



## The Alignment of Intended, Enacted, and Assessed Curricula: The Case of Shiraz University TEFL B.A. Curriculum

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**Abstract:** This study addresses a critical need for effective curriculum alignment in higher education, particularly within Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). As educational institutions strive to enhance the quality of their programs, understanding the interconnections between intended, enacted, and assessed curricula becomes essential. This study examined the alignment among these curricula in the TEFL B.A. program at Shiraz University. Drawing on [Anderson and Krathwohl's \(2001\)](#) taxonomy of educational objectives, the researchers employed a mixed-methods design to analyze the cognitive processes and knowledge types in the curriculum standards, course content of instruction, and achievement tests of language teaching methodology, language testing, and linguistics courses. The qualitative content analysis revealed a notable overemphasis on lower-order thinking skills (LOTs) across all components of the courses studied. Specifically, the presence of higher-order thinking skills (HOTs) was quite limited within the curriculum standards, course content of instruction, and achievement tests. The quantitative analysis, using [Porter's \(2002\)](#) alignment index, further demonstrated a significant alignment (0.50) between the curriculum standards and achievement tests, but an insignificant alignment between the course content of instruction and the other two components. The findings highlight the need for policies that foster HOTs and support professional development for TEFL instructors. Educators should clarify learning objectives and align tasks with students' cognitive needs, thereby enriching TEFL curriculum design. The results advocate for integrating HOTs across the curriculum while ensuring alignment between intended, enacted, and assessed curricula. This study also contributes to ongoing research on curriculum design and implementation in TEFL higher education.

**Keywords:** Official Curriculum Standards, Content of Instruction, Achievement Tests, Higher-Order Thinking Skills, Lower-Order Thinking Skills, Curriculum Alignment.

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## Introduction

The alignment and coherence among curriculum components are essential for achieving effective educational outcomes and enhancing the overall learning experience for students. Scholars in the field of education identify key components of curriculum design that collectively contribute to the educational process. These components are typically categorized into three main areas: objectives, instruction, and assessment, which are also known as the intended, enacted, and assessed curricula (Aikenhead, 2006; Amiri & Rezvani, 2021; Thijs & van den Akker, 2009; van den Akker, 2003). These categories offer a structured framework for understanding curriculum dynamics. More nuanced conceptualizations may further dissect these components into subcategories (Lattuca & Stark, 2011; Scott, 2016). This comprehensive framework enables educators and researchers to analyze the relationships between what is prescribed in educational standards, what is implemented in classroom practices, and what is ultimately evaluated through student assessments.

The intended curriculum refers to the officially articulated curriculum standards that encompass the principles of teaching and learning as stated in formal documents (Looney, 2011; Rezvani et al., 2021). In contrast, the enacted curriculum encompasses the specific tasks, activities, and instructional materials utilized in the classroom, often described as the teacher's content of instruction (Richards, 2017; Thijs & van den Akker, 2009). Additionally, the assessed curriculum focuses on the content and methods of evaluation, including achievement tests and high-stakes assessments (Porter, 2002).

In any standards-based educational system, consistency among the various curriculum components is crucial to yielding the intended outcomes. In other words, the alignment of the curriculum components, including the intended, enacted, and assessed curricula, is of high importance. Alignment is defined as "the degree of correspondence between objectives, instruction, and assessment" (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 10). The alignment of instruction to the standards and their implementation in the classroom has been shown to result in improved student performance on achievement tests (Bhola et al., 2003; Gamoran et al., 1997; La Marca et al., 2000; Porter et al., 2007).

While curriculum evaluation offers significant benefits for any educational system in ensuring it meets societal and student needs, the alignment evaluation of the curriculum or its components has only recently gained attention and is the subject of several studies conducted globally (Amiri & Rezvani, 2021; Dabbagh & Safaei, 2019; Edwards, 2010; Huang & Lin, 2006; Näsström & Henriksson, 2008; Rezvani et al., 2021; Rezvani & Haghshenas, 2015; We & Ou, 2018; Zamani & Rezvani, 2014; 2015). The basic argument in favor of evaluating the

alignment of curriculum components lies in its significance in providing more learning opportunities for students, which leads to the establishment of a more efficient educational system (Biggs, 2003). Furthermore, policymakers and educational leaders can recognize misalignment in the educational system and take proactive measures to compensate for and revise any deficiencies in the curriculum elements (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Given that universities play a crucial role in equipping students with the practical skills necessary to enhance their career prospects and pursue vocational opportunities, it is particularly important to conduct alignment studies in higher educational contexts. This is especially true for Shiraz University, which, as a leading institution of higher learning in Iran, plays an important role in the preparation of future English language teachers. By examining the alignment between the intended, enacted, and assessed curricula at Shiraz University, researchers and policymakers can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of the university's educational programs and identify areas for improvement, ultimately enhancing the quality of higher education and the career readiness of its graduates.

To determine and improve the standards-assessment-instruction cycle at Shiraz University, the current study evaluated the objectives stated in the B.A. TEFL policy documents, the content delivered by professors, and the achievement tests in terms of the cognitive processes and knowledge types of Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Notably, the curriculum components of certain primary courses such as teaching methodology, language testing, and linguistics were targeted in this study, as they are key subjects in this major and the main source of questions for the TEFL M.A. entrance exam. Additionally, the HOTs and LOTs of the educational objectives present in the official policy documents, professors' practices, and achievement tests were identified and their inclusion was tallied. Finally, the study examined the alignment among the B.A. TEFL curriculum components at Shiraz University. The study seeks to address the following four research questions:

1. What is the distribution pattern of the cognitive processes and knowledge types intended in the official B.A. curriculum standards of TEFL?
2. What is the distribution pattern of the cognitive processes and knowledge types observed in the B.A. content of instruction of TEFL?
3. What is the distribution pattern of the cognitive processes and knowledge types intended in the B.A. achievement tests of TEFL?
4. Is there any alignment between the curriculum standards, content of instruction, and achievement tests in terms of the intended objectives?

## Literature Review

Humans continually assess the value, merit, and significance of various subjects and interventions, a process systematically executed through evaluation (White, 1971). Evaluation is applicable across numerous domains, including education, where the curriculum should be subject to ongoing examination. The term “curriculum” is defined differently depending on the context (Lewy, 1973; Long, 2015; Richards, 2017; Welch, 1969). It encompasses the entirety of the students’ academic program, including the allocation of time for various activities such as academic studies, skill practice, physical activity, and vocational training. Curriculum development involves determining which courses to include in the student program, which to exclude, and how many weekly periods to dedicate to each subject (Lewy, 1973).

A comprehensive curriculum consists of three essential components: objectives, instruction, and assessment (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), commonly referred to as intended, enacted, and assessed curricula (Porter, 2002). These components must be thoroughly scrutinized and defined before implementing any program or course of study. Rezvani et al. (2021) describe curriculum standards as documents detailing the courses in a program, key objectives, discussion topics, and methods and criteria for assessment. The enacted curriculum refers to the tasks, activities, practices, and methods that teachers implement daily (Porter, 2002). Conversely, the assessed curriculum encompasses achievement tests frequently utilized in educational settings to evaluate students’ comprehension, retention, and application of the material covered in a given course (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Porter, 2002).

Given the significance of curriculum in foreign language education, there has been a persistent focus on assessing both the curriculum as a whole and its individual components (Aslan, 2016; Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Cushing, 2020; Erdoğan, 2023; Gereade, 2005; Islam et al., 2021; Kader, 2016; Mearns & Platteel, 2021; Ocak et al., 2013; Örmeci, 2009; Rohiyatussakinah, 2021; Samir, 2022; Shah et al., 2024; Song, 2022; Tolosa et al., 2023; van Kampen et al., 2020; Zorba, 2012). Curriculum or program evaluation, from a general perspective, can be defined as "a structured process that creates and synthesizes information intended to reduce stakeholders' uncertainty about a specific program or policy" (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006, p. 3). For instance, Kaya and Ok (2016) evaluated the second-grade English language curriculum to determine whether the new program was implemented as intended regarding teacher roles, materials, and activities in five different cities in Turkey. The results indicated that some teachers' roles were inconsistent with the curriculum standards, audio-

visual materials were insufficiently utilized, and communicative activities were not conducted in accordance with those standards.

In another study, [Drachmann et al. \(2023\)](#) examined the curricula for three primary language courses taught in the schools of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, focusing on three main approaches: the Integrated Didactic Approach (IDA), Intercomprehension between Related Languages (ICRL), and *Éveil aux Langues* (EAL). According to the findings, IDA is not included in the Swedish curriculum, and Denmark's ICRL objectives are more ambitious than those of the other nations. Additionally, the pluralistic approaches of Sweden and Norway incorporate national minority languages, whereas the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland—regions with strong political ties to Denmark—do not prioritize linguistic diversity.

In a curriculum evaluation study conducted by [Nabi Ranjbari et al., \(2020\)](#), the suitability and effectiveness of the latest English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teacher education curriculum were examined. The findings indicated that while the curriculum provided teachers with adequate linguistic and pedagogical knowledge, several areas necessitated revision. Respondents identified issues such as a lack of effective materials and facilities, an excessive emphasis on theoretical teaching aspects, and the inability of the activities to foster teachers' professional development.

Although curriculum evaluation is crucial for any educational system, literature suggests that the alignment of its components—both internationally and nationally—has received heightened attention and should be emphasized to achieve the intended educational goals ([Aulia et al., 2019](#); [Baharun et al., 2016](#); [Dabbagh & Safaei, 2019](#); [Mizbani & Chalak, 2017](#); [Mohammed & Sidek, 2015](#); [Pak et al., 2020](#); [Riazi & Mosalanejad, 2010](#); [Rouffet et al., 2023](#); [Wallace & Ke, 2023](#)). For instance, [Rouffet et al. \(2023\)](#) investigated the alignment of foreign language teaching and assessment practices with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) oriented Dutch foreign language curriculum in lower-form education in the Netherlands. Their research concluded that the learning activities were highly guided and did not encourage free production as per CLT criteria. Moreover, language skills were tested infrequently, with reading skills receiving disproportionate attention. Overall, the learning activities and assessments did not align with the curriculum's learning objectives.

In another study, [Amiri and Rezvani \(2021\)](#) evaluated the newly developed English textbook series (Prospect 1-3) for Iranian junior high schools based on Bloom's revised taxonomy of educational objectives ([Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001](#)). They concluded that

while the lessons were well-structured, they primarily emphasized lower-order cognitive processes and knowledge types, neglecting HOTs. However, statistically significant positive alignment was observed in the horizontal and vertical structure of the books, as indicated by Porter's Alignment Index (2002).

While schools are the primary venues for foreign language exposure, there has been a recent increase in studies examining the alignment of various curriculum components within universities (Loughlin et al., 2021; Rezvani & Haghshenas, 2015; Rezvani & Zamani, 2012; Workie & Haregu, 2020; Wotring et al., 2021; Zaghlool & Khansawneh, 2024; Zamani & Rezvani, 2014; 2015). For instance, [Rassul \(2022\)](#) explored the alignment between learning outcomes specified in course syllabi and final examination questions at Salahaddin University in Iraq, utilizing Bloom's revised taxonomy. The findings revealed that university professors were largely unaware of the constructive alignment between a module's learning outcomes and its summative assessment questions, with a predominant focus on LOTs rather than higher-order ones.

In a study conducted by [Rezvani et al. \(2021\)](#), the official postgraduate curricula for Teaching Persian to Speakers of Other Languages (TPSOL) at both the M.A. and Ph.D. levels were investigated using Bloom's revised taxonomy of educational objectives ([Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001](#)) as the theoretical framework. The findings indicated that educational objectives emphasizing lower-order cognitive processes were prioritized at both educational levels, overshadowing higher-order processes. Notably, while the lowest-order cognitive process, "remember," received excessive attention at the Ph.D. level, HOTs, particularly "analyze" and "create," were not entirely neglected. In contrast to the M.A. educational objectives, higher-order cognitive skills were more prominently incorporated at the Ph.D. level, although both levels still placed significant emphasis on the LOTs. Regarding knowledge types, the study revealed a dominance of lower-order knowledge types at both levels, suggesting that postgraduate TPSOL programs frequently exhibit this tendency. Furthermore, "meta-cognitive" knowledge was given minimal consideration at the Ph.D. level compared to the M.A. level.

Theoretically, alignment research within higher education serves as a powerful mechanism for integrating various components of the educational system in a systematic and efficient manner. By focusing on the M.A. entrance exam, evaluating specific courses such as teaching methodology, language testing, and linguistics can convey a significant message to TEFL educators about the quality of standards, instruction, and assessment.

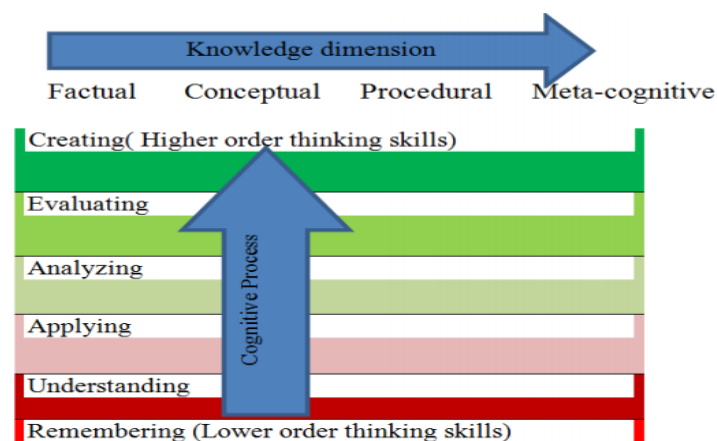


However, there has been limited effort to evaluate the achievement tests for the three primary courses included in the M.A. entrance exam and the instructional content at Shiraz University. This evaluation could provide valuable insights into the cognitive processes and knowledge types considered in each curriculum component, along with their alignment. Given the insufficient research on these curriculum components, the current study is deemed necessary as it investigates the alignment of B.A. TEFL policy documents, instructional content provided by professors, and achievement tests, in relation to Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

### *Theoretical Framework: Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) Taxonomy*

According to the literature on curriculum studies, various alignment methods and models have been developed, ranging from simple to highly complex frameworks (e.g., Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956; Porter & Smithson, 2001; Webb, 1997). Each model offers a unique perspective on evaluation, resulting in significant differences in alignment degrees (Bhola et al., 2003). For this study, the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) serves as the theoretical framework, as it encompasses both cognitive processes and knowledge types, proving to be a more effective classification tool in alignment studies (Näsström & Henriksson, 2008).

The cognitive dimension addresses six levels of cognitive complexity that constitute educational objectives, progressing from simpler processes (such as remembering and understanding) to more complex ones (like evaluating and creating). Conversely, the knowledge dimension is divided into four primary categories that correspond to content in alignment analyses, ranging from the most concrete forms of factual knowledge to the more abstract nature of meta-cognitive knowledge, as illustrated in the following figure.



**Figure 1.** The Structure of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (2001)

## Method

The current study aims to investigate and provide a descriptive account of the distribution patterns of knowledge types and cognitive processes as intended by the B.A. TEFL curriculum standards, instructional content, and achievement tests for specific courses included in the M.A. entrance exam (namely, teaching methodology, language testing, and linguistics) at Shiraz University. Additionally, [Porter's \(2002\)](#) Alignment Index (PAI) was employed to assess whether the educational objectives across these curriculum components were statistically aligned.

## *Participants*

A purposive sampling procedure was employed to select three professors (two male and one female) from the Foreign Languages Department at Shiraz University, specifically those teaching the courses relevant to this study: language teaching methodology, language testing, and linguistics. All participating professors held Ph.D. degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and their years of experience ranged from 17 to 30 years. Prior to participation, the professors were provided with an informed consent form that included detailed information regarding the study's purpose, duration, potential risks, and benefits. They were assured of their freedom to participate voluntarily, to withdraw from the study at any time, and that their identities would remain confidential.

## *Instruments*

To assess and quantify the knowledge types and cognitive processes addressed by the official TEFL B.A. policies, instructional content, and achievement tests, a checklist designed by [Rezvani and Zamani \(2012\)](#) was utilized (see Table 1 for examples). This checklist was developed based on Bloom's revised taxonomy of educational objectives ([Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001](#)) and features a twenty-four-cell grid that encompasses both the cognitive and knowledge dimensions defined by [Anderson and Krathwohl \(2001\)](#). Specifically, the six rows of the grid represent the cognitive processes, which include remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, while the four columns correspond to the types of knowledge, which are factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge, each further divided into subcategories. By employing this structured approach, the research effectively categorizes and clarifies the educational objectives inherent in TEFL programs. Data triangulation ([Riazi et al., 2023](#)) was achieved through observational field notes taken by the third researcher in conjunction with the



checklist during classroom observations of the relevant courses, ensuring that the findings were not only reliable and valid but also reflective of the actual pedagogical practices being employed. Additionally, this triangulation process allowed for the identification of discrepancies between intended outcomes and observed practices. The rich qualitative data collected through these observations further enhanced the quantitative findings derived from the checklist, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how TEFL curricula are enacted in practice.

### *Materials*

In terms of study materials, the official policy documents for the TEFL B.A. program at Shiraz University, developed by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), were analyzed. This ministry is responsible for providing universities with appropriate program guidelines. Additionally, observational field notes from three core courses included in the M.A. entrance exam—teaching methodology, language testing, and linguistics—were examined, along with achievement tests from two of these courses (teaching methodology and language testing) conducted in the second semester of 2024. It is important to note that the professor of linguistics declined the researchers' request to analyze the final exam items; consequently, the achievement test for linguistics was excluded from the study.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

To gather the necessary data regarding curriculum standards, the official policy documents for three core courses included in the M.A. entrance exam, as designed by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), were downloaded from the official MSRT website. For data collection related to the contents of instruction, the professors were contacted to gain access to the relevant courses. After receiving permission, the professors who taught the selected courses were observed by the third researcher during 21 sessions, utilizing the checklist developed by [Rezvani and Zamani \(2012\)](#). Specifically, observations were conducted for 12 sessions in teaching methodology, 6 in language testing, and 3 in linguistics. The researcher also took additional field notes regarding the professors' practices during these sessions.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding and a balanced perspective of the professors' instruction, observations were scheduled at the beginning, middle, and end of each course. Data on achievement tests (final exams) developed by the professors for two courses

(teaching methodology and language testing) were collected and subjected to content analysis at the end of the semester in 2024.

To provide evidence for intra-coder reliability, 10 percent of the data collected for two curriculum components—curriculum standards and contents of instruction—were independently recoded by the second researcher after a two-week interval. The measures of agreement for these two components were calculated using Cohen's kappa coefficient with SPSS (2007) software. Cohen's kappa ( $k$ ) values of 0.9 and 0.85 were obtained for curriculum standards and contents of instruction, respectively, indicating nearly perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1997). It is noteworthy that, due to confidentiality concerns regarding the achievement tests, the researchers were unable to assess the intra-coder reliability for the achievement test items.

### *Data Analysis Procedure*

The data collected from the official policy documents of the TEFL B.A. program at Shiraz University, the professors' instructional content, and the achievement tests for the relevant courses included in the M.A. entrance exam were subjected to content analysis using the checklist developed by Rezvani and Zamani (2012), which is grounded in Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) taxonomy of educational objectives. This taxonomy categorizes cognitive processes through specific verbs and knowledge types through nouns, which were initially identified and systematically organized into the appropriate rows and columns of the checklist for evaluating both the achievement test items and the statements in the policy documents.

To identify the cognitive processes and knowledge types within each curriculum component, numerical and alphabetical codes were assigned to each course and entered into the corresponding cells of the checklist by the third researcher. For instance, "T2" denotes the second test item of language testing in the achievement test checklist. The data regarding the professors' instructional content, derived from the observational notes of the third researcher, underwent a similar coding process and were documented in the appropriate cells of the related checklist.

The following table illustrates examples of the analysis, codification, and placement processes employed for the curriculum standards and contents of instruction. It is important to highlight that providing specific examples for the analysis of the test items was problematic due to confidentiality concerns raised by the respective professors.

**Table 1.** Example of the Official Curriculum Standards for Linguistics Course

Linguistics	a1. Students should be acquainted with the concepts in Linguistics (phonology, syntax, semantics, discourse analysis and applied Linguistics)
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Considering the verb “acquaint” and the noun phrase “concepts in Linguistics” in Table 1, the standard statement of linguistics is classified as “remembering factual knowledge”. Each curriculum standard and test item from the achievement tests was evaluated accordingly. However, in certain instances, the verbs and nouns present in the curriculum components were not sufficiently explicit to fit into a single category; thus, the researchers meticulously scrutinized the stems.

To supplement the data from the checklist, the observational field notes, which contained the third researcher’s reflections and descriptions of the tasks and activities, were later examined in detail. For instance, the professor of teaching methodology divided the students into five groups and assigned each group an activity to analyze whether it constituted a task or an exercise, based on the task characteristics taught in the previous session. The students were required to justify their answers by writing them on a piece of paper and presenting them in front of the class. Since the group members had to analyze the constituent parts of the activity and determine whether it was a task based on specific criteria, the task was categorized as “analyze procedural knowledge”.

The frequencies, percentages, proportions, and totals of the distribution of cognitive levels and knowledge types were identified in the curriculum standards, contents of instruction, and achievement tests, and calculated using Microsoft Excel (2021) to address the first three research questions. Utilizing Porter et al.’s (2007) alignment index (PAI) formula (see the formula below), the researchers computed the alignment indices, which indicated the degree of alignment among the curriculum components.

$$AI = 1 - \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - Y_i))}{2}$$

**Figure 2.** Porter et al.’s (2007) Alignment Index Formula

In the formula, X denotes cell proportion in one matrix, and Y stands for cell proportion in another. The values of the AI “range from 0 to 1.0 indicating perfect alignment” (Porter, 2002, p. 5) and need to exceed 0.5 to be indicative of a significant alignment (Porter et al., 2007).

## Results

The results of the study, derived from precise data analysis, are presented in the following sections, detailing the educational objectives associated with each of the three curriculum components under examination. Initially, the findings from the analysis of the educational objectives concerning cognitive processes and knowledge types within the B.A. TEFL curriculum standards, contents of instruction, and achievement tests are outlined. Furthermore, the curriculum components are assessed in terms of HOTS and LOTs. Finally, the report concludes with a comprehensive examination of the degree of alignment among the B.A. TEFL curriculum components to effectively address the research questions.

### *Cognitive Processes Targeted in the B.A. TEFL Curriculum Components*

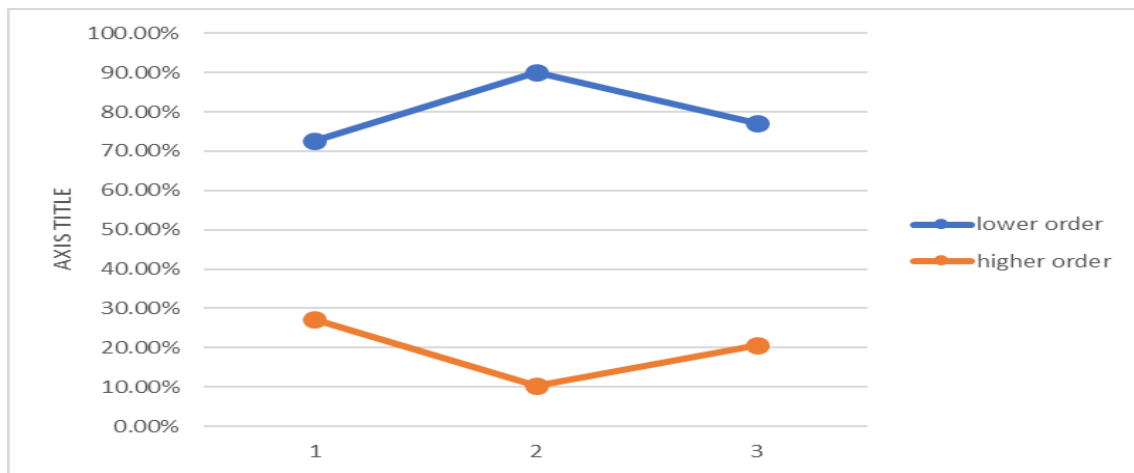
The educational objectives within the B.A. TEFL curriculum components at Shiraz University indicated a significant emphasis on the cognitive processes of “remember” and “understand”. The distribution of HOTS and LOTs across each curriculum component is illustrated in the following table (Table 2). Notably, all curriculum components—including curriculum standards, contents of instruction, and achievement tests—primarily focused on LOTs. Specifically, the contents of instruction exhibited the highest proportion of LOTs at 90.16%, indicating that the professors’ tasks and activities were predominantly centered on these skills, in contrast to the curriculum standards (72.72%) and achievement tests (76.99%). Conversely, the curriculum components allocated minimal attention to HOTS. Specifically, 27.27% of the curriculum standards, 10.41% of the contents of instruction, and 20.68% of the achievement tests addressed HOTS. It is noteworthy that the cognitive process “create,” which represents the most complex level of cognitive engagement, was entirely absent from both the curriculum standards and achievement tests; however, it was marginally present in the contents of instruction at a rate of 0.12%.

**Table 2.** HOTS and LOTs in B.A. TEFL Curriculum Components

	Lower order	Higher order
Curriculum standards	72.72%	27.27%
Contents of instruction	90.16%	10.41%
Achievement tests	76.99%	20.68%

As illustrated in the following figure (Figure 3), all curriculum components exhibited an imbalanced emphasis on HOTS and LOTs. The blue line, representing LOTs, is positioned

above the orange line, which represents HOTS in the educational objectives. The peak and trough depicted in Figure 3 correspond to the contents of instruction, indicating that the professors' practices primarily engaged LOTS, while only a minimal amount of attention was devoted to HOTS by the faculty of the relevant courses.



**Figure 3.** HOTS and LOTS in the TEFL Curriculum Components

*Note.* Numbers 1, 2 and 3 represent standards, contents of instruction, and achievement tests.

### ***Knowledge Types Targeted in the B.A. TEFL Curriculum Components***

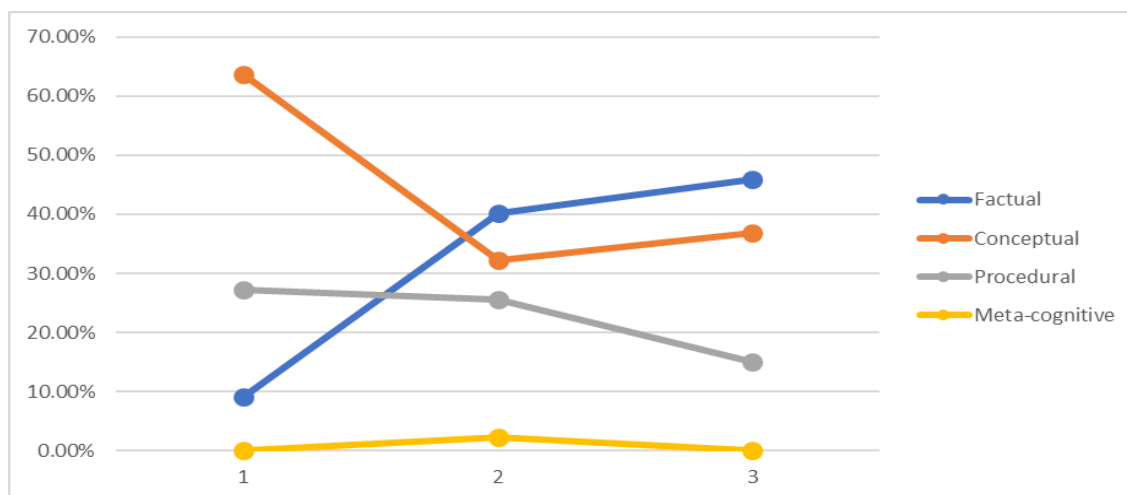
The following table (Table 3) reports the extent to which the curriculum components addressed various types of knowledge. The curriculum standards allocated the highest proportion of attention to “conceptual knowledge” at 63.63%. In contrast, the contents of instruction (40.10%) and achievement tests (45.97%) predominantly focused on “factual knowledge”. Notably, “meta-cognitive knowledge” received no attention from the curriculum standards or achievement tests, while a minimal amount (2.19%) was acknowledged in the professors’ practices.

**Table 3.** Knowledge Types in the B.A. TEFL Curriculum Standards

	Factual	Conceptual	Procedural	Meta-cognitive
Curriculum standards	9.09%	63.63%	27.27%	0%
Contents of instruction	40.10%	32.21%	25.48%	2.19%
Achievement tests	45.97%	36.78%	14.94%	0%

As depicted in the following figure (Figure 4), the line representing “meta-cognitive knowledge” is positioned below the other lines, indicating that, despite its significance,

“meta-cognitive knowledge” did not receive adequate attention. In contrast, “factual,” “conceptual,” and “procedural knowledge” were substantially targeted across all curriculum components. Notably, the peak in the curriculum standards line within the figure suggests that the official policy documents developed by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) prioritized “conceptual knowledge” over the other types of knowledge.



**Figure 4.** Knowledge Types Targeted in the B.A. TEFL Curriculum Components

*Note.* Numbers 1, 2, and 3 represent standards, contents of instruction, and achievement tests.

#### ***Porter’s alignment index among the B.A. TEFL curriculum components***

According to Porter’s alignment index formula, the alignment between curriculum standards and achievement tests was calculated to be a moderate 0.50 (2002). Given that the contents of instruction exhibited incompatible distribution patterns of cognitive processes and knowledge types compared to both curriculum standards and achievement tests, an insignificant alignment was anticipated. Supporting the descriptive findings and predictions, the PAI between the contents of instruction and the standards was found to be 0.43, while the lowest index, at 0.25, corresponded to the alignment between the contents of instruction and achievement tests. This indicates that professors’ practices had minimal correspondence with the test items of the related courses (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Porter’s Alignment Index between the B.A TEFL Curriculum Components

Curriculum components in pairs	Porter’s alignment indices
Standards and achievement tests	0.50
Standards and Contents of instruction	0.43
Contents of instruction and achievement tests	0.25

## Discussion

Concerning the first research question regarding the distribution pattern of educational objectives in the official curriculum standards, this study revealed that LOTs, specifically “remember” and “understand,” were significantly over-emphasized, while minimal attention was given to HOTs such as “analyze” and “evaluate”. Moreover, two cognitive processes—“apply” and “create”—were entirely disregarded. The findings also indicated that the official curriculum standards directed the highest level of attention to “conceptual knowledge” (63.63%), while “meta-cognitive knowledge” received no attention (0%).

Reflecting on the same theoretical framework, [Edwards \(2010\)](#) reported similar results, highlighting an increased emphasis on LOTs within curriculum standards for lower educational levels, including high school. In a study by [Wei and Ou \(2018\)](#) conducted across four regions in China, it was found that “conceptual knowledge” was over-emphasized, and curriculum standards predominantly favored LOTs for junior high school standards. A closely related study examining B.A. TEFL curriculum standards, while aligned with the same theoretical framework, also indicated that TEFL B.A. objectives tended to focus on lower levels of educational objectives ([Rezvani & Zamani, 2012](#)).

This trend persists despite numerous research studies (e.g., [Choi et al., 2011](#); [Magno, 2010](#); [Pintrich, 2002](#)) demonstrating the positive impact of more complex knowledge types on student learning. [Pintrich \(2002\)](#) noted the importance of including meta-cognitive knowledge in educational curricula as it fosters student development. However, objective formulation can vary significantly depending on the subject matter. Complex objectives may not be effectively taught or assessed, leading the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) to refrain from emphasizing complex student learning outcomes, instead representing what they believe is essential for students' education ([Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001](#)). Furthermore, the tendency to focus on LOTs may stem from the assumption that students, upon entering undergraduate programs, are already familiar with key concepts in TEFL. This assumption might arise from the understanding that students lack knowledge of TEFL-specific terminology, prompting curriculum designers at the MSRT to believe that students might find it challenging to achieve higher levels of cognitive knowledge and complexity.

Regarding the second research question, which explored the educational objectives in the contents of instruction, this study demonstrated that the proportion of learning objectives associated with lower-level cognitive processes was notably high at 90.16%, with “understand” comprising 52.52% of this total. In contrast, HOTs were scarcely considered,



accounting for only 10.41%, and the “create” cognitive process was nearly disregarded, with a mere 0.12% representation. Additionally, it was found that “factual knowledge” was heavily emphasized in professors’ instructional practices, while “meta-cognitive knowledge” received minimal attention.

A study by [Gul et al. \(2020\)](#), although focused on secondary school teachers’ instruction, similarly revealed an over-emphasis on the cognitive process of “understand,” which aligns with the findings of the current research. This inclination among professors to prioritize less complex cognitive processes and knowledge types may stem from students’ needs to acquire relevant information and a comprehensive understanding of their major (TEFL).

Furthermore, it is posited that “understand” constitutes the largest category of transfer-based educational objectives emphasized in schools and universities ([Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001](#)). Given that “understand” was the primary goal of professors’ instruction, their tasks and activities facilitated transfer—the ability to apply learned knowledge to solve new problems, answer new questions, or facilitate the learning of new subject matter ([Mayer & Wittrock, 1996](#)).

Another noteworthy aspect is the distinction between professors’ roles as curriculum makers and curriculum implementers ([Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001](#)). In this context, professors serve as curriculum implementers, tasked with delivering instruction based on a set of objectives (curriculum standards) designed to enable a significant proportion of students to meet those standards. Consequently, professors may feel compelled to align their practices with official policies that emphasize simple educational objectives, predominantly LOTs.

In response to the third research question, which addressed the distribution pattern of cognitive processes and knowledge types in achievement tests, this study found that LOTs, including “remember,” “understand,” and “apply,” dominated the achievement test items, comprising 76.99% of the total. In contrast, HOTs were less emphasized, accounting for only 20.68%. While “remember” was over-emphasized relative to other cognitive processes, “create” was entirely neglected. [Edwards \(2010\)](#), using the same taxonomy, reported similar findings regarding final exams in South Africa, highlighting a predominance of LOTs, particularly “remember”.

In another study, [Rezvani and Zamani \(2012\)](#) examined the TEFL B.A. entrance exam and observed similar results, indicating that lower-order cognitive processes surpassed higher-order processes in the test items. Furthermore, [Zamani and Rezvani \(2014\)](#)

investigated the M.A. entrance exam for TEFL and English translation using the same framework and found consistent results regarding the emphasis on LOTs. The prevalence of less complex cognitive processes and knowledge types in achievement tests may be attributed to the washback effect of entrance exams on teaching and learning (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

In contrast to the predominant emphasis on “factual knowledge,” “meta-cognitive knowledge” was entirely neglected in the achievement test items. Although employing a different framework and considering assessments across various majors, Webb’s (1999) study aligns with the current findings, indicating that assessment items in mathematics and science similarly required a lower degree of knowledge types. Moreover, there are various methods to assess students and promote their responsibility for their own knowledge and thought (McMahon, 2006). The difficulty of measuring “meta-cognitive knowledge” through traditional paper-and-pencil assessments may explain its complete absence in the achievement test items.

Another significant finding pertains to the alignment of curriculum components, as addressed by the fourth research question. Regarding the alignment between curriculum standards and achievement tests, a PAI of 0.50 indicated a substantial correlation between these two components with respect to their educational objectives. This notable alignment mirrors findings from Edwards (2010), who investigated the alignment of curriculum standards and achievement tests in physics and chemistry using a similar theoretical framework. Additionally, Rezvani and Zamani (2012) found a strong alignment between curriculum standards and assessments while examining the B.A. TEFL curriculum standards, the M.A. entrance exam, and the textbook published by SAMT in accordance with Bloom’s revised taxonomy.

The literature emphasizes the importance of alignment between curriculum standards and assessments. Webb (1999) asserts that alignment occurs when standards and assessments are coherent with one another, guiding the educational system to facilitate the acquisition of the intended knowledge and competencies by students. The compatibility observed in the current study may contribute to B.A. TEFL students at Shiraz University achieving the knowledge and skills outlined in the official policy documents.

In contrast, the alignment between curriculum standards and the contents of instruction yielded a PAI of 0.43, indicating an insignificant correlation, which contradicted the researchers’ expectations. Floden et al. (1981) argued that teachers receive recommendations and resources from various sources, including textbooks and assessments, yet policymakers

expect teachers to adhere to the planned content standards. This underscores the essential nature of alignment between curriculum standards and instructional content, as highlighted by Porter (2002). Furthermore, research indicates that students tend to perform better when classroom tasks and activities align with the objectives articulated in official policy documents (Bhola et al., 2003; Gamoran et al., 1997; La Marca et al., 2000; Porter et al., 2007).

Finally, the observed alignment between instructional content and achievement tests was the weakest of the study, with a PAI of 0.25, indicating a poor and insignificant relationship (Porter, 2002). In 2007, Porter and colleagues employed the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum model to assess the alignment between teachers' instructional content and eighth-grade math assessments across twenty schools in six states, revealing a similar lack of significant alignment.

Such misalignment contradicts Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) assertion that "alignment should reflect the degree of correspondence among instructional objectives, methods, and forms of assessment" (p. 10). Biggs (2003) further posits that a favorable teaching environment arises when teaching practices and assessments are in sync. It is possible that professors in this study prioritized transfer and meaningful learning, designing their instruction to transcend mere recall or recognition, thereby focusing on retention where students are expected to remember what they have learned (Bransford et al., 2000).

## Conclusion

The present study evaluates the distribution patterns of educational objectives in the B.A. TEFL curriculum standards, instructional content, and achievement tests at Shiraz University, utilizing Bloom's revised taxonomy (2001) as a framework. The analysis reveals an overemphasis on LOTS, particularly the cognitive level of "remember," while the "understand" dimension received the most extensive coverage within the instructional content. Conversely, HOTS were given insufficient attention; notably, the highest cognitive level, "create," was entirely neglected within both the curriculum standards and the achievement tests.

With respect to knowledge categories, "factual knowledge" was prominently featured in both instructional content and achievement tests, whereas "conceptual knowledge" was predominantly emphasized within the curriculum standards. It is important to note that "metacognitive knowledge" was minimally represented in the instructional content and was entirely overlooked by other curriculum components. These findings are corroborated by

multiple studies that highlight the significance of LOTs, advocate for transfer as a critical educational goal, and recognize educators as facilitators of curriculum implementation (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Edwards, 2010; Gul et al., 2020; Mayer & Wittrock, 1996; Rezvani & Zamani, 2012; Webb, 1999; Wei & Ou, 2018).

The study's findings regarding alignment indicate that the instructional content did not align with the curriculum standards or the achievement tests. This misalignment contradicts several studies that underscore the necessity of coherence between instructional content and the other two curriculum components (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bhola et al., 2003; Biggs, 2003; La Marca et al., 2000; Porter et al., 2007). However, this finding aligns with the work of Porter et al. (2007), who emphasize transfer-based education and the role of professors as curriculum implementers (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Interestingly, the objectives articulated in the curriculum standards were considered in the related achievement tests and demonstrated significant alignment, a finding consistent with Edwards (2010) and Webb (1999), who stress the positive effects of alignment among these curriculum components. It is possible that the objectives developed by professors prior to assessments (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010) were influenced by the objectives detailed in the policy documents created by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MASRT).

The findings of this study hold significant implications for stakeholders in the field of education, particularly in the context of TEFL programs. Policymakers and officials at Shiraz University stand to benefit greatly from these results as they inform the design and revision of curricula that are aligned with contemporary educational research and best practices. Specifically, this research can guide the development of new curricula that are responsive to the evolving needs of students, ensuring that educational objectives are clearly articulated and effectively communicated. By updating existing policies to better delineate these objectives, educational leaders can foster an environment that prioritizes students' cognitive development and learning outcomes, ultimately enhancing the educational experience.

Moreover, TEFL instructors teaching courses such as teaching methodology, language testing, and linguistics—both at Shiraz University and in other institutions—are encouraged to adopt a more strategic approach to assessment design. By clearly articulating learning objectives in their assessments, instructors can better align tasks and activities with students' needs and relevant policy documents. This alignment not only facilitates more effective teaching practices but also contributes to a more cohesive educational framework that supports student achievement and engagement.

Finally, while there may be a tendency among some stakeholders to view instructors primarily as implementers of the curriculum, it is essential that they actively participate in the processes of curriculum development and revision. Involvement in these processes allows instructors to identify and address shortcomings in existing policy documents, thereby promoting continuous improvement in educational practices. Engaging instructors in these discussions empowers them to make informed decisions that reflect both pedagogical insights and the realities of the classroom setting. Ultimately, fostering a collaborative approach to curriculum development ensures that educational policies remain relevant and effective, aligning with the needs of students and the objectives of the TEFL program. Such a partnership among stakeholders not only enhances the quality of education but also contributes to the professional growth and efficacy of educators in the field.

Regarding the study's limitations, the specificity of the data to the B.A. TEFL curriculum components at Shiraz University restricts the generalizability of the findings to other Iranian universities and TEFL professors. This localized focus may not accurately reflect the diverse teaching practices and curricular designs present in different educational contexts, limiting the applicability of the results beyond this specific setting. Additionally, the researchers faced challenges in assessing intra-rater reliability for the test items due to confidentiality concerns expressed by the participating professors. This could result in an underestimation of potential inconsistencies in how cognitive processes and knowledge types were interpreted and applied by different instructors. Moreover, the study could benefit from interviews or qualitative feedback from the professors themselves, as this would provide valuable insights into their intentions and perceptions regarding the alignment of curriculum components with educational objectives.

To address these limitations, future research should aim to include multiple institutions and a broader range of TEFL professionals to enhance the generalizability of findings across various educational contexts. Employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative interviews with faculty members could illuminate the nuanced reasons behind curricular choices and help understand the alignment (or lack thereof) with educational objectives. Expanding the scope to include a comparative analysis of TEFL programs across institutions could provide a clearer picture of best practices and common challenges in the field, ultimately contributing to more effective curriculum development and instructional strategies.

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