



## Evaluation of the implementation of Farhangian University's internship curriculum: A semantic analysis of Iran's experience

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 06 February 2022  Revised: 24 April 2022  Accepted: 28 April 2023  Online: 09 March 2024</p>	<p>Teacher education has been one of the fundamental challenges of Iran's educational system during the last hundred years. The purpose of research is to provide a meaningful analysis of the evaluation of the implementation of internship curriculum in Farhangian University, Iran. The research method was a qualitative type using grounded theory and the data collection method was a semi-structured interview. The research findings led to the presentation of a semantic model. Extracted from the basic concepts, this model contains seven categories and main core namely "continuation of incomplete implementation of internship program". Also, the findings reveal that causal conditions (educational and organizational challenges), contextual conditions (financial obstacles) and intervening conditions (role of supervisors, guidance teachers, student interns, and school administrators) have caused Farhangian University internship's program could not be realized according to the planned plan. Other finding shows that supervisors and student-teachers use three strategies of analyzing previous experiences, applying individual creativity, and mastering despair and hopelessness to accept or deal with the current situation of the internship program. The current semantic model can contain this important lesson for teacher training planners in other developing countries that the realization of the goals of reform programs depends on the reform of conditions that are sometimes beyond the power of teachers and schools.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Curriculum  Evaluation  Internship  Semantic Analysis  Teacher Education</p>	

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## **1. Introduction**

There is a general agreement between all educational system practitioners and educational sciences researchers that the quality and efficiency of any educational system largely depends on competence of its teachers. Also, there is a common view that teacher education is one of the most difficult sections of professional training (Grubb, 2006; Choy, Warvik, & Lindberg, 2018). Meanwhile, one of the basic programs of teacher education course is practical training (internship) for student-teachers before entering the classroom. Internship is one of the most important programs that take a novice teacher from the stage of theoretical training to the stage of activity and action, so that she/he feels herself/himself in the role of a real teacher (Miniurova, & Belousova, 2020). Naturally, the better the novice teacher goes through this practical course, the more successful she/he will be in the future. Thus, strengthening the professional skills of teachers is the most important mission of universities and teacher education centers in the modern world (Department of Human Development, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2017). For this reason, many researchers consider the main goals of internship to be learning on the job, developing critical thinking, establishing a link between theory and practice, accepting job responsibilities, and developing teacher's professional ethics (Busher, Gündüz, Cakmak, & Lawson, 2015; Kosnik, & Beck, 2003; Hora, Wolfgram, & Thompson, 2017).

Regardless of the importance of internships in the process of teacher education, today the implementation and quality of these courses has become one of the main concerns of teacher education planners and educational sciences researchers - especially in many developing countries. For example, recently in Malaysia, Bunyamin, Hanri, Rameli, & Alhassora (2021) examined the teacher training program during the Corona epidemic and found three main challenges for students-teachers: How students access the Internet, the level of interest & attitude of students to online learning, and knowledge and skills of intern teachers for online teaching & assessment of student learning. In the Philippines, Tindowen, Bangi, & Parallag Jr (2019) suggest that regular evaluation of internships by educators, teacher training institutions, and schools should be conducted to address the gaps faced by student-teachers.

In Indonesia, Dewi, & Kartowagiran (2018) found that the internship program should be evaluated regularly and periodically. This evaluation can be done before the program, during and at the end of program. Also, teachers and trainers should determine certain criteria to measure the success of the internship program. The findings of Baskan, & Ayda (2018) in Northern Cyprus showed that there are challenges in teacher training courses such as insufficient practical courses, lack of scientific competence of trainers to supervise internship courses, and lack of planning for in-

service training. In Brazil, Scaico, & Costa (2014) mentions the lack of qualified teachers to guide student-teachers in the internship period. In Rwanda, Otara (2014) found that student-teachers were unhappy that they received the monitoring report of their action research activity late. They also expressed their displeasure that there are different views from the supervisors about the internship program.

In Iran, during the last two decades, many researches have been conducted on teacher education and especially the internship program. Before paying attention to the findings of some of these researches, it is necessary for the readers to briefly familiarize themselves with the internship program in the teacher education system of Iran. In recent years, Iran's educational system is facing the challenge of retirement of a generation of teachers who are leaving classes and schools after thirty years length of service. To face this challenge, Farhangian University has accepted about 20,000 student-teachers every year in its 100 branches. It should also be said that currently only Farhangian University is the main responsible university for training student-teachers in Iran and other universities have no role and responsibility in this regard. Based on this, every year young people interested in the teaching profession are selected through a national examination and interviews held by this university and under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science, Research & Technology (Musapour, & Ahmadi, 2013). These students must participate in a four-year course and then be permanently employed by the Ministry of Education as teachers and be sent to different regions of the country. These students are required to participate in internship courses (eight units) during a four-year period in addition to theoretical training (Hajazi, 2017). The internship program is structurally the same for all disciplines and subjects. Student-teachers must attend schools one day a week for a total of 59 days in their final four semesters. Table 1 shows the contents of Farhangian University's internship program.

Table 1. Internship curriculum of Farhangian University

Unit	Goal	Strategy
Internship 1	Skill acquisition in educational situation analysis	Reflective observation and identification of educational issues at the class and school level
Internship 2	Skilled in identifying and providing solutions for specific educational and teaching-learning sub-activities issues / limited implementation of some solutions)	Research and reflection (with emphasis on learning sub-activities)
Internship 3	Finding skills in teaching based on constructivism	Action research
Internship 4	Finding skills in designing cooperative learning and teaching units	Lesson research (group action research) and implementation of the role of a teacher as a planner (active leader)

Source: Gashmardi, 2021

Considering that Iran's educational system is facing a crisis of teachers leaving due to retirement during the last decade. The need to train and hire young teachers becomes more evident every year (Moulai, 2021). Attention to the quality of teacher training courses - and especially internship - has become one of the favorite subjects of educational science researchers in Iran. For example, recently Hajazi, & Bakhtiari (2021) revealed that compared to the internship program in Australia and Singapore, in Iran, firstly, very little time of the four-year teacher education period is dedicated to the internship program, and secondly, this program follows a linear course and pre-determined follows, which indicates the neglect of presenting course materials in parallel. Ahmadi, Maleki, Mehrmohammadi & ImamJuma (2018) believe that the current internship program in Iran's teacher education system is facing the following problems: lack of attention to the levels of reflection, lack of proper & sufficient time allocation, lack of correct evaluation method, and lack of sufficient attention to attributes & teacher's professional characteristics. Safarnavadeh, Musapour, Azhari & Mohammad Shafiei (2018) found that the implementation of internship program faces the challenge of academic and professional weakness of school teachers and trainers. Hajazi (2017) determined that monitoring & evaluation and financial obstacles have the greatest impact on the implementation of the internship program in Farhangian University. Zare Sefat (2016) believes that instead of continuous monitoring and scientific & professional support of student-teachers, supervisors and teachers abdicate their responsibility and implement the internship program incompletely. Almasi, Zarei Zwarki, Nili & Delawar (2016) emphasize the change in the processes and contents of the internship curriculum based on the goals of upstream documents of the Iran educational system. Karamati and Ahmadabadi (2016) mention issues such as the ignorance of teachers and administrators about positive results of internship program, prejudice about consequences of accepting interns, lack of ability in class leadership, inappropriate physical space of classes, and reluctance of parents to attend interns in schools. Tatari, Tajik & Tatari (2015) mentioned challenges such as the absence of supervisors in schools, uncertainty about how to evaluate internship program; and lack of commuting facilities for students and teachers.

Although previous researchers have tried to investigate the implementation of Iran's teacher education internship program from aspects such as the implementation method and relationship between novice teachers and professors, and teachers & school principals, this program has not been evaluated through a scientific and documented model. At the same time, the present researchers believe that according to the evolution of internship program in the teacher education system of Iran, the experiences of this country can be used by teacher training planners

in other developing countries. According to Iran's experiences, at the same time, teacher training curriculum planners in other developing countries realize that changes in student-teacher internship methods do not necessarily mean solving previous challenges and sometimes new challenges also emerge. The general purpose of this research was to evaluate the Iran teacher training internship program by presenting a semantic model that shows the conditions under which the internship program operates (causal, contextual, and intervening) and what consequences and selected strategies to deal with these conditions have caused the creation of a general atmosphere (main core).

## **2. Research Method**

Qualitative research method with grounded theory approach was used by present researchers. In fact, one of the advantages of grounded theory is the use of an analytical tool namely paradigm. The paradigm organizes findings and increases its explanatory power and includes three parts: Conditions, action/reciprocal action, and consequences (Blaikie, 2007; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Conditions can originate from factors such as time, place, culture, rules, beliefs, power, social world and organizations. Action/reciprocal action refers to those types of strategic or normal measures that people use in dealing with situations, issues and problems. In relation to action/reciprocal action, conditions take three states: Causal, intervening, and contextual (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Wherever action/interaction occurs, strategies, new phenomena, consequences, and a major component i.e. "core" usually emerge (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 134).

A semi-structured interview was used to collect data and thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method that is used to express and explain facts (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). A theme is a pattern found in the data that at least describes and organizes observations and at most interprets aspects of the phenomenon. The population includes all supervisors and student-teachers of Farhangian University of Bandar Abbas City , South of Iran, and the available sampling method was used to select the research sample due to the spread of the Corona virus (n=27). The research sample included 8 intern professors and 19 student-teachers. Also, in terms of gender, 11 of the interviewees were female and the rest were male. The interviews were mainly conducted in two ways, face-to-face and communicating through the virtual space of WhatsApp. After ensuring the satisfaction of the participants and observing research ethics, the interviews were recorded and continued until the theoretical saturation stage. The average time of each interview was 53 minutes. After implementing and recording the interviews, the review method was used by two colleagues and four participants to validate the data. In the review by the

colleagues, while monitoring all the stages of research, the data were coded again. In the review by the participants, the text of interviews, codings and results of the analysis of interviews were provided to the selected interviewees and their changes and suggestions were implemented. To determine the reliability of the research, after extracting the codes, referring to four professors of Farhangian University of Bandar Abbas, the codes were re-identified and extracted under their supervision. By comparing these two stages and based on the degree of agreement between the two stages of coding and the reliability coefficient was calculated and determined to be 0.78.

### **3. Findings**

The main purpose of research is to provide answers to these questions, how do supervisors and student-teachers understand and interpret the current situation and the changes & developments of the teacher training internship program, what are the concepts, topics and ideas for them in the process of making sense of these changes; and finally, what is the basic concept resulting from these interpretations. The answers to these questions led to the presentation of a semantic model - which is the result of data analysis -. Semantic model is the output of data analysis that was done by the present researchers through grounded theory approach. The sum of these factors creates a picture and a general idea of the situation of the subject under study (internship program), which is called "semantic model". In the following sections, the components of this model are explained separately:

#### *Coding & conceptualization*

After recording and implementing the interviews, the data were analyzed according to the method suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), which includes coding (Open, Axial and Selective). The findings indicate that 59 primary concepts were extracted in the open coding stage, seven major categories were extracted in the core coding stage, and one core category was extracted in the selective coding stage. In the next section, six major categories are explained in order with respect to 59 primary concepts to explain how the primary concept was formed:

Table 2: Results of three stages of open, axial and selective coding

concepts	Categories	Core category
1. Student-teachers' lack of desire and interest in internship program 2. Inability of student-teachers to communicate effectively with school management and guidance teachers 3. Weak participation and cooperation of school administrators and teachers 4. Lack of sufficient information and knowledge of school teachers about the internship program and student-teacher guidance methods 5. Teachers' negative attitude towards students' presence in class and not giving students freedom of action 6. Excessive theorizing in process of implementing internship program 7. Lack of familiarity between guidance teacher and student with narrative research, action research and lesson research 8. Lack of detailed instructions regarding the duties of supervisors, guidance teachers and school administrators 9. Implementation of the internship program based on personal taste and preferences of supervisors, supervisors and student-teachers. 10. Teachers not taking student-teachers seriously in the classroom 11. Formal and spiritual implementation of the stages of the internship program, such as the preparation of lesson plans by the student 12. The impact of the organizational climate governing schools and different styles of school leadership 13. Allocation of little time for the internship program considering the length of the four-year teacher training period 14. A large number of students in Kala Saha 15. Non-cooperation of education departments and schools 16. Determining dream goals and guidelines for the internship program	Causal conditions 1. Educational challenges 2. Organizational challenges	Continuation of incomplete implementation



<p>17. Little supervision and control of the officials of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of the internship program</p> <p>18. Lack of meetings between mentors and mentor teachers in the student-teacher evaluation process</p> <p>19. The goals of the internship program do not match with the centralized structure governing the country's education system</p> <p>20. Weak spirit and teamwork culture between teachers and students</p> <p>21. Implementation and evaluation of the internship program by its various executors</p> <p>22. Lack of familiarity and use of guidance teachers with new teaching methods</p> <p>23. Unfamiliarity of teachers and supervisors with observation and reporting techniques</p> <p>24. Unfamiliarity of supervisors with the culture and organizational environment of schools</p> <p>25. The difficulty of realizing and evaluating the goals of the internship program</p> <p>26. Failure to train school teachers about the internship program</p> <p>27. Student-teachers need a lot of time to prepare and organize reports for supervisors</p> <p>28. Lack of mastery and skill of student-teachers to prepare narrative research, action research and lesson research reports.</p> <p>29. Lack of coordination between the teacher, student and supervisor regarding the implementation of the internship program</p> <p>30. Student-teacher evaluation by the supervisor instead of the supervisor</p> <p>31. Student-teacher attendance in classes and different levels of education without specific planning and plan</p> <p>32. Evaluating the intern's reports instead of evaluating his actual performance in the classroom</p> <p>33. Low number of internship days considering the length of the four-year</p>		
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teacher training period 34. Bureaucracy and many administrative regulations hinder the effective implementation of the internship program		
1. Small fees for tutors 2. Lack of budget for the internship program at Farhangian University 3. Lack of budget for student-teacher transportation to school 4. Lack of suitable educational and organizational infrastructure for internships in schools 5. Failure to allocate funds and financial resources by the Ministry of Education for the implementation of the internship program in schools 6. The lack of attention of Farhangian University administrators and the Ministry of Education on the strict implementation of the internship program	Contextual conditions 1. Financial barriers	
1. Directors of the Ministry of Education 2. Senior managers of the university 3. Master guides 4. School principals 5. Teachers 6. Parents 7. Students	Intervening conditions 1. Human obstacles	
1. Holding seminars 2. Publication of new educational resources 3. Holding workshops	phenomenon 1. Entry of competitors	
1. Analyzing experiences to improve the current situation 2. Despair and despair regarding the improvement of the existing situation 3. Taking advantage of individual initiatives and creativity	strategies	
1. The distance between the intended program and its implementation 2. Repetition of ambiguous and ineffective structure 3. Weakness in the leadership of the internship program 4. Lack of unanimity in evaluating the internship program 5. Ignoring the real problems of students and the school	consequences	

6. Lack of strong professional motivation to learn before officially entering the teaching profession		
Number of concepts and categories: 59	7	1

*Causal conditions:* Analyzing the data obtained from the interview determined 34 primary concepts related to causal conditions. After examining the content of these concepts, they were placed in two general categories of educational and organizational challenges. Due to the large number of these concepts, some of these concepts are briefly explained with the help of the interviewees' words to familiarize the readers:

One of the common concepts among the participants is the lack of interest of student-teachers to actively participate in courses and internship programs. In this regard, one of the mentors says:

"Basically, student- teachers do not show interest in participating in internship programs, for which several reasons can be mentioned. However, my experience shows that most students are used to taking theory courses and reading one or two books and do not like to waste their time spend between the teacher training campus and the school" (interviewee no. 3).

In this regard, one of the student-teachers says:

"During internship 1, I had a lot of enthusiasm to attend class and school and see and talk to pupils, but I was so annoyed in many ways that I hated the internship" (Interviewee no. 21).

The second derived concept may be an explanation for the lack of motivation. The inability of student-teachers to communicate effectively with school management and guidance- teachers provides an opportunity to reduce the motivation of student-teachers. One of the student-teachers shares his experience with us in this regard:

"What we read in the university for more than three years is mainly theoretical, which does not correspond to the current realities in the school. As a very young student-teacher, I was very anxious when I entered the teacher's office in the school for the first time. Also, I could not easily establish a relationship with some teachers. The guidance teachers should come to the school step by step" (Interviewee no. 12).

This critical situation is aggravated when we find out that school administrators and teachers also do not have enough information and knowledge about Farhangian University's internship program and student-teacher guidance methods:

"Firstly, some school principals have a negative view of student-teachers and consider their presence in the classroom and the school to disrupt the continuity of current activities. Secondly, some teachers also have minimal cooperation with us because they think we are taking up class time, while they have to teach the book quickly and according to the schedule (Interviewee no. 17).

In addition to the educational challenge, many organizational challenges also prevent increasing the efficiency and quality of internship programs. In this regard, it can be pointed out that the goals of the internship program do not match with the centralized structure that governs Iran's educational system. One of the mentors says:

Every week, school principals and teachers deal with a number of student-teachers who want to take part of the class time, while the official school schedule does not provide time and facilities for this issue, and teachers face a lack of time and they are in a hurry to finish the book as soon as possible" (Interviewee no. 5).

Also, another organizational challenge is the little supervision and control of the officials of the Ministry of Education over the implementation of the internship program. While student-teachers are definitely employed by the Ministry of Education after the four-year teacher education period, this ministry has no approved plans and programs to monitor the quality of internships and increase the professional skills of novice teachers. One of the student-teachers says:

"The officials and managers of the Ministry of Education have no sense of responsibility regarding the quantity and quality of teacher training courses and have left everything to Farhangian University. For this reason, there is no logical relationship between school managers and teachers and student -teachers. In fact, those involved Ministry of Education never pays attention to the extent to which a novice teacher has achieved professional skills" (Participant no. 19).

*Contextual conditions:* Contextual conditions refer to the effect of all factors that sometimes occur under the influence of the role of social systems and it is not possible to eliminate their effects in the short term. In this research, these conditions include financial challenges. For example, one of the challenges is the lack of budget for the internship program at Farhangian University. In this regard, one of the instructors says:

"The Ministry of Education and Farhangian University have not considered additional funds for holding internship programs. As a teacher guide, I have to spend hours visiting schools and observing the behavior and performance of student-teachers, while there are no financial facilities for me "(interviewee no. 4)

At the same time, students-teachers are also facing the crisis of lack of funds for the cost of commuting to school. One of the students says:

"The distance between the teacher training campus and the school is long. I have to walk this route early in the morning without eating breakfast and in a hurry. There is nothing else to eat in the school except tea. I either have to buy lunch from the restaurant outside the school or I will be at school until evening hungry" (Interviewee no. 14).

*Intervening conditions:* Intervening conditions refer to the influence and role of people who, in a natural process, should accelerate internship programs. In this research and through the speech of the interviewees, at least seven groups can be mentioned. As already said, for example, school teachers sometimes do not cooperate much with the intern teacher. One of the students says:

"The guidance teacher is one of the most effective people in internship programs, but each of them refuses to cooperate seriously with us for various reasons. For example, when I am in class, the teacher only asks questions of the children and takes care of their homework. I have never seen her teaching; it seems that she is afraid of teaching in my presence" (Interviewee no. 4).

Also, there is not much communication between the supervisor and principal and teachers of the school. For example, while some tutors are reluctant to attend schools, students act as mediators between them and teachers. One of the students says:

"Whenever I tell the guidance teacher, when are you coming to school? He says that you should be in touch with the class teacher for now. On the other hand, the teacher always asks me why the university teacher does not come to school (Participant no. 10).

*Phenomenon:* The meaning of phenomenon is emergence of an alternative state to solve the shortcomings of the existing situation. While the implementation of internship programs faces

various challenges, some supervisors and also student-teachers use alternative methods to increase their professional skills, such as participating in scientific conferences and workshops and using scientific resources (such as books and articles).

*Strategy:* Formulation of strategies can be considered based on the interviewees' understanding and interpretation of the forecast of the current situation of the internship program and rational-emotional reactions to it. Based on this, in contrast to the current situation, the strategies adopted by supervisors and student-teachers can be specified as follows:

- Analyzing experiences to improve current situation: Through this strategy, supervisors and student-teachers try to improve the current situation despite many challenges and remove obstacles by increasing collective colleagues.
- Despair and despair regarding the improvement of current situation: Adopting this strategy shows the frustration of some supervisors and novice teachers in improving the current situation and accepting the failure of internship programs.
- Taking advantage of individual initiatives and creativity: Some supervisors and student-teachers have tried instead of correcting the current situation of the internship program by using personal creativity, such as establishing a stronger relationship with teachers and students, recording professional memories and participate in joint meetings with other students and exchange experiences to increase their professional richness.

*Consequences:* refer to short-term, medium and long term decisions that supervisors and novice teachers take to deal with the three causal, contextual and intervening conditions in order to maintain their professional survival. These consequences include:

- Creating a gap between intended program and the implemented program
- Repetition of the vague and inefficient structure of internship programs
- Weakness in the implementation and leadership of the internship program
- Lack of unanimity in the evaluation of the internship program
- Ignoring the real problems of students and the school
- Lack of strong professional motivation to learn before officially entering the teaching profession

According to the seven categories, a meaningful model can be presented according to analysis of the data and words of the participants (Figure 1).

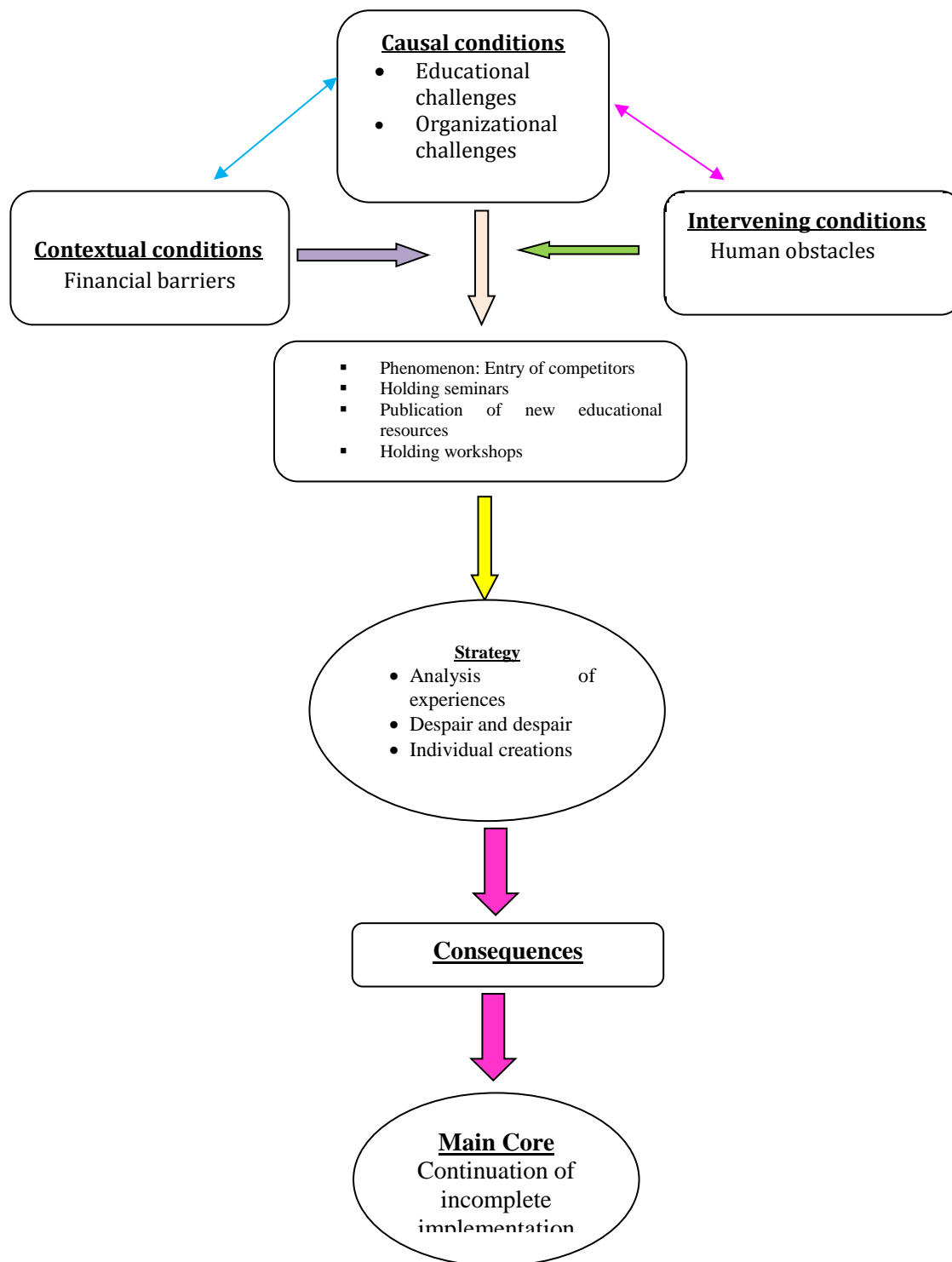


Figure 1: Semantic model based on the evaluation of implementation of internship program in teacher education system of Iran

The semantic reconstruction of the interrelationships of seven categories for evaluation of the internship program indicated the formation of a main or core concept under the title "Continuity of incomplete implementation". The continuation of the incomplete implementation shows the emotional and mental states governing participants in terms of drawing the future perspective of the internship program in the teacher education system of Iran. This concept indicates that the majority of these people do not have much faith in a sure and clear perspective for change or fundamental reforms in internship programs and they see themselves facing a situation based on the continuation of incomplete implementation of this program. Therefore, it is possible to propose with high certainty the obtained core category, that is, "Continuity of incomplete implementation" as a general category that covers sub-categories and their subset concepts to a large extent .

#### **4. Conclusion**

The teacher education system in many countries of the world is facing many challenges and problems. Iran's teacher education system with more than a century history is not exempt from this issue. The purpose of research was to present a semantic model based on the analysis and interpretation of the content of interviews with supervisors and student-teachers. The first finding showed that the internship program is influenced by three groups of causal, contextual and intervening challenges. Meanwhile, causal challenges - in two main groups, educational obstacles and organizational obstacles - have a negative effect on the implementation of internship programs more than contextual and intervening challenges. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ahmadi, Maleki, Mehramohmadi & ImamJuma (2018); Gashmardi (2021); Hajazi (2017) and Karamati & Ahmadabadi (2016) who emphasized the negative role and function of educational and organizational challenges. Also, this finding indicates that it is possible to solve many challenges of the implementation of internship program by adopting corrective measures in Farehgian University and schools.

The second finding reveals that not paying attention to the financial and material facilities causes the quality of internship program to deteriorate. The findings of previous researches have also confirmed this point (Safarnavadeh et al. (2018), Hejazi (2017); Zare Sefat (2016); Almasi et al. (2016); Karamati & Ahmadabadi (2016) and Tatari, Tajik & Tatari (2015). Another finding - which has received less attention in previous researches - is the strategies adopted by supervisors and intern teachers to deal with the challenges of implementing the internship program. It is obvious that the strategy of analyzing individual experiences and creativity - as a natural reaction - has been



visible in many teacher education systems (Henriksen, & Mishra, 2015; Stoykov, 2021), while the method and effectiveness of resorting to the passive strategy of "despair" requires more research. Another finding of the research is to reveal the unfortunate consequences that have been created due to the negative effect of causal, contextual and intervening conditions on the internship program. The findings of the research in other developing countries also indicated that they – same as Iran - have negative consequences such as creating a gap between intended program and implemented program, weakness in the implementation and leadership of the internship program, lack of unanimity in evaluation of internship program and lack of strong professional motivation for student-teacher learning (Tindowen, Bangi, & Parallag Jr, 2019; Scaico, & Costa, 2014; Bunyamin et al, 2021; Dewi, & Kartowagiran, 2018; Hajazi & Bakhtiari, 2021). These findings shows that currently teacher training internship programs in Iran are implemented incompletely and this situation can be considered the main feature of the internship program. It can also be concluded that improving the professional skills of young teachers requires educational and organizational reforms on the one hand and the allocation of dedicated financial resources on the other hand.

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