A Comparative Evaluation of Iranian ELT PhD Curriculum: Reappraisal of Goals, Admission Criteria and Course Requirements in Iran

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Abstract

The present study made attempts to evaluate the Iranian ELT PhD curriculum as compared to that of five high-ranking foreign universities from the United States, Turkey and Ireland. For this purpose, the corresponding curricula were collected, analyzed and categorized. Results indicated that in all three aspects i.e. the goals, admission criteria and required courses of Iranian ELT PhD were in need of revisions. More goals with more specific and operational goal descriptions were suggested to replace the current ones. In terms of admission criteria several requirements such as an academic CV, a statement of purpose and a research proposal were suggested to be added to the current Iranian ELT PhD admission criteria. Results on the number of coursework credits indicated that the major problem with Iran's curricula was the low number of campus courses. Besides, one hundred seventy Iranian PhD graduates were asked to answer a Likert scale questionnaire and 5 experienced ELT PhD instructors were interviewed to find their viewpoints on the curriculum. The findings in this section revealed that both students and instructors believed the curriculum was in need of major revisions in all above aspects. Finally, suggestions were provided to improve the curriculum in the studied areas.

Keywords: Curriculum Evaluation, Comparative Curriculum Evaluation, ELT PhD Curriculum

1. Introduction

In Iran the number of students seeking to pursue their studies in institutes of higher education has been on the increase and the ELT PhD program with an increasing annual capacity for admitting 475 students per year has not been an exception. In this regard the need for educating a sufficient number of highly competent university instructors and researchers in the field of ELT seems to be felt all over the country. Such a need is consistent with the explicitly mentioned goal of the program which is to train highly expert individuals who will serve as faculty members and teach at different levels of English fields. However, the substantial question is to find whether ELT program at PhD level has been designed properly to meet such a goal.

In a globalizing world with a growing need for English language as the main tool for communication, teaching English is becoming an educational field that is in need of exploring and improvement. The studies relating to English Language Teaching (ELT) deal with various issues and all of these issues are somewhat connected to the training of English teachers. Therefore, it is very important for ELT programs to have a structured evaluation system so that necessary changes can be made about the program. As stated by Peacock (2009), evaluation of these programs is the starting point on the way towards professionalization of the field of ELT. Moreover, evaluations contribute to program improvement; therefore, systematic evaluation should be placed at the very heart of a program.

Related studies indicate that programs have pronounced influence on teachers' development and that designing and revising programs are among the key tasks of teacher education reform (e.g., Abednia, 2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Freeman, 1996, Kiely & Askham, 2012). As curriculum evaluations are used to provide feedback which informs curriculum design, the role of curriculum evaluation in ELT PhD like any other education program is a vital one. However, according to Graves (2009) curriculum planning is still an under-researched area. Another area which has received little attention is comparative research on teacher education curricula (Dooley, Dangel, & Farran, 2011).

At the first glance, the ELT PhD program seems to be suffering from some major shortcomings. The first one which is a problem of all higher education curricula in Iran is what Fathi Vajergah (2008) believes, the 'intensive' category of curriculum systems. Such systems in his view allow for little or no manipulation of course topics by universities. These

curriculum systems, as Nasr-e-Esfehani (2007) asserts, discourage faculty members from spending time on improvement and modification of the syllabuses because such activities do not have any positive effects on their salary or credit.

Based on what was mentioned so far, two main issues emerged. The first issue was that the nature of ELT PhD curriculum in Iran called for individual evaluation studies. The second issue was that lack of former evaluations called for comparative evaluations which compared the current curriculum with successful equivalent programs in the world. It is also worth mentioning that any suggested modification(s) which resulted from these comparative emulations could not be carried out by a single research or organization and were in need of actions at national level. Yet, without evaluations one could never claim that a certain curriculum was in need of modifications.

2. Literature Review

The body of literature in the field of second language teacher education (Brandt, 2006; Crandall, 2000; Johnson, 2009) suggests that Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) programs have great influence on teachers' development. As mentioned earlier, there has been little theory or research of second language teacher education curriculum design. Brief discussions of the topic can be found in Johnston and Goettsch (2000) and Graves (2009). Johnston and Goettsch (2000) propose four issues that need to be addressed in designing and revising SLTE programs. Graves (2009) proposes a framework for curriculum planning for these programs that focuses on (1) who will be taught, (2) what will be taught, (3) how it will be taught, and (4) how what is learned will be evaluated. Graves (2009) further highlights the role of context analysis (i.e. gathering of information about available resources and existing constraints) in designing a pragmatically feasible curriculum. This view is supported by sociocultural perspectives on ELT (e.g., Johnson, 2006, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011), which see context as an influential factor in teacher learning.

Mousapour (2012) maintained that the developments of educational evaluation in Iran can be discussed from two main standpoints. The first one is referred to as the analytical classification which studies the background of educational evaluation regardless of its developments beyond the boundaries of Iran. The second one or the comparative type classifies the developments with regards to its developments worldwide. He further adds that

the main developments in the field of educational evaluation started from 1992 and continued up to now.

Curriculum evaluation has been mainly dealing with school curricula until very recently. However, in 1997, the first seminar on Higher Education in Iran was held and the movement toward evaluating university level curriculum started. Mousapour (1997) evaluated the curricula for PhD in Curriculum Planning. Shahmohammadi (2012) evaluated curriculum for nursing and Shaker (2010) evaluated the curriculum for medicine at the university level. In the field of English, there have been few efforts to look at the curricula. Razi and Kargar (2014) have evaluated the in-service language teacher education programs in Iran. Moreover, the First International Conference on Quality in Higher Education curriculum as held at the Islamic Azad University (Khorasgan Branch) in October 2014 which discussed the quality of higher education curriculum in Iran.

Curriculum evaluations in Iran at the PhD level in ELT were not carried up to this date but the few studies which were reported above indicated that there were discrepancies between the expected and real outcomes of these educational programs at all levels. Rahmani (2007) investigated the curriculum for BA of translation to obtain data concerning the current functioning of the program (status quo). In a study in (2014) Divsar and Jafari Gohar investigated the ELT curricula at BA and MA levels with reference to Bloom's revised taxonomy. They found that the current curricula did not provoke critical thinking abilities or metacognitive knowledge and the syllabus of the courses could only touch the students at the understanding and cognitive level. They concluded that both curricula were in need of revision to enable critical thinking and metacognitive skills. The ELT PhD curriculum was not evaluated before and the present study was the first attempt towards its evaluation.

Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) studied the influential factors which led to student learning of English in high schools. They found that despite high emphasis and spending considerable amount of money to publish English books for the students, the results are disappointing and the students who entered universities were not at acceptable levels of English proficiencies. Shirvani (2010) compared English high school books with those taught at English Institutes. The teachers who participated in this study believed that the English books of English Institutes were better in terms of diversity of tasks, attention to language skills and types of exercises. In 2008, Mall Amiri conducted a study to evaluate ESP education at MS/A and PhD levels at Science and Research Campus of Islamic Azad University. The results of the

study demonstrated that there were mismatches between the students' perceived English language needs and the ESP courses they attended. Atai (2006) carefully diagnosed the controversy between the Ministry of Research and Technology's focus on in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) on one side and the strikingly insufficient, inconsistent, and unsystematic teacher education in Iran on the other side. Still another study by Dahmardeh (2007) at University of Warwick investigated the English Language Teaching (ELT) concluding that while the designed curriculum document was to a great extent compatible with communicative pedagogy, the materials being used by teachers, as well as the ELT program, were mainly structurally based and could not be considered communicative.

Taking into consideration the studies which attempted to evaluate ELT at different levels and from different perspectives, the need for a comparative evaluation study at PhD level was felt and thus the present study was carried out to find answers to below questions:

1. To what extent are the goals of old and recently revised ELT PhD curriculum in Iran consistent with those of foreign universities?"

2. To what extent are the admission criteria for old and recently revised ELT PhD curriculum in Iran compatible with those of foreign universities?"

3. What componential variation is there across the required courses of old and recently revised TESOL PhD at the Iranian and those of foreign universities?

4. What are the views of Iranian TESOL PhD graduates and instructors on different aspects of the curriculum?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

The comparative nature of curriculum evaluation as well as the contingent nature of data required for such evaluation led to the analyses of the available data in the curriculum of different universities which were either available on the university websites or were collected from catalogues received from related departments at these universities. Firstly, about 80 English language leaching curricula at different parts of the world including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Turkey etc. were checked in order to find the proper curricula for comparison. The final selection was based on two main criteria.

The first criterion was that of comparability which meant that the selected curriculum needed to be about teaching English as a foreign language. Many of the so-called TESOL, TEFL and ELT programs around the world dealt mainly with literature and linguistics in their curricula. The second one was that these programs were listed among the high-ranking ELT PhD programs according to the list provided by QS World University Rankings. Besides offering high quality ELT programs the universities were chosen with reference to Kachru's three concentric circles namely inner circle, expanding circle and outer circle (Kachru, 1985, P. 366). The inner circle country universities were Colombia University, Alliant University and Anaheim University from the US, the outer circle country university was Middle East Technology University from Turkey and the expanding circle country's university was Limerick University from Ireland. The first part included information about PhD programs' goals. These stated goals were analyzed and categorized to see if they were consistent between Iran and other universities in question and to find and report differences.

Concurrently, a Likert scale questionnaire was distributed among 175 ELT PhD graduates or candidates who had finished their coursework to find out their opinions about different aspects of curriculum. Moreover, qualitative interviews were conducted with 5 ELT PhD instructors who had more than 10 years of experience in teaching ELT PhD from 5 different universities. They were asked to give their opinions about different aspects of ELT PhD curriculum and the ways in which it could be improved. Their answers to 10 open-ended questions were recorded, analyzed, categorized and reported.

3.2. Participants

Two groups of participants took part in the present study. The first group of participants were chosen from among the ELT PhD graduates from different universities as well as candidates who had passed their required courses. The sampling method was opportunity sampling and used those participants who were available at the time and were willing to take part. These candidates came from different branches of Azad University as well as state universities. Initially, request emails explaining the questionnaire and the general goals of the study were sent to 43 candidates directly and 162 indirectly by the first group making a total of 205 emails 177 of which were replied. The second group of participants were also selected based on their willingness to participate. These were ELT

PhD instructors who had more than 10 years of experience in teaching ELT at the PhD level. Totally 14 candidates were contacted and five of them accepted to take part in the interview.

3.3. Instruments

Instruments used to collect the data for the present study included email, voice recording application, and pilot and main Likert scale questionnaires.

3.3.1. Email

Emails were used for the following purposes:

– Asking for and getting different curricula from the corresponding foreign universities
– Sending and receiving the questionnaire to PhD participants
– Contacting PhD instructors and asking for their participation in the interviews

3.3.2. Voice Recording Application

This application was available on the cellphone and was used to record the interviews.

3.3 3. Pilot and Main Likert Scale Questionnaires

A pilot Likert scale questionnaire including 87 questions was developed by the researcher and used to collect information about the ELT PhD candidates' views on the curriculum. The questionnaire was distributed among 20 ELT PhD participants who were randomly selected from the 205 available PhD participants. Since the respondents were all PhD graduates of ELT readability testes were not carried out and the mere reading by sample participants sufficed. Now the questionnaire was ready to pilot test. Moreover, the questionnaire was checked with two field experts to ensure that the validity concerns and criteria were met. Adjustments were made based on the sessions with experts.

Later and upon examining, re-wording, re-scaling and revising all questions, all unnecessary, difficult or ambiguous questions were discarded. Having finalized the questions and format of the questionnaire in every aspect the researcher sent it to the potential participants to get the results. Results were then collected and analyzed using SPSS and the reliability and validity of the questionnaire was estimated to ensure generalizability of results. For an estimation of reliability Cronbach's alpha was measured and found to be 0.747 for the final number of 70 items. As the Cronbach's alpha value was greater than 0.7

therefore the reliability of the questionnaire was at an acceptable level. . The final Likert scale question including 70 questions was prepared and distributed among 170 participants. The answers ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". This was used to find out the viewpoints of Iranian ELT PhD graduates and candidates about the curriculum they were exposed to.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data for the present study were collected from multiple sources. The study started with studying the Iranian ELT PhD curriculum. This curriculum which was the last approved ELT PhD curriculum was available online at the official website of Ministry of Science, Research Technology (https://prog.msrt.ir). The next step was to find the similar programs from top universities. PhD programs for English language teaching were numerous. Almost 80 programs were studied to see which were the most contingent with the Iranian curriculum. In some cases, the curricula were fully available online and in other cases the researcher had to contact the corresponding departments in the universities such as the Temple University in Japan, Limerick University in Ireland and Colombia University in the United States to and receive the curricula via mail or email.

Three curricula were received via email from Dr. Freda Miran for Limerick University, Dr. Hansun Waring for Colombia University and Dr. Hayo Reinders for Anaheim University. The curricula for Turkish Middle East Technology University and Alliant University were collected from their websites online.

The next step was to find PhD graduates' views about the curriculum that had been exposed to during their course of study. A Likert scale questionnaire including 70 questions was sent to 205 ELT PhD graduates via email in excel form and 170 filled out questionnaires were returned by the participants. The responses started from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree" and showed the participants' viewpoints on different aspects of the curriculum.

Finally, the interviews were conducted in order to collect information concerning the ELT PhD instructors' views on the curriculum in Iran. Initially, an interview protocol was prepared to ensure that the interviewer was prepared for the interview and that she would not forget the key points throughout the interview. Later, 12 experienced ELT PhD instructors were asked to participate in the interview and 5 of them agreed to do so.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and the participants' points of view were summarized and categorized.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

In order to find the extent to which the goals and the admission criteria of foreign ELT PhD programs were different from those of Iranian ELT PhD, the related texts in the curriculum documents were broken into short statements using most frequent keywords and were then reported in tables for each university. Then, the most salient and frequent goals or admission criteria among the universities were put into a single summary table and finally this summary table was compared to Iran's ELT PhD curriculum.

In order to find out about the required courses in each program, the PhD brochures acted as the source of data. The required courses for the five foreign universities as well as for Iranian ELT PhD were collected and reported in individual tables along with each course's credit points. Then, the courses were then analyzed in terms of main concentration and were assigned to different areas like second language acquisition, discourse studies and research. Finally, the weighting of each domain within the curriculum was calculated in the form of percentage. For example, if a 98-point curriculum included a 4-point unit, a 6-point unit, and a 3-point unit that contributed to discourse studies, the total credit points would be 13 (i.e., 4+6+3) and the weighting of the domain of discourse studies within the curriculum would be 17.5% (i.e., 13 out of 98).

Moreover, the study made attempts to learn about students' and lecturers' views on the curriculum. The Likert scale format was used to measure participants' attitudes and opinions. Participants were asked to choose from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' to quantify a subject's response on a particular variable. The next step included the analysis of interview results. For this purpose, the interview notes were put on a different paper for each interviewee. The answers were analyzed to find the themes of answers.

4. Results
4.1. ELT PhD Programs' Goals

As mentioned earlier, the goals of different curricula were carefully studied, categorized and listed in corresponding tables in order to realize the extent to which the goals of ELT PhD curriculum in Iran were consistent with those of foreign universities.

Table 1.

List of Goals for Iran's Curriculum

No.	Goal Description	Elaboration
1	Teaching the corresponding courses of TESOL , translation studies and English literature at BA, MA and PhD level	Teaching
2	Developing curriculum in TESOL, writing ESP books, developing tests in language teaching	Curriculum Development for EFL
3	Doing research in language acquisition and teaching	Research
4	Planning and developing teacher training courses at Ministry of Education and language institutes	Teacher Education Curriculum Development

Table 1 shows the goal descriptions and elaborations for the Iranian ELT PhD and was the result of the analyses of the comprehensive curriculum document which was issued by the corresponding committee and announced. It included the basic goals for Iranian ELT PhD which were expressed in the curriculum document. The paragraph form of the goals were shortened and then categorized into different elaborations.

Table 2.

Summary of Goals of ELT PhD from METU, Colombia University, Limerick University, Anaheim University, Alliant University

No.	Goal Description	Elaboration
1	Taking up and evaluating large-scale qualitative/quantitative and mixed-methods research	Research
2	Acquiring a firm theoretical and practical knowledge to improve the practices of national English language teaching and learning	Improving national ELT /EFL practices
3	Working as academicians and researchers and advisors at universities, higher education institutions and research centers both nationally and internationally	Working as academicians
4	Applying TESOL and SLA theory and research to TESOL methodology.	Applying TESOL theory to practice
5	Developing theories of teaching, understanding the nature of teacher decision making, and developing strategies for critical self-awareness and self-evaluation	Understanding the nature of teaching
6	Gaining knowledge, skills and ethics needed to serve effectively as educational leaders and practitioners in the face of rapidly changing global environment	Acting as educational leaders
7	Gaining a comprehensive understanding of curriculum and program design, development, administration and evaluation.	Curriculum Development for EFL
8	Developing the knowledge and skills to design, implement and evaluate teacher-training programs for ESL/EFL instructors.	Curriculum Development for Language Teaching
9	Practitioner-Scholars in integration of technology into TESOL instruction and learning.	Integration of Technology into EFL/ELT
10	working as teacher educators of pre-service and in-service teachers in the field of English Language Teaching	Teacher Education

Table 2 was the result of the analyses of different foreign universities' curricula with regards to the goals mentioned for the corresponding educational programs. These goals which were mentioned in paragraph form were first summarized and then the elaboration of the goals were put in front of the descriptions to enable more objective analyses.

4.2. Results of the Admission Criteria for ELT PhD Programs

Table 3.

Summary of Admission Criteria for ELT PhD in Iran

No.	Requirement
1	Passing PhD entrance exam including a field-scientific and a general proficiency section
2	Successfully passing specialty interview run by university faculty members
3	Having an M.A. in TESOL, Applied Linguistics or a related field
4	Official course by course evaluations and transcripts from each university the applicant has attended

The admission criteria are the requirements introduced by different universities which act as the yardsticks to ensure that the admitted students are quailed for the different educational programs. Such requirements vary among different programs and are generally an indicator of the quality level of the programs themselves. The higher the quality of the program the more demanding the admission criteria. Table 3 shows the admission criteria for the Iranian ELT PhD curriculum.

Table 4.

Most Common Academic Admission Criteria for Foreign Universities

No.	Requirements
1	Having an M.A. in ELT , Applied Linguistics or a related field
2	A current resume or CV including full details of qualifications
3	Two or three highly positive academic references, supporting applicant's intellectual ability, academic achievement, and motivation
4	One or two pieces of written work which demonstrate the applicant's understanding of the subject area and the ability to construct and defend an argument in academic English
5	A convincing personal statement (statement of purpose), explaining the applicant's reasons for applying to the program and highlighting the applicant's relevant academic and professional experience
6	A research proposal in English of up to 2,500 words in length, including a title, an outline of the proposed research and a discussion of the applicant's intended research methods.
7	Evidence of proficiency in English at the higher level (i.e.6.5 to 7.5 IELTS, 110 TOEFL)
8	Official course by curse evaluations and transcripts from each university the applicant has attended

Having collected the admission criteria for ELT PhD, the most important criteria which were common across five foreign universities were reported in Table 4. It is worth mentioning that some universities required specific academic achievements in addition to the above mentioned requirements but these were the core and basic requirements which were expressively mentioned in the curriculum documents of all five universities under study.

4.3. Results of the Required Courses for ELT PhD Programs

In the following step the required courses for different programs were compared and the results were reported.

Table 5.

List of Required Courses and Credits for Iran's Curriculum

Type of course	Description	Credits
10 points required courses	Research in Language Education	2
	Second Language Acquisition Studies	2
	Language Assessment	2
	Language Curriculum Development	2
	Critique of Issues in Language Teaching	2

The list of required courses and the number of credits for each course for Iran's ELT PhD were reported in Table 5. The total number of program units for this curriculum was 36 out of which 10 were required courses was mentioned in the Table 5.
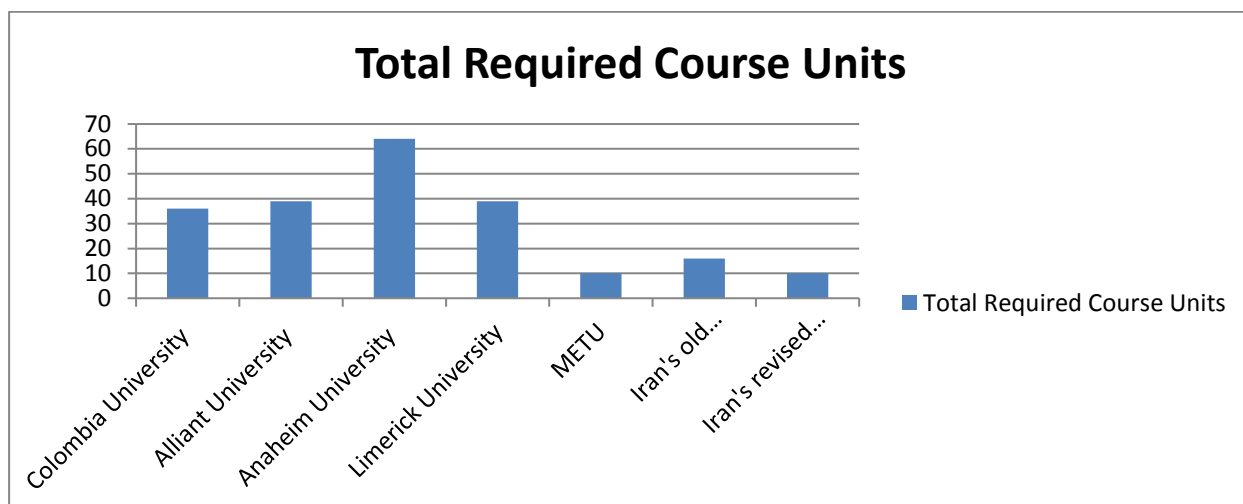
Figure 1. Comparison of the number of the required course credits among universities.

Upon reporting the total number of required courses for different universities under study the number of required course units for each curriculum was reported in a Figure 1 with the aim of visualizing the quantity differences between Iranian ELT PhD and those of foreign universities .
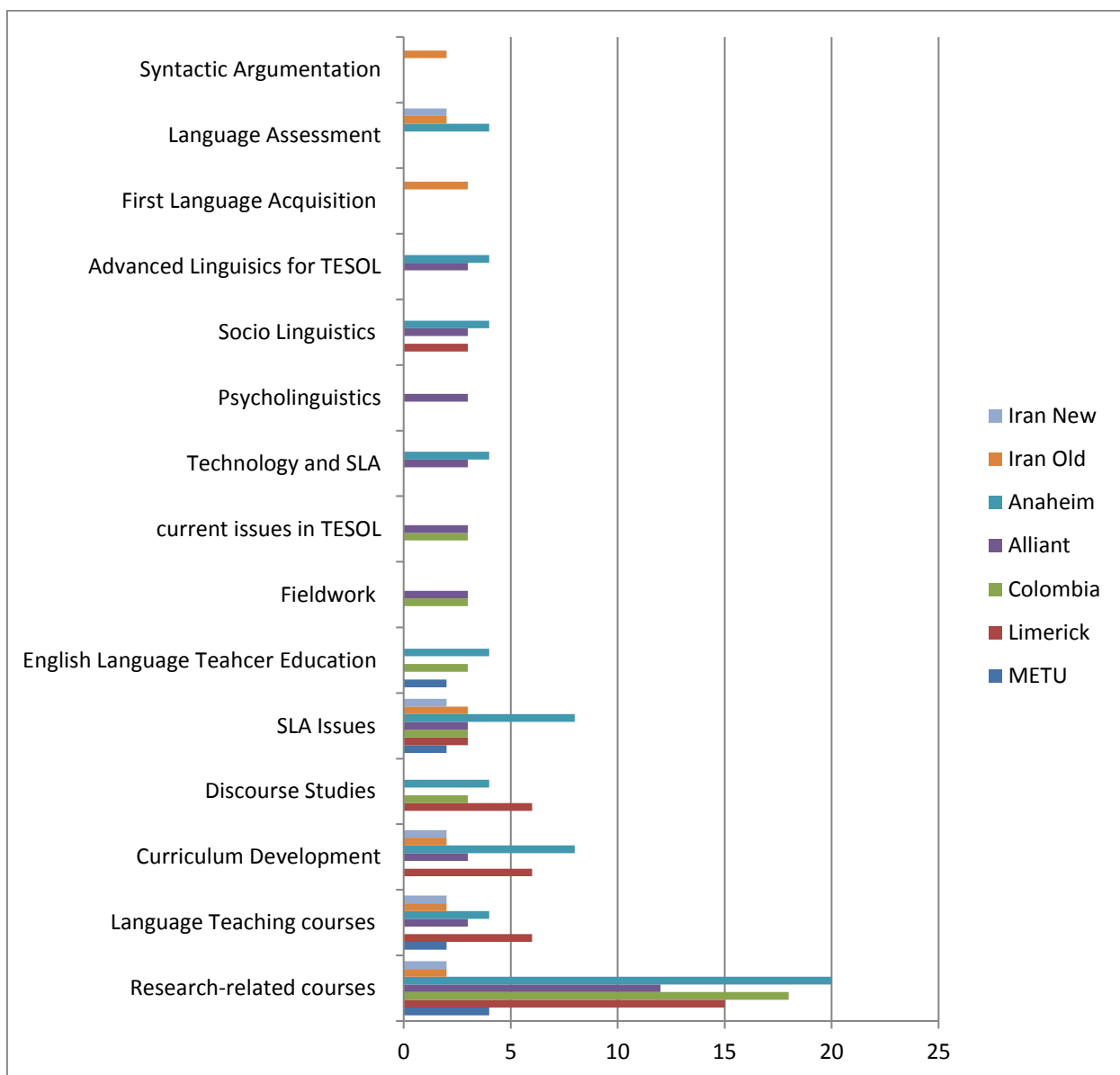
Figure 2. Comparison of the most common required course concentrations in the different programs.

Having checked the number of required courses for different ELT PhD curricula and in order to find out the course concentrations across these curricula, the subject and content of these course were studies, anal zed and categorized into broader concentrations. Consequently, different concentrations were found to be dominating most ELT PhD curricula in the required course selections by program policy makers and practitioners. The Figure 2 shows the number of credits allocated to different areas or concentration within the realm of ELT.

4.4. Questionnaire and Interview Results

The questionnaire statements aimed at collecting information on the overall attitude of the ELT PhD students on different aspects of the ELT PhD curriculum. Results indicated that:

– 82% of the respondents believed they did not have enough opportunities to present their works at seminars and sessions in or outside the faculty and needed to have more off-campus activities.

– 78% respondents believed that they needed to take more research-related and statistics courses as well as teaching skills in areas like CALL.

– 74% of the respondents believed that the ELT PhD program was highly theoretical and did not prepare them for practical research and practice in ELT.
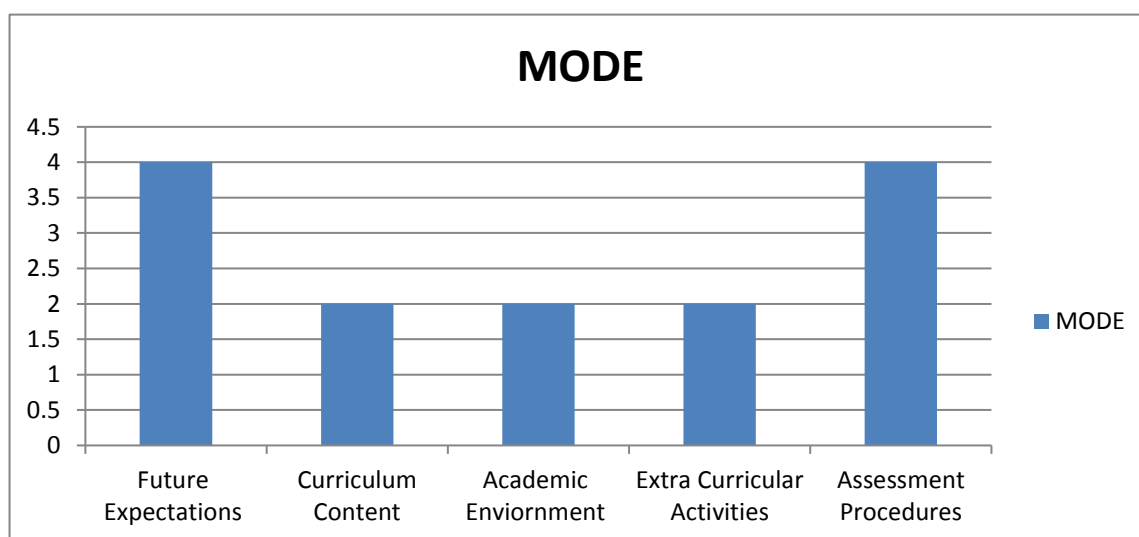
Figure 3. Mode on affirmative attitudes of respondents towards different aspects of ELT PhD curriculum in Iran.

The mode bar chart above in Figure 3 illustrates the general attitude of respondents on the affirmative statements about the Iranian ELT PhD curriculum in five main sections of the curriculum. As it can be seen the respondents approved of the statement that the ELT PhD candidates would meet their future expectations by entering ELT PhD and also the assessment procedures. However, they were not much satisfied with the curriculum content, academic environment and the amount of extra-curricular activities in the curriculum. Moreover, the results collected from the analyses of interview notes shed further light on the

fact that updating syllabi of a curriculum is only one aspect of the ongoing process of curriculum evaluation and revision. The instructors' emphasis on increasing student involvement, extracurricular activities, and required courses indicates that the ELT PhD curriculum was need of change at some other aspects as well.

Regarding the goals of ELT PhD program in Iran all five interviewees mentioned that becoming university professors and researchers as the main goals of the program and that the goals of Iranian ELT PhD were insufficient. An excerpt from interviewee 1 goes as below:

"…I have had the opportunity to study PhD in one of the finest universities …Victoria University in New Zealand…there I found the PhD program a totally different story…when we entered the program we were officially informed about the goals of the he program…we were given brochures…checklists…and much information about the curriculum…different courses…fees…accommodation and almost every detail of the program…hmmm.. let me see…as far as I remember the goals of the ELT program were more than simply becoming faculty members and researchers…well…how should I say…the goals were mentioned in more details…and I think this is right because it gives students a more understandable framework…a more vivid picture of the program…I believe this like a journey you start somewhere and you need to know about your destination…the clearer the destination the more easy it would be to plan and move along the path…well…the details of the goals included some points like…. attaining marked capability, scholarship, and research skills in a broad field of language learning and teaching…and…to assume positions of leadership in research…as I remember a mostly repeated sentence was that the program aimed at teaching the students to create knowledge… and to contribute to an on-going "conversation" between the top researchers in the field…I think we can add these goals to program goals after we discuss them in more detail …"

With reference to the courses in the ELT PhD Curriculum in Iran, the necessary and unnecessary courses, program update …etc. A sample answer to the questions in this section was quoted below:

"…I myself have studied PhD in Iran…Azad University…there are many things I have learned throughout years but I think we need to be more practical…I mean we need a lot more practice both in research and in teaching… if you ask what courses need to be added to or omitted from ELT PhD curriculum I would say that we need to add courses which

include conceptual research frameworks…we need to study philosophy of science…we need to carry out research project...in a simple sentence …we need to engage students more and more…we need to motivate them to get involved in research and teaching…they must teach at BA and/or MA levels and do research based on their observations in class… well I should say no…unfortunately I cannot confirm this… ELT PhD graduates are not competent teachers or researchers…they might be strong in theoretical issues…but you know when they teach at BA level for example…they need to be practically good teachers and teacher trainers…on the other hand…I have been observing that...unfortunately… the proficiency level is not satisfactory at times…especially during recent years…well…I'm not talking about everybody…there are students who are perfect…self-motivated… industrious…but what I want to say is that there are some students who are not like this…I'm asking why on earth everybody must graduate…some people can't finish…are not capable…but…at the end of the day…all finish and get a degree…"

Three of the interviewees believed that admission criteria needed to be revised. The other two interviewees believed the national entrance exam and individual interviews were competitive enough for entering the ELT PhD program. Those who advocated revision of admission criteria believed that students need to present some piece of written work before they are admitted to ELT PhD program. Below are a few lines from the interviews:

Interviewee 3

"... the most important part of PhD program is thesis writing and I believe students who are not able to establish and maintain arguments is academic language should not be allowed into the program…at least this must be part of universities' internal requirements… current admission criteria don't let a picture of students' practical capabilities…they only evaluate theoretical knowledge..."

5. Discussion

The present study was the first attempt to evaluate the ELT PhD curriculum in Iran by means of comparing it to similar curricula at foreign universities. In similar studies the curriculum of English language teaching was evaluated at BA and MA levels and from within the curricula meaning that either the viewpoints of different groups including the teachers, the students and the managers were checked or the textbooks were analyzed two examples of this are studies carried out by Razi and Kargar, (2014) and Rahmani (2007).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the ELT PhD curriculum was updated and revised only in December 2013 after 23 years.

The present section dealt mainly with answering the research questions posed earlier. The first question was as below:

1. To what extent are the goals of old and recently revised ELT PhD curriculum in Iran consistent with those of foreign universities?"

While no similar studies at any level or any field of study dealt with the goals of curricula in Iran, these goals were revised in the first revision to the ELT PhD curriculum. In fact, the old goals were expanded in terms of scope and diversity to include teaching in different areas of ELT and at different levels, curriculum development, writing TESOL and ESP books and developing tests of language and planning and developing teacher education curricula. However, the comparison of the summary of the goals from five foreign universities revealed that the goals were inadequate both in terms of number and clarity. The results showed that while there were 10 elaborations on goals form different curricula the goals of ELT PhD in Iran concentrated on 4 aspects of the discipline and took new trends such as integration of technology and acting as educational leaders for granted.

The second question was to see the extent to which the admission criteria for ELT PhD curriculum in Iran were compatible with those of foreign universities Having compared the admission criteria between Iran's ELT PhD and the most frequent criteria from foreign universities revealed that the admission criteria for entering ELT PhD in Iran were far less demanding and limited in number. Some of the common admission criteria for foreign universities seemed to have a positive wash back effect on the students' during MA and were more competitive.

- Firstly, the students needed to present at least two academic references. Such a requirement is directly related to students'' performances during MA
- Secondly, the students needed to provide the university with a personal statement of purpose which not only provided the faculty with valuable information on the students' objectives of entering the program but also gave useful information about their past academic experience and future expectations.
- Thirdly, the students had to start with a research proposal. This is undoubtedly highly influential in directing students' research interests in right path and in understanding their potential problems in academic writing, argumentation and research methods

- Fourthly, the (international) students were required to provide proof of proficiency in English at the higher level (i.e.6.5 to 7.5 IELTS, 110 TOEFL). Such a proof of proficiency is assessed during the ELT PhD entrance exam in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and reading modules and in writing. Although the Iranian applicants are assessed for their general English as well but what is really required is a high level of proficiency and if such requirement can be overcome be cramming for the entrance exam the prospective students will definitely have difficulty in positioning themselves in the academic. In Iran the requirement for such proof of proficiency is delayed until before the comprehensive exam.

- Fifthly, a current resume or CV including full details of qualifications. This will help provide quick access to newly arrived students' backgrounds, capabilities and other information and will be of benefit to the university and their department. Moreover, it shapes the learning efforts and academic activities of MA applicants who intend to pursue their studies in PhD by increasing their attempts to present more reliable resumes to their future universities.

The third research question dealt mainly with the required courses across different curricula. It sought find the componential variation across the required courses of ELT PhD at the Iranian and foreign universities.

In terms of required course credits Iran's revised curriculum decreased the number of required courses by 6 credits. Therefore, the number of required courses in the curriculum was significantly lower than top ranking universities such as Anaheim, Colombia and Alliant from the US. As it was mentioned in the revised version of the curriculum the revision was made by getting insights and information from the curricula of universities in the US and Canada. However, the average number of required courses at the three universities from the US is 46 credits while the number is 18 for Iran's revised version. Allocating a large number of credits to dissertation without having the students attend preparation courses is another shortcoming of the revised curriculum. This was what 84% of the respondents confirmed. They either agreed or strongly agreed that they did not feel ready to take the dissertation courses and thought that they did not have the knowledge to conduct research. Consequently, by decreasing the number of required courses the revised program and the old program seem to have failed in meeting the academic needs of the students adequately and sufficiently.

Moreover, as mentioned before the small number of campus course credits has led both old and the revised Iran ELT PhD curricula to lack courses in several important areas. In this respect results indicated that Iran's old and revised curricula lacked the following required courses from their curricula:

- Advanced Linguistics for TESOL (offered by Anaheim and Alliant universities in the US)
- English Language Teacher Education (offered by METU Anaheim University and Colombia University)
- TESOL Fieldwork (offered by Alliant University and Colombia University)
- Current Issues in TESOL (offered by Alliant University)
- Technology and SLA (offered by Anaheim and Alliant universities in the US)
- Psycholinguistics (offered by Anaheim and Alliant universities in the US)
- Socio Linguistics (offered by Anaheim and Alliant universities in the US)

Regarding the last two courses i.e. Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics it is worth mentioning that although these courses were among the required courses of Iran ELT PhD but these two courses were mainly taught as electives in most universities in Iran based on information gathered from ELT PhD graduates from 8 different universities. Another mind boggling area in the proportion of courses allocated was that the number credits allocated to research was significantly low in comparison to five foreign universities. The average number of Research related courses such as Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research, Research Design, TESOL Field Research Project, and Advanced Research Methodology for the three top ranking universities from the US was 16. Limerick University allocated 15 credits to research related courses and the METU from Turkey which as mentioned before is very similar to Iran allocated 4 credits to research related courses.

Accordingly, Language Assessment course which enjoyed a 20% share in the overall credits of required courses in Iran's program was only present in Anaheim University's required course list with a 6% share. The presence of his course in Anaheim's 64 credit required course list however can be ignored when compared to its absence from other 4 universities' lists.

The forth question of the present research focused on finding the views of Iranian ELT PhD graduates and instructors on different aspects of the curriculum. Put into general terms the results of the questionnaire and interviews confirmed the results of similar studies such

as Shirvani (2013), Razi and Kargar (2014), Rahmani (2007) and Mall Amiri (2008) who studied the views of students and teachers on the high school, BA and MA English text books and curriculum. They all showed levels of dissatisfaction on the side of students and instructors and emphasized that the curriculum in general and the text books in special were in need of major modifications. In terms of the present study most ELT PhD candidates believed they needed more interaction with their professors and faculty members. They strongly agreed that they needed to be more actively involved in extra-curricular activities such as seminars, workshops etc. The same respondents did not seem to have positive attitudes towards curriculum content, academic environment and extracurricular activities. The interviewees on the other hand, believed that the goals of ELT PhD were in need of three types of corrective actions including clarification, increasing the number of goals and, informing the students about the goals of ELT PhD programs.

All interviewees agreed that they needed to assess students' knowledge of SLA and scientific reasoning and academic writing skills before they were let in the program. They confirmed that submitting academic references and statement of purpose should become obligatory. This is line with what other five universities do and as 2 of these interviewees had got their PhD abroad they insisted that such requirements are influential in increasing students' academic efforts to get into PhD programs from MA. The results collected from the analyses of interview notes shed further light on the fact that updating syllabi of a curriculum is only one aspect of the ongoing process of curriculum evaluation and revision. The instructors' emphasis on increasing student involvement, extracurricular activities, and required courses indicates that the ELT PhD curriculum is need of change at some other aspects as well.

6. Conclusion

The ELT PhD comparisons so far have revealed what Mehrmohammadi et al. (2012) called the 'illusion of comprehensive curriculum'. The so called comprehensive curricula like that of Iran is the result of an extremely simplistic view on different aspects of curriculum. Iran's curriculum too disregards the concept of 'curriculum implementation' and 'curriculum evaluation' by just designing the curricula and imposing it on different universities. According to Mehrmohammadi et al. (2012) such types of curricula are 'teacher proof" in that they take teachers' roles for granted. Unfortunately, as the findings of the study

revealed the ELT PhD in Iran did not match with the curricula from foreign universities. Curriculum designers need to pay attention to other aspects of curriculum other than syllabi. Letting universities design their own curricula will help them adapt the curriculum with their facilities, policies, funds, and futures plans. This will in turn encourage specific research areas to grow out of such curricula.

Certainly, the goals of any educational are an integral part of it which serve as the roadmap of the program. The revised ELT PhD has fortunately provided more detailed descriptions of program goals and has increased the number of the roles that applicants were assumed to take in future and has therefore become more rigorous in terms of validity. This will enable the (prospective) students and other stake holders to converge their educational activities with more precision and toward these goals. Yet, these goals were more of an operative nature and lacked what might be called the supervisory and evaluative capacity of the PhD programs. The findings on the common goals of the five foreign universities showed that improving national ELT and EFL practices, applying TESOL theory to practice, acting as educational leaders and, the ability to integrate technology into EFL/ELT are the main goals which can be added to the stated goals of Iran ELT PhD curriculum.

With regards to the admission criteria discussed earlier, it seems logical to think that the admission criteria can have a positive wash back effect on the students' performance during MA studies. Such a view sheds more light on the significance of admission criteria for higher education programs. Consequently, the most common criteria among foreign universities were suggested to be added to the current ones in the ELT PhD in Iran. These included presenting at least two academic references, providing the university with a personal statement of purpose, starting with a research proposal, providing proof of proficiency in English at the higher level, and finally, submitting a current resume or CV including full details of qualifications. Adding these admissions criteria challenges the MA students' knowledge and academic records and call for more purposeful and practical attempts for those who aim at continuing their studies at PhD level.

In terms of the courses the findings of the present study revealed that the number of required courses in Iran ELT PhD was significantly lower than five foreign universities under discussion and some areas and concentrations which were present in other programs were lacking from Iran's and revised curriculum. In this respect the following courses need to be added to the list of required courses to become compatible with the foreign universities'

curricula. Advanced Linguistics for ELT, English Language Teacher Education, ELT Fieldwork, Current Issues in ELT, Technology and SLA, Psycholinguistics for ELT, Sociolinguistics for ELT, Qualitative Research Methods, and Quantitative Research Methods.

Moreover, the dissertation course was broken into courses with smaller credits by these two of the top-ranking universities from the US. Anaheim and Alliant Universities divided the number of credits for dissertation into the following course categories. These include Dissertation Plan, Dissertation Proposal, Dissertation Preparation, Dissertation or Project Extension.

Such dividing will make the dissertation process easier to handle and will help students break the herculean task of thesis writing into more manageable tasks which are evaluated and supervised by their advisors constantly. These will further save students' time and energy by keeping them on track.

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