

## Evaluation of the Latest Pre-Service Teacher Education Curriculum in EFL Context: A Testimony of Teachers, Teachers Educators and Student Teachers' Perspectives

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**Abstract:** Teacher training programs in Iran have undergone extensive investigations and modifications since the establishment of educational institutions. This interest in teacher education has emerged from the innovative approaches to teaching suggested by the trends and findings of the time. Regarding the importance of curriculum evaluation in the EFL teacher education, this study mainly focused on the adequacy and effectiveness of the latest EFL pre-service teacher education curriculum through the eyes of the key stakeholders. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used in the study. The participants of the study were 227 teachers, teacher educators, and senior student teachers. The data were gathered through a 35-item Likert scale questionnaire on the curriculum courses with stated objectives for each course and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that the latest curriculum was adequately laid out and positively evaluated by the participants in terms of pedagogic and linguistic competence although there were some shortcomings and slight differences in the participants' perceptions. There were some slight perceptual differences among the participants. The findings of this study may provide some helpful suggestions for promoting the latest EFL pre-service teacher education curriculum.

**Keywords:** Adequacy, Effectiveness, Evaluation, Objectives, Stakeholders, Teacher Education Curriculum.

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## Introduction

The goal of teacher preparation programs is to move in the direction of designing the social, organizational, and intellectual contexts by means of which prospective teachers could enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function as decision makers (Cochran-Smith, 2004). It is expected that once teachers have completed their teacher education program, they will be able to demonstrate required competencies acquired through their classroom experiences, field experiences and standardized assessments (McNergney & Herbert, 2001).

The demands for deeper and more effective student learning and the rapid changes in modern information age and the expanded global role of English have propelled the decision-makers and stakeholders in schools and universities to find new schemes for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programs and think more systematically about how to improve teachers' learning. Complex forms of teaching are required to develop 21st century student competencies, such as deep mastery of challenging content, critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication and collaboration, and self-direction. In turn, opportunities are needed for teachers to learn and refine the pedagogies required to teach these skills.

Since the 1980s, teacher education has moved away from knowledge transmission to knowledge construction where teachers combine theory and research with experiential and reflective study of their own classroom practices (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The emphasis has shifted away from content, to teacher, to the process of learning or education (Freeman, 2001). Teacher education needed to change itself and shift its paradigm away from traditional master-apprentice model towards a model which intended to enable teachers to examine their context and needs with critical looks and create their own local methodologies in post method era (McMorrow, 2007).

However, the question is how we can be sure that all teachers are well-prepared for the important work that they do and are updated, refined, and improved so that they can be responsive to the needs of their students and society. In Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) words, good preparation means preparing students to be effective teachers and having programs that have power to change teachers and to change their students. This can be achieved by the improvement of teacher preparation programs through evaluation. Peacock (2009) argues that teacher-training programs must involve internal evaluation systems within their programs. He states that the evaluation of pre-service teacher education programs would

result in the professionalization of the ELT field and make a useful contribution to the robustness of the theoretical backgrounds. To secure the effectiveness of TEFL, TESOL or ELT programs and teacher quality, consistent evaluation is rigorously emphasized (Musset, 2010). Generally, a teacher is perceived as an instrumental figure in the learner's learning process. According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner, (2017), for most of the nations, teaching has been identified to occupy an impressionable position in the education policy. Students' achievement is determined by the quality of teaching. Teacher preparation and development are thus reported as key elements, yielding effective teachers.

Studies of ELT in Iran have addressed foreign language policies (Kiany, Mirhosseini & Navidinia, 2011), problems in foreign language teaching (Jahangard, 2007; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2014), curriculum planning and practice (Atai & Mazlum, 2013), or effectiveness of specific methodologies (Hayati & Mashhadi 2010). Although some research has been devoted to examine TEFL programs, it must be remembered that the latest curriculum has undergone some modifications and requires evaluation to examine its outcomes and success. In order to make sure that curriculum is relevant to the aims and addresses the concerns of stakeholders, this paper attempts to offer an evaluative review of the current program in light of the previous research, related theories and models by focusing both on the strengths and weaknesses given that evaluation is considered as an initial step towards professionalization in the field (Peacock, 2009).

## **Literature Review**

The significance of systematic evaluation of teacher education programs has been emphasized by many researchers. Wallace (1991) suggests that teacher education programs need a clear philosophy, and the program content should reflect that philosophy. He also claims that curriculum should be balanced in terms of received and experiential knowledge, and programs should contribute to the development of reflective practices. In the field of second language teacher education, Freeman and Johnson (1998) mention that views of the knowledge-base of foreign-language teachers should be included together with the knowledge of the social context of learning (i.e. classrooms) since learning cannot be fully comprehensible without it. Richards (2008) notes that second language teacher education is a relatively new discipline as it is perceived as an educational specialization. Therefore, investigating what teachers do, think, and believe can promote both theory and practice in second language teacher education.

Johnson (1994) found that the images participants had of their language teacher preparation program were less influential than those that referred to their learning experiences. Gutiérrez (1996), on the other hand, found that the methods course attended by her participants contributed to transforming the pre-training knowledge they brought with them. Other studies (Freeman, 1996) indicated that language teacher education programs made beginning teachers familiar with the discourse of teaching and developed a deeper knowledge of the target language.

Focusing on the practical component of a pre-service language teacher education program, Seferoglu (2006) carried out a qualitative study and asked for last year student teachers' opinions about the methodology and practice component of the program. It was found that most of the student teachers expressed the need for more micro-teaching activities in addition to more observations of different aspects of different teachers at different levels in the school experience courses.

Peacock (2009), in an evaluation study in Hong-Kong, put forward a new procedure for the evaluation of EFL teacher-training programs. The model put forward a list of fifteen questions which covered key features of program philosophy, knowledge base and model of teacher education. The findings revealed that the program had strengths, including the teaching of pedagogic skills and promoting reflection and self-evaluation, and drawbacks, incorporating lack of attention to practice teaching and classroom management skills.

He and Yan (2011) examined the perspective of a cohort of 60 Chinese EFL pre-service teachers with regard to microteaching. Reflective paper writing was employed to explore the student teachers' perceptions of the experience. The study results showed that microteaching was a useful tool for the pre-service teachers' professional development; however, the experience was not without flaws. The most commonly perceived deficiency was artificiality, which appeared to have somehow limited the student teachers' development of real-life classroom teaching competence.

Salihoglu (2012) explored the beliefs of English Language pre-service teachers and their instructors on the effectiveness of an educational program at a Turkish university within the evaluation framework by Peacock (2009). The participants were 200 senior students and 21 instructors from the ELT Department. Data were collected through two similar form questionnaires based on Peacock (2009), a focus group discussion, and semi-structured interviews with three instructors. The findings indicated that although the pre-service teachers were mostly satisfied with the program; the practice, needs and language proficiency

components were reported to be the major concerns. The data from the instructors revealed some similar and differing attitudes towards the program.

Erten (2015) sought to explore how practicing teachers feel about their university education they received as part of their training as teachers of English. To do this, a web-based self-report survey form was administered to 49 practicing Turkish teachers of English (mean length of experience = 6 years) across Turkey. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that participants were fairly satisfied with their program. Qualitative analysis showed that participants often complained that they did not experience real life teaching during their education; that they were unaware of contextual challenges awaiting; and that there was a mismatch between ideals and actuals.

Brown, Lee, and Collins (2015) investigated how student teaching experiences impact the sense of teaching efficacy and feelings of preparedness of pre-service teachers in an early and elementary teacher education program (EC-6). The study used an action research, mixed-methods design. Seventy-one pre-service teachers at a large public university in the Southwest completed surveys about their preparedness to teach. Findings indicated that pre-service teachers' perceptions of preparedness and sense of teaching efficacy both increased significantly ( $p < 0.5$ ) from pre student teaching to post student teaching.

Celen and Akcan (2017) conducted a study to evaluate the English Language Teacher Education practicum offered at a state university in Turkey to discover: a) the strengths and weaknesses of the program; and b) the needs and problems experienced by student teachers. The results indicated that diversity and technology components of the teacher education program received lower ratings from both groups. The chance to teach in classrooms, discussions and peer feedback, observation of various grade levels, good relationship with cooperating teachers, and guidance by university supervisors were the strengths of the practicum experience.

Cesur and Ertas (2018) investigated the pedagogical content knowledge of the prospective language teachers in the English Language Teaching Department of Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Results revealed that prospective teachers of English believe they do not have required knowledge of the language they teach though they see themselves competent in other knowledge domains. Considering their knowledge on planning lessons, knowledge of their learners, and knowledge on assessment, there were mismatches/ discrepancies between teachers' perceptions/ beliefs and their actual/ real teaching practice.

General dissatisfactions with language teacher education in Iran have been discussed. Atai and Mazlum (2013) argued that there is a discrepancy between macro and practice levels in Iran. While planners believe that teacher education programs are efficient for teachers, Iranian teachers believe that in-service programs are not so effective and their personal investment is more beneficial.

Baniasad-Azad, Tavakoli, and Ketabi (2016) investigated the nature of EFL teacher education programs with respect to implementation, practicality, and approach to teacher learning. The results attested to the transmission orientation of the programs. It was found that a pre-specified body of teaching knowledge is transferred from the trainers to the teachers. Teachers' creativity, prior knowledge, experience, the role of teaching context, and the population of learners are not considered in program development. The results also revealed that even the trainers are not involved in the process of program development and what teachers considered beneficial for their development was different from what was incorporated in the programs.

Khanjani, Vahdany, and Jafarigohar (2016) investigated the layout of the pre-service EFL teacher training program in Iranian EFL context. Different components of the program, including needs analysis, objectives specification, instructional materials, teaching activities, and assessment procedures were evaluated in this study. The results revealed that the program had not been adequately laid-out.

Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016) investigated the attitudes key stakeholders in a teacher education program hold toward the appropriateness of TEFL teacher education programs at an Iranian teacher education university and their relevance to and sustainable impact on the real teaching context. The results indicated that the pre-service teachers and teacher educators found courses with literary strands less relevant to English language teaching and believed that those courses should be modified or replaced by teaching more knowledge-building or knowledge-applying subjects. Besides, the participants believed that it is essential for the universities to incorporate several practical courses including practicum and classroom observations within the curriculum.

The authors of the present study could not find any study conducted specifically on the detailed stated objectives for each course in the latest teacher education curriculum in Iran. This lack called for a thorough investigation of the latest EFL pre-service teacher education curriculum to determine how adequate and effective it is and practiced. Time is ripe to look at new teacher education curriculum and the extent to which it meets the goals of specific

teacher education institutions and the needs of pre-service language teachers. Accordingly, the following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers, teacher educators, and student teachers believe that the latest pre-service teacher education curriculum develop the student teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge?
2. Is there any difference between the teachers, teacher educators and student teachers' perceptions of the latest pre-service teacher education curriculum in three domains of knowledge?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Three groups of participants (N=227) took part in the present study. The first group included 130 EFL high school teachers who were selected through cluster random sampling from 363 teachers in Markazi Province. The teachers aged within the range of 22 to 50 (mean age 36), and their length of service ranged from 2 to 30 years. The majority of them were male (53%) and the rest were female (47%). The second group included 40 teacher educators (29 males, 11 females with a mean age of 45) who were teaching courses related to TEFL at Farhangian University or other universities which offered BA programs in TEFL. Eight of them had M.A in TEFL, and the rest held PhD in TEFL. Their length of service ranged from 5 to 30 years. The third group comprised 57 pre-service teachers who were senior BA students in TEFL at two Farhangian Universities and familiar enough with all of the courses provided by the university. The age range of the students was between 21 and 29 (mean =25). The majority of them were male (80%) and the rest were female (20%). Out of these participants, 20 teachers and 5 teacher educators volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews. Some of them were experienced and well-known.

### **Instruments**

This study made use of both questionnaire and semi-structured interview to explore the participants' views on the adequacy and effectiveness of the latest English pre-service teacher education curriculum (LTEC). In the latest curriculum, there have been some modifications including the removal of some unrelated courses and the addition of more courses related to pedagogical skills and ICT. The courses have been categorized into three domains of

knowledge including content knowledge (CK), pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and pedagogical knowledge (PK). A questionnaire was designed and validated by the researchers based on the courses and their stated objectives and performance tasks in afore-mentioned domains. This questionnaire used a five-point (1–5) Likert scale of 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'undecided', 'agree', and 'strongly agree'.

A panel discussion was conducted on the items of the first draft of the questionnaire. Ten EFL teacher educators judged the relevance and coverage of the items. A pilot study was, then, conducted on 45 high school teachers. The defective items were repaired and the final revision was conducted. The Cronbach's alpha showed a high reliability index of .89 for the whole questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprised 35 closed items and consisted of 2 sections. The first section elicited demographic information of the participants. The second section comprised 3 parts. The first part (items1–17) concerned the courses and their stated objectives in CK. The second part (items18–27) addressed the courses and their stated objectives in PCK. The third part (items28–35) targeted the courses and their stated objectives in PK. To avoid any possible misinterpretations, all questions were presented in the respondents' native tongue (i.e. Persian).

The semi-structured interview was used as a second data collection technique and aimed at gathering in-depth data and obtaining teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the curriculum. The researchers developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix 1). The content of the interview targeted the three domains of knowledge and some further issues regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. Twenty EFL teachers and five teacher educators voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews. The interviews, taking approximately 20 minutes each, were recorded, transcribed, and content analyzed. Fifteen EFL teacher educators judged their content coverage and relevance.

## **Procedure**

In this study, the data were collected through administrating the questionnaire and conducting follow-up semi-structured interviews with twenty EFL teachers and five teacher educators during three months. The interviewees were well-experienced and could provide the researchers with in-depth data. The data were collected in two main phases using a sequential process. The quantitative data were collected and analyzed in the first phase, and the



qualitative data were collected and analyzed in the second phase. Considering the stated objectives and performance tasks of different courses in the three domains of knowledge, the results of the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were analyzed to examine the adequacy and effectiveness of the latest curriculum.

This study used descriptive and inferential statistics for the survey instrument and qualitative patterns for the interview data. The data obtained from the sample were coded and fed into SPSS version 25 and were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, means, median, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics such as Kruskal-Wallis-H was run.

After analyzing quantitative data, the data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed and coded. The analysis of interview data followed the three flows of activity suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. The first step was the reduction of the huge amount of data by cutting it into smaller chunks and labelling to assign the meaning units to the data. Next, the data were displayed by creating categories and themes. Finally, the detailed description and insightful views about the participants in relation to teacher education curriculum were given.

## Results

In this section, the results of the data analyses are presented in details. The present study explored the perceptions of the EFL teachers, teacher educators and student teachers on the latest pre-service teacher education curriculum in the CK, PCK and PK domains.

### Teachers' Perception of the Courses in CK, PCK and PK

With regard to the courses in the CK, PCK and PK domains, the teachers' perceptions are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Results for Each Item (Teachers' Responses)*

	Item	N	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test	p-value
Content knowledge	A1	130	4.00	4.19	0.451	8128	0.000
	A2	130	4.00	4.15	0.641	8202.5	0.000
	A3	130	4.00	3.97	0.634	7243.5	0.000
	A4	130	4.00	3.42	1.113	5809	0.000
	A5	130	4.00	3.27	1.002	4930	0.001
	A6	130	4.00	3.80	0.687	4494	0.000
	A7	130	3.00	3.33	0.884	2836	0.000
	A8	130	4.00	3.52	1.013	4994.5	0.000
	A9	130	4.00	3.88	0.784	6132	0.000

	Item	N	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test	p-value
	A10	130	4.00	3.79	0.775	5640	0.000
	A11	130	4.00	4.13	0.615	7365	0.000
	A12	130	4.00	4.10	0.569	7285	0.000
	A13	130	4.00	4.05	0.601	6996	0.000
	A14	130	4.00	3.85	0.855	5644.5	0.000
	A15	130	4.00	3.95	0.843	6933	0.000
	A16	130	4.00	4.10	0.633	6700	0.000
	A17	130	4.00	3.86	0.785	5919.5	0.000
Pedagogical content knowledge	A18	130	4.00	3.65	0.962	5224	0.000
	A19	130	4.00	4.10	0.633	7005	0.000
	A20	130	4.00	3.90	0.714	5355	0.000
	A21	130	4.00	3.98	0.676	6040	0.000
	A22	130	4.00	3.81	0.881	5721	0.000
	A23	130	4.00	3.68	0.790	5050.5	0.000
	A24	130	4.00	4.19	0.672	7140	0.000
	A25	130	4.00	3.42	0.922	3508.5	0.000
	A26	130	4.00	3.78	0.972	6288.5	0.000
	A27	130	4.00	3.35	0.931	4267.5	0.000
Pedagogical knowledge	A28	130	4.00	3.81	0.694	5496	0.000
	A29	130	4.00	3.75	0.791	4780	0.000
	A30	130	4.00	3.88	0.682	5716	0.000
	A31	130	4.00	4.01	0.688	7038	0.000
	A32	130	4.00	3.89	0.650	5329.5	0.000
	A33	130	4.00	3.93	0.673	6267	0.000
	A34	130	3.00	3.00	0.956	2838.5	0.496
	A35	130	4.00	3.58	0.702	3670	0.000

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Responses in CK, PCK and PK

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Std. Error of Mean	Std. Deviation
CK	130	2.82	5.00	4.093	4.118	0.033	0.378
PCK	130	2.90	5.00	4.012	4.100	0.038	0.429
PK	130	2.88	5.00	3.983	4.000	0.040	0.462

In general, findings revealed that in most cases the teachers marked their positive perceptions of the adequacy and effectiveness of the stated objectives for the courses in the curriculum. The medians for three variables are more than 4. This is an indication of high agreement with the stated objectives for the courses in three domains of knowledge. The findings in Table 1 show that the p-value is less than 0.05 which indicates that the medians for three variables are more than 3. It can be concluded that with a high level of confidence the teachers marked their agreements with the stated objectives for the courses in three domains of knowledge. Only for item 34 the p-value is more than 0.05 which shows the teachers' disagreement with the stated objectives.

### Teacher Educators' Perception of the Courses in CK, PCK and PK

The descriptive data for the teacher educators' perceptions of the courses in CK, PCK and PK are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3.** *Descriptive Results for Each Item (Teacher Educators' Responses)*

	Item	N	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test	p-value
Content knowledge	A1	40	4.00	4.48	0.506	820	0.00
	A2	40	4.00	4.45	0.504	820	0.00
	A3	40	4.00	4.20	0.564	703	0.00
	A4	40	4.00	4.08	0.797	699	0.00
	A5	40	4.00	3.95	0.714	691.5	0.00
	A6	40	4.00	3.25	1.316	487.5	0.14
	A7	40	4.00	3.83	0.903	560	0.00
	A8	40	4.00	4.10	0.810	435	0.00
	A9	40	4.00	4.08	0.797	606	0.00
	A10	40	4.00	4.05	0.959	588	0.00
	A11	40	4.00	4.40	0.591	741	0.00
	A12	40	4.00	4.28	0.816	683	0.00
	A13	40	4.00	4.05	0.749	465	0.00
	A14	40	4.00	4.23	0.577	703	0.00
	A15	40	4.00	4.35	0.483	820	0.00
	A16	40	4.00	4.15	0.949	757.5	0.00
	A17	40	4.00	4.05	0.552	630	0.00
Pedagogical content knowledge	A18	40	4.00	3.95	0.846	557.5	0.00
	A19	40	4.00	4.28	0.751	561	0.00
	A20	40	4.00	4.03	0.947	421	0.00
	A21	40	4.00	4.20	0.791	496	0.00
	A22	40	4.00	4.20	0.791	779.5	0.00
	A23	40	4.00	3.95	0.846	645	0.00
	A24	40	2.00	2.83	1.662	351	0.80
	A25	40	4.00	4.00	0.961	640.5	0.00
	A26	40	4.00	3.23	1.405	488	0.14
	A27	40	4.00	4.20	0.883	671.5	0.00
Pedagogical knowledge	A28	40	4.00	3.95	0.846	737.5	0.00
	A29	40	4.00	3.98	0.733	602	0.00
	A30	40	4.00	3.35	1.460	520	0.06
	A31	40	4.00	3.98	0.577	561	0.00
	A32	40	4.00	3.83	0.903	645	0.00
	A33	40	4.00	3.95	0.552	561	0.00
	A34	40	4.00	3.60	1.128	622	0.00
	A35	40	4.00	3.53	1.261	570	0.01

**Table 4.** *Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Educators' Responses in CK, PCK and PK*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Std. Error of Mean	Std. Deviation
CK	40	3.41	4.88	4.115	4.118	0.066	0.415
PCK	40	3.00	4.80	3.885	3.800	0.090	0.570
PK	40	3.13	4.50	3.769	3.750	0.076	0.483

The data in the tables show that the teacher educators marked their positive perceptions of the courses and their stated objectives. It is reflected in the medians for three variables. Except for the items 6, 24, 26 and 30, the findings demonstrate the teacher educators' agreement with the stated objectives. The p-values for these four items are more than 0.05 which show the respondents' disagreement.

### Student Teachers' Perception of the Courses in CK, PCK and PK

The descriptive data for student teachers' perception of the courses in CK, PCK and PK are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5.** *Descriptive Results for Each Item (Student Teachers' Responses)*

	Item	N	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test	p-value
Content knowledge	A1	57	4.00	4.23	0.501	1540	0.00
	A2	57	4.00	4.09	0.786	1545.5	0.00
	A3	57	4.00	3.86	0.766	1338	0.00
	A4	57	4.00	3.58	0.999	1263	0.00
	A5	57	4.00	3.54	0.908	1038	0.00
	A6	57	4.00	3.74	0.720	561	0.00
	A7	57	3.00	2.86	1.008	337.5	0.86
	A8	57	4.00	3.40	1.116	1060	0.00
	A9	57	4.00	3.91	0.714	1288	0.00
	A10	57	4.00	3.68	0.890	856	0.00
	A11	57	4.00	4.07	0.563	1548	0.00
	A12	57	4.00	3.82	0.909	1324	0.00
	A13	57	4.00	3.84	0.727	1139	0.00
	A14	57	4.00	3.96	0.801	1199	0.00
	A15	57	4.00	3.96	0.963	1325	0.00
	A16	57	4.00	3.98	0.582	1253.5	0.00
	A17	57	4.00	3.47	1.020	740	0.00
Pedagogical content knowledge	A18	57	4.00	3.46	1.070	889	0.00
	A19	57	4.00	3.89	0.817	1299	0.00
	A20	57	4.00	3.74	0.768	872	0.00
	A21	57	4.00	3.58	1.085	836	0.00
	A22	57	4.00	3.47	1.020	939	0.00
	A23	57	4.00	3.60	0.884	891.5	0.00
	A24	57	4.00	3.84	0.996	1029	0.00
	A25	57	3.00	3.23	0.846	403	0.02

	Item	N	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test	p-value
Pedagogical knowledge	A26	57	4.00	3.39	1.161	906	0.01
	A27	57	4.00	3.18	0.966	705	0.09
	A28	57	4.00	3.37	0.879	661	0.00
	A29	57	4.00	3.54	0.908	645	0.00
	A30	57	4.00	3.96	0.654	1233	0.00
	A31	57	4.00	3.98	0.612	1333	0.00
	A32	57	4.00	3.58	0.823	766	0.00
	A33	57	4.00	3.53	1.054	995.5	0.00
	A34	57	3.00	2.91	0.950	345	0.76
	A35	57	3.00	3.37	0.723	339	0.00

**Table 6.** Descriptive Statistics for Student Teachers' Responses in CK, PCK and PK

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Std. Error of Mean	Std. Deviation
CK	57	3.00	4.35	3.77	3.82	0.04	0.30
PCK	57	2.20	4.40	3.54	3.70	0.07	0.54
PK	57	1.88	4.50	3.53	3.63	0.06	0.49

As it can be seen in the tables, the student teachers marked their positive perception of the stated objectives for the courses in three domains of knowledge. It is reflected in the medians for three variables which are more than 3. The p-values for the items 7, 27 and 34 ( $p > 0.05$ ) show the student teachers' disagreement with the stated objectives of the courses in CK, PCK and PK.

### Comparative Analysis of the Teachers, Teacher Educators and Student Teachers' Responses in CK, PCK and PK

Tables 7, 8 and 9 present the results of the comparative analysis of the teachers, teacher educators and student teachers' perceptions of the stated objectives for the courses in CK, PCK and PK. To obtain the results, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was run.

**Table 7.** Kruskal-Wallis-H Results for Participants' Responses in CK

Variable	Group	N	Median	Mean	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	P-value
CK	Teachers	130	3.853	3.846	108.97	22.239	0.000
	Teacher educators	40	4.117	4.115	156.63		
	Student teachers	57	3.824	3.766	95.56		

**Table 8.** *Kruskal-Wallis-H Results for Participants' Responses in PCK*

Variable	Group	N	Median	Mean	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	P-value
PCK	Teachers	130	3.800	3.786	119.29	9.381	0.009
	Teacher educators	40	3.800	3.885	128.50		
	Student teachers	57	3.700	3.537	91.76		

**Table 9.** *Kruskal-Wallis-H Results for Participants' Responses in PK*

Variable	Group	N	Median	Mean	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	P-value
PK	Teachers	130	3.750	3.731	120.24	7.077	0.029
	Teacher educators	40	3.750	3.768	122.03		
	Student teachers	57	3.625	3.531	94.14		

According to the shown data, the medians and the means of the participants' responses to the items slightly differ. However, these differences do not indicate the participants' disagreement with the items. The medians for the responses of three groups ( $M > 3$ ) show the participants' agreement with the adequacy and effectiveness of the courses in the curriculum.

### Teachers and Teacher Educators' Interviews

Twenty EFL teachers and five teacher educators voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews. After the administration of the questionnaires, interviews were used to further explore and gain better understanding of teachers and teacher educators' perceptions of the courses in three domains of knowledge.

After transcribing the interviews, content analysis was conducted. It was aimed to identify patterns of themes to explain the data. Four general themes emerged in relation to three domains of knowledge. They focused on the fundamental aspects of curriculum: knowledge of language; knowledge of pedagogical and teaching skills; balance of theory and practice, and integration of the technology across the curriculum.

Regarding the language knowledge and skills, the findings from the teachers and teacher educators' interviews revealed the adequacy of the courses in the content domain. Most of the interviewees found the latest curriculum more effective in developing language knowledge and skills. They raised some positive issues such as modified and new courses and the increase in the teaching hours and credits of some courses. One teacher educator said, "The latest curriculum provides student teachers with more opportunities to improve their language skills and equip them with more knowledge of English". However, they expressed

that some other factors like student teachers' motivation and prior linguistic knowledge and teaching practices should be considered important and the theoretical adequacy does not guarantee effectiveness.

Some teachers and teacher educators expressed that the courses for language skills especially speaking and writing courses do not develop the student teachers' speaking and writing skills as it is intended in the curriculum. One of them said, "I think the student teachers need more writing subjects and practice so that they will be able to use the language to express their thoughts and organize their writing". In reference to his experience, he said, "When I am teaching English to my students, I feel less proficient for teaching speaking and writing". Another teacher said, "If the speaking courses are not improved and promoted, the student teachers won't be able to speak well and it will be so challenging in class". In other courses in the CK domain, almost all the interviewees in both groups agreed on the success of the latest curriculum in achieving intended objectives.

Regarding the pedagogical and teaching skills, the majority of the interviewees believed that the latest curriculum includes necessary related courses and provides adequate theoretical knowledge in this domain. Also, they stated that more practical teaching courses are provided. But they referred to one main problem and it was that the focus of some courses and subjects is mostly on theoretical aspects. One teacher said, "I find theories useful to help student teachers prepare themselves to teach, but students need more time to practice than focusing too much on theory". In line with this perception, another teacher said, "Subjects related to pedagogical skills are not well explored when compared with English skill subjects. Areas such as managing the classroom and meeting the students' needs are theoretically focused on and lack practical considerations". In her interview, one female teacher explained:

What the student teachers are given is just a guideline in teaching generally, not specifically on the subject. I'm saying that they teach student teachers generally on how teaching is and how they should manage the classes, instead of really teaching them how they should teach English. It seems that they are just taught on the theoretical aspects. So, when they start teaching in real class, they encounter a situation different from what they learn in teacher education classes at university.

With respect to balancing the theory and practice, the data from the interviews showed that most of the teachers and teacher educators perceived the newly incorporated teaching practicum courses helpful in enabling student teachers to implement what they have learned during the curriculum into the real world of school teaching practice. In fact, they stressed

that the latest curriculum is much richer and more effective in teaching practicum than the previous one. One of them expressed her view about teaching practicum in the latest curriculum in this way:

The latest curriculum is so rich in teaching practicum. It provides the student teachers with high opportunities to get experience in teaching in front of students delivering subject matter, managing the classroom, and conducting assessment. In other words, the teaching practicum is the place to implement what the student teachers have learnt about school practice. It is the time to bring theories into practice. They learn how to design a lesson plan, construct test instruments and prepare teaching devices.

One teacher educator pointed out:

Teaching practicum is the most important step in becoming an English teacher. During the teaching practice in school, the student teachers gain a lot of experience, such as how to face student misbehavior, deliver the subject content of English and do some school stuff. They have the opportunity to bring the theories they have learnt at university into practice in school. By incorporating more teaching courses, the latest curriculum enables the student teachers to gain experience of teaching in real educational setting.

Considering the technology integration across the curriculum, the interviewees agreed that it is one of the strengths of the curriculum and the ICT courses are inseparable from modern educational systems. They pointed out that these courses should be taught by teachers other than English teacher educators and the necessary equipment should be provided at both teacher training centers and schools where the student teachers are going to do their teaching practicum. Classrooms can be viewed as reflections of social contexts. To help teachers understand students, they need to keep up with all dimensions of the larger social contexts. One teacher stated:

Knowledge of content and pedagogical skills alone is not sufficient for being a teacher. Teaching English requires knowledge of everything ranging from the social context to technology. And the rapid development of technology has driven me to worry about technological literacy. How can I teach the course unless I am knowledgeable and up-to-date enough to integrate social innovation in my lessons? If not, teachers would be far behind students.



### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the latest Curriculum**

With regard to strengths, a dominant number of the interviewees believed that the latest curriculum raises effective language teachers. One teacher interviewee uttered, "The curriculum teaches how to teach with various courses and I think all the courses in it help student teachers be a well-trained language teacher in the future."

Another strength of the program as stated by some interviewees was the effectiveness of the subject matter and pedagogical courses in the latest curriculum. To exemplify, one interviewee said, "All the approaches, methods, and techniques of how to teach English, how to adapt materials, how students learn, as well as how to be a flexible teacher are taught in the curriculum."

Moreover, some of the interviewees mentioned the given assignments and projects as a strength. They believed that they are fruitful for the student teachers. One teacher educator said:

Additionally, I can say that projects are more important than exams because the exams are based on memorization. For example, in Testing and Evaluation in English Language Teaching course I not only ask 'the principles of testing' in the exam but also assigns a project about them, and the student learn them very well. I believe that they will never forget these principles since they had a chance to practice them. I always support learning by doing.

Another strength mentioned by most interviewees was that the latest curriculum has a linear structure, which makes it stronger because the structure of it follows a stepwise progress. In other words, the first step prepares the student for the second step. For example, the first and second year courses prepare the students for the third and fourth year courses by supplying them relevant and necessary knowledge in order to understand and perform successfully in them.

On the other hand, some interviewees mentioned some drawbacks. They pointed to the inadequacy of the instructional materials implemented in the curriculum, lack of effective sources and materials for some courses and lack of facilities. For a majority of these interviewees, the materials are outdated and do not help student teachers put the pedagogical content knowledge into practice. They believed that lack of language labs and up-to-date textbooks for some courses is quite evident in the curriculum.

To some teachers, the teaching activities utilized in the program could not give rise to teachers' professional development. To add more, they were unhappy with the inadequate

assessment procedures implemented in the curriculum. For them, the lecture-based instruction leaves no room for the student teachers to express themselves, to develop communicative skills in English, and to experience collaborative work and reflective practice.

Furthermore, some interviewees stated that due attention is not paid to the practical knowledge of the student teachers. In a majority of cases, there is overemphasis on the theoretical aspects of teaching at the expense of practical orientation. One of the teacher educators said, "After several sessions, the teacher trainees feel the classes aren't going to improve their teaching skills as instructors talk about teaching theories, methods or techniques presented in different books instead of teaching them how to put such knowledge into practice."

## Discussion

This study was a comprehensive endeavor to explore the Iranian EFL teachers, teacher educators and student teachers' perceptions of the adequacy and effectiveness of the courses in three domains of knowledge in the latest pre-service teacher education curriculum.

First, looking at research question one, the overall quantitative findings of the study indicated that the participants held a positive view about the adequacy and effectiveness of the stated objectives of the courses in the curriculum. They marked their positive perceptions and satisfaction by showing their agreement with the items. Except for a few items, the medians and p-values ( $M=4$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) showed the participants' high agreement with almost other items in the CK, PCK and PK domains. It can be argued that the stated objectives are laudable and the latest curriculum provides the student teachers with adequate training and preparation on teaching profession in both linguistic and pedagogical domains. The findings of this study are not in accord with the findings of the studies by Baniasad-Azad, Tavakoli, and Ketabi (2016) and Khanjani, Vahdany, and Jafarigohar (2016) in which the results revealed that what teachers considered beneficial for their development was different from what was incorporated in the programs and the teacher education program had not adequately been laid out. The overall quantitative findings of the study are compatible with what Plucker, Burroughs, and Song (2004) and Salihoglu (2012) found. The findings of the first study revealed that the graduates reported feeling well-prepared by their IUB teacher education program. Graduates report being most satisfied with: a) learning the content necessary to teach effectively in their subject area and b) the positive overall learning environment of their IUB undergraduate program. The findings of the second study showed that there was some measure of satisfaction for the program by students and lecturers.

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and allowed the researchers to explore the diversity and heterogeneity within the topic of the latest teacher education curriculum assessment, not covered fully by the questionnaire. On the one hand, almost all 25 teacher and teacher educator interviewees held a positive view on the adequacy and effectiveness of the courses in the latest teacher education curriculum. They believed that the modifications in the latest curriculum have enriched it with more specialized, technical and practical courses in the pedagogical domain compared to previous teacher education programs and have laid the foundations for preparing the student teachers for their future job. These findings somehow agree with the findings by Agudo (2017) who carried out a study in Spanish context and found that the TEFL program adequately covers pedagogic competence. Also, the findings of this study are compatible with the findings by Brown, Lee, and Collins (2015) who investigated how student teaching experiences impact the sense of teaching efficacy and preparedness of pre-service teachers in an early and elementary teacher education program. Findings indicated that pre-service teachers' perceptions of preparedness and sense of teaching efficacy both increased significantly through teacher education program.

On the other hand, a majority of the interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with some issues and mentioned some drawbacks in the latest curriculum. They argued that the inadequacy of instructional materials, lack of effective sources, the limited and inadequate time, hours and credit for some courses, the dominant old attitudes and teaching practices among some teacher educators and insufficient space and time for theory-practice praxis could lead to the point that the latest curriculum fails to fully satisfy the practical demands in different everyday situations of the classroom. Despite the fact that more teaching practicum courses have been incorporated into the latest curriculum, some of the interviewees pointed out that there should be more experiential and real teaching at schools and due attention should be paid to practical knowledge of the student teachers. The qualitative findings also revealed the need for more practice oriented knowledge of subject matter especially for the writing and conversation courses and assessment methods. These findings show similarities with other studies. Erten (2015) came up with a conclusion that the majority of participants complained that they did not experience real life teaching during their education; that they were unaware of contextual challenges awaiting; and that there was a mismatch between ideals and actuals. He and Yan (2011) examined the Chinese EFL pre-service teachers' perspective with regards to microteaching. The study results showed that microteaching was

a useful tool for the pre-service teachers' professional development; however, the experience was not without flaws. The most commonly perceived deficiency was artificiality, which appeared to have to some extent limited the student teachers' development of real-life classroom teaching competence.

Second, looking at research question two, the results of *Kruskal-Wallis-H* test demonstrated that even if there were some slight differences in the participants' perceptions, the medians for responses to the items in three groups ( $M > 3$ ) reflect the participants' positive perceptions of the adequacy and effectiveness of the courses in three domains of knowledge.

## Conclusion

This study attempted to obtain an insider's view on the adequacy and effectiveness of the courses in the latest pre-service teacher education curriculum in the Iranian educational context. It revealed that participants' perceptions were positive for the majority of items in three domains of knowledge. The findings showed that the latest curriculum provides student teachers with adequate linguistic and pedagogical knowledge and if the objectives are fully implemented, it will produce well-prepared and competent teachers. In fact, teachers' positive perceptions of the courses in the latest curriculum might be an indication of effective and promising modifications in the latest curriculum. At the same time, the findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed that the latest curriculum is not free of drawbacks, and it requires reforms in some parts. Despite the fact that the current curriculum seeks to accommodate all needs of student teachers, there are some areas that must be addressed to enable effective implementation of the curriculum. Some interviewees pointed to the inadequacy of the instructional materials implemented in the curriculum, lack of effective sources and materials for some courses, and lack of facilities. For a majority of these interviewees, the materials were outdated and do not help student teachers put the pedagogical content knowledge into practice. Some teachers believed that the teaching activities utilized in the program could not give rise to teachers' professional development, due attention is not paid to the practical knowledge of the student teachers, and there is overemphasis on the theoretical aspects of teaching at the expense of practical orientation.

In view of the findings derived from this study and the conclusions arising from them, it should be stated that listening to EFL school teachers and student teachers' voices is a very important issue which is required to be taken into consideration in any teacher education curriculum. It is recommended that both policy and decision makers in teacher education

programs give the chance to the stakeholders to express their views on different elements and components of their program such as teaching practices and methods, content, assessment procedures, performance tasks and instructional materials. The current study can inform the educational authorities of the student teachers' needs and preferences which are significant in designing new programs or making reforms to the existing ones.

Further studies can be done to explore the other domains of a knowledge base, as suggested by Richards (2010). Also, further studies are needed to involve class teachers as middleman in teaching practicum courses and examine how they affect the English language teacher education program design. It is suggested other issues such as prior knowledge of the student teachers and their expectations of the teacher education curriculum be investigated and teaching and learning practices be observed from inside the classrooms of pre-service teacher education.

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## Appendix 1

### Interview Questions

1. How do you feel that the current curriculum improves student teachers' ability to meet the individual learning needs of English language learners?
2. How do you feel that the current curriculum improves student teachers' ability to utilize technology in the classroom as a tool to meet their students' individual learning needs?
3. Do you feel that the field experience and teaching courses influence the student teachers' development as EFL teachers?
4. How well does the current curriculum prepare the student teachers to teach subject matter concepts, knowledge, and skills in ways that enable students to learn?
5. How well does the current curriculum prepare the student teachers to be effective EFL teachers as far as teaching competencies are concerned?
6. Does the current curriculum promote student teachers' flexibility in using different teaching approaches for different situations?
7. How well does the current curriculum prepare the student teachers function in the sociocultural context in which they will work?
8. Does the current curriculum incorporate and balance linguistic, pedagogic, and managerial competence to an appropriate degree?
9. Does the current curriculum meet the student teachers' needs and adequately prepare them for classroom teaching?
10. What is your overall evaluation of the current curriculum?
11. What problems and challenges or good points do you observe in the current curriculum?