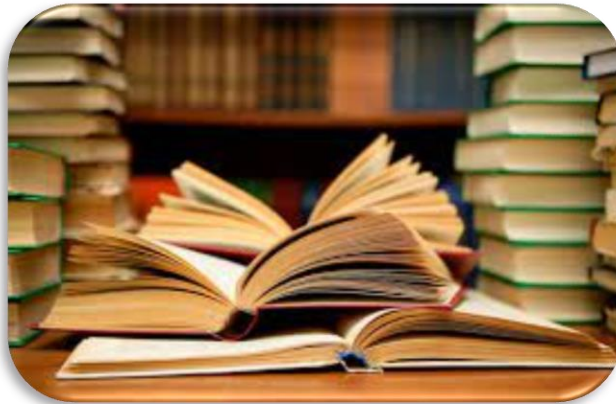




## Research Paper



## Teacher Training or Teacher Draining: A Critical Analysis of Iranian Teacher Training Courses (TTC)

Hamed Zarabi \*<sup>1</sup>, Nadia Gharani<sup>2</sup>, Nima Yamrali<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Gonbad-e-Kavous, Iran

Hamedzarabi97@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Gonbad-e-Kavous, Iran

nadia.gh1998@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Gonbad-e-Kavous, Iran

Nima.y:@icloud.com

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### ABSTRACT

This paper sought to look critically at Iran's teacher training courses (TTCs) to discover the main problems and missing links. To this aim, twenty English teachers (8 men and 12 women) teaching general English courses at five private language institutes in Tehran and Mashhad participated in this study. Through a qualitative approach employing semi-structured interviews the needed data were collected and analyzed. It was worth mentioning that the researchers observed around 200 hours of teacher training courses in Iran for even delving deeper into the problem. By using inductive content analysis, the data were analyzed and the results and findings showed miscellaneous problems in Iran's teacher training courses. The main problems detected were Lack of THEORY, Lack of FREEDOM of CHOICE, Lack of SUPERVISION in the courses, Lack of Teacher REFLECTION, Lack of TECHNOLOGY in education, and Lack of consideration for teachers' PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE. This study had important implications for teacher trainers to work more on their theoretical knowledge and for teachers to choose the right courses for their professional development. Also, this study helps managers and lesson planners to hold better courses by eradicating these problems.

**Keywords:** Teacher Training Courses (TTC), Teacher Education Programs, Trainers, Trainees.

### تربیت معلم یا تخلیه معلم: تحلیل انتقادی دوره های تربیت معلم ایرانی (TTC)

این مقاله به دنبال نگاهی انتقادی به دوره های تربیت معلم ایران (TTCs) برای کشف مشکلات اصلی و حلقه های مفقود است. برای این منظور، ۲۰ مدرس زبان انگلیسی (۸ مرد و ۱۲ زن) به تدریس دروس عمومی زبان انگلیسی در پنج موسسه زبان خصوصی در تهران و مشهد در این پژوهش شرکت کردند. با رویکرد کیفی و با استفاده از مصاحبه های نیمه ساختاریافته، داده های مورد نیاز جمع آوری و مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت. شایان ذکر است که محققان حدود ۲۰۰ ساعت دوره تربیت معلم را در ایران مشاهده کردند تا حتی بیشتر به این مشکل بپردازند. با استفاده از تحلیل محتوای استقرایی، داده ها مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت و نتایج و یافته ها مشکلات متفرقه ای را در دوره های تربیت معلم ایران نشان داد. عمده ترین مشکلات شناسایی شده فقدان تئوری، نداشتن آزادی انتخاب، عدم نظارت در دروس، عدم تأمل معلم، فقدان فن آوری در آموزش و عدم توجه به دانش قبلی معلمان بود. این مطالعه پیامدهای مهمی برای مربیان معلم داشت تا بیشتر روی دانش نظری خود کار کنند و معلمان دروس مناسب را برای رشد حرفه ای خود انتخاب کنند. همچنین این مطالعه به مدیران و برنامه ریزان درسی کمک می کند تا با رفع این مشکلات، دوره های بهتری را برگزار کنند.

## INTRODUCTION

### **(English) Teacher Training Courses**

Teacher Training Courses refer to educational programs designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and pedagogical competencies of individuals who aspire to become teachers or who are already teaching in various educational settings (Borg, 2015). Such courses are designed to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach effectively and efficiently in their respective fields. In the case of English Teacher Training Courses, the programs focus on developing the language proficiency and teaching methodologies of teachers in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL).

Recent studies have shown the importance of English Teacher Training Courses in improving the quality of English language teaching. For instance, a study conducted by Chang, Hsu, and Wang (2019) on the effectiveness of a teacher training program on EFL teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices found that the program positively impacted teachers' beliefs and practices, leading to improved student learning outcomes.

Another study by Mirshahidi and Khodadady (2021) examined the impact of teacher training courses on Iranian EFL teachers' instructional practices and reported significant improvements in teachers' use of communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques and overall teaching effectiveness.

English Teacher Training Courses also aim to enhance teachers' language proficiency, which is crucial in teaching English as a second or foreign language. In a study by Yilmaz and Ergin (2019), it was found that participating in a teacher training course significantly improved Turkish EFL teachers' language proficiency, leading to more effective teaching and better student outcomes.

In conclusion, English Teacher Training Courses play a crucial role in improving the quality of English language teaching. These courses provide teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and language proficiency to teach effectively in ESL/EFL contexts. Recent studies have shown the effectiveness of such courses in improving teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, instructional techniques, and language proficiency.

### **Second Language Teacher Training Courses (Its Revisions in the World and Iran)**

The development of second language teacher education is relatively new, despite the long history of teacher education programs. Teachers of second or foreign languages have typically been either native speakers of the target language or had some level of established proficiency in it. If instructors from one of these two sources had degrees or had completed other educational courses, they were typically in the literature and culture of the target language. It's true that frequently the only requirement was simply being a native speaker. The teaching and learning of second languages, both in terms of actual instruction and the preparation of second language teachers, have, however, experienced a meteoric rise over the past thirty years.

According to a review of the changes in teacher training programs occurring in both developed and developing countries, Raouf (2000) has come to the conclusion that many countries have realized the necessity of revising their teacher training programs. Teacher training has thus become a focus of attention in many nations. The two nations of Japan and the United States were compared in a study by Vivienne and Ono (2001). The study found that the teacher training programs in these two nations needed to be improved and revised.

Villegas and Reimers (2000) compared teacher training programs and how teachers develop in these nations, including the UK, Germany, Holland, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, Ukraine, Japan, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Israel, North America, and Canada. According to the study's findings, a good teacher preparation program must begin with pre-service training and continue through in-service programs in order to give students a true sense of the profession.

Iran has undergone numerous revisions and changes over the years regarding teacher training. A few studies have looked into Iranian teacher training programs, though. According to Estiri (1995), candidates for teacher training programs claimed that the lessons they had learned there weren't very useful for their classroom instruction. According to Kashef (1999), applicants majoring in physical education cited the lack of class time and practical training as two of the teacher education facilities' biggest issues. Abedi (1998) argued that the Association of Arts/Science's (AA/S) course materials lacked the necessary teaching techniques.

According to Tavana (1994), who studied evaluation and assessment, evaluation is carried out more theoretically than practically. The same idea was put forth by Liyaghatdar (2002), who claimed that practical courses do not aid in the practice of teachers and that the majority of the way teaching applicants are evaluated is theoretical.

### **The Need for Teacher Training Courses**

Numerous studies have demonstrated the need for teachers who are more skilled and efficient (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Lewis & Young, 2013). Or, to put it another way, in order to adapt to the changing needs of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education, teachers must rebuild their professional knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Continuous professional development is the main strategy for achieving this. Programs for teacher development can be very beneficial in this regard. In order to become qualified teachers, preservice EFL teachers, according to Ogilvie and Dunn (2010), go through a transformation from learners to teachers. Compared to later in their careers, when practical knowledge has stabilized, teacher candidates are more open to innovation. The training of qualified teachers with the requisite abilities to enhance students' language learning processes is also necessary for EFL instruction in the post-method condition (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

According to Kumaravadivelu (2001), the purpose of post-method teacher education is to develop independent teacher candidates who are capable of reflecting on their own teaching practices and acquiring the necessary "pedagogical content knowledge" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). Shulman (1987) divided the knowledge bases of L2 teachers into various categories in his widely used model, with content knowledge (i.e. e. subject-matter expertise), pedagogical expertise (i.e., teaching methodologies), and pedagogical content expertise (i. e., a synthesis of pedagogical and content knowledge) can be mentioned. The exchange of pedagogical and subject-matter knowledge, which manifests in the transformation of subject-matter knowledge in the actual teaching practice, is the key to the knowledge base of teachers, according to Shulman (1987). The development of new standards for the specification of the content of EFL teacher education programs can actually aid in professionalization thanks to research on pedagogical content knowledge (Guntermann, 1993).



## Significance of the Study

The significance of studying the flaws of English Teacher Training Courses in Iran lies in the fact that the quality of teacher training directly affects the quality of education in the country. According to Khezrlou et al. (2017), "teacher education is the backbone of educational development and improvement, and the quality of teacher education directly affects the quality of education in any society" (p. 227). Therefore, identifying the flaws in English teacher training courses in Iran can lead to the improvement of the quality of education in the country. Furthermore, an updated inquiry is essential to investigate the limitations and detrimental aspects of Teacher Training Courses (TTCs) in Iran from various perspectives, especially those of the trainees. This is apparent from all previous investigations in the field of teacher training courses. Therefore, the researchers aimed to enhance our comprehension of Iranian teacher training programs. The main objective of this research was to address the information gap regarding whether teacher education programs in Iran genuinely prepare prospective teachers or are solely designed to exhaust current teachers to promote non-academic goals. Thus, this study was of utmost significance for Iranian language teachers and teacher educators.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Program Evaluation

Program evaluation, according to Robinson (2003), is the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data in order to make decisions about the merits of a given program. The objective is to give the necessary information regarding program accountability and improvement (Peacock, 2009). According to Brown (1989), five factors should be taken into account when evaluating any program: a needs analysis, goals, and objectives, assessment methods, materials, and teaching. A dynamic process of curriculum development can be created by evaluating each component. He contends that the effectiveness of a language program depends on how well these stages of curriculum development have been carried out. He continued by pointing out that evaluation data should be used to assess and improve the program.

It is a noble and developing profession to evaluate educational programs. It wasn't until the middle of the 1960s, when efforts to systematically evaluate the quality of educational programs multiplied, that the term "program evaluation" began to be used widely (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005). According to Peacock (2009), this kind of evaluation serves the above-mentioned purpose of providing information to decision-makers who are in charge of the suggested or existing educational programs. For instance, program evaluation could be helpful to decision-makers who are debating whether to develop a program (needs assessment), how best to develop a program (formative evaluation), or whether to modify—and even continue—an existing program (summative evaluation) (Robinson, 2003).

According to Wholey et al. (2010), a program is a collection of resources and activities that are focused on one or more common goals and are ordinarily managed by a single manager or management team. A program may consist of a particular set of activities carried out by a single agency or a complex set of activities carried out by two or more governmental levels, a collection of for-profit, non-profit, and public providers, and implemented at numerous sites. On the other hand, program evaluation entails the gathering, examination, and interpretation of data in order to make decisions regarding the merits of a specific program (Wholey et al., 2010). Needs assessment is the method used to identify needs and establish priorities among them. It is one of the fundamental elements of any program evaluation process.





Summative evaluation refers to the process of evaluating a program after it has been running, while formative evaluation refers to the process where the evaluator works with the program developer.

In the literature, a number of models for program evaluation have been put forth. According to Brown (1989), every program evaluation in the literature on education can be divided into one of four groups: product-oriented approaches, static-characteristic approaches, process-oriented approaches, and decision-facilitation approaches. Brown (1989) employed a number of models to develop and evaluate a language curriculum. He asserts that the process of creating curricula and assessing them entails several steps, including needs analysis, objective specification, material development, teaching activities, and evaluation procedures.

Worthen et al. (2004) called our attention to additional evaluation strategies in the meantime. They contend that the value of alternative approaches lies in their ability to stimulate our thinking, present novel concepts and methods, and act as mental checklists for things we need to think about, keep in mind, or be concerned about. They sparked an eclectic approach to program evaluation, which combines a number of evaluation methods. This study addresses various program components as recommended by Brown (1989), while also taking into account Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen's (2004) eclectic evaluation approach.

Recent years have seen a significant and widespread increase in program evaluation. According to Balint (2009), general educational program evaluations have a large body of literature compared to language-specific evaluation studies. The growing and significant amount of textbooks and journal articles in this field show that language program evaluation is a significant but unresolved problem in the teaching of English as a second language. Balint also makes reference to two outstanding pieces that had a significant impact on how language programs are evaluated today. The first piece written by Bachman (1981) promotes curriculum development by utilizing formative evaluation administered by curriculum planners. The second study, carried out by Long (1984), had a discernible effect on shifting evaluators' perspectives from product-oriented language program evaluation approaches to process-oriented ones. Regarding the evaluation of second language programs, Cumming (1988) takes an "idealistic stance". According to him, language program evaluations are practical and useful in more ways than just serving the interests of the program's administrators. He believes that evaluation studies are instructive tasks that can benefit the growth of students, teachers, and programs.

Cumming (1988), after reviewing a number of evaluation studies, identified seven educational advantages of program evaluation: validating educational innovations, guiding program development, illuminating learner perspectives, defining an educational rationale, exposing social inequalities, and appreciating the art of education.

### **Evaluation of TTCs**

Studies evaluating pre-service teacher training programs in EFL contexts have looked at participant perceptions of the program's suitability (e.g., Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Mirhassani & Beh-Afarin, 2004; Peacock, 2009) or the adoption of fresh training plans or instructional techniques to produce teachers who are more self-reflective (e.g., Lee, 2007; Liou, 2001; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010).

Ogilvie and Dunn (2010), for instance, examined the impact of a task-based course on trainees' perspectives toward the principles of task-based instruction in an exploratory study on pre-service teachers in Taiwan. The researchers hypothesized, based on quantitative and qualitative analyses, that



the course improved the trainees' disposition toward such instruction, but that the favorable disposition did not translate into actual use or implementation during the practicum.

Peacock (2009) proposed a new method for evaluating EFL teacher-training programs in an evaluation study conducted in Hong Kong. The process centered on the program's advantages and disadvantages as well as how well it met the needs of the teacher candidates. The model proposed a list of fifteen questions that address significant elements of program philosophy, knowledge base, and teacher education model. The results showed that the program had many positive aspects, such as the promotion of reflection and self-evaluation and the teaching of pedagogical skills, but it also had some negative aspects: proper attention was not given to teaching practice and classroom management skills.

Coskun and Daloglu (2010) attempted, using Peacock's (2009) model, to identify the pre-service English teacher training elements that, from the viewpoints of teachers and students, needed improvement or maintenance. The study was conducted in a Turkish setting. Some program elements, including the pedagogical side and linguistic competence, required improvement, according to the data gathered through questionnaires and interviews.

Targeted teacher training programs have also been developed for the Iranian EFL market. However, in-service teacher preparation was the focus of the majority of the studies (e.g., Atai & Asadi, 2014; Hashemian & Azadi, 2010). It appears that Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004) assessed the pre-service EFL teacher training program in Iran to determine whether the communicative language teaching methodology was applied in such a course. In a thorough survey-based study, Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004) attempted to assess the state of Iranian EFL teacher training programs with regard to the incorporation of the communicative approach. 589 people participated in the study to achieve this goal. The findings showed that participants were unhappy with the program's current state, there was a disconnect between what participants expected from the program and their current circumstances, the communicative approach could not be easily incorporated into the programs, and the majority of participants expressed a need for a revision in such programs.

According to Nezakat-Alhossaini and Ketabi (2013), teacher training in Iran requires significant reforms in terms of scheduling study time, course material, job considerations, and the level of practicality required for such a vocational practice of teaching. The fact that EFL teachers in Iran have access to low-quality training systems makes this statement about all teacher education majors, which is also true, even more important.

Additionally, the findings of a different study showed that teachers generally had positive attitudes toward online learning opportunities, and the use of new technology presents opportunities for teachers to engage in learning activities, collaborate with peers, and reflect. Teachers draw attention to the fact that the planning and evaluation phases of the online course, the contextual needs of teachers, as well as the traits of teachers and their facilities, their internet knowledge, and computer literacy, need to be taken into account. Teachers in the current research project said they would like more time and materials like handouts, CDs, and other resources. to be used in the classroom and for future reference. Administrative authorities should therefore provide technological infrastructures to satisfy these needs (Amirian et al., 2016).

Another study demonstrated that there are numerous problems with these teacher preparation programs, including management issues, teacher absenteeism, financial difficulties, and human resource concerns (Farah et al., 2016).



In line with Baniasad-Azad et al. (2016) found that even the trainers were not involved in the creation of the program because they were only disseminating the materials presented by textbook authors. Their findings also showed a discrepancy between what teachers thought was helpful for their development and what was actually included in the programs. Due to Iran's centralized educational system, where practicing teachers are not involved in the decision-making process, there is currently a discrepancy between macro plans and teachers' practices and preferences.

It was also discovered that EFL teachers themselves lacked the necessary education and proficiency in four key skills to instruct them. The academic reading abilities of EFL teachers can be a focus of TTCs. Additionally, English language seminars and training programs may be essential for keeping their subject-matter expertise and teaching abilities current. More credits could be added to CALL-related courses to increase EFL teacher trainees' exposure to computers, software, and applications. This would help EFL teachers become more computer literate. So that teacher candidates are familiar with both theoretical and practical issues, more courses on research methodology should be offered. Teacher educators can familiarize teacher trainees with the various parts of a research article through modeling, and teacher trainees can also be taught how to conduct action research. A genre-based instruction can be extremely helpful in assisting teacher trainees to conduct academic research (Khanjani et al., 2017).

Tajik et al., (2019) used the reflections of 12 beginning English language teachers, three supervisors, and three private language institutes with headquarters in Tehran to examine the level of teacher preparation in the country's roughly 420 language schools. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, teacher diaries, unofficial peer interviews, and observation of sporadic meetings between supervisors and teachers were used to collect a lot of data. The data were investigated using an inductive analysis procedure. Current language teacher training programs in the context of concern may benefit from various improvements in the areas of the theory-practice gap, supervised in-service workshops, reflective teaching techniques, the use of technology, and teachers' experiential learning.

Last but not least, Nikoobin (2021) aimed to assess teacher training courses (TTCs) in a number of institutes in Isfahan, Iran, in order to investigate the teachers' perspectives on the status and features of this program. She specifically asked language teachers' opinions on the TTC program's elements (duration, intensity, instructors, practicum) and contents (topics covered in the program, teaching the skills, theory). 34 language teachers were asked to complete a survey for her purposes in order to learn more about how participant teachers felt about the TTC program's components. Additionally, the teachers were asked to participate in an interview session in order to express their views on the overall value of the teacher training programs they had taken. Overall, the results showed that teachers were happy with the program's various components. The program's "instructors" and "teaching the skills" sections, respectively, were deemed by the teachers to be its most useful feature and subject matter.

### **Recent Empirical Studies on the Ups and Downs of TTCs in the World**

English teacher training courses have long been recognized as a crucial aspect of improving the quality of English language education in different contexts. However, recent studies have highlighted both the importance and potential drawbacks of these courses, as explored below.

Importance of English teacher training courses: Many recent studies have emphasized the importance of English teacher training courses in improving teachers' pedagogical knowledge, skills, and confidence. For instance, a study by La Velle et al. (2020) found that participating in an online teacher



training program significantly improved EFL teachers' self-efficacy and their ability to apply communicative language teaching principles. Similarly, Kochem (2022) found that a training program focusing on task-based language teaching helped English teachers enhance their teaching practices and students' language proficiency. Another recent study by Malu and Tweuhanda (2023) found that a professional development program that included reflective teaching practices improved the teaching effectiveness of English teachers in Angola.

Moreover, some studies have highlighted the importance of considering pedagogical factors in designing English teacher training courses. For example, a study by Risan (2022) found that a teacher training program that incorporated the pedagogical tasks and students' needs was more effective in improving the teaching practices of English language teachers.

Drawbacks of English teacher training courses: While the importance of English teacher training courses is widely recognized, some recent studies have also pointed out their potential drawbacks. For instance, Vogt et al. (2020) argued that teacher training programs may not necessarily lead to improved teaching practices, as they may not address the root causes of teachers' challenges in implementing new approaches or technologies in the classroom. Similarly, Winje and Løndal (2021) found that some teacher training programs may focus more on theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills, leading to a gap between what teachers learn in the courses and what they actually apply in the classroom.

Another potential drawback of English teacher training courses is related to the sustainability of their impact. For instance, a study by Goller and Rieckmann (2022) found that although a training program on effective feedback practices had a positive impact on EFL teachers' feedback practices, this impact diminished over time due to various factors such as workload, lack of support, and resistance to change.

In conclusion, recent studies have highlighted both the importance and drawbacks of English teacher training courses. While these courses can be effective in enhancing teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, they need to be designed with consideration of cultural and contextual factors and focus on practical skills rather than just theoretical knowledge. Moreover, the sustainability of the impact of these courses needs to be addressed through continuous support and monitoring of teachers' practices in the classroom.

However, a new study is required to investigate the flaws and detrimental elements of TTCs in Iran from various perspectives, particularly those of the trainees. This is evident from all previous studies in the field of teacher training courses. The authors of the study, therefore, hoped that it would advance our knowledge of Iranian teacher training programs. The goal of the current study was to close the knowledge gap regarding whether teacher education programs in Iran are actually designed to prepare future teachers or are merely designed to drain existing teachers in order to further non-scientific goals. For Iranian language instructors and teacher trainers, this study was therefore extremely important. Hence, the following research questions were formulated to address the gap in the literature:

*What are the weaknesses of teacher training courses in the context of Iran?*

## METHODOLOGY

In this section, we go into greater detail about the study's context, participant characteristics, research design, methods for gathering data, and data analysis techniques.





## Design of the Study

After selecting the subject to investigate, we bargained the study's specifics. We intended to frame the study using a qualitative grounded-theory type of design (first made popular by Glaser & Strauss, 1967) due to the nature of this investigation. According to a number of academics, such as Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Pidgeon and Henwood (1997), grounded theory entails either inferring a theory from data or developing a theory from the data. Furthermore, Charmaz (1990, 2000, 2002, 2006), who favored a social constructionist version of grounded theory, noted that in this type of qualitative design, the researcher constructs categories and theories through an interaction with the data. We chose grounded theory because we needed to categorize problems with the nation's current teacher-training programs using data from new teachers and language supervisors. This framework then served as a guide for all stages of carrying out this research, including the creation of research questions and the gathering and analysis of pertinent data. Next, we chose the study sites; we picked five of the most renowned language institutions with a wide range of language schools across the nation. We selected these organizations because they are among the best places to learn a language and because they have many branches, a review of their teacher education programs could provide insight into how ELT teacher education is conducted in these language organizations. As far as sampling size was concerned, we were aware that we needed to reach data saturation, or the point at which newly acquired data could no longer yield novel insights.

## Location of the Study

Five private language institutes with headquarters in Tehran and Mashhad and a total of more than 300 teaching facilities in Tehran or other cities across the nation participated in this study. They all had different language learning populations in mind, including those with beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced levels of general English language proficiency. They provided different course books, but they were all designed to help students become more proficient communicators. The institutes provided weekend courses as well as intensive and ultra-intensive classes on odd or even days. They used somewhat comparable standards and criteria when hiring teachers. First, candidates for the position of a teacher had to satisfy the entry requirement of having a level of language proficiency that was either upper intermediate or advanced as determined by an exam and an interview. They then had to finish an initial Teacher Training Course (TTC), a common certification policy, in their respective institutes in order to achieve qualified teacher status. Since TTCs were scheduled at specific intervals, it was possible that, in a few rare instances, an institute in need of teachers might recruit a few individuals before they could enroll in the institute's training program. In these instances, the recruited individuals were obligated to complete the first TTC scheduled at the institute after their recruitment. The TTCs delivered in various institutes shared similar content and training requirements, with syllabi containing a carefully planned and balanced selection of language content, even though each institute had its own teacher education unit that made decisions about the program's content, instructors, and implementation of the course and related programs. The expectation was that after spending between 30 and 40 hours in the training program, the student teachers would have acquired a significant amount of hands-on teaching experience, which was assessed through a teaching demonstration. Teachers who completed the course requirements successfully went on to work as instructors in various language schools. Head instructors or supervisors visited the classes at predetermined or ad hoc intervals to ensure the quality of instruction.



## **Participants**

After we planned the details of the study, we gained the permission of the managers of the five institutes to conduct our research in their contexts. We explained the purposes of the study as well as the type of data we needed. We promised not to reveal the names of their participants or their language institutes. Though we intended to continue data collection to the time when no new information emerged from the data.

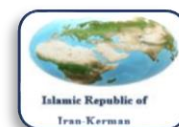
Twenty English teachers (8 men and 12 women) teaching general English courses at five private language institutes in Tehran and Mashhad—named institutes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in this study—participated in this study, as well as five supervisors, each from a different language institute. Using a purposive sampling method, teachers were chosen. The reason for this type of sampling was that the researchers were looking for some teachers who have just participated in some teacher training programs. Due to their recent participation in TTCs and ability to recall their specifics, we chose novice teachers. They had also been teaching for a while so they could discuss how their training had affected the way they taught. Teachers had between six and twelve months of experience in the classroom; fourteen of them had earned a BA, and six had earned an MA.

The five language institutes' supervisors and teachers both took part in the study. Due to the fact that they were the participants who could offer comprehensive and in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation, we purposefully selected them through purposive sampling. With between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience and between 4 and 10 years of experience as teacher trainers, there were two females and three males. All five supervisors were in close contact with the teacher participants and had experience training inexperienced teachers in their language institute.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection started as soon as the study's specifics were worked out. One of the authors of this article, who had taught in Institute 1, was in charge of gathering the data because she was more familiar with the setting of the language institutes. He regularly met with the other two authors, who were English teachers, to make sure he was following the right path and to check all of his actions. He first chose the participants using a criterion-referenced sampling method. In addition to ensuring that they met the necessary requirements, he made an effort to find teachers who were eager to work with him and who could manage their time well for the data collection methods of the study. Before beginning data collection, he gave participants a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, outlined the different types of information he hoped to obtain from them, requested their permission to record the interviews and workshops on audio and let them know that their information would be used to write an academic paper.

He started gathering data at the start of the summer term, and it continued for three subsequent semesters or roughly six months. He asked all teachers to keep diaries following each class session as a way to start gathering data. He instructed them to write about the challenges and difficulties they encountered while teaching and to discuss whether or not their training program could have aided them in overcoming them. Along with asking teachers to keep journals, the researcher also asked them to take part in semi-structured interviews to discuss their perspectives on current TTCs, their expectations for appropriate and effective L2 education programs, and their experiences with L2 teacher education programs. All interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher for transcription purposes later. Interviews began with the warm-up and introduction phases, during which the facilitator—who was also the researcher—explained the goal of the discussion session. Every participant had enough time to



express their thoughts after each question was posed to the group on the main stage. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. The researcher provided a summary of the key points at the conclusion stage. For future transcription, all sessions were audio recorded.

We used two methods to collect data from all teachers: teacher diaries and semi-structured interviews. In the academic setting, a diary is a tool used to record the introspective or retrospective reflection or perceptions of a teacher or learner about their teaching or learning (Bailey, 1990; Bailey & Ochsner, 1983; McDonough & McDonough, 1997). A useful tool for identifying teaching or learning realities that cannot be identified through direct research observation is a diary (Bailey, 1990; Numrich, 1996; Nunan, 1992). They could be a valuable source of information for figuring out how teachers actually teach (Palmer, 1992; Russell & Munby, 1991). Another tool for gathering data in qualitative research is the semi-structured interview, which is a verbal process composed of predetermined semiformal questions that permit further explanation and/or exploration of the questions or answers as needed (Dörnyei, 2007). This method gives researchers access to teachers' beliefs and thinking in addition to other advantages (Patton, 1990).

In addition to these strategies, another technique was used to gather information from institutes: participant observation (Tracy, 2012) of teacher meetings. Observation is the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting selected for study, according to Marshall and Rossman (1989). Participant observation is a technique that enables researchers to gain knowledge about the actions of the subjects of their research in their natural environment by watching and taking part in those actions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010).

The information about supervisors was lastly gathered through semi-structured interviews. The present study, therefore, used a variety of qualitative data collection techniques. We were able to detect teachers' beliefs regarding the current teacher education programs using a variety of methods with varying degrees of sensitivity (Borg, 2006; Phipps, 2009). In fact, researchers increased their understanding of teachers' thoughts on the training programs available by triangulating their findings from various sources.

## Data Analysis

The three researchers conducted data analysis using the grounded-theory framework. To analyze all data, including transcriptions of semi-structured interviews, teacher diaries, and direct observations, we used an inductive analysis procedure (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997) while working within this framework. That is, after the data were transcribed into their original content, we divided the data into separate instances of the programs' problematic areas. Next, we assigned labels to each category based on its content, identifying a troublesome area. Finally, labels for the categories were added.

## RESULTS

### Interview Analysis

This section reports the outcome of the analysis of participants' beliefs about current L2 teacher training programs and makes references to features they mentioned for an effective program. It summarizes six categories that emerged from different sources of data collection. The categories are the followings:

1. Lack of THEORY
2. Lack of FREEDOM of CHOICE



3. Lack of SUPERVISION in the courses
4. Lack of Teacher REFLECTION
5. Lack of TECHNOLOGY in education
6. Lack of consideration for teachers' PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

The categories that emerged from the data are presented, discussed, and illustrated in the sections that follow. Please be aware that the conclusions drawn from the various data collection sources will not be presented under distinct headings because all of the conclusions were supported by data from multiple sources, and none of the categories were obtained solely from one of the sources. Consequently, we use excerpts from transcripts that we obtained from various sources to illustrate the categories.

### 1. Lack of THEORY

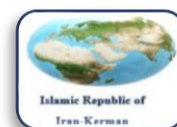
The majority of participants' data were used to create the first category, which was comprised of instances illustrating participants' dissatisfaction with the training programs' lack of integration between theory and practice.

The lack of adequate professional training and support for teachers to deal with the various and novel issues they would encounter in their actual classes was a major point of concern raised by all participants. They complained that teacher training courses provided too much "practice" and demanded that they prepare teachers for new-teacher situations when they encounter brand-new issues that were not addressed in the TTCs. They believed that teacher educators could solve this issue by allowing teachers to participate in practical courses and gain a thorough understanding of the fundamental theories underlying the instruction of the English language. Participants thought this theory could have helped them in a variety of ways, such as by giving them a place to encounter challenging situations in actual settings and ask for advice from mentors or peers, as well as by easing their anxiety about starting to teach by allowing them to understand classroom contexts and their own teaching abilities. The following findings were drawn by two instructors:

*Over 80% of our TTC was practice, so it was very brief. Despite having passed it less than three months ago, I have no memory of the practices, but I do clearly recall some of the theories. I don't mean to imply that practice is unimportant; rather, I'm saying that when they presented these, they ought to have explained why they chose to engage in this particular activity, allowing us to apply our theoretical knowledge to actual situations. (semi-structured interview)*

*I encountered numerous issues when I first began teaching after completing my TTC because I was terrified of my pupils even though I was unaware of this while I was there. Before I started learning the theoretical underpinnings of my classroom practices, I couldn't even begin to imagine how much I hated teaching. I realized after three months of teaching that this is not a profession in which I can be successful. (Interview, semi-structured).*

Supervisors and teachers both agreed that teacher preparation programs have a stereotypical focus, emphasizing more the practical than the theoretical aspects of teaching. Despite initially seeming unwilling to acknowledge problems with their training courses, they eventually expressed dissatisfaction with the inability of current programs to provide a clear image of the theories in language teaching in response to the researcher's questions. They recalled being dissatisfied with the classroom behavior of the teachers because they placed an excessive emphasis on the actual practical activities, as evidenced by their observations of practitioners in the classroom. One supervisor alleged that:



*I think that TTCs not being held in the proper manner contributes to some of teachers' failures. They're very intense, and as a teacher, I only have a very limited amount of time to introduce teachers to the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching. Teachers frequently leave classes with a very different impression than when they arrived. We needed to acquaint teachers in TTCs with theoretical and psychological skills as well as management or practical skills. Sometimes when I watch their classes, I feel like the students want to run away. (Supervisor).*

The majority of teachers argued that the preparation they received in teacher preparation programs was insufficient to prepare them to handle the variety and novelty of situations they encounter in their classes, which can be frustrating for teachers. Practitioners felt that what they learned in their training program about teaching skills was very different from actually having to teach them. One instructor said:

*I realized I wasn't qualified the first time I wanted to teach the alphabet. I questioned why I hadn't received the right amount of formal education on how to instruct the English alphabet. To be completely honest, I don't recall learning anything about teaching the alphabet during the training. (diary).*

*We have many students in one class at our institute who range in age and academic proficiency. The manager enrolls a large number of students in our classes in an effort to save money. It can be challenging to manage many students of various ages and linguistic backgrounds when you're a novice teacher like me. I made an effort to instruct in the same manner in which I had been taught, but I was at a loss for ideas. Because I lacked the theoretical knowledge necessary, I lacked the creativity to devise a novel practice. In the TTC, we haven't yet learned how to handle these problems. (diary).*

## **2. Lack of FREEDOM of CHOICE**

Additionally, practitioners bemoaned the fact that the practice of classroom observations receives insufficient attention in current training programs. Teachers recalled that they required explanations of the rationale for this practice, its advantages and disadvantages, and how to respond to the observer's criticisms of their classes. The lack of teacher feedback training among the observers angered our survey respondents. Further, they questioned the very act of being observed, which they felt limited their teacher's flexibility. Worse yet, they believed that the strict guidelines for classroom behavior set forth by the observers would make the class boring for the students if they were followed. In her diary, a teacher noted:

*The freedom to modify the teaching recommendations made for them by teacher educators by teachers must be given to them. However, in reality, if teachers fail to meet one of the requirements set forth by the institute, the observer will mark it off their checklist, which is bad for us. (diary).*

In the same vein, teachers asserted that at times they had been given contradictory feedback from different observers, resulting in their confusion:

*Everything in the TTC I passed appeared to be ideal in theory. But once I started teaching, I realized that there was a serious issue called being observed. Every time I have an observer in my class, they point out numerous errors in my instruction, though I assume that I am doing what they expected of me. I get conflicting feedback from various central office observers. I get anxious when I have problems like this and I don't feel good when I know I'm going to be watched. It's as if you are restricted from doing what you believe is best for your class, and your creativity will suffer as a result of being told what to do and what not to do. (Interview, semi-structured).*





From the above-mentioned excerpt, it generally follows that teacher courses have not been able to provide teachers with a sufficient theoretical basis for their pedagogical practice, even after several months of pedagogical experience, our teachers are still frustrated by certain questions related to theory.

### 3. Lack of SUPERVISION in the courses

The requirement to conduct adequate, supervised in-service workshops was mentioned by almost all participants.

*When I participated in workshops, I didn't receive any helpful guidelines about how to treat my students or how to teach English to kids or adults. The focus of workshops should be much broader than how to teach the skills I guess. So, it was not very beneficial for me. All the practical aspects of teaching which were discussed in workshops were available on the internet. I needed someone to give me feedback and watch me and tell me my strengths and weaknesses (semi-structured interview)*

Along with the teachers, all of the supervisors agreed on the value and necessity of systematic, in-service supervised workshops, or what they referred to as on-the-job training, to support teachers as they pursue their professional development.

*Unquestionably, we cannot teach everything in TTC, and even if we bring the best TTC trainer in the world and gather the most talented and enthusiastic teachers, there would undoubtedly be many issues when teachers entered the classroom. This is comparable to trying to teach someone how to drive and telling them they can't become a good driver until they drive themselves and hit a pole. On paper, in-service training is therefore a very important issue, but in reality, financial constraints prevent us from implementing it. (Supervisor)*

Almost all of our participants were aware of the benefits of participating in in-service workshops at their language institutes, as the preceding section makes clear.

### 4. Lack of Teacher REFLECTION

This problem seemed to trouble teachers more across all institutes. a teacher made the following comment:

*My classes would be boring for the students if I wanted to carry out exactly the tasks that my instructors wanted me to do in the classroom. A teacher is not a machine to repeat things. I should be able to reflect on what works in my classes and understand the role of a teacher's creativity and differences from other teachers. The information provided by TTC educators isn't always effective. (semi-structured interview)*

Our participants valued the time to reflect on their own practices and were aware of the training programs' shortcomings in promoting teacher reflection, as shown by these teachers' concern.

### 5. Lack of TECHNOLOGY in education

The responses from the teacher participants indicated that there had not been enough introduction to and use of educational technology tools in their TTCs. Teachers talked about how crucial it is to use technology in the classroom and to give students access to digital learning resources. At the same time, they pointed out that given the quick technological advancements currently occurring, such as the emergence of online educational movies, numerous educational websites, and tools for learning languages like electronic portfolios, teacher educators should have gotten more use out of these new tools. One teacher stated:



*I had anticipated a more technologically advanced TTC. I believe that computer-based technologies offer new opportunities for educators. If educators made use of these resources, they would have more freedom to choose the time and location of their classes. To get advice on creating a lesson plan, we could engage in online discussions with teachers. We could learn more and educators could spend more time with us in this way. (diary)*

As the example demonstrates, neither the updated educational technology tools nor the technology-integrated teaching strategies have been implemented in the teacher education programs of our concern.

## 6. Lack of consideration for teachers' PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

In spite of the fact that their prior experiences as students could have provided them with valuable insights into their teaching practice, some of the teachers claimed that there was no place for them in teacher training programs. The significance of the problem to our participants is illustrated by the following excerpts:

*My teacher at the first English-learning institute I attended advised us to create our own personal dictionaries and to memorize vocabulary. I didn't learn anything there; all I could do was memorize a small amount of vocabulary, and I couldn't talk until I switched institutes. We enjoyed having the opportunity to act out role-plays in the new institute. Having learned from these experiences, I can now help my students learn more by empathizing with them and remembering how I could have learned English faster. (semi-structured interview)*

*The teacher disregarded my comments about my experiences learning English. They might allow us some time to talk with our coworkers about the special learning experiences we've had. (diary)*

### Direct Observation Analysis

Before mentioning the common points among all these teacher training courses, the researchers wanted to explain the syllabus and format of these teacher training courses. Each course lasted at least 20 hours and all of them claimed that their course contained both theoretical and practical aspects of teaching, though the reality was something else. Each course, at least, had two instructors and the end of each course was supposed to be held an exam to test the level of students after instruction for awarding their degrees. The researchers were insider participants and emic researchers and observe and note down all things carefully and in detail. All sessions were held at the end of the week on Thursdays and Fridays in Iran from morning (10 a.m.) to evening (5 p.m.). The followings were the common points that were observed by the researchers:

1. **Intensive sessions of teaching:** All teacher training courses in Iran were too intensive with long hours of teaching classes.
2. **Lack of sound knowledge of instructors:** The researchers observed that almost 90 percent of Iran's teacher trainers in these courses didn't have adequate theoretical and methodological knowledge about the nature of language, theories of language, different terms, and definition of terminologies in language and also lack of sound knowledge about methods of teaching and learning. Sadly, illiteracy among Iran's teacher trainers is the biggest problem. Because they all see themselves as a practitioner, they have far little theoretical and methodological knowledge.
3. **Lack of sufficient equipment:** All classes were too hot in the summer. Also, there existed no computer or instructional device for students in classes during the teacher training courses.



4. **Heterogeneous students:** No placement tests were held for homogenizing the participants. Most of the participants were from various fields of study and apparently, the observers observed that most of the participants had miscellaneous levels of English ability. In a nutshell, the classes contained heterogeneous participants which was one of the biggest hurdles in Iran's TTCs.
5. **Hidden financial purposes:** Unfortunately, the hidden purpose behind all these courses were just to take out money from the participants' pockets instead of really teaching them something useful to be used in the future. The researchers most of the time heard from participants that they asserted they have paid a lot of money but they didn't learn anything important or useful.
6. **Arrogance of the teacher trainers:** Another problem that observers observed among all Iran's teacher trainers was statements such as "*I'm the best role model. So copy me*" or "*I am the best teacher of Iran. So, You can imitate me*". Many of them see themselves as "*the God of teaching*" in Iran and from a discourse analysis viewpoint, there existed a kind of hegemony in their statements. Expressing such statements from the teacher trainers only killed the creativity of the participants as would-be teachers.
7. **Practical emphasis instead of theories:** The next biggest problem in all these courses was that all of the teacher trainers asserted that they just need to teach practice and that the theories and methods of language teaching were bullshits. They call themselves practitioners, not theoreticians, and believed that what they have read as theories of language and methodology of language were unnecessary and it is sufficient to teach the practice to young teachers only by saying them what they should do in their classes.

The seven main problems of teacher training courses in Iran were mentioned above. From the observers' viewpoint, the major missing link in Iran's teacher training courses was "*the lack of sound knowledge of teacher trainers about language and lack of theories and methodological issues*". put simply, as the researcher is himself an international teacher trainer, believed that "*theory without practice is meaningless and practice without theory is misleading*". Iran's teacher trainers should work on themselves to enlarge their knowledge about the theories of SLA and language learning and try to combine both practice and theory in their courses.

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study attempted to advance an understanding of the status quo of L2 teacher education programs in Iran and to propose some components for an effective model of teacher education. Six categories were extracted from the data of the participants:

1. Lack of THEORY
2. Lack of FREEDOM of CHOICE
3. Lack of SUPERVISION in the courses
4. Lack of Teacher REFLECTION
5. Lack of TECHNOLOGY in education
6. Lack of consideration for teachers' PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Also, seven categories were discovered through direct observation of the researchers which are the followings:

1. Intensive sessions of teaching
2. Lack of sound knowledge of instructors
3. Lack of sufficient equipment



4. Heterogeneous students
5. Hidden financial purposes
6. Arrogance of the teacher trainers
7. Practical emphasis instead of theories

A model of teacher education, in the opinion of Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005), must contain each of the following components. They maintain that a comprehensive model is necessary to identify and organize the subject matter of teacher education, the learning process of teaching candidates, the performance assessment strategies of candidates, and the learning context, which includes subject matter domains and the community of teaching candidates. They go on to say that such a model must allot adequate time to the evaluation of teaching and learning activities and give top consideration to student teachers' autobiographies that emphasize the value of teaching candidates' prior individual educational experiences. They contend that each of these characteristics enables teachers to learn through experience. Overall, developing a comprehensive teacher education program that best satisfies candidates' needs and necessitates thorough research is challenging. Although it could be argued that the findings of the present study have helped to shape some initial steps in the design of an efficient teacher education model, it is obvious that more time, effort, institutional support, and research are needed to create an ideal, all-encompassing L2 teacher education model.

As was already mentioned, this study adheres to the tradition of qualitative research, where the generalizability of results is not seen as a problem because it is believed that the research context is unique. The ideas presented in the current study do not, however, imply that they are irrelevant to other ELT teacher preparation programs. As was already mentioned, this study can inform the ELT teacher preparation community in other parts of the world about the necessity of giving more priority to disclosing teachers' and supervisors' thoughts about what is happening in the training courses because the subject of ELT practitioners' beliefs about the common training courses appears to be one of the neglected areas in the literature of ELT. Because teacher education and cognition are issues of global significance, the findings of the current study may also have implications for improving teacher training programs abroad.

According to the findings of the current study, which took into account the shortcomings of teacher training programs in Iran, a major weakness of TTCs in Iran was a dearth of theoretical knowledge throughout the courses. Based on Tajik et al. (2019), the theory-practice gap in the context of concern may benefit from a number of improvements. These improvements are in line with the findings of the current study, which found that theory is typically neglected in TTCs and replaced by practice, which can be frustrating.

Professionals have emphasized the need for significant reforms in the length and quality of teacher preparation programs in other parts of the world as well in order for them to continue to be the best option for initial L2 teacher training (e.g., Ferguson & Donno, 2003; Sahlberg, 2010). Additionally, as our participants indicated, there is a gap between theory and practice in teacher education programs, a problem that has been highlighted in numerous studies over the past few decades (e.g., Crandall, 2000; Crookes & Arakaki, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Freeman, 2002; Korthagen, 2010).

Furthermore, not only in theory but also in practice there are serious issues to be considered when it comes to TTCs in the context of Iran. Overall, it appears that teacher education programs have not been



able to adequately prepare teachers for the realities of their teaching practices; our teachers still expressed frustration over a number of issues related to their teaching practices even after months of experience. The results upheld by Numrich (1996) are somewhat corroborated by this finding. After ten weeks of instruction, her teachers were struggling to control class time, give the students clear instructions, respond to their various needs, effectively teach grammar, evaluate the learning of the students, and keep the attention of the class on the students rather than on themselves. In the literature, classroom observation has received particular attention as one of the teaching frustrations mentioned by teachers in the current study. According to Stoller (1996), in a successful teacher education program, teachers should actively participate in the observation process and receive helpful feedback while exchanging ideas with the observer.

Additionally, related publications in the field have confirmed the importance of offering in-service programs for teachers (e.g., Borg, 2011; Crandall, 2000; Friedman, 2000; Huhn, 2012; Kansanen, 2003). According to the available research, close collaboration between coworkers and subject-matter experts during in-service training benefits teacher learning. According to them, workshops serve as a venue for in-service training and help teachers deal with work-related issues and demanding circumstances, such as managing challenging students and organizing the classroom.

Our participants valued having time to consider their own practices and were aware that training programs had not been successful in encouraging teacher reflection. Several studies have argued in favor of giving teachers the opportunity to reflect most heavily on their own instruction including Adler (1991), Valli (1992), LaBoskey (1994), Hatton and Smith (1995), Reiman (1999), Dinkelman, (2003), Akbari and Tajik (2009), Tajik and Pakzad (2016), and Tajik and Ranjbar (2018).

The programs we're worried about haven't given teachers modernized educational technology tools or teaching strategies that incorporate technology. Despite the fact that providing teacher candidates with the chance to participate in technologically enhanced instruction has been listed as one of the traits of a successful and motivating foreign language teacher education program (e.g., Huhn, 2012). While regretting that, up until recently, technology had not been integrated into the methods courses as one might have expected, Huhn (2012) urges that multiple uses of technology be effectively and meaningfully merged with instructional practices and activities and be intertwined throughout teachers' careers. It is clear that teacher educators must include information about Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in teacher education programs, in accordance with the views of our teachers and pertinent discussions in the literature.

Regarding the issue of ignorance of teachers' previous knowledge, Bailey et al. (1996) observed that teachers use their memories of their extensive experiences as learners as de facto guidelines for how to approach what they do in the classroom. This paints a general picture of Borg's (2003) claim that teachers' prior language learning experiences, or what Lortie (1975) referred to as apprenticeship of observation, influence their beliefs about language learning and serve as the foundation for their conceptualization of L2 teaching in teacher preparation programs.

The results of this study may have significant ramifications for L2 teacher education as well as ongoing studies on teachers' perceptions of L2 teacher preparation programs. First, this study can shed light on the necessity of reviewing current programs in the context of language institutes in Iran for teacher educators and other experts involved in designing teacher education programs. The development of L2 teacher education programs' curricula and materials that best meet the needs of aspiring teachers can be aided by the inclusion of needs-based elements and components that have been introduced by our





participants and supported by the literature. In fact, the study's emic perspective, which offered guidelines for the endeavor, would probably help define the directions of the teacher preparation program. The results of this study should contribute to a better understanding of the qualities of the ideal teacher preparation program, which can produce knowledgeable, reflective, and actively involved teachers. In addition to the importance of this study in creating a revised model of teacher education, the methodology used can shed light on future research on critical elements of an effective teacher education program based on the authorities' beliefs of experienced teachers. By addressing the study's primary goals in a broader context, future research can build on this one and enhance our understanding of the elements of a successful teacher education model. A more complete picture of the state of ELT teacher preparation in the nation can be obtained, for example, by learning what ELT practitioners in other language institutes believe. Finally, related efforts in the future can address teachers' perceptions of other elements of a successful teacher education model, such as the program's content, the methods used to evaluate teaching candidates' performance, the learning environment, and the learning processes.

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### Biodata

**Mr. Hamed Zarabi** has been teaching English for about five years. He is an official English language teacher at the Ministry of Education. He is currently an M. A. candidate for TEFL at the Islamic Azad University, Gonbad Kavoods branch, Gonbad Kavoods, Iran. He has published some articles in national and international journals and conferences in the area of Teacher Education, Coursebook Analysis, Academic writing, etc. His main area of interest is Critical Discourse Analysis, Flipped Teaching, Rapport, and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

Email: hamedzarabi97@gmail.com

**Ms. Nadia Gharani** has been present in the English teaching industry for about six years teaching at different language institutes of Gonbad Kavoods city. She is currently studying for her M. A. degree in TEFL at Islamic Azad University, Gonbad Kavoods branch, Gonbad Kavoods, Iran. She has been a co-





author of some scientific articles published in national and international journals. her main areas of study are Corrective Feedback, Content Analysis, Language Assessment, and SLA.

Email: [nadia.gh1998@gmail.com](mailto:nadia.gh1998@gmail.com)

**Mr. Nima Yamrali** got his B. A. in Civil Engineering from the Non-profit University of Babol. He is currently pursuing his desire to English Language Teaching by studying for his M. A. at Islamic Azad University, Gonbad Kavoods branch, Gonbad Kavoods, Iran. He got his CELTA certificate in 2018 and is currently teaching English in different state schools in Turkey. He has been a co-author of some articles in national and international journals and conferences. His main areas of interest are Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), Material Development, and Applied Linguistics.

Email: [nima.y@icloud.com](mailto:nima.y@icloud.com)

