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The Perceptions of Elementary Kurdish Teachers of their Education Preparation Programs

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The Perceptions of Elementary Kurdish Teachers of their Education Preparation Programs

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction

by

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May 2023
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceptions of in-service elementary Kurdish teachers regarding their educational preparation and teacher training courses in the Kurdistan Regional Government. An ethnographic case study approach was utilized, which involved a survey of four study domains and in-depth interviews with elementary teachers. These study domains included classroom planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibility. Additionally, demographic characteristics of the in-service teachers were examined, such as gender, age, years of experience, study majors, and institutions they graduated from. The sample comprised 195 participants selected by the General Directorate of Education to complete the survey. Purposive sampling was used to select ten teachers for in-depth interviews.

The interview responses were coded, and seven themes emerged creating a picture of pre-service and in-service teacher development for these participants. The results of the study indicate that in-service teachers hold negative perceptions of their educational preparation and teacher training courses. All participants expressed inadequate or insufficient preparation. Significant findings were derived from the interview responses that could inform improvements in teacher education programs and training courses. This study thus contributes to the existing literature on teacher education programs in Kurdistan by highlighting areas for enhancement.

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Lastly, I extend my sincere gratitude to all the teachers who participated and contributed to the success of this study.

DEDICATION

This work is a dedication to those who not only read and learn from it but also appreciate its value and apply its insights to create positive changes. May the knowledge and ideas conveyed through this work serve as a catalyst for transformation and inspire action toward a better tomorrow.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Chapter One</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
A Brief Introduction to the Kurds.....	3
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Positionality Statement	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Significance of the Study	9
Specific Research Questions.....	9
Overview of the Proposed Method	10
Assumption	10
Limitations of the Study.....	10
Delimitations.....	11
Definitions.....	11
<i>Chapter Two</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Literature Review</i>	<i>14</i>
Introduction to Teacher Education Programs	14
Models of Effective Teacher Preparation Programs.....	19
Challenges in Teacher Education Programs	24
Teacher Education in Iraq's Kurdistan Region	30
Improving KRG K–12 Education	31
Perceptions of Some Experts on Teacher Preparation Programs.....	34

Gaps in the Literature.....	36
Conclusion and Summary of the Chapter	36
<i>Chapter Three</i>	37
<i>Research Methodology</i>	37
Nature of the Study	37
Participants.....	38
Data Collection	40
Research Procedure.....	43
Timeline for the Study	45
<i>Chapter Four</i>	48
<i>Results and Analysis</i>	48
Description of Coding, Categorizing, and Theming Interview Data	48
Research Question One.....	58
Research Question Two	64
<i>Chapter Five</i>	89
<i>Discussion and Implications</i>	89
Findings and Discussion	90
Discussion for Research Question One.....	90
Discussion for Research Question Two.....	93
Recommendations.....	101
Future Research	105
Conclusion	107
References.....	109

Appendices.....	117
Appendix A.....	117
Permission Letter from the General Directorate Education Office in Sulaymaniyah	117
Appendix B.....	118
IRB Approval.....	118
Appendix C.....	119
Survey Questions	119
Appendix D.....	119
Interview Questions	119

LIST OF TABLES

3.1. Teachers' Demographic Data.....	40
3.2. Timeline for the Study.....	45
4.1. Preliminary Open Codes Labeled Tentatively.....	51
4.2. Final Open Codes, Categories, and Themes.....	54

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Kurdistan Regional Government Map.....4
Figure 1.2. Danielson’s Model for the Conceptual Framework.....8
Figure 3.1. Danielson’s Four Domains.....42

Chapter One: Introduction

The fundamental goal of any educational endeavor is to provide learners with the skills, understanding, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes necessary to perform effectively in society. Ultimately, education is a potent instrument for developing desired habits, abilities, and viewpoints by molding students' behavior for appropriate adjustment in the community (Chauhan, 1994). Given this, quality education has become crucial in achieving any nation's intended educational goals. As a result, the role of teachers and educators is critical in deciding whether these desired educational goals and objectives were attained.

From 2008-2009, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) undertook an ambitious restructuring of the Kurdistan Region—kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) education system. The KRG implemented a more demanding curriculum, particularly in science and mathematics. It mandated the teaching of English beginning in grade one, made education obligatory until grade nine rather than grade six, created two national exams in grades nine and twelve, and required all new teachers to obtain a bachelor's degree. Before 2008, teachers could get degrees from Teacher Institutes (TI), which were five-year programs that began after the ninth grade and ended with the equivalent of the second year of university study (RAND, 2016).

According to Vernez et al. (2016), the Ministry of Education (MoE) in KRG had moved preservice teacher education from the MoE institutes to newly constructed teacher colleges under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR). Additionally, the old system's three levels (primary for grades 1–6, intermediate for grades 7–9, and secondary for grades 10–12) were reduced to two: primary/basic (grades 1–9) and secondary (grades 10–12). Finally, regulations were implemented to minimize the rate at which children were held back in

early grades, including eliminating the need to pass a 9th-grade exam to continue to secondary school.

For quality education to be attained, the KRG was expected to have appropriately qualified, physically and mentally competent teachers with quality knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2014) stated that "teaching should be for individuals who are intellectually competent, effective and efficient decision-makers, producers of warm classroom environments, seekers of alternative solutions, and possessors of professional interest and pride" (p. 88). Hence, teachers' skills and training became the worthy focus of interest of KRG's educational system, and teachers were required to finish greater levels of education than before the 2008-2009 changes (Vernez et al., 2016).

In this sense, training programs that prepared teachers for their careers were and continue to be closely evaluated and examined (Khalid et al., 2017). Teaching practices assisted teachers in developing a positive attitude toward teaching, exposing them to the real-life classroom experience, discovering their educational strengths and weaknesses, providing a forum for them to interpret educational theories and principles into practice, and equipped with adequate skills, competencies, individual qualities, and experiences for full-time teaching while teaching (Amankwah et al., 2017). Lam and Ching (2006) mentioned that teaching practice assisted teachers in service activities by providing them with hands-on experience that improved their learning or comprehension of topics pertinent to a particular field. It also aided teachers in closing the gap between academic learning and practical realities.

Teaching practice allowed student teachers to build and assess their competencies in important teaching areas. Multiple studies (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Davidson-Shivers et al., 2004; Heywood, 2000; Rice et al., 2000) have found that the most important factor influencing

student learning is the quality of the educator. Students who were fortunate enough to have teachers who understood their content and how to teach it well succeeded significantly more, and the consequences of an excellent or unskilled teacher lingered beyond a single year, impacting their students' learning for years to come. Teachers' essential tasks included assisting students with learning and academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2006b). Good preparation programs trained teachers on four primary domains (instruction, classroom environment, planning and preparation, and professionalism) as fundamental and required skills for their professional careers and determined how well prepared they were (Cruickshank et al., 2009), which was the main focus of this study.

A Brief Introduction to Kurds

Because Kurdish teachers, especially primary/basic school teachers (1-9), were this study's principal focus, it is convenient to have a brief overview of Kurds. Kurds are an Indo-European ethnolinguistic group that lives in the Middle East Western Asia area of Kurdistan, which borders Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It is commonly called the "Kurdish homeland," as their forefathers first emerged on the Iranian plains about 900 B.C. They speak Kurdish languages, which is a subset of Median, an Old Iranian language. The current population of the four parts of Kurdistan (Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran) is believed to be between 35 and 40 million people. Kurds are Turkey's and Iran's second-largest ethnic group. Turkey has the Kurdish population share, with 22.5 million people, followed by more than 5 million in Iraq, Iran (8.08 million), and Syria (2.2 million). Other post-Soviet republics with Kurdish populations include Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) finally performed in 1992 the first elections for a 105-member Kurdish National Assembly and a Kurdish independent government president. The

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is a semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq. To the east is Iran, to the north, is Turkey, and to the west is Syria. It is around the size of the Netherlands or Switzerland. (Vernez et al., 2016) The KRI is categorized into three governorates: Duhok, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah; Erbil is the capital of the KRG (Figure 1.1.).

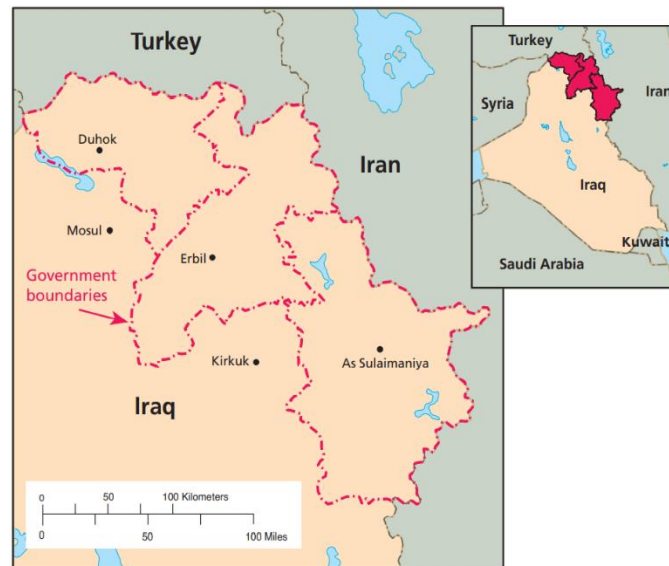


Figure 1.1. Kurdistan Regional Government's geographical boundaries and three governorates (Vernez et al., 2016.)

Furthermore, because the KRG had introduced a more challenging curriculum in 2008-2009, notably in science and mathematics, teachers were required to meet several criteria, including obtaining a higher qualification, teaching in multiple languages, and coping with a new and rigorous curriculum (RAND, 2016.) In light of these needs, the KRG MoE had to appropriately train teachers for these aspects through comprehensive preparation programs. Teachers were instructed to acquire the necessary knowledge, abilities, and attitudes during their training programs to tackle these difficulties. This ethnographic case study aimed to investigate the perceptions of primary Kurdish teachers using a survey (appendix C) and an interview

(appendix D). The survey included questions related to four domains: instructional practice, planning and preparation, classroom environment, and professional responsibilities. All participating teachers completed the survey. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten teachers to further explore their teacher preparation programs and training courses and how well they were prepared to handle school challenges.

Statement of the Problem

Examining teachers' perceptions of their educational preparation and teacher training programs were critical in determining how well-prepared teachers were for the classroom (Hassan et al., 2010; Khalid et al., 2017; Witcher et al., 2001). Previous researchers noted that universities and education administrators worldwide had a culture of assessing the efficacy of their teacher education preparation programs by studying graduates' and teachers' impressions of their pedagogical and preparatory training. In response, teachers had the opportunity to offer feedback on their perceptions of their educational practice, enabling the identification of program weaknesses and strengths. Through their practice, teachers gained the skills and abilities needed for teaching. This idea was also reinforced by Akbar (2002), who claimed that training for preservice and in-service teachers created desired professional abilities, interests, and attitudes toward the teaching profession. No study had been undertaken in Kurdistan since KRG's MoE policy makers moved preservice teacher education from the MoE's institutes to newly constructed teacher colleges under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) to examine how teachers evaluated their teacher training. Hence, it was evident that further investigation was necessary to give attention to teacher preparation programs and teachers' beliefs to assess the effectiveness of the preparation programs offered by MHESR and the MoE's training courses to in-service teachers.

Positionality Statement

As a researcher, I am fully cognizant of the impact that my background, experiences, values, and beliefs could have on the research process. This awareness is particularly relevant in my study, where I had a personal connection to the topic as an English teacher who had taught elementary/basic school grades seventh- ninth in Kurdistan, particularly in Sulaymaniyah province, without formal education training or preparation. This experience gave me a unique perspective on in-service teachers' challenges and motivated me to investigate the preparations and support provided by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Education.

In accordance with Creswell's (2003) view that a researcher is a tool in the research process, I acknowledged that my subjectivity must be considered throughout the research process. It included reflexively considering how my experiences, values, and beliefs may have shaped my data collection and analysis and my interpretation of the findings. By doing so, I aimed to enhance the study's credibility and trustworthiness and ensure that the findings accurately reflected the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

My research aimed to explore the perceptions of in-service Kurdish teachers who taught in public schools in Sulaymaniyah province regarding their teacher preparation and training courses. I hoped to identify potential solutions to these difficulties by gaining a comprehensive understanding of their challenges. Through this study, I aimed to highlight the importance of adequate teacher preparation and support and to encourage collaboration between the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education in Kurdistan.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated elementary/basic schoolteachers' perceptions of their educational preparation programs. Teachers in Kurdistan who had completed universities and institutions participated in this study and discussed their level of preparedness. This study gave valuable information regarding teachers' perceptions of the quality of education they received during their preparation and teacher training programs in Kurdistan. Many educational administrators assessed their teachers' perceptions of the quality of education they obtained immediately after completing the program or after a training course was provided. However, no study in this area had been undertaken in Kurdistan, nor had a longer-term investigation been accomplished. This ethnographic case study assists and contributes to educational institutions by informing them about the quality of the programs they offer or identifying shortcomings in the programs that need to be addressed.

Conceptual Framework

The study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions of their preparation programs in Kurdistan and their development along Berliner's five stages of expertise in teaching while utilizing Danielson's four domains of teaching as a guide for analysis. In 2008-2009, the MoE reformed the education system, requiring teachers to develop teaching strategies and improve their abilities by attending training courses. Every educational program was expected to provide continuous mentoring programs, teaching support, and performance assessments to teachers to meet their learners' requirements after graduation.

I incorporated Danielson's framework into the survey and interview questions to conduct the study. The aim was to examine teachers' perceptions of their preparation programs in

Kurdistan regarding the four domains outlined by Danielson (1996). These domains aligned with the stages of expertise identified by Berliner (1988). Novice teachers were expected to learn situations' objective facts and features; advanced beginners recognized similarities across contexts. They built episodic knowledge, competent teachers could make conscious choices and set priorities, proficient teachers had an intuitive understanding of teaching, and expert teachers had deep knowledge and could improvise when necessary.

In this way, the two frameworks worked together to understand teacher preparation and development comprehensively. Danielson's framework outlined the components of teaching practice, while Berliner's framework identified the stages of expertise in teaching. This combination of frameworks provided a valuable tool for assessing and improving teacher practice and guiding the training and mentoring programs required for teacher development.

Figure 1.2. serves as a visual reference for the conceptual framework pathways for this study.

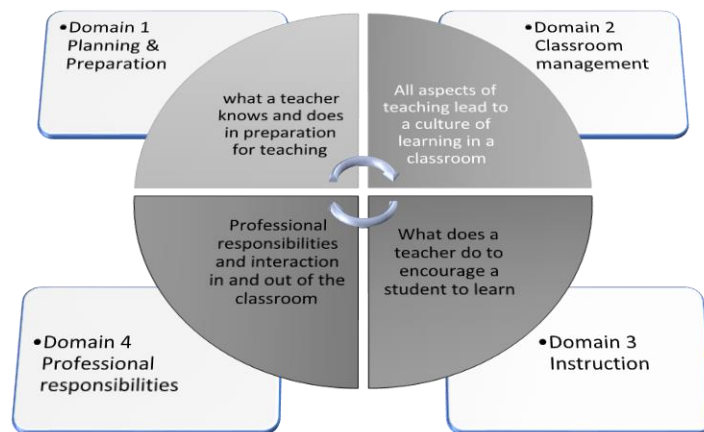


Figure 1.2. A visual reference of Danielson’s conceptual framework

Significance of the Study

The study would play a crucial role in assisting the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education in improving their teacher training programs and providing necessary training courses and professional development for current administrators. By investigating teacher preparation programs and teachers' opinions, the study would help administrators identify areas where new teachers did not feel adequately prepared. Furthermore, the study would contribute to the nation's desire for highly trained educators and satisfy the increased demands of educational systems. The findings would also add literature about teachers' opinions of their educational programs for future studies. The investigation's findings would be used to make essential modifications at the introductory level, such as designing programs to help teachers attain their maximum potential and increase student achievement. Additionally, the study would benefit KRG schools and education offices by improving teacher education research and highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of teacher preparation programs.

Specific Research Questions

Based on the literature and the need to analyze the various types of teacher preparation programs in KRG, this study aimed to explore the research questions below to examine teachers' perceptions of teacher preparation programs. Therefore, the following questions led this study:

1. What are the elementary Kurdish teachers' impressions of their preparation and teacher training programs?
2. What would teachers like to have included in their preparation programs, or would they like to be more included?

Overview of the Proposed Method

This study employed an ethnographic case study method to investigate the perspectives of elementary Kurdish teachers regarding their teacher preparation programs and how they evaluated them. I utilized surveys (see appendix C) and in-depth interviews (see appendix D) to gather data from 200 teachers. The study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward their teacher education programs and how these perceptions and experiences might shape their teaching practices and professional identities. Moreover, the study explored the broader cultural, social, and political contexts that influenced teachers' views of their teacher education programs. By analyzing the data obtained from the surveys and interviews, I identified patterns, themes, and categories that would inform the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher education programs. The study's findings could contribute to developing more effective and efficient teacher education programs that could support teachers' professional growth and enhance the quality of education in schools.

Assumption

I assumed that the participating teachers would provide honest responses to the survey, interview, and follow-up questions, as they were aware of the importance of the study in assessing the effectiveness of their teacher preparation programs (Seidman, 2013.)

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on 195 elementary teachers from five elementary schools in Sulaymaniyah province in KRG who had finished universities and institutions in different subject areas of focus and responded to the survey. The schools were decided by the Directorates of Education in Sulaymaniyah, limiting the scope of the study to only elementary teachers in one

province, Sulaymaniyah province. Later, I selected ten of them to be interviewed. Therefore, the findings could not be generalized to other teachers in Kurdistan who teach secondary schools. According to Creswell (2014), the findings of case studies were not intended to generalize to a larger population. It was because case studies were typically conducted on a small and specific sample or context, which limited the ability to draw broad conclusions that applied to other populations or contexts. However, Creswell (2014) also noted that this did not mean that case study findings were not valuable or generalizable in some ways. Case study findings could offer rich and detailed insights into a particular phenomenon or context, which could be informative for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in related contexts.

Delimitations

The study's delimitations were that the number of schools was limited, as the Directorates of Education chose them for the inquiry. Additionally, the number of participants was limited due to issues with access to the internet, digital literacy, and time constraints. To distribute the survey, a Google Form was created and shared with school principals to post on WhatsApp and Viber groups created explicitly for this purpose. As a result, the sample size was limited to 200 elementary teachers and only covered a few schools in Sulaymaniyah province; 195 responded to the survey. Moreover, ten of them were selected by me, the researcher, to be interviewed, which restricted the generalizability of the findings to other teachers in different areas in Kurdistan.

Definitions

KRG: The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is a self-governing northern Iraq region established in 1992 with its parliament, president, and prime minister. It governs the

Kurdish-majority areas of the north of Iraq. It controls the Kurdish military force known as the Peshmerga, which has played a vital role in the fight against ISIS in Iraq.

KRI: The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is an autonomous region located in northern Iraq. Turkey borders it to the north, Iran to the east and the rest of Iraq to the south and west. The Kurdistan Region has a population of approximately 6 million people, predominantly consisting of Kurds but also including other ethnic and religious groups.

MoE: It is a governmental organization responsible for overseeing the education system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Its primary functions include setting educational policies, developing and implementing educational programs and curricula, managing the education budget, and supporting educational institutions, teachers, and students throughout the region.

MHESR: It is a governmental organization overseeing the Higher Education and Scientific Research system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Its primary functions include setting policies and strategies for higher education and research, supervising and accrediting institutions, promoting scientific research, and supporting researchers and students. MHESR is also in charge of pre-service teacher preparation for K-12 schools.

TI: Until recently, most teachers for basic education (grades 1-9) in Kurdistan were trained in MoE Teacher Institutes (TI). These institutes offered two programs: a six-year program for students who enrolled after completing grade 9 and a two-year program for students who enrolled after completing grade 12. However, these institutes have been replaced by newly established four-year teacher colleges administered by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. These colleges grant a bachelor's degree, and all new basic teachers are now required to have a bachelor's degree to teach in Kurdistan.

TQT: Teacher Qualification Training (TQT) in Kurdistan is a professional development program designed to improve the qualifications and skills of existing teachers. The program focuses on teaching methodology, classroom management, and subject-specific knowledge. It is typically delivered through workshops and training sessions in collaboration with universities and other institutions and aims to enhance the quality of education in Kurdistan.

TOT: In Kurdistan, in-service training is primarily delivered through Training-of-Trainer (TOT) programs. Experienced supervisors serve as part-time rotational trainers in addition to their school inspection duties. The TOT approach provides teachers with tailored, high-quality training.

EFL: EFL stands for 'English as a Foreign Language.' It refers to teaching and learning English in non-English speaking environments where English is not the primary language of communication.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The quality of teacher preparation programs and the production of quality teachers for public schools has been and will continue to be a primary concern for many universities and educational programs worldwide. They provide high-quality teacher education preparation programs, especially for countries seeking to reform their education programs, as shown by several studies (Cobb, 1999; Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010; Eckert, 2014; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2003; Graham & Garton, 2003; Tairab, 2008; Varrati & Smith, 2008).

As a result, this literature review acknowledged and analyzed the literature on teachers' education programs, effective teachers' education program models, challenges and changes in teachers' preparation programs, teachers' education programs in Kurdistan, improving KRG K-12 education, perceptions of some experts on preparation programs, and teachers' perceptions of their educational programs. According to Loughran (2006), teachers enter their preparation environment with prior knowledge, sometimes with no knowledge and preconceived notions about the teaching profession. Their perception significantly impacted their development as they entered the education sector. Similarly, their preparation program was essential to their career, as highlighted in Gassama (2020).

Introduction to Teacher Education Programs

The education of teachers involved preparing pre-service teachers for a career in the school context through pedagogical training and obtaining a degree in an academic subject like English, science, mathematics, and social studies (Darling Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). The training program comprised subject area courses, pedagogy courses, and a practicum. For effective instruction, a university degree was necessary for those aspiring to become future

teachers (Glathron et al., 2006). According to Darling-Hammond (1999), pre-service teachers with tertiary education could better use teaching strategies and respond to students' needs and learning styles, promoting higher-order learning. With the in-service teacher enhancement world changing rapidly, it is critical to equip future teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, and attributes to deal with this change. Effective preparation programs could help them achieve this goal. Albakry (2018) defined teacher preparation programs as planned and organized programs given by specialized educational institutions based on current educational and psychological theories to provide pre-service and in-service educators with intellectual, professional, and cultural influences to be effective teachers. Undoubtedly, teachers had a crucial role in providing students with a good-quality education by promoting learning and student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Lasley et al., 2006). The ability to impact all aspects of student learning was inextricably linked to teacher quality, so the quality of pre-service teacher preparation programs was critical (Berry, 2010).

Pre-service teachers gained experience through school experience and work placement during their training. Their work placement period gave them a general understanding of the school environment, students, and what it took to be a teacher, as Floden & Meniketti (2005) acknowledged. These experiences were crucial for teachers as they provided them with a firsthand understanding of what the teaching profession required regarding skills, knowledge, and abilities and what it meant to be a teacher. This was the stage of their learning where pre-service teachers shaped their ideas and thoughts about becoming good teachers. Pre-service teacher education programs played an essential role in the professional development of pre-service teachers, such as preparing them to fully understand school and classroom environments, as stated by Kennedy (1999). Additionally, the programs offered them critical thinking skills

regarding teaching techniques and pedagogical knowledge, which were essential for teaching the curriculum, as highlighted by Kukla-Acevedo and Toma (2009).

When Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) examined the effect of pre-service teachers' college preparation on them, they discovered that their college education positively impacted their development in teaching, such as reasoning, communication, and interaction skills. Pre-service teacher education training programs offered teachers various abilities to improve an extensive understanding of what it takes to be a good teacher. In the same way, Straková (2015) emphasized that education programs should identify their strengths and weaknesses and the criteria for measuring pre-service teachers' readiness for the teaching profession by the end of their educational training.

High-quality education demanded that instruction emphasized constructivist student-teacher learning techniques rather than traditional passive learning methods. Also, pre-service teachers should have obtained research-based training on reading components and language structures (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Teshome, 2012.) Multiple researchers mentioned in their studies that teachers' initial training influenced their capacity to benefit from professional development and other teacher support frameworks, as well as the abilities they brought to the classroom (Tatto et al., 1993)

Significantly, teacher training influenced the knowledge teachers brought to the classroom like teachers' core knowledge and pedagogical skills did (Ball et al., 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 1989.) Professional development for teacher educators that included hands-on cooperative learning opportunities to build academic content knowledge in the context of research-based practice enabled them to engage in collaborative teaching and learning

techniques, increase their understanding of effective literacy instruction practice and introduce relevant skills.

According to Amankwah et al. (2017), teaching practice was intended to assist pre-service teachers in developing a positive attitude toward teaching. Also, it exposed them to real-life classroom experience, discovering their strengths and weaknesses in education, providing a forum for them to translate educational theories and principles into practice, and providing them with the necessary skills, competencies, and personal characteristics. Similarly, Bukaliya (2012) mentioned in his study that teaching practice promoted trainees gaining knowledge and interest in teaching and personal development, such as decision-making abilities, critical thinking skills, and increased confidence and self-esteem. Cook et al. (2004) also claimed that pre-service teachers benefited from teaching practice regarding career development, practical experience, and interpersonal skills.

Similarly, Furco (1996) showed that teaching practice assisted pre-service teachers in preparing well-organized activities for their students by providing hands-on experience that improved their learning or comprehension of topics pertinent to a particular field of study. Moreover, it helped pre-service teachers bridge the gap between academic learning and classroom environment (Lam & Ching, 2006). In Ghana, Mensah (1991) researched organization and supervision. His research indicated that, in general, teaching experience allowed pre-service teachers to build and assess their competencies in important teaching areas. Mensah particularly said that teaching practice assessed trainees' professional knowledge, understandings, and abilities, made both personal and professional competencies under optimal settings, and evaluated their competencies and preparation to enter the teaching profession, among other things.

In the same sense, Gower and Walters (1983) said that the purpose of teaching practice was to allow trainees to try out strategies, approach teaching situations under sympathetic observation, and to allow them to have their teaching reviewed and constructively challenged. In Nevett's (1985) research, pre-service teachers' programs indicated that teaching experience bridged the gap between classroom theory and real life. As a result, the teaching practice program was regarded as a practical means of acquiring broad skills in which necessary knowledge supports and complements theoretical studies obtained in classrooms (Mihail, 2006.) According to Knechel and Snowball (1987), teaching practice was designed to analyze teachers' performance in their professional skills. Teaching practice was crucial to teacher education programs, so they identified teachers' needed career skills. Adekunle (2000) noted insufficient time and a lack of seriousness on the part of student teachers toward the teaching practice program, frequently resulting in pre-service teachers not developing the desired skills, confidence, and knowledge to handle classroom settings.

The literature on pre-service teacher education training programs clearly stated the importance of pre-service required preparation. All these expectations caused societies to scrutinize colleges, institutions, and universities that prepared pre-service teachers. Pre-service teacher education programs that prepared future teachers were considered responsible for a successful educational system. When a school system failed to produce quality students, the preparation of teachers came under criticism. A failing school system was frequently held as the responsibility of teachers who were thought to be unprepared for their jobs (Ben-Pretz, 2001). Hence, a significant focus was placed on improving the quality of pre-service training programs. Nevertheless, the best way to prepare pre-service teachers to be qualified teachers with the necessary knowledge, teaching skills, and characteristics had to be vigorously debated.

Models of Effective Teacher Preparation Programs

Dr. Deborah Ball said, "Great teachers are not born; they are taught." According to Walter et al. (1996), the quality of instruction depended on how teachers taught and how effectively their preparation programs prepared them. Providing successful educational systems was challenging without well-trained, skilled, and devoted teachers (Unwin, 2005). It was essential to acquire the appropriate skills and knowledge to confront the difficulties of globalization. The structure and requirements of teacher education training programs differed depending on the context. Despite the teaching profession being around for centuries, there were various modes of teacher preparation. Eret (2013) found that teachers worldwide were trained in various ways and gained additional training in education, skills, knowledge, and characteristics.

Tigelaar et al. (2004) emphasized that any professional practice framework produced must have given standards on what a teacher accomplished when teaching and considered themselves effectively prepared in their preparation programs. Thus, in 1996, Charlotte Danielson developed a framework as a teaching infrastructure and stated that teacher training materials should be built on it to generate high-quality teachers. Each domain gave teachers a road map to achieve the required skills and abilities.

Planning and Preparation

Planning and preparation were essential components of good teaching and preparation programs, according to Danielson (2007). Planning entailed a thorough comprehension of the curriculum and methodology and an awareness and respect of the students and their contributions to the adopted strategies. Teachers had to use instructional design to synthesize content into sequences of activities and exercises that students could access. All parts of the

instructional design – learning activities, resources, and techniques – had to be relevant to the subject and the students and relate to broader instructional goals.

According to Danielson (2007), lesson preparation had critical roles for teachers and instruction: (a) It prepared teachers. Some content may have been familiar to teachers, like the back of their hands, while other material might have been new or more complicated, making conveying it more difficult. Planning allowed them to quickly shift from one activity to another when educating children. (b) It enhanced teachers' self-esteem. In the classroom, confidence was mostly about constant levels of control. They could reach instructional objectives more effectively and avoid those "dead" minutes while delaying or thinking on the fly if they had a daily strategy to teach students. (c) It reinforced teachers' status as professionals. They would be judged on their efficacy in the classroom when they were evaluated for performance assessments. Lessons that had been thoughtfully planned were easy to identify, whereas unprepared lessons might appear unorganized and uninspiring. (d) It ensured that lessons were meaningful. The most crucial reason to plan was to guarantee that their students' time in the classroom was productive. Teachers should relate all daily classes to long-term units and attach all activities to specified learning objectives. Everything must work together so teachers can assist their learners in meeting grade-level criteria. (Danielson, 2007)

Classroom Environment

In her framework, Danielson (2007) emphasized that positive interpersonal interactions, efficient routines and processes, clear and consistent rules of behavior, and a safe classroom environment that supports learning aims were used by teachers to establish a learning environment. Furthermore, the class environment encouraged students to enjoy their work and accept responsibility for their learning. Students responded to teachers' warmth, kindness, and

high expectations for accomplishment and dedication. They trusted these teachers and knew they could rely on them to be fair and empathetic. Students were highly attentive to subtle indications about their talents from professors. According to Danielson (2007), the components of the classroom environment were not related to the teaching of any specific material; instead, they set the stage for all learning. The instructor developed a pleasant and courteous classroom setting that fostered a learning culture and provided a safe environment for students.

Instruction

Students' engagement in learning through gaining a comprehensive understanding and engaging in a community of learners was considered the core of teaching. Students were engaged in meaningful work that had value beyond the following quiz or test and was relevant to their lives. Teachers who developed their instructional abilities in artwork thrived. Their work in the classroom was dynamic and adaptable; they could swiftly switch from one technique to another if the situation called for it. They seamlessly combined ideas and concepts from other curriculum sections into their explanations and exercises. Their inquiries elicited student thought and assisted in broadening learning. They paid close attention to the various students in the class and the degree to which they were actively engaged; they carefully checked student knowledge as they went (through well-designed questions or exercises) and made modest mid-course modifications as needed. Above all, they fostered the development of self-directed learners involved in the activity at hand. (Danielson, 2007)

Professional Responsibilities

Danielson (2007) posited that professional responsibilities were related to becoming a real professional educator: they included duties assumed outside of the classroom and those in

the classroom with learners. Students seldom watched these events; parents and the greater community did so infrequently. However, the changes were crucial to the profession's sustainability and advancement. Some of them (for example, keeping records and connecting with families) were used by educators immediately since they were essential to their work with learners. It encompassed various professional obligations, ranging from self-reflection and professional development to involvement in a professional community and contributions to the profession. Interactions with students' families, relationships with the greater community, and student advocacy were also included. This domain encapsulated the core of teacher professionalism; due to their abilities in this domain, they were complete members of the teaching profession and dedicated to its advancement (Danielson, 2007.)

In order to teach in schools, teachers were required to have different degrees in every country. The structure, length, and content of pre-service teacher education varied globally, and various models of pre-service education programs were proposed by educational researchers in the literature. Pre-service teachers could attend four-year undergraduate teacher education programs at colleges and universities, including general education, field subject teaching, professional study, and fieldwork, most of which specialized in elementary education. However, pre-service teachers specializing in high school education had to complete a five-year undergraduate degree. It is worth noting the differences between elementary and secondary preparation programs, which were primarily based on the grades they were prepared to teach. According to Feuer et al. (2013), primary school, often called elementary school, consisted of smaller classes ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade, while secondary school was for learners aged 12 to 18 and included middle and high school. Teachers who majored in elementary education were trained to teach all relevant topics to the same group of learners and had a closer

relationship with them throughout the academic year. As a result, their training mainly focused on educational theory, research, assessment methodologies, and teaching practices.

Conversely, secondary education majors had a narrower emphasis as they taught one school topic to different students throughout the school day, and they assisted their students in considering their future after high school by assuming the role of advisor and preparing for it in college.

Furthermore, post-baccalaureate education programs allowed graduate students from other fields to teach in subject areas related to their specialty (Hoban, 2007). Apart from these pre-service teacher education program types, several additional pre-service teacher education program models existed. Pre-service teacher education programs attracted individuals with bachelor's degrees in various disciplines and trained and licensed them to enter the industry. These candidates were interviewed, evaluated, and thoroughly reviewed before admission into these alternative pre-service teacher education programs. They were required to complete this instructional training with the highest performance levels (Hoban, 2007). Teach for America (TFA) was an example of a model pre-service teacher education program in the United States that placed people with degrees from various disciplines in impoverished schools around the country (Hopkins & Heineke, 2013).

Pecheone and Whittaker (2016) showed a model of teacher preparation programs in the United States that set performance requirements to guarantee that new teachers were well-prepared, competent, and ready to teach. That was why the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) created edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment). They defined edTPA as "a performance-based, subject-specific assessment and support system used by teacher preparation programs across the United States to emphasize, measure, and support the

skills and knowledge that all teachers" required from the first day of their careers. During their student teaching clinical experience, prospective teachers produced a portfolio of resources for this examination, including unedited video recordings of themselves at work in a real classroom. Highly qualified teachers graded this portfolio. The assessment enabled teacher candidates to (a) demonstrate their readiness to teach by developing lesson plans that supported their students' strengths and needs; (b) engage real students in ambitious learning, and (c) assess if their students were learning and adjusting their instruction to become more effective.

Another model was Finland when it came to education. Finland set an excellent example for the rest of the globe. Pre-service teachers who wanted to teach in elementary, upper secondary, or lower secondary had to get a master's degree in the topic they wanted to teach (Alanko, 2018). Before being admitted to colleges for teacher education programs, all pre-service teachers had to pass an entry exam. They were exposed to various pedagogical instruction during their pre-service teacher training. Pre-service teachers had to finish general education, pedagogical topic knowledge courses, a minor thesis, and supervised teaching practice (Niemi, 2012).

Challenges in Teacher Education Programs

Teachers are required to continue learning and growing throughout their careers. The world is evolving rapidly, and people's lifestyles are changing; hence, education cannot be left behind as such changes also influence people's lives. Teachers are seen as change agents, if not experts, and their students hold them in high regard. As a result, the teaching profession possesses the potential ability to cope with change, and it necessitates educating others to be ready for and manage change (Head & Taylor, 1997). Strakova (2015) posited that teachers

should engage in ongoing professional growth to acquire traits such as these, and they must be aware of this during their training.

Changes in teachers' education were influenced by changes in educational policy, stakeholders, job requirements, and school curriculum. All these characteristics were prevalent in nearly every civilization. Pre-service teacher education programs should have considered all these societal changes, which should have been included in curricula (Simsek & Yildirim, 2001). Darling-Hammond (2006b) discovered that pre-service teacher education programs were not preparing pre-service teachers to be adequately prepared for their profession when considering societal developments.

Additionally, the relationship between theory and practice in pre-service teacher education programs competed. Pre-service teachers who thrived in the theoretical component of their teacher education program did not always flourish in the practical component of their education system. There was a strong emphasis on how social and school system issues impacted pre-service teachers' education programs. Nevertheless, teachers were held accountable for students' academic progress and the nation's educational system (Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, as Musset (2010) pointed out, pre-service education programs' obstacles varied by nation. In hindsight, each country should have undertaken research and assessed the success of pre-service teacher education programs and the problems they confronted.

It was important to note that the majority of new teachers began their careers in education with little or no professional support and were expected to handle a full educational load right away. Some novice teachers were asked to teach subjects outside their expertise. They were required to teach in areas for which they were unprepared, received no assistance, and were not assessed based on appropriate criteria to enhance their teaching. In these domains, novice

teachers needed assistance, while some experienced teachers needed to renew their teaching skills. To support this claim, studies demonstrated that teachers tended to teach how they were taught (Ball, 1990.) Chesley and Jordan (2012), among others (Mensah, 1991& Nwanekezi et al., 2011), researched in-service teachers about their perceptions of their preparation programs at the university. Nwanekezi et al. (2011) investigated student teachers' attitudes toward teaching practice at the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria. They discovered insufficient preparation of students for teaching practice, a lack of necessary equipment, facilities, and materials for the exercise, and a poor learning environment characterized by poor ventilation, class congestion, and a short practicing period. Mensah (1991) discovered that unfavorable contact between supervisor and supervisee frequently led to dissatisfaction and poor performance in research that studied difficulties of teaching practice in the first training of teacher training institutes in Ghana. He said a competent supervisor should build and maintain a fruitful connection with their supervisee.

Chesley and Jordan (2012) demonstrated the obstacles and difficulties in their study concerning teachers' preparation programs via their analysis of pre-service teachers' education programs. The teachers questioned for the research interview had reported and commented on their training programs. Recent teacher preparation program graduates had been highly critical of professors who had not taught in a public-school classroom in more than 20 years; the teachers had claimed that these professors had a "credibility gap." Additionally, they believed that student teaching was the most effective component of their pre-service learning rather than the lessons they had learned in a university classroom. However, many of these teachers stated that their programs had little or no regular activities or goals. Hence, the quality of their experiences

depended on the knowledge and abilities of their coordinating or mentoring teachers. The teachers also highlighted the skills lacking in their educational preparation programs.

First, their programs did not prepare them for professional responsibilities. According to the teachers, their pre-service schooling did not prepare them for the physical and emotional hardship they encountered in their classrooms. New teachers, especially those not well-prepared, always face significant obstacles due to their workload and the expectation that they manage several demands simultaneously. Their undergraduate curricula focused little on establishing the professional habits of mind required for a successful teaching career. They also stated that their education did not assist them in developing the abilities required to be highly collaborative and active participants in professional learning communities. (Chesley & Jordan, 2012.)

Second, they were not well prepared to teach content properly. The teachers were poorly educated in core pedagogy, especially when teaching reading at the elementary or secondary levels. Coursework in reading education was sometimes overly generic and ineffective for their specific institution. Elementary teachers reported receiving insufficient instruction in mathematics, physics, and writing, leaving them unprepared for the comprehensive lesson preparation demanded of them. No college coursework addressed what to do if students did not learn the content delivered by the teacher the first time. Teachers reported having limited experience utilizing daily formative assessments to diagnose student needs, a vital skill in today's high-accountability classrooms. (Chesley & Jordan, 2012.)

Third, classroom management was another skill teachers lacked in their preparation programs. When presented with real students, teachers indicated that courses on student management and classroom norms were useless. Teachers stated they lacked essential, research-based tools for successfully managing classroom conduct. There was little emphasis on positive

interpersonal interactions, efficient routines, processes, clear and consistent rules of behavior, or a safe physical environment that supported the learning aims during their training programs, which should be included in their training programs to establish a warm learning environment. (Chesley & Jordan, 2012.)

Fourth, teachers reported that their college lesson preparation experience was artificial and somewhat practical. Assignments were frequently designed. The teachers reported that they were obliged to create rubrics for lessons they rapidly understood would not function in practice. They were ordered to create "engaging" assignments but did not know their audiences, never gave lessons, and never found out if their lesson designs were engaging. Teachers said they had not been exposed to enough strategies for inspiring children in the same aspect. They lacked the necessary skills to implement differentiated education, constructivist activities, or cooperative-grouping procedures. In particular, beginners felt unprepared to support hesitant or obstinate classmates. Using technology was another comment raised by teachers that there was little or no guidance on using digital platforms properly. Coursework did not emphasize digital teaching skills (Chesley & Jordan, 2012.)

Teacher preparation based on 21st-century abilities was a vital developmental problem that aided students in learning and achieving higher levels of education and instructing teachers. Kayange and Msiska (2016) stressed the need to incorporate these abilities in all aspects of schooling through preparation programs. According to Alharby (2013) and Shalabi (2014), 21st-century skills ensured teachers' and student preparedness to learn, create, work, and optimize the information and technological methods. The skills included knowledge and communication, thinking and problem-solving, and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Teachers had to incorporate them into the classroom environment to encourage student interaction with the

subject and other students. Hammond (2005) and Shalabi (2014) reiterated that teachers had to learn how to use technology gadgets and software in the classroom, and they also should be proficient in digital age literacy, innovative thinking, effective communication, and high productivity. As a result, teacher education programs had to rethink their curricula to suit the needs of twenty-first-century skills.

The role of 21st-century education skills shifted to enhance students' curiosity, comprehension, and ability to conclude independently. As a result, several Arab seminars and conferences were held in Middle Eastern countries to discuss teacher roles and the 21st-century skills required. These included the Third Conference on Information Technology Applications in Education in 2002 at al Ene University, the Conference on Teacher Preparation for the Millennium and the Requirements of the Development Plan in Kuwait in 2003, and the Conference on Teacher Preparation for the Third Millennium at the United Arab Emirates University in 2003. Additionally, there was King Saud University's 2004 Conference on Globalization and Education Priorities (Alharby, 2013).

On the other hand, Alhothali (2021) urged program designers to reconsider the content, including a broader cognitive base and multidisciplinary topics in various fields. Skills might include learning and growth, information and technology, and life and career. Tools that aided in the development of abilities; professional constraints included psychological, educational, and technological concerns, for instance, instructor attitudes and motivation, as well as the best use of technology in creating educational methods in teacher training programs.

Teacher Education in Iraq's Kurdistan Region

The MoE slowly closed teacher institutions in Kurdistan Region as part of a reform execution of the education policy announced in 2008-2009 that required new teachers to finish at least a bachelor's degree (Sofi-Karim, 2015). According to Vernez et al. (2014), these institutes had been preparing most in-service teachers. Students who enrolled in teacher institutes were required to obtain a secondary (high school) diploma and were trained for two or five years following elementary/basic school. Basic school teachers (grades 1–9) were trained in teacher colleges, of which there were four in different provinces in KRG. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research administered these colleges, and their graduates earned bachelor's degrees. Secondary school teachers (grades 10-12) were drawn from education and other academic university programs. Nevertheless, teachers training in those colleges were generally not provided with the appropriate education training (Sofi-Karim, 2015).

Vernez et al. (2016) introduced two training programs in the RAND study that the Ministry of Education provides in Kurdistan. First, the Directorate of Training Centers offers pre-service training to teachers with a bachelor's degree who did not attend college. These graduates were hired for high-demand specialties like mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts. Second, in-service training was offered before the beginning of the school year, called Teacher Qualification Training (TQT). The in-service training may vary yearly, including academic subject matter training, instructional methods, and technological tools. The training of trainers (ToT) approach was used to recruit trainers from competent staff and train them from other or international organizations (Vernez et al., 2014).

The MoE in KRG offered six types of in-service teacher training programs within the two main programs mentioned above: curriculum-specific training, capacity-development training,

school leadership and management training, supervisory and administrative training, contractor-specific training, and other training programs. However, there was significant variation in training duration even within the same topic. Training programs were reported to last anywhere from five to twenty days, and administration or capacity development training ranged from two to three days to 30 or 40 days. The MoE had no continuous in-service preparation program capabilities, negatively impacting more than 89,000 KRI teachers and administrators (Vernez et al., 2016).

Kurdistan's teacher education programs faced a significant challenge due to a lack of genuine interaction, coordination, and collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. These two institutions operated as separate entities with no connection to one another. The teacher education programs did not consult with schools to become acquainted with and aware of the present schooling demands of a continuously changing society. As a result of this unhealthy collaboration, teachers were not equipped to understand the genuine demands of the educational system. They were unprepared to respond to the demands of schools and students since they were never exposed to such settings during their pre-service training. This unhealthy link between institutions of education and schools negatively impacted the development of future teachers and students. Regular meetings between teacher educators and school officials were critical in identifying gaps in teacher education programs, as Sofi-Karim (2015) and Vernez et al. (2016) noted.

Improving KRG K–12 Education

Since gaining independence in 1991, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) had made significant educational growth and reform efforts, including establishing many new colleges and schools, introducing a new curriculum, and passing new educational policies. The Kurdistan

Regional Government's education sector had been established from the ground up, and it has grown dramatically in recent years, acknowledging the need to educate its inhabitants and communities to secure future economic, political, and social prosperity.

However, the present educational system was generating low-quality students and was outdated (Sofi-Karim, 2015.) In response, the KRG requested assistance from the RAND Corporation on several programs. In 2010, it commissioned the RAND organization to analyze the existing state of the K–12 system and its improvements and provide solutions for achieving program objectives that KRI had set for increasing access and enhancing educational quality (Vernez et al., 2016). RAND's examination of the current educational K-12 school system revealed various flaws, such as the highly centralized nature of the existing system and limited means of reviewing and monitoring policies and procedures. They had found a top-down decision-making policy with few shared visions or communications among stakeholders. After finishing their research, RAND researchers produced suggestions for the Kurdistan government, offering three strategic targets for improving KRI's K–12 system.

Firstly, according to Vernez et al. (2016), the region was required to establish enough schools to accommodate new school spaces while reducing overcrowding. They estimated that the KRG would need to build up to 2,000 additional 18-classroom schools during the following decade. The KRG began an ambitious school-building plan for an initial batch of 500 new schools to satisfy this need.

Second, the area needed to increase practicing teachers' expertise and preparation while boosting instructional time for their students. They discovered fewer than 40% of teachers felt well-equipped to apply the new curriculum's resources and framework. One-third of professors reported teaching subjects other than their academic specialty. In addition, KRI schools did not

give adequate teaching time to implement the new syllabus. Most schools had 250 fewer hours of classroom instruction per year than schools in several Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development member nations (OECD). As a result, the KRG planned regional teacher training centers and considered prolonging the school day and year. (Vernez et al., 2016)

Third, they suggested that the KRG needed to improve incentives and accountability by redesigning the current system for evaluating and reporting teacher and school performance and progress, expanding the role of school principals, and measuring student achievement and improvement while making results public (Vernez et al., 2016). In support of this, RAND created a management information system to handle data on educational system performance. However, the war against ISIS absorbed significant resources since 2014. The MoE's intentions to enhance the education system had been severely hampered due to numerous Syrian refugees and internally displaced Iraqi citizens, which had also taken an economic toll. The government was still concerned about the quality of the education system in Kurdistan, and public debate and teacher education programs were being criticized and scrutinized. Preservice and in-service teachers' preparation for the teaching profession was often tested using assessment procedures similar to those used by most higher education institutions to assess their students, such as exam marks, practical feedback, and final evaluation (Straková, 2015).

After all the crises, the Ministry of Education in Kurdistan, such as the war against ISIS and the Coronavirus pandemic, still sought to improve educational quality and increase access. The MoE was launching many new projects at the time, but they required time and ongoing work to bear fruit. The Ministry of Education did not have formal curricular standards, although it examined regional accomplishment assessments against worldwide standards to build such standards. The MoE was planning to build a research and evaluation office to boost its

capabilities in data analysis, which was required for quality assurance initiatives. Given the fast growth in secondary school enrolment, the Ministry of Education sought to review the quality of such education to ensure its relevance to the national and international criteria through university preparation and educational programs. Finally, the Ministry of Education may have wished to evaluate the success of present university admission procedures and adjust them as needed to regard student and school priorities (Vernez et al., 2016).

Perceptions of Some Experts on Teacher Preparation Programs

In their study, Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) asked, "Do teachers' perceptions of preparation programs make a difference?" The literature compiled several studies to show teachers' perceptions of their preparation programs, focusing on four areas: planning and preparation for instruction, classroom environment, professional duties, and teaching abilities. Many research studies on pre-service teachers' educational preparation have been conducted in higher education institutions in several countries, focusing on pre-service teacher education program assessment and pre-service teacher perception in preparation for the teaching profession. However, very little research has been conducted regarding in-service teachers' perceptions of their preparation program. Therefore, the literature mainly focused on the pre-service teachers' perception of their education programs.

Researchers focused on the need for and requirements of teacher education programs for teacher development, but which types of real teacher growth were necessary at each stage of education? The genuine interest in the quality of schoolteachers prompted a careful examination of the education programs that prepared them. Hassan et al. (2010) stated that several U.S. institutions and colleges assessed the efficacy of their teacher education preparation programs by surveying their graduates' opinions. Many critics of teacher education preparation programs in

the United States agreed with the findings of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2013b; Elliot, 2013), as reported in Fuller (2014), that "U.S. teacher preparation programs failed to produce quality teachers needed for the diverse classroom student population" (p. 63). Several academics conducted research studies on teacher education preparation programs in response to the discussion and interest in the quality of future schoolteachers were pre-service teachers' perception of middle schooling preparation, effective teaching methods, beginning of education class, the readiness to teach English languages (Blair, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Fajet et al., 2005; Hudson, 2011; Powers, 2012; Wong et al., 2012).

Darling-Hammond (2006a & 2006b) believed that teachers needed subject matter expertise, pedagogical content knowledge, and other characteristics. However, according to Darling-Hammond and Brans Ford (2005), "subject knowledge alone did not adequately prepare teachers for the challenges they would face in today's classroom" (p.36). Hudson's (2009) research emphasized the importance of pedagogical knowledge and the need for "connections between middle school theories and teaching practices." This indicated that pre-service teachers needed real-life experiences to relate theoretical concepts. Additionally, researchers investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of their mathematical preparation (Rosas & West, 2011; Sears et al., 2013). They concluded that the teachers were "reasonably prepared to teach mathematics but needed more opportunities to demonstrate and practice teaching proof." Tairab (2008) also studied science teachers' academic and professional preparation perspectives to develop competent and well-trained science teachers. Likewise, Keller (2003) criticized teacher preparation programs for being academically undemanding and poorly preparing teachers for the classroom. These programs equipped pre-service teachers with technical and management skills. Public sector teachers appeared to learn how to manage a classroom but often failed to

understand how students learn and how to teach in a way that ensures learning. His research findings indicated that science teachers believed they had been adequately prepared in most of the areas evaluated in the investigation.

Gaps in the Literature

According to the literature review, there were research gaps related to teacher preparation programs for in-service and pre-service teachers in Kurdistan. Until this point, nothing was known about these two areas in Kurdistan, and there had been very little research on teachers who teach English as Foreign Language (EFL) teacher training programs; these data did not provide a comprehensive picture of teacher preparation programs in general. As a result, this research focused on teacher preparation in Kurdistan, not only for teachers who taught a single subject but also for all subjects studied in schools. This is the area in which I aim to contribute to the research and gain a better understanding of the types of preparation programs available in Kurdistan and their effectiveness in preparing teachers for the classroom.

Conclusion and Summary of the Chapter

This literature review explored many different forms of studies on teacher preparation programs. They clearly demonstrated that pre-service teachers or teachers acknowledged their educational preparation's strengths and limitations. These studies provided a significant contribution to the advancement of teacher education programs. The findings advised that an ongoing study of teachers' education programs and their perceptions of their preparedness for the teaching profession be conducted. Furthermore, if pre-service teachers were to gain high-quality education, more components of their education programs should be evaluated and developed.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This study investigated Kurdish teachers' perspectives on how effectively their teacher preparation programs and teacher training courses prepared them for school and classroom life at the elementary school level in Kurdistan. For this purpose, the following sections of this chapter detailed the methodology employed in this research: research questions, the nature of the study, participants, data collection, research procedure, timeline, validity, and reliability. Through the two research questions for which data were collected, I sought to get an in-depth assessment of teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their preparedness.

The Research Questions were as follows:

1. What are the elementary Kurdish teachers' impressions of their preparation and teacher training programs?
2. What would teachers like to have had included in their preparation programs, or would they like to be more included?

Nature of the Study

This study aimed to examine the perceptions of Kurdish elementary teachers regarding their teacher education programs. An ethnographic case study was conducted to serve this purpose. An ethnographic case study is a type of qualitative research that involves the comprehensive exploration and analysis of a particular social group or culture. It aims to understand the culture, behavior, and experiences of a specific individual, community, or organization in their natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, the study aimed to explore the experiences of these teachers during their teacher preparation and teacher training courses in Kurdistan by using a survey and in-depth interviews. A modified survey instrument was used to

collect data, adapted from previous studies conducted in the United Arab of Emirates (UAE) (Khalid et al., 2017) and Qatar (Gassama, 2020) that investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of their educational programs. The survey was modified to suit the specific context of Kurdish elementary teachers' preparation programs and consisted of 33 items based on Danielson's framework. Two hundred elementary Kurdish teachers were invited to participate in the study, and 195 completed the survey.

I used the survey responses to develop 12 interview questions designed to explore the areas of teacher preparation programs that needed more in-depth understanding and clarification. The interviews were conducted with selected teachers to gather more detailed information about their perceptions of their teacher education programs.

The survey and interview methods were used to collect data, allowing me to reveal the participants' voices and perspectives. I reported from different angles, recognizing several aspects of the study and sketching the wider image that emerged. This approach was relevant because it allowed for an in-depth investigation of the issue, enabling me to construct a nuanced picture of the subject under investigation, recognizing the complexities and nuances of the perceptions of Kurdish elementary teachers on their teacher education programs.

Participants

The targeted population of this study was elementary Kurdish teachers who graduated from the University of Sulaymaniyah, College of Education, and Teacher Institutes in the Iraqi-Kurdistan Region. Through multi-stage sampling, survey data were gathered from 195 Kurdish in-service teachers in five elementary schools in Sulaymaniyah province in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The Directorate of Education determined the survey participants, which

was referred to as *probability sampling*, especially *simple random sampling*, to eliminate bias in the study (Ary et al., 2019). An official letter was issued to each school chosen by the same office to collaborate with me in conducting the survey. As the Directorate of Education Office provided a permission letter for this study to be conducted in the schools, consent forms were not required for the teachers to sign. The survey was distributed through a Google Forms link shared with the WhatsApp and Viber groups that the school principals created for this purpose.

For the interview part, ten survey participants were chosen to participate in the interview. Participants ranged in gender, academic background, years of experience, subject area taught, and the grade level they taught, and all ten teachers taught in public schools (see Table 3.1.). Purposive sampling was used to select interview participants, based on Ary et al. (2019). *Purposive sampling* is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants for a study based on specific characteristics, criteria, or expertise relevant to the research question. This sampling method is often used in qualitative research, where the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon or group of people. Later, interviews with ten teachers were conducted virtually via WhatsApp and Viber communication apps.

The initial survey for the study was written in English (Appendix C). Because not all teachers in Kurdistan speak English, it was translated into Kurdish by a certified translator and then reviewed by me, the researcher, before data collection. Additionally, because some teachers could not use email, the survey was shared via a link through two digital platforms. I visited the sites and met with the teachers to explain the nature of the study and clarify how to complete the questionnaire.

Table 3.1. Teachers' Demographic Data

Teacher	Gender	Current Grade level(s)	Highest degree earned	Subject(s) taught	Current school	Years of experience	Alma Matter
Aras	M	9 th	M.A.	Social science	Public school	12	University of Sulaymaniyah
Dlzar	F	7 th & 8 th	B.A.	ESL	Public school	12	University of Sulaymaniyah
Ghamgin	F	7 th -9 th	Diploma	Computer	Public school	15	Teachers' Institution
Gulan	F	8 th	B.S.	Science	Public school	4	College of Education
Habib	M	2 nd , 3 rd & 5 th	Diploma	ESL	Public school	14	Teachers' Institution
Hawar	F	7 th - 9 th	B.A.	Arabic & Islamic subject	Public school	11	College of Education
Sarkan	M	7 th - 9 th	B.A.	Social Values	Public school	16	College of Education
Shaima	F	7 th - 9 th	B.A.	Kurdish Language	Public school	12	University of Sulaymaniyah
Sonia	F	7 th - 9 th	B.S.	Science	Public school	9	University of Sulaymaniyah
Nian	F	9 th	Diploma	Math	Public school	13	Teachers' Institution

Data Collection

This study utilized two data collection methods: a survey and in-depth interviews. The study primarily focused on using in-depth semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data collection. However, the survey was used to identify the teacher preparation program's deficit areas and form the interview questions. First, the survey questions used in this study were adapted from Khalid et al. (2017) and Gassama (2020), who investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of their educational preparation using Danielson's Model for Teaching (1996) and relevant literature. The survey was sent out to 200 elementary teachers 195 responded, which

consisted of five demographic questions and 33 items related to the domains of teaching (see appendix C), planning and preparation for instruction, classroom environment, professional responsibility, and time for learning different subjects (see figure 3.1.), was culturally adapted for teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan. The survey utilized a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4. 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4 strongly agree, with "4" indicating that participants "consider they have been extremely prepared" in a specific domain component, and "1" meaning that they "feel they have not been prepared at all" in that aspect.

Later, ten teachers were then interviewed to gain further insight into their perceptions of their preparation teacher training courses. Cohen et al. (2011) suggested using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality; teachers assigned pseudonyms, creating a safe environment for teachers to express their perspectives. The interviews elicited rich and nuanced responses that complemented the survey data and provided valuable insights into elementary teachers' perceptions regarding their teacher preparedness.

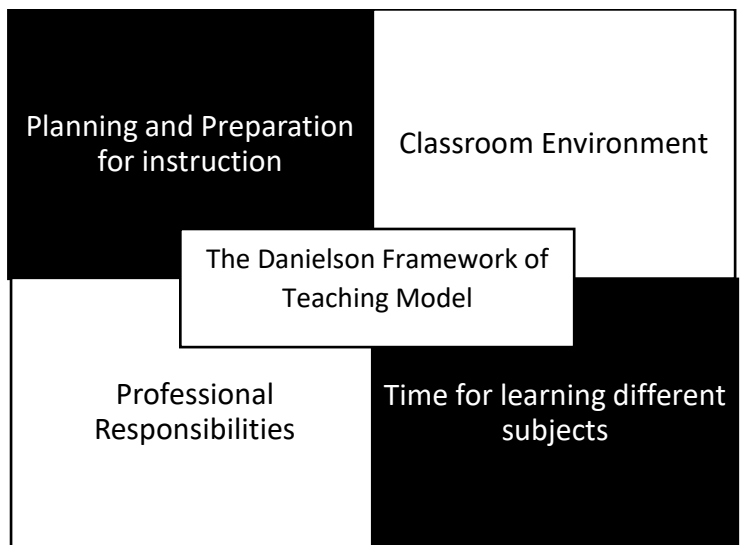


Figure 3.1. The four domains in the Danielson framework of teaching evaluation (1996).

The following demonstrated the labels and descriptions of the four domains used to serve the survey questions in this investigation:

Planning and Preparation for Instruction

This domain assessed in-service teachers' skills, knowledge, and capacities to organize and prepare classroom lessons. Darling-Hammond (2006b) determined that planning and preparing for classroom teaching are critical pedagogical abilities for teachers to develop. The more prepared teachers were for classroom planning and instruction, the higher the score they reported in this domain.

Classroom Environment

This domain is used to assess the abilities of Kurdish primary teachers to manage various difficulties connected to their classroom environment and management as they progress through their preparation programs. The research focused on measuring the teachers' knowledge, skills, and capacities in managing different aspects of classroom management, such as student behavior, classroom routines, and rules, and creating a safe and productive learning environment for all students. The scores in this domain were intended to reflect how well the teachers were prepared to handle these challenges. (Danielson, 2007)

The Professional Responsibility

This section addressed many professional tasks that Kurdish teachers were expected to carry out in schools, which they learned through their teacher preparation programs. The higher the ratings of teachers' responses, the better they performed various professional obligations in their schools and demonstrated the effectiveness of their training programs. (Danielson, 2007)

Time Allotted for Learning Different Subjects

This section demonstrated how much time teachers spent learning the various courses and disciplines provided in the program. The higher the ratings of teachers' responses, the more time was provided for the program's courses to assist them in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills.

Research Procedure

The survey used in this study was adapted from previous survey research conducted in the UAE and Qatar by Khalid et al. (2017) and Gassama (2020). These studies focused on pre-service teachers' perceptions of their educational preparation and utilized Danielson's Model for Teaching (1996). I modified the survey instrument to make it appropriate for Kurdish teachers. To test the validity and reliability of the repeated instrument, I conducted a pilot study to evaluate the survey. I sent the survey to 25 EFL teachers who were not part of this study to assess the time they needed to respond and indicated that the reliability coefficient of the 25 replies was 0.81, demonstrating the instrument's internal consistency. As part of the pilot project, I emailed interview questions to five graduate students and two professors at the University of Arkansas to refine the structure and instructions of the interview questions.

After I completed the first pilot study in the US, I traveled back to Kurdistan in December 2021 to get permission from the General Directorates of Education in the Kurdistan Region to introduce the study and provide the principals with the Google form link of the survey. The purpose was for them to post the link on their WhatsApp or Viber groups once the IRB approval was granted. The study was initially planned to be conducted in three provinces, but due to political limitations and time constraints, it was carried out in one province,

Sulaymaniyah. During the visits to the schools to take the permission letter that I received from the education office, I had time to speak with the teachers who had vital perspectives about their education programs and were eager to participate in the interview. I also inquired about other teachers with interesting views about their training programs; that was how I selected my last interviewee.

The second pilot study was conducted in December 2021 in Kurdistan, utilizing the translated survey questions. A Kurdish language teacher reviewed all 33 questions on the survey for grammatical errors, structure, and understanding. After completing the survey's organization, it was ready for the first data-gathering phase, and the link was shared with the schools on April 15th, 2022.

Once the participants who expressed interest in participating in the interviews were identified, efforts were made to keep them engaged and explain the significance of the study, which was the first to investigate their perceptions of their training programs. Furthermore, their contact information was obtained to inform them of any changes to the interview and to use as members checking the submit the report back to them before producing the final report to ensure the validity of the interview findings. All interviews were screen recorded with the participant's consent; the consent was taken verbally and recorded at the beginning of every interview. The responses were transcribed verbatim, processed, and evaluated to look for commonalities or themes. The most crucial element of the information contained in the data analysis was analyzed promptly to reduce mistakes caused by any delay, which involved promptly identifying commonalities and themes while keeping track of the timestamps to facilitate transcription.

Timeline for the Study

The timeline for this study, indicating data collection and analysis exhibited in table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Timeline for the study

Research Task	Estimated Timeframe
Pilot study for survey & interview questions (English Version)	November 4 th , 2021.
IRB application	November 11 th , 2021.
Translate the survey and interview questions in Kurdistan	December 20 th , 2021.
Permission letter from Directorates of Education in Sulaymaniyah province	January 05 th , 2022
Pilot study for survey questions (Kurdish Version)	January 7 th , 2022
IRB approval	April 14 th , 2022
Conduct the survey	April 15 th – May 15 th , 2022
Interviewing ten teachers	September 25 th , 2022
Verbatim translation	January 2023
Findings and results	April 2023
Write conclusion	April 2023

Survey Validity

First, I used a survey to gather data from elementary Kurdish teachers about their perceptions of their preparation programs. To ensure the validity of the survey questions, two types of validity, face validity, and content validity, were considered. Face validity was considered the least accepted type, as it only ensured that the instrument looked appropriate.

Content validity was utilized to determine if the survey and interview questions accurately reflected the study's objectives (Ary, 2019). To achieve content validity, the initial draft of the survey questions was sent to five graduate students and two professors in the University of Arkansas' Curriculum and Instruction Department. They were asked to evaluate the questions' comprehensibility, structure, relevance to the phenomenon under investigation, appropriate categorization, and whether they measured what the study intended to measure. Based on their recommendations and contributions, double-barreled questions were corrected, and some survey questions were simplified structurally and linguistically.

Survey Reliability

According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), reliability relates to an instrument's consistency or reproducibility. The most significant type of reliability for multi-item instruments is internal consistency, the degree to which groups of items on an instrument act consistently. It is significant since the instrument scale items used in this study measure the same underlying concept as those Khalid et al. (2017) and Gassama (2020) employed Danielson's Model for Teaching. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a frequently used indication of internal consistency, is used to determine the reliability of a questionnaire. Cronbach's alphas of 0.7 and above are considered acceptable. The greater the Cronbach's alpha value, the greater the internal reliability and consistency (Hassan et al., 2010). I examined the reliability of the survey questions I took from Khalid et al.'s and Gassama's research to obtain reproducible results. The total scale's reliability coefficient was 0.93, as provided by Khalid et al. (2017) study. The total scale dependability coefficient was 0.97 in the Gassama (2020) study. Similarly, the Cronbach alpha analysis for the current investigation produced a reliability score of 0.81. This number demonstrated strong internal consistency, and I considered it suitable and reliable for this study.

Interview Validity and Reliability

The trustworthiness of the qualitative instrument in this study was of paramount importance for ensuring validity and dependability, mainly as I was the primary instrument in data collection and analysis. In order to establish internal validity or credibility, the study focused on the connection between the study outcomes and the real world. Triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the findings, which involved using multiple data sources to develop a logical argument for the emerging themes from the interview questions. Ten elementary school teachers were interviewed, and a checkmark or responder validation mechanism was employed.

To ensure reliability of the qualitative instrument, Yin (2015) recommended that qualitative researchers document the methods of their studies in detail. In this study, the interview process was documented thoroughly to enable the research findings to be replicated. Additionally, member checking was utilized by reporting back to three participants and explaining the findings in Kurdish to them via WhatsApp phone calls. Transferability, which refers to the study's generalizability, was also considered. In this case, the findings can be applied to the programs under investigation (Yin, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With regard to reliability, qualitative research is more concerned with the consistency of results with the collected data rather than replication (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By employing these methods to establish trustworthiness, this study was able to ensure the validity and dependability of the qualitative instrument, while also enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings.

Chapter Four: Results and Analysis

Chapter four presents the findings that emerged from the data analysis that examined the perceptions of elementary Kurdish teachers towards teacher preparation programs by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Teacher Training courses by the Ministry of Education in Kurdistan. The data was collected using two methods: a survey adapted from Khalid et al. (2017) and Gassama (2020), who investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of their educational preparation using Danielson's Model for Teaching (1996) modified by me, the researcher and in-depth interviews with ten selected participants.

The survey was sent to 200 in-service teachers who taught different subjects, with 195 responding. Ten of these respondents were chosen for in-depth interviews using WhatsApp and Viber applications. For data analysis, I reviewed the survey questions with the most disagreement and strongly disagreed responses. Fourteen questions were identified, and the highest rates of disagreement and strong disagreement were found in questions 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 29, 31, and 33. No statistical procedures were used to analyze the survey findings.

Description of Coding, Categorizing, and Theming Interview Data

The data analysis began by reviewing the survey questions with more disagreement and strongly disagreed responses. Fourteen questions were identified, and the highest rates of disagreement were found in questions 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 29, 31, and 33 (see appendix C). No statistical procedure was used to review the survey findings.

Next, 12 semi-structured questions were formulated, leading to follow-up questions. These questions were used during in-depth interviews with ten elementary Kurdish teachers who

taught different subjects and grades 1-9 (basic/elementary school teachers). The interviews were translated into English for analysis as they all spoke Kurdish. I used their words that were parallel and very close to English words because I did not want to lose the feelings and perspectives they had towards their teacher preparation programs and their training courses. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture the teachers' responses' essence and to understand their perspectives, opinions, and feelings. While interviewing the teachers, I took notes in a notebook of any codes that stood out to me and were significant so that I could relate to other interviewees when they expressed their opinions and the same code emerged. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture the essence of the teachers' responses, to form an understanding of their perspectives and opinions, and finally, for me, to be more familiar with my data. I used an inductive coding process to derive the codes from the interviews. Later, I began analyzing, which was divided into three phases. The first phase was reading through the transcripts (open coding). I used highlighting, annotating, identifying key passages, and adding tentative labels to mark quotes that stood out to me from the first reading. Fifty-two codes were identified as open codes, and four tentative labels were used to put the codes under these umbrellas (see table 4.1.).

Table 4.1. Preliminary open codes are labeled tentatively.

Ministry of Education	MHESR- Colleges	MHESR- College of Education	Personal Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short period of training. • No training. • No direct training after graduation. • Training courses are not practical. • No updated information regarding teaching. • No technology guide in the sessions. • Local trainers (not experienced). • Political interference, tension, affiliation. • Advisors/ colleagues get judgmental. • Advisors (degrading, criticizing, destructive feedback.) • Most advisors don't offer help. • No follow-up after training for implementation. • Most training courses are ticked in a box. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No TPPs • Don't feel comfortable for a couple of years. • Language barrier. • Content area subjects help them teach if they are placed in proper grade levels. • No practicum. • Not prepared to be teachers; however, 95% become teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not satisfied with the quality of TPPs. • Professors' knowledge. (Careless, biased, unqualified) • The selection and organization of the classes do not support a teaching career. • Insufficient time to study strategies and content areas. • General information about human psychology. • No or minimal overlap between school and college content area coverage. • TPP level is different from their placement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-study. • Enthusiasm. • Love and passion for teaching. • Willing to share. • Assisting others. • Personal experience in dealing with the mental and physical status of the students. • Self-effort. • Self-improvement. • Pay from their pockets to participate in private courses. • Substitute the substances for learning objectives.

Table 4.1. (Cont.)

Ministry of Education	MHESR- Colleges	MHESR- College of Education	Personal Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School facilities are not appropriately equipped. • Placements are to fill the vacancies. • Placements are not according to the TPPs. • LP is used to satisfy supervisors/ principals. • Later, they use it to promote learning. • Design tests for 3 IQ levels, no instruction. • No hands-on practices. • Pedagogy is for graduate level. • When using new strategies, they face obstacles. • Reflect to improve. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation for a short time (instructors). • No technology use guidance. • No hands-on practices. • Pedagogy is for graduate level. • Language barrier to learning. • Focus is on content areas, not TP aspects. 	

I reread the transcripts during the second phase to begin the first coding cycle. *In Vivo* and descriptive coding were used to assign codes to the data, focusing on capturing the teachers' authentic perspectives without involving the researcher's judgments. *In Vivo* codes were used to capture the explicit language of the teachers, while descriptive coding was used to identify primary topics that appeared in the data. According to Saldaña (2016), descriptive coding

involved identifying, labeling, and categorizing primary concepts and categories found in the data. This process aimed to organize and categorize data into themes and patterns and build a theoretical framework explaining the studied phenomena.

Using *in vivo* and descriptive coding in the first cycle helped me become familiar with the data and break it down into concepts. I reread the transcripts, writing down words, phrases, and highlighted crucial quotes in different colors. The identified codes were then organized on different color note cards to generate and classify patterns and to find relationships among the codes to categorize them. During this process, the number of codes increased to seventy-eight open codes and sixteen categories. I also compared the emerged codes to the preliminary codes noticed at the beginning of the interviews, using previous notes taken during the interviews. Marshall et al. (2021) reported that *in vivo* codes emerge from the actual data as they are collected, allowing the researcher to use the explicit language of the teachers as emerged codes rather than generated words and phrases. The final phase was to group the initial codes along conceptual categories that reflect commonalities among codes, referred to as Axial Coding (Marshall et al., 2021), as the same researchers note that codes are clustered around points of intersection or axes. Axial coding relates codes to one another, relying on complex thinking that combines induction and deduction. Using this technique, I could identify the most frequent codes from the initial coding process. It also helped me decrease the number of initial codes into fewer and more inclusive categories and headings. The next step was to put the codes into broader categorized units, and these categories merged into overarching themes that answered both research questions, what are the elementary Kurdish teachers' impressions of their preparation and teacher training programs? And what would teachers like to have included in their preparation programs, or would they like to be more included?

Finally, seven themes emerged from the open codes and categories that best represented the data and gave definitions and interpretations of the data (see table 4.2.).

Table 4.2. Final open codes, categories, and themes.

Open codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short period of training • Small places for courses • No direct training after graduation • Training courses are not practical • Most training courses are ticked in a box • Some of the private training courses present general information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack or none of the professional development. 	1. Training and Professional Development Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No updated information regarding teaching strategies • No technology guide in the sessions • Local trainers are not experienced • No follow-up after training for implementation • Information is presented but not practiced • No information about students' psychology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Inadequacy of training content and delivery 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political interference, tension, affiliation • The economic and political situation • The two ministries don't collaborate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Political and economic instability 	2. Political and economic Issues

Table 4.2. (Cont.)

Open codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are put to fill the vacancies in schools • Misplaced/misinformed • Placements are to fill the vacancies • Teachers are forced to teach different subjects and different grades • Placements are different from the TPPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Inadequacy of teacher placement and preparation 	<p>3. Placement and Career Issues</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogy is for the graduate level • Not prepared to be teachers; however, 95% become teachers • Not satisfied with the quality of TPPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Insufficient pedagogical preparation 	<p>4. Curriculum, Pedagogy, and adjustment Hindrance</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No hands-on practices (activities) • General information • No practicum • The practicum was for a different grade level • Lesson plan is to satisfy the advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Limited practical experience for teachers 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When using new strategies, we face obstacles. • Don't feel comfortable because I don't know how to use it. • Technological barrier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenges in implementing new teaching strategies or the use of technological tools 	

Table 4.2. (Cont.)

Open codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professors' knowledge (Careless, biased, unqualified) • Insufficient time to study strategies and content areas • General information about human psychology • Observation for a short time (instructors) • No technology use guidance Teacher students had (have) language barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Inadequate teacher preparation program quality 	<p>5. Inadequate Teacher Preparation Quality and Alignment between Education Institutions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The selection and organization of the classes do not support a teaching career • Focus on studying the content area than the education side • New established colleges/ departments have an issue with their TPPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Inadequacy of College Curriculum and Class Organization 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No or minimal overlap between school and college content area coverage • Content area subjects help us teach if we were placed in proper grade levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Disjointed alignment between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education 	

Table 4.2. (Cont.)

Open codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiasm • Willing to share (assist others) • Personal experience in dealing with the mental and physical status of the students • They seek information • Being humble • Self-realization • Self-effort • Self-improvement • Pay from our pockets to join private courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Professional growth mindset 	<p>6. Teacher Characteristics and Attitudes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substitute the substances for the learning objective (Adaptation) • Held myself accountable for teaching inappropriately • Adaptation in teaching and using resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong work ethics 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological and physical growth. • Become Buddies. • Establishing rapport with our students • Encourage the growth of students (student-centered) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emphasis on whole-child (student) development 	

Table 4.2. (Cont.)

Open codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School facilities don't support the type of instruction • School facilities are not appropriately equipped • Lack of resources The resources are not sufficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Limited and deficient School Resources and Facilities 	7. Resources and Support Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisors/ colleagues get judgmental • Advisors (degrading, criticizing, destructive feedback) • Most advisors don't offer help • Different major advisors evaluate them (Buddy of Criticism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Negative Feedback from Advisors and Colleagues 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay from their pocket to buy teaching tools an supplies • Pay from their pockets to participate in private training courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Financial Burden on Teachers for Teaching Supplies, and Participating in Private Training Courses 	

I demonstrate the outcomes of interviews conducted with selected participants in this section. The teacher participants shared their views on the in-service and pre-service preparation programs corresponding to the two research questions. The findings are listed into seven distinct themes and answer both research questions.

Research Question One

What are the elementary Kurdish teachers' impressions of their preparation and teacher training programs?

The quality of teacher preparation and training programs was essential in ensuring teachers were well-equipped to deliver effective instruction to their students. In the Kurdish region, it was crucial to examine the impressions of elementary Kurdish teachers on their preparation and training programs. The first research question aimed to explore the views of Kurdish teachers on the adequacy and effectiveness of their preparation and training programs in preparing them for their roles as educators.

Below, the findings represent teachers' perceptions of the adequacy of their pre-service preparation and teacher training courses through two themes and two categories:

4.1. Training and Professional Development Challenges

The theme "Training and Professional Development Challenges" discussed teachers' challenges in continuously improving their skills, knowledge, and practices to be effective educators. It highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers and acknowledged various challenges that may arise. Two categories under this theme highlighted the hindrances teacher faced in their daily career, especially for those who did not have teacher preparation programs, and they are:

4.1.a. *Inadequacy of Training Content and Delivery*

Under this category, *inadequacy of training content and delivery*, participants expressed their opinions about the inadequate training content and delivery they received as teachers. Two

participants shared their experiences highlighting gaps in the training curriculum and its effectiveness in preparing teachers to handle real-world challenges in the classroom.

Lack of practical guidance in training courses was one of the essential topics the teachers discussed. Shaima expressed disappointment with the lack of practical guidance in the training courses, stating, "I would say I was not prepared in the college. As for the seminars, the second course was about the introduction of class management and very little information about different students' understanding abilities in class. Some students are visual, and some are acoustic (auditory), some are kinesthetic, and so on... but no practical activities or guidance offered." This emphasized their need for practical training that equipped teachers with the necessary skills to effectively engage and educate their students.

Insufficient focus on pedagogical preparation was another emphasized topic by the teachers as the importance of pedagogical preparation in teaching and how the quality of teaching changes if this aspect is taught in the training courses. Dlzar said, "Pedagogical preparation is the core of teaching. Unfortunately, none was included in the (Teacher Qualification Training)." She also pointed out, "We were not offered any courses about teaching strategies at the college. Also, there was insufficient time for teaching methods in the seminars or Teacher Qualification Training. I have not received any instruction about using technological tools in my college or training courses." These omissions in the training curriculum resulted in teachers' unpreparedness with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively educate their students.

Gulan expressed frustration with the lack of training she received in designing instruction for students with different levels of intelligence, both at the university and in the training courses she participated in. She stated, "I did not have or take any courses about the differentiated

classroom. Moreover, I was not taught how to design my lesson for different intelligent levels of instruction. I have not found any typical instruction designed for my students' three levels of intelligence." Gulan further emphasized that she had been taught to design tests for three different IQs and stated, "I have been taught in college and in the seminars to design tests based on the three levels of intelligence, not how to teach them."

Under this category, most participants emphasized the importance of the students' psychological and physical development in the courses and for the teachers to be familiar with their students and how they deal with them in classes. Nian said, "There were no courses about human physiological and psychological development in college or any seminars I participated in." These gaps in the training curriculum can result in teachers not being equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively engage and educate their students.

Some training courses have a narrow focus on specific subjects and may not adequately prepare teachers to handle a range of subjects and situations. Habib's experience with training highlights the narrow focus of some training sessions, saying, "Both training sessions were about how to teach grammar, phonetics, and vocabulary." Furthermore, some training courses repeat topics and provide outdated information, which leads to disinterest and a lack of motivation among teachers to participate in further training opportunities. Sonia said, "The topics discussed were brief information about treating students in general, organizing test questions for different levels of intelligence, and marking the exam papers. These topics were discussed repeatedly in the three seminars I participated in without any updates."

The places where training sessions are organized also pose challenges for teachers. Often, organizers do not pay much attention to the locations and environment and fail to create engaging topics that teachers can benefit from. Sonia expressed her experience with poorly

organized training sessions, saying, "They put 80 teachers in a small hall for two hours without creating engaging topics for us to benefit from. Most teachers were busy taking pictures to post on Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat."

4.1.b. *None or Lack of Professional Development (Training courses)*

In the *none or lack of professional development (Training courses)* category, teachers discussed their lack of access to professional development or training courses in their teaching careers after graduating and starting their teaching careers, especially for those who did not have any preparation. Professional development is crucial for teachers to continue to grow and develop their skills and knowledge throughout their careers. Without it, teachers may struggle to address the diverse needs of their students or may not be equipped to incorporate new teaching methods and technologies.

Aras, who graduated from the University of Sulaymaniyah in 2011, did not have any teacher preparation programs during his college years or after he graduated. He says, "I had no teaching practices for 11 years that equipped me for my career as a teacher until 2021; I received the two training that I can say I know now how to teach and fix my deficiencies in teaching; however, I do not think it is a perfect training, but it is better than nothing." Dlzar also had a similar experience, participating in a Teacher Qualifications Training course, and she mentioned, "Well, they told us they would have us participate in (Teacher Qualifications Training) (TQT) course in 2010 that would prepare us for a classroom. When I participated in it, it lasted less than a month, and the sessions were about different education offices in different cities and their obligations towards teachers, what the subjects studied at school, how we should interact with children in general, nothing more or less. After that, there was no (TQT) course until 2019."

Shaima, who has been teaching for 15 years, had never participated in any training or seminars during her career. She said, "For the Ministry of Education, it is undeniable that they are aware of the type of preparation offered in the universities; they know that 85% of teachers need preparation courses after graduation, but they do not care." She added, "even if I had been prepared, it would not have been helpful because I had friends who graduated from teacher education college and did not teach better than me."

Ghamgin taught computer science to students in seventh and eighth graders whom she had a few special-need students but had not received any instruction about human psychology, physiology, or special need students. She said, "I have a few special-needs students that I want to include in my lessons, but most of the time, I fail because I do not know how to deal with them and do not know how to design a proper lesson to include all my students in my teaching."

On the other hand, Sonia participated in seminars organized by the Education Offices, but she rated it as only 10% prepared her for class. She said, "The topics covered in the seminars did not equip me for class, my teaching style, or teaching in various methods. I am the only one who helped to equip myself for class. Moreover, I sometimes doubt myself teaching those poor kids the right way."

4.2. Political and Economic Issues

This theme, "Political and Economic Issues," explored the intricate relationship between political and economic factors and their impact on education in Kurdistan, particularly teacher preparation programs. The teachers' quotes, including Aras, Shaima, and Sarkan, highlighted challenges and obstacles facing teacher preparation in Kurdistan.

Sarkan raised the issue of the lack of collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research responsible for education. He stated, "The issue is that the two ministries, MoE and MHESR, are not connected, and they do not receive reports from each other to make changes in their courses, common core subjects in university, training, and professional development for teachers." This lack of collaboration hampered the development of effective policies and practices for teacher preparation and education in general.

Similarly, Shaima emphasized the need for better coordination between the two ministries, particularly in designing the education system, curriculum, and teacher preparation. She noted, "The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) is responsible for designing all colleges' education systems and curricula. This includes the preparation of teachers, course design, and curriculum development. However, the current system appears to lack effective modifications or amendments, which negatively affects all aspects of the education system. Each of these areas is interconnected and impacts the other. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is aware that 85% of teachers require additional preparation courses after graduation, yet they seem unconcerned with these issues due to political reasons." She underscored that the lack of effective coordination between the two ministries negatively impacted teacher preparation and education quality.

Aras highlighted the interdependence of the two ministries and underscored the need for better governance. He stated, "in other countries, each one (MHESR & MoE) is responsible for preparing teachers. It is like the dominos effect, and each facility completes the other. However, in our country, the collaboration system is interrupted because of the political parties running each ministry; they do not work together." Sarkan pointed out that the lack of effective

governance hampered coordination between the two ministries and undermined their ability to address teacher preparation and education challenges.

Furthermore, Sarkan highlighted the impact of political and economic instability on teacher preparation, noting, "Another problem we had was in 2014, the year of the ISIS attack, and most of the time, the classes were canceled, or professors were protesting for their salary. That was why our teacher preparation program was even worse." This quote emphasizes the need to consider the impact of political and economic instability on teacher preparation and education and to develop strategies to address these challenges.

Research Question Two

What would teachers like to have had included in their preparation programs, or would they like to be more included?

Teacher preparation programs are critical in shaping educators' skills and abilities to teach their students effectively. It is essential to understand what teachers would have preferred to be included in their preparation programs to equip them for their roles better. This research question aimed to retrospectively explore teachers' preferences regarding the content and format of their preparation programs. It is explored via six themes and thirteen categories.

4.3. Placement and Career Issues

The "Placement and Career Issues" theme in education referred to the challenges teachers faced in finding suitable employment opportunities within the education system. These challenges were listed under the category of *inadequacy of teacher placement and preparation*. Teachers often face difficulties finding employment opportunities matching their qualifications and experience, negatively impacting their career development and job satisfaction. The theme

highlighted the need for improved teacher placement and preparation programs that adequately prepared teachers for the job market and provided them with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their chosen career path.

4.3.a. Inadequacy of Teacher Placement and Preparation

This category, *inadequacy of teacher placement and preparation*, referred to the challenges teachers faced when they were not properly placed or supported in their teaching careers. This included issues such as not being given appropriate grade-level preparations or subject areas to teach and inadequate training and support. Several teachers spoke about their experiences with inadequate teacher placement and career issues. Their quotes illustrated teachers' challenges and issues when they were not adequately placed or supported in their teaching careers.

Shaima expressed her frustration with the lack of transparency in the placement process, stating, " I was not told I would teach a particular grade level. Even after graduation, when I applied for a teaching career, I was not told what grades I would teach. When I started teaching, I felt I was not qualified, which affected my confidence in the classroom." She felt that her knowledge and skills were not considered when placed in schools, leading to a mismatch between her teaching abilities, students' needs, and confidence.

Sarkan's experience highlighted the lack of job opportunities, which may have forced teachers to accept jobs they were not qualified for. As a veterinarian, he filled out a teaching form to teach science in schools for adults who did not receive education in their childhood. Although he may have had a passion for teaching, he lacked the required skills and preparation to handle the unique needs of adult learners.

Nian's experience revealed the consequences of inadequate preparation and its negative impact on teachers and students. She was forced to teach 7-9th grade, despite not being trained to handle that age group or the content. When she requested a training program to enhance her skills, her supervisor disregarded her request, saying, "I do not care even if you teach math mistakenly; you have to teach 7-9th grade." Such a lack of support for teachers could result in poor teaching quality and disengagement from the teaching profession.

Sonia, like Nian, was placed in a grade level that did not match her area of expertise. She was supposed to teach physics in 10th-12th grades but ended up teaching physics, chemistry, and biology to 7th-9th grades, saying, "I am supposed to teach physics in 10th-12th grades. However, now, I am teaching physics, chemistry, and biology to 7th-9th grades. For these reasons, I will say I am put in the wrong grade level, and my content knowledge does not meet elementary education requirements."

Ghamgin's experience highlighted the inadequate preparation provided to teachers. She noted, "The level of our Teacher Institution (TI) preparation was for students aged 6-12 years old, which is 1st-6th grades, yet we were placed in 7th and 8th grades or even 10th and 11th grades because of the low rate of computer science teacher graduation." This placement resulted in a lack of subject matter knowledge and the inability to meet the students' needs, ultimately leading to poor teaching quality.

4.4. Curriculum, Pedagogy, and adjustment Hindrance

The theme of "Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Adjustment Hindrance" was central in teacher preparation programs because it equipped teachers with the knowledge and skills to create effective curricula, implement instructional strategies that promoted student learning, and

recognize and address adjustment hindrances that may have prevented some students from engaging in the learning process. Without this knowledge and skills, teachers may have struggled to engage all students, design effective lesson plans, and support students with diverse learning needs.

4.4.a. Insufficient Pedagogical Preparation

In the *insufficient pedagogical preparation* category, curriculum and pedagogy were fundamental components of teaching and learning, and the quality of education largely depended on how well they were designed and implemented. When teachers were not adequately prepared to teach a particular curriculum or use specific pedagogical approaches, it could hinder learning and negatively affect student outcomes.

Dlzar highlighted the lack of pedagogical preparation that many teachers experienced, stating, “The core of teaching lies in pedagogical preparation. Regrettably, Teacher Qualification Training and university programs fail to address this. As educators, we are responsible for seeking out and implementing effective strategies to benefit our students in the classroom.” Dlzar's statement illustrated how most teachers in Iraq were not adequately prepared for the realities of teaching, which had significant consequences for students' quality of education.

Sonia suggested that pedagogical preparation was essential for effective teaching, stating, "Again, there was no pedagogical preparation for college. I say pedagogy is required for us; it should be included in the college courses or in the seminars that the MoE organizes, which include the ability to organize, start, lead, plan, and develop education and teaching based on a general and subject-specific understanding of student learning, the use of technology, and project-based learning for students." Sonia's statement highlighted the need for pedagogical

training that included not only general teaching strategies but also a subject-specific understanding of student learning, the use of technology, and project-based learning.

Shaima expressed frustration at the lack of pedagogical training, stating, "Because I did not have teacher preparation programs at the university or teacher training after university, I did not have any courses about pedagogy, and I do not know what it means." Shaima's statement highlighted how some teachers in Iraq lacked even a basic understanding of pedagogy, which could have significant consequences for the quality of education they provided.

Sarkan's statement highlighted a significant gap in teacher preparation programs in Kurdistan, where pedagogical training was only available to graduate students who had already completed their advanced degrees.

Nian emphasized the importance of pedagogical preparation, stating, "Pedagogical preparation is essential for teachers to succeed in their profession. I am uncertain about whether I have received any pedagogical preparation. However, after observing my daughters' teachers at a private elementary school called Shooaifat (this school implements a UK teaching style), I noticed that the way they taught was distinct from my teaching methods. I learned that teachers in private schools received different teacher preparation programs outside of Iraq, such as in the UK and European countries. Unfortunately, such programs are not commonly available in Kurdistan or Iraq." Nian's statement highlighted the differences in teacher preparation between Iraqi Kurdistan and other countries and suggested that inadequate pedagogical training might significantly hinder effective teaching in Kurdistan.

4.4.b. Limited Practical Experience for Teachers

This category, *limited practical experience for teachers*, referred to situations where teachers did not have enough opportunities to gain hands-on experience in the classroom. This could have been due to various reasons, such as a lack of teaching opportunities or limited access to resources and support. The quotes provided support for this category.

As highlighted by Aras, he said, "During my college years, no time was dedicated to learning different strategies or teaching methods." He pointed out the lack of emphasis on teaching strategies and methods during pre-service teacher training programs.

Additionally, Gulan and Habib expressed concern about the limited practical experience provided by their teacher preparation programs. Gulan explained, "In the final year of college, we had a practicum of 40 days at school; one of our professors came to supervise us on the last day of the practicum for 30 minutes." The lack of adequate supervision during practicum and hands-on experience could leave teachers feeling unprepared to handle the challenges they face in the classroom. Habib added that "the organization and the time allotted to teach the courses were insufficient." This further compound the problem by limiting the time and resources available for teachers to develop practical skills.

Sarkan's quote further emphasized this issue by stating, "In my department, we were not allowed to take the residency part in schools for 40 days because they said we were teachers. At the end of the fourth year, we had microteaching for 15 minutes." This lack of practical experience could have limited pre-service teachers' ability to develop teaching skills and adapt to different classroom settings.

Additionally, Shaima mentioned, "we only received general information about different levels of students' comprehension, no hands-on activities in the training courses." Without hands-on experiences to develop their skills, teachers struggled to effectively apply the theoretical knowledge they acquired during their training to their classrooms.

Habib's quote also highlighted the limited usefulness of lesson plans in pre-service teacher training programs, where the focus was on satisfying supervisors rather than developing effective teaching strategies. Habib mentioned, "I used a lesson plan to satisfy my advisor because I was not told how to write a very helpful plan for my lesson for my students." He demonstrated that pre-service teacher training programs might not have provided adequate support for developing effective teaching practices, which could have limited a teacher's ability to meet the needs of their students.

4.4.c. Challenges in Implementing New Teaching Strategies

The category, *challenges in implementing new teaching strategies*, was about the challenges teachers faced when implementing new teaching strategies, specifically related to the use of technology. Teachers' quotes highlighted the need for more support, resources, and training for teachers to successfully implement new teaching strategies, particularly those involving technology. Without adequate support and training, teachers could struggle to incorporate new methods into their instruction, which could ultimately impact student learning outcomes.

Sonia emphasized that many teachers were not provided with adequate training on using technological tools such as PowerPoint, which hindered the implementation of new teaching

strategies requiring technology. She explained, "Most teachers did not know how to use computers and required us to use those tools without proper training."

According to the comments made by Aras and Sarkan, teachers often face a lack of resources or support when it comes to implementing new teaching strategies. As Aras explained, "When I designed informative PPT content for 9th-grade students, my social studies supervisors showed no interest or support; they were not ready to support me." Similarly, Sarkan described his experience using PowerPoint and other technological tools, stating, "When I wanted to use it in my class and assist other teachers, I did not get the needed support." Despite their efforts to learn and apply new skills, both teachers could not receive the necessary support to help others implement these strategies in their classrooms.

Nian and Hawar shared the same sentiment, illustrating that some teachers had not been taught how to use technology. Nian explained that she had stuck to traditional teaching tools like colorful markers, saying, "None of the technological tools for teaching was included while I was an undergrad...I do not know how to use PPT or projectors in my class." Similarly, Hawar admitted that she did not use any technological tools and felt uncomfortable because she was not taught how to use technology in her class. She said, "I had not been told or taught to use technological tools in college."

4.5. Inadequate Teacher Preparation Quality and Alignment between Education Institutions.

The theme "Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Alignment between Education Institutions" referred to the challenges and shortcomings that arose when there was a mismatch between what teachers were taught in their training and the skills and knowledge needed to

effectively teach students. This could manifest in a number of ways, such as a lack of training or a misalignment between the goals and priorities of different educational institutions. When teachers were not adequately prepared to meet the demands of their profession, it negatively impacted their students' learning outcomes and led to a range of other issues in the education system.

4.5.a. Inadequate Teacher Preparation Program Quality

Inadequate teacher preparation program quality category represented the under-preparedness of teachers due to inadequate training programs creating challenges in effectively teaching students in the classroom. The quotes presented issues such as inadequate instruction, unqualified instructors, language barriers, and limited practical experience within these programs.

Some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their teacher preparation program, showing a lack of profound and relevant instruction due to their professors' carelessness and bias. According to Hawar, "We had psychology and teaching methods in our teacher preparation program, but the instruction was inadequate, and the Arab professors did not seem to care if we understood the content since we were Kurds, and they were Arabs." This highlighted how bias, and carelessness could impact the learning experience and leave students feeling unsupported and unprepared. The lack of qualified professors at the college further exacerbated the issue, significantly impacting the quality of instruction and teacher preparation. Sarkan explained, "I had not taken any classes about differentiated classrooms, and even if we took them, it was not informative because of how the professor taught the class." The carelessness on the part of the professors left many teachers feeling unequipped to comprehend subjects taught in college and implement them in their classrooms.

Furthermore, the language barrier created by professors teaching Kurdish students was a significant issue, as noted by Hawar highlighted a language barrier faced by Kurdish students in their College of Education "As all the professors in the preparation program were Arabs and did not know Kurdish, all the classes were in Arabic. I found the program below my expectations. The language barrier caused me to miss out on much information."

In addition, Dlzar said, "the teaching methods should be taught in Kurdish because I know many English teachers, including myself, struggle with English; it is not our first language. Even after I graduated, I could not speak properly. It is a weakness we face as students in college and teachers after we start teaching."

4.5.b. Inadequacy of College Curriculum and Class Organizations

The *inadequacy of college curriculum and class organizations* referred to the perception or reality that the content and structure of college courses did not effectively prepare students for their future academic, professional, and personal pursuits. The Inadequate college curriculum and class organizations could have significant consequences, including lower student engagement and motivation, decreased academic performance, and limited career opportunities. The quotes provided by teachers highlighted these issues.

Ghamgin expressed frustration with the lack of organization of courses in the teacher preparation program, stating, "The teacher preparation program was disorganized, lacked structure, and experienced personnel changes. Insufficient time and disorganized information on teaching methods added to the disorder, and the program was newly established within the computer science department, with my cohort being the first to take the course."

Sarkan criticized the college's approach to teacher training, stating that the classes only focused on theory and lacked practical sessions, stating, "In both classes, we had them theoretically; they were talking like a radio in a class without any practice sessions. If we depended on the classes offered in the college, they would not prepare teachers at all to teach."

Nian highlighted the importance of incorporating practical teaching methods into the curriculum and being adequately prepared to teach different content areas and age groups, stating, "However, my institution primarily focused on teaching math content to primary students rather than integrating the educational aspects with it. I now teach elementary students, but when I first started, my supervisor forced me to teach grades 7th-9th. It was a big challenge for me as I did not know how to teach the content or manage students of that age group."

4.5.c. Disjointed Alignment between the Ministries of Education and Higher Education

The category of *disjointed alignment between the ministries of Education and Higher Education* was highlighted by the teachers criticizing the lack of coordination and coherence between the policies and goals of the ministries of Education and Higher Education, leading to a disjointed alignment. Specifically, Shaima and Aras highlighted the inadequacy of teaching content in college that did not align with the content taught in schools, resulting in mismatches between a new teacher's skills and the requirements of their role. Aras specifically pointed out the issue of teaching content in college that was not related to the content in schools, saying, "No, I was not taught any content related to school or grade content that I would be teaching. We studied all the required courses for geography in general but did not study specific content for a specific school grade. Furthermore, now I am teaching history, geography, and social values." This mismatch between the content taught in college and the specific requirements of the school

system created difficulties in teaching and potentially negatively impacted student outcomes, as evidenced by Aras's experience.

Shaima further emphasized the *inadequacy of coordination between higher education and the ministry of education*, stating, "It was insufficient, and the content did not overlap with school content; I was not told I would teach a particular grade level." Shaima's experience highlighted the lack of clarity and direction for new teachers when they entered the school system, leading to potential mismatches between their skills and the requirements of their role.

Ghamgin's quote further illustrated the disjointed alignment between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education regarding the content area. She stated, "The programs in Teacher Institution were (word, excel, access, visual, and database) but in school, 7th-grade, I teach Paint program, and in 8th, I teach Word program... When a student transferred to another school, he/she would get confused because of the different content knowledge taught in different schools." Ghamgin's experience highlighted the lack of standardization and coherence in the content taught in college and the school system, in addition to the content taught in different schools, leading to confusion among students and teachers and potentially limiting career opportunities for teachers.

4.6. Teacher Characteristics and Attitudes

The theme of "Teacher Characteristics and Attitudes" refers to the personal qualities, values, beliefs, and attitudes teachers bring to their role as educators. This theme focuses on understanding how a teacher's personality, behavior, and mindset impact their interactions with students, the quality of their teaching, and their overall effectiveness as an educator. "Teacher Characteristics and Attitudes" encompass many factors, including communication skills, empathy, openness to new ideas, sense of humor, passion for teaching, and ability to establish

positive student relationships. This theme was supported by three categories: *Professional growth mindset*, *Strong work ethics*, and *Emphasis on whole-child (student) development*.

4.6.a. Professional Growth Mindset

According to the teachers interviewed, the *professional growth mindset* of teachers involved a belief and attitude of continuous learning, self-reflection, and improvement to enhance teaching skills, knowledge, and practices. They were committed to ongoing professional development, seeking feedback, and embracing challenges as opportunities for growth. They viewed mistakes and failures as learning opportunities rather than setbacks. The teachers with a professional growth mindset were open-minded, adaptable, and continuously sought to expand their knowledge and skills to improve student learning outcomes.

Dlzar highlighted the importance of passion and dedication in teaching. Despite facing challenges and a lack of support from the Ministry of Education, she said, "You should ask me personally how much I am willing to be a teacher because my love for teaching and my students made me ignore the challenges I faced in the past and currently. My enthusiasm for teaching kept me going and learning from the internet and others despite the lack of support of the MoE for us as teachers because 'I love my job.'"

Hawar shed light on her enthusiasm to pay from her pocket to improve herself for sake of her students. She explained, "The Education Office does not organize it (training course); local or international trainers organize it for us, and we, the teachers, pay for our expenses to participate in this course."

Sarkan emphasized the importance of collaboration and learning from more experienced colleagues. He said, "I ask other teachers who are more experienced than me and have a better

teaching style I benefit from. I observe my colleagues, and they observe my class; this mutual professional work relationship will help us move forward and assist our students."

Dlzar's quote highlighted the importance of understanding and connecting with students to be an effective teacher. By reading about psychology and being a friend to her students, she thoroughly understood their experiences and was better equipped to help them with their problems and questions. Dlzar mentioned, "What I use in my class is my thorough understanding of the teenage experience of my children, reading many books about the psychology of different ages, and being a friend to my students to listen to them when they have problems or questions. I respect the insight of my students."

Aras attributed his teaching skills to his curiosity, enthusiasm, observation, and independent learning through searching the internet. He emphasized the value of personal experience in developing teaching skills. Aras said, "All the teaching skills I have come from my curiosity, enthusiasm, observation, and searching the internet. I can say I gained all my skills from personal experience."

Shaima acknowledged the importance of continuous learning and development in teaching. Despite being experienced but not yet professional in teaching, she recognized the need to continue asking, researching, and studying to improve her teaching skills. Shaima said, "I can call myself experienced but not professional, and I still need to learn and develop my teaching skills. I got comfortable teaching after six years by asking, researching, and studying."

In addition, Shaima highlighted the importance of adapting teaching styles to engage students in her class. By changing her style of teaching, she made the lesson more enjoyable for her students and encouraged them to be creative and engaged. Shaima explained, "In my first six

years of teaching, I noticed that my students did not particularly enjoy the composition lesson. However, after I changed my teaching style for this lesson, it became apparent that they began to love it. In fact, most of the time, they were able to express their creativity and even drew pictures related to the topic."

4.6.b. Strong Work Ethics

Strong work ethics referred to the values, principles, and behaviors that teachers exhibited to demonstrate their commitment, dedication, and responsibility towards their students, colleagues, and the education system. Teachers with solid work ethics demonstrated reliability, accountability, honesty, professionalism, and a willingness to go above and beyond to meet the needs of their students and ensure their success. They prioritized their responsibilities and strove to maintain high standards of teaching and learning, despite the challenges and difficulties they encountered.

Habib stated, "They were not included (multiple intelligence theories) in my teacher preparation, but from my experience, I noticed that some students were visual, auditory, and tactile; they learned via these abilities. That is why I used speakers, flashcards, written activities, and pictures to include everyone in my teaching strategy." Despite not being introduced to multiple intelligence theories during teacher preparation, Habib recognized the importance of accommodating diverse learning styles in the classroom. He incorporated various teaching strategies, such as visual aids, written activities, and speakers, to engage and support all learners in his classroom.

Sonia noted, "When teaching biology, I would often bring in the heart of a goat or a sheep to demonstrate the different parts of the organ to my students. Similarly, when discussing

density, I would use shampoo, water, and oil to show how different substances have varying densities. I found that in science subjects, there was ample opportunity to incorporate other resources and materials into my lessons, and I was always able to create and organize engaging instruction for my student." Sonia employed interactive teaching methods, even if they did not involve technology, to help her students comprehend complex scientific concepts. She recognized that science subjects provided opportunities to utilize various resources and materials to create engaging and meaningful lessons.

Dlzar demonstrated her humbleness by acknowledging her weaknesses, saying, "Moreover, I sometimes doubted myself and held myself accountable for teaching those poor kids if I was teaching the right way." As a teacher, Dlzar was committed to her role and recognized the challenges of educating students from underprivileged backgrounds. She was not afraid to question her teaching techniques and held herself accountable to ensure that she provided the best possible education for her students.

Gulan emphasized the importance of making lessons meaningful and relevant to her students' lives, saying, "As a teacher, when my students struggled to understand a lesson, I tried to connect it to their daily life to find logic and help them understand it easily." Gulan utilized real-life examples and related scientific concepts to everyday experiences to achieve this. For instance, in teaching density, Gulan brought in simple materials like water and oil to make the topic more tangible and relatable to her students.

Ghamgin emphasized that her teaching style was learned through everyday interactions with her students, saying, "How I taught, I learned from everyday teaching and dealing with my kids." She shared an example of adjusting her approach based on a student's specific needs and challenges, stating, "One day I was explaining the process of an opening paint program, and one

of the students asked me to lower my voice, but my voice tone was ordinary; it was very strange until later when I found out that he had an anger management issue; he got irritated with high pitched voices.” Ghamgin's ability to reflect on her experiences in the classroom and adapt to her students' needs demonstrates her willingness to modify her teaching style as necessary.

4.6.c. Emphasis on Whole-Child (student) Development

The *emphasis on whole-child (student) development* category referred to the belief and practice among teachers that their role extended beyond academic instruction and encompassed the whole child's (student's) development, including their social, emotional, and physical well-being. Teachers who prioritized the whole-child development of their students recognized that education should not only focus on imparting knowledge but also on fostering personal growth, self-awareness, empathy, and character development. They strove to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment that enabled students to develop their full potential, become confident and independent learners, and contribute positively to society.

Aras believed building a friendly relationship with students was key to better understanding their interests and learning styles. He stated, "Before I taught students, I wanted to be their buddy. From there, I could establish my lessons, what they liked, the fastest way to help them digest a topic, and how I could relate my topic to their daily life." This approach helped him create lesson plans that were engaging and relevant to his students' lives outside the classroom.

Sarkan prioritized alternative methods of assessment and encouraged student participation in problem-solving and thinking out of box. He stated, "Students were not required to take tests to pass my subject. For that, I used project-based, report, and group work to assess

their understanding. Also, I taught them that there was no right or wrong answer in my class and that the Social Values subject allowed students to integrate their opinions to answer or solve the questions and problems I proposed to them." This approach fostered open-mindedness and diverse perspectives, creating a classroom environment where students felt comfortable sharing their opinions.

Shaima committed to her students' well-being by investing in her professional development. She used her money to attend a training course on adolescent psychology to inform her teaching style and approach to promoting physical and mental growth in her students. As she explained, "The only course that I went on my expenses was organized by an Iranian trainer who gave a general idea of how to deal with teenagers' psychology and the biological changes they underwent in that period and how we as teachers should deal with them in the class. Later, I had a big picture of how to deal with them and encouraged their growth physically and mentally." Shaima's dedication to her profession and willingness to go above and beyond for her students was evident in her investment in her education.

Despite lacking resources, Aras took it upon himself to create a comfortable and engaging learning environment for his students. He stated, "Although my school was not equipped to have a class like that, I designed it at my expense for students to be comfortable and engage in my teaching style. I used the student center, group work, and project-based activities to relate the lesson to their daily social and life." By incorporating project-based activities and real-life examples into his lessons, he made the resources more relevant and accessible to his students.

Sarkan prioritized his students' critical thinking and independent thought, rejecting a "one-size-fits-all" approach to education. He explained, "I wanted them to come out of their

comfort zone and think independently. I did not want them to act like robots; I wanted them to act like humans. There was no right or wrong answer in my class. I took my teaching style back to the number of training courses I participated in, my reflection on my teaching style, and keeping myself updated." This commitment to ongoing professional development and self-reflection demonstrated his dedication to creating a supportive learning environment that enabled his students to reach their full potential.

4.7. Resources and Support Challenges

The "Resources and Support Challenges" theme referred to the difficulties and obstacles teachers encountered regarding the availability and adequacy of resources and support systems necessary for effective teaching. This theme encompassed a range of challenges that teachers faced, such as limited access to teaching materials, outdated technology or facilities, inadequate support from colleagues or superiors, and financial burdens related to purchasing necessary tools and supplies. These challenges negatively impacted a teacher's ability to provide quality education and support to their students and may also have affected their motivation and job satisfaction.

4.7.a. Limited and Deficient School Resources and Facilities

The category of *limited and deficient school resources and facilities* encompassed situations where schools lacked necessary resources and facilities, such as outdated technology, insufficient materials for instruction, or inadequate physical spaces, which could impede effective teaching and learning. Gulan highlighted the challenge of limited school resources: "Primarily, we were involved with generating electric projects in the college. Because we did not have the exact resources at schools, I could not involve students with every project mentioned in

the book for lack of resources." This highlighted the constraints teachers faced in engaging students in valuable learning opportunities due to the unavailability of resources in schools.

Sonia explained that the scarcity of resources in her school, such as only having one projector, limited the use of PPT in the classroom: "My school had only a projector, and as teachers, we had to have a waiting list to show our students some pictures or information on PPT via projector. That is why we did not use PPT because we struggled to get proper resources. We did not have a lab to experiment with for science subjects." This highlighted how a lack of resources, such as lab facilities for science subjects, could impede the effective teaching of certain subjects.

Aras described several challenges related to the lack of technology in schools: "First, our schools are not equipped with technology. Second, students did not have access to any technology. Third, there was no Wi-Fi and electricity in the schools provided for the time students spent 5 hours in school. Fourth, most teachers did not know how to use a computer. Finally, most students did not even have phones; how could they know how to use or access any technology?" Aras highlighted how limited access to technology impeded effective teaching and learning, with teachers lacking the necessary skills and students lacking access to technology.

Hawar expressed her frustration with the class sizes and overcrowding in her school. She explained, "We have overcrowded classes in my school, I have 45-50 students in one class. It makes it difficult to teach, involve all students for daily participation, and the facilities do not support student-centered approach or use project-based learning in class." Her quote represented the challenges she faced as a teacher due to the many students in her classroom, which made it difficult to engage with each student individually and implement student-centered learning

approaches. Hawar's concerns about the limited facilities to support such teaching methods compounded her difficulties in delivering quality education.

Ghamgin shared the challenge of limited electricity in accessing school computer labs: "We did not have electricity to take my students to the computer lab. Or, if we had electricity, the computers did not work properly, and their software and programs were outdated." This highlighted how limited resources, such as electricity, limited the effective use of computer-based learning in schools.

4.7.b. Negative Feedback from Advisors and Colleagues

The category *negative feedback from advisors and colleagues* referred to situations where teachers experienced criticism, discouragement, or lack of support from their professional network, including advisors and colleagues. The feedback could be either constructive or destructive, affecting teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and well-being. Negative feedback contributed to an adverse school climate, further impacting teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

Gulan explained that she had never reached out to her supervisor for help due to the supervisor's negative attitude towards questions teachers ask. Gulan also noted that the criticism from the supervisor was destructive and not constructive, which created additional challenges for effective teaching and learning: "I had never contacted or asked my supervisor for help. I never dared to ask them for help; they did not allow us to ask them questions. Their criticism was destructive."

Aras opened up about the negative feedback he had received from colleagues when seeking help, creating anxiety and stress. As he explained, "I asked my colleagues at school if I

needed help, and sometimes when I asked them for help, they would not provide full support; they would judge me for asking for help, and they would say, 'How would I become a teacher if I do not know this skill or information?'" Such feedback from colleagues could hinder Aras's professional growth and development, making it difficult for him to seek help another time to improve his teaching skills.

Sonia highlighted the negative impact that severe and hurtful criticism from supervisors had on teachers' morale and motivation. She also expressed her concern that the new supervisors, referred to as the Buddy of Criticism/Hawre Rakhnagr, lacked the necessary expertise to evaluate teachers effectively. She explained, "They (supervisors) criticized so severely and said hurtful words that I wished I had never asked them any questions. Recently, the supervisors were replaced by Hawre Rakhnagr/Buddy of Criticism; they held principals accountable to observe and evaluate us, which I found insane because I want someone to evaluate and observe my class who has the same expertise in my subject area. Our education system every day they implement new ideas in the wrong way. Instead of going forward, we stepped 100 steps backward." Sonia's concerns highlight the need for constructive feedback and evaluations from individuals with relevant expertise, as this is crucial for teachers' growth and development. She also called attention to the disorganization and mismanagement in the education system, which can hinder progress and lead to negative consequences for teachers and students.

Shaima described the challenge of receiving negative feedback on her teaching method from someone without the necessary expertise in the subject area. She explained that her approach was necessary to deliver the lesson effectively and that criticism without expertise could be unhelpful and unfair, saying, "After I finished teaching idioms, he criticized my teaching method. He suggested that instead of teaching idioms in my own way, I should stick to

the book's approach and have students write down the idioms as they were presented in the text. He also scolded me for going beyond the book and providing additional information. I explained that my approach was necessary to deliver the lesson effectively. I argued that it was unfair for someone who lacked expertise in my teaching area to evaluate my performance. It would be like a non-expert in physical education telling a soccer player how to play."

Dlzar shared that she experienced harsh judgment from others and that her fellow teachers were unwilling to help despite her seeking assistance. Additionally, she explained that her department did not have a teacher preparation program, which may have contributed to her challenges as a teacher: "There were times I cried because I got judged harshly, and fellow teachers were not ready to help despite my seeking help. They did not understand that my department did not have a teacher preparation program."

4.7.c. Financial Burden on Teachers for Providing Teaching Tools and Supplies

The *financial burden on teachers for providing teaching tools and supplies* referred to when teachers spent their money on materials, resources, and tools needed for effective teaching and learning despite not receiving their complete salary. Sarkan illustrated his proactive approach to providing his students with engaging educational material, using his resources to set up a classroom that did not rely on shared equipment with other teachers. He also demonstrated a personal commitment to ongoing professional development by seeking out private teacher training courses. According to Sarkan, "The PPT slides have short clips, animation, and YouTube videos appropriate for my student's age and grade level. For this, I needed a computer and a projector; I provided (bought) both for my class. I do not need to ask other teachers to give me their turns or get permission to use the computer lab."

Sarkan's words highlighted teachers' financial burden when seeking professional development opportunities. According to Sarkan, "I have not participated in any courses or seminars designed by the MoE. However, because I always want to keep myself updated with new methods and teaching and education trends, I took part in 20 private teacher training courses at my expense. The first time I took part in a ToT training by Canadian experts was 13 days long, costing me \$1300 to obtain a certificate. " He emphasized that he invested his time and money in these courses without considering the financial burden.

Although some teaching materials, such as posters, were provided by the Directorate of Education, teachers still had to purchase some supplies out of their pocket. Habib highlighted a combination of personal investment and institutional support in equipping his classroom with educational resources. He bought some items himself, but the Directorate of Education provided posters to supplement the textbooks used by teachers and students. Habib stated, "I bought some of them, like the speaker (CD player), colored pen and markers, and flashcards. Nevertheless, the posters were provided by the Directorate of Education in Sulaymaniyah; they came with textbooks for students and teachers."

In conclusion, the perceptions of elementary Kurdish teachers towards their preparation programs revealed several challenges and obstacles they face in their profession. Participants described their in-service and pre-service preparations as inappropriate and insufficient, leading to feelings of being poorly prepared. They highlighted many challenges, including inadequate training and professional development opportunities, political and economic issues affecting education, challenges in finding suitable employment opportunities, hindrances in implementing effective curricula and instructional strategies, mismatches between teacher preparation and the profession's demands, and inadequate resources and support systems. Additionally, teacher

characteristics and attitudes, such as a growth mindset, strong work ethics, and a focus on whole-child development, were emphasized. These findings suggest a need for improved teacher preparation, ongoing professional development opportunities, and addressing political and economic issues affecting education in Kurdistan. Adequate resources and support systems should be made available to support teachers in their profession and ensure quality education for students.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

The concluding chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research findings and analyses the conclusions based on the research questions. It also features a detailed discussion of the results in relation to the literature review presented in chapter two and the conceptual framework underpinning the study. The final segment of this chapter offers recommendations and future research directions. The primary focus of this research inquiry was to explore the perceptions of elementary Kurdish teachers regarding their teacher education programs and the various teacher training courses and seminars offered by the Ministry of Education in Kurdistan and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The primary objective of this ethnographic case study was to explore the experiences, perceptions, and concerns of in-service elementary/basic school teachers regarding their pre-service preparation and teacher training courses presented by MHESR upon their graduation and training courses offered by MoE during their teaching careers. I used a survey followed by in-depth interviews to collect data to achieve this aim. For the survey instrument, I drew upon previous survey research conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar by Khalid et al. (2017) and Gassama (2020), respectively. These studies examined pre-service teachers' perspectives on their educational preparation, utilizing Danielson's Model for Teaching (1996) and relevant literature on teachers' education knowledge and views. The survey was adapted to suit the Kurdish teachers' context. The survey was administered via WhatsApp and Viber to 200 in-service teachers who taught various subjects in public schools; 195 teachers responded.

The survey allowed teachers to indicate their interest in participating in a follow-up interview. Based on the responses received, ten teachers were selected for in-depth interviews. I developed 12 semi-structured interview questions sent to each participant three days before the

interview. During the interview, follow-up questions were asked, and I recorded and translated the interviews verbatim.

Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion below are organized according to the research questions. It was discovered that several themes worked together to create a picture of teacher preparation and answer each research question. The study's research questions were:

1. What are the elementary Kurdish teachers' impressions of their preparation?
2. What would teachers like to have included in their preparation programs, or would they like to be more included?

The two themes, *Training and Professional Development Challenges* and *Political and Economic Issues* best answer research question 1. The other five study themes address research question 2.

Discussion for Research Question One

Training and Professional Development Challenges

Albakry (2018) posits that teacher preparation programs are carefully planned and organized programs offered by specialized educational institutions based on current educational and psychological theories. Their primary objective is to provide pre-service and in-service educators with intellectual, professional, and cultural influences to become effective teachers. The importance of quality pre-service teacher preparation programs in providing students with a good-quality education has been highlighted by Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002) and Lasley et al. (2006), while Berry (2010) emphasizes the critical role of these programs in

producing competent teachers. Despite this, most teachers interviewed in this study consider themselves “not prepared or poorly prepared” for some reasons, including inadequate training content and delivery and a lack of professional development opportunities. One participant (Gulan) expressed frustration with the lack of training she received in designing instruction for students with different levels of intelligence, both at the university and in the training courses she participated in. She stated, "I did not have or take any courses about the differentiated classroom. Moreover, I was not taught how to design my lesson for different intelligent levels of instruction. I have not found any typical instruction designed for my students' three levels of intelligence." Most teachers reported that the content they studied at the university and the content they teach at school do not overlap.

Tatto et al. (1993) suggest that the quality of teachers' initial training affects their ability to benefit from their preparation programs, professional development opportunities, and other teacher support frameworks. Aras, for example, had no teacher preparation programs during his college years or after graduating. He shared that this significantly impacted his career as a teacher until 2021. It was discovered that all the teachers interviewed said that they were not prepared or poorly prepared.

Political and Economic Issues

Vernez et al. (2016) highlighted that the teacher education programs in Kurdistan face a substantial challenge due to the lack of coordination and collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The teachers interviewed for this study explicitly pointed out this issue, stating that the two ministries work as separate entities, and political agendas control them. Each ministry belongs to a political party, working according to their party's view rather than working to improve the education system.

Aras, one of the interviewed teachers, mentioned this problem, stating, "The issue is that the two ministries, MoE and MHESR, are not connected, and they do not receive reports from each other to make changes in their courses, common core subjects in university, training, and professional development for teachers."

Ben-Pretz (2001) highlighted that when the quality of students produced by a school system is inadequate, the focus shifts to improving the quality of pre-service training programs for teachers. However, the lack of meaningful relationships and cooperation between the two ministries responsible for education in Kurdistan has left teachers ill-equipped to understand the genuine demands of the educational system. This situation has harmed the development of teachers, particularly those teaching at the elementary level. Sofi-Karim (2015) further argued that the current educational system in Kurdistan produces incompetent pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and students, and the curriculum is outdated.

In an attempt to identify areas for improvement in teacher preparation and student instruction, the Ministry of Education commissioned Vernez et al. (2016) to evaluate the current education system in Kurdistan. The researchers discovered that a mere 40% of practicing teachers felt adequately equipped to implement the new curriculum's resources and framework. Additionally, one-third of professors reported teaching subjects other than their academic specialty, indicating a shortage of qualified instructors in key subject areas. The study also revealed that KRI schools provided inadequate instructional time to implement the new syllabus. Compared to schools in several Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development member nations (OECD), most KRI schools had 250 fewer hours of classroom instruction per year. The interview findings of the teachers in this study are consistent with the findings of the RAND study, which attributed the lack of preparedness among teachers to political issues.

Despite creating a management information system to handle data on educational system performance and recommendations made by the researchers in the same report, the war against ISIS has absorbed significant resources since 2014. The MoE's efforts to improve the education system have been severely hampered due to the influx of Syrian refugees and internally displaced Iraqi citizens, which have also taken an economic toll. Teachers' and professors' salaries have been deducted, leading to protests and the cancellation of classes in universities and schools.

Discussion for Research Question Two

Placement and Career Issues

Placement and career development challenges for teachers in this study were clearly reported, especially regarding their inadequate placement and preparation. Many teachers expressed concerns about being placed in schools that do not align with their specific preparation and training, hindering their ability to perform their duties effectively. For instance, Shaima stated, "I was not told I would teach a particular grade level. Even after graduation, when I applied for a teaching career, I was not told what grades I would teach. When I started teaching, I felt I was not qualified, which affected my confidence in the classroom."

Pre-service teacher education programs prepare teachers to fully understand the school and classroom environments, develop the necessary skills and knowledge, and become productive teachers. Kennedy (1999) noted that pre-service teachers gain experience through school experience and work placement during their training, which is vital for their professional development. However, many teachers in Kurdistan struggle to find employment opportunities

matching their qualifications and experience, leading to career difficulties, job dissatisfaction, and discomfort when teaching.

Kennedy (1999) also reported that post-baccalaureate education programs have been identified as a potential solution to help graduate students from other fields to teach in subject areas related to their specialty. Pre-service teacher education program models also exist that train and license individuals with bachelor's degrees in various disciplines to enter the teaching industry. However, some teachers in the interview reported unfair treatment for being forced to teach different grade levels and subjects. For example, Nian shared, "I was forced to teach 7-9th grade, despite not being trained to handle that age group or the content. When I requested a training program to enhance my skills, my supervisor disregarded my request and said, 'I do not care even if you teach math mistakenly; you have to teach 7-9th grade.'"

Floden and Meniketti (2005) highlighted the importance of work placement in the professional development of pre-service teachers, as it provides them with firsthand experience and an understanding of what the teaching profession requires regarding skills, knowledge, and abilities. However, many teachers in Kurdistan feel that they were not adequately prepared or placed by their teacher preparation programs, leading to further difficulties in their job search. These challenges teachers face in Kurdistan hinder their personal career development and affect the quality of education provided to students in the region.

Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Adjustment Hindrance

Glathron et al. (2006) emphasized the importance of a university degree for aspiring teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to create effective curricula, implement instructional strategies, and address adjustment hindrances. However, despite having university

degrees, Kurdish teachers are still poorly prepared to face the challenges of teacher preparation. These challenges include the need to incorporate 21st-century skills and technology literacy into the curriculum, insufficient pedagogical preparation, limited practical experience, and difficulties in implementing new teaching strategies. Hence, there is a need to enhance teacher preparation programs to address these challenges and provide teachers with the necessary tools and skills to promote student learning and engagement.

The education of teachers involves preparing pre-service teachers for a career in the school context through pedagogical training and obtaining a degree in an academic subject like English, science, mathematics, and social studies (Darling Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). The training program typically includes subject area courses, pedagogy, and a practicum. However, some participants have reported a lack of pedagogical preparation in their training programs, hindering their classroom effectiveness. As Dizar highlighted, "The core of teaching lies in pedagogical preparation. Regrettably, Teacher Qualification Training (TQT) and university programs fail to address this. As educators, we are responsible for seeking out and implementing effective strategies to benefit our students in the classroom." In addition, some teachers have limited practical experience and face challenges in implementing new teaching strategies; they do not find support to implement new strategies.

All the teachers interviewed in this study complained about their final-year practicum, which they felt was too short and did not provide enough helpful feedback. Gulan stated, "In the final year of college, we had a practicum of 40 days at school; one of our professors came to supervise us on the last day of the practicum for 30 minutes."

Teachers need to be proficient in digital-age literacy, innovative thinking, effective communication, and high productivity (Hammond, 2005; Shalabi, 2014). Therefore, teacher

education programs should rethink their curricula to suit the needs of 21st-century skills.

Unfortunately, some participants reported having limited or no experience utilizing technology in their classes and did not receive guidance. Chesley and Jordan (2012) reported that differentiated instruction integrated into daily formative assessments can diagnose student needs, a crucial skill in today's high-accountability classrooms. However, as participants reported, they were not provided with the necessary information and tools to design a lesson for three levels of intelligence. Nevertheless, they are taught how to design a test for them.

Lesson preparation plays a critical role in enhancing teachers' skills and confidence. As Danielson (2007) stated, lesson preparation has four critical roles: preparing teachers, enhancing their self-esteem, reinforcing their professional status, and ensuring meaningful lessons. Nevertheless, some participants felt inadequately prepared in these areas, citing insufficient pedagogical preparation, limited practical experience, and challenges in implementing new teaching strategies. Habib said, "I used a lesson plan to satisfy my advisor because I was not told how to write a very helpful plan for my lesson for my students."

Inadequate Teacher Preparation Quality and Alignment between Education Institutions

Chesley and Jordan (2012) conducted a comprehensive study investigating pre-service teachers' obstacles and difficulties in their teacher education programs. Their study's findings indicated that recent graduates of teacher preparation programs were highly critical of professors who had not taught in a public school classroom in more than two decades, which created a "credibility gap." Furthermore, the study highlighted the inadequate qualifications of some university professors to teach certain classes, which Kurdish teachers also found to be a significant issue. The study revealed a significant issue in teacher preparation related to racial conflicts and language barriers in Kurdistan. This issue had a detrimental impact on students'

ability to understand the content effectively, as one teacher, Hawar, reported: "We had psychology and teaching methods in our teacher preparation program, but the instruction was inadequate. The Arab professors did not seem to care if we understood the content since we were Kurds, and they were Arabs." Furthermore, the study highlighted how newly established departments and departmental personnel changes, including replacing several professors for one class, contributed to further disorganization within the program.

Moreover, the study highlighted the need for hands-on activities and practical lessons to receive more emphasis than theoretical classroom-based instruction, which dominated the program's curriculum. The Kurdish teacher participants noted that their programs had little or no regular activities or goals, the organization of the classes and the time allocated to teach specific subjects was not enough, and the curricula were outdated and disorganized. Ghamgin stated, "The teacher preparation program was disorganized, lacked structure, and experienced personnel changes. Insufficient time and disorganized information on teaching methods added to the disorder, and the program was newly established within the computer science department, with my cohort being the first to take the course." Therefore, the quality of pre-service teachers' experiences in these programs depended on the knowledge and abilities of their coordinating or mentoring teachers. These findings align with Chesley and Jordan's (2012) investigation.

Teacher Characteristics and Attitudes

Teachers' personal qualities, values, beliefs, and attitudes are crucial to their effectiveness as educators. The teachers focused on these aspects and how they impacted the quality of education they offer students, their ethics, and their professional growth. The participants worked on developing themselves for their students, career, and professional development, despite facing many challenges because of the poor education system and teacher preparation programs.

According to Amankwah et al. (2017) and Bukaliya (2012), teaching practice is a crucial component of teacher education programs that help pre-service teachers develop a positive attitude toward teaching and gain real-life classroom experience. They also posit that teaching practice exposes pre-service teachers to their strengths and weaknesses in education, especially in their character and attitudes. It helps them translate educational theories and principles into practice and provides the necessary skills, competencies, and personal characteristics. Teaching practice promotes personal development, such as decision-making abilities, critical thinking skills, increased confidence, and self-esteem (Bukaliya, 2012).

Nevertheless, none of the aspects mentioned in the previous study were available for the study teachers. They had to strive to work on themselves to offer better education to their students. Aras said, "All the teaching skills I have come from my curiosity, enthusiasm, observation, and searching the internet. I can say I gained all my skills from personal experience." Multiple studies have found that the most important factor influencing student learning is the quality of the educator (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Davidson-Shivers et al., 2004; Heywood, 2000; Rice et al., 2000). Students who were fortunate enough to have teachers who understood their topic and how to teach it well succeeded significantly more. The consequences of an excellent or unskilled teacher lingered beyond a single year, impacting their students' learning for years to come. The elementary Kurdish teachers in this study identified essential tasks that included assisting students with learning, academic performance, and social performance. A professional growth mindset was critical in the teachers' interviews who strived to develop themselves despite many school challenges and not receiving quality preparation. All the interviewed teachers emphasized continually improving their skills and adapting to changes in the education landscape.

Additionally, the participants' strong work ethic is essential to mention to have credible character and stick to the ethics of teaching despite the education system's oblivious to these attitudes of the teachers. The Elementary Kurdish teachers interviewed maintained their commitment to their profession and ensured they put in the necessary effort to help their students succeed. Shaima said, "I can call myself experienced but not professional, and I still need to learn and develop my teaching skills. I got comfortable teaching after six years by asking, researching, and studying." Finally, a focus on whole-child development meant a lot to the participants. Teachers should prioritize the well-being of their students and consider their emotional, social, and academic needs in their teaching approach. Sarkan explained, "I wanted them to come out of their comfort zone and think independently. I did not want them to act like robots; I wanted them to act like humans. There was no right or wrong answer in my class." Unfortunately, many participants felt their teacher preparation programs did not adequately address these essential qualities and attitudes. This resulted in teachers feeling ill-equipped to handle the demands of their role and provide the best education possible for their students.

Resources and Support Challenges

Participants discussed difficulties and obstacles in obtaining the necessary resources and support systems for effective teaching. The lack of support and resources can be incredibly daunting for new teachers, who are expected to handle a full educational load right away, often with little or no professional support. In some cases, novice teachers are asked to teach subjects outside their expertise without assistance or appropriate evaluation criteria to enhance their teaching, primarily through their supervisors.

Research has shown that the teaching methods of experienced teachers tend to be influenced by their own experiences during their teacher preparation programs (Ball, 1990).

Chesley and Jordan (2012), as well as Mensah (1991) and Nwanekezi et al. (2011), have researched the perceptions of in-service and student teachers regarding their preparation programs at universities. Their studies have revealed that students often feel ill-prepared for teaching practice, lacking the necessary equipment, facilities, and materials for exercise. Additionally, students reported a poor learning environment characterized by poor ventilation, class congestion, and a short practicing period. The present study highlights the challenges teachers and students face regarding inadequate resources, such as limited access to electricity and poorly constructed school facilities that hinder the installation of technological devices and classes that are overcrowded. Hawar stated, "We have overcrowded classes in my school, I have 45-50 students in one class. It makes it difficult to teach and involve all students for daily participation, and the facilities do not support a student-centered approach or use project-based learning in class." These challenges align with the findings of previous studies that have identified resource scarcity as a significant obstacle to delivering quality education. As discovered by Mensah (1991), unfavorable contact between supervisor and supervisee frequently leads to dissatisfaction and poor performance in his research on the difficulties of teaching practice in the first training of teacher training institutes in Ghana. He suggested that a competent supervisor build and maintain a fruitful connection with their supervisee. It is unfortunate that many participants in this study do not feel supported by their supervisors. In some cases, the feedback they received was hurtful and destructive, without offering constructive solutions to help them improve. What is even more disheartening is that some of their peers also judged them when they sought assistance. As Dilzar mentioned "There were times I cried because I got judged harshly, and fellow teachers were not ready to help despite my seeking help. They did not understand that my department did not have a teacher preparation program."

Implementing the British Council system in schools has added to the challenges that teachers face. Instead of being evaluated by subject-area supervisors who understand their expertise, they are now evaluated by a person called the "Buddy of Criticism/Hawre Rakhnagr," whose subject area differs from theirs. This has increased the amount of criticism Kurdish teachers receive without the necessary support to help them grow.

Another key finding from the interviews was the financial burden on teachers for providing teaching tools and supplies. Kurdish teachers have suffered from not receiving their complete salaries since 2014; with the start of the war against ISIS until late 2022, they did not receive their salary every month. However, many participants took it upon themselves to buy teaching supplies and technological tools to support students' learning. Most of the time, these challenges significantly impact a teacher's ability to provide quality education and support to their students and affect their motivation and job satisfaction.

Recommendations

It is essential to consider the perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers since they face real-life challenges in the classroom, and their feedback should be taken seriously (Straková, 2015). By listening to their recommendations and suggestions, policymakers can positively change the teacher education programs offered by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Education in the Kurdistan Regional Government. As this study focused on in-service teachers' perceptions of their preparation programs in college and teacher training after graduation, there are two recommendations: one for the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the other for the Ministry of Education. To reform teacher education preparation programs, we need to understand how in-service teachers perceive their preparation programs.

The following recommendations are made for the MHESR to improve teacher preparation programs:

1. Organization of courses: The sequence of courses in a teacher preparation program should be carefully designed to ensure that pre-service teachers build on their knowledge and skills over time. The program should start with foundational courses that cover basic teaching skills and gradually move toward more advanced coursework that covers subject-specific teaching strategies and advanced pedagogy.
2. Quality of professors: It is vital to hire professors who are not only experts in their fields but also have experience in teaching and are not biased. They should be able to demonstrate effective teaching methods and provide practical advice on improving student learning.
3. Improve practicum: Improving practicum experiences in teacher preparation programs in Kurdistan by providing pre-service teachers with structured and meaningful learning opportunities is important. This includes ensuring that the practicum experience is of sufficient duration, 30 days are not enough, as the teachers highlighted, and that pre-service teachers have regular contact with their liaison or supervisor for support and guidance. Practicum experiences should provide pre-service teachers opportunities to practice classroom management, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques. Feedback from experienced teachers and professors can help pre-service teachers improve their teaching skills, and technology should be incorporated into the classroom to enhance student learning. Finally, provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to reflect on their experiences and use this reflection to improve their teaching practice.

4. Focus on the practical side: Teacher preparation programs should focus more on the practical side of teaching and less on traditional memorization. This can include hands-on activities to help pre-service teachers to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.
5. Overlapping content: Teacher preparation programs should ensure that the teaching content overlaps the school content. This can help pre-service teachers better understand the curriculum and future students' needs.
6. Technology guidance: Pre-service teachers should be guided on using technology in college to assist their students in the future. This can include training on how to use educational software, online resources, and digital media to enhance student learning.
7. Students' psychology: Teacher preparation programs should include coursework on educational psychology to help pre-service teachers understand the needs and behaviors of their students. This course should identify the specific psychological needs of students at a particular grade level. This can include learning theories, developmental psychology, and behavior management strategies.

The following recommendations are for the MoE to improve teacher training courses.

1. Develop a uniform curriculum for pre-service training: The Directorate of Training Centers should work with education colleges to develop a uniform curriculum, focusing on instructional approaches, classroom management, student discipline, child psychology, and other key areas. This will ensure that all pre-service teachers receive consistent training.
2. Increase the duration and frequency of in-service training: In-service training should be offered more frequently throughout the year rather than just in the summer months. Additionally, the duration of the training should be extended to provide more

comprehensive coverage of topics. This will allow teachers to receive more targeted training on subjects like academic content, instructional methods, and technology, especially for the teachers that did not receive preparation programs.

3. Ensure all teachers receive in-service training: The MoE should establish a policy that mandates all teachers to receive in-service training regularly. This will help to ensure that all teachers are up-to-current with the latest teaching methods, technologies, and content.
4. Implement a mentorship program: The MoE should implement a mentorship program that pairs experienced teachers with new and pre-service teachers. This will provide new and pre-service teachers with guidance, feedback, and support as they navigate their early years of teaching.
5. Establish training centers with full-time qualified staff: The MoE should establish training centers with full-time qualified staff devoted to training in content, pedagogy, and students' psychology growth. These centers should focus on training teachers to implement the new curriculum and provide ongoing professional development opportunities.
6. Provide incentives for participation: The MoE should provide incentives for teachers to participate in both pre-service and in-service training, such as pay raises, promotions, or additional benefits. This will encourage more teachers to take advantage of these opportunities and improve their teaching skills.
7. Building new school facilities is a crucial recommendation to be considered to reduce classroom overcrowding and support various teaching styles. Even if the other recommendations are implemented, overcrowding will negatively impact the quality of education and limit the ability of teachers to implement different teaching methods

effectively. New facilities can be designed to provide different types of spaces for different learning activities, such as open areas for group work and collaboration, quiet spaces for individual study, and well-equipped labs for science and technology courses. Additionally, new school facilities can be designed to incorporate modern technology and support digital learning. This includes providing reliable internet access, ensuring classrooms are equipped with digital tools such as projectors and interactive whiteboards, and designing spaces that support digital tools and resources. Building new facilities can also provide an opportunity to create safe and welcoming environments that promote student learning and well-being.

8. Train supervisors to support teachers: A critical aspect of teacher training programs is the need to train supervisors to support teachers. In many cases, supervisors may be more focused on evaluating teachers rather than providing support and guidance for improvement. This can lead to a negative environment in which teachers feel judged and criticized rather than supported in their efforts to improve. Training programs should focus on providing supervisors with the skills and knowledge needed to provide constructive feedback and support for teachers. This includes training on effective communication, active listening, and providing specific, actionable feedback. Additionally, supervisors should be encouraged to focus on identifying strengths and areas for growth rather than simply pointing out weaknesses.

Future Research

One of the limitations of this study was that I could only investigate elementary teachers in one province and only five schools. The perimeter of my investigation was limited, yet I could identify many critical aspects of the preparation programs and teachers' training courses. Future

studies might incorporate a more extensive number of teachers who teach secondary and kindergarten education programs across the Kurdistan Region to get a clearer view of the process of preparing teachers for all grades rather than only elementary teachers. Besides using surveys and interviews, a variety of other data collection methods, such as observation of teaching performance and examination of portfolios or reflection notebooks, might be used in future research to understand better the teachers and how they have been prepared in their pre-service programs.

The following are the future suggestions for investigation:

1. The long-term impact of teacher preparation programs: One potential area of research is to examine the long-term impact of teacher preparation programs on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. This could involve following teachers who have completed different types of preparation programs over several years and tracking their performance in the classroom and their student's academic achievement.
2. Comparative analysis of different preparation programs: Another possible area of research is to conduct a comparative analysis of different teacher preparation programs between two provinces since a political party leads each province. It could lead to examining the perceptions of teachers who have completed different types of programs (e.g., traditional university-based programs, alternative certification programs, residency programs) and assessing the impact of these programs on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes in these two provinces.
3. Stakeholder perspectives on teacher preparation: Researchers could also explore the perspectives of different stakeholders (e.g., teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and parents) on teacher preparation programs, including conducting focus groups or

surveys to gather data on perceptions of teacher preparation, as well as identifying areas of agreement and disagreement among stakeholders.

4. A cross-cultural analysis of teacher preparation: Finally, researchers could explore cross-cultural differences in perceptions of teacher preparation programs. This could involve comparing the perceptions of teachers and other stakeholders in different countries or regions and examining the factors that shape these perceptions, for instance, cultural values and educational policies.

Conclusion

This qualitative ethnographic case study explored in-service teachers' perceptions in the Kurdistan Regional Government, particularly in Sulaymaniyah province, regarding their educational preparation and teacher training courses. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, the study investigated teachers' feelings, experiences, and concerns related to the programs offered at their educational institutions. The study found a high level of dissatisfaction among in-service elementary Kurdish teachers regarding their pre-service preparation and teacher training courses. The participants believed that their program lacked required courses such as learning theory, teaching strategies, and students' psychology, and also suffered from unqualified and biased professors, a mismatch between school content and college content taught for schools, short practicum, and a lack of practical and pedagogical content in teacher training courses. The study suggests that to prepare quality elementary teachers, the two ministries in the country should collaborate to identify the deficit areas of their training programs and update their curriculum with a greater focus on practice teaching. The study also highlights the importance of consulting and appropriately training teachers regarding any changes to be made in the curriculum because teachers' voices are crucial in improving the curricula. The findings of this

study can be used for future planning in many areas but primarily for elementary teacher preparation programs. The study concludes that a new curriculum and practical practicum can be designed to enforce the learning experience of the student and in-service teachers and help them improve their teaching abilities.

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Appendix A

Permission Letter from the General Directorate Education Office in Sulaymaniyah

<p>شركة شازاد محمد فؤاد للترجمة ترجمة قانونية لكافة اللغات عنوان: شارع ممولوي - سوق سوز - الطابق الثاني ٧٧٠١٤٥٧٥٥ - ٧٧٠٧٩٠٦</p>	 <p>License No. 975</p>	<p>Shazad Mohammed Fouad Co. For legal translation All languages Address: Mawlawi St. - Soz Market - Second Floor +9647701455755 +9643207906 shazadco51@yahoo.com</p>
<p>Kurdistan region - Iraq Council of ministers Ministry of education General directorate of Sulaimaniyah education Educational directorate of West Subjectivity & Governmental sector</p>		
<p>No.: 621 Date: 05-01-2022</p>		
<p>To/ All the primary schools of our directorate's border Sub /Permission</p>		
<p>Mentioned in the written letter of the General Directorate of Sulaymaneyah/Media and Communications office No.(328) issued January 4th, 2022. We want to let you know that Ms. (Khoshee Othman Mohammed) is completing her Master's degree at the University of Arkansas in the United States. She will be surveying and interviewing teachers at your schools.</p>		
<p>Please cooperate with her while visiting your schools.</p>		
<p>Attached to// form (3 pages)</p>		
<p>BAKR MOHAMMED MAHMOOD Education Director Signed</p>		
<p>A copy to:</p>		
<p>-Educational Supervising unit of Sulaimaniyah west - Subjectivity & Governmental sector</p>		
  <p>ترجمة القانونية شركة شازاد محمد فؤاد للترجمة SHAZAD MOHAMMED FOUAD COMPANY TO TRANSLATE ALL LANGUAGES / INDIVIDUAL PROJECT</p>		

Appendix B
IRB Approval



To: Khoshee Othman Mohammed Mohammed
From: Douglas J Adams Justin R Chimka, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 04/14/2022
Action: **Exemption Granted**
Action Date: 04/14/2022
Protocol #: 2111372211
Study Title: The Perceptions of Elementary Kurdish Teachers Regarding their
Preparation Programs

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@ark.edu. cc: Heather D Young, Investigator

Appendix C

Survey Questions

- Highest degree earned? Bachelor's Master's Doctorate
- How long have you been teaching? 1-10 11-20 More than 20
- What type of school are you teaching in? Public school Private school
- Gender? Male Female
- What grade(s) are you teaching currently? 1-6 7-9

1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree

Question Number	In my teacher preparation programs, I learned to:	1	2	3	4
1	Use appropriate teaching strategies that suit the content.				
2	Consider the characteristics and differences of individual students in the classroom.				
3	Create a good classroom environment that encourages my students to learn UpToDate knowledge.				
4	Design appropriate activities to promote students learning.				
5	Organize appropriate assessment techniques to improve students' knowledge levels				
6	Provide proper feedback to students.				
7	Adjust teaching to suit diverse students' needs and include every student in my instruction.				
8	Give appropriate assessments to students to identify their learning difficulties				
9	Adapt my teaching to the classroom environment and my students.				
10	Consider the level of understanding, age, and learning ability of students.				
11	Use technological tools to help my instruction in the classroom.				
12	Create a classroom environment based on respect, rapport, motivation, and encouragement				
13	Connect teaching approaches to the daily lives of my students.				

14	How to manage my classroom and establish my class culture in it.				
15	Maintain students' interest and incentive to learn.				
16	I learn how to manage my classroom and deal with the challenges and behavior issues				
17	I have been given plenty of time to learn about teaching strategies.				
18	I have been given enough knowledge to learn about the school curriculum.				
19	I have received enough practical training that prepares me for the classroom.				
20	Cooperate with my fellow teachers to improve students' level of education.				
21	Make appropriate decisions when necessary in dealing with problems.				
22	Build social relationships with parents and solve student problems together.				
23	I was allotted enough time and knowledge to learn about human development and learning improvement.				
24	I was taught strategies to communicate with parents.				
25	I was taught strategies to solve students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive abilities.				
26	I have been given enough information to recognize educational principles and theories				
27	I have been given enough guidance in self-assessing my teaching style				
28	I have been given adequate time to prepare myself for selecting appropriate resources and linking them to specific topics for teaching students.				
29	The appropriate time is allocated to identify a variety of teaching strategies.				
30	I have been given enough instructions on planning my lessons and preparing for a particular topic.				
31	I was given enough instruction about educational materials and resources.				
32	I learned how to think independently and determine my teaching style.				
33	I was taught how to include seven multiple intelligence activities in my class.				

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Demographical questions

- Highest degree earned?
 - How long have you been teaching?
 - What type of school are you teaching in?
 - What subject area are you teaching?
 - What grade(s) are you teaching currently?
1. Did you have teacher preparation in your undergrad program? Where and when have you been prepared?
 2. Who is responsible for preparing elementary teachers for their careers?
 3. How well do you believe you have been prepared for the classroom?
 - What kind of pedagogical preparation do teachers require, and how much of them did you learn from your preparation programs?
 - Do you believe your preparation programs aided you in gaining a thorough understanding of the material you teach? Could you please explain?
 - Did you take any course(s) about differentiated classrooms? How did they benefit you in your career? Can you give an example?
 - Were you given sufficient time to become familiar with instructional strategies and adapt them to your lessons? Can you give more detail? If not, whom did you seek help to assist you?
 - How much time was dedicated to learning about various teaching methods?
 - How often do you reflect on your teaching style?

4. Are you using any new techniques or 21st Century skills in your instruction? If so, what?"
5. What techniques have you learned to assess and evaluate students learning?
6. What are the teaching methods that you learned which would help for the student's age, ability, and level of learning?
7. How much of the use of technological tools in classroom instruction was included in your preparation program? Do you use them in your lessons?
8. Before starting to teach, did you receive enough knowledge about the content you would be teaching and learn about the school curriculum?
 - Were there times you knew the subject but did not know how to teach or deliver it to students? If yes, why? If not, why?
 - What teaching practices have you learned that equipped you for a career as a teacher?
 - How do you design, select, and use appropriate resources related to the content?
9. Human development, mentally and physically, is an exemplary aspect of understanding how students learn; how much of this aspect was included in your teacher preparation program?
10. Do you think you had enough knowledge to learn about educational principles and theories? Can you elaborate more?
11. How much of multiple intelligence theories were included in your teacher preparation program?
12. What are your suggestions for your teacher preparation programs? Or if you want to add something that you find essential for the quality of professional development teacher preparation programs?