system

#### 4. Conclusion

Borrowing ideas from other societies is both sweet and difficult. On the one hand, we are happy that without spending a lot of money, energy and time, we can use the valuable experiences of other societies to improve our current situation. On the other hand, we are always concerned about whether a tree that has grown well in a neighbor's house and bore fruit will bear fruit in our house as well. We are also worried about a tree that we have at home but does not bear fruit. We have to cut this tree to make room for the new tree. The LS method in the mainland - Japan - has had many benefits for the education system. The experience of many Western countries in borrowing LS also

shows its positive effects, although at the same time they have faced difficulties in this transition process.

The transfer of the LS method from Japan to Iran was welcomed by teachers. Now, more than a decade later, it seems necessary to look at this experience and its challenges. To understand these challenges, primary school teachers with LS experience were interviewed. Data analysis led to the formation of a semantic model. This model includes five sections: causal, contextual, interventional, entrance of competitor phenomenon, and consequences. Causal conditions led to the identification of four major challenges. Some of these challenges have also been considered in the research of Bakhtiari & Mossadeghi Nik (2016); Ebaegu, & Stephens (2013); Emamipour & Khakbaz (2019); Rappleye & Komatsu (2017); Saito, & Atencio (2013); Seif & Badper (1397), Soleimani & Ahmadi (2017). The research findings also indicated that the contextual and interventional conditions affect the institutionalization of LS. In primary schools, for example, female teachers are more likely to welcome the LS model than their male colleagues. At the same time, families, school principals, the Teachers' Council, and the Parents - Teachers' Association in various schools have had both positive and negative reactions to the LS idea. This finding is consistent with the research of Chen (2013); Ebaegu, & Stephens (2013) and Raplay & Komatsu (2017) who emphasized the influence of factors such as family, political and cultural systems on LS. . In addition, the research findings showed that one of the reactions of some teachers in facing the challenges of LS is to turn to other educational ideas. Although this has not been addressed in previous research, empirical evidence suggests that teachers have simultaneously embraced the three ideas of action research, narrative research, and future research. Another finding of research and semantic model indicates that schools in the face of the challenges of the LS model usually use three strategies of aggressive, complementary and diverse. The choice of these strategies has also been confirmed by Bakhtiari & Mossadeghi Nik (2016). In sum, Iranian teachers have become familiar with many of the scientific, educational, and cultural aspects of the LS model over the past decade. Also, this Japanese model - unlike previous educational borrowing experiences - showed that we can benefit from the innovations and experiences of other countries as long as there is a deep understanding of cultural differences. The LS model has been able to relatively well institutionalize behaviors such as dialogue with colleagues and students, increasing the spirit of criticism, and strengthening the spirit of teamwork in Iranian teachers. It is obvious that solving some of the challenges of this model requires more time and energy.

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