

**Global Thoughts, Local Action:
a case of comparative EFL teacher education***

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Abstract

Teacher education is deemed to play a critical role in revolutionizing any education system. As a result, pre-service teacher education has received considerable attention in education systems world over. In the context of Iran, the process of teacher education has not been properly implemented and following their being recruited teachers would go directly to classes, without possessing adequate professional competencies. Hence, the present study intends to provide a comparative account of EFL pre-service teacher education in Iran and five other countries attempting to address applicable issues, criticisms, and constructive lessons to be learned from the relevant experiences of such countries. To this end, the study examines recruitment requirements, EFL teacher professional preparation and evaluation, and teaching practice in the Iranian context and those of other countries. In so doing, this study analyzed the existing documents and reports published by international and governmental organizations and previous research done relevant to the countries included in the study. The results indicated that almost all the five countries bear some resemblance to one another in pre-service teacher recruitment requirements. Iran and Japan, however, seem to have a more sensitive stance on teachers and conducting interviews with candidates than other countries. Moreover, Germany and the U.S. appear to have built up a more sophisticated teacher education system compared to other countries. The results further revealed that the TEP program in Iran has made arrangements to keep up with the new trends in teacher education and has partly been successful in following in developed countries' footsteps.

Key words: Pre-service EFL teacher education, Teacher preparation, Teaching practice, Pre-service teacher evaluation.

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Introduction

In the past few years, research studies have indicated that the quality of instruction is the main factor affecting learners' academic achievement (Gaspar & Vieira, 2013; Hattie, 2002; Morgan and Hodge, 2014). In a study done by Gaspar and Vieira (2013), teachers turned out to account for about 30% of the variance on learner's achievement. In the same line, Morgan and Hodge (2014) contend that teachers are the most important school-based determinants of student achievement. Since teachers lie at the center of high-quality education, there is a dire need to ensure their accomplishment of all professionally required competencies if we are to reach and maximize teaching effectiveness. Thus, the demand for qualified and quality teachers has been continuously on the increase the world over. Quite naturally, the teacher education programs have acquired renewed significance.

Initial teacher preparation program is a fundamental element of the process of the teachers' professional development (Smith, 2005). This crucial component of the teacher education equips teacher candidates with the required professional knowledge, skills and competencies (Brook, Cock, Lim, & Lock, 2009). Through such programs prospective teachers embark on the journey to becoming professionals (Freeman & Johnson, 1998), build up their teaching confidence (Akbari and Dadvand, 2011), and enhance their professional knowledge (Smith, 2005). Moreover, by placing the candidates in a 'safe' and supported environment, they provide them with the opportunity to experience the reality of the school, whereby they can reflect, discuss, and pool experiences or ideas with their supervisors and peers.

As a result, it has become imperative that the effort and resources mobilized towards teacher education are effective and field relevant in particular country contexts. Hence, over recent years, pre-service teacher education has received considerable attention in education systems all over the world which has subsequently sparked off a large array of studies, reports and even legislations and policies to enhance teacher quality (Gaspar & Vieira, 2013;

Morgan & Hodge, 2014; OECD, 2005). Many scholars (Ingersoll, 2007; Shabani, 2004; Shafi & Ahmed, 2013), for instance, have conducted comparative analysis of teacher education programs aiming to examine the strengths and weaknesses of each program and to come up with the logic behind some countries' success in teacher education.

Teacher education in Iran

In Iran, Farhangian University is the primary institution that provides teacher education programs throughout the country. As far as pre-service teacher education is concerned, 98 institutions with more than 5000 teacher educators are operating in Iran. In spite of substantial quantitative improvement during the past few years, however, many academicians and researchers have criticized the Iranian teacher education sector for low quality (Hashemian & Azadi, 2014; Molaenezhad & Zekavatee, 2008; Shebang, 2004). In the history of teacher education in Iran, with the inappropriate selection of student teachers from among University Entrance Exam candidates through multiple choice tests and ethical audit, they have entered TEP programs. Upon their recruitment, despite their deficiencies and the deficiency of the recruitment system, teachers go to classes and their professional competencies and human relation aspect have seldom been evaluated (Shabani, 2004). Most of the candidates who have entered such programs basically did not possess the required competencies to be considered effective teachers.

The Iranian government has recently shown great concern to enhance the quality of teacher education, and has adopted some concrete measures which have relevance to and implications for teacher education institutions. One of the major initiatives taken by Iranian Ministry of Education was the establishment of Farhangian University which was intended to improve and professionalize the process of teacher education in Iran by hiring more experienced and knowledgeable teacher educators and increasing the teacher training period from two to four years. Subsequently, Farhangian University in Iran drew up and ratified the New Teacher Education Curriculum. The dominant perspective in the revision and codification of the New Teacher Education Curriculum was based on core competencies,

flexibility and practicality. The Key Competencies, based on which the courses have been classified, are as follows: competencies related to Content Knowledge (CK), competencies related to Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), competencies related to Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and competencies related to General Knowledge (GK) (Mousapour, & Ahmadi, 2014).

Moreover, having put performance assessment in its educational agenda, Farhangian University, in addition to the general achievement tests given at the end of each course, has recently set up a national project named Evaluation of Teachers' Professional Competencies as part of its teacher licensing requirements. This project, the first of its kind, aims to assure the attainment of professional competencies by student teachers, develop the performance level of student teachers, and increase student teachers' motivation with the purpose of increasing the quality of education. For this purpose, performance assessment, written assessment, portfolio, and GPAs are used as the criteria for evaluating these competencies. In view of the new teacher evaluation policy, some Iranian researchers (Amoosi, 2017; Norouzi, 2017) have tried to delve into the issue and develop performance assessment and written competency tests to be used in the context of Iran.

Norouzi (2017) explored the components of the performance assessment through detailed analysis of the Curriculum Document of the English Major, review of literature, and investigation of the stakeholders' perspectives. To this end, in this exploratory study, convenience, purposive, and cluster sampling procedures were used for the selection of the teacher educators, student-teachers, and mentor teachers. Then, in-depth interviews were conducted with the stakeholders. Finally, based on the content analysis of the above-mentioned sources which resulted in a strong agreement, a performance assessment scheme with seventeen items was developed to be used as the criterion for assessing the professional competencies of student teachers.

In another study, Amoosi (2017) attempted to describe the development and validation of a 'written assessment framework for

assessing professional knowledge and competency levels of EFL teacher candidates through paper-and-pencil tests. The test consists of two sections: Section one purports to measure candidates' General Knowledge and Section two focuses on Content knowledge. The overall findings and the resultant written test provide a terrain for examining English teacher candidates' CK and readiness to teach.

Evaluation of teacher training programs

Effective teaching has always been of great significance, and over the past decade the effectiveness of programs to result in qualified and quality teachers has become a national concern worldwide. This renewed focus on teacher education programs has resulted in considerable attention as regards creating an efficient and valid tool to assess the efficiency of teacher preparation process. Over the recent years, to guarantee the outcome of their teacher education programs, many countries have increased the entry requirements and standards and have implemented stricter program accreditation and certification processes. Thus, education authorities must make tangible decisions regarding (a) whom to admit, (b) how to assess their teacher candidates' progress toward becoming effective teachers, and (c) whom to recommend for state licensure as teachers (Worrell et al., 2014).

There are many different approaches and models of evaluation to choose from when deciding to conduct a program evaluation study. The CIPP (context, inputs, process, and product) model has been utilized to evaluate teacher education programs in different contexts. The model, proposed by Stufflebeam (1968), is composed of four different elements. In the context section, an overview of the setting and the context of the program at issue is provided and analyzed. Following this, the inputs of the program are examined. The input is made up of the diverse elements of the program intending to guarantee the proper implementation of the program. In the process section we define the activities to be used and those who are served by such activities. In the final stage, the outcomes will be defined. These outcomes are then classified as short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals to facilitate defining the goals and objectives of the program (Warju, 2016). Program evaluators, by dividing such elements into separate stages can

fully appreciate what the program and the parties involved are supposed to be operating in the program, so doing, will make it easier to pinpoint the merits and demerits of the program when the relevant data have been collected. Program evaluation has the potentials to provide highly significant evidence which can be drawn upon as a basis for improvement, accountability, and decision making (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

Regarding the crucial role of teacher education programs, there seems to be a general consensus among scholars that initial teacher education has a direct influence on the quality of prospective teachers and their students' school achievement (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Morgan & Hodge, 2014; Stein, et. al., 2016). Musset (2010) contends that pre-service teacher education is of great significance as it can be regarded as "the first entry point to the teacher professional career, playing a fundamental role, the organization of which determines both the quality and quantity of teachers" (p. 15). Therefore, pre-service teacher education programs and curricula must constantly be evaluated, modified and updated in accordance with the demands of the globalized modern world, specifically in Iran where teachers are seldom provided with adequate and proper in-service training. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the paramount significance of such programs and their profound impact on teacher candidates' professional lives, and their future students (Peacock, 2009), not many researchers have attempted to shed light on the adequacy of such programs in the Iranian teacher education context. Therefore, it is deemed necessary that special attention is paid to pre-service English teacher programs and the impact of such programs are evaluated so as to come up with practical and practicable suggestions to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education. As selection of qualified and quality teachers is considered the first step in teacher professional development (Kang & Ahn, 2014), nurturing highly qualified teachers has grown to be among the main foci of educational agenda in many countries recently. In the past two decades, several researchers have delved into the issue of teacher education in Iran and compared it with those of other countries (Liaghatdar, 2000; Sangari & Akhash, 2017; Shabani, 2004).

Nonetheless, few researchers have investigated the issue of pre-service EFL teacher education in the context of Iran. Hence, the principal goal of this comparative analysis was to locate the commonalities and variabilities among the studied countries and identify the applicable issues, criticisms, and constructive lessons to be learned from the relevant experiences of such countries in terms of pre-service teacher education and evaluation, recruitment requirements, and certification. So doing, the present research study makes a comparison of pre-service teacher education in Iran and that of four other countries; Germany, the U.S., Japan and Singapore. In other words, this paper examined how EFL teacher candidates are trained, certified and recruited in five nations, from four demographically and geographically diverse areas of the globe: one country in the Middle East, two East Asian countries comparing them with one in Europe and one in the American continent. The reason behind selecting these countries was that they have utilized research-based procedures for educating and evaluating pre-service teachers. Thus, the following research questions were formulated:

Research questions

1. What qualifications are required of teachers at the entry point in teacher education programs in the researched countries?
2. What requirements must be met to complete the teacher education program in teacher education programs in the researched countries?
3. What kinds of teaching practice or classroom experiences are required in teacher education programs in the researched countries? What is the nature and duration of these courses?
4. What are the requirements for the initial certification of teachers in pre-service teacher education programs in the researched countries? Are tests used? For how long is the initial certificate valid?

Method

The present study was a comparative study which collected its required data via existing documents and reports published by OECD, the international and governmental organizations and previous research done relevant to the countries included in the study. The study utilized

the Bereday Comparative framework (1964) which is carried out in four stages: description, interpretation, proximity, and comparison. Based on this framework, first the required data on each country are collected from valid and reliable sources and interpreted respectively. Following this, the data are classified and categorized based on specific criteria. Finally, similarities and differences are analyzed in the final stage. The countries to be included in this study were selected from among countries which are the pioneers in developing teacher education systems.

Results and findings

Entry requirements

One distinctive feature of the TEP programs around the world is the requirements that the candidates have to meet before entering such programs. Table 1 depicts the entry requirements and the level of qualifications that candidates must possess if they are to be accepted in each program.

Table 1. Entry requirements in Iran

Candidates must be physically and mentally healthy and able-bodied to perform the teacher's professional responsibilities
Candidates must have and submit a clean criminal record and Not-addicted certificate
Candidates should not be over 22 years of age
Candidates must have an over-15 high school average
Candidates must participate in university entrance examination and be accepted in the examination
Candidates must take part in interviews and successfully pass such general and technical interviews
Candidates accepted must partake in four-year teacher education programs and graduate the program with the stipulated requirements

Adopted from Sangari and Akhash (2017)

Table 2 illustrates what teacher candidates must possess to stand a chance in being admitted to teacher education programs in four other countries.

Table 2. Comparison of entry requirements in Iran and other countries

	Holding a diploma	clean criminal record	Age limit	GPA	University entrance exam	interview	physical standards qualifications	Length of program	Induction period
Iran	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	4 years	□
Germany	■	■			■			7 years 2 years' probation	■
Japan	■	■			■	■	■	4 years	■
Singapore	■	■			■		■	5 years	□
The U.S	■	■			■			4 years	■

Adopted from Wang et al. (2003)

The results indicated that almost all the five countries bear some resemblance to one another in pre-service teacher recruitment requirements (holding a diploma, passing university entrance exam, and having a non-criminal record). Iran and Japan, however, seem to have a more sensitive stance on teachers and conducting interviews with candidates than other countries. In Iran, some other criteria such as age limit and GPA limit have been added to the requirements (Sangari and Akhash, 2017). In Japan, besides various examinations, university marks and average are also effective in their being selected (Collision & Ono, 2001). In Iran, Japan and Germany candidates have been chosen from among university entrance exam participants (Sabani, 2004). Teacher education system in Japan is an open system. In other words, graduates from other universities, if interested in selecting teaching as future career, can take part in a one-year training and be prepared as teachers (Collision & Ono, 2001). In Germany, for teacher recruitment, numerous special, financial and professional privileges have been considered for teachers so as to attract meritorious and elite candidates into teaching profession (Speer & Harich, 2005). The pay rate and the level of welfare facilities are much higher in Germany in comparison to other industrial countries (Speer & Harich, 2005).

Teaching practice

All the nations included in this study require and provide teaching practice or other in-school practical field experiences. The duration of the practical experience and the days of the week candidates have to

partake school, however, differ from country to country. A university supervisor and an experienced mentor teacher will jointly supervise and evaluate the practical experiences. The principal can sometimes share the burden.

Teaching practice in Iran

Teaching practice in the Iranian teacher education system includes observing classes, attending schools, teaching real classes, microteaching and practical teaching at university. Teaching practice 1-4 are provided as 12 credits at universities (Mousapour & Ahmadi, 2014). These courses consist of three fundamental teaching activities:

- *Introductory activities* (familiarity with educational planning, implementation of the curriculum, placement assessment and theoretical education in schools in Iran)
- *Practical and field study activities* (familiarity with schools, observation, collaboration, microteaching and whole session teaching)
- *End of program activities* (Teaching demonstration, reviewing performance and evaluation) (Mousapour & Ahmadi, 2014)

Numerous research studies conducted in the past have indicated that teacher education system in teaching practice courses in Iran have always been an easy course to take care of without much responsibilities or concerns (Liaghatdar, 2000; Shabani, 2004; Sangari, & Akhash, 2017). This indicates that supervisors, as implementers of the curriculum, have not been able to properly fulfill their roles and as a result, such courses have been less effective in preparing teachers and shaping their behaviors and personalities (Liaghatdar, 2000). Therefore, some education authorities believe this course to have acquired a formality status in the teacher education system and have lost its significance over the years (Liaghatdar, 2000).

Teaching practice in Japan

Teaching practice courses in Japan are held in schools under the supervision of universities and teacher education programs which are designated based on the number of student teachers. In such courses

student teachers take part in real classes, observe, manage a whole class and are trained on different activities happening in schools. Teaching practice in the teacher education system in Japan is conducted under the supervision of a competent and experienced teacher and a credit has been assigned to teaching practice (Yasuyuki, 2004). Teaching practice is mostly held in schools affiliated to universities and is carried out in various forms:

- *Teaching practice at schools*, two days a week or 70 days a year
- *Teaching practice at educational centres*, once a week or 35 days a year
- *Teaching practice at school* under the supervision and collaboration of school teachers and school deans two weeks

In Japan, similarly, the supervision and evaluation of student teachers is shared among an experienced teacher along with a committee consisting of members from the teacher education program (Sangari & Akhash, 2017).

Teaching practice in the United States.

In the United States, teacher candidates are offered two types of practical experiences: *field experiences and student teaching* (Ingersoll, 2007). Field experiences, which are required by most states prior to student teaching, normally consist solely of observations. At the beginning, the student teachers are just required to attend school, observe classes and assist teachers. Following this, experienced teachers, who are paid for the supervisory roles, take on the responsibility of supervising them (Ingersoll, 2007). The duration of the teaching practice ranges from six weeks in Louisiana to a semester or more in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Teaching practice evaluation also varies from state to state. The supervision is typically done by a classroom teacher and a university faculty member and the school principal (Wang et al., 2003).

Teaching practice in Singapore

In Singapore, teacher candidates must take part in a compulsory teaching practice (nine weeks) and school experience (one week)

(Chong & Cheah, 2009). The teaching practice courses are held under the supervision of specially selected mentor teachers and the university professors. School principals might also attend the class to observe prospective teachers in the classroom. The evaluation of the course is done by the university supervisor mentor and the teacher (Chong & Cheah, 2009).

Teaching practice in Germany

The emphasis and weighting on teaching practice courses in teacher education in Germany is much greater than that of other countries. During their first phase (degree) of their studies, prospective teachers have three practical experience periods to complete, each lasting about twelve days (Speer and Harich, 2005). Those who have successfully passed the first phase can enroll in the second phase (two year) and will be required to be at school four days a week (about 240 days). In the German teacher education system, at the end of the theoretical courses, each week teacher candidates must attend internship periods at schools four day a week and 8 hours is dedicated to teaching classes. Moreover, one day is devoted to technical seminars which are held in teacher education centers. The supervisors and practicum instructors must observe and evaluate at least 25 sessions for each student teacher (Speer & Harich, 2005). To evaluate the competencies of candidates, the mentor teachers and supervisors' evaluations have also been utilized (Ingvarson et al., 2014). Thus, candidates acquire practical teaching skills through various different means:

- Attending courses taught and provided at teacher education centres.
- Taking part and observing real classrooms teachings by experienced teachers
- Participating in extra and optional teaching methodology courses and acquiring classroom experiences as opportunities to analyse and review teaching skills (Ingvarson et al., 2014).

Graduation Standards

Nearly all the programs operating in the researched countries require passing grades in all courses and the student-teachers' field experience,

if they are to graduate. Here, graduation is granted only if prospective teachers are able to demonstrate an acceptable level of teaching competence while teaching in real classrooms. Moreover, across institutions, a comprehensive end-of-the-program exam (written or oral) is also a common requirement.

Iran

The new generation of the Iranian pre-service teacher assessment consists of 4 separate, but related, components; namely, a) written assessment: assessment of subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, which allows teacher candidates to demonstrate knowledge about teaching the subject and the related theories; b) performance assessment: assessment of teacher candidates' use of subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in actual classroom context; c) portfolio assessment: assessing teacher candidates' four-year process of development through two different portfolios; namely, educational, and sociocultural ; and d) overall GPA: teacher candidates' four-year GPAs (Amoosi, 2017; Norouzi, 2017).

Japan

The board of directors in the Japanese Education Department administers annual exams which include both written items on general and disciplinary knowledge and interviews as well as performance assessment tests (Collision & Ono, 2001).

Oral and written exams includes subjects such as learning and pedagogical theories, pedagogical psychology, teaching methodology and the credits that student teachers are to teach after graduation.

Performance assessment specifically evaluates the domains in which the candidates have specialized. Exams assess issues such as school management, sociology of education, educational rules and education, education and citizenship (Shabani, 2004).

Candidates who successfully pass these tests receive a teacher certificate which is an indicator of their teaching competencies and qualify them as teachers (Collision & Ono, 2001).

United States

In the United States, teacher education graduation standards and requirements vary from state to state, and will be determined at the institutional level. Such requirements include completion of required courses, student teaching, and an adequate GPA (Tatto et al., 2016). Further, almost all the programs require teacher candidates to pass a content knowledge test as part of their graduation requirements (Ingersoll, 2007).

Singapore

In Singapore, written tests, fieldwork, project assignments, and teaching practice in the school context are the exit requirements expected from the prospective teachers (OECD, 2013).

Germany

Following their successful completion of the first academic degree (first phase) of their studies, student teachers in Germany are required to take their first State Examination. This examination, (containing both written and oral components), tests the candidates' content knowledge they are to teach. As another requirement, candidates are also required to write a long subject matter essay (Speer, & Harich, 2005; Yelken, 2009). Those passing this examination will be considered to have a college degree (OECD, 2013).

Teacher initial certification

Table 3 illustrates and summarizes the findings on initial teacher certification and the type of tests the candidates have to go through to get a teaching certificate.

Table 3 Comparison of initial teacher certification in the researched countries

	Additional certificate beyond TEP	valid for life
Germany	■ Two state tests one at the end of phase 1 and another at the end of phase 2	■
Japan	■ Performance and written assessment tests	■
Singapore	■ Written test	■
The U.S	■ (Praxis, PACT)	Must be renewed after probationary
Iran	■ Performance and written assessment tests	■

As the table shows, in almost all the researched countries, once student teachers successfully finish a TEP program and pass the required exams (oral, written, and performance), they will be awarded a teaching certificate and can start their teaching endeavor.

The two widely employed tests in the United States are the PRAXIS Series and the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT), which are required in most states (Ingersoll, 2007). These exams have been designed to measure prospective teachers' professional teaching knowledge which is actually applied in real classroom situations prior to being granted a teaching license. In other words, they assess teacher candidates' instructional competencies to plan, implement, and assess instruction in action in real classrooms (Pechione & Chung, 2006). In almost all the countries the certificate is valid for life (OECD, 2013). In the U.S., however, the initial certificate is valid for two years and they must be renewed after probationary period (Ingersoll, 2007).

Conclusion

The present study set out to give a comparative account of pre-service teacher preparation in the context of Iran and that of four other countries in terms of four issues: recruitment requirements, teaching practice, graduation standards and initial teacher certification. In other words, the main goal of this study was to give a detailed account of the pre-service teacher preparation, qualifications standards and certification in each system trying to come up with workable solutions and constructive lessons to be learned from each system. Both similarities and differences were discovered in the recruitment requirements and the preparation process among the five systems examined. One piece of finding interesting to note was that although the five studied nations are located on different parts of the world, numerous commonalities were found among them. For instance, it was found that in terms of recruitment and employment requirements in some cases (high school graduation, holding a diploma, successfully passing university entrance exam) the countries are very similar to one another. Iran and Japan, however, seem more sensitive towards teaching profession and interviews at the outset of the program. This way, they can assess

ethical, social and physical competence as well as motivation, clean criminal record and general abilities of the candidates. In Iran, besides the aforementioned factors, age, average and the commitment of the candidates are considered and are of paramount importance in acceptance and non-acceptance of the candidates. The duration of the programs range from four to seven years in the countries examined. A close analysis of the five teacher education systems revealed that Germany and the U.S. appear to have built up a richer and more sophisticated pre-service teacher education and evaluation system compared to other countries. As a case in point, more severe rules are applied in selecting teachers in Germany and the U.S compared to other countries. Screening and evaluation in Germany, in particular, proceed to in-service teachers and upon their failure and unsatisfactory performance, teachers would be fired. Teaching practice courses, in almost all the examined teacher education systems, are conducted in the form of classroom observation and teaching real classes, and evaluation is normally carried out by the presence of an experienced teacher and a university instructor.

The results further revealed that the TEP program in Iran has made arrangements to keep up with the new trends in teacher education and has partly been successful in following in developed countries' footsteps. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that teacher education in Iran is in special need of improvement in certain aspects. This study suggests that a more goal-oriented, systematic and practical approach needs to be effected in teaching practice courses if Iran is to have more effective EFL classes. Further, Iran must take lessons from these two exemplary countries (Germany and the U.S.) and use them to improve the quality of its education. For instance, following their employment, teachers should be provided with a proper working environment catering in-service training. Teachers should be given the chance to attend in-service training and sabbaticals so as to keep up-to-date and enjoy lifelong learning opportunities. In Germany, for teacher recruitment, numerous special, financial and professional privileges have been considered for teachers so as to attract meritorious and elite candidates into teaching profession. The pay rate and the level of

welfare facilities are much higher in Germany in comparison to other industrial countries. If the Ministry of Education is to realize its future goals (i.e., quality education), qualified and quality teachers, as the most valuable assets of the education system, are the key. Therefore, to nurture and educate qualified teachers for future generations, teacher education programs must be equipped with proper learning space and professional faculty members. Regarding the entry requirements the point which must be taken into consideration is the applicants entering such programs and the necessity of making arrangements for the proper selection of student teachers at the outset. Meaning that to select better and more proficient EFL teacher candidates, Farhangian University is bound to require an upper-intermediate proficiency level and accordingly complement the entrance exam with interviews (conducted in English) or add a highly valid proficiency test (TOFEL or IELTS) so that more proficient candidates are surfaced and identified.

Another crucial point concerns the student teachers' tenureship or job guarantee. Teacher candidates in Iran have always been granted a 30-year tenureship the very first day they step into the programs, regardless of how well they do and what they do during their studies. So doing, this policy might have negatively affected the amount of effort they put in pursuit of their education so long as employment status is not affected by making or not making efforts and as long as they do not feel the necessity to enhance their qualifications and proficiency (Nezakat-Alhossainia & Ketabi, 2012). This concern will hopefully be dismissed by the introduction of the new Teacher Education Curriculum and the new pre-service teacher evaluation policy though.

Recommendations

The study came up with the following recommendation as regards teacher education in Iran:

1. It appears that in the process of EFL teacher recruitment and selection there should be a variety of selection stages and methods so that there is a high possibility that those with higher mental and physical capabilities, knowledge, competencies and professional skills, and

language proficiency enter teacher education programs. More specifically put, arrangements should be made that, in the entry point, the more qualified candidates are always chosen. Following this, after undergoing the teacher education period, the candidates' professional competencies must be put to test and only those who are fully prepared and highly competent must be allowed to embark on their teaching career and the unqualified ones should either be dismissed or retake the end of the program exam.

2. Despite the fact that language proficiency plays a key role in effective teaching in an EFL context like Iran, unfortunately, most EFL teacher preparation programs are not able to provide their student teachers with an acceptable language proficiency level and fail to equip them with the required level of proficiency (Parks, 2017). As a consequence their graduates might experience major difficulty in their future teaching career. Murdoch (1994) highlights the crucial significance of teachers' language proficiency level in an EFL context by contending that "for non-native English teachers, language proficiency will always represent the bedrock of their professional confidence." (p. 254). Thus, the development and enhancement of teacher candidates' language proficiency must be a top priority and be placed high on the educational agenda of ELT teacher education programs. This can be fulfilled by either providing more practical conversational courses or recruiting more proficient teacher candidates at the entry point. Moreover, setting a proficiency benchmark (IELTS or TOEFL) as an exit requirement for the program is highly likely to work wonders. For instance, requiring an IELTS band score of 6 or higher for all those intending to be English school teachers, might act as an impetus to encourage teacher candidates to take initiatives to improve their language proficiency one way or another.
3. Previous research has voiced student teachers' dissatisfaction with the courses as being either too theory-based rather than practical or general courses that have nothing to do with improving their content (CK) or pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Khanjani, Vahdany & Jafarigohar, 2016). Since the focus of ELT is learning how to

teach a foreign language, curriculum developers should tailor the curriculum in such a way that the lion share is dedicated to core courses the focus of which is developing candidates' English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, enabling them to make competent and effective teacher.

4. Recruitment should be implemented after graduation and after student teachers have acquired general and professional competencies. Put it differently, teaching certificate must be granted after finishing the educational courses and teaching practice and after the student teachers have successfully passed teacher competency tests.
5. To enrich teaching practice in the teacher education curriculum we must utilized the experimental schools and innovative educational activities in which the mentor teachers and the personnel have been specifically trained to assist in the professional development of prospective teachers.
6. To manage and guide student teachers in the teaching practice courses, a team of experts, experienced teachers, principals and supervisors must be formed and coordinated. That is, a close mutual collaboration and coordination is required to exist among the parties involved in the process of teacher education and evaluation i.e., schools, universities and teacher education authorities.
7. In Iran, the issue of teacher standards has just recently gained momentum and as yet no standards have been specified and stipulated in teacher education programs. Thus, it is recommended that this matter be given top priority and the Ministry of Education set an organization to provide such standards for EFL student teachers and EFL teachers.
8. To assist better implementation of teacher education curriculum and increase the effectiveness of the curriculum, teacher education programs should add an induction period to the program. Well-designed induction periods are intended to enable the teacher candidates to become a useful, integrated member of the community

and will dramatically boost teacher candidates' acquisition of the required competencies and thus enhance their productivity in a shorter period of time.

9. In order to attract elites into the teaching profession, a revision of the payment procedure, welfare privileges and facilities in proportionate with professions of the same level seems necessary so as to motivate the elites to enter the teaching profession.

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