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Evaluation of the Undergraduate TEFL Program at Farhangian University: Merits and Demerits

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to evaluate the undergraduate TEFL program at Farhangian University. The university specializes in educating prospective teachers and the program is important since it is expected to equip the student teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for qualified teachers. Hence, in this study, measures were taken to investigate the merits and demerits of the implemented TEFL program and explore the domains in which the program needs to be improved. The study assessed the program from the perspectives of 220 student teachers, 32 teacher educators, and 12 heads of departments and experts including the university deans, deputies, and research and teaching staff, through using three instruments, i.e. questionnaires, interviews, and observations in a mixed methods design .The findings indicated that the TEFL program did not address some educational and administrative needs as the participants believed that they were not enriched with the necessary skills, the practice of the learned theories, problem solving, critical thinking, flexibility, and innovation. Furthermore, this study demonstrated several theory- practice gaps in the curriculum.

Keywords: Evaluation; Undergraduate TEFL program; Farhangian University; Merits; Demerit

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1. Introduction

The rapid changes in our current information age and the expanded global role of English inevitably compel the decision-makers and stakeholders in schools and universities to find new schemes for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programs. These programs focus on established frameworks, procedures, and methods, train language teachers for their professional activities, and are expected to equip teachers with ideological, language-specific, and pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Farhangian University specializes in educating teachers in different fields of study including TEFL. The purpose of the founders of the university is to enhance teacher education in Iran. More than 50,000 student teachers (including 2149 TEFL student teachers) have been admitted to this university in three years since its establishment in 2012. The mission of the university is to educate student teachers based on the principles of Islamic teachings and domestic settings in order to become competent qualified teachers.

Teacher education at this university has expanded very rapidly during the last few years and more and more TEFL courses are held in different campuses. Accordingly, some policies have been taken by the decision makers with the purpose of improving teacher education at this university. First of all, the university's admission policy demands volunteers to participate in interviews for physical, psychological, and ideological qualifications after being accepted in National University Entrance Examination. Thus, being checked through several filters, the input for the university is supposed to have the maximum qualifications as prospective teachers. Secondly, student teachers at Farhangian University are employed and paid by the Ministry of Education at the onset of their entrance; thus, their educational attainments are important as certifying teaching competencies. Hence, the program for these students needs to be designed

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carefully to effectively prepare them for their job and maximize the output qualifications. Thus, the current program at this university is different from the teacher education program implemented for a long time in different universities in Iran.

The fundamental question about the TEFL program at this university relates to how differently it has been designed from the previous TEFL programs, and more importantly, how the differences may have caused challenges and opportunities. In order to make sure that this program is relevant to the aims and addresses the concerns of stakeholders, program evaluation models advocating systematic evaluation of programs need to be performed.

Although a great deal of research has been devoted to examine TEFL programs, it must be remembered that their findings can hardly be generalized to this specific situation. This is due to the fact that the TEFL program implemented at Farhangian University is different from what is implemented in other universities. In other words, the findings from the literature might not show the merits and demerits and the needs of the student teachers at this University. Therefore, this study investigated the success of the implemented TEFL program at this university.

2. Review of the Literature

A great deal of research has been devoted to examining TEFL programs. Quite a large number of these studies focus on investigating the strengths and shortcomings of TEFL programs and how to improve them through proposing frameworks and models for the evaluation of these programs. Such models provide insights into participants and data collection procedures of the program evaluation studies. Minott and Young (2009), for instance, proposed *evaluation survey* through *reflective journaling* for collecting data from students to evaluate programs. Although this method provided a large amount of data, the participants (as the only source of data)

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needed to be trained as reflective practitioners. On the other hand, *Utilization-focused approach,* proposed by Patton (2012) was used to gather data from different groups of stakeholders. He focused on the intended use by the intended users illustrating how this approach helped to ensure actual users and the utility of evaluation practices. In contrast to the externally imposed evaluation, internal evaluation in this approach can be less of a threat or pressure, and more of a motivating and involving nature leading to program improvement.

Another method used to collect data from different stakeholders was proposed by Peacock (2009), who investigated a teacher-training program and presented a new procedure for the evaluation of EFL teacher-training programs. This model focuses on "program strengths and weaknesses and the extent to which it meets the needs of students" (p. 259).Besides, *CIPP Evaluation Model Checklist* (Stufflebeam, 2007) is a comprehensive framework focusing on program evaluations, particularly those aimed at affecting long-term, sustainable improvements. This checklist addresses the following issues within the curriculum: Context, Input, Process, and Product evaluation (the latter is divided into impact, effectiveness, sustainability, and transportability evaluations). However, CIPP evaluations should complement rather than supplant other defensible evaluations of an entity. Meta-evaluation (evaluation of an evaluation) should be done through the evaluation process. Thus, in order to validate the summative evaluation, a meta-evaluation checklist was also proposed and developed by Stufflebeam (2012) that allowed scoring evaluations and was organized according to the Joint Committee Program Evaluation Standards (2011).

In Iran, some scholars have used different models and procedures for the evaluation of TEFL programs in different universities or centres. Zamanian and Mobashshernia (2011), for instance, investigated the PhD program for TEFL in Iranian universities to cast light on its strengths and

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weaknesses. However, in their study, the only source for collecting data was the internet guides and directories in a PhD program, where there might be some inaccuracies.

Another common data collection procedure used by the Iranian scholars for program evaluation has been the use of questionnaires completed by students around their graduation time. As an example, Aliakbari and Ghoreyshi (2013) examined the success of the TEFL MA programs in achieving their goals from their graduates' viewpoints. They adopted Stufflebeam's CIPP model (2002) as the theoretical framework to look at the TEFL program at MA level at Ilam University. As another example, Karimnia and Kay (2015) assessed the quality of Islamic Azad University TEFL program at BA (undergraduate) level in Iran through a researcher-made questionnaire using Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP model and interview. To do so, twenty senior students were randomly sampled as the participants of the study. In addition to the students, five professors who were selected through accidental sampling participated in this study. The findings indicated that considerable reform had to be implemented in the TEFL curriculum design.

Such questionnaires or other methods of data collection (like pre-test and post-tests of teaching candidates' knowledge, sample of student teachers' work, longitudinal observation of clinical practice, and observation of graduates' teaching practice) provide valuable insights into the students' opinions or perceptions; however, by themselves, they may not yield sufficient data to evaluation. Thus, the power of evaluation appears to be in its inclusiveness of the diverse perspectives, engaging all in learning about the program, and utilizing different ways and tools for eliciting first-hand data while minimizing the subjectivity of instrumentation and potential sources of bias.

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With this in mind, Khanjani, Vahdany, and Jafarigohar (2016) went through a more comprehensive procedure with regard to participants and data collection. They evaluated the layout of the pre-service EFL teacher training program in Iranian EFL context through a concurrent mixed-method design. The participants in their study were high school EFL teachers, teacher trainees, and teacher trainers. They evaluated different components of the program including needs analysis, objectives specification, instructional materials, teaching activities, and assessment procedures. However, in their study, the participants were solely from one province of Iran and the study was largely concerned with the layout of the program, overlooking other aspects.

On the other hand, Foroozandeh, Riazi, and Sadighi (2008) believed in ongoing formative evaluation for both improvement and renovation in TEFL programs. They believed this method of evaluation prevented "counterproductive outcomes" and stopped the "invisible malignant growth of deficiencies" (p. 96). They reported part of a large-scale study designed based on Stufflebeam's CIPP Model (2002)to evaluate the TEFL curriculum in MA programs in Iran. Their findings revealed that (1) there was no consensus among the participants regarding the overall aim of the programs, (2) the implemented curriculum was partially compatible with the official curriculum, and (3) the participants felt a need for (a) major curriculum revision, (b) reforms in the program, and (c) reconsideration of the screening system.

Atai and Mazlum (2013) even took a step further to investigate curriculum documents, do interviews with Ministry officials, material developers, and head teachers, and use teacher questionnaires to examine English language teaching curriculum in Iran in a more comprehensive way. They conducted program evaluation, needs analysis, ELT-specific document evaluation, teacher evaluation and student assessment, re-examination of

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national policies within the Ministry, and ELT materials evaluation. Results attested to the lack of ELT-specific document for material development, absence of research-based needs assessment as the basis of the programs, the need for pre-defined linguistic and professional criteria for evaluating teachers, and the absence of a program evaluation or an ELT evaluation model. Diversity of data and negotiating with differing points of view are among the rigours of such studies.

The above studies have shed some light on the current status of the TEFL programs in Iran. With few exceptions, the bulk of writings produced about program evaluation suggest the ongoing evaluation of each program for the context in which it is implemented. Among these program evaluations, there are some cases which focus on BA level in TEFL; however, none of these studies has covered the program at Farhangian University. It seems that the merits and demerits of this program and the domains in need of improvement have remained under-researched. Accordingly, this study was carried out to probe into evaluation of the undergraduate TEFL program at Farhangian University to explore the perceptions of those involved in the program. Therefore, the following questions were posed in the study:

1.What are the merits and demerits of the undergraduate TEFL program at Farhangian University?

2. In what domains does the undergraduate TEFL program at Farhangian University need to be improved?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants who agreed and signed consent forms to take part in the study (N=264) included 220 TEFL student teachers, 32 teacher educators, and 12 heads of departments who filled out the questionnaires. From among these

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participants, 100 student teachers, 32 teacher educators, 12 heads agreed to be interviewed. Participants were from different campuses of Farhangian University in Lorestan, Tehran, Tabriz, Ilam, Khouzestan, Khorasan, Mazandaran, Isfahan, Zanjan, and Koredstan provinces.

In order to select a stratified sample from this population, the population was divided into two strata of those who were studying in the first to the fourth semester and those who were students of the last four semesters. Then, from the second group, there was an equal chance (probability) that each student could be included in the sample. For teachers and heads, a similar procedure was followed in which the strata included teachers who taught or guided the TEFL students and those who had no experience of working with these students. The participants were convinced that measures would be taken to keep their responses confidential. The distribution of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of participants by university campus

Province	Experts	Teacher educators	Student teachers
Ilam	1	3	19
Khorasan	1	3	13
Tabriz	1	2	19
Kordestan	1	5	35
Isfahan	2	5	41
Mazandaran	1	2	35
Khouzestan	2	3	13
Lorestan	2	7	17
Zanjan	1	2	13
Tehran	-	-	15

3.2. Instrument

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Three different instruments were developed and used in this study: participant observation, sequential-question interviews, and questionnaires.

3.2.1. Observation

A few areas of focus, including merits, demerits, needs, and improvements were determined for the observation of people, places and settings. Field notes (open-ended narrative data) were written while observing different classes, exams, and sites, such as libraries, internet sites, and language labs. The notes were also taken at the time of conducting interviews with the participants. Through invited observations, processes or situations were monitored, data on individual behaviours or interactions between people were gathered, and the physical settings were described. Classes, libraries, and internet sites were also surveyed through recording sheets and checklists which were also developed and validated to accompany the observation. To ensure high quality and consistent data, a well-trained colleague accompanied the researcher in most observations.

3.2.2. Interviews

Several types of interviews were performed in English during special events. The researcher interviewed all the participants based on a 15 open-format item interview model inspired by Peacock's (2009), which sought the respondents' opinions about whether the program incorporated important features of TEFL programs (Appendix A). The series of sequential interviews provided invaluable in-depth information concerning the curriculum from the stakeholders' perspective. The interview was first validated with some faculty members to figure out its strengths and weaknesses, and then administered for 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews were also conducted with graduates, educational staff, and deans and deputies of the university. These interviews sought their perception and attitude about different aspects of the program.

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3.2.3. Questionnaires

Different questionnaires were designed, constructed, piloted, and administered to student teachers, teacher educators, and TEFL experts. The questionnaires included 7 sections based on Stufflebeam's (2007) model: Context, Input, Process, Impact, Effectiveness, Sustainability, and Transportability evaluation. This 5-point Likert-Scale questionnaire was developed for different groups of participants. Three open-ended questions followed the first section, where the respondents expressed their general impression of the needs, program quality, challenges, and ways for improving the curriculum, course syllabi, teacher educators, and the methods. These were piloted with a group of colleagues to check clarity, adequacy, and length of the questionnaires to collect the required data. Finally, in a pilot study with 40 student teachers, 10 instructors, and 2 administrators, the items were checked. The reliability for the modified experts' questionnaire (r = 0.72), teacher educators' (r = 0.92), and students' questionnaire (r = 0.95) were estimated using Cronbach's Alpha. The content validity of the instructors' and students' questionnaires was checked from the perspective of the program objectives specified in the Official Curriculum (Foroozandeh, et al. 2008).

There were two more questionnaires for assessment and research infrastructure of the university. They were designed, validated by experts, and distributed to a) educational staff for evaluating the exams, and b) the librarians and research staff for evaluating the research conditions of 15 campuses of the university. Following the administration of the questionnaires, there were interviews with educational and research staff as well as the librarians for collecting further information about the exams and research facilities of the university.

At last, in order to validate the evaluations, a checklist, inspired by Stufflebeam's metaevaluation (2012), was designed and filled based on

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meeting the requirements for utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability. Each of these standards was broken down into multiple indicators that each represented an aspect of the standard in question. If the evaluation had any of the indicators present, the rater checked a box to indicate that it was present. After reviewing each indicator, the rater summed the number of indicators that were present and recorded it on the checklist. This number corresponded to a score for that particular standard.

3.3. Procedure

First, the CIPP questionnaires were distributed to the respondents via email, snail mail, or personal visits. The students' questionnaires were distributed in person or with the help of colleagues or students. All of the 220 student teachers, 32 out of 60 available instructors, and 12 out of 40 contacted heads shared their opinions and returned the questionnaires. Following the questionnaires, there were interviews with 100 student teachers, 32 teacher educators, and 12 heads who expressed in their questionnaires their willingness to take part in the interview.

At the same time, field notes were taken by the researcher and a colleague separately for recording talking and interacting with people and observing the settings and different sites, such as classes, libraries, internet sites, and language labs. This was done to overcome the probable disadvantages of interviews and questionnaires in which the responses provided by the participants may not be accurate. Available documents and materials were also investigated. To this end, the course syllabi, prepared and used materials, and faculty and staff meetings were documented with the purpose of checking the consistency of the program.

The qualitative data were collected and the interviews were tape-recorded. Then, they were transcribed by the researcher. The validity of the field notes, checklists, and transcriptions were measured by examining the

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degree of concordance (percent agreement) between the number and type of themes that emerged in the independent observations of the researcher and the colleague. They were also double-checked with 25% of the respondents to ensure the validity of interpretations. All this process took place for 13 months (from 2015, August to 2016, September). Consequently, the researcher could receive the respondents' perceptions for three consecutive semesters.

3.4. Data Analysis

Both quantitative (Frequency statistics through SPSS software) and qualitative techniques of *Constant comparative method* (Charmaz, 2006*) and Extreme case analysis* (Dornyei, 2007) were carried out to analyze the data. More specifically, to address the research questions, triangulation of data from short answer questions of CIPP, cross tabulation of different sections of the questionnaire, questions of interview, and observations of places and natural settings were conducted. The reliability of data codification was estimated as 92% using inter-rater agreement formula (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

4. Results

The collected data from questionnaires (Table 2) indicated the participants' level of agreement with different aspects of the program. Student teachers and teacher educators disagreed that the program fulfilled their needs, provided necessary assets, and solved the probable problems (context evaluation). They also believed that the strategies, work plans, and allocated budgets (input evaluation), activities (process evaluations),and the quality and significance of outcomes (effectiveness evaluation) were in appropriate. More importantly, less than 5% of respondents agreed that the program had been developed on the basis of the needs assessment of the stakeholders.

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Table 2

Participants' perceptions of the program

	Completely disagree(%)	***Disagree (%)***	***No idea(%)***	***Agree***	***Completely agree***
			Students		
Context	15.5	41.4	35.8	7.3	0
Input	5.9	45.0	40.0	8.6	.5
Process	10.4	60.0	26.4	3.2	0
Impact	15.0	23.2	45.0	14.1	2.7
Effectiveness	24.5	38.2	30.9	5.9	.5
Sustainability	20.9	27.7	25.9	21.4	4.1
Transportability	28.6	31.8	28.6	8.6	2.4
Needs	11.4	48.6	35	5	0
Overall Insight	26.4	53.2	18.2	2.2	0
			Teacher Educators		
Context	0	53.1	34.4	12.5	0
Input	12.5	43.7	43.8	0	0
Process	0	53.1	46.9	0	0
Impact	0	9.4	53.1	37.5	0
Effectiveness	0	43.7	56.3	0	0
Sustainability	12.5	9.4	46.8	18.8	12.5
Transportability	25.0	34.3	18.8	21.9	0
Needs	0	53.1	46.9	0	0
Overall Insight	9.4	62.4	28.2	0	0
			Experts		
Context	0	16.7	75.0	8.3	0
Input	0	91.7	8.3	0	0
Process	0	0	100	0	0
Impact	0	0	0	58.3	41.7
Effectiveness	0	33.3	66.7	0	0
Sustainability	0	8.3	33.3	41.7	16.7
Transportability	0	8.3	41.7	50.0	0
Overall Insight	0	25.0	75.0	0	0

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Nevertheless, all the experts agreed that the program reached the target audience (impact evaluation). The experts either had no idea or expressed no favourable idea about context, process, and effectiveness of the program. Regarding the sustainability of the program (contribution to its institutionalization), there were contradictory perceptions. That is, students disagreed while experts agreed with the continuation of the program over time and the teachers were undecided about it. This contradiction was also observable in the case of its transportability evaluation (attitude to the program's transparency) (Table 2).

The qualitative data were gathered through open-ended questions, interviews, and observations. Following 164 interviews, out of 1190 cases of reference to the program, 6 major themes related to courses, methodology, policies, material, facilities, and staff (including heads of departments, instructors, and students) were identified. More than 543 suggestions, needs, and challenges emerged during the interviews regarding these six themes. Some of these points were mentioned by a large number of student teachers and were similar to those mentioned by the teachers and heads. At last, data collected from the questionnaires and interviews were truncated and triangulated with those obtained from observations, and the extracted factors were categorized and summarized into two major domains of educational and administrative dimensions. Figure 1 sums up the final themes along with the constituting components.

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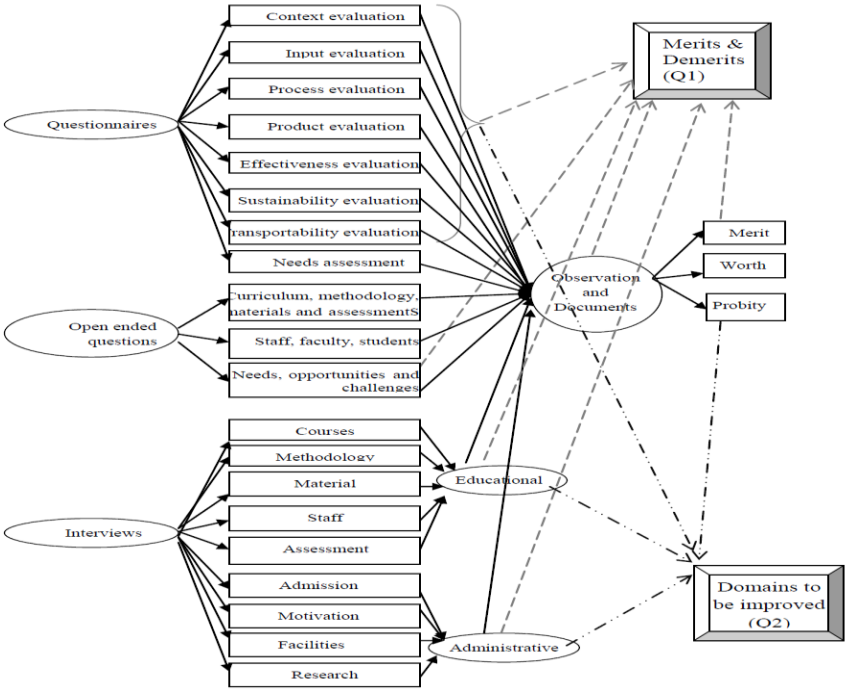


Figure 1

The thematic summary report of TEFL program evaluation

To address the first research question of the study, which was intended to investigate the merits and demerits of the undergraduate TEFL program, both quantitative and qualitative data were employed. The most obvious demerit of this program, based on the results obtained from the questionnaires, observations, and interviews was that the program is not based on the needs analysis of the student teachers, and participants mentioned the urgent need for conducting needs assessments and designing a curriculum based on the students' linguistic, educational, ideological, and psychological needs, with special consideration of their occupational needs. The followings were among the educational and

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administrative needs mentioned by the participants of the current study as being neglected in the program. The need to:

- practice and enhance teaching skills
- have courses to improve students' reflection and critical thinking
- improve language proficiency
- relate courses to their field
- develop materials
- learn target language culture and intercultural communication skills
- train teachers
- promote flexibility in using different teaching approaches for different students
- develop criteria for teacher selection and student admission.

Analyzing the responses related to needs assessment, as depicted in Table 3, revealed that according to the participants, the main need includes the need to train teacher educators (88%). They also expected to add courses to 'improve students' reflection, flexibility, and critical thinking'.

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Table 3
Participants' perceptions of their needs

Needs	Frequency
Practice and enhance teaching skills	63
Have courses to improve students' reflection and critical thinking	76
Improve language proficiency	48
Relate courses to their field	37
Develop materials	38
Learn target language culture and intercultural communication skills	52
Train teachers	88
Promote flexibility in using different teaching approaches for different students	71
Develop criteria for teacher selection and student admission	64

Scholars who conducted evaluation studies (e.g. Aliakbari &Ghoreyshi, 2013; Foroozandeh, et al., 2008; Mazdayasna &Tahririan, 2008) agreed that if decisions and efforts are made to conduct needs analysis for programs, most stakeholders are willing to actively take part in expressing the actual needs and shortcomings based on their future employment and professional requirements. However, in case of Farhangian University, as Khanjani, et al. (2016) mention, none of the databases of ERIC, Science Direct, Sage publications, Irandoc, SID, and Magiran contain any research articles or conference papers on needs assessment projects for pre-service EFL teacher training programs.

Another demerit of the program, based on the collected data, was with regard to its assets, including heads of English departments, teacher educators, student teachers, equipment, sites, and materials. Heads of English departments in this university have no or little experience in the

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field of TEFL and are mostly from fields other than TEFL. Heads of Department, as mentioned by different scholars, should be able to recognize when the group requires direction (Murphy, 1992), to interact with the group effectively and to guide them to the accomplishment of the task (Green, 1996), to identify factors that are associated with student learning outcomes (Angus, 1993), and as Hammond (2000) mentioned, to use departmental meetings as opportunities for professional development, and use their meetings and publications to selectively introduce new ideas about the subject and the way it is taught, to monitor the quality of classroom provision through observation, to sample students' work with feedback to staff, and to manage workload and deploy resources effectively. Unfortunately, from interviews and as observed and investigated from the available documents, the heads have no clear subject definition or related academic orientation. Each campus has one or two heads for all the fields; thus, the head of English Department may be a Geography, History, Persian literature, or hopefully Curriculum Development teacher. These heads may not be aware of the factors associated with TEFL students' learning needs and success. Departmental meetings are rare and the heads are supposed to plan with no flexibility in the suggested courses. Some of the participants' comments are the indication of the seriousness of the problems with heads:

> *There seems to be little need for their presence at all: curriculum and pedagogy are relatively static and unquestioned, and program is designed external to department rather than embedded in the context.*

> *They should feel responsible for establishing and ensuring high standards of teaching and learning in their subject, play a key role in monitoring, supporting, and motivating other*

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teachers of the subject. They should be critical to group improvement.

Most of the teachers are not motivated enough to train the student teachers since they are mostly invited teachers from high schools or other universities teaching several courses at their extra time at this university and there are few faculty members at the university. This teachers' uncertainty of "to be or not to be" reduces teachers' energy and motivation to teach. There is, also, no in-service education for teacher educators or if there is, the quality of the classes is under question. Since "qualifications too soon become outdated as a result of changes in the field" (Richards & Ferrell, 2005, p.10), teacher educators need ongoing training in their field and many other innovations related to their profession. Over the past few years, research has continued to show that the main factor influencing student achievement is the quality of education (Clotfelter, Ladd, &Vigdor, 2007; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) and such unmotivated teacher educators and heads may not be able to provide the student teachers with high quality instruction. Teachers have no security of tenure and may not be teaching at this university in the future. This negatively affects their commitment towards teaching. This finding indicates that there is a need for the government to employ teachers on a permanent basis in order to improve the quality of education being offered. The selection of teacher educators at this university is based on the information stated in an application form (Salahiyat – e – Tadris or Teaching Competency Form) in which the criteria for selection are not defined on the basis of standards for TEFL teacher educators. Actually, such standards have not been determined or defined yet for teacher education in Iran. Put differently, since the central role of teachers as the main players in each educational system has been more evident, and since this university is in charge of teacher education, lack of a systematic teacher evaluation and

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selection system that can contribute to quality teaching can be regarded as a crucial demerit for this program.

Regarding student teachers, the graduates of this university are not allowed to take part in MA exam until they work three years at schools (Ministry of Education [Letter to Farhangian University], 2014) since the Ministry of Education needs them at work. This policy, although helps them put their theoretical knowledge into practice, teach in real classrooms, and receive due feedback to be able to face challenges as teachers and/or improve their current practice, results in a gap in their education. This gap may decrease their motivation in continuing their education to higher levels and result in BA teachers who are not willing to develop professionally.

The access to language labs, internet sites, and other similar facilities is limited, as mentioned by participants, and this may affect instruction. Almost all heads similarly mentioned the unavailability of some facilities and amenities. An expert, for instance, mentioned:

> *Language labs, computer sites, and study rooms do not exist or are not equipped with necessary and updated facilities which play an important part in teachers' teaching.*

Experts' responses to questions indicated that students did not take much time to get involved with listening or speaking activities in the classroom. The students did not have adequate exposure to spoken English because of the unavailability of computer sites and language labs. Thus, dissatisfaction with facilities in language labs, computer sites, and libraries was a recurring theme (95%) in the data collected from all participants, and they believed that the program needed improvement in this regard. Razi and Kargar's (2014) findings indicated vocabulary and oral skills are ranked higher in importance than reading and writing, while the findings of the current study indicated that the amenities for such courses are under question in this

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university and students have no listening or speaking courses until their third semester.

There was a consistency of opinions among instructors, heads, and students across different campuses that the helpful strategies used by the university were sometimes problematic. For instance, students who enter this university are employed by the Ministry of Education at the onset of their entrance. This causes the university to encounter huge financial problems so that sometimes even paying the teacher educators' salaries is postponed for several months. This may lead to low motivation in some experienced teacher educators to teach at these centres. The findings demonstrated that the financial and economic problems, low and delayed salaries, and inadequate allowances demotivate the teachers in their job and influence the quality of teaching (Aghajanzadeh, Maftoon, & Birjandi, 2016). In addition, that is why this university cannot offer the necessary facilities and sites for the students, as some heads and teachers believed. The challenges found at this university were in line with the results of other studies about teacher training in Iran (e.g., Khanjani, et al., 2016; Moiinvaziri &Razmjoo, 2016).

The findings of this study, also, cast light on the merits of the practical courses as perceived by participants and especially by students. These merits are summarized in Table 4.

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Table 4
Participants' perceptions of the merits of the program

Merit	Frequency
Getting familiar with:	
• classroom management techniques and strategies	62
• interaction patterns in and out of the classroom	71
• the ways to confront challenging situations and face unanticipated problems	62
• appropriate appearance at school	62
Gaining:	
• better satisfaction and confidence in their ability as teachers	71
• better understanding of students and teacher roles in the class	62
• increased awareness of the characteristics of young learners	71
Improving:	
• their knowledge about different methods of teaching and using computers	54
• their ability to motivate students and make them believe in themselves	62

Thus, presenting the practical courses more efficiently and allocating more time, they believed, make the courses more useful for prospective teachers.

The second research question was intended to shed light on a number of domains in which the undergraduate TEFL program at Farhangian University needs to be improved. These domains include *context, input, process,* and *effectiveness*. There are a total of fourteen rubrics,

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operationalized in more than 25 task descriptions, within the four main domains, mentioned by participants (Table 5).

To this end, the information obtained from the above-mentioned domains (Table 5) provided insights into the actions to be taken to improve the quality of the program at Farhangian University. The needs and problems within the context domain are divided into three aspects of linguistic, pedagogy and culture. In linguistic aspect of the program, for the majority of the participants (65%), teacher educators need to have a solid and shared understanding of what should be taught in the courses since materials have been regarded as essential components in teaching by scholars like Tomlinson (2005). Materials can act as motives for student teachers, enhance interaction in and out of class among students and teachers, and establish links between theory and practice (Rahimi, 2008). Teacher educators must undergo specialist training in the skills to be taught to student teachers and gain detailed and greater familiarity with innovative instruction, assessment, and learning (88%). Sikka, Nath, and Cohen (2007) indicated a need for the inclusion and use of different types of assessment in teacher training programs; however, for a host of interviewed experts (around 70%), innovative assessment approaches seem to have been totally ignored in the program.

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Table 5

Proposed domains for program improvement

Domain	Sub-domain	Rubrics	Task description
context	Needs and Problems	Linguistics	a. what is taught b. familiarity with innovative instruction, assessment, and learning
		Pedagogy	a. how to teach b. how students learn c. practice in differing approaches to learning and in dealing with students' diversity
		Culture	a. how native culture influences teaching and learning b. how target culture influences teaching and learning
	Assets	Educational facilities	a. what facilities influence teaching and learning b. what facilities are available for teaching and learning
		Teacher educators	what teachers need to know about students' preconceptions that must be engaged for effective learning
		Heads of English department	a. what heads and administrators need to know b. what heads and administrators need to do c. what heads and administrators need to be
		Content and material	a. what materials enhance teaching and learning b. what content they plan to teach
Input	Strategies and work plans	planning	effective teaching strategies to impart the specialized knowledge of subject area
		instruction	
		analysis	
		Evaluation	
	Budget		a. for amenities b. for personnel
Process	monitoring, documenting, and assessing program activities		a. the criteria and evidence document that has been met b. the level of performance expected to determine progress c. exemplars of learners' work to help student teachers align instruction and assessment at the appropriate level of difficulty
effectiveness	the quality and significance of outcomes		a. to gauge the program's positive and negative effects on stakeholders b. to sort out and judge important side effects c. make a bottom-line assessment of the program's success.

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Moreover, the student teachers should acquire great expertise in pedagogy and the ways teachers teach and students learn. In Iranian EFL pre-service teacher education, much more emphasis is put on the theory of teaching and the practical aspects of teaching are largely overlooked in the EFL teacher training programs (Hashemian & Azadi, 2010; Khanjani, et al., 2016; Mirhassani & Beh-Afarin, 2004). Thus, as the findings of the current study also indicate, actions should be taken to provide student teachers with the practice and expertise in dealing with the students' diversity and differing approaches to learning (62%). With regard to these issues, the findings showed that all student teachers felt the need to be delivered well-prepared lessons in their teaching practice, which, according to Lacang (2007), would be manifested in their future students' learning and the fulfilment of the instructional objectives. The participants' perception was also in line with Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll's (2005) findings, suggesting that preparation for teaching English led to greater confidence in student teachers' skills in working successfully with students. Thus, constant reconstruction and renovation of teacher educators' professional knowledge and practices seems to be urgent, which can be obtained through consistent professional training and development.

Besides, student teachers expressed their need as to gain greater familiarity with the culture and ways of life in different parts of the country and the world (72%). They need to have a shared understanding of how native culture and target culture influence teaching and learning. Abawi, Conway, and Henderson (2011) believe that greater familiarity with culture could lead to the continuing cycle of practice and increasing proficiency. Therefore, the program should be enriched linguistically, pedagogically, and culturally with educational experience in real situations to prepare student teachers for their occupation. This should be in a way that the student teachers would be able to develop teaching plans consistent with curriculum

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goals and care about the nature of learning and learners' individual differences. Besides, majority of participants (72%) believed that the program should encourage students to do and document their assignments or tasks via using different educational technology (internet, power point, and websites, etc.).

Then, it comes to the assets within the context domain including educational facilities (94%), teacher educators (94%), heads of English department (96%), and content and material (88%). There is a general consensus among many scholars (e.g., Aghajanzadeh, et al., 2016; Khanjani, et al., 2016; Moiinvaziri & Razmjoo, 2016) that any of these assets are essential components in teaching. More specifically, the program is assumed to take the influential facilities of teaching and learning into great consideration. The facilities which are available for teaching and learning should be investigated and those which are required should be identified carefully and then the shortages and weaknesses should be overcome.

Besides, actions should be taken by policy makers at Fahangian University to improve the quality of the program and raise student teachers' awareness of what they need to know about students' preconceptions that must be engaged for effective learning (72%), and about what heads and administrators need to know (65%), need to do (65%) and need to be (56%). For this purpose, quality standards should be established for teachers' employment and development for each major or subject; and then the educational quality standards should be evaluated from year to year to make sure they have been generalized and implemented adequately. Holding workshops through which specialists (supervisors and experienced teachers) illustrate the importance, intent, and the way the courses are applied in continually teaching and evaluating the workshops may be helpful.

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The next domain which needs improvement is input, including strategies and work plans, and budget. Information obtained from the above-mentioned domains provides insights into the actions to be taken to improve effective teaching strategies and impart the specialized knowledge to planning, instruction, analysis, and evaluation (56%). The university is also in desperate need of providing budget for facilities and paying the personnel (88%) since financial problem is reported to be teachers' hindering obstacle to get motivated in their teaching practice (Aghajanzadeh et al., 2016).

Process domain involves actions to be taken for determining the criteria for monitoring, documenting, and assessing program activities and documenting those which have been met (65%). Teacher educators need to have a shared understanding of what should be done to help student teachers align instruction and assessment (56%). They must undergo training in the instruction and assessment to make them at the appropriate level of difficulty for student teachers (56%). As Inbar-Lourie (2013) asserts, language teachers need a solid background in assessment through training and education to be equipped well to integrate assessment with instruction and use appropriate forms of teaching leading to enhanced learning.

The policy actions should also be taken to support the effectiveness of the program. In addition to the provision of facilities, quality, and significance of outcomes is another issue which should be taken into account. For this purpose, actions should be taken to gauge the program's positive and negative effects on stakeholders and sort out and judge important side effects periodically, as mentioned by majority of the participants (72%). Besides, actions should be taken to make a bottom-line assessment of the program's success to improve the quality of the program (56%). In order to improve the quality of TEFL program, the employment needs of graduates should be considered by providing courses in major areas of study and

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providing greater innovations, practice, and/or flexibility in teaching methods/ modes of delivery.

At the end of the whole process, meta-evaluation of the present program evaluation was conducted using the *Meta-evaluation Checklist* (Stufflebeam, 2012) to explore the extent to which this evaluation met the requirements for utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability. The Meta-evaluation showed a total of 74.25% strength for this evaluation study (Table 6).

Table 6

Strength for the Meta-evaluation Model's Standards

Standards	*Strength*
Utility	75.94%
Feasibility	75.67%
Propriety	67.14%
Accuracy	81.11%
Accountability	71.42%
Total	74.25%

The scores then corresponded to ratings of Poor, Fair, Good, and Excellent. Table 7 indicates that, except for the fiscal responsibility and external meta-evaluation which were scored as Fair, in other cases, the evaluation was rated as Good and Very Good. The Meta-evaluation Checklist (Stufflebeam, 2012) recommends that an evaluation fails if it scores Poor on standards P1 (Responsive and Inclusive Orientation), A1 (Justified Conclusions and Decisions), A2 (Valid Information), or A8 (Communication and Reporting). Thus, this evaluation can be considered as achieving the necessary standards.

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Table 7

Rating for the meta-evaluations' provisions and standards

Standard	*Criteria*	*Rating*
UTILITY	Evaluator Credibility	Good
	Attention to Stakeholders	Good
	Negotiated Purposes	Excellent
	Explicit Values	Excellent
	Relevant Information	Very Good
	Meaningful Processes and Products	Excellent
	Timely and Appropriate Communicating and Reporting	Very Good
	Concern for Consequences and Influence	Very Good
FEASIBILITY	Project Management	Very Good
	Practical Procedures	Very Good
	Contextual Viability	Good
	Resource Use	Very Good
PROPRIETY	Responsive and Inclusive Orientation	Very Good
	Formal Agreements	Excellent
	Human Rights and Respect	Very Good
	Clarity and Fairness	Good
	Transparency and Disclosure	Very Good
	Conflicts of Interests	Good
	Fiscal Responsibility	Fair
ACCURACY	Justified Conclusions and Decisions	Excellent
	Valid Information	Excellent
	Reliable Information	Very Good
	Explicit Program and Content Descriptions	Excellent
	Information Management	Excellent
	Sound Designs and Analyses	Excellent
	Explicit Evaluation Reasoning	Excellent
	Communication and Reporting	Very Good
ACCOUNTABILITY	Evaluation Documentation	Good
	Internal Metaevaluation	Good
	External Metaevaluation	Fair

5. Conclusion

The findings revealed that participants thought the TEFL program did not adequately prepare the students for their career and did not meet some of their educational and administrative needs. This study demonstrated several gaps between the theory and practice of the curriculum. The students, although empowered by culture and ideology, were not enriched with the necessary skills, the practice of the learned theories, problem solving, critical thinking, flexibility, and innovation. Based on the results of this

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study, specified personnel application forms and strategies seem to be urgent to be applied to different fields, their teachers, heads, students, and staff. Such a specialized system must be according to the established and validated quality standards to achieve objectivity. Library enrichment and providing teachers and students with publications, educational technology use, and the facilities needed for the use of technology enhance the motivation of both students and teachers. The findings of the present study suggested domains in which the program needs to be improved. These included a total of fourteen rubrics within four main domains of context, input, process, and effectiveness which are operationalized in more than 25 task descriptions, i.e., actions to be taken to improve the quality of program. These factors may either have a direct relation to the students' target needs or help them achieve their psychological, social, and educational needs through the program.

Hopefully, this study encourages planning of evaluation projects in this educational setting on regular basis to improve teacher training program and to eliminate defects before transmission through the whole body of education. This study can be helpful for policy makers and curriculum developers as well as the language teachers who want to carry out classroom activities and exercises more potently. Teachers who are educated in a program – which is based on the stakeholders' needs and is improved constantly based on their suggestions and meets the necessary criteria for a program – may have the conceptual and practical skills that they are supposed to. Such teachers may be skilful in planning the collection of information that facilitates the decisions they will make. Hopefully, they may know and follow appropriate principles for developing and using teaching and assessment methods in their teaching, avoiding common pitfalls in student assessment. Such teachers may select the techniques which are appropriate for the purpose of the teacher's instruction. They may

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be better skilled in administering, scoring, and interpreting the teaching and assessment results, and also in planning teaching, developing curriculum, and school improvement. It is recommended that further follow-up studies need to be conducted over the mentioned domains in order to explore further domains which need to be improved and alternative solutions.

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Appendix. Interview questions

To what extent does the undergraduate TEFL program at Farhangian University…

1) … have a clearly stated philosophy?
2) … reflect program philosophy?
3) … promote trainee flexibility in using different teaching approaches for different situations?
4) … promote the ability to use, and to adapt foreign-language-teaching materials?
5) … balance received versus experiential knowledge?
6) … incorporate and encourage trainee reflection on the experiences and values they have when they enter the program? In particular, does it encourage trainee reflection on their 'apprenticeship of observation'?
7) … promote the skill of reflection and self-evaluation as a teacher?
8) … promote future reflective practice?
9) … promote the 'long-term, developmental nature of learning to teach' – does it promote post-qualification teacher growth and development?
10) … have good linkage among courses, avoiding overlaps?
11) … is the program up-to-date?
12) … balance teacher- and student-centered learning?
13) … prepare EFL teachers to function in the socio-cultural context in which they will work?
14) … do students believe the program meets their needs, is relevant to their needs, and adequately prepares them for classroom teaching?
15) … incorporate and balance linguistic, pedagogic, and managerial competence to an appropriate degree? Linguistic competence here means L2 proficiency. Pedagogic competence refers to teaching skills plus knowledge of language and second language acquisition.

Totally,

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16) What are your first impressions of BA degree TEFL program?
17) How would you describe your experiences within the program? Why?
18) What are the BA degree program's strengths?
19) What are the BA degree program's challenges?
20) What advice would you give in order to improve the program?
21) Is there anything you would like to add or that we did not discuss?

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