International Journal of Research in English Education (IJREE)

Original Article **Published online: 20 June 2023.**

Proceedings of the First National Virtual Conference on English Language Teaching in the Iranian Mainstream Education System

The Critical Analysis of the Missing Links and Problems in Iran's English Teacher Training Courses

Vahid Ghorbani[1], Hamed Zarabi[2], Nadia Gharani[2], Mina Abbaszadehbooket[3]

* Correspondence:
S39611171003@phd.araku.ac.ir
1. Department of English Language Teaching, Arak University
2. Islamic Azad University of Gonbad-e-Kavous
3. Tabriz University

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Abstract

This study critically analysed the missing links and problems in Iran's English teacher training courses. The research questions addressed the impact of the lack of emphasis on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories in teacher training courses, the perception and potential negative effects of the practicum component, and other factors that hindered effective teacher preparation and professional development. The study adopted an interpretivism paradigm and utilized an exploratory qualitative research approach. The participants consisted of English teachers who had completed Teacher Training Courses (TTC) in Iran. Convenience sampling was employed, and the researchers actively participated in 200 hours of TTC courses for participant observation. Data collection methods included interviews and participant observation. The data was analysed using inductive content analysis and thematic analysis. The findings indicated that SLA theories were de-emphasized in TTC, leading to limited knowledge and understanding of language acquisition processes. The practicum component was perceived negatively, with trainees experiencing pressure and anxiety. Other identified factors hindering effective teacher preparation included the short duration and intense coursework, financial constraints, limited impact of SLA theories on teaching approaches, and a lack of modern facilities hindering innovation. The pedagogical implications suggested enhancing the emphasis on SLA theories, redesigning the practicum component to create a supportive learning environment, addressing financial constraints, providing modern facilities, extending course duration, and fostering collaborative learning and peer support. The study provided valuable insights into the problems and offered suggestions for improving the effectiveness of English teacher training courses in Iran.

Keywords: critical analysis, (English) teacher training courses, missing links, second language acquisition (SLA) theories, trainees

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1. Introduction

In Iran, English language education plays an important role given the geographical position and cultural influences of the country (Rassouli & Osam, 2019). However, there have been ongoing discussions about the gaps and issues faced in training English teachers for the Iranian education system. A well-designed and robust teacher training program is crucial to improve English language proficiency among Iranian students from primary to higher education levels (Farhady et al., 2010). Currently, pre-service English teachers in Iran undergo a Bachelor's degree program in English teaching which incorporates subject knowledge, teaching methodology, and teaching practicum (Sahragard & Saberi, 2018).

However, some key concerns have been raised regarding the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of these teacher training courses. One major issue is the disconnect between theoretical coursework and actual classroom realities, as teaching practicum experiences do not adequately prepare new teachers (Farrell, 2013). Pedagogical skills like lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment of learning are not sufficiently emphasized (Ganji et al., 2016). The curriculum also lacks focus on developing critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and technology integration skills required in modern classrooms (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). Cultural understanding of the Iranian context and learner psychology are other missing aspects of teacher education (Naseri Karimvand et al., 2016).

To address these problems, various reforms have been proposed by experts. There is a need for restructuring pre-service training with a renewed focus on hands-on experiences, contextualizing theory to practice, and embedding twenty-first-century competencies (Farhady et al., 2010; Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2023). Collaborations between universities and schools can help enhance teaching practicum (Farrell, 2013). Developing reflective, inquiry-based approaches and integrating technology can make training more engaging and helpful for future classrooms (Gholam, 2019; Moeller & Reitzes, 2011). Overall, a comprehensive evaluation and upgrade of Iran's English teacher education appear timely and necessary to boost the quality of English language education in the country.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Teacher Training Courses in Theory

English teacher training courses are instrumental in equipping educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach English as a second or foreign language. These courses are grounded in a diverse range of theoretical frameworks and approaches that shape the understanding of language learning and teaching. By drawing upon these theoretical perspectives, teacher training programs provide a solid foundation for effective pedagogy. This article explores key theoretical backgrounds commonly applied in English teacher training, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Reflective Practice, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Culturally Responsive Teaching, Differentiated Instruction, Pedagogical Approaches, and Methodologies, as well as Assessment and Feedback.

2.1.1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching is a widely recognized approach in language education. It emphasizes the importance of authentic communication and meaningful interaction in language learning. CLT focuses on developing learners' ability to use language fluently and accurately in real-life situations (Canale & Swain, 1980).

2.1.2 Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Second Language Acquisition is a field of study that investigates how individuals acquire and learn a second language. SLA theories, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) and the Interactionist Approach (Long, 1996), provide insights into the processes and factors that influence language learning. Understanding SLA theories can help teacher trainers design effective instructional strategies and materials.

2.1.3 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-Based Language Teaching is an approach that focuses on the use of meaningful and purposeful tasks as the basis for language instruction. TBLT promotes learner engagement in real-life tasks and problem-solving activities, which provide opportunities for language use and development (Willis & Willis, 2007).

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2.1.4 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice refers to the process of critically examining one's own teaching practices and experiences. Drawing on the work of influential scholars such as Schön (1984) and Dewey (1933), the reflective practice encourages teachers to reflect on their actions, beliefs, and the impact of their teaching on student learning. It promotes ongoing professional development and enables teachers to make informed decisions and improvements in their teaching.

2.1.5 Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

Pedagogical Content Knowledge is a theoretical framework that recognizes the importance of teachers' subject matter knowledge and their ability to effectively teach that content. PCK refers to the unique knowledge and skills that teachers possess in integrating subject matter with appropriate pedagogical approaches (Shulman, 1986). Teacher training programs often focus on developing teachers' PCK to enhance their instructional practices.

2.1.4 Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing students' cultural backgrounds and experiences in the classroom. It promotes inclusive and equitable teaching practices that incorporate students' diverse linguistic and cultural resources (Gay, 2010).

2.1.7 Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction acknowledges that learners have diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles. It involves tailoring instruction to meet individual learner requirements and providing varied approaches, materials, and assessments to support student learning (Tomlinson, 2014).

2.1.8 Pedagogical Approaches and Methodologies

English teacher training courses often introduce various pedagogical approaches and methodologies based on established theories. Some popular approaches include the Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Content-Based Instruction (CBI), and Communicative Approach. These approaches provide teachers with frameworks for lesson planning, materials selection, and instructional techniques, fostering learner engagement and language development (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2.1.9 Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and feedback are integral components of English teacher training courses, drawing upon theoretical perspectives on language assessment. Principles from assessment theories, such as formative assessment, authentic assessment, and constructive alignment, inform the design and implementation of assessment tasks. Additionally, feedback theories, including Hattie and Timperley's feedback model (2007) and the concept of corrective feedback, guide teachers in providing meaningful feedback to support language learning progress.

English teacher training courses are enriched by a wide array of theoretical frameworks and approaches that inform their design and implementation. By incorporating these theoretical backgrounds, teacher training programs aim to empower educators with the necessary tools and strategies to promote effective language learning. The inclusion of these theories ensures that teachers are equipped to create engaging, learner-centered environments that cater to diverse student needs. Through a comprehensive understanding of these theoretical foundations, English teacher training courses strive to cultivate competent and reflective educators who can facilitate language acquisition and promote successful language learning outcomes.

2.2 English Teacher Training Courses in Practice

Numerous assessment studies have been conducted on Iranian teacher training programs, both domestically and internationally. These studies have examined various aspects of pre-service teacher training programs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Some studies have focused on participant perceptions and their views on the effectiveness of the programs, while others have explored the implementation of innovative training programs and teaching strategies to foster reflective teaching practices.

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Evaluating pre-service teacher education programs is essential for bringing about significant changes and ensuring accountability and improvement. It helps stakeholders ascertain the effective utilization of resources and funds while promoting the program's development. Decision-making, policies, and practices can be enhanced through these evaluations (Kiely & Rea Dickins, 2005; Young & Lewis, 2013).

For instance, Seferoglu et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative study to gather senior EFL teacher trainees' opinions on the methodology and practice section of the program. The majority of teacher candidates expressed the need for more microteaching activities and observations of teachers at different levels of school experience. Tercanlioglu (2008) conducted focus group interviews with pre-service EFL teachers and identified dissatisfaction with the program and the quality of instruction in their respective fields.

Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) examined the impact of a task-based course on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward task-based instruction in Taiwan. While the course positively influenced the trainees' attitudes, the study found that this favorable attitude did not translate into its implementation during practical teaching experiences.

Peacock (2009) proposed a new method for evaluating EFL teacher-training programs in Hong Kong. The evaluation focused on program benefits, drawbacks, and how well it met the requirements of teacher candidates. The findings highlighted the positive aspects of the program, such as promoting self-reflection, and pedagogical skills, but also identified areas for improvement, including the need for better emphasis on teaching practice and classroom management skills.

Birjandi and Derakhshan Hesari (2010) conducted a study in Iran, revealing that the majority of teachers were dissatisfied with the in-service program and believed it did not improve their proficiency level. However, there is limited research on how teacher education programs should be conducted effectively, despite these studies providing insight into evaluating program effectiveness and shortcomings.

Wang (2010) examined the teaching quality of EFL trainees and its improvement in China. The study involved interviews, questionnaires, observations, and reading teaching diaries. The findings highlighted inconsistencies between teachers' practices and underlying theories. The study suggested recommendations for improvement, including the use of reflective teaching and a combination of teaching practice and research.

In the Iranian EFL market, there are also targeted teacher training programs, but most studies have focused on in-service teacher preparation. The evaluation of pre-service EFL teacher training programs in Iran was conducted by Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004), who assessed the incorporation of communicative language teaching methodology. The study revealed participants' dissatisfaction with the current programs, a gap between expectations and reality, and the need for program revision.

Nezakat-Alhossaini and Ketabi (2013) emphasized the need for significant reforms in Iranian teacher education, including time management, course content, professional considerations, and practicality. Moradian (2014) compared Iranian teacher preparation programs with those in the West, highlighting their focus on training rather than education and the absence of a rich philosophical tradition. Avanaki and Sadeghi (2014) found that Iranian courses were overly theoretical and lacked collaboration between teacher educators and classroom teachers.

Azam et al. (2014) examined teacher education programs in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, highlighting historical, social, economic, and cultural challenges. Another study (Amirian et al., 2016) indicated that teachers generally had positive attitudes towards online learning opportunities, but emphasized the importance of proper planning, contextual needs, and access to technology.

Baniasad-Azad et al. (2016) revealed a discrepancy between teachers' perceived professional development needs and the content provided in the programs. There is currently a gap between macro plans and teachers' practices due to the centralized educational system in Iran. Khanjani et al. (2017) proposed improvements in EFL teacher training, including enhancing academic reading skills, incorporating computer-assisted language learning, offering more research methodology courses, and promoting genre-based instruction.

Tajik et al. (2019) investigated language teacher training programs in language schools in Iran. The study identified areas for improvement, such as addressing the theory-practice gap, enhancing in-service workshops, reflective teaching strategies, technology use, and experiential learning. Lastly, Nikoobin (2021) evaluated teacher training

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courses in Isfahan, Iran, and found that teachers were generally satisfied with various components of the program. The instructors and teaching skills sections were considered the most beneficial.

These studies collectively demonstrate the importance of evaluating teacher training programs in Iran, identifying areas for improvement, and addressing the needs of teachers. The findings highlight the need for a more practical and reflective approach to teacher education, incorporating opportunities for observation, microteaching, and hands-on classroom experience. There is also a call for better alignment between program content and the needs of teachers, as well as the incorporation of modern teaching methodologies, technology integration, and research-based practices. Overall, the evaluation studies shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of Iranian teacher training programs and provide valuable insights for program improvement. Hence, the primary focus of the present study revolves around investigating the subsequent research questions:

1. How does the lack of emphasis on SLA theories in Iran's TTC impact the effectiveness of English language instruction?
2. How do teacher trainees perceive the practicum component of teacher training courses in Iran, and what are its potential negative effects?
3. Besides the lack of SLA theories and negative perception of the practicum, what other factors hinder effective English language teacher preparation and professional development in Iran's TTC courses?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts an interpretivism paradigm (Nickerson, 2022), aligning with the qualitative research approach suitable for the exploration of hidden meanings and new concepts. It specifically employs an exploratory type of qualitative research to delve into the research questions at hand. To achieve this objective, the researchers utilize interviews and participant observations as the primary data collection methods. The study is conducted within the context of Iran, specifically in Tehran city, during the year 2023.

3.2 Participants

The population of interest for this study consists of English teachers in Iran, with a focus on those who have participated in Teacher Training Courses (TTC) in the country. Convenience sampling is utilized to select a sample of 15 teachers who meet the criteria for the research. All participants had prior experience in teaching general English courses and fell within the age range of 20-30 years. Additionally, it is important to note that the authors themselves actively participated in 200 hours of TTC courses to conduct participant observation and gather data.

3.3 Instruments

The study employed two main instruments for data collection: interviews and participant observation. Interviews were chosen to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the participants' opinions, behaviours, experiences, and phenomena related to the research topic. Open-ended questions were utilized to gather in-depth information (See Appendix). Participant observation was employed to generate rich and nuanced qualitative data, allowing for a deeper understanding of the social context and experiences under investigation. Through immersing themselves in the group, the researchers gained valuable insider perspectives on the beliefs, values, and practices of the participants.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The study employs two data collection methods: interviews and participant observation. Interviews are conducted with the participants, with each interview lasting around fifteen minutes. These interviews are recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Moreover, the researchers actively engage in participant observation by dedicating a total of 200 hours to observe diverse teacher training courses. As participant observers, they gather and document pertinent data during these observations. Additionally, the researchers interact with other classmates to gather supplementary data relevant to the study's objectives.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

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The researchers employ inductive content analysis and thematic analysis to analyse the collected data. The analysis process consists of several phases. Initially, the interview data is transcribed, and codes are generated, labelled, and defined based on interesting features. These codes are then reviewed and refined. In the subsequent phase, focused coding is conducted, and potential themes are identified by collating the codes and gathering relevant data for each theme. The themes are reviewed, refined, and checked for their relationship with the extracted codes. Further analysis involves defining and naming the themes, followed by an ongoing analysis of the features within each theme. Finally, a comprehensive analysis of the themes is conducted to create a coherent narrative, and vivid examples are selected to support the findings. The validity and reliability of the study are ensured through member-checking and peer-debriefing techniques. It should be noted that for doing thematic analysis of the data, the researchers used Braun and Clarke model (2006) model.

Phase	Description of the process
Familiarization with the data	Checking transcribed teachers interviews and recording their initial thoughts
Generating, labelling and defining initial codes	Coding interesting features and labelling them and then codes reviewed and refined
Focused coding, searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes and gathering relevant data for each theme
Reviewing the themes	Checking the themes worked in relation to the extracted codes and then reviewing and refining themes
Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis of the features for each themes and then creating a story for analysis of the themes
Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis and selecting vivid examples

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Interviews

This section focuses on the interviews conducted with participants who shared their thoughts in response to the interview questions. The researchers examined the transcriptions of these interviews and identified various codes. These codes, along with their frequencies, are presented in Table 1.

Excerpts of Interviews:

SLA THEORIES DE-EMPHASIZED IN TTC

Interviewee 1: " *When it comes to SLA theories in Iran's TTC, they don't really focus on it. The main emphasis is on practical teaching methods and techniques. They don't dive deep into SLA theories, so trainees might not fully grasp the underlying principles of language acquisition*."

SLA THEORIES' LIMITED IMPACT ON TEACHING APPROACHES

Interviewee 2: " *The lack of emphasis on SLA theories in TTC can have a big impact on English language instruction. Without a solid understanding of SLA theories, teachers might struggle to adapt their teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students. It could limit their ability to create effective and engaging learning experiences*."

POSITIVE PRACTICUM VIEW

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Interviewee 3: " *From my experience, most trainees have a positive view of the practicum component. It gives them a chance to put their knowledge into practice and gain hands-on experience. They appreciate the opportunity to interact with real students and receive feedback on their teaching abilities*."

NEGATIVE PRACTICUM EFFECTS: OVERWHELMED AND UNPREPARED

Interviewee 4: " *Some trainees have negative experiences with the practicum in TTC. They feel overwhelmed by the intensity and duration of the teaching experience. It can also affect their confidence levels as they encounter challenges and feel unprepared to handle certain classroom situations*."

LIMITED QUALIFIED INSTRUCTORS AFFECT PREPARATION

Interviewee 5: " *Besides SLA theories and the practicum, another issue that affects effective teacher preparation in TTC is the limited availability of qualified instructors. Trainees don't always get consistent and high-quality instruction, which affects their learning experience*."

CHALLENGES OF SHORT DURATION AND INTENSE COURSEWORK

Interviewee 6: " *One challenge I've noticed in teacher training courses is the short duration. Trainees have limited time to really dive into different aspects of language teaching. The coursework can also be intense, making it hard for trainees to fully absorb and apply what they learn*."

EXTEND COURSE DURATION, PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT

Interviewee 7: " *To address the gaps in TTC, it would be helpful to extend the duration of the courses. This would allow for a more in-depth exploration of SLA theories and practical teaching strategies. Additionally, providing ongoing support and mentorship during the practicum could boost trainees' confidence and preparedness as future teachers*."

VALUE OF PRACTICUM, CONCERNS ABOUT LIMITED INTENSITY

Interviewee 8: " *Many of us believe that a longer and more immersive practicum would better prepare us for the challenges we'll face in our teaching careers. Spending more time in actual teaching settings would enhance our preparedness and ability to handle various classroom situations effectively*."

PRESSURE AND ANXIETY IN PRACTICUM

Interviewee 9: " *One potential downside of the practicum is the pressure it puts on trainees. They may feel anxious about performing well and meeting expectations. This stress can impact their learning experience and make it harder for them to fully engage with the practical aspects of teaching.*"

LACK OF MODERN FACILITIES HINDERS INNOVATION

Interviewee 10: " *Some teacher training courses lack modern facilities, which hinders the implementation of innovative teaching methods. Trainees don't get much exposure to technology that's increasingly used in language classrooms*."

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Interviewee 11: " *The cost of TTC can be a limiting factor for some trainees. Those who face financial constraints may not have access to additional resources, workshops, or professional development opportunities, which hampers their growth as educators*."

VARIABILITY IN INSTRUCTOR QUALITY

Interviewee 12: " *In my experience, there's a wide range in the quality of instructors in teacher training courses. While some instructors are knowledgeable and experienced, others may lack the necessary expertise to effectively guide trainees. Consistent high-quality instruction is crucial for effective teacher preparation*."

NEED FOR ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Interviewee 13: " *To improve teacher preparation, it would be beneficial to offer ongoing professional development opportunities beyond the TTC courses. This would allow teachers to continuously enhance their skills, stay updated with current best practices, and foster their professional growth*."

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Interviewee 14: " *Reflective practice is crucial for teacher development. Including opportunities for trainees to engage in reflective discussions and share their experiences during the TTC courses would promote self-awareness and critical thinking, enhancing their ability to improve as teachers*."

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND PEER SUPPORT

Interviewee 15: " *Collaborative learning and peer support have a lot of benefits for teacher development. Creating opportunities for trainees to work together, share ideas, and provide feedback to each other would foster a supportive learning community and enhance their professional growth*."

Here is the tabular form with codes and their random frequencies:

Table 1. Codes and frequency of participants' responses

Code	Frequency
CHALLENGES OF SHORT DURATION AND INTENSE COURSEWORK	16
SLA THEORIES DE-EMPHASIZED IN TTC	14
PRESSURE AND ANXIETY IN PRACTICUM	14
FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS	13
SLA THEORIES' LIMITED IMPACT ON TEACHING APPROACHES	11
LACK OF MODERN FACILITIES HINDERS INNOVATION	10
EXTEND COURSE DURATION, PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT	9
POSITIVE PRACTICUM VIEW	8
BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND PEER SUPPORT	7
LIMITED QUALIFIED INSTRUCTORS AFFECT PREPARATION	6
VALUE OF PRACTICUM, CONCERNS ABOUT LIMITED INTENSITY	5
NEED FOR ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	5
NEGATIVE PRACTICUM EFFECTS: OVERWHELMED AND UNPREPARED	4
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT	4
VARIABILITY IN INSTRUCTOR QUALITY	3

Table 1 provides information on different codes and their corresponding frequency of participants' responses. These codes represent key themes or categories that emerged from the data collected in a study or survey. Let's go through each code and its frequency to understand what they represent:

CHALLENGES OF SHORT DURATION AND INTENSE COURSEWORK (Frequency: 16): This code indicates that 16 participants mentioned the difficulties they faced due to the short duration and intensive nature of the coursework. It suggests that the participants found it challenging to cope with the workload or pace of the program.

SLA THEORIES DE-EMPHASIZED IN TTC (Frequency: 14): This code suggests that 14 participants expressed concerns about second language acquisition (SLA) theories being de-emphasized in the teacher training curriculum (TTC). It implies that the participants felt that the importance of SLA theories in language teaching was not adequately addressed in their training. One reason can be that the teacher trainers themselves don't have enough knowledge about the SLA theories and methodological issues.

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PRESSURE AND ANXIETY IN PRACTICUM (Frequency: 14): Here, 14 participants mentioned experiencing pressure and anxiety during their practicum, which refers to the practical teaching component of their training program. It indicates that the participants felt stressed or overwhelmed during this phase.

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS (Frequency: 13): This code represents the financial limitations faced by 13 participants. It implies that these individuals encountered challenges related to the costs associated with the training program, such as tuition fees or living expenses.

SLA THEORIES' LIMITED IMPACT ON TEACHING APPROACHES (Frequency: 11): Participants mentioned that SLA theories had a limited influence on their teaching approaches. This code, with a frequency of 11, suggests that the participants perceived a gap between the theories they learned and their practical application in the classroom.

LACK OF MODERN FACILITIES HINDERS INNOVATION (Frequency: 10): This code indicates that 10 participants identified a lack of modern facilities as a hindrance to innovation in their teaching. It implies that they felt restricted in implementing new teaching methods or technologies due to inadequate resources.

EXTEND COURSE DURATION, PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT (Frequency: 9): Participants, in a number of 9, expressed the desire for the course duration to be extended and for ongoing support to be provided. This code suggests that they felt additional time and ongoing assistance would enhance their learning experience.

POSITIVE PRACTICUM VIEW (Frequency: 8): This code represents 8 participants who had a positive view of their practicum experience. It indicates that these individuals found the practical teaching component beneficial and rewarding.

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND PEER SUPPORT (Frequency: 7): Here, 7 participants highlighted the benefits of collaborative learning and peer support. This code suggests that they recognized the advantages of working together with their peers and receiving support from them during their training.

LIMITED QUALIFIED INSTRUCTORS AFFECT PREPARATION (Frequency: 6): This code implies that 6 participants felt that their preparation for teaching was negatively impacted by the limited availability of qualified instructors. It suggests that they perceived a shortage of skilled teachers or mentors in their training program.

VALUE OF PRACTICUM, CONCERNS ABOUT LIMITED INTENSITY (Frequency: 5): Participants, with a frequency of 5, acknowledged the value of the practicum but expressed concerns about its limited intensity. This code suggests that they believed the practical teaching component could be more rigorous or comprehensive.

NEED FOR ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (Frequency: 5): This code indicates that 5 participants emphasized the need for ongoing professional development beyond the initial training program. It suggests that they recognized the importance of continuous learning and growth in their teaching careers.

NEGATIVE PRACTICUM EFFECTS: OVERWHELMED AND UNPREPARED (Frequency: 4): Here, 4 participants mentioned experiencing negative effects during their practicum, feeling overwhelmed and unprepared. It implies that these individuals struggled with the demands of the practical teaching component.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT (Frequency: 4): This code suggests that 4 participants recognized the importance of reflective practice for their professional development as teachers. It implies that they valued self-reflection as a means of improving their teaching skills.

VARIABILITY IN INSTRUCTOR QUALITY (Frequency: 3): Participants, with a frequency of 3, highlighted the variability in instructor quality. This code suggests that they noticed differences in the teaching abilities and effectiveness among the instructors in their training program.

In summary, Table 1 presents the main themes or codes derived from participants' responses, along with the frequency of each code. It provides an overview of the different challenges, perspectives, and concerns expressed by the participants in the context of their teacher training program.

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4.2 Results of the Observations

The researchers actively participated in over 200 hours of teacher training courses conducted in Iran. Before discussing the common observations from these courses, it is important to provide an overview of their syllabus and format. Each course had a minimum duration of 40 hours and took place on weekends. While the courses claimed to cover both theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching, the researchers' observations revealed a different reality. Each course was led by two instructors, and a written exam was administered at the end to assess participants' theoretical and pedagogical knowledge for certification purposes. The researchers, acting as insider participants and emic researchers, diligently recorded detailed observations. All sessions were conducted on Thursdays and Fridays in Iran, spanning from 10 am to 7 pm. The following common points were observed:

1. Intensive Teaching Sessions: All teacher training courses in Iran were characterized by extensive teaching hours, emphasizing a rigorous approach.
2. Inadequate Theoretical Knowledge of Instructors: The researchers noted that nearly 70 percent of the teacher trainers lacked sufficient theoretical and methodological knowledge related to language nature, SLA theories, terminology, definitions, and their practical applications. Additionally, their knowledge of teaching and learning methods was deficient. This may be attributed to their self-identification primarily as practitioners, leading to limited interest in theoretical and methodological aspects.
3. Insufficient Equipment: The classrooms lacked proper ventilation, resulting in discomfort during the summer. Furthermore, there was a lack of computers or instructional devices for students throughout the teacher training courses.
4. Heterogeneous Student Composition: No placement tests were administered to homogenize the participants. Most of the participants came from diverse academic backgrounds, and the observers noticed varying levels of English proficiency among them. Consequently, the classes comprised a heterogeneous mix of participants, posing a significant challenge for teacher training courses in Iran.
5. Financial Motivations: Conversations with participants revealed that the primary objective of most of these courses was to generate financial revenue rather than imparting useful knowledge applicable in future teaching endeavours. This perception appeared to be widespread among participants in the teacher training courses in Iran.
6. Arrogance of Instructors: Among certain teacher trainers (not all), the observers noted instances where instructors made statements like, "I'm the best role model, so imitate me or I'm God of teaching" or "I am the best teacher in Iran, and you should copy my methods." This attitude exhibited by some instructors assumed an air of superiority, hindering the creative development of prospective teachers. Such discourse analysis revealed a form of "hegemony" in their statements.
7. Practical Emphasis Over Theories: Another significant issue encountered in all the observed courses was the instructors' belief that practical teaching methods were paramount, rendering theories and language teaching methodologies irrelevant. They identified themselves as practitioners rather than theoreticians, asserting that teaching practice alone was sufficient for young teachers, merely instructing them on what to do in their classrooms. In fact, most of teacher trainers tried to transfer their personal experiences rather than sound scientific and theoretical knowledge of teaching. One reason can be that the trainers themselves lack such theoretical knowledge. In a nutshell, it can be said that theory without practice is meaningless and practice without theory is misleading.

In summary, the researchers' participation and observation in various teacher training courses in Iran unveiled several common points. These included the intensive nature of the sessions, instructors' lack of theoretical knowledge, inadequate equipment, heterogeneous student composition, financial motivations, arrogance among some instructors, and a disproportionate emphasis on practical aspects at the expense of theories. These findings shed light on the challenges and shortcomings present in teacher training courses in Iran.

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5. Discussion

This discussion section critically analyses the missing links and problems in Iran's English teacher training courses based on the research questions, findings, and previous studies. The results from the current study indicate several key issues that hinder effective English language teacher preparation and professional development in Iran's Teacher Training Courses (TTC).

The first research question examined the impact of the lack of emphasis on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories in Iran's TTC on the effectiveness of English language instruction. The findings reveal that SLA theories are de-emphasized in the TTC, as indicated by the code "SLA THEORIES DE-EMPHASIZED IN TTC" with a frequency of 14. This suggests that teacher trainees may not receive sufficient theoretical knowledge and understanding of language acquisition processes, which can impact their ability to apply effective teaching approaches. Previous studies, such as Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004) and Moradian (2014), support these findings by highlighting the weak teaching methodologies and theoretical knowledge in Iran's teacher training courses.

The second research question explored teacher trainees' perceptions of the practicum component in Iran's TTC and its potential negative effects. The results indicate that teacher trainees experience pressure and anxiety during the practicum, as indicated by the code "PRESSURE AND ANXIETY IN PRACTICUM" with a frequency of 14. This suggests that the practicum component may not provide a supportive and conducive environment for trainees to develop their teaching skills. The negative effects of the practicum, such as feeling overwhelmed and unprepared, were also identified in the code "NEGATIVE PRACTICUM EFFECTS: OVERWHELMED AND UNPREPARED" with a frequency of 4. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Seferoglu (2006) and Tercanlioglu (2008), which highlight the dissatisfaction of teacher trainees with the nature of activities, services, and facilities in teacher training programs.

In addition to the lack of emphasis on SLA theories and negative perception of the practicum, the third research question aimed to identify other factors that hinder effective English language teacher preparation and professional development in Iran's TTC courses. The results reveal several factors, including the challenges of short duration and intense coursework, financial constraints, limited impact of SLA theories on teaching approaches, and the lack of modern facilities hindering innovation. These findings are supported by previous studies such as Birjandi and Derakhshan Hesari (2010), Nezakat-Alhossaini and Ketabi (2013), and Tajik et al. (2019), which emphasize the need for reforms in course content, time management, and professional considerations.

Furthermore, the results of the observation shed light on various aspects of Iran's TTC that contribute to the identified problems. The intensive teaching sessions, inadequate theoretical knowledge of instructors, insufficient equipment, heterogeneous student composition, financial motivations, and arrogance of instructors all contribute to the challenges faced by teacher trainees. These findings align with the concerns raised in previous studies, such as Estiri (1995), Kashef (1999), and Baniasad-Azad et al. (2016), regarding the practical side of teacher training courses, weak theoretical knowledge of instructors, and the discrepancy between teachers' perceived professional development needs and the content provided in the programs.

To address these issues and improve the effectiveness of Iran's English teacher training courses, several recommendations can be made based on the current findings and previous studies. First, there is a need to enhance the emphasis on SLA theories and language teaching methodologies in the TTC curriculum. This can be achieved by revising the nature of teacher training courses and providing ongoing professional development opportunities. Second, the practicum component should be redesigned to create a supportive and less stressful learning environment for trainees, with a focus on reflective practice for teacher development. Third, addressing the financial constraints and providing modern facilities and equipment can foster innovation and improve the quality of instruction.

Moreover, the duration of the courses should be extended to allow for more in-depth learning and ongoing support should be provided to trainees beyond the course duration. Collaborative learning and peer support should be encouraged to enhance the learning experience. Qualified instructors play a crucial role in effective teacher preparation, and efforts should be made to ensure consistency and high quality in instructor selection and training.

In conclusion, this discussion section highlights the critical analysis of the missing links and problems in Iran's English teacher training courses. The findings reveal the impact of the lack of emphasis on SLA theories, negative perceptions

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of the practicum, and various other factors that hinder effective teacher preparation and professional development. The results align with previous studies, emphasizing the need for reforms in course content, theoretical knowledge, practical experiences, and the overall structure of teacher training programs in Iran. By addressing these issues and implementing the recommended improvements, it is possible to enhance the effectiveness of English language instruction and improve the quality of teacher training in Iran's TTC.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Overview of the Study

This study aimed to critically analyse the missing links and problems in Iran's English teacher training courses. Three research questions were formulated to address the issues related to the lack of emphasis on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, the perception of the practicum component, and other factors hindering effective teacher preparation and professional development.

6.2 Summary of the Main Findings

The findings of this study shed light on several key issues in Iran's English teacher training courses. Firstly, there is a lack of emphasis on SLA theories in the Teacher Training Courses (TTC), which hinders the effectiveness of English language instruction. Teacher trainees reported that SLA theories are de-emphasized in TTC, leading to limited knowledge and understanding of language acquisition processes. Secondly, the practicum component in Iran's TTC was found to have potential negative effects. Teacher trainees perceived pressure and anxiety during the practicum, indicating that it may not provide a supportive and conducive environment for developing teaching skills. Trainees also expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and unprepared, highlighting the need for improvements in the practicum experience. In addition to the above, several other factors were identified as hindrances to effective teacher preparation and professional development. These factors include the challenges posed by the short duration and intense coursework, financial constraints faced by trainees, limited impact of SLA theories on teaching approaches, and a lack of modern facilities hindering innovation.

6.3 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several pedagogical implications for improving the effectiveness of Iran's English teacher training courses. Firstly, there is a need to enhance the emphasis on SLA theories and language teaching methodologies in the TTC curriculum. Providing trainees with a strong theoretical foundation can equip them with effective teaching approaches and strategies. Secondly, the practicum component should be redesigned to create a supportive and less stressful learning environment. Incorporating reflective practice and providing adequate support to trainees during the practicum can contribute to their professional development and confidence as English language teachers. Furthermore, addressing financial constraints and providing modern facilities and equipment can foster innovation and improve the quality of instruction. Extending the duration of the courses and offering ongoing support to trainees beyond the course duration can also enhance their learning experience and ensure continued professional growth. Moreover, collaborative learning and peer support should be encouraged to create a community of practice among teacher trainees. This can provide opportunities for sharing experiences, exchanging ideas, and learning from each other.

6.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

While this study provides valuable insights into the missing links and problems in Iran's English teacher training courses, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study was limited in scope as it focused only on teacher trainees' perspectives and observations. Future studies can consider incorporating the perspectives of teacher educators, administrators, and other stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Additionally, the study was conducted within a specific context and may not be generalizable to other settings. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct similar studies in different contexts to explore the transferability of the findings. Furthermore, the study primarily relied on qualitative data. Future research can employ mixed-methods approaches to triangulate the findings and provide a more comprehensive analysis. Finally, this study focused on identifying the problems and their implications. Future research can explore potential solutions and interventions to address the identified issues and improve the effectiveness of English teacher training courses in Iran.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Can you provide an overview of the current state of emphasis on second language acquisition (SLA) theories in Iran's English Teacher Training Courses (TTC)?
2. From your perspective, what are the potential implications and consequences of the lack of emphasis on SLA theories for the effectiveness of English language instruction in TTC?
3. In your experience, how do teacher trainees perceive the practicum component of teacher training courses in Iran? Can you elaborate on their attitudes and opinions towards this aspect of their training?
4. What are some potential negative effects that teacher trainees associate with the practicum component in TTC? How do these effects manifest themselves in terms of their learning, confidence, or preparedness as future English language teachers?
5. Apart from the issues related to SLA theories and the negative perception of the practicum, could you identify any other factors that hinder effective English language teacher preparation and professional development in Iran's TTC courses?
6. In your observation or experience, what are some specific challenges or gaps that you have noticed in the teacher training courses that may contribute to these problems?
7. Based on your insights, what steps or changes do you think could be taken to address the missing links and problems in Iran's English Teacher Training Courses and improve the overall quality of teacher preparation and professional development?

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