

Exploring the Path to Humanized L2 Education in Iran: A Qualitative Study of Determinants

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Abstract

Humanized pedagogy centers on student agency, diversity, and holistic development. Despite a growing international interest, there is a lack of research on operationalizing this approach within the Iranian EFL context. This study explored the determinants of implementing humanized pedagogy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Iran. The qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews and life history narratives from seven university lecturers and five school teachers in Iran. Thematic analysis identified two key themes as determinants of humanized L2 education in Iran: 1) aligning education systems with new student-centered paradigms, including redefining educational goals, improving teacher-student relationships, involving students in assessment, integrating technology, and bridging local and global perspectives, 2) implementing participatory curriculum development by fostering collaboration among stakeholders, cultivating shared ownership, and nurturing democratic values. Comprehensively modernizing curriculum, instructional approaches, and stakeholder engagement are crucial for transitioning toward humanized EFL education in Iran. This involves policy shifts, updated teacher training, balanced integration of localization and globalization, and iterative curriculum review processes engaging diverse voices. The study discusses implications based on its findings for implementing humanizing pedagogies, and it provides a contextual model for identifying determinants that can inform efforts to implement humanizing pedagogies across educational settings.

Keywords: educational paradigms, English as a foreign language, holistic development, humanized pedagogy, participatory curriculum development

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Introduction

In recent decades, humanized pedagogy has increasingly influenced English language teaching by focusing on learners' agency and diversity (Freire, 1970; Salazar, 2013). This student-centered approach aims to foster empowerment by respecting learners' individual strengths and potential for growth (Bartolomé, 1994; Salazar, 2013). While an abundance of research documents the benefits of this approach, its practical implementation in EFL contexts warrants deeper exploration, specifically regarding the contextual factors that facilitate or inhibit its successful adoption (Olszewska et al., 2021; Salazar, 2013). Despite growing international interest in humanizing pedagogy, research has not clearly explained its application in Iranian EFL contexts. There is a significant gap in identifying key factors that promote humanized L2 education in Iran. Without better understanding these determinants, targeted efforts to facilitate student-centered practices cannot be properly developed or evaluated—representing an urgent need for illuminating research. Specifically, there's little research or published work addressing how humanized pedagogy could be effectively implemented in Iranian EFL contexts or what benefits it might bring. This gap in knowledge and research imposes certain challenges for educators and policymakers seeking to improve EFL education in Iran.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the fundamental drivers of humanized L2 education in Iran, outlining attributes and limitations presently faced in classroom implementation. In doing so, it seeks to delineate fundamental determinants underlying humanized approaches to L2 education in Iran. The findings hold significant implications for informing culturally-responsive teaching practices, professional development programs, and policies tailored to better create more inclusive learning environments. Identifying key determinants allows practitioners to draw on findings to enhance student experiences and promote holistic development through education. The central research question investigated was: What are the key determinants that contribute to humanized L2 education in Iran? The study explored these determinants, aiming to identify attributes and limitations in implementing humanized pedagogy in EFL education.

Literature Review

Humanized pedagogy is a transformative educational approach based on key principles and grounded in the works of scholars such as Bartolomé (1994), Carneiro (2013), Cammarota & Romero (2006), Freire (1970, 1985), Giroux (2011), and Salazar (2013). First, central to Freire's philosophy of humanizing pedagogy is the notion of “becoming more fully human” - a process of actualizing one's full humanity as a social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, and creative being (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Salazar, 2013). Accordingly, a humanized pedagogy prioritizes recognizing learners' individual strengths and needs, and it provides personalized learning support (Bartolomé, 1994; Murillo et al., 2009; Price & Osborne, 2000; Salazar, 2008, 2013).

Second, a central principle of humanized pedagogy is promoting inclusivity by valuing and embracing diversity in the classroom, ensuring all students feel respected, heard, and represented (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Giroux, 2011). It recognizes classrooms are made up of students with diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences that should be celebrated with providing personalized support (Bartolomé, 1994; Murillo et al., 2009; Salazar, 2008, 2013). Inclusivity rejects discriminatory practices that strip away students' cultural, linguistic, and familial identities (Bartolomé, 1994); instead, integrating these funds of knowledge into a “permeable curriculum” to ensure all students have voice, representation, and affirmation of their identities (Salazar, 2010, p. 120).

Third, humanized pedagogy advocates social justice, empowering students to critically examine and challenge systemic inequalities and oppressive structures in society (Carneiro, 2013; Freire, 1970, 1985). Additionally, becoming more fully human involves developing critical consciousness, engaging in reflection, and taking action to transform oppressive structures (Giroux, 2011). As Freire (1985) stated, “to transform the world is to humanize it” (p. 70).

A fourth key principle of humanized pedagogy is collaboration and interdependence. The educational process is a collective and dialogic pursuit of humanization, where teachers and learners are interdependent partners (Huerta, 2011). Knowledge is co-constructed through open dialogue, sharing of diverse perspectives, and mutual learning. The teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding discussions and activities that foster critical thinking, self-reflection, and growth for

all participants. By embracing collaboration, humanized pedagogy empowers students to be active agents in their own learning and to develop a sense of community and shared responsibility for one another's success (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Salazar, 2013). This is not merely an individualistic endeavor, but unfolds through dialogic relationships and interactions with others, aligning with Freire's perspective that "Our being, is a being with" (Roberts, 2000, p. 43).

Thus, humanized pedagogy views education as a liberating force that empowers individuals through awareness, dialogue, and action (Salazar, 2013). However, implementing this humanized approach is complex, requiring careful planning, resource allocation, and long-term commitment from educators and institutions (Carneiro, 2013; Olszewska et al., 2021).

The principles of humanized pedagogy are highlighted by key works in the field. Award-winning educators argue that this approach fosters inclusivity and equity by building community and valuing diverse perspectives (Burke et al., 2008). Unlike traditional methods that marginalize certain groups, humanized pedagogy encourages active learning for all students, aligning with Bartolomé's (1994) critique of exclusionary teaching. The implementation of these principles helps educators guide students in understanding social and political issues while developing their strengths (Freire, 1970; Salazar, 2013).

Seminal conceptual works help spotlight the goals of humanized pedagogy, illuminating its aims and attributes. Noddings (2013) used extensive empirical observations to construct a theory situating care and needs-responsive education at the center of humanized pedagogy. Hayes and Cuban (1996) described humanized pedagogy as balancing technical instructional competence with building caring interpersonal relationships. Sleeter (2012) argued that humanized pedagogy aims not just to develop each student holistically, but also to help dismantle oppressive systems in society that disadvantage people along dimensions of identity, such as race or socioeconomic class.

A substantial body of scholarly research has investigated the effects and implementation of humanized pedagogical approaches. Collectively, these studies highlight the substantial benefits associated with instructional frameworks that prioritize caring relationships, cultural relevance, empowerment, and social justice objectives. Salazar (2010) found that humanized teaching, focused on dialogue, care,

and cultural responsiveness, enhances relationships, engagement, achievement, and empowerment. Students in these classrooms outperformed those in traditional settings. Garrett et al. (2009) also highlight the short- and long-term benefits of humanized education.

However, ethnographic research has revealed ongoing obstacles to translating caring, empowering, and culturally affirming ideals into daily classroom practices. Sleeter (2012) studied attempts at humanizing reforms in diverse high schools, finding ingrained systemic barriers which inhibited progress, ranging from cultural disjunctures to standardized curricula forcing teachers into technical rather than relational practices. Valenzuela (2016) observed dehumanizing policies and assumptions pervading supposedly progressive suburban schools.

While the evidenced benefits of humanized pedagogy are substantial, openings remain for strengthening research in certain areas. The areas requiring further exploration include documentation of determinants influencing practitioner abilities to implement humanized practice. This study sought to help address this gap by exploring the perspectives of Iranian secondary English teachers regarding the barriers and facilitators they experience while attempting to forward humanized pedagogical approaches within Iran's highly centralized educational system. Additionally, the resulting insights will provide an original context-specific yet adaptable model elucidating systemic and classroom-level determinants impacting efforts to humanize teaching. The findings potentially broaden cultural representation while highlighting mechanisms that influence practitioners' ability to advance the ideals of humanized pedagogy.

Methods

The Context

The study focused on a select group of 12 English language teachers to gain insights into humanized pedagogy as implemented in the context of the Iranian education system. Iran's English as a foreign language (EFL) education system has shown a willingness to reform, improve, and develop students' communicative competence over time (Iranmehr et al., 2024). While formal instruction beginning in junior high school around age 12 has traditionally emphasized a curriculum controlled by the Ministry of Education focusing on grammar, translation, and exam

preparation (Ansary & Babaii, 2003; Yavari, 1990), more recent years provide promising signs of openness to reform. After the 1979 revolution and the indigenization of textbooks and curriculum to protect Islamic identity (Borjian, 2013), now, the increasing need for functional English abilities in today's globalized world is driving interest in incorporating more communicative approaches, as seen in efforts to modernize the curriculum through the reform initiated in 2013.

While compulsory English instruction begins at junior high level high school graduates still often lack strong communicative abilities, and teaching has traditionally relied more on grammar-translation than teacher-centered methods (Ardavani & Durrant, 2015; Sadeghi & Richards, 2016), the standardized national curriculum and materials are showing signs of evolving in equipping students with better functional English mastery (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016; Riazi, 2005). Persistent barriers like teaching-to-tests and insufficient teacher development and infrastructure inhibit full implementation of reforms (Barabadi & Razmjoo, 2016). However, with openness to progressive, humanistic values and student-centered instruction, Iran's EFL education context holds promise for continued positive evolution to cultivate students' real-world English communication skills (Ardavani & Durrant, 2015).

Procedures

In this qualitative study, we purposefully sampled 12 English language teachers in Iran who had the experience of teaching at both university and school levels. The participants included seven university lecturers with prior school teaching experience and five school teachers who had also taught at the university level. By selecting these individuals, we captured a range of teaching experiences across different educational settings, allowing for multiple viewpoints and variations in practice (Patton, 2015). Participants consented with both verbal and written permission before data collection and analysis, with a concentration on their rights and confidentiality. Anonymity was ensured by utilizing pseudonyms, and information was safely retained, with plans for eventual destruction.

The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews, which served to obtain rich descriptions and nuanced insights into participants' professional viewpoints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a complementary method, life history narratives provided a more expansive account of educators' backgrounds

in the field. The flexible interview structure allowed space for themes to emerge during conversation. While interviews captured situated perspectives and reflections, life history narratives, which are accounts of individuals' lives in their own words, provided a more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The purpose of integrating these two qualitative instruments was to gain a holistic yet multifaceted understanding of opinions and influences shaping meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

During the semi-structured interviews, which aimed to gain teacher perspectives on conceptualizing and implementing humanized pedagogy in English language education within the Iranian educational system, a single 120-minute interview was conducted with each participant. The interview utilized a 12-item protocol to explore key facets of humanistic pedagogy, including its defining principles (Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 1970; Salazar, 2013), perceived benefits for learners (Salazar, 2013), considerations for empowering environments (Noddings, 2013), distinguishing features compared to more traditional approaches (Salazar, 2013), challenges faced when operationalizing learner-centered pedagogies (Carneiro, 2013; Olszewska et al., 2021), and recommendations for supporting the development of criticality (Giroux, 2011). Questions were open-ended (see appendix A) to allow for in-depth discussion while follow-up prompts ensured comprehensiveness adhering to standards for qualitative interviewing (Kvale, 2012). The interviews and narratives were subjected to a process of verbatim transcription, followed by a comprehensive analysis.

To further contextualize teacher perspectives within the sociohistorical context of Iran, life history narratives were collected (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Teachers were prompted to recollect critical incidents and interactions that shaped their understanding of teaching over time (see Appendix B). This general prime was provided to structure accounts while allowing flexibility for individually lived experiences to emerge authentically (Murray, 2009). This included reflections of experiences with learners, pre-service training, professional growth experiences, reactions to policy reforms, and relationships with students and colleagues that influenced their meaning-making (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Both the conversations and life histories were initially held in Farsi. The research team personally translated the interviews and narratives from Farsi into

English (following Temple & Young, 2004). To guarantee correctness, translations underwent a member check. The English segments (utilized as evidence in reporting results) were contrasted against the original Farsi texts to boost accuracy. Any disparities found were resolved through conversation and revision.

Data Analysis

This study employed a codebook thematic analysis approach combining elements of reflexive thematic analysis and structured coding methodology (Braun & Clark, 2006). The analysis process began with extensive data familiarization, where all researchers independently reviewed and re-examined the interview transcripts and life histories. Following this, the research team collaboratively developed an initial codebook grounded in the conceptual framework of humanized pedagogy in EFL education and the study's research questions.

Researchers then undertook open coding of the data independently to generate preliminary codes employing an inductive approach (Saldaña, 2013). The team convened to discuss and compare these initial codes, refining definitions and reaching agreement on a coding schema. This refined codebook was systematically applied to the entire data set, allowing for both deductive coding using established codes and inductive coding to identify novel constructs.

Axial coding was utilized to cluster codes with conceptual commonalities into potential themes. For instance, codes relating to “reconceptualizing goals,” “transforming assessment practices,” and “reframing global-local dynamics” were mapped to the candidate theme “Aligning Education with New Paradigms.” Emerging themes were continuously refined through mapping relationships between codes and evaluating coded extracts’ fit within themes. The final stage involved synthesizing refined themes into a coherent narrative addressing the research questions.

Throughout the analysis process, the research team took several measures to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the data analysis. Constant comparison of data within and between developing codes and themes was used to enhance internal validity, while analytical perspectives and evaluations of theme saturation over time were documented through researcher memos (Charmaz, 2014). Given their prior positionality as English language teachers in Iran, the researchers maintained a reflexive stance through reflective journals to acknowledge any

potential influence on analysis. Regular team discussions were also held to identify and address potential biases. Additionally, member-checks were conducted by inviting participants to review and comment on initial findings. Data triangulation was employed by examining emerging patterns across interviews and life histories. A detailed record of memos, transcripts, and coding revisions was also maintained. Finally, thick description was used to present findings and allow confirmability in interpreting how understandings were derived from participants' perspectives on implementing humanized pedagogy.

Findings

Based on the types of the data, this study identified two pivotal determinants for humanizing pedagogy in Iran: aligning education systems with new student-centered paradigms and implementing participatory curriculum development. Updating curriculum, teacher training, and materials are needed to shift towards contemporary learning approaches that honor student agency, human resources, and holistic development. Additionally, engaging diverse stakeholders especially learners themselves in collaborative curriculum design is essential for successful curriculum development and implementation. The study’s findings are concisely tabulated in Table 1, with a detailed elaboration on each theme to follow. The first column represents Determinants, which are the overarching themes or factors that influence humanized pedagogy in the Iranian EFL context. The second column encompasses Conditions, detailing the specific circumstances or criteria under which the determinants operate. The third column, referred to as Strategies, includes actionable steps employed to address these conditions in light of the determinants.

Table 1
Mapping the Landscape of Humanized Pedagogy in the Iranian EFL Context

<i>Determinants</i>	<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
	1. Right Goal Setting	▪ Shifting from content mastery and exam preparation to holistic development
		▪ Acknowledging non-cognitive outcomes (identity development)
	2. Emancipation from	▪ Recognizing the coexistence of

<i>Determinants</i>	<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Aligning Education with New Paradigms	Dichotomous Thinking of Individualization and Personalization versus Collaboration	personalized and collaborative learning approaches
		▪ Acknowledging the interdependence of autonomy and collaboration in learning
	3. Developing Positive Teacher-Student Relationships	▪ Fostering trust and open communication through collaborative environments
		▪ Encouraging active engagement, intellectual risk-taking, and identity formation
		▪ Creating caring communities of learners
	4. Reconceptualizing Traditional Top-down Assessment as a Participatory, Formative Process	▪ Involving students in self-assessment, peer review, and criteria development
		▪ Shifting teachers' roles from sole judges to facilitators of student-driven work
		▪ Nurturing lifelong learning capacities (critical thought, communication, and metacognition)
	5. Viewing Localization and Globalization as Complementary rather than Contradictory	▪ Enhancing learning experiences by respecting students' backgrounds and potentials
		▪ Implementing cultural relevance through contextualization and global perspective simultaneously
Participatory and	6. Technology Integration	▪ Developing digital literacy to empower students and enhance communication and collaboration skills
		▪ Utilizing online resources to cater to individual learning styles and paces
		▪ Promoting critical thinking, empathy, and understanding through diverse perspectives
	1. Fostering Collaboration between Key Stakeholders	▪ Involving policymakers, educators, syllabus designers, material developers, teachers, and learners in curriculum design ▪ Incorporating diverse views to meet the real

<i>Determinants</i>	<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Coherent Curriculum		needs of learners and ensure relevance to learners' experiences
	2. Developing a Sense of Ownership among Stakeholders	▪ Engaging stakeholders in the curriculum development and implementation process
		▪ Enhancing motivation and engagement through increased investment in the curriculum
	3. Ensuring Responsiveness to Changing Circumstances	▪ Establishing continual feedback loops between stakeholders during curriculum development and application
		▪ Adapting the curriculum to evolving needs and opportunities for improvement
	4. Nurturing Democratic Values and Holistic Development	▪ Treating all voices equally and valuing each person's viewpoint
		▪ Fostering important citizenship attributes (collaboration, consensus building, and empathy) in students

Aligning Education with New Paradigms

One of the foremost themes that emerged from the perspectives shared by ELT educators involved in this research was that comprehensively “updating the education system and its constituent elements ... to align with evolving paradigms of education” (Peyman, Interview) represents the most critical step towards humanizing education in Iran. Specifically, the educators emphasized that “curriculum, teacher education [programs], instructional materials, and professional development” (Behzad, life-history narrative), must all be re-examined to reflect contemporary student-centered approaches. Paradigm shifts that place greater focus on “learner needs, interests, and [active] engagement ... have been shown to help create more meaningful learning experiences” (Rose, Interview).

A student-centered paradigm includes collaborative projects, problem-solving activities, and formative assessment and feedback. When educators are “train[ed] in [these] contemporary techniques, they can better facilitate learning in a way that respects students’ potentials, background and voice” (Fatemeh, Interview). To clarify the point, the participants used examples of two paradigm shifts and how

they encourage humanized pedagogy. The shift from ‘assessment of learning’ to ‘assessment for and as learning’ places students at the center of the assessment process. “Traditional ‘assessment of learning’ measures how much knowledge students have acquired” (Behzad, Interview). The newer paradigms view assessment as an ongoing process that supports learning. ‘Assessment for learning’ uses formative evaluation to continually guide student understanding and instruction. “Assessment as learning’ integrates assessment into classroom activities so students can self-assess [their own] strengths and challenges” (Shiva, Interview). They set personalized goals and take ownership of their learning. This “gives students [agency] to direct their education” (Nima, life-history narrative).

Right Goal- setting. The participants asserted that a crucial element of aligning education with the new paradigm shift involves redefining the fundamental objectives of education. “In various educational systems, ... including Iran’s, there has been a [historical] emphasis on content mastery and exam preparation” (Elnaz, life-history narrative). Humanized pedagogy, on the other hand, broadens education goal by acknowledging that education contributes to identity and holistic development. As one educator noted, a perspective that “confines the goal of education solely to content learning and exam preparation may not fully leverage the potential of education in facilitating students’ exploration of their interests and passions ...” (Lia, life-history narrative). This perspective might not fully “utilize the students’ potential or effectively nurture their abilities.” (Nazi, Interview)

In the context of humanized pedagogy, there is an emphasis on the importance of non-cognitive outcomes, such as “identity development, cultural awareness, civic participation, and well-being (Milad, Interview). There is a need for all stakeholders to “... [re]consider the setting of educational goals... to make education see students as whole individuals” (Peyman, Interview). In addition, the goal of education could be redefined to “encompass joining the discourse of the desired community ...” (Behzad, Interview). This perspective acknowledges that education extends beyond individual accomplishments and view students as integral parts of interconnected social systems, rather than as isolated learners.

Emancipation from Dichotomous Thinking of Individualization and Personalization versus Collaboration. One of the determinants of humanized pedagogy is moving beyond the dichotomous thinking of personalized learning

versus collaborative learning. While personalized learning caters to individual learning styles and preferences, it's important to note that the implementation of such methods can vary greatly across different cultural and educational contexts. For instance, in Iran, "there appears to be some resistance towards integrating personalized and collaborative learning approaches" (Mehdi, Interview). This resistance may stem from a belief that autonomy and interdependence are mutually exclusive. However, "it's crucial to understand that interdependence is... an integral part of autonomy in learning" (Nazi, Interview). Just as personalized learning encourages learners to explore their interests and learn at their own pace, it also promotes collaboration and interaction. Thus, these two concepts "can and do coexist in a humanized learning [environment] to respect learners as [full] human beings" (Elnaz, Interview).

Historically, as one educator noted "the term 'autonomous learning' has often been misunderstood as solitary learning. However, ... it actually signifies the capacity of an individual to take charge of their own learning, ... which involves interaction ...with others" (Fatemeh, Interview). Nonetheless, a more humanistic approach to pedagogy acknowledges that personalized and collaborative learning methods are not mutually exclusive but can coexist harmoniously. With appropriate structures in place, "personalized learning, enable[ing] students to learn as individuals and also through engagement with a community" (Nima, Interview).

Developing Positive Teacher-Student Relationships. The analysis revealed that fostering positive relationships between teachers and students is a crucial factor in humanizing pedagogy, as emphasized in contemporary educational paradigms. A participatory curriculum characterized by the active involvement, contribution, and mutual understanding of all stakeholders, fosters a shared understanding of the curriculum, promoting a sense of ownership and investment in the learning process. The resulting collaborative environment, in turn, "facilitates the establishment of trust and [open] communication, which are fundamental to constructive teacher-student relationships" (Fatemeh, Interview). As a result, education becomes a "transformative tool for societal development ... and change", aligning with the principles of humanized pedagogy (Fatemeh, life-history narrative).

Dialogic and interactive teaching methods that are central to humanized

learning depend on constructive relationships between educators and learners. “Students must feel respected, valued, and [emotionally] safe ... in order to take risks and engage actively in discussions” (Peyman, life-history narrative). Teachers also need students' trust to provide constructive feedback, challenge assumptions respectfully, and guide learning in a caring manner. With “positive T-S relationships, teachers make themselves available and approachable... students will be more willing to share perspectives, ask questions, and discuss ideas without [fear of] judgment.” (Rose, Interview). Furthermore, “through [open] dialogue, teachers can better understand students’ progress and provide assistance that ... responds to their needs.” (Fatemeh, Interview)

A good relationship between teachers and students is the starting point for creating a caring and supportive community of learners fostering positive connections among the students themselves. “When students support each other, [healthy] competition replaces [unhealthy] comparison, ... and diversity is celebrated” (Naser, Interview). It is then that “learning becomes a collaborative social experience rather than an isolated act” (Nima, Interview).

Reconceptualizing Traditional Top-down Assessment as a Participatory, Formative Process. The participants highlighted that modernizing education requires “reimagining traditional conceptions of teacher and student [roles]” (Shiva, Interview), particularly around assessment practices. Assessment is not just a tool for grading but can itself “be a powerful tool for learning when done [collaboratively]” (Nazi, Interview). Historically, assessment has been the exclusive domain of teachers, with students playing “a passive role as objects of external evaluation” (Nima, Interview).

Involving students in self-assessment, peer review, and criteria development allows assessment to function formatively throughout learning rather than just summatively afterwards. This provides continual opportunities for reflection, discussion of strengths and weaknesses with both teacher and student perspectives incorporated, and calibration of future efforts. Such an assessment approach shifts teachers away from being “sole judges towards facilitators [of student learning]” (Shiva, life history narrative.).”

Most importantly, engaging student agency and ownership through collaborative assessment nurtures lifelong learning capacities. It demands critical

thinking, communication, and metacognition as students reflect on their own and assess others' activities. It emphasizes "transform[ing] students from passive recipients of knowledge ... to active participants in their own learning" (Rose, life-history narrative). Involving students in the process of assessment, feedback use and generation, and assistance seeking taps into their inherent potentials as human beings. Students' active involvement in assessment practices nurtures their potentials promoting, full development.

Viewing Localization and Globalization as Complementary rather than Contradictory. Based on the participants' opinions, in the context of humanized pedagogy, "it's [crucial] to remove the dichotomous thinking of localization and globalization" (Mehdi, Interview). Instead, these two concepts should be viewed as complementary. This harmonious integration "enhances the learning [experience] by respecting the students' backgrounds" (Nima, Interview). Localization of education, "should be implemented concurrently ... with a global perspective to ensure cultural relevance through contextualization and globalization" (Rose, Interview). Cultural Relevance through Contextualization involves integrating content that "resonates with the cultural background ... and experiences of the learners" (Milad, life-history narrative). It's about making the learning materials relevant and relatable to "students' own lives and experiences" (Lia, Interview). On the other hand, Global Perspective is about "exposing students to a variety of perspectives [from different cultures and societies]" (Shiva, Interview). When these approaches are concurrently enacted, a milieu is created which respects and values the diverse cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of individuals and appreciates the perspectives of those who are less familiar. In such an environment, students are not merely participants but active contributors whose potential as human beings acknowledged and cultivated. More importantly, this pedagogical approach engenders a sense of belonging, a critical element in fostering a more comprehensive educational experience.

Technology Integration. From the perspectives of the ELT professors, technology integration in education is a critical aspect of modern pedagogy that taps into the human resources and potential of students. It's a multifaceted approach that encompasses digital literacy and the use of online resources, both of which play pivotal roles in fostering holistic development in students. Digital literacy, for

instance, “empowers students by equipping them with the [necessary] skills to navigate the digital world” (Behzad, Interview). This enhances their communication and collaboration skills, significantly boosts their confidence and autonomy, and “fosters a sense of community ... and shared understanding” (Mehdi, Interview). Furthermore, it “promotes critical thinking, ... by encouraging students to evaluate and analyze digital information” (Naser, Interview). On the other hand, online resources “make learning materials [widely] accessible, catering to individual learning styles and paces” (Milad, Interview). They expose students to a diverse range of perspectives and ideas, promoting empathy and understanding, which are central to holistic development. Moreover, interactive online resources can “make learning more engaging and relevant, thereby enhancing motivation and the joy of learning” (Rose, Interview).

Participatory and Coherent Curriculum

The second major themes developed from the opinions of the participating teachers were the centrality of participatory and coherent curriculum development (see Figure 1.). “A participatory curriculum is essential for humanizing education because it fosters collaboration between [all key] stakeholders” (Naser, life-history narrative) involved in the curriculum development and implementation process. Participatory curriculum development yields a coherent program whereby “policymakers are able to provide [high-level] guidance regarding [desired] learning outcomes ... and standards, educators offer pragmatic insights based on years of experience in the classroom, and learners contribute perspectives on comprehending and applying knowledge” (Elnaz, I). By incorporating inputs from these diverse viewpoints, the various elements that constitute the curriculum - from overarching goals and topics, to individual lessons, assessments, and activities - can be designed, sequenced, and interconnected in a logical flow. In turn, such internal coherence allows for streamlined implementation as all involved. It is through the “collaborative [design process] that diverse stakeholders cultivate shared ownership over the curriculum” (Rose, Int) addressing challenges that may emerge during application.

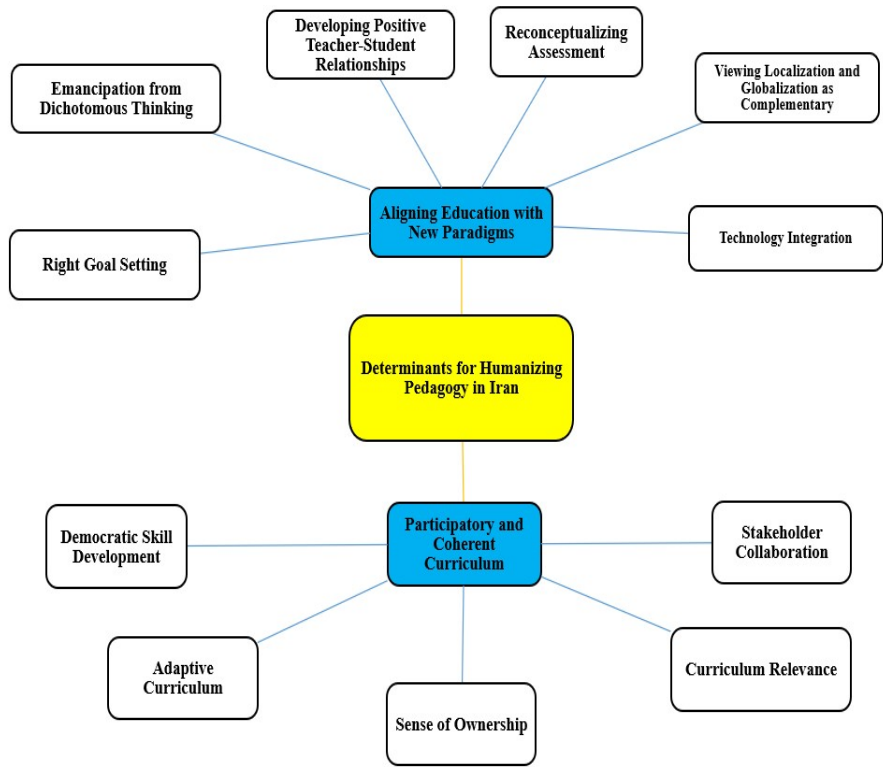
Such an approach incorporates diverse views from those most directly involved, helping create a curriculum that is “more relevant ... to learners’ lived experiences” (Milad, Int). Each stakeholder group develops a sense of ownership

over the curriculum. Continual feedback between stakeholders during both the development and application of the curriculum ensures it remains responsive to changing circumstances. “Issues for improvement that one group faces can be [swiftly] communicated to policymakers” (Milad, Int). Perhaps most importantly, participation treats everyone involved in learning equally. Learners and teachers become actively “engaged in designing learners’ educational pathway, fostering skills like collaboration” that is vital for developing well-rounded citizens.

A coherent and participatory curriculum development enhances the relevance of the learning experience as “the curriculum becomes more applicable to students’ real-world contexts” (Behzad, Interview). As learners are able to directly contribute to curriculum shaping, they are given the space to develop a stronger sense of ownership. This increased investment translates to “higher motivation [among teachers and learners] to fully engage with the materials and activities” (Naser, Interview).

Through ongoing feedback collected from all stakeholders, the curriculum remains adaptive over time and evolves in response. Additionally, the collaborative design process cultivates democratic skills among students like respectful communication. This ensures both strong academic outcomes as well as informed and caring citizenship.

Figure 1
Key Determinants of Humanized Pedagogy in the Iranian EFL Context and Their Subcomponents



Discussion

The study explores the views of Iranian English Language Teaching (ELT) educators. The research objective was investigating the key determinants for implementing humanized pedagogy in Iran's education system, particularly in the context of English language teaching (ELT). It clarified the conditions needed for a more human-centered teaching approach.

Aligning Education with New Paradigms

The main findings include the need for updated educational models with reconceptualized education goals, improved teacher-student relationships, rethought assessment methods, and participatory curriculum design, among others. Echoing the sentiments of Salazar (2013) and Bartolomé (1994), who posited that education should be student-centered, we have discerned that an evolution in educational practices and stakeholder engagement is imperative to align with emerging

paradigms.

Our findings affirm Biesta's (2010) and Huerta's (2011) assertion that educational objectives must transcend a narrow focus on content mastery and test preparation. Consistent with Huerta's conceptual framework differentiating educational goals from mere curriculum delivery, we determined identity development to be inextricably linked to meaningful academic learning. When education aims solely to maximize assessment scores, it risks neglecting students' holistic needs. However, our research suggests that identity formation and content absorption are interconnected and support each other. Only by attending to the dynamic interplay between who students are becoming and what they are studying can we genuinely fulfill education's potential to transform lives and societies. The idea that nurturing the whole person involves supporting identity development and socialization highlights education's role in fostering multidimensional human growth, including academic, personal, and civic domains (Biesta, 2010). It helps actualize education's potential to empower students in discovering their interests and growing into autonomous citizens.

The findings of our study build upon previous research highlighting the central role of positive teacher-student relationships in humanistic pedagogy (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004). As our results demonstrate, and as others have theorized, nurturing caring and trusting bonds between educators and learners is pivotal to fulfilling students' learning needs and promoting engagement and well-being. This allows the learning environment to function as a space where students can freely participate and develop their full human capacities.

The literature provides empirical support for the ways supportive teacher-student relationships facilitate numerous beneficial academic and social-emotional outcomes. Specifically, previous works have linked positive relationships to greater student self-efficacy, critical thinking, motivation, satisfaction, retention and achievement (Veldman et al., 2013). Notably, constructive relationships characterized by caring and respectful bonds between teachers and learners may also bolster teachers' job enthusiasm and commitment (O'Connor & McCartney, 2008; Veldman et al., 2013).

The findings suggest involving students in assessment through practices like self-assessment, peer review, and collaborative criteria creation (Andrade &

Brookhart, 2020). Formative assessment, including Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessment as Learning (AaL), focuses on using evidence of student learning to guide instructional decisions (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Earl, 2013). These methods integrate assessment into the learning process rather than treating it as a separate activity. Paired with these approaches is dialogic feedback, viewed as a needs-responsive, comprehensible, and ongoing communication (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). In AfL and AaL contexts, this involves promoting learner engagement through ongoing interaction (Carless, 2013), helping students understand and use feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2012; Mulliner & Tucker, 2017), and supporting the development of self-regulation (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006).

Our study's findings reinforce the value of integrating local and global orientations in TEFL in mutually reinforcing ways. This aligns well with current thinking in the field advocating for an approach that positions the local and global as dynamically co-emerging through contextually negotiated practices (Alsagoff et al., 2012; Canagarajah, 2013). Linking familiar and globalized approaches respects learner's background and identities while cultivating intercultural competence (Liddicoat, 2016).

This study contributes insights into the potential of technology to enhance foreign language education in humanizing ways. The findings showed that purposeful technology integration can engage learners and provide authentic communicative opportunities aligns with prior work demonstrating technology's capacity to boost motivation, cultivate skills, achievement, critical thinking and intercultural competence when appropriately leveraged (Dörnyei, 2000). However, to motivate learners and capitalize on technology's affordances, education systems must provide supportive cultures and ensure purposeful tool design, task implementation, and educator training.

Participatory and Coherent Curriculum

Our research highlights the importance of participatory curriculum development in actualizing humanized pedagogy in higher education. By advocating inclusive stakeholder engagement throughout the entire curriculum design and implementation process, from policymakers to educators and learners themselves, a mutually reinforcing cycle can be created where collaborative decision-making and continuous feedback loops cultivate sophisticated yet durable learning advancement

(Steen-Utheim & Wittek, 2017). Such participatory processes empower all actors in the education system through relevant and effective learning experiences that align closely with learners' needs, backgrounds and interests (Fortus & Krajcik, 2012). A participatory curriculum generates the humanizing culture of care, trust, and support necessary for learning, allowing for adaptation and responsiveness to changing needs over time.

Conclusion

Two key determinants in humanizing English language education in Iran are modernizing curriculum and ensuring curriculum coherence, according to our research. It could be concluded that transitioning toward this humanizing pedagogy demands thoughtful changes from national policies to classroom practices.

Based on our findings, we propose redefining Iran's national education goals to focus on developing students' cognitive, personal, and social skills, rather than just content mastery. This requires reimagining the education system to align with modern, student-centered approaches. Policymakers can support this shift through targeted funding and policy reforms. The transformation should balance global perspectives with local relevance, ensuring educational content is both internationally and culturally appropriate. To implement these changes, it's essential to update technology integration and teacher training standards, equipping educators to respect and nurture students' potentials and backgrounds.

Furthermore, curriculum developers should adopt a participatory approach by consulting diverse stakeholders, including teachers, students, and education experts, in the design process to ensure ongoing alignment between curriculum objectives and classroom realities. Positive teacher-student relationships are crucial for creating a humanized learning environment. Relationship-building skills should be a core part of teacher training and recognized as essential to effective teaching. Additionally, assessment practices should be reconceptualized as participatory formative processes that engage students actively in their own learning journey. By implementing these comprehensive changes, the Iranian education system can move towards a more humanized pedagogy that nurtures students' full potential and prepares them for the challenges of the 21st century.

Although the small sample size of ELT educators in this study may limit its

generalizability, we minimized its impact by providing a clear context, in-depth description, and data and theoretical saturation. Instead of strict generalizability, we emphasized transferability to similar contexts.

Further exploration of concrete classroom-based practices would maximize the benefits of humanized pedagogy across diverse learner populations and contexts. Future research could apply this approach across disciplines through mixed methods, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of its impact. Longitudinal studies tracking student outcomes over time could offer valuable insights into the long-term effects of humanizing pedagogy on both academic achievement and non-cognitive skills development.

Cross-cultural comparative studies between Iran and other countries could offer valuable insights into the adaptability and effectiveness of humanizing pedagogy in different educational systems. These studies could focus on identifying best practices and challenges in implementation across various cultural contexts. This could include case studies of schools or teachers successfully implementing these approaches, providing models for wider dissemination.

Finally, policy analysis research examining how educational policies can be reformed to support the implementation of humanizing pedagogy could provide valuable guidance for policymakers and educational leaders. This could include studies on the alignment of curriculum standards, teacher evaluation systems, and school accountability measures with humanizing pedagogy principles.

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APPENDIX (A)

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Exploring Humanized L2 Education in Iran

1. How would you define a "humanized" approach to L2 education? What are its key principles and practices?
2. In your view, what are the major benefits of adopting a humanized pedagogy in L2 classrooms?
3. What factors do you think contribute to creating a student-centered, empowering environment for L2 learners?
4. How would you distinguish between humanized versus non-humanized L2 teaching methodologies? What are some key differences?
5. What challenges or obstacles have you faced in trying to adopt a more humanized approach to L2 teaching?
6. In your experience, what hurdles exist in the Iranian education system context that inhibits humanized pedagogy?
7. What changes would need to happen at an institutional or policy level to better promote humanized L2 education?
8. What strategies have you tried or observed other teachers try to overcome hurdles to humanized teaching?
9. What kind of professional training or support would help more L2 teachers transition to humanized pedagogies?
11. What advice would you give to L2 teachers wanting to incorporate principles of humanism, critical thinking, inclusivity etc. into their classrooms?
12. In your opinion, what distinguishes outstanding humanistic L2 teachers from more traditional teachers? What qualities make them effective?

APPENDIX (B)

Six Prompts for Asking Participants to Provide Life History Narratives

1. Reflect on your journey as an English language teacher in Iran. What critical incidents or experiences have shaped your understanding of humanized pedagogy over time?
2. Describe your pre-service training and early teaching experiences. How did these influence your approach to student-centered and humanistic teaching methods?
3. Consider your experiences with professional development throughout your career. Which opportunities have been most influential in helping you implement humanized pedagogy in your classroom?
4. Reflect on how your understanding of the balance between local cultural context and global perspectives in EFL teaching has evolved over your career. What experiences have informed this understanding?