



Unveiling Educational Insights: Exploring Students' Perceptions of the Hidden Curriculum in TEFL at the Undergraduate Level in Iran

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ABSTRACT

The investigation of concealed components within educational systems, commonly referred to as the hidden curriculum, has garnered scholarly attention within the realm of pedagogy. The hidden curriculum assumes multifaceted roles, both positive and negative, within educational settings, necessitating thorough exploration in academic research. This study aims to scrutinize the dimensions of the hidden curriculum in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the undergraduate level in the Iranian context, with a specific focus on the perspectives of university learners. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research encompasses an extensive review of pertinent literature. A randomly selected cohort of 327 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners pursuing undergraduate studies in teaching English across various colleges and universities in Iran constituted the study participants. The participants, whose first language was Persian, represented diverse demographics encompassing both genders and various age groups. The investigative tools utilized in this study comprised a 33-item questionnaire designed to explore diverse facets of the hidden curriculum at the undergraduate level for the quantitative phase. Additionally, for the qualitative component, an open-ended question and a semi-structured interview format were employed. The quantitative findings unveiled that the organizational ambiance of the university, the social milieu within the educational institution, the dynamics of student-teacher relationships in classes, and the non-academic dimensions of university courses exert a discernible impact on students' cognitions, emotions, and behaviors within the academic environment. Consequently, these aspects are identified as integral components of the hidden curriculum within the TEFL undergraduate program in Iran. The qualitative results of the study are also presented, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the non-academic factors that wield substantial influence on academic outcomes within university settings. In essence, the outcomes of this study offer valuable insights into the hidden curriculum of TEFL education at the undergraduate level, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the intricate interplay between non-academic variables and academic performance in higher education institutions.

KEYWORDS: Curriculum Development; Hidden Curriculum; Learners' Perspectives; TEFL

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the future trajectory of individuals. Enhancing the quality of education involves a myriad of contributing factors, including teachers who serve as primary facilitators, the educational context, materials, settings, course books, and various other influential determinants. The educational system encompasses multifaceted issues across diverse fields that significantly impact the educational process. The exploration and identification of these influential factors within the classroom learning environment have garnered increased scholarly attention in recent years. Among the factors scrutinized by scholars, the curriculum has emerged as a focal point. Diverse curricular frameworks have been introduced and delineated in the domains of education and language, with the hidden curriculum standing out as a particularly contentious curriculum type.



In every nation, the educational system is intricately involved in both the implicit and explicit transmission of societal norms and pedagogical approaches to students. Given that learners spend extended periods in educational institutions, these learning contexts play a crucial role in shaping their personal development. Additionally, students accrue experiences that contribute to the formation of their cultural identity and values. It is noteworthy that not all influences on student learning stem from direct methods or explicitly informed educational efforts. The hidden curriculum encompasses elements that are not officially intended, documented, or explicitly taught by educators (Azimpour & Khalilzade, 2015).

The idea of hidden curriculum became popular after the Jacksons' book, *Life in Classrooms* in 1968. Jackson believed that there are some values and ideologies that students learn while they are in the learning context such as schools or universities which are not obtained by formal courses and course books. At the beginning of the last century, there were some studies related to 'collateral learning', 'concomitant learning', and 'associated learning' which were introduced by Dewey (1914) could be referred to as the beginning of research on hidden curriculum. A hidden curriculum can be known as a side effect of an education system. It refers to things that are learned but not formally and intentionally taught. Any learning experience may have some unintended lessons for students. These include behaviors, norms, values, attitudes, and perspectives that students learn while they are in classrooms. Jerald (2006) looks at hidden curriculum as an implicit curriculum that addresses attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors that are communicated and conveyed indirectly and without awareness. Cunningsworths (1995) talks about the importance of hidden curriculum and says that hidden curriculum which is about social and cultural values that are inherent in course books forms part of any educational program, but it is still unstated or undisclosed. Maclaren (1993) looked at hidden curriculum from a critical and political viewpoint and stated that hidden curriculum is associated with implicit methods that generate knowledge and behavior. It means that the hidden curriculum refers to something beyond the official and planned educational material (Azimpour & Khalilzade, 2015).

The main purpose of this study is to investigate various aspects of the hidden curriculum in the TEFL context in Iran. Specifically, the study tries to explore the perceptions of Iranian EFL learners towards categories of the hidden curriculum at the BA level. For this reason, the following research questions are posed:

- 1) To what extent do the hidden curriculum dimensions lead to unintentional learning at the TEFL BA level in the view of Iranian EFL university students?
- 2) What are the challenges and issues regarding the hidden curriculum in the TEFL context at the BA level in Iran?

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The concept of hidden curriculum refers to the school environment, programs, and policies that are included in schools' aims. It includes everything that is not academic but has a great impact on the academic outcomes of schools. Values, attitudes, beliefs, and individuals' communication styles are all considered hidden. It can be called the culture of schools and is outside of the official curriculum.

According to studies (Abbaspour et al., 2020; Alimorad, 2016; Raissi Ahvan et al., 2020), hidden curriculum has become one of the current issues around the world nowadays. As an important message sent from school staff, including teachers, the hidden curriculum can influence negatively or positively on learners. Most of the things, learners learn at school are not publicly outlined in official statements of school syllabi and this learning can be attributed to hidden curriculum (Cornbleth, 1984). Therefore, it needs to be explained completely. Based on what Alsubaie (2015) said, one of the best ways of teaching social skills to students is the hidden curriculum. Teachers should be equipped with the skills and strategies to help their learners understand the hidden curriculum better by providing opportunities for students to practice and apply the rules of the hidden curriculum in classes. Many scholars (Mehr Mohammadi & Fathi Vajargah, 2008; Mosalanejad et al., 2015; Taghva'ei Yazdali et al., 2014) believe that the hidden curriculum is more significant than the formal curriculum because most of the learning occurs through non-academic aspects of meta-learning environment, and social relationships. According to Mosalanejad et al. (2015), many factors are involved in shaping the hidden curriculum such as the building and architecture of the school or university, educational environment like color, lightening, sound, and equipment, the relationship between faculty members and learners, attitude and behavior of faculty members, and teachers. Cornbleth (1984) also found that various elements can impact and shape the hidden curriculum such as awareness, society, knowledge, learners, and teachers.



ISSUES OF HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Dickerson (2007) addresses some of the issues related to the hidden curriculum which functions within the classroom and believes that they have a great impact on students and faculty. These issues are listed below:

- **Societal and Political Power over Curriculum:** this means that hidden curriculum is an issue of power and becomes an instrument for controlling students, teachers, administrators, and others dealing with education. Individual students cannot be considered in isolation and the social context in which they are in is crucial.
- **Diversity and the Hidden Curriculum:** this means that classes today are very diverse and as teachers enter them, they face different cultural backgrounds, and misunderstandings of cultural mores can lead to hidden curriculum. There are also many different socio-economic backgrounds and the structures of families are different today and teachers are expected to understand these differences.
- **Popular Culture and Educational Issues:** this means that everybody is surrounded by popular culture in every walk of life and uses that culture as a localizing power to gain some control over an uncontrollable situation and if all educators use popular culture, they can capture the interest of learners to a great extent.
- **Mass Media Function in Education:** media specialists believe that media is not a channel for transmitting new information; rather, it is a kind of shaper of a new social environment.
- **Dress as Popular Culture and Education:** it is one of the major issues of the hidden curriculum because it is one way that learners employ localizing power to have control over their lives. People are defined by their clothing and students use clothing to make a statement.
- **Popular Culture and Stereotypes in Education:** stereotypes can be considered as barriers to acceptance and media define the stereotypes. Hidden curriculum functions through stereotypes.
- **Curriculum Issues of High Stakes Testing:** this means that high-stakes testing defines the curriculum and changes students' motivations and teachers' behaviors.
- **Teacher Behaviors and the Hidden Curriculum:** this means that a hidden curriculum is created, maintained, and managed by the students and staff of the school, and the hidden curriculum can be both constructive and destructive and teachers' behavior has great influence on it.

SOURCES OF HIDDEN CURRICULUM

There are two main sources of the hidden curriculum, school sources and social sources (Al. qomoul et. al., 2017). School sources include different elements such as teachers, school syllabi, teaching methods, teaching aids, evaluation, and school environment.

Teachers: each teacher has his/her philosophy of teaching which comes from his/her point of view. As one of the cornerstones of the hidden curriculum, teachers reflect their own personal, professional, and practical characters in the classroom.

School syllabus: schools have to implement a kind of syllabus that is matched with students' needs and interests. Therefore, they can influence on hidden curriculum differently.

Teaching methods: teaching methods are varied based on teachers' perspectives and teaching situations.

Teaching aids: depending on the teaching and learning process there are different kinds of aids used in classes. The availability, comprehensiveness, and adequacy are varied.

Evaluation: lots of factors influence evaluation methods and ways in teaching and learning contexts.

School environment: contexts of schools are not the same depending on social and psychological conditions that influence learners to accommodate themselves to educational scenes.

Social resources as another main source of hidden curriculum are represented by social, cultural, and economic factors and schools have a great role in enhancing positive values in the students. According to Mehr Mohammadi (2013 as cited in Al. qomoul et. al., 2017), there are some important elements affecting the formation of a hidden curriculum. These elements are divided into six groups as follows:

1. **Architecture and the physical appearance of the university:** scholars believe that non-verbal teaching can have a great influence on students' learning and transmission of messages to them. Therefore, some physical elements such as technological equipment, classes' colors and lighting systems, heating and cooling systems, and educational environments are all important.
2. **Social environment and official structure of the university:** rules and regulations, reward and punishment methods applied by the university, the relationship between the dean of the university and students, and the way everything is planned are regarded as important elements of the hidden curriculum.



3. Mutual relationship between professors and students: professors' behaviors in classes can have a great impact on shaping students' personalities. For instance, they can inspire self-confidence and self-respect in students by having free discussions and a positive atmosphere in classes.
4. Students' relationships with staff and other students: different kinds of groups in universities can greatly influence students' behaviors, such as the relationship between staff and professors, or students with students.
5. Social condition of the university: various social and economic groups within which students are growing up and the different social roles they bring with them to the university and transmission of these to others in group and class discussions are very significant in students' learning.
6. Content and materials: all the content of the course books including pictures, graphs, charts, characters, language, examples, and the emphasis of the books are considered aspects of the hidden curriculum.

Various studies have been done about hidden curricula around the world. Azimpour et. al. (2015) endeavored to review the literature, definitions, attitudes, and influential factors upon the hidden curriculum to develop a better understanding of the case. Aazami et. al. (2016) investigated the effect of hidden curriculum on learning English lessons from the English teachers' point of view in Amol high schools. Nami et. al. (2014) investigated the role of hidden curriculum on university students' achievement. Accordingly, they believed that the most important factor influencing students' learning is informal or hidden. Cubukcu (2012) investigated the effect of hidden curriculum on the character education process of primary school students. Gholami Pasand (2013) investigated the M.A. curriculum of TEFL in Iran, paying special attention to courses. Gonzalez-Ocampo et al. (2015) studied about the curriculum question in doctoral education. Their focus was on explicit curriculum analysis to be able to bring about some changes in the processes and outcomes of doctoral education. Alifat et. al. (2016) determined the role of aspects and components of hidden curriculum on the social self-efficacy of students. In the same way, in Iran there are some studies focusing on hidden curriculum. Raissi Ahvan et al., (2020) worked on the impact of hidden curriculum components on cognitive characteristics of high school students' learning to create a better learning environment. They did a mixed method research by using a cross-sectional survey in a quantitative way and showed a significant relationship between the components of hidden curriculum and cognitive characteristics. In another study, Kian et al., (2020) investigated the effect of the hidden curriculum on creativity and social skills and concluded that there was a positive relationship between these two variables. Nowrouzi et al., (2015) pointed out that the hidden curriculum term should be classically defined as the unofficial, un-written, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school.

Furthermore, Taghva'ei Yazdeli et al. (2014) in their research entitled "The relationship between the hidden curriculum and emotional intelligence of students of Kashan Medical Sciences University," concluded that the hidden curriculum has a significant impact on students' emotional intelligence and lack of attention to the hidden curriculum is one of the barriers to professionalism. In addition, Mehr Mohammadi and Fathi Vajargah (2008) tried to explore the place to hidden curriculum in continuing medical education. Moreover, Abbaspour et al., (2020) focused on the hidden curriculum and its role in medical sciences education under the skin of curriculum. Accordingly, Alimorad (2016) examines and uncovers the hidden curriculum in the First Certificate Masterclass (FCM) that is taught at Navid Institute in Iran. FCM was deeply examined to identify any instances of Western cultural norms and preferences and their potential influences on Iranian EFL learners' thoughts and ideologies. However, more studies are needed in the field of education regarding curriculum development. The vast area of curriculum and its implications, limitations, uses and applications need to be studied more by scholars, materials developers, and curriculum planners. The concept of hidden curriculum needs to be paid attention to in the field of education, especially in Iran.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

A group of 327 EFL learners studying at different colleges and universities at the BA level in Iran were selected randomly and were all majoring in teaching English with Persian as their first language. The participants were both female and male from different age ranges who studied at various universities. The setting of the present study is universities in Iran because hidden aspects of the educational curriculum are a broad concept, thus all educational settings including public schools and private institutes could not be regarded and a more limited and specified setting was needed.



**INSTRUMENTATION
HIDDEN CURRICULUM QUESTIONNAIRE**

Two instruments were employed in the present study. A 33-item questionnaire consisting of different items for investigating the aspects of the hidden curriculum at the BA level was used in the present study for the quantitative part. The questionnaire was developed based on the underlying theories, research, and available literature with a special focus on an already made questionnaire by Sazegar, Ashraf & Motallebzadeh (2020) and the existing literature including Alikhani (2004); Auerbach & Burguss (1985); Fathi Vajargah & Vahed Choukdeh (2006); Hafferty & Franks (1994); Heidari, Ali Golbandi & Hosseini (2018); Nadi, Hesampour, Salami & Ghoddosi (2016) and Vallance (1983). 33 items were chosen to be included in the inventory based on previous studies and 10 TEFL experts' ideas in the process of expert validation. The CVI and CVR were measured to make sure of the content validity of the items. The items of the questionnaire were classified into 4 different constructs. The first construct namely 'organizational atmosphere' included 10 different statements such as "The university and English Department physical structure" starting with the following question: "In your opinion, to what extent do each of the following items influence the thought, emotions, and behavior of TEFL students at BA level?"

The second construct namely 'the social atmosphere of the English department' included 14 different statements such as "Transfer of social values and social norms to students" starting with the following question: "In your opinion, to what extent do each of the following items influence the thought, emotions, and behavior of TEFL students at BA level? The third construct namely 'student-teacher relationship' included 6 different statements such as "Formal relationship between students and instructors" starting with the following question: "In your opinion, to what extent do each of the following items influence the thought, emotions, and behavior of the TEFL students at the BA level?"

Finally, the fourth construct namely 'non-academic aspects' included 3 statements such as "Students' financial condition" " starting with the following question: "In your opinion, to what extent do each of the following items influence the thought, emotions, and behavior of TEFL students at BA level? The designed questionnaire gained an acceptable index of Cronbach alpha equals .94 which shows the reliability of it. Furthermore, the questionnaire enjoyed acceptable validity which had been computed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Each item of the questionnaire was rated on a five-point Likert scale from (not really) to (to a very great extent). The whole questionnaire took something like 10 minutes to be completed. Table 3.1 below shows the constructs and items in the questionnaire.

Table 3.1

Items and constructs of the questionnaire

In your opinion, to what extent do each of the following items influence the thoughts, emotions, and behavior of TEFL students at the BA level?

Organizational Atmosphere

1. The university and English Department's physical structure
2. Technological equipment in the English Department and classrooms
3. Classrooms' colors and lightening system
4. Heating and cooling system
5. The existence of the appropriate educational environment
6. Teachers' proper use of technological tools
7. Availability of internet and software in classes
8. Enough number of computers and other technological tools for students
9. Availability of virtual tools and classes for students
10. Managerial authority in the English department

The Social Atmosphere of the English Department

11. Transfer of social values and social norms to students
12. Maintaining the social class and economic structure
13. Proper social environment in the university and English Department
14. Notification system (such as sending SMS) of university
15. Social, scientific, and cultural billboards in the English Department
16. English Department's transfer of cultural norms to students
17. English Department's ethical rules (unwritten rules)



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18. Use of rewards and punishment (such as giving penalties or bonuses) for students

 19. Instructors' and English Department's use of negative reinforcement

 20. Instructors' and English Department's use of positive reinforcement

 21. Students are alienated due to university and English Department conditions (such as crowded classrooms, or different cultural statuses among students)

 22. Transfer of books' predetermined norms, social values, and ideological transfer to students

 23. International books' false cultural content which is not appropriate for Iranians

 24. Disciplinary laws and orders in the English Department

Student Teacher Relationship

-
25. Formal relationship between students and instructors

 26. Informal relationship between students and instructors

 27. Evaluation system of instructors' performance

 28. System of instructors' rewards

 29. System of students' assessment method (tests and scores) used by instructors

 30. Instructors' appropriate teaching strategies and methods

Non- academic Aspects

-
31. Students' financial condition

 32. Students' social gaps

 33. Students' geographical location
-

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

For the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews were run to collect information about the opinions of the participants of the study regarding the hidden curriculum and its probable challenges and issues in the context of TEFL in Iran to be able to support the data gathered in the quantitative part much stronger. Furthermore, an open-ended question was given at the end of the hidden curriculum questionnaire which stated "In your opinion, what other factors can influence the thoughts, emotions, and behavior of TEFL students at BA level?" To strengthen the overall validity of the study's findings, the dependability and credibility of the interviews conducted for the qualitative part of the study were assessed through the factors of Participant Selection, Transparency and Trustworthiness, Interviewer Training and Consistency, and Member Checking. Interviewing EFL learners studying at different colleges and universities at the BA level in Iran demonstrates a diverse sampling strategy. By including participants from various educational institutions, the study captured a range of perspectives, potentially enhancing the credibility of the findings. The study provided transparency regarding the interview process, including the participants were recruited voluntarily, the interview protocol was provided, and some steps were taken to establish rapport and trust with participants. This transparency helped to ensure the credibility of the data collected. The interviewer received the proper training to conduct interviews in a standardized manner, ensuring consistency across interviews. This helped to minimize potential bias and ensured that all participants were given equal opportunity to share their perspectives. To enhance credibility, the researchers considered engaging in member checking, whereby participants were allowed to review the findings and provide feedback to ensure that their perspectives were accurately represented.

STUDY DESIGN

The study was done based on mixed-methods research and it is known to be exploratory as perceptions and attitudes of EFL learners were investigated towards hidden curriculum in Iran through applying a questionnaire (quantitative) and a semi-structured interview (qualitative).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

TEST OF NORMALITY

To check the normality of data distribution, again the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed for the main phase of the study with 327 students. Table 4.1 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the main phase of the study.



Table 4.1

The Results of the K-S Test for the Main Phase of the Study

	df	Sig.
Organizational Atmosphere	327	.14
Social Atmosphere	327	.15
Student Teacher Relationship	327	.09
Non- academic Aspects	327	.07

As can be seen, the obtained sig value for all sub-constructs of Hidden Curriculum in the TEFL BA Level Questionnaire is higher than .05. It can safely be concluded that the data is normally distributed across all the variables. Therefore, parametric tests can be used to analyze the data.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ: To what extent do the hidden curriculum dimensions lead to unintentional learning at the TEFL BA level in the view of Iranian EFL university students?

To answer the research question, frequencies and percentages of items were utilized for each of four sub-constructs of the scale and then again one sample t-test was used to find the significance level. The findings of each item that relates to a particular sub-construct are presented in tables and explanations are described accordingly. Table 4.2 presents the results of the students' responses to the first sub-constructs (Organizational Atmosphere) of the designed questionnaire which contained ten items.

Table 4.2

Frequencies and Percentages of the Items on the Organizational Atmosphere

Item	Not really		To a minor extent		To a moderate extent		To a great extent		To a very great extent		Mean
	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	
Q1	15	4.6	62	19	168	51.4	74	22.6	8	2.4	2.99
Q2	16	4.6	84	25.7	125	38.2	99	30.3	4	1.2	2.98
Q3	31	9.5	60	18.3	146	44.6	84	25.7	6	1.8	2.92
Q4	18	5.5	76	23.2	155	47.4	76	23.2	2	.6	2.90
Q5	7	2.1	43	13.1	152	46.5	117	35.8	8	2.4	3.23
Q6	10	3.1	34	10.4	129	39.4	148	45.3	6	1.8	3.32
Q7	17	5.2	80	24.5	131	40.1	93	28.4	6	1.8	2.97
Q8	42	12.8	115	35.2	114	34.9	53	16.2	3	.9	2.57
Q9	24	7.3	65	19.9	116	35.5	116	35.5	6	1.8	3.05
Q10	21	6.4	101	30.9	134	41	61	18.7	10	3.1	2.81



As Table 4.2 indicated, the majority of the students selected “To a moderate extent”. Among the items, item 1 had the highest percentage of “To a moderate extent” (f=168, p=51.4%) and item 6 had the highest percentage of “To a great extent” (f=148, p=45.3%). Table 4.3 presents the results of the students’ responses to the second sub-construct (Social Atmosphere) of the scale which contained 14 items.

Table 4.3
Frequencies and Percentages of the Items on the Social Atmosphere

Item	Not really		To a minor extent		To a moderate extent		To a great extent		To a very great extent		Mean
	f	p	f	p	F	p	f	p	f	p	
Q11	7	2.1	45	13.8	148	45.3	116	35.5	11	3.4	3.24
Q12	10	3.1	35	10.7	146	44.6	134	41	2	.6	3.25
Q13	15	4.6	43	13.1	144	44	118	36.1	7	2.1	3.18
Q14	13	4	30	9.2	136	41.6	146	44.6	2	.6	3.29
Q15	12	3.7	15	4.6	157	48	139	42.5	4	1.2	3.33
Q16	7	2.1	28	8.6	179	54.7	112	34.3	1	.3	3.22
Q17	11	3.4	33	10.1	130	39.8	111	33.9	7	2.1	6.40
Q18	13	4	80	24.5	101	30.9	129	39.4	4	1.2	3.09
Q19	31	9.5	98	30	101	30.9	91	27.8	6	1.8	2.83
Q20	8	2.4	58	17.7	116	35.5	108	33	37	11.3	3.33
Q21	11	3.4	75	22.9	123	37.6	113	34.6	5	1.5	3.08
Q22	11	3.4	73	22.3	111	33.9	127	38.8	5	1.5	3.13
Q23	48	14.7	32	9.8	111	33.9	126	38.5	10	3.1	3.06
Q24	8	2.4	66	20.2	105	32.1	136	41.6	12	3.7	3.24

As it can be seen in Table 4.3, the majority of the students selected “To a moderate extent”. Among 14 items, item 16 had the highest percentage of “To a moderate extent” (f=179, p=54.7%) and item 14 had the highest percentage of “To a great extent” (f=146, p=44.6%). Table 4.4 presents the results of the students’ responses to the third sub-construct (Student Teacher Relationship) of the scale which contained six items.



Table 4.4

Frequencies and Percentages of the Items on the Student Teacher Relationship

Item	Not really		To a minor extent		To a moderate extent		To a great extent		To a very great extent		Mean
	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	
Q25	5	1.5	29	8.9	92	28.1	125	38.2	76	23.2	3.73
Q26	8	2.4	27	8.3	79	24.2	137	41.9	76	23.2	3.75
Q27	0	0	46	14.1	85	26	119	36.4	77	23.5	3.69
Q28	5	1.5	25	7.6	89	27.2	131	40.1	77	23.5	3.76
Q29	4	1.2	32	9.8	92	28.1	122	37.3	77	23.5	3.72
Q30	7	2.1	33	10.1	78	23.9	130	39.8	79	24.2	3.74

The third sub-construct measures students' views about the Student Teacher Relationship. According to the results of item analysis, the majority of the students selected to a great extent for this sub-scale. Among 6 items, item 26 had the highest percentage of "To a great extent" (f=137, p=41.9%). Table 4.5 presents the results of the students' responses to the fourth sub-constructs (non-academic Aspects) of the scale which contained three items.

Table 4.5

Frequencies and Percentages of the Items on the Non-Academic Aspects

Item	Not really		To a minor extent		To a moderate extent		To a great extent		To a very great extent		Mean
	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	
Q31	14	4.3	82	25.1	118	36.1	105	32.1	8	2.4	3.03
32	10	3.1	100	30.6	123	37.6	91	27.8	3	.9	2.93
Q33	14	4.3	86	26.3	89	27.2	129	39.4	9	2.8	3.10

The fourth sub-construct of the questionnaire aimed to check out students' non-academic Aspects. Subjects' response in Table 4.4 indicates that the students selected to a moderate extent and to a great extent for this sub-construct. Among the three items, item 32 had the highest percentage of "To a moderate extent" (f=123, p=37.6%), and item 33 had the highest percentage of "to a great extent" (f=129, p=39.4%).

To answer the question "To what extent do the hidden curriculum dimensions lead to un-intentional learning at TEFL BA level in the view of Iranian EFL university students?" a one-sample t-test was used. Table 4.6 shows the results of the one-sample test and descriptive statistics for the overall hidden curriculum from EFL university students.

Table 4.6

Results of One-Sample Test and Descriptive Statistics for the Overall Hidden Curriculum from EFL University Students

				t	df	Sig.	Mean differences
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean				
Overall Scale	2.91	.46	.02	35.42	326	.000	.91



As Table 4.6 shows, the mean score of learners in the overall scale is 2.91 with a standard deviation of .46. As the results show the mean score of learners' responses is higher than the average (=2). Based on the results there is a significant difference in their responses ($t=35.42$, $p<.05$) which shows that the hidden curriculum dimensions significantly lead to un-intentional learning at the TEFL BA level in the view of Iranian EFL university learners.

Q2: What are the challenges and issues regarding the hidden curriculum in the TEFL context at the BA level in Iran?

To find out the ideas and perspectives of university instructors and learners about the challenges and issues regarding hidden curriculum in the TEFL context at the BA level in Iran, some of the university students (53 students) who were participants in the present study voluntarily participated in the interview. The interviews continued till the saturation was reached. They were asked to give their opinions about the probable challenges and issues in the Iranian context of EFL teaching and learning regarding hidden curriculum. The interview was run to come up with rich data which can confirm the results of the quantitative part of the study. It needs to be mentioned that the validity of the interview was checked through expert validation and its face validity was confirmed. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed and coded by two raters. The results of the interviews showed that there are some challenges and issues regarding the hidden curriculum. According to university students, there are some challenges and issues regarding hidden curriculum in the TEFL context at the BA level in Iran. First of all, some of the expectations students understand through hidden curriculum in university are not matched with the expectations of society. For instance, society emphasizes the role and functions of technology in today's lives, and technological tools are seen as a must in everybody's life; however, no simple form of technological tools is available in universities for the students and this sends the message that it is not seen as necessary as it should be.

Another theme is related to the physical appearance of the classrooms which is again different from the values dictated in the society. One of these important values is the significance of group work and group activities in society; however, the position of chairs does not show this importance as chairs are fixed and not portable which indirectly means that individual performance is much more wanted in university classes. Rows of seats emphasize the value of listening respectfully to others and being invited to speak, but in society, this is never seen which sends this message to students that they learn something in classes that is not compatible with what is the reality in society.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In addressing the research inquiry posited as "What are the perceptions of Iranian EFL university students towards the Hidden Curriculum in TEFL at the BA Level within the Iranian context?" frequencies and percentages were employed to analyze each of the four sub-constructs delineated by the scale. The findings from the participants' responses to the first sub-construct, namely "Organizational Atmosphere," indicated that the majority of students opted for "To a moderate extent" in the questionnaire. This suggests a prevalent acknowledgment that these organizational elements wield a substantial influence on the cognition, affective states, and comportment of TEFL students at the BA level. Consequently, university students assert that the organizational atmosphere of academic institutions indirectly and inadvertently shapes their perceptions and experiences within the learning milieu. Furthermore, these elements convey messages that may not consistently align with societal realities. Therefore, following the perspectives of the learners, these aspects should be construed as integral components of the hidden curriculum at the TEFL BA level in Iran. Proposing the establishment of a positive and competitive milieu to showcase students' talents, along with fostering a conducive environment for their active engagement, is posited as a constructive approach.

Regarding the second sub-construct, "Social Atmosphere," the outcomes of students' responses denoted a prevalent selection of "To a moderate extent" in the questionnaire. This indicates that, in the students' perception, the social atmosphere within universities significantly influences their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors. Consequently, these social dynamics, encompassing norms, expectations, beliefs, social systems, values, population, and peer pressure, are posited as constituents of the hidden curriculum at the TEFL BA level in Iran. The findings about the third sub-construct, "Student-Teacher Relationship," disclosed that the majority of students opted for "To a great extent" in the questionnaire. This signifies that students attribute substantial importance to the relationships they cultivate with professors or classmates, deeming them influential in shaping their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors within the university context. Consequently, these interpersonal relationships should be recognized as integral components of the hidden curriculum at the TEFL BA level in Iran. Advocating for the establishment of an environment characterized by trust, respect, and active participation within the classroom, along with providing a



secure space for discussion, commentary, and interaction, is identified as a conducive measure for enhancing the learning experience.

Lastly, the results of the fourth sub-construct, "Non-Academic Aspects," indicated that students selected "To a moderate extent" and "To a great extent" in the questionnaire. This signifies that students attribute considerable significance to factors such as their financial circumstances within the family, social disparities with peers, and geographical location, perceiving them as influential elements impacting their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Consequently, these non-academic aspects are posited as integral components of the hidden curriculum in the TEFL BA level in Iran. The second research inquiry, posited as follows: "What challenges and issues characterize the latent curriculum within the TEFL context at the undergraduate level in Iran?" delved into the perceptions and viewpoints of university students concerning challenges and issues of the latent curriculum within the TEFL domain at the undergraduate level in Iran. A total of 53 university students expressed their perspectives on these challenges and issues.

A primary concern revolves around the incongruity existing between the expectations of students and instructors, leading to occasional misunderstandings. The disparity between learners' interpretations and instructors' perspectives on the curriculum is identified as a salient source of this challenge. Additionally, a notable challenge lies in the prominence accorded to the explicit curriculum. Students deliberately concentrate on the content articulated in the explicit curriculum, which may at times diverge from the implicit curriculum. The findings of the present study are comparable with the results of other studies done in the same area of interest. Aazami et. al. (2016) talked about school rules as one important element of the hidden curriculum with a great impact on students learning English which is exactly in line with the results of the present study about the roles of university disciplines and rules. Azimpour et. al. (2015) endeavored to review the literature, definitions, attitudes, and influential factors upon the hidden curriculum to develop a better understanding of the case. The present study also tried to provide both students and instructors with a better understanding of the hidden curriculum. Alifat et. al. (2016) determined the role of aspects and components of the hidden curriculum which are categorized into different categories as follows: 1. Teacher, 2. Teaching method, 3. Physical location, 4. Assessment, 5. Rules and regulations and 6. Content. This is comparable with the categories of the current study about the components of the hidden curriculum which are classified into: 1. Organizational atmosphere, 2. Social atmosphere, 3. Student-teacher relationship and 4. Non-academic aspects. In another study, Bayanfar (2013) tried to discover the effects of hidden curriculum on effective characteristics outcome of learners in high schools to suggest a design for developing interest in subjects and schools. The results are comparable with the results of the present study that worked AT BA level curriculum in a TEFL context. Accordingly, Raissi Ahvan et al., (2020) worked on the concept of hidden curriculum in Iranian high schools for the purpose of making a better learning environment that is in agreement with the aim of the present research in which the researchers focused on BA setting to create a better learning context in future. In the same way, Nowrouzi et al., (2015) claimed that the hidden curriculum term should be classically defined as the un-official, un-written curriculum which is in accordance with the definition of the hidden curriculum used in the present study. Besides, Taghva'ei Yazdeli et al. (2014) believed in the positive role of hidden curriculum among learners which can be in agreement with the findings of the present study in that here the researcher tried to show the significant impact of hidden curriculum components in the TEFL context.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate findings, providing valuable insights into the intricate interplay of non-academic determinants that significantly shape the academic outcomes of tertiary institutions. These determinants encompass a spectrum of values, attitudes, beliefs, and communication modalities embedded within the university community, collectively forming integral components of the learning environment. The discernible impacts of these non-academic factors on students' educational experiences highlight the need for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play. Considering the diverse and often unpredictable encounters that students undergo during their university tenure, the study's outcomes hold important implications for learners. By shedding light on the covert curriculum within the Teaching English as a Foreign Language context at the undergraduate level, the research equips students with an enriched understanding of the constituent elements and facets that may influence their educational journey. This heightened awareness empowers learners to navigate the implicit aspects of their academic environment more effectively, fostering a trajectory toward enhanced academic attainment.



Moreover, the study's implications extend to educators, administrators, and policymakers within the higher education landscape. Awareness of the nuanced influences of the covert curriculum underscores the importance of planning and implementing educational strategies that consider these subtle yet impactful determinants. By incorporating these insights into pedagogical approaches and institutional policies, stakeholders can contribute to a more holistic and student-centered educational experience, ultimately fostering a conducive environment for academic success and personal development.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The primary objective of the current investigation was to scrutinize facets of the concealed curriculum within the TEFL context at the undergraduate (BA) level in Iran. Subsequent inquiries might delve into the intricacies of the curriculum at the postgraduate (MA or PhD) levels and ascertain the influence of the concealed curriculum within those academic frameworks. It is recommended that future researchers employ triangulation as a methodological approach. Given that the current study employed a mixed-methods design, forthcoming research endeavors may consider alternative methodologies, exploring various qualitative or quantitative paradigms.

It is crucial to note that this study exclusively focused on the undergraduate curriculum; hence, forthcoming investigations could concentrate on the postgraduate (MA or PhD) curricula, aiming to uncover latent elements within them. Additionally, the correlation between concealed aspects and other curriculum classifications is a topic that merits attention in subsequent research.

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