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Foreword

It gives us great pleasure to introduce you to the TESOL Sudan 3rd International Conference proceedings published in collaboration with TESOL Sudan. The conference took place on December 13-15, 2012, in Khartoum, Sudan. It featured such world-class speakers in the fields of Applied Linguistics and Language Education including Noam Chomsky and John Swales. There were over thirty sessions presented by scholars and practitioners from around the world. Presenters were invited to submit their full papers to be considered for publication in the conference proceedings. Based on our review guidelines and the recommendations of our reviewers we accepted for the current publication those papers which appear here. Our sincere apologies go to those whose papers did not get selected this time.

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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’s 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 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 [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 befriending 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 learning. 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.

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References
Error-correcting Adult Learners’ Writing: Quantitative Interpretations of their Preferences and Perceptions

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Abstract
Current knowledge on the efficacy of teacher error and grammar correction in second language writing classes is controversial and inconclusive, mostly because of the lack of quantitative studies. ‘Bottom-up’ studies researching the views on learners’ preferences on if and how they prefer their written errors to be corrected are therefore clearly necessary. Perceptions and attitudes towards written error correction may substantially vary according to learners’ previous schooling experiences, cultural values and other socio-educational factors. This quantitative study therefore specifically focuses on urban-based, middle-class Sudanese learners of English. This cohort of learners clearly favours the detailed correction of surface errors, particularly of grammar, lexis and spelling; they appreciate explicit written suggestions and corrections. Slightly more than half of the learners want their teacher to correct errors by writing the solution above, but only around a third said this technique is adopted. A significantly larger proportion of higher-level learners indicate this is not sufficiently done by their teachers; but lower-level learners’ requests for this are not significantly different from what is delivered by teachers. Slightly more than a third of the learners want the teacher to underlining the error with a code-indication written above, and half said their teachers use this correcting technique. Two thirds of the learners want all surface errors corrected, big and small, even if there are many. Most learners said they carefully read the teacher’s corrections and comments on their written work. Almost two thirds of the learners choose underlining the error with correction written above as their preferred correction technique. However, a quarter of all learners prefer being referred to specific pages of the course book during written error correction; lower-level learners consider this to be more important than higher-level learners. Only around one learner in ten considers the teacher underlining the error only, or to only comment about content as a ‘very good’ correcting technique.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, adult learners, Arab cultural influence and perceptions, linguistic quantitative study, bottom-up research.
Introduction

Educators, albeit to a different degree, often feel the need to supply written corrective feedback (WCF) to assist learners’ language learning (Brown 2007; Casanave, 2007; Goldstein, 2008). Recent studies are tending to favour the judicious use of WCF. For example, Polio (2012) argues that despite differences in various teaching approaches, written error correction could be effective in certain conditions. Other examples include its benefit during synthesis writing (Zhang, 2013), and collaborative writing and feedback (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Collaborative writing, done mainly in pairs and with WCF on their writing, gives learners the opportunity to scaffold each other’s contributions and knowledge (Ibid, 2012). Another ongoing trend is challenging the assumption that WCF is an exclusively posthumous task applied to the learner’s final text. Using a multistage writing task, Hanaoka and Izumi (2012) examined if learners successfully ‘noticed’ their issues and corresponding solutions during written output, and if they incorporated them in subsequent revisions.

But enormous differences among views on the importance of WCF in the EFL class have been highly evident, with certain proponents still emphasizing that it is a negative practice to be abandoned. Some researchers have also taken into account the teachers’ (e.g. Jordan & Kedrowicz, 2010; Montgomery, 2007) or learners’ perspectives (e.g. Zhou, 2009; Oladejo, 1993; Leki, 1991) when discussing WCF, incorporating and contrasting their respective views with those proposed by academics in the field. This exploratory study takes a ‘bottom up’ approach, including learners’ perspectives by directly collecting information from them about the writing process, and their ideas on the utility of WCF and how it should be conducted. Further to the pragmatic use of knowing and understanding learners’ preferences and perceptions of WCF, this study may help in giving an additional and highly relevant perspective in the broader, debatable case for or against WCF.

The case against written corrective feedback (WCF)

The case against WCF continues to present times. Indeed, Truscott (2010, p.329) succinctly expresses “…the conclusion that correction is a failure and has no place in second language writing classes”. Active debate on the benefits and damage attributed to WCF has raged on for several years, particularly since Truscott (1996, p.328) emphatically proposed his case against grammar correction in the L2 writing class as follows:

“(a) research evidence shows that grammar correction is ineffective; (b) this lack of effectiveness is exactly what should be expected, given the nature of the correction process and the nature of language learning; (c) grammar correction has significant harmful effects; and (d) the various arguments offered for continuing it all lack merit”.

Several studies leading up to Truscott’s (1996) explicit stand against WCF had also suggested that this practice, administered to second language writing students, actually discouraged them, and was even harmful for the development of their writing abilities. Some examples of this research include: Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Krashen, 1984; Semke, 1984; Hillocks 1986; Robb et al. 1986; Kepner, 1991; Sheppard 1992. The dilemma on WCF continues to the present day among researchers (e.g. Polio et al., 1998; Gray, 2004; Truscott, 2010) and
practitioners alike. For example, with university ESL students, Liu (2008, p.65) showed that “Overall results imply that providing corrective feedback on students’ writing is not a sufficient way to improve students’ accuracy in writing”. Truscott and Yi-Ping Hsu (2008) also showed that WCF did not make any sustained difference with the amount of written errors produced by learners.

The case for written corrective feedback (WCF)

A large number of researchers and educators have consistently reiterated the benefits of WCF. Many researchers feel that WCF is central, indeed essential for writing tasks. For example, Williams (2003) considers written feedback to be an essential aspect of any English language writing course, especially true now with the predominance of the process approach to writing that requires some kind of second party feedback, usually the instructor, on student drafts. Kroll (2001) takes an equally strong stance when he says that current writing instruction is quintessentially dependant on instructor feedback, it being one of the two components most central to any writing course (with the other being the assignments the students are given). Williams (2003) also adds that the purpose of WCF is to teach skills that help students improve their writing proficiency to the point where they are cognizant of what is expected of them as writers, and are able to produce it with minimal errors and maximum clarity. WCF has also been said to be important for helping learners notice the gaps between the learners’ interlanguage and target language, facilitating L2 development (Abadikhah & Ashoori, 2012). Further to the correction of surface errors, aspects of written discourse such as coherence and cohesion, critical to synthesis writing, have also been seen to benefit from WCF (Zhang, 2013). Other recent studies favouring the use of WCF were referred to in the introduction, e.g. Hanaoka & Izumi (2012); Polio (2012); Wigglesworth & Storch (2012).

Ferris (1999) has been a leading proponent, and indeed spearheaded the counterproposal, ‘The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott’, towards Truscott’s (1996) stand against WCF. Among the many ideas and arguments raised by Ferris is that Truscott’s ideas positively serve to highlight the complexity of error correction in language learning, yet that his theory (essentially that WCF is of no use and even damaging to learners) should be supported by further research. This is of particular relevance as Ferris points out that Truscott actually offers an improper and ineffective review of error correction by relying on flawed research studies, and that Truscott’s stand is not overly helpful to language learners. In contrast, Ferris distinguishes between effective error correction and ineffective error correction, whereby effective error correction can positively impact language learners' writing. There is mounting research evidence that effective error correction which is selective, prioritized and clear can, and does help at least some student writers.

Pawlak (2004) also agrees in the need for further research that, however, is quantitative (empirical), and that the role of grammar instruction in foreign language pedagogy has been subject to considerable controversy. A positive result of this has been the creation of a need for answers which has generated a number of empirical investigations. Indeed, a growing body of empirical research is now investigating the agenda proposed by Ferris (1999), with evidence in favour of WCF. For example, in a 10-month study on 52 low-intermediate ESL students in New Zealand showed the treatment groups (with WCF) outperformed the control group on all post-tests (Bitchener & Knock, 2009). Another study on 53 adult migrant students investigated three
types of error (prepositions, the past simple tense, and the definite article); this resulted in improved accuracy in new pieces of writing over a 12-week period for those receiving WCF (Bitchener & Young, 2005). Another example is a study on 144 international and migrant ESL students which investigated the extent to which different WCF options help students improve their accuracy in the use of two functional uses of the English article system (referential indefinite `a’ and referential definite `the’). This study found that students who received all three WCF options outperformed those who did not receive WCF, and that their level of accuracy was retained over seven weeks ((Bitchener & Knock, 2008).

**Written corrective feedback (WCF): where do we stand?**

In pragmatic terms, the outcome of these divergent ideas is that language advisors and teachers of English worldwide continue to receive conflicting information as to how to proceed with WCF. Indeed, “…..many teachers continue to be confused about the practical steps they should utilize to help their students improve their writing” (Hartshorn et al., 2010, p. 84). Therefore nested within this controversy on WCF in the academic world are also educators and learners, namely the actual protagonists of this scenario.

Indeed, if error correction is to be effective, the opinions of linguists and teachers alone is not sufficient, but must be flexible enough to incorporate the preferences and needs of the language learners (Oladejo, 1993). Yet Truscott (1996) observed that although students want grammar correction, teachers need not necessarily give it to them, a position criticized by Ferris (1999), who felt that learners’ needs and perceptions could not be brushed aside so lightly. This is the key rationale on which this study has been based.

Several studies have successfully targeted specific groups of learners, enquiring on their specific preferences and perceptions. For example, a study in Costa Rica on 23 college students showed their clear preference explicit oral error correction in class (Amador, 2008). In China, 15 learners in a pre-university intensive English for Academic Purposes programme said they lacked the knowledge and resources to take effective action and improve grammar and vocabulary in their writing (Zhou, 2009), suggesting that the teacher has role in being more proactive in WCF.

It is essential for researchers and educators alike to understand the preferences and perceptions of learners. Learners may come to the classroom with very different notions from those of their teachers about what sort of ‘responses’ in WCF will be of most help to them for improving their writing (Leki, 1991). It is therefore essential that (at least some) studies focus on the views and perceptions of the learners themselves, and this has been the fundamental strategy adopted in this paper.

Furthermore, research must also take into account research design and methodology, and variables such as age, language level, culture, past educational experiences and learning motivation; these factors may influence results and interpretations. For example, Ferris (1999) specifically indicates that there is, in fact too much diversity between environments and students in Truscott’s (1996) referenced studies, and the results are over generalized outside the context in which they were conducted. These variables often cannot be fully accounted for (statistically) or interpreted quantitatively and at times qualitatively. Therefore focussing research on targeted, homogenous groups (e.g. adult vs. young learners, urban vs. rural learners, nationality etc.) may help generate accurate, target-group focussed results on the question of WCF, rather than fuel generalized controversy.
Research objectives

This study specifically focused on urban-based, middle-class Sudanese learners of English. Being a bottom-up study, it directly enquired about their personal preferences and perceptions of writing and WCF. More specifically, learners were asked about their views on:

(i) the importance of accuracy in writing as a skill for the learners themselves as learners of English (i.e. having as few errors as possible in their written work);

(ii) their perceptions of teachers’ views on the importance of accuracy in writing as a skill (i.e. having as few errors as possible in their students’ written work);

(iii) what the teacher should focus on when correcting homework; for example, if surface errors important, such as grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation errors etc. Other requested areas to focus on could be errors based on the content, register and style, and general organization (e.g. paragraphing) of the written work.

(iv) the utility of using a set of correction or proof-reading symbols, and the use of a red marker for showing corrections;

(v) how they want their teachers to show the mistakes in their written work, for example: showing where the error is only; writing the correct word or grammar structure above the error; underline where the error is, with suggestions how to correct it (for example, with correction symbols); underline where the error is and indicate where to find the correction (example page indications in the textbook); focus on ideas with no error corrections in grammar, spelling, punctuation…etc.;

(vi) how do their teachers actually show the mistakes in their written work from the choices listed in (v);

(vii) how they want English teachers to correct their written work if there are many errors, for example: correct: all errors, big and small; all big errors but not the small errors; most of the big errors if there are many of them; a few of the big errors even if there are not many; all repeated errors whether major or minor; only errors that might give you problems with communicating your ideas; no error correction and only discuss ideas;

(viii) how carefully they look at the teacher’s marks and comments on their written work, for example: do they: read all carefully; look at some marks and comments more carefully than at others, or focus mostly on ideas.

Materials & research methods

Participants

Adult Sudanese Learners attending English classes at the British Council in Khartoum, Sudan, have formed the basis of the study population for this study, which is still ongoing. A sample of classes was taken ensuring that a varied and representative selection of different language levels was taken, ranging from beginners through to advanced classes. No sampling was taken among the learners in any of the classes chosen: all learners were included in the study, compiling the questionnaire as part of the ‘routine’ feedback collected form students at the teaching centre. This ensured that not only those learners who were positive about WCF and wanted to give their views were included in the study, as this would have generated bias by
presenting a picture that was positively skewed. Moreover, the learners had the added option of remaining anonymous, further to being guaranteed confidentiality. The sample size included for this paper was of 168 learners and the entire study was conducted inside the learners’ own habitual classrooms, and during regular class hours. This eliminated any possible bias that could have been caused due to the stress of changing the educational environment or time when conducting the study.

Data collection

The research tool used was a written questionnaire (Appendix 1), with eight questions that covered the research objectives described in the previous section. Answer options varied: for example, many questions required an answer where the learners had to choose from a selection of answer options, circling the single most appropriate choice given (closed-ended questions). They were usually also given the option for choosing ‘other’, allowing the learners to describe an option that was not listed but possibly the most important for them (this gave a more open-ended aspect to these questions). In other questions, learners were asked to choose all the options that were relevant and important to them, while in other cases they were asked to allocate numbers to choices (1-5), these representing a 5-point scale in order of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree (Likert, 1932).

Although this was a written questionnaire to be compiled by the learners, the researcher was always present to help orally administer the questionnaire. This ensured the complete understanding of the questions, and in particular the sometimes subtle differences among the possible answer choices. The learners were in a better position to answer accurately after having a full understanding of the questionnaire, rather than having to second-guess some of the finer differences in answer choices. This therefore increased the internal validity of the study. On average the questionnaire took between 20-30 minutes to conduct. Learners often asked the researcher for explanations of the options, including the ‘advanced’ learners. As the questionnaire was conducted by the same person for all learners, the possibility of introducing bias via the use of different questionnaire administrators was eliminated. Furthermore, the researcher, also being a British Council teacher and familiar face among the learners, also lessened the possibility of bias being introduced by having a new face in the classroom: the learners therefore felt confident about being able to freely express their choices. Learners compiled the questionnaire independently so as not to influence each other in their choices.

Data analysis

Responses, expressed as percentages were calculated for the entire sample (Appendix 1, Q.1-7) For analytical purposes, the sample was also divided into lower-level learners, namely elementary and pre-intermediate, or A1, A2, B1 ALTE levels, and higher-level-learners, intermediate to advanced, or B2, C1 and C2 ALTE levels (Harmer, 2007). For certain questions (Q.4-5), the difference in response proportions between higher and lower-level learners were calculated using a two-tailed z-test, and the significance level (α) was set at 0.05.

Learners’ views on written error-correction (Q.8) were examined after allowing the participants to rank each technique according to their perception of its utility, using a 5-point scale. Rankings between higher and lower-level learners were then examined using a Wilcoxon rank-sum test.
Results and Conclusions

Learners’ views on WCF importance and their perceptions of teachers’ views

The results and conclusions addressed in this section are those stemming from questions in the questionnaire used (Appendix 1, Q.1-8). The salient summary statistics of learners’ preferences on WCF are summarized in Table 1.

Learners’ perceptions of teachers’ views on the importance of accuracy (Q.2) in writing as a skill showed some important discrepancies when compared with their own: 39.29% and 30.95% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that thorough WCF, and that learners make as few errors as possible in their written work was seen as important for their teacher. Indeed, 53.57% of the learners strongly agree and 32.74% agree that to focus on accuracy when writing and having as few surface errors as possible, such as grammar, spelling and vocabulary errors is important (Q.1). Local learners therefore feel that foreign, native-speaker teachers tend to give less importance on written work to be totally error-free and are more tolerant of some surface errors that local learners would be content with. Such teachers possibly divide their time when giving WCF between correcting surface errors, and other aspects of writing, such coherence, cohesion, paragraphing and subject development.

Learners’ preferences for specific WCF techniques were compared to their perceptions of teachers’ preferences for written error correction (Table 2). The proportion of learners wanting the underlining of errors with and error-type indication written above, e.g. through the use of symbols, was the same as what the learners said teachers actually adopted. Likewise, there was no difference between the proportion of learners wanting WCF via underlining error only, and the proportion of teachers that used this technique. There was a significantly higher proportion between teachers and both high-level learners (p=0.01), and low-level learners (p=0.05) for the WCF through underlining the error and the corrected version written above.

From the learners’ perspective, when correcting homework teachers should strongly focus on surface errors. Learners agree or strongly agree on the importance of grammar (86.31%), spelling (73.81%) and vocabulary errors (95.98%), and also to punctuation errors (67.85%), paragraphing (73.815%) etc. Learners also agree or strongly agree on the importance of the teachers’ comments on the ideas of what was written (75.59%). Learners also agree or strongly agree that register and paragraph organization to be important (76.79%). While most learners had not experienced the use of correction symbols in their WCF they were mostly enthusiastic about their possible use: 62.51% agreed or strongly agreed on their use. Many were also not against the use of red markers to highlight and correct written errors; indeed, slightly more than half of the learners (52.97%) were strongly in favour of their usage (Q 3a-i).

Learners stating that the teacher should not correct written errors at all, and focus on ideas only, i.e. with no surface error corrections in grammar, spelling, punctuation, were only 1.79 %. This in sharp contrast to research that dismisses the importance of WCF. More than half (51.19%) of the learners were favoured their teacher directly writing the correct word or grammar structure above the error. Other learners (39.88%) said that underlining the error and giving an idea about correcting it was their first choice (Q.4). Only 5.95% said the teacher should only underline errors. In contrast, when asked how their teachers actually show the mistakes in their written work, 50.00% said they underline the error and give an idea about the correction,
36.31% said teachers write the correct word or structure above error, 8.33% only underlined errors, and 1.19% focused on development of ideas only and did no WCF (Q.5).

When comparing what learners want to what they reported teachers delivered, no significant differences were reported. However, after splitting the sample into lower-level and higher-level learners, differences between the two levels were observed. A significantly larger proportion of higher-level learners wanted teachers to correct errors by writing the solution above, than was done by their teachers. This indicated an area of disconnect between the degree to which learners wanted this technique and how widely it was done by their teachers. However, there was no difference in the proportion of lower-level learners’ requests and what they reported was delivered by teachers, indicating that learner perceptions of ‘good techniques’ corresponded to how teachers were conducting WCF (Q.4-5).

After division of the learner sample into two levels, when asked to rank various WCF techniques, lower-level learners considered being referred to specific pages of the course book during written error correction to be more important than did higher-level learners (Table 4). The proportion of low-level learners who considered only underlining the error as a ‘very good’ technique was also significantly higher (p=0.04) than higher-level learners (Table 3). There were no other significant differences between the two learner levels for the other WCF techniques (Q.8).

When learners were asked about how detailed teachers’ correction of their written work should be if there are many errors, 65.45% answered that they hoped to see the correction of all errors, big and small. Only 17.86% wanted only all big errors corrected, but not the smaller errors; fewer still wanted only most (4.17%), or a few (1.19%) of the big errors to be corrected. Few learners felt that a correction focus on repeat-errors alone was satisfactory for them (4.76%), or that focusing only on errors that impeded communication (4.76%). A mere 1.19% of the learners said WCF was irrelevant and that the focus should be on ideas only (Q.6).

Learners were also asked about how carefully they looked at the teacher’s marks and comments on their written work (Q.7), with 81.55% stating they read all errors corrections and suggestions about errors carefully. Only 1.19% said they looked at some comments and corrections more carefully than others, and 4.76% suggested that feedback on ideas was more important than error correction.

While this cohort of learners is still under study, these preliminary empirical results suggest they clearly favor the detailed correction of their errors, large and small, particularly of grammar, lexis and spelling, and appreciated explicit written suggestions and corrections. The study seems to positively favor WCF, strongly dismissing ideas that it is pointless and possibly damaging for learners of this age group and socio-cultural background. The cohort of learners appears to see strong advantages in detailed WCF of surface errors, and also other linguistic components such as register, paragraphing and layout. Perhaps rather surprising was the importance given to feedback on the ideas expressed in the learners’ writing: such comments were valued by them almost on par with WCF.

Finally, the importance of discriminating among different learner language levels has been highlighted as differences in perceptions on WCF have emerged when statistical analyses were conducted on learners according to different language ability. Learner perceptions on WCF vary according to previous schooling experiences, cultural values, and other socio-educational...
factors. However, perceptions and needs may also change as learners improve their writing skills, increasing their autonomy and altering their needs and expectations.

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References


Error-correcting Adult Learners’ Writing


Available at: http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Williams-Feedback.html. Last accessed 3rd January 2013


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners perceptions &amp; views on written corrective feedback (WCF) focus/techniques with which they ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ (n=168)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important to have as few errors as possible</td>
<td>86.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers think it’s important to have as few errors as possible</td>
<td>73.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF focuses on grammar</td>
<td>95.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF focuses on spelling</td>
<td>89.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF focuses on vocabulary</td>
<td>91.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF focuses on punctuation</td>
<td>67.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF focuses on paragraphing</td>
<td>73.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF focuses on writing style &amp; register</td>
<td>76.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF focuses on ideas</td>
<td>75.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF with use of correction symbols</td>
<td>62.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCF with use of a red pen</td>
<td>52.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners’ ideal WCF should have a focus on:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all big &amp; small errors</td>
<td>65.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all big errors</td>
<td>17.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
most big errors | 4.17
some big errors | 1.19
all repeated errors | 4.76
effects impeding communication | 4.76
discussion of ideas only | 1.19

Table 2. Learners' preference, and perceptions of their teachers’ preference, on written error correction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written error-correcting technique usage</th>
<th>Learners’ level: High*</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Z-score: High* Low#</th>
<th>P-value: High* Low#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error, correction above</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error, error- type indication above</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error only</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on ideas only</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ 5-point scale in order of learner’s perception of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree about the use of this error-correcting technique [i.e. values towards ‘1’ reflect a positive preference, and increasingly negative as they approach ‘5’]

* Proportion of higher-level learners [intermediate to advanced (B2, C1, C2); n = 95] favouring a specific technique, compared to learners’ perception of teachers’ preference; corresponding z-score and p-value: Sig./Not sig. = significant/not significant (2-tailed z-test, α = 0.05)
# Proportion of lower-level learners [elementary to pre-intermediate (A1, A2, B1); n = 73] compared to learners’ perception of teachers’ preferences; corresponding z-score and p-value: Sig./Not sig = significant/not significant (2-tailed z-test, α = 0.05)

Table 3. Difference in the proportion of higher- and lower-level learners when referring to different written error-correction techniques as ‘very good’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written error-correcting technique usage</th>
<th>Lower-level learners *</th>
<th>Higher-level learners **</th>
<th>Z-score</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Significant difference#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners referred to page(s) in course book</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error only</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error, correction above</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-1.45</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on ideas only</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.80</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error, error-type indication above</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No correction or comments</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ 5-point scale in order of learner’s perception of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree about the use of this error-correcting technique [i.e. values towards ‘1’ reflect a positive preference, and increasingly negative as they approach ‘5’]

* Proportion of lower-level learners [elementary to pre-intermediate (A1, A2, B1); n = 73]

** Proportion of higher-level learners: [intermediate to advanced (B2, C1, C2); n = 95]

# 2-tailed z-test, α = 0.05
Table 4. Differences in ranking of written error-correction technique preferences between higher- and lower-level learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written error-correcting technique usage</th>
<th>Lower-level learners</th>
<th>Higher-level learners</th>
<th>Z-score</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Significant difference#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners referred to page(s) in course book</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>-1.57</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error only</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error, correction above</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on ideas only</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlining error, error-type indication above</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No correction or comments</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Wilcoxon rank sum test

^ 5-point scale in order of learner’s perception of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree about the use of this error-correcting technique [i.e. values towards ‘1’ reflect a positive preference, and increasingly negative as they approach ‘5’]

* Mean value from 5-point scale, lower-level learners [elementary to pre-intermediate (A1, A2, B1), n = 73]

** Mean value from 5-point scale, higher-level learners: intermediate to advanced [B2, C1, C2], n = 95]

Appendix 1. Questionnaire for ‘Error correction for writing skills – the students’ perspective’

➢ Read each statement, and then you can decide if you: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree.

Please write the number of your response in all the spaces provided.
1. It is important to me as a student to have as few mistakes as possible in my written work. ____

2. It is important to my English teacher for me to have as few mistakes as possible in my written work. ____

3. When correcting your homework the teacher should always focus on:
   a. grammar errors (verb tenses, subject/verb agreement, article use…etc.) ___
   b. spelling errors ___
   c. vocabulary errors ___
   d. punctuation errors ___
   e. poor organization of paragraphs in the homework ___
   f. incorrect writing style (the way you write – too formal, too informal etc) ___
   g. make comments on the ideas expressed in the paper ___
   h. use a set of correction or proof-reading symbols ___
   i. use a red marker to correct ___
   ➢ Answer the following questions (4-7) by circling the best response (ONE choice).

4. How do you want your English teacher to show the mistakes in your written work?
   a. Writing the correct word or grammar structure above the error;
   b. Underline error is and giving an idea about correcting it;
   c. Showing where the error is;
   d. Focus on ideas with no error corrections in grammar, spelling, punctuation…etc.;
   e. Other (please tell us): __________________________

5. How does your English teacher show you the mistakes in your written work?
   a. Writes the correct word or structure above error;
   b. Underlines the error and give an idea about the correction;
   c. Underlines the error;
   d. Focuses on ideas and not error correction of grammar, spelling, punctuation…etc.
   e. Other (please tell us): __________________________

6. If there are many errors in your work, do you want your English teacher to correct:
   a. all errors, big and small;
   b. all big errors but not the small errors;
c. most of the big errors if there are many of them;
d. a few of the big errors even if there are not many;
e. all repeated errors whether major or minor;
f. only errors that might give you problems with communicating your ideas;
g. no errors and discuss only your ideas;
h. Other (please tell us): __________________________

7. How carefully do you look at the teacher’s marks/comments on your written work? You…..
   a. read all carefully;
b. look at some marks/comments more carefully than at others;
c. focus mostly on ideas;
d. Other (please tell us): __________________________

➢ Answer question 8 by circling ALL answers that you think are good.

8. Look at the different ways of sentence error correction.

➢ For each one, circle #1 if you think it is very good, circle #5 if very bad, and a number between #1 and #5 if in between.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Very Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **See section ‘X’ in**
**grammar handbook**  |           |       |       |       |          |
| a. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| b. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| c. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

➢ I’m so pleased about this!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error-correcting Adult Learners’ Writing</th>
<th>Mallia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**tense**

| e. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Your details:**

Full name:___________________________________________________________

Number of years of English completed at school________________________

Number of years of English completed at university_______________________

Number of years when you learnt university subject(s) through English_____

Your current English level:______________________________________________
A Bird's Eye View on Teachers' Perception of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Azadeh Nemati
Department of English Language Teaching
Islamic Azad University, Jahrom, Iran

Abstract: In this survey study it was intended to explore Indian teachers' perception regarding understanding and implementation of task-based language teaching (TBLT). Furthermore, an attempt was made to find the main reasons of applying or avoiding task-based language teaching in room setting. The data was gathered through a questionnaire from 32 Indian teachers in private and governmental schools. English was considered as both medium of instruction and as a subject at selected schools. It was subjected then to descriptive statistics and the overall findings of the study showed that teachers' understanding of task-based language teaching was low, though the majority of them were eager to implement task-based language teaching. The main reasons of applying task-based were promoting academic progress, giving intrinsic motivation and creating collaborative environments. Lack of proficiency, little knowledge of task-based instruction and lack of training were among the main reasons that teachers avoided TBLT.

Key words: task, task-based instruction, task cycle, teachers' perception.
Introduction

In 1980s communicative language teaching emerged as a reaction against the shortcomings of behaviorist audio-lingual method because audio-lingual method failed to have the desired effect of helping learners to communicate. This method was based on the premise that if language patterns present, imitate and practice intensively in the classroom learners are able to assimilate and use them in similar contexts outside the classroom (Leaver & Willis, 2004). In other words, it is based on habit formation and atomization. Researchers such as Chomsky (1959) launched a scathing attack on behaviorists' view of language learning.

One of the major drawbacks of this method was neglecting the need for communication. Earlier, classroom time was spent in developing learners' communication skills. As a result in the 3-stages of presentation, practice and production (known in Europe and Latin America as PPP) more importance is given to the third stage i.e. free production (Leaver & Willis, 2004). Wherein, the production stage learners interact in pairs or groups to complete a communication task. Then Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) led to different types of instruction such as content-based language instruction. It also inspired Prabhu (1987) of Bangalore, India to begin his communicational teaching project in which sequences of task gave to secondary school learners’ experience of English use (Leaver & Willis, 2004, P. 8). Thus, Task-Based Instruction (TBI) evolved as a branch of CLT.

The emergence of TBI

Concerning TBI practitioners adopted different views. According to Leaver and Willis (2004) some of the practitioners adopted TBI out of a desire for a meaning focused approach that reflected real-life language use. In contrast, other practitioners like Prabhu (1987) adopted task because they firmly believed that task-based instruction stimulated natural acquisition process and were less concerned with real life situation per se. Leaver and Willis (2004, p. 8) stated that most teaching practitioners would agree that TBI rests on three basic premises as follows, (all practitioners would give equal importance to each).

1) Language learning is a gradual and complex organic process, and it does not proceed in a linear additive fashion. This means that teaching a discrete language item does not lead to immediate mastery of that item.

2) Language form is best learned when learners’ attention is on meaning. This means that learners need a lot of comprehensible input and according to Krashen (1985) the most suitable input is comprehensible input plus 1 often referred to as I+1.

3) Furthermore, in addition to exposure learners need opportunities to use the target language for a real purpose to learn it. This can be referred to Output Hypothesis.

Definition of task from literature

To have a better understanding of task-base instruction defining task form the related literature is a crucial part as the first step. A task differs from other devices such as exercise and activity. Based on Ellis (2004) tasks are primarily meaning focused while in contracts exercises are activities that call for primarily form-focused language use. The following definitions are selected from amongst available definitions of task in literature. They address a number of dimensions such as, meaning, outcome and object while all have one thing in common. They imply that "task involve communicative language use in which the user's attention is focused on
meaning rather than linguistic structure" (Nunan, 2001). Various definitions of task are widely promoted in literature as follows:

- **Task as focus on meaning**
  
  A task is a piece of classroom work which involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form (Nunan, 1989).

  A task is an activity in which meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome (Skehan, 1996).

  A task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning to attain an objective (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001).

- **Task as derived outcome**

  A task is an activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process (Prabhu, 1987).

  - **Task as object-oriented activity**

    A task is a piece of work or activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research (Crookes, 1986).

**Types of task**

Tasks can be in three main types so when planning TBI program teachers should consider which kind of task best reflect target language use or which one is most appropriate for the learners to achieve goal. Each of which is briefed below.

- **Open/closed task**

  Open tasks include experience-sharing tasks or anecdote telling (Leaver & Willis, 2004). In open end tasks the content and style of the end-product varies in individual learners. 'A childhood memory' is an example of open end task.

  Closed tasks are highly structured and have one right answer (Willis, 1996). A famous and very common example of close task is 'spot the differences' where the two pictures have normally ten differences and learners work in pairs cooperatively to find the differences.

- **One-way/two-way tasks**

  In a one-way task one participant control the flow of information and others are involved in listening and doing something, such as listening to a lecture and labeling the diagram. While, in two-way tasks learners have more opportunities for negotiation of meaning, for instance, discussing a topic in the class time.

  - **Focused/unfocused**

    The two terms of focused and unfocused are used by Ellis (2004). According to Ellis (2004, p. 16) "focused tasks aim to induce learners to process." In other words, it has a specific and predetermined linguistic focus.
In comparison, unfocused tasks predispose learners to choose from a range of forms. The following two activities taken from Ellis (2004) are examples of focused and unfocused tasks respectively.

**Activity 1: (Prepositions of time)**

1. Underline the time expression in this passage.
   
   I made an appointment to see Mr. Bean at 3 o'clock on Tuesday 11th February to discuss my application for a job. Unfortunately, he was involved in a car accident in the morning and rang to cancel the appointment... (Ellis, 2004, p.18).

2. Write the time phrases into this table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AT</th>
<th>IN</th>
<th>ON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 o'clock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Make up a rule to explain when to use 'at', 'in' and 'on' in time expressions.

**Activity 2: (Going shopping)**

Look at Mary's shopping list. Then look at the list of items in Abdullah's store.

Mary's shopping list

1. oranges  
2. eggs  
3. flour  
4. powdered milk ...

Abdullah's store

1. bread  
2. salt  
3. apples  
4. tins of fish... (Ellis, 2004, p.13)

Work with a partner. One person be Mary and the other person be Abdullah. Make conversation like this:

Mary                   Good morning. Do you have any flour?

Abdullah               Yes, I do.

**Task cycle**

For task-based lessons various stages or components were designed by different researchers (Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996). However, they all have in common three principal phases of 'pre-task', 'task', 'post-task'. According to Ellis (2004) only the task is obligatory in task-based teaching but the two other phases can serve an important role in ensuring that the task performance is maximally effective for language development. In the pre-task phase the teacher sets up relevant topic schemata, explain the task and clarify the intended outcome (Leaver & Willis, 2004). In the task phase, learners on their own or in pairs work on the task and finally in the post-task learners finalize and present the outcome to others.
To have a better understanding about educational system an overview of education system in India is detailed in this part.

Current education policy as related to structure and access is based on the objectives of National Education Commission (NEC), which in its 1968 education policy called for a standard educational structure based on a 10+2+3 year model. The first ten years were to be non-selective to provide opportunities in both the academic and vocational streams. Although there are considerable differences between the various States in terms of the organizational patterns and years of schooling, mainly due to the existence of State Education Board, education system in India can be divided into the following stages:

**Pre-Primary:** Putting aside non compulsory nursery school which compromises children of 2-2.5 age group, pre-primary kindergartens are considered as an internal part of education in India. They are divided into two stages of lower kindergarten (LKG) and higher kindergarten (UKG). Typically, an LKG class comprises children of 4-5 years old ("India Education", 2009). At this stage, the student is given knowledge about school life and is taught to read and write some basic words.

In other words, children begin formal schooling at the age of 5 or 6. Compulsory education is guaranteed by the Constitution as a Fundamental Right until the age of 14. The government is committed to ensuring universal elementary education for all children aged 6-14.

**Primary:** According to Clark, 2006 the primary cycle lasts seven (in few States) to eight years and is divided into two stages of lower primary and upper primary—in fifteen Stats the primary cycle finishes at Standard VII, in the others it ends at Standard VIII. Lower primary school includes children of ages 6 to 11, organized as class 1 through 5, and upper primary school includes students of ages 12 to 14, organized as classes 6 to 8.

The primary school curriculum emphasizes general education and covers basic subjects such as reading, writing and arithmetic, supplemented by history, geography, general science, and civic. Municipal Boards administer education at all levels and either the school or the board sets examination held at the end of each semester and school year.

**Secondary:** Secondary education, which in some categories is classified under high school, is divided into two 2–year stages: Lower Secondary (Standards IX to X) and Upper Secondary (Standards XI to XII). The exact breakdown of the primary and lower secondary stages varies by State, however, all States follow a model based on 10 years of general education followed by 2 years of pre-university or upper secondary education and a 3-year professional degree (10+2+3).

Lower secondary school generally begins at Standard IX and lasts 2 or 3 years. In keeping with the first 8 years of Indian education, lower secondary education emphasizes general education with little or no specialization. Students take one of the various Secondary School Certificate Examinations at the end of Standard X. If successful, students are awarded the Secondary School Certificate (or its equivalent) by the relevant State or by the All-India Board. A mark sheet listing courses and grades is issued with the award of all secondary school certificates. At this stage, curriculum must encompass mathematics, science and technology, social sciences, arts, etc.
Thus, upper secondary education is dual (academic, vocational/professional). The second stage of secondary education is designed to allow for diversification and specializations, while also preparing students for higher education. Broadly speaking, there are three standard majors or specialization in the academic stream including science, business and humanities. In the academic stream, students are prepared for university-level studies in a number of specializations.

The vocational stream prepares students for a variety of occupations through vocational studies and training at technical high school centers. Programs are offered in 160 fields such as agriculture, commerce, technology, paramedical services and home economics. States have high degree autonomy in determining the focus of vocational high school offerings as determined by their particular manpower needs. After both stages students take examinations controlled by State and Central Examination Boards.

How English is taught

The language of instruction at the lower primary level is generally the mother tongue, either Hindi or a regional language. From upper primary other languages are also introduced: English, and/or Hindi (if Hindi is not the mother tongue). At State schools, English is required from Standard V, this varies from State to State. At some private schools English is used almost exclusively. Thus, English can be taught in mainly two different ways as a subject in governmental school and as a medium of instruction in private schools. In this study the teachers of both groups i.e. private and governmental schools were targeted as the participants of the study.

Significance of the study

Any educational system comprises of three elements viz. students, teachers, and materials. TBI is not an exception to this rule. A glance at the component of task reveals that teacher role is an element there. The other factors of communicative task are goal, input, activities, learner role and setting.

Richards and Roger (1986) suggested that learner roles are closely related to the functions and status of the teacher. Some methods are teacher dependent, and some others view the teacher as a catalyst, consultant, or guide. In TBI the role of a teacher is as a monitor and facilitator (Nunan, 2000) where students can not benefit from the materials. A task itself does not guarantee its successful implementation unless the teacher, the facilitator and controller of task performance understands how the tasks actually work in the classroom (Jeon, 2006). Applying TBI needs experienced teacher to help students to achieve their goals. Hence, it is important to see how task-based is welcomed by the teacher especially in an environment where providing opportunities for the students outside the class i.e. providing task is easy. In other words, in EFL environments learners can be naturally exposed to meaningful task activities. This situation can be contrasted to ESL environments where tasks are mostly artificial and cannot be applied outside hence, learners are limited in their accessibility to use the tasked language on a daily basis. Thus, utilizing TBI can be easier and as a result more effective in EFL environments.

Despite its pedagogical benefits, TBI has not yet been sufficiently researched in foreign language learning context (Jeon, 2005). Similar situation is seen for second language learning
contexts. In light of this, this study was intended to explore Indian ESL teachers' perception of task-based instruction, their view on TBLT implementation and the practical reasons they chose or avoided implementing TBLT. Regarding the goal of the study the following research questions were posed.

**Research questions**

1) How much teachers are familiar with TBLT concept?

2) What is the attitude of teachers with respect to TBLT implementation?

3) What are the main reasons of choosing TBLT in teachers view?

4) What are the main reasons of avoiding TBLT in teachers view?

**Methodology**

*Instrument*

A two-page questionnaire was devised to do the survey study. The questionnaire composed of 40 Likert-type items. The five point Likert scale ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Appendix).

Apart from the demographic information such as age, gender and years of teaching English, the prepared questionnaire consists of four sections. The first section measured teachers understanding of task and TBLT with 9 questions. The second part (items 10-18) dealt with teacher's view on implementing TBLT. Section three consisted of 10 questions (items 19-29) regarding why teachers apply TBLT and finally section four (items 30-40) aimed at finding out why teachers avoid applying TBLT. The questions were adapted and modified from Jeon and Hahn (2006) and Leaver and Kaplan (2004). The reliability of the test measured by Cronbach alpha was .765.

*Participants*

The participants of the study were 32 Indian English teachers (8 male and 24 female) working at primary and secondary school levels in 14 randomly selected governmental and non governmental schools. Teachers were selected based on the availability rule. The school teachers ranged in age from 28 to 53 (Mean =38.75 and SD = 28.80) and their English teaching experience ranged from 2 to 34 years with the mean of 10.82 and SD of 12.18.

*Data analysis*

Table 1 presents percentage comparisons of teachers' response to overall concept of TBLT, implementing and their view about choosing or avoiding task-based in the classroom. For the convenience of referencing the 5 point Likert scale responses were merged into a 3 point simplified scale.

Table 1: Teachers' view regarding understanding, implementation and applying or avoiding TBLT
A bird's eye view on teachers' perception of TBLT

Nemati

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA+A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D+SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of TBLT</td>
<td>15.60+9.40(25)</td>
<td>18.80</td>
<td>18.80+37.50(56.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing of TBLT</td>
<td>18.80+37.50(56.30)</td>
<td>18.80</td>
<td>25.0+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons of applying TBLT</td>
<td>9.40+71.90(81.30)</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>- +9.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons of avoiding TBLT</td>
<td>25.0+</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>- +37.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers are in percentage.

Table 1 depicted that teachers' understanding regarding the key concept of task is low. In other words, few teachers (25%) were agree with the concepts of task and more than half of the teachers were not agree with items 1-9 related to the concept of task-based and 18.8% of them were undecided while 56.3% of them was eager to implement task. The visual representation of data regarding teachers' view on concept of task was displayed through the following graph.

Graph 1: Teachers' view regarding the concept of TBLT

In the graph it was shown that 18.8 of the teachers were undecided regarding the concept of the task. While, just 25% of them had positive view about task and more than half of them (56.3) did not know the basic concept of task. To get a better understanding about teachers’ view their responses to items 1-9 regarding the perception of task-based were analyzed.
Table 2: *Teachers' view regarding understanding TBLT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA+A</th>
<th>U (neutral)</th>
<th>D+SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers are in percentage.

The analysis in the Table 2 revealed that less than half of the respondents knew that Prabhu in Bangalore was the pioneer of task-based. The vast majority of them (62%) understood that task has a communicative purpose and focus on meaning. All the participants (100%) agreed that task has a defined outcome and 46.6% of them disagreed with the idea that a task is an activity in which the target language is used by the learner. In response to the questions 7-9 which deals with principles of communicative teaching, students centered instruction and cycle of task the participants had no clear idea.

Table 3: *Teachers' view regarding implementation TBLT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA+A</th>
<th>U (neutral)</th>
<th>D+SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 illustrates the results of teachers’ view on implementing task in classroom. In response to item 10 it was shown that unlike overall lower level of knowledge regarding task-based concept 62% of the teachers were interested in applying task-based in class. Items 11 to 16 deal with teachers’ belief about task-base. While just 18% of the teachers believed that task-based provide a relaxed atmosphere, all the respondents (100%) stated task-based teaching is interesting for learner and as a result develop integrated skills and teach students more effectively.

Items 14-16 concern teachers’ role. Few respondents (37%) stated that task-based will give teacher psychological burden. In contrast 62.5% of the participants expressed that it requires more preparation time comparing other methods. More than half of them (56.3%) disagreed that it is good for classroom arrangements and the majority of them (90.6%) answered that task-based material should be meaningful based on the real world context.

Table 4: Teachers’ view regarding applying TBL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency of SA+A</th>
<th>percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>90.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>90.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>90.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>65.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>65.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 gives answer to the third research question. The analysis revealed that all the teachers (32) believed that they like to apply task-based because it improves learners' interaction skills. Most of them (29 out of 32) expressed that task-based can promote academic progress, give intrinsic motivation to the learners and create a collaborative environment for the students as the second
most important reason. Bringing greater motivation and giving better program evaluation are further reasons why teachers would like to apply task-based in the classroom.

Table 5: Teachers’ view regarding avoiding TBL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency of SA+A</th>
<th>percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 37</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis of table 5 illustrated 20 out of 32 participants mentioned that the main reasons of avoiding task-based language in the class are due to limited target language proficiency, little knowledge of task-based instruction, and lack of training before using task-based with the first rank. They also opined that since students are not used to task-based as well as testing they don’t apply task-based in the class. Paucity of material and proper textbooks are other main reasons of avoiding task-based in the class. The answers to open ended questions regarding any other views on applying or avoiding task-based language teaching in the classroom did not add to the items.

When learners engage themselves with the task, they prepare themselves to participate in classroom interaction with more self-esteem. According to Ellis (2003) tasks create contexts that facilitate second language acquisition (i.e. an L2 is best learned through communicating).

Though most students and teachers get used to the lecture and textbook leaning and when turning to practice, it was found that few teachers put this method into practice hence it is worthy to devote some special attention to task-based language learning.
Discussion and conclusions

It is a long lasting debate amongst scholars on how to teach language using less time and energy but having more results. In the last twenty years or so a range of alternative syllabus models have been proposed, including a task-based approach (Nunan, 2001) in other words, in task-based the syllabus is task-based and the approach is focus on form. While, the methodology centres around students performing a series of tasks.

Task-based approach has been advocated as an effective way of teaching and learning English in schools "Graduates from problem based and task-based curriculums are expected to be more skilled in their personal skill and better prepared for self-directed, long-life learning" (Sharifa Sulaiha, et al., 2009). Because task-based language teaching is based on the premise that students should have collaboration and more time should be spent on self direct learning.

In this article it was intended to explore Indian teachers' perception of task-based teaching. The study consists of four parts namely, teachers' perception of TBLT, their implementation and the main reasons of applying or avoiding TBLT in class settings.

All together the findings of item 1 to 9 showed that teachers had a low perception regarding task and task-based. Though the study was conducted in Karnataka state, just 43.8 percent of the teachers agree with the idea that task was developed in India by N.S. Prabhu in the 1980s in Bangalore, Karnataka, south India. Likewise, in response to items 7-9 regarding the principles of communicative teaching the answers were more neutral implying that teachers' knowledge about the origin and basic principles of TBLT is low.

Regardless of the general low understanding of teachers about task the findings to items 9 to 18 revealed that the majority of the respondents (62%) are willing to implement TBLT and all of them believed that it provides a relaxed atmosphere and activates learners’ interest. They also agreed that task-based instruction should be meaningful based on the real world and authentic materials. The task given to the students should be clear and authentic to life reality and can be available everywhere from having dinner to making a paper plane (Lochana & Gitoshree, 2006) and these situations can be found in ESL environment very easily.

Last two parts revealed that the first three main reasons of choosing TBLT were promoting academic progress, giving intrinsic motivation and creating collaborative environments.

Lack of proficiency, little knowledge of task-based instruction and lack of training were among the main reasons that teachers avoided TBLT. For applying TBLT much consideration should be given to overcome these obstacles that teachers expressed. In this article as a point of departure it is recommended that since task-based instruction has an edge over other traditional methods, some training course should be conducted and teachers should be given this opportunity to acquire knowledge of task-based. It is a good point that teachers showed affirmative attitude towards implementing TBLT despite their low understanding.
A bird's eye view on teachers' perception

About the author:
Dr. Azadeh Nemati is an assistant Professor in Iran, majoring in ELT. She is the editor in chief of some international journals and supervised some MA theses. In 2010 and 2012 she was selected as distinguished researcher in the University.

References


Appendix

Teacher's Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to examine Indian ESL teachers’ beliefs of task-based language teaching (TBLT) with reference to classroom practice. Please answer all questions as best and honest as you can. Thank you for your cooperation.

**Demographic Information**

Gender …………………

Age…………………..

Total number of years teaching English…………………………………………………………..

**Section I. Teachers’ Understandings of Task and TBLT**

For each of the following statements, please answer by putting a tick in a box. According to the following scale: *SA (strongly agree), A (agree), U (undecided), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prabhu (1987) from Bangalore was a pioneer in task-based.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A task is a communicative goal directed.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A task has a clearly defined outcome.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A task is any activity in which the target language is used by the learner.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A task provides a purpose for classroom activity.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. TBLT is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A bird's eye view on teachers' perception

Section II. Teachers’ Views on Implementing TBLT

The following statements address teachers’ views on implementing TBLT in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have interest in implementing TBLT in the classroom.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. TBLT provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote the target language use.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. TBLT activates learners’ needs and interests.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. TBLT pursues the development of integrated skills in the Classroom.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. By applying TBLT students learn English more effectively because learners use language to solve problems and to talk about personal experience.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. TBLT gives much psychological burden to teacher as a facilitator.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. TBLT requires much preparation time compared to other approaches.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. TBLT is proper for controlling classroom arrangements.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. TBLT materials should be meaningful and purposeful based on the real-world context.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Section III. Reasons Teachers Choose TBLT

I as a teacher apply TBLT because:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. TBLT promotes learners’ academic progress.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. TBLT improves learners’ interaction skills.</td>
<td>□□□□□</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21. TBLT encourages learners’ intrinsic motivation.

22. TBLT creates a collaborative learning environment.

23. TBLT is appropriate for small group work.

24. TBLT brings greater motivation.

25. TBLT gives opportunity for repetition without boredom.

26. TBLT increases students’ satisfaction

27. TBLT promotes learners how to learn.

28. TBLT leads to better program evaluation results.

29. TBLT brings higher proficiency and students satisfaction.

If you have other reasons that you decide to implement TBLT, please write them down.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Section IV. Reasons Teachers Avoid Implementing TBLT

I as a teacher don't apply TBLT because:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30. It needs faculty development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>31. There are obstacles related to students testing expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>32. It lacks predictability of how much time students need to spend for each topic.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>33. Students are not used to task-based learning.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>34. Paucity of sources and materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>35. Materials in textbooks are not proper for using TBLT.</td>
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<tr>
<td>36. Large class size is an obstacle to use task-based methods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>37. I have difficulty in assessing learner’s task-based performance.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>38. I have limited target language proficiency.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Teachers should be trained before using task-based instruction in the class.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you have other reasons that avoid you to implement TBLT, please write them down.
Launching e-Partnership between Universities: Towards Online Virtual Classrooms

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Department of Foreign Languages
Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages
Tlemcen University – Algeria

Abstract

With changing winds and shifting sands, language teaching research has moved its emphasis from traditional classrooms to technology-enhanced classrooms and due to the rapid growth in information and communication technologies together with societal changes, tremendous development in distance language learning opportunities has been launched. Indeed, such a radically innovative phenomenon; namely technology have had a fascinating impact on the way learners learn and grow, and also on the way teachers teach and develop. Thus, the present paper attempts to reflect upon how distance language programmes may move from traditional print-based correspondence courses, to courses delivered entirely online with extensive opportunities for interaction, feedback and support between teachers and learners, and among the learners themselves. This later may result cooperation and collaboration between universities either locally or internationally.

Key-words: Distance language learning, e-Partnership, e-learning, virtual classroom, online education
Introduction

A new global landscape is emerging as our world currently witnesses a period which may be called “a digital age” where countries are trying to catch and utilize amazing technological developments into every area of their technical and social life. It is often assumed that one of the main challenges of current pedagogy is the integration of technology into classroom tasks. Language researchers strongly argue that it appears to be inevitable that, the more a teacher makes use of instructional technology in the classroom, the less teacher-centered and the more student-centered a classroom will become. Currently, due to the ongoing globalization process and other forces, distance learning opportunities are becoming an increasingly noticeable part of educational provision.

Therefore, higher education systems all over the world are challenged nowadays by the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). These technologies have had an enormous influence on the world economy, corporate management and globalization trends, and they bear a tremendous potential to redesign the nature of study environments everywhere. Thus, the desire of many educational institutions to meet new challenges and retain their market share was a motive towards more e-based learning and online pedagogy. Hence, it is no longer a need to spend time defining what online distance learning is or is not; it is now commonplace in higher education. It seems wiser at this level to mention how technological developments have been fused in education throughout history; the following table draws this development clearly:

Table 1. Developments in Technology Available for Language Learning in Distance Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Technology Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>Educational radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>16mm film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Broadcast television (live and pre-taped)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Audiocassettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Live satellite delivery (one-way video, two-way audio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video compression (two-way video/face-to-face)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Videocassettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Computer-based education (asynchronous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive multimedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multimedia conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CD-ROM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The WWW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Web-based video, audio, multimedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-</td>
<td>Broadband technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wireless access</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distance Learning and Online Education

With changing winds and shifting sands, language teaching research has moved its emphasis from traditional classrooms to technology-enhanced classrooms which are supposed to promote discovery learning, learner autonomy, and learner-centeredness. The idea of distance language learning in its all diversity does not seem a new phenomenon per say, what makes it appear so is the newest and the ample accessibility of the new technologies for connecting learners and teachers. Distance learning can be seen differently according to the adopted approach. For instance, Shelley (2000: 651) defines Distance learning as an “educational system in which learners can study in a flexible manner in their own time, at the pace of their choice and without requiring face-to-face contact with a teacher. Garrison and Archer (2000: 175) on their part, believe that distance education must involve “two-way communication between (among) teacher and student(s) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process. Distance education uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication”. Thus, visions differ according to the specific settled goals when dealing with distance environments.

Distance learning or online education gives an opportunity for education to go beyond the traditional classroom merely by owning a connected computer. It is important to posit that the shift to online distance learning continues to create massive challenges to instructors and their institutions. Strangely enough, a great number of educators still believe that the online classroom is no different from the traditional one, by assuming that the approaches used in face-to-face teaching will work when learners are separated from them and from each other by time and distance, however, when learning moves out of the classroom and into the online arena, teachers need to pay attention to other issues which were taken for granted in the face-to-face classrooms. The following table maps significant differences between the two arenas:

Table 2. Traditional Vs Online Classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional and E-learning approaches</th>
<th>Traditional Classroom</th>
<th>Online Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Physical – limited size</td>
<td>Unlimited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synchronous</td>
<td>Anytime, anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>PowerPoint/transparency/etc</td>
<td>Multimedia / simulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textbooks/library</td>
<td>Digital library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>On demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>online Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalisation</td>
<td>One learning path</td>
<td>Learning path and pace determined by learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore, despite the fact that many educationalists still believe that the growth and delivery of high-quality online education is but a result of learning how to transfer traditional pedagogy to an online environment (Sloboda, 2005), there is little in the literature about how the knowledge and skills associated with high-quality online teaching can be transmitted to the traditional classroom setting. In this line of thought, research over the past two decades reveals that students enrolled in online classes may have greater control over their own learning (Sloboda, 2005), and they experience high levels of interactivity with other students, besides they are able to construct new knowledge (Eastmond, 1998). On the other side of the coin, online learning is popular for almost all types of students in part because of its asynchronous nature, moreover, in online education instructional content can be delivered more cost-efficiently (i.e., Virtual learning environment, Share lessons among schools, e-partnership, Reduce material cost). (Eastmond, 1998; Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jones, K., 2009).

Oddly enough, Warschauer (2000) and Warschauer, Shetzer and Meloni (2000) suggest a number of potential shortcomings in these developments, they are summarized in the following points:

- High quality distance learning opportunities require significant amounts of personal interaction which are expensive to set up and maintain;
- Providers may be under pressure to reduce teacher–student interaction, which requires significant resources, and to place more emphasis on individual access to pre-packaged materials;
- Administrators may seek intellectual property rights for materials and courses produced by teachers to reuse them in distance programmes;
- As the development of distance programmes may be separated from the delivery of learning opportunities, staff may be employed on parttime, temporary contracts which can have long-term effects on their professional status and standing.

The Challenge: E-Partnership between Universities

Online learning now takes more than one form, including the use of technology to enhance a face-to-face class, a hybrid class that combines both face-to-face meetings and online work, and fully online courses. The web-based Information and Communication Technologies (w-ICTs) have greatly generated the culture of distance learning or online education as a new genre in the bulk of pedagogy literature. The need for partnership and collaboration among universities seems to be one of the challenges in this digital age. E-partnerships allow interaction among universities to exchange points of view and to give and obtain different experiences. In such environment, universities should be expected to work together to generate deeper levels of understanding and critical evaluation of the teaching/learning materials. In the process of seeking out additional materials for this purpose, universities should be expected to share the resources they are finding with the other members of the globe. Another level of collaboration may be to facilitate knowledge exchange between learning communities, for instance, the same course
might be delivered at different universities to create a kind of globalizing the curriculum throughout all universities.

In this fashion, a network of videoconferencing connecting universities with each other in order to connect two or more locations to interact via two-way video and audio transmissions simultaneously. Videoconferencing, is also called video conference or videoteleconference, is a set of telecommunication technologies, its purpose is to contribute to the exploitation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in higher education in addition to conducting web-based seminars. It also aims to complement the efforts of governments and education departments to integrate technology into our classrooms and curricula and to link them to the information superhighway. As a concrete representation, one may put the Algerian e-partnership between other universities in the form of Global Virtual Classroom (GVC) between the University of Abu Bekr Belkaid, Tlemcen and East Carolina USA, this will be discussed in the following section.

**Virtual Classrooms**

With the growing popularity of E-Learning and online education, new terms in education have been introduced to keep pace with the latest technologies like the Virtual Classroom, where students will not be present physically in the classroom but connected to the classroom via Internet. Virtual classroom aims to create the experience of attending a class over the web, i.e., it provides a suitable communication environment for distance learners just like traditional face-to-face classroom. Just like traditional classrooms, a Virtual Classroom is a scheduled, online teacher-led training session where teachers and learners highly interact together using computers linked to the Internet. Following are some pros and cons of virtual classrooms:

### Table 2. Pros and Cons of Virtual Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Virtual Classroom</th>
<th>Disadvantages of Virtual Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Removal of geographical barriers</td>
<td>- Teachers and students need to become familiar with the technological tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anywhere/Anytime</td>
<td>- Time dependency for Live Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sessions can be recorded</td>
<td>- Technical Limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quicker to organize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- One to one communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The broad mission of this global understanding course is to contribute, develop and facilitate the task of students to acquire knowledge about others’ cultures around the world. This project is part of the government efforts to integrate technology into their classrooms and make learners more acquainted with these tools. The Give Something Back International foundation (G.S.B.I) 2003, summarised its objectives as follows:

- **a)** Cross-cultural Communication Skills
- **b)** Collaboration
- **c)** Computer skills

**Global Virtual Classroom: The Algerian Experience**
In an increasingly interconnected world, a great number of virtual programmes were created to provide individual, international experiences for the overwhelming majority of students who cannot study abroad. The global understanding course is taught in a shared virtual classroom with students and faculty at 31 universities, in 22 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. GVC project is a collection of free-online daily video-based activities such as dialogs, chat, and joint student projects to provide personal and global experiences which hopefully open the door for students’ prospective about other cultures. this project aims at creating Cross Cultural Communication Skills to overcome culture shocks, global communicators, it also offers the opportunity for collaborative and team work among students in different universities. Besides, as this project is based on technological-based tasks, it enhances students’ technological competence to be confident and comfortable with technology. The following diagram illustrates this:

![Diagram 1. GVC Aims](image)

From another layer of analysis, the GVC permits students to interact and communicate with their partners from different parts of the world about specific topics, in which they prepare each session to talk about. East Carolina University sent a document including the following subjects at the beginning of the fall session so that both learners and their lead teacher prepare to exchange cultural knowledge. Among the proposed topics:

- **College life:**
  - Describing a typical day for each student in college.
✓ Describing the process students had to go through to get into college.
✓ Describing the most noticed transition they faced when entering college.

- **Family:**
  ✓ Members of each student’s family.
  ✓ Family traditions.
  ✓ The meaning and importance of family to every student.

- **Holidays:**
  ✓ The most important holidays.
  ✓ The way students celebrate their holidays.
  ✓ Activities that students programme in their holidays.

- **Culture and Identity:**
  - Meaning of life and Religion:
  - Stereotypes and prejudices:

### Conclusion
Based on the fact that the Use of technology especially computers and internet in every area of education enhances language learning, necessary budgets need to be reserved to equip schools with several kinds of technology. Additionally, teacher preparation programs are required to prepare ‘technology aware teachers’ because tomorrow teachers will be expected to follow and use technological developments in their classrooms.

Instructional technology improves student achievement when integrated into education. However, for this improvement to occur, teachers need to be familiar with computers, have positive attitudes towards computers, be comfortable with the technology and be able to use it effectively. Especially, experienced teachers have difficulty in finding effective uses of computers in their classrooms (Rakes & Casey, 2002).

Despite this praise for online learning, there are still considerable structural, psychological, and pedagogical challenges in shifting instruction spontaneously from traditional classrooms. Distance learning remains immature and experimental. Higher education institutions need to innovate and allow distance learning to evolve and develop.

**About the author:**
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References


Graduate Attributes Dilemma in Sudanese Tertiary Institutions: a Case of Engineering Graduates

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Abstract

This study is intended to explore Sudanese tertiary institutions engineering graduates beliefs about their current graduate attributes and their importance to their jobs, specifically communication skills in English language. Research has shown that spoken and written communication in English are of paramount importance for engineering graduates. Thus, this study aims at investigating and exploring 50 engineering graduates working in Oman for different companies and 20 Sudanese professors. Both questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze data. The findings have implications for engineering education in Sudan because the vast majority of the respondents believed that graduate attributes are important and their undergraduate degrees did not equip them with adequate skills and they felt that their current communication skills in English need further improvement. The study puts forward recommendations with regard to textbook used, teaching methodology, integrating graduates attributes into the degrees, etc.

Keywords: graduate attributes communication skills, engineering graduates, dilemma.
Background of the Study

Graduate attributes are by no means highly important in today's labour market. Pollick (2009) cited in Ntombela, (2010, p. 598) "Hard skills will get a person an interview; but soft skills will land that person a job". Teaching graduate attributes can facilitate the students’ mastery of disciplinary knowledge, and develop their sense of judgment (Star & Hammer 2008). Therefore, the role of tertiary institutions has now changed to a mass activity rather than an elite activity (Ong et al. n.d). The traditional expectation of universities was that they were elite, research-center institutions whose role was to produce professional, intellectual class. Recently, the expectation has shifted to a more vocational and mass educational focus role (Star & Hammer 2008, p. 238). The focus on disciplinary knowledge is no longer sufficient to meet the various stakeholder needs for graduates with contemporary workplace professional needs and expectations (Litchfield, Nettleton, & Taylor, 2008 cited in Litchfield et al., 2010, p. 519). Therefore, universities are expected to produce more employable graduates (Barrie, 2006)."Unskilled graduates represent a failure on two counts: firstly, in terms of employability and, secondly, in terms of universities' traditionally conceived role in the formation of capable citizens" (Star & Hammer 2008, p. 204). This paper is an attempt to investigate factors that graduates attributes, specifically, communication skills dilemma stem from, highlight the needs of teaching generic skills and enlighten decision makers, instructors, and syllabus designers on the needs of graduate attributes in Sudanese Tertiary Institutions. These skills are the knowledge and abilities of university graduates beyond disciplinary expertise and technical knowledge, which are applicable in a range of contexts and required as a result of completing any graduate degree Mclean (2010). Bridgstock (2009,p, 32) asserts that 'in the context of changing information- and knowledge –intensive economy, workers must not only maintain and develop knowledge and skills that are specific to their own discipline or occupation , but also possess 'generic skills, dispositions and attributes that are transferable to many occupational situations and areas' (Bridgstock: 32). Therefore, demand for these skills is increasing in the labour market; however most of the graduates lack these important skills. Communication skills are chosen because they play significant role in engineering-related jobs and in this modern age industrialization (Kakepoto et al, 2012). The reason for choosing engineering students because the researcher has been teaching academic English and research skills for engineering students for a couple of years. Kakepoto et al, (2012: 176) add globalization has brought dramatic changes in the labour market especially in engineering-related jobs during the last three decades. Engineers have to communicate with people at workplace such as workers, customers, managers, employers and other stakeholders within or outside their organizations. Communication skills refer to one's ability to use active listening, writing skills, oral communication, presentation skills, questioning and feedback skills in order to establish successful communication (QCA, 2002; SQA, 2003; Washer, 2007; & Jones, 2009 cited in Hadiyanto, 2010). Therefore, engineering graduates should be proficient in all generic skills if they want to be successful at workplace in order to perform workplace job successfully. They assert that communication skills assist engineering graduates to obtain a job thereby excel in job promotion ladder at workplace. They claim that "communication functions as soul blood of any organization and engineering organizations heavily rely on effective communication skills of its employees"(QCA, 2002; SQA, 2003; Washer, 2007; & Jones, 2009 cited in Hadiyanto, 2010,p, 177). Thus engineering companies usually assign important duties to those engineers who tend to have effective oral communication skills and they are considered as productive engineers from employer's point of view (QCA, 2002; SQA, 2003; Washer, 2007; & Jones, 2009 cited in Hadiyanto, 2010, p. 177).
Sudanese tertiary institutions have to update their curriculum, syllabi and teaching methodologies to meet current job market needs. Because the traditional knowledge which prepares a graduate in the past is no longer applicable to the demands of both today and future job market. Today's graduates need to be confident in tackling challenges in an ever-changing and dynamic workplace which requires higher–order thinking and effective communication skills.

Statement of the Problem

Graduate attributes of tertiary institutions usually reflected and stated in the learning outcomes of undergraduate and post-graduates programs or advertised either on their websites on their missions and visions. The websites of a five national universities in Sudan were searched using words and phrases such as generic skills, graduate attributes, transferable skills, employability skills and soft skills. The research did not yield significant information with regard to these skills. Higher education in Sudan has witnessed a greater expansion and the number of universities has increased dramatically. This expansion has raised many questions with regard to quality of graduates in both their technical expertise and generic skills, specifically, communication skills. There are frequent complaints from the employers inside Sudan and abroad with regards to the dropping of the graduates' standards in terms of their communication skills in English and other generic skills. The rationale behind choosing engineering graduates because they are the most targeted graduates in the job market particularly in the Gulf countries. Engineers, doctors, IT graduates, technicians are the most demanded graduates in the today's job market, but their generic skills such as communication skills (written and spoken), critical thinking and problem solving skills are always questioned by their employers. McLean (2010, p, 14) advocates that universities need to prepare their graduates for the largely unknown of future professional practice. Further, Manathunga et al. (2007) claim that 'universities have been criticized for producing over-specialized research graduates, who struggle to apply their expertise to new workplace problems and agendas' (Manathunga et al., 2007, p, 19).Current knowledge therefore needs to be learnt in a way and with a purpose that develops in learners the ability to adapt to situations not yet encountered. Manathunga et al, 2007, p, 14) claim that learners require skills to deal with unfamiliar situations. Therefore, this paper argues for the main factors behind the deterioration of the recent graduates' generic skill, notably, communication skills and it strives to find out these factors whether institutional, pedagogical or others. It also attempts to find out some possible solutions and strategies for alleviating this problem. Technical skills were the main skills to obtain and retain a job at workplace but the latest development have changed the scenario of world of work (James &James, 2004 cited in Kakepoto 2012).Employers usually look for engineering graduates who can communicate well with multiple stakeholders on the job (P.177).  (Lippe 2005 cited in Kakepoto, 2012) surveyed college graduates and graduate attributes and the findings show that communication skills are important skills for workplace and job industry. Further, Sutton claims that if two candidates applied for a job and both are technically sound but one candidate possesses better communication skills, the candidate that possesses better communication skills is more likely to get the job against the candidate who lacks these skills. Oral communication skills at workplace include presentation skills, participation in meetings, conversation skills, discussion, and negotiation. Engineers need to make presentations to keep their management informed about their projects and their progress of work. Research has shown that engineers usually need presentations in their workplace (Kassim et al. 2010 cited in Kakepoto, 2012). Conversation is an informal way of communication in
engineering workplace, engineers need to converse with workers, supervisors, managers, etc. at their work place, therefore, and conversation is of a paramount importance in the engineering world, because conversation develops better work relationship between the engineers and their subordinates (Woodilla, 1999 cited in Kakepoto 2012). Further, negotiation in English is an important aspect of workplace communication and it involves communication with different people within and outside organization. Fernando et al. (2001) surveyed Portuguese managers and executives from 500 Portuguese companies on the importance of communication skills for successful negotiation in complex business environments. The results show that all the respondents expressed that the ability to communicate effectively is very important in negotiation. Therefore, skills-based pedagogy could be one of the ways for addressing the decline of the graduate attributes among Sudanese tertiary institutions. However, this is challenged with the fact that many university teachers believe that they have been employed to teach 'content' rather than graduate skills. Most of the tutors hold strong preference for content over process and they do not like the idea of graduate attributes to be embedded in the disciplinary subjects. Because these skills are seen as mere 'by- products' of disciplinary learning and should be taught in pre-orientation or foundation courses (Star & Hammer 2008, pp. 246-247). (Jones,200) claims that generic attributes are seen by content teachers as external to disciplinary knowledge and so consequently are underestimated by disciplinary knowledge teaching staff. Moreover, skills-based pedagogy can help undergraduates successfully navigate their shift to higher education institutions, engage critically with their discipline and make mature judgment about their own performance (ibid:248). Bowden & Marton (1998) cited in Hart et al. (n.d.) argues that the curriculum for any tertiary institution need to be developed round the idea that students are being prepared for a career that is largely unknown. The traditional content knowledge that prepared a graduate for workplace and professional practice in the past is increasingly inadequate as a preparation for the future (p. 2). Ong (n.d.) stresses the importance of generic skills and the need to incorporate them within tertiary institutions programs to successfully produce employment ready graduate. Green et al. (2009) add although higher education institutes seem to accept their new vocational role, there is still considerable confusion over how these skills, attribute or capabilities can be defined and implemented (Green et al., 2009, p. 19).

This study is carried out because it is believed that the findings would contribute in drawing teachers', stakeholders', and practitioners' and syllabus- designers' attention to the importance of graduate attributes and oral communication in particular in today's ever-changing labor market. Further, the study will contribute to literature on generic skills by providing quantitative responses from both engineering graduates and teachers with regard to graduate attributes. The study tries to help gaining thorough understanding of the factors that contributes to the decline of generic skills and communication skills in particular among Sudanese tertiary institutions engineering graduates.

**Defining 'Graduate Attributes'**

There are different terms which have been used interchangeably in the literature for graduate attributes such as 'virtual attributes' (Gow & McDonald, 2006, Hadiyanto,2010), 'soft skills', 'transferable skills' in France , 'key, core, common or employable skills' in the united Kingdom,(Wellman,2010), 'trans-disciplinary goals' in Switzerland, 'critical enabling skills or competencies in Singapore, 'essential skills' in New Zealand, 'process independent qualifications'
in Denmark, "soft skills", "Germany key qualifications, "generic graduate attribute, 'key competencies or employability skills' in Australia" (Bowden et al. 2000; Hager et al., 2002 cited in Barrie 2012,p.123). Graduate attributes are defined by Higher Education Funding for England cited in Wellman (2010) as [...] a set of achievements –skills, understandings and personal attributes-that makes graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workplace, the community and the economy (Wellman, 2010,p. 909). The broad category of generic skills of the HEA'S (2006) are 14 skills such as imagination and creativity, cross-cultural competence willingness to learn, working in team, ability to manage others, ability to work under pressure, good oral communications, communication in wiring for varied purposes and audiences, numeracy skills, learning how to learn, independent working, attention to detail, time management, assumption of responsibility and for making decisions and planning, coordinating and organizing ability (Wellman, 2010, p,911). They referred to them as generic because they are developed regardless of the field of study or domain of knowledge or disciplinary or non-disciplinary contexts (Barrie, 2012). Moreover, "graduate attributes are seen as the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. There are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future" (Bowden et al. 2000 cited in Barrie, 2006, 217). Additionally, Jelas et al. (2006, p, 3) cited in Hadiyanto (2010, p, 13) define core competencies as a set of skills or abilities acquired and developed during one's course of study at higher education level and they are absolutely essential to meet three potential outcomes of higher education, namely the different needs and requirements of employers in the marketplace, lifelong learning, and good citizenship (Hadiyanto 2010, p, 13)

Further, Litchfield et al., (2010) suggest key graduates as being wanted in graduates across the professional societies: ethics and professionalism which encompass maturity, respecting others, honesty, integrity and continual learning. Global perspective, employers look forward to seeing graduates with a broad understanding and awareness of the world. Graduates need to have a global understanding to multi-cultural context. Lack of global perspectives or 'worldliness' is considered as a key weakness of graduates (Litchfield et al., 2010, p, 522).

Many countries have taken serious steps in addressing the issue of generic attributes. For example, Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (MoHEM) identified eight competencies that students should demonstrate at the end of their degree. These competencies such as Information Communication Technology (ICT), intellectual skills in critical thinking, knowledge seeking, problem solving and creative decision making, practical skills, and ability to communicate effectively in oral and written ways (Hadiyanto, 2010).

Despite the variations of definitions and terms used to describe generic skills, they have many things in common; they all include communication, critical thinking, and problem solving skills.

**Conceptualizing Graduate Attributes**

Al-Mahmood & Guba (2007, p. 174) conceptualize attributes in four categories such as precursor, complementary, translation and enabling conceptions. First, in precursor conceptions graduate attributes viewed or seen as requirements, but they stand separate from the disciplines.
For example, language teachers and other non-disciplinary educators would create additional courses to teach and promote students generic skills. Second, in complementary conceptions graduates attributes considered as a part of all higher education experience and centered on learning the discipline knowledge. They considered a part the degree for all students and should be taught by language educators and non-disciplinary specialists. Third, translation conceptions of attributes view graduate attributes as "cluster of personal attributes, cognitive abilities and skills of application" (Barrie, 2004, p.266 cited in Al-Mahmood & Guba 2007, p. 174) and are independent from disciplinary knowledge. Finally, enabling conceptions of attributes view graduate attributes as helping students to lead small project teams, demonstrate critical thinking in a variety of settings, and communicate with both specialists and the wider public.

Further, Al-Mahmood & Guba (2007) propose three models and approaches for delivering generic skills. Firstly, dedicated model in which generic skills are delivered as an independent units. A dedicated program can be implemented to enhance graduate attributes through different activities and the focus on generic skills rather than discipline content. Secondly, infused model in which generic skills are infused within discipline subject or degree program. Finally, in embedded model, generic skills are embedded within the subject discipline content and studied and assessed with the discipline (Al-Mahmood & Guba 2007, p. 176). Each model has its own advantages and disadvantages but they could be integrated to suit the context in which they were applied.

Challenges in Teachability & Assessibility of Graduate Attributes

Implementing graduate attributes is not an easy task due to some challenges. There are epistemological barriers which are concerned with the fact that some practitioners consider generic attributes as not considered as a part of the discipline. Additionally, cultural barriers view generic skills as not a central role of university. Further, pedagogical challenges center round a lack of understanding to the nation of generic skills, its assessment strategies. Finally, structural challenges revolve round large classes, lack of time and teaching generic skills is not supported by the department (Jones 2009 cited in McLean, 2010). Barrie (2007) advocates that some academics expressed their lack of clear understanding of the teaching of generic attributes as being part of usual university teaching at all, because they feel developing these skills should be the responsibility of earlier education experiences. The only role of the university teaching generic skills should be in terms of remedial teaching for those students who have not already developed these skills. Other academics understand the development of generic attributes should be a part of university teaching role (Barrie, 2007, p. 444). Assessment, students learning resources and academic teaching resources cou could be a source of challenge to higher education tertiary institutions. Further, Varasavsky (2010 cited in Holi 2012), reported that challenges which were encountered in promoting generic skills in the Faculty of Science of Monash University in Australia. The first reported challenge was teaching methodology, where instructors needed to change their teaching methods to promote these skills. Additionally, the instructors’ roles and duties had increased and they felt that the primary role was to teach core subjects only. Moreover, generic skills cannot be developed in isolation and must contextualize within real life and authentic environment which is always difficult to be done. This is supported by 'There is a consensus in higher education that generic skills are best developed and assessed within the context of the discipline rather than as 'bolt-on' approach' (Bowden et al. 2000; Bath
To sum up; teaching and assessing generic skills is considered to be of the most common pedagogical challenge that can be encountered in promoting these skills in higher education institutions in general.

**Importance of Graduate Attributes for the Job Market**

The employers consider the graduate attributes to be important for higher education because they reflect how well graduate skills meet the expectations of job market (Hadiyanto, 2010). 'Graduate attributes have become more important in recruitment process than the graduates' degree subject' (Harvey 2000 cited in Velasco, 2012, p,504) 300 UK-based employers were surveyed by Branine and the results reveal that the process of graduate recruitment and selection in the UK has become more personal-related than job-oriented because many employers are more interested in the attitudes, personality and generic skills of applicants than the type of qualification acquired (Branine 2008 cited in Velasco, 2012, p,504). Therefore, it could be argued that generic skills are more important in today's labour market than academic degrees.

Assessing graduate attributes is of utmost importance but it is not an easy task. Hughes & Barrie (2010, p, 326) claim that if graduates are not assessed, they will not be taken seriously by student or teachers.

**Significance of Oral & Written Communication in English for Engineering Graduates**

Communication plays a significant role for engineers at workplace in this digital and industrialized world (Kakepoto, et al, 2012). Therefore it is very important for engineering graduates to be equipped with effective oral and written communication skills that would promote business of their organizations and satisfy customers' needs. Additionally, Prichard & Nasr (2004, p,426) claimed that "English is of particular importance for engineering science students because it is a principal international language of science and is looked upon as an effective means of enabling those students to become familiar with professional texts written in English". Furthermore, Joesba & Arado (2005) added that 'English has become the international language of science and technology, engineering students need to know it because all their resources in their specialties are written in English and it highly demanded in their potential labour market and workplace. Similarly, ORR (2002, p, 40) pointed out that "though engineers around the world conduct their work in nearly every language on the planet, there are few who never use English for some aspects of their jobs, and the largest professional companies use English as their primary language; most of the world engineering texts written in English and most companies use English language as a means of communication" (p. 40). In addition, clear and concise communication is fundamental for success in global business environment (Jaderstorm et al., 2008 cited in in Kakepoto 2012). The findings of this study are expected to be of a great value for engineering education in general and for Sudanese tertiary institutions in particular.

**Research Questions**
1. How do Sudanese tertiary institutions graduates perceive their graduate attributes, specifically, communication skills?
2. How important are the graduate attributes for engineering graduates?
3. What are the factors that contributed to the decline of graduate attributes among engineering graduates?

Methodology

This study is descriptive exploratory study which seeks to survey both Sudanese tertiary institutions engineering graduates and teachers about the significance of graduate attributes, notably, oral communication skills and the factors behind their decline among these graduates in order to find some possible solutions to this dilemma.

Participants

The study employed a survey and interview to collect both students' and teachers' perceptions about factors that contribute to the drop of the standard of engineering graduates in communication skills. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher. The sample of the study was 15 Sudanese professors from different disciplines who have been teaching for several years in Sudan and abroad, and 50 engineering graduates who have been working in Oman in construction companies and some for local and international companies for a number of years. Unstructured interviews were conducted with 10 engineering graduates. They were selected randomly. All the students were homogenous because they came from similar linguistic and cultural background. All the respondents were Sudanese national and they speak Arabic language (mother tongue) and their age group ranges between 25 -32.

Instruments & Procedures

The study examines four national universities websites to find out about their policies, plans and strategies in dealing with graduate attributes dilemma. Four universities were chosen because they are the premier and the first universities to be established in Sudan. A questionnaire was distributed to 15 professors and 50 recent graduates from these four universities with bachelor degrees in engineering to explore the importance of communication skills and the factors behind the decline of their graduate attributes particularly communication skills in English and their generic skills or attributes in general and the problems they faced with regard to these skills. In-depth interviews were conducted with some of the professors and some of the students to support the questionnaire findings. Frequencies and percentages were used for statistical analysis. The result of this study intends to yield further insights for reviewing the current curriculum and teaching methodologies to respond to the current demands of the job market and the new role of the tertiary institutions.

Results & Discussion

This section displays the results which based on the data collected via questionnaire and interview from both engineering graduates and professors in the four selected tertiary institutions in Sudan.

Table 1: Analysis of faculty’s Questionnaire: Institutional Factors
Table 1 illustrates faculty's perceptions about some of the institutional factors that could affect the development of generic skills in Sudanese tertiary education institutions. In response to item 1, (65%) of the respondents believed that there was no clear policy with regard to teaching generic attributes from Sudanese tertiary institutions, while (25%) reported by 'I don't know', and only (10%) disagreed with the statement. It could be argued that generic skills are not considered as important because there is no clear policy according to the respondents. As for item 2, (60%) of the respondents indicated that the nature of classroom is not conducive to the development of engineering graduates' generic skills, whereas (30%) said that they 'don't know', and (5%) 'disagreed'. Concerning question 3, (65%) 'agreed' that the classroom seating arrangement and layout do not help in developing communication skills, while (15%) said they don't know, and (20%) 'disagreed' with the statement. Regarding item 4, (70%) of teachers 'agreed' that the number of students in the classroom is one of the main reasons behind the deterioration of students' generic skills because students could not find opportunities to take part in discussion or to get constructive feedback from their teachers due to the number of the students in the classroom which always beyond the instructors' capabilities and time. On the other hand, (5%) reported that they 'don't know' whether this is a main institutional factor or not, and only (25%) disagreed with the statement and they believed that this is not to be considered as a main institutional factor that could negatively affect students' generic skills.

Table 2: Analysis of Faculty's Questionnaire: Pedagogical Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Generic skills are not explicitly taught at Sudanese tertiary institutions.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Generic skills are not embedded with the syllabi.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Instructors are not adequately trained to teach generic skills such as critical thinking and communication skills in an</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
effective manner.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Current teaching methodology does not promote generic skills.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Assessment mechanisms and tools do not encourage the development and promotions of graduate attributes.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The textbooks used do not help in promoting students' graduate attributes.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lack of teaching aids hinders the development of graduates attributes.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lack of contextualization of generic skills within core subjects leads to deterioration of generic skills among graduates.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 depicts faculty's responses with regard to some of the pedagogical factors that could negatively affect students' graduate attributes. As for item 5, (70%) of the teachers felt that generic skills are not explicitly taught at Sudanese tertiary institutions, while (5%) were 'not sure', and (25%) 'disagreed' with the statement. It could be argued that graduate attributes are not taught as a separate course. Item 6, shows whether generic skills are embedded with the syllabi or not, (65%) of the respondents 'agreed' that these skills are not embedded in the syllabi, while (5%) only were 'not sure', and (15%) 'disagreed'. In response to item 7, the responses indicated that (85%) assumed that instructors are not well trained in teaching generic skills in an effective manner, (10%) were 'not sure', and only (5%) 'disagreed'. It could be argued that both English language and core subject teachers need to be trained on how to teach these kinds of the skills. Concerning item 8, (90%) of teachers believed that the current teaching methodology is outdated and could not promote generic skills, (5%) were 'not sure' whether the current teaching methodology is effective in fostering these skills or not, and only (5%) 'disagreed' with the statement. It is quite evident that the vast majority of the teachers believe that teaching methodology in use in not that effective.

As for item 9, which deals with assessment mechanism in use, (55%) of the respondents indicated that the mechanisms and tools do not encourage the promotion of graduate attributes, (5%) were 'not sure', and only (5%) 'disagreed'. For item 10, (75%) of the teachers believed that the textbooks in use do not promote generic skills because they lack content which could foster skills such as communication, critical thinking, etc., while (20%) of the respondents were 'not sure' whether the textbooks help in promoting generic skills or not, and only (5%) 'disagreed'. It is quite clear that the majority of the teachers believed that the textbooks in use do not help in prompting generic skills, therefore, materials' writers, syllabus-designers and concerned authorities need to keep into their consideration this issue. Regarding item 11, (65%) of teachers claimed that lack of appropriate teaching aids could hinder the development of graduate attributes, (20%) were 'not sure', and (15%) disagreed with the statement. Finally, (85%) of the teachers reported that lack of contextualizing generic attributes within disciplinary knowledge or
core subjects could be one of the pedagogical reasons behind the deterioration of graduate attributes among Sudanese tertiary institution graduates. Whereas, only (5%) of the respondents were 'not sure', and (10%) of the respondents 'disagreed' with the statement. It could be argued that teaching graduate attributes can only be successful if they are embedded with the core subjects and should be dealt with as a shared responsibility between core subject instructors and language teachers.

In summary, in appropriate teaching methodology and teaching aids, training instructors, contextualizing graduate attributes within core subjects are considered as the major pedagogical reasons behind the deterioration of graduate attributes in Sudanese tertiary institutions.

**Table 3:** *Analysis of Students' Questionnaire: Students' Perceptions about their Current Communication Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Excellent F %</th>
<th>Good F %</th>
<th>Fair F %</th>
<th>Poor F %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Skills in English Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How do you describe your oral communication or spoken skills in English language with regard to your current job.</td>
<td>3 10</td>
<td>7 23</td>
<td>14 47</td>
<td>4 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Your ability to interact effectively in a job interview.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>4 30</td>
<td>15 50</td>
<td>9 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Your verbal negotiation skills in English language.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>7 23</td>
<td>15 50</td>
<td>7 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Your understanding to people speaking in English with different backgrounds.</td>
<td>3 10</td>
<td>4 13</td>
<td>16 53</td>
<td>6 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Your ability to participate in group conversation and everyday communication in English.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>8 27</td>
<td>16 53</td>
<td>6 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Your ability to introduce yourself to others and introducing people to one another in English.</td>
<td>3 10</td>
<td>6 20</td>
<td>14 47</td>
<td>7 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Your ability to write e-mail, letters and reports in English.</td>
<td>3 10</td>
<td>8 27</td>
<td>12 40</td>
<td>7 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Your ability to object and make argument in English.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>6 20</td>
<td>13 43</td>
<td>1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Your ability to ask and answer questions in English.</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>6 20</td>
<td>14 47</td>
<td>8 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Your ability to present your ideas in public in English.</td>
<td>2 7</td>
<td>5 17</td>
<td>13 43</td>
<td>9 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Item 1 displays the respondents' views about their evaluation of current communication skills in English in relation to their current jobs. (3%) responded by 'excellent', (23%) described their communication skills as 'good', (47%) responded by 'fair', and (13%) described them as 'poor'. As for question 2, (3%) described their ability to interact effectively in a job interview, (30%) of the respondents believed that they are 'good', (50%) described them as 'fair', and (30%) viewed them as 'poor'. It is quite evident that the majority of the respondents view their communications skills as 'fair' in relation to their current jobs. As for their verbal negotiation skills (23%) viewed them as 'good', (50%) as fair and (23%) described their skills as 'poor' in relation to their jobs. Concerning item 4, (10%) of the respondents described their abilities in understanding people speaking in English with different backgrounds as 'excellent', (13%) viewed them as 'good', (53%) considered them as 'fair', and (20%) perceived their communication skills in English as 'poor'. As for item 5, (3%) only perceived their ability to negotiation skills in English as 'excellent', (27%) viewed them as 'good', (53%) described them as 'fair', and only (20%) described them as 'poor'.

Regarding item 6, only (10%) viewed their ability to introduce themselves and others in English as 'excellent', (20%) described them as 'good', (47%) as 'fair', and (23%) perceived them as 'poor'. Concerning their ability to write e-mails and reports, (10%) of the respondents felt that their ability is 'excellent', (27%) described them as 'good', (40%) viewed them as 'fair', and (23%) described them as 'poor'. It could be argued that most of the respondents are not happy with abilities to write e-mails and reports in English. As for item 8, the respondents' ability to construct argument in English, only (3%) of the respondents described their abilities as 'excellent', (20%) viewed them as 'good', (43%) described them as 'fair', and (33%) of the respondents depicted them as 'poor'. It could be argued that the majority of the respondents find it difficult to construct an argument in English and they need to be trained to do so.

Finally, items 9, shows the respondents' views about their abilities to question in English, (3%) of them viewed their ability to ask question in English as 'excellent', (20%) of the respondents perceived them as 'good', (47%) of them described them as 'fair', and (27%) viewed their abilities as 'poor'. As for the last item which illustrates the respondents' views about their presentation skills, (7%) of the respondents described their skills as 'excellent', (17%) of the respondents viewed their presentation skills as 'good', (43%) of them depicted them as 'fair', and (30%) saw them as 'poor'. It is quite clear that the respondents are not satisfied with presentation skills.

**Table 4: Analysis of Students' Questionnaire: Students' Perceptions about the Importance of Generic Skills to in Relation to their Current Jobs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>V. Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of Generic Skills to their Current Jobs</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Communicate orally in English language</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Communicate accurately in written English</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work in team</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 displays the respondents' views about the importance of generic skills to their current jobs. As for item (1) in the student questionnaire, (67%) of the respondents considered oral communication is 'very important' to their present jobs, (20%) saw them as 'important', and (10%) of the respondents viewed them as 'not important'. Concerning item 2, (63%) of the respondents believed that written communication skills are 'very important' to their current jobs, (23%) of them viewed them as 'important', and only (7%) responded by 'not important'. It could be argued that both oral and written communication skills are of utmost importance for engineering–related jobs. Concerning item 3, (50%) of the respondents felt that team work skills are 'very important' to their current jobs, (30%) of the respondents described team work as 'not important' to their present jobs. As for question 4, (83%) of the respondents saw their abilities to solve technical problem or their problem solving skills as 'very important', (13%) described them as 'important', and only (3%) as 'not important'. Item 5, illustrates the importance of adapting knowledge of a new situation, (60%) of the respondents responded by 'very important', (20%) viewed this skill as 'important' and (30%) said they are not important at all. It is quite evident that the vast majority of the respondents believed that the ability to adopt knowledge of a new situation is very important to their current jobs. Regarding item 6, (80%) of the respondents believed that the ability to work with minimum supervision is considered to be 'very important' to their current jobs, (17%) reported by 'important', and only (3%) of the respondents perceived them as 'not important'.

As for item 7, describes the importance of the ability to be open to new ideas and possibilities, (70%) viewed this skill as 'very important' to their current jobs, (17%) believed this skill as 'important', and only (7%) considered them as 'not important'. Regarding item 8, the ability to think logically, critically and creatively (67%) claimed that this as 'very important', (20%) believed that as 'important', and (7%) viewed them as 'not important'. As for item 8, (87%) of the respondents believed that the ability to make mature judgment as very important, (7%) of the respondents believed that this skill as 'important', and (7%) of the respondents 'perceived' as 'not important'. Regarding item 10, this deals with the importance of awareness of technology to their
current jobs (77%) of the respondents believed that awareness of technology is 'very important',
(17%) viewed them as 'important', and (3%) considered it as 'not important'. As for item 11,
(40%) believed that ability to manage time as 'very important', (50%) viewed them as 'important',
and only (10%) of the respondents claimed that as 'not important'. Concerning, item 12, most of
the respondents (73%) believed that the skill of ability to maintain standards as 'very important',
(23%) viewed them as 'important', and (3%) considered them as 'not important'. As for item 13,
(67%) of the respondents viewed the ability to work with numbers as 'very important', (27%) of
the respondents considered this skill as 'important', and only (3%) of the respondents (3%) viewed them as 'not important'.

**Extracts from Qualitative Data**

In-depth interviews were conducted with both professors and students to support the
questionnaires findings and the results revealed that most of the graduates expressed their
desperate need for graduate attributes and they reported that many things could be taken to
improve the situation. An instructor wrote:

- Some methods of teaching English are still traditional
- in nature without involvement of new advances in
- technology. Shortage of native English teachers.
- lack of specialized work and seminar to practice
  speaking in English language.

Another professor added:

Students leave school with weak background in English.
Even the teachers of English do not receive enough training
to do their jobs well.

Another professor added:

It is due to a combination of reasons. The most salient one
is their previous background in English which is heavily
based on a transmission approach.

Another professor added:

The main factors are: the curriculum, lack of qualified faculty,
learning environment (lack of modern equipment) & group size.

To sum up, it is quite clear from the professors' responses that faculty training, curriculum
issues, teaching methodology and learning environment could be the main factors behind the
deterioration of Sudanese tertiary institutions graduates of generic skills or attributes.
Regarding the factors behind their decline among graduate, a student wrote:

I think it is more important to learn how to communicate with people.

Another student added:

Education and school system, work atmosphere, etc.

Another added:

The main factor is teaching in Arabic

Another added: lack of practice and application

It is quite evident from these responses from both qualitative and quantitative data that there are various possible factors that could contribute to the decline of graduate attributes among these graduates and which cannot be investigated through this small scale study.

**Conclusions & Pedagogical Implications**

To conclude, the findings of this study are only illustrative not conclusive because the study has several limitations due to the fact that it is a small scale study and the sample size is not representative to the whole population and therefore, the results and findings cannot be generalized. Moreover, only communication skills were investigated in depth and the rest of the graduate attributes are beyond the scope of this study. Further, study did not involve other stakeholders in higher education such as decision makers, materials writers, etc. Based on the study findings the following recommendations were made from the respondents' suggestions and study findings which could improve the situation of graduate attributes in Sudanese tertiary institutions.

- Textbooks that promote graduate attributes should be used
- Advanced teaching and learning technology could be incorporated in the classroom to foster learning the skills.
- Teachers and students should be trained on good teaching and learning strategies that help developing these skills.
- Learning environment and lectures rooms should be improved to more conducive ones.
- Students' selection should be based on a proficiency test.
- The concern with generic skills should start from primary and secondary levels of education and not to be left to the tertiary level in which case it'll be 'too late to little'.
- Graduate attributes should be stated clearly in the university learning outcomes, missions and visions and should be integrated into the core subjects and should be dealt with as a shared responsibility between core subjects and language instructors.

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References


