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### Research Paper

## Exploring the Perceptions of the Educational Stakeholders Concerning the Most Important Challenges of the Current ELT Curriculum in Iran

Mohadeseh Sedghi

*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Yazd University*

**Ali Mohammad Fazilatfar**<sup>1</sup>

*Full Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Yazd University*

**Ali Akbar Jabbari**

*Full Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Yazd University*

**Mohammad Javad Rezai**

*Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Yazd University*

### Abstract

Despite severe attempts of the policy makers and curriculum designers, English has failed to have a proper position in the ELT educational system, in Iran, resulting in the weak performance of Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the perceptions of the most direct educational stakeholders, concerning the important challenges of the current ELT curriculum. In order to achieve the intended objective, a sequential mixed method survey design was adopted. Moreover, 403 participants from different groups of stakeholders (preservice teachers, in-service teachers, scholars) were selected, and their perceptions were taken into account through various instruments (questionnaire, observation checklist, and interview questions). The results, obtained through qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data, revealed that authenticity, lack of communicative skill, deficiency in teacher training programs, and

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [afazilatfar@yazd.ac.ir](mailto:afazilatfar@yazd.ac.ir)

## 2 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

malfunctioning assessment methods were among the most frequently selected challenges. These viewpoints were different from the perceptions of researchers and policymakers working in this area. Therefore, it would be a good idea to consider the perceptions of direct stakeholders in designing ELT educational syllabi and materials. They are in close contact with the real-world classroom context, and their views may have significant implications for effective material development and curriculum designing.

**Keywords:** Challenge, Curriculum, Educational Stakeholders, Perception.

### 1. Introduction

Globalization has significantly changed the world and made English the most powerful language in various aspects of personal and social life (Crystal, 2022; Pennycook, 2023). Many non-English-speaking countries have realized the strategic position of the English language in gaining an upper hand in the global interaction and economy. As a result, we can observe a rush in the opening of a lot of English language schools, online courses, and other learning materials aimed at enhancing English language skills among students and professionals (Curry & Lillis, 2022).

The Iranian policy makers and educational authorities are also aware of the need for their people to acquire a good command of English in order to compete in the global market (Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022; Morady Moghadam & Murray, 2019). Therefore, serious attempts were made into reforming English language teaching from the primary to the higher levels of public education, making English a compulsory subject at schools and promoting English instruction in higher education institutions (Kiany et al., 2010). However, deciding on the language to be instructed as the foreign language in the academic setting of a country is affected by educational, political, social, economic, and ideological factors (Farhady et al., 2010). Therefore, Foreign Language Education Policies (FLEP), in Iran, are rooted in a multi-dimensional framework, shaped by the historical heritages, educational purposes, socio-political issues, and cultural norms (Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020). Although the documents, published by the government, outline some elevated objectives and strategies, the real implementation of these policies, goals, and techniques has faced countless problems and challenges, leading to the results which were not intended at the disposal of the roadmaps (Kiany et al., 2010; Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020).

This failure has also been confessed by the statistical ranking provided by Education First (2019). Based on the numerical results, published by Education First (2019), which evaluates countries worldwide based on their

English language skills, English proficiency level of Iranians is observing a considerable drop, ranking as the 62<sup>nd</sup> country (low proficiency) among the 116 observed countries. In fact, the gap between the dictated policies and deployed methodologies in language teaching context is significantly large. Therefore, there is a need to uncover the factors playing a role in this misalignment, leading to unfruitful educational results.

Moreover, it has been confessed in various research works that the involvement of stakeholders of the language education system in the process of policy formulation was always ignored (Kiany et al., 2010; Zare & Anani Sarab, 2020). This lack of consideration has led to the gap between the designed policies and the diverse needs of the students studying in the present educational system, leading to inadequacy and impracticality of the proposed policies and instructional methodologies. Thus, there is a need to be concerned with the perception of the direct stakeholders, in the present educational system, about the challenges of the intended policies and the proposed curriculum.

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

The review of the related literature reveals significant gaps in the existing research on the most important challenges of ELT curriculum in Iran, based on the perspectives of the stakeholders in this area. For example, the studies conducted by Mirhosseini and Miryouness Haghi (2023) and Tajeddin and Chamani (2020) have explored different national documents and highlighted their inconsistencies and ideological biases. Hosseini Goodrich (2020) has highlighted the role of ideological biases in material development process. Some other studies have focused on the shortcomings and challenges of the current ELT curriculum. Some research works have emphasized the lack of communicative skill in ELT syllabus (Barabadi & Razmjoo, 2016; Kiany et al., 2010; Kiany et al., 2024; Saidi, 2021; Tafazoli & Egan, 2022; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020). Some other studies have considered authenticity as the significant challenge (Bagheri Nevisi & Moghadasi, 2020; Gholami, 2015; Saidi, 2021; Tafazoli & Egan, 2022; Yarmohammadi, 2002). Moreover, teacher training and assessment issues were highlighted in various qualitative and quantitative research works (Barabadi & Razmjoo, 2016; Davari & Iranmehr, 2021; Safari & Rashidi, 2015; Saidi, 2021).

However, the perspectives of direct key stakeholders, including scholars, experienced teachers, and pre-service teachers, concerning the most important shortcomings or challenges were rarely taken into account. Understanding their insights and challenges is essential for developing a responsive and effective ELT curriculum that addresses the unique needs of the Iranian educational context. Therefore, the present study was conducted to investigate the perception of scholars, in-service teachers, and preservice

## 4 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

teachers regarding the most important ELT curriculum challenges in Iran. In order to meet the objective of the study, three research questions were raised as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of preservice teachers, in Iran, regarding the most important challenges of the current ELT curriculum?
2. What are the perceptions of in-service teachers, in Iran, regarding the most important challenges of the current ELT curriculum?
3. What are the perceptions of scholars, in Iran, regarding the most important challenges of the current ELT curriculum?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

A sequential mixed method survey design was adopted in this study to explore the challenges of the ELT curriculum in Iran. Through the mixed-method design, the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were integrated to provide a comprehensive and holistic analysis of the issue (the challenges of the current ELT curriculum). The sequential process of this study was composed of various stages including the literature review, exploration of participants' perceptions, interviewing the participants, and direct observation of curriculum implementation.

#### 3.2 Participants of the Study

The participant groups included ELT scholars, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers. The reason underlying the participant diversity was that each group could provide a unique perception about the challenges in the current ELT curriculum which can lead to a more comprehensive analysis of the issue. Except for the scholars who were selected through the analysis of their academic background, research works, and the experience in ELT curriculum design and implementation, the rest of the participants were selected through the convenience sampling technique.

The ones selected as the scholars (N=10) were the university instructors and educational supervisors working in the ministry of education (with background in teaching and current job as evaluator and observer). Table 1. provides the results on the frequency and demographic information of the participants in the scholars' group.

**Table 1.**

#### *Frequency and Demographic Information of the Scholars*

		Frequency	Percent
Age	40-49	2	20%
	50 and above	8	80%
Gender	Male	8	80%
	Female	2	20%
Degree	M.A.	1	10%

	Ph.D.	9	90%
Teaching Experience	16 to 25 years	1	10%
	More than 25 years	9	90%
Field of Study	Teaching	10	100%

In-service teachers (N= 269) were selected from the ones teaching English textbooks (*Vision* and *Prospect* versions) in junior and senior high schools across Iran. Table 2. provides the results on the frequency and demographic information of the participants in in-service teachers' group.

**Table 2.***Frequency and Demographic Information of the In-Service Teachers*

		Frequency	Percent
Age	20-29	45	16.7%
	30-39	93	34.6%
	40-49	92	34.2%
	50 and above	39	14.5%
Gender	Male	97	36.1%
	Female	172	63.9%
Degree	B.A.	106	39.4%
	M.A.	134	49.8%
	Ph.D.	29	10.8%
Field of Study	Teaching	202	75.1%
	Literature	26	9.7%
	Translation	37	13.8%
	Others	4	1.5%
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	63	23.4%
	5-15 years	80	29.7%
	16-25 years	73	27.1%
	More than 25	53	19.7%
Rank	senior	101	37.5%
	junior	168	62.5%
Geographical Region	west	44	16.4%
	east	45	16.7%
	north	11	4.1%
	south	30	11.2%
	center	139	51.7%

Pre-service teachers (N=124) were the students currently involved in training programs, in Farhangian universities, to become language teachers. Table 3. provides the results on the frequency and demographic information of the participants in pre-service teachers' group.

**Table 3.***Frequency and Demographic Information of the Pre-Service Teachers*

		Frequency	Percent
Age	20-29	123	99.2%
	30-39	1	.8%
Gender	Male	50	40.3%
	Female	74	59.7%
Degree	B.A.	124	100%
Field of Study	Teaching	124	100%
Experience	Less than 5 years	124	100%

## 6 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

Rank	senior	104	83.9%
	junior	20	16.1%
Geographical Region	west	13	10.5%
	east	3	2.4%
	north	3	2.4%
	south	9	7.3%
	center	96	77.4%

### 3.4 Research Instruments

In order to run a systematic data collection process, three instruments were developed and applied in this study. In this section, the development and administration process of each instrument is provided in detail.

#### 3.4.1 Questionnaire

The first data collection instrument, in this study, was a questionnaire that was constructed based on the challenges of the current ELT curriculum in Iran, elicited from the previous literature. The selected studies (49 articles) were reviewed and explored considering the direct and indirect reference to the challenges. The review method, was in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) framework introduced and raised by Tricco et al. (2018). The derived challenges were summed up and categorized into nine subcategories: Lack of Authentic and Engaging Content; Inadequate Development of Communicative Skills; Absence of Cultural and Social Contexts; Overemphasis on Exam Preparation; Rigid and Centralized Educational System; Insufficient Teacher Training and Support; Political Constraints; Misalignment Between Policy and Classroom Practice; and Inadequate Assessment Methods.

The initial draft of the questionnaire contained extra items that needed to be modified, reduced, or even omitted. Therefore, the supervisor and advisors as well as some of the experienced colleagues cooperated with the researcher during the processes of item modification, the number of items, the format and the structure of the items, and even the word selection and grammaticality of the sentences. Finally, seven items were adopted and adapted to be included in the questionnaire for each challenge (a total of 63 items) in the statement format which was reader friendly and suitable for Likert scale items.

The researcher decided to measure the internal consistency of the items through the Cronbach Alpha coefficient procedure of SPSS. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the questionnaire used in the present study (63 items) was  $\alpha = 0.958$ . Moreover, Table 4. shows the Cronbach Alpha coefficient values for each category.

**Table 4.***Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Values for Each Challenge Category*

Challenge Category	Cronbach's Alpha Values
Lack of authentic and engaging content	0.848
Inadequate development of communicative skills	0.777
Absence of cultural and social contexts	0.875
Overemphasis on exam preparation	0.725
Rigid and centralized educational system	0.701
Insufficient teacher training and support	0.788
Political constraints	0.695
Misalignment between policy and classroom practice	0.718
Inadequate assessment methods	0.787

After finishing the initial questionnaire development phase and going through the validation and piloting stages, there was a need for another approval stage. This stage is often fulfilled by a statistical procedure called Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The primary results showed an acceptable correlation rate (*Determinant Value*= 6.60). Moreover, the KMO and Bartlett's Test were run to indicate the factorability of the data. The results revealed that  $KMO=0.948$  (which is above 0.6), and that Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $p=.000$ ); therefore, the factorability of the data was confirmed.

### 3.4.2 Interview

After finishing the data collection process through questionnaires, 10 in-service teachers were selected to participate in an interview concerned with the most important challenges of the ELT curriculum in Iran. The researcher-developed interview was composed of five questions and their equivalent Persian translation. Since the interview was developed in the semi-structured format, the developed questions were not rigidly structured. Each domain included a couple of items denoting similar concepts.

At the next stage, the designed Persian and English interview questions were provided to some ELT scholars, and their comments were implemented on the items.

Interviews lasted from 10 to 20 minutes based on the expansion of the answers provided by the participants and all the interviews were recorded to be transcribed later. After finishing the transcription stage, the scripts were translated into English (the ones that were in Persian), and they were coded to be thematically analyzed.

### 3.4.3 Observation

In this study, an observation checklist composed of 24 items was also developed by the researcher. The mentioned checklist consisted of items on related nine challenges extracted from the literature to identify the most important ones. It was designed in a five-point Likert scale format (ranging

## 8 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) that allowed the observer to record the extent to which his observations agreed with the statements representing the reviewed challenges.

The validity and reliability of the items in the checklist were approved by the comments and revisions provided by the scholars involved in the educational system of high schools in Iran. As a result, 10 classes were selected and observed by the researcher. The observation sessions lasted from forty to fifty minutes based on the break times of different high schools.

#### **3.5 Data Collection Procedure**

This study went through several steps in order to have a systematic investigation of the most important challenges of ELT curriculum within the context of Iran.

In the first step, the specific research works, focused on the challenges of ELT educational system, in the context of Iran, were taken into account. Codification and theme analysis of the articles were done with great care to avoid any ambiguity (based on PRISMA-ScR framework introduced and raised by Tricco et al. (2018)). The derived challenges were summed up and categorized into nine subcategories:

1. Lack of Authentic and Engaging Content
2. Inadequate Development of Communicative Skills
3. Absence of Cultural and Social Contexts
4. Overemphasis on Exam Preparation
5. Rigid and Centralized Educational System
6. Insufficient Teacher Training and Support
7. Political Constraints
8. Misalignment Between Policy and Classroom Practice
9. Inadequate Assessment Methods

Based on the extracted challenges, a Likert-Scale type questionnaire was developed. Moreover, some interview questions were developed to guide the interview process needed for the qualitative phase of the study. Finally, an observation checklist was designed to help the researcher through the process of actual observation of ELT classrooms.

In the next step, the intended participants, from different stakeholder populations, were selected through convenience (preservice and in-service teachers) and purposive (scholars) sampling techniques.

After that, the quantitative and qualitative data, collected out of the literature investigation, questionnaire administration, interview implementation, and observation, were analyzed and interpreted to face different dimensions of language learning and their challenges, in Iran, to

provide an approach that can help the revision and refinement of the current ELT curriculum.

#### 4. Results

As mentioned before, this study was concerned with the perceptions of three groups of the influential educational stakeholders, considering the current ELT curriculum challenges in Iran.

##### 4.1 Preservice Teachers

The performance of all the pre-service teachers, on the questionnaire items, was analyzed through a repeated measure ANOVA. The results revealed that the highest mean score was associated with authenticity ( $M = 20.77$ ,  $SD = 6.23$ ), indicating a strong recognition of its importance among the participants. Then, it is closely followed by communicative skills ( $M = 20.15$ ,  $SD = 5.99$ ) and teacher training ( $M = 20.15$ ,  $SD = 5.70$ ), suggesting their prominence in shaping educational outcomes. However, the significance of the difference between the priority given to these challenges needed to be examined through multivariate tests provided in Table 5.

**Table 5.**

*Multivariate Results on the Challenge Selection by Pre-Service Teachers*

Effect		V alue	F	Hypot hesis df	Er ror df	Si g.	Partial Eta Squared
cha llenge	Pillai's Trace	.4 45	1 1.63	8.000	1 16.0	.0 00	.445
	Wilks' Lambda	.5 55	1 1.63	8.000	1 16.0	.0 00	.445
	Hotelling's Trace	.8 02	1 1.63	8.000	1 16.0	.0 00	.445
	Roy's Largest Root	.8 02	1 1.63	8.000	1 16.0	.0 00	.445

The multivariate tests, presented in Table 5, showed the combined effect of challenges on the outcome. The results revealed significant differences between the priority of the challenges (Wilks' Lambda = 0.555,  $F(8) = 11.632$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, a deeper pairwise comparison was needed to identify the significance of the differences among the challenges. The pairwise results demonstrated that certain challenges such as authenticity ( $M = 20.77$ ,  $SD = 6.24$ ), communicative skills (Mean = 20.15,  $SD = 5.99$ ), and teacher training ( $M = 20.15$ ,  $SD = 5.70$ ) were the most frequently highlighted ones by the participants, and they were significantly higher than the other ones. Moreover, other challenges such as assessment methods (Mean = 19.89,  $SD = 5.31$ ) and policy-practice misalignment (Mean = 19.19,  $SD = 4.15$ ) were also significant issues compared to the rest of the challenges (less frequent ones).

#### 4.2 Inservice Teachers

In order to be in line with the generalizability principle, the researcher did her best to include in-service participants from different age groups, genders, degrees, fields of study in English, teaching experience, ranks, and geographical regions. In order to identify the effect of each of the mentioned autobiographical categories on the responses provided by the participants seven One-Way Between-Groups MANOVAs were carried out.

The first MANOVA analysis was conducted to check the effect of geographical region on the selection of the specified challenges. The multivariate results are represented in Table 6.

**Table 6.**

*Multivariate Results for In-Service Teachers' Geographical Region*

Effect		V	F	Hypot	Er	Si	Partial
		alue		hesis df	ror df	g.	Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's	.9	50	9.000	25	.0	.947
	Trace	47	7.0		6.0	00	
	Wilks'	.0	50	9.000	25	.0	.947
	Lambda	53	7.0		6.0	00	
	Hotelling's	1	50	9.000	25	.0	.947
	Trace	7.82	7.0		6.0	00	
Geographic al region	Roy's	1	50	9.000	25	.0	.947
	Largest Root	7.82	7.0		6.0	00	
	Pillai's	.1	1.	36.00	10	.2	.039
	Trace	57	175	0	36.	23	
	Wilks'	.8	1.	36.00	96	.2	.040
	Lambda	50	179	0	1.0	19	
Geographic al region	Hotelling's	.1	1.	36.00	10	.2	.040
	Trace	67	183	0	18.	14	
	Roy's	.0	2.	9.000	25	.0	.085
	Largest Root	92	658 <sup>c</sup>		9.0	06	

As it is illustrated in Table 6, multivariate test statistics ( $F(36) = 1.179$ , Wilks' Lambda = 0.850,  $p$ -value = 0.219) revealed that geographical region may not significantly affect the selection of the challenges. In addition, just 4.0 % of the variance in the challenge selection can be explained by geographical region (Partial Eta Squared = 0.040, indicating an ignorable effect size).

The effect of academic degree on the selection of the specified challenges was checked by conducting the second MANOVA analysis. The multivariate results are represented in Table 7.

**Table 7.**

*Multivariate Results for In-Service Teachers' Degree*

Effect		V	F	Hypot	Er	Si	Partial
		alue		thesis df	ror df	g.	Eta Squared
In tercept	Pillai's	.9	60	9.000	25	.0	.955
	Trace	55	6.99		8.0	00	
	Wilks'	.0	60	9.000	25	.0	.955
	Lambda	45	6.99		8.0	00	
	Hotelling's	.17	6.99	9.000	25	.0	.955
	Trace	21			8.0	00	
D egree	Pillai's	.0	.92	18.000	51	.5	.031
	Trace	63	9		8.000	44	
	Wilks'	.9	.92	18.000	51	.5	.031
	Lambda	38	7 <sup>b</sup>		6.0	46	
	Hotelling's	.0	.92	18.000	51	.5	.031
	Trace	65	5		4.0	48	
	Roy's	.0	1.2	9.000	25	.2	.041
	Largest Root	.17	6.99		8.0	00	
		43	42 <sup>c</sup>		9.0	69	

The numerical results represented in Table 7 showed academic degree may not significantly affect the selection of the challenges ( $F(18) = 0.927$ , Wilks' Lambda = 0.938,  $p$ -value = 0.546). Moreover, the results revealed that only 3.1 % (Partial Eta Squared = 0.031) of the variance in the challenge selection can be explained by the academic degree of the in-service teachers.

The effect of teaching experience of the in-service teachers on the selection of the specified challenges was checked by conducting the third MANOVA analysis. The multivariate results are represented in Table 8.

**Table 8.**

*Multivariate Results for In-Service Teachers' Teaching Experience*

Effect		V	F	Hypo	E	S	Partia	
		alue		thesis df	ror df	ig.	l Eta Squared	
Intercept	Pillai's	.	9	9.000	2	.	.970	
	Trace	970	20.3		57.0	000		
	Wilks'	.	9	9.000	2	.	.970	
	Lambda	030	20.3		57.0	000		
	Hotelling's	.223	20.3	9.000	2	.	.970	
	Trace	3			57.0	000		
Teaching experience	Pillai's	.	1.	27.00	7	.	.043	
	Trace	129	298	0	77.0	143		
	Wilks'	.	1.	27.00	7	.	.044	
	Lambda	875	301	0	51.2	142		
	Hotelling's	.138	303	0	27.00	7	.	.044
	Trace	138			67.0	140		
	Roy's	.	2.	9.000	2	.	.078	
	Largest Root	084	423		59.0	012		

## 12 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

The multivariate test statistics provided in Table 8 showed that teaching experience (provided in four categories) does not significantly affect the selection of the challenges ( $F(27) = 1.301$ , Wilks' Lambda = 0.875,  $p$ -value = 0.142). Moreover, the results revealed that only 4.4 % (Partial Eta Squared = 0.044) of the variance in the challenge selection can be explained by the teaching experience of the in-service teachers.

The fourth MANOVA analysis was conducted to check the effect of age on the selection of the specified challenges. The multivariate results are represented in Table 9.

**Table 9.**

*Multivariate Results for In-Service Teachers' Age*

Effect		V alue	F	Hypoth esis df	Er ror df	Si g.	Partial Eta Squared
In tercept	Pillai's	.9	79	9.000	25	.0	.965
	Trace	.65	0.72		7.0	.00	
	Wilks' Lambda	.35	0.72		7.0	.00	.965
	Hotelling's	.27	79	9.000	25	.0	.965
	Trace	.69	0.72		7.0	.00	
	Roy's Largest Root	.27 .69	79 0.72	9.000	25 7.0	.0 .00	.965
A ge	Pillai's	.0	.70	27.000	77	.8	.024
	Trace	.72	9		7.0	.62	
	Wilks' Lambda	.29	7	27.000	1.2	.64	.024
	Hotelling's	.0	.70	27.000	76	.8	.024
	Trace	.74	5		7.0	.66	
	Roy's Largest Root	.0 .37	1.0 76 <sup>c</sup>	9.000	25 9.0	.3 .81	.036

According to the statistical results represented in Table 9, multivariate test statistics ( $F(27) = 0.707$ , Wilks' Lambda = 0.929,  $p$ -value = 0.864) revealed that age group does not significantly affect the selection of the challenges. In addition, it was revealed that just 2.4 % of the variance in the challenge selection can be explained by age (Partial Eta Squared = 0.024, indicating an ignorable effect size).

The effect of Gender of the in-service teachers on the selection of the specified challenges was checked by conducting the fifth MANOVA analysis. The multivariate results are represented in Table 10.

**Table 10.**

*Multivariate Results for In-Service Teachers' Gender*

Effect		V alue	F	Hypot hesis df	Er ror df	Si g.	Partial Eta Squared
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In tercept	Pillai's	.9	85	9.000	25	.0	.968
	Trace	68	8.30		9.0	00	
	Wilks'	.0	85	9.000	25	.0	.968
	Lambda	32	8.30		9.0	00	
	Hotelling's	.29	85	9.000	25	.0	.968
	Trace	.82	8.30		9.0	00	
G ender	Pillai's	.0	1.4	9.000	25	.1	.046
	Trace	46	00 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	88	
	Wilks'	.9	1.4	9.000	25	.1	.046
	Lambda	54	00 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	88	
	Hotelling's	.0	1.4	9.000	25	.1	.046
	Trace	49	00 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	88	
	Roy's	.0	1.4	9.000	25	.1	.046
	Largest Root	49	00 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	88	

The multivariate results provided in Table 10 showed that, unlike pre-service teachers, in in-service group, gender does not significantly affect the selection of the challenges ( $F(9) = 1.400$ , Wilks' Lambda = 0.954,  $p$ -value = 0.188). Moreover, the results revealed that only 4.6 % (Partial Eta Squared = 0.046) of the variance in the challenge selection can be explained by the gender of the in-service teachers.

The sixth MANOVA analysis was conducted to check the effect of field of study on the selection of the specified challenges. The multivariate results are represented in Table 11.

**Table 11.**

*Multivariate Results for In-Service Teachers' Field of Study*

Effect		V	F	Hypot	Er	Si	Partial
		alue		hesis df	ror df	g.	Eta Squared
Inter cept	Pillai's	.8	17	9.000	2	.0	.861
	Trace	61	6.46		57.0	00	
	Wilks'	.1	17	9.000	2	.0	.861
	Lambda	39	6.46		57.0	00	
	Hotelling's	.6	17	9.000	2	.0	.861
	Trace	180	6.46		57.0	00	
field ofstudy	Roy's	.6	17	9.000	2	.0	.861
	Largest Root	180	6.46		57.0	00	
	Pillai's	.0	.7	27.000	7	.8	.024
	Trace	73	13		77.0	58	
	Wilks'	.9	.7	27.000	7	.8	.024
	Lambda	29	11		51.2	60	
	Hotelling's	.0	.7	27.000	7	.8	.024
	Trace	75	09		67.0	62	
	Roy's	.0	1.	9.000	2	.2	.042
	Largest Root	43	251 <sup>c</sup>		59.0	64	

The numerical results, represented in Table 11, demonstrated that field of study cannot significantly affect the selection of the challenges ( $F(27) = 0.711$ , Wilks' Lambda = 0.929,  $p$ -value = 0.860). Moreover, the results

## 14 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

revealed that only 2.4 % (Partial Eta Squared = 0.024) of the variance in the challenge selection can be explained by the field of study of the in-service teachers.

The effect of rank of the in-service teachers on the selection of the specified challenges was checked by conducting the last MANOVA analysis. The multivariate results are represented in Table 12.

**Table 12.**

*Multivariate Results for In-Service Teachers' Rank*

Effect		V alue	F	Hypoth esis df	Er ror df	Si g.	Partial Eta Squared
In tercept	Pillai's	.9	87	9.000	25	.0	.968
	Trace	68	9.72		9.0	00	
	Wilks'	.0	87	9.000	25	.0	.968
	Lambda	32	9.72		9.0	00	
	Hotelling's	30	87	9.000	25	.0	.968
	Trace	.57	9.72		9.0	00	
R ank	Roy's	30	87	9.000	25	.0	.968
	Largest Root	.57	9.72		9.0	00	
	Pillai's	.0	.86	9.000	25	.5	.029
	Trace	29	2 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	60	
	Wilks'	.9	.86	9.000	25	.5	.029
	Lambda	71	2 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	60	
	Hotelling's	.0	.86	9.000	25	.5	.029
	Trace	30	2 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	60	
	Roy's	.0	.86	9.000	25	.5	.029
	Largest Root	30	2 <sup>b</sup>		9.0	60	

Based on the multivariate test statistics, represented in Table 12, rank of the in-service teachers does not significantly affect the selection of the challenges (F (9) = 0.862, Wilks' Lambda = 0.971, p-value = 0.560). In addition, it was revealed that just 2.9 % of the variance in the challenge selection can be explained by rank (Partial Eta Squared = 0.029, indicating an ignorable effect size).

Therefore, autobiographical categories did not significantly affect the responses (challenge selection) by in-service teachers. Now, there was a need to run a one-way repeated measures ANOVA to identify whether participants' perceptions significantly varied across the identified challenges and the magnitude of these differences. The descriptive statistics provided insights into the mean and standard deviation of various challenges perceived by in-service teachers. Authenticity (M = 19.82, SD = 5.46) indicated the highest mean score among the participants. Then, it was followed by teacher training (M = 19.45, SD = 5.09) and assessment method (M = 19.35, SD = 4.84), suggesting their prominence in shaping educational outcomes.

**Table 13.**

*Multivariate Results on the Challenge Selection by In-Service Teachers*

Effect		V	F	Hypot	Er	Si	Partial
		alue		hesis df	ror df	g.	Eta Squared
cha llenge	Pillai's	.3	18	8.000	26	.0	.368
	Trace	.68	.98		1.0	.00	
	Wilks'	.6	18	8.000	26	.0	.368
	Lambda	.32	.981 <sup>c</sup>		1.000	.00	
	Hotelling's	.5	18	8.000	26	.0	.368
	Trace	.82	.98		1.0	.00	
Roy's	.5	18	8.000	26	.0	.368	
Largest Root	.82	.98		1.0	.00		

The multivariate tests, presented in Table 13, revealed significant effects of the challenges (Wilks' Lambda = 0.632,  $F(8) = 18.981$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, the partial eta squared value of 0.368, suggested that 36.8 % of the variance in the dependent variables is explained by these challenges. However, a deeper pairwise comparison is needed to identify the significance of the differences among the challenges. The pairwise results on certain challenges such as Authenticity ( $M = 19.82$ ,  $SD = 5.46$ ), teacher training ( $M = 19.45$ ,  $SD = 5.09$ ), and assessment method ( $M = 19.35$ ,  $SD = 4.84$ ) that were the most frequently highlighted ones by the participants, and they were significantly higher than the other ones.

### 4.3 Scholars

The participants, in the scholars' group, were selected based on their research and educational background and instructional experience. Therefore, autobiographical categories were not taken into account for the participants in the mentioned group. The results (obtained through one-way repeated measures ANOVA) revealed that communicative skills ( $M = 19.00$ ,  $SD = 3.46$ ) indicated the highest mean score among the participants. Then, it was followed by authenticity ( $M = 18.20$ ,  $SD = 3.32$ ), teacher training ( $M = 18.00$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ), and assessment method ( $M = 19.35$ ,  $SD = 4.84$ ). On the other hand, the lowest mean is observed for sociocultural context ( $M = 14.80$ ,  $SD = 3.49$ ), reflecting lesser focus on this factor compared to others. However, the significance of these challenges needed to be examined through multivariate tests provided in Table 14.

**Table 14.**

#### *Multivariate Results on the Challenge Selection by Scholars*

Effect		Va	F	Hypoth	Er	Si	Partial
		alue		esis df	ror df	g.	Eta Squared
cha llenge	Pillai's	.9	60	8.000	2.	.0	.996
	Trace	.96	.394		.000	.16	
	Wilks'	.0	60	8.000	2.	.0	.996
	Lambda	.04	.394		.000	.16	
	Hotelling's	.24	60	8.000	2.	.0	.996
	Trace	1.57	.394		.000	.16	

## 16 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

Roy's	24	60	8.000	2.	.0	.996
Largest Root	1.57	.394		000	16	

The multivariate tests, presented in Table 14, revealed significant effects of the challenges (Wilks' Lambda = 0.004,  $F(8) = 60.394$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ). Moreover, the partial eta squared value of 0.996, suggested that 99.6 % of the variance in the dependent variables is explained by these challenges. However, a deeper pairwise comparison is needed to identify the significance of the differences among the challenges. The pairwise results on certain challenges such as communicative skills ( $M = 19.00$ ,  $SD = 3.46$ ), authenticity ( $M = 18.20$ ,  $SD = 3.32$ ), teacher training ( $M = 18.00$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ), and assessment method ( $M = 19.35$ ,  $SD = 4.84$ ) were the most frequently highlighted ones by the participants, and they were significantly higher than the other ones.

#### 4.4 Holistic Comparison of the Perceptions of the Stakeholders

In order to have a holistic view of the perceptions of the stakeholders in different groups, a One-Way Between-Group ANOVA was conducted. Table 15 provides the variance results on the total scores in the three expertise groups.

**Table 15.**

*Variance Results on the General Performance of the Participants on the Questionnaire*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5315.333	2	2657.667	2.099	.124
Within Groups	506393.540	400	1265.98		
Total	511708.873	402			

As represented in Table 15, experienced teachers ( $M = 168.21$ ,  $SD = 33.99$ ), pre-service teachers ( $M = 173.46$ ,  $SD = 39.69$ ), and scholars ( $M = 152.40$ ,  $SD = 18.46$ ) did not reveal any significant between-group variability (Sum of Squares = 5315.3;  $F = 2.099$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.124$ ) in their total scores on the questionnaire. Moreover, the multiple comparisons results obtained through Tukey's HSD test demonstrated that none of the pairwise differences between the groups were statistically significant.

#### 4.5 Class Observation Checklists

The one-way repeated measures ANOVA was run to identify whether the class performances significantly varied across the application of the identified challenges and magnitude of these differences. The significance of the

differences in the mean scores was examined through multivariate tests provided in Table 16.

**Table 16.**

*Multivariate Results on the Observation Mean Scores*

Effect		V alue	F	Hypoth esis df	Er ror df	Si g.	Partial Eta Squared
f actor l	Pillai's	.5	3.	3.000	7.	.0	.595
	Trace	95	429 <sup>b</sup>		000	81	
	Wilks'	.4	3.	3.000	7.	.0	.595
	Lambda	05	429 <sup>b</sup>		000	81	
	Hotelling's	1.	3.	3.000	7.	.0	.595
	Trace	470	429 <sup>b</sup>		000	81	
	Roy's	1.	3.	3.000	7.	.0	.595
	Largest Root	470	429 <sup>b</sup>		000	81	

The multivariate tests, presented in Table 16, revealed non-significant difference between the observed challenges (Wilks' Lambda = 0.405,  $F(3, 7) = 3.429$ ,  $p = 0.081$ ) in the intended classes. Moreover, the partial eta squared value of 0.595, suggested that 59.5 % of the variance in the dependent variables is explained by these challenges. Moreover, the pairwise comparisons revealed no significant two-by-two differences.

#### 4.6 Interview Results

The interview set was concerned with the perceptions of in-service teachers about the main challenges in the current ELT classes: "*What are some of the main challenges you encounter with the current ELT curriculum? Do you feel the curriculum allows you the flexibility to adapt lessons to meet your students' needs, and if so, how?*"

Most of the mentioned challenges were in line with the challenges extracted from the literature. Teachers mainly focused of rigid curriculum and teach-to-test approach as their main challenge, attempting to have more effective classes.

For example, Mr. Saadat said:

*"One of the main issues is its rigidity. Many of my students come from various backgrounds and have different learning styles, but the curriculum tends to prioritize a one-size-fits-all approach. Moreover, the curriculum emphasizes standardized testing and rote memorization. Overall, these limitations stop me to adapt the lessons effectively, thus, both me and my students feel frustrated our teaching and learning process."*

Ms. Negahban, in a comprehensive uncovering of the issue, mentioned that:

*"Since the curriculum is designed to be provided to different students with different language backgrounds and capabilities, they are fixed and rigid and avoid flexibility. Moreover, the assessment methods are unidimensional*

*which may pose some challenges for the students. I believe that if the policy-makers cannot provide more flexibility in their instructional materials, they should provide the teachers with facilities and infrastructures that they can have more flexibility in teaching and evaluation of the studies.”*

In addition, Mr. Moradi mentioned that:

*“The curriculum is rigid and distracted..... For example, the grammatical content gets to be so hard when the students get to senior high school (this was not the case in junior high school), and if the students do not attend language institute classes (out of the school), they cannot follow the lessons successfully..... This makes the students demotivated, because they think that they do not have the talent to the learn a new language.”*

Moreover, Ms. Khezri believed that:

*“Not much. Because I have to teach to the test. The biggest problem is the final exams at the end of the educational year managed by the educational department for all schools. This makes the students terrified. We just have to cover the book chapters as fast as we can and then practice the question samples of the previous years.*

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The results, in this study, provides critical insights about the perceptions of different groups of stakeholders on the challenges of the current ELT curriculum in Iran. The qualitative and quantitative results obtained by the application of the mentioned instruments have demonstrated that the most important challenges (authenticity, communicative competence, teacher training, and assessment methods) were similarly and consistently taken into account by both groups of pre-service and in-service teachers as well as the scholars. These findings are in line with other research works carried out on ELT curriculum challenges in the Iranian and global educational settings.

Previous research works have emphasized the importance of communicative competence in ELT syllabus or curriculum design process, considering that the educational plans should concentrate on how languages are used in actual situations and interactive classroom contexts (Barabadi & Razmjoo, 2016; Kiany et al., 2010; Kiany et al., 2024; Saidi, 2021; Tafazoli & Egan, 2022; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020). The findings, obtained in the present study, confirm the fact that inadequate development of communicative skills turns to be the greatest concern of the stakeholders.

Authenticity, which is concerned with the match between the class activities and the use of real-world language samples and contextually meaningful tasks, is widely seen as one of the most important factors facilitating the language learning process (Bagheri Nevisi & Moghadasi, 2020; Saidi, 2021; Tafazoli & Egan, 2022; Yarmohammadi, 2002). The

homogeneity of the current findings with the previous trends implies that ELT curriculum reform needs to be targeted at making learning more communicatively engaging and authentic.

Moreover, teacher training was another key concern among the participants in all three groups, suggesting that teachers who are poorly trained find it difficult to apply communicative and student-centered methodologies with success. The perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers are in line with various research works that have emphasized the inadequate teacher training process as one of the most significant factors affecting unfruitful educational results (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017; Barabadi & Razmjoo, 2016; Davari & Iranmehr, 2021; Safari & Rashidi, 2015; Saidi, 2021). Therefore, a cumulative look at these results and the ones obtained on other research works confirm the need for regular professional development courses that provide teachers with the theoretical and practical skills they need to master modern ELT methods.

Inadequate assessment methods were also noted as one of the key challenges. Previous studies (Abbasian & Khadempir, 2018; Safari & Rashidi, 2015) have emphasized the overreliance on traditional, grammar-oriented testing techniques as one of the sources of failure in ELT educational settings.

The overall results of the perception questionnaire have revealed that all groups of stakeholders had similar views about the key challenges of the current ELT curriculum, including authenticity, communicative competence, teacher training problems, and assessment issues. This convergence shows that the declared ideas were not subjective concerns of a special group in a specific context, but they were shared concerns among all groups of stakeholders. The observed consensus can affirm the idea that the future reformation processes should be based on the frequently cited issues in this study to be strongly supported by the target population. Simultaneously, the low priority given to socio-cultural and identity related issues show a great gap between the theoretical and faces of the educational system and the immediate concerns of the teachers in the real classroom context. In other words, although theory highlights the significant role of culture and identity, the educational practitioners are more focused on training issues. This discrepancy and mismatch call for the great need to include more practical and sociocultural issues in the teacher training programs to have a transformation in teachers' ideas from mere pedagogy to social characteristic of the language.

In conclusion, in the present study, the researchers did their best to identify the perceptions of different group of stakeholders considering the priority of the identified set of challenges. Moreover, it was attempted to

compare the groups concerning their perceptions and no significant difference was observed. These results affirm the idea that different groups of stakeholders had similar positions and ideas regarding the shortcomings of the current ELT curriculum, despite their differences in age, gender, educational degree, geographical region, etc. Thus, the biographical value had minimal influence on the responses of the participants about the obstacles of the ELT curriculum in Iran. The findings highlight the point that stakeholders' views about the challenges of ELT curriculum might be different from the results obtained in the literature which are highlighting cultural or social concerns. These results highlight the gap and disconnection between the research studies on various aspects of educational system, the real-world classroom practices, and the perceptions of the ones involved in these contexts. Therefore, it could be concluded that there is an urgent need for comprehensive reforms in the ELT educational system in Iran. The most pressing issues such as lack of authenticity in language instruction, inadequate communicative skills training, insufficient teacher preparation, and flawed assessment methods, must be addressed through a multidimensional approach.

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## 22 Teaching English Language

### Exploring the Perceptions....

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