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Research Paper

Efficacy of L2 Teacher Education Programs: A Comparison of Public and Private Sectors in Iran

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Abstract

The study is an attempt to evaluate and compare teacher education programs (TEPs) in *Farhangian University* and private language institutes in Iran. The data were collected from 142 Iranian EFL teachers through a questionnaire and focus group interviews. The results of multiple independent samples t-tests showed that teacher educators in private language institutes performed better in preparing teachers compared to teacher educators in *Farhangian University*, while no considerable difference was found in the other five subscales of the TEPs (i.e. program structure, program courses, psychology and cognition, professional development, and knowledge base), and the overall teacher education programs in *Farhangian University* and private language institutes; nonetheless, teachers in private language institutes recorded higher mean scores in all the subscales than their counterparts from *Farhangian University*, indicating that private language institutes performed

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slightly better in preparing EFL teachers. Additionally, based on the interview data, various categories of suggestions were developed for improving the TEPs from several aspects including the length of the programs, teacher educators, content knowledge, practice-based education, reflection and professional development, and program courses. The implications for L2 teacher education, policymakers, and teacher educators are discussed, along with some suggestions for additional research.

Keywords: EFL Teachers, *Farhangian University*, Language Institutes, Teacher Education Programs

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1. Introduction

Students all across the world deserve to be taught by qualified teachers. There is no doubt that teachers are considered to be at the center of the academic system that the success of the system depends on them. (Soodmand Afshar et al., 2017). In the past, there were some beliefs that everyone can teach, or at least, they believed that knowing a subject is the sole key prerequisite for teaching it (Darling-Hammond, 2000). There was also a misconception about the role of teachers in class that they have to stand in front of the class, lecture a textbook, and administer an exam at the end of the term. However, previous studies revealed that teachers are required to have specific skills, characteristics, and knowledge including content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge (GPK), pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), and even technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK), which refers to learning how to demonstrate English learning materials and project-based content using appropriate pedagogy and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) technology (Liu & Kleinsasser, 2015). Besides, teachers are supposed to build a good rapport with students, have a sense of humor to break the ice in the classroom, and

provide a relaxed atmosphere for learners (Chen, 2012). More importantly, they are supposed to show professional attitudes and values in their profession as they must be good role models for students (Pham, 2022). Taking on these roles requires a high level of training and preparation for teachers before they enter the classroom.

Considering the importance of training teachers, L2 Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) are intended to offer teachers diversity of teaching techniques and skills to help them meet the requirements of the profession. Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016) believed that "these programs act as the building blocks of teachers' knowledge regarding their understanding of teaching and learning theories" (p. 6). In spite of the pivotal role in preparing teachers, these programs are not mainly designed to meet the needs of teachers (Tajik et al., 2019). Therefore, according to Peacock (2009), in order to train qualified EFL teachers, all TEPs must be subjected to critical review so that their quality and imperfections can be identified, suggestions for improvements made, and ultimately, an efficient and comprehensive training program produced. To this end, various studies have been conducted around the world in recent years to assess the effectiveness of TEPs held for pre-service teachers (De Dios Martinez Agudo, 2017; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Karim et al., 2019; Yook & Lee, 2016). Different studies regarding the evaluation of TEPs have been also conducted in the context of Iran (Ganji et al., 2016; Masoumpanah et al., 2017; Tajik et al., 2019), but the number of these studies is few. Besides, EFL teachers are typically dissatisfied with the TEPs they participated in and they believe that they are not fully prepared for their teaching profession. Furthermore, no comparative studies were conducted to evaluate these programs separately and determine which program best suits the needs of the teachers. Considering the shortcomings mentioned before, the current study explores the effectiveness of L2 teacher education programs in preparing pre-service EFL teachers by investigating the content and

structure of the TEPs offered in public and private sectors in Iran. More specifically, this study aims to discover whether teachers who have attended the TEPs in the private sectors are different from those in the public sectors in terms of their preparation for teaching. As a result of conducting the present study, a vivid picture of the content and structure of the TEPs will be depicted, along with some recommendations for enhancing the quality of the TEPs, making the importance of this study even more clear.

2. Context of the Study

The study was conducted in private language institutes that provide English courses for EFL learners as well as intensive teacher training courses (TTCs) for student teachers with degrees in English or other majors. The goal of this project was to provide student teachers with classroom teaching techniques, pedagogy, classroom management, and ways of building a good rapport with students (Ganji et al., 2016). Additionally, Farhangian University is a public teacher training university in Iran with more than 98 branches and about 95000 enrolled student teachers. It provides teacher education programs for various majors including Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (Tavazoei & Razmjoo, 2021). Undergraduate TEFL student teachers are educated at Farhangian University for four years. This university, whose curriculum is developed under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, offers a wide range of courses including general courses, general English courses, Islamic educational courses, training courses, and specialized courses in teaching language skills, and assessment. Besides, *Farhangian University* provides several practical courses and classroom observations in which student teachers are required to attend the schools in order to complete their education (Masoumpanah et al., 2019).

3. Literature Review

3.1 Teacher education/training programs

Training teachers professionally is vital to create a more efficient educational system and, as a result, to raise the standard of education for

students. In one of the studies, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) discussed the effect of teacher education programs on student teachers' preparedness. They compared certified teachers with those who had not met any training requirements in Texas and it was confirmed that teachers holding standard certification were more efficient than other non-certified teachers in simulating student achievement gains. As regards the critical role of L2 teacher education programs in preparing teachers, several researchers have investigated the TEPs from diverse aspects (Ackan, 2016; Arslan & Gulden, 2018; Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Karakas, 2012; Masoumpanah et al., 2019). Such investigations, for the most, incorporated the impact of employing the TEPs on pre-service teachers and pointed out the structure and content of these programs by focusing on their various aspects and suggesting modifications depending on the TEP under review. Presented here are the studies that have been conducted to examine these programs.

3.1.1 Practice-based education

Practical experience has always been part of a well-planned teacher education program. Studies have shown that TEPs that allow trainees to put the theories of language teaching into practice have a greater influence on teacher quality. Faez and Valeo (2012) investigated the impact of TEPs on novice teachers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) in Canada, with novice teachers' perceptions of being prepared for teaching increasing after learning from experience and teaching in actual classrooms. In addition, examining the TEPs in one of the universities of Myanmar, Chaw and Kopp (2021) realized that having practicum courses in the TEP allowed student teachers to combine theory and practice, and helped them develop their professional skills and their interest in teaching. Likewise, Arslan and Gulden (2018) explored the effect of TEPs held in Turkey on EFL teachers. The results revealed that practicum experience improved student teachers'

confidence while entering the real classrooms, and they were less anxious to manage the class. Masoumpanah et al. (2017) similarly stressed the value of practical training. According to the obtained results on investigating the TEFL program at *Farhangian University*, both teacher educators and student teachers felt that the TEP should place a strong emphasis on teaching skills development and practice. The findings of the study by Tajik et al. (2019) regarding the TEPs conducted in three various private language institutes in Iran suggested the same findings that the training programs failed to provide teachers with actual teaching practice opportunities and they were dissatisfied with the plethora of theories presented in teacher preparation programs.

3.1.2 Teacher educators

In addition to the importance of providing a balance between theory and practice, the effectiveness of TEPs is thought to be significantly influenced by teacher educators. Yuan and Hu (2018), examining the effectiveness of teacher educators in the TEP of China, argue that effective teacher educators are like 'fountains of knowledge' (p. 4) that support teachers' professional development. Besides, the study noted that language teacher educators must provide useful theories and approaches to help student teachers acquire and integrate the knowledge they learn during teacher education courses. Additionally, having well-trained, motivated, and knowledgeable teacher educators on hand to help student teachers whenever needed was mentioned in the study by De Dios Martinez Agudo (2017), which investigated the English TEPs in Spain. Likewise, Peacock (2009) evaluated the TEPs offered by a university program in Hong Kong. Having collected the data from students and teachers through interviews, questionnaires, and essays, he found that teacher educators were very helpful and they were easy to contact in this program. On the other hand, the study by Ganji et al. (2018) on the evaluation of the TTCs in six private language institutes in Iran revealed that

teacher trainers were not experienced, certified, and skillful to train other student teachers.

3.1.3 Program courses/content

A TEP's core components—the program's content and the courses—can be made to be of a higher quality if they are selected with consideration for the needs of student teachers. In the study by De Dios Martinez Agudo (2017), student teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the Spanish TEP course content since it placed a greater emphasis on pedagogical competence than managerial skills and linguistic proficiency. Moreover, evaluating the TEPs offered by a university program in Hong Kong, Peacock (2009) reported that the TEP under investigation was stronger regarding pedagogic competence than linguistic proficiency and classroom management skills.

Karim et al. (2019) explored student teachers' perspectives regarding the content of TEPs in Bangladesh. As the results indicated, the majority of student teachers affirmed that pedagogic competence was coupled with English proficiency and management skills in this program. They also stated that the content of the program was up-to-date and relevant to their needs. Along the same lines, teachers in Farhangian University voiced their opinions in the study by Gholami and Qurbanzada (2012). They contended that some courses which are irrelevant to teaching, such as literature or translation, must be replaced by other courses that are. It was recommended in a different study by Ganji et al. (2016) on the TTCs offered by private language institutes that the course contents include practical and up-to-date teaching techniques to equip teachers for dealing with the common challenges of teaching in classrooms.

3.1.4 Reflection and professional development

Nowadays, it is generally accepted that reflection is a crucial part of TEPs throughout the world (Farrell, 2018) since it heightens teachers' awareness of

teaching and facilitates deeper knowledge. This also helps teachers to think about their teaching and make better decisions. Therefore, any educational system must foster teachers' higher-order thinking skills (Namaziandost et al., 2022). This concept was prioritized in a study by Coskun and Daloglu (2010) on the evaluation of TEPs conducted in Turkey, and they found that student teachers were motivated to reflect on their teaching experiences and receive feedback from their peers.

Action research is also another technique for teachers to reflect on their teaching as it helps them examine their teaching methods, think critically, and attempt to improve their methods in order to better meet their students' needs (Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015). However, it appears that some programs do not consider the matter of reflection. In a study by Tajik et al. (2019), teachers at private language institutes claimed that the TTCs they participated in could not help them reflect on their performance. They mentioned that teachers' thinking was disregarded and they were assigned recipes to imitate in the classrooms.

3.1.5 Length of the program

Along with the previously listed aspects of the TEPs, the duration of these programs is equally significant and should not be neglected. In the study by Ganji et al. (2018), this issue was raised by the EFL private language teachers and they voiced their displeasure over the short length of the TEP; they believed that due to the intensive nature of the courses and lack of enough time for teaching practice, they could not develop their teaching skills.

Overall, the studies conducted so far concern multiple EFL contexts around the world, probing teachers' perceptions regarding the components of the TEPs they undertook. As such, the necessity of carrying out such an evaluation in the context of Iran cannot be questioned. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated in this study:

1. Based on EFL teachers' perceptions, is there any significant difference in the quality of L2 teacher education programs offered by *Farhangian University* and private language institutes?

2. What are EFL teachers' suggestions for improving the quality/efficiency of such programs?

4. Method

4.1 Participants

At first, 10 teacher educators/trainers (five from *Farhangian University* and five from private language institutes) and 10 EFL teachers (five from each context) were selected using snowball sampling method to be interviewed for developing a questionnaire. To complete the questionnaire data, 140 Iranian EFL teachers (64 at *Farhangian University* and 76 in private language institutes) who had attended the TEPs were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that helps the researcher obtain a representative sample of the population and provides relevant information about the study (Ary et al., 2018). It should be noted that since the experience range of EFL teachers could vary, to eliminate any potential disparities caused by the influence of experience years on the outcomes of the study, the data were only gathered from the teachers with less than three years of teaching experience; this cut-off point was adopted from the study by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), who classified the teachers into two categories of novices with less than three years of experience and experienced teachers with more than four years. The participants were informed that they may be invited to attend an interview session voluntarily. Furthermore, they were assured that withdrawing from the study at any point would not be a problem. Table 1 summarizes the background information related to the participants.

Table 1.

The Demographic Information of the Participants

	Gender		Age		Experience	
	Male	Female	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Farhangian University</i>	33	31	23.76	1.53	1.90	0.90
Private language institutes	20	56	25.31	3.95	2.19	0.85

4.2 Instruments

A questionnaire was developed to address the first research question of the study. First, to design this questionnaire, a comprehensive review of the literature on the criteria of a competent teacher and high-quality teacher education programs was carried out to obtain the relevant themes. Then, individual semi-structured interviews with teacher educators and EFL teachers at *Farhangian University* and private language institutes were conducted to identify the requirements of a qualified EFL teacher and a reliable teacher education program based on their opinions (Appendix A). After transcribing the interviews and finding the relevant themes, the themes obtained from the interviews and reviewing the literature were compiled to reach common themes between the two groups, and finally the questionnaire was designed. This questionnaire consists of two sections: the first section includes 48 items assessing respondents' points of view regarding the teacher education programs they passed within six subscales: program structure (eight items), program courses (ten items), psychology and cognition (three items), professional development (six items), knowledge base (fourteen items), and teacher educators (seven items). There was also a single item at the end of the questionnaire that measured teachers' satisfaction with the TEPs they had taken. This questionnaire should be answered based on a four-point Likert scale ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (4) 'strongly agree' (Appendix B). The second section aimed at collecting participants' demographic information including age, gender, years of experience,

academic degree, major, the context in which they undertook their teacher education/training programs, and contact information (for the follow-up interview). To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, 10 expert teacher educators were asked to review the first draft carefully and suggest any revisions. A pilot study was also conducted with 30 EFL teachers from private language institutes and Farhangian University to identify the possible problems before implementing the survey. Additionally, to check the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was run for every single subscale and the whole questionnaire. The results indicated that the questionnaire was highly reliable with Cronbach's Alpha of .95.

To address the second research question regarding the qualities of teacher education programs and to provide suggestions for improving these programs, a semi-structured focus group interview with two groups of volunteering EFL teachers from Farhangian University and private language institutes was conducted. Focus group interviews are considered to be more beneficial than individual interviews since they provide more comprehensive information in a short period of time by provoking controversial debates among the participants (For a sample of the interview questions, see Appendix C).

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The sequential exploratory mixed method design was used in this study for data collection and analysis. To answer the first research question, 230 questionnaires were distributed among EFL teachers from *Farhangian University* and private language institutes by sending the link of the questionnaire via email or social media such as Telegram and WhatsApp. Only 140 questionnaires remained after 90 questionnaires were excluded due to the fact that the participants had not completely responded to the questionnaire items, had been teaching for more than three years, or had

undertaken their teacher education programs in a context other than Farhangian University or private language institutes. Then, the data were fed into SPSS 26 for further analysis followed by calculating Cronbach's alpha and skewness and kurtosis values to ensure the reliability of responses and normality of distribution, respectively. In the next stage, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine the difference between TEPs in *Farhangian University* and private language institutes within each subscale and in the overall program.

To answer the second research question, the EFL teachers who provided their phone numbers or email addresses for follow-up interviews were invited for two separate focus group interviews; one with five EFL teachers at *Farhangian University* and the other one with five EFL teachers in private language institutes. These interviews, which lasted for approximately 25-40 minutes, were conducted in Farsi so that EFL teachers felt comfortable expressing their ideas regarding suggestions to improve the content of the TEPs they undertook. The interviews were recorded with the prior consent of the participants and transcribed. Following Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) inductive thematic analysis (ITA), a three-stage process of open coding, axial coding, and labeling was adopted to analyze the focus group interviews. At first, the transcripts were read carefully and different codes (including a single sentence to different sentences) indicating useful suggestions for improving the quality of teacher education programs were extracted. Then, two researchers held a session in which they discussed the extracted themes to decide which theme could be the subset of which category. As an illustration, the following codes were extracted from the focus group interview in Farhangian University and private language institutes and were grouped into a single category labeled "reflection and professional development":

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[A teacher at Farhangian University] I wish we could have the opportunity for watching our colleagues in class so that we could assess our/their teaching performance and find our weaknesses or strengths.

[A teacher in a private language institute] I think one of the features of a high-quality TEP is providing professional development courses for teachers after their training to help them with the challenges of the class.

5. Results

5.1 *Farhangian University versus Private Language Institutes' Teacher Education/Training Programs*

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive results including Cronbach's alpha, skewness, and kurtosis values for the overall scores and the six subscales of the TEPs for Farhangian University and private language institutes. As the table illustrates, Cronbach's alpha values vary from 0.67 to 0.89, demonstrating that the teachers' responses to the questionnaire items enjoy a relatively high internal consistency. In addition, the skewness and kurtosis values range from -0.56 to 0.48 and from 0.17 to 0.78, respectively, suggesting that the collected data are normally distributed; therefore, the assumptions for running t-tests were met. The mean and standard deviation for the overall scores as well as the six subscales of the programs are also shown in Table 2. As the table indicates, private language institutes scored higher in general and in every subscale of the program than Farhangian University. Therefore, private language institutes provided better pre-service teacher education programs for student teachers than Farhangian University.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for the Six TEP Subscales

	Farhangian University				Private language institute			
	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD
Program structure	1.02	3.17	2.27	.40	1.02	3.44	2.34	.47
Program courses	.91	3.54	2.32	.48	1.31	3.44	2.34	.41
Program development	1.08	3.28	2.24	0.49	1.08	3.44	2.28	.42

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Psychology & cognition	0.78	0.30	1.98	0.49	0.78	3.11	2.04	.47
Knowledge base	0.93	3.45	2.50	0.54	1.43	3.59	2.66	.42
Teacher educators	0.88	3.37	2.30	0.53	0.92	3.51	2.52	.49
Overall score	0.80	2.55	1.95	0.36	1.23	2.90	2.01	.30

The results of the t-tests (Table 3) revealed that there was not any significant difference concerning the overall quality of teacher education programs of Farhangian University and private language institute: $t(140) = -1.09$, $p = 0.27$; stated differently, both programs behave almost similarly when it comes to preparing pre-service teachers and prepare student teachers in the same way. The findings also indicated a statistically measurable difference between teacher educators at Farhangian University compared to teacher educators in private language institutes $t(140) = -2.51$, $p = 0.01$ with medium effect size, $d = 0.43$. In other words, according to the participating teachers, teacher educators at private language institutes were more qualified and performed better in preparing teachers compared to the teacher educators in Farhangian University. No statistically significant difference was observed in the five remaining subscales of the program (program structure, program course, psychology and cognition, program development, and knowledge base), which means that both programs have the same quality in preparing student teachers considering the five mentioned subscales. As reflected in the last question of the questionnaire regarding teachers' perceptions after attending the TEPs, it is concluded that half of the teachers in private language institutes (46 out of 76 teachers) and *Farhangian University* (35 out of 64 teachers) felt prepared for teaching in the real classroom after attending the TEPs and believed that the program prepared them for their task.

Table 3.

Independent Samples T-test for the Six Subscales and the Overall Scores of Teacher Education Programs of Farhangian University and Private Language Institutes

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>d</i>
Program structure	-0.96	140	0.33	0.16
Program courses	-0.13	140	0.89	0.04
Program development	-0.44	140	0.65	0.08
Psychology & cognition	-0.70	140	0.48	0.12
Knowledge base	-1.93	140	0.55	0.33
Teacher educators	-2.51	140	0.01	0.43
Total program	-1.09	140	0.27	0.18

5.2 Improvements in the Teacher Education Programs

The results of analyzing the interviews yielded six main categories in which the teachers in *Farhangian University* and private language institutes described the TEPs they passed and gave some practical suggestions to improve these programs. To keep the interviewed teachers' identities confidential, pseudonyms were used while quoting them.

Teacher educators. The first category highlighted by almost all interviewees in the focus group interview was the role of teacher educators in the TEPs. Both teachers in private language institutes and *Farhangian University* believed that teacher educators' majors must be related to teaching English.

One of the problems that we had in the TEP we passed was that the teacher educators who were teaching us graduated from other majors, for instance, translation or English literature. It could be a good idea if their major was related to teaching English or at least they would pass CELTA or DELTA courses. (Ali, a teacher at Farhangian University)

Besides, private language institute teachers emphasized the importance of holding the TEPs with experienced teacher educators, as Reza commented:

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Unfortunately, our teacher educators were not experienced enough to train pre-service teachers. I believed that teacher educators must be experienced to teach student teachers for this important job.

Another important aspect that was emphasized by both groups of teachers was that teacher educators must be updated and encourage student teachers in using technology in their classes.

Our teacher educators were not updated at all and they didn't have up-to-date knowledge regarding teaching and training student teachers. They didn't train us to use technology for teaching in our classroom. (Sara, a teacher at Farhangian University)

Finally, regarding the importance of the availability of teacher educators, it was mentioned that teacher educators must be available during and after the program to help student teachers and give them feedback.

Content knowledge. The second category has to do with the necessity of considering the general English proficiency of student teachers before entering the program. Both groups of teachers reported that it is essential that student teachers' general English proficiency level be measured before entering the program and, if necessary, some useful courses be provided to improve their language proficiency.

It might be a good idea if the TEPs worked on improving teachers' general knowledge of English so that student teachers' general English level is not the same as their students'. (Mahdi, a private language institute teacher)

Practice-based education. This category was emphasized in both groups of teachers from different points of view. Farhangian University teachers complained about not having enough opportunities for practicing what they

had learned in the program theoretically. As Navid (a Farhangian University teacher) mentioned:

Although the real classroom is different from our practicum, more teaching opportunities and practicing the things we learned theoretically were necessary to help us be familiar with the real classroom atmosphere and the challenges in advance. Unfortunately, when we entered the real classroom, we were like soldiers left on the battlefield without knowing what to do.

On the other hand, the teachers in private language institutes preferred a balance between practical and theoretical aspects of the program. They believed that they had enough practice opportunities, but they did not know much about the theoretical aspects of the TEPs and language teaching.

In my viewpoint, there should be a balance between the theoretical and practical aspects of the TEP. For instance, we knew that showing the spellings of the new words is the last step in teaching new vocabulary, but we don't know the reason for that. (Ata, private language institute teacher)

Reflection and professional development. In the fourth category of improving the TEPs, both groups of teachers reported the importance of observing different teachers at various levels and peer-watching to evaluate their own teaching performance. Navid (a *Farhangian University* teacher) said:

I wish we could have the opportunity for watching our colleagues in class so that we could assess our/their teaching performance and find our weaknesses or strengths.

Teachers at private language institutes also emphasized the necessity of holding professional development courses after the program to help teachers

overcome the challenges they faced during their teaching and to update their knowledge. In addition, *Farhangian University* teachers mentioned that the TEPs must encourage student teachers to do action research to improve their teaching methods and their performance. Amir said:

The TEPs must train student teachers to be more research-oriented and move toward doing action research. In other words, they must prepare teachers to pursue learning on their own and research to improve and update their teaching knowledge.

Courses/sources/student evaluation. This category focuses on the necessary courses for the TEPs, the quality of the courses, and the courses that must be added or removed from the TEPs. Firstly, *Farhangian University* teachers noted that the courses used in the TEPs they undertook were outdated. Secondly, they reported the necessity of some courses for analyzing and evaluating different course books.

I suppose we could have some courses to evaluate and analyze the coursebooks for teaching English so that we could realize which book is suitable for teaching students with different levels of proficiency. (Reza, a private language institute teacher)

Private language institute teachers also emphasized the use of some courses to teach student teachers how to assess and evaluate learners fairly. Moreover, *Farhangian University* teachers noted that some irrelevant courses must be removed from the curriculum of *Farhangian University*, and instead, some other useful courses related to teaching must be added to the program. Sara said:

Our major is teaching English to students. We don't need courses that are useless and irrelevant to teaching such as the Fundamental

Transformation Document of Education
(Aghamohammadi, 2021).

In this regard, private language institute teachers reported the absence of psychological courses for student teachers so that student teachers learn how to deal with the problematic learners in the classroom.

Length of the program. The last category entails different opinions from both groups of teachers regarding the length of the TEPs. Interviews with Farhangian University teachers revealed that they mostly agreed on holding an intensive TEP instead of a four-year program. Amir said:

An intensive TEP is much better than a four-year program as we can see that those courses held in private language institutes were more successful in preparing student teachers than our long-term program.

In contrast, private language institute teachers believed that the duration of teacher education programs must increase.

In private language institutes, the TEPs are usually short and because of the time limit, the stakeholders are forced to hold the program intensively for long hours. Thus, the student teachers are usually tired and the program is ineffective for them. As a result of the time limitation, the stakeholders have to reduce the number of practicum sessions. (Hanieh)

6. Discussion

The findings of this study cast light on various aspects of the TEPs at Farhangian University and private language institutes to determine whether they differ and to find the program that best prepares EFL teachers for their careers. This aim was achieved by comparing and evaluating these programs and resulted in six different categories of suggestions for improving them. Peacock (2009) also endorses the importance of evaluating the TEPs to make these programs more efficient, and, as a result, to prepare more qualified teachers. The results of the t-tests also indicated that teacher educators in

private language institutes performed better in preparing teachers compared to teacher educators in Farhangian University. Similarly, Yuan and Hu (2017) highlighted the effectiveness of EFL teacher educators in supporting teachers' professional learning and development. Additionally, the results of the study by Masoumpanah et al. (2017) and Gholami and Qorbanzada (2012) on the TEPs in Farhangian University corroborate the findings of our study in that teachers in these programs felt that the program did not meet some of their educational needs and there should be some improvements regarding their courses, practicum, and classroom observations.

The analysis of the qualitative phase also yielded six themes. Concerning the first theme (i.e., teacher educators), the results suggested that teacher educators were not updated, experienced, knowledgeable, and available to the teachers during or after the program. This finding is supported by the results from Ganji et al.'s (2018) study, in which teachers believed that their teacher trainers in private language institutes were not experienced, certified, and skillful to train student teachers. On the other hand, this finding concurs with the results of the study by Agudo (2017), who claimed that the teacher educators in the TEPs of Hong Kong and Spain, respectively, were knowledgeable, experienced, and available to student teachers whenever needed. Prior research, however, did not pose the issue of teacher educators' certificates. A novel finding was that teachers in both contexts suggested that teacher educators' majors be related to teaching English, or they be DELTA or CELTA-certified.

Regarding the second theme, it was recommended that the linguistic proficiency level of student teachers be taken into consideration together with the other crucial competencies, and some helpful courses be provided to improve the linguistic proficiency of student teachers if their level of English proficiency is not satisfactory. In some ways, this result corresponded to the

findings of the study by Agudo (2017) in that the participants of the TEP in Spain agreed that managerial and pedagogical competence were prioritized over English proficiency. Moreover, the study by Peacock (2009) on evaluating the TEPs in Hong Kong confirms these findings as student teachers felt an imbalance in terms of their linguistic, managerial, and pedagogic competence due to the emphasis placed on pedagogy rather than the other two facets.

Considering the third theme, practice-based education, although both groups of teachers discussed its significance, the *Farhangian University* teachers believed that more teaching practice and observation opportunities and less theory should be provided in the curriculum. In contrast, the teachers in private language institutes noted that the TTCs provided them with enough teaching practice and that a balance should be maintained between the theoretical and practical aspects by not focusing excessively on either aspect. These findings are supported by numerous studies in the literature in that they all emphasized the need for having a balance between the theoretical and practical aspects of the program (Agudo, 2017; Akcan, 2016; Arslan & Gulden, 2018; Chaw & Kopp, 2021; Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Ganji et al., 2016; Karakas, 2012; Masoumpanah et al., 2017; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Tajik et al., 2019).

Reflection and professional development comprise the fourth obtained theme in this study. According to both groups of participants, student teachers must be encouraged to reflect by assisting them to do action research. The significant role of reflection was highlighted in the study by Nguyen and Hang Ngo (2018) as the most effective technique for teachers. Dehghan and Sahragard (2015), and Kitchen and Stevens (2008) also echoed the positive role of doing action research in teachers' performance in their studies.

The length of the program, the fifth theme, was controversial among both groups of teachers as they were not satisfied with the length of the TEPs they passed. Private language institute teachers thought their program was very intensive and its duration should be extended. Ganji et al. (2018) also addressed the same issue in their study in which the program was criticized by teachers at private language institutes because of its limited duration. Conversely, Farhangian University teachers considered their program to be very long and they suggested that a one-year program could be more helpful for them.

Finally, the last theme (i.e., the courses/sources) was raised by both groups of teachers as they believed that the programs were out of date and teacher educators did not incorporate updated sources in these programs. These results are consistent with the results of Ganji et al. (2016) on the coursebooks of the TTCs in private language institutes that were not up-to-date and could not meet their needs for teaching English. Contradictory to these findings, the study by Karim et al. (2019), exploring EFL teachers' perception towards the TEPs in Bangladesh, revealed that the content of this TEP was up-to-date and relevant to student teachers' needs, and flexible for teachers in using different teaching approaches. In addition, the teachers in Farhangian University believed that some irrelevant courses to teaching English should be removed from the program. This finding somehow is matched with the findings of the study by Gholami and Qurbanzada (2012) in that the teachers stated that some irrelevant courses such as literature or translation should be removed from Farhangian University's TEP. A new finding of the present study was that teachers in both contexts proposed the idea of providing some courses for evaluating and analyzing the coursebooks. Besides, the teachers in private language institutes pointed to the necessity of

having psychology courses for student teachers to help them deal with the challenges of the learners.

7. Conclusion

The present study revealed that the TEPs in *Farhangian University* and private language institutes were not significantly different in terms of the overall program and the five subscales of program structure, program courses, psychology and cognition, professional development, and knowledge base. The only statistically measurable difference was observed regarding the teacher educators of private language institutes that performed better in preparing student teachers than *Farhangian University* teacher educators. A striking finding of this study was that although there was no significant difference between the TEPs in private language institutes and *Farhangian University*, the mean scores of the overall program and the five subscales in private language institutes were higher than those in *Farhangian University* indicating that private language institutes provided a slightly better program than *Farhangian University*. Besides, some useful suggestions were offered to raise awareness in L2 policymakers in *Farhangian University* and private language institutes, EFL teachers, and teacher educators regarding the teacher education programs and to help them modify the curriculum and the syllabus of the programs based on teachers' needs, to improve the shortcomings observed, and to boost their strengths. As a result, the prospective student teachers will be provided with a high-quality teacher education program which will make them better teachers for the students. More importantly, since the results of this study provided insights into the TEPs and as these programs are considered significant all around the world, the findings of this study are likely to have implications for improving teacher training programs in other countries.

The present study is limited in terms of the years of teaching experience of the participants to minimize the impact of different years of teaching experience. Furthermore, this study was carried out only based on the EFL teachers' perspectives, which means that teacher educators' and policymakers' opinions regarding the teacher education programs in *Farhangian University* and private language institutes were not considered in this research process. Moreover, in light of the fact that longitudinal studies provide in-depth insight into the nature of these programs, it is recommended that future studies be conducted using qualitative or longitudinal studies that examine both Farhangian University and private language institutes' programs over time. Future studies can also explore and compare these two programs based on teacher educators' and policymakers' opinions. Finally, it is suggested to replicate the study using further data collection sources such as official documents mandating how teacher education programs should be administered and field observation of these programs.

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Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview for Teacher educators and EFL Teachers

1. What characteristics a good L2 teacher must have?
2. What requirements/standards should be taken into account in screening initial entry into L2 teacher education programs? What qualities should applicants possess to be eligible to attend such programs?
3. In what ways does a teacher education program influence L2 teachers’ competencies?
4. What features/standards are necessary for a good L2 teacher education program?
5. If you had the authority to modify the L2 teacher education program you have passed/ are running, what amendments would you make?

Appendix B. Exploring Teacher Education/ Training Program Questionnaire

Items

In the teacher education/training program that I undertook,...

Program Structure

1. I became familiar with the program objectives at the outset. there was enough opportunity for teaching practice.
 3. there was enough opportunity to observe experienced teachers’ classroom performance.
 4. there was enough opportunity for developing my critical thinking skills.
-

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5. there was enough opportunity for developing my problem-solving skills.
 6. I became familiar with the basic principles of English as a lingua franca (the idea that native speakers of English should not be regarded as norms for language learning).
 7. I became aware of the effects of ideology and policy on teaching.
 8. I was exposed to up-to-date course books and resources.

rogram courses/modules

- every offered course/module helped me in teaching.
2. suitable courses familiarized me with different linguistic components of English (for example, phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax).
3. there were suitable courses/modules on how to use technology in language teaching.
4. there were enough courses/modules to sufficiently cover all necessary subjects related to language teaching and learning.
5. a good portion of courses/modules focused on improving my language proficiency.
6. a relatively adequate portion of courses/modules focused on the relationship between psychological constructs (e.g. motivation, learning styles and strategies, personality types, etc.) and language teaching/learning.
7. a sufficient number of courses/modules focused on developing teacher-like personality traits among pre-service teachers.
8. a sufficient portion of courses/modules helped me learn how to assess or develop a curriculum.
9. I could properly develop my intercultural competence (which refers to a range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills required to appropriately communicate with people of other cultures).
10. a sufficient number of courses/modules helped me develop my rhetorical skills (the ability to speak and deliver information/knowledge to students effectively).

Psychology and cognition

1. increasing pre-service teachers' motivation for teaching received appropriate focus.
2. the teacher education program took care of the emotions and well-being of pre-service teachers during the program.
3. pre-service teachers had opportunities to collaborate and share their language teaching/learning experiences.

Professional development

1. I had the opportunity to explore my future professional needs.
 2. I received enough care for my professional teacher development within the teacher education program.
 3. I learned how to pursue my professional development independently upon graduation.
 4. I learned to critically examine the teaching philosophies/ideologies underlying my teaching practice.
 5. I understood how to reflect on my teaching practices and evaluate myself.
-

6.the teacher education program encouraged me to explore how my past learning experiences as a student influenced my teaching-related beliefs.

Knowledge base

- 1.I acquired adequate training in classroom management skills (for example, establishing rapport with students, dealing with problem-making students, and managing class time and teaching pace).
- 2.I learned how to deal with contextual constraints (for example, lack of teaching facilities and large class sizes) to minimize their negative impact on language teaching/learning.
- 3.I learned how to develop good lesson plans.
- 4.I learned how to teach oral skills (listening and speaking).
- 5.I learned how to teach written skills (reading and writing).
- 6.I learned how to teach different linguistic components (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation).
- 7.I learned how to deal with students' language-related errors.
- 8.I discovered how students' individual differences (for example, their learning styles and strategies) would influence their language learning.
9. I learned how to design reliable and valid language tests.
- 10.I learned how to engage in small-scale research to improve my teaching.
- 11.I discovered how to properly use students' mother tongue as a pedagogical tool.
- 12.I learned how to critically evaluate/analyze teaching materials.
- 13.I learned how to assess students' progress during the course.
- 14.I learned how to assess students' language ability at the end of the course.

Teacher educators

- 1.the teacher educators/trainers gave feedback that helped me improve teaching.
- 2.the teacher educators/trainers had an acceptable level of English proficiency.
- 3.the teacher educators/trainers had enough theoretical knowledge about language teaching.
- 4.the teacher educators/trainers' instructions were in line with the realities of classrooms.
- 5.the teacher educators/trainers were approachable to pre-service teachers during the program.
- 6.the teacher educators/trainers were good professional role models for pre-service teachers.
- 7.the teacher educators/trainers taught the courses/modules in a dialogic manner (as opposed to a lecture-based approach) by appropriately engaging pre-service teachers in the course/module activities.

Final remarks

Overall, the teacher education program I undertook properly prepared me for my teaching career.

If you like, you can elaborate on your response.

Appendix C. Focus Group Interview Questions for EFL Teachers

1. In your opinion, what improvements can be made to the courses/modules of the teacher education/training program you undertook?

2. How do you think we can improve the content of the teacher education programs to equip teachers with the pedagogical skills they need?

3. What is your suggestion to amend the teacher educators' role or the efficacy of teacher educators in the teacher education program you undertook?

4. In terms of the course books/resources used in the teacher education program, do you see the need for improvement? If yes, how do you improve that?

5. In general, what suggestions do you have to make the teacher education/training programs more useful?



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