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## “Now as a teacher”: Novice Teachers Reflect on English Language Teacher Education in Iran

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### **Abstract**

This study relied on the reflections of 12 novice English language teachers and 3 supervisors to explore the status quo of teacher training in 3 private language institutes with headquarters in Tehran and about 420 language schools throughout the country. Extensive data collection was done through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and teacher diaries as well as informal peer interviews and observation of occasional meetings of supervisors and teachers. To analyze data, an inductive analysis procedure was used. Findings revealed that current language teacher training courses in the context of concern may require different types of improvements with regard to theory-practice gap, supervised in-service workshops, reflective teaching skills, use of technology, and teachers' experiential learning.

### **Keywords**

Teacher Education, Teacher Training, English Language Teaching, Beliefs, Novice Teachers, Supervisors, Qualitative Study

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## **“Now as a teacher”: Novice Teachers Reflect on English Language Teacher Education in Iran**

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### **Introduction**

Second language (L2) teacher education has undergone drastic changes in the last three decades. Before the 1980s, the influential model for teacher education in applied linguistics was of a process-product type where the aim was to understand how teachers' actions resulted in student learning (Freeman, 2002). Such a view, known as technicism, thought of teaching as efficient performance which seeks to achieve ends prescribed for teachers (Halliday, 1998). Learning to teach was defined as having complete knowledge of the content to be taught along with its required methodology, and any failure on the part of learners to acquire the assigned content was attributed to “the teaching process and, by extension, ...[to] the teacher's competence” (Freeman, 2002, p. 5). However, the profession has outgrown such simplistic interpretations of teaching and behavioral conceptions of instruction have been replaced by socio-cognitive views of teaching (Johnson, 2006). Inspired by this replacement, called a *revolution* by Freeman and Johnson (1998), English Language Teaching (ELT) literature now addresses different aspects of teacher development from professional and cognitive as well as social and contextual perspectives (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2006; Huhn, 2012; Johnson, 2000; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Among recent changes in L2 teacher education has been researchers' and educators' focusing attention on the significance of teacher cognition, defined as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching-what teachers know, believe and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81). In this new orientation, teachers are thinking decision makers who draw upon networks of knowledge, thought, and beliefs in their instructional choices (Borg, 2003). Studies of teachers' mental lives has enabled a greater realization of “how language teachers conceive of what they do, what they know about language teaching, how they think about their classroom practice, and how that knowledge and those thinking processes are learned” (Freeman & Richards, 1993, p. 1). The growing interest in teachers' mental lives within L2 teacher education research resulted in investigations of teachers' knowledge base using various terminologies like moral

knowledge base (e.g., Akbari & Tajik, 2012), personal practical knowledge (Sun, 2012), and pedagogical knowledge base (Akbari & Dadvand, 2011; Akbari & Tajik, 2009). Additionally, the literature on teacher cognition has explored teacher beliefs about different aspects of their teaching as listed by Borg (2003).

Even though recent research has highlighted the importance of investigating teachers' beliefs about various aspects of their work, the literature, to our knowledge, has not paid due attention to L2 teachers' beliefs about the available teacher education programs. Gaining access to teachers' beliefs about the education they undergo can result in designing programs that better suit the needs of L2 teacher community. This neglect is specifically felt in the Iranian context. In addition to neglecting English teachers' beliefs about current teacher preparation courses, the existing publications have failed to address English language supervisors' perspectives about the training programs. Due to the fact that in the context of language institutes, English language supervisors are mostly responsible for running the training courses, or, more technically, delivering the teacher education curriculum, enquiring about their beliefs on their teacher preparation courses can further elucidate the components neglected in the current programs. Researching both teachers' and supervisors' beliefs can also provide insights into potential areas of compromise or disagreement between these practitioners as to the features of the present programs.

With these points in mind, the present study aimed to investigate the status quo of L2 teacher education in the context of language institutes in Iran based on the beliefs of a number of L2 teachers and their supervisors. More specifically, the study was conducted to detect the major problematic areas in ELT teacher preparation in the settings of concern and to point to the ways one can remove the existing problems. Considering the significance of preparing qualified teachers through well-developed teacher education programs, the highlighted features of an effective teacher education program may assist language institutes in designing teacher education courses which best fit the needs of language teachers while preparing them for the new demands made of them based on recent advancements in the field. In fact, research on features of an efficient teacher education program can help curriculum developers or policy makers define the curricula for teacher preparation courses and to decide on its program directions. Since the issue of ELT teachers' and supervisors' beliefs about the existing training courses seems to be among the neglected areas in the literature of ELT, the present study can provide ideas for and raise awareness of the ELT teacher preparation community in other parts of the world on the necessity of giving more priority to probing into teachers' and supervisors' cognition about what is occurring in the training courses. Additionally, as the issue of teacher education and cognition is of global significance, findings of the present study are likely to be applicable for teacher training programs in other countries.

## **Background**

In this section, we, first, provide information on various orientations towards teacher education through last decades; next, we introduce a brief background on the history of teacher cognition and teacher belief. In the last part, we review the existing discussions on the status of ELT teacher education in Iran as well as the available literature comparing teacher education programs in Iran with other countries.

Through the last decades, different orientations have been dominant in teacher education research. Academic, personalistic, technical, practical, and inquiry-based orientations have been reported as the most influential ones during the last years. Academic orientation is based on positivistic epistemology, linked to process-product approach (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Phipps, 2009); personalistic orientation is based on humanistic epistemology, placing teacher's development at the center of teacher education (Feiman-Nemser, Remillard,

& Murray, 1995; Phipps, 2009); technical orientation comes from an empirical-analytic tradition which places efficiency, rationality and objectivity at the center of the educational process (Gage, 1989; Valli, 1992); practical orientation is based on the perception that human activities are steeped in moral and ethical activities (Grundy, 1987) and that the decisions arise as a result of “interaction and group meaning-making” (Rearick & Feldman, 1999, p. 334); and inquiry-oriented approach, in line with constructivist view of teaching, acknowledges the importance of cognitive processes of learning to teach, encouraging teachers to reflect on their own teaching (Adler, 1991; Borg, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Phipps, 2009; Richardson, 2003; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Interest in teachers' mental lives and cognition, promoted through the inquiry-oriented approach to teacher education, started with the investigation of the decisions teachers make in their classes (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Reducing the complexity of teachers' cognition to decision making was in line with behaviorist conceptions of teaching since this strategy created an easy, almost quasi-behavioral, unit of analysis that could be applied across multiple classroom settings, content areas, and levels of teacher expertise (Freeman, 2002, p. 5). Research that addressed teachers' mental lives in a serious, comprehensive way mostly started during the 1990s and in language teaching after 1996 (Borg, 2003). With the recognition of the significance of teachers' mental lives, the study of teacher cognition, and consequently teacher beliefs, developed into a major area of research (e.g., Andrews, 1999; Birello, 2012; Borg, 2003; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Housner & Griffey, 1985; Kagan, 1990; Packer & Winne, 1995; Phipps, 2009; Powell, 2000; Zembylas, 2005). In consequence, many scholars recognized the primacy of teachers' beliefs in all aspects of teachers' thought processes and decision making (e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992) and explored teachers' beliefs about different aspects of their teaching (Borg, 2003).

Though the literature has investigated teachers' cognition about various components of their teaching practice, it has, largely, ignored practitioners' beliefs on the training courses, including both pre- and in-service, they have to complete. As is true of the other areas, the literature on ELT teacher cognition and teacher education in Iran has neglected to explore teachers' and supervisors' beliefs about teacher education programs they attend. Notwithstanding this neglect, the existing research on ELT teacher education in the country is quite diverse, taking various orientations towards the programs. Regarding pre-service teacher training, Ebrahimi and Faghih (2016) studied incorporation of corpus linguistics into teacher preparation courses; Ebrahimi (2015) studied the orientation of pre-service teachers towards constructivist classroom environments; Mehrmohammadi (2014) developed a practical teacher education program curriculum; Soleimani and Zanganeh (2014) evaluated current programs based on improvements in knowledge and disposition of participating teachers; Naseri Karimvand, Hessami, and Hemmati (2014) explored the position of post-method pedagogy in teacher preparation programs; Abednia (2012) documented contribution of a critical program to teachers' professional identity reconstruction; and finally, Rahimi (2011) examined how training programs foster teachers' critical awareness. In exploring local in-service teacher education programs, Razi and Kargar (2014) found that ELT teacher preparation programs are not satisfactory in improvement of English teachers' language proficiency level, teaching skills, management skills, evaluation skills, teachers' motivation, and administration of the courses. Quite opposite to Razi and Kargar (2014), Sarlak and Vafaeimehr (2014) found the available courses successful in promoting teachers' general English proficiency and classroom management skills as well as employing technology.

Besides the studies exploring English teacher education within the country, some research has compared programs in Iran with other countries. Moradian (2014) juxtaposed teacher preparation courses in Iran with western programs and concluded that programs in Iran are more training oriented than education oriented. Furthermore, he realized that, in comparison

with western contexts, theories, teaching methodologies, practices and research inquiry of teacher education programs in Iran are not emanated from a rich philosophical background. Avanaki and Sadeghi (2014) compared education programs in Iran with the UK and found that courses in Iran are too much theoretically oriented and that teacher educators do not have collaboration with teachers. Farah, Fauzee, and Daud (2014) pointed to traditional, social, economic and cultural problems with teacher education courses in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Nezakat-Alhossaini and Ketabi (2013) compared L2 teacher training courses in Iran, Turkey, and Australia in terms of programming and materials. They revealed that teacher programs in Australia are more precise and rich, goal oriented and up-to-date in terms of course content, study hours and course practicality.

As we stated in the preceding paragraphs, notwithstanding a rather rich literature on the status of ELT teacher education in Iran, researchers have, primarily, explored the issue from an etic perspective and, in consequence, have failed to examine teachers' and supervisors' thinking about what is occurring in the training courses offered in various contexts, including language institutes. To address this gap in the literature and to document practicing teachers' and supervisors' ideas about their teacher preparation programs, we embarked on this study. By probing into practitioners' cognition on the status of the existing programs, including the problematic areas thereof and suggestions as to how to improve the courses, the present article can provide insights on designing teacher education programs incorporating elements favored by teachers and supervisors as the main contributors in these programs.

### **Context of the Researchers**

The idea of exploring ELT teachers' beliefs on the status of current teacher education programs first occurred to one of the researchers of this article who had just begun her career in teaching English in one of the renowned language institutes. At that time, she was a novice teacher who had recently completed the training program in her language institute. Since it was only a few months since she had participated in the program, she had a live memory of the program specifications. As her colleagues and she were not fully satisfied with the program requirements, she was motivated to explore if other novice teachers in her language institute and other institutes share similar concerns. Additionally, since she had completed her teacher training course after a short time of teaching experience in the same language institute in which she attended the training program, she thought there might be differences in the way novice teachers with and without field experiences prior to completing the preparation course offered by their language institute might have different ideas as to the course problematic features of the advantages. Additionally, she wondered if supervisors of the institutes were similarly discontent with the programs. Since the other two authors of this article were also dissatisfied with the existing training programs, they made their decision to embark on conducting the present study with the main goal of elucidating the problematic areas of the existing programs and suggesting improvements. Note that all three authors of the present article are quite familiar with ELT teacher education programs in various contexts, including language institutes, universities and the programs directed by the Ministry of Education. All three have completed the training programs offered in at least one of the famous language institutes. Two of the authors have completed their MA and PhD studies in ELT and have the experience of teaching English in high schools and universities governed by the Ministry of Education as well as in universities regulated by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology. In consequence, they are quite familiar with the teacher education contexts in the country.

## **Methodology**

In this section, we elaborate on the context of the present study, as well as characteristics of the participants, research design, data collection techniques and procedures, and method of data analysis.

### **Research Design**

After we came to an agreement over the issue to investigate, we negotiated the details of the study. Due to the nature of this inquiry, we planned to situate the study within the qualitative grounded-theory type of design (first introduced by Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As maintained by a multitude of scholars, including Glaser and Strauss, (1967) and Pidgeon and Henwood (1997), grounded theory involves discovering theory from data or generating theory from the data. Also, as highlighted by Charmaz (1990, 2000, 2002, 2006), who favored a social constructionist version of grounded theory, in this type of qualitative design, the researcher constructs categories and theories through an interaction with the data. We chose grounded theory as we needed to discover categories of problems with the current teacher training programs in Iran based on data of novice teachers and language supervisors. This framework, then, guided the whole stages of conducting this research, from posing research questions to data collection and data analysis. Working within this type of design, later, we chose the data collection techniques introduced earlier. In the next step, we agreed on the research sites; we selected three of the most renowned language institutes with a multitude of language schools around the country. We selected these institutes since they were among the highly-ranked language teaching sites and due to their having many branches, an inquiry into their teacher education programs could give us insights into how ELT teacher education is practised in about 420 language schools. Additionally, we thought that the other less reputed language institutes might replicate some details of teacher education programs conducted in more renowned ones. As to the sample size, we were cognizant that we had to meet data saturation, namely to collect data to the point at which the newly collected no longer provided additional insights.

### **Context**

Besides the highly centralized English language teaching at Iranian schools, a multitude of private language institutes, owned by private individuals or local companies and supervised by the Ministry of Education, and a few state-owned, non-profit ones offer English language classes in the country. The language institutes differ in the number of language schools they have, the type of language learners they attract (i.e., kids, teenagers, young adults and adults), the client group they target (i.e., general English and business English learners), teaching supplies and other resources, their hiring standards for teachers and etc.

This study was conducted in three private language institutes whose headquarters were located in Tehran with about 420 teaching schools in Tehran or other cities around the country altogether. They all targeted various types of language learners at basic, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced levels of general English language proficiency. They offered different course books but all with the aim of developing learners' communicative competence. The institutes offered intensive, ultra intensive, odd or even day, and weekend classes. To hire teachers, they had somehow similar criteria and standards. First, teacher candidates needed to meet the entry requirement of having an upper intermediate or advanced level of language proficiency measured by an interview and a test. Later, to achieve qualified teacher status, they had to complete an initial Teacher Training Course (TTC), a common certification policy, in their respective institutes. Since TTCs were

held in specific time intervals, it might happen that, in rare cases, an institute, with an urgent need for teachers, recruited few teachers prior to their attending the institute's training program; these teachers were obliged to complete the first TTC scheduled in the institute, after their recruitment. Though each institute had its own teacher education unit which decided about the content and the instructors of the program and implemented the course and associated programs, the TTCs administered in different institutes shared similar content and training requirements with syllabi containing carefully planned and balanced selection of language content. Having spent between 30 and 40 hours in the training program, the student teachers were expected to have gained considerable practical teaching experience which was measured by a teaching demonstration by the student teachers. Upon successful passing of the course requirements, teachers went on to teach in different language schools. To make sure of the quality of teaching, head instructors or supervisors visited the classes in fixed or random intervals.

## **Participants**

After we planned the details of the study, we gained the permission of the managers of the three institutes to conduct our research in their contexts. We explained about the purposes of the study as well as the type of data we needed. We promised not to reveal names of their participants nor their language institutes. Though we intended to continue data collection to the time where no new information emerged from the data, the managers of institutes B and C imposed limits on the number of practitioners we could contact. Accordingly, we felt compelled to predetermine the sample size.

Participants of this study were 12 female teachers teaching general English courses at three private language institutes—named as institutes A, B, and C in this study—in Tehran and three supervisors, each from one of the language institutes. Teachers were selected through criterion referenced, or purposive, sampling technique (Mertens, 2014). The main criteria for selecting practitioners was their teaching experience and their having/not having field experiences prior to attending TTCs. We selected novice practitioners due to the fact that they had recently taken part in TTCs and could, more vividly, remember the nuances thereof. At the same time, they had taught for a few months so they could talk about the influence of the training they had on their teaching practices. Since one of the authors of this article had recently been hired in one of the language institutes studied and she had completed her teacher training course after some months of teaching experience, she thought there might be differences in the way novice teachers with and without field experiences prior to completing the preparation course perceive the course features. Hence, we planned to inquire into the beliefs of practitioners with and without teaching experience before completing their TTC. The first group of teachers comprised nine practitioners who did not have any field experience prior to attending TTC (three teachers from each language institute). The second group included three teachers, from institute A, who had taught for a short time before taking part in teacher education programs. At the time of data collection, institute A was the only institute with few teachers beginning their teaching career prior to completing their training course. Teachers in both groups had between four to six months of teaching experience, five of which had completed their BA and seven had obtained their MA degrees.

In addition to teachers, supervisors of the three language institutes participated in the study. We selected them through purposive sampling since they were the participants who could provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. They were all females with about 10 to 17 years of teaching experience and five to nine years of experience as teacher educators. All three supervisors had the experience of educating



novice teachers in their language institute and they were in direct contact with the teacher participants.

### **Data Collection**

Once we worked out the details of the study, data collection began. Data collection was done by one of the authors of this article who had been teaching in institute A and had easier access to the context of the language institutes. So as to make sure she was on the right path, she checked all steps she took with the other two authors, who were faculty members, through meetings at short time intervals. Initially, she selected the participants through criterion referenced sampling. She endeavored to identify teachers who were enthusiastic to cooperate and were able to manage their time for the data collection techniques of the study besides meeting the essential criteria. Prior to data collection, she explained the aims of the study to the participants, elaborated on various types of data she aimed to collect from them, asked participants' permission for the audio recording of the interview sessions and the workshops, and informed them that their data will be used in writing an academic paper.

She began data collection at the beginning of the winter term; it lasted for two subsequent semesters, about four months. To collect data, first, she asked all teachers to keep diaries after each session of their classes. She guided them to write about the struggles and difficulties they faced in their teaching and to explain whether their training program could have helped them or not in dealing with them. In addition to asking teachers to keep their diaries, the researcher asked teachers to participate in semi-structured interviews about their experiences of L2 teacher education programs, their beliefs about current TTCs, and their expectations of appropriate and successful L2 education courses. In addition to this information, for the three teachers who had some months of teaching experience before attending TTC, interviews could elicit their voices about the pros and cons of having field experiences prior to attending the education program. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour based on different individuals' schedule. The researcher audio recorded all interviews for later transcription. Two weeks after individual interviews, the researcher inquired teachers to take part in focus group discussions. The researcher conducted group interviews in four different sessions. Three sessions were allocated to teachers who had no teaching experience before their training course. In each of these sessions, three teachers from the same institute were interviewed in their own teaching context. Session four was devoted to three teachers who had some months of field experience prior to their TTC. This segmentation was based on the idea that teachers with similar experiences of teaching context and the training program had common insights, struggles, and beliefs to share and discuss. Focus-group interviews initiated with the warm-up and introduction stages in which the facilitator, who was the researcher herself, elucidated the purpose of the discussion session and reviewed the key points mentioned by the participants in semi-structured interview. In the main stage, questions were directed to the group and every individual had enough time to share her ideas. The interviews lasted between 1 hour and a half to 2 hours. In the conclusion stage, a review of the main points was presented by the researcher. All sessions were audio recorded for later transcription.

Besides data collection types mentioned above, two other types of data were collected from teachers of institute A, in which the researcher had been teaching and had easier access to and more contact with the teachers. First, the researcher carried out peer interviews with six teachers through her face to face informal talks; next, she took part, as a participant observer, in two workshops held in the same institute. These sessions were conducted in English, each of which lasted about 2 hours. All teachers and the supervisor of the institute attended the workshops. In these meetings, teachers shared any type of problem they faced in their teaching with the supervisor and their colleagues and listened to the solutions and coping strategies they

proposed. Based on the researcher's experience in attending these sessions, she believed that collecting the data of these workshops could yield information relevant to the purpose of the study. All talks in the gatherings were audio recorded to be transcribed later. Besides collecting data from the teachers, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with three supervisors of the institutes. In the interviews, they were asked to talk about their personal experiences about current teacher education programs and to give suggestions on how current programs can be improved. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 1 hour.

We used three methods to collect data of all teachers: teacher diaries, semi-structured interviews, and focus-group interviews. In the academic context, a diary is an instrument employed to record introspective or retrospective reflection or perceptions of a teacher or learner about their teaching or learning (Bailey, 1990; Bailey & Ochsner, 1983; McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Diaries are a valuable tool to discover teaching or learning realities that are not possible to be discovered through direct research observation (Bailey, 1990; Numrich, 1996; Nunan, 1992). They may provide a rich source of data in order to understand teachers' practices (Palmer, 1992; Russell & Munby, 1991). Semi-structured interview, as another data collection tool in qualitative research, is a verbal process consisting of predetermined semiformal questions which allow for additional clarification and/or exploration of the questions or answers when needed (Dörnyei, 2007). In addition to other benefits, this technique enables researchers to access teachers' thinking and belief (Patton, 1990). Focus-group interview has been defined as a "carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). This type of interview "capitalizes on group dynamics and allows a small group of respondents to be guided by a skilled moderator into increasing levels of focus and depth on the key issues of the research topic" (Mulwa & Nguluu, 2003, cited in Nyariki, 2009, p. 95). In fact, focus-group interview is a special type of group used to gather information from members of a clearly defined target audience who are similar in one or more ways and are guided through a facilitated discussion (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001).

In addition to these techniques, two other methods, that is, peer interviews and participant observation (Tracy, 2012) of teacher meetings, were utilized to collect data of six teachers in institute A in which one of the authors of the present research has been teaching. Peer interview has been defined as "a permissive unstructured interview a researcher conducts with a member of his or her peer group" (Menzies, Waller, & Pain, 2011, p. 273). The purpose of using such an interview is to reduce the anxiety and limitations that might happen in semi-structured interviews and to approach a deeper understanding of participants' mental lives by allowing them to freely express their attitudes and beliefs towards issues under study (Good & Robertson, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p. 79). Participant observation is a process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010).

Finally, data of supervisors was collected through semi-structured interviews. As such, various types of qualitative data collection techniques were employed in the present study. By using different methods, we were able to use different levels of sensitivity (Borg, 2006; Phipps, 2009) in detecting teacher's beliefs about current teacher education programs. In fact, findings from different sources were triangulated and therefore increased researchers' understanding of teachers' mental lives about the available training courses.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out by the three of the researchers and followed the grounded-theory scheme. Working within this framework, we employed an inductive analysis procedure (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997) to content analyze all data, including transcriptions of semi-structured, focus group and peer interviews, as well as teacher diaries and workshops. That is, following the content transcription of the data, we, first, segmented the data into distinct instances of problematic areas of the programs, more technically called condensed meaning units (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), each of which comprising a number of chunks or independent meaning units which were organized on the basis of their content into condensed meaning units. Independent meaning units were either single simple sentences or a part/parts of a compound sentence with a distinct theme. Next, based on its content, we labeled each condensed meaning unit, indicating a problematic area. In a later stage, we classified condensed meaning units under their relevant categories-an umbrella term for condensed meaning units with a similar thematic core. Finally, the categories were labeled. The following extracts from the practitioners' responses can exemplify the way segmentation, categorization and labeling proceeded in practice:

Example (1): Sometimes we have a difficult class such as 20 boys (1). You know that managing so many students is very difficult (2) because you have to satisfy learning needs of all of them (3). Number of students is very important in teaching (4).

As can be observed, this piece of transcribed interview represents one condensed meaning unit, or simply one problematic incident, reported by the teachers. This incident consists of four separate chunks or, more technically, independent meaning units with the same underlying theme which is concerned with a novice teachers' dilemma in managing the problem of meeting large classes which had not been addressed in the teacher training course. This condensed meaning unit and other similar incidents were later labeled as *Class size*. It should be noted that for discerning the majority of incidents of concern, the researcher felt no need to do the initial segmentation of the transcribed data into independent meaning units and could simply identify the condensed meaning units, or incidents of problems reported by the teachers, reading through the transcription.

Example 2 marks another problematic incident, or condensed meaning unit, with a focus different from the previous one. This dilemma, which comprises four independent meaning units, represents another novice teachers' conflict in dealing with very young pupils in the class. Based on their common focus, we organized these independent units into the condensed meaning unit labeled as *Teachers' struggle with kids*.

Example (2): When I teach kids, I realize I've not learnt anything about them (1). Children between 3 and 4 years old don't pay attention at all (2). I don't know how I should attract their attention (3). They just like to play (4).

When all transcribed data were segmented into condensed meaning units and labeled, we further scrutinized the condensed meaning units to find their similar thematic cores and to group them under their relevant categories. Hence, incidents with a common focus were classed under the same categories- this practice was done with the aim of condensing data into a more meaningful and more manageable form in a research paper and a more comparable one across the groups. Examples 1 and 2 and similar cases were found to share similar content and were

included in the same category which was later labeled as *Failure of TTCs to help teachers overcome teaching frustrations*.

To make sure the participants concurred with the categorization of the data, some instances of segmentation, categorization, and labeling of all responses were checked with them. Since the supervisors had busy schedules, they could only review a small part of their data; all teachers, however, could check around a third of the analysis of their own interview. In 98% of the cases, consensus was obtained between the researchers and teachers over the categorizations. At the same time, to check the interrater reliability of the content analysis phase (i.e., segmentation and labeling), all three of us carried out the processes of data analysis. Initially, one of the researchers performed the analysis of the data which was later reexamined by the second and third parties, a procedure believed to increase the reliability of the findings (Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000). The results of this second and third round of content analysis yielded high consistency between the first, second, and third round of analyses. The cross-checking of the analysis procedure with the participants and the second and third parties, also, enhanced internal validity or credibility of the study—as highlighted by various scholars including Lincoln and Guba, (1985) and Shenton (2004)—which had already been addressed through one of the researchers' full engagement in the field and being immersed into the study during the time to complete data collection (Maxwell, 1996). A further attempt to ensure credibility of the research was to employ multiple sources, or triangulation, of data collection (Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2009). Additionally, use of well-established methods of data collection and analysis, a point emphasized by Yin (2009) and Shenton (2004), added to the trustworthiness of the study.

## Results

This section reports the outcome of the analysis of participants' beliefs about current L2 teacher education programs and makes references to features they mentioned for an effective program. It summarizes six categories that emerged from different sources of data collection. The first two categories, that is *Theory-practice gap* and *Dearth of adequate supervised in-service workshop* were present in all participants' recollections. Two categories, including *Failure to develop teacher reflection* and *Ignoring educational technology tools* were shared among the majority of teachers. One category, namely *Disregard for teachers' prior experiences as learners*, was extracted from the responses of teachers with no field experience prior to completing their training course. Another category (i.e., *Disregard for teachers' field experiences prior to attending TTC*) was only reported by novices who enjoyed some teaching practice before attending TTC. In the following, we present and discuss the emerged categories and illustrate them with extracts from the data. Please note that the findings extracted from different sources of data collection will not be presented under separate headings as, throughout the whole findings, various sources of data corroborated each other and none of the categories were obtained exclusively by one of the sources. In consequence, to illustrate the categories, we make references to extracts taken from transcripts obtained through different sources.

### Category One: Theory–Practice Gap

The first category, which was extracted from the data of the majority of participants, encompassed incidents representing participants' dissatisfaction with the gap between theory and practice in the training programs. This category was further detailed into two subcategories of *Lack of opportunity for student teachers to have actual teaching experiences during TTCs* and *Failure of TTCs to help teachers overcome teaching frustrations* which will be exemplified below.

**A. Lack of opportunity for student teachers to have actual teaching experiences during TTCs.** A major concern expressed by all participants was that teachers had not been equipped with adequate professional training and support on how to deal with problems they would face in their real classes. They complained about too much theory presented in teacher preparation programs and expected TTCs to prepare teachers for their actual classroom practice. They thought that teacher educators can remove this problem by providing space for teachers to have real classes while taking part in the education courses. Practitioners believed this practice could have benefited them in various ways, including providing space for them to encounter problematic situations in real settings and seek advice from the educators or peers, reducing their anxiety for embarking on teaching through providing an understanding of real classroom contexts and their own teaching abilities. Two teachers noted that:

Our TTC was very short and more than half of that was theory. Although less than five months ago I have passed it, I don't remember anything about those theories, but I exactly remember my demonstrations and others'. I am not saying that theory is not important at all...But what I mean is that while presenting these, they should have given us a real class with real students, so we could practice theories in real contexts. (Elham, Institute A, semi-structured interview)

I had many problems when I started teaching after my TTC...I was afraid of my students and I didn't know this when I was attending the TTC. I even couldn't imagine how much I hated teaching before starting to teach in real classes. After three months of teaching, now I have understood that teaching is not the job in which I can be successful. (Sepideh, Institute B, semi-structured interview)

In addition to teachers, supervisors affirmed that the available teacher preparation programs suffer from a stereotypical specification, that is, more focus on theoretical aspects of teaching rather than practical ones. Though, at the outset, they seemed unwilling to admit problems with their training courses, through the researcher's probes, they expressed dissatisfaction with the failure of current programs in giving a clear image of the classroom to student teachers. They recalled that they were discontented with teachers' classroom performance, observed through their classroom observation of practitioners. One supervisor asserted that:

I believe part of teachers' failure is because TTCs are not held in an appropriate way. I mean they are very intensive and I, as the educator, have a very short time to familiarize teachers with principles of teaching and related techniques, let alone the practical aspects. Many times, when teachers go to the classes, they get a very different image. Sometimes when I observe their classes, I feel students want to run away! We needed to familiarize teachers, in TTCs, with real classroom settings and psychological and management skills. (Supervisor, Institute A)

To get rid of the problem with the existing teacher preparation programs in terms of their failure to take into account the primacy of trainee teachers' experiential learning, concomitant with creating a theoretical repertoire of the discipline for them, respondents shared quite practical ideas. For instance, they affirmed that an increase should occur in the length of teacher preparation courses; to them, longer TTCs could provide opportunities for prospective teachers to practice teaching approaches, methods, and techniques in real contexts. According to them, longer and more comprehensive L2 teacher education programs, also, allow the educator to

allocate more time to each individual trainee so as to acquaint them with varying and changing teaching situations. Overall, our participants believed that to set up a longer road for professional development of prospective teachers, there is a need to reconsider the quality of current L2 teacher education programs, including the duration of the courses. In other parts of the world, also, professionals have emphasized the need for substantial reforms in the length and quality of teacher preparation programs to remain an optimal form of initial L2 teacher training (e.g., Ferguson & Donno, 2003; Sahlberg, 2010). Also, the gap between theory and practice in teacher education programs, as revealed by our participants, have been criticized in numerous studies during recent decades (e.g., Crandall, 2000; Crookes & Arakaki, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Freeman, 2002; Korthagen, 2010).

**B. Failure of TTCs to help teachers overcome teaching frustrations.** Seven teachers maintained that the training they received in teacher preparation programs couldn't equip them with the ability to deal with realities of the classrooms named as *teaching frustrations* (Numrich, 1996) in the literature. The most frequently mentioned teaching frustrations by participants were concerned with teaching language skills, class size, time management, preparing lesson plan, their struggles with kids, and classroom observations. Regarding teaching language skills, practitioners believed that what they acquired about teaching skills in their training program had been substantially different from the real task of teaching them. One teacher declared:

The first time I wanted to teach writing, I found myself unqualified. I wondered why I hadn't received proper practical training on how to teach writing. To be honest, I don't remember anything about how to teach writing in the training course. (Elham, Institute A, diary quotation)

There were also teachers who found themselves incapable of dealing with crowded classrooms or managing their class time. For example, two of the teachers mentioned that:

In our institute, we have many students in different age ranges in the same class. Because the manager wants to save money, she puts many students in our classes. For a teacher like me who is not experienced, managing lots of students with different ages is difficult. We've not learnt how to deal with these issues in the TTC. (Parnian, Institute B, diary quotation)

After five months of teaching, I still have many problems with time management. Time management was not fully worked on in TTC because we didn't have real classes. We only had a ten-minute demonstration. (Zohreh, Institute C, focus group interview)

Teacher participants were, also, displeased with lack of proper training on how to prepare lesson plans in the TTCs. Half of teachers (mainly in institutes A and B) resented that they handed in a lesson plan to the trainer on their demonstration session but didn't receive any feedback. One of the teachers of institute B pointed out:

My big problem is lesson plan. They just wanted us to bring a lesson plan. This is while I didn't know what exactly a lesson plan is. So how could I prepare a lesson plan? They could at least show us one example, but because of time limitation, they didn't. (Parnian, Institute B, focus group interview)

Struggle with kids was another problem our teachers had faced after being engaged in teaching. Seven teachers (three teachers from institute A, three from institute B, and one from institute C) were teaching kids when we were collecting data and although they had participated in young learners' specific teacher education programs, they appeared to suffer from difficulties coping with their pupils. They thought they had not received sufficient training on how to deal with very young learners. One participant declared:

When I teach kids, I realize I've not learnt anything about them. Children between 3 and 4 years old don't pay attention at all. I don't know how I should attract their attention. They just like to play. (Elham, Institute A, semi-structured interview)

Practitioners, also, criticized current training programs for their lack of due attention to the practice of classroom observations. Teachers recalled that they needed to hear about the logic behind this practice along with the pros and cons of it and how to react to the observer's criticisms of their classes. Our respondents resented that the observers have not been trained on how to give feedback to teachers. They went further in questioning the sheer phenomenon of being observed which, as they felt, prevented their teacher flexibility; even worse, they thought that their sticking to the strict rules for the class conduct, as dictated by the observers, makes the class boring for the students. A teacher wrote in her diaries:

Teachers need to be given the autonomy to make adaptations to the teaching prescriptions dictated to them by the teacher educators. But, in practice, if teachers miss one of the points dictated by the institute, the observer ticks it in her/his checklist, and this is a negative point for us. (Setareh, Institute C, diary quotation)

In the same vein, teachers asserted that at times they had been given contradictory feedbacks from different observers, resulting in their confusion:

In the TTC I passed, everything seemed to be perfect in theory. But when I started to teach, I understood that there is a big problem named "being observed." Whenever I have an observer in my class, they notice many mistakes in my teaching while I suppose I am teaching based on what they expected me to do. Different observers from the central office give me conflicting comments. This problem makes me nervous and I don't feel good when I know I'm going to be observed. (Sepideh, Institute B, focus group interview)

Overall, based on the preceding excerpts, it seems that teacher education programs have not been capable of preparing teachers for the reality of their teaching practice; our teachers continued to feel frustrated about certain practice-related issues even after months of teaching experience. This finding partially corroborates the results maintained by Numrich (1996). After 10 weeks of teaching, her teachers felt frustrated in managing their class time, giving clear directions to the pupils, responding to students' various needs, teaching grammar effectively, assessing students' learning, and focusing on students rather than on themselves. Among teaching frustrations mentioned by teachers in the present study, classroom observation has attracted special attention in the literature. According to Stoller (1996), in an effective teacher education program, teachers should be involved as active participants in the observation process and receive constructive feedback while engaged in the interchange of ideas with the observer.

## **Category Two: Dearth of Adequate Supervised In-Service Workshops**

Almost all participants referred to the necessity of conducting adequate supervised in-service workshops. Six teachers, from institute A, who had attended regular compulsory workshops in their institute, thought that workshops played the role of a remedy for the inadequacies of the initial TTCs, enhancing their knowledge about nuances of teaching. According to them, workshops provided a supportive context in which teachers could discuss their teaching frustrations and problematic situations with their colleagues and supervisors. For instance, as they reported, they could share ideas about classroom management, probable solutions for difficult students, more efficient approaches to maintain students interested in the classroom, presentation of educational games, enhancement of students' achievement, and various other aspects of their teaching. A teacher recalled:

When I participated in workshops, I received very helpful guidelines about how to treat my students or how to teach English to kids. The focus of workshops was much broader than how to teach the skills. So, it was very beneficial for me. All the practical aspects of teaching which were discussed in workshops were really important and useful. (Sharareh, Institute A, semi-structured interview)

All teachers from institutes B and C who hadn't experienced participating in workshops in their working place reported that these discussion sessions can provide stress-free and friendly contexts for teachers to express predicaments they face in teaching, that workshops can also help teachers to keep up with recent innovations in the field. All these practitioners were found to be eager to attend workshops regularly under the supervision of a trained instructor. When inquired about the importance of such meetings, one teacher asserted:

For now, because I've recently attended TTC, I remember the techniques they taught. But after a while, we'll forget them. So workshops are necessary for each institute to keep their teachers updated. (Sarah, Institute C, focus group interview)

In addition to teachers, all supervisors confirmed the necessity and value of systematic in-service supervised workshops or what they called "on the job trainings" for guiding teachers through their path of professional development. They believed that workshops can play the role of a remedy for teachers' probably inappropriate and unrealistic understandings of teaching acquired through detached initial preparation programs. As supervisors emphasized, a short and intensive teacher education program cannot appropriately meet student teachers' needs; in-service workshops, however, as a preferred option, can provide a situation for novice teachers to talk about their career, to discuss what occurs in their classes, to receive support from experienced colleagues or supervisors, and to improve their level of language proficiency through English-medium discussions. According to them, notwithstanding the need for providing in-service training, institutes refuse to hold them, mostly, due to the costs involved. The following example depicts this point:

For one hundred percent, we cannot teach everything in TTC and even if we bring the best TTC trainer in the world and we gather the most interested and talented teachers, definitely when teachers enter the classroom, in practice, they would have many problems. This is like when you want to teach driving to a person, until he drives himself and until he hits a pole, it is impossible to be a



good driver. So in-service education is the issue much needed on paper, but unfortunately in practice we cannot have it because of money. (Supervisor, Institute B)

As the preceding part elucidates, almost all of our participants were cognizant of the benefits of attending in-service training in the form of workshops in their language institutes. The necessity of providing in-service programs for teachers has also been confirmed in related publications in the field (e.g., Borg, 2011; Crandall, 2000; Friedman, 2000; Huhn, 2012; Kansanen, 2003). The existing research asserts that the close relationship between colleagues and expert trainers in in-service education contributes to teacher learning. To them, workshops, as a site for in-service training, assist teachers to cope with professional problems and stressful situations, like classroom organization and dealing with difficult students.

### **Category Three: Failure to Develop Teacher Reflection**

Dewey (1933) defines reflection as an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). Although more than a century ago Dewey (1904) criticized teacher education programs for placing much of the emphasis on mechanics of the classroom and acquisition of skills at the expense of reflection, findings from participants of the present study revealed that current teacher education programs in Iran still suffer from failure in developing reflection in prospective teachers. Based on our teachers’ beliefs, teacher education programs disregard the treasure of teachers’ thinking and give them a “recipe” they have to imitate in their classroom contexts intended for students of various gender and age ranges. Teachers from institute C appeared to be more troubled with this issue. A teacher mentioned:

If I want to perform the exact activities that educators wanted me to do in the classroom, my classes would be boring for students. A teacher is not a parrot to repeat. What is the role of creativity of a teacher? What is the role of differences between teachers? I should be able to reflect on what works in my classes. What TTC educators presented doesn’t work in all situations. (Setareh, Institute C, focus group interview)

As this teachers' concern elucidates, our participants were aware of the failure of the training programs in promoting teacher reflection and appreciated being given space to reflect on their own practices. The idea of giving primacy to teachers' reflection on their own instruction has been advocated by various studies including Adler (1991), Valli (1992), LaBoskey (1994), Hatton and Smith (1995), Reiman (1999), Dinkelman, (2003), Akbari and Tajik (2009), Tajik and Pakzad (2016), and Tajik and Ranjbar (2018).

### **Category Four: Ignoring Educational Technology Tools**

Though the proponents of technological innovations in language teacher education have focused on “its use as a tool to help support the components of strong teacher education programs” (Huhn, 2012, p. 172), from the responses of teacher participants, it appeared that not enough educational technology tools had been introduced and applied in their TTCs. Teachers referred to the necessity of employing technology in their teaching and of introducing technological learning tools to the pupils. At the same time, they reported that considering today’s rapid technological innovations such as the appearance of online educational films,

various educational websites and educational language learning tools like electronic portfolios, teacher educators should have benefited more from these newly-introduced gadgets. One teacher mentioned:

I expected the TTC I attended to be more equipped with technology. I think computer-based technologies bring new possibilities for teachers. If educators use these facilities, they would have more flexibility in time or even the place of the classes. We could have online chats with educators about how to prepare a lesson plan and we could receive feedbacks on that. This way, educators could spend more time for us, and we could learn more. (Elham, Institute A, peer interview)

As the example shows, teacher education programs of our concern have neither applied updated educational technology tools nor equipped teachers with technology-integrated teaching strategies. This is while providing teacher candidates with opportunities to experience technology enhanced instruction has been highlighted among the features of an effective and supportive foreign language teacher education program (e.g., Huhn, 2012). While resenting that, until recently, technology has not been integrated into the methods courses, as one might have expected, Huhn (2012) recommends that multiple uses of technology be effectively and meaningfully merged with instructional practices and activities and be intertwined throughout teachers' careers while resenting. Based on our teachers' thinking and relevant discussions in the literature, it is certain that teacher educators need to equip prospective teachers with knowledge on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in teacher education programs.

#### **Category Five: Disregard for the Teachers' Prior Experiences as Learners**

Eight teachers reported that although their prior experiences as learners could give them helpful insights into their teaching practice, there was no room for them in teacher training courses. The following excerpts depict significance of the issue to our participants:

In the first institute in which I started to learn English, my teacher told us to memorize vocabularies and to create a dictionary for ourselves. I didn't learn anything there; I could just memorize some limited vocabularies and I was not able to talk till I changed my institute. In the new institute, we could perform role-plays and this was very pleasant for us. Now as a teacher, these experiences help me in teaching and when I remember how I could learn English better, I can sympathize with my students and I can help them more in learning. (Sahra, Institute A, semi-structured interview)

When I spoke about my experiences of learning English, the educator ignored them. They could give us some time to share our unique experiences of learning with the colleagues. (Sepideh, Institute B, focus group interview)

In the above recollections, teachers introduced their prior learning experiences as an advantageous source of professional growth. The primacy of prior language learning experiences of teachers for their career has been captured by numerous studies (e.g., Bailey et al., 1996; Borg, 2003; Freeman, 1993; Johnson, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Numrich, 1996; Phipps, 2009). Bailey et al. (1996) noted that teachers' memories of their vast experiences as learners "function as de facto guides for teachers as they approach what they do in the classroom" (p. 11). The general picture to emerge here is Borg's (2003) assertion that teachers' former

language learning experiences, or what has been named apprenticeship of observation by Lortie (1975), influence their beliefs about language learning which forms the basis of their conceptuality of L2 teaching during teacher education programs.

### **Category Six: Disregard for Teachers' Field Experience Prior to TTCs**

As stated previously, three of our teachers began their teaching career before taking part in the training program. These teachers admitted that the first day they started to teach, they felt anxious. It has been their first experience of teaching without any prior experience of attending teacher education programs. However, their confidence grew after some weeks of fieldwork. They believed that this period of teaching before taking part in TTC could benefit them in the training course, specifically in performing demonstrations. They reasoned that their field experiences made them familiar with troublesome situations they were most likely to confront, for which they could seek solutions in the training courses. Moreover, they explained that teaching practice enabled them to find out their abilities and weak points in teaching before attending TTC. In fact, these teachers, with their prior-to-TTC teaching practice, entered teacher preparation programs with valuable experiences gained through direct contact with the students. They added that their teaching experience in real classroom contexts helped them get a clearer understanding of phenomena and to be able to picture the real image of classroom while being educated in TTC. One of them explained:

My teaching experience helped me a lot in TTC. When, for example, the educator was talking about difficult students, I could imagine how they are. Otherwise, we were only passive observers. When you are a passive observer in TTC, you cannot exactly understand how teaching is, because you have not experienced it. (Sajedeh, Institute A, semi-structured interview)

As the above extract, also, reveals, our teachers regarded teaching experience before TTC as an opportunity, since, through this experience, they were able to evaluate their teaching abilities, to get familiar with real classroom contexts and students' manner, and to learn to teach by real act of teaching. Our teachers' concerns about the significance of teaching experience are supported by Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2014) and Schulz (2005), among others. They confirm that student teachers universally regard field experiences as the most important part of their education.

The above section presented the categories extracted from data of the practitioners collected through various techniques. As illustrated, our participants resented the disconnection they perceived between theoretical information presented in TTCs and realities of classrooms and favored a more practical orientation for the L2 teacher education programs. Exploiting practical teaching contours in preparation programs has also been favored by related discussions in the field. According to them, student teachers tend to learn better how to teach through engaging in teaching (Eisner, 2002; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005); in other words, teaching is best learned by actually teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Eisner, 2002; Huhn, 2012; Simons, 1999; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Watzke, 2003). Darling-Hammond (2010) highlights the significant role of teachers' experiential knowledge by maintaining that "no amount of coursework can, by itself, counteract the powerful experiential lessons that shape what teachers actually do" (p. 42).

According to our data corroborated by relevant literature, an area which needs reconsideration is the way theoretical and practical considerations are addressed in the available courses. To revisit this area in the current programs, we can move along several paths. One way is for teacher educators to work collaboratively with teachers in deriving principles,

or rules, for the practice from abstract ideas, or theories, which in turn can be applied to problems of practice. Another way is that prospective teachers deliver lessons in the presence of peers and the teacher educator and to function as teacher assistants in real classroom contexts throughout their training duration. As maintained in the literature, prospective teachers will be involved in basic practice by delivering lessons to and practicing basic teaching skills in front of peers; trainees' advanced practice, however, occurs when they function in real contexts of selected field institutes or schools (Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2011; Sahlberg, 2010). These seemingly simple acts of teaching demonstration and internship yields precious experiential learning for teacher candidates, allowing them to start moving through professional development and reduces their future teaching frustrations (Huhn, 2012; Sahlberg, 2010). At the same time, these supportive acts improve student teachers' professional development through integration of theoretical studies with practice and giving them comprehensive responsibility in their field. All these might not happen unless more rigorous training is provided to teachers in longer teacher training courses, as admitted by our participants and the previous relevant literature.

Removing the barriers between theoretical knowledge of the discipline and practical knowledge, further, promotes teacher reflection through involving teachers in the reality of the classrooms. More specifically, when teachers are in real teaching sites and might feel handicapped by mere resorting to the field's abstract principles, they seem to have no other way but to reflect on their class routines to be able to rule their classes. This, however, necessitates that teacher educators give value to the precious asset of thinking power teachers possess, as, also, pointed out by our practitioners. In addition to promoting teachers' thinking about their own class events, to turn the existing teacher education programs into more favorable ones, it is further recommended that teacher educators access the preconceptions trainees hold about teaching. The strong claim that "teachers teach the way they were taught" (Heaton & Mickelson, 2002, p. 51), synonymous with the catchphrase "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), elucidates considerable bearing teachers' presuppositions about teaching has on their future undertaking. Considering trainees' prior experiences as teachers can further enrich the training courses.

Based on the findings of the present study and the literature support, it is proposed that in addition to the attention which needs to be devoted to the initial education of teachers, in-service and ongoing training be provided for practicing teachers. Huhn (2012) believes that ongoing education allows practitioners to continue to develop as they gain experience in classroom settings. Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) maintain that through ongoing education, teachers learn better how to teach through reflection on their experiences that is guided by a trained mentor. In fact, through involving teachers in discussions with colleagues and supervisors about the outcomes of their class practices and the difficulties they face during teaching, in-service meetings or workshops can help advance teachers' reflection on their own practice. Friedman (2000) considers in-service training as a potent means of reducing stress and burnout for professionals, in general, and teachers, in particular, due to their task of dealing with classroom problematic areas. Due to the benefits attributed to continuous development of teachers in the literature and by our participants, it is advised that teacher educators pay considerable attention to on-going professional growth of teachers through holding in-service workshops.

Besides making attempts towards removing the gap between theory and practice, giving primacy to teachers' reflection and experiential learning, and providing continuous instruction for teachers, teacher education programs need to be integrated with technology. According to participants' beliefs and a review of related discussions, technology-enhanced instruction brings new possibilities and facilities for teachers. A revisited model of teacher education can offer multiple uses of technology throughout teacher education and teachers' profession; these

might include use of electronic portfolios (Dhonau & McAlpine, 2005), use of computer-mediated communication technologies such as e-mail and virtual discussions to enable student teachers form communities of foreign language teachers-in-training to learn to teach and reflect besides becoming expert in technology (Lord & Lomicka, 2007), use of speech-to-print software which enables teachers to significantly enhance students' spelling and writing problems (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010), and use of different educational films or videos during teacher education programs (Seidel, Blomberg, & Renkl, 2013).

### **Discussion**

This study attempted to advance an understanding of the status quo of L2 teacher education programs in Iran and to propose some components for an effective model of teacher education. Six categories were extracted from data of the participants: The gap between theory and practice, Dearth of adequate supervised in-service workshops; Failure to develop teacher reflection; Ignoring educational technology tools in current TTCs; Disregard for the prior experiences of teachers as learners; and Disregard for teachers' field experiences prior to attending TTC.

Overall, the present study attempted to take initial steps in proposing features for an effective L2 teacher education model based on the beliefs of our participants, which represents a picture of how teacher training is addressed in about 420 branches of three language institutes in the country, and published discussions. Notwithstanding all efforts taken for this purpose, we are well aware that, to be able to develop a comprehensive teacher preparation program for ELT teachers in Iran, we need to add all essential elements of an all-inclusive model to the present proposed scheme. Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005) have enumerated required constituents for a model of teacher education. They believe that a comprehensive model needs to identify and organize content of teacher education; learning process of teaching candidates; candidates' performance assessment strategies; and the learning context which includes subject matter domains and community of teaching candidates. They add that such a model needs to devote enough time to the analysis of teaching and learning events and to give priority to student teachers' autobiography which highlights the power of teaching candidates' prior personal educational experiences. According to them, all these features enable teachers to learn "in and from practice" (p. 441). Overall, designing a comprehensive teacher education program which best fits candidates' needs is not an easy task and needs rigorous research. Though it can be claimed that findings of the present study have helped take some preliminary steps in designing an efficient teacher education model, it is evident that more effort and time, and more importantly, institutional support and research is needed to develop an ideal all-inclusive L2 teacher education model.

As stated previously, this study is situated within the tradition of qualitative studies in which generalizability of findings is not an issue due to the belief in the particularity of the research context. It does not mean, however, that the ideas advanced in the present study has no bearing on other ELT teacher education programs. As already stated, since the issue of ELT practitioners' beliefs about the common training courses seems to be among the neglected areas in the literature of ELT, this study can raise awareness of the ELT teacher preparation community in other parts of the world on the necessity of giving more priority to uncovering teachers' and supervisors' thinking about what is occurring in the training courses. Additionally, as the issue of teacher education and cognition is of global significance, findings of the present study are likely to have implications for improving teacher training programs in other countries.

Findings of this study can also have important implications for L2 teacher education as well as continuing research on teachers' beliefs about L2 teacher preparation programs. First, this research can give insights to teacher educators and professionals involved in designing

teacher education programs on the need to revisit current programs in the context of language institutes in Iran. Needs-based elements and components introduced by our participants and confirmed by the literature can assist curriculum and material developers of L2 teacher education programs in designing curricula and materials which best suits the needs of trainee teachers. In fact, the emic perspective uncovered in this study would, most likely, help define teacher preparation program directions through providing guidelines for the enterprise. Hopefully, findings of this study can help advance our understandings of an optimal teacher preparation program which can be capable of preparing teachers who are knowledgeable, reflective, and actively engaged in their own professional development. In addition to the significance of this study in developing a revised model of teacher education, the methodology followed can provide insights into continuing research on essential components of an efficient teacher education program based on experienced teachers and/or stakeholders' and authorities' beliefs. Further research can, also, build on this study by addressing its main objectives in a larger scope, resulting in improving our perception of the components of an effective teacher education model. For instance, uncovering the beliefs of ELT practitioners in other language institutes can provide a more complete picture of the status quo of the ELT teacher preparation in the country. Finally, future related attempts can address teachers' beliefs about other constituents of an effective teacher education model, including content of the program, learning processes and performance assessment strategies of teaching candidates, and the learning context (as listed by Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005).

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