Evaluating an English Teacher Training Course for Iranian Private Language Institutes' Teachers

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Abstract

Initial teacher training courses are of utmost importance because they are the first entry point to the teacher professional career and determine the quality and quantity of teachers. Despite the importance of initial teacher training courses and their influence on the professional lives of teacher applicants, English teachers, and language learners, there is a dearth of research evaluating these courses in Iranian private language institutes. This paper reports on a mixed-methods study that utilized questionnaires with open-ended and Likert-scale items and available documents to evaluate the English Teacher Training Course (ETTC) held in an Iranian private language institute. Data were gathered from 60 teacher applicants applying for this ETTC and 94 English teachers who took this ETTC in 2016. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that while teacher applicants needed training most in teaching language skills and components, general teaching skills, and classroom management, the institute focused on the first area at the cost of second and third areas. Furthermore, it was found that the ETTC focused on received rather than experiential knowledge, offered scant opportunity for teaching practice and classroom observation, and provided little training in classroom management skills. The article concludes by outlining the pedagogical implications of the findings for English teachers, trainers, and course designers.

Keywords: teacher training course; private language institutes; evaluation; English teacher

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1. Introduction

Teacher preparation and the desperate need for teacher's development have caught the researchers' interest for the last two decades (Bayrakçı, 2009; Hammadou, 2004; Lee, 2007; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Besides, Sandres and Horn (1998, p. 19) rightly state that "the single most important factor in determining student academic success or failure is the classroom teacher". In order to keep up to date, Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008, p. 10) emphasize that "there is a pressing need for education for teachers at all stages in their careers which aims to prepare or upgrade teachers' knowledge and skills". Several researchers (Bayrakçı, 2009; Richards & Farrell, 2005) argue that because of the dynamic nature of language teaching profession and the theory-oriented nature of pre-service courses, English teachers need to continually update their teaching knowledge and skills. Harmer (2002) names several ways for teachers' professional development such as attending teacher training courses, conducting action research, reviewing the literature such as methodology books, journals and magazines, and sharing ideas with colleagues through cooperating and collaborating with colleagues, team teaching and observation, and joining teachers' groups and associations. Among all the above mentioned methods of professional development, attending Teacher Training Course (TTC) seems to be the most common method for Iranian English teachers.

Private language institutes are mushrooming across Iran (Mesri, 2009; Sadeghi & Richards, 2016) and thousands of these language institutes hold 40-60 hour teacher training courses to train English teachers. Each year, a great number of Iranian university graduates at BA and MA levels take these courses to become English teachers. The participants are given a certificate at the end of the course, which allows them to work as English teachers in some of these institutes. However, several researchers have found that these language institutes are not successful in teaching spoken English, which is their main purpose and function (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015; Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). More importantly, Sadeghi and Richards (2015) pointed out English teachers in these institutes did not undergo any training regarding the complexity and technicality of teaching a speaking course effectively. Furthermore, Abaszadeh (2012) argued that English teachers and teacher trainers' held quite different views regarding the content of TTCs and typical problems teachers face while teaching in Iranian language institutes. Investigating the impact of these TTCs on the English teachers' beliefs, Abasifar and Fotovatnia (2015) noted that these teacher training courses did not influence the teachers' beliefs

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very much, and teacher applicants had a more positive view towards language learning than those who passed a teacher training course.

Iranian language institutes seem to diverge in their aims, candidates' selection, course content, and the presentation policy adopted in their teacher training courses. To be more exact, each institute runs its own TTC and does not approve of the TTCs held in other institutes. As a consequence, university graduates have to attend several TTCs in different institutes while applying for teaching English in language institutes. Regrettably, in spite of the critical importance of evaluating teacher training courses (Payne, 1994; Peacock, 2009; Rea-Dickins & Germaine, 1993), there is a dearth of research in the area of teacher training in general (Day, 1991; Weir & Roberts, 1994) and in Iranian private language institutes in particular (Abaszadeh, 2012; Abasifar & Fotovatnia, 2015; Sadeghi & Richards, 2015) investigating the content of these courses, comparing them with international courses, or evaluating them to see if they reach their objectives. The present study, therefore, was conducted to depict a vivid picture of Iranian English teacher applicants' real needs for initial teacher training courses, and secondly to evaluate them from the viewpoints of English teachers who were teaching in GOSA.

2. Review of Literature

As regards the critical role of teachers in education, several researchers (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain 2005) have pointed out that these are the teacher education programs that directly influence teacher quality and student achievement. Musset (2010) added that initial teacher education program is of utmost importance since it is 'the first entry point to the teacher professional career, it plays a fundamental role: the way it is organized determines both the quality and quantity of teachers' (p. 15). Thus, initial teacher training courses need to be constantly changed according to the demands of a fast-changing world and regularly evaluated, especially in a country such as Iran where there is not much on-the-job training for the employed teachers.

While there are thousands of language institutes in Iran and their popularity has spread far and wide, not many studies have investigated the teaching practices and effectiveness of English education in Iranian private language institutes (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015; Sadeghi & Richards, 2015; Sadeghi & Richards, 2016). Sad to say, there has not been much investigation of English teacher training courses held in these institutes (Abasifar & Fotovatnia, 2015; Abaszadeh, 2012).

Investigating how spoken English is taught in these institutes, Sadeghi and Richards (2015) reported that teachers used text books, audio materials, video, and computer in their speaking courses. To reach the course aims, they employed dialogues, drills, pronunciation work, role plays, pair work, and group work. The most serious problems that the participating teachers faced in their teaching were to do with developing fluency in speaking, handling classes with mixed proficiency levels, encouraging learners to speak out, organizing interesting class activities, involving weaker students in class discussion, developing speech accuracy, improving learners' background/topical knowledge, teaching large classes, using sensitive topics for speaking, and lack of learners' ideas for certain topics.

To measure the impact of TTCs on Iranian English teachers' beliefs, Abasifar and Fotovatnia (2015) distributed a modified version of Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory to 110 English teachers in Isfahan language centers. It was revealed that teachers without a TTC held more positive views about language learning than those with a TTC. Surprisingly, non-English majors viewed learning English more positively than English majors. All in all, the researchers concluded that TTCs did not exert a big influence on teachers' beliefs about language learning.

Abaszadeh (2012) conducted a study comparing teachers' and teacher trainers' views about essential elements of teachers' knowledge base and typical problems faced by Iranian English teachers while teaching in private language institutes. She concluded that Iranian English teachers and teacher trainers held different views. Analysis of the trainers' point of view indicated that language proficiency and communication skill, teaching skills and technicalities of the job, knowledge of the learner, self-awareness, and self-evaluation were necessary for an English teacher. Trainers predicted that teachers would encounter difficulties with stage fright, motivating learners, and meeting various objectives of the learners in the classroom. On the other hand, teachers believed that language proficiency and classroom language, knowledge of theories of second language teaching and learning, teaching skills, knowledge of target culture and its teaching, and assessment and error correction techniques were essential for teaching in these institutes. Finally, teachers noted they needed to get prepared for challenges in classroom management, motivating students, building rapport with the students, adaptation to the students' level of language proficiency, and establishing group work activities in the classroom.

The general impression gleaned from the studies investigating TTCs in Iranian private language institutes bears testimony to the idea that teacher training courses in these institutes do not prepare teacher applicants fully for their job. Peacock (2009) asserted that FLT-training programs need a clear evaluation procedure for collecting and using feedback on whole programs. He added this can be the starting point for the professionalization of the field of ELT. Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1998, p. 8) also stressed "the importance of having systematic evaluation at the heart of a program". Nonetheless, Weir and Roberts (1994) rightly suggested that there have not been much research about the evaluation of English teacher education programs. Given the paucity of research in this area, and the vital role of initial teacher training in Iranian language institutes, this study aims to examine the teacher applicants' real needs and expectations from these courses, and to evaluate them from the employed English teachers' perspectives. In other words, the study firstly aims to find out if there is any match between the teacher applicants' expectations and the TTC's aims and content. It further aims to find out if the English teachers who have passed the TTC in GOSA and started their job as English teachers are satisfied with this course.

1. What are the teacher applicants' needs and expectations from English teacher training courses held in Iranian private language institutes?
2. To what extent are the participants satisfied with different aspects of English teacher training courses held in GOSA?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

First of all, from among private language institutes which held teacher training courses of at least 40 hours, one language institute was chosen. This institute, called GOSA from now on, is one of the most well-known institutes across the country, has more than 80 branches in different cities, and has trained over 1000 English teachers. There were two groups of participants involved in this study. The first group comprised of 60 teacher applicants who had not taken any training course in private language institutes at the time of data collection and were about to take the TTC in GOSA. The second group comprised of 94 English teachers who took the teacher training course in this institute in 2016. Table 1 displays the background information of these participants.

Table 1. Background information of the participants

Participants	Number	Age range	Male	Female	Field	Degree
Teacher applicants	60	21-27	35	25	English Literature (10), Translation Studies (34), and TEFL (16)	38 BA 22 MA
English teachers	94	23-34	45	49	English Literature (17), Translation Studies (37), and TEFL (40)	55 BA 39 MA

4. Instrumentation

4.1 Needs-analysis Questionnaire

The researcher used two different questionnaires in the study to collect data for answering the research questions: a needs-analysis questionnaire, and an evaluation questionnaire. In order to collect data about the applicants' needs and expectations from a training course, a needs-analysis questionnaire was designed (see Appendix A). The first part of this questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions about the applicants' personal background information, teaching experience, their expectation form a teacher training course, and their suggestions for an ideal TTC. The second part of this questionnaire dealt with a series of abilities and skills that an English language teacher need for teaching in Iranian language institutes. The skills and abilities listed in the second part were taken from available research in this area (Şahin, 2006), the goals and objectives of TTCs in 34 Iranian language institutes, and the typical problems teachers faced while teaching in these institutes (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). The original version of this questionnaire consisted of 7 main areas and 34 skills. Although the items were in the outline form and their wording did not matter very much, the researcher asked five teacher applicants and two teacher trainers to read this version carefully and indicate if there were any items to be deleted from or added to the list. After piloting the questionnaire, six items were deleted. Thus, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of 7 main areas, and 28 skills. In the first part, the teacher applicants were asked to express their needs for a teacher training course and their expectations from such a course. In the second part, they were asked to read each of the items carefully and to indicate to what extent they needed to receive instruction in each skill by choosing one of the options. Each item was followed by five options, ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much).

4.2 Evaluation Questionnaire

The second questionnaire was designed to collect data about the opinions of the employed English teachers regarding different elements and aspects of the teacher training course (see Appendix B). The first version of the questionnaire was also based on previous literature (Şahin, 2006), the goals and objectives of TTCs in 34 Iranian language institutes, and the typical problems teachers face while teaching in these institutes (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). The original version of the questionnaire comprised of 65 items. In order to ensure the validity, five experts were asked to participate in the piloting session of the questionnaire, and to indicate how far the items were related to the main themes. The experts were asked to read each item carefully, and choose one of the options ranging from 1 to 10, to show how far they agreed that the item was measuring or addressing the main area mentioned. Furthermore, they were asked to comment over any problems they identified with the instrument, to express any further ideas that might have been ignored by the researcher, and to underline any wording problems existing in the items. The piloting phase of the questionnaire resulted in breaking down one double-barrel item into two separate ones, adding two more items, deleting thirteen items, and combining two areas into one. The result of this piloting phase was a 55-item questionnaire which needed to be piloted.

Then, in order to pilot the questionnaire, it was distributed among 16 teacher trainees in private language institutes, and the measure of Cronbach Alpha was calculated for different subsections as well as the whole questionnaire. The results showed that the designed questionnaire was highly reliable, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.967, but the researcher had to shorten the questionnaire since almost all the participants of the pilot phase stated that the questionnaire was too long. Four of the areas enjoyed a high reliability index, and the researcher decided to keep them without any change. However, reliability of six areas could be improved through deleting problematic items. For example, the area *course content* included six items with the reliability of 0.487, but removing item number three improved the reliability to 0.693. Thus, according to the results of the Cronbach's alpha for each area without the problematic items, the researcher deleted six items from the questionnaire. Finally, four items were deleted because the participants in the pilot phase noted that they did not have enough information about these items and could not answer them. The final version of the questionnaire included 45 items belonging to these areas: course content, course implementation, course trainer, teaching language skills and components, classroom management skills, course planning, course evaluation,

motivating the participants, error correction, and impact on teachers' attitudes and teaching knowledge. Here, the participants were asked to choose the best option ranging from extremely disagree to extremely agree, six-point Likert-scale items, showing their level of satisfaction with the training course.

5. Data collection and data analysis procedure

First of all, the researcher collected data about the aims and objectives of the TTCs held in Iranian private language institutes. In order to collect data in this regard, the researcher searched the terms "teacher training course+ Iranian language institutes" in the web. Having found the websites of language institutes which hold TTCs, all the information available on the website was collected and saved for later analysis. The search for new institutes continued until the researcher reached data saturation point (34 language institutes). In other words, the researcher continued his search until there was no new information available.

Second, GOSA language institute was chosen because it was is one of the most well-known institutes across the country, has more than 80 branches in different cities, and has trained over 1000 English teachers. Having chosen the target institute, the researcher distributed the first questionnaire among the teacher applicants who were planning to attend the teacher training course in GOSA. The teacher applicants who applied for (35 applicants) and attended the training course in GOSA (25 applicants) filled out the questionnaires. All in all, 60 teacher applicants filled out the needs-analysis questionnaire.

To collect data for evaluating the teacher training courses, the researcher distributed the evaluation questionnaire among the employed English teachers working in GOSA. There were 97 teachers responding to this questionnaire, but 94 responses were valid because three of the applicants ticked the sixth option (strongly agree) for all of the items even the negatively worded items. The responses of the participants to both of the questionnaires of the study were entered into SPSS software version 22 for later analysis.

As regards the data analysis procedure, the researcher utilized descriptive statistic (mean) to report about the need and satisfaction level. The results of the data analysis are presented in the form of tables and graphs. The descriptive statistic will be calculated for each item, different sections of the questionnaires, and the whole questionnaires. The qualitative data of the open-ended questions of the needs-

analysis questionnaire and institutes' objective were analyzed through content analysis technique. The results of the data analysis are presented with regard to the research questions respectively.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Research Question One

In order to find out the extent to which the teacher applicants needed training and instruction in the specified areas and teaching skills, the needs-analysis questionnaire was distributed among the applicants. The first part of the questionnaire included two open-ended questions about the applicants' expectations from the teacher training course, and their suggestions for an ideal TTC. Content analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions revealed five main themes.

First of all, the teacher applicants expected the training course to follow certain specific aims (2 participants), to enjoy a written syllabus (8 participants), and to have a convenient schedule (5 participants). Wallace (1991) suggests that every teacher training program should have a clearly stated objective and the course content should reflect that objective.

Another suggestion made by almost half of the applicants (29 participants) was that the training course should contain enough teaching practices, allow the participants to experience the real teaching situation, or be like a workshop. These findings match well with the results of Erozan (2005), Seferoglu (2006), and Uysal (2012) indicating that teacher trainees expected more micro-teaching, practice teaching activities, and practical teaching techniques in their teacher training programs.

The third group of comments focused on the content of the course. Four of the applicants believed that the course content should be interesting, exciting, and inviting. The course content should contain practical techniques for teaching English (23 applicants), be up to date (7 applicants), contain modern teaching techniques and methods (14 applicants), contain instruction about using technology in class (17 applicants), and prepare the teachers for the usual challenges of teaching (6 applicants). Four applicants expected the trainer to teach them how to encourage the learners, to motivate the learners (3 applicants), and to answer unexpected questions for which the teacher has no answer (2 applicants). Sadeghi and Richards (2015) and

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Abaszadeh (2012) also found that encouraging and motivating the learners was one of the main difficulties of Iranian English teachers.

Still another theme mentioned by the applicants was the outcomes of the course. They expected the course to give them enough self-confidence in teaching (12 persons), to give them the ability to handle and control a class (10 persons), and to increase their teaching abilities significantly (4 persons). Salli-Copur (2008) and Kazemi and Ashrafi (2014) concurred with this finding that teacher applicants needed to receive training in regard to classroom management. However, the most important theme which was emphasized by 43 of the participants was the course trainer. They noted that the course trainer should be experienced enough, skillful, knowledgeable, energetic, creative, and able to establish a friendly relationship with the participants.

The second part of the questionnaire dealt with the skills and abilities needed for an English teacher. Here, the participants were asked to show their level of need for receiving instruction by choosing a number from 1 (very little), to 5 (very much). Table 2 displays the means of all the items and areas included in the needs-analysis questionnaire. Means are calculated based on the responses ranging from 1 to 5.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the teaching skills and abilities

Teaching Skill	Mean	Teaching Skills and Components	3.82
Learning Theories and Teaching Methods	**3.12**	Teaching grammar	2.96
Reviewing the language learning theories	2.23	Teaching vocabulary	4.23
Reviewing the English teaching methods	2.28	Teaching pronunciation	4.21
Reviewing **new** learning theories	3.43	Teaching reading	3.60
Reviewing **new** teaching methods	4.55	Teaching writing	2.66
Genera Teaching Skills	**3.80**	Teaching speaking	4.53
Establishing rapport with the learners	4.05	Teaching listening	4.57
Encouraging and supporting the learners	3.50	**Using Classroom Resources**	**1.95**
Conducting group work activities	2.96	Using audio-visual aids	1.58
Practical teaching techniques	4.48	Using song and music in teaching	2.25
Involving weak and shy learners in class	4.01	Using educational movies in teaching	2.01
Classroom Management Skills	**3.69**	**Language Testing**	**1.50**
Designing interesting class activities	4.50	Getting familiar with testing theories	1.43
Organizing class activities effectively	2.80	Evaluating the learners' progress	1.58
Classroom control skills	4.13	**Error Correction**	**3.50**
Presenting clear instructions for students	2.70	Correcting errors in spoken English	4.27
Preparing lesson plans	4.31	Correcting errors in written English	2.74

Looking at the means of the seven main areas, it was found that teaching language skills and components (3.82), general teaching skills (3.80), classroom management (3.69), and error correction techniques (3.50) were the areas the applicants needed training most. Next, the applicants stated they needed to receive some training regarding language learning theories and teaching methods (3.12). The applicants were eager to get familiar with the most recent teaching methods and language acquisition theories, not all of them. However, the results revealed that the applicants needed very little training in using classroom resources and language testing, with mean scores 1.95 and 1.50 respectively. These findings are in line with those of Kazemi and Ashrafi (2014) and Sadeghi and Richards (2015) who revealed that Iranian English teacher applicants and English teachers expressed a need for improvement in general teaching skills and classroom management skills especially in case of large and mixed level classes. They were also corroborated by Abaszadeh (2012) who found that Iranian English teachers considered general teaching skills and technicalities of the job essential for an English teacher in Iranian private language institutes.

Comparing the teaching skills individually, the researcher found that applicants needed to receive the most training in teaching listening skill (4.57), recent English teaching methods (4.55), teaching speaking skill (4.53), developing interesting activities and exercises (4.50), and practical techniques for teaching English (4.48). Sadeghi and Richards (2015) also found that Iranian English teachers teaching in private institutes had problems in teaching spoken English and developing interesting class activities for language learners. On the contrary, the applicants felt competent enough in language learning theories, using audio-visual aids, using movies for teaching English, testing theories, and evaluating learners' progress. Thus, they expressed that they did not need to undergo much training in these areas. These are the areas about which course designers have the same idea as the participants and do not include them in their teacher training course. For one thing, the training courses in Iran are not very long, and English teachers are not responsible for designing midterm and final exams. The students are usually evaluated by a final written exam designed by the institute supervisor or copied from the Teachers' Guides available for the books taught in these centers. Besides, the tests at the Iranian institutes are not high stakes and do not affect the students' lives and careers dramatically.

Although the applicants were not very eager to get familiar with language learning theories, they stated that they needed to keep up with the most recent and modern teaching methods. In a study conducted by Kazemi and Ashrafi (2014), the English teachers attending the training course also stated they needed to get familiar with the new teaching methods but their course trainers were not very informed in this regard. However, it hardly need be said that if the teacher applicants are non-English majors, it is wise to include language learning theories and teaching methods in the TTC. With regard to general teaching skills, applicants asked for training in establishing a friendly relationship with learners, and involving shy and weak learners in class activities. Sadeghi and Richards (2015) also argued Iranian English teachers need to be trained in involving weak students in class activities. Likewise, participants in Abaszadeh (2012)'s study noted that establishing rapport with language learners was necessary for an Iranian English teacher.

In order to manage classes effectively, the applicants needed more instruction in preparing interesting classroom activities, and preparing lesson plans. Not surprisingly, the results indicated that teaching listening, speaking, and vocabulary were the skills needing a lot of training. Furthermore, the applicants asked for very little training in regard to language testing, and using classroom

resources, but they expressed more need for instruction about spoken error correction techniques. This finding finds support from Abaszadeh (2012) who revealed that teachers teaching in Iranian language institutes need to know error correction techniques.

7. Research Question Two

The second aim of the research was to evaluate the teacher training course held in GOSA. In order to do so, 94 employed English teachers who took the training course in GOSA filled out the evaluation questionnaire. They were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with different elements and aspects of the course through a six-point Likert-scale questionnaire. The graph below displays the participants' level of satisfaction with the training course in GOSA.

Graph 1. Participants' satisfaction with the teacher training course

Generally speaking, the teachers were satisfied with the teacher training course (4.01). The results of the questionnaire showed that the participants were most satisfied with the techniques they learned in relation to error correction (4.89). The training course seems to focus on the techniques for correcting spoken and written language since the results of the needs analysis revealed that the teacher applicants needed training in this regard. In the same vein, Abaszadeh (2012) found that Iranian

English teachers consider knowledge of error correction techniques necessary for an English teacher. The next most satisfying aspect of the training course was that the participants learned practical techniques for teaching language skills and components (4.39). This is one of the main goals of holding a TTC in private language institutes and one of the most frequently mentioned needs and expectations by the teacher applicants. Indeed, one third of the applicants expected the course to provide them with practical techniques for teaching the language skills and components. The participants noted the courses provided them with more techniques for teaching grammar (5.22) than conversation (5.04). Although this difference might not be statistically significant, one should bear in mind that teachers and course books in this institute are supposed to mainly focus on speaking and conversation rather than grammar. The participants learnt more techniques for teaching listening (4.98) than speaking (4.40). This might be due to the fact that grammar and listening skills are easier to teach, and there are more techniques and methods for developing these two than conversation and speaking.

Furthermore, the teacher training course enjoyed a systematic planning (4.33), and could encourage and motivate the participants to take part in future teacher development plans (4.28). It was revealed that the training course was very systematic, had a convenient and user-friendly schedule, and provided the teachers with a suitable physical atmosphere. These findings are in contrast to Özer (2004) and Uysal (2012) who asserted that INSETs in Turkey lack systematic planning and comfortable setting. Teachers in the Uysal (2012)'s study complained that the classes were too crowded and the physical setting was not suitable. On the downside of planning aspect, the course designers did not specify and announce their aims at the beginning of the course and the course was too short for preparing a real English teacher. As proposed by Uysal (2012), teachers complained that they were not informed of the course aims beforehand. But the advantage of the course in GOSA was that it motivated the participants to take part in future teacher development plans. The teachers were encouraged to take part in more teacher training courses, to continue their studies in TEFL, and most importantly they obtained enough self-confidence to teach English in a real class. This study does not support Birjandi and Derakhshan (2010)'s findings that Iranian English teachers lack enough motivation to participate in teacher training courses. However, it should be mentioned that they evaluated the TTCs held by Iranian Ministry of Education, not private language institutes.

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The teachers were fairly satisfied with the course trainer (4.16), course content (4.09), and classroom management sessions of the course (3.92). These areas included both positive and negative aspects. With regard to the course trainer, the results showed that the trainer had enough experience and ability for teaching the course and acted as a good model for the teaching techniques, but he could not offer constructive suggestions and useful feedback about the teaching practices the teachers had during the course. These findings support Kazemi and Ashrafi (2014)'s findings as the teachers in that study also complained that Iranian teacher trainers were not qualified for teaching the course. Unfortunately, course content was not what the teachers expected, and they expressed dissatisfaction with some of the course sessions. Like Coskun and Daloglu (2010)'s study, the participants were provided with detailed theoretical background of different teaching methods, and various techniques for teaching the language skills and components. However, it could not meet their needs for teaching English, was not up-to-date, and neglected the language learning theories. Özer (2004) and Uysal (2012) also revealed that teacher training courses in Turkey were not based on teachers' needs and local context. Just like Salli-Copur (2008), and Kazemi and Ashrafi (2014), the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with another aspect of the content: classroom management sessions. Among the seven main areas of the needs analysis questionnaire, classroom management was ranked third by the teacher applicants. The strong point of the course in this regard was that the participants learned how to prepare lesson plans, and control a class, while they did not receive much training in designing interesting activities for students, managing class activities, and encouraging the learners in their attempts in learning English. This can be considered one of the most serious drawbacks of the training courses since Sadeghi and Richards (2015) who conducted their study in the same context concluded that designing interesting activities, managing classes and encouraging the learners were among the most challenging problems for Iranian language institutes' English teachers.

On the downside, it was revealed that the teachers were not actively involved in the course (3.51). The teachers believed that the course was lecture based (4.40), they did not have enough opportunities for teaching practice, and were not actively involved in the course. These results are shared by several studies in previous literature (Erozan, 2005; Seferoglu, 2006; Razi and Kargar, 2014). The worst point was that almost all the teachers noted that they did not observe any real class taught by experienced teachers (2.50), while Bax (1997) and Hockly (2000) argued that experiential training approaches where teachers are allowed to practice and analyze

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the modeled lessons and approaches have a profound effect on their teaching practices. Another weakness of the course was that the participants acknowledged that they earned the ability to teach English to some extent, but the institute could not create an ideal situation for the learners to learn and change their behavior. The biggest problem with the course was that the institute did not collect the teachers' feedback about the course to improve their future training courses, concurring with Özer (2004), Bayrakçı (2009), and Uysal (2012). Finally, the course did not impact the teachers' attitude and knowledge considerably (3.32). Similar to Uysal (2012)'s study, the teachers did not learn much about conducting group and pair work activities. Besides, they had problems with involving the weak and shy learners in class activities and establishing rapport with the learners which were found to be a very common problem among Iranian English teachers in the study conducted by Sadeghi and Richards (2015). Unlike participants in Coskun and Daloglu (2010)'s study, the teachers expressed that they were not trained in evaluating and criticizing their performance as teachers. It must be emphasized that all the above-mentioned findings were based on the teacher applicants' and English teachers' perceptions about learning since the data were gathered through questionnaires, not any test or observation.

8. Conclusion and Implications

This study was conducted to firstly diagnose the teaching skills in which Iranian English teacher applicants needed training using a needs-analysis questionnaire. The 28-item questionnaire which was based on previous literature in this regard was filled out by 60 teacher applicants. It was found that they needed to receive training most in three areas: teaching language skills and components, general teaching skills, and classroom management skills. However, analysis of the aims and objectives available on the websites and documents of 34 language institutes showed that most Iranian private language institutes focused on teaching language skills and components, and devoted few, if any, sessions to classroom management and general teaching skills, or neglected these two areas completely. Error correction techniques, and language learning theories and teaching methods were ranked fourth and fifth respectively by the participants. While the teacher applicants did not consider these areas very important, 27 of the institutes mentioned language teaching methods and error correction techniques as the main topics in their TTCs. However, just 4 of the institutes included language learning theories in their syllabus. Finally, the results of the needs analysis questionnaire revealed that the applicants needed little, if any,

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training in using classroom resources and language testing. Fortunately, there was a unanimous agreement between teacher applicants and TTC designers in this respect and none of them considered these areas essential for an English teacher.

With these findings, the researchers suggest that teacher training course designers consider both the applicants' needs and expectations from a training course and the institute's aims and policies. Given the short duration of English teacher training courses in Iranian institutes, course designers and trainers are advised to devote the course to practical teaching techniques and classroom management skills. They need not review all the language teaching history from Grammar Translation Method up to now. Besides, since institutes' English teachers are not responsible for designing midterm and final exam, they need not much training with regard to language testing theories. Next, since some of the teacher applicants are not English majors, course designers are encouraged to offer a different course for those who have no background in English teaching methodology and language acquisition theories. Finally, as the results of this study as well as the findings of Sadeghi and Richards (2015) revealed Iranian English teacher applicants and current teachers need to undergo training in general teaching skills since they were among the most problematic aspects of teaching.

Content analysis of the qualitative data provided in the needs-analysis questionnaire revealed that the participants expected the training course to enjoy good planning (setting realistic goals, following a clear syllabus, and offering a convenient schedule), to provide them with enough teaching practices, to be interesting and inviting, to contain practical techniques for teaching English, to be up to date, and to prepare the teachers for the usual challenges of teaching. They further expected the course to give them enough self-confidence in teaching, to give them the ability to handle and control a class, and to improve their teaching abilities significantly. Most important of all, they noted that the course trainer should be experienced, skillful, and knowledgeable.

Considering the above-mentioned results, institutes' supervisors are strongly recommended to choose 2-3 attainable objectives which are in accordance to the teacher applicants' and institutes' needs and offer further on-the-job training course for more specialized needs. More importantly, in order to reach these objectives, the course trainer should follow an exact and detailed syllabus which is designed for the Iranian context, not blindly following the syllabus of international teacher training courses such as CELTA or TESOL. Another implication of this study is to reduce the

theoretical content and provide enough opportunities for teacher applicants to teach their peers or if possible in a real class, which is suggested by Bax (1997) and Hockly (2000). They argue teacher training courses which are holistic and experiential and where trainers are allowed to practice and analyze the modeled lessons or approaches have more impact than traditional transmission-based linear approaches. Lastly, institute's supervisors should choose course trainers who are experienced enough for teaching these courses, and are able to give constructive and insightful comments regarding the trainees' teaching performances.

Finally, the results indicated that Iranian teacher training courses had both strong and weak points in planning and implementation stages, but there was no mechanism for evaluating the course. On the up side, teachers were most satisfied with two aspects: error correction and techniques for teaching language skills and components. Regarding course planning, the teacher training course had a convenient schedule, was well-organized, and had a suitable physical atmosphere. Furthermore, the courses were found to be useful since the participants were motivated to take part in future teacher training courses, earned enough self-confidence to teach English, learned how to prepare lesson plans, and control a class. However, this course suffered from serious drawbacks. From among the language skills and components, the training course focused more on teaching grammar and listening than on teaching conversation and speaking. Next, the course aims were not clear, and course was too short. Furthermore, the teachers were fairly satisfied with the course trainer, course content, and classroom management sessions of the course. The course content was not based on teachers' needs, was not up-to-date, and did not include training in designing interesting activities, in managing class activities, and in encouraging the learners. It was also revealed that the teachers were not actively involved in the course, and the institute could not create an ideal situation for the learners to learn and change their teaching behavior for example through observing classes taught by experienced teachers. Still another problem was that the teachers did not learn much about conducting group and pair work activities, involving the weak and shy learners in class activities and establishing rapport with the learners, and evaluating and criticizing their own performance as teachers. Finally, the biggest problem with the course was that the institute did not collect the teachers' feedback about the course to improve its future training courses.

Iranian teacher training courses need to reduce the theoretical contents, focus on the practical techniques of teaching language skills and components, and teach the participants different classroom management skills. To provide a better situation for

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the teachers, the course trainers need to give more opportunities for teaching practices of the participants and concentrate more on their experiential knowledge. The teachers need to observe the real classes taught by experienced teachers or watch the video recordings of these classes. Most importantly, course trainers and institutes' supervisors need to systematically and regularly collect feedback from the participants, to compare the teaching performance of the teachers before and after the TTC, and to use this information to improve their future teacher training courses.

Before concluding this article, it should be noted that the data collection methodology used in this study is subject to some limitations. This study utilized questionnaire as the only tool for collecting data regarding the evaluation of teacher training courses. The authors believe that other data collection methods such as observation of the training course, before-course and after-course comparison of teachers' teaching performance and collecting data from the students of these teachers can render more illuminating results. Future studies can employ final standard written and oral practical teaching tests to measure the extent to which the training course impacts the teaching knowledge and abilities of the participants.

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