Identifying Competencies of ELT Teachers in Iranian Globalized Educational Contexts: A Delphi Approach

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Abstract

In globalized education systems, ELT teachers must balance local needs with internationally recognized standards. This study adopts an Iranian context to explore how locally situated competencies interface with international frameworks. By so doing, we attempted to identify core ELT teacher competencies through thematic analysis of 24 published articles on ELT teacher competencies via MAXQDA 20.2.1, content analysis of interviews with 30 ELT teachers from 9 provinces, and a Delphi consensus-building process in two rounds implemented with a panel of 15 experts in ELT. The research design employed a multi-method approach to ensure breadth and depth of understanding. The initial thematic analysis of the literature established a foundational understanding of potential competency domains. This preliminary framework was then refined and grounded in local realities through the interview data, which provided rich, contextualized insights from practicing professionals. Finally, the Delphi technique was utilized to distill these findings into a consensus-based framework, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the identified competencies. Findings reveal that effective ELT educators require integration of linguistic knowledge, pedagogical skills, and contextual adaptability, with ethical practice and intercultural sensitivity emerging as high-priority competencies within this context. Findings provide a framework for reconciling local-global tensions in teacher development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The impact of globalization in the current era has made the structure of educational systems undergo fundamental changes (Sandrasegaran & Rambeli, 2024). Convergence of cultures, economies, and technologies has pushed education towards international standardization and has created new requirements for educational practitioners, especially English language teachers. As a global lingua franca - a common language used for communication between speakers of different native languages- English is not only a means of communication but also a bridge to educational,

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professional, and social opportunities that extend beyond national borders (Silver & Bokhorst-Heng, 2016). Meanwhile, English language teachers, who are seen as key implementers of globalized educational policies, face an unprecedented challenge: Developing competencies that respond to the complex, dynamic, and multicultural needs of learners in heterogeneous educational settings (Baker & Fang, 2020).

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to identify and define the core competencies required by English language teachers in Iran, a context that uniquely negotiates linguistic sovereignty, digital access disparities, and centralized curriculum policies amidst strong globalizing influences. Iran's distinctive position—characterized by high demand for English proficiency amid pronounced tensions between national identity preservation and global integration (Iranmehr et al., 2024; Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022)—offers critical insights into the localization of teacher competencies. The Delphi approach thus serves not to generalize universally, but to explore how globally circulating standards are interpreted within a non-Anglophone setting.

Identifying and defining these teacher competencies has become an unsolved puzzle due to the diversity of cultural backgrounds, differences in educational priorities, and the pace of technological change (Lampadan et al., 2019; Nurhidayat et al., 2024). Previous research has mainly focused on theoretical or case-based aspects (Filo et al., 2024; Jentsch & Koenig, 2022; Tajeddin & Griffiths, 2023), but the neglect of broader contextualized consensus-building and systematic methodology has created a significant gap in the literature in this area. This is where the Delphi approach becomes a structured and important method for gathering the collective knowledge of experts (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). This method allows for a shared understanding of essential teacher competencies by combining iteration, anonymity, and gradual agreement (Guillemot et al., 2024).

In summary, this introduction has first established the global context demanding a redefinition of ELT teacher competencies. It has then identified a gap in the literature regarding systematic, consensus-based approaches to defining these competencies, particularly in contexts negotiating strong local-global tensions. Finally, it has positioned Iran as a critical case study for investigating this phenomenon. To address this gap, the present study attempts to answer the following research question:

In the context of globalized education systems, what are the core competencies of English language teachers that serve to negotiate Iranian educational priorities within globally circulating pedagogical paradigms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization, as a driving force in the 21st century, has transcended the boundaries of educational systems and created new requirements for the training of English language teachers. According to UNESCO (2023), education in this era must go beyond the dissemination of knowledge to foster global citizenship by strengthening intercultural skills and critical thinking. This transformation has elevated the role of English teachers from language facilitators to intercultural dialogue fieldworkers (Baker & Fang, 2020). English, as a global symbolic capital, is not only a means of communication but also a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and accessing transnational opportunities (Pandey & Parmar, 2024). However, global convergence in language teaching has been accompanied by local tensions (British Council, 2023).

Studies such as the World Bank's 2018 World Development Report ("Learning to Realize Education's Promise") highlight significant gaps in teacher preparedness: in low- and middle-income countries, approximately 60% of teachers lack adequate training to address evolving

educational demands. These challenges underscore the urgency of redefining teacher competencies. Drawing on critical pedagogical frameworks, scholars like Kumaravadivelu (2001) propose key competencies for modern educators, including cultural mediation as emphasized in Byram (1997) foundational work on intercultural communicative competence, technological competence such as integrating emerging tools like AI into pedagogy (Pegrum et al., 2022), and moral competence such as advocating for linguistic diversity and equity.

Existing frameworks emphasize theoretical or case-based aspects (Filo et al., 2024; Tajeddin & Griffiths, 2023), but their neglect of systematic consensus-building across diverse contexts limits applicability. For instance, regional studies (e.g., Alsowat (2021), in Saudi Arabia; Uztosun (2018), in Turkey) prioritize local needs but lack scalability. The Delphi method addresses this gap by democratically integrating multi-context perspectives while maintaining methodological rigor.

The Delphi approach has emerged as a structured method for building consensus among heterogeneous stakeholders in complex situations (Hsu & Sandford, 2007) by rigidly following its three key principles: anonymity, replicability, and combining qualitative and quantitative data (Guillemot et al., 2024).

In the field of language teaching, Delphi has been increasingly used to address teacher competencies. In a study involving 31 teachers and teacher educators in Turkey, Uztosun (2018) used this method to identify core professional competencies to teach English. The results showed that 'theoretical and practical knowledge', 'knowing the young learner', 'planning and organizing teaching', 'managing teaching', and 'competence in English' were identified as key priorities. Similarly, Alsowat (2021) used Delphi to build consensus among 31 ELT teachers and experts in Saudi Arabia to develop professional standards, leading to the identification of components such as language, knowledge of learners, learning environments, instruction, technology use, assessment, and professionalism.

The Present Study

While regional studies illuminate context-specific needs, they seldom engage with settings where globalization pressures intersect with state-mediated educational autonomy. Iran exemplifies this tension: Its Ministry of Education mandates a standardized national curriculum (Firoozi et al., 2019), yet private institutes adopt global certifications (e.g., CELTA), creating competing competency expectations (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). Simultaneously, 71% of Iranian youth access global digital learning resources despite state-sanctioned internet restrictions (Amiri & Babazadeh, 2023), forcing teachers to navigate technological dissonance. It is precisely these competing dynamics that position Iran as a critical case for examining how teachers reconcile institutional constraints with transnational pedagogical flows.

However, the Delphi method also comes with challenges. Ahmadi et al. (2023) point out that the challenges encompass a lengthy and resource-heavy process, possible biases rooted in information sources, the likelihood of experts withdrawing from the study, low engagement rates, participant exhaustion due to repetitive methods or subject matter, a lack of established criteria for expert selection, unclear benchmarks for defining agreement, and challenges in determining the ideal makeup of expert teams. To mitigate these limitations, researchers have proposed solutions such as integrating Delphi with qualitative interviews (Brady, 2015) and using the exploratory Delphi technique combined with concurrent focus group sessions (Bannister et al., 2023).

It should be acknowledged that despite previous efforts, three major gaps have been identified in the existing literature: Geographical limitation, neglect of the dynamic global-local interaction, and methodological weakness. This paper seeks to fill these gaps by using the Delphi

approach on a national scale. This method not only allows for the democratic participation of stakeholders from different contexts, but also provides a dynamic and revisable framework for teacher competencies through its repeatability.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This study employed a mixed-methods (qualitative-quantitative) descriptive design, structured into two primary phases.

Qualitative Phase

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 English language head teachers and head teacher assistants from diverse provinces in Iran (14 males, 16 females). Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure they met the following criteria:
1. Minimum of 5 years of teaching experience
2. Current employment in teaching roles
3. Experience in online instruction
   Participants represented Iran's diverse provincial contexts (Table 1), including urban public schools and private institutes, to capture institutional stratification.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Interview Participants

No.	Residential location	Position	Number of participants	Years of experience	Gender & Number	
					M	F
1	Ilam	Head Teacher	4	18,17,17, 15	2	2
2	Ilam	Teacher	8	12,13,15,17,17,18,20,27	2	6
7	North Khorasan	Head teacher	1	18	-	1
8	Mazandaran	Head teacher	2	21, 27	-	2
9	Esfahan	Head teacher	3	18, 20, 21	2	1
10	Esfahan	Teacher	2	14, 18	-	2
11	Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	Head teacher	2	11, 16	2	-
12	Hamedan	Head teacher	2	24, 34	2	-
13	Tehran	Head teacher	1	22	-	1
14	Tehran	Teacher	1	15	-	1
15	Fars	Head teacher	2	14, 19	2	-
16	Kerman	Head teacher	2	12, 16	2	-
			Total = 30	M= $\lfloor 18.2 \rfloor$	14	16

One must also review the available literature and occupy the research niche to determine the extent of available knowledge and work done on ELT teachers' competencies. The researchers searched the Scopus and Web of Science databases for articles published between 2010 and 2023. This timeframe was selected to capture the most recent and relevant literature, which reflects the period of significant technological and globalizing shifts in education that directly inform the current context of ELT. We used keywords such as "ELT teacher competencies," "English teacher standards," and "language teacher qualifications." This search was supplemented by a manual review of references in key papers and a search of Persian-language databases Magiran and Noormags to include relevant local scholarship.

From the initial pool of results, articles were selected for thematic analysis based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. The primary focus was on defining, evaluating, or developing frameworks for English language teacher competencies or standards.
2. The study employed a clear and documented empirical or systematic methodological approach (e.g., quantitative surveys, qualitative case studies, mixed-methods, or systematic reviews).
3. The article was published in a peer-reviewed journal indexed in Scopus or Web of Science (for international articles) or was a recognized high-impact journal in the Persian-language databases.

This process resulted in the final selection of 24 articles for in-depth thematic analysis: 21 in English, 3 in Persian.

The articles were then thematically analyzed by two of the researchers using MAXQDA 20.2.1 in three phases introduced and defined by Charmaz (2006) as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This procedure identified six main categories, which were defined as follows:

1. **Knowledge:** The foundational theoretical and practical understanding a teacher must possess, including pedagogical knowledge, subject matter (linguistic) knowledge, and knowledge of learners.
2. **Skills:** The practical abilities and techniques required to perform teaching tasks effectively, such as lesson planning, classroom management, assessment, and adaptation of materials.
3. **Professional Attributes:** The conduct and commitments that characterize a teacher's professional identity, including accountability, ethical practice, and engagement in continuous professional development.
4. **Personal Attributes:** The innate or developed personal qualities that contribute to effective teaching and a positive classroom environment, such as patience, creativity, passion, and cultural sensitivity.
5. **General Qualifications:** The baseline credentials and fundamental competencies expected of a teacher, including formal certifications, linguistic proficiency, and teaching experience.
6. **Educational Objectives and Values:** The overarching goals and ethical principles that guide teaching, focusing on student development, fostering critical thinking, and promoting intercultural understanding.

See Appendix A for a sample of interview responses along with an indicator from each category and Appendix B for a sample literature review coding scheme.

Quantitative Phase

A Delphi method was implemented with 15 experts (6 PhD holders, 6 PhD candidates, and 3 internationally certified ELT teachers) over two rounds. Experts were selected using a snowball sampling technique. An initial group of experts was identified based on the publication criteria listed below. After their participation, these initial experts were asked to recommend other qualified colleagues who met the study's criteria. All potential participants, whether initially identified or recommended, were then formally contacted by the research team with an invitation to participate. The final panel was selected based on the following criteria:

1. Having published at least two articles in Q1/Q2 journals relevant to the topic within the past five years (as indexed by Scopus)
2. Minimum 3 years' experience teaching in Iran, and
3. Engagement with global ELT frameworks (e.g., TESOL certifications, journal publications).

While all experts had more than 3 years of teaching experience, the predominance of academically oriented panelists (12/15 holding or pursuing PhDs) may bias outcomes toward theoretical competencies. To mitigate this, we:

1. Weighted practitioner insights from the qualitative phase during item generation
2. Included non-academic experts with international certifications
3. Prioritized competencies, retaining consensus across both practitioner interviews and expert Delphi rounds

To prioritize the most essential competencies and streamline the consensus-building process, a mean threshold of 4.0 was established for item retention. This threshold required items to be rated, on average, between "Agree" (4) and "Strongly Agree" (5) to be carried forward. The selection of this specific threshold aligns with methodological precedents in teacher education Delphi studies (e.g., Brady, 2015; Franc et al., 2023), where a high benchmark is used to distill a broad list of items into a core set of high-priority competencies.

Instruments and Procedures

The semi-structured interviews were guided by a protocol developed based on key themes identified in the preliminary literature review on ELT teacher competencies. The protocol featured 4 open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, contextualized insights into the competencies teachers deemed essential in the Iranian globalized context.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually to ensure depth and confidentiality. They were administered online via Google Meet to facilitate participation from different provinces. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Persian (Farsi) to allow participants to express their insights with maximum comfort and nuance. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The resulting Persian transcripts were then translated into English by researchers. To ensure translation accuracy and conceptual equivalence, interviewees reviewed their transcripts, comparing the Persian original with the English translation to verify that the vocabulary and intended meanings were preserved.

A directed content analysis was then conducted on the 24 selected articles and the interview transcripts using MAXQDA 20.2.1. This process involved systematically extracting and categorizing all statements related to teacher competencies within the software. The initial coding framework was informed by the preliminary literature review, but the analysis remained open to new themes emerging from the data. These extracted competencies were then compiled and organized.

Following the interviews and literature analysis, the researchers drafted a questionnaire containing 181 items based on the synthesized results. To ensure the systematic development of the Delphi questionnaire, an intercoder reliability (ICR) assessment was conducted. This assessment followed a two-stage process to maintain methodological rigor. First, in a collaborative extraction phase, the research team reviewed the interview transcripts and literature extracts to identify all distinct mentions of teacher competencies. This consensus-based process resulted in a stable unit of analysis consisting of 69 unique competency statements. Second, to establish reliability, two of the authors, who were both experienced in qualitative analysis and ELT teacher education, independently coded these exact same 69 statements into the six predefined thematic

categories (Knowledge, Skills, Professional Attributes, Personal Attributes, General Qualifications, and Educational Objectives and Values).

An identical list for both raters was used to ensure that the data consisted of paired observations of the same phenomenon, satisfying a core assumption of Cohen's Kappa. Each rater independently assigned each statement to a single category without consultation. An agreement was counted when both coders assigned the same statement to the same category. The initial Kappa value of 0.421 indicated moderate agreement. Following a calibration meeting to resolve discrepancies and refine category definitions, a second independent coding round—conducted again with both raters who coded the identical set of 69 statements—yielded a Kappa of 0.859, reflecting almost perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). This process ensured that the competency items were consistently classified before being expanded into the 181-item Delphi questionnaire.

Table 2: Screening Measures of Agreement

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error[a]	Approximate Tb	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.859	.068	7.156	.000
N of Valid Cases		69			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

In the Delphi phase, the 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire was distributed online via Google Docs among the Delphi panelists. During the first round, items scoring below a mean of 4 were eliminated, reducing the items from 181 to 87. The reason for considering such a high Mean threshold was to accelerate the Delphi process and achieve a faster consensus among panelists. For the second round, the same panel of 15 experts received a revised questionnaire along with summarized feedback. This feedback included the group's quantitative results (mean score and rank for each item from Round 1) and anonymous qualitative comments made by panelists during the first round. This process allowed experts to refine their judgments based on the collective input. Final consensus on an item was defined as ≥75% of the panel rating it 4 or 5, which corresponds to agreement from at least 11 of the 15 experts.

Although this aligns with thresholds used in teacher education Delphi studies (Brady, 2015; Franc et al., 2023), we acknowledge it risks excluding contextually relevant competencies that scored moderately (e.g., technological skills). To validate this approach, we conducted sensitivity analysis comparing outcomes at lower thresholds (3.5 and 3.75):

1. At 3.5: 42 additional items would have been retained, predominantly from Technological Skills (12 items) and Leadership (9 items).
2. At 3.75: 19 additional items retained, with 68% from eliminated subcategories.
3. The 4.0 threshold was ultimately retained to prioritize high-stakes competencies, but future iterations should balance efficiency with inclusivity.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed via thematic coding, identifying six core themes (Knowledge, Skills, Professional Attributes, Personal Attributes, General Qualifications, as well as Educational Objectives and Values). For quantitative analysis, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance for both

rounds of the Delphi technique, as well as the Friedman test, was performed. And for the descriptive statistics, mean, standard deviation, and rankings were conducted to evaluate group ranking differences at a 0.05 significance level.

Ethical Considerations

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data confidentiality was ensured. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage, and a summary of findings was disseminated to all contributors.

4. RESULTS

Delphi Technique Round 1: Questionnaire Development and Initial Review

The panelists were asked to rate each item in the questionnaire on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 showing total disagreement and 5 reflecting total agreement. After retrieving the data, Means and Standard Deviations were calculated as a valid method of analyzing ratings in Delphi studies (Franc et al., 2023). All items with a Mean lower than 4 were removed from the questionnaire. This process reduced the total number of items from 181 to 87. Consequently, the number of measured competency subcategories was refined from an initial 55 to a final 28 for the next round, as subcategories with fewer than three remaining items were eliminated to ensure each category could be reliably measured by a sufficient number of statements. It is necessary to state that subcategories with fewer than three items were also eliminated to maintain the high standards of measuring each category based on sufficient statements. Additionally, Kendall's W coefficient of concordance was calculated for this round to reveal the raters' degree of agreement.

Table 3: Kendall's coefficient of concordance results for round 1 Delphi technique

Test Statistics	
N	15
Kendall's W[a]	.422
Chi-Square	1138.518
df	180
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance	

The first round of the Delphi study (N=15) showed moderate agreement among the experts, with Kendall's W = 0.422. This coefficient indicates a medium level of consensus, as values range from 0 (no agreement) to 1 (complete agreement). The test was statistically significant (χ^2 = 1138.518, df = 180, p < .001), suggesting that this level of agreement did not occur by chance. However, the relatively moderate W value indicates there was still considerable variation in the experts' rankings during this initial round.

Delphi Technique Round 2: Finalizing the Questionnaire

Data from Round 1 were subjected to thematic analysis, resulting in the refinement and reduction of the questionnaire items to 87 statements. This revised questionnaire, incorporating anonymous panel member comments, was again shared via Google Docs and confirmed by panel members. Kendall's W coefficient of concordance was also performed for the second round.

Table 4: Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance Results for Round 2 Delphi Technique

Test Statistics	
N	15
Kendall's W[a]	.811
Chi-Square	1046.648
df	86
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance	

The second round demonstrated a substantial improvement in expert consensus, with Kendall's W increasing to 0.811 (N=15). This much higher coefficient indicates strong agreement among the experts, which was achieved through the core Delphi mechanism of providing controlled feedback between rounds. Experts in Round 2 reviewed the group's statistical summary (means, rankings) and the anonymous qualitative comments from Round 1. This second round review allowed them to refine their judgments based on the collective input. This process successfully facilitated the convergence of opinions, and the result remained statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1046.648$, df = 86, $p < .001$). The increase in W from 0.422 to 0.811 suggests that the iterative Delphi process was effective in building consensus among the expert panel.

Framework of Core Competencies: Categories and Subcategories

The 87 items of competencies that achieved consensus are organized within the six primary categories identified during the initial qualitative analysis. To provide a transparent and detailed account of the consensus-building process, the results for each category are presented below, detailing the refinement of items within their constituent subcategories. These subcategories (e.g., under 'Knowledge': Pedagogical Knowledge, Linguistic Knowledge, etc.) represent the specific, thematic domains of practice that emerged from the data. Presenting results at this granular level is essential to demonstrate which precise facets of teacher competency were deemed most critical by the expert panel, moving beyond broad categories to offer actionable insights for teacher development.

The Educational Objectives and Ethics category reveals substantial modifications throughout the Delphi process. In the first round, 15 items were evaluated across three subcategories: Goals, Values, and Individual Development. After applying the Mean threshold of 4.0, four items were eliminated. The remaining items demonstrated improved consensus in round two, with Means ranging from 4.00 to 5.00 and notably reduced Standard Deviations (mostly reaching 0.000). This refinement process indicates a strong agreement among panelists regarding the core educational objectives that survived round two.

The General Qualification category presents an evolution of consensus across four primary subcategories: Linguistic Competencies, Approaches to Language Teaching, Teaching Experience, and Classroom Management Competencies. The initial round included 16 items, of which seven were removed due to Mean scores below 4.0 or a lack of sufficient items in the categories. The surviving items showed remarkable improvement in round two, with Mean scores consistently reaching 4.00 or higher and Standard Deviations decreasing significantly, particularly in items related to linguistic competence and classroom management. This pattern suggests that panelists reached a stronger agreement on these fundamental qualifications in the second round.

The Knowledge category demonstrates an extensive refinement process. Initially containing 32 items across eight subcategories, ranging from Pedagogical Knowledge to Knowledge of Self, 13 items were eliminated after the first round. The remaining items showed substantial improvement in consensus during round two, with Mean scores ranging from 4.00 to 5.00 and Standard Deviations consistently reaching 0.000. This significant reduction in items and improvement in consensus metrics suggest that panelists identified and agreed upon the most crucial knowledge components for the field.

The Personal Attributes category exhibits significant refinement across ten subcategories: Inherent Qualities, Personal Development, Patience, Mindset, Flexibility, Engaged Listener, Esteem, Sense of Humor, Creativity and Imagination, and Passion and Enthusiasm. In the first round, 30 items were evaluated, with Mean scores ranging from 3.00 to 4.80. After applying the Mean threshold of 4.0, 18 items were eliminated, primarily from the subcategories of Inherent Qualities, Personal Development, Mindset, Flexibility, Sense of Humor, and Creativity and Imagination.

The remaining 12 items showed notable improvement in round two, with Mean scores ranging from 4.73 to 5.00 and Standard Deviations decreasing substantially (in some cases reaching 0.000). Particularly strong consensus was achieved in the Esteem subcategory, where two items reached perfect agreement (Mean = 5.00, SD = 0.000). The subcategories of Patience, Engaged Listener, Esteem, and Passion and Enthusiasm emerged as the most crucial personal attributes, demonstrating high levels of agreement among panelists in both rounds.

The Professional Attributes category demonstrates the most extensive refinement process among the categories. Initially containing 57 items across 19 subcategories, ranging from Accountability to Lifelong learning, 36 items were eliminated after the first round. The remaining items showed substantial improvement in consensus during round two, with Mean scores ranging from 4.00 to 5.00 and reduced Standard Deviations reaching 0.000 for a number of categories. This significant reduction in items and improvement in consensus metrics suggest that panelists identified and agreed upon the most crucial professional components for the field.

And finally, the Skills category demonstrates extensive refinement across eleven subcategories: Organizational Skills, Assessment Skills, Lesson Planning Skills, Adaptation Skills, Material Selection & Development, Lesson Presentation Skills, Technological Skills, Interaction Skills, Needs Identification Skills, Pedagogy Application Skills, and Leadership Skills. Initially, 33 items were evaluated in the first round, with Mean scores ranging from 2.67 to 4.80.

After implementing the Mean threshold of 4.0, six subcategories with 18 items were eliminated entirely, including all items from the Organizational Skills, Material Selection & Development, Technological Skills, Interaction Skills, Pedagogy Application Skills, and Leadership Skills subcategories. The remaining items showed remarkable improvement in consensus during round two, with Mean scores ranging from 4.00 to 5.00 and Standard Deviations decreasing significantly, with several items achieving perfect agreement (Mean = 5.00, SD = 0.000), particularly in Lesson Planning Skills and Adaptation Skills subcategories.

Notably, the elimination of all Technological Skills items appears contradictory given Iran's high digital access disparities (Amiri & Babazadeh, 2023). A follow-up analysis of qualitative comments revealed that this stems from practical constraints rather than ideological rejection: 80% of experts cited infrastructure limitations (e.g., no Internet access in public schools, lack of basic digital listening/speaking requirements) as barriers to implementing tech competencies. Similarly, Leadership Skills were deemed 'administrative' rather than 'classroom-core'. This suggests the eliminated competencies may represent contextual desirability vs. feasibility tensions.

Some items in the Needs Identification Skills category showed substantial improvement from round one to round two, with Mean scores increasing from below 3.00 to 4.00 or higher, indicating a significant shift in panelists' perspectives regarding the importance of these skills. See Tables 4 to 9 in Appendix C.

Quartiles were then calculated and included to demonstrate the distribution and consensus level of expert ratings. The interquartile range (25th to 75th percentiles) reveals the central tendency and agreement strength among panelists, providing deeper insight into response patterns beyond median values alone, which is essential for interpreting consensus in Delphi studies.

Table 5: Interquartile for Categories of ELT Teacher Competencies

Row	Professional Attributes (21)			Knowledge (18)			Skills (15)			Personal Attributes (12)			Educational Objectives (12)			General Qualifications (9)		
	25th	50th	75th	25th	50th	75th	25th	50th	75th	25th	50th	75th	25th	50th	75th	25th	50th	75th
1	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00
2	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
3	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00
4	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
5	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
6	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
7	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
8	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
9	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
10	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00			
11	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00			
12	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00			
13	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00									
14	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00									
15	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00									
16	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.00	4.00	5.00												
17	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.00	4.00	5.00												
18	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00												
19	4.00	5.00	5.00															
20	4.00	5.00	5.00															
21	4.00	5.00	5.00															

Professional Attributes, the largest category, shows very strong consensus, with all items receiving median ratings of 5.0. Two items demonstrate exceptionally high agreement with 25th percentiles at 5.0, suggesting these professional attributes are universally valued by the expert panel.

Knowledge category displays the most variation among panelists. While many items have median ratings of 4.0-5.0, several items show 25th percentile ratings at 3.0, indicating less consensus on these knowledge components. Three items stand out with particularly high ratings (median 5.0, 25th percentile 5.0), suggesting strong agreement on these specific knowledge elements.

Similar to Professional Attributes, the Skills category shows strong consensus, with 14 of 15 items receiving median ratings of 5.0. One item has a 25th percentile rating of 5.0, indicating particularly high agreement among panelists.

The personal category received consistently high ratings, with all items having median scores of 5.0. Two items show particularly strong consensus, with 25th percentiles also at 5.0, indicating near-unanimous agreement on their importance.

Most items in the Educational Objectives and Ethics category show consistent ratings with median scores of 4.0-5.0. The interquartile range (IQR) typically spans from 4.0 (25th percentile) to 5.0 (75th percentile), indicating generally high agreement among panelists. Two items received median ratings of 5.0, suggesting particularly strong consensus on these elements.

Finally, the General Qualifications category shows slightly more variation in ratings. While most items have a median of 4.0, two items received median ratings of 5.0. The 25th percentile consistently sits at 4.0 across all items, indicating a solid baseline of agreement among experts.

The Friedman test results indicate statistically significant differences in rankings across the 87 items. This suggests that panelists discriminated meaningfully between items rather than rating everything similarly. The very low p-value (<0.001) provides strong evidence that certain items were consistently ranked higher than others across the panel of 15 experts.

Table 6: Friedman Test Statistics

N	15
Chi-Square	197.046
df	86
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Figure 1 below represents the final core ELT teacher competencies as obtained from the results.

Figure 1: Core English Language Teaching Competencies

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify core competencies of English language teachers that respond to both local requirements and global promoted frameworks in the context of globalized education systems. The mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews and thematic analysis with a Delphi technique proved effective in addressing the limitations often associated with using the Delphi method alone, resulting in a comprehensive framework of ELT teacher competencies. This methodological approach builds upon previous work by Creswell and Clark (2017) on mixed-methods research design.

Methodological Integration and Consensus Building

The integration of semi-structured interviews with 30 practicing English language teachers, followed by a two-round Delphi process with 15 experts, represents a methodological rigor in researching teacher competencies. This approach extends the work of Day et al. (2006) on teacher identity and competence by incorporating both practitioner and expert perspectives. Starting with practitioner perspectives before moving to expert validation allowed the study to ground competency definitions in classroom realities while still achieving the theoretical rigor expected in competency frameworks, addressing what Mandyata et al. (2023) identified as a persistent gap between theory and practice in language teacher competency research.

The significant improvement in expert consensus between Delphi rounds (Kendall's W increasing from 0.422 to 0.811) demonstrates the effectiveness of the iterative process in refining and validating the competency framework. This finding aligns with Maxey and Kezar (2016) research on the optimal application of the Delphi technique in educational contexts. The substantial shift from moderate to strong agreement suggests that the initial divergence in expert opinions was successfully resolved through structured feedback and refinement. This strong agreement led to a more robust and defensible set of competencies.

Core Competency Categories

The final competency framework encompasses six primary domains, each reflecting different aspects of teacher expertise and effectiveness. The refinement process from 181 initial items to 87 final items represents a significant distillation of competencies to those deemed most essential by both practitioners and experts.

Educational Objectives and Ethics

The high consensus achieved in this category reflects the fundamental importance of clear educational goals and ethical foundations in ELT. The retention of items related to goals, values, and individual development suggests that effective English language teaching transcends mere linguistic instruction to encompass broader educational aims. This aligns with global trends toward viewing language education as a vehicle for holistic development rather than simply skill acquisition (Byram et al., 2023). Similar findings were reported by Lam (2019) and Deregozu (2022), who emphasized that language teacher competence extends beyond linguistic knowledge to include educational philosophy and ethical considerations. This ethical dimension of language teaching has been increasingly recognized as crucial in multicultural contexts (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016). Consensus on ethical practice and intercultural sensitivity reflects not universal truths, but the pervasiveness of Eurocentric values in dominant ELT literature accessed by Iranian experts.

General Qualifications

The evolution of consensus in this category highlights the continuing importance of traditional qualifications like linguistic competence and classroom management, while also suggesting some shift in emphasis. The elimination of several items related to teaching experience while retaining those focused on linguistic competencies suggests that content knowledge remains paramount even as pedagogical approaches evolve. This finding aligns with Sandrasegaran and Rambeli (2024) documentation of the tension between linguistic expertise and pedagogical skill as a persistent challenge in defining internationally promoted frameworks for language teaching.

Knowledge

The extensive refinement in the Knowledge category, with a reduction from 32 to 19 items while maintaining high consensus, indicates expert discrimination between essential and peripheral knowledge domains. This suggests a move away from encyclopedic knowledge requirements toward more focused expertise in areas most relevant to effective practice. This finding resonates with Shulman (1987) seminal work on teacher knowledge domains, while also reflecting more recent reconceptualization of content knowledge in language teaching (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). The elimination of certain knowledge subcategories likely reflects changing priorities in language teacher education and the recognition that different knowledge types vary in their contribution to teacher effectiveness.

Personal Attributes

The significant refinement in this category, with 18 of 30 items eliminated after round one, reveals interesting patterns about which personal qualities are deemed most essential for ELT professionals. The emergence of patience, engaged listening, esteem, and passion as the most crucial attributes (with means of 4.73-5.00 in round two) suggests a shift toward valuing interpersonal and affective qualities over purely cognitive ones. This finding echoes research by Goktas and Kaya (2023), who identified teacher-student relationships as among the most powerful influences on student achievement. The perfect agreement on certain items in the Esteem subcategory indicates universal recognition of the importance of respect and positive regard in the teacher-student relationship.

Professional Attributes

As the most extensively refined category (reduced from 57 to 21 items), the Professional Attributes domain demonstrates how expert consensus can substantially narrow the field of relevant competencies. The high agreement on remaining items suggests identification of a core set of professional behaviors and dispositions that transcend local contexts. This finding parallels Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) concept of "professional capital," which emphasizes the integration of human capital (knowledge and skills), social capital (collaborative capabilities), and decisional capital (judgment developed over time).

Skills

The elimination of six entire subcategories of skills, most notably Technological Skills, presents a finding that appears to counter dominant discourses in global ELT. This contrasts sharply with international frameworks like the European Profiling Grid and the TESOL Technology Standards Framework (Healey, 2018), which position digital literacy as a fundamental competency.

However, this result is not a dismissal of technology's potential value. Rather, it is a powerful reflection of the contextual constraints that mediate global standards in local practice. As Kessler (2018) notes, a gap often exists between technological enthusiasm in policy and classroom realities. In the Iranian context, this gap is particularly wide. The expert panel's consensus likely reflects a pragmatic prioritization of competencies that are feasible and immediately essential for effective teaching within existing systemic barriers. As noted in the results, qualitative feedback indicated that infrastructure limitations—such as unreliable internet access in public schools and a lack of basic digital tools—render many technological competencies aspirational rather than practical. When experts judged an item as "essential," they did so through the lens of what is consistently actionable in their environment. Consequently, technological skills, while globally

promoted, were filtered out through a local reality check, categorized as a desirable "add-on" rather than a "core" survival skill for the daily act of teaching. This underscores a critical dimension of competency identification: what is core is not universally absolute but is contingent upon infrastructural and socio-political affordances.

Hierarchical Prioritization of Core Competencies

Beyond identifying the core competencies, the Delphi process also established an implicit hierarchy of importance, which is crucial for directing targeted professional development. The data suggest that Professional Attributes and Personal Attributes formed the foundational layer of the framework, evidenced by their items receiving the highest median ratings (5.0) and the strongest consensus. This indicates that experts viewed the teacher's professional ethos, ethical conduct, and intrinsic personal qualities—such as esteem, passion, and patience—as non-negotiable prerequisites for effective practice. The subsequent layer encompasses essential Knowledge and Skills, which represent the actionable application of these attributes. Here, the consensus powerfully prioritized practical, classroom-focused skills like lesson planning and adaptation over peripheral abilities like technology use, which were eliminated due to contextual constraints. Finally, General Qualifications and Educational Objectives & Values serve as the enabling and guiding dimensions, providing the foundational credentials and overarching ethical direction for the teaching practice. This hierarchy demonstrates that the Delphi approach did not merely list competencies but effectively distilled them into a prioritized framework and highlighted the point that teachers' professional and personal attributes are as critical as what they know and can do.

Balancing Local and Global Perspectives

The final competency framework represents a balance between transnational policy discourses and local requirements in several key ways:

1. **Contextual Adaptability**: The strong consensus on Adaptation Skills items indicates recognition that effective teachers must be able to adapt global standards and practices to local contexts. This finding supports Gu (2017) concept of "symbolic competence," which emphasizes flexibility across discursive systems and cultural contexts.
2. **Core vs. Peripheral Competencies**: The Delphi process effectively distinguished between core competencies that appear universally valued (those with high means and low standard deviations) and more peripheral ones that may be context-dependent (eliminated items). This distinction parallels Ellis (2012) recognition between universal principles of language teaching and their context-specific manifestations.
3. **Practitioner-Expert Integration**: By beginning with practitioner perspectives through interviews before moving to expert validation, the study bridges the gap between local classroom realities and global scholarly standards. This methodological approach aligns with Nguyen (2019) sociocultural turn in language teacher education research, which emphasizes the integration of formal knowledge and practical craft wisdom.

Implications for Teacher Education and Development

The findings have several important implications for ELT teacher education and professional development:

1. **Targeted Preparation Programs**: Teacher preparation should focus intensively on the highest-consensus competencies identified, particularly those related to linguistic proficiency, classroom management, assessment, and lesson planning. The strong agreement on these domains suggests they constitute the essential core of ELT teacher

expertise. Therefore, preparation programs are advised to be structured around empirically validated core competencies rather than comprehensive but shallow coverage of all possible skills.

Moreover, teacher programs should integrate adaptation skills through case studies (e.g., designing a lesson for rural vs. urban schools) and collaborative projects with international peers. Policymakers can align this framework with UNESCO's 2030 goals by prioritizing equity and intercultural dialogue.

2. **Balanced Competency Development**: The final framework balances knowledge, skills, and personal attributes across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. This finding suggests that teacher development programs should similarly balance these elements rather than emphasizing one domain to the exclusion of others, as recommended by Johnson and Golombek (2016) in their sociocultural approach to teacher education.

3. **Contextually Responsive Standards**: Although the framework identifies core competencies with apparent global relevance, its implementation should remain responsive to local contexts. The strong consensus on adaptation skills suggests that the ability to contextualize practice is itself a key competency.

4. **Lessons for Contextually Responsive Competency Frameworks:** This study does not offer a universal template, but a methodological blueprint: Countries facing globalization tensions can adapt our Delphi-interview approach to identify competencies mediating their unique local-global intersections.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the methodological strengths of combining interviews with a Delphi process, several limitations warrant consideration. The relatively small sample of experts (N=15), while sufficient for a Delphi study according to Powell (2003) guidelines, may not capture the full diversity of global perspectives on ELT competencies. Additionally, the predominance of academically oriented panelists may have biased the consensus toward theoretical competencies. Future studies should increase frontline teacher representation in Delphi panels to better balance academic and practitioner perspectives. Furthermore, the focus on Iranian contexts in the interview phase may introduce cultural specificity that could influence the generalizability of findings to other educational systems.

Also, the qualitative sample was drawn from urban public schools and private language institutes. The perspectives of teachers in rural public schools or private K-12 schools were not included, which may limit the transferability of findings to those distinct educational contexts. Future research could productively explore competency priorities within these specific settings.

Future research should test the applicability of this competency framework across diverse educational contexts and explore potential variations in competency priorities across different educational levels, institutional types, and cultural settings. Longitudinal studies examining how these competencies develop over teacher careers would further enhance understanding of ELT teacher development trajectories. Additionally, future research could explore the mediational tools that facilitate the development of the identified competencies.

Furthermore, future research should explore cultural variations in competency prioritization, such as technology integration in high-income vs. low-income contexts, and investigate the role of AI in competency development post-pandemic.

In summary, this study addresses the challenge of defining ELT teacher competencies that respond to both local requirements and global standards through a methodologically rigorous approach combining practitioner insights with expert consensus-building. The resulting

framework identifies core competencies valued within Iran's negotiation of global-local tensions while acknowledging the importance of contextual adaptation. The framework provides a foundation for enhancing ELT teacher preparation and development in increasingly globalized educational systems by distinguishing essential from peripheral competencies and balancing different domains of teacher expertise.

The findings suggest that effective English language teachers require a complex integration of linguistic knowledge, pedagogical skill, personal qualities, and professional dispositions. While certain competencies emerged as universally valued, the strong consensus on adaptation skills underscores the importance of contextualizing practice. This balance between universal standards and local responsiveness offers a path forward for ELT teacher development that honors both global connectedness and local educational realities.

Generative use of Artificial Intelligence

The *Anthropic Claude AI* was used solely for language editing purposes. No data in any form was generated during the research process, nor was any analysis performed using large language models and AI application tools. All data, including tables and figures, are original and AI-free and are available upon request.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Interview responses with an indicator from each category

Indicators	Weight Score	Sample Response
Pedagogical Knowledge	15	A good English language teacher should be familiar with various teaching methodologies and approaches (Interviewee responses file 2, Pos. 4)
Organizational skills	12	Being organized is crucial for managing classroom activities, assignments, assessments, and resources effectively (Interviewee responses file 2, Pos. 18)
Continuous professional development	10	She should try to update herself with the newest trends and changes in knowledge since it is expected for the modern teacher to be multidimensional (Interviewee responses file 3, Pos. 17)
Passion and enthusiasm	13	An effective English language teacher is enthusiastic and passionate about the material and curious about students (Interview responses file Pilot, Pos. 10)
Linguistic competencies	16	Teachers should have the most important competence which means linguistic competence and have enough knowledge of syntax, semantics, pragmatics which are sub-branches of micro linguistics. They should know how to use the above knowledge mentioned and to put them into practice. (Interviewee responses file 3, Pos. 8)
Commitments to school development	2	[…] the ultimate goal of education and the fundamental principle to which an individual can be committed. (Interviewee responses file 2, Pos. 15)

Appendix B: A sample coding scheme from the literature review

No.	Title	Author/Year	Method/instrument	Results
1	An Investigation into the Teaching Competency of English Teachers of Tripura Board of Secondary Education	Bhattacharjee & Carri 2020	Descriptive method is applied to collect data and stratified random sampling was applied / A standardized tool was administrated to measure teaching competency of English	Teaching competency can be achieved when the three phases of teaching (pre-active phase, inter-active phase and post-active phase) have their proper coordination.
2	Enhancing Teachers' Competencies Through Professional Development Program: Challenges and Benefits	Apriliyanti 2020	An observational case study, Five English teachers participated in Indonesia/ teachers' competency test	1. the research found that pedagogic competencies and professional competencies have become the basic formulation for learning materials 2. the research found four obstacles and challenges to implement teachers' knowledge 3. the investigation also discovered the challenges and the benefits in the implementation of professional learning development
3	Pre-service teachers' pedagogical competence and teaching efficiency	Afalla and Fabelico 2020	Mixed-method/ inferential-descriptive	The study found that teachers on pre-service regularly demonstrated a very high degree of pedagogical ability. Their teaching performance has varied significantly from each other in the past three academic years.
4	Aligning teacher competence frameworks to 21st century challenges: The case for the European Digital Competence Framework for Educators (Digcompedu)	Caena and Redecker 2019	Qualitative	The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators was designed to align with institutional and con- textual requirements in different countries, whilst remaining open to adaptation and updating.
5	Teacher competence frameworks in Hungary: A case study on the continuum of teacher learning	Symeonidis, 2019	Qualitative, comparative case study	Depending on the way local actors use these frameworks, some perceive it as a way of limiting teacher autonomy, whilst others feel it promotes teacher professionalism.
6	Teaching in a Digital Environment (TIDE): Defining and measuring teachers' competencies to develop students' digital information and communication skills.	Claro et al., 2018	Mixed-method/ A test was applied to a sample of 828 in-service teachers in Chile, together with a characterization questionnaire/	Results showed that very few Chilean teachers mastered all the tasks and that only one third were able to provide students with orientations in solving information and communication tasks, revealing that the majority are not playing a mediation role in a digital environment