EFL Teacher Education in Iran: Does It Promote Trainees' Pedagogical Content Knowledge?[1]

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Abstract

Teacher education programs can play a principal role in helping prospective teachers to acquire requisite knowledge and skills. Vital to the issue of teacher education is the efficient evaluation of such programs in promoting prospective teachers' knowledge base. However, the literature contains very few reports of the evaluation of the Iranian EFL preservice teacher education program, which is a gap to be addressed by this study. To this end, 346 high school EFL teachers, 20 EFL teacher educators, and 97 teacher trainees took part in the study. A questionnaire, semistructured interviews, tests, and an observation checklist were utilized. A mixed methods design was employed to evaluate the program. The results of the questionnaire, tests, and observation checklist were analyzed quantitatively. For the interview results, both quantitative (percentages) and qualitative analyses were deployed. Findings indicated that the program was not satisfactory in enhancing the EFL teacher trainees' pedagogical content knowledge.

Keywords: EFL; Evaluation; Teacher Education; Pedagogical Content Knowledge

1. Introduction

A host of studies have pointed to the need for more qualified and effective teachers (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Lewis & Young, 2013). In other words, in order to meet the changing demands in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education, it is mandatory that teachers reconstruct their professional knowledge, beliefs and practices, which can

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mainly be achieved through continued professional training and development. Preservice EFL teacher education programs can be invaluable in this regard. As Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) postulated, preservice EFL teachers, on their journey of becoming professional teachers, undergo a process of transformation from a learner to a teacher. During this journey of change, the teacher trainees "are more amenable to innovation than later in their careers when practical knowledge has become stabilized" (p. 164). Moreover, EFL instruction in the postmethod condition (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) calls for the preparation of professional teachers who have the requisite knowledge to enhance students' language learning processes.

The role of the postmethod teacher education is, indeed, to train autonomous teacher trainees who can reflect on their own teaching practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) and develop the requisite "pedagogical content knowledge" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). In his influential model, Shulman (1987) classified L2 teachers' knowledge base into different categories, among which content knowledge (i.e., subject matter knowledge), pedagogical knowledge (i.e., teaching methodologies), and pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., a combination of content and pedagogical knowledge) can be pointed out. According to Shulman (1987), the key for the knowledge base of teachers is the transaction of pedagogical knowledge and subject matter knowledge, manifested in the transformation of subject-matter knowledge in the actual teaching practice. Research on pedagogical content knowledge, in fact, can help professionalization by developing new standards for the specification of the content of EFL teacher education programs (Guntermann, 1993).

Considering the pivotal role of preservice teacher education in teacher trainees' professional development (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010), we conducted this study to examine its efficiency in promoting trainees' pedagogical content knowledge and skills. There is, in fact, an increasing emphasis today on the quality of the educational experience provided to preservice EFL teachers in the ever-changing competitive environment (Tercanlioglu, 2008). Program evaluation can be invaluable in this regard. As put forward by Peacock (2009), evaluation of these programs is an important step towards professionalization in our field, which contributes to program improvement; hence, its accountability.

So far, most studies on preservice EFL teacher education programs either have been concerned with the perceptions of the teacher trainees/trainers regarding the adequacy of the program (Cosgun-Ogeyik, 2009; Mirhassani & Beh-Afarin, 2004; Peacock, 2009) or have targeted EFL teachers' knowledge base (Akbari & Dadvand, 2014). However, little attempt has been made to evaluate the efficiency of such programs in enhancing EFL teacher trainees' pedagogical content knowledge. In addition, most studies have been concerned mainly with the teacher

trainees'/trainers' perceptions, neglecting their actual learning, their behaviors, and the effects such learning could have on their actual performance.

In sum, concerning the importance of program evaluation in teacher education (Peacock, 2009; Robinson, 2003), we hope that the present study would contribute to our better understanding of the preservice EFL teacher education program and shed more light on EFL teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. Hence, the following research question was formulated to address the gap in the literature:

1. To what extent is the teacher education program efficient in promoting preservice EFL teachers' pedagogical content knowledge?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Underpinning

A large number of studies have voiced the need for qualified, effective teachers and the necessity to develop efficient approaches to preparing them for the teaching practice (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Jourdenais, 2009; Kamhi-Stein, 2009). To meet these needs, researchers have put forward various models of teacher education (Jourdenais, 2009). However, in line with the postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001), there is no consensus on a single model for language teacher education program; rather, each teaching context, due to its particularity, calls for different components observed in the various models proposed (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). No single model seems to be able to cater for all the broad social, cultural, and linguistic requirements of any particular teacher education program.

The major development in L2 teacher's knowledge discussion, according to Akbari and Dadvand (2014), resulted from Shulman's (1987) influential model. His model was made up of six categories: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of the learner, and knowledge of educational goals and their philosophical orientations. More specifically, content knowledge is concerned with subject matter, that is, L2 teacher's language proficiency or "knowledge about," as Richards (2008, p. 162) put forward. According to him, such knowledge comprises "language analysis, discourse analysis, phonology, curriculum development and methodology" (p. 162). Pedagogical knowledge or "knowledge how" (Richards, 2008, p. 162), on the other hand, is a set of techniques and strategies that the L2 teacher needs for teaching activity. In fact, the distinction made for explicit and implicit knowledge can be delineated through knowledge *about* and knowledge *how*, respectively (Richards, 2008). Integral to the knowledge how, according to Richards (2008), are "concepts such as pedagogical content knowledge and practical knowledge" (p. 163).

Pedagogical content knowledge, which is the amalgam of content and pedagogical knowledge, according to Shulman (1987), enables teachers to transform content knowledge into pedagogically useful strategies. He contended that "such knowledge blends content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized for instruction, represented, and adapted to a diverse student audience" (p. 8).

Moreover, the issue of effective programs to train highly efficient teachers is a constant concern in the literature (Peacock, 2009). Hence, it is necessary that preservice teacher education programs be systematically evaluated so that considerable modifications can be made. Program evaluation, indeed, can be invaluable, both for purposes of improvement and for accountability (Lewis & Young, 2013). Such evaluations can assure the stakeholders that resources and funds have been properly used, and "can also contribute to the development of the program through improved decision-making, policies and practice" (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005, p. 63).

Different models of program evaluation have been proposed (Ross, 2009). This study took into account Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) model, which comprises a four-level model of training evaluation: reaction, learning (knowledge, skill, and attitude), behavior, and organizational results. Evaluation on the reaction level measures how those who take part in the program react to it. This level of evaluation depends on the measurement of attitudes, usually through the use of a questionnaire or/and semistructured interview. Learning is the measurement of the promotion in knowledge and/or skills before and after learning experience in the program. Knowledge is commonly measured through already available standardized or instructor constructed tests. Skills can typically be examined through, a performance test and/or an observation checklist. At level three, behavior, the goal is to find out if the trainees modify their on-the-job-behavior as a result of having participated in the program. Level three evaluation is specifically concerned with measuring the transfer of knowledge and skills from the training context to the workplace. Probably the most common design used for behavior is the one-group pretest-posttest design. An alternative approach can be the use of observation checklists instead of tests in this design. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) also discuss another popular design for measuring transfer of learning, namely the retrospective survey design. They postulate that the evaluator can survey (using questionnaires or interviews) the trainees and trainers. Finally, result is concerned with the final organizational outcomes.

Level three outcomes, according to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006), are intrinsically useful, even if level four outcomes are never fully demonstrated. They believe that, in many situations, evidence of reaction, learning, and behavior will be

sufficient to determine the adequacy and usefulness of a training program. Accordingly, this study was carried out to probe into the efficiency of the preservice EFL teacher education program in promoting the EFL teacher trainees' pedagogical content knowledge through participants' reactions, learning, and behavior.

2.2 Empirical Studies

Evaluation of preservice EFL teacher education program, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, has been the subject of few studies in Iran. Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin (2004), in a survey-based study, evaluated the status of the preservice EFL teacher training program in Iran. The results indicated that the participants were dissatisfied with the present situation of the program; there was a gap between desired and current situation; communicative approaches could be hardly incorporated into the program; and a majority of the participants expressed a need for a revision in the program.

In similar EFL contexts like Turkey, some studies have targeted the preservice EFL teacher training, too. Seferoglu (2006) initiated a qualitative study and elicited the senior EFL teacher trainees' perceptions with regard to the methodology and practice component of the program. The findings revealed that most teacher trainees felt a need for more microteaching activities in the program. Furthermore, they asked for more observations of teachers at different levels in the school experience courses.

In a similar vein, Tercanlioglu (2008) probed into the perceptions of preservice EFL teachers on their educational experience. Through interviews with five focus groups, she came up with certain themes, including department services, general facilities, department impressions, and student experiences in the department. She found that almost all the participants reported dissatisfaction with the program; they were dissatisfied with the quality of education in their department.

Along the same lines, Cosgun-Ogeyik (2009), through conducting a survey on the last year trainees in a Turkish university, found that the program in implementation was consistent with its expectations in terms of outlining the goals of the teaching profession, the social objectives, and benefits obtained from the program. The program was generally evaluated as appropriate; the only weak point in the program was thought to be lack of culture-specific courses.

Similarly, Peacock (2009) evaluated a preservice TEFL university program in Hong Kong. He collected the data from students, teachers, and alumni through interviews, questionnaires, essays, and analysis of program materials. He found that the program was successful in teaching pedagogic skills and promoting reflection and self-evaluation, but it also had some drawbacks. He suggested an increase in the

amount of practice teaching and input in certain areas such as knowledge of teaching within the local sociocultural context and classroom management.

Finally, to investigate EFL trainees' teaching quality and its improvement, Wang (2010) conducted a study in China, with a convenient sample of 58 trainers and 176 trainees. The methods employed consisted of interview, questionnaires, observation, and reading teaching diary. The results indicated mismatches between the teachers' practice and the theories underlying their practice. On the basis of the obtained results, some feasible suggestions were made for teacher development, such as reflective teaching and combination of teaching practice and research.

The above studies have shed some light on the current status of the preservice EFL teacher education programs. However, they have been merely concerned with the perceptions of the trainees/trainers despite the fact that in evaluating a program, according to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006), we should go beyond perceptions and take trainees' learning and behavior into account—a gap that this study tries to address.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

All the participants ($N = 463$) were selected from Guilan Province, north of Iran, in the academic year 2014. According to the records of the education board in Guilan Province, 924 high school EFL teachers served in the 13 counties of the province. The questionnaire was filled in by 346 high school EFL teachers, selected through cluster random sampling from eight counties which constituted eight clusters. From each of these counties, the education offices and EFL teachers were randomly selected. The EFL teachers' teaching experiences ranged from 2 to 27 years. Nearly, 75% of the teachers had B.A. degrees. and the rest had M.A. degrees. In addition, other respondents ($n = 117$) were selected from the EFL teacher trainees/educators at the Teacher Education Centers of Guilan Province through convenience sampling. Among the 20 teacher educators participating in this study, only four had Ph.D. in TEFL. The majority were female (59.82 %) and the rest male (40.17%). The demographic information about the participants is given in Table 1.

3.2 Instruments

A questionnaire, semistructured interviews, tests, and an observation checklist were utilized in this study. To construct the questionnaire, the researchers derived the first insights from the current theories of teacher education and L2 teachers' knowledge base in the literature. Accordingly, the different parts of the questionnaire were developed to target some recently focused aspects of pedagogical content knowledge of the EFL teachers, including academic reading skills, assessment literacy, computer skills, research skills, lesson planning, and classroom

management. Each part was adopted from a particular expert in that field, as explained below to suit the purpose of this study. To ensure construct validity, Haynes, Richard, and Kubany (1995) suggest that an assessment instrument should undergo content validation, which can be obtained through professional expert judgment. More specifically, "every element of an assessment instrument should be judged by multiple experts, using 5- or 7-point evaluation scales, on applicable dimensions such as relevance, representativeness, specificity, and clarity" (p. 249). Hence, 10 EFL professors/teacher educators judged the content coverage and relevance of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was, then, pilot tested on 40 EFL teacher trainees and high school teachers who were selected through accessibility sampling from Guilan Province.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of Participants*

Variable	*F*	Percentage
Gender (*N* = 463)		
Male	*186*	40.17%
Female	277	59.82%
Profession		
ST	346	74.7%
TT	97	20.95%
TE	20	4.31%
Teaching Experience		
ST (*n* = 346)		
Less Than 5 Years	96	20.73%
More Than 5 Years	250	52.26%
TE (*n* = 20)		
Less Than 5 Years	8	1.7%
More Than 5 Years	12	2.59%
Level of Education		
ST		
B.A.	262	56.58%
M.A.	84	18.14%
TE		
M.A.	16	3.45%
Ph.D.	4	0.86%

Note. ST = School Teachers; TT = Teacher Trainees; TE = Teacher Educators

Based on the pilot test, Cronbach's alpha reliability, which is an indication of the internal consistency of the questionnaire, as presented in Table 2, was calculated. The questionnaire comprised closed items developed in Likert scale and consisted of seven parts (Tables 3-11). The first part asked for the participants'

demographic information. The second part (6 items) was concerned with the adequacy of the program to promote lesson planning. The third part (8 items) probed into the classroom management skills (Martin & Sass, 2010). The fourth part (9 items) centered on assessment literacy (Newfields, 2006). The fifth part (4 items) dealt with the participants' research orientation (Nassaji, 2012). The sixth part (7 items) was used to address the participants' computer literacy (Son, Robb & Charismiadji, 2011). Finally, part seven (10 items) targeted the participants' perceptions of their ability to teach academic reading skills (Hellekjar, 2009). To avoid any possible misinterpretations, all the items were presented in the respondents' L1 (i.e., Persian):

Table 2. *Cronbach's Alpha for Evaluation Questionnaire*

Parts	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Lesson Planning	.73	1-6
Classroom Management	.70	7-14
Assessment Literacy	.92	15-23
Research Orientation	.69	24-27
Computer Literacy	.85	28 -35
Teaching Reading Skills	.73	36-45
Total	.91	1-45

Moreover, to provide some qualitative accounts on the efficiency of the program, the researchers administered semistructured interviews. The semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix) was developed based on the theoretical framework of the study. It elicited the participants' views with regard to the main challenges and problems of the program. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis. Each interview took approximately 30 min. The 10 EFL professors/teacher educators also judged its content coverage and relevance. Besides, an observation checklist which targeted the various aspects of teaching activities (Brown, 2001) was developed and then piloted in similar classes. Its adequacy was discussed with the aforementioned professors in the field. The items of the checklist were concerned with the presence of classroom management skills, learning/teaching strategies, learners' involvement, appropriate instructional materials, and the different types of assessment techniques employed in the class. A checkmark was provided for the presence of the teaching variables.

In addition, a standardized English proficiency test, namely the Preliminary English Test (PET, 2010) was used. PET is the second level of the Cambridge ESOL which is at B-preintermediate level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. Due to some limitations in the implementation of aural and oral skills, only the reading module of the test was implemented. It comprises five parts, a total of 35 items consisting of matching, true/false and

multiple-choice item types. Prior to the study, the sample test was piloted among a group of teacher trainees. The Cronbach's alpha obtained was .84. Finally, to obtain more data regarding the content knowledge of the EFL teachers, the Methodology and Testing sections of the Iranian standardized nation-wide TEFL M.A. test (2012) were administered to the teachers. All the items were in a multiple-choice format.

3.3 Procedure

Taking into account Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) model of program evaluation and extensive review on EFL teacher education, the researchers utilized a concurrent mixed methods design (Creswell, 2003) to evaluate the Iranian EFL preservice teacher education. More specifically, the study began with a broad survey on the participants' reactions to the program, which was accomplished through administering the questionnaire. During the same time frame—second semester of the academic year 2014—the teacher education courses at teacher education centers in Rasht and EFL high-school classes were observed. Eighteen teacher educators' classes in different courses of the program, namely Academic Reading, Materials Development and Course Design, Teaching Methodology, Research Methodology, Assessment Methodology, Practicum, and Computer courses in teacher education centers were observed. Moreover, to obtain further information on the participants' learning, 98 high school EFL teachers ($n = 62$) and teacher trainees ($n = 36$) were chosen through convenience sampling to answer the tests. In addition, to probe into the application of the pedagogical content knowledge in high schools, 18 teacher trainees' teaching practice on reading comprehension and grammar in Practicum courses and 18 high school EFL teachers' practice in actual high school classes were observed. Furthermore, 14 EFL teacher educators and 18 M.A. high school EFL teachers agreed to be interviewed. The participants' viewpoints regarding the main problems in the EFL teacher education programs were also elicited.

3.4 Data Analysis

Informed by the pragmatists' rationale, a mixed methods design was utilized to strengthen the validity of the results (Creswell, 2003). In this design, quantitative and qualitative data on the same phenomenon are collected and analyzed separately; the results are, then, converged during interpretation. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and descriptive analyses (frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviation) were run. For the interview results, both quantitative (percentages) and qualitative analysis, open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), were deployed. In open coding, the data from the interview were conceptualized, and a large number of codes were obtained and were reduced later. In axial coding, the parts related to the same topic were brought under one bigger category. Besides, the percentage of the respondents who had voted for

the adequacy or inadequacy of the program on the issues raised in the interview was calculated. The results of the observation checklist were analyzed quantitatively, that is, the percentage of the presence of teaching variables was calculated. The results of the tests were also tabulated, and descriptive analyses were implemented. In addition, a chi-square test was implemented on the results of the observation checklist to probe into the significant differences in the application of teaching activities. The data were fed into SPSS, version 22.

4. Results

4.1 Participants' Reaction
4.1.1 Lesson planning

As demonstrated earlier, the questionnaire was filled in by 463 participants. The first part of the questionnaire probed into the participants' reactions with regard to the adequacy of the program in enhancing lesson planning skills. The items began with the statement: "The program promotes teachers' ability to . . . ." As seen in Table 3, in nearly all cases, around 40% of participants disagreed; around 25% had no idea and around 35% agreed with the adequacy of program in this regard. On the whole, at least in terms of the participants' perceptions, the program was somehow successful in promoting lesson planning ($M = 2.96$; $SD = 1.10$):

Table 3. *Frequency (Percentage) of Participants' Perception on Lesson Planning*

Items	Highly Disagree	Disagree	No Idea	Agree	Highly Agree	M	SD
Write their own lesson plans for teaching EFL students	74 (15.8)	113 (24.2)	95 (20.3)	154 (33)	27 (5.8)	2.8	1.19
Specify behavioral objectives, teaching methods and techniques for measuring outcomes	40 (8.6)	152 (32.5)	110 (23.6)	143 (30.6)	18 (3.9)	2.8	1.06
Match activities and learning experiences to main content and the needs of the learners	53 (11.3)	140 (30.3)	102 (21.8)	134 (28.7)	34 (7.3)	2.9	1.15

Distribute appropriate time according to each activity	27 (5.8)	108 (23.1)	102 (21.8)	181 (38.8)	45 (9.6)	3.2 1.09
Select appropriate materials, media or technologies for lesson presentation	27 (5.8)	139 (29.8)	1 37 (29.3)	127 (27.2)	33 (7.1)	3.0 1.04
Incorporate formal and informal assessment	44 (9.4)	149 (31.9)	130 (27.8)	114 (24.4)	26 (5.6)	2.8 1.07

4.1.2 Classroom management

The classroom management section elicited the participants' responses with regard to the success of the program in enhancing different attributes of classroom management. The items began with the statement: ''The program promotes teachers' ability to . . . .'' Table 4 presents the participants' perceptions in this regard. A close look at this finding reveals that, in nearly all cases ($M = 2.53; SD = 1.10$), the participants' disagreement with the adequacy of the program in promoting classroom management skills outweighed their agreement. More specifically, around 55% disagreed, around 30% had no idea, and less than 20% agreed with its appropriateness:

Table 4. *Frequency (Percentage) of Participants' Perception on Classroom Management*

Items	Highly Disagree	Disagree	No Idea	Agree	Highly Agree	M	SD
Reward students for good behavior in the classroom	103 (22.1)	177 (37.9)	112 (24)	63 (13.5)	8 (1.7)	2.3	1.02
Establish a teaching daily routine in classroom and stick to it	49 (10.5)	158 (33.8)	136 (29.1)	98 (21)	22 (4.7)	2.7	1.5
Be somehow strict when it comes to student	74 (15.8)	155 (33.2)	132 (28.3)	72 (15.4)	30 (6.4)	2.6	1.12

	Highly Disagree	Disagree	No Idea	Agree	Highly Agree	M	SD
compliance in the classroom							
Redirect students back to the topic when they get off task	67 (14.3)	188 (40.3)	114 (24.4)	75 (16.1)	19 (4.1)	2.5	1.05
Direct the students' transition from one learning activity to another	76 (16.3)	171 (36.6)	131 (28.1)	68 (14.6)	17 (3.6)	2.5	1.04
Closely monitor off task behavior during class	75 (16.1)	187 (40)	129 (27.6)	58 (12.4)	14 (3)	2.4	1.00
Use indirect instruction when they teach	64 (13.7)	187 (40)	140 (30)	56 (12)	16 (3.4)	2.5	.98
Be flexible with preplanned learning activities	80 (17.1)	161 (34.5)	132 (28.3)	74 (15.8)	16 (3.4)	2.5	1.06

4.1.3 Assessment literacy

The participants' perception with regard to the adequacy of the program in promoting teacher trainees' assessment skills was also elicited. The items began with the statement: "The program promotes teachers' ability . . . ." As Table 5 shows, the majority of the participants (more than 70%) assessed themselves as poor or fair in the assessment attributes presented in the questionnaire ($M = 2.04$; $SD = .88$):

Table 5. *Frequency (percentage) of Participants' Perception on Assessment Literacy*

Items	Highly Disagree	Disagree	No Idea	Agree	Highly Agree	M	SD
To calculate and interpret statistical common measures of centrality and deviation	116 (24.8)	234 (50.1)	90 (19.3)	17 (3.6)	6 (1.3)	2.05	.84
To discern whether or not the difference	116 (24.8)	229 (49)	91 (19.5)	18 (3.9)	9 (1.9)	2.08	.87

between two or more data sets is significant							
To logically distinguish between correlation and causation	148 (31.7)	198 (42.7)	96 (20.6)	18 (3.9)	3 (.6)	1.98	.86
To use a variety of assessment measures to assess students with minimal bias	129 (27.6)	210 (45)	99 (21.2)	18 (3.9)	7 (1.5)	2.05	.88
To construct, administer, and score tests within a given field of expertise	145 (31)	203 (43.5)	93 (19.9)	13 (2.8)	9 (1.9)	2.00	.89
To evaluate the reliability, item difficulty, item facility, and content validity of tests within ones' field of teaching	126 (27)	219 (46.9)	92 (19.7)	20 (4.3)	6 (1.3)	2.05	.87
To statistically determine where the cut-off point of a CRT examination should be	145 (31)	194 (41.5)	101 (21.6)	17 (3.6)	6 (1.3)	2.01	.89
To detect poorly performing test items and how to factor out those items from the test scores	155 (33.2)	196 (42)	92 (19.7)	10 (2.1)	10 (2.1)	1.97	.90

4.1.4 Research orientation

Regarding the participants' research orientation, four items were used. The first item in this section asked for the respondents' interest in doing academic research. As Table 6 indicates, more than half of the participants (more than 53%) were not interested in doing SLA research; nearly, 32% stated that they were somewhat interested in doing research; and only 15% said that they were interested or highly interested ($M = 2.50$; $SD = .97$). It is likely that the program was not successful in changing the participants' views on doing related academic research in their fields of interest:

Table 6. *Frequency (Percentage) of Participants' Perception on Interest in Doing Research*

Item	Not Interested At All	Not Interested	Somewhat Interested	Interested	Highly Interested	M	SD
How interested are you in doing SLA research?	59 (12.6)	189 (40.5)	149 (31.9)	48 (10.3)	18 (3.9)	2.5	.97

The second item elicited the participants' perception on the usefulness of L2 research in teaching. As Table 7 demonstrates (*M* = 2.58*; SD* = .99), the majority of the participants had negative views in this regard:

Table 7. *Frequency (Percentage) of Participants' Perception on Usefulness of Research in Teaching*

Item	Not Useful At All	Not Useful	Somewhat Useful	Useful	Highly Useful	M	SD
How much useful do you think SLA research is for L2 teaching?	71 (15.2)	139 (29.8)	180 (38.5)	59 (12.6)	14 (3.0)	2.58	.99

The third item was concerned with how often the participants read L2 academic research articles. According to Table 8, it can be concluded that the majority of teacher trainees and high school teachers (*M* = 2.25*; SD* = .82) were not interested in reading research articles.

Table 8. *Frequency (Percentage) of the Participants' Perception on Reading Research Articles*

Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	M	SD
How often do you read SLA research articles?	76 (16.3)	223 (47.8)	139 (29.8)	19 (4.1)	6 (1.3)	2.25	.82

Finally, with regard to the usefulness of the Research Methodology course, the fourth item, as Table 9 shows, 78% considered it as "Not Useful"; 22% saw it "Somewhat Useful" and only 10% perceived it as "Useful" (*M* = 2.18*; SD* = .94):

Table 9. *Frequency (Percentage) of the Participants' Perception on Usefulness of Research Methodology Course*

Item	Not Useful At All	Not Useful	Somewhat Useful	Useful	Highly Useful	M	SD
How useful have you found the research methodology course(s)?	112 (24)	206 (44.1)	102 (21.8)	34 (7.3)	9 (1.9)	2.18	.94

4.1.5 Computer literacy

The next part dealt with the perception of the participants with regard to their computer literacy. As it can be observed in Table 10, in the majority of the cases (except for items 4 & 5), more than 60% considered themselves as weak in computer skills; around 20% considered themselves as average; and less than 20% saw themselves as good ($M = 2.47; SD = 1$). With regard to items 4 and 5–the social networks and search engines–around 40% saw themselves as weak, nearly 25% as average, and around 35% considered themselves as good:

Table 10. *Frequency (Percentage) of Participants' Perception on Computer Literacy*

Items	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	M	SD
The word processors like MS Word	67 (14.3)	223 (47.8)	107 (22.9)	51 (10.9)	15 (3.2)	2.40	.97
The statistical packages like SPSS	62 (13.3)	260 (55.7)	80 (17.1)	47 (10.1)	14 (3.0)	2.33	.93
The presentation programs like PowerPoint	64 (13.7)	243 (52)	92 (19.7)	51 (10.9)	13 (2.8)	2.36	.94
The communication applications such social networks, e-mails	65 (13.9)	124 (26.6)	142 (30.4)	107 (22.9)	25 (5.4)	2.79	1.11
The Web search engines	55 (11.8)	107 (22.9)	115 (24.6)	144 (30.8)	42 (9.0)	3.02	1.17
Web designing	81 (17.3)	194 (41.5)	140 (30)	45 (9.6)	3 (.6)	2.34	.89
The English learning soft wares	140 (30)	212 (45.9)	59 (12.6)	42 (9.0)	10 (2.1)	2.07	.99

4.1.6 Teaching reading skills

Table 11 presents the participants' recommended ways of teaching reading (sub)skills. In nearly all cases (except items 2, 4, 5), more than 60% of the participants never or rarely recommended the reading skills or strategies stated here.

Only for "consulting a dictionary" ($M = 4.01$; $SD = .69$), "sentence by sentence translation" ($M = 4$; $SD = .88$) and "working with grammar" ($M = 3.69$; $SD = 1.63$), the opposite happened; more than 60% stated that they often or always recommended such strategies. These strategies seem to be more compatible with the traditional procedures of teaching reading skills:

Table11. *Frequency (Percentage) of Participants' Perception on Their Recommended Ways of Teaching Reading Skills*

Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	M	SD
Looking at the title and underlining keywords in the text	48 (10.3)	202 (43.3)	149 (31.9)	50 (10.7)	14 (3.0)	2.52	.92
Consulting a dictionary	2 (.4)	4 (.9)	84 (18)	270 (57.8)	103 (22.1)	4.01	.69
Prereading and postreading activities	70 (15)	205 (43.9)	163 (34.9)	18 (3.9)	7 (1.5)	2.32	.83
Sentence by sentence translation	11 (2.4)	17 (3.6)	62 (13.3)	242 (51.8)	131 (28.1)	4.00	.88
Working with grammar	8 (1.7)	37 (7.9)	141 (30.2)	207 (44.3)	69 (14.8)	3.69	1.63
Identifying references	23 (4.9)	213 (45.6)	160 (34.3)	44 (9.4)	23 (4.9)	2.63	.90
Drawing conclusion based on the text read	44 (9.4)	228 (49)	123 (26.3)	48 (10.3)	20 (4.3)	2.50	.95
Guessing the meaning…	56 (12)	232 (49.7)	148 (31.7)	19 (4.1)	8 (1.7)	2.33	.80
Pair-work activities	38 (8.1)	190 (40.7)	165 (35.3)	55 (11.8)	15 (3.2)	2.60	.91
Reading and searching for related information on the Internet:	69 (14.8)	212 (45.4)	121 (25.9)	52 (11.1)	9 (1.9)	2.39	.93

Moreover, the results of teacher education classroom observations demonstrated that, among all the teacher educators in different courses observed,

22.4% had lesson plans, only 16.7% had specific objectives, 11% used up-to-date materials, 22.2% focused on the practical aspects of teaching, 33.3% used English as a medium of instruction, 50% used management techniques, 22.2% involved teacher trainees in their teaching practice, and only 22.2% used various assessment techniques. The results indicated that the majority of the teacher educators themselves did not apply various aspects of pedagogical content knowledge in their teaching practices.

In addition, the results of the interviews indicated that, for the majority of the participants (more than 70%), the program was not appropriate in promoting the teacher trainees' pedagogical content knowledge. Concerning the teaching activities in the program, many of the interviewees postulated that, in the teacher education program, the practical aspects of teaching were largely neglected; the due attention to the theoretical aspects of teaching, indeed, had left little room for the practical dimensions in the program. According to one of the participants, for example:

> *In courses related to the academic skills, teacher trainees become familiar with different academic skills, subskills and the related strategies. However, rarely are they taught how to teach them.*

Still related to teaching academic skills is the prospective teachers' poor proficiency in such (sub)skills. For most interviewees (nearly 60%), the prospective teachers themselves did not have the requisite proficiency in different academic skills and, consequently, they would not be able to teach their students such skills in their future career. They believed that was why, in most cases, the EFL teachers resorted to traditional procedures and used Persian as the medium of instruction, as these were less challenging for them and required less communication abilities in English.

Some interviewees (about 40%) complained that the teacher trainees were not appropriately educated to invest strategically in their own learning. Related to this issue was the way such knowledge was delivered to the teacher trainees. Most participants (nearly 80%) complained about the lecture format or teacher-centered model of teacher education. One of the participants, for example, said:

> *In nearly all classes, the teacher trainers explain different methods, techniques or approaches of teaching language skills and the teacher trainees are expected to take notes.*

Accordingly, little opportunity was provided for teacher trainees to express themselves and to engage in meaningful activities or tasks. Moreover, they believed that the teacher educators had traditional orientation toward teaching English, and innovative approaches and techniques were rarely used by these practitioners themselves. A participant, for example, said:

> *In assessment course, for example, teacher trainees become familiar with some assessment techniques, which are the traditional multiple-choice questions, true-false items and so on. At the end of the course, they are asked to develop these tests. Little attempt is made to make the trainees familiar with alternative assessment and the sad point is that in most cases their learning is assessed through the same traditional assessment techniques!*

Along the same road, concerning the teacher trainees' pedagogical knowledge, similar voices were heard. One participant, for example, put forward:

> *Regarding classroom management skill, very old techniques, mostly coming from outdated textbooks, are presented which cannot be applied in our actual classes. The teacher educators themselves do not apply classroom management techniques with regard to classroom arrangement, disciplinary rules, punishment, disruptions and so on, even superficially, so we really have no idea regarding their applicability in actual classes.*

4.2 Trainees' Learning

To get more insights regarding the pedagogical content knowledge of the teachers, the researchers administered the PET test and two sections of the TEFL M.A. test to the high school EFL teachers holding B.A. and senior teacher trainees (n = 98). The results are displayed in Table 12. As observed, a majority of participants performed poorly on the tests:

Table 12. *Performance of Participants on Total Scores of Tests*

Test	Items (*N*)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	*SD*
PET	35	6.00	32.00	16.56	6.63
Assessment Test	20	4.00	16.00	8.09	2.44
Teaching Methodology	20	4.00	18.00	9.73	2.71

4.3 Applications of Teaching Activities

The teacher trainees' and the school teachers' application of teaching activities was investigated through an observation checklist. As Table 13 shows, in almost all cases, the teaching activities were applied more in practicum than in high school practice. However, to find out whether such difference was significant, the researchers ran a chi-square test (see Table 14):

Table 13. *Frequency (Percentage) of Observed Variables of Teaching*

Variable	Practicum	High School
Lesson Plan	14 (73.3)	4 (22.2)
Clear and Specific Objectives	1 (5.5)	1 (5.5)
Pace and Time Management	5 (26.3)	4 (22.2)
Use of Up-to-Date Materials	14 (73.3)	2 (11.1)
Use of English as a Medium of Instruction	12 (63.2)	3 (16.6)
Use of Questioning, Feedback, etc.	11 (57.9)	3 (16.6)
Learners' Involvement	15 (78.9)	6 (33.3)
Various Assessment Techniques	13 (68.4)	4 (22.2)
Managing Misbehavior	11 (57.9)	2 (11.1)

Table 14. *Chi-Square Test for Application of Teaching Activities*

Variable	Chi-Square	*df*	*Sig.*
Lesson Plan	14.20*	1	.000
Clear and Specific Objectives	.021	1	.88
Pace and Time Management	.52	1	.47
Use of Up-to-Date Materials	19.46*	1	.000
Use of English as a Medium of Instruction	11.87*	1	.001
Use of Questioning, Feedback, etc.	9.80*	1	.002
Learners' Involvement	12.47*	1	.000
Various Assessment Techniques	11.83*	1	.001
Managing Misbehavior	12.21*	1	.000
Total	1.88	1	.38

As Table 14 indicates, with regard to the application of lesson planning, χ^2 (1, *n* = 18) = 14.20, *p* = .000, up-to-date materials, χ^2 (1, *n* = 18) = 19.46, *p* = .000, teaching techniques such as questioning, giving feedback, χ^2(1, *n* = 18) = 9.80, *p* =.002, learners' involvement, χ^2 (1, *n* = 18) = 12.47, *p* = .000, assessment techniques, χ^2 (1, *n* = 18) = 11.83, *p* = .001, and management techniques, χ^2 (1,*n* = 18) = 12.21, *p* = .000, there was a significant difference between practicum and high school practices. However, with regard to the total variables, no significant difference was observed, χ^2 (1, *n* = 18) = 1.88, *p* = .38.

4.4 Main Problems of Program

For the majority of the participants (more than 70%), the structure and layout of the program were not appropriate. The most agreed upon issue was lack of systematic needs analysis. They believed that most courses did not target the teacher trainees' requisite skills and knowledge. Moreover, for a majority of the interviewees (nearly 70%), the materials were outdated and did not help the prospective teachers to put the pedagogical content knowledge into practice. In addition, they believed that the teaching activities were inadequate, as they did not

give rise to the teacher trainees' professional development. They complained about lack of qualified teacher educators, lecture-based methodology, absence of strategic investment, focus on the theoretical aspects of teaching, irrelevant courses, excessive use of L1, low general English proficiency of teacher trainees, heterogeneity of the teacher trainees, low motivation of teacher trainees, and inadequate assessment procedures.

According to respondents (about 80%), the lecture-based or teacher-centered approach left no room for the prospective teachers to express themselves, to develop communicative skills in English, and to experience collaborative work. They believed that, in most classes, due to the low English proficiency of the teacher trainees, the L1 (i.e., Persian) was the medium of instruction. As a result, the communicative skills of teacher trainees did not develop adequately, and their language proficiency, as the cornerstone of prospective teachers' content knowledge, lagged behind.

Furthermore, for most interviewees (nearly 70%), overemphasis on the theoretical knowledge was common in all courses. The interviewees maintained that this was more evident for academic skill courses. In most academic skills courses, the teacher educators presented different skills, subskills, and strategies theoretically, without educating the students how to teach such skills or strategies. To put it more simply, there was no difference between the academic skills courses in the program and similar courses in other English related fields of study. Hence, the prospective teachers could not transform the acquired knowledge in different aspects of language teaching into their actual classes and, as a result, resorted to more traditional methods.

Finally, the teacher trainees' poor computer literacy and research orientation were issues raised by most interviewees (about 60%). They believed that, in most computer-assisted language learning (CALL) courses, the teacher trainees became familiar with the theoretical aspects of CALL, and less time was devoted to the work with the computer applications or the learning software programs. Accordingly, most EFL teachers were not able to work with the Internet properly, could not work with commonly used word processing applications, and were not familiar with various learning software programs available. Regarding research orientation, they stated that, in most cases, the teacher trainees were only introduced to basic research concepts and rarely were they educated to write an academic article.

5. Discussion

With regard to the teaching activities in the program, two main issues were raised by the participants: overemphasis on theories and lecture-oriented

methodology. The results demonstrated that, in almost all classes, undue attention was paid to the theory of teaching at the expense of proper practice. This accords with the findings of many researchers, indicating that, in EFL teacher education programs, much emphasis is put on the theories of teaching (e.g., Hashemian & Azadi, 2010; Mirhassani & Beh-Afarin, 2004; Peacock, 2009). Although the results indicated the program had been somehow successful in making the teacher trainees' familiar with basic methods, approaches, or techniques in language teaching, it seems that such received knowledge was decontextualized from practice.

Moreover, the result that shows the program was conducted in a lecture-based format and followed a transmission model rhymes with the findings by Farhady, Sajadi, and Hedayati (2010). Such transmission-oriented and lecture-based methodology, in fact, provides few opportunities for creativity, collaboration, and experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) in the classroom. It is only through experience and active engagement with the knowledge that prospective teachers can transform their knowledge in their actual teaching practices. In the same vein, Cochran-Smith (2005) believes that it is due to a failure to adopt a social constructivist approach in producing knowledge in teacher education that teachers resort to a transmission model in their own teaching practice.

With regard to the pedagogical content knowledge, the results indicated that the classroom management skills were not adequately targeted in the program and the prospective teachers were neither theoretically nor practically familiar with recent classroom management techniques. This finding concurs with those by peacock (2009) who also came to the conclusion that classroom management skill was a serious problem for the prospective EFL teachers. According to Soares (2007), teacher educators almost underscore the issue of classroom management and put forward theories and practices around the concept of ideal learners. This gives rise to a sense of disappointment in teacher trainees and leaves them with "little but their intuition to guide them" (p. 43) in handling unwanted situations and disruptive incidents in their classrooms. However, as Farrell (2006) suggests, it is the responsibility of teacher education programs to guide preservice teachers into discovering alternatives and implementing classroom management strategies.

The results also indicated that the program had not been successful in promoting the prospective teachers' assessment literacy. This finding is in line with that of Munoz, Palacio, and Escobar (2012) who studied the EFL teachers' beliefs about assessment, and the results revealed a gap between perceptions and practices of the teachers, which needed to be bridged through teacher training courses. It is also congruent with Riazi and Razavipour's (2011) finding that the EFL teachers' assessment literacy was lower than expected. Similarly, Sikka, Nath, and Cohen (2007) indicated a need for the inclusion and use of different types of assessment in

teacher training programs. The low assessment literacy may be due to the fact that EFL teacher trainees do not experience alternative assessment techniques in their teacher education courses, despite the fact that alternative assessment approaches have gained importance in educational contexts (Soleimani & Rahmanian, 2014).

Furthermore, the results showed that the EFL teachers' language proficiency was low, and the program was not successful in helping them to acquire the requisite skills in teaching academic skills, especially the reading skill. These results are in parallel with the results of Kiany, Mahdavi, and Ghafar Samar (2011) who also came to the point that the EFL teachers did not have the requisite skills to teach academic skills such as reading comprehension appropriately. They are also along the same lines with the findings of Butler (2004) who contended the EFL teachers were not appropriately trained in the teacher education program to acquire the requisite academic language skills.

Academic language skills, in fact, play a significant role in a teacher's pedagogical practice, as it "may contribute to enhancing or undermining the teacher's confidence, therefore, affecting the teacher's instructional practices" (Kamhi-Stein, 2009, p. 95). According to Kamhi-Stein (2009), many scholars believe that incomplete knowledge of the target language will hinder the appropriate planning of teaching and learning objectives. This lack of knowledge and skills in teaching academic skills may justify the fact that a large number of EFL teachers still resort to obsolete techniques and procedures—as the findings revealed—and resist trying innovative approaches.

Another aspect of the teachers' knowledge targeted was their computer literacy. The findings revealed that the EFL teachers did not have the necessary knowledge and skills for using computer applications, language-learning software programs, and Internet tools confidently. This finding is in agreement with the finding by Dashtestani (2014) who concluded that the EFL teachers and teacher trainees did not have the requisite skill in computer. The importance of the EFL teachers' computer literacy has been highlighted in a number of studies (see Son & Robb, 2011). According to them, for the implementation of CALL, EFL teachers are required to develop their knowledge and skills in using computers and improve their competency in doing CALL activities. This finding coincides with the assertion made by Dubin and Olshtain (1992), as cited in Dashtestani (2014), that EFL teachers who are accustomed to the use of traditional materials and resources are often incompetent in the implementation and development of modern and technology-based materials. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon the program to promote the EFL teacher trainees' knowledge and skills for using computer applications, language-specific software programs, and Internet tools appropriately. According to Dashtestani (2014), many scholars, indeed, believe in the affordance

provided by CALL in providing optimum conditions for learning, especially in responding to students' needs in a more individualized way.

Finally, another important aspect of EFL teacher trainees' knowledge, which has not been adequately appreciated in the program, is their research orientation. This finding is in congruence with the findings of Borg (2009) and Nassaji (2012). Borg (2009) found little evidence for the teachers' familiarity and engagement with research. Nassaji (2012) also found few EFL teachers had conducted or published academic research. Indeed, teachers' research orientation, both in terms of their theoretical familiarity with research methodology and their actual implementation of the research manifested in action research, can highly contribute to their professional development (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Nassaji (2012) believes that one way to get teachers to participate in the process of research is by doing teacher research or action research. The negative perceptions of L2 teachers toward research and little engagement with it can be due to their conceptions of research (Borg, 2009). For most teachers, according to Borg (2009), doing research involves large samples and statistics, being objective, and publishing the results in an academic journal. Accordingly, one way to change such misconceptions is to make prospective teachers familiar with other forms of research such as action research. However, to train research-oriented teachers, it is not enough to merely change their attitudes. As Borg (2009) contends, we should take into account the organizational and institutional factors as well.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The findings can be used to improve the current status of the preservice EFL teacher education in Iran. The study highlights that the program suffers from some drawbacks in promoting the EFL teacher trainees' pedagogical content knowledge. To improve the current status of the program, we have made some practical suggestions that will be indispensable for policy makers, curriculum developers, EFL teacher educators and students, and high school EFL teachers.

To improve the EFL teacher trainees' pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum developers should address the present and target needs of teacher trainees. Moreover, teacher education courses should involve both theoretical and practical aspects of L2 teaching. The courses in the preservice EFL programs in Iran are theory-oriented; hence, more practical aspects should be included. Teacher educators can make use of various techniques such as simulations and/or case studies to help teacher trainees transform such knowledge in their actual classes. They can also deliver their own lessons through innovative approaches such as task-based instruction to provide situations similar to those of real contexts so that prospective teachers can really experience such practice and apply it in their near future practices. Practicum courses can play a fundamental role in this regard.

Accordingly, the amount of time should be extended in length and intensity, so that there will be more opportunities for teacher trainees to practice teaching. Besides, instead of waiting for the practicum courses until the later terms of the program, teacher trainees can engage in teaching practice much earlier in their program by observing experienced teachers and reflecting on their practices.

In addition, it was found that the EFL teachers themselves were not competent in four main skills and were not educated adequately to teach them. In-service programs can target the academic reading skills of EFL teachers. Moreover, English language workshops and seminars will be indispensable to update their knowledge and skills in teaching. Regarding EFL teachers' computer literacy, more credits can be added to CALL-related courses, so that teacher trainees will have more time to work with computer, its applications and software programs. More research methodology courses should be included, so that the teacher trainees become familiar not only with the academic research but also with other types of research such as action research. A genre-based instruction can be invaluable in helping teacher trainees to undertake academic research; through modeling, teacher educators can make teacher trainees familiar with the various components of a research article; teacher trainees can also be instructed how to do action research.

What was highly missing in this program was the Classroom Management course. Classroom management techniques are taught as part of teaching skills in teaching skills course. However, to familiarize teacher trainees with classroom management techniques both theoretically and practically, we have to include a specific Classroom Management course. Moreover, EFL teacher educators'/ students' opinion regarding the importance and adequacy of courses can be elicited and some irrelevant courses can be removed. Finally, more summative and formative evaluations in the program can be initiated to probe into whether the teacher trainees have acquired the requisite pedagogical content knowledge.

Although the study shed some light on the preservice EFL teacher education, it had its own limitations. Due to some logistical concerns, the participants were just from Guilan Province, Iran. Moreover, the study was concerned solely with the EFL teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in terms of their teaching reading skills, lesson planning, classroom management, assessment literacy, computer literacy, and research orientation. Moreover, to probe into whether the requisite knowledge transformation really took place, the researchers should have conducted a longitudinal study on the EFL teacher trainees to trace the application of teaching activities in their actual high school performances. However, due to some practical problems, it was only possible to observe the teacher trainees' performance in the practicum courses and randomly selected EFL teachers'

performance in high schools. Finally, among all the academic language skills, only the academic reading skills of the teacher trainees were targeted.

Further research can address the present and target needs of EFL teacher trainees. Moreover, in-depth qualitative studies on the nature of knowledge base of EFL teachers can be conducted. Besides, different attributes of EFL teachers' pedagogical content knowledge can be studied more qualitatively. In addition, the application of the knowledge acquired in the program in the actual classes can be probed into using a longitudinal study on certain cases. Some quasi-experimental studies can also be designed to examine the possible effects of practically instructing each of the pedagogical knowledge base on EFL teachers' teaching performance and their students' learning. In short, more evaluation projects can be conducted to target specifically the efficiency of the program in promoting the different aspects of EFL teacher trainees' knowledge and skills.

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Appendix
Semistructured Interview

1. Do you think the program has been successful in helping Iranian high school EFL teachers to teach academic reading skills appropriately? Why?
2. Do you think the program has helped Iranian high school EFL teachers to acquire the requisite classroom management skills? Why?
4. Do you think the Iranian high school EFL teachers have the requisite assessment skills? Why?
5. Do you think the Iranian high school EFL teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills in computer? Why?
6. Do you think the Iranian high school EFL teachers are research oriented? Why?
7. What problems and challenges do you observe in the program?