

# A Comparative Study of Teacher Education in Iran and the UK

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**Abstract**—This paper briefly compares teacher education in the UK system with that of Iran's. It identifies the main differences, basically of policy and practice, in that teacher education has always been centralized in Iran, whereas it had once been more or less de-centralized in the UK. However, teacher education is now being centralized in the UK, despite all the disagreements and dissatisfaction amongst the educators and teacher trainers. It seems that this new shift is unjustified so may result in non-professionalisation and politically inappropriate intervention as is indicated by Gilroy et al (1991-1995). The article will deal mainly with Iranian teacher education. It will conclude with an intensive of comparison that will clarify the essential different issues regarding teacher education in the two systems which is followed by some experiential suggestions and conclusions.

**Index Terms**—teacher education, Iran, UK, assessment

## I. INTRODUCTION

It will be difficult to identify or deal with every single influential element in teacher education, so we will consider the main issues, the 'theory and practice'. A critical literature review of the teacher education of the two systems shows that there are positive and applicable factors in the UK system in the 1960s that can be adjusted and applied to Iranian teacher education. On the other hand, the failure of the centralized system in Iran can be a useful lesson for the recent shift of education in the UK. Nevertheless, what is ignored more than anything else in Iranian teacher education is the practice of teaching. This is basic need of the teacher trainees and requires a balance between theory and practice, as it has been soundly provided in the UK system so far. In making such a balance needs to identify the related issues of the teacher education in Iran as is detailed below.

### A. Teacher Education in the UK in Brief

Teacher training in the UK began in 1798 in Southward, a slum district of London. Gilroy (1996) wrote in fact, that initially there was no formal teacher education and the first pupil-teachers were the older students of the class. In 1846 the national pupil teacher programme began with intelligent pupils aged thirteen and above as apprentices trained and practiced for five years. These apprentices were taught only by a schoolmaster for 1.5 hour's daily instruction out of school hours and teaching were examined by Her Majesty's InspectorMIs. In 1849 the number of female pupil teachers was doubles that of males. This was due to lower wages of the female pupil teachers. Stones' (1992) views on teacher education as: The view of teaching as transmission of knowledge sees teaching as talking; as explaining; as delivering. It accept as proof of learning, reciting, answering questions by verbalizing, whether orally or in writing, and giving back to the teacher what the teacher dispensed earlier. In 1862 the Revised Code Scheme was introduced which was based on results' system. Coppock (1997) has given a picture of the social situation of the apprentices that is interesting to mention:

"At a time when pupil teachers began to predominate at training colleges it is likely to have been the case that the social background of those admitted was predominately that of the lower middle class (e.g. daughters of shopkeepers, clerks, commercial travelers, etc.) or, at the very least, from the respectable working class. ...From its inception, the pupil teacher scheme laid down requirements, about basic age and good health criteria, which had to be satisfied by all candidates. The school managers had to certify the moral character of the candidates and their families, with attention directed at home conditions. This would suggest that working-class pupil teachers had to come from respectable homes."

Coppock further pointed out that in 1881 Pupil Teacher Centers were set up that pupil teachers attended for training. To the writer the teaching of apprentices was without life and point and, in fact, they were in charge of the lower grades. The pupil-teachers who passed the exams set by HMIs could sit for a three-year college scholarship. At the same time, there were many pupil teachers with no certificate of any kind. More than one-third of the apprentices were female. During this period only a small number of these pupil-teachers were accepted into religious colleges for a certificate and qualification. Formal teacher education has had two kinds of training: Initial teacher education and In-service training.

Teacher education and training include both theoretical and practical dimensions. Both of these are vital to training, which needs to be completed thoroughly and professionally.

In this regard Curle (1963) argued for the importance of teacher education as being: One of the nerve centers of the educational system. More can be done to raise standards of education at less cost through teacher training. But in the under-developed countries relatively little attention has been paid to this urgent task. Lack of a cadre of trained teachers has lowered university entrance standards, has crammed universities with students unable to follow the courses or attain their degrees.

However, some may deem that pedagogical knowledge is considered as a minor factor of improved teaching. More knowledge about teaching practice can increase teachers' initial teaching ability. The Robbins Committee recommended a B. Ed. degree for elevating teachers' qualification, validated by university education departments. This system, in which universities were involved in teacher training, had in fact many advantages such as:

1. To elevate teacher's profession;
2. To satisfy teacher education graduates;
3. To encourage teaching staffs in the colleges and polytechnics by promoting their teaching level and certificate validation;
4. To help Departments of Education in universities to establish close relationships with colleges;
5. To broaden and strengthen the course content.

Coppock further pointed out that toward the end of eighteenth century the Society of Friends in England established the Welsh Circulating Schools and a number of other institutions. At that time in those schools the emphasis was on content rather than method. There were about 30 colleges and polytechnics and 21 universities by 1963. These institutions were called on to collaborate at this time. Consequently, universities applied their quality teaching methods and research work in order to transfer the excellence of teaching styles in their classrooms.

Gosden (1989) argued that the certificated teacher at the time of the Butler Act had to take two years training preferably in grammar school or single-sex colleges rather than in higher education. But emphasis on practice by Wilkin (1996) that training had shifted to more practice and students spent more time in schools. Heward (1993) discussed that there were strong battles among the related authors on this regard.

The relationship between colleges and universities continued until the early 1990s. By this time the government's intervention had created a situation where they had central control of teacher education teachers trained in colleges, polytechnics, and universities and in school-based schedules. Trainees normally taught, observed and undertook activities with pupils or visited special educational development or facilities in-groups. Of course, teaching practice was of most concern to the students and their tutors. However, a major change in the UK teacher education began in 1976 and it still continues by centralizing teacher education in which the government is wresting power and training from universities and higher institutes and leaving it to schools and probably placing teacher education at risk. This was the consequence of the paper, *Teaching Quality*, which criticized the quality of teacher education teaching. Gilroy (1991) argued that in 1984, as a result of the report, the government created the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE). Another attack came from the Secretary of State's speech in January 1992 which in effect, supported the snipping of the "New Right" on teaching subject and materials.

Based on the context, self-evaluation can provide a strong basis for professional development for those concerned but is usually limited in its wider significance. Inspection provides a valuable basis for comparison within, and review across, whole systems but tends to be less flexible and can be less sensitive to particular contexts.

It may be important to consider developments at three levels, those of the individual practitioner, either pupil or teacher; the institution and the national system.

### *B. Teacher Education in Iran*

Teacher education and training in Iran began nearly eight decades ago. The 'Central Teacher Training school' with very limited courses in pedagogical principles, philosophy of education and logic was established in 1920. 9 years later the school changed its name to 'Advanced Teacher Training School' and in 1970 the school changed again to 'Teacher Training University' and moved to its current location, Saadi Street in Tehran. The new university began its function under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education devolved from the Ministry of Education. At this time the number of courses also increased to: intermediate pedagogical principles, history of education, educational psychology as well as chemistry, physics, natural sciences and general psychology. Teacher education in Iran subsumes initial teacher education, which embodies the main part of the teacher education program, and in-service training, which is a limited scheme. There are two separate centers for teacher education: teacher training universities, colleges and higher institutions for teachers to teach at schools. These institutions educate teachers in three echelons for:

1. Elementary level, in which pupils start at age seven as first year school student and study for five years.
2. Second level is guidance, which is a three-year course, followed after succeeding the elementary years.
3. Level three is high school or secondary education, which is four years (pre-university included).

At present there are 8 universities and 12 training colleges and training institutions located in all big cities and some small ones as well. These institutions award either Higher Diploma (H & D) or BA/B.Sc. to their graduates. The normal H & D course is two years with some 36 units or 12 courses and BA/B.Sc. four years with about 140 units. Each course normally is 3 and some 2 units (credits). The students usually reside in dormitory and residential halls during their study

(as stated by the university prospectus, 1997).

There is only one university, the University of Tarbiat Modarres (Daneshgah Tarbiat Modarres, DTM) for university teacher training established after the Islamic Revolution and this is located in Tehran. The graduates from this university are awarded MA/M.Sc. or Ph.D. All training universities, colleges and other institutions are public and there are no private institutions for this purpose. The students studying in training centers do not have to pay tuition or any other fees, but sign agreements to work as teachers wherever needed after their graduation. The students are also paid an allowance or given loans to help their personal needs during the study. An MA/M.Sc. normally takes three to four years and Ph.D. between three to seven years in DTM.

Patrick et al (1982) have reported the percentages of graduate qualifications of a first degree, masters and doctorate.

English student teachers are trained for almost all disciplines. Therefore, there are a large variety of courses and areas to study and is not possible to list all of them here. English language student teachers are my main targets to focus on. The reason for this option was that English teachers have had difficulties in their classes, especially in the use of English language.

The university graduates teach either in the Faculty of Letters and Humanities to teach English students only (English language and literature or linguistics) along with teaching the ESP in other Faculties. The other place to teach English is in language centers, which are located in the universities. These centers are not always separate and independent as in some universities they are combined with the Faculty of Letters and Humanities. English instructors at the centers teach two types of English: ESL as English general language or ESP to students of various disciplines, except English. There is of course in-service training for teachers of schools, but not for university instructors.

Teacher education concerns professional skills, knowledge and adaptability of teachers. The process of teacher education promotes trainees' personal practical knowledge and skills, but the emphasis is on practical preparation in handling a class. An effective teacher education program should include basic qualifications, that is, having credits both in professional educational subjects such as principles of education, pedagogical psychology, teaching methods and teaching practice; and in the subject to be taught. Teacher training in Iran can be pre-service programs for student teachers or in-service programs for untrained current ones under qualified trainers' supervision.

In fact, the political and social change affected the students' needs and anticipations. Accordingly, The 1988 Education Act states: The curriculum for a maintained school satisfies the requirements if it is a balanced and body based curriculum which: A) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and B) prepares such pupils for opportunities, responsibilities and experiments of adult life (Education Reform Act 1988, section 1, Para.2).

According to Goodson (1997) teacher education courses were: Grundy and Hatton (1995) report a critical view of recent changes in teacher education that there is no picture of the teacher as an intellectual element in ethical and knowledge transformation, or in the fostering of democracy, social justice and order.

### C. *Background to University Teacher training: Tarbiat Modarres University*

This University was founded under the guidance of the Islamic Revolution Leader (late Imam Khomeini) and the High Council of Cultural Revolution in 1982. Later, in 1983 the University was thoroughly approved by the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education.

The University of Tarbiat Modarres commenced with the enrollment of 123 students with 11 majors in Humanities and later expanded to other areas such as Agriculture, Art, Engineering, Medical Science and Natural Resources. At present, there are some 2,670 students studying in 80 Master degree programs and about 30 in Ph.D.) programs. The University has planned to provide facilities for research schemes in schools and with outside institutions and industries to develop research independence. It is also providing opportunities to improve relations with other national and intentional higher education institutions; to send Iranian students to study in foreign countries as well as preparing higher education research centers.

The chief aim of the University is to prepare its students to graduate with the ability to instruct at any Iranian university or higher education institute. It seems necessary to mention here that there are of course other universities and higher institutions that train teachers for schools; elementary, guidance, a three-year study between elementary and high school; and high schools. Only the most eligible candidates are chosen through a selection process. Candidates for master's programs must be under 35 years of age and hold a bachelor's degree certified by the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, and for the Ph.D. must be under 40 and holding a certified master's degree. There is an oral examination as well as an interview after a written exam, in which the candidates are required to fulfill certain conditions. Both degrees' programs are of course work and research. The master's programs include 13 general credits, 32-38 core subject credits (each credit involves 17 hours per semester) and 4 to 8 credits of research to a total of approximately 2.5 years. After the completion of the required courses and research, the students defend their theses in the presence of a formal Evaluation committee. The Ph.D. students take 12-30 core subject credits and two years of research work. These students are also required to publish at least two articles concerning their theses. This degree normally takes 4 years full-time. Students are required to take 13 course credits in Education, Teaching Methods, Logic and Methodology, and Islamic Ideology. This combination of study provides the students with the opportunities to expand their intellectual capacities and broaden their perspectives in teaching. Finally, it allows them to specialize in an area in which they will be responsible for teaching in the future. The students are presently accommodated within the

campus. Education at university level needs to be more practical to make a balance between theory and practice in Iran. This is what is expected in Iranian universities so as to enable the graduates to develop their intellectual power and practice what they learn.

Having introduced some critical issues of teacher development in Iran, the viewpoints of a few writers such as Brumfit (1986) and Widdowson (1982) on ESL/ESP have been identified encouraging and applicable to Iranian teacher training. There are some, related comparative arguments to highlight the issues.

In a study conducted in Scotland showed that since 1998 (DfEE, 1998a) routes of entry into the English teacher workforce became even more varied in nature, with continuing expansion of employment based routes (qualifying teachers are still required to pass skills based tests) – the recent Select Committee Report on the training of teachers suggests 15% of new teachers now take this path (House of Commons, 2010).

The *Becoming a Teacher* (BaT) project (2003–2009) examined experiences of initial teacher training, induction and early professional development of entrants to the profession via university-based, employment-based and school-based routes in England.

## II. PROBLEM

The overall aim of this paper is to understand the contribution that teacher education can make to the quality and effectiveness of the educational experience and wider personal development of the learners, drawing on effective practice.

The main problem with Iranian teacher training is its centralization and lack of practice in the English language and the link with theoretical, coursework accomplished by student teachers. Teacher students need to be involved with a number of practicing classes during their training and before their real class handling which needs to match theory and practice or conception and execution. Obviously, any prescribed programs usually frustrate the professionals by lowering their self-esteem. Teachers with low esteem would have difficulties in transferring knowledge, values and more than that may not behave appropriately as expected by the society. Due to not having a training center for university teacher training in the previous regime the majority of the Iranian English teachers in Iranian universities have not received any teacher training, unlike the training given to teachers in the UK system. In fact, we do not have many teacher educators and teacher trainers for university student teachers. English teachers urgently need specialized and professional training for their expected and successful teaching methods with appropriate techniques, if successful teaching/learning is expected. Training teachers will be more effective if these teachers are exposed to an English environment even for a short period after their graduation.

One of the main problems with teacher education in Iran is that many of its courses are still learned theoretically so the practice aspect of it needs more time and allocations. The reason is that teaching is a very complex issue. Teaching is complex, because it involves many of the factors that affect teachers' teaching; factors such as the emotional, economical, cultural, social and, of course, political condition of teachers' life. Moreover, teachers have the important responsibility, educating the generation, those who will run the society in future.

Most Iranian English teachers are not professionally self-assured, or independent, and many of these teachers have no peace of mind and feel insecure in their classroom, especially when they have students who have been abroad and are fluent in speaking English. This is due to the lack of training. These English teachers who lack the abilities to use, an effective applied approach inevitably follow the teacher's guidelines, if any, and have no ability in most cases to go further or deviate from them. Therefore, they cannot be flexible in the use and selection of their teaching style or materials for English classes. Consequently, teacher training is an essential factor in particular when training. Therefore, the process of education promotes teachers' personal practical knowledge.

## III. RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, Iranian English teachers have two basic needs in training:

a) The art of teaching and operating a classroom handling English students with particular characteristics, such as having a prior knowledge of specific English and background of professional matter to use the learned language themselves and teach the English language students how to use it;

b) The need to learn the content meaning of English (material knowledge).

Accordingly, Iranian English teachers possibly need guidance for both 'a' and 'b' needs mentioned above to follow procedures in the process of teaching. Not all teachers and teaching would have one unique guide to act accordingly. Each particular classroom situation demands a special need, which may be fairly different from other ones. For example, English classes in Iran require a special type of English that meets their subject and/or English use opportunity in accord with the Iranian culture and societal customs. Each particular area of teaching in each discipline requires a specific guidance flexible for an eclectic model. This is true of English teachers; that is, they need to be flexible. The circumstances of unqualified and uncoordinated intervention imposed by the UK government and its agents has been so unwelcome that it has been called 'attacks', 'rape', 'savage' and 'provocative'. Nevertheless, if teacher education is a national priority then it should insist it be brought to the attention of both government and public. This can be achieved by employing the resources and expertise of all involved in teacher education.

The university based elements of the course can be as follows:

- 1) Lesson planning, including the selection of content;
- 2) Motivating English students of different abilities;
- 3) Selecting and creating appropriate resources for learning;
- 4) Introducing the new techniques of teaching such as lesson analysis;
- 5) Ensuring equality of opportunity for both girls and boys;
- 6) Matching work to the capabilities of the students;
- 7) Teaching the whole assigned topic;
- 8) Gathering feedback on the students' progress.

The purpose of the course is to develop the English student teacher to be able to: understand the ways in which their potential can be developed. Accordingly, there are certain inter-related components of the course:

- a) Curriculum work;
- b) Understanding classrooms and universities;
- c) Practical work in university classes.

All English teachers in Iran need to know and strive to be an efficient teacher and know more than just what is in the textbook. All this indicates the urgency of training for the majority of these teachers. Great changes need to be focused on teaching/learning attitude towards routine and technical English use for the meaning of subject matter such as the meaning of specific symbols, expressions, and relevant formulae. To this end, an appropriate approach to teaching as well as the teacher student relationship seems necessary, because this prepares the teacher to be a motivator, assured, patient, frank and friendly and to feel sympathy towards students.

There was a general feeling that students should be introduced to various theoretical principles underlying the practice. An English tutor, for example, introduced different models of English teaching as well as his own. This approach to teaching indeed provided options for students to deal with the models that suit their class situation and has been very helpful. The view states that teaching practice should be considered as the main criterion accepted by the majority of teachers more than any other subject especially in languages. It seems necessary to establish a co-operative partnership between the universities and schools. A collaborative model introduced by some writers seems rational and applicable. The implementation of the model should result in all teacher practices being rational and teachers acting professionally. The implementation procedure can be through the acquisition of theories for conceptual framework application, observation, practice and discussing various teaching approaches.

Nevertheless, there is a generally accepted agreement that the ultimate criteria for evaluation of a teacher are the effects of the teaching behavior on the performance of the students, as discussed by Furlong et al.(1996). Theory can also be strengthened for new school based training to maintain and establish a collaborative and strong theoretical function. Goodson (1997) puts more emphasis on this in relation with practice by citing:

“Any profession whose essential theoretical and practical knowledge does not have a high place in universities and other institutions of higher education must count itself deprived and, in the long run, be diminished in status. “

He, however, puts more emphasis on theory than practice and argues that the attachment to theory can change the status and importance of teaching as a profession. Teaching and Learning Research Program study ‘Learning to Learn’ by Pedder et al (2005) found that there were opportunities for considerable teacher learning to take place in the classroom context, through, for example applying research, collaborating with colleagues, or consulting with pupils. They viewed such learning as being of high potential value. However it is also viewed as relatively high risk, and some teachers appear to be less comfortable with such approaches.

#### IV. A CONCISE COMPARISON OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE UK AND IRAN

<b>IRAN</b>	<b>UK</b>
Poor Literature	Rich Literature
Rather short history - some seven decades	Long history - some two centuries
Has always been public only	Has always been public and private
Has been taught by H.E.Is only for B Ed higher institutions and Higher Diploma (H & D) by under the Ministry of Education	Has been taught by H.E.Is and schools
Public service, no contract	Has been taught on contract
Almost all theoretical theory and practice	There has always been a blend of theory and practice.
There has never been a balance between theory and practice theory d practice	There has been a balance between theory and practice
Full prescribed programs	Less prescribed by government
No political intervention	Government political intervention
Full prescribed program designed by H.E.Is or by teacher trainers of the Ministry of Education	Teachers and teacher educators have opportunities for course content selection
Almost all courses are obligatory - only a few optional and individual activities	Student teachers have opportunity to select courses for individual activities
Teacher educators have had no collaborative task with teachers	Teacher educators have had collaboration task with school teachers with school teachers
Teacher educators have nothing to do with schools	Teacher educators visit schools
Neither teacher educators nor teachers have the opportunity to express their views and criticize the criticize overtly	Teacher educators and teachers have the opportunity to express their views and criticize the criticize overtly
Has always been centralized	Is moving toward centralization
No conflict overtly between teaching staff	There has always been conflict between government and teaching and government staff
Increasing funding	Drastic cuts in funding
Progressing and optimistic	Unknown future, mostly provocative, pessimistic

*Note:* Teacher education in Iran has two divisions:

1. Nursery, elementary, guidance and high school teacher education;
2. University teacher education for university teachers which is accomplished in the only university teacher training, DTM.for MA/MSc or Ph.D.

## V. CONCLUSION

The examination of teacher education in the UK and Iran showed that there are more differences than similarities, so as you may find it easier to entitle a contrast rather than a 'comparison'. In fact, a reflective conclusion captures some sense of the differences in the two societies whose teacher education system were examined in the previous two chapters. The contrasts illuminate the analysis of the relationships between H.E.Is, schools, government and local authorities. In England teacher education has been based on the reports by governmental agencies or HMIs in form of committees and commissions, whereas the real task, training the teachers has been carried out by other groups directly involved with teachers and teacher educators. This is indeed completely different from teacher training in Iran. There are also differences in the basic characteristics of the teaching force and of the schools where teachers have been taught and trained. There is an overt distinction between the institutions providing academic education with more practical tasks, though both systems shared a common purpose, teaching student teachers. There has been a relationship between UK H.E.Is and schools in the form of collaboration and integration for teaching material assimilation in English while there has never been such collaboration or relationship in Iran. There has also been a balance between theory and practice in England and more emphasis on practice. This is quite lacking in Iran, that is, there is no balance between theory and practice. In fact, there is for more theory than practice. There is much more flexibility of courses in England than is in Iran. The common point is that both systems have been employing their social, cultural and, more importantly the political features in teacher education, though not in the same way. The basic common point is that both systems have been educating teachers for their nations.

The study of teacher education in UK and Iran and their comparison/contrast provided us a sound knowledge and useful insights. First of all, we have learned how different the systems are and second; how they can benefit from each other's experiences. Teacher education in all was planned chiefly for the improvement of classroom practice. As we found, teacher education in Iran badly needs to balance theory and practice. That is, much more practice is needed. Therefore, what is now required is an investigation into the teaching methods used in the two systems in the same way as teacher education for the convention of positive and applicable teaching strategies mainly from the English system to the Iranian system.

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