

Research paper


The Intensive Pre-Service EFL Teacher Education Program in Iran: A Description and Analysis Based on the ENABLE Model

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Abstract

Being a definitive factor in forming the quality of education, any teacher education program needs to be described, investigated, and brought into line with standards. The intensive pre-service teacher education program for prospective English language teachers who enter the Ministry of Education through Teacher Employment Examination is an unexplored context, the content and curriculum of which is described and investigated in this paper. Using a qualitative research design, and through framework analysis approach, the program is reviewed based on the ENABLE model which proposes a sociocultural model of teacher education. The findings revealed that the program typically follows a traditional university-based model with a focus on theoretical knowledge and pedagogical methods, and it fails to establish a systematic sociocultural structure. Lack of feedback provision, guidance and self-mediation opportunities deviates significantly from the sociocultural model outlined by the ENABLE model. Some suggestions are put forward in order to socioculturally uplift the program. Providing constructive feedback, fostering collaboration among student teachers, modeling by the teacher educator, discussing classroom narratives with peers, encouraging collaborative reflection, and keeping reflective journals are among these suggestions which are recommended to be considered by policy makers, curriculum developers and syllabus designers of teacher education programs and teacher educators.

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Introduction

As teacher education plays a pivotal role in shaping the quality of education and subsequently societal progress (Maggioli, 2023), it is crucial to describe, investigate and examine any existing teacher education curriculum to weigh them up against standards which can ensure to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively nurture the next generation, to contribute significantly to students' academic and personal development and to shape a better-educated and empowered society.

The Ministry of Education which is responsible for secondary and basic education in Iran invites applicants for teaching positions in elementary, lower secondary and higher secondary schools via two procedures. As the primary and main procedure, high school graduates can enter Farhangian University through participating in the Entrance Exam of Universities, and they can start their career as a teacher in the Ministry of Education after four years of studying in this university and being awarded a B.A. degree in various subjects of teaching. Next procedure which is devised to compensate for teacher shortage in the Ministry of Education is teacher recruitment by Teacher Employment Examination which is held annually and which is an alternative pathway to become a teacher in the Ministry of Education for graduate students who have earned a bachelor's degree or postgraduate students undertaking further study at M.A. or PhD levels in other higher education institutions and universities in Iran who are interested to pursue teaching career. This is based on article 28 of Farhangian University statute. After passing Teacher Employment Examination which is a highly competitive exam and going through various processes such as teaching interview and ideological interview, these prospective teachers including prospective English language teachers must pass an intensive pre-service teacher education program before they start teaching at schools which is held in Farhangian University, the duration of which can vary from two months to one academic year.

This paper aims to evaluate the content and curriculum of this intensive pre-service teacher education program for prospective English language teachers, a detailed account of which is given through an explanation of its educational philosophy, general courses, required program-based coursework, practicum experiences and so forth. Given the importance of effectively assessing teacher education programs to identify strengths and weaknesses, this study focuses on this unexplored context in Iran. Previous research has examined various programs, but the intensive pre-service program lacks an investigation and a defined framework and clarity on its effectiveness in preparing teachers for real classroom settings. Therefore, the program is reviewed on the basis of ENABLE model proposed by Maggioli (2023) which looks at teacher education from a sociocultural perspective emphasizing various forms of mediation and activities which help teachers learn to see, to do and to become. By analyzing the program's content and curriculum and comparing it to the ENABLE model by Maggioli (2023), the study seeks to fill this gap. In line with the objectives of the study, the following research questions are addressed:

- 1- What are the main features and components of the intensive pre-service teacher education program for prospective English language teachers in Iran?
- 2- How does the program align with the sociocultural standards of teacher education as defined by the ENABLE model?
- 3- What are the possible ways to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of the program for the prospective English language teachers in Iran?

Literature Review

Generally speaking, language teacher education in Iran has been described as top-down, prescriptive, transmissive, theory-laden and lecture-oriented, which is a developing area full of challenges and opportunities (Hassani, 2021). The existing literature with regard to the description of teacher education in Iran is reviewed by reference to the research body on shortcomings and main drawbacks of teacher education in Iran's teacher education system, and studies with respect to merits and improvements in Iran's teacher education programs.

There is a long list of shortcomings attributed to teacher education in Iran and being transmissive tops the list. Baniasad-Azad et al. (2016) examined the nature of EFL in-service teacher education programs that are held in the Ministry of Education in Iran through seminars, workshops, and sporadic in-service courses regarding their implementation, practicality, and approach to teacher learning. Observation of these in-service courses and interviews with teacher trainers were used to collect the data for this research. The transmissive nature of such teacher education programs was concluded as it was verified by Hassani (2021). The findings showed that these courses were designed to transfer a pre-specified body of teaching knowledge from the trainers to the teachers, regardless of teachers' creativity, attendees' prior knowledge and experience, the specific teaching context or even trainers' contribution to the course.

In a study by Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016), key stakeholders' attitudes including student teachers, in-service teachers, and teacher educators in Farhangian University towards teacher education programs in TEFL were investigated using a questionnaire. The results showed dissatisfaction with literacy courses, lack of practicum and classroom observations and the absence of empowering, knowledge-building or knowledge-applying subjects and impracticality of courses in real classroom settings. Moreover, Moradian (2014) believes that EFL teacher education in Iran is more training-centered than education-oriented because it is not grounded on a well-defined philosophical orientation.

In the same vein, Amin (2020) has attempted to review the system of teacher education in Iran. He believes that teacher education programs have failed to equip student teachers with practical knowledge of implementing the theories and methodologies they have mastered in these courses despite the successful transmission of theoretical knowledge. In another study, Gebal and Nawracka (2019) probed into foreign language teacher education program being carried out in the University of Tehran in a comparative study. Once more, the emphasis and focus on theoretical aspects of teacher education are verified. Courses are focused on language

teaching methods, educational psychology, and sociology of education according to these authors. Moreover, they have asserted that the practical part of these teacher education programs is restricted to classroom observations which happen in the last two semesters. Student teachers' critical views based on their classroom observations may be put forward in their final semester, however they are not viewed as potent and effective due to the non-flexible, ideological framework.

Other characteristics attributed to EFL teacher education in Iran being considered as a drawback are lack of teacher-learners' reflection and collaboration, lack of attention to teacher-learners' critical consciousness and dominance of a summative approach to assessment (Darabi Bazvand, 2023; Naseri Karimvand et al., 2016), centralized teacher education programs (Avanaki & Sadeghi, 2014; Pasalari et al., 2023), prioritizing religious perspectives in English language teacher recruitment (Mirhosseini et al., 2021), inadequacy with regard to improving teaching, management and evaluation skills as well as increasing teachers' motivation (Razi & Kargar, 2014), and lack of mentoring scheme and consequently absence of any feedback and evaluation regarding classroom teaching (Beigi Rizi et al., 2019). Table 1 summarizes the studies in this section:

Table 1.

Studies on Iran's teacher education system

Study	Context	Data Collection Procedure	Findings
Baniasad-Azad et al., 2016	In-service teacher education programs in the Ministry of Education	Course observation and interview with teacher trainers	Transmission of a pre-specified body of teaching knowledge from the trainers to the teachers
Gholami & Qurbanzada, 2016	Farhangian University	Questionnaire administration	Dissatisfaction with literacy courses, lack of practicum and classroom observations and the absence of empowering, knowledge-building or knowledge-applying subjects and impracticality of courses in real classroom settings
Moradian, 2014	EFL teacher education in universities	Qualitative analysis	Being training-centered and lacking a well-defined philosophical orientation
Amin, 2020	EFL teacher education in universities	Qualitative analysis	Transmission of theoretical knowledge and impracticality in equipping student teachers to implement theoretical knowledge

Gebal & Nawracka, 2019	EFL teacher education program in the University of Tehran	Comparative study	Focus on theoretical aspects of teacher education, lack of attention to students' critical views, and non-flexible, ideological framework
Darabi Bazvand, 2023	University-based teacher education programs	Interview with EFL teacher candidates	One-dimensional, teacher-initiated, summative oriented assessment, and lack of transparency in feedback provision
Naseri Karimvand et al., 2016	Private language centers	Semi structured observations and interview with teacher educators	Detailed implementation of preplanned courses, lack of teacher learners' reflection and collaboration, lack of attention to teacher learners' critical consciousness, and dominance of a summative approach to assessment
Avanaki & Sadeghi, 2014	Teacher education in universities	Comparative study	Centralized teacher education programs
Pasalari et al., 2023	Farhangian University	Comparative study	Centralized structure that originates from ideological thought
Mirhosseini et al., 2021	Iran's teacher education system	Qualitative content analysis of documents	Prioritizing religious perspectives in English language teacher recruitment
Razi & Kargar, 2014	In-service EFL teacher education program	Questionnaire administration	Inadequacy with regard to improving teaching, management and evaluation skills as well as increasing teachers' motivation
Beigi Rizi et al., 2019	Farhangian University and Schools	Questionnaire administration	Lack of mentoring scheme and absence of feedback and evaluation regarding classroom teaching

There are also studies that enumerate the advantages of teacher education programs in Iran or present empirical results about improvements in such programs based on research. Safarnavadeh et al. (2019) investigated the internship curriculum of Farhangian University, a program started in 2014, through interviews with student teachers. It was found that the program was effective in terms of satisfying students' expectations, increasing teaching competence and shaping teachers' identity. Other benefits listed for EFL teacher education

programs in Iran include positive effects on teachers' evaluation and promotion due to providing certificates, plus opportunities for them to exchange their ideas with other colleagues (Razi & Kargar, 2014).

As frameworks and policies including teacher education policies in private language institutes are concerned, Divanbegi et al. (2023) believes that minor private language institutes in Iran are expected to follow leading language institutes in terms of tests, teachers, and coursebooks. Therefore, analysis of local needs can be undertaken by these institutes to establish a creative, well-informed model for the minor language institutes.

Moreover, various tools have been suggested and tested to be used by pre-service teachers who are likely to encounter several obstacles, especially during the beginning years of their practice. In this respect, Arefian (2022) explored the use of collaborative action research with Iranian pre-service English language teachers using interviews, reflective journals, and observations. In this study, collaborative action research proved to be effective for pre-service teachers with regard to building confidence, reinforcing independence, incorporating reflective action and logical predictions of events, engaging in a supportive environment, and searching for novelty and creativity. Arefian (2023) investigated the same tool concerning Iranian in-service language teachers' perceptions, and similar promising findings were concluded about the implementation of collaborative action research.

Similarly, Aliakbari and Valizadeh (2023) explored student teachers identity construction in team teaching. This study can be said to be informed by the sociocultural theory as it incorporated peer and expert mediation. Stimulated recall sessions, interviews and reflective reports were used to collect the data for this study. It was revealed that team teaching can help student teachers develop professionally, attain self-regulation and gain more satisfaction in their practice. Another study in terms of identity construction is done by Mahmoodarabi et al. (2022) in which prospective teachers' language awareness, teaching practicum experiences and identification with learners' needs were shown to be significant in prospective teachers' professional identity development.

Another tool investigated to upraise student teachers' professional experience is the incorporation of a genre-based teacher education writing course into TE program (Nazari & Alizadeh Oghyanous, 2022). A course was designed to familiarize teachers both with theoretical and practical aspects of argumentative writing based on the genre-based approach which led to enhanced awareness, a more professional authorial identity, and increased content knowledge. Furthermore, lesson study approach is another area which is explored in the literature and can be used to facilitate reflective thinking in student teachers (Azimi et al., 2023).

With regard to the fact that efficient evaluation of teacher education programs is a vital issue (Khanjani et al., 2016) and that improvement of teacher education programs is dependent on their evaluation, accentuating the strengths and removing the weaknesses (Razi & Kargar,

2014), this paper has tried to effectively evaluate the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program being carried out for prospective English teachers who are entering the Ministry of Education through Teacher Employment Examination. The research findings set forth earlier were obtained in various contexts including B. A. programs in Farhangian University, teacher education programs in higher education institutions and universities, teacher education programs in private language institutes and in-service teacher education courses carried out by the Ministry of Education as can be seen in Table 1. The missing context which has not been explored yet is the intensive pre-service teacher education program. This program is a relatively new and unexplored context of teacher education in Iran, and it is not clear how well it prepares the teachers for the real classroom settings. Moreover, there is a lack of a well-defined framework or model to guide the design and implementation of this program. This study aims to address this gap by describing and analyzing the content and curriculum of the intensive pre-service teacher education program and using the ENABLE model proposed by Maggioli (2023) as a benchmark to compare and contrast the program with.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design, aiming to gain insight and understanding of the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program for prospective English teachers of the Ministry of Education in Iran. First, document analysis is used to collect the data. The study has reviewed and analyzed the official documents related to the program, such as the curriculum, the syllabus, the course materials, and the assessment criteria. Moreover, the study uses a content analysis approach to identify the main features and components of the program, such as its educational philosophy, objectives, content, methods, and evaluation. Second, the study has compared and contrasted the program with the ENABLE model proposed by Maggioli (2023), which adopts a sociocultural perspective on teacher education and emphasizes various forms of mediation and activities. The study has used a framework analysis approach to map the program's strengths and weaknesses against the criteria and indicators of the ENABLE model, and to discuss the similarities and differences between the two approaches. Finally, the findings of the data analysis are used to provide suggestions for improving the program, and to contribute to the community of practice in a beneficial way.

Main Features of the Program

Educational Philosophy based on National Documents

The Document of Fundamental Evolution in Education (2011), otherwise called the document of the educational philosophy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is a national document jointly compiled and edited by the Ministry of Education and the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution which consists of eight chapters mapping out a plan of action to be undertaken to promote human capital in all cultural, scientific, social, and economical aspects. It is declared that the Document would provide a clear and precise outlook of what the educational system is going to achieve by the year 2025.

The first chapter of the Document sets the ground for explicating the educational philosophy by defining the terms that are used throughout the Document. One important issue which is

mentioned here is the division of educational philosophy into six spheres. The spheres of education include religious and ethical education, artistic and aesthetic education, economical and occupational education, scientific and technical education, social and political education, and finally biological and physical education.

The second chapter of the Document clarifies the statements of the values which are the statements that delineate the main principles and fundamental propositions of the educational system. All the components of the educational system and the makers and executors of policies should adhere to and act according to these statements. To mention a few, the educational system must provide the foundation for students to achieve the basic competencies and to engage in a continuous identity development in all individual, familial, and social dimensions by an emphasis on religious qualities. Teachers must be considered as a supporting guide and a trusting model and the most important component of the educational system. The significant role of the families and their participation and involvement in the process of educating students must be recognized. The importance of religious sites, social and nongovernmental institutions, and the media in education must be acknowledged. National unity and social integrity must be protected through endorsing an Islamic-Iranian identity. Scientific achievements and human experiences must be considered valuable if they don't overstep the Islamic framework. The overall thirty statements in this chapter emphasize on the unity, integrity, moral growth, religious identity, and nationalism. It is explained in the third chapter of the Document that the Ministry of Education is responsible for advancing the education in all six spheres of the education mentioned before, while considering the statements of values and with the help of families, institutions, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

A description of an ideal school is presented in chapter four of the Document. According to this description, the school must be the center for providing educational services and opportunities for students to grow their identity in an Islamic framework which has the following features: manifesting the Islamic culture, autonomous in planning for local and regional policies, having the capacity to acknowledge individual differences and directing intrinsic talents, being responsive to individual needs and interests, learning-centered and perfectionist, providing a safe, delightful, and positive environment, enhancing the participation of all the stakeholders, being blessed with moral and professional teachers and educators, and finally having connections with social issues and topics with active participation in local, regional, and national scales.

In the fifth chapter, eight macro-objectives are enumerated. Among which educating religious, responsible, peaceful, and self-confident students, spreading educational justice, increasing public participation, and reforming the national curriculum can be mentioned. In the next chapter, some macro-strategies are introduced to achieve the macro-objectives. For example, to achieve educational justice, the curriculum and teacher education system need to be reformed, financial resources must be allocated, new technologies must be utilized, education in border areas must be supported, and teachers in those areas must be empowered.

Then, the macro-objectives and -strategies are broken down into operational objectives and micro-strategies in chapter seven. Some of the micro-strategies in this chapter are: adapting the content of the textbooks to school hours, taking advantage of active and innovative approaches of teaching, attending to individual difference and more specifically gender differences, presenting foreign language teaching in the framework of an Islamic-Iranian identity, providing mechanisms to reinforce religious lifestyle, standardization of the educational evaluation, providing consulting services to increase physical and emotional health, designing courses which specifically address the needs of a particular gender, setting up science and technology exhibitions, establishing networks of learning centers like research centers, public libraries, entrepreneurship centers, sport clubs and the like. The final chapter of the document relates to how it is going to be planned, supervised, assessed, and updated.

Some issues are stressed in the Document such as the Islamic-Iranian identity, national integrity, religion and ideology, individual empowerment, individual and gender differences, global intercultural interaction, global self-determination, and identification of the Persian language as the common language of Iranians (Farokhinia et al., 2022; Mohammadinejad & Sahragard, 2021; Pourbagher, 2022).

Ahmadabadi and Abdollahi (2021) reviewed 165 articles regarding the Document of Fundamental Evolution in Education to trace the obstacles to its implementation. They have identified and discussed nine main dimensions that the obstacles can be categorized in which are: obstacles related to the compilation of the Document (overemphasis on religious ideology, no clear link between its philosophy and proposed strategies, methodological ambiguity, being idealistic, etc.), obstacles related to the executors of the Document (lack of teachers' familiarity, lack of conformity to its implementation, lack of appropriate operational strategies with regard to teachers' practice, etc.), obstacles related to management (low attention to teachers' roles, low attention to motivational factors, etc.), obstacles related to the curriculum (lack of attention to content reform of the curriculum, nonanalytical textbooks, low attention to needs analysis, employing traditional methods of teaching, etc.), obstacles related to human resource improvement (mismatch between teachers' field of study and field of teaching, impracticality of in-service courses, low attention to meritocracy, etc.), obstacles related to space and equipment (no access to computers and internet at schools, no equipped lab, no exercise facilities, etc.), obstacles related to financial resources (low funding, etc.), obstacles related to research and assessment (low attention to experiment and research in school subjects, inefficient teachers' evaluation processes, etc.), and structural obstacles (high attention to system and structure protection, centralized management, hasty attempt to employ 3-3-6 model, etc.).

According to Janbozorgi et al. (2022), the most important problem with the Document is its overemphasis on the role of "religion" which has led to a partial ignorance of modern life values such as cultural diversity, social responsibility, citizenship and environmental concerns and created a gap between students' real-life experiences and formal education.

The Document of Fundamental Evolution in Education is presented as a source for one of the courses in the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program. The title of the course is “Educational Philosophy in the Islamic Republic of Iran”, and the Document is covered in this course as it holds the educational philosophy around which all other aspects of education including core subjects and curriculum, standardized assessments, formal structure, school autonomy, discipline, grading systems among others are shaped. The Document is highlighted and emphasized in all other courses throughout the program as well whenever the philosophy of education and teaching is concerned.

Analysis and Description of the Courses Presented throughout the Program

As mentioned before, the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program is held in two academic semesters. However, the program may sometimes be held in a shorter span of time due to delay in the administration of the Teacher Employment Examination or other administrative problems. Yet, all the courses which are presented in Table 2 are covered irrespective of the duration of the intensive program.

Table 2.

Courses presented in the intensive EFL teacher education program

First Semester		
Title of the Course	Course Learning Objective(s)	Required Reading
Educational Research (1)	Enabling STs to define research and its various types Helping STs identify the obstacles in the way of doing research in the Ministry of Education Making STs familiar with the tenets of Action Research and enabling them to carry out Action Research in the context of their future classrooms	A Practical Guide to Action Research- Eghbal Ghasemipouya
Internship (1)	Providing opportunities for STs to directly observe various pedagogical and administrative relationships within a school Making STs familiar with national school standards and physical space and health standards	
Textbook Evaluation (1)	Presenting the Prospect Series and the Vision Series to STs, the English textbooks which are used in junior and senior high schools in Iran	Official Teachers’ Guide for the Prospect and Vision Series

Teaching Methods and Techniques	Developing STs teaching skills through the description and analysis of various teaching methods and techniques Increasing STs' knowledge of different language teaching methodologies	Educational and Developmental Skills (Methods and Techniques of Teaching)- Hasan Shabani
Educational Psychology	Increasing STs' knowledge of educational and developmental psychology and different learning theories Helping STs to gain the competency to address individual students' needs and issues in the classroom	Modern Educational Psychology: Psychology of Learning and Instruction- Ali-Akbar Saif
Second Semester		
Title of the Course	Course Learning Objective(s)	Required Reading
Educational Research (2)	Preparing STs to conduct lesson study collaboratively through their career Practicing and enhancing collaboration, reflection, and ongoing professional discussion among STs	
Internship (2)	Providing opportunities for STs to directly observe English classes at schools and compare their observations with their previous expectations Practicing microteaching and giving constructive feedback to STs regarding their teaching technique	
Textbook Evaluation (2)	Presenting how the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be dealt with in the Prospect and Vision Series	Official Teachers' Guide for the Prospect and Vision Series
Evolution Documents and Educational Philosophy in IR Iran	Making STs familiar with the educational philosophy highlighted by Iran's education system Justifying the educational philosophy for STs to bring a sense of conformity and tendency for them to align their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors	The Document of Fundamental Evolution in Education

		to those recommended by the proposed philosophy	
Assessment in English Language Teaching	Addressing different approaches to educational evaluation	Helping STs develop the skills in test construction by describing different testing procedures	Measurement, Assessment and Educational Evaluation- Ali-Akbar Saif
Course Design in English Language Teaching	Presenting the educational theories for curriculum design, course design and syllabus design	Analyzing units of learning with an emphasis on Bloom's Taxonomy	Understanding by Design- Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe
Workshops			
Field Trip Management			
First Aid Training			

As is clear from Table 2, the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program is focused on equipping student teachers with necessary knowledge and skill of teaching through content analysis of textbooks, transmission of teaching and assessment techniques, observation of real classrooms, increasing the knowledge of psychological and philosophical aspects of teaching, and the last but not the least awakening the enthusiasm to carry out classroom research. Another important point which can be concluded based on Table 2 is that almost all the courses (except the internship courses) are reading-oriented. A source book or other written document is offered and covered during the semester which is believed to lead to student teachers' enhanced knowledge of various aspects of teaching.

EFL student teachers are expected to grow a good command of the teaching content presented in the Prospect Series and the Vision Series, the English textbooks which are used in junior and senior high schools in Iran. In order to expand their understanding, application, evaluation and synthesis of the body of knowledge in these series, a Teachers' Guide is published by the Textbook Compilation Office and supervised by General Administration for Supervision of Publication and Distribution of Educational Materials. In these books, Communicative Language Teaching is introduced as the teaching approach which should be employed in junior and senior high schools for English teaching with an emphasis on the utilization of varied teaching activities, experience-based language learning, provision of comprehensible, meaning-focused materials, development of a collaborative learning environment, offering constructive corrective feedback and attention to emotional aspects of learning. The books also offer various activities and tasks that correspond to each section in the textbooks which can be considered as a valuable resource for student teachers who are yet to gain experience in teaching.

The internship courses can be regarded as the most practice-based courses in the program where student teachers can experience and observe real classroom issues at first hand which can change their idealistic views of classroom mechanisms which are shaped through what is proposed in reading-based courses and help them become more realistic practitioners who are able to approximate the existing conditions to the standards as far as possible.

Lastly, the courses on classroom research revolve around “action research” and “lesson study”, but they can be viewed as more theoretically driven courses rather than practical courses on research due to a lack of actual research projects undertaken and done by student teachers. Instead, they are presented with definitions, stages of research, data collection procedures, data analysis processes, and advice on writing about the problem under investigation.

Teaching Practicum and Coursework in the Program

Teaching practicum is commonly used in pre-service teacher education programs. Practicum is a key element to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and actual classroom practice (Gebhard, 2009; Maharani & Fithriani, 2023; Qazi et al., 2012; White & Forgasz, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2014). Through supervised teaching experiences and systematic observation (Gebhard, 2009), pre-service teachers can apply their knowledge, develop teaching skills, and gain hands-on experience in real educational settings. This practical component, which has been included in the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program as well is essential for preparing prospective teachers to effectively navigate the challenges of teaching.

The practicum should be designed to achieve some goals including gaining practical teaching experience, applying theory originating from previous course work, reflecting on experienced teachers’ practice, building up lesson planning skills, and acquiring the skill of course material development (Richards & Crookes, 1988).

Different types of teaching practicum are included in the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program that are accompanied by specific coursework to be undertaken by student teachers. The internship courses being the preeminent practical courses include reflective observation of experienced teachers’ practice in real classrooms, as well as other aspects of the educational milieu like the school’s physical features, the administrative affairs and student-teacher or student-student relationships. As the coursework, student teachers are required to write a report on their observations including their expectations before observing the classes, their observation notes, their reflections on classroom challenges and interactions, and their own suggestions to overcome the challenges. The internship courses also include the teacher training technique of microteaching in which student teachers need to write lesson plans on specific sections of the Prospect or Vision series in groups of three, teach and record the session, and send it to the teacher educator who would assess the teaching as part of student teachers’ evaluation.

The research-oriented courses also encompass teaching practicum. Throughout the first semester, student teachers are required to write a research proposal for action research about an issue they have observed in their internship course. Furthermore, for the second semester, they need to form a lesson study team, assign roles for each team member, clarify the statement of the problem which is again based on an issue observed in the internship course, and explore the problem with the team approaching it from different perspectives. Subsequently, the lesson study team should conclude a resolution for the problem. The discussion sessions which are held by the team should be recorded and sent to the teacher educator for evaluation.

Lesson planning and mind mapping are two other practical techniques emphasized during the intensive program. Bloom's taxonomy is emphasized both for planning the educational objectives and for evaluating the lesson plans. Student teachers also need to visualize one of the lessons from the Prospect or Vision series through a mind map, identifying cognitive levels according to Bloom's taxonomy and relating it to other lessons in the textbook. A further teaching practicum which is worked on in the intensive program is material development. Student teachers are demanded to develop extra material which are aligned with English textbooks and can be used with them to achieve the educational objectives.

As far as the textbook evaluation courses are concerned, student teachers are asked to conduct a textbook analysis project in groups of three. Each group has to choose one of the lessons of the Prospect or Vision series and analyze it page by page, deconstructing the texts, activities, and exercises in various sections of the chosen lesson including the title page, the impact page, conversation and reading pages, speaking and listening activities, and writing exercises. They then need to present their comments and results of analysis clearly and elaborately in an around 3000-words article.

What has been discussed so far was related to the practical aspects of the program's courses which are assessed in order to count towards the course's final grade. Except for these course works, two other types of practicum are required to be undertaken by student teachers. One is providing an action plan of 2000 to 3000 words regarding their future career in which they first need to describe the status quo with respect to the individual, social, political, etc. state of affairs in the educational environment. Having in mind the educational philosophy presented earlier and different educational spheres, they need to describe the ideal condition that all educators should strive for and present their own role and practical strategies to obtain that condition. The other practicum is conducting interviews with experienced teachers about the challenges they might have had in their teaching career or any other influential story regarding their teaching. This also should contain the student teacher's own reflection on the interview.

The Assessment Procedure

The intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program involves a multi-step assessment process. The first step for prospective teachers to be successful in the program is to pass all the courses offered in the program. To pass the courses, student teachers need to take part in the final examinations which are all-inclusive assessments conducted at the end of each semester

to evaluate student teachers' understanding of the material covered. These exams often contribute significantly to a student's overall course grade. The other definitive factor is the on-time submission of the course project which determines the student teacher "pass" or "fail" in the specific course. Oftentimes, student teachers do not get any feedback or supervision regarding their projects. Therefore, the assessment of practice remains unsupervised and summative.

After passing all the courses, student teachers are required to participate in a comprehensive examination which is a rigorous test that assesses the student teachers' mastery of the theoretical aspects of teaching and learning through multiple choice items, as well as their competency in teaching and overcoming the challenges of teaching through essay type items. In the latter case, some challenges or issues that arise within specific educational context are presented. These can include diverse classroom scenarios, student behaviors, or unexpected events that teachers must navigate. These items are meant to examine student teachers' adaptability, problem-solving skills, and the ability to adjust teaching strategies to meet the unique needs of the context.

After completing these stages, the "Professional Competency Assessment Report" is issued to each student teacher by Human Resources Competency Assessment Center which determines whether the student teachers can start their teaching at school or not. Table 3 shows how different aspects of the program affect this report.

Table 3.
Grading Chart

Component	Maximum Grade
Performance Assessment Grade	275
Cultural Grade	275
Written Examination Grade	450
Total	1000

As is shown in Table 3, three components are included in the "Professional Competency Assessment Report". The first component, performance assessment grade, is decided on by the internship instructor which accounts for 27.5% of the total grade. The second component which is titled "cultural grade" is determined by the participation in the workshops which are mentioned in Table 2. This again accounts for 27.5% of the total grade. And the final component, written examination grade is the score obtained from the comprehensive examination which accounts for 45% of the total grade. A grade of 600 out of 1000 would suffice the requirements.

The ENABLE Model and How it is Contrasted with the Program

The sociocultural theory developed by Lev S. Vygotsky, who considers culture and social interaction as important factors in shaping cognitive development, has influenced teacher education trends as well. The ENABLE model proposed by Maggioli (2023) which is a teacher education model is based on the sociocultural theory. Figure 1 shows the various aspects and elements of the model. The first outer ring of the figure shows various forms of mediation that

may happen within the zone of proximal development, a term used to represent the distance between what a learner is capable of doing unsupported and what the learner is capable of doing with the help of a teacher or a peer. Self-access, scaffolding, collaborative learning, reciprocal teaching, and technology-supported learning are included in the ENABLE model as forms of mediation which refers to the help provided to a less knowledgeable other by a more knowledgeable other.

Figure 1
The ENABLE Model



The second ring of the figure classifies activities in a teacher education program into three categories of learning to see activities, learning to do activities, and learning to become activities. The first category of activities makes reference to tasks that help student teachers notice and mark the core concepts and practices and explicitly learn about their profession and compensate for the lack of experience. These include learning about the core concept or practice through various tools, observation of a core concept or practice being implemented, deconstruction of a core concept or practice, confrontation with the apprenticeship of observation, experiential learning, etc. The second category touches on activities that help student teachers act out in real classrooms in principled and effective ways. These include modeling, using protocols, scaffolded planning, rewriting a lesson plan, collective rubric creation, microteaching and the like. And the final category, learning to become activities,

helps student teachers contextualize their teaching to the needs of their specific learners and gain self-assessment dispositions. Reflective journals, lesson critique, feedback sessions, scrutinizing the lesson plan, supported experiments, giving anonymous positive feedback and talking about the experiences with the teacher educator are activities listed in this category.

Finally, the hexagon that is formed within the inner circle of the figure shows the six stages of the ENABLE model. Each stage can be accomplished by various activities presented by Maggioli (2023). The first stage in the model is *Engaging* with the core concept or practice. The activities mentioned for this stage are modeling, reading professional literature, discussions and interviews with various members of the community of practice. The second stage in the model is *Noticing* which happens through deconstruction, analysis and synthesis of theories and practices of teaching and learning. The third stage in the model is *Accessing* representations of the concept or practice. This refers to the process of carefully examining the core concept or practice shown in professional literature, videos, lesson plans, student products and the like. Stage four of the model is *Bridging* theory and practice where student teachers apply what they have learned in a simulated way through activities like microteaching, guided rehearsals, collaborative planning and active coaching. Stage five of the model is *Launching* the core concept or practice where student teachers implement what they have learned in real classrooms for the first time. This happens while other student teachers and the teacher educator are present and observing. Lastly, the final stage of the model is *Extending* the concept or practice which involves student teachers in reflection, goal setting, action planning, and collaboration with other student teachers.

From a general perspective, the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program typically follows a traditional university-based model with a focus on theoretical knowledge and pedagogical methods. As mentioned before, the emphasis of most of the courses covered throughout the program is on content knowledge, with less focus on practical teaching skills and experiential learning. Practical teaching experience is typically gained through teaching internships in schools, although the extent and quality of these experiences may vary. Furthermore, the experiences acquired in internship courses are usually limited to observation of experienced teachers. No supervised teaching to actual students happens during the program.

Some aspects of the program and practices assigned and undertaken throughout the program align with the activities elaborated by the ENABLE model. Yet, these activities cannot form a coherent sociocultural structure leading to student teachers' professional development and contributions to the community of practice. There are two reasons for this. One reason is the dominance of an ideological educational philosophy that doesn't emphasize and make room for the recent developments in teacher education trends. And the second reason is that there is a gap between the proposed learning objectives and what really happens in teacher education classrooms. For example, all the teaching practicum explained earlier that are included in the intensive EFL teacher education program match the requirements of the ENABLE model, although they are few in number. These include reflective observations in internship courses, microteaching, trying out "action research" and "lesson study", lesson planning, action

planning, and interviews with experienced teachers. However, for the vast majority of cases, student teachers receive no feedback or more specifically, expert or peer mediation when conducting the practicum. And they are not oriented to self-mediate themselves. The practices are not reviewed except for rare cases which makes the program significantly diverge from the sociocultural model.

Discussion

This study intended to discuss the main features and components of the intensive pre-service teacher education program for prospective English language teachers in Iran who enters the Ministry of Education through Teacher Employment Examination. Moreover, the program was explored in the framework of the ENABLE model which holds a sociocultural perspective. The intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program aims to prepare student teachers by providing them with essential teaching knowledge and skills. This involves analyzing textbooks, teaching methods, and assessment techniques, observing real classrooms, exploring psychological and philosophical aspects of teaching, and fostering a passion for classroom research. Additionally, most courses, excluding internships, prioritize reading-based learning, with a focus on using source materials to deepen student teachers' understanding of teaching principles. Studies of teacher education programs in Iran in other contexts also show similar results regarding the transmission of teaching knowledge through reading-based learning (Amin, 2020; Baniasad-Azad et al., 2016; Gebal & Nawracka, 2019).

The internship courses are the most hands-on components of the program, providing student teachers with direct exposure to real classroom challenges. This firsthand experience can challenge their idealized perceptions of classroom dynamics shaped by theoretical courses, fostering a more pragmatic approach.

While few elements and activities within the program correlate with the principles outlined in the ENABLE model, they fail to establish a cohesive sociocultural framework conducive to the professional growth of student teachers and their integration into the community of practice. Two primary factors contribute to this discrepancy. Firstly, there is a prevailing ideological educational philosophy that neglects recent advancements in teacher education practices. Secondly, there exists a disparity between the intended learning outcomes and the actual experiences within teacher education classrooms. For instance, while some components of the intensive EFL teacher education program, such as reflective observations, microteaching, and action research, align with the ENABLE model, they are limited in number. Additionally, the majority of student teachers receive insufficient feedback or support, both from experts and peers, during practical experiences. This lack of guidance and self-mediation opportunities deviates significantly from the sociocultural model outlined by the ENABLE framework. Lack of feedback provision can also be traced in other teacher education contexts in Iran (Beigi Rizzi et al., 2019; Darabi Bazvand, 2023).

Feedback can provide student teachers with insights into their strengths and areas for improvement. Constructive feedback helps them reflect on their practice, leading to continuous

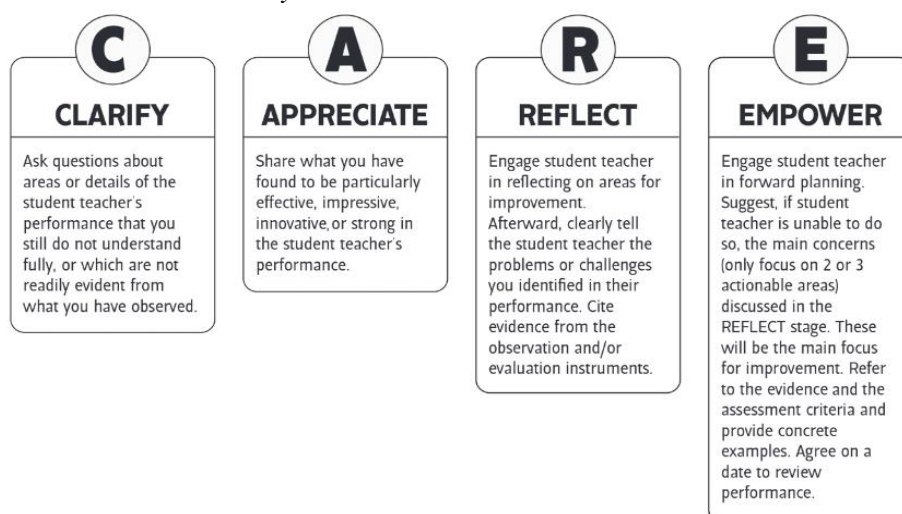
professional growth. Moreover, feedback can enable student teachers to refine their instructional techniques, classroom management strategies, and assessment methods. This, in turn, improves student learning outcomes. Positive feedback reinforces student teachers' confidence in their abilities, motivating them to innovate and take risks in their teaching. Conversely, constructive criticism helps them address weaknesses and build resilience. Establishing a culture of feedback fosters collaboration among teachers and administrators. Peer feedback, mentorship, and coaching create opportunities for sharing best practices and supporting each other's professional development (Maggioli, 2023).

In short, effective feedback in teacher education is essential for nurturing skilled and reflective educators who can meet the diverse needs of their students and contribute to positive learning environments which is highlighted in the literature, as well. Yusuf et al. (2017) investigated the effect of multimodal feedback on pre-service teachers' competence and the result showed a significant improvement in the participants' teaching competence. Carless and Winstone (2023) emphasize that feedback processes would be impactful if the responsibilities were distributed between students and teachers.

Maggioli (2023) also highlights feedback as a powerful form of mediation which plays a crucial role in guiding learning and growth. According to this author, the frequency and quality of feedback significantly impact the establishment of the Intermental Development Zone wherein student teachers can engage with educators or peers to enhance their learning journey and progress. Additionally, Maggioli (2023) defines the features of effective, formative feedback which is described as "feedback that shows that you CARE". Both educators and student teachers should be trained to use this kind of feedback which leads to an environment that is conducive to learning and development. Figure 2 taken from Maggioli's book shows the characteristics of effective, formative feedback that can be used within a sociocultural framework.

Figure 2

Feedback that shows that you CARE



The internship courses in the intensive pre-service EFL teacher education program which are the most practice-based courses in the program also mostly remain unmediated, thus lacking a sociocultural direction. Instead of being pure observation of experienced teachers' classrooms and contrary to the claims of being reflective, they can be uplifted to a mediated experience through various activities such as multimodal representation of student teachers' expectations of real classrooms before observing them, providing them with lesson observation guide, feedback slip, and annotated observation chart as mediational tools, and fostering collaboration among student teachers when reporting on the classroom observed, and discussing the issues that are raised during their observations back in teacher education classroom.

Besides reading and learning about core concepts and practices in second language teaching, student teachers need to stabilize the teaching dispositions through learning to do things effectively which cannot be gained by reading alone. They need to put their learning into practice. Modeling by the teacher educator is an effective way for student teachers to learn how to do things which rarely happens in the intensive EFL teacher education program. Student teachers can also be provided with protocols which are scripts that explain how to use a core professional concept or practice which are a mediating tool. Scaffolded planning for teaching sessions, revising lesson plans based on teacher educator or peers' comments, collective rubric creation, comparing teaching styles, microteaching, teaching rehearsal, discussing classroom narratives with peers, and exploring other possibilities for teaching are other activities that can be done in this regard.

To further equip student teachers with self-regulation tools, activities like lesson critique provided by peers, encouraging collaborative reflection on different possibilities of teaching, using graphic organizers to provide feedback, giving positive anonymous feedback, and keeping reflective journals can be utilized.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the key aspects and elements of the intensive pre-service teacher education program for aspiring English language teachers in Iran, those who enter the Ministry of Education through the Teacher Employment Examination. Furthermore, the program was analyzed within the context of the ENABLE model, which adopts a sociocultural viewpoint. Based on the analysis, the majority of courses were revealed to emphasize reading-based learning, with an emphasis on utilizing source materials to enhance student teachers' comprehension of teaching principles. Although some elements and activities within the program align with the principles outlined in the ENABLE model, they do not establish a coherent sociocultural framework conducive to the professional development of student teachers. Suggestions have been made to improve the program with a sociocultural framework of teacher education which are recommended to be considered by policy makers, curriculum developers and syllabus designers of teacher education programs and teacher educators.

In light of these findings, several areas for improvement emerge. Firstly, all the stakeholders involved should consider incorporating more practical teaching experiences that enable student teachers to engage in real-world teaching, promoting reflective practice and equipping them with practical skills for their future roles. Additionally, fostering collaborative learning and peer feedback within the program could provide opportunities for student teachers to learn from each other's experiences and refine their teaching practices. Since the program is implemented within an Iranian context, integrating culturally relevant content could further enhance the engagement and relevance of learning, making training more meaningful and applicable. Establishing feedback mechanisms for continuous program evaluation would also allow for ongoing adjustments in response to input from current participants and alumni, helping to align the curriculum more closely with sociocultural principles over time.

Further research is needed in this context to explore why there is a gap between the proposed guidelines of the program and the real practices within the teacher education classroom. In other words, the reasons behind teacher educators' reluctance to provide feedback to student teachers should be explored. Student teachers' perceptions participating in the intensive pre-service teacher education program, as well as other stakeholders' perceptions should be explored. Moreover, experimental research can be done with regard to the implementation of a sociocultural teacher education program to investigate its effects on student teachers' professional development. Finally, there is a need for clear policy implications and strategic recommendations to support a sociocultural approach within the intensive teacher education program. The coherence between policy, training, and practical application would ultimately enhance the program's impact on student teachers' development.

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