

EFL Teachers' Background Knowledge is the Key to Learners' Needs

Salwa Al Darwish¹

¹ Public Authority for Applied Education & Training, College of Basic Education, Kuwait

Correspondence: Salwa Al Darwish, Public Authority for Applied Education & Training, College of Basic Education, Al Shamiya, Block 9, Street 93, Kuwait. Tel: 965-9901-3946. E-mail: salwaaldarwish@hotmail.com

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining an unorthodox approach in which teacher trainees observe experienced teachers to benefit from their professional experience instead of the more common practice in which teacher trainees are evaluated through self-reflection and peer review. The target population was 111 teachers randomly selected by 20 teacher trainees teaching English in 20 schools within 6 school districts in Kuwait. A mixed method of questionnaire and observation by the teacher trainees was used for data collection. The results showed a discrepancy between the questionnaire responses and personal observation. The questionnaire responses indicated that the teachers had significant confidence, high competency, and excellent performance. However, classroom observation revealed that EFL teachers had to plan their classes with constraints of limited teaching hours and resources and mixed levels of proficiency and learning environment. Thus, Kuwaiti EFL teachers have the ability, proficiency, and confidence to teach EFL, but lack the required freedom from the educational authorities to implement their methods.

Keywords: EFL teachers, instruction technique, teacher trainees, questionnaire, Kuwait

1. Introduction

1.1 Study Background

Traditionally, language teaching has been described in terms of what teachers do: that is, in terms of the actions and behaviors of teachers in the classroom and the effects of these on learners (Rea & Mercuri, 2006). Richards and Lockhart (2007) as well as Nunan (1999, 2005) mentioned that regardless of the class a teacher teaches, he or she is typically confronted with different kinds of tasks. For example, these tasks include observing students' interactions, developing materials for the topic of the day, discussing reading materials, brainstorming for certain topics to write, problem solving, creating certain games to stimulate and assist students' understandings, etc. In trying to understand how teachers deal with these tasks of teaching, it is necessary to examine the beliefs and thinking processes that underlie teachers' classroom actions through giving her/his lessons (Krashen, 1998). Even though self-observation of the teachers would be the first step in consciously understanding one's weaknesses, and followed by an action plan to address those weaknesses (Richards & Renandaya, 2008), with this study self observation was not carried out by teacher trainees to observe and evaluate themselves because many teachers never reflect on why they teach as they do. On the one hand, Richards also added that self-observation gives the younger teachers who are in the first stage of their careers a far greater insight into their own teaching habits by emphasizing the effective ways of improving and understanding their own teaching; on the other hand, self observation is an unfamiliar process that might create conflict in their personal and teaching values. However, by observing experienced teachers, teacher trainees know their current status with regard to teaching, and this helps them decide what they need to do to reach their goals. In addition, Pachier and Field (2001) expressed their concern that in order to be an effective foreign language teacher, the individual needs a commitment to keep up with the recent developments in the field and a willingness to engage in continuous professional development. Therefore, observing experienced teachers would have more effect on newly graduate teachers than by any other means.

1.2 Research Motivation

This study was motivated by the desire to provide useful information about the strategies of instructions carried out by the English language teachers inside the classroom in general and the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Kuwaiti elementary school context specifically. Kuwaiti English education can be

categorized as a true foreign language learning context rather than as an English as a Second Language (ESL) situation. That is, outside the classroom, English is rarely used, and the classroom instruction is most likely the only input for the target language learning. Although the learners have 12 years of foreign language education starting from elementary stage till the end of high school, these learners receive limited target language input and have limited language learning time. Because of the large gap between what students are learning with regard to EFL and not ESL within the public schools in Kuwait, students show poor academic achievement at the university level especially when the medium of instruction and all the text books are in English in certain colleges such as the School of Engineer, Medical School, and the College of Art and Science (2011 English Department Statistics, at CBE). So, this level of academic achievement stems not from lack of intelligence but from the manner of exposure to the target language English. As a preliminary step toward improving Kuwaiti English education, the present study aims at exploring and describing the actual scenario in the English classrooms in Kuwait from the teacher trainees' perspectives, because these young female teacher trainees are prospective future teachers and are in the first stage of their careers. They will be more open to certain professional critique, especially if this critique comes from experienced teachers who have been teaching for many years in this field. Furthermore, teachers often work in isolation and do not always have opportunities to benefit from the collective expertise of their colleagues. One way to avoid this is to build in opportunities for collaborative planning, for example, when teachers work together in pairs or groups on course planning, material development, and lesson planning. So, it is best to encourage teacher trainees to report their positive teaching experiences by examining how experienced teachers conduct their lesson inside the classroom. In addition, these teacher trainees are more ready to take risks by implementing new ideas gained from observation and practice, in addition to those they learn theoretically. Therefore, as explained by Koksal (2011), letting these young teacher trainees observe, learn, and gain guidance from experienced teachers would be more effective and acceptable than guidance from any other individual as well as self observation.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What teaching techniques do teachers try to implement in their classroom?
- 2) To what extent is the teacher's performance inside the classroom similar to her response in the questionnaire?
- 3) What teaching resources do teachers make use of? and why?

With regard to the above research questions, it could be said that it is essential for the teacher trainees who are in the first stage of their careers to show initial commitment and enthusiasm (Day, 1999). Koksal (2011), in his article on English Language Teachers working in elementary schools in Turkey, explained that their main goal was to improve the performance of teachers in Turkish schools, so they came up with training programs for young teachers, and renewed and shared the knowledge of experienced teachers. Therefore, it would be more effective if these teacher trainees attentively watch their colleagues or experienced teachers so that they can get help and guidance and identify their areas of strength and weakness from these experienced teachers. If teachers are expected to teach well and develop their teaching skills and knowledge over time, they need ongoing support. This may take a number of forms. New teachers need a careful orientation to teaching assignments in order to clarify the goals of the program, teaching approaches, resources, problems to anticipate, and their solutions. So, when teacher trainees connect with experienced teachers for mentoring and support as needed during their practicum period, they are encouraged to set higher goals and expend more personal effort, which in the end improves their self-confidence.

1.4 Literature Review

For a long time in foreign/second language education, language has been viewed as an 'object' which is to be analyzed and broken down into its smallest components (Rea & Mercuri, 2006). According to Dornyei (2007), the teacher does not consider the students empty vessels that need to be filled with words of wisdom coming entirely from the teacher and the course book. Therefore, the teacher's role has been to help students learn what is in the textbook that is mostly grammar driven, and the study of foreign /second language teaching has been largely decontextualized and unrelated to students' real life (Tedick & Walker, 1995). On the one hand, Phillips explained that both vocabulary and grammar need to be taught in context, and should be used by students in class (2010). On the other hand, Reyes and Vallone (2008) added that gaining knowledge of what is not dependent on the individual, but on social interaction and culturally situated contexts can motivate students to use the target language and shape their communication competence. Morris (1995) observed that schools develop a culture, ethos, or environment that might be favorable or unfavorable to change and innovations. A

school with a relatively open climate, where the teachers collaborate with each other and where the principal and senior teachers are supportive of younger teachers, is more likely to try and implement change. In contrast, a school where the principle focuses on administrative matters, the teachers work in isolation or in narrow subject-based groups, and where there is no mechanism to discuss and try to solve problems is less likely to change. For example, if a school encourages innovation and successful implementation of foreign language teaching, the teachers might introduce material from English-speaking cultures. This in turn is interesting to the students because the lives of children in foreign places give a more human face to the language they are learning. Based on Al Dabbous and Howells experience (1994) with English teaching in Kuwait, EFL exams mainly concern structure in the target language that students fear and intensely dislike. They observed that the only way to acquire such knowledge is by extensive reading and listening. In language teaching history, the acquisition of linguistic structures or vocabulary has been emphasized for a long time, and it has been acknowledged that structures and vocabulary is important (Richards & Renandya, 2008). However, many researchers (e.g., Widdowson, 1995; Freeman, 1998) insisted that preparation for communication will be inadequate if only these are taught. That is, they argued that students might know the rules of language usage, but would be unable to use the language (Gebhard, 2005). Traditionally, language teaching has been explored in terms of what teachers do in the classroom, that is, the manner in which they carry out these tasks (Littlewood, 1992). It is, however, assumed that “what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe in, and that teacher knowledge and ‘teacher thinking’ provide the underlying framework or schema which guides the teacher’s classroom actions” (Richards & Lockhart, 2000). It is, therefore, required to examine the thinking processes which underlie teachers’ classroom actions (Richards & Lockhart, 2007).

Through his investigation of 105 EFL teachers’ practices about their language teaching, Johnson (1982) concluded that “teachers teach in accordance with their theoretical beliefs and that differences in theoretical beliefs may result in differences in the nature of literacy instruction” (pp 101). Reyes and Vallone (2008) believe that a teacher is effective only if her students have access to a curriculum that closely mirrors their culture. Goldfus (2011) emphasized that foreign language teachers must direct the attention of the foreign language educators toward the acquisition of the literacy within the structure and components of not only the learner’s native language but also the target language. Also, Richards and Lockhart (2007) argued that “any language teaching program reflects both the culture of the institution as well as collective decisions and beliefs of individual teachers.... Within a program or school, teachers’ views on such things as lesson planning, use of objectives, and assessment may lead to quite different classroom practices” (pp 38). Thompson (1992) noticed that “teachers interact with their environment, some experience no conflict between their beliefs and their practice, and some learn to live with unresolved conflicts” (pp 138). However, Edge (cited in Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001) states that working in isolation holds teachers back.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants and the Settings

This study focused on 111 female Kuwaiti EFL teachers who currently teach English as a foreign language in 20 elementary public schools located in the 6 school districts in the State of Kuwait. These schools in Kuwait are segregated into all-girl and all-boy schools. Only female teachers teach both genders in these schools because the Ministry of Education (MOE) in the State of Kuwait stipulates this gender segregation. Like all Kuwaiti public schools, these buildings are enclosed within a high, fortified stone and brick wall and have an unarmed guard at the single entrance, to protect the children from intruders or other harm. Even children who are late to school are stopped by the guard, and must receive approval from the principal before being allowed to enter. The standard elementary school day schedule throughout Kuwait runs from 7:30 a.m. to 1:20 p.m., after which the children go home to lunch (children may bring snacks to eat during breaks). The children have seven 40-minute class periods over the course of the school day, broken by a 20-minute recess period after the second class, and by a 15-minute prayer period break after the fourth class. However, not all academic subjects receive the same amount of time. Two of the daily 40-minute periods are devoted to Arabic reading and writing, and two more 40-minute periods each day are given to mathematics. Only one 40-minute period a day is spent on English. The remaining two daily periods are divided among several subjects: science (which is studied for three periods a week), Islamic religious studies (also studied for three periods each week), social science, physical education, music, and art. All elementary public schools have between 10-15 teachers for different subjects and are trained to teach from 1-5 grades. For example, in each school selected for this study, there were 10-13 English language teachers who randomly teach students from grades 1-5 every year, based on the school timetable and how the subjects are distributed throughout the day. That is, one English teacher teaches first, second, and fifth grade for a whole school year, whereas another one teaches third and fourth grade, and so on. Furthermore, children stay in a single

classroom throughout the day (except for recess and prayers). All teachers use the curriculum prescribed in the textbooks which are given to all teachers and students around the country by the MOE. Also, according to the regulations of the MOE, all mainstream teachers have unexpected visits from the ministry supervisors and school principals for evaluation. Because the MOE and the College of Basic Education (CBE), a college that trains and graduates teachers mainly for primary levels, work closely together, the teacher trainees are assigned different schools for their practicum course. Furthermore, the 20 trainees enrolled in the practicum course had already completed a micro-teaching course, which is a core course the trainees have to pass before they graduate with a degree in teaching English as a foreign language from the CBE. As soon as the practicum course starts with every semester in every school year, the CBE contacts the MOE to inform the ministry about the number of students who will be enrolled in the practicum course. In return, the MOE will assign the schools where the practicum will be conducted. Then, the teacher trainees contact the assigned schools for their practicum. As soon as the teacher trainees arrive to these assigned schools, each of them has 2 weeks to observe mainstream teachers teach before she takes over one of the mainstream teachers' classrooms. The teacher trainee is just a non-participating observer and sits at the back of the classroom and observes the class without interfering in it.

Before the beginning of the practicum course, I approached the school district authorities to get permission and official letters for the principals to guarantee access to the schools for the research. Furthermore, because the teacher trainees were observing the experienced teachers for their practicum, I approached the 10-13 experienced teachers in each school one week before the practicum started. I explained the scope of the study and got approval from at least 2-4 experienced teachers in each school. Then, I approached the principals of these 20 schools and asked them to assign these experienced teachers who had agreed to fill out the questionnaire first and then the observation for the practicum course.

2.2 The Instrument

A non-participant observation and a questionnaire were used for this study. The questionnaire was handed to the experienced teachers to be filled out by them before their class began. The same teacher trainee then observed the experienced classroom teachers and wrote her comments in her journal. Each trainee had a chance to observe 4-6 teachers per week in the assigned school (an average of 1 teacher per day) and report her observations to the author at the end of the day. The observation was carried out in the classrooms for the entire period of the class, i.e., 40 minutes. Based on the teacher trainees' journal, the author analyzed what was written and cross checked with other trainees. The researcher's questionnaire was guided by a checklist, developed by Christison and Bassano (1996), and used by the author as a guide for experienced teachers and teacher trainees self evaluation.

2.3 Data Analysis

2.3.1 Questionnaire

To identify the differences between categories (learning environment, individuals, and activities) and the corresponding sub-categories in the teachers' self-assessed performance, the overall score achieved by each teacher in each case was calculated by summing up the values of their responses. For example, a score of 9 in the sub-category 'Relationship to Students' was achieved if a teacher believed she had an excellent performance in all items within this subcategory (answers = 3 in all cases). Next, scores were transformed into a proportion of the maximum possible score achieved; this enabled to compare categories with different numbers of questions. For example, in the sub-category 'Relationship to Students,' the maximum possible score was 9. For a subject with a total score of 7 (two answers 'excellent/3' and one answer 'improvement is needed/1'), the calculated proportion was 7/9 or approximately 0.77. The maximum possible score of individuals who did not respond to all questions or indicated that a question was 'not applicable' was adjusted accordingly. The author also conducted an exploratory analysis to examine potential associations between the scores in each category by using Spearman rank correlations.

2.3.2 Observation

The instrument on which the observation was based included the same items as the questionnaire. To ensure the credibility of the teacher's response to the questionnaire as well as to triangulate and assure the validity of the conclusions, the author requested the teacher trainees to observe the teacher as many times as possible. The reason for using the same items on the questionnaire for the teacher trainees to follow in their observation is to allow for more rigorous comparison and contrast between the teacher's response to the questionnaire and how she teaches her lesson inside the classroom. Based on exploration of Kuwaiti EFL teachers' classroom practices, teacher trainees found that teaching is a very personal activity, and it is not surprising that individual teachers brought to teaching very different beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching. EFL teachers had their classes organized and the instructional events are structured to a large extent on the nature of

the language that students hear and use in the classroom. The analysis classified two sets of characteristics that appeared to distinguish classes that work for language learning from those that do not. The first set relates to the way the classes are structured or are organized for instruction, the second to the way language is used in lessons (Richards, 1997). Class structure as observed by the teacher trainees that EFL lessons worked effectively, usually followed the following procedure:

- 1) A lesson began with a short statement of goals to be covered for the day and followed by a short review of the previous day.
- 2) New materials were presented in small steps with student practice after each step.
- 3) Instructions and explanations were given in a clear and detailed manner.
- 4) A high level of active practice was provided for all students.
- 5) Questions were asked and then checked for student understanding and eliciting of the responses.
- 6) Students were guided during initial practice.
- 7) Systematic feedback and corrections were provided.

Explicit instruction and practice were provided for paired and group work exercises, and students were monitored during these work sessions.

Furthermore, teachers mainly used tape or CD recorder, where data storage devices and computers were not available to them. Authentic materials and learner-centered activities were not used as often. In some classes, the teacher trainees reported that 58.7% of the teachers rated their performance from the questionnaire as excellent and 27.5% as good when it comes to activities and materials; however, when the teacher trainees analyzed the classroom observation, they realized that the teachers had no power to develop and implement new strategies for English teaching. The teachers acknowledged that these problems were fostered by the officials at the education ministry, who discouraged English teachers from exploring or using any materials other than the required textbooks and activity books.

3. Interpretation of Results

Responses were marked according to the following scale: (3) Excellent, (2) Good, (1) Needs improvement, (0) Not applicable. All the data were transferred directly to SPSS for analysis. There are three main topics in the questionnaire, namely learning environment, individuals and activity, under which are various sub-categories. The first category to be reviewed is the learning environment. This category is divided into three sub-categories, namely the relationship to students, classroom, and presentation. In the second sub-category classroom, 2 questions were asked: are class arranged according to the class activity? And are materials and equipment needed for a class set up before the class begins? The third sub-category presentation consisted of seven questions, each of which focused on the teachers' presentation skill and performance. To obtain a general view in the presentation field, the mean was obtained from all the answers provided by the participants in the seven questions. The next category in the questionnaire is related to individuality. This category consists of five subcategories, namely, physical health, self-concepts, aptitude and perception, reinforcement, and development. Each subcategory contains three to five statements, each of which needs to be rated by the participants according to their performance. The final topic in the questionnaire is "the activity" category. This category consists of two sub-categories, namely "interaction" and "language." The first one involves seven statements, which were answered by the participants in light of their teaching context. However, the last five statements in the interaction subcategory are related to what the students are saying (content) rather than error correcting. In addition, teachers rated themselves high on how these activities are geared toward the outside world.

Figure 1 shows that in all three categories, learning environment (relationship to students, classroom, presentation), individuals (physical health, self concepts, aptitude & perception, reinforcement, development), and activity (interaction, language), most EFL teachers rated their teaching performance positively, as indicated by the fact that most answers were within the 'Excellent' and 'Good' categories. Within learning environment, performance was especially high for question Q7, namely, their assessment of their voice volume in class (see Tables 1, 2, and 3 for the corresponding question codes and their description). The results also show that the area where teachers believe there is more room for improvement is how students are divided into groups and based on certain physical or may be cognitive features. However, teachers thought that their writing and speaking clearly was not applicable due to the fact that taped materials were mainly used inside the classroom. In addition, within the same category (learning environment), most teachers thought they had an excellent presentation skills, whereas as the teacher trainee observed that the teachers were almost never communicative in the exercises

carried out in the classrooms. There was very little freedom and lack of predictability in what teacher or students did or said. The teachers were in control of the activities, and the students tended to passively parrot the teacher's English words or phrases. The students did not ask questions, and the teachers' recitation and discussion questions were narrow and drill-oriented and did not encourage anything besides parroting. Not only the students, but the teachers were also passive and restrictive in what they did. In the different classes around Kuwait, under teachers with different personalities and ideas, the teacher trainees saw identical classes that resembled closed copies of each other. The same drills were held to give children experience saying the same material, followed by the same games or songs, using the same handouts, wall charts, flashcards, or tape recordings.

After the students practiced a new item for a few times, the teachers often assumed that the students had learned it and accelerated the pace of teaching in order to move to the next item on the agenda. The overriding goal of these teachers seemed to be the completion of the step-by-step, class-by-class plan supplied by the MOE, regardless of whether they thought the students understood or were interested. Keeping pace with the other teachers seemed to be the main priority of all the teachers.

Although the majority of teacher participants have shown confidence in their performance and have rated it as excellent or good, for Questions 10 and 12, namely the target language ability, less than 2% felt that language activities that lead to proficiency level as well as the information gained inside the classroom links the students to the outside world spoke the truth based on the analysis of the data collected during the observation. Almost all the students were not exposed to native-speaker pronunciation during the English class, and many of these teachers modeled several grammatical errors. The class activities observed by the teacher trainees consisted of vocabulary drills, exercises, and games, almost entirely without translation, and the meanings of words were indicated contextually by pictures or gestures. The entire class would chorus the answers first, and later, individual students would be called on. The teacher trainees noticed that some students seemed more proficient and knowledgeable than others, and that classes often ended with some students still not seeming to understand the vocabulary. Students' mistakes were not corrected at once, but were ignored, to avoid their discouragement or humiliation; later, the teacher or another student would model the correct answer.

Figure 2 confirms that self-assessment rating was highly positive and consistent across categories, as indicated by the observation of the graph, that in all cases scores were close to the maximum possible score within each category. However, most of the teachers considered themselves as good within all the subcategories.

The exploratory correlation analyses conducted (Figure 3) indicates a high degree of consistency in the answers to the questionnaire by each teacher. As shown in the figure, with the exception of the association between the scores of 'Relationship to Students' and 'Language' (not significant: NS in the graph), all correlations were significant. The strongest association (darkest square in Figure 3) was between the scores of the categories 'Aptitude & Perception' and 'Reinforcement'. This result indicates that a strong positive correlation between the two variables. However, if we look at the same figure 3, the scores for self-concepts and the interaction and the development and language were very low compared to the other categories. However, based on the classrooms observations, the teachers showed lack of accuracy in terms of implementing the technique, such as active involvement in language use and student-centered activities. Throughout the period of teacher trainees' observation, not only novice teachers but more experienced teachers also followed these lessons based on the teacher's manual provided by the MOE, mostly without any deviation, just like actors following a script. The teachers seemed convinced that they were required to do this by the MOE. Students' competence and understanding often seemed to be irrelevant. Therefore, instruction tended to resemble "parrot learning," in which many students made sounds without knowing why.

The lessons in the manual are also fairly teacher-centered, and became even more so because the teachers did not introduce pair work or small group work, although it is permitted by the manual. A teacher-centered approach is clearly necessary to some degree with novice students. But the manual does not suggest, for instance, that students might ask for the English names of objects they bring to class or for the English names for Arabic words, a communicative activity that would have kept the students interested. Presumably this is because such activities could have involved some translation (or perhaps because the teachers might not always have known the English words).

Table 1. Frequency of responses of EFL teachers to questions related to their learning environment.

	Questions	Answers					
		0	1	2	3	B	Total
Relationship with students	1. I establish good eye contact with my class. I do not talk over their heads, to the blackboard, or to just one individual.						
	2. If I tend to teach predominantly to one area of the classroom, I am aware of this. I make a conscious effort at all times to pay attention to all students equally.						
	3. I divide my students into small groups in an organized and principled manner. I recognize that these groups should differ in size and composition, varying with the objective of the group activity.						
Classroom	4. I arrange the seating in my class to suit the class activity for the day.						
	5. When I need special materials or equipment, I have them set up before the class begins.						
Presentation	6. My handwriting on the blackboard and charts is legible from all locations in the classroom. It is large enough to accommodate students with vision impairments.						
	7. I speak loudly enough to be heard in all parts of the classroom and I enunciate clearly.						
	8. I vary the exercises in class, alternating rapid and slow paced activities to keep up maximum interest level in the class.						
	9. I am prepared to give a variety of explanations, models or descriptions, understanding that one explanation may not be sufficient for all students.						
	10. I help the students form working principles and generalizations.						
	11. I use new skills or concepts long enough so that they are retained and thus future application is possible.						
	12. I plan for “thinking time” for my students so that they can organize their thoughts and plan what they are going to say or do.						

Note: Teachers were asked to thoughtfully consider each statement and rate themselves in the following way: (3) Excellent, (2) Good, (1) Needs improvement and (0) Not applicable. Column denoted as ‘B’ in the table represents the frequency of blank answers. The total represents the sum of valid (non-blank) responses.

Table 2. Frequency of responses of EFL teachers to questions related to 'Individual' (Students) in their classes.

	Questions	0	1	2	3	B	Total
Physical Health	1. I know which students have visual or aural impairments and make them seat as close to my usual teaching position as possible.						
	2. I am aware that a student's attention span varies from day to day depending on mental and physical health and external distractions. I pace my class activities to accommodate the strengths. I don't continue with an activity which may exhaust or bore them.						
	3. I begin my class with a simple activity to wake the students up and get them working together.						
	4. I am sensitive to individual students who have bad days. I don't press a student who is incapable of performing at the usual level.						
	5. I try to challenge students who are at their best.						
	6. If I am having a bad day and feel it might affect my normal teaching style, I let my students know so there is no misunderstanding about my feelings for them.						
Self-Concept	7. I treat my students with the same respect that I expect them to show me.						
	8. I plan "one-centered" activities which give all students an opportunity at some point to feel important and accepted.						
	9. I like to teach and have a good time teaching — on most days.						
Aptitude Perception	10. I am aware that my students learn differently. Some students are visual-receptive, some are motor-receptive, and others are audio-receptive						
	11. My exercises are varied, some are visual, aural, oral and kinesthetic. I provide models, examples, and experiences to maximize learning in each of these areas						
	12. I know basic concepts in the memory process. When applicable, I make use of techniques such as backward buildup and association to aid students in rapid skill acquisition.						
Reinforcement	13. I tell students when they have done well, but I don't let praise become mechanical.						
	14. I finish my class period in a way which will review the new concepts presented during the class period. My students can immediately evaluate their understanding of those concepts.						
	15. My tests are well-planned and produced.						
	16. I make' my system of grading clear to my students so that there are no misunderstandings of expectations.						
Development	17. I keep myself updated on new techniques in the ESL profession by attending conferences and workshops and by reading pertinent professional articles and books.						
	18. I realize that there is no one right way to present any lesson. I try new ideas where and when they seem appropriate.						
	19. I observe other EFL teachers so that I can get other ideas and compare them to my own teaching style. I want to have several ideas for teaching any one concept.						

Note: Teachers were asked to thoughtfully consider each statement and rate themselves in the following way: (3) Excellent, (2) Good, (1) Needs improvement and (0) Not applicable. Column denoted as 'B' represents the frequency of blank answers. The total represents the sum of valid (non-blank) responses.

Table 3. Frequency of responses of EFL teachers to questions related to 'Activities' in classes.

Questions	0	1	2	3	B	Total
Interaction	1. I minimize my role in conducting the activities.					
	2. I organize the activities so that they are suitable for real-world interaction					
	3. The activities maximize student involvement					
	4. The activities promote spontaneity or experimentation on the part of the learner.					
	5. The activities generally transfer attention away from "self" and outward toward a "task".					
	6. The activities are organized to insure a high success rate, leaving enough room for error to make the activity challenging.					
	7. I am not overly concerned with error correction. I concentrate on what my students are saying (content).					
Language	8. The activity is focused.					
	9. The content or the skill presented will be easily transferable for use outside the class.					
	10. The activity is geared to the proficiency level of my class or slightly beyond.					
	11. The content of the activity is not too sophisticated for, my students.					
	12. I make the content of the activity relevant and meaningful to my students' world.					

Note: Teachers were asked to thoughtfully consider each statement and rate themselves in the following way: (3) Excellent, (2) Good, (1) needs Improvement, (0) Not applicable. Column denoted as 'B' represents the frequency of blank answers. The total represents the sum of valid (non-blank) responses.

4. Conclusion

One of our greatest challenges as we prepare teachers for the complexity of foreign language instruction is to continue to believe that we are preparing teachers to make change. Through the micro-teaching and the practicum courses, we stress the disparities between what we might want to see in classrooms and what they are actually experiencing in schools. Teacher trainees often report with delight the opportunity to work alongside a true mentor (classroom teacher), a teacher with a belief that second language instruction is challenging but wonderful. In other words, teacher trainees should take the initiative to work with colleagues for their own development; by this way, they can gain an inside perspective on other teachers' experiences and raise their awareness through reflecting on their own teaching.

Generally speaking, most teachers seem to be confident as the data has shown that all the answers were mainly either excellent or good. Figure 1 summarizes the answers to the research question (1-3). It indicates that the teachers have high level of performance in relation to the items on the questionnaire based on the three main categories: learning environment, individuals, and activity. It is worth considering that a few teachers who participated in this research and chose the "not applicable" answer were mostly those who not only felt it was irrelevant to teach English but also did not properly teach English in their classes.

According to the note-taking during the observations, it is apparent that the teachers do not perform in the same way as stated in the questionnaire. The teachers felt that they had insufficient opportunities in which they could make mistakes without being judged; therefore, it was better for them to follow the syllabus and the teacher's manual. They also experienced difficulty finding opportunities to reflect upon their own performance and to identify and address the real needs of learners.

Peer observation and reflection on own teaching are considered as important by teacher trainees because this helps them in search of learning and adapting to new teaching environment through observing their fellow peers and reflecting on their own teaching once they start this profession. In this study, all teachers rated themselves as

high as possible for the categories assessed on the questionnaire. They gave themselves higher score regardless of the quality of their performance as was observed. Furthermore, teachers needed to feel secure in EFL teaching environment. Consequently, they experienced anxiety and frustration. This frustration became apparent after the administration of the questionnaire. Thus, there should be a technique for comprehensive and objective self observation for teachers. However, because the questionnaire was used as against observation, the teacher did not feel a sense of security in EFL teaching environment. The findings indicate that the participants (teachers) conceptualized practice in concern with their beliefs about English learning, teaching, their teacher role, and unique context factors, but in reality, they were merely following the guidelines of the MOE of Kuwait.

4.1 Study Limitations

One limitation of this study was the presence of the teacher trainee as an observer for the experienced teacher, which was awkward decision to follow. Second, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of English teachers, because this study dealt only with elementary school teachers. Finally, the study focused on Kuwaiti elementary school English teachers working in public elementary schools. Information about teachers in private schools and about foreign teachers were not included in this article.

4.2 Future Direction for the Research

The Ministry of Education should relax its curriculum guidelines so that creative teachers feel free do their best teaching. The official curriculum has not served as a framework of goals, within which the teachers may develop their own teaching styles, but instead has been functioning as a straitjacket, imposing unimaginative, curriculum-centered teaching. Instead of laying out lesson plans for the entire year, the teachers' manual might set learning goals, and then offer a rich array of teaching techniques and materials for teachers to choose among in developing their own lesson plans.

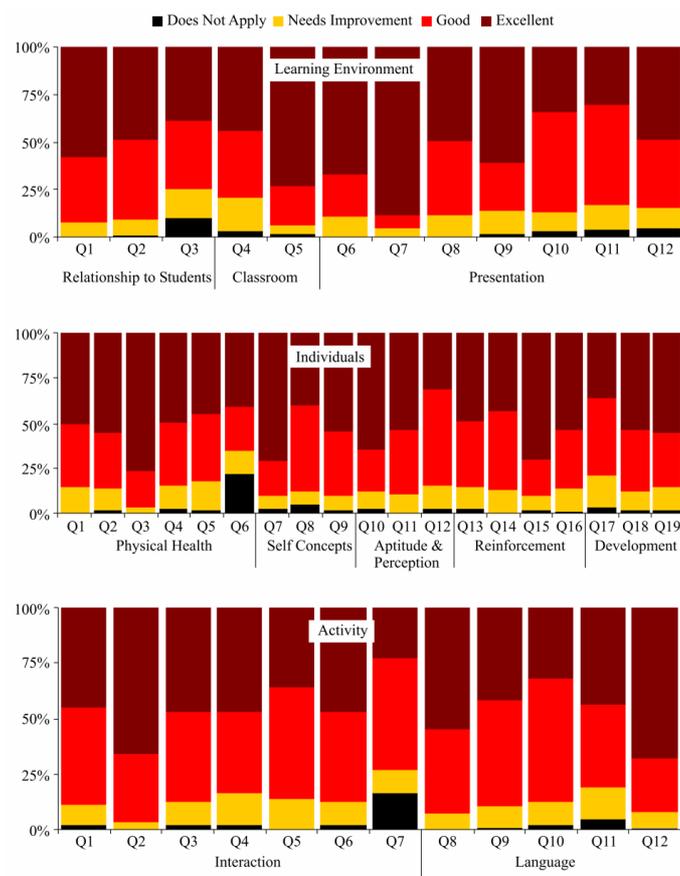


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of teacher responses to each of the questionnaire items in each of the categories assessed (learning environment, individuals, and activities). For a description of questionnaire items (Q1, Q2, and so on), please refer to Tables 1, 2, and 3.

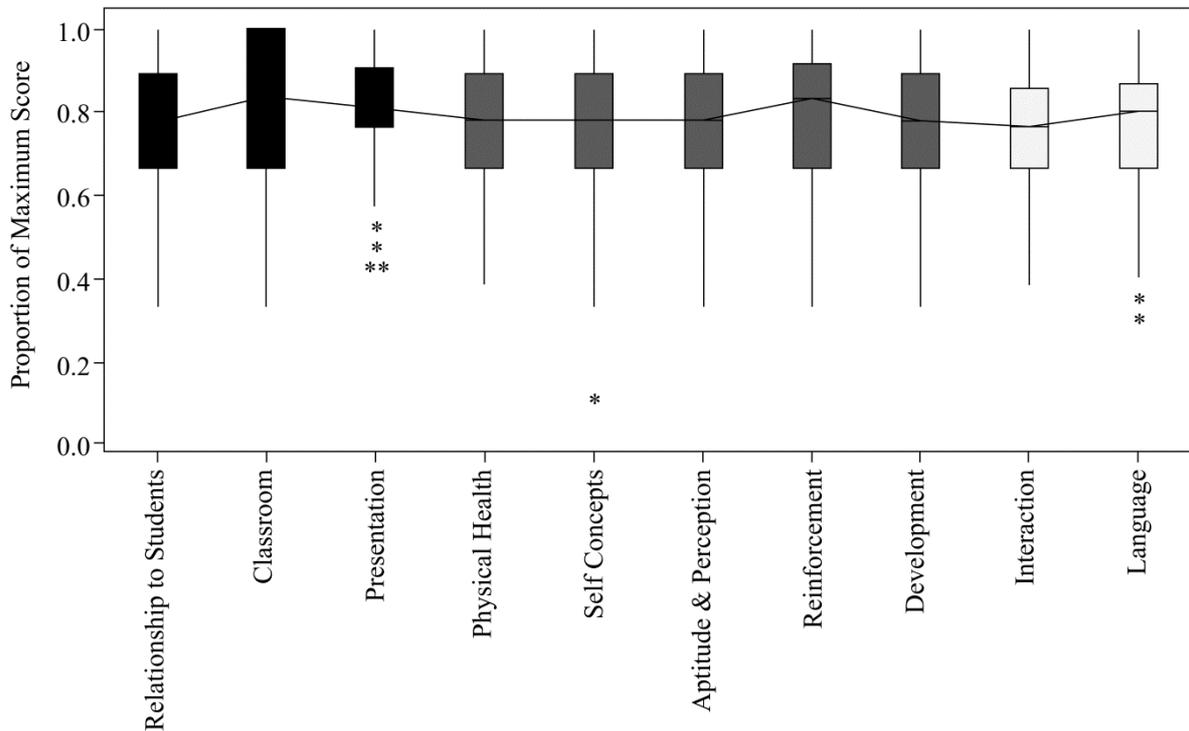


Figure 2. Box plot showing the performance of EFL teachers based on their answers to a self-assessment questionnaire (Table 1). Answers are represented as the proportion of the maximum possible score in each of the subcategories shown. Major categories are differentiated by colors. Black: learning environment; Grey: individuals; White: activities. The line represents median values.

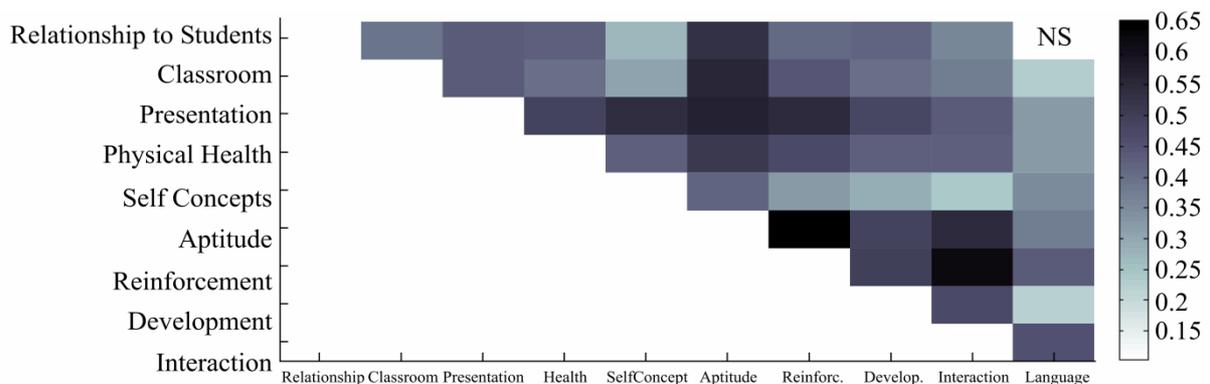


Figure 3. Exploratory correlation analyses between the EFL teacher responses to a self-assessment questionnaire (as based on each teacher's total score in each subcategory). The color map on the right side of the graph represents Spearman rank correlation coefficients, with darker shades representing higher coefficients. With the exception of the association between the scores of 'Relationship to Students' and 'Language' (not significant: NS in the graph), all correlations are significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

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