

AWEJ May, 2013

TESOL Sudan Conference 2012 Proceedings

pp. 3-17

Doing Teacher Education: Implications for the Classroom

Aymen Elsheikh
Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

Abstract

Preparing effective English as foreign language (EFL) teachers is a perennial and hotly debated issue in language teacher education. The debates have focused on the importance of theory and/or practice and were theoretical in nature. This article reports on an empirical study that takes this debate beyond the conventional discussions over theory and practice. The study was conducted in a Sudanese EFL teacher education program with the participation of four student teachers. The findings show that Sudanese EFL student teachers employed knowledge from their formal training in their classroom practices. Additionally, they also drew on knowledge of their contexts and students in order to structure their classes in certain ways which include the use of L1, how they presented the material as well as establishing particular kinds of relationships with their students. The findings suggest that the student teachers would benefit from a teacher education program that would equip them with ways to increase their language proficiency as well as preparing them for meeting the challenges of the practical realities of their future classrooms. This can be achieved through the use of pedagogical tools that allow them to theorize from their own practice as well as their personal and professional experience.

Keywords: Language Teacher Education, Teacher Knowledge, Teacher Identity.

Introduction

There is a world-wide acceptance of the vital role played by mastery of English language skills in the development and participation of countries in the global economy as well as accessing knowledge and information. This realization places a heightened importance on the process of teaching English as well as commanding a high demand on providing and preparing competent and well-qualified English language teachers. Teacher education programs are considered one of the important sites for preparing those teachers. Therefore, if we are to prepare effective teachers, a careful examination of these programs and their curricula become an imperative. In 1998 TESOL Quarterly published its special-topic issue on research and practice in language teacher education which contained a heated discussion over the question of the effective preparation of EFL/ESL teachers. The essence of this debate was centered on the dichotomy between seeing teachers as technicians versus seeing them as knowers—creators of knowledge as opposed to transmitters of this knowledge. That is, while some scholars argue for the importance of theory or disciplinary knowledge in teacher education programs (e.g., Tarone & Allwright, 2001), others stress the potent role of practice or pedagogical knowledge (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Yates & Muchisky, 2001). These debates were, however, theoretical in nature.

In this article, I report on an empirical study that takes this debate beyond the conventional discussions over theory and practice. The article will outline the historical development of language teacher education, with a special reference to Sudan as a case in point. Then, after presenting the findings of a study conducted in a Sudanese teacher education program, I will suggest a course of change to be adopted in the teacher education program and conclude with practical implications for the EFL classroom emanating from the very essence of updating language teacher education programs.

Language Teacher Education Programs: A Historical Development

Three decades ago, language teacher education programs were based on positivist epistemological approaches represented in their cognitive learning theories that conceptualize learning as a psychological process taking place inside the learner's mind, irrespective of the social and physical contexts in which learning takes place (Johnson, 2009; Lenneberg, 1967). Another related theme of the positivistic perspective, which is also known as the scientific method, is the realization that reality exists in the world in isolation of the knower and can be ascertained by way of careful observation and interpretation. A direct implication of this view of knowledge and how to obtain it was the emphasis in teacher education programs and research on ascertaining good and effective ways of teaching. This focus on teaching behaviors or processes was thought to lead to student achievement, success, and learning.

Knowledge transmission approaches were famous because teacher educators and researchers were thought to be the experts who could impart theories of learning and teaching. This knowledge is often transmitted through reading about language acquisition theories, lectures, and workshops and other professional development activities that claim to provide quick fixes to complex pedagogical issues. Teachers' job was then to internalize and apply this knowledge into their classrooms. A prime example for the understanding that teachers need *declarative knowledge* (knowledge about the language) is the work of Robert Lado (1957) and

Charles Fries (1945). The publication of their works influenced how teachers are educated immensely, with a great focus on linguistic analysis, language acquisition and error correction.

The genesis of refuting the transmission model, or what Habermas (1971) calls technical rationality, is in general teacher education. Scholars, such as Elbaz (1981), Shon (1983), Connelly and Clandinin (1985, 1988), and Shulman, (1986), have contributed to an understanding that knowledge in and of itself is predicated in the very contexts in which teachers work. New concepts of teachers' knowledge have then emerged drawing from the realization that knowledge is practical, context-specific, personal, process-oriented, and instantiated in and through reflection. L2 teacher education programs followed in the footprints of general teacher education. The field has then moved from basing L2 teacher education programs on epistemological or external knowledge, such as language acquisition theories, applied linguistics, literature, and teaching methodology to seeing the classrooms as places not only for the application of knowledge but also for knowledge generation and co-construction.

The socio-cultural turn in education in general and teacher-learning in particular gave rise not only to teacher knowledge but also to the reshaping of teaching identities which emanate from interactions in the classroom and other teaching contexts. In L2 teacher education, identity work is particularly important because of the intricate relationship between language and identity (Hall, 1997). Teacher identity relates to how teachers see themselves and this identity has been characterized as multiple, negotiated, a site of struggle, relational, and constructed in and through discourse (Gee, 2000-2001; Norton, 2000; Weedon, 1997). For example, given the new conceptualizations of teacher-learning, teacher identity is not only realized through acquiring language theories and how to apply them in the classroom but also by "the acquisition of new modes of discourse and new roles in the classroom" (Richards, 2009, p. 9). Teacher identity has thus emerged as an important dimension of teacher education since it concerns the understanding of what it means to be a teacher.

As one can see, L2 teacher education has come a long way. Several programs in the world have incorporated the new trends emanating from recent research and (re)conceptualizations of teacher-learning. Courses such as reflective teaching, action research, classroom discourse, narrative inquiry, and the like have become the building blocks of effective L2 teacher education around the globe. In other contexts, however, such as Sudan, these programs are still lagging behind and continue to follow and reproduce traditional modes of teacher education.

Language Teacher Education Programs in Sudan

After 1993, the basic (Grades 1-8) as well as secondary (Grades 9-12) level teachers are required to complete a four-year bachelor of education degree in order to be qualified to teach in those levels. Since English as a subject starts in the basic level (Grade 3) and continues until the final year of secondary school, the teacher qualification process includes both kinds of EFL teachers (basic and secondary). EFL teacher education programs are generally housed in the colleges of education of different universities around the country. In the section below, I describe in detail one of these teacher education programs because, based on my observation and personal experience, it is similar in nature to other programs in the country.

I will first start by outlining the program prior to the educational reforms of the 1990s. The EFL education program under investigation is housed in the college of education of a large university in Sudan. After the students finish their first semester of general studies, the second semester is devoted to improving their language skills and proficiency (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In the second year, they take such courses as phonetics, introduction to literature, introduction to linguistics, and reading comprehension, in addition their minor and other elective courses (e.g., Arabic language, educational philosophy, general education teaching methodology), which are taught in English. In the third year, they study drama, the novel, a semi socio-linguistics course (Style and Usage), ELT methodology, American literature, and Grammar. During the fourth year, they are introduced the higher level courses related to linguistics, literature, and issues in ELT. Finally, during the first semester of the 5th year, they conduct their supervised student teaching practice.

Those who maintain a GPA equivalent to a B or higher go on to the second semester of the 5th year to take more advanced courses in linguistics, literature, and translation. Upon completion of the required courses (major, minor, and electives), students are awarded a Bachelor's honor degree if they successfully complete the second semester of the 5th year (B.A. with Distinction, B.A. with First Class, or B.A. with Second Class). Those who do not continue past the student teaching practice, graduate with a regular B.A. degree. Both groups of students become certified to teach English at the high school level after they graduate. However, the former group (who finishes the 5th year) has a better chance of becoming Teacher Assistants (TA's) and hence pursuing graduate study. The program offers a two year Master's degree that basically expands upon the knowledge gained throughout the five years of undergraduate study. In the Master's program, however, the students are introduced to courses of research methodologies that enable them to write their Master's thesis.

Following the reforms of the 1990s onward, the EFL program remained housed in the English department of the college of education. The philosophy of the department is to train future teachers of English versed in English literature (British, American, African), Linguistics (phonetics, phonology, syntax, etc), and English language teaching (ELT methodology). Further, judging by the curriculum and my recent visit to Sudan, during which I talked to a former Department chair, some of the teacher educators, and the students, the program still focuses more on linguistics and literature than it does on pedagogical issues related to EFL. The only courses that are geared toward EFL teaching remain unchanged: ELT methodology in the third year and ELT trends in the fourth year. The descriptions of these two courses emphasize the introduction of ELT methodology to help the student teachers to move from theory to practice.

In the light of the changes that took place after the Arabicization process of the 1990, the structure of the English department has not changed much. Instead of declaring a major during the second semester of the 1st year, students are directly enrolled in their preferred department, depending on their score on the college entrance exam. For example, if a student achieves a score of 75 out of 100 in English and expresses interest in majoring in English, the student is automatically enrolled in the English department. If the student has an interest but has not achieved the required score, he/she will be given a placement test by the department. It should also be noted that entry to the colleges of education is less demanding than other colleges.

During the first year, the students who major in English take courses geared toward improving their own language skills. Further, they take required courses in the minor and other electives. An important change has taken place with regard to what is now known as the *university requirement*. The students take mandatory courses in Islamic studies, Arabic language, and English language (even for those who are majoring in English). Additionally, the minor, elective, and the university requirement courses are now being taught in Arabic (with the exception of English). Moreover, the five-year system of the past has been dispensed with throughout the program to make it a four-year program, with three credit hours for each course instead of the two credit hour system of the past. Each semester is and has always been three months long. However, the curriculum has not changed. That is, it teaches the same topics and subjects that were taught before the reforms. Instead of conducting the supervised student teaching during the first semester of the 5th year, however, it is now being conducted during the first semester of the fourth year at the high school level in the public school district.

The ELT situation

The Arabicization process, which started in 1990, has had serious repercussions on the teaching and learning of English. Students have become reluctant to take up the subject of English seriously. Knowing that only a passing grade would grant them university admission, and once in the university, study is conducted in Arabic, much of their attention and interest is focused on passing the college entrance English exam. Teachers, too, caved and geared their instruction to help students achieve this end. To satisfy this, pedagogical practices have included, for example, emphasis on testable components such as reading comprehension, grammar, and writing. Students and teachers who have been products of this system enjoy low levels of English language proficiency. As Al-Busairi (2009) observes, students come to the university with “poor or no English at all. Most of them can hardly write a brief paragraph in simple English and even one in four university entrants is unable to construct an elementary sentence” (p. 51). The use of L1 (Arabic), therefore, has come to the rescue. It has become the preferred classroom practice for students and teachers alike. These teaching and learning tendencies would not be understood without taking a look at the curriculum used inside the classroom.

The ELT curriculum

The English curriculum consists of a series of textbooks called Sudan Practical Integrated National English (SPINE). This series consists of six textbooks: three in basic school and three in secondary school. The books claim to follow a communicative approach in developing the language skills (Arora, 2003). They are organized into units and each unit is divided into lessons. The lessons are structured around a reading text with comprehension, vocabulary, grammar points, and writing questions at the end of each reading. The topics of the readings mostly discuss different aspects of Sudanese life with little or no inclusion of global and / or target culture content. For example, the topic of the reading of Lesson One in the first unit in Book 4, which is introduced in the first year of secondary school, is “Houses in the Sudan”.

There are no teacher’ manuals in secondary schools to guide teachers unlike basic schools. No supplementary materials such as graded readers are made available either. SPINE 3 Teacher’s Book, the only teacher’s book I could find, states the objectives of the lesson, gives some suggestions for teaching it in four or five sentences, and provides an answer key. Most of the teaching suggestions focus on warming up by revising the previous lesson, pre-teaching vocabulary, silent reading and reading aloud, and answering comprehension questions. Some

suggestions have included pair and group work. Sometimes the suggestions have also included encouraging students to talk in Arabic to complete certain tasks.

The Sudanese EFL classroom

The EFL classroom in Sudanese public schools is large and overcrowded (60+ students). This has been considered as a limitation for teachers and students. For example, the possibility of using pair and group work can either be ruled out or practiced minimally. Additionally, there will be limited opportunities for developing speaking and listening skills. Students are reluctant to learn those skills since they are not tested. Further, students are interested when instruction is geared toward passing the test with the frequent use of the Arabic language. A dominant instructional routine, therefore, is the teacher-fronted approach.

Teachers follow the textbook religiously, with the exclusion of the final years in basic and secondary schools, using the PPP approach (presentation, practice, production). It should be noted that the participants in this study followed this approach in preactive (lesson plan) and interactive (during the lesson) phases (Jackson, 1968). They present the topic of the lesson, give meaning of vocabulary in Arabic, and ask students to read silently and aloud to answer comprehension questions. Some teachers explain the reading mostly in Arabic if students are unable to answer the comprehension questions. While students are reading aloud, teachers stop them to correct their pronunciation. Grammar points are also explained mostly in Arabic. Additionally, teachers ask students to complete writing exercises with little or no explanation and modeling of the writing process. Homework is assigned at the Production stage which usually consists of completing some exercises (reading, grammar, vocabulary, writing) from the textbook.

The use of corporal punishment

Although the use of corporal punishment has been recently banned by the Federal Ministry of General Education (FMoGE), some teachers still use it. This was once a popular and widespread practice in the Sudanese context not only in education but also in the homes. The belief that children would behave better if they were physically punished carried over from the home to the school. Therefore, parents did not object to corporal punishment in schools, unless it seriously injured the child. In my personal experience, I still have scars from being whipped at elementary school for failing to provide a correct solution to a math problem. I have observed similar situations in the schools I visited during collecting data for the current study.

The Study

In this article, I draw upon a study that I have recently conducted at the teacher education program described above. While the original purpose of the study was to investigate the knowledge and identity construction of pre-service EFL teachers, I chose to focus in the article on the process of doing teacher education programs and its implications on classroom teaching.

Research Methodology

The study is designed as a multiple qualitative case study the experiences of four participants (Yousif, Awad, Fatima, and Jameela) enrolled in the fourth and final year of the teacher education program. I used a case study approach to examine broad, open-ended, and flexible research questions (Merriam, 2002). This approach has been used to investigate how

teachers develop or construct their professional knowledge and identity (Elbaz, 1981; Golombek, 1998; Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Tsang, 2004; Tsui, 2003; Varghese et al, 2005). The data collected comprised of interviews, classroom observations, group discussions, researcher's notes, and participants' lesson plans. A standard qualitative data analysis procedures have been followed, namely deductive and inductive coding.

Findings

In this section, I present the findings of the study relating to classroom practices. I observed the participants while they conducted their teaching practicum which took place in secondary schools. Their classroom practices fell into three categories: material presentation, use of L1, and student-teacher relationships. Due to space limitations, I provide an analysis across all the cases on the basis of similarities and differences among the participants, as opposed to presenting findings from each individual case separately.

Material presentation

A striking similarity between the participants lay in their classroom practices, especially as these practices related to presenting the material. The most salient similarity in this area can be seen in the way the participants taught reading. All of them explained key vocabulary, asked the students to read the passage silently and aloud, and then asked comprehension questions. While reading the passage and answering its comprehension questions were part of the reading exercises outlined in the textbook, explaining the vocabulary and reading the passage aloud were not. This suggests that the participants drew from three (or more) different discourses to teaching reading.

The first discourse the participants drew from was the EFL curriculum represented in the prescribed textbook. They followed the instruction of the textbook in a religious fashion, suggesting that they viewed their role as enactors of the curriculum. They understood this curriculum to be the textbook only, as they failed to articulate the aims and outcomes of the Sudanese EFL curriculum during the final interview. They also did not bring any supplementary material, such as a reading passage, for example, from outside the prescribed textbook. Had they understood the curriculum in its fullest sense and had their teacher education program encouraged it, they might have reached out to other material to use in the classroom in order to motivate their students and help them learn better. This finding also suggests that while the participants understood and used the prescribed textbook, they lacked the knowledge of the EFL curriculum. Their lack of knowledge contributed to preventing them from being creative by bringing different and interesting material to reinforce their students' learning, especially in the light of the stark criticism that the textbook received not only from scholars (e.g., Al Busairi, 2009) but also from the participants.

Another discourse the participants drew from was their "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). For example, although Yousif thought the teacher education program was beneficial, he followed in the foot prints of his previous teachers. His teaching of reading was influenced by how his previous teachers used to present the material. He stated that he enjoyed his teachers' reading of the passages for them and the correction of the students' pronunciation when they read aloud. It is this approach to reading that Yousif employed in his teaching. Jameela's philosophy of silent reading and its role in aiding comprehension also came from previous teachers. In answering my question about the reasons and source of silent reading, she stated, "it helps with comprehension [...] I learned this from my personal experience" (Post

Observation Interview 3). Fatima did not think a different or modern approach to teaching reading would work given the large number of students in the class. Thus, she followed “the common approach used” in schools (Interview 3, lines, 109-116), a practice that can be explained by relying on her previous schooling experiences. While Awad’s teaching of reading could not be directly linked to the way he was taught, he was more aware of his “apprenticeship of observation” because he mentioned that he learned to become an EFL teacher in high school. His previous teachers engaged him in the lessons as well as encouraged him to become an EFL teacher in the future (Interview 2, lines 15-22).

The “apprenticeship of observation” is a plausible source of the participants’ knowledge of teaching because the teacher education program does not radically alter or influence student teachers’ pre-existing beliefs about teaching (Peacock, 2001). In other words, the participants’ teaching practices and instructional decisions were mainly influenced by the knowledge gained from their practice and contexts or their PPK—personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Golombek, 1998; Tsang, 2004). Their acknowledgement, with the exception of Yousif, that their program was ill-prepared to meet the expectation of teaching and learning English, was a case in point. However, this does not mean that they did not use knowledge gained from professional training in their classrooms. In fact, all the participants reported that they utilized this knowledge, especially the ELT methods course, in their teaching. My observation of their use of structured lessons in which they started with a warm-up activity, presentation of the new the material, and, later, the exercises that followed (production stage) confirmed their narratives of using knowledge from the methods course since these were issues dealt with in the course. In so doing, the participants were presenting themselves as good learners and teachers because they were putting what they had learned about effective teaching to good use.

Jameela was explicit about attributing much of her reading instruction to the ELT methods course. She claimed that she applied what she had learned in this course, such as vocabulary pre-teaching and asking comprehension questions, into her teaching. Fatima also claimed that she used the methods she had learned in the teacher education program when she assessed the experience of the practicum. Applying this knowledge was among the factors that led to a successful student teaching experience (Fatima, Interview 3, lines 12-15). However, she did not expand on which methods she used. Yousif made similar claims when I asked him about the reason behind teaching the different skills the way he did. He maintained: “we had this way or theory about how to teach skills or yeah all the skills and as I had [been] taught, there are many theories in teaching. I used to join them together to have perfect one” (Interview 3, lines 96-97). Awad’s emphasis on pre-teaching vocabulary and ensuring that the students pronounce the words after him was a byproduct of his phonetics course in which he learned the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), a system of phonetic symbols, he believe, that helped him to decipher English words’ pronunciation from the dictionary. Unlike the rest of the participants, he did not explicitly speak about his pedagogical knowledge as emanating from formal training.

What is interesting about the participants’ pedagogical content knowledge explained above is that they discursively linked it to their formal training. They incorporated the techniques of teaching different language skills taught in the methods course. This finding is not in congruence with research that showed minimal impact of the methods course on student teachers’ beliefs and practices (Horwitz, 1985; Peacock, 2001). This divergence can be attributed to two factors. The first one relates to the participants’ culture of learning. In the Sudanese

context, there is a tendency to value a transmission approach to knowledge. Therefore, the participants adopted and accepted the ELT approaches taught in their program with the few instances in which they relied on their “apprenticeship of observation”. The second factor is the realization that the student teachers are evaluated on the basis of using precepts from the methods course. Thus they enacted these practices in order to receive good evaluations on their practicum.

Use of L1

Another important similarity between the four participants is their salient use of L1. The degree to which they used it, however, differed from one participant to another. Three of the participants, Yousif, Awad, and Jameela, used L1 minimally in the classroom and mostly adhered to an “English-only” instruction. Conversely, Fatima relied solely on a Grammar Translation Method (GMT) in which she mainly used Arabic in the classroom. In this fashion, the participants were constructing certain professional identities in relation to how they thought of themselves, their students, and other community members.

Yousif was presenting himself as an effective teacher and user of English when he chose to use “English-only” in the classroom. His philosophy did not emanate from a vacuum for he linked it to precepts of the communicative language teaching approach (CLT). He learned about CLT from his methods course as well as the textbook he used in the practicum. Therefore, developing a professional identity as an effective teacher can be traced to formal and experiential knowledge. This way of presenting and thinking of himself, however, clashed with the students’ perceived image of an effective teacher. Their constant demand for L1 instruction can tacitly be seen not only as resisting the “English-only” instruction but also as articulating what effective teaching meant for them. Yousif did not find an alternative but to renegotiate his professional identity vis-à-vis his students’ needs. Although he disagreed with his practicum supervisor’s suggestion for using L1, he ended up using it so as to respond to more powerful discourses: to satisfy his students’ demand for making the material comprehensible and to manage the classroom and control the students’ rowdy behavior. Therefore, L1 was not only a resource for Yousif’s professional identity renegotiation but it also served as a strategy for establishing and maintaining control over the students.

Awad’s minimal use of L1 and his adoption of an “English-only” policy were motivated by his portrayal of himself as an effective user of the English language since he rejected a professional identity as an EFL teacher. Therefore, he was after developing his language skills, especially after receiving feedback from his practicum supervisor suggesting refraining from using L1. Although he did not wholly agree with his supervisor and would use L1 judiciously or whenever the situation called for it, he maintained: “I do not talk to them in Arabic except outside of the lesson. This way I get to improve myself before I improve [...]” (Interview 2, lines 218-220). In this respect, Awad was different from Yousif in that the latter maintained a view of himself as a teacher which influenced his professional practice in a particular way. Awad’s brushing up of his language skills was a strategy to prepare for the profession that he envisioned for himself: translation. Irrespective of his rejection of a teaching post, Awad developed a professional identity as an EFL teacher through his classroom discourse. He evaluated his students’ comprehension and adapted his pedagogical practices accordingly by using L1 to explain vocabulary items or to make the material comprehensible. Also, similar to Yousif, he resorted to L1 to establish and maintain control over the classroom. These were professional

dealings that would discursively render Awad an effective teacher.

Jameela was not different from Awad in her rejection of an EFL teaching post as well as espousing an “English-only” instructional practice to improve her language skills. Developing her language proficiency was a more valuable discourse than the feedback she received from her practicum supervisor asking her to incorporate L1 into her teaching. She vehemently rejected this suggestion and saw it as undermining the entire student teaching experience. However, Jameela, similar to Awad and Yousif, would concede in accordance with the realities of the classroom. She used L1 when the majority of her students failed to understand the material. In so doing, although she might not be aware of it, she was influenced by her previous learning experiences for she maintained that she was able to learn and understand English when her former teachers translated for them (Interview 3, lines 48-50). The footprints of the methods course in which the participants were instructed not to use L1 unless it was badly needed can also be seen in Jameela’s practices as well as Awad’s and Yousif’s. On the contrary, Fatima did not comply with her formal knowledge in this regard.

Fatima mostly used a GTM in the classroom, a process which entailed heavy reliance on L1 to make the material comprehensible. Although Fatima spoke highly about the Direct Method, which was learned in the methods course and entailed the use of “English-only” to make the content comprehensible through the use of dramatization and other techniques (Interview 1, lines, 277-283), her practices did not reflect or follow in the footprints of this approach. This finding is congruent with Horwitz (1985) and Peacock’s (2001) findings that the methods course does not significantly alter the student teachers’ beliefs about language teaching. However, Fatima had justification for the mismatch between her professional knowledge and practices. She lamented that the use of L1 was diffused in the Sudanese context to the extent that it became a *sine qua non*. Had this practice been flipped or replaced by “English-only” use, according to Fatima, the situation of English would have been much better. While this has some element of truth to it in the sense that the use of L1 is a byproduct of the exam-driven culture in the public schools system, Fatima was implicitly downplaying her own proficiency level because she was a product of this failure system. She then stated that “this, in my view, is a good method [the Direct method]. If we had used it from the very beginning, we could have improved a lot”(Interview 1, lines, 277-283).

Student-teacher relationships

All the participants in this study aspired to an amicable relationship with their students. When they failed to establish this solidarity, however, they often leaned toward authority. The basis of this relationship, according to the participants’ narratives, was to gain the respect of the students, a discursive strategy signaling how they wanted to position themselves. In other words, they wanted to be seen (or recognized) by their students as particular kinds of persons (Gee, 2000-2001), such as individuals who are worthy of attention, respect, and recognition as legitimate and knowledgeable teachers as opposed to the dominant view of the student teachers as teachers-in-training, a view that is often associated with lack of knowledge and expertise in the students’ collective memory. It is according to this relational reality that the participants were able to negotiate their professional identities. The ways in which they went about establishing relationships with their students, however, differed from one participant to another. In this section, I will look at the participants’ encounters with their students on the first of the teaching

practice as well as how they treated and were treated by the students throughout the practicum.

The four participants discursively envisioned a certain relationship that they would like to maintain with their students. Fatima's first encounter with her students involved laying out the foundation or nature of this relationship. She erred on the side of authority more than solidarity in the beginning, as she maintained: "the first [class] I spent on telling the students the rules and asking them to stop talking [...] the teacher told me that I should be serious with them from the very beginning, otherwise they will not respect me" (Interview 2, lines 32-35). However, she renegotiated this position throughout and (especially) toward the end of the practicum. She aspired for and achieved a relationship along the lines of solidarity: "after we spent some time with them, we became more than friends [...] especially during the last few days (Interview 3, lines 163-165). This change in Fatima's identity did not emanate from a vacuum, as it was a response to the students' resistance of her power represented in the subject matter knowledge as well as maintaining control over the classroom.

Yousif also resorted to a cane approach to establish a powerful relationship with his students. In this respect, however, he contradicted himself because he once told the students: "we are not here hmm, hmm to give you or to beat you or to punish you or control you". This was a discursive strategy that Yousif used to gain the respect of his students and to establish a more amicable relationship with them in the beginning. The realities of the classroom, however, represented in the students' erratic behaviors and negative attitudes toward learning and Yousif's instruction contributed to a conflict in his identity. He resorted to physical punishment which took up a considerable amount of time that could have been devoted to instruction. Beating the students had negative impact on how they viewed him and his instruction. One student, for example, refused to participate in the lesson because he was beaten by Yousif (Observation 7, 2nd Year, 12:40PM). Unlike Fatima and the rest of the participants, Yousif did not try to soften up his classroom management approach due to his strong personality and view of himself as a father teacher. As aforementioned, this attitude had direct consequences on his pedagogical practices and robbed the students of some instructional time.

Awad's approach, unlike Yousif's, was much softer in the sense that he did not use corporal punishment at all. This was not only due to adhering to instruction from his practicum supervisor against the use of corporal punishment but also due to his personal belief and knowledge of himself that there were other more effective approaches to classroom management which could foster positive relationships with the students. He maintained: "I do not resort to corporal punishment at all because I know that I could be very brutal. Therefore, I have my own approach" (Interview 2, lines 419-423). This approach was represented by keeping naughty students standing for some time. He sometimes asked them questions, and if they answered correctly, he would allow them to sit down. From what I observed, the factors that contributed to mitigated serious behavioral issues were the use of this approach as well as the discursive move Awad made at the beginning of the practicum: "[...] I told them [the students] to correct me if I make a mistake and I will correct them as well. [You can] think of me as your big brother or uncle" (Interview 2, lines 113-115). This strategy helped him strike a balanced relationship along solidarity and authority lines. His classes also went smoothly, making good use of class time for instruction. These were qualities, in the Sudanese context, that contribute to a positive view of the teacher by the students.

Jameela's discursive strategy in building a harmonious relationship with the students revolved around finding a meeting point between authority and solidarity. This is captured in

Jameela's response to my question about the first encounter with the students: "You will not be too lenient but befriend them at the end [of the teaching practice]. But you have to be strict on the very first day [...] so they respect you (Interview 2, lines 245-252). She followed a similar approach to Fatima's regarding establishing friendly relationships with students at the end of the practicum. In so doing, they were both aware of the moral nature of the teacher and teaching—student relationship (Johnston, 2003). Jameela (and Fatima) did not want to have friendly encounters that would have negative consequences not only on their identities as teachers but also their pedagogical practices. Jameela succeeded in striking a balanced relationship for she did not encounter major behavioral issues or resistance. She was able to adapt her pedagogical tendencies in the face of the minor demands of the students which mainly centered on using L1. She went a step further and tried to ascertain the students' views about her teaching. Based on her narratives and practices, she either convinced them with her pedagogical approaches or adapted to the students' preferred ways of learning. This practice portrayed Jameela as a reflective teacher whose identity was in a continuous dialogue with her students, pedagogical practices, and knowledge of herself.

Conclusion

As revealed in the description of the teacher education program in Sudan as whole as well as the analysis of the data above show, Sudanese EFL teacher education programs are still predicated in the traditional modes of teacher leaning. One of the implications of this study, therefore, concerns the re-conceptualization of the knowledge-base of teacher education programs (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). In this section, I sketch out a scenario for how the program's curriculum might be structured in the light of the findings discussed above. These programmatic recommendations have direct consequences on future classroom practices of Sudanese student teachers. They might also have resonances elsewhere.

As the participants grappled with language proficiency issues represented in the dichotomy between using "English-only" versus the L1, one way to provide and strengthen subject matter knowledge in relation to the increased proficiency levels is through offering ongoing language development courses. Instead of allocating only the first year for language proficiency, this practice could be carried out in the remainder of the years so as to achieve maximum results. One course per semester, targeting proficiency across the four skills with special attention to oral proficiency in subsequent years, should suffice. In addition, utilizing available technology to aid in this process would help expedite and produce positive outcomes. For example, the use of mobile phone technology is booming in Sudan and a large percentage of college and secondary school students are not only using mobile phones but also accessing the Internet through them. This technology could, therefore, be utilized to enhance the student teachers' language proficiency. For instance, mobile phones could be used as a pedagogical tool in order to, among other things, enhance vocabulary learning through downloading various vocabulary activities from the Internet. Additionally, pop and hip-hop music are popular among college students, especially those majoring in English. Thus, teacher educators could utilize this popular culture in order to enhance the student teachers' listening skills. This would also enable student teachers to master the skills necessary for teaching EFL through media because many scholars have acknowledged and encouraged their use as pedagogical tools (e.g., Ibrahim, 2012).

Sustaining and ensuring that the language proficiency courses work effectively is as crucial an enterprise as offering these courses. A possible direction the program could take in this

respect is through offering some sort of rewards. These rewards could be in the form of opening a private tutoring center for public schools kids so as to give the student teachers opportunities for tutoring in order to earn some income. The college of education offers course work in English for specific purposes (ESP) as well as general English to the community taught mainly by TA's, so it would be feasible to provide tutoring services for public schools kids. To qualify for this private tutoring, the student teachers would need to obtain a certain proficiency level. This measure would, in turn, motivate them to excel in their language proficiency classes.

Another possibility for motivating and increasing the student teachers' language proficiency is to offer introductory courses in translation with the stipulation that these courses would be open for enrollment only to those who achieve certain levels of proficiency. The program could partner with translation agencies so as to help with the logistics of the courses, such as setting course materials and supplying instructors. The benefits of offering such courses are manifold. In addition to developing the student teachers' language skills, they might help them to generate extra income, especially those who express interest in a translation field. Moreover, translation is a great tool for creating and fostering effective learning opportunities because it "is a holistic activity, which immediately compels the learners to pay more attention to the SL/FL text, which encourages their awareness of form and meaning in context and improves their reading and writing skills in SL/FL" (Machida, 2011, p. 740). To create these opportunities, however, the methods course would need to include the use of translation in the EFL classroom.

It is impossible for a single methods course to incorporate the pedagogical issues suggested above. It would, therefore, be more productive to offer multiple theme-based courses (one theme per year) addressing a different theme every year. For example, the introductory methods course could deal with an introduction to traditional methods, which will be built upon in subsequent courses. In the second and third years, for example, the student teachers could be introduced to the post-method discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Prabhu, 1990) and micro teaching, respectively. The post-method discourse would give them an opportunity to revisit and challenge the methods encountered in their first year through a critical examination of their shortcomings and ideological underpinnings. It is here that the instructor of the course could assign short readings on the teaching of English as an international language as well as colonization and a critical re-reading of the history of ELT in Sudan (Elnoor, 2003). The experience of challenging traditional (and modern) methods would assist them to formulate the method(s) that works in their own contexts and putting it into practice during micro teaching. Instead of the existing course on micro teaching, which is done on their peers, they could utilize the tutoring center to provide them with teaching in contexts that they are likely to encounter in schools. During the fourth year, prior to the practicum, the course could be structured around classroom scenarios that address the multiple and competing identities of teachers.

An innovative way of teaching the methods course in the fourth year could revolve around excerpts from actual or fictional classrooms that are suited to the context in which the student teachers will be working. These excerpts should not only touch on issues of how to teach the four (and sub) skills but also discuss different classroom realities that impinge on teachers' practices. For example, one of the important themes to be discussed should relate to how teachers develop multiple and competing identities around issues of classroom management. Analyzing soft and hard classroom management techniques that teachers use to present themselves in particular ways and their consequences on students' learning would benefit the student teachers in identifying and adapting their own teaching identities. These kinds of practices would take L2 teacher education away from an overreliance on theory and situate it in a

discourse of negotiating and becoming aware of the practical reality in which teachers live and work.

About the author:

Aymen Elsheikh has a Ph.D. in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education from Indiana University. He is currently a lecturer at Qatar University and the Vice President of TESOL Sudan. His research interests include teacher identity, teacher education, and teaching English as an international language.

References

- Albusairi, M. (2009). The English language at tertiary level in Sudan. *Sudan Studies*, 39, 51-59.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1985). Personal practical knowledge and the modes of knowing: Relevance for teaching and learning. In E. Eisner (Ed.) *Learning and teaching ways of knowing: The eighty-fourth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 174-198). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Arora, G. L. (2003). Sudan basic education sub-sector study analysis of curriculum and suggestions for national curriculum framework. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001365/136514e.pdf>.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Elbaz, F. (1981). The teacher's "practical knowledge": Report of a case study. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 11(1), 43-71.
- Elnoor, A. M. (2003). *History of English language in Sudan: A critical re-reading*. New Delhi: Board of Islamic Publications.
- Freeman, D., & Johnson, K. (1998). Reconceptualizing the knowledge-base of language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 397-417.
- Fries, C. C. (1945). *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2000-2001). Identity as analytic lens for research in education. *Review of research in Education*, 25, 99-125.
- Golombek, P. (1998). A study of language teachers' personal practical knowledge. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 447-464.
- Habermas, J. (1971). *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). Cultural identity and diaspora. In K. Woodward (Ed.), *Identity and difference* (pp. 51- 59). London: Sage Publications.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1985). Using student beliefs about language learning and teaching in the foreign language methods course. *Foreign Language Annals*, 18(4), 333-340.
- Ibrahim, A. (2012, December). *It is bigger than music and movie: Teaching English through media*. Paper presented at TESOL Sudan 3rd International Conference, Khartoum, Sudan.
- Jackson, P. W. (1968). *Life in classrooms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Johnson, K. E. (2009). Trends in second language education. In A. Bruns & J. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 20-29). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnston, B. (2003). *Values in English language teaching*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Dangerous liaison: Globalization, empire and TESOL*. In J. Edge (Ed.), *(Re) locating TESOL in an age of empire* (pp.1-26). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lenneberg, E.H. (1967). *Biological Foundations of Language*. New York, NY: John Wiley.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Machida, S. (2011). Translation in teaching a foreign (second) language: A methodological perspective. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(4), 740-746.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson Education.
- Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service teachers' beliefs about second language learning: A longitudinal study. *System*, 29, 177-195.
- Prabu, N. S. (1990). There is no best method – Why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 161-176.
- Richards, J. C. (2009, March). *The changing face of TESOL*. Paper presented at TESOL International Convention, Denver, CO, USA.
- Samuel, M., & Stephens, D. (2000). Critical dialogues with self: Developing teacher identities and roles—a case study of South African student teachers. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33, 475–491.
- Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.
- Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4-14.
- Tarone, E., & Allwright, D. (2001, May). *Language teacher-learning and student language-learning: Shaping the knowledge-base*. Paper presented at the Second International Conference on Language Teacher Education, Minneapolis, MN.
- Tsang, W. K. (2004). Teachers' personal practical knowledge and interactive decisions. *Language Teaching Research*, 8, 163-198.
- Tsui, A.B.M. (2003). *Understanding expertise in teaching: Case studies of second language teachers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 4, 21–44.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Yates, R. & Muchisky, D. (1999, May). *On the status of disciplinary knowledge in language Teacher education*. Paper presented at the First International Conference on Language Teacher Education, Minneapolis, MN.