

## The EFL Pre-Service Teacher Training in Iran: Is it Adequate or not?

<sup>1</sup>Amin Khanjani\*

<sup>2</sup>Fereidoon Vahdany

ID: IJEAP-1702-1011

<sup>3</sup>Manoochehr Jafarigohar

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### Abstract

Teacher training programs should provide evidence that they are preparing teacher trainees for their teaching career. However, the literature contains few evaluation reports of the layout of the pre-service EFL teacher training program in Iranian EFL context, a gap which this study tries to fill. The participants of the study were high school EFL teachers (n = 346), teacher trainees (n = 97) and teacher trainers (n = 20) from Guilan Province. This study utilized a concurrent mixed-method design to evaluate the adequacy of the program. Different components of the program, including needs analysis, objectives specification, instructional materials, teaching activities, and assessment procedures were evaluated in this study. The results of the questionnaire and observation checklist were analyzed quantitatively. For interview results, both quantitative (percentages) and qualitative analyses were deployed. The results revealed that the program had not been adequately laid-out. Finally, some practical solutions for the improvement of the program are suggested.

**Keywords:** Teacher Training, Pre-service, Layout, EFL, Iran, Evaluation

### 1. Introduction

Education is a complex and dynamic system comprising various agents (Van Geert & Steenbeek, 2014), including educational researchers, policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, parents, students and instructional tools. Among all these

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<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author- Language Department, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. Email: [khanjanitefl@gmail.com](mailto:khanjanitefl@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Language Department, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. Email: [frvahdany@gmail.com](mailto:frvahdany@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>Language Department, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. Email: [Jafarigohar2007@yahoo.com](mailto:Jafarigohar2007@yahoo.com)

agents, teachers are perceived to play the most significant role in efficiency of educational systems (Garies & Grant, 2014; Markley, 2004). In fact, teachers are the key elements in the implementation of educational reform (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). Besides, a number of studies have demonstrated that teacher effectiveness and professionalism can lead to student achievement (Heck, 2009). Hence, it is urgent that teachers reconstruct their professional knowledge, and practices, which can only be obtained through consistent professional training and development. According to Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002), teacher training, especially, pre-service teacher training is a strong predictor of teacher professionalism; it can also provide an impetus for change in teachers' educational practices (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). However, despite the principal role of pre-service teacher training in enhancing teacher professionalism, little attempt has been made to evaluate the adequacy of such programs in EFL contexts (Peacock, 2009). As put forward by Peacock (2009), evaluation of these programs is an important step towards professionalization in our field, which contributes to program improvement, hence its accountability.

## 2. Literature Review and the Rationale of the Study

Robinson (2003) defined program evaluation as "the collection, analysis, and interpretation of information for forming judgments about the value of a particular program" (p. 199). The aim is to provide necessary information on the accountability and improvement of the program (Peacock, 2009). According to Brown (1989), in evaluating any program, five elements should be considered: needs analysis, goals and objectives, assessment procedures, materials, and teaching. Each aspect can be evaluated to provide a dynamic process of curriculum development. The efficiency of a language program, according to him, depends on how well these stages of curriculum development have been implemented. He further noted information gathered through an evaluation should be used to improve the program and to assess its effectiveness.

In the literature, various models of program evaluation have been put forward. According to Brown (1989), in educational literature, each program evaluation can be placed into one of the four categories: product-oriented approaches, static-characteristic approaches, process-oriented approaches, and decision-facilitation approaches. Brown's (1989) approach to designing and evaluating a language curriculum draws from various models. In his view, curriculum development and evaluation is an ongoing process, which comprises a series of activities: needs analysis, objective specification, material development, teaching activities, and evaluation procedures.

Meanwhile, Worthen, Sanders and Fitzpatrick (2004) drew our attention to the alternative evaluation approaches. According to them, "the value of the alternative approaches lies in their capacity to help us think, to present and provoke new ideas and techniques, and to serve as mental checklists of things we ought to consider, remember, or worry about" (p. 159). They provoked an eclectic approach for program evaluation: a combination of several evaluation approaches. This study while taking into Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen's (2004) eclectic evaluation approach, addresses different components of the program, as advocated by Brown(1989).

There have been some evaluation studies on the pre-service teacher training in EFL contexts focusing on the perceptions of participants on the adequacy of the program (e.g., Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Mirhassani & Beh-Afarin, 2004; Peacock, 2009) or the introduction of new training programs or methodology to provide more reflective teachers (e.g., Lee, 2007; Liou, 2001; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010).

Ogilvie and Dunn (2010), for example, in an exploratory study on pre-service teachers in Taiwan, investigated the influence of a task based course on trainees' perspectives towards the principles of task based instruction. Based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the researchers suggested that the course increased the trainees' disposition towards such instruction, but that the positive disposition did not translate into actual use or implementation during the practicum.

Peacock (2009), in an evaluation study in Hong-Kong, put forward a new procedure for the evaluation of EFL teacher-training programs. The procedure focused on program strengths and weaknesses and how far the program met the needs of the teacher trainees. The model put forward a list of fifteen questions which cover key features of program philosophy, knowledge base and model of teacher education. The findings revealed that the program had much strength, including the teaching of pedagogic skills and promoting reflection and self-evaluation, but also drawbacks: Due attention was not paid to practice teaching and classroom management skills.

Following Peacock's (2009) model, Coskun and Daloglu (2010) tried to reveal the pre-service English teacher training components that were in need of improvement or maintenance both from teachers' and students' perspectives. The study was done in the Turkish context. The data collected through questionnaires and interviews revealed that some program components, including pedagogic side and linguistic competence, needed improvement.

Teacher training in the Iranian EFL context has also been targeted. Most of the studies though were concerned with the in-service teacher training (e.g., Atai&Asadi, 2014; Hashemian&Azadi, 2010). To the best of researchers' knowledge, only Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004) seem to have evaluated the EFL pre-service teacher training in Iran to see whether communicative language teaching approach was utilized in such program.

Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004) in a comprehensive survey-based study tried to evaluate the status of the Iranian EFL teacher training in terms of the adoption of the communicative approach in such programs. To this end, 589 participants took part in the study. The results indicated that the participants were dissatisfied with the present situation of the program; there was a gap between what participants expected from the program and their current situation; the communicative approach could be hardly incorporated into the programs; and a majority of the participants expressed a need for a revision in such programs.

Reviewing the literature revealed that few studies, to the best of researchers' knowledge, have targeted the different components of EFL pre-service teacher training programs while as Brown (1989) contended efficiency of a program can be examined through its five components, including needs analysis, objectives, materials, instructional activities and assessment procedure. Moreover, most evaluation studies were concerned solely with the participants' perceptions; however, in order to provide evidence for the efficiency of the program, we need to go beyond the reactions of the participants and take into account their behavior in the actual teaching practice (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Most studies seem to have overlooked this important aspect of program evaluation. Considering the indispensable role of program evaluation (Peacock, 2009; Robinson, 2003), it is hoped that this study would contribute to our better understanding of the pre-service EFL teacher training in Iran and it would provide some practical suggestions for its improvement. The following research question was formulated to address the above-mentioned gap in literature:

- To what extent is the Iranian pre-service EFL teacher training program adequately laid-out?

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Participants*

The participants (N=463) of the study were all selected from Guilan Province, north of Iran. According to the records of the education board, 924 high school EFL

teachers serve in 13 counties of the province. 346 high school EFL teachers, both male and female, were selected through cluster random sampling to complete the questionnaire. Eight randomly selected counties constituted eight clusters. The teachers aged within the range of 23 to 56 (mean age 38). Most teachers (nearly 80%) had B.A degrees and the rest had M.A degrees in TEFL. The teachers' teaching experience ranged from 3 to 27 years. In addition, 117 trainees/trainers selected through convenience sampling from Guilan Province teacher training centers filled out the questionnaire. Among the 20 teacher educators participated in this study, only four had PhD in TEFL and the rest M.A in TEFL. All trainers were male and their teaching experience ranged from 2 to 21 years (Mean age = 39). The majority of participants were female (59.82 %) and the rest male (40.18%).

### 3.2 Instruments

A questionnaire, semi-structure interviews, and an observation checklist were utilized to evaluate the program. The questionnaire was developed based on the current theories of teacher training and program evaluation in the literature, which focus on triangulation and the exploratory interview with the graduate teacher trainees and teacher trainers. A panel discussion was conducted on the items of the first draft of the questionnaire. Ten EFL professors/teacher trainers judged the relevance and coverage of the items on a Likert scale. A pilot study was, then, conducted on 45 EFL teacher trainees and high school teachers. The defective items were repaired and the final revision conducted. The Cronbach's alpha showed a high reliability index of .93 for the whole questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprised 50 closed items developed in the Likert scale and consisted of 6 parts. The beginning part of the questionnaire elicited demographic information of the participants. The first part (items 1–8) was concerned with the overall design and layout of the program (Peacock, 2009; Rahimi, 2008). The second part (items 9–16) addressed the adequacy of program learning objectives (Fadil, 1985; Guilbert, 1983). The third part (items 17–22) targeted textbook evaluation (Jahangard, 2007; Mukundan & Rezvani Kalajahi, 2013; Rahimpour & Hashemi, 2011). The fourth part (items 23–30) dealt with the adequacy of instructional activities of the program. The fifth part (items 31–35) was related to the efficiency of assessment procedures used in the program. Finally, part 6 (36–50) examined possible challenges and problems in the program. To avoid any possible misinterpretations, all questions were presented in the respondents' native tongue (i.e. Persian).

The researchers also developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix). The content of the interview targeted the layout of the program and some further relevant issues regarding main challenges and problems in the program.

The interviews, taking approximately 20 minutes each, were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The 10 EFL professors/teacher trainers also judged its content coverage and relevance. An observation checklist was also developed for observing teacher trainees' and high school EFL teachers' instructional activities (Brown, 2001). It addressed the type of teaching method used by the teacher; the orientation toward teacher/learner-centered approach; the use of group-work; the presence of lesson planning; use of various assessment techniques and the medium of instruction utilized. A checkmark was provided for the presence of the variables. The observation checklist was piloted with similar classes and its adequacy was approved by the experts in the field.

### *3.3 Procedure*

To investigate whether the program was laid out on a systematic needs analysis, the researchers conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher training in Iran in the main education-related databases. Concerning objectives of the courses, results of the questionnaire and the interview were analyzed to examine the adequacy of the objectives stated in the Educational Planning Resolution developed by the Supreme Council of Planning in 2004. For the evaluation of the materials implemented in the program, through the questionnaire and interview, the researcher elicited participants' perception on the adequacy of the textbooks—as the main instructional materials—used in the program. Similarly, their perceptions on the adequacy of the assessment procedures implemented in the program were elicited through the questionnaire and interview. In addition, to probe into the application of the acquired knowledge in high schools, one of the researchers (the first author) observed 18 teacher trainees' teaching practice on reading comprehension and grammar in the practicum courses and 18 high school EFL teachers' practice in actual high school classes. Furthermore, 14 teacher trainers and 18 MA high school teachers were interviewed.

### *3.4 Data Analysis*

In this concurrent mixed-method study (Creswell, 2003), various qualitative and quantitative instruments were employed. The obtained data were then fed into SPSS, version 22. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and descriptive analyses (frequency, percentage, means and standard deviation) were run. For interview results both quantitative (percentages) and qualitative analyses, open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), were conducted. In the open coding, transcribed data from the interview were conceptualized and a large number of codes were obtained and were reduced later. In the axial coding, the pieces related to the

same topic were brought under one bigger category. The results of the observation checklists were also quantitatively analyzed.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Overall Layout

With regard to the adequacy of the layout of the program, the participants' overall perceptions are presented in Table 1. In general, the findings revealed that apparently in most cases around 70% of the participants were not satisfied with the structure and layout of the program ( $M=2.29$ ;  $SD=.81$ ).

Table 1. Frequency (Percentage) of the Overall Participants' Perceptions on the Layout of the Program

Item (N = 463)	HD	D	NI	A	HA	M	SD
1. The program has been developed based on a systematic needs analysis	176 (37.7)	198 (42.1)	74 (15.8)	15 (3.2)	0	1.8	.80
2. The program has clearly stated objectives based on the needs analysis	75 (16.1)	181 (38.8)	181 (38.8)	21 (4.5)	5 (1.1)	2.3	.84
3. It has good linkage among different courses	7 (1.5)	78 (16.7)	230 (49.3)	127 (27.7)	21 (4.5)	3.1	.81
4. It utilizes up-to date instructional materials	44 (9.4)	25 (56.7)	126 (27)	21 (4.5)	7 (1.5)	2.3	.76
5. Teaching materials are based on the needs of the trainees	119 (25.5)	230 (49.3)	92 (19.7)	16 (3.4)	6 (1.3)	2.0	.84
6. Teaching activities promote reflective practice in teacher students	90 (19.3)	254 (54.4)	95 (2.3)	18 (3.9)	6 (1.3)	2.1	.81
7. The assessments clearly measure the learning objective	71 (15.2)	250 (53.3)	117 (25.1)	15 (3.2)	10 (2.10)	2.2	.82
8. The results of the assessments can help teacher educators to refine and revise their instructional plans for the next term	63 (13.5)	219 (46.9)	155 (33.2)	16 (3.4)	10 (2.1)	2.3	.83

Note: HD = Highly Disagree; D = Disagree; NI = No Idea; A = Agree; HA = Highly Agree; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

## 4.1.1 Needs Analysis

As presented earlier, the first item of the questionnaire elicited 463 participants' perceptions with regard to the needs analysis ( $M = 1.84$ ,  $SD = .80$ ). More than 79% of respondents disagreed that the program had been developed on the basis of a systematic needs analysis.

Moreover, a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher training in Iran, focusing on the key word *needs analysis/ needs assessment for Iranian EFL teacher training* in the main inter/national education-related databases (e.g. ERIC, Science Direct, Sage publications, Irandoc, SID and Magiran) was done. The scope of the study was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers that reported needs analysis projects in the Iranian EFL teacher training context in recent 20 years. To the best of researchers' knowledge, none of the databases mentioned contained any research articles or conference papers on needs assessment project for pre-service EFL teacher training programs.

## 4.1.2 Objective Specification

Table 2 presents the participants' perceptions on the adequacy of the objectives of the program. As the results demonstrate ( $M=2.94$ ;  $SD=.84$ ) around 40% of the participants had negative attitudes regarding the objectives; around 25% stated that the objectives were not appropriate; nearly 50% had no idea in this regard; and around 25% postulated that the objectives were appropriate.

Table 2. Frequency (Percentage) of the Participants' Perceptions on the Adequacy of the Objective of the Program

Item (N = 463)	HD	D	NI	A	HA	M	SD
9. The statements demonstrate the requisite level or standards for the knowledge and skills, and the learning conditions	17 (3.6)	76 (16.3)	194 (41.5)	135 (28.9)	41 (8.8)	3.23	.95
10. The statements use active verbs that specify observable behaviors or performance levels	6 (1.3)	63 (13.5)	247 (52.9)	119 (25.5)	28 (6)	3.21	.80
11. The outcomes are feasible and reasonable to attain	12 (2.6)	132 (28.3)	231 (49.5)	78 (16.7)	10 (2.1)	2.87	.79
12. The intended outcomes are distinct and specific to the EFL teacher training program	24 (5.1)	125 (26.8)	255 (54.6)	49 (10.5)	10 (2.1)	2.77	.78
13. The objectives are capable of being assessed by more than one	29	115	220	95	4	2.84	.83

14. The objectives can be used to improve the EFL teacher trainees' knowledge and skills	21 (4.5)	95 (20.3)	254 (54.4)	87 (18.6)	6 (1.3)	2.91	.78
15. Considered all, the intended outcomes accurately mirror the key desired learning results for the teacher training program	45 (9.6)	96 (20.6)	243 (52.2)	75 (16.1)	4 (.9)	2.77	.86

Note: HD=Highly Disagree; D=Disagree; NI=No Idea; A=Agree; HA=Highly Agree; M=Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

What is noteworthy here is the large number of participants—half of the participants—who had no idea with regard to the objectives. It shows that for a majority of the EFL teachers, teacher educators and teacher trainees, the objectives of the program might be still unclear or, at least, they may not be aware of them.

To get more insights from the participants on the adequacy of objectives, the researchers elicited their opinion through the first question of the semi-structured interview. To help the participants remember the objectives, the researchers provided them with a copy of the objectives released by the Supreme Council of Planning of the Ministry of Education. Around 45% of participants believed the objectives were appropriate; about 35% believed that they were inadequate while 20% were neutral. For those who voted for the inadequacy of objectives, the major problem was the *generality of objectives*; they believed the objectives were not specific to the EFL teacher training program. They attributed such problems to the *lack of a systematic needs assessment*. One of teacher trainers, for example, said that:

*I can see no difference between the reading course objectives here and those developed for the same course for English translation or literature students. It seems that for those who have developed such objectives, the needs of the students have no role.*

In the same vein, another important issue raised was *lack of attention to teacher trainees' practical knowledge*. One interviewee, for example, stated that:

*Although somehow convincing the objectives appear, one can ask himself/herself why there is no room for promoting teacher trainees' pedagogic knowledge. I mean the objectives do not help the students learn how to teach the required skill or knowledge. They center on developing students' theoretical knowledge at the expense of the practical knowledge.*

Finally, some pointed to the *ambiguity of the assessment techniques*. They believed that the assessment techniques are too general and identical for different courses. One interviewee, for example, said:

*When you look at the assessment part of the objectives, you see some general terms that if they were not included, nothing special happened. You can take a look at the assessment techniques of different courses and find no difference. Moreover, no reference to alternative assessment can be traced.*

#### 4.1.3 Textbook Evaluation

Table 3 presents respondents' views with regard to the adequacy of the textbooks implemented in the program. In general, from these findings ( $M=2.11$ ;  $SD=.83$ ), it can be concluded that most likely a majority of the respondents (around 70%) perceived the textbooks utilized in the program as inadequate in terms of their form and content.

In addition, the results of the interviews revealed that for a host of participants (around 70%), the textbooks were not appropriate. They stated that the textbooks were out-of-date and did not target recent findings in the field of language teaching. As a result, the prospective teachers could not update their knowledge about the innovative techniques and approaches in teaching English. Moreover, they believed that the textbooks were mostly concerned with the knowledge development of the teacher trainees rather than with their skill development. They complained that the textbooks were not practically-grounded. Besides, some of the participants believed that the textbooks could not provide the requisite communicative and meaningful practice for teacher trainees. They believed that a large number of text books lacked this property. Besides, they complained that many textbooks lacked attractive layouts; finally, some contended that the textbooks were not supported by accompanying teaching materials such as workbooks, detailed teacher's guides, videos, CDs, and DVDs.

Table 3. Frequency (Percentage) of the Participants' Perceptions on the Adequacy of the Textbooks in the Program

Item (N = 463)	SD	D	NI	A	SA	M	SD
16. The layout and design of the textbooks are attractive and print easy to read	107 (22.9)	254 (54.4)	80 (17.1)	14 (3)	8 (1.7)	2.05	.82
17. The textbooks match the specifications of the syllabi developed by the Supreme	98 (21)	257 (55)	3 (17.8)	22 (4.7)	3 (.6)	2.08	.79

18. The textbooks contain Interesting and up-to-date topics and tasks	139 (29.8)	231 (49.5)	69 (14.8)	16 (3.4)	8 (1.7)	1.96	.86
19. The activities are compatible with the background knowledge and level of the teacher students	131 (28.1)	200 (42.8)	108 (23.1)	16 (3.4)	8 (1.7)	2.07	.89
20. The books provide activities that encourage sufficient communicative, meaningful and reflective practice	103 (22.1)	223 (47.8)	109 (23.3)	19 (4.1)	9 (1.9)	2.15	.88
21. The subjects and content of the textbooks are relevant to teacher trainees' needs as prospective English language teachers	78 (16.7)	253 (54.2)	101 (21.6)	20 (4.3)	11 (2.4)	2.20	.85
22. The textbooks offer meaningful situations and a variety of techniques for teaching different skills and components of language	101 (21.6)	240 (51.4)	97 (20.8)	21 (4.5)	4 (.9)	2.10	.82

Note: HD = Highly Disagree; D = Disagree; NI = No Idea; A = Agree; HA = Highly Agree; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

#### 4.1.4 Teaching Activities

Table 4 demonstrates participants' overall perception of the teaching activities in the program. From the findings ( $M=2.07$ ;  $SD=.84$ ), it can be inferred that in nearly all cases of teaching activities mentioned, the majority of participants (over 70%) had negative perceptions concerning the teaching activities utilized in the program.

Table 4. Frequency (Percentage) of the Participants' Perceptions on the Adequacy of Teaching Activities of the Program

Item (N = 463)	SD	D	NI	A	SA	M	SD
23. The teaching activities theoretically help trainees to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills in teaching EFL, including language skills	105 (22.5)	221 (47.3)	113 (24.2)	17 (3.9)	6 (1.3)	2.13	.85
24. The teaching activities practically help trainees to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills in teaching EFL, including language skills	107 (22.9)	262 (56.1)	71 (15.2)	16 (3.4)	7 (1.5)	2.03	.81
25. The program helps trainees to actively participate in classroom discussions and activities	125 (26.8)	237 (50.7)	78 (16.7)	15 (3.2)	8 (1.7)	2.01	.85
26. The program helps trainees to initiate their own research in different fields of	111	230	99	17	6	2.08	.84

interest	(23.8)	(49.3)	(21.2)	(3.6)	(1.3)		
27. The teaching activities comprise meaningful tasks that help trainees to practice different aspects of language teaching	121 (23.8)	236 (50.5)	80 (17.1)	21 (4.5)	5 (1.1)	2.03	.84
28. The teaching activities help trainees to effectively use a wide repertoire of classroom management techniques	106 (22.7)	237 (50.7)	97 (20.8)	16 (3.4)	7 (1.5)	2.09	.83
29. The program balances teacher-centered and student-centered learning on its courses	105 (22.5)	228 (48.8)	110 (23.6)	12 (2.6)	8 (1.7)	2.11	.84
30. The program makes teacher students familiar with reflective practice	114 (24.4)	225 (48.2)	101 (21.6)	17 (3.6)	6 (1.3)	2.08	.88

Note: HD = Highly Disagree; D = Disagree; NI = No Idea; A = Agree; HA = Highly Agree; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

#### 4.1.5 Assessment Procedures

Table 5 demonstrates the perception of the participants with regard to the adequacy of assessment procedures in the program. In almost all the related items ( $M=2.34$ ,  $SD=.80$ ), only around 6% agreed with the adequacy of the procedures and the majority (around 60%) disagreed.

Table 5. Frequency (Percentage) of the Participants' Perceptions on the Adequacy of the Assessment Procedures in the Program

Item (N = 463)	HD	D	NI	A	HA	M	SD
31. The assessments clearly measure the learning objective the teacher students need to achieve	64 (13.7)	196 (42)	174 (37.3)	20 (4.3)	9 (1.9)	2.38	.84
32. The assessments measure something that the trainees expect to be measured	58 (12.4)	205 (43.9)	173 (37)	17 (3.6)	10 (2.1)	2.38	.83
33. New assessment techniques and procedures such as alternative assessment (e.g., portfolio assessment) are used in the program	63 (13.5)	238 (51)	139 (29.8)	16 (3.4)	7 (1.5)	2.27	.79
34. The assessments help teacher trainers to determine how to refine and revise their instructional plans for the near term	51 (10.9)	232 (49.7)	161 (34.5)	13 (2.8)	6 (1.3)	2.33	.75
35. The assessments help teacher trainees to see where they are proficient and where they need to improve	50 (10.7)	221 (47.3)	169 (36.2)	13 (2.8)	10 (2.1)	2.37	.79

In addition, the results of the interview revealed that for nearly 65% of the interviewees the assessment procedures utilized by the teacher educators in the program were not adequate. They believed that in a majority of courses, to assess prospective teachers' learning outcomes, the teacher educators used mid-term and final exam as the main criteria. In other words, they deployed summative rather than formative assessment. As a result, little attempt is made to target students' weak points as the assessment results are released at the end of the courses. Besides, the interviewees raised some questions regarding the nature of the assessment procedures. They believed that in most cases, there was traditional orientation toward evaluation, and alternative assessments were rarely implemented by the teacher educators. Moreover, they believed that the assessment techniques targeted theoretical knowledge of the prospective teachers, and little attempt was made to evaluate their practical knowledge and skills.

#### *4.2 Application of Teaching Activities*

From the observation checklist, it was found that around 28% of the trainees used communicative approach in their practicum practices while only around 5% of school teachers implemented CLT. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Audio-lingual Method (ALM) were among the most utilized methods in both practicum and high school practices. However, 90% of school teachers used GTM whereas 50% of trainees had inclination toward GTM. Similar results were found for the ALM. Moreover, only a minor friction (less than 18%) of trainees and school teachers used learner-centered methodology. Similarly, the use of group-work activities was not satisfactory either in practicum practice (around 35%) and in school practices (around 10%). Along the same road, lesson planning was less observed in high school practice (28%). However, in practicum practice the use of lesson planning was more evident. Finally, it was found that in a majority of cases (more than 80%) Persian or an amalgam of Persian and English was used as a medium of instruction in school and practicum practices. In practicum practice, in a majority of cases, the practitioners used English and Persian interchangeably; while the dominant language in school practices was Persian.

#### *4.3 Main Problems of the Program*

As Table 6 indicates the majority of the participants (more than 75%) agreed with the problems presented in the questionnaire ( $M=4.1$ ;  $SD=.77$ ). Less than 10% disagreed with the items put forward here. It can be inferred from these results that seemingly

the program has not been adequately laid out and in almost all aspects it needs serious modification.

Table 6. Frequency (Percentage) of the Participants' Perceptions on the Main Problems of the Program

Item (N = 463)	HD	D	NI	A	HA	M	SD
36. The program has not been developed based on a needs analysis of the teacher trainees:	2 (.4)	11 (2.4)	58 (12.4)	253 (54.2)	139 (29.8)	4.11	.73
37. There are no clearly stated objectives for the Iranian EFL teacher training programs	1 (.2)	16 (3.4)	46 (9.9)	239 (51.2)	161 (34.5)	4.17	.75
38. The program is not up-dated in terms of its contents and the type of materials	1 (.2)	16 (3.4)	66 (14.1)	210 (45)	170 (36.4)	4.14	.80
39. In the program, more emphasis is laid on theoretical part than the practical aspects	0	18 (3.9)	68 (14.6)	236 (50)	141 (30.2)	4.07	.77
40. Lecture method or teacher-fronted procedure is used frequently in majority of courses	1 (.2)	18 (13.9)	66 (14.1)	273 (58.5)	105 (22.5)	4	.73
41. Teacher trainees are not familiar with the pedagogical implication of the reflective model and professional development strategies	0	22 (4.7)	88 (18.8)	243 (52)	110 (23.6)	3.95	.78
42. The program does not help teacher trainees to teach learning strategies to their students	4 (.9)	22 (4.7)	79 (16.9)	242 (51.8)	116 (24.8)	3.93	.82
43. The program does not provide teacher trainees with how they do their own research	3 (.6)	15 (3.2)	72 (15.4)	257 (55)	116 (24.8)	4.01	.77
44. The program does not provide teacher trainees with classroom management skills	4 (.9)	19 (4.1)	82 (17.1)	243 (52)	115 (24.6)	3.96	.81
45. The academic language skills and strategies of the teacher trainees are not paid due attention	1 (.2)	17 (3.6)	89 (19.1)	260 (55.7)	96 (20.6)	3.93	.75
46. Alternative and assessment techniques are not used to assess the EFL teacher trainees' teaching performance	2 (.4)	22 (4.7)	101 (21.6)	250 (53.5)	88 (18.8)	3.86	.78
47. Working with colleagues, as a key factor in professional development, is not paid due attention	1 (.2)	21 (4.5)	87 (18.6)	244 (52.2)	110 (23.6)	3.95	.79
48. There is a gap between what teacher trainees learn in the programs and what they teach in high schools	4 (.9)	18 (3.9)	64 (18)	248 (53.1)	109 (23.3)	3.94	.80

49. Computer technology is not appropriately instructed to the teacher trainees to integrate it in their workplace	3 (.6)	24 (5.1)	66 (14.1)	276 (59.1)	94 (20.1)	3.91	.78
50. Teachers/teacher trainees are not financially supported well, which will influence their professional development	0 (2.1)	10 (7.7)	36 (7.7)	243 (52)	174 (37.3)	4.25	.68

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Note: HD = Highly Disagree; D = Disagree; NI = No Idea; A = Agree; HA = Highly Agree; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

The results of the interview revealed that for a majority of the participants (more than 70%), the layout of the program might not be appropriate. The most agreed upon issue was *lack of systematic needs analysis*. The participants believed that the courses had not been developed based on the present and target needs of the prospective high school EFL teachers. The interviewees believed that most courses did not target the teacher trainees' requisite skills and knowledge, and the lack of correspondence between course contents and the prospective teachers' needs was quite conspicuous in almost all courses.

In the same vein, they believed that the *objectives were not adequate*; they might not be derived from the needs of the learners but from the hunches of curriculum developers and policy makers. Related to the structure of the program, they pointed to the *inadequacy of the instructional materials* implemented in the program. For a majority of the interviewees, the materials were outdated and did not help prospective teachers put the pedagogic content knowledge into practice. They believed that *lack of facilities* such as language labs, the Internet, up-to-date textbooks was quite evident in the program. In addition, they believed that the *teaching activities* utilized in the program could not give rise to teachers' professional development. In addition, they were unhappy with the *inadequate assessment procedures* implemented in the program. For them, the *lecture-based instruction* left no room for them to express themselves; to develop communicative skills in English, and to experience collaborative work and reflective practice. Furthermore, most interviewees stated that due attention was not paid to the practical knowledge of the prospective teachers. In a majority of cases, there was *overemphasis on the theoretical aspects* of teaching at the expense of practical orientation. One of the interviewees, for example:

*After several sessions, the teacher trainees feel the classes aren't going to improve their teaching skills as teacher trainers talk about teaching theories, methods or techniques presented in different books instead of teaching them how to put such knowledge into practice.*

Finally, a majority of the respondents (nearly 60%) stated the teacher trainees were not motivated enough to make every effort to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills in the program. They traced the root of the problem to terrible economic status of the teachers and low prestige of teaching profession in society due to low payment. They believed that low salary might negatively affect teacher trainees' effort for professional development. One interviewee for example:

*Teacher trainees see that the high-school teachers are not paid adequately. They find most teachers have different part-time jobs, irrelevant to their teaching career, to make a simple living. They can feel that the majority of teachers are not satisfied with their job conditions. Moreover, when they feel that their professional development has little effect on their income, they might ask themselves: Why should I kill myself to promote my knowledge when nobody cares about it?!*

## 5. Discussion

As the findings demonstrated, the participants were largely not satisfied with the program. A majority of participants perceived it as inadequate in implementing its objectives. These findings agree with those by Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004) as well as Coskun and Daloglu (2010) who found that the participants were dissatisfied with the current status of pre-service EFL teacher training program. This dissatisfaction can be stemmed from inadequate structure of the program.

As the results indicated, for the majority of participants, the program has not been developed based on a systematic needs analysis; hence the objectives, teaching materials and activities cannot target the present and target needs of the prospective teachers. As it was found, no serious research studies have been conducted to operationalize the present or target needs of the teacher trainees. As a result, the objectives have been developed based on the course designers' and curriculum developers' intuition, rather than on specific needs of the prospective teachers while, according to Long (2005), the outcome for any needs analysis is the specification of objectives. What is noteworthy here is the large number of participants—half of the participants—who had no idea with regard to the objectives. It shows that for majority of the EFL teachers, teacher educators and teacher trainees, the objectives of the program are still unclear or, at least, they are not aware of them. In addition, for most participants, the objectives are perceived not to be specific to the program.

Closely related to the layout of the program is the materials implemented in this program. There is a general consensus among many scholars that materials are an essential component in teaching (Tomlinson, 2005). Materials can represent a source of motivation for teacher trainees, enhance interaction among the participants and establish links between theory and practice (Rahimi, 2008). Among all the materials available, it is widely agreed that textbooks are of great value in the process of teaching and learning (Jahangard, 2007). However, when the instructional materials fail to meet such expectations, feeling of dissatisfaction emerge. Also related to this point is the inadequacy of the EFL textbooks used in the Iranian high school EFL context (Jahangard, 2007). One way to improve a curriculum is to improve the instructional materials such as textbooks employed in the program. According to Jahangard (2007), this is not possible unless the stakeholders involved systematically evaluate them on the basis of some established criteria. Moreover, many scholars, indeed, believe in the affordance offered by the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in providing optimum conditions for learning (Tomlinson, 2005), especially in responding to students' needs in a more individualized way— an issue which has not been paid due attention in the EFL teacher training program.

With regard to the teaching activities in the program, the results obtained demonstrated that in almost all classes, much more emphasis is put on the theory of teaching. This is in line with the findings of Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004) that practical aspects of teaching are largely overlooked in the EFL teacher training programs. Moreover, the results indicated that the program is heavily lecture-based and follows a transmission model.

Taking a socio-cultural perspective, teaching within an educational context, according to Johnson (2009), is best characterized as integrating a student-centered approach. From this perspective, dialogic mediation afforded through the interaction between learners, teachers, and the objects in the learning environments will be indispensable in providing optimum conditions for learning. Such interaction, according to her, has the potential to provide opportunities for development.

Moreover, the results indicated that rarely are the innovative assessments techniques utilized in the program. Sikka, Nath, and Cohen (2007) indicated a need for inclusion and use of different types of assessment in teacher training programs. Alternative assessment, for example, has recently gained considerable support in the literature (Moradan&Hedayati, 2011); however, it seems to have been totally ignored in the program. When the EFL teacher trainees do not experience innovative assessment approaches in their practicum courses, and the teacher educators do not

assess the prospective teachers' learning outcomes through such innovative techniques, the teacher trainees would not be ready to transform such knowledge in their actual teaching practices.

The use of traditional techniques in teaching and assessing academic skills such as reading comprehension may also be accounted for by the structure of the Iranian high school English education system, and especially the effects final exams and the National University Entrance Exam (Konkour) have on the EFL teachers. More specifically, the centralized EFL textbooks in the Iranian high schools are form-focused and leave little maneuver for the EFL teachers to practice communicative approaches. In addition, as the EFL teachers' performance is largely bound to some broader factors such as parents' expectations, school policies and larger social attributes, it is difficult to ask the EFL teachers to change their form-focused instruction into a communicative-based approach. Furthermore, as a majority of scholars agree the EFL instruction is heavily affected by the washback effect (see Riazi&Rezvanipour, 2011).

In addition, the results indicated that the program might not be successful in promoting reflective practice in EFL teachers. These results rhyme with those of Choy and Oo (2012) who found that most of the EFL teachers did not reflect deeply on their teaching practices. Ball (2009) noted that in order for teachers to become reflective over their teaching practices they must be motivated to change their teaching strategies when needed. However, in most cases teachers resorted to a transmission model of education, which left little room for reflection on the procedures and techniques of teaching.

Last but not certainly the least is the issue of teachers' job dissatisfaction and the effect it might have on their professional development. Many factors might contribute to job dis/satisfaction. According to Tillman & Tillman (2008), they include organizational policy, salary, promotion opportunities, supervision, work relationship, working conditions, job security, personality, education, intelligence, age and marital status. According to Song and Alpaslan (2015), one solution to promote teachers' job satisfaction is "to offer them financial compensation such as competitive salaries, additional stipends, and monetary prizes" (p. 363).

## **6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study indicated that the Iranian pre-service EFL teacher training program has not been well laid-out. The findings can be employed to improve the current status of pre-service EFL teacher training in Iran. The study demonstrated that

the program suffered from some drawbacks in its design and structure. To improve the current status of the program some practical suggestions are made that will be indispensable in this regard. One point worthy of mentioning here is that preparing EFL teachers to face the demands of future is indeed a collaborative endeavor. It requires the cooperation of different parties. Only under such cooperation, can the necessary changes be made.

First, according to Long (2005), a program to be accountable and relevant must begin with needs assessment. In fact, the success of any program relies highly on the analysis of its participants' needs, as the main building block for whole program (Richards, 2001). Only through such a systematic needs analysis, it would be possible to specify the learning objectives teacher trainees should achieve. The trainers themselves should conduct needs assessments with their trainees to ensure that the class meets their needs and goals, hence making the course relevant to learners. Systematic needs analyses should also be conducted by various stakeholders to address the present and target needs of the prospective teachers. Only through such a systematic needs analysis, would it be possible to specify the learning objectives the teacher trainees should achieve.

Second, the objectives should be written in a way that they clearly specify the feasible learning outcomes through some standards; they should also highlight the conditions under which the teacher trainees can demonstrate their knowledge and skills; and the outcomes should be specifically concerned with the teacher training program so that the learners' pedagogic content knowledge is targeted.

Third, more up-to-dated materials should be implemented in the program. Materials are an important component in any curriculum. Although text books are integral in any educational context (Jahangard, 2007), the overwhelming growth in technology, especially in CALL, provides us with more options than merely using textbooks. One way to tackle the problem is to provide CALL workshops to make teachers practically familiar with the advantages of CALL in promoting effective conditions for learning. The government should also introduce legislations to deal with lack of technological facilities and resources observed in the majority of teacher training centers and schools.

Fourth, the courses in the pre-service EFL programs in Iran are theory-oriented; hence, more practical aspects should be included. One way to bridge the theory-practice gap is by appeal to task-based instruction (Norris, 2009). If the trainers provide participants with tasks that help them to talk about their own personal learning/teaching experience and relate newly acquired knowledge to their

experiences, then their learning will be relevant and meaningful to them. This is, in fact, the exploratory practice which Allwright (2005) advocates. Practicum courses can play a fundamental role in this regard. Johnson (2009) stressed the role of practicum courses in linking theory-practice gap. In the practicum, according to her, an ongoing dialogue takes place in the trainee's mind between expert knowledge and experiential knowledge so as to get a better understanding of himself/herself as teacher and classroom practices.

Fifth, to promote reflective practice, teacher educators should provide teacher trainees with opportunities to reflect on their practices and perceptions. The teacher trainees should be required to develop their own journals as short evaluation of every lesson they have. They can be asked to evaluate their own teaching and their classmates in the practicum courses. These reflective journals can provide them with an opportunity to think about different aspects of teaching, identify their areas of improvement, and relate what they know with new information (Lee, 2007). In addition, the teacher training courses can be carefully assessed by the teacher trainees themselves. Moreover, they should be required to observe different EFL classes and reflect critically on their weaknesses and strengths. Furthermore, collaboration among teacher trainees should be encouraged; this can be operationalized through some shared projects.

Finally, to provide optimum conditions for teachers' practices, the government should introduce legislation to improve job satisfaction and commitment among teachers. This can be operationalized through increasing teachers' salaries, providing adequate training and support, and fair promotion. Moreover, it is urgent that the ministry of education allocate sufficient budget to supply necessary materials and equipment that is necessary for practical use. Offering scholarships or loans for a teacher's training might also be promising in this regard.

Although the results of this study seem valuable for improvement of EFL teacher training programs, they should be interpreted with caution because of some limitations. Due to the availability of adequate sample, the participants were solely from Guilan province of Iran. Moreover, the study was largely concerned with the layout of the program, overlooking other aspects such as its efficiency in promoting teacher trainees' pedagogic content knowledge. Regarding evaluating learning objectives of the program, only participants' perceptions were taken into account while they could be subjected to deeper analyses.

Further research can address the present and target needs of the EFL teacher trainees. Moreover, in-depth qualitative studies on the nature of the knowledge base

IJEAP, (2016) vol. 5 issue. 1 (Previously Published under the title: Maritime English Journal) of the EFL teachers can be conducted. Besides, different attributes of the EFL teachers' pedagogic content knowledge can be studied more qualitatively. In addition, the real application of the knowledge taught in the program in the actual classes can be probed into using a longitudinal study on certain cases. The issue of reflective practice and the effects of its instruction on EFL teachers' performance and their students' learning can also be studied. In addition, evaluation studies can be conducted to probe into the efficiency of the program in promoting EFL teacher trainees' pedagogical content knowledge.

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## Appendix

### Semi-Structured Interview

1. Do you think the objectives released by the Educational Planning are appropriate? Why?
2. Do you think the teaching activities in the program can promote Iranian high school EFL teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching English? Why?
3. Do you think the textbooks used in the program are appropriate? Why?
4. Do you think the learning outcomes are assessed appropriately in teacher training program? Why?
5. What problems and challenges do you observe in the program?