



## Development of a Sociocultural Language Teacher Education Curriculum Model for Iranian EFL Context

Saman Soleymani<sup>1</sup> 

Ghafour Rezaie Golandouz<sup>2\*</sup> 

Parviz Maftoon<sup>3</sup> 

### Abstract

Although Sociocultural Theory (SCT) was introduced to English Language Teaching (ELT) almost three decades ago, it has not yet started to find its way into the epistemological and practical aspects of English Language Teacher Education (LTE) programs in Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) language institutions context. Not having met the needs of English teachers, teacher educators, and academic and non-academic teaching programs and feeling a pressing need for innovative approaches in language teacher education, the time is ripe for LTE programs to present a curriculum that is globally driven and locally appropriate. To this end, this paper aimed to develop a sociocultural language teacher education (SLTE) curriculum model as an alternative to the LTE programs in the Iranian EFL context. The researchers applied Vygotskian principles and extensions of SCT pedagogy to construct a curriculum model that draws on Graves' framework of LTE curriculum design and Richards' model of teacher education that collectively incorporate different aspects, namely context analysis, needs analysis, approach, content, process, teacher educator's roles, student teachers' roles, and program evaluation. To present an innovative LTE program, the researchers extracted and put together the tenets, extensions, and categories of SCT comprehensively and presented them through a complementary curriculum model that is a combination of Graves' framework and Richards' model of teacher education. This tentative but dynamic curriculum model might help teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to reconceptualize and restructure their mentalities and use the findings when designing small-scale and large-scale LTE programs.

**Keywords:** Vygotsky, Sociocultural language teacher education (SLTE), Sociocultural Theory (SCT), LTE curriculum model, Teacher education model

Language teacher education as an amalgam of teacher training and teacher development (Freeman, 2001) has undergone two major epistemological paradigms since its inception. It has

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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; [samansolaymany@yahoo.com](mailto:samansolaymany@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English, Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, Garmsar, Iran (Corresponding Author); [rezaie434@gmail.com](mailto:rezaie434@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University Tehran, Iran; [pmaftoon@gmail.com](mailto:pmaftoon@gmail.com)

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been looked into through positivism and interpretivism as two divergent epistemological lenses in the course of its development. Teachers were considered vessels/cabinets to be filled, passive, conformist, voiceless, and unheard, according to positivism. Positivism gained momentum for some decades, but it lost its popularity for its downsides. As positivism could not bear the pressures exerted against its lack of responsiveness to emerging contradictions, questions, challenges, tensions, and crises, it gave way to a new incommensurable paradigm, interpretivism, where teachers are given voice, agency, emancipation, ownership, share of power, sociality, and criticality (Johnson, 2009). These two epistemologies have been used as foundations for designing educational and teacher education programs worldwide. As an example, the sociocultural theory (SCT) put forth by Vygotsky aligns with tenets of interpretivism and can be positioned under it. Since the publication of the cutting-edge scholarly work by Freeman and Johnson (1998), the field of LTE has leaned towards sociocultural standpoints, viewing knowledge as collectively built through engagement and involvement in sociocultural practices and settings (Brandt, 2006; Crandall, 2000; Johnson, 2009).

SCT and its extensions, though profoundly grounded in education, are gaining worldwide momentum and have been recently used in teacher education programs all around the world. Barcelona Formative Model (BFM) and Praxis-Oriented Pedagogy (PROP) are profoundly grounded in SCT (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). In PROP, for instance, the program creates structured mediational spaces and well-organized instructional practices through pedagogical concepts, experiences, engagement with cultural tools and activities, zone of proximal development (ZPD) activities, social relations and interactions, shared meanings among teachers and educators, and meaningful learning environments to orient novice teachers toward teacher cognition and teaching reasoning to create dialectical combination of theory and practice that might result in development on the parts of teachers and learners (Johnson et al., 2023). Johnson and her team assert that their program is designed to guide new teachers in developing a more experienced, conversational, interactive, and adaptable approach to instruction as they prepare for and interact with their students.

In line with the global boom of SCT and its application in teacher education programs and teacher training courses, this trend has gathered more momentum in recent years in Iran. To the best of current researchers' knowledge, SCT and its extensions have been fragmentarily practiced and investigated in the EFL language teacher education context of Iran since the investigations have mostly dealt with its sub/components. According to some Iranian scholars, teacher education programs are traditional, prescriptive, top-down (Avanaki & Sadeghi, 2014), transmissive (Jadidi & Bagheri, 2014), theory-laden, lecture-based (Shahmohammadi, 2012), non-practical (Sahragard & Saberi, 2018) and cannot meet the ever-changing needs of teachers, educators and other stakeholders, and an urgent need for alternative and modular models and programs is felt in educational systems in Iran (Leather & Motallebzadeh, 2015; Safari &

Rashidi, 2015). To diminish these pitfalls, the current research aims to narrow the existing gap and develop an appropriate SCT-informed teacher education curriculum model that borrows from Graves's curriculum design and Richards's teacher education model as an alternative to current teacher education programs and to implement it later to see its contributions to teacher professional identity and its impacts on learner achievement.

This paper, in a nutshell, has three aims and concerns: a short overview of the development of SCT and its extensions in education and language teacher education, the development of an SCT-informed LTE model, and an SCT-informed LTE curriculum model based on Graves's (2009) curriculum design and Richards's (1989) teacher education model.

### Literature Review

Vygotsky is globally well-recognized for his groundbreaking ideas and technical terms which have borrowed from and contributed to education, educational psychology, and language teacher education. His terms are ubiquitous in every corner of educational settings. Mediation, mediational spaces and activities, mediated/assisted learning, *perezhivanie* (one's lived experiences), *obuchenie* (learning/teaching), ZPD, ZPD activities, scaffolding, theory-practice dialectical unity, and dynamic assessment are some to mention.

During his lifetime, Vygotsky did not grasp an opportunity to disseminate his unique ideas and concepts. After his untimely demise, his students and colleagues expanded his mentality, and it emerged under Vygotskian sociocultural theory (VSCT). Activity systems and theory, dynamic assessment and sociocultural teacher education programs are some descendants of his ideas. Recently, some VSCT-inspired models have been presented. Barcelona Formative Model (BFM) and Praxis-oriented pedagogy (PROP) are two newly established teacher education models profoundly rooted in SCT (Johnson, Verity, & Childs, 2023; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024).

Believing in the role of ontogeny, phylogeny and Neo-Darwinian adaptation paradigm in human evolutionary trajectory and (language) education, Vygotsky posits that relational ontology cannot resolve our problems in education. Rather, he has faith in transformative ontology that underscores the influence, role, and contributions of human being on/to their surrounding milieu (Johnson, Verity, & Childs, 2023; Nardo, 2021) through tools-for-result and tools-and-result (Infante, 2021) which imply human's capacity of using and making tools.

According to Vygotsky (1997a), education as an artificially constructed entity through schooling has its roots in the learning-leaps-development trajectory. Vygotsky prioritizes consciousness through education that materializes through learning and development mediated by tools. He postulates that learning as a continuous, dynamic, and cumulative process culminates in development, a discontinuous process, which is mediated by leaps through the pedagogical and/or teachers. Vygotsky holds that there are four principles for the formation of

consciousness: mediation, sociogenesis, internalization, and developmental stages (Pohner & Lantolf, 2024).

Mediation represents a shift from direct, instinctive, and natural behaviors to mediated, constructed mental processes that evolve during cultural development (Vygotsky, 1998). This principle underlines the historical formation and growth of human behavior as cultures build different types of material and symbolic tools to help them change nature to stay alive and to better their living conditions.

Sociogenesis suggests that the connection between higher mental functions was originally a tangible relationship among individuals; as collective social behaviors evolve, they transform into methods for individual adaptation and shape the behavior and thinking of the person (Vygotsky, 1998). Vygotsky believes that consciousness, the ultimate goal of education, is the result of sociogenesis, auxiliary means, and historical experience. According to sociogenesis, higher psychological functions are grounded in social relations, which generate social facts and social persons (Roth & Jornet, 2017). This principle shows the fact that every higher mental process emerges between people and then within each individual, interpersonally and then intrapersonally.

Internalization concerns the “*transition of a function [is] from outside inward*” [italics in original] (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 170). This principle is related to sociogenesis and denotes that our social experiences form our psychological makeup. Thus, the interplay between our psychology and our social world is essential and unbreakable.

Developmental Stages deal with the internalization of higher mental functions through four stages (Vygotsky, 1997b). The first stage points to the predominance of our natural instincts. The second stage deals with the ways other people mediate/regulate our behavior externally through social “I ~ You” (p. 103) communication. In the third stage, individuals begin to lead the symbolic means applied by others toward the self in “I ~ Me” (p. 103) communication to mediate/regulate their own mental and physical behavior by means of egocentric or private speech (Vygotsky, 1987 cited in Poehner & Lantolf, 2024) that is social in form but psychological in function. In the fourth stage, private speech completely internalizes and is no longer explicitly expressed. At this point, it turns into inner speech, losing all the formal features of external speech but keeping its meaning as it regulates our mental activity.

To bring about learning and development in learners/teachers, teachers/teacher educators/teacher education programs should have pre-OBA (orienting basis of action), SCOPA (schema for complete orienting basis of action), and post-OBA in their interactions and interventions in teaching contexts. This idea is rooted in systematic theoretical instruction (STI) formulated by Gal’perine that was modified and presented by Poehner and Lantolf (2024) under the model of concept-based language instruction (C-BLI). Teachers/teacher educators should also carry out and practice sociocultural discourse analysis (SCDA) in their teaching

practice that aligns with transformative ontology. A tangible example of SCDA is dialogue/talk as both a form of intellectual activity and a social mode of thinking (Mercer, 2004) that can be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Language/talk is a tool for teaching and learning, facilitating knowledge construction, idea generation, understanding sharing, and collaborative problem-solving (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). According to Littleton and Mercer (2013), SCDA differs from linguistic discourse analysis in that it focuses less on the organizational structure of language and more on its content, particularly how it supports joint intellectual activities and the development of shared understanding within a social context over time. Mercer's (2000) construct of inter-thinking—thinking together—as an individual and social endeavor underscores how humans use language to do joint intellectual activity and to understand joint experiences. For children, talk typology has disputational, cumulative, and exploratory archetypal forms. Teachers should have Zeigen—showing something novel (Biesta, 2012)—in their teaching practices and design and run ZPD and intermental development zone (IDZ) (Mercer, 2000) based upon their unique characteristics of responsibility, cultural maturity, and pedagogical expertise (Nardo, 2021) that intelligent machines cannot supersede. This reality accentuates the irreplaceability of teachers. ZPD, in Vygotsky's opinion, is getting the courage to walk into a zone of novel possibility that is neither a process nor a teaching technique but rather a metaphor (Nardo, 2021). As ZPD activities, dynamic assessment, and mediated learning can be used by teachers/educators to help learners trigger, activate, and use their learning potentials to narrow the gap between their actual and ideal abilities (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). More important than the instructional stance and practices is what teachers/teacher educators try to achieve through the practices in educational contexts (Johnson et al., 2023). IDZ refers to the ways in which teachers and learners stay attuned to each other's evolving knowledge, understanding, and emotions throughout an educational activity (Mercer, 2000). IDZ is valuable for explaining how dialogic interactions facilitate obuchenie. Mercer differentiates IDZ from Vygotsky's ZPD, proposing that IDZ provides a more dialogic, negotiated, and dynamic perspective on the processes of conceptual development through collective dialogue and collaborative engagement. For effective instruction and learning to occur, both the teacher and learner must engage in conversation and joint activities to create a shared communicative space or IDZ, based on their mutual knowledge and objectives.

According to Vygotsky, the theory-practice divide is negated and should be superseded by praxis, that is, the unity of theory, research, and practice. In Vygotskian ideas, theory and research are prerequisites for practice, and practice is a testing ground for theory (Nardo, 2021). Through praxis (and voice), “professional, intentional, and seasoned activity are modeled, enacted, and explored” (Johnson et al., 2023, p. 5).

To narrow the divide between theory and practice, we all need innovation. SCT is an option, and it can be used as an analytical tool and a framework in the realm of learning, teaching, and

teacher education. SCT can serve as the foundational basis for new innovations in teaching and teacher education. A significant advancement in this area is the approach to second language teacher education from a sociocultural perspective, as introduced by Johnson (2009). Firmly rooted in interpretivism and SCT, Johnson proposed a preliminary model consisting of five key principles. She contends that teachers are also learners in the teaching process, that language functions as a social practice, that teaching involves dialogic mediation, that macro-structures and the second language teaching profession are interconnected, and that inquiry-based methods should be employed to foster professional development. Her perspective has laid the groundwork for numerous studies in language teacher education. Johnson argues that adopting a sociocultural viewpoint transforms our understanding of language, language instruction, and the broader social, cultural, and historical macro-structures that influence the constantly changing field of ELT and what constitutes professional development. Additionally, Johnson's principles are interrelated and non-linear, with a symbiotic and synergistic relationship among them.

As another innovation, the first-generation activity theory (AT) put forth first by Vygotsky was expanded later by Leont'ev and Engstrom. According to the latest version of the theory, subjects, mediation, objects and outcomes, society, rules, and division of labor make the interdependent elements of the theory. In addition, activity systems exist in every society, and the interactions among them might result in contradictions that educators and educational systems should resolve. These contradictions can be drivers for more development (Engeström, 2008).

Another innovation rooted in SCT is BFM (Esteve et al., 2017), which underscores three major pedagogical concepts of text genre, linguistic concepts, and instructional sequence on its path to teacher development. Linguistic concepts are communicative activities in texts and are internalized by teachers through dialogic mediation (Esteve, 2018). BFM has three stages: pre-OBA (Orienting Basis of Action), OBA, and post-OBA. According to BFM, it is necessary for teachers to change their pre-understandings as they go through the teacher education program. OBA refers to an action plan designed on the basis of learners' current knowledge. Pre-OBA refers to teachers' initial grasp of language, language teaching, and their teaching practices. Post-OBA is teachers' changed grasp of language, language teaching, and their teaching practices. The teachers' OBA must change when they go through the program. In conclusion, BFM can be presented through the following formula: Pre-OBA + OBA + SCOBA + post-OBA which can be considered as a tripartite sociocultural mechanism (TSM) in SCT. SCOBA (Schema for Orienting Basis of Action) refers to the drawings, graphs, diagrams, and objects teacher educators use to help (novice) teachers. Educators should change teachers' everyday, spontaneous concepts (their background knowledge and lived experiences) to scientific concepts through obuchenie (learning/teaching process).

Another SCT-rooted novelty is PROP (Johnson, Verity, & Childs, 2023; Pohner & Lantolf, 2024) in which Vygotskian sociocultural theory leads to the development through well-designed instructional practices and pedagogical concepts. Activity design and construction, direction/leading, predictability, embodiment in teaching, guided participation, instructional rewording, student orientation, provision of relevance, reasoning-based teaching, and teaching as connecting make the principles of PROP. PROP has three pillars: “teaching ESL; tutoring internship; and teaching practicum” (p.11). Professional readings, observation, engagement with real teaching contexts and pedagogic concepts, and talk with experts are the resources of PROP. Teachers and teacher educators should use the pedagogical model of concept-based language instruction (C-BLI) to implement PROP and other teacher education programs. The original version of this model, systematic theoretical instruction (STI), was proposed by Gal’perin (Engeness, 2021) whose goal was an explanation of internalization (movement from inter-plane to intra-plane of psychological functioning). The model has six phases: “pre-understanding; concept presentation; materialization; verbalization/Languaging; communicative, dialogic, and performance phases, and internalization” (Pohner & Lantolf, 2024, p. 19).

A simple net surfing, prolific works on SCT, and the establishment of some academic journals on SCT demonstrate that research on the role of SCT and its extension on learning/teaching in general and language teacher education, in particular, is gathering momentum all around the world. Due to the word limit, the researchers of this study skipped those investigations. In line with a global boom in studies on SCT and its extensions, the number of studies done in Iran is increasing. Some scholars have fragmentarily worked on some aspects/components of SCT. The studies concern investigations on the role of private speech in teacher-learner interactions (Gheisari, 2017), SCT, and writing (e.g., Ataie-Tabar, Zareian, Amirian, Adel, 2019; Hajjimaghsoodi & Maftoon, 2020; Latifi, 2023; Mallahi & Sadaat, 2018; Zareian & Mallahi, 2016), SCT and teacher professional identity (e.g., Amir Abadi & Razmjoo, 2022; Asgarbigdeli, 2020; Hoominian Sharifabad, Fazilatfar, & Yazdani Moghaddam, 2021; Mohammadi & Izadpanah, 2019; Moghaddasi-Hajiabadi, Kolahi, & Mall-Amiri, 2021; Rashidi & Zolfaghari, 2018), teacher/peer scaffolding, dialogism, and speaking development (Soozandehfar & Soozandehfar, 2022), sociocultural perspectives and foreign language learning (Fahim & Haghani, 2012), dynamic assessment and teacher assessment literacy (Estaji, 2024; Estaji, Brown, & Banitalebi, 2024; Nasiri, 2020; Sarabi Asl, Rashtchi, & Rezaie, 2024), and collaborative content learning (Eslami, Saeidi, & Ahour, 2024).

How to develop a VSCT-informed teacher education curriculum model for the context of Iran is the aim of this study. To develop and implement a new model, as researchers of this study we believe that we need a robust framework. Our suggested model is a complementary

curriculum model consisting of Graves’s curriculum design and Richards’s teacher education model. They are explained in the following sections.

### Graves’s Curriculum Design

Graves’s (2009) model of curriculum (Figure 1) emphasizes planning that begins with an understanding of the needs of student teachers and the specific environments in which they operate. Effective curriculum planning relies on a needs analysis that is informed by diverse contexts. The fundamental questions regarding who will be taught, what will be taught, and how it will be taught are crucial components of the framework, providing a basis for making curriculum decisions. When designing an educational program, attention must be given to who the learners are, what content will be delivered, the methods of instruction, and how learning outcomes will be assessed. Additionally, the curriculum’s goals must be taken into account, as these refer to the knowledge and skills that teachers should acquire by the end of the teacher training program.

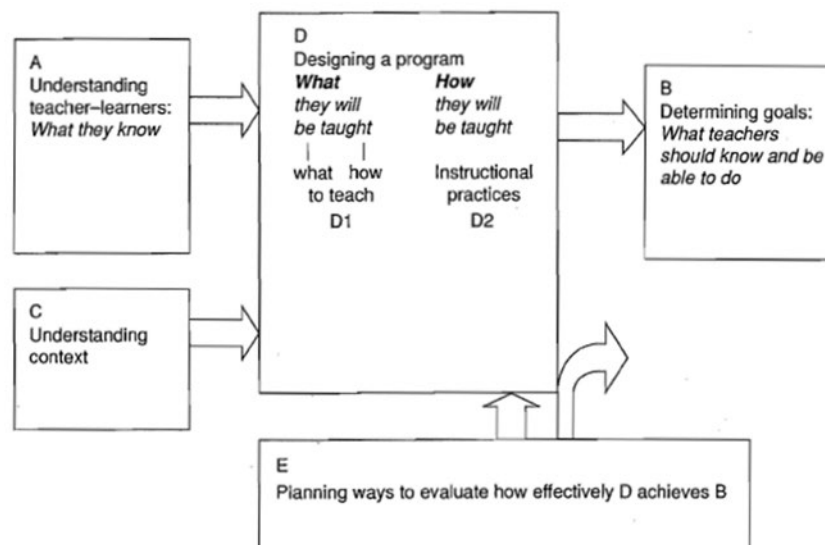


Figure 1. A Framework for Planning a Curriculum (Graves, 2009)

### Richards’s Teacher Education Model

Richards’ (1989) model of teacher education is composed of five key components: approach, content, process, student-teacher roles, and teacher-educator roles. The term approach refers to the foundational conceptual framework or philosophy that guides the program, encompassing the theories and assumptions about teaching and teacher education that serve as the basis for program development; it includes the primary objectives that the program aims to achieve. Content, on the other hand, pertains to the goals, topics, and subject matter addressed by the program. When considering teacher education from a developmental



perspective, it is essential to articulate goals and content that extend beyond mere skills and techniques, addressing higher-level issues such as conceptual understanding, attitudes, and emotional aspects of teaching. The third component, process, is defined as the methods through which the program's content is delivered, including the techniques, activities, and experiences that facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for teachers. Richards acknowledges that this definition of process, which emphasizes the transmission and imparting of knowledge, aligns with a training-oriented perspective. Therefore, he suggests that the concept of process should be revisited to address the higher-order cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching adequately. Additionally, Richards identifies the roles of both teacher educators and student teachers as important dimensions of a teacher education program. He notes some similarities between his model and Graves' (2009) curriculum design model, particularly that the "process" in Richards' framework corresponds to Graves's "how," which is reflected in "instructional practices" (D2).

Two important things that matter to and are in common in both Graves's curriculum design (2009) and Richards's teacher education model (1989) are content (knowledge base) and pedagogy (how to teach the content). There is still discord over the knowledge base of teacher education models and programs among scholars. To put it concisely and together, the knowledge base should include knowledge of context, reasoning skills and decision-making, communication skills, and language proficiency, subject matter knowledge, process knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, knowledge in-person and in-place, and knowledge-for-teaching according to Richards (1998), Roberts (1998), and Freeman (2016). Though their explanation is not in the scope of this paper, they are elaborated a bit under the proposed sociocultural language teacher education model. The knowledge base also embraces professional readings, video decomposition, teaching ESL, observation, engagement with real teaching contexts and pedagogic concepts, and talk with experts in newly-established VSC-informed teacher education models and programs (PROP), teachers' lived experiences (initial understanding), beliefs and values, and their everyday concepts (BFM).

Pedagogy is another important module of teacher education models and programs. It is implicitly expressed in some models like teacher education models by Kumaravadivelu (2012) and Johnson (2009). Unlike these two models, pedagogy is explicitly presented in some SCT-based models like PROP and BFM, that can be considered as an exemplary plan of action.

As mentioned earlier, since teacher education programs and/or courses are traditional, prescriptive, top-down, transmissive, and non-practical and cannot meet the ever-changing needs of teachers, educators, and other stakeholders, and an urgent need for alternative and modular models and programs is felt in educational systems in Iran, this study aims to bridge the existing gap and develop an appropriate SCT-informed teacher education curriculum model that borrows from Graves's curriculum design and Richards's teacher education model as a

reform to current teacher education programs and/or courses and to implement it later to see its contributions to teacher professional identity and its impacts on learner achievement.

Though teacher education programs all around the world have, in fact, shifted toward SCT-based programs since the sociocultural turn (Johnson, 2006), it has not yet found its place and value in the Iranian language learning and teaching context. So, the SCT model can be a worthwhile option to be used in language institutions that bear the major responsibility of the language learning and teaching industry in Iran. To do so, the ground should be prepared. This work is an effort to that end. The philosophy behind the current study is to develop an SCT-informed teacher education curriculum model. Later, it will be implemented, and its contributions to teacher professional identity and learners' achievement will be investigated.

## Method

### Context of the Study

This investigative endeavor was carried out in Iran, a context where English is learned and taught as a foreign language. Teacher education programs are mostly traditional, prescriptive, top-down, transmissive, non-practical and cannot meet the ever-changing needs of teachers, educators, and other stakeholders, especially in state-run institutions, and an urgent need for alternative and modular models and programs is felt in educational systems in Iran (see the introduction for references). It is far better in the private sector for their freer decision-making process and less unnecessary supervision and bureaucracy.

### Procedure

In the preliminary stage of their research, the authors undertook a meticulous process of gathering pertinent data that would underpin their study's framework. The researchers extensively reviewed the literature to identify the knowledge base, pedagogy, principles, codes, themes, categories, and extensions of SLTE. They reviewed many journal papers, book chapters, and books on SCT and its extensions to reach a saturation point where no new ideas on SCT and its extensions were identified. From the personal, hands-on, and experiential viewpoints of the authors and as a matter of choice, agency, and voice, three prominent knowledge bases - Richards (1998), Roberts (1998), and Freeman (2016) – might align well with the sociocultural perspective in Iranian LTE programs since they all together make a coherent whole that might satisfy the needs of the learners, teachers, teacher educators, and other stakeholders. As a suggestion, other scholars willing to work on the same topic can use different knowledge bases for their own agency and voice. To develop the SLTE curriculum model, the researchers drew on Vygotskian SCT tenets and relevant extensions (e.g., Freeman and Johnson (1998), Leont'ev's activity theory (Johnson, 2009), and Johnson's (2009) principles to name a few). The principles and extensions focused on different dimensions of an

educational program informed by SCT. Ultimately, the researchers decided to develop the SLTE framework based on these principles and their extensive literature review. The researchers also considered the specific features of L2 teacher development. The researchers got consultation from seven professional teacher educators a panel of experts, throughout the study on the basis of some criteria. Teaching experiences, publications in second language teacher education, and manuscript review experience made the criteria. The experts were not merely consulted for their roles but were distinguished by their substantial tenure in academia, each boasting a minimum of a decade's experience in teaching at the tertiary level. They were university professors, primarily teaching in teacher education programs across famous Iranian institutions, including Kharazmi University, Tarbiat Modarres University, Islamic Azad University, University of Applied Science and Technology (UAST), and Farhangian University. They were all PhD-holders in ELT and Applied Linguistics. They were responsible for examining the codes, themes, and categories which the authors extracted through an extensive literature review. They were also employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the extracted codes, themes, categories (data), and the innovative curriculum model. They, in fact, were supposed to help the researchers to be sure of the credibility of the codes, themes, categories, and/or content (data).

The researchers then analyzed the collected data, all the information extracted through an extensive literature review, which was done by the researchers of this scholarly work, to draw codes, meaningful themes, and categories out of SCT and its extensions. They did it through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). They extracted the codes, sorted them out in meaningful ways, and finally put them together coherently and comprehensively.

To ensure the credibility of the codes, themes, and categories gained from the sociocultural teacher education model and its extensions, the researchers presented the themes and categories to the panel of experts. The experts examined the codes, themes, and categories to ensure that they were representative of the tenets and extensions of sociocultural theory and its place in teacher education. The panel of experts ensured the trustworthiness of the data. Trustworthiness, as a principle in qualitative research, includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of data. Credibility in quantitative research refers to reliability and validity, while the focus is on trustworthiness in qualitative studies. In qualitative research, dependability and confirmability lead to replicability, which refers to adequacy and transparency of methodology that includes procedures of data coding and analysis (Riazi et al., 2023). This step was crucial in ensuring that the trustworthiness of the SCT model and its content were rigorously examined and affirmed by experts.

Later on, the researchers put all the extracted themes and categories in Graves' (2009) framework for planning a curriculum. They also incorporated the elements of the teacher

education model by Richards (1989) in part D of Graves' framework to present SCT teacher education principles and its extensions in a novel form, i.e., the proposed sociocultural curriculum model, that might contribute to the existing literature on LTE and help teacher educators and teacher education programs prepare more effective teachers for this educationally ever-changing world. Then, the proposed innovative curriculum model was again given to the panel of experts to ensure its trustworthiness. The panel unanimously maintained that the curriculum model was trustworthy.

### **The Proposed Sociocultural Language Teacher Education Model**

As illustrated in Figure 2, the proposed sociocultural LTE model comprises two primary modules: the knowledge base (KB) and SCT principles. The knowledge base is positioned at the center of the model and consists of eight components, which are outlined below. "Contextual knowledge" (Richards, 1998; & Roberts, 1998) refers to understanding learners, the school environment, the community, and society and how these factors influence and shape teaching. "Pedagogical reasoning skills and decision making" (Richards, 1998) focuses on the intricate cognitive abilities that underpin teaching skills and techniques. While proficiency in teaching methodologies and mastery of teaching skills are essential starting points in teacher development, they must be complemented by an exploration of the specialized thinking and problem-solving skills that teachers utilize in their practice (Richards, 1998). "Communication skills and language proficiency" (Richards, 1998) encompasses general communication abilities and proficiency in the target language. Given that speech typically serves as the medium for teaching any subject, it is not surprising that effective communication is often regarded as one of the fundamental skills of a competent teacher. Additionally, it is generally necessary to achieve a certain level of language proficiency to teach effectively, making language proficiency activities a central element of many LTE programs. "Subject matter knowledge" (Richards, 1998) refers to the specialized concepts, theories, and knowledge required by second language teachers, forming the theoretical foundation for the field of second language teaching. "Process knowledge" (Roberts, 1998) entails a collection of enabling skills and attitudes essential for teacher development. These skills apply both within and beyond academic courses and include academic study skills, collaborative skills (such as teamwork, active listening, and constructive criticism), inquiry skills (like observation and self-evaluation), and "meta-processing," which encompasses self-awareness and self-management skills and attitudes (Roberts, 1998). "Pedagogic content knowledge" (Roberts, 1998) refers to the understanding of language necessary for teaching it. This includes awareness of which aspects of the target language may be more challenging for learners, a repertoire of examples and activities to convey an understanding of language systems, and an awareness of which elements of the target language to introduce at different stages. "Knowledge in-person; in-

place,” derived from Freeman (2016), aims to reconcile localized beliefs and actions found in various novel methodologies with broader perspectives of teacher decision-making (cited in Freeman et al., 2019). This knowledge emphasizes the relational aspect of ELT in the classroom and serves as a foundation for teacher decision-making. “Knowledge-for-teaching” (Freeman, 2016) shifts the emphasis from teachers and their environments to the knowledge necessary to facilitate student learning (Freeman et al., 2019). The knowledge base may also include professional readings, video analysis, ESL teaching practices, classroom observations, engagement in real teaching contexts and pedagogical concepts, discussions with experts (PROP), teachers’ personal experiences (initial understanding), beliefs and values, and everyday concepts (BFM).

Johnson’s (2009) five key sociocultural principles are closely linked to the KB: “teachers as learners of teaching,” which examines the progression from externally mediated activities to internal mediation governed by the individual teacher, referred to as internalization in Vygotskian SCT terms; “language as social practice,” highlighting language as both a psychological and cultural tool used to interpret experiences and share them with others, thereby reorganizing experiences into cultural knowledge and understanding; “teaching as dialogic mediation,” which asserts that effective teaching within formal education is best characterized by a blend of student-centered approaches and intentional instruction; “macro-structures” (such as activity theory, educational politics, and high-stakes assessments), which address the larger social, cultural, and historical structures that continuously influence the L2 teaching profession; and “inquiry-based approaches,” which describe how the foundational premises of inquiry-based professional development align with a sociocultural lens, enhancing opportunities for meaningful teacher learning and modifications in teaching practicum.

All these SCT principles, except “macro-structures,” are realized through TSM, drawn from Golombek and Johnson (2019), which is discussed in the process under components of the LTE curriculum model. The last circle is the evaluation of the program. This tentative model is non-linear and context-dependent, and the relationship among its constituents is synergetic and symbiotic. The relationship among the modules is not sequential, and different modules of the model should be used according to the needs of each context.

All other extracted themes in the figure are related to and subcategorized under Johnson’s five principles by the researchers of the present study based on their relevance. The themes are language use, teacher language awareness, meaning, scaffolded learning, assisted performance, ZPD, IDZ, new models of engagement, populating theories, TSM, OBA, teacher socialization, alternative approaches, located LTE, dynamic assessment, activity theory, high-stakes tests, and educational policy. The explanation of these terms is beyond the scope of this paper.

DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIOCULTURAL LANGUAGE

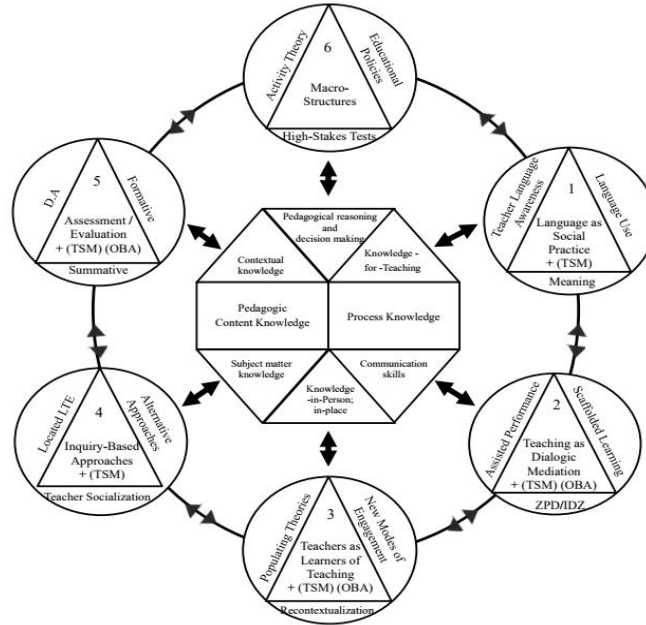


Figure 2. The Proposed Sociocultural LTE Model

**The Proposed Sociocultural LTE Curriculum Model**

When planning a sociocultural teacher education program (TEP), attention is given to the target audience, content, instructional methods, and assessment of learning outcomes. Our proposed curriculum model, a complementary version based on Grave’s (2009) framework and Richards’ (1989) teacher education model, embraces context analysis, needs analysis, content and pedagogical knowledge (what and how knowledge), aims, and assessment and evaluation as its building blocks. Approach, content, process (TSM), teacher educator’s roles, and student teacher’s roles build the content and pedagogical knowledge (part D of Grave’s framework for planning a curriculum).

The Sociocultural LTE curriculum model provides a comprehensive framework for curriculum development, with a central focus on understanding the needs of student teachers and the environments in which they operate. Effective curriculum planning begins with a needs analysis (Graves, 2009). This analysis involves gathering information from both initial and final perspectives. The initial perspective (labeled as “A” in Figure 3) involves understanding learners’ characteristics, existing knowledge, skills, expectations, and other relevant factors. In the context of the LTE curriculum (part C in Figure 3), these learners may include prospective teachers (pre-service) and practicing teachers (in-service), collectively referred to as student teachers.

Key considerations within this model involve identifying the “who,” “what,” and “how” (content and pedagogical knowledge) aspects of language teaching (part D in the framework).

The LTE curriculum consists of two main components: the content to be taught (Knowledge base and/or content knowledge), aligned with program goals, and the process and instructional strategies (pedagogical knowledge and/or TSM employed to facilitate learning) (Golombek and Johnson, 2019).

Program goals and/or the final perspective, labeled as “B” in the figure, are the knowledge and skills that student teachers should acquire through the educational program. Bridging the gap between students’ initial competencies and desired competencies is the purpose of the SLTE program (labeled as “D” in the diagram).

Additionally, curriculum planning includes strategies for evaluating the program’s effectiveness in achieving its goals (shown by “E” in the figure). To ensure practical feasibility, context analysis (labeled as “C”) assesses available resources and constraints that may impact program delivery. Graves (2008) underscores the importance of considering various curriculum contexts, including educational institutions, local communities, states, and nations, during the curriculum design process.

Outcome, an added element to Graves’s original curriculum design, refers to what teachers get out of teacher education programs to which they have been exposed. Teachers’ changed understandings and/or beliefs can be a noticeable outcome. Changes in a program should be made on the basis of the outcomes of the program.

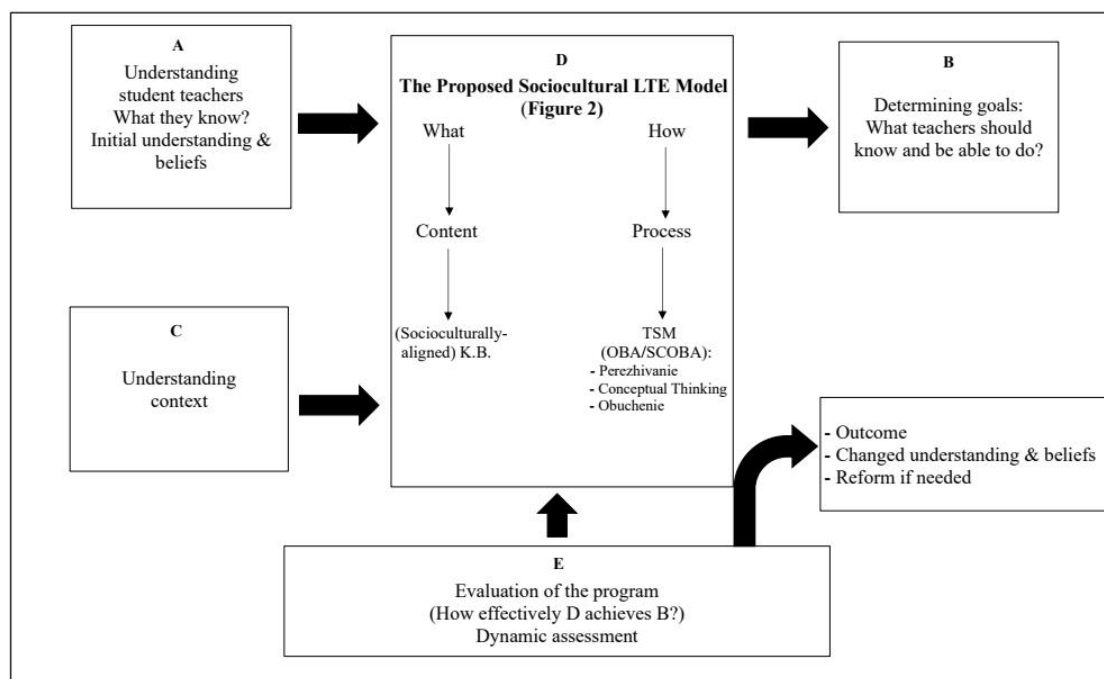


Figure 3. The Proposed Sociocultural LTE Curriculum Model

## Components of the LTE Curriculum Model

### *Context Analysis*

Context analysis entails examining the factors relevant to the setting in which the teacher education course will be implemented and assessing how the course should address these factors. Nation and Macalister (2010) identify three components of environmental analysis: learners, teachers, and the situation, which correspond with activity theory. The sociocultural principle of “Who teaches what to whom, where?” (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 405) is closely connected to the environment. Therefore, sociocultural language teacher educators and curriculum designers should consider this principle in their work.

### *Needs Analysis*

Gaining insight into teachers’ needs and addressing them can be achieved through needs analysis and elicitation. The sociocultural principle of “Who teaches what to whom, where?” is closely connected to this aspect. According to Nation and Macalister (2010), needs analysis primarily focuses on the goals and content of a course, assessing what learners already know and what they still need to learn. This process ensures that the course includes relevant and valuable learning materials. Effective needs analysis requires asking the right questions and discovering the answers in the most efficient manner.

## Proposed Sociocultural LTE Model (Content and Pedagogical Knowledge)

### *Approach*

The approach concerns the theory of learning and the theory of teaching. Sociocultural principles, activity theory, genetic method, and historicity are directly related to the approach outlined in Richards’ (1989) model.

If the objective of LTE is to equip individual teachers to operate effectively within the professional realm of ELT, it is essential to consider how a teacher’s actions are influenced by and, in turn, influence the social, cultural, and historical macro-structures that define this professional environment (Johnson, 2009). Consequently, sociocultural LTE curriculum designers should examine these macro-structures using the analytical framework of activity theory to gain insight into the interdependent nature of L2 teacher learning and teaching activities. This approach will help reveal the effects that these larger macro-structures have on the practice of ELT.

### *Content*

This paper advocates for the incorporation of three key knowledge bases identified by Richards (1998), Roberts (1998), and Freeman (2016), which align well with a sociocultural viewpoint. Sociocultural principles by Freeman and Johnson (1998), a reconceptualization of



the LTE knowledge base, and the development of teachers' awareness of Johnson's (2009) principle of language as social practice are directly related to this component. The knowledge base can also include professional readings, video decomposition, teaching ESL, observation, engagement with real teaching contexts and pedagogic concepts, talk with experts (PROP), teachers' lived experiences (initial understanding), beliefs and values, voices, and their everyday concepts (BFM). Teacher educators can use diagrams, graphs, drawings, comic strips, and posters as mediational tools. Therefore, sociocultural LTE curriculum designers should reconceptualize the traditional knowledge base according to the sociocultural turn in epistemology.

Sociocultural LTE designers should critically evaluate the traditional theories of language that have long been prevalent in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and linguistics, as these theories have largely influenced the KB of LTE without adequately equipping language teachers with a suitable understanding of language for effective L2 instruction. We contend that training professionals who view a language as a social practice perspective necessitates language teachers to develop a conscious awareness of the fundamental concepts related to how language use conveys meaning. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate theories that align with sociocultural theory, such as Halliday's (1989) systemic functional linguistics, into the curriculum.

### ***Process (Implementation of the Proposed Sociocultural Model through TSM)***

Process refers to the methods by which tasks are accomplished. Sociocultural principles such as *perezhivanie*, *obuchenie*, teaching as dialogic mediation, inquiry-based approaches to professional development, TSM, action research (AR), content-based language instruction (C-BLI), tutoring internships, and teaching practicums (PROP) are directly associated with this process component.

Golombek and Johnson (2019) propose a tripartite socio-culturalization mechanism (TSM) to implement VSCT-informed LTE practices and interactions. The proposed sociocultural model will be implemented through TSM. It involves three key phases: challenging everyday notions, promoting conceptual thinking, and developing and enacting conceptual teaching. To implement TSM, teacher educators should first challenge teachers' existing beliefs, then foster their conceptual understanding, and finally encourage them to apply these concepts in both pre-and in-service LTE programs. Additionally, the researchers recommend integrating action research (AR) into LTE curriculum design to help teachers devise personal theories and address real-world problems. Sociocultural LTE curriculum designers should also consider incorporating *perezhivanie* and C-BLI.

VSCT-informed research in LTE investigates how teacher educators and researchers foster conceptual thinking to deepen teachers' understanding of their own instructional practices

(Golombek & Johnson, 2019). These researchers highlight the interconnectedness of theory and practice, a concept referred to as praxis. Teacher educators not only model but also promote conceptual thinking within their professional development activities for teachers. By examining these practices and the resulting interactions, they document both their quality and characteristics, as well as their impact on teachers. The objective is to establish safe meditational spaces where teachers can articulate their everyday concepts, engage in reflection, and offer critiques. Mentor teachers like Harvey (2011) and Harvey and Vasquez (2015), serve as examples of how to demonstrate conceptual thinking during post-observation discussions with novice L2 teachers.

Another essential principle in VSCT-inspired pedagogy involves the deliberate introduction of relevant academic concepts to teachers. These concepts are often new to teachers, requiring them to internalize and apply them in their teaching activities (Golombek & Johnson, 2019). The practices that promote conceptual teaching aim to establish safe spaces where teachers can explore new understandings of these academic concepts and restructure their teaching practices accordingly.

As a recommendation, teacher educators should use content-based language instruction (C-BLI) to implement the current model. C-BLI includes “pre-understanding; concept presentation; materialization; verbalization/Languaging; communicative, dialogic, and performance phases, and internalization” (Pohner & Lantolf, 2024, p. 19). They can also elicit teachers’ initial understanding through Pre-OBA stage, intervene through OBA and SCOBA, and try to change their initial understandings in post-OBA. Other recommendations are tutoring internship and teaching practicum which are components of PROP.

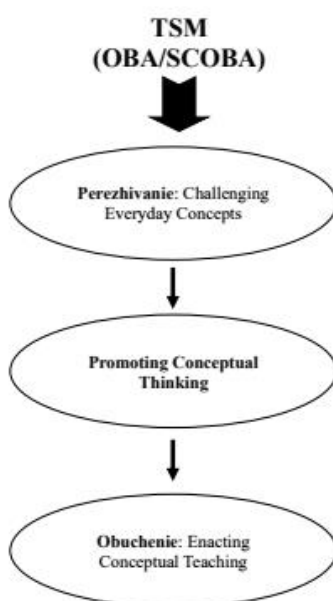


Figure 4. Schematic Representation of TSM

### ***Teacher Educator's Roles***

Given the nature of SLTE, teacher educators hold various types of responsibilities. Specifically, their role transitions from being an expert, trainer, or supervisor to that of a collaborator, consultant, or facilitator (Richards, 1989). Language teacher educators are also responsible for establishing well-structured mediational spaces where teachers can engage with relevant academic concepts while participating in diverse teacher education practices (Johnson & Golombek, 2018). Adopting a sociocultural perspective on L2 teacher learning provides a framework for understanding how teacher educators can effectively support the professional development of L2 teachers (Johnson, 2009).

### ***Student Teacher's Roles***

The sociocultural principle of “teacher as a learner of teaching” is directly connected to this component. A sociocultural approach to L2 teacher learning views teachers as learners themselves, understanding that their learning is rooted in and influenced by sociocultural contexts and mediated through various artifacts. This perspective provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the learning processes of language teachers (Johnson, 2009). In the context of teacher education as development, a student teacher is seen as capable of taking responsibility for identifying priorities for observation, analysis, and, when necessary, intervention (Richards, 1989). Similarly, a student teacher is regarded as a reflective individual and a change agent, possessing experience and tacit knowledge about teaching derived from their own experiences as students, even if they have not yet engaged in formal teaching (Freeman, 1991).

### ***Assessment and Evaluation***

According to Graves (2009), curriculum planning also includes determining ways to evaluate the efficiency of the program, that is, how well the student teachers are able to achieve the objectives. The sociocultural LTE proposes the integration of dynamic assessment (DA)—assessment of and for learning—in LTE programs to engage teacher-learners in a social practice that has the potential to promote expert thinking (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 122).

Curriculum planning includes identifying methods to assess the program's effectiveness, specifically how successfully the teacher-learners meet the established objectives. The sociocultural Learning and Teaching Environment (LTE) suggests incorporating dynamic assessment (DA)—both assessment of and for learning—into LTE programs. This approach aims to involve teacher-learners in a social practice that can foster advanced thinking skills.

### ***Outcomes***

Outcome refers to what teachers get out of teacher education programs to which they have been exposed. Teachers' changed understanding and/or beliefs can be a noticeable outcome. The goals and outcomes of a program might either converge or diverge. If they converge, it means everything has gone smoothly. If they diverge, a change is natural and inevitable.

Changes in a program should be made on the basis of the outcomes of the program when the outcomes and set goals do not align. Sometimes, the goals of a program are not all achieved. Rather, teachers and teacher educators get something that is different from the set goals. They are, in fact, the outcomes. They are achievements that are a bit and/or very much different from the goals of a program.

### Discussion

The proposed LTE curriculum model entails the cutting-edge SCT-oriented knowledge base and its extensions being considered through Vygotskian-inspired SCT principles and mentality. The rationale behind the model is SCT theory and interpretivism. It is different from the previous models in terms of its interpretivist nature and philosophy. It is also an innovative curriculum model, which is a combination of Graves's curriculum and Richards's teacher education model.

It is not necessarily the intention of this curriculum model to be applied in centralized state-run educational systems in the context of Iran since such macro-structure shifts are almost impossible because of their top-down and transmissive natures, and it is quite against Vygotsky's educational philosophy. The nature of Vygotskian principles of SCT is, in nature, antithetical to centralized state-run educational systems. The proposed LTE curriculum model might contribute to existing literature on language teacher education. It might also serve as a reform to teacher education programs and/or courses and be especially applied in private language institutions where there is more freedom and less bureaucracy in decision-making over the application of such curriculum models. It is far better applicable in Iranian private language institutes which bear the major burden of English language teaching and learning rather than centralized educational system.

In this line, this paper explores the origins of the necessity for a reform in languageteacher education programs and/or courses and advocates for a sociocultural perspective as a response. The urgency of moving toward an SCT-informed epistemology in Iranian LTE programs and/or courses is emphasized. Rather than adhering to traditional transmission-oriented models, interpretative sociocultural epistemology and a customized context and needs analysis are proposed as more fitting alternatives.

The paper critically examines conventional views on LTE, highlighting the necessity for reconceptualization. Reviewing current trends in the field underscores the potential of a sociocultural lens, particularly drawing from Vygotskian-grounded concepts. The proposed sociocultural model might align with Iranian contextual characteristics, considering the diverse unmet needs of student teachers, teacher educators, and program contexts.

Neglected tenets of sociocultural theory, such as *perezhivanie*, *obuchenie*, and activity theory, are to be introduced within the Iranian context. Implementing this model through

inquiry-based approaches, including obuchenie, perezhivanie, CBI, and TSM, might propel Iranian LTE programs and/or courses forward. Teacher educators, too, can leverage this model by tailoring their approaches to the specific context and needs.

The proposed SCT curriculum model shares similarities with Kumaravadivelu's (2012) tentative teacher education model (KARDS: knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing). These models emphasize context and need analysis, knowing, dialogizing, theorizing, knowledge base, and theory-practice unity, praxis. Unlike KARDS, our theoretically robust tentative model presents its content and pedagogical knowledge as well and leaves room for new innovations. Additionally, it resonates with Abednia's (2009, 2012) proposal for transformative L2 teacher development, which is rooted in Richards' (1989) model of teacher education.

Given the multifaceted factors unique to Iranian LTE programs, flexibility is paramount. Acknowledging the varied backgrounds of student teachers (ST) and addressing their specific needs—whether pre-service STs requiring skill development, novice teachers, or in-service STs seeking deeper theoretical understanding—requires institutional commitment. Unfortunately, existing support services for teachers remain inadequate in most Iranian teacher education programs.

To better prepare EFL teachers, curriculum models should incorporate background information of applicants. Currently, this practice is uncommon in Iran. Understanding the lived experiences, language learning journeys, and teaching contexts of prospective teachers is essential for effective language teacher education.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper presented a sociocultural teacher education curriculum model through a complementary framework that is a combination of Graves's curriculum design and Richards's teacher education model. The complementary framework encompasses needs analysis, context analysis, content and/or materials (What?), goals, process (How?), teacher's roles, student teacher's roles, program evaluation, and (dynamic) assessment.

The proposed LTE curriculum model might contribute to existing literature on language teacher education. This tentative but dynamic curriculum model might help teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to reconceptualize and restructure their mentalities and use the findings when designing small-scale and large-scale language teacher education programs. It might also serve as a reform to teacher education programs and/or courses and be especially applied in private language institutions where there is more freedom and less bureaucracy in decision-making over the application of such curriculum models. It is far better applicable in Iranian private language institutes which bear the major burden of English language teaching and learning rather than centralized educational system.

The application and implementation of the curriculum model depends on the goals, needs, infrastructures, and policies of educational systems and/or language institutions, their willingness and readiness for such changes, teachers' expertise, and contextual factors, and since they vary from context to context, the model can be presented in different versions.

Like any other scholarly endeavor, this study is not devoid of limitations. A big limitation of the current study concerns the fact that the researchers only consulted a limited number of experts. They extracted the SCT themes through extensive literature review, expert consultation and their consensus over trustworthiness of extracted themes and categories. The voices of other stakeholders were unheard. Engagement and involvement of other significant stakeholders, such as policy makers, materials developers, syllabus designers, and seasoned teachers, is our suggestion for further research that might contribute to available literature in this domain.

For this study, the researchers decided to present SCT and its extensions through Richards's (1989) and Graves's (2009) model of teacher education and curriculum design. Researchers can use alternative frameworks that may provide different lenses for understanding teacher cognition, teacher education and presenting SCT-based models with varying contributions.

Our proposed tentative SCT curriculum model was developed in an EFL context. It can be replicated by other researchers in different EFL contexts in Iran. This model can be constructed and implemented in English as a second language (ESL), English as lingua franca (ELF), and English as an International Language (EIL) contexts. Moreover, it can be used in contexts where English is not the medium of instruction (EMI). It can be applied to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) contexts. Corpus, bibliometric studies, quantitative research, systematic reviews, and meta-analysis could also be used to extract more profound themes and/or findings in future studies at larger scales. In addition, this study can be done by adopting an ecological perspective.

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