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INVESTIGATING IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TEACHERS' CODE SWITCHING

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ABSTRACT

Code switching is defined as change in language teaching to help learners understand the EFL points. Code switching can be enjoyed at different times in the EFL classes by the teachers and may be as a safe help to understand and comprehend the points and materials. The present paper is to analyze and study the Iranian learners' attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classrooms. The researchers enjoyed a questionnaire adopted from a study done by Yao (2011). The questionnaire had 20 items in different topics. The learners' attitudes toward the questionnaire's items were stated in percentage form. The findings showed that most of the learners had a positive look toward code switching by their teachers because some EFL points are really difficult to understand and it is better to change the language of teaching and help learners achieve the EFL points.

Key words: code switching; attitude; Iranian learners; EFL classes

Introduction

English in developing countries plays an important role and it is taught as a foreign language. It is paid attention a lot recently and most people living in developing countries consider it as an important tool to communicate with other nations and countries. English is learnt and taught through different methods. One of the common method to deliver the points is code switching. Code switching is defined as "the process whereby a speaker goes back and forth between one or more languages or varieties of a language to achieve discourse functions" (Asali, 2011, p. 5).

Code switching is seen in EFL classes repeatedly to teach different points and notes related to English as a foreign language. It is stated that code switching is chiefly discussed and enjoyed in linguistics branch of a language (Moradi, 2014). It is believed that code switching can happens within the same sentence or structure calling intrasentential or includes switches from a language to the other between structures or sentences calling intersentential (Ahmad Shah, Armia & Ibrahim, 2013). It is also claimed that code switching can be considered as a usual practice of multilingual or bilingual that can be expanded as an outcome of the speakers' habits for the especial goals (Afizah & Al-Hourani, 2013).

The learners who learn English as a foreign language sometimes do not understand their teachers' aims when teaching the target language; therefore, the teacher may switch his language to native language and explains in learners' first language. It is believed that code can be enjoyed to cover any type of structure that two persons use for talking and also have communication (Iqbal, 2011). Code switching sometimes is considered as a sole method to deliver the points and notes related to English. It is believed that lately some researches have an idea that code switching plays an essential role in considering second or foreign language (Jakobsson & Rydén, 2010); therefore, considering code switching as a method of passing the points can be important and in some situations necessary in EFL classes. It is also claimed that code switching happens in speech as partners of the context alter languages or among various varieties of one language (Hong Parr, 2013).

The present research attempts to know the Iranian EFL learners' attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classes. EFL learners as one of the most important participants in EFL classes have different ideas toward the method of teaching and these attitudes can help to achieve the possible goals in

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EFL classes. The learners' attitudes toward EFL teachers' code switching help also the teachers who teach English as a foreign language because the teachers should know their learners' intentions and also needs to satisfy and help them to understand and comprehend the English points. The learners' attitudes can also be as a good source to know their possible shortcomings and strengths in EFL classes; therefore, the present study can be a good source to know and find these problems by the learners. The present study searches Iranian EFL learners' attitudes toward code switching to understand how the students see code switching as a method of teaching points in EFL classrooms.

1. Review of the literature

1.1. *Studies in Code Switching*

The studies of the code switching can be viewed from different views by the researchers. The methodology and also the way of gathering data toward these studies are very important because sometimes these ways are the subject of considering the notes and also points. The subjects of the studies are different and have also different functions meaning that sometimes it was written and studied to know the functions of code switching. Sometimes they are done to know the reasons of enjoying code switching in EFL classes, sometimes they are done to know the attitudes of the teachers toward enjoying code switching e.g. code-switching in Iranian elementary EFL classrooms by Rezvani and Eslami Rasekh (2011), teachers' code-switching to L1 in EFL classroom by Jingxia (2010).

The issue of switching in a linguistic context in target language teaching was not a chief matter for different studies in the past. But these days code switching has been paid attention a lot among the learners and teachers (Gulzar, 2010). By considering and studying different articles it can be claimed that code switching can occur within clauses, words and sentences (Abdel Jalil, 2009).

1.2. *Teachers and Students' Attitudes toward Code Switching*

The views and looks toward code switching are different among two important members of the EFL classes, i.e. teachers and learners because each member of the class sees code switching to meet his needs. It is believed that most of the people in educational and social places disagree with code switching and never encourage learners to enjoy it because they believe that it has a relationship with semilingualism, mental confusion, alingualism, interference and fossilization (Dhaouadi, 2006).

Code switching is enjoyed to transfer the points which are difficult to understand through the target language. It is believed that sometimes the persons who enjoy two languages at the same time are not able to enjoy suitable structures or lexical items and also they do not know a suitable way of translating a sample point; therefore they may lead to code switching (Asali, 2011).

Code switching can also be helpful for two members of EFL classes because the target points are not always easy to transfer or comprehend. It is believed that code switching can be considered as a helpful device to assist in learning English (Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009). By considering the previous statement, the roles of the learners and teachers in EFL classes should be considered; therefore, their attitudes toward code switching can be important and useful to hold a better situation to teach and learn. It is believed that most of the people consider code switching as a structure that has no grammar in blending the languages and also mentioned that people who enjoy code switching have no knowledge toward the language in a sufficient mode to converse (Jegade, 2012).

It was also mentioned that although the key word of the study, i.e. code switching characterizes the discourse of instructor and learners, instructors' code switching is not all the time done consciously, meaning that they are not all the time aware of its roles like topic switch, affective and repetitive roles that could be beneficial in language learning when applied in a suitable way. It was said that in topic switch samples the instructor may switch codes when dealing with the structure of a language creating a bridge from something that is familiar (mother tongue language) to the something which is not familiar (new target language content) so that the teacher exploits learners' mother tongue learning experience to improve their knowledge of target language (Dhaouadi, 2006).

It is also claimed that code switching is blending of sentences, phrases and also words from two separate language structures (Ayeomoni, 2006) that can be called the function of code switching in a language and be useful to understand the importance of code switching. It is also held that the students who took part in EFL classes were rarely allowed to enjoy code switching and the information which are authentic were very difficult to receive in 1970s–1980s (Zabrodskaia, 2007).

It is believed that enjoying mother tongue within a code switching environment, some scholars and instructors stipulate that it manifests lack of credibility and incompetence (Horasan, 2014). The affective role refers to the contribution of code switching in making a supportive language area in the class which assists the instructor construct solidarity and intimate communications with the pupils. While the repetitive role refers to the instructor's adding clarity to the subject of the unit by code switching among the foreign language and the mother tongue language when teaching is not clear to assist efficient understanding (Dhaouadi, 2006).

In a similar research on the effects of code switching on school pupils' talking, it was reported the impressive talent of the speakers who are bilingual to switch with ease at different notes in talking; it was also noted and believed that code switching by learning two languages is not due to shortage of proficiency, but it is used to express communicative knowledge to gain conversational aims during partner interaction. It was proposed that younger students show more lexical item code switching comparing older pupils not because of incomplete knowing of one of the languages, rather and in some samples, learners may be momentarily unable to gain a word for an idea in the language in use, but can gain its equivalent promptly in the other language. Further, it was stated that older learners code switch when they learn the elements of the other language and understand the meaning of the intended opinion more accurately.

It is argued that people select their codes according to their individual or/and communication with their peers or partners; therefore, it can be as a role of negotiating and debating (Jagero & Odongo, 2011). It is mentioned that, based on the learners and teachers' attitudes, code switching is an option which is enjoyed by speakers of two or more languages in their communication with others (Abdul-Zahra, 2010). It was also argued that code switching increases in learners who are bilingual as they have more exposure to the second language, and it is enjoyed as a resource to increase communicative competence. As these learners who were bilingual got older, their exposure to different social and linguistic knowledge rise, and these experiences in turn affect and enlarge their knowledge and ability to enjoy their different languages and to deploy code switching for sociolinguistic aims and goals (Dhaouadi, 2006).

Studies also showed that speakers with the highest degree of bilingual communicative competence are the ones who use code switching in different situations as a strategy to meet their conversational aims and to communicate with their partners. This case suggests a relationship which is positive between bilingual code switching and language proficiency. The considered idea is in contradiction with the opinion that code switching is a sign of communicative incompetence or language deficiency. Instead, it was claimed that code switching is recently observed as one of the abilities the children who are bilingual use during cooperative learning areas.

Moreover, it is stated that students' attitudes can be as an outcome of understanding or comprehending enjoyed by the learners in a collaborative manner; therefore, each persons' consideration and aspect is inborn and is influenced by factors like culture, behavior and belief (Hamzehlou Moghadam, Abul Samad & Rahmani Shahraki, 2012). In a study called "teachers' patterns of alternation between English the majority language and the target languages in a foreign language context", it was found that instructors' code switching did not make easy to pupils' target language learning. It is assumed that the foreign language instructor is often the only source of foreign language input. Therefore, instructor's code switching practice should be minimized not to prevent students from the chances of target language intake and for authentic conversation in the foreign language. By studying the relationship between especial pedagogic functions and code switching, it was not found every consistency in the target language use by the samples in the research. It was not found that there was a systematic relationship between particular pedagogic functions and the teachers' language choices (Dhaouadi, 2006).

2. Research questions

In the present study the possible attitudes of the EFL learners toward code switching were gathered and the following matters were considered:

1. What are Iranian EFL learners' attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classes?
2. What are differences and similarities among Iranian EFL learners' attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classes?

3. Methodology

3.1. *Participants*

Fifty EFL learners participated and took part in the present study sharing their attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classes. They were both male and female. They learnt English as a foreign language and their native language were Persian, Iran's national language. They were both university and also school students. Their ages were from 15 to 40 who were in EFL language institutes in Sari, North of Iran.

3.2. *Instrumentation*

The only instrument of the study was a questionnaire adapted from Yao (2011). The items of the questionnaire were modified by the researchers and distributed among EFL learners to state their attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classes. The instrument has twenty items related to the functions and roles of code switching in EFL classes in four parts.

3.3. *Procedure*

A hundred Iranian EFL learners were asked to state their attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classes. The learners were selected randomly by the researchers. The research was done in some EFL classes in some English institutes in Sari in the north of Iran. The related statistics toward the aim of the research was calculated after gathering the data from the questionnaire distributed among Iranian EFL learners and its statistics was considered and reported by the researchers.

3.4. *Results and Discussion*

There are two research questions regarding the topic of the study. The learners stated their attitudes toward teachers' code switching in EFL classes. The results demonstrate that EFL learners' attitudes were different and each learner has his attitude toward teachers' code switching. They had different attitudes toward each item; however, some of their attitudes were the same. Some of these attitudes stated by the EFL learners could be reasonable and useful sources to teach in Iranian EFL classes and the teachers who teach English know their learners' attitudes toward code switching.

Table 1: Distribution of the Number of Each Item Stated by the Learners in the Questionnaire

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	30	15	3	2	0
2	35	13	2	0	0
3	15	20	10	3	2
4	20	10	10	6	4
5	15	15	18	1	1
6	20	13	7	6	4
7	35	10	3	2	0
8	20	10	20	0	0
9	30	10	6	3	1
10	38	10	1	12	0
11	15	22	13	0	0
12	13	14	10	5	8
13	14	20	3	3	10
14	15	20	5	8	2
15	10	22	6	8	4
16	23	10	7	3	7
17	15	10	6	6	13
18	10	12	15	8	5
19	18	14	3	6	9
20	20	13	7	4	6

4. Learners' attitudes toward EFL teachers' code switching

The learners' attitudes toward EFL teachers' code switching were as follows:

4.1 Teachers' Attitudes toward Classroom Code Switching

This part of the questionnaire consists of five items with different subjects. The highest percentage refers to item 2 that seventy percent of the learners strongly agree with this item. Sixty percent of the learners who participated in this paper strongly agreed with item one and thirty percent agreed, six percent had no idea toward the item, no one strongly disagreed and four percent disagreed whereas in a study done by Yao (2011) forty six percent of the learners strongly agreed, forty seven percent agreed, five percent had no idea, only two percent of the students disagreed and no one strongly disagreed with the first item. By considering the attitudes of the learners toward item one, it can be said that the highest numbers of the learners strongly agreed with this item.

To respond to the second item of the first part, seventy percent of the learners strongly agreed, twenty six percent of the learners agreed, four percent had no idea and no one strongly disagreed or disagreed

with the second item while in the study studied by Yao (2011) sixteen percent of the learners agreed or strongly agreed with the item, ninety percent of the learners had not any idea and others strongly disagreed or disagreed with the item. Most of the learners of this paper strongly disagreed with the second item and it shows the importance of the item in the questionnaire.

The three other items were also answered by the learners who participated in this study. The highest percentage toward the remaining items refers to item three in which forty percent of the learners agreed with the item the lowest percentage goes back to the fifth item that only two percent of the students strongly disagreed or disagreed however in a study studied by Yao (2011) the highest percentage that the learners strongly agreed refers to the fifth item and the lowest percentage that the learners strongly disagreed refers to fourth item that the learners both strongly disagreed and disagreed with that item.

4.2 Attitudes toward Code switching in Relation to Subject Access

This part of the questionnaire also has five items like the first part. The learners who participated in this study had different views and ideas toward the items of the second part. The second part starts from item 6 to item 10. Forty percent of the learners strongly agreed with the sixth item and the percentage of the items answered by the learners to agree, have no idea, strongly disagree and disagree are as twenty six, fourteen, twelve and eight percent respectively, but in a study done by Yao (2011) seventeen percent of the learners strongly agreed, thirty one percent of them agreed with the item and the percentage of the learners who had no idea, disagreed and strongly disagreed are twenty seven, twenty one and four respectively.

The learners also stated their ideas toward item seven as: seventy percent strongly agreed, twenty percent agreed, six percent had no idea, four percent disagreed and no one strongly disagreed. As it was seen to analyze the second item of the second part, it can be stated that seventy percent of the learners strongly agree which indicates that most of the learners who took part in the present study stated that they strongly agreed with the item and it shows the rank of this item among the other items whereas in the study done by Yao (2011) ninety three percent of the learners strongly agreed or agreed, two percent of them had no idea and five percent of the others disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item.

Item eight deals with teachers who switch codes from English to Persian which can better explain cultural topics in the text. The cultural points and notes are always challenging by both learners and teachers and they have their own ideas toward culture. It is very interesting that the percentage of the learners who strongly agreed and had no idea toward the eighth item is the same meaning that forty percent strongly agreed and also forty percent had no ideas toward it. Twenty percent of the learners agreed with the item and no one strongly disagreed or disagreed with the eighth item while in Yao's study (2011) the most number of the learners, 86%, of the learners strongly agreed or agreed with the item, ten percent of them had no idea, and only four percent of the remaining learners disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item.

To know the responses of the learners is always a difficult task in the classroom. The ninth item of the questionnaire was dealt with this importance in EFL classes and the learners stated their attitudes toward the role of code switching to elicit responses. In stating the attitudes toward item nine, sixty percent of the learners strongly agreed, twenty percent agreed, twelve percent had no idea, six percent disagreed and only two percent of the learners strongly disagreed. Again, the highest percentage goes back to strongly agree showing that most of the learners strongly agreed with code switching of the teachers to elicit the responses. To compare the result of the present study with a study done by Yao (2011), the results in that study shows that eighty one percent of the learners agreed or strongly agreed with the item, fourteen percent of the learners had no idea and five percent of the student took part strongly disagreed or disagreed with the item.

Seventy six percent of the learners strongly agreed with item ten that is the highest percentage of the items in the second part. The highest percentage of item ten shows that most of the learners believed in the fact that a teacher can enjoy code switching in EFL classes to explain the points because sometime the sole way to teach EFL points is code switching like idioms and also proverbs and some grammar points while in the study done by Yao (2011), eighty eight percent of the learners strongly agreed or

agreed with the tenth item, six percent of the learners had not any opinion and others strongly disagreed or disagreed with item number ten.

4.3 Attitudes toward Code Switching in Relation to Classroom Management

How to manage an EFL classes is always an important point to consider and is changed to one of the most important issues for most teachers to be employed in EFL classes. The third part of the questionnaire is dealt with some important items to know how code switching can help the teachers in EFL classes and the learners as one of the most important elements of the EFL classes stated their attitudes toward them. The highest percentage of five items in the third part turns back to the last item of this part i.e. item sixteen in the questionnaire. Twenty three among fifty learners who participated in this study stated that they strongly agreed with item sixteen and it is about half of the numbers of the learners who participated in the study and no one disagreed or strongly disagreed with item eleven. The results of the third part of the questionnaire show that in learners' ideas teachers can enjoy code switching to direct the learners and code switching shall not be banned in all situations and issues toward EFL. The learners as one of the elements in EFL classes believed that code switching should be enjoyed whenever the teachers feel that it can be as a facilitator to pass the points to the learners. In the study done by Yao (2011) the highest percentage of the questionnaire which the learners agreed or strongly agreed is for the fifteenth item that fifty percent of the learners agreed with the item and thirteen percent of the learners strongly disagreed with item number twelve.

4.4 Attitudes toward Code Switching in Relation to Interpersonal Relations

The fourth and also the last part of the questionnaire is analyzed and considered carefully by EFL learners who were selected randomly to state their points. In response to the first item of the fourth part, thirty percent of the learners strongly agreed, twenty percent agreed, twelve percent had no idea, twelve percent disagreed and twenty six percent strongly disagreed. It is observed that more than twenty percent of the students of the present paper strongly disagreed with the item meaning that in learners' ideas who stated strongly disagreed code switching cannot be used as a means to encourage the learners whereas in the study carried out by Yao (2011), six percent of the learners strongly agreed with the item, thirty four percent of the learners agreed with the item and the percentage of the learners who disagreed and strongly disagreed are nineteen and seven, respectively. Thirty four percent of the learners also had no comment of the item.

Thirty percent of the learners who took part in the study strongly believed that code switching can be enjoyed by their learners to praise their classmates. Praising the learners who study English as a foreign language is always encouraged by the experts because the learners should believe themselves and also find their self-confidence. The data gathered by the research show that twenty percent of the learners agreed, twelve percent had no ideas, twelve percent disagreed and twenty six percent of the learners strongly disagreed. The results show that half of the learners strongly agreed or agreed with the seventeenth item and it shows the place of code switching to praise among learners who learn English as a foreign language; however, in a study done by Yao (2011) thirty two percent of the learners strongly agreed or agreed, twenty nine of them had no idea and thirty nine percent of the learners had not any view toward the item.

Sixty four percent of the learners who selected and participated in the present paper strongly agreed or agreed with item number eighteen. Thirty six participants stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the mentioned item and fifteen learners had no idea about code switching to create a funny class showing that thirty percent of the learners were not sure toward the item while in a study done by Yao (2011) seventy one percent of the learners agreed or strongly agreed with the item, only nine percent of the learners strongly disagreed or disagreed with the item and twenty percent of the students didn't have any idea.

It indicates that the learners' responses can increase the motivation of the learners to participate in class discussions. One of the methods to have a comment for the learners' answers can be enjoying code switching. In analyzing item nineteen it was found that more than half of the learners strongly agreed or

agreed with item nineteen and thirty percent of the learners had opposite ideas and they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item. Thirty two learners agreed or strongly disagreed with the item and they would like to have a comment by the teachers through code switching. Just three participants consisting six percent of the learners in the present study had no certain ideas toward item nineteen and they stated that they were not sure about the place of code switching to comment the learners' responses; however, more than half of the learners, 53%, agreed or strongly agreed with the item, twenty percent of the learners disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item and twenty seven percent had no idea and opinion.

The last item was studied by the learners and following statistics were gathered by the researcher: Forty percent strongly agreed, twenty six agreed, fourteen percent were not sure, eight percent disagreed and others i.e. twelve percent strongly disagreed. To discuss and negotiate with the learners changed to an interesting task in EFL classes among learners and teachers. Code switching again sometimes can be as an only way to express your idea and intentions. The results show that about half of the learners strongly agreed with code switching to express your points to discuss your teachers to show that he understands the points. In the paper done by Yao (2011) sixty six percent of the learners agreed or strongly agreed with the last item, thirteen of those learners disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item and twenty – one percent of them had no idea.

5. Conclusions & Pedagogical Implications

The gathered data and information toward the learners' attitudes toward EFL teachers' code switching in EFL classes found that learners who learn English as a foreign language believe in code switching as one of the most important method to teach English as a foreign language and in some situations it is the only and sole way to teach EFL points in Iran. It was also considered that code switching can be enjoyed by the teachers in EFL classes to clarify the points behind EFL because most of the learners strongly agree with code switching to make simple the possible subject matter in EFL classes although some others disagree with this fact. By looking at the result of the questionnaire, both sides of code switching can be considered because all the learners who participate in the present study are not strongly agree with all the items nor strongly disagree and their attitudes are variable therefore considering these attitudes can be good to teach, manage and also provide a suitable and desirable EFL setting for the learners.

Learners and teachers are two important sides of EFL classes and each of them has its own especial place and rank in this environment. Doing the present research can be useful to respect the learners as one of the most important elements of the EFL classes because their ideas and attitudes are very important for the teachers who teach English as a foreign language because EFL classes are held for them to know the important points and notes of English. The learners' attitudes toward code switching can be a way to teach EFL to them because their wanting is manifested in the present study and it can be a good source for all those who deal with EFL points and settings.

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Questionnaire

Part 1 Teacher' persona

1. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian or from Persian to English can express themselves clearly in both languages.
2. Teachers who switch codes from Persian to English or from English to Persian may cause difficulty in understanding.
3. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian or from Persian to English pollute languages.
4. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian are deficient in English.
5. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian are proficient in English.

Part 2 Subject access

6. Teachers who switch codes from Persian to English or from English to Persian can do so in all kinds of topics in class.
7. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better explain the grammatical points and lexical items in the text.
8. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better explain cultural topics in the text.
9. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better elicit responses from students.
10. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better clarify the lesson content taught.

Part 3 Classroom management

11. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better clarify task instruction.
12. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better discipline the students.
13. Teachers who code-switch from English to Persian can better engage students' attention.
14. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better request quiet.
15. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better direct (call on) students.

Part 4 CS for interpersonal relations

16. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better encourage students.
17. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better praise students.
18. Teachers who switch codes from Persian to English or from English to Persian can better enliven the atmosphere of class (e.g. make a joke for humor).
19. Teachers who code-switch from English to Persian can better comment on the students' response.
20. Teachers who switch codes from English to Persian can better negotiate with students (reduce distance).

LA MÚSICA EN EL ÁMBITO EDUCATIVO: LAS COMUNIDADES DE APRENDIZAJE

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RESUMEN

A lo largo de la historia, la música se ha utilizado para mejorar el bienestar físico, psíquico y emocional. En este sentido, el sistema educativo, y dentro de él, las Comunidades de Aprendizaje², también han apostado por la música como elemento formador. Así, en el presente artículo, repasaremos el papel que la música tiene dentro del sistema de enseñanza, sus posibilidades en cada nivel educativo y su inclusión dentro de las CCAA.

Palabras clave: Música, comunidades de aprendizaje, inclusión social, atención a la diversidad, interdisciplinariedad

ABSTRACT

Throughout history, music has been used to improve the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. In this sense, the educational system, and within it, the Learning Communities (LC), have also opted for music as an educational element. Thus, in this article, we will review the role that music plays in the education system, its possibilities in the field of secondary education and its inclusion within LC.

Key words: Music, learning communities, social inclusion, attention to diversity, interdisciplinarity

1. Introducción

En estos últimos años, el rápido cambio social, motivado en gran medida por los avances tecnológicos, y el frenético ritmo de vida han afectado drásticamente a la vida de las personas. Vivimos en la sociedad de la comunicación y con ello se han creado nuevas necesidades que provocan día a día un aumento en la demanda de competencias. Ahora, por ejemplo, es indispensable saber sobrellevar estados de estrés y tensión elevados y derivados de estos tiempos de constante ajeteo e incertidumbre. Por todo ello, se hace imprescindible un alto nivel de competencia personal, lo cual exige una alta cualificación en todos los niveles posibles: emocional, intelectual, profesional, social..., y no hay duda de que en ese proceso de formación, la educación juega un papel decisivo.

La sociedad del siglo XXI guarda pocas similitudes con la de épocas pasadas, por lo que los métodos educativos no pueden quedarse estancados. Si dicha metodología funcionaba en el pasado es porque se ajustaba a la sociedad de su tiempo pero, si la educación quiere avanzar a la par que la sociedad, la renovación ha de ser una máxima en ella. Así, la música puede contribuir en gran medida a desarrollar las nuevas competencias que la era tecnológica exige –creatividad, control emocional, dinamismo, empatía, habilidades sociales, etc.– y, por ello, resulta fundamental su inclusión en el currículo desde la más tierna infancia.

Del mismo modo, conviene tener presente que, si bien en el pasado la educación se basaba prácticamente en la memorización de contenidos teóricos, ahora ha de apostar por lo práctico, por el empirismo que supone vivir experiencias para aprender de ellas a todos los niveles. Así, el aprendizaje ya no queda en el aula, sino que trasciende a todos los contextos sociales donde se mueve el individuo, con carácter integrador. Bajo esta filosofía se mueven las CCAA, donde cada individuo se convierte en alumno y a la vez mentor, y donde el carácter participativo hace que el aprendizaje cobre una dimensión interactiva y práctica que permita el desarrollo y el bienestar interpersonal. En este sentido, la música es

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² CCAA en adelante.

una forma de comunicación universal que fácilmente puede compartirse y donde la interacción personal cobra gran importancia. No es de extrañar, por tanto, que sea una herramienta de gran utilidad en los planes educativos, dada su versatilidad y las enormes posibilidades que ofrece a nivel personal y social.

2. Evolución de la música en el sistema educativo: desarrollo en cada nivel escolar

La música posee gran cantidad de propiedades (Fernández-Carrión, 2011): curativas, catárticas, terapéuticas, sociales, lúdicas, hedónicas, emocionales, afectivas, formativas, éticas, espirituales, etc., lo que la ha llevado a ser un elemento fundamental en la educación de las personas. De hecho, ya en la Grecia Clásica, filósofos como Aristóteles y Platón destacaban el papel de la música en la enseñanza de los más jóvenes y de las principales clases sociales, destacando además sus múltiples virtudes éticas, morales y educativas (Grout y Palisca, 2006). Dicho pensamiento influiría profundamente en los autores medievales como Boecio, que establecía la música dentro de las disciplinas científicas del *Quadrivium*, y en renacentistas como Lutero, para el cual no podría concebirse la idea de un buen maestro si este no sabía cantar.

Aunque la música siempre tuvo especial relevancia en el ámbito educativo, habría que esperar a principios del siglo XX para que la enseñanza musical empezara a centrarse en principios basados en el desarrollo integral del alumnado, especialmente de aquel con necesidades especiales. Así, a lo largo de todo el siglo XX se sucedieron diversos periodos dentro de la pedagogía musical moderna, con autores de renombre que revolucionarían el panorama didáctico-musical (Sabbatela, 2004):

- La primera etapa, iniciada en 1900 y conocida como Revolución, sería encabezada por los autores de la Escuela Nueva, tales como Jacques-Dalcroze –creador de la *terapia educativa rítmica*– y Willems –que destaca la importancia del factor psicológico y del desarrollo de la personalidad gracias a la música–.
- La etapa de transición, que comenzó a partir de 1955, contaría con pedagogos como Ward, Kodály –haciendo hincapié en la formación vocal y auditiva a través de canciones populares–, Orff –valorando el papel social y activo del individuo en el proceso musical e integrando para ello los denominados “instrumentos Orff” – y Suzuki –basando el método de aprendizaje instrumental en un proceso similar al del aprendizaje de la lengua materna.
- A partir de 1965, la etapa de Revisión estuvo representada por músicos que animaban a la potenciación de la creatividad a través de la experimentación en el aula y a la composición bajo la estética contemporánea, tales como Self, Paynter y Schafer.
- Ya en 1980, el proceso de Integración se vio enriquecido con una gran variedad de tendencias con fines dispares, como la investigación, la musicoterapia, la psicología de la música y el multiculturalismo.
- El último periodo del siglo XX, llamado ecológico y que abarca su última década, se basó en conceptos como la acústica, la ecología y la conciencia sonora. Aquí los hallazgos de su máximo representante, Schafer, supusieron un gran avance para la especialización de la educación musical y la musicoterapia.

Centrándonos en el siglo XXI, los profundos cambios sociales y la rápida evolución tecnológica hacen que las metodologías pedagógicas musicales tengan que adaptarse a los nuevos tiempos, de modo que contribuyan a formar a nivel holístico al alumnado más que a adquirir un conocimiento puramente teórico. No obstante, el diseño eficaz de la pedagogía musical parte de adaptar las posibilidades que esta ofrece a las capacidades y limitaciones del alumnado en cada etapa escolar. Así, a continuación, presentamos una clasificación de las aportaciones musicales a cada etapa escolar, de acuerdo con el desarrollo psico-evolutivo general del alumnado en las etapas de Infantil, Primaria y Secundaria (Gfeller, 2000):

- Educación Infantil. Si bien de los 0 a los 2 años el niño se guía únicamente por su experiencia sensorial, en la etapa pre-operacional –de 2 a 7 años– ya no se depende únicamente de la necesidad de experimentar los estímulos físicamente para poder entenderlos. El proceso de imitación de melodías y las ganas de cooperar y compartirlas con los compañeros va mejorando a partir de los cuatro o cinco años, pudiendo servir la música en esta etapa como una herramienta para desarrollar la empatía o la disciplina, para respetar

los turnos en las actividades y en los juegos de grupo y para el desarrollo de otras habilidades sociales de carácter comunicativo y emocional.

- Educación Primaria. De los 7 a los 11 años –etapa de las Operaciones Concretas–, se produce un afianzamiento de los movimientos motrices, para lo cual ayuda mucho incluir el baile junto con la música. El desarrollo de la capacidad lógica lleva a los niños a ser capaces de solucionar problemas de su realidad inmediata y a procesar conceptos rítmicos y de armonía, incluso en situaciones en las que se presenten otras melodías secundarias que puedan distraer. Teniendo en cuenta esto, la música en esta etapa puede servir para afianzar y desarrollar la memoria, para incrementar el cociente intelectual –como demuestra el Efecto Mozart– o para favorecer la concentración.
- Educación Secundaria. A partir de los 11 años –periodo de las Operaciones Formales– se desarrolla la capacidad de pensar de manera abstracta, que adquiere niveles de pensamiento cada vez más complejos a medida que se vaya incrementando el número de experiencias vitales. La adolescencia supone una importante época en la que se define la identidad y, en este sentido, la música juega un papel decisivo. Muchos adolescentes se identifican con un estilo musical concreto e incluso asocian una forma de vestir, de sentir y de vivir a dicho estilo –como sucede con el *heavy* o el *rock*, por ejemplo–. Su experiencia musical llega a ser enorme si tenemos en cuenta que la música está prácticamente en todas partes. El hecho de compartir su experiencia musical y, de forma inherente, vital, con adolescentes que comparten sus mismos gustos les lleva a afianzar y a fortalecer sus vínculos sociales y su pertenencia al grupo. No obstante, también se deben potenciar la tolerancia y la curiosidad por descubrir otros estilos diferentes que les lleven a enriquecer su universo sonoro. Por todo ello, la música en esta etapa constituye un factor esencial para desarrollar valores tan importantes como la apertura de pensamiento, el enriquecimiento personal, la armonía interpersonal e intercultural, el desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas y la expresión de emociones profundas, difíciles de expresar de otra manera.

La música, como vemos, constituye un medio perfecto para el desarrollo físico, mental y espiritual del alumnado, ya que le permite adquirir capacidades motrices básicas, le ayuda a expresarse y comunicarse de cara a la sociedad y puede llevarlo a desarrollar valores éticos que afectan al bienestar individual y social. De todo ello se ocupan las CCAA, que pretenden alcanzar el conocimiento colectivo bajo los principios de inclusión e igualdad, cosa que resulta fundamental en cuestiones como la educación especial y la atención a la diversidad³.

3. La música dentro de las comunidades de aprendizaje

3.1. Concepto, principios y objetivos de las Comunidades de Aprendizaje

Son muchos los autores que han dado una definición de CA y en todas ellas encontramos como factor común el diálogo y la participación. Así, para Ramón Flecha García (2002, p. 11) una CA supone un proyecto que “apuesta por el aprendizaje dialógico mediante los grupos interactivos, donde el diálogo igualitario se convierte en un esfuerzo común para lograr la igualdad educativa (...)”. Para Valls (2000, p. 8):

Comunidad de Aprendizaje es un proyecto de transformación social y cultural de un centro educativo y de un entorno para conseguir una sociedad de la información para todas las personas, basada en el aprendizaje dialógico, mediante una educación participativa de la comunidad, que se concrete en todos sus espacios, incluida el aula.

Respecto al aprendizaje dialógico mencionado anteriormente, este se entiende como un tipo de aprendizaje que no se reduce al aula en forma de interacción profesor-alumno alumno-profesor, sino que incluye a todas las personas que rodean al escolar, influyendo con ello en su proceso de aprendizaje (Aubert, García y Racionero, 2009). Así, esta nueva concepción se aleja del modelo educativo tradicional, pues ahora la educación ya no se limita al centro de enseñanza, sino que permanece en todos los

³ Ver epígrafe 3.2.

aspectos de la vida del individuo, extrapolándose a contextos escolares y extraescolares. De esta manera, la educación proviene de cada uno de los individuos que interactúan con el sujeto, convirtiendo su proceso vital en un contexto educativo e implicando a todos los sectores sociales que lo rodean: comunidad educativa, familia, amigos y sociedad en general. Según este principio, todos los sujetos actúan a su vez como modelos y referentes, favoreciendo la apertura mental, la tolerancia, el enriquecimiento y la formación a través de “iguales”. Todas estas circunstancias favorecen el concepto de comunidad y la idea de que, al formar parte de ella, el bien individual contribuirá al bien grupal y viceversa.

Para Coll (2001), este nuevo espacio interactivo abarca cuatro grandes categorías: el aula – *Classroom-based Learning Communities*–, el centro educativo –*School-based Learning Communities*–, la ciudad, comarca o región de residencia de la persona –*Community-based Learning Communities, Community Learning Networks, Learning Cities, Learning Towns, Learning Regions*– y el entorno virtual –*Virtual Learning Communities*–. Resultado de la interacción de todas ellas es la creación de un conocimiento colectivo (Reigeluth, 2013) basado en procesos de aprendizaje, trabajo colaborativo y consenso social.

Por otra parte, Bielaczyc y Collins establecen catorce principios para el diseño de CCAA eficaces en el aula (Reigeluth, 2013):

- El principio del crecimiento de la comunidad, basado en incrementar el conocimiento y las habilidades del grupo. A esto contribuyen metodologías como la *técnica puzzle de Aronson*.
- El principio de objetivos emergentes, centrado en construir dicho conocimiento a partir de las demandas y necesidades del aula en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje.
- El principio de articulación de objetivos pretende establecer acuerdos en el aula y favorecer el sentimiento de grupo, fijando los objetivos y los criterios de evaluación a partir de un consenso.
- El principio de metacognición destaca el papel de la reflexión sobre el propio aprendizaje, modificando lo necesario para optimizar el rendimiento.
- El principio de superación de los límites es fundamental para conseguir un aprendizaje significativo y desarrollar las potencialidades de cada individuo y del grupo.
- El principio del respeto resalta la importancia de respetar, comprender y valorar las aportaciones de cada miembro del grupo.
- El principio de aceptación del fracaso insiste en convertir las experiencias negativas en un aliciente para crecer, impulsando el concepto de resiliencia.
- El principio de dependencia estructural implica que las actividades realizadas a nivel individual repercuten directamente en el trabajo del grupo, lo que favorece la simbiosis entre sus miembros.
- El principio de preeminencia de la profundidad sobre la amplitud destaca la necesidad de respetar los tiempos en el proceso de maduración de conceptos, algo fundamental en el desarrollo del potencial humano.
- El principio de la diversidad parte del aprendizaje entre iguales en el cada estudiante enseña a sus compañeros los conocimientos de las áreas en las que se sienten más preparados y capaces, favoreciendo que todos sean maestros de todos.
- El principio de la multiplicidad de vías de participación implica que las actividades propuestas sean diversas y estén al alcance de todos para alcanzar el éxito.
- El principio de mecanismos para compartir vuelve a remarcar la necesidad del aprendizaje entre iguales.
- El principio de negociación parte del consenso entre los miembros del grupo para la realización de cualquier actividad.
- El principio de calidad de los productos destaca la necesidad de compartir el conocimiento creado por el grupo con otras personas ajenas a él, teniendo muy en cuenta la valoración externa.

En cuanto a los objetivos de las CCAA, el principal de todos es entender y crear conocimiento como un bien colectivo, de manera que la sociedad sea construida por todos y para todos, posibilitando que

cada individuo se convierta a su vez en alumno y mentor. Sin embargo, esto implica retos como la creación de un sistema de enseñanza mucho más flexible y abierto al cambio, capaz de renovarse y de actualizarse día a día, con el objetivo de evolucionar con y para la sociedad. En este sentido, Paolo Freire (2003) propone la transformación de las personas y del mundo a través de la educación, por lo que se hace necesario abandonar la idea tradicional de educación “bancaria” –en la que el profesor imparte contenidos y el alumno los almacena para plasmarlos en un examen– por un nuevo modelo en el que los alumnos participan de forma activa en su propia comunidad, asumiendo las responsabilidades que ello implica (García, 2002, p. 2). Otros objetivos que se persiguen son:

- Conseguir un sistema educativo más igualitario en el que las diferencias de sexo, religión, raza, poder adquisitivo, capacidades, etc. no supongan factores de exclusión.
- Unificar el conocimiento como una gran construcción colectiva en la que cada disciplina de saber interactúa con el resto y no de manera aislada, conformando un todo y favoreciendo la interdisciplinariedad.
- Valorar el proceso de aprendizaje por encima del resultado final, entendiendo cada contexto de aprendizaje como un fin en sí y no como un medio para alcanzar un conocimiento superior.
- Ampliar la idea de “conocimiento” por encima de la simple adquisición de saberes, pues también se desarrollan habilidades y capacidades que constituyen un todo.
- Integrar a grupos diversos dentro de un solo colectivo, el de la sociedad, favoreciendo la tolerancia, el respeto y la apertura a lo nuevo.
- Abandonar el esquema de educación y sociedad basado en la jerarquía y el poder, implicando a todos los colectivos como agentes activos de conocimiento.
- Favorecer el trabajo en grupo, el diálogo, el consenso, la adquisición de responsabilidades y el desarrollo del máximo potencial humano.

En definitiva, los objetivos perseguidos son todos aquellos que permitan crear una sociedad en la que el concepto de colectividad y el sentimiento de comunidad superen las limitaciones que actualmente supone la mentalidad individualista imperante en la sociedad actual y en la que se dejan de lado valores tan importantes como la solidaridad o el amor al prójimo.

3.2 Inclusión social y atención a la diversidad

Las CCAA constituyen un espacio perfecto para la integración y la inclusión social, ya que en ellas prima el consenso y el diálogo para llegar a construir significados comunes, al margen de ideologías individuales. Esto permite que la diferencia se conciba como una posibilidad de enriquecimiento del conocimiento inicial y no como un factor de exclusión. El resultado de ese intercambio recíproco de saberes y aprendizajes supone una revalorización del conocimiento individual en favor del conocimiento colectivo, lo que favorece la autoestima, la integración y el sentimiento de grupo.

En cuanto a la atención a la diversidad, Flecha y Puigvert (2002, p. 18) destacan que “las comunidades de aprendizaje no quieren adaptarse a la diversidad (es decir, a la desigualdad) sino transformar la escuela y su contexto social hacia la utopía de convertirla en un proyecto educativo igualitario”. Para no llevar a equívocos, es necesario aclarar esta afirmación, ya que detrás de ella se esconde la verdadera filosofía de una CA. Para una CA, el hecho de que en la normativa referente a educación exista un apartado dedicado a la atención a la diversidad ya supone un factor de exclusión, pues da a entender que este colectivo se merece un trato diferente al que recibiría cualquier miembro “no diverso” (Flecha y Puigvert, 2002). No obstante, se trata de un aspecto un tanto delicado y abierto a interpretaciones.

Para entender mejor la delicadeza del término “atención a la diversidad” dentro de una CA pondremos un ejemplo que aclarará las posibles dudas. Llevando la CA al ámbito educativo, imaginemos que en el aula hay un niño ciego, otro con problemas psicomotrices y otro con problemas mentales, por ejemplo. Aunque estos alumnos también aporten conocimientos al saber colectivo que se crearía entre todo el aula, también es cierto que necesitarían una adaptación de algunos de los métodos utilizados para que

ellos puedan nutrirse de ese conocimiento colectivo. Por ejemplo, el niño ciego no podría percibir el contenido visual, por lo que habría que transmitirlo de alguna manera por vía auditiva o por cualquier otro medio por el que pudiera percibirlo. En el caso del niño con problemas psicomotrices, su coordinación y movimientos no serían tan ágiles como los del resto de compañeros, por lo que se podrían plantear otros métodos en las actividades físicas –si las hubiera–. En cuanto al niño con problemas mentales es posible que hiciera falta adaptar los contenidos a su capacidad y hubiera que buscar métodos de estimulación individualizados. En este sentido, se aplica el término “atención a la diversidad” para hacer mención a los métodos individualizados necesarios para que alumnos de este tipo asimilen los contenidos, sin infravalorar sus capacidades ni su potencial.

3.3. *Interdisciplinariedad e interactividad*

Si el conocimiento creado en una CA parte de la interrelación de saberes de los miembros del grupo, es normal que se produzca una fusión de conocimientos referentes a diferentes campos de conocimiento. Si bien cada profesor es experto en su materia, las CCAA pretenden que el personal docente adquiriera el compromiso de interactuar y aunar esfuerzos para crear un conocimiento colectivo holístico e integral. Esta es, entre otras, la base del aprendizaje significativo que permite al alumnado poner en práctica en su vida diaria todo lo aprendido en el aula (Rusinek, 2004). Los conocimientos, habilidades, capacidades y actitudes aprendidas en clase son producto de todo un proceso de convivencia y socialización dentro del centro educativo. Por ello, no tiene sentido que cada profesor desempeñe su labor de una forma aislada, sino que cada parcela ha de tener su lugar propio fusionándose a su vez con los demás, aspecto al que la música contribuye en gran medida, pues puede incluirse en prácticamente todas las asignaturas: matemáticas –ejemplificado en conceptos como el ritmo y la armonía–, lengua –el canto mejora la vocalización y el lenguaje–, educación física –la danza unida a la música mejora la coordinación y la psicomotricidad–, lengua extranjera –con el canto de melodías en otro idioma–, informática –con la manipulación de programas de creación y edición musical–, física –con el análisis de aspectos acústicos–, plástica –“dibujando la música” para potenciar la creatividad y la expresión de sentimientos–, ciencias naturales –al tratar el tema de la contaminación acústica o del reciclaje mediante la construcción de instrumentos con materiales de desecho–, etc.

Por otra parte, el factor interactivo es fundamental en una CA, ya que no solo está formada por los alumnos y profesores que conviven en el aula, sino que implica a todos los individuos que rodean al sujeto y participan de alguna manera en su vida. En este sentido, el pedagogo Paolo Freire (2003) destaca la necesidad de basar el proceso formativo en un diálogo que incluya a toda la comunidad y que permita la planificación conjunta del aprendizaje.

Partiendo de esta idea, podemos distinguir varios grupos de miembros implicados de forma directa en el desarrollo de este sistema de aprendizaje. Así, como principal agente, encontramos al alumnado en sí, que es sobre el que se centra principalmente el proceso de aprendizaje –aunque hay que tener presente que en una CA todos sus miembros son de alguna manera alumnos, porque constantemente están aprendiendo unos de otros mediante el aprendizaje dialógico de iguales–. Este factor favorece la inclusión de todos los alumnos, sin distinción, haciendo que la diferencia y el contraste de opiniones sea un factor de enriquecimiento y no de rechazo o exclusión.

Por otra parte, dentro del ámbito escolar, el profesorado ejerce un importante papel en el proceso de aprendizaje, cumpliendo una función de guía y sirviendo de referente o modelo en el proceso de construcción de la identidad. Para ello, ha de evolucionar en su papel y no vertebrar su enseñanza bajo el patrón de jerarquía de los modelos tradicionales, en los que se establece una relación de dependencia y autoridad (Fernández-Carrión, 2011). Ahora el docente ha de ser capaz de empatizar con el alumno, convirtiéndose en un apoyo constante sobre el que poder expresar con naturalidad sus inquietudes, estableciéndose con ello una relación de complicidad y simbiosis. La comprensión y el apoyo percibidos mejoran mucho el proceso de aprendizaje y por eso es fundamental tratar aspectos personales que puedan llevarle a mejorar su proceso de enseñanza, adaptándolo a sus necesidades. Estaríamos hablando de un modelo de enseñanza individualizado en el que el profesor podría entenderse más como un tutor personal y un negociador. Aunque esta situación pudiera parecer utópica –ya que el docente tiene numerosos alumnos y resultaría casi imposible poder profundizar en la situación de cada uno de

ellos– la creación de grupos más reducidos o la posibilidad de compartir o complementar tal labor con otros miembros de la comunidad educativa podría facilitar mucho el proceso.

En cuanto al resto de miembros que forman parte de la comunidad educativa, estos forman parte del proceso de convivencia del alumno, tanto dentro como fuera del centro. No podemos pensar que esas personas actúen de manera casual y aislada, pues también suponen una importante fuente de influencia, por lo que también han de procurar participar en ese conocimiento colectivo desde un punto de vista ético y sinérgico. Ejemplo de esta clase de miembros serían, dentro del centro educativo, los conserjes, profesores que no le dan clase al alumno en cuestión, compañeros de otras clases, etc.

Por otra parte, fuera del ambiente escolar, también existen otros factores de influencia y, de entre todos, la familia ejerce un papel decisivo. Flecha García y Puigvert (2002, p. 20) apuntan que “el aprendizaje depende cada vez menos de lo que ocurre en el aula y cada vez más de la correlación entre lo que ocurre en las aulas, en la calle o en la cocina”. Esto supone un cambio de paradigma respecto a la concepción del proceso de aprendizaje, pues ahora los conocimientos adquiridos pueden extrapolarse a cualquier ámbito de la vida y no solo al escolar. En este sentido, si tenemos en cuenta que la familia es la principal fuente de educación desde el momento del nacimiento y que suele ser el agente con el que el individuo interactúa más, no podemos dudar de la importancia que va a tener en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje, superando el papel del docente o de la comunidad educativa en su conjunto. Es por esta razón por la que las CCAA destacan la necesidad de formar a las familias para que sepan transmitir valores y actitudes de cara a la vida en sociedad.

Finalmente, el último –aunque no por ello menos importante– agente que conforma una CA es la sociedad en conjunto, ya que el ser humano es un ser sociable por naturaleza y, por eso, ha de aprender a convivir en ella y con ella. Hasta ahora, las relaciones sociales se basaban en gran medida en el poder que el grupo dominante ejercía sobre el grupo minoritario, contribuyendo así a la segregación y a la exclusión. Las CCAA apuestan por lo contrario, pretendiendo crear una sociedad más justa e igualitaria en la que los principios de solidaridad, respeto y ayuda mutua sean los motores de un nuevo modelo social basado en el sentimiento de colectividad. En consecuencia, se favorecerá la creación de intereses comunes, rompiendo con las limitaciones del materialismo y del individualismo, tan propias del siglo XXI. De esta forma, la sociedad y los valores que establece determinan en gran medida la clase de personas en la que se convierten sus miembros. Es tarea de todos caminar hacia unos nuevos valores más respetuosos con nuestros semejantes y que favorezcan la unidad y la cooperación.

3.4. Proyectos de Comunidades de Aprendizaje

Las CCAA son una realidad creciente que se están desarrollando en la actualidad en diferentes países, con unos resultados tan eficaces y positivos que se están extendiendo a nivel internacional (Fernández-Carrión, 2011). Como ejemplo de ellas, mostramos dos modelos –FESNOJIV y Proyecto LOVA– que se centran principalmente en la inclusión del colectivo al que van dirigidos, de manera que se favorezca un panorama igualitario e integrador.

-FESNOJIV

La Fundación del Estado para el Sistema Nacional de las Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela (FESNOJIV) –también denominada “El Sistema”– es una propuesta fundada por José Antonio Abréu donde la música actúa como medio de inclusión social dentro de colectivos que sufren un nivel de pobreza extremo. Así, bajo el pretexto de la formación de una orquesta y su correspondiente desarrollo, se crea un espacio comunitario donde el aprendizaje musical y, sobre todo, personal y social, es el principal motor. Aquí se trata de fomentar el amor por la música como forma de motivación y de futuro profesional entre personas que, debido a sus escasos recursos económicos y su alto riesgo de exclusión social, se encuentran en una situación constante de desesperanza.

Bien es sabido que estudiar música no está al alcance de cualquiera, pues los gastos que conlleva en ocasiones ascienden a cifras muy elevadas. Por ello, “El Sistema” proporciona a los niños del programa todos los recursos necesarios para llevar a cabo su desarrollo musical. Para las familias, esto supone un

halo de esperanza al poder ver aspiraciones hacia un futuro mejor y una forma de sentirse escuchados, ya que la FESNOJIV apoya e implica a todo el colectivo familiar, aportando todo lo necesario para que sus músicos no dejen la orquesta debido a factores económicos. Con este proyecto, se ofrece a los niños una oportunidad única para aprender música y enriquecerse con ella, evolucionando a su vez como personas y favoreciendo la inclusión social al evitar que estos jóvenes se muevan en ambientes delictivos.

Aquí, la metodología utilizada trata de educar en unos casos y de reeducar en otros a personas que carecen de recursos y que han de desenvolverse en ambientes hostiles cargados de dificultades y con escasas posibilidades laborales. Es por ello que la música no solo se concibe como una práctica orquestal o como una formación puramente academicista, sino que aprovecha todo lo que una orquesta demanda para que sus miembros aprendan a convivir, a desarrollar técnicas de trabajo colaborativo y en equipo, a asumir responsabilidades, a adquirir compromisos, a entender que el trabajo individual afecta al desarrollo del grupo y viceversa y, en definitiva, a desarrollar al máximo sus capacidades y potencialidades musicales y personales.

Del mismo modo, para que el éxito esté garantizado, el trabajo se adapta al desarrollo psico-evolutivo propio de cada edad, de manera que los niveles iniciales están centrados en la expresión corporal y, a medida que se asciende, se pasa al trabajo del canto, del ritmo y de la interpretación, primero de la flauta dulce y de la percusión y, finalmente, de un instrumento propio.

Los resultados de dicho proyecto han sido muy favorables, como demuestra el caso de Gustavo Dudamel que, gracias a la educación recibida desde los cuatro años en “El Sistema”, se ha convertido en uno de los principales directores de orquesta del mundo. La idea de crear orquestas para jóvenes en riesgo de exclusión social se ha extendido a otros países y ya se ha puesto en marcha en 25 de ellos, como Argentina, Austria, Canadá, Ecuador, Estados Unidos, India o Inglaterra.

-Proyecto LOVA

Desarrollado por Mary Ruth McGinn y Ellen Levine en 2001 con el nombre de “Creating Original Opera”, este proyecto se basa en la creación de una Ópera como Vehículo de Aprendizaje. El programa parte del *Metropolitan Opera Guild* de Nueva York y hace uso de métodos de enseñanza innovadores y alternativos pensados para desarrollar el máximo potencial posible.

En la misma línea que “El Sistema”, el Proyecto LOVA trata de crear una comunidad de aprendizaje en la que los alumnos desarrollen su propia obra a partir del trabajo en grupo, compartiendo inquietudes y colaborando por un mismo objetivo. Así, cada grupo de alumnos asume una responsabilidad y un “oficio” propio, relacionado con el mundo operístico. De esa manera, cada grupo se encarga de una tarea concreta –composición de la música, creación del decorado, redacción del libreto, realización del vestuario, interpretación musical, etc. – teniendo en cuenta la labor del resto de grupos y caminando en la misma dirección. Se trata pues de un ambicioso proyecto con carácter interdisciplinar que contribuye con creces al desarrollo personal y social del alumnado, incrementando su autoestima y su desarrollo emocional, intelectual y profesional. Aquí, los alumnos toman la iniciativa y se convierten en creadores y artistas con espíritu crítico y capacidad de diálogo, creando un producto común y en equipo donde lo importante, más que el resultado final, es el proceso para llegar a él.

La organización que se utiliza afecta tanto al alumnado como al profesor, dando lugar a nuevos roles basados más en la empatía y la guía profesional que en la simple transmisión de conocimientos. En consecuencia, el alumno ya no depende del profesor en su proceso de aprendizaje, sino que se constituye como responsable directo de su aprendizaje y toma de decisiones. El profesor actúa como un “consejero” que orienta e interviene si fuera necesario para completar el trabajo del alumno a partir de su propia experiencia. Se establece así una alta simbiosis basada en el aprendizaje mutuo entre ambas partes y extrapolada a su vez al ámbito familiar, ya que las familias también orientan al alumnado en su labor, transmitiendo sus conocimientos en las parcelas que más dominan y contribuyendo al desarrollo de la autonomía personal. Por ejemplo, en la labor de vestuario, las familias pueden guiar a sus hijos para elegir las telas adecuadas, diseñar los trajes y elaborarlos. La interacción social es constante y esto se traduce en una mejora del desarrollo cognitivo, social y emocional.

En definitiva, la metodología seguida consiste en convertir el aula en una compañía operística y emplear el año académico en crear la obra, impartiendo las diferentes asignaturas y desarrollando las competencias de cada una de ellas bajo un mismo hilo conductor: la ópera.

4. Conclusiones

Las CCAA han sido llevadas a la práctica en diversos contextos y han demostrado teorías sobre la mejora de la convivencia y la superación del fracaso escolar, siendo avaladas por la comunidad científica internacional (Díez y Flecha, 2010).

Por otra parte, la música es una disciplina que ofrece grandes posibilidades y beneficios en todos los niveles de la persona –físico, mental, intelectual, anímico, social, espiritual...-. El fenómeno sonoro está presente prácticamente en todos los contextos que rodean al individuo y, por eso, resulta muy fácil acceder a él.

Combinado las ventajas de las CCAA y de la música como herramienta de bienestar personal y grupal, pueden diseñarse nuevas metodologías y modelos educativos eficaces, adaptados a las verdaderas necesidades de la sociedad del siglo XXI. Descubrir a través de la música valores que buscan la mejora del grupo y llevarlos al resto de la sociedad permite transformar el mundo desde una perspectiva más adaptativa y ecológica.

Por todo ello, y aunque ya se han diseñado en España algunos proyectos similares a los mencionados en este artículo, se propone el diseño futuro de nuevas CCAA que utilicen la música como hilo conductor dentro del aula, fomentando desde edades tempranas la creatividad y la solución de problemas grupales bajo la máxima de que el verdadero beneficio no es solo el individual, sino también el grupal. Si bien es cierto que se está avanzando en la dirección correcta, aún queda mucho por hacer y para ello es fundamental que la música sea revalorizada tanto a nivel artístico como a nivel de herramienta de bienestar social.

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L2 WRITING DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF TWO HIGH-ACHIEVING AND TWO STRUGGLING COLLEGE-LEVEL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Researchers and language practitioners have long been interested in the quest for theory-based, research-supported constructs that can adequately characterize L2 writing proficiency and development. The ongoing scholarly inquiry in this research area has led to the mounting recognition that complexity, accuracy and fluency (henceforth, CAF) constitute a conceptual framework capable of charting L2 writing proficiency and benchmarking development. Against this background, the present study aims to investigate four college-level semester-one students' L2 writing development over a time frame of twelve weeks. Couched within the constructivist paradigm, which advocates learner independence, meaningful learning and collaboration, the study examines the extent and nature of the progress that two high-achieving L2 students made as compared with two struggling peers with regard to their written productions. On the basis of case study methodology, a thick description is provided for each student on account of his measurable progress as assessed by theoretically motivated indices of complexity and accuracy. The paper also explores the time spent on online Moodle activities by the four participants to ascertain whether or not a relationship existed with the progress made. Complexity was measured by mean length of t-unit, mean length of clause and number of clauses per t-unit; accuracy was measured by mean number of error-free t-units and the ratio of error-free t-units to total number of t-units. The writing program in which the participants were engaged was based on the use of Moodle as a platform where students have access to myriad supplementary materials including website links, videos, PowerPoint slides, book chapters and exercises handouts. They were also required to post their written assignments in the Moodle-hosted blog and to participate in forums designed for the exchange of feedback. The implications of the results for L2 writing instruction are discussed.

Key words: ELT, L2 writing pedagogy, complexity, accuracy, ICT.

1. Introduction & Background

Arguably, no other language skill is more complex than writing (Verspoor *et al.*, 2008; de Groot, 2012, Skehan, 2009). Theoretical and empirical evidence exists suggesting that writing is multilayered, including sentence-level and discourse-level skills, stylistic and pragmatic awareness, genre literacy and self-regulated strategy development (Haoucha, 2005). For this reason, besides the intensive unguided free-writing activity recommended by the process-oriented, expressivist approach, writing skills development requires systematic and rigorous guided instruction. Guided L2 writing instruction presupposes that learners are provided with personalized feedback to meet individual students' special learning needs. However, growing student populations in Moroccan universities in general, and in English departments in particular, make it extremely difficult for writing teachers to offer such personalized feedback (Ennaji, 2005). This leaves large numbers of students grapple with the intricacies and complexities of L2 writing acquisition on their own. Worse still, limited class time aggravates the situation even further as writing teachers can do very little to ensure that students continue to practice writing outside class time. Assuming that students do continue to practice writing outside class time, the outcome is oftentimes unpromising as students will have to work in isolation from their peers and their teacher. No wonder, lack of students' engagement, which has been found to bear on the quality of their learning (Wong, 2013), leads to demotivation, frustration and eventually failure to subsist in the writing course. Such a situation calls for research aimed at exploring the effectiveness of instructional procedures of writing that can respond to all the concerns outlined above.

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The majority of the studies that attempt to examine the effectiveness of writing instructional procedures have been carried out within a quasi-experimental research design in Moroccan tertiary education. While this line of research produces numeric, generalizable data, it falls short of providing a detailed account of the effects of the model of writing instruction being tested on individual students' writing development. Another limitation of quasi-experimental designs is that students' mean score gains tend to be influenced by outliers and therefore several prominent aspects of students' writing performance remain unexplored. Due to these concerns, the present study uses case study methodology to investigate L2 writing development of four college-level semester-one students over twelve weeks. More precisely, the study aims to probe the extent and nature of the progress that two high-achieving L2 students made as compared with two struggling peers with regard to their written productions. It also seeks to explore the extent of students' engagement with the online Moodle-hosted activities and its impact on their writing ability. These objectives were operationalized into three research questions:

1. What is the impact of a blended learning environment on the writing complexity and accuracy of two L2 high-achievers as compared with two struggling students working collaboratively in the same group?
2. What is the nature of the growth in complexity and accuracy attained by the four students?
3. To what extent does these students' engagement with the online Moodle platform bear on the progress made in complexity and accuracy?

The paper begins by introducing the theoretical framework within which the study is situated as well as a review of relevant literature. This will be followed by a description of the methods and instruments used alongside the procedure implemented in the model of writing instruction proposed in the study. Subsequently, the results will be presented and discussed in accord with previous research studies. Finally, the study will be concluded with a number of implications for the teaching of writing in post-secondary education.

2. Constructivism

Constructivism is a theoretical paradigm that includes several theories with crucial implications for classroom pedagogy (Palincsar, 1998). Growing disenchantment with traditional Western conceptions of knowledge generation has led to the emergence of Constructivism, which thus stands in stark contrast to objectivist epistemology and positivism. The versions of constructivism range along a continuum from trivial constructivism to radical constructivism. Trivial constructivism maintains that knowledge is constructed by individuals and that research should be concerned with whether or not such constructions are correct representations whereas radical constructivism dismisses objective knowledge and holds that knowledge results from dialogue among people in society. Despite the multiple positions in constructivism, the following discussion will focus on Piaget's and Vygotsky's theorizing and how they have affected conceptions about learning.

According to Piaget, knowledge and understanding are generated by the unconscious activation of several processes set in motion each time individuals encounter information captured by any of their senses (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). These processes are assimilation, accommodation and equilibration. Assimilation results from the addition of new information to already existing schemata. When the incoming information conflicts with internal cognitive structures, accommodation modifies or transforms these structures in order to establish a state of equilibrium. Learners confronted with a new situation may resort to one of three different types of accommodation. They may ignore the conflicting information and cling to already existing schemata; they may oscillate by maintaining the contradiction and viewing it as reflecting separate or distinct cases; or they may modify their earlier understanding of the phenomenon in question to attain a sense of balance with the surrounding environment.

Regarding Vygotsky's views of knowledge construction and learning, he theorizes that cognitive and intellectual growth is a corollary result of social interaction, thus placing special emphasis on the dialogue that takes place among people as they go about their daily lives. Vygotsky (1978) argues that "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level" (p. 57). Central to Vygotskian thinking is the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which he contends is the space between what a learner can do independently and what the learner can do only with the assistance of

a more knowledgeable other. At this level, the role of social interaction becomes evident as the dialogic assistance between more knowledgeable members of the community and novice learners brings them to new ZPDs, representing higher levels of understanding and cognitive maturity. This more knowledgeable other does not have to be the teacher or an adult but a high-achieving peer can play this role by helping struggling classmates in the context of group or pair work (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010).

Constructivism is a theoretical framework primarily concerned with learning, not teaching. However, constructivist principles of learning can be made to yield several useful prescriptions for teaching (Palincsar, 1998). Drawing on constructivist theories of learning, instruction should therefore abandon the practice of uprooting ideas and concepts from their context for teaching purposes. Alternatively, teachers should create a learning environment that provide learners with meaningful and concrete experiences where they can identify patterns, pose questions, solve problems and structure their own models, concepts and strategies. The classroom should then be pictured as a society in miniature where learners collaboratively engage in problem-solving situations and attempt to solve them through dialogue and the joint negotiation of meaning. These assumptions and principles have been put to intensive research activity in the domain of second language acquisition, particularly in empirical investigations of the effects of collaborative onsite and online learning environments to which we now turn for a review.

3. Onsite collaborative writing

A large body of empirical research has concerned itself with the effects of collaboration on the quality of learners' written productions. In the Moroccan context, Haoucha (2005) investigated whether process writing is more effective when implemented collaboratively or individually. She experimented with four different types of feedback: self-monitored feedback, peer feedback, teacher feedback and taped feedback. One major result was that collaborative peer feedback was a valuable aid not only in encouraging the students to revise multiple drafts but also in having other linguistic, cognitive and affective benefits. By means of a dictogloss task, Kuiken and Vedder (2012) tested the hypothesis that collaborative writing activities more positively affect learners' text reconstruction quality than individual writing activities. The study focused on the grammatical and lexical complexity of the collaboratively reconstructed text as well as the strategies employed by the learners as they negotiate their way through the task. It was found that the three groups varied with regard to the use of strategies as well as attention to form, the lexicon and the mechanics of writing. The inconsistency among the learners was attributed to several factors such as the cross-sectional design, learners' L2 proficiency and the nature of the tasks. Another study that probed the effects of collaboration on text quality is Dobao (2012), who examined the impact and nature of the oral interactions among group, pair and individual participants on the complexity, accuracy and fluency of their compositions. Group collaboration was found to be more effective than pair collaboration in terms of accuracy. While it was reported that individual learners produced longer texts, no clear differences were found among the three groups in terms of syntactic and lexical complexity.

Along the same line of research, Neumann and McDonough (2014) investigated the relationship between learners' interactions during collaborative prewriting tasks and their written texts alongside the writing aspects attended to when they engaged in collaborative dialogue about their own writings. As the researchers compared the results of two related studies, they found that structured prewriting tasks in Study two were more effective than naturally-occurring discussions among the students in Study one. They did not find any positive correlation between amount of reflective episodes in prewriting activities and the quality of students' texts. On the basis of a proposed instructional writing methodology called dynamic written corrective feedback, Hartshorn *et al.* (2010) assigned two groups of students to two conditions: one exposed to conventional writing instruction and the other to a proposed model. It was reported that the mean score gains related to accuracy notably increased in the treatment group, which is based on the collaborative exchange of written corrective feedback. However, rhetorical competence, complexity and fluency did not yield any significant results.

Additionally, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) examined the impact of collaborative pair work writing activities on complexity, accuracy and fluency. Again, it was found that the pair work condition produced significant results with regard to accuracy but it did not positively affect complexity and fluency. Similar findings were reported in Storch (2005), who explored the nature of the collaborative discussions that transpire during

the writing process by comparing texts produced by pairs of students and texts produced by students working individually. Although the collaboratively produced compositions were short, they were more effective at the level of task fulfillment, grammatical accuracy, and complexity. Despite a few reservations on collaborative writing, the majority of the students had a positive attitude towards the experience.

4. Online collaborative writing

Undoubtedly, the affordances of social networking technologies for collaborative L2 writing have opened up new avenues of empirical research. To illustrate, Tuzi (2004) explored the impact of electronic feedback on students' revisions with special emphasis on how peers responded to their partners and the nature of the revisions made. While the students expressed preference for the oral face-to-face feedback, written e-feedback had a greater impact on revisions. E-feedback was also observed to draw the students' attention to larger units of writing, implying that e-feedback can be useful in macro-revisions of students' writing samples. Similarly, Zhang *et al.* (2014) reported on the positive effects of blog-mediated collaborative writing. They found that the exchange of peer feedback on a blog platform had statistically positive correlations with motivation, collaboration and course satisfaction. This experience gave the students ample time to reflect on their language and also raised their confidence in expressing themselves in L2 writing.

Additionally, Jones *et al.* (2006) investigated the dynamics of group interactions by comparing online and onsite peer-tutoring of writing in a Hong Kong university. The study uncovered several differences between these two modes of interactive writing. That is, onsite face-to-face interactions were characterized by hierarchically unequal relationships between the tutors, who monopolized the conversations, and the clients, who assumed a more passive role. It was also found that more emphasis was laid on grammar, vocabulary and style in face-to-face interactions while the online mode directed the students' attention to more global issues such as content and the process of writing. Similar results were reported in Liu and Sadler (2003), who examined the relationship between mode of interaction (technology-mediated or face-to-face) and attention to the area, type and nature of comments given by peer-reviewers. The results showed that the online mode emulated the onsite mode in terms of number of comments, percentage of revision-oriented comments and the overall number of revisions made. Because the study found that onsite interactions were also of value in some respects, the researchers concluded that a blended environment where a sequence of onsite and online writing activities is used may be more effective than a single mode.

Seeking to explore and understand the nature of collaborative writing, Kessler *et al.* (2012) investigated web-based, project-oriented, many to many collaborative writing. They reported that the participants focused more on meaning than form and that the grammatical changes they made were more accurate than inaccurate. Besides, the students showed inconsistency in terms of participation frequency and used the web-based tool simultaneously for multiple purposes. The application of the changes the students made was fluid and iterative in the sense that they did not wait until they finished to attend to formatting issues. In another study, Elola and Oskoz (2010) researched the relationship between students' wiki-based collaborative writing and the quality of their written productions. No statistically significant differences were found between individual and online collaborative writing in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency. However, the study cast light on the nature of the interactions with regard to the text as a function of whether the task is carried out individually or in groups.

5. Methods and materials

5.1. Context of the study

The study took place in Hassan II University, the School of Humanities in Ben M'sik, Morocco. The English department accommodates around 330 semester-one students divided into three groups, with each having a different writing instructor. The writing course in question is called paragraph writing and aims to equip the students with all the necessary skills and competencies to operate with confidence and efficacy in the context of the academia. The course spanned a twelve-week period starting from mid-October to mid-January. Among the objectives of the course is to help the students to acquire macro-level skills such as organization, content and rhetorical patterns of development. It also seeks to assist the

students to come to terms with micro-level skills such as grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. In response to local and international calls for further integration of educational technology in the teaching and learning process, the administration faculty offers its students several web-based tools to enhance their learning environment. Among such tools is Moodle, which is a learning management system including several useful features and affordances that can bring about valuable learning gains if used in pedagogically informed ways.

Of the three teachers in charge of the writing course, two were Moroccan with long-standing experience in English studies whereas the third instructor was a Full-bright visiting scholar from the USA. The role of the researcher was to coordinate with the main course teachers in order to ascertain that the follow-up activities conducted in the virtual learning environment were in consonance with the lessons that took place in the classroom. The researcher was also tasked with uploading a multitude of supplementary materials on Moodle for students to consult on a weekly basis. Besides, on the grounds that learners need constant monitoring to guarantee the sustainability of the online collaborative writing activities, it was necessary to keep track of the students' interactions and to encourage those who do not show interest in posting their assignments online and exchanging feedback with their peers.

5.2. Participants

Given the great number of semester-one students, it was convenient to arrange them into groups of four and ask them to build a tightly bound learning community where everyone is held accountable for the gains of the whole group. This was deemed necessary because if students were required to read and comment indiscriminately on one another's work, it would be equally hard to manage for both the students and the teacher. The students would find it hard to decide whose work to read and the teacher would not be able to monitor students' interactions and make sure that everybody is doing their fair share of the work. Therefore, the present case study selected one group for in-depth analysis including one female and three male students. The main criterion that determined the selection of this group is that it included two high-achievers and two low-achievers.

For confidentiality purposes, the participants were assigned pseudonyms; namely, Brahim, Khalid, Rashid (Males) and Fatima (Female). Brahim is 29 years old and has a BA in Arabic studies. He enrolled in the English studies department in order to enhance his English language skills for employability reasons. As a matter of course, he has a good command of standard Arabic and is reasonably literate in French. A 19-year-old, Khalid obtained his science baccalaureate the previous year and made a major shift from science studies to the humanities. Besides a fairly good proficiency level at Arabic, he has a more than average mastery of French. Opting for English studies from high school, Rashid is also 19 whose level at French is notably poor with an average command of standard Arabic. All three male students were born and raised in middle and lower-middle class families in Casablanca. Fatima constituted the exception as she came from a small village about 139 kilometers away from Casablanca and rented a flat together with other female students who had similar situations. She is 20 years old with poor French and standard Arabic literacy. All male students had a computer and internet connection at home except for Fatima, who had to go to a cyber café or a café with Wi-Fi internet connection to post her assignments and collaboratively interact with her group-mates. On the basis of the first two assignments, it turned out that Fatima and Brahim had major writing issues and thus represented the poor achievers in the case study. By contrast, performing reasonably well in the first two assignments, Khalid and Rashid assumed the role the high-achievers.

5.3. Instructional procedure

As indicated above in passing, three writing instructors were in charge of teaching in the onsite, face-to-face mode of instruction. The researcher assumed the role of monitor and facilitator of the online platform by uploading supplementary materials on Moodle and attending to the work performed by the students on a weekly basis. The onsite mode included a mini-lesson on a given aspect of writing such as mechanics, tenses, run-ons or fragments. The mini-lesson together with some practice was not allowed to go beyond 30% of the session's time. The remaining time was invested in developing a paragraph on a

given topic assigned by the teacher. Brain-storming, outlining and drafting took place in the classroom under the supervision of the main course teacher. The students had to post their paragraphs online and wait for their peers' feedback. The researcher checked the feedback exchanged and provided guidance for groups who seemed to be disoriented. The students revised and edited their paragraphs in light of the feedback they obtained and posted back their finalized work.

5.4. Data collection and analysis

The decision to use case study methodology was driven by a number of considerations (Cohen et al, 2007). First, a case study makes it feasible to spotlight details that may be eclipsed in survey, large-scale research. Second, the close examination of one particular instance of the phenomenon being investigated can help gain generalizable insights into other similar instances of the same phenomenon. Third, the focus in case studies is not mainly on outcomes but rather on the processes that work towards the emergence of these outcomes. Four, although it is situated on the qualitative end of the continuum, case study methodology can use a variety of different methods and techniques to obtain a comprehensive and complete picture of the area under investigation.

The present study used both quantitative and qualitative tools of data collection and analysis. However, the quantitative data was kept to a minimum and had a subservient role as compared to the qualitative aspect of the study. The data were elicited by means of the students' online assignment postings and the record of the activities they performed online. The analysis of the data was carried out using t-unit-based (Hunt, 1977) indices of complexity and accuracy. The students' writing samples were subjected to content analysis to explore the elements that contributed to the progress made in complexity and accuracy.

6. Results

6.1. Growth in complexity

The first research question is concerned with the extent of the progress made in complexity and accuracy as a function of the onsite and online collaborative Moodle-hosted interactions as well as the exposure to multiple supplementary materials. Table 1 shows that all the participants seemed to be making progress in complexity except for Fatima whose scores demonstrated a good deal of variability. The main difference in the variability of the measures between Fatima and the other students lies in the fact that she did not move upwards away from the score she obtained in the first assignment. Fluctuation was also a feature of the other participants but it is a fluctuation with an upward movement, signaling slow but palpable progress. Brahim, who started out as a low-achiever, scored higher in all the measures and seemed to be moving towards closing the gap between him and the other two high-achievers. Although Khalid's scores were higher in the first assignment, Rashid outperformed Khalid in the ensuing assignments.

Table 1: Growth in complexity from the first (F) to the last (L) assignment

	MLTU		MLC		C/T	
	F. Assig	L. Assig	F. Assig	L. Assig	F. Assig	L. Assig
Khalid	14.251	16.554	8.403	8.893	0.403	0.452
Rashid	13.653	16.732	8.102	8.978	0.396	0.456
Fatima	10.321	10.912	6.934	7.106	0.302	0.389
Brahim	10.819	12.281	7.237	8.128	0.347	0.371

Besides, the measure that exhibited the highest degree of syntactic maturity was MLTU. Even Fatima whose scores were not as stable as her group-mates had a slight increase in MLTU (0.591). Figure 1 displays the trajectory of progress in MLTU in every second assignment from the beginning to the end of the semester. Although Rashid and Khalid were moving in parallel lines of progress, Rashid's MLTU made

a leap from 13.653 to 16.732. Brahim also seemed to be progressing at approximately the same rate as Khalid (10.819 to 12.281). As evidenced by the fluctuating line representing Fatima's progress, she reached a peak in the fourth week with a MLTU of 11.205 only to drop sharply in the eighth week to land at a MLTU of 10.333.

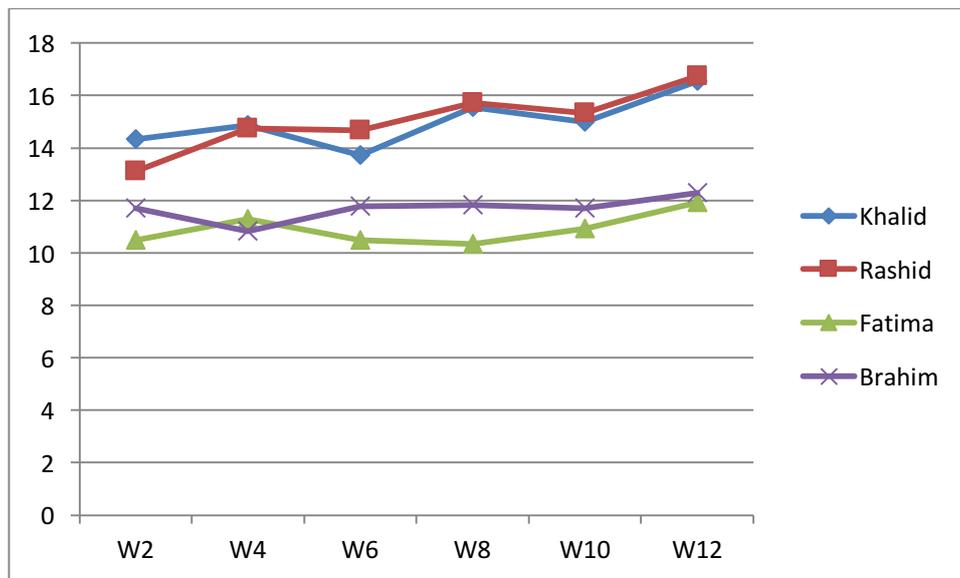


Figure 1: The trajectory of growth in MLTU from the second to the twelfth week

6.2. The nature of the growth in complexity

A closer examination of students' writing assignments uncovered the linguistic features that contributed to the increase in the complexity measures reported above. In terms of length, the analysis of the students' writing productions revealed that although the students were in the same writing course and belonged to the same group for collaborative writing, the linguistic features that lengthened their clauses and t-units were not of the same category, which suggests that complexity was realized in idiosyncratic ways by each participant. Of the four students, three increased the length of their clauses and t-units through incorporating more non-clausal structures into main clauses. Two participants (Khalid and Rashid) seemed to have an inclination to consolidate more full clauses into nominals with adjectival, prepositional or verbal pre- or post-modifiers. To illustrate, four full clauses such as "The man was tall. The man was happily singing. The man was in the basement. The man was my uncle" were reduced by Rashid into one long eleven-word t-unit "The tall man happily singing in the basement was my uncle". The number of densely modified nominals nearly doubled for both high-achievers.

Although Fatima and Brahim were labeled as low-achievers at the start of the study, it seems that they followed dissimilar pathways in the way they grew in terms of complexity. The latter participant managed to make a long leap to come closer to Rashid and Khalid at the level of clause and t-unit length by almost equally developing the ability to lengthen structures other than nominals. Besides a noticeable increase in the number of nominal modifiers (not as sizable as that achieved by Rashid and Khalid), the average length of clauses and t-units in Brahim's writings steadily increased in proportion to main verb auxiliary expansion and over-reliance on adjective clauses. An example of an expanded main verb auxiliary from one of his assignments was "The situation could have been totally reversed if" while his overuse of adjective clauses can be exemplified by "the doorman, who was with his club which was really big, gave a feeling of security to the residents, who were always generous with him". However, Fatima relied on simple and sometimes complex sentences with very few noun, adjective and verb modifiers. This led to the slight change observed in the length of her clauses and t-units.

Although closely followed by Brahim in terms of clause and t-unit length, Rashid and Khalid seem to outperform him with regard to another complexity-related dimension; namely, depth of modification. This means that they embedded modifiers within other modifiers inside the same clause or t-unit. In one of his assignments, Khalid wrote "my nephew delighted to have passed his exams with the confidence of an

experienced man....". Another example from Rashid's writings was "the children assembled in the backyard trying to build a snowman with a carrot nose which they borrowed from Mrs. Latifa were hopping in jubilation". The latter example clearly shows how depth of modification served as another source of clause and t-unit lengthening. This type of modification accounted for 41% in Rashid's last assignment and 52% in Khalid's. By contrast, similar structures constituted 13% in Brahim's last assignment while none appeared in Fatima's last assignment.

6.3. Growth in accuracy

As can be seen from table 2, the four participants did not make as much progress as they did in complexity. Despite the slight increase observed from the first to the last assignment, an examination of all the written productions showed that the change was not linear, particularly at the intra-individual level. Interestingly, Rashid's EFT dropped sharply in assignments 3, 4, 8 to 12.5, 12.1, 12.9 respectively. Brahim's assignments also saw remarkable fluctuation so that he scored an EFT as high as 12.5 in week 8 and 11.7 in week 9. Even Fatima, gained an EFT score exceeding that obtained in her last assignment (EFT=7.2). However, Khalid's written productions did not show as much variation, ranging along a continuum of 12.89 at one end and 13.8 at the other end.

Table 2: Growth in accuracy from the first to the last assignment

	EFT		EFT/T	
	First Assign.	Last Assign.	First Assign.	Last Assign.
Khalid	13.1	13.6	.423	.528
Rashid	13.3	14.5	.492	.577
Fatima	6.5	6.8	.281	.284
Brahim	7.8	9.61	.301	.441

6.4. The nature of the growth in accuracy

The analysis of the four students' composition errors at the micro-level showed that notwithstanding an area of overlap in the error types they made, there are some error types that appeared uniquely more frequently in each participant's assignments. To chart the common errors that surfaced to an important degree in the analyzed compositions, articles (7 per 100 words), prepositions (5 per 100 words), verb tenses (7 per 100 words), and capitals (9 per 100 words) were identified as the most frequently occurring errors. More specifically, the students appeared to be grappling with the use of articles with regard to countable and uncountable nouns. The following examples taken from each participant's writing illustrate this type of error: "an advice; a bread; an information; a food, etc.". Besides, the prepositions that seem to present the students with the most difficulty are those that conventionally go with certain verbs, nouns and adjectives (draw on; focus on; convinced of). As for verb tenses, the distinction between closely related tenses (ex. past simple and present perfect) and the correct spelling of the past participle of irregular verbs were found to cause the students a good deal of confusion. Finally, although all the four students appeared to have mastered the basic capitalization function of starting sentences, they still missed other contexts where a capital letter is mandatory (e.g. names of mountains, lakes, cities, etc.).

As indicated above, there were other error types that emerged in one student's writings more than the others. Fatima appeared to be still operating within a low-level inter-language system as suggests the nature of the errors that she made (spelling, subject-verb agreement, fragments and run-ons). While Brahim had some of these errors to a lesser extent, he seemed to have some difficulty with adverb placement in relation to the verb it modifies (ex. she felt always sad - instead of - she always felt sad). Brahim also had a high percentage of word order errors and run-ons. By contrast, the two high-achieving students appeared to have overcome a good number of the errors predominant in their low-achieving counterparts. The most conspicuous type of error that surfaced in their writings was more lexical than grammatical; namely, word choice (she did -instead of *made* - a lot of progress; there is a quotation - instead of *proverb* - that goes "..."; I am a Moroccan descent - instead of descendant).

6.5. Moodle log-in activities

The third research question addresses the nature of the online activities done over a semester and the amount of time spent doing such activities. Moodle contains a feature that enables the teacher to track the online activities and the amount of time invested in each activity by each student enrolled in a given course. This information is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: A record of the online activities and time allocations for each

	Cumulative of Time spent in minutes					Total
	Videos	Book chapters	Presentations	Feedback exchange	Practice	
Khalid	67	456	105	903	382	1913
Rashid	47	501	72	817	562	1999
Fatima	16	34	23	49	284	406
Brahim	77	492	98	1043	530	2240

It can clearly be observed that the most active member of the group was Brahim, who spent 2240 minutes over a semester doing multiple online activities. He was also highly motivated with regard to feedback exchange as demonstrated the amount of time that he allocated for online discussions with his group-mates. On the contrary, Fatima did not log in as much as the rest of the group. The 16 minutes she spent on the uploaded videos showed that she watched about three out of the 20 uploaded videos. Moreover, she was the least active member during online feedback discussions (49 mn). As regards Khalid and Rashid, they showed a sustained degree of motivation towards the online activities as well as the collaborative online discussions on their written assignments.

7. Discussion

The present study set out to investigate the extent and nature of the growth in complexity and accuracy attained by two high-achievers and two struggling students working collaboratively in a blended writing course. The study also aimed to report on the online activities and the time spent on such activities to see whether they were reflective of the progress made in complexity and accuracy. Of the four students in the group, three attained a certain degree of growth in complexity despite the attendant variability. However, Fatima's writing complexity did not mature beyond the performance she made at the inception of the study. It was also found that each student realized complexity on the basis of different linguistic structures. Additionally, accuracy measures did not show as much growth as did complexity and the degree of variability associated with accuracy in the students' writings was comparatively greater. Differences among the participants were detected with regard to the error types that emerged in their compositions. Finally, all the students in the group had a record of online activity spanning a measurable amount of time except for Fatima.

On the basis of the results stated above, it can be understood that complexity proceeds at different rates of development both across individuals as well as at the intra-individual plane. The classification of the participants into high-achievers and low-achievers was useful as it highlighted this asymmetrical rate of development within and across these two subclasses. As for Fatima and Brahim (low-achievers), they did not grow in terms of complexity in parallel lines. Fatima seems to have stagnated at a low proficiency level as suggested the difference between her first and last assignments. By contrast, the fact that Brahim drew closer to his high-achieving group-mates insinuates that he benefitted from the blended learning environment offered by the writing course. One interpretation why Brahim's rate of growth seems to exceed that of Rashid and Khalid is that complexity as measured by length of t-units and amount of subordination has a peak that learners cannot go beyond (Hunt, 1977). At the start of the study, Rashid and Khalid were situated not relatively further away from this peak, which explains why their magnitude of growth was smaller than that of Brahim. However, Brahim started out as a low-achiever with a sizable distance away from such a peak. Besides, the variability at the intra-individual level is no less significant. Even the high-achieving students regressed in terms of complexity at certain weeks in the semester. This intra-individual variability can be ascribed to several factors such as familiarity with the topic, the structure

of the task, time spent on the task, amount and quality of the feedback received from peers and other affective considerations (Kuiken & Vedder, 2012).

The picture built so far on complexity is supported both theoretically and empirically. The fact that the students initially formed a heterogeneous group, which began to partly homogenize towards the end is reminiscent of the Vygotskian concept of the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's theorizing rests on the assumption that the collaboration that occurs within a socially interacting group of students activates different ZPDs with students operating at higher proficiency ZPDs scaffolding their group-mates to reach for the next ZPD area (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Empirical research offers evidence in support of this theoretical position. Dobao (2010) found that collaborative group work improved students' writing quality. While finding that collaborative work is a valuable tool to enhance students' learning, Liu and Sadler (2003) suggested that a blended learning environment may be more effective than an exclusively onsite or online mode of instruction delivery.

Another theoretical orientation supports the results obtained in the current study. According to dynamic systems theory, there is not one uniform developmental pattern to chart growth in complexity. To elucidate, Verspoor, Lowie & Van Dijk (2008) found that although there was a general complexity increase over time in the case of an advanced learners' performance, such increase was nonlinear punctuated with moments of progress and regress. This is also consistent with Skehan's trade-off hypothesis (2009) that argues for the interplay between working memory and limited attentional resources. In other words, when a given learner's attention is dispersed over several writing aspects (e.g. complexity, accuracy and fluency), the result of such competition is for the learner to focus on one particular aspect, leaving very little room to mentally attend to other related elements. This account can be a viable explanation for the fact that the learners under study realized complexity differently. It may be the case that while producing text, the learners could only invoke a limited repertoire of linguistic resources derived from their unique educational experiences, the mini-lessons they were exposed to, their teachers, their personal reading activity together with other affective factors (Verspoor, Lowie & Van Dijk 2008).

Contrary to previous research, the present study found that complexity increased a little faster than accuracy. Having assigned their participants to two conditions, Hartshorn *et al.* (2010) reported that the gains in accuracy were greater than complexity and fluency. Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) found that collaborative pair work activities had a positive impact on accuracy more than complexity. However, other studies reported that collaborative interactions among learners led to parallel developments in both complexity and accuracy. Storch (2005) found that students working in groups to jointly produce texts benefitted in several respects including growth in grammatical accuracy and complexity as well as nurturing a positive attitude towards writing. Again, invoking dynamic systems theory and the trade-off hypothesis, it can be argued that the greater attention allocated to sentence structure and an accompanying concern with sentence-combining exercises in semester one led the students to assume that they would gain more credit if they produced more complex sentence structures in their compositions. This may explain the high degree of variability in accuracy observed not only in the two low-proficient students but also in their high-proficient group-mates.

Just as complexity was realized differently by each participant, once again accuracy was found to mark each participant as distinct from the others with regard to the error types that emerged in their writings. That's why accuracy displayed a higher proportion of variability than complexity. Empirical research seems to be aligned with this finding. De Groot (2012) argued that the high variability of accuracy development is due to the many competing subsets or subsystems at the intra-individual level. While De Groot admitted the difficulty of tracing this variability back to a specific factor or set of factors, he suggested that a likely explanation would be uptake of input or exposure to the language. Similarly, the writing course teachers in the present study laid special emphasis on sentence structure, which may have diverted their students' attention away from accuracy. This situation seems to have left the students to grapple with grammatical accuracy on their own creating a group or groups of students with miscellaneous language ability.

The third research question is based on the premise that the more actively engaged in educational activities germane to curriculum subjects students are, the more likely it is that they will achieve quality academic performance. Research-based evidence exists suggesting that there is a direct correlation between students' extent of engagement in online activities and learning outcomes (Wong, 2013). Engagement in the present study was operationalized in terms of amount of time invested in online

activities by each participant. In this regard, it appears that the amount of time Fatima invested in online activities including the exchange of feedback with her group-mates has a relationship with her low-level performance over the semester. An examination of Fatima's profile readily provides clues as to why she did not engage as actively as the other students in the online activities. It was reported that she came from a small village and had to rent an apartment with other girls. It was also mentioned that she did not have internet connection and a computer at home, which forced her to pay repeated and costly visits to a cyber café to join in the online discussions and activities as well as to post her assignments. In stark contrast to Fatima's degree of engagement in online activities, Brahim made noticeable gains in complexity and accuracy. A quick look at the number of minutes he allocated for diverse online activities would suggest that they had an impact on his performance over the semester.

8. Conclusion and Implications

In a nutshell, the present study investigated the extent and nature of the progress made by two high-achieving and two struggling students working collaboratively in a blended learning environment to enhance their writing ability. Measurement of writing ability was carried out on the basis of empirically motivated indices of complexity and accuracy. The study also explored the degree of students' engagement in online activities to ascertain whether or not this had a relationship with the growth attained in complexity and accuracy. It was found that although there was some progress in complexity and accuracy, a high rate of variability was detected both inter- and intra-individually. This variability was notably higher in accuracy with each student grappling with a unique set of error types. Finally, a relationship seems to hold between the students' extent of engagement with the online activities and the growth attained in complexity and accuracy. This was reflected, on the one hand, by Fatima's weak performance over the semester and the amount of time she spent in the online activities. On the other hand, the progress made by the other participants, especially Brahim, was proportionate with the extent of the time investment that went into the multiple Moodle-hosted activities.

In light of the results reported above, a number of implications are in order. In consonance with constructivist theory, onsite and online collaborative learning environments should bring together students of different proficiency levels. As was found in the present study, high-proficient students can help their struggling group-mates notice their language problems during sessions of feedback exchange and hopefully try to avoid them in future assignments. The question that arises in this regard is the extent to which high-achieving students can benefit from such a situation. It can be argued that the mere process of reading other students' written productions in order to provide feedback offers the high-achieving students an opportunity to reinforce their learning. However, the fact that Fatima did not benefit from online group work does not so much mean collaboration cannot work for a certain category of students as it arguably calls to attention the issue of connectivity and inclusivity. Successful implementation of an online instruction based on peer collaboration requires that the educational authorities invest in infrastructure and equipment to help students of poor social backgrounds find facilities within the university premises where they can join their socially more fortunate group-mates in online activities. Additionally, given the asymmetrical development of complexity and accuracy both inter- and intra-individually, more efforts need to be deployed in designing syllabuses that incorporate all the major components of effective writing instruction. This will help distribute students' attention evenly over all such components to ensure that complexity and accuracy are given equal weighting.

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TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND TECHNIQUES TOWARDS EFL WRITING IN EGYPTIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

In 2008, the Egyptian Ministry of Education introduced a new national textbook, *Hello for Secondary Schools*, which recommends a shift in EFL teachers' instructional practices. Since then, very little attention has been paid to teachers' techniques in EFL writing classes. Hence, this paper aims at investigating teaching writing practices in secondary schools and exploring the teachers' attitudes towards EFL writing skills in addition to exploring the difficulties that teachers encountered in EFL writing lessons.

The paper depends on data triangulation through administering two questionnaires: one to 44 teachers and the other to 24 students, and conducting semi-structured interviews with 11 teachers. Both teachers and students are asked to describe teaching practices in EFL writing classes while the open-ended questions and interviews collected data about the teachers' difficulties in writing lessons.

The questionnaires indicate that teachers have negative attitudes towards teaching writing, and most of their practices are still traditional. Five factors have influenced teachers' practices: backwash of the test, teachers' professional development, students' culture of reading and large classes. The paper recommends there has to be a necessary change in the students' examination system, and ongoing teachers' professional development should be considered. Finally, a teaching model and implications are suggested.

Key words: Teacher's techniques, attitudes, EFL writing, Egyptian secondary schools

Introduction

In recent years, Egyptian researchers have become increasingly interested in EFL writing. Attempts are often made to change teaching and learning of languages in the Egyptian context, but these are not always monitored, especially at classroom level. There are important reasons for undertaking this paper. First, there have been few attempts to investigate teachers' practices and attitudes in EFL writing classes after adopting 'Hello Textbook' at secondary schools in Egypt in the academic year 2008/2009. Second, little research can be found that directly addresses the public secondary schools context; most of the literature has been in the tertiary level.

1. Context and background of the paper

Acquiring English is a difficult issue among EFL learners, especially Arab learners (Abbad, 1988; Rabab`ah, 2005). It has been found that most language learners at all levels believe that writing is one of the most difficult language skills to master (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Abdel-Latif, 2007) or a sophisticated skill compared with other skills (Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010).

English is the first and most commonly used foreign language in Egypt. It is a highly valued language in both public and private Egyptian schools to the extent that it was introduced as a mandatory subject to first year primary in 2003/2004. EFL writing is very important for secondary school students as it prepares them for academic writing which is the medium of written communication in most universities in Egypt. Basically, there is one unified English language textbook for all students in each grade in the Egyptian

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schools. This national textbook is compulsory for all students in the public and the private sectors, and the final exam is based on it.

In recent years, the Egyptian government has accorded greater priority to improving the education system. Accordingly, a new textbook series *Hello! English for Secondary Schools: Year One, Year Two, and Year Three* has been introduced to the general secondary stage since the academic year 2008-2009. The main aim of this series is to further equip students with the necessary language, thinking and study skills to communicate effectively and understand competently spoken and written English. Additionally, the aim of the EFL writing tasks is to help students write different types of texts, varied in length, on familiar themes and topics, take notes through speech or from a text, and to translate from Arabic to English and vice-versa (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2014). Moreover, the new textbook requires an instructional shift from the traditional product-oriented writing into writing as a process.

2. Research questions

Taking the paper aims into account, the research questions of this paper are as follow:

1. What are the teachers' attitudes towards EFL writing?
2. What are the teachers' practices in EFL writing classes?
3. What are the students' perceptions towards their teachers' EFL writing practices?
4. How do teachers perceive their teaching EFL writing difficulties and problems?

3. Literature Review

3.1. EFL writing from product to process

The Product Approach has been known as a traditional approach for teaching writing (Murray, 1980). This approach has been practiced widely since the 1950s well into 1970s. The emphasis on written product is clear in the fact that the teacher only responds to the composition once it is finished, and not before or while it is in progress (Jordan, 1997). Within this approach, teaching writing is regarded mainly as teaching mechanics: punctuation, spelling, and correct usage. In this perspective the teacher plays a primary role as an examiner (Zamel, 1987). Classroom time chosen for writing is normally allotted to drills and exercises on mechanics or grammar. It focuses on the final product, the coherent and the error-free text (Nunan, 1999). The product approach involves building up a list of skills that are needed to acquire before producing texts.

This approach was adopted in Egypt for many years. Most Egyptian researchers believed that the product approach resulted in a remarkable weakness in Egyptian students EFL writing (Salem, 2007). In addition that Egyptian students lost creativity; they became dependent on their teachers and passive listeners most of the lessons (Ahmad, 2010). On the other hand, the teaching method has been mostly teacher-centred and lecturing has been the most commonly method for teaching. This approach has developed students' tendency to memorise extracts from texts and recall them when they need. It is a big problem if they are asked to write about a topic without being given previous practice (Salem, 2007).

Therefore, there was a need for a new textbook with a new writing approach to encourage students to think, plan, search for ideas, develop, organise, review their writing and above all meet the requirements of examinations and academic life. There was a demand for an approach where the main concern of the teacher is to help learners develop their ideas, focus less on a perfect final draft product than the development of successive drafts of a text (Nunan, 1999), and writers are encouraged to get their ideas onto paper without worrying too much about formal correctness in the initial stages and learn the linguistic, cultural and rhetoric norms of the new language. Evidently, 'Hello for Secondary Schools Series' was introduced in 2008 as a component of the standards-based curricula reform.

The Process Approach emerged as a reaction to the Product Approach; it mainly focuses on the stages of writing such as planning, drafting, revisiting or redrafting and editing (Harmer, 2007). Therefore,

the Process Approach tends to focus more on varied classroom activities involving multiple stages (Zeng, 2005).

The Process Writing Approach involves teaching pupils strategies to help them express themselves in writing through the act of writing. According to Mahon (1992), students experience five interrelated steps before the final products come out. These steps include pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing, and publishing.

Pre-writing and brainstorming: In this process, teachers elicit ideas from students. Then, they help students organise their ideas by using mind maps or visuals.

Drafting: On completion of mind mapping exercises, students write their first draft. Guidance and help are probably necessary in this stage and students are reassured that the first draft will not be perfect.

Revising and editing: Students are supported to reshape their writing, e.g. check their spelling, grammar, punctuation etc., or change ideas. This can be achieved through self-editing, peer editing and teacher editing, as well.

Publishing: At the end of the process, students produce the final draft. Opportunities are created for students to share their final products with their classmates or in front of the class.

Research on the Arab ESL/EFL teachers' practices in the writing process classroom is still in its infancy and there remains much to be explored about that process. Though most of the previous studies confirmed the feasibility and practicality of the process writing approach to developing the EFL writing skills of Arabic speaking students, a few studies have been conducted in experimental contexts, under controlled practices and variables using samples of students and teachers (Al-Hosani, 2008; Al-Ashri, 2013). Yet, few studies have paid attention to the actual teaching context considering the problems around it, e.g. lack of resources and large classes. That is why this paper is important as it might reflect factual teaching EFL writing context in the Egyptian classrooms.

Given the significance of the teacher's role, there is a need to know more about what teachers actually do in EFL writing lessons when charged with applying a new approach of teaching writing, on what basis they resist or accept the innovation, and the extent to which they see themselves as agents of change (Carless, 2011).

3.2 *Challenges affecting EFL writing teaching*

To provide a valid and reliable view about the practicality and feasibility of the process writing in the Egyptian classrooms, many difficulties and problems that might affect the teaching and learning process should be considered. However, these difficulties will be titled as 'challenges' to give a positive attitude for implementing the approach. Reviewing the literature, four main challenges affecting teaching EFL writing were identified.

1. Teachers' attitudes
2. Teachers' professional development
3. Backwash of the examination system
4. Teaching large classes

3.2.1 Teachers' attitudes

Teachers' attitudes and expectations are important factors in L2 writing classrooms (Dornyei, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Williams, 2003). Williams (2003) indicates that sound teaching methods could fail to produce significant progress in performance if the teachers do not believe that they can make a difference in the classroom and/or view students as having little or no competence. As Proctor (1984) has argued, to be effective, teachers must feel good about teaching and about students and believe that they can influence student learning.

Thus, the relationship between attitude and performance has been viewed as mutual, with each factor affecting the development of the other. All in all, SLA literature supports a relationship between attitudes

towards a language and language achievement (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Many researchers think that attitudes include cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Wenden, 1991). The cognitive component involves beliefs or perceptions about the objects or situations related to the attitude. The affective component refers to the feelings and emotions that one has towards an object, 'likes' or 'dislikes', 'with' or 'against'. The behavioural component means that certain attitudes tend to prompt someone to adopt particular behaviours. It can be pointed out that all these types of attitudes are interactive in a non-linear shape. The cognitive impacts the behavioural and they both influence the affective element, and they can swap their roles.

A little literature discussed the relationship between attitudes and writing achievement (Graham et al, 2007). They defined writing attitude as an affective disposition involving how the act of writing makes the author feel, ranging from happy to unhappy. Even so, Bartscher et al (2001) say that writing attitude is highly effective on improving or obstructing writing achievement. The proposed study is noteworthy because it investigates how teachers' attitudes may affect their strategies in EFL writing classes.

3.2.2 Teachers' professional development

Teachers' development means providing teachers with opportunities to acquire new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Also, professional development programmes could encourage teachers collegiality which is very significant for most teachers for two main reasons as Jarzabkowski (2002) confirms: First, it may enhance better working relationships that may yield quality teaching and learning. Second, it encourages through social interaction a better emotional health environment among staff, which decreases emotional strain and burnout. As a result it leads to better teaching attitudes towards EFL writing. Also, the research on professional development refers to the significance of the idea of collectivity, collaboration and community (Day & Sachs, 2004).

Since teaching is a complex job, training will certainly assist teachers to do their job better. However, this training and updating to their knowledge should be on-going as changing methods of teaching takes much time. Hayes (1997) claims that the notion of change in the method of teaching should not be scrutinized narrowly, because change does not inevitably mean doing something completely in a different way. Rather, it refers to 'a change in awareness or of the current practice' (Hayes, 1997, p. 4). The 'awareness' of one's teaching practices equals what Alexander (2008) refers to as the constant improvement in standards of teaching.

Unfortunately, there is a number of barriers that may hinder teachers' professional development in Egypt; in his Investigation into Professional Practical Knowledge of EFL Experienced Teachers in Egypt, Abdel-Hafez, (2010) referred to a variety of intervening contextual challenges to deter the actualisation of teacher knowledge and professional development, such as the EFL exam policy, lack of time, support and resources, mismatch between teacher purposes and students' expectations and needs, and large class size.

3.2.3 Backwash of the examination system

Another important factor that might be hindering teaching writing as a process is the washback. Backwash or wasback refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Abdel-Latif, 2012). Examinations in Egypt, whether regular monthly assessments, promotion tests or more formal examinations such as GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), have traditionally emphasised memorisation of facts; this has influenced the methods of both teaching and learning. Therefore, most teaching could be more precisely described as lecturing (Sorour, 1991) and most learning as memorisation learning. The high stakes nature of much of the testing, particularly at preparatory and secondary schools, confirms that the curriculum conforms to the examination system which affected even the culture of teaching where this atmosphere of students fear from exams have also given teachers the opportunity to teach to the test (Herrera, 1992).

Exploring teacher instructional practices within EFL secondary school class-rooms in Syria, Rajab (2013) found out that most teachers, during the interviews emphasised the significance of exams not only to their personal agendas, but also to the students', parents' and the school administration's agendas.

Broad expectations were held about students' great success in the final exam. Because of the exam, the teaching styles of the teachers were geared towards serving this end (Ibid). In the same seam, while investigating the essay writing difficulties of Egyptian student teachers of English, Ahmad (2010) asserts that both students and their teachers seem to consider that their target is not how to write, but how to get a high score irrespective of teaching and learning. Likewise, Abdel-Latif (2012) conducted a similar study to the current one, but it was more generic, i.e. all language skills, he examined how a standards-based communicative curricular reform in general secondary school English in Egypt has changed teachers' classroom practices; he suggested that for this standards-based communicative curricular reform to serve as a catalyst for changes in instruction, there has to be another parallel reform in the students' examination system.

Thus, confirming Abdel-Latif's suggestions, it would seem important for active and effective teaching and learning, that there would need to be formal links between the bodies responsible for curriculum development, examinations and teacher's training.

3.2.4 Teaching large classes

Indeed, teaching a large class is a great challenge for teachers due to many reasons: First, managing students is rather difficult in large classes (Blatchford et al., 2007). Second, teacher-student relationship is negatively affected. Third, teachers' use of time for marking, planning, and assessment is a problematic issue in these classes. Furthermore, teachers find it difficult to motivate and involve students' interests in large classes (Ballantyne et. al., 2000). It can be pointed out that large classes affect the interaction between teacher and students and could probably affect collaborative tasks inside the classroom. Most teachers contend that they do not have collaborative activities in their classrooms because of the big number of students, so they have to lecture most of the time.

In the present study, the challenge of large classes is one of the difficulties facing the Egyptian teachers while teaching process writing; due to the over-population problem in Egypt, classes at secondary schools in Cairo range from 40-69 in different areas. However, it is argued that large classes could be an advantage for process writing as students can share many different ideas and exciting life experiences; this stimulates the students and enlivens those parts of your lesson where students can discuss and learn from each other (Sarkisian, 2010).

4. Methodology & Participants

To acquire comprehensive profiles of teachers' practices and beliefs, the current paper employed mixed methods which combined quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative data (interviews).

The teachers' questionnaire was developed to collect data concerning attitudes and techniques of teachers while instructing EFL writing, and another questionnaire was also developed to investigate students' perceptions towards teaching EFL writing. Interviews were conducted with teachers to seek deep data about teachers' EFL writing practices and explore the difficulties they faced while teaching EFL writing.

A sample of secondary school female and male teachers of English in Egypt took part in the study. They were all working in secondary schools in Cairo. The rationale for choosing Cairo governorate is based on the accessibility of recruiting participants. All participants agreed to take part in the study on a voluntary basis. The 44 teachers (32 males and 12 females) were chosen randomly to fit the purpose of the study. Similarly, 11 teachers (9 males and 2 females) from the 44 participants were interviewed. All teachers were Egyptian native-Arabic speakers.

On the other hand, 24 students (14 females and 10 males) in 3rd secondary grade from four schools in Cairo Governorate filled out the students' questionnaire, and 10 of them sent 10 writing tasks of unit one in the workbook. They were deliberately selected to investigate the teachers' practices; those students have been studying EFL at the secondary stage for about three years. The rationale of choosing 3rd grade students was their probable ability to provide a comprehensive picture covering the EFL writing instructional practices better than their younger peers in 2nd and 1st grade. The students' ages ranged from 16 to 18 years old. They have been studying English for 12 years. 3rd secondary year is the most

important year for most students in Egypt for it is the year that determines whether they would join tertiary education or not. Additionally, English is very important for those students as it is the language of most universities.

Table 2 shows each of the research questions vis-à-vis the research instruments and the number of the target group used to help answer each research question.

Table 1: Research questions, instruments and target group

Research Question	Research Instruments	Target & Total Numbers
What are the teachers' attitudes towards EFL writing?	Teachers' Questionnaire (Question 2)	44 teachers
What are the teachers' practices in EFL writing classes?	-Teachers' Questionnaire (Question 3)	44 teachers
What are the students' perceptions towards their teachers' writing practices?	Students' Questionnaire (Questions 1 and 2)	24 students
How do EFL teachers perceive their teaching EFL writing difficulties and problems?	-Teachers' Questionnaire (open ended questions) (Question 4) -Teachers' interviews	44 teachers 11 teachers

5. Findings & Discussion

5.1. Research question (1) Teachers' attitudes towards EFL writing

No	Attitudes	Strongly disagree	disagree	uncertain	agree	Strongly agree
1	I prefer teaching writing to other skills.	2	22	7	12	1
2	EFL writing is an important skill for students.	0	2	4	32	6
3	Priority should be given to teaching writing	8	19	8	6	3
4	EFL writing lessons in "Hello for 3 rd Secondary Grade" are interesting for me.	3	5	21	9	6
5	EFL writing lessons are more difficult and tiring for me than other lessons.	3	5	7	19	10
6	Giving feedback in EFL writing lessons is more difficult than other skills.	1	3	4	22	14

7	Lack of resources affects negatively my EFL writing lessons.	0	14	5	18	7
8	I know the process writing approach.	5	7	16	11	5
9	I know product writing approach.	3	5	19	12	5
10	I am updated to the most recent approaches of teaching English especially writing.	1	7	22	10	4

As seen in the figures above, the teachers' attitudes towards EFL writing practices are mostly negative. The figures show that about 87% have positive attitudes towards the importance of EFL writing, but only 29% prefer teaching it. This is clear when the majority of them consider EFL writing practices and feedback to be exhausting which is also confirmed by most teachers in the world as claimed by Zheng (1999) who says that many teachers of English have noted, acquiring the writing skill seems to be more laborious and demanding than acquiring the other language skills. Similarly, Ahmad (2010, p. 239) indicates that Egyptian essay writing teachers' attitudes towards their work is mostly negative, with six participants of eight commenting on it as 'difficult', 'hard', and 'challenging'. These negative behavioural attitudes might be resulted from different reasons: first, most teachers have been teaching in large classes characterised by physical as well as intellectual distance between teachers and students. Next, many teachers still use traditional teaching techniques, such as lecturing as noticed in the teaching practices data analysis. Consequently, they feel tired quickly and the lack of communication between them and students leads to boredom and negative attitudes.

On the other hand, nearly half of teachers surprisingly are unsure if 'Hello Textbook' is interesting or not. It could be that case that they do not care about the book because they are not usually consulted about new curricula.

It should be pointed out that teachers' negative attitudes and the uncertainty of making decisions could be related to their poor cognitive perceptions of EFL writing; only eight out of forty four teachers state that they are updated to the new teaching approaches, but the majority of them are uncertain and outdated. A big number of teachers have unclear idea about the Product Approach or the Process Approach of teaching writing, and this is confirmed during the interviews, as well. This uncertainty of teaching methods might develop negative attitudes for both teachers and students towards EFL writing teaching. Moreover, the teachers' negative attitudes towards teaching writing lessons seem to affect their willingness to teach it. They may have different attitudes if these variables (cognition and action) change.

5.2 Research question (2) Teachers' techniques

The teachers' techniques were divided into two:

1. The traditional techniques (items 1- 2)
2. The Teacher's Guide techniques which include:
 - a) Pre-writing practices (items 3-4- 5)
 - b) Drafting practices (6-7- 8)
 - c) Editing and revising practices (9-10-11-12)
 - d) Publishing practices (13- 1)

The traditional practices

Beginning with the the traditional practices, most of the teachers (84%) claimed that lecturing was less frequently used in their lessons. On the contrary, 58% of the students stated that lecturing was a common practice for their teachers; also worth noting is that roughly fifth of the students agreed with the teachers' views.

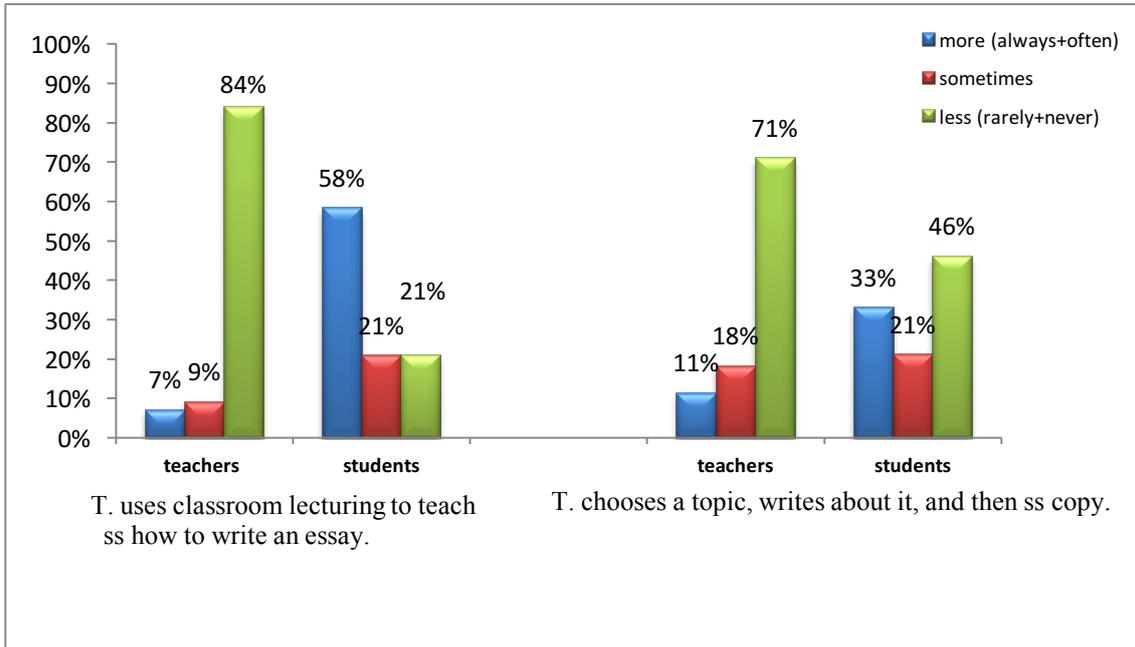


Figure 1: Traditional practices

Turning to choosing the topic of the essay, it can be seen that 71% of the teachers said that they rarely followed that traditional technique. Accordingly, a little less than half of the students supported the teachers' opinion; only about a third stated that their teachers used to do that traditional practice.

Teacher's Guide techniques

Pre-writing practices

As for the pre-writing practices, most of the teachers and the students agreed on the frequency of doing most of them in the classroom (see Figure 1).

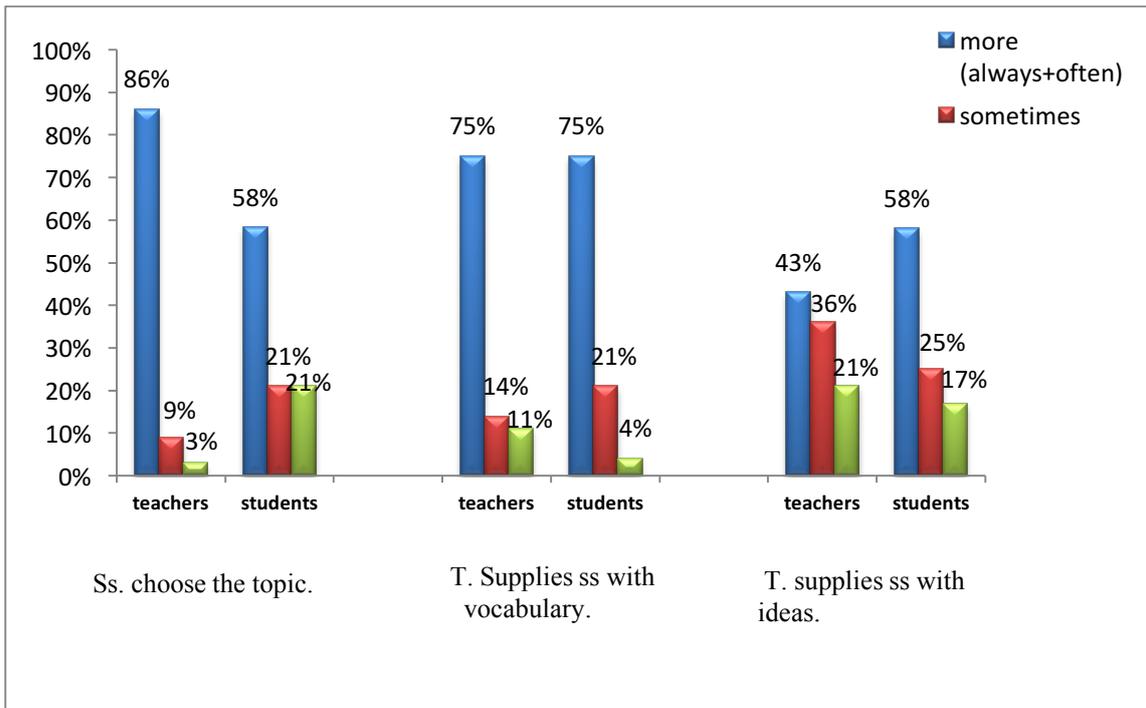


Figure 2: Pre-writing practices

To begin with the first item, a very high percentage of teachers (86%) asserted that students used to choose the topics of their essays. On the contrary, almost one-third (31%) of the students agreed with them while the highest percentage (more than half) confirmed that they did not choose the topics of their essays. On the other hand, it can be clearly seen that teachers and students showed an exact similar trend with the teachers' providing students with both vocabulary and notes; three quarters of both teachers and students gave positive responses concerning supplying vocabulary. Likewise, but with a lower percentage, both teachers and students confirmed that teachers used to provide their students with ideas for the writing (43% and 58% respectively) (see Figure 2).

Drafting practices

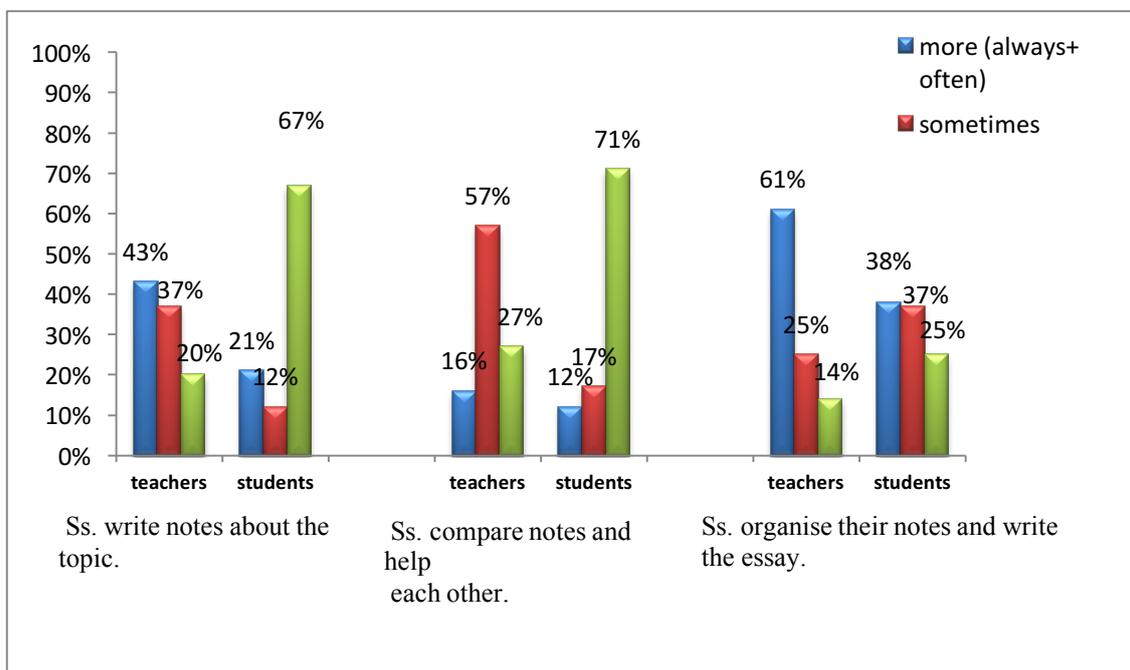


Figure 3: Drafting practices

The drafting practices revealed a notable contrast between the teachers' and the students' views regarding to the first two practices. While about 43% of the teachers assured that their students used to write notes about the topic, a significant proportion of the students (67%) opposed that opinion. It is clear that about 57% of the teachers had neutral opinions about students' comparing their notes with their peers, but a considerable number of the students (71%) refuted this argument saying those practices rarely occurred. Nevertheless, the majority of both teachers and students agreed on the 3rd item where 61 % of teachers and 38% of the students emphasised that students used to organise their notes and write the essay in writing lessons; it is also worth pointing out that about 37% of the students expressed neutral views (see Figure 3).

Editing and revising practices

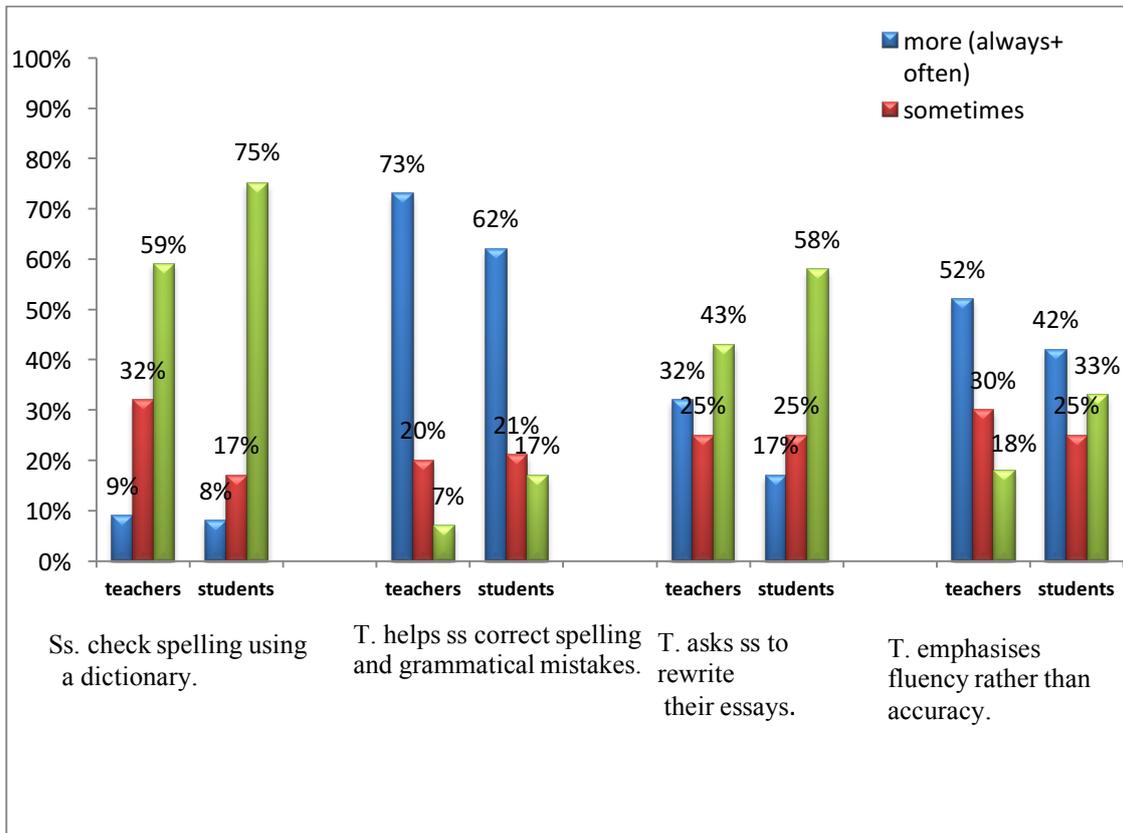


Figure 4: Editing and revising practices

Moving on to the editing and revising practices, both teachers and students showed almost similar trends. A significant percentage of teachers, as well as students (59 % and 75% respectively) assured that students rarely used their dictionaries in writing lessons while the minority of both of them gave positive responses. Also, almost three quarters of the teachers and less than two thirds of students asserted that teachers used to help their students correct their spelling and grammatical mistakes. With the same accordance of opinion, 58% of the teachers and 43% of the students confirmed that the teachers did not use to ask students to rewrite their essays, but only about third of the teachers said that they did. With the same agreement, roughly half of the teachers gave a positive view on their emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy, whereas with 10 % less than teachers, students had the same opinions; only 18% of the teachers and nearly third of the students said that teachers focused on accuracy more than fluency (see Figure 4).

Publishing practices

Finally, the statistical results confirmed that teachers had difficulty in the publishing activities, the word 'sometimes' dominated most of the teacher's practices. More than half of the teachers showed neutral views concerning the first publishing practice. Similarly, about two thirds of the students argued that they did not use to be seated in groups and read each other's essay; however, to some extent, the students agreed with the teachers on the 2nd item where 42% of students and 48% of teachers said that students sometimes read their essays aloud. The remarkable trend that can be observed in this item is that the responses (more, neutral and less) were to some extent proportioned (see Figure 5).

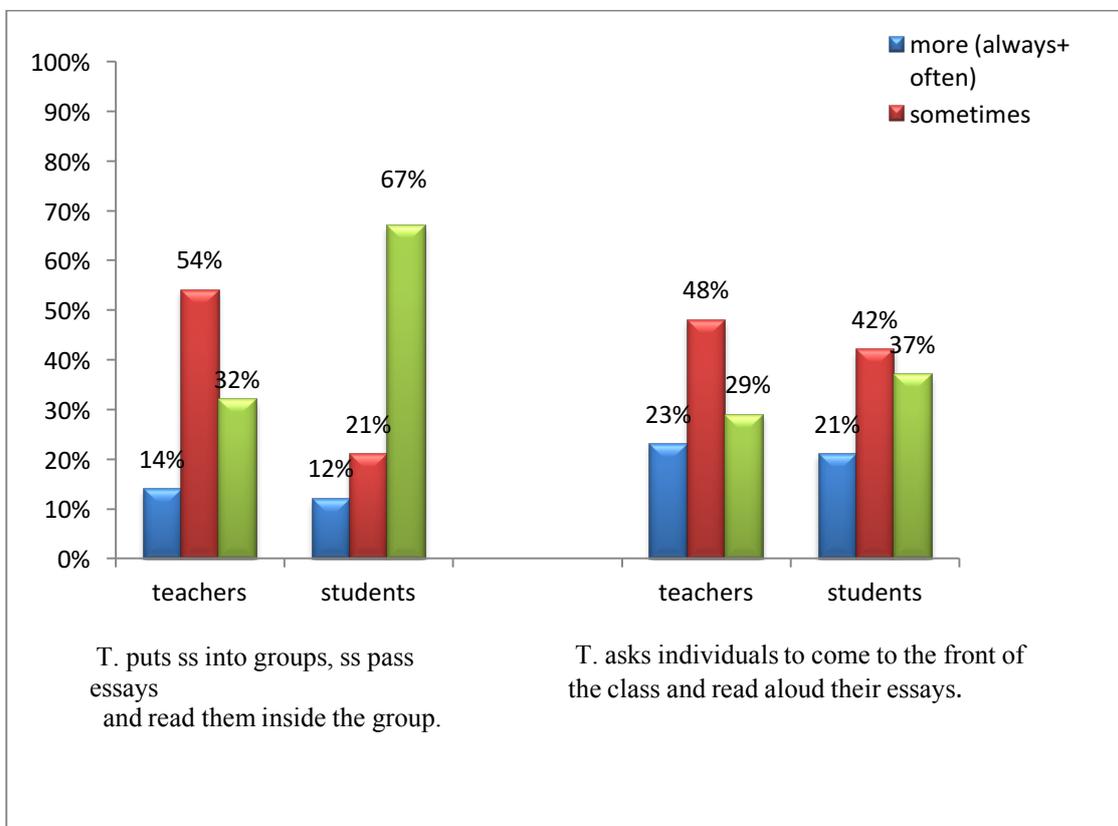


Figure 5: Publishing practices

It can be concluded that both teachers and students indicate that teachers do not adopt any clear approach while teaching EFL writing. Their practices do not correspond to the teacher's book guidelines. They are possibly affected by factors that may be internal or external. It can be clear that teachers and students have different views on most of these practices. About three quarters of teachers indicate that the traditional practices, such as lecturing or students' modelling an essay, are less frequently used in their writing lessons, but a big number of students disagree with them and refer that lecturing is most frequently used, and they sometimes copy their teachers' essays.

According to Hyland (2003), the teacher does not go beyond providing guidance and assistance to students. Teachers should be only facilitators (Hillocks, 1984). In their questionnaires, students consider writing supporting sentences to be the most difficult writing skill teacher find difficult to clarify for them. This probably gives implications that students struggle in writing supporting sentences. Accordingly, the pre-writing data might give negative impression that the prewriting practices are more teacher-centred, and students do not get the chance to think by their own to generate ideas and look for the needed vocabulary.

Most of the data regarding to the drafting, the editing and revising and the publishing practices imply that they are used less frequent than the previous ones according to both teachers and students' views. The results indicate that the process writing practices that based on collaborative work and more student-centred activities have not been successfully implemented. In contrast, the teacher-centred practices were

more frequent, such as teachers' supplying vocabulary, notes or checking mistakes. The mismatch between teachers' responses and those of the students is just the priority of these activities; besides, the teachers' percentages are notably higher than students' which could imply that teachers want to draw a more communicative lesson view than students.

Therefore, these findings contradict the other findings in the literature that approved the process approach, such as (Mohamed, 1993; Al-Ashri, 2013) which were conducted under experimental controlled variables and context, i.e. small number of students, available resources and trained teachers. In the real classroom context, the teachers seem to fail to utilise the process writing techniques and are affected by the traditional strategies.

It can be argued that teachers are probably struggling to get rid of all the traditional practices. The findings show that teaching EFL writing in Egypt seems to be a combination of more traditional (teacher-centred) and fewer process techniques (students-centred). Perhaps, the teachers' unsystematic and fuzzy practices resulted from their poor knowledge of the proper way of teaching writing. Teacher-centred classes can be physically and mentally exhausting for teachers. The internal and external factors that will be mentioned later might affect these practices. This confirms what Myles (2002) argues that EFL writing is a process which is affected by external factors, e.g. context, and/or internal factors, e.g. psychological and cognitive elements.

5.3 Research question (3) Students perceptions towards teaching EFL writing

Because the students of this study were not interviewed, it was significant to obtain their perceptions towards general issues in EFL writing lessons; the responses could emerge findings that might support the study. The following questions were included in first part of the questionnaire (items 4, 5, 6 and 7).

As shown in Figure 5, the students' responses were proportioned to most of the choices with small intervals among most of the percentages.

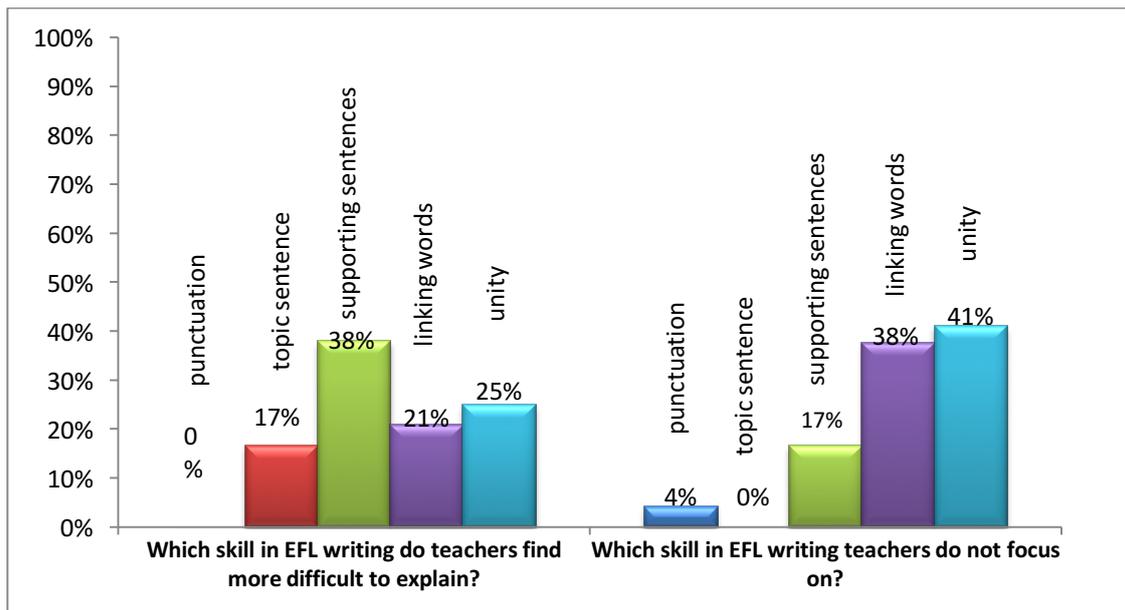


Figure 6: Students' perceptions (1)

To begin with the first question, 38% of the students believed that teaching how to generate supporting sentences was very hard for teachers while a quarter said 'unity' followed by 'linking words' (21%). With regard to the skill which teachers did not focus on, about 41% mentioned 'unity, and then came linking words and supporting sentences with (38% and 17% respectively.

Moving on to different questions, more than half of the students thought that the teachers took on the responsibility for facilitating writing skills and making writing lessons enjoyable according to the students' responses, as shown in the figure below.

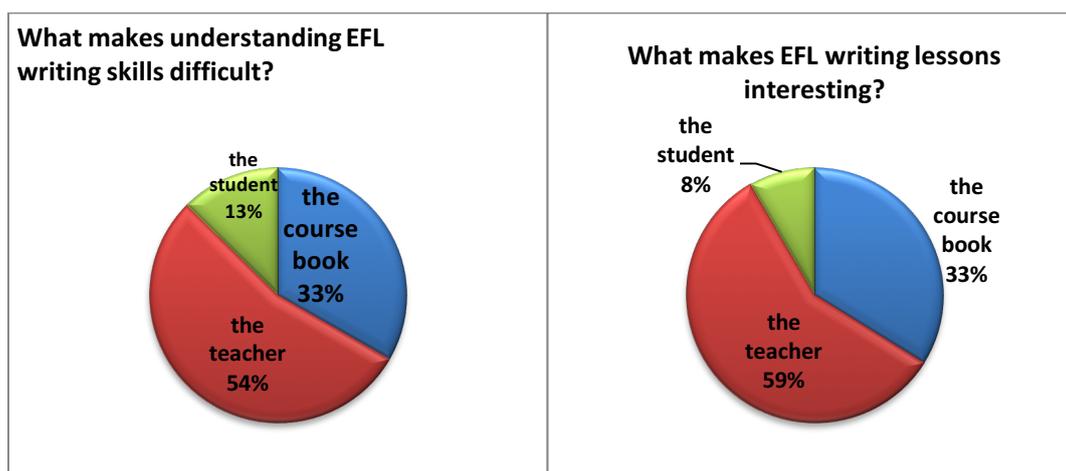


Figure 7: Students' perceptions (2)

Though the data from the students' questionnaire draw a gloomy picture of the teachers' practices regarding to interactive and process writing teaching, more than half of the students believe that teachers are the main player of the learning process as they are able to make the lessons more interesting and facilitate the learning process emphasising what is said by Kavcar (2005) that the teacher is the most important element of an education system. This may indicate that the reform is supposed to begin from the teacher; the Egyptian Ministry of Education reform may achieve nothing if it does not include teachers' professional development in its future plans to improve education.

5.4 Research question (4): Teachers' difficulties

The interviews and the open-ended questions data indicate that the previously mentioned instructional practices are influenced by three main factors:

- a) Instructional factors that include the teaching workload and the teacher's training and culture.
- b) Learning factors that include learning to the test, students' low proficiency and students' culture of reading.
- c) Contextual factors that include lack of time, lack of resources and large classes. Accordingly, the qualitative and quantitative results will be classified under four main themes, three of them were discussed in the literature review, namely washback, 'teachers' cultural and professional development' and teaching large classes while students' reading culture emerged as a new theme.

- Washback

The term washback was not mentioned in the questionnaire or the interviews, but it was identified from them. The washback of the exams is highly ranked by interviewed teachers to be the first obstacle that they encounter when teaching EFL writing. Students' needs are prioritised by teachers' techniques targeting the exam. Teachers neglect pair work, group work, students' interaction and thinking to generate ideas, and the publishing activities.

Interviewee 8: I have to concentrate on the parts in which students are tested. Otherwise, I will be classified as a bad teacher by students. I have to skip some writing activities or practices so as not to waste my students' time.

They focus only on checking spelling and grammar, providing ideas and vocabulary to reach to the final enhanced essay in a short time satisfying students' needs, but ignoring their role in the writing process. The students' role comes later when they memorise the main parts of this essay. This confirms

what the literature says about the Egyptian context that most teaching could be more precisely described as lecturing and most learning as memorisation learning (Sorour, 1991).

Above all, because of the test, teachers and students seem to focus on the mechanics of the language rather than its rhetoric and cultural norms. The assessment criteria of the exams are based on grammatical, spelling and punctuation accuracy; these practices are product oriented and the process writing aim is to develop the thinking, creativity of learners and to make them well-acquainted with the cultural, rhetoric and linguistic norms of the target language.

It can be pointed out from the interviews and the practices that teachers' anxiety with student final examinations directly impact the way they prepare and deliver the writing lessons. These results are similar to what Rajab (2013) found out during his study at secondary schools in Syria and Ahmad's (2010) study with university teachers in Egypt as mentioned earlier in the literature review. The exam results for students, parents, principals and teachers are more important than acquiring the language, i.e. practising it properly. This resulted in an emphasis on teaching content rather than skills and fostered teaching about the language rather than teaching 'the use of the language for communication' (Ellis, 2005, p. 43). This naturally led to more teacher-centred practices, whereas the new textbook suggests that teachers should modify their teaching to become student-centred.

The examination system could be blamed of ignoring the teacher's role; teaching and assessment are viewed as two separate entities. Student learning is measured through objectively scored tests and assessments. Teachers' practices cannot be communicative as long as exams are completely based on memorisation. Classroom practices are expected to remain unchanged as long as the assessment procedures are not changed to test communicative skills (Weir, 1993).

- **Teachers' culture and professional development**

The attitudinal data displayed that teachers' theoretical knowledge of teaching methods are limited and that has affected their practice. Both the quantitative and the qualitative data indicate that a big number of teachers do not have clear idea about writing approaches or practising the proper techniques in writing lessons. Presenting solutions, teachers comment that their traditional methods are radical because they used to learn and teach by these old-fashioned methods, and they need regular training to use the new approaches. Also, dealing with large classes and lack of time can be discussed in workshops and in-class training sessions to limit the negative effects of these difficulties. Many studies have found that teachers' lack of commitment to the effective implementation of student-centred activities was attributable to the minimal training opportunities provided for teachers (Abdel-Latif, 2012; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Karavas, 1993).

The training is important for teachers' practices and teaching culture, as well. Some teachers in the interviews refer to their passive roles during student-centred lessons.

Interviewee 1: I know that this textbook is better than the previous one because it is based on students talking time and more pair work and group work, but we do not have this culture as teachers who used to talk all the time or as students who are expecting their teachers to be the only source of information, or even the principal who expects students to be always quiet.

Teachers in the study also criticise the inadequate length of time for their training and pinpointed the need for on-going teacher training. One-shot, short term training courses, as they described the training in the study, are seen as being insufficient for realising new curriculum initiatives.

- **Large classes**

Teaching large classes is one of the major problems facing education systems in Egypt and many developing countries. In Cairo, the average class size is estimated as 49.7 students per class (MOE,

2014). When an interviewed teacher was asked about lecturing in EFL classes, he justified by mentioning that the classroom was stuffed with students and there was no space to walk through students or to organise collaborative tasks.

Interviewee 5: Generating ideas in large classes is fine; it is an advantage, but putting students in pairs or in groups is impossible in a 60 student class. I cannot even walk through students. I keep standing in front of them.

In a similar research, Gahin's (2001) study of 120 EFL Egyptian preparatory teachers found that large class size was thought by teachers to be the primary obstacle to students' participation in curricular activities and in pair and group work. It can be pointed out that there seems to be a strong link between the size of the class and the length of the lesson as teachers claim that they do not have time to set collaborative work or give proper feedback. Teachers' training is likely the key for solving these problems as there are many programmes that assist teachers to arrange students for group and pair work in large classes.

- **Students' reading culture**

The findings of this paper highlight that teachers have voiced their concern about their students' lack of reading English or Arabic texts resulting in substantial challenges with regards to topic prior knowledge, coherence, cohesion, style, range of vocabulary, and punctuation. Moreover, teachers, justifying their overdoing of providing students with various vocabulary and notes, reported that students do not make use of the reading lesson to serve the writing lesson.

Interviewer: Why do not they make use of the reading passage preceding the writing lesson?

Interviewee 6: Aha, that is another disaster; they deal with each lesson as it is. They have difficulty to combine or link between lessons.

Pedagogically, it is recommended that L2 reading would help improve L2 writing at the beginners and the advanced levels (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). In the Egyptian context, EL-Koumy (1997) sheds light on the importance of reading to enhance students' prior knowledge. He claims that the teaching of reading and writing should be integrated to better prepare English teachers to read like writers and write like readers. In agreement with this, Langer (1983) argues that there is a strong and consistent relationship between topic-specific background knowledge and the quality of students' writing. Thus, most of the research concentrates that students' prior reading of the topic subsidises their writing quality. However, the question is why students are not interested in reading.

Overall, teachers have negative attitudes towards teaching EFL writing lessons as they consider these lessons to be tiring and exhausting. Their lack of knowledge and training combined with other contextual problems resulted in unsatisfactory practices and scratches of techniques which probably form this negative attitude. The washback of the examination system and the teacher's professional development are supposed to be the most significant factors that have affected teachers' techniques and attitudes.

Regardless of the washback of the test and the insufficient training, it can be concluded that there is another problem in teaching writing in Egypt. It is not the issue of teaching as product-oriented or process writing because many teachers depend on lecturing and do not make use of resources in most private schools where the number of students is smaller in the classrooms. The problem is likely a cultural instructional/learning problem; how to shift from teacher-centred to student-centred lessons. To be able to

overcome the previous difficulties, the educational system seems to go through three directions; reform of the examination system, improving teachers' professional development and a new model of teaching that helps a gradual transfer from TTT (Teacher Talking Time) to STT (Student Talking Time) lessons. Therefore, this paper proposes the following suggestions.

6. Implications

This section is divided into two main parts: first, a model to teaching EFL writing in Egypt is presented. Next, some implications arising from the findings of the paper have been put forward to overcome the numerous teaching EFL writing difficulties.

6.1 Research question (4): Teachers' difficulties

The model is based on the metacognitive theory (Flavell, 1979), scaffolded instruction (Hartmann, 2001) and SRSD (Self-Regulated Strategy Development) model in reading (Harris & Graham, 1999). First, metacognition is knowledge about cognition and regulation of cognition. In other words, it means knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning. Accordingly, SRSD model and the scaffolded instruction are based on teaching students strategies for achieving writing tasks in addition to procedures for regulating these strategies. Furthermore, students' knowledge about the writing process is increased and teachers' and students' positive attitudes about writing are formed. The model is organised into five stages:

Stage 1: Develop background knowledge (students/teacher)

Teacher and students work together; students think about what they know about the topic to develop background knowledge, and supplement ideas from the teacher. The teacher introduces the main strategies to be used in writing (cognitive or metacognitive). For Example: "First, I look for a topic sentence which will draw the reader's attention. However, I should take care of the unity of the composition which means"

Stage 2: Modeling (teacher)

The teacher models how to write a piece of English composition by thinking aloud his or her cognitive activities involved in the task. For example, he composes aloud in front of the students by writing the words on the board. All students follow the process of composing. The teacher verbally reports the on-going mental activities that generate the written output. Students observe the teacher's monologues like "First, I write the topic sentence which identifies the main idea of the paragraph. "Am I beginning with a capital letter?" "What should I write next?" "Am I making my intended meaning clear to the readers?"

So students can see not only what metacognitive strategic knowledge the teacher employs but also how he/she self-regulates the cognitive activities throughout the entire composing process.

Stage 3: Discuss it (class work)

In groups of three or four, students discuss what they have learned with one another; then, they discuss a specific writing strategy. Students write a plan or notes that include first, the strategy of writing, then the ideas of the topic (pre-writing). Peer practice can be effective; skilled students can support weak students. The teachers can use images, paintings, pictures in a magazine, a book cover or authentic materials to help students generate ideas. A dictionary should be available with each group of students. Using different monolingual / bilingual dictionaries (Christianson, 1997) would help students generate ideas and be independent looking for the vocabulary required as well as it would increase their confidence.

Stage 4: Collaborative practice (teacher & class)

Students begin to write using their writing strategy. The teacher monitors (walking through or eye contact); if students are struggling, the teacher should support and gradually shift control to the students. Students are encouraged to move towards self-instruction to monitor their progress.

Stage 5: Publishing

Students combine into larger groups, read each other's composition, check mistakes; students' peers would help in the editing and revising writing stage. The teacher monitors and writes notes. At the end of the lesson, he writes comments on the board of students' most common mistakes. Individual students read aloud if there is time.

The main aim of this model is to provide students with guided practice until their metacognitive strategies move towards an automatic state. It bridges the gap between what they can do on their own and what they can do with guidance from more competent others including teachers and peers. The model may solve the communication between teacher and students in large classes as it reduces the teacher's involvement in the lesson which will decrease the teaching load. At different times in a lesson, teacher's role may change as the lesson moves from teacher-led to student-centered and back again. Shortly, first, the model seems provide suggestions for teachers in practical pre-writing activities that may reduce their direct involvement in the generation of ideas. Second, the models encourage peer work that might reduce the work load of writing lessons for teachers. Third, each group of students can bring only one dictionary for the writing lesson. Finally, it is a gradual shift from teacher-centred to student-centred lessons because as mentioned it look to be a cultural problem and culture cannot be changed abruptly. The more teachers and students practise the steps of the model the less time they spend on metacognitive strategies.

However, it can be pointed out that both teacher and students need much patience and persistence to practice the series of teaching / learning activities. For instance, using new techniques may face resistance from some students, or inefficient implementation of untrained teachers, so teachers should be provided with sufficient training to have better understanding of teaching metacognitive models and the strategic metacognitive knowledge. Another issue that might emerge is the dominance of high skilled students over low level ones; weak students may depend on their skilled peers and be passive during the group work; therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that all students participate.

6.2 Other implications

The examination system and teachers' professional development are important issues that influenced teaching in this paper.

First, it is supposed that, had the exam coordinated the content of the textbook, teachers could have managed to change their instructional practices, and challenge the contextual difficulties encountered. Consequently, to ask students to learn process writing, writing tests also should be considered as a process, i.e. formative tests and on-going evaluation around the year. Students should be asked to write essays around the year and should be assessed and monitored by their teachers. Students should perceive that learning EFL writing is not just translating from Arabic to English, but it is a process in which they learn the rhetoric, cultural and linguistic norms of the new language. This understanding would probably help both teachers and students to adapt to the process of teaching writing.

Nonetheless, the examination system cannot be the only determinant of classroom practices (Wall, 2000). Once the quality of teaching is improved, the quality of students' learning opportunities will improve, as well. Also, this paperraises the question of which comes first: changing views or changing class-room practices. This leads to the importance that teachers' professional development. Stenhouse (1975) wisely notes that there can be no curriculum development without teacher development. Moreover, without follow ups in the classroom; the training would have little impact. There is a need for monitoring processes to be introduced to evaluate the usefulness of the training. Additionally, better coordination between the Ministry of Education as a recruiter and Egyptian universities as the supplier would certainly help bridge the gap examined between theory and practice. Shortly, the findings of the present paper suggest that the improvements of pedagogical practices require professional development programmes that develop and upgrade pedagogic and theoretical knowledge and skills.

7. Conclusions

The paper quantitative data have investigated the teachers' attitudes and practices in EFL writing classes in secondary schools in Egypt in addition to students' perceptions towards those practices. Also, the difficulties that teachers encounter in EFL writing lessons have been scrutinised by teachers' interviews and the open ended questions of the teacher's questionnaire. Findings have revealed that teachers have positive attitudes towards the significance of EFL writing skill, but they perceive negative ones towards practising and theoretical understanding of the teaching of EFL writing skill. Both teachers and students, but with higher percentages, have noted that the teachers' techniques are mostly traditional and outdated, and most teachers do not consult the teacher's book which offer very detailed procedures of how to present writing lessons. This may have led to traditional practices that negatively have influenced EFL writing lessons. It is pointed out that EFL writing classrooms seem to be commonly teacher-centred, and the most frequent practices are teacher-driven while the students' pair work, group work and brainstorming activities are less frequent.

The interviews and questionnaire data indicate that these instructional practices have been influenced by a number of difficulties and problems encountering teachers in the EFL writing lessons; they have been classified into instructional, learning and contextual factors. The examination system has been strongly rated by teachers to be the most influential aspect that might have influenced instructional practices. However, a number of factors have accounted for the overall results; these factors are categorised into four main themes, namely washback, 'teachers' cultural and professional development', large classes and students' reading culture.

A proposed model is recommended to teaching EFL writing; a required change in the English language exams is suggested which would possibly lead to change of teaching and learning practices. It is recommended to draw teachers' attention of their professional development and provide them with the required training to cope with new approaches of new curricula.

8. References

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OMANI SCHOOL SUPERVISOR PERSPECTIVES OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS IMPACTING UPON STUDENTS' LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of Oman's "modern era" in 1970, English has assumed a central role in the country's education system and has acted as a lingua franca across a variety of domains. However, despite this, graduates of Omani public schools are often reported as lacking the English-language linguistic and communicative abilities demanded by higher education institutions and the world of work. Consequently, most high school graduates entering tertiary education are required to enrol in foundation programs to improve their English language skills, while the employability of graduates seeking jobs straight from high school has also been reported as being negatively affected. Within this context, the current research explored the ways in which contextual factors relate to Omani school graduates' development of English language skills. To achieve this, eight high school English language teaching supervisors responded to an on-line, open-ended question about the contextual factors they believed caused Omani school students to graduate with low English language proficiency. Results indicate that participants believed families, parents, and "Englishness" are the most important contextual factors contributing to this issue. The practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Key words: Oman, EFL, English proficiency, contextual factors, supervisors

Introduction

The position of English as the world's current lingua franca and only truly global language is well-documented. Its dominance in a variety of domains worldwide, including in science and technology, international business, finance and banking, tourism and higher education, is matched by the increasing inroads the language is making into daily communications and interpersonal and familial interactions in a number of contexts, including in many of the countries of the Muslim world (Clarke, 2007; Jones, Martin, & Ozog, 1993; Kim, 2003; Sinno, 2008). While this dominance could be argued to be the result of historical and political factors in many outer circle nations which, for the most part, were directly under British colonial rule (Kachru, 1992, 1998), English is now also beginning to take root in a number of expanding circle nations where Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova (2010) state it is increasingly used in business, tourism, industry, education, insurance, aviation, and medical care. This worldwide dominance is most likely set to continue, with Graddol (2000) asserting that English will dominate many international domains for at least the next 100 years.

Tuzlukova and Al-Mahrooqi (2010) claim that English acts as a bridge that synchronically and diachronically connects learners as individuals with the enormous amount of information and other data stored in the language and, without access to English, this knowledge base is largely inaccessible. For this reason, the authors continue, learning English should be stressed in "any educational system that seeks to produce graduates who can compete in the international market and help in the development and advancement of their societies" (p. 41). This is especially the case within those outer and expanding circle nations where English is positioned as a tool for achieving excellence across numerous fields as offered above.

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It is for these reasons that English has officially assumed such an important position in Oman's education system since it was first expanded to the national level following His Majesty Sultan Qaboos's assumption of the throne in 1970. Given its importance to education in the country and its dominance across a wide variety of domains, English has become an essential asset for employability and employment in the Omani job market. A good command of English and a communicative ability in the language form a competitive advantage for getting a good job. In fact, Al-Issa (2007) highlights the centrality of English to education and employment in the country by stating: "Oman needs English – the only official foreign language in the country, as a fundamental tool for 'modernization', 'nationalization' and the acquisition of science and technology" (pp. 199-200).

In addition to these potential benefits, English is also important for the internationalization of higher education institutions both within Oman and around the world. According to Renard (2010), for Omani tertiary institutions to function effectively in an increasingly globalized world, they must "continue to make significant investment in English to enable full involvement in global academic networks that function in English" (p. 3). This investment, Renard claims, is based on the fact that English remains the preeminent language of science, scholarship, and engagement with the world's academic community. As a result, tertiary-level staff and students must be fluent in the language. In most scientific fields, English is the primary language of knowledge dissemination and international journals usually publish in English. Even in the Middle East where Arabic is widely spoken, English tends to be the key tool of academic discourse with it even being positioned in some cases as the key for academic exchange between Arab Gulf universities (Denman, 2014, pp. 96-97).

However, despite the importance of English to Omani society, graduates of Omani public schools are often reported as lacking the kinds of linguistic and communicative abilities in the language that are demanded by both higher education and the world of work (Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010; Moody, 2009). As a result, most high school graduates upon entering tertiary education are required to enrol in English foundation programs (Al-Issa, 2011) for periods that usually extend between six months and two years. This enrolment naturally lengthens the amount of time these graduates spend attempting to complete their studies – often in English-medium colleges – and therefore has a negative effect on the nationalization of the workforce or what is locally termed "Omanization". Moreover, because many Omani school graduates struggle with their English studies, they are often unable to enter prestigious universities in the country and may also not have the language skills that many businesses, especially those in the private sector, demand.

A number of reasons have been offered for Omani school graduates' weaknesses in English despite the large investment, in terms of teacher training, curriculum reform, and curriculum development, that the system has received over the past decade or so. These have been offered as including contextual factors such as national culture, the community, family, parents, and peers (Al-Mahrooqi, Al-Maamari, & Denman, 2015), among many others (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Toubi, 1998). Given the officially recognized position of English as a driver of Omanization and as a key plank in increasing Oman's participation in the global economy, the current exploratory research was deemed necessary to understand more about the ways in which these contextual factors relate to Omani school graduates' development of English language skills. In order to achieve this, eight Omani public school system EFL supervisors responded to an on-line open-ended question about the contextual factors they believed caused Omani school students to graduate with low English language proficiency.

1. Literature review

1.1. Context and language learning

A number of authors highlight the ways in which contextual factors can exert an important influence on language learning (Canagarajah, 1993; Holliday, 1994; Van Lier, 1988). For instance, Freeman and Johnson (1998) claim that the teaching context acts as a "socio-cultural terrain" in which teaching and learning take place. Bax (2003) adds that effective teaching in the EFL classroom is shaped not only by teaching methodology, but also by contextual factors such as student needs, the school culture, existing syllabuses, language-in-education policies, and the wider socio-political setting in which learning and

teaching is situated. Toohey (2007) adds that teachers are not agentive in their own right but are constrained by specific societal factors such as the institutional culture in which they teach.

A number of studies highlight the importance of these contextual factors. For example, LoCastro (1996) observes how the socio-cultural context can have a negative effect on the implementation of communicative language teaching approaches in largely monolingual Japan. According to the author, a major problem hindering the implementation of this approach in the country is that other aspects of the education system, such as the system of entrance exams, are often at odds with the push for more communicative teaching in EFL classes. As a result, Japanese English teachers are pressured to prepare students for university entrance exams and thus pay little attention to the educational discourse on the importance of adopting communicative, learner-centred approaches.

Toohey (2007) also stresses the need for curriculum planners to take into account the influence of cultural factors such as the institutional culture in which teaching takes place and the way this may either impose constraints or enable their agency. Stritikus (2003) notes the influence of socio-cultural factors in curriculum reform by stating that teachers do not respond to national curricular reforms through the policy itself, but rather to other factors that include their teaching context, their beliefs and attitudes towards pedagogy, and their political and personal ideologies. Bax (2003) summarises several contextual factors that exert an important influence on language teaching and learning. These include teachers' personal contexts (their individual differences, learning styles and strategies, personal motivation), the school culture (group, dynamics, class, environment, school environment), the societal culture (status of teachers and students, attitudes and behaviours of parents, the local environment including communities), and the national culture (political, religious, social and national context).

According to Gardner's (1979, 1983, 1985) highly influential socio-educational model, language can be acquired in both formal and informal contexts. The formal context here refers to the classroom that helps pupils to learn to be both linguistically competent and functionally bilingual. Traditionally speaking, drill and practice, audio-visual methods, and translation and grammar exercises were common learning approaches in the ESL/EFL classroom and teaching was formal and direct, even though these approaches have largely fallen out of favour in the learner-centred, communicative-focused language classrooms that now dominate English education in many parts of the world. In contrast, an informal learning context is one in which no formal structure is in place to support language learning and can be conceived of as involving such activities as watching a foreign language movie or reading a foreign language magazine primarily for entertainment. However, despite the informal nature of these activities, their intended outcome remains to extend skills in the language.

The socio-cultural context in which learning is situated plays an important role in language acquisition. For instance, Gardner (1985, 2010) states that, in those cultures where the target language is valorized, learners will be more motivated to become actively engaged in learning it. In addition to the classroom itself, the school also plays an important role in promoting positive attitudes towards learning a language. The influence of the school environment, which includes staff, students, principals, and parents, can be viewed as an important contextual factor that influences attitudes towards the language and the realization of effective language learning and teaching (Lamie, 2005).

This context, in addition to the learner's cultural background (Ramírez, 1995), also helps define learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the target language. Peng (2007) reports that students' L2 willingness to communicate could be influenced by such contextual factors as group cohesiveness, which here is defined as the commitment of learners to work together in achieving the best outcomes in class. WTC in the EFL classroom is also influenced by teacher support. Peng continues that L2 communication in the classroom is boosted by teachers' dedication to, and skills in providing, both linguistic and non-linguistic aids to foster a warm and wholesome classroom environment. In addition, WTC also depends on how teachers manage the class, what teaching styles they employ, and what tasks they design for a particular class (Peng, 2007, p. 258), in addition to the influence of peers' and parents' attitudes towards the potential utility and value of the language itself.

Language anxiety, which can be conceived of as the discomfort or negative emotional arousal anticipating or accompanying communication in the target language, has also been reported as affecting L2 WTC. On the other hand, risk-taking students were found to be more willing to communicate. Risk-

taking is the learners' tendency to use the target language regardless of uncertain outcomes (Peng, 2007, p. 257). According to MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei and Noels (1998), language teaching should ultimately foster learners' willingness to engage in communication and to talk in order to learn. The authors continue that this "readiness to enter into discourse" (p. 547) could be viewed as encompassing L2 learners' linguistic, cognitive, affective and cultural readiness, with it therefore beneficial to incorporate their socio-cultural backgrounds into the classroom to build upon their level of preparedness to communicate in the target language.

However, this incorporation can be difficult to achieve in those contexts where English has only a minimal presence in wider society and is not used as a second language or lingua franca. Zhu (2003) notes that this is a situation that is common across large parts of China, with students in less-developed areas of the country in particular having few opportunities to use English for social and vocational purposes. In settings similar to these, the author recommends the creation of English-language environments within schools themselves which can include the use of English songs, an "English Day" celebration, English-language contests and carnivals and so on. In this way, a socio-linguistic environment conducive to English-language learning can be realized at the school level even when the school setting itself is outside of what would typically be described as a "supportive" socio-cultural environment.

1.2. English and education in Oman

One firm belief guiding recent reforms to the teaching of English in Omani government schools is that English's role as the modern world's international language cannot be denied and its importance as the medium through which the sciences, information technology, technical advancement, communication, international relations, politics and a host of other fields are mediated (Altbach, 2010; Bisong, 1995; Crystal, 1992; Graddol, 2006; Phillipson, 1992) will continue for the foreseeable future. The widespread nature of this belief is apparent in the fact that a seemingly ever-increasing number of governments around the world prescribe the teaching of English in their schools as a first, second or foreign language. As highlighted above, Omani policy makers have intrinsically linked the country's modernization and development with English. Hence, the language has emerged in the country as not only important as a mediator of science and technology and communication with the rest of the world, it is also regarded as a platform from which Oman can propel itself to the front rank of developments across the globe.

In addition to the value of English as a means for Oman and Omanis to engage in communication with the international community, the presence of a large foreign workforce in the sultanate to assist in the process of development and modernization means that English has also become essential as a lingua franca and as the language of a large number of domains including private enterprise, trade, health care, banking, tourism, higher level education and so on (Charise, 2007). It is in consideration of these exigencies that English is now taught from the first grade in Basic Education schools where previously it was introduced during grade four. Indeed, private schools teach English to their students from kindergarten.

Despite the extensive nature of the Basic Education reforms that were introduced to the country from academic year 1998/1999 on a gradual basis, school students English language levels are still reported as being largely unsatisfactory for their future academic and professional purposes. Although the new education system brought with it a different education model that supported communicative teaching methodologies, students continue to leave school with limited English skills and around 90% of all graduates have been reported as requiring English-language foundation studies for anywhere between three months to two years upon entering university (Al-Mamari, 2011; Carroll, Razvi, & Goodliffe, 2009). The apparent failure of the public education system to develop learners' English proficiency to an appropriate level has been reported by researchers such as Al-Mahrooqi, Al-Maamari and Denman (2015), Al-Busaidi (1995), Moates (2006), Al-Mahrooqi (2012), Al-Issa (2011), and Moody (2009, 2012). Investigations into the reasons for such low levels of proficiency suggest a number of challenges including teachers and the quality of teaching, student-related factors, the education system, the curriculum, and the context in which English language education in the country takes place.

Government schools in Oman are, despite far-reaching reforms, still failing to equip Omani students with the English language skills they need to be successful in their academic and professional careers. This failure has been well documented (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Moates, 2006;

Moody, 2009, 2012) and the number of factors potentially associated with it include teachers, students, parents, supervisors, administrators, the education system itself, and the curriculum. While Al-Mahrooqi, Al-Maamari and Denman (2015) offer a nation-wide examination of the potential influence of these factors on the limited development of Omani school graduates' English proficiency, the current study sought to focus on the potential impact of one area that, as of yet, has only received minimal investigative attention – contextual factors. In order to achieve this, this exploratory research examined the potential impact of the contextual factors of culture, community, family, parents, and peers on Omani school graduates' development of English language skills.

2. Methodology

A group of Omani government school supervisors that were involved in a large-scale nation-wide investigation (see Al-Mahrooqi, Al-Maamari, & Denman, 2015) were contacted through email and asked to volunteer in the current study. Those who expressed a desire to participate, after being reminded of issues of confidentiality and anonymity, were sent a link to an on-line form that contained the following open-ended question in English:

- What contextual-factors cause Omani school students to graduate from school with low English language proficiency?

Participants were asked to respond to the question within a 2-week data collection period and were reminded that their responses could be as extensive or as short as they desired. Once the data collection period was finished and the on-line form closed, all responses were collected in a series of text documents and analysed with NVivo through the application of a theoretical framework formed by the literature related to the contextual factors offered above. Thirteen supervisor participants volunteered to take part in the current research. Of these, eight were male and 5 were female. The vast majority of participants (n = 10) came from the governorate of Batinah South, while one participant each was drawn from Batinah North, Musandam, and Al Dhahera. Eleven participants were regional supervisors, one was an English supervisor and one was an acting supervisor. Nine participants held bachelor's degrees, while the remaining four had master's level degrees. Most participants (n = 5) had between 16 and 20 years of experience, while one had between 0 and 5 years, two had between 6 and 10 years, two had between 11 and 15 years, and three participants had between 21 and 25 years of experience. The vast majority of participants had received their highest level qualifications either between 2001 and 2005 (n = 5) or between 2006 and 2010 (n = 6). One participant each received their highest level degree between 1995 and 2000 and between 2011 and 2015. Although 13 participants agreed to take part in this part of the research and completed their demographic details accordingly, only 8 provided a complete response to the open-ended question. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, with particular attention paid to emerging themes and areas of overlap and divergence between participant responses.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of the data revealed a number of emergent themes related to the influence of contextual factors that displayed a high degree of overlap with the literature. That is, participants offered family, Englishness, parents, peers, and the community as being the most important contextual factors contributing to Omani school graduates' limited development of English language proficiency. Table 1 examines the number of responses associated with these themes in terms of both source, or the number of respondents that mention these factors, and references which refer to how many times these responses were mentioned across the data. The table suggests that, whether factors are examined by source or reference, supervisors believed that three main contextual factors contributed to the limited English language proficiency of Omani public school graduates. These factors are family (61.5%, 24.44%), parents (53.8%, 26.66%), and Englishness (61.5%, 24.44%). Factors related to learners' communities (30.7%, 15.55%) and peers (20.70%, 8.88%) also featured in this table, though their level of coverage was roughly half of the first three factors. In addition to these, other factors (30.7%, 13.33%) not associated with these five main categories were also mentioned.

Table 1: Emergent themes

CATEGORY NAME	SOURCES (OUT OF A TOTAL OF 13)	SOURCES %	REFERENCES OUT OF 51 (SPECIFIC EXTRACTS)	REFERENCES %
Family	8	61.5%	11	24.44%
Englishness	8	61.5%	11	24.44%
Parents	7	53.8%	12	26.66%
Peers	4	30.7%	4	8.88%
Community	4	30.7%	7	15.55%
Non-categorized	4	30.7%	6	13.33%

The five contextual factors featured in Table 1 can be classified into two main groups: actors in the context (including peers, parents, family and community) and nature of context (in this case, Englishness). Englishness here refers to the closeness between English and its importance and use in this predominantly Arabic-speaking country. A closer examination of the data reveals attitudes that highlight the importance of these factors in contributing to learners' limited English language skills upon graduation. For example, supervisors indicated that some of the participants' parents and the community in which they live may hold English language learning and English language teachers in low esteem. For example, one participant stated:

Families and societies do not reflect a respectful view on teachers. Therefore, the new generation do not respect learning and teachers which creates a wide gap between teachers and learners

Another participant claimed that, "Some students come from backgrounds which do not value English language so students tend not to give much concern in learning the language". Respondents related these negative views of both English language learning and of EFL teachers in Oman to parents' limited education levels and their subsequent low English language proficiency. Respondents also referred to the importance of a lack of family, parent and community support for school students to learn English, in addition to the lack of opportunities in the community to use the language. Participants added that parents' lack of interest in their children's learning in general, and the limited conversation that takes place about learning and education between children and their parents, also contributes to school students' limited English language development. For example, one supervisor stated, "Some parents do not follow up their children' learning and progress. They do not cooperate with language teachers to overcome the challenges encountered by their children".

With regards to Englishness as a theme that emerged from the data, almost without exception there appeared a very strong agreement among respondents about the fact that there is little opportunity for learners to engage in English outside of the classroom in Oman. Supervisors claimed that this was the case because English, despite its dominance across a large number of domains in the country, remains a foreign language as only Arabic has legal status in the country under Oman's common law. Further, respondents posited the concept of context as it relates to Englishness as operating at two levels: (1) the perceptions of the community about the lack of importance of English and the lack of purpose in learning it; and (2) the limited real opportunities to practice English in context. For instance, one supervisor maintained that, "[Learners'] social environment is not English [in] public places, shops, hospitals... So the students have few possibilities to practice. This reduced space helps for less linguistic inquisitiveness about using a foreign language".

It must be noted that the lack of reference to the concept of 'culture' by participants is an interesting omission in itself. That is, even though culture has been widely offered in the literature as one of the most important contextual factors impacting upon language learning, only one participant mentioned this as a contributor to Omani school students' limited English language skills. Other factors that were offered by supervisors as contributing to this issue included the widespread use of languages other than English, such as Urdu, Swahili, and Baluchi, in Oman, students involvement in family farms and the fishing

industry, especially in more rural and remote settings, and a lack of interest in learning in general. In addition to these factors, supervisors also offered the lack of co-operation between ministries and the limited use of media and other technology in the classroom as important contributors.

4. Conclusions

Findings from the exploratory study reported here suggest that Omani public school system EFL supervisors believe that families, parents, and Englishness are the most important contextual factors impacting upon Omani high school graduates' limited English proficiency. Respondents maintained that negative family and parent attitudes towards English, in addition to their lack of understanding of the language's importance for their children's academic and professional futures, help create a context in which learners often fail to see the point of studying English and hold negative attitudes towards it. Parents' attitudes towards learning a second or foreign language are often posited as an important factor associated with learner motivation and attitudes (Gardner, 1988) and, as such, the negative attitudes reported here may contribute to the limited development of Omani school students' English language skills. Perhaps as a result of these attitudes, supervisors claimed that parents were also unlikely to become involved in their children's English language studies and rarely spoke with them about their progress in the subject – findings that are similar to those reported in the literature (Al-Harrasi & Al-Mahrooqi, 2014; Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, & Al-Maamari, in press).

Moreover, similar attitudes were also ascribed to the wider community in relation to responses associated with the theme of Englishness. A number of participants claimed that, in addition to negative community attitudes towards English, students also experienced limited opportunities to practice the language outside of school. Adding to this concern, supervisors stated that the community often held negative views of English teachers in Oman and that the traditional levels of respect extended to teachers in this still relatively traditional Arab society are beginning to disappear. While this contention is one that is open to debate, it should be noted that Al-Mahrooqi, Al-Maamari, and Denman (2015) reported a number of stakeholder groups, including parents, students, administrators, supervisors, and even ELT teachers themselves, believed that teachers represented an important contributor to Omani school graduates' limited development of English language skills. The belief that EFL teachers in Oman have an important influence on poor language learning outcomes, therefore, may imply that these stakeholder groups do, in fact, hold negative attitudes towards those working in the profession, even though Denman (2014) reported opposite findings with Omani EFL teachers at the tertiary level.

While the influence of peer factors, including unmotivated peers who display little interest in learning English, were also highlighted by supervisors as influencing poor English language learning outcomes, interestingly, culture was only mentioned by one respondent as having a negative impact. Cultural factors, perhaps most famously encompassed by Gardner's (1988) term "socio-cultural milieu", are often posited as being among the most important contextual contributors to learning a second or foreign language. This is often especially the case in those Muslim-majority countries where students may consider the normative baggage associated with the English language to represent a threat to their traditional socio-cultural values (Rahman, 2005). However, the fact that cultural factors were not identified by participants here as being an important contributor to learners' limited development of English skills suggests that English language education in Omani schools is being implemented in a culturally-appropriate way that meets the specifications outlined by the Ministry of Education (2004, 2010).

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OBSERVING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHERS' CODE-SWITCHING IN EFL CLASSES. DOES GENDER HAVE ANY IMPACT?

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ABSTRACT

Code-switching is a widespread phenomenon used as a communicative resource both in natural and educational settings. This is very common in bilingual and multilingual settings but not in educational ones. There are varying attitudes towards the use of code switching. The present study was to investigate students' attitudes towards teachers' code-switching in EFL classes. Moreover, gender differences in students' attitudes were observed. To this end, a four-section 20-item questionnaire developed by Yao (2011) was distributed to students. They were also supposed to answer the question regarding their gender identity at the top of the questionnaire. The data were tabulated, and frequencies and percentages were conducted by SPSS program. The findings displayed that students totally had positive attitudes towards code-switching used by teachers in EFL classes. However, there were some situations in which they were not interested in it. Furthermore, this study showed that gender does not cause any significant differences in students' attitudes.

Key words: Code-switching, attitude, gender, investigation, EFL classes

Introduction

Among bilinguals, there are various and usual forms of linguistic behaviors such as borrowing on lexical and syntactic levels, language transfer, interference, pidginization, and creolization (Corder, 1981). However, the most normal and immediate form is code switching (Swigart, 1992; Goyvaert & Zembele, 1992). It is a widespread phenomenon and used as a communicative resource both in natural and educational settings. Code switching is the natural outcome of not only bilingual or multilingual speakers, but also of second language learners who are trying to acquire another language (Gumperz, 1982; Valdes-Fallis, 1977). Therefore, many researchers throughout the world are attracted to this topic to better clarify issues like function of code switching, reasons for code switching, or attitudes towards it. Gumperz (1982) marked out code switching as the use of more than one language in the course of a single conversational episode. Myers-Scotton (2001) asserted that code switching is a phenomenon that appears on a regular basis both inside and outside of educational settings. Code switching is regarded as "a quite normal and widespread form of bilingual interaction" (Muysken, 1995, p. 177). Moreover, in the light of Brown's claim (2006), code switching is as usual as breathing for some people, it comes naturally and without any attention. The reason could be the internalization of societies and expansion of contacts both in and out of our own communities. In spite of that, some studies have shown that code switching is a strategy used by students to bridge understanding gaps caused by their lack of knowledge or proficiency in language classes (e.g. Greggio & Gil, 2007; Mahadhir & Then, 2007; Martin, 2005).

In educational settings, there are varying attitudes towards the use of code switching in EFL classes. For example, Cummins and Swain (1986) argued that "progress in the second language is facilitated if only one code is used in the classroom, asserting that the teacher's exclusive use of the target code will counteract the "pull" towards the native code" (p.105). But Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) claimed that "a learner's L1 is one of the most important factors in learning L2 vocabulary" (p.2) or Cook (2001) declared

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that code switching in language classes is common because of the bilingual situations within these contexts.

Almost related to the use of code switching in classes is the issue of gender. Holmes and Meyerhoff (2005) said that "in any identifiable social group, women and men are different. Gender differences are frequently represented as complementarities, that is, whatever men's language is, women's language is not" (p. 452). In language classes, male and female students usually use code switching for different goals. Rahimi and Jafari (2011) declared that "male students switch when they say humorous remarks while their female classmates switch more frequently when they ask and/or gave L1 equivalents" (p.15). So, because gender plays an important role in students' attitudes to their own language use, it may also affect their attitudes towards others' language use and language alternation (code switching).

There have been several studies on code switching in EFL classes. For instance, Moghadam, Abdul Samad, and Shahraki (2010) examined the students' attitudes towards code switching, the positive impact of code switching on understanding the target language, and the negative impact of code switching on students' learning ability. Borlongan, Lim, and Roxas (2012) investigated the attitudes of university students towards the use of Tagalog-English code switching instruction. The results showed that not only do students have positive attitudes towards code switching, but also it fosters learning.

Despite its importance, much less attention has been drawn to the possible role of gender on students' attitudes towards teachers' code switching in EFL classes. To the best knowledge of the researcher, a study done by Rahimi and Jafari (2011) investigated types and functions of code switching as well as gender preferences. But the analysis of the role of gender on attitudes has been lacking. So, this study is going to investigate students' attitudes and the role of gender on attitudes. It tries to answer the following research questions:

1. What are students' attitudes towards teachers' code switching in EFL classes?
2. What is the impact of gender on students' attitudes towards teachers' code switching in EFL classes?

1. Methodology

The focus of this study was on students' attitudes towards teachers' code switching in EFL classrooms. The sample was made up of 74 male and female senior English language students who were randomly chosen from all senior English classes in ShahidBahonar University of Kerman. It is worth mentioning that out of 74 students, 27 belonged to male group and 47 were females.

To gather the needed information, an adapted questionnaire was conducted to analyze students' attitudes in EFL classrooms. The questionnaire consists of four sections and twenty items. Section one elicits some information on teachers' persona according to their use of code switching. Section two elicits participants' attitudes to code switching used for subject access. Section three elicits data to recognize if teachers' code switching was used for classroom management and the forth section elicits attitudes towards teachers' code switching for interpersonal relations. There are five choices to each question item using a Likert-type scale and choices are given marks from 5 to 1. Students were asked to choose one of the five boxes by each statement. Furthermore, the students were asked to answer a question regarding their gender identity at the top of the questionnaire so as to be able to analyze the second research question.

The Cronbach alpha was estimated .893 in the present study which indicates that the reliability of the questionnaire is very high. The data from the questionnaire were tabulated and frequencies and percentages were conducted by SPSS program.

2. Findings and Discussion

2.1 Findings

Students' attitudes towards teachers' code-switching, according to each question item in the questionnaire, are presented in the table below:

Table 2.1. Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Code-switching

QUESTION	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Q1	2.7%	17.6%	28.4%	45.9%	5.4%
Q2	10.8%	39.2%	21.6%	24.3%	4.1%
Q3	12.2%	39.2%	32.4%	16.2%	0%
Q4	10.8%	37.8%	33.8%	17.6%	0%
Q5	1.4%	23.0%	48.6%	27.0%	0%
Q6	8.1%	37.8%	20.3%	31.1%	2.7%
Q7	4.1%	21.6%	21.6%	40.5%	12.2%
Q8	6.8%	14.9%	23.0%	45.9%	9.5%
Q9	2.7%	23.0%	35.1%	32.4%	6.8%
Q10	2.7%	16.2%	16.2%	51.4%	13.5%
Q11	5.4%	18.9%	24.3%	45.9%	5.4%
Q12	14.9%	24.3%	28.4%	32.4%	0%
Q13	9.5%	27.0%	14.9%	45.9%	2.7%
Q14	9.5%	27.0%	29.7%	31.1%	2.7%
Q15	9.5%	27.0%	33.8%	25.7%	4.1%
Q16	14.9%	24.3%	35.1%	23.0%	2.7%
Q17	6.8%	31.1%	37.8%	18.9%	5.4%
Q18	1.4%	17.6%	18.9%	50.0%	12.2%
Q19	8.1%	25.7%	31.1%	29.7%	5.4%
Q20	8.1%	24.35	24.3%	36.5%	6.8%

2.2 Discussion

2.2.1 Students' attitudes to code-switching

In the following four sections, students' attitudes to each question item will be discussed by detail and their total views about each section will be concluded.

2.2.1.1 Attitudes to code-switching in relation to teachers' persona

The first question involves students' attitudes to the language proficiency of those teachers who switch codes in EFL classes. Table 2.1. indicates that 51.3 percent of the students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the opinion that teachers who switch codes are capable of expressing themselves easily and clearly in both languages. 20.3 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" and about 28.4 percent were not sure about the opinion on this question.

The second question is about students' attitudes towards whether teachers' code-switching will cause any difficulties in understanding what the teacher talks about. Regarding this question, contrary to the previous one, half of the students (50.0%) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the opinion on the question. 21.6 percent were unsure and 28.4 percent agreed with the opinion. It shows that in EFL classes, teachers' switches may cause students misunderstanding to teachers' remarks.

Question 3 elicits students' attitudes on whether teachers' switches will pollute the languages. About 51.4 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed". However, 16.2 percent "agreed" or "strongly agreed" and 32.4 percent were not sure of it. One of the probable reasons for their choices is that they did not know what "language pollution" means.

Question 4 concerns students' attitudes towards the relationship between teachers' code-switching and their proficiency in languages. Almost half of the sample (48.6%) "disagreed" with this opinion that teachers who switch codes are deficient in English. 17.6 percent "agreed" and 33.8 percent were not sure. Totally, the results show that students did not consider these teachers as deficient in English.

The fifth question varies from those of the previous one. This question asks about the same opinion on teachers' proficiency who code switches, from the other side. Table 2 reveals that 24.4 percent of students "disagreed", 27.0 percent "agreed" and less than half (48.6%) were not sure about the statement. One of the possible causes of students' uncertainty may be the closeness of this question meaning to that of question 4.

As a whole, with regard to the results of these five questions, it can be concluded that most of students acknowledged the relationship between code-switching and teachers' persona. Consistent with what Ferguson (2003) asserted, "far from being an indicator of deficiency in the use of one or both languages, switching codes requires high levels of bilingual proficiency" (p. 45)

2.2.1.2 Attitudes to code-switching in relation to subject access

This part attempts to analyze students' attitudes towards the role of code-switching on their understanding of subject matter of lessons. In other words, it observes whether code-switching helps students to better learn what the teacher teaches or not. There are lots of studies (Lin, 1996; Martin, 1999; Pennington, 1995; etc.) which claim that code-switching plays a significant role in providing commentary on the meaning of the texts. The following is the explanation of the five questions investigating various aspects of code-switching used for text clarification.

Question 6 asks whether teachers who code switch are able to alternate their language in all kinds of topic or not. Contrary to what has been anticipated, near half of the students (45.9%) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the opinion on this question. Only 33.8 percent of the sample "agreed" or "strongly agreed" and 20.3 percent of them were unsure. Therefore, it can be inferred that teachers change codes to mother tongue to teach certain aspects of language such as grammatical point or new lexical items, not all kinds of topics.

Question 7 investigates students' attitudes on a more detail opinion. It asks if teachers' code-switching use to better explain the grammatical points and lexical items. More than half (52.7%) of student "agreed" or "strongly agreed" ; while 25.7 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" and 21.6 percent were not sure about the opinion on this question. This result is in accordance with both that of question 6 and also with the hypothesis that teachers often change their language to students' native one when teaching grammatical points and new lexical items.

Question 8 believes that teachers prefer to use students' mother tongue so as to illuminate the cultural points in the texts. The result of opinions verifies this assumption. 55.4 percent of the sample either "agreed" or "disagreed" with this point; 21.7 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with it and 23.0 percent were not certain about the claim on this question. This is again in accordance with the idea of two previous questions asserting that teachers can code-switch to illustrate some of the points in specific topics.

Attitudes to question 9 are similar to those in question 8. This question declares that teachers sometimes code-switch for eliciting responses to the teachers' questions and also attracting their attentions. Less than 40 percent (39.2%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed", 25.7 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" and more than one-fourth (35.1%) were not sure.

The last question of this section asks about students' opinions on whether code-switching would help teachers to better clarify the lesson content they teach. 64.9 percent of the sample "agreed" or "strongly agreed" whereas only 8.9 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" and 16.2 percent were not certain.

Among five questions in this part, the responses to the sixth one were opposite to common expectations but the rest were supported by most of the students. So, it proves that code-switching is regarded as a fruitful strategy in teaching subject matter of lessons.

Observing students' attitudes towards teachers' code-switching in efl classes. Does gender have any impact?

2.2.1.3 Attitudes to code-switching in relation to classroom management

Another situation in which code-switching may occur is the management of classroom behavior to discipline students, to attend to latecomers, and to attract students' attention. In another word, it could refer to students' learning management including negotiating task instructions, eliciting students' Responses, disciplining them, engaging their attention, and also directing them. The following five questions try to survey students' attitudes towards this aspect of teachers' code-switching in EFL classes.

With regard to question 11 which asserts that "teachers who switch codes from English to Farsi can better clarify task instruction". The responses inclined to agreement. More than half of the sample (51.3%) expressed agreement, 24.3 percent expressed disagreement and 24.3 percent were uncertain about the opinion on the question. So, it is assumed that code-switching could be considered as a useful strategy to better clarify classroom task instructions.

Question 12 states that "teachers who switch codes from English to Farsi can better discipline the students". Considering this, students almost "agreed" with the statement. 32.4 percent of the sample showed "agreement", while 39.2 percent showed "disagreement" and 28.4 percent were not sure. So, students believed that code-switching is not the best way to discipline students in EFL classes.

Question 13 says that "teachers who code-switch from English to Farsi can better engage students' attitudes". Almost half of the sample (48.6%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed", while 36,5 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" and 14.9 percent were uncertain. It can be concluded from the responses that code-switching is not regarded as the most appropriate way for engaging students' attention in EFL classes.

Responses to question 14 which asserts that "teachers who switch codes from English to Farsi can better request quiet" exhibit that only 33.8 percent of the sample "agreed" whereas 36.5 percent "disagreed" and 29.7 percent were not sure about this opinion. It can be understood that this opinion was not agreed even by half of the sample. So, code-switching is not considered a good way to request silence from students in EFL classes.

The last statement of this section, question 15, states that "teachers who switch codes from English to Farsi can better direct (call on) students". 29.8 percent of the students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with it, while 36.5 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with it and 33.8 percent were unsure. The results are not in line with Arthur's claim (1994) that code-switching may be used for addressee specification.

The above results about applying code-switching in classroom management depicts that the students did not purely agree or disagree with the statements. Therefore, it can be inferred that totally, code-switching is not a good strategy used to manage classroom.

2.2.1.4 Attitudes to code-switching in relation to interpersonal relations

As Yao (2011) claims, classroom is not only a place for gathering together and learning new things in different subject matters, but it is also a place which creates various situations for social and affective relations. For this reason, teachers may use students' native language to make close relationships with individual students. In the following, students' attitudes towards teachers' code-switching in relation to interpersonal relations is going to be analyzed.

Regarding question 16 which declares that "teachers who switch codes from English to Farsi can better encourage students", 25.7 percent "agreed" or "strongly agreed", 39.2 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", 35.1 percent were not sure. This could be understood that students are not interested in being encouraged in their mother tongue in EFL classes or they are not often encouraged by their teachers.

The opinions on question 17 are similar to those of question 16. About 24.3 percent of the students showed agreement, 37.9 percent showed disagreement and 37.8 percent were uncertain. These two questions analyzed identical opinions about how to motivate students' interests in learning English.

Question 18 states that “teachers who switch codes from Farsi to English or from English to Farsi can better enliven the atmosphere of class (e.g. make a joke for humor) “. More than half of the participant students (62.2%) expressed agreement, whereas 19.0 percent expressed disagreement and 18.9 percent were not sure about the opinion on the question. It indicates that code-switching is a good strategy to be sometimes used to change the atmosphere of the classrooms.

Question 19 states that “teachers who code-switch from English to Farsi can better comment on the students’ responses”. 35.1 percent of the sample “agreed” or “strongly agreed”, 33.8 percent “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” and about 31.1 percent were not certain about the opinion on the question. The results illustrate that teachers’ use of native language in order to better comment on students’ responses is not the best strategy.

To the last question which states that “teachers who switch codes from English to Farsi can better negotiate with students (reduce distance)”. 43.3 percent of the participant students showed agreement while 32.4 percent showed disagreement and 24.3 percent were unsure about this opinion. These percentages indicate that not many students agree that teachers’ code-switching is the best way to negotiate with students.

From among the above five questions, it can be inferred that students are interested in teachers’ language alternation to refresh the atmosphere of classroom. However, they are not tended to teachers’ code-switching for encouragement and praise, to comment on their responses, and also to reduce distance.

2.2.2 Role of gender on students’ attitudes to teachers’ code-switching in EFL classes

According to Rahimi and Jafari (2011) who declared that males and females have different reasons for code-switching use in EFL classes, it was also guessed that they would have different attitudes towards teachers’ code-switching in classes. In the present study, to assess gender differences in total code-switching scores, an independent-sample T-test was utilized. The results indicated that there was not a significant difference between males and females regarding total code-switching scores. Therefore, being a male or female student does not have any impact on attitudes towards teachers’ code-switching in EFL classes.

3. Conclusions

This paper focused on students’ attitudes to teachers’ code-switching in EFL classrooms in Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman city. The sample included 27 males and 47 female senior English language students. It aimed at finding out their opinions on teachers’ use of code-switching in EFL classes as well as analyzing the probable role of gender on attitudes. With regard to students’ attitudes, two aspects were discussed: firstly, students’ attitudes towards teachers’ code-switching were analyzed; secondly, the impact of gender on students’ attitudes was investigated. Table 2 shows that most of the students had positive view on the relation between code-switching and proficiency. Regarding section 2 of the questionnaire, they agreed with all statements except question 6 which states the ability of teachers to code-switch in all kinds of topics. However, students did not consider code-switching as a good way to classroom management. Finally, they were interested in teachers’ code-switching to enliven the atmosphere of classes but not for encouragement and praise, to comment on their responses, and also to reduce distance. Furthermore, it is inferred from the results that gender has no significant impact on students’ attitudes towards code-switching used by teachers in EFL classes.

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REPRODUCING THE INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES: A CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Since “consciousness is the first step towards emancipation” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 233), and since reproducing the ideological power-bearing discourses and hierarchical relations needs foregrounding the taken-for-granted relations in academic settings, the present study focuses on the different discourses and interactions of supervisors, advisors, external and internal examiners, and the audience with the M.A. defending students while urging on various orders of discourse with change. The present paper is a qualitative ethnography-based approach and sees into various commonsensical power-bearing verbal and nonverbal discourses. The specific methods of this work are a long-term observation accompanied by a detailed contextual analysis of five recorded viva sessions in two universities in the west of Iran. The findings of this study, power in discourse and power above discourse, helped in answering how orders of discourse are naturally produced in academic settings generally, and in viva voce settings specifically. Finally, this study concedes that both students and members of the elite groups _professors_ comprehend and produce power-bearing discourses without even a minor change, so that the traditionally held and commonsensical ideologies leading to powerful discourses appeared quite legitimate. Compliances resulted in reinforcing commonsensical assumptions in the academic settings. Resistance or social struggle, as the alternative reaction, is suggested at the end of this work which could lead to reforms in academic and educational systems in favor of emancipation. Similar studies can be done in classrooms and the same contexts where there seems to be unequal hierarchical relations for the purpose of bringing about social struggle. This study has implications for higher education specifically, and for education in general.

Keywords: Higher education, critical language awareness, viva voce, reproduction

1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is a branch of Discourse Analysis which objects the existing commonsensical relations of power in favor of the marginalized. This is rightly put by Van Dijk (1998) who stated that CDA is a kind of tool that first and foremost probes the way power abuse, dominance, and manipulation are exerted, reproduced and accepted or maybe resisted in the social and institutional contexts. He stipulates that with such endeavors, discourse analysts get critical to understand, analyze and ultimately to question and reject social inequality in various contexts. In this section, Critical Discourse Analysis is introduced as an analytical tool through which analysts can get into the commonsensical discourses for finding any power asymmetrical relations.

CDA, as a very novel approach in the interactive settings like education, has some useful tenets, also manifested in this work. These are inequality, power relations, ideology, dominance, hierarchical orders, and so on. All these key theories are very well fitted in Fairclough's (1989) three stages of CDA. All Fairclough's three stages of CDA are studied the present study. These stages have to do with verbal and nonverbal discourses, invisible ideological assumptions, and power asymmetry abound among the collected codes of this study. He stresses on language use, rather than language usage. He stipulates that

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discourse cannot be taken from its root, or let's say its context. To clarify this point, I can refer to the effects various orders of discourse can have upon the minds of others whether through coercion or persuasion. Fairclough's (1989) model of critical discourse analysis includes three interrelated processes of analysis, closely connected to three interrelated aspects of discourse. These aspects are the text, production and understanding processes, and the macro social conditions governing them. Fairclough regards a different kind of analysis for each of these aspects of discourse. The first one is called text analysis or simply the description and transcription processes, the second one is processing analysis or interpretation of interactions. The last one is called social analysis or let us call it the explanation stage which necessitates explaining the already existing social structures.

A key concept in re-producing the discourses without change is the matter of transferring old ideologies, backgrounded in the minds of all members of a given society. This has been observed in Van Dijk's (2008) words stating that "remembering our personal experiences as well as remembering what we read in the press, or what we told someone, thus consists in the search for and activation of "old" mental models" (p. 62). Activating old mental models without change leads to re-producing the same old discourses. The representation of old mental models can be re-shaped in a new way by foregrounding them. Interestingly, Van Dijk's (2008) discussion of memory is in line with Fairclough's (1989) discussion of MR, or member resources. He also believed that MR influences on the society, while at the same time determining by it. Likewise, Van Dijk (2008) referred to the social knowledge and this implies somehow the same thing that Fairclough (1989) presented as holding images of the society with oneself. Fairclough (1995) stated that "Discourse is use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within socio-cultural practice" (p. 7). By this, he asserts that we cannot separate discourse from its social and cultural roots. Both of them also pointed to the schemata activation for getting help from the past MR or memories. Text, interaction, and context are the other names for Fairclough's (1989) three stages of CDA.

"Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach, a way of looking at texts, not a rigorously systematic method of analysis" (Huckin, 2000, p. 12). Huckin (2000) also adds that the task of an analyst is to confirm, explain, and communicate the existing relations of power in a detailed manner to others. So, the task of systematically analyzing the texts for exploring the social events and relations is on the burden of a critical discourse analyst who is keen enough to find and foreground unequal conditions. "One of the benefits of CDA is its ability to bring together social and linguistic analyses of discourse, thus integrating analysis at the macro level of social structure with analysis at the micro level of social action" (Henderson, 2005, p. 5). CDA relies on the triangulation of discourse, ideology, and power, each of which are closely interrelated and reinforced by each other.

For the most part, Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), tying to a branch of critical research, came into existence from the Frankfurt and neo-marxian tradition (Marx, Gramsci, Althusser), CDA (Fairclough, Wodak, Van Dijk), Foucault and some other branches. McKenna (2004) asserts that CDS's main concerns were discourse and social structures. For CDS, liberty and justice mattered a lot. However, Critical Discourse Analysis, as a new branch to Discourse Analysis emerged in the late 1980s. Its new dimensions were power, inequality, ideology, and hegemony in verbal and nonverbal discourses.

CDA theories and strategies assist in revealing some culture sharing ideologies which had been traditionally kept and transferred to the others. An example of this is the interactions in a viva voce where there are some hierarchical orders and transferring ideologies occurs there very often. In line with this and by transferring some power asymmetrical ideologies to other academic contexts, defending students have to tolerate rather than resist some interactions. As "processes of a thesis are often a source of great anxiety for many students in higher education," (Sachs, 2002, p. 99) these asymmetrical relations add to their anxiety. Hence, the present work is a pioneering one with regard to studying interactions in the viva voce. This study is significant in some ways. Firstly, it is a novel study for making use of critical discourse analysis as a new approach for investigating what is going on in viva contexts. No study ever resorted to critical discourse analysis to unpack the interactions existing in the viva settings. The other thing which made this study significant is that it is an emancipatory study in favor of the marginalized students. It tries to give voice to the voiceless. The voiceless are those who even do not regard rights of voicing for themselves!

As Wareing (1999, p.10) rightly mentioned that “power is a complex and abstract concept, and an infinitely important influence on our lives,” it can be noticed that it seems somehow vague upon the first look, because it is a subjective term and no clear-cut definition can be ascribed to it. However power is everywhere, for it comes from the society and society is not limited to a specific boundary (Ritchie, Rigano, & Lowry, 2000). Different scholars define it differently, but the main concept is one for all. For example, Jones & Stilwell Peccei (1999) defined it as a kind of force “to persuade people to act voluntarily in the way you want” (p. 38); however this definition is very much similar to what Fairclough (1989) stated about it. He stated that it is the exerting of a kind of hidden force “through the manufacture of consent to or at least acquiescence towards it” (p. 4). This is the link of power to ideology, if we pay attention to these scholars’ definitions. To secure this kind of persuasive power, it is relevant to encourage people that what you want them to do is exactly what they want. It means that if one wants to exert power, it is important to enter their minds, influence them, and make sure that what is asked them is in line with their goals and purposes. Also, there is a view of hegemony that discusses a kind of power which is exerted through alliances and integrating people, or much the same as Fairclough’s (1989) notion of manufacturing consent (Thornton & Reynolds, 2006).

Equating their actions and words with goals of the dominated is a strategy often seen in the data of this study when a member of the elite group repeatedly asserts that what is asked the defending student to do is in favor of them to improve their study. Van Dijk (1996) stated that:

Social power is defined in terms of the control exercised by one group or organization (or its members) over the actions and/or the minds of (the members of) another group, thus limiting the freedom of action of the others, or influencing their knowledge, attitudes or ideologies [p. 84].

He also stipulated that this power makes ‘centers of power’ or ‘elite groups.’ This term is borrowed from him in the present study to refer to those whose knowledge creates superiority over the others lacking it or having a lesser degree of it. This group includes professors, or external and internal examiners, advisors, and supervisors in the present study. CDA calls the attention of all to the social context of the viva voce in order to break down the taken-for-granted relations and assumptions. Also, it would be appropriate to think of changing the term ‘defense’ to a better alternative, because the term ‘defense’ implies some hidden meanings of existing someone to attack, and this is troublesome in educational settings where there should be close and caring relations.

The objective of this study is to augment the awareness of academicians and students by justifying that variations in discourse are also possible, not to think that there is just one to state a discourse in a specific session. The usefulness of this study is that this study aims to make trouble using social struggle strategies. It points to the role of awareness in any educational or academic setting. Raising someone’s awareness can be a more potent strategy than forcing her to do something. “Education is seen as a major area for the reproduction of social relations, including representation and identity formation, but also for possibilities of change” (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 451), so some scholars insist on rethinking power relations in the social or institutional contexts (Smith, 2006 & Koutsantoni, 2006). They think that by rethinking about the existing power relations equality is achieved in favor of the dominated. So, awareness is accompanied by struggle and resistance. When resisting the hegemonic status quo, the same orders of discourse are not re-produced. So, re-producing occurs in new emancipatory ways. If relations in the viva settings get symmetrical, the educational and academic contexts will surely get influenced by the change.

The literature on M.A. or Ph.D. viva sessions lacks this kind of analysis on their discourses, something that the present study dealt with. It gets connected to the body of literature by critically analyzing the viva voce sessions, something which is studied for the first time. There are some studies on viva contexts, but they do not tackle with the issue from the perspective of CDA. So, the findings of this study add a new dimension to the literature on the viva interactions. “Despite the fact that universities have been assessing doctoral and master’s theses for many years, there has been little research done on the processes involved in that assessment” (Tinkler & Jackson, 2000, cited in Mullins & Kiley, 2002).

2. Methodology

The data of this qualitative and ethnography-based study were recorded using a handy camera in 5 viva sessions and then they were transcribed carefully for a textual analysis. As we know, qualitative data are forms of information collected in nonnumeric ways. In this study, Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) was the range of processes and procedures whereby I shifted from the collected data towards some forms of explanation, understanding and interpretation of the people's interactions and situations. Hence, QDA seemed to be based on an interpretative philosophy. The most common forms of qualitative data were what people -with their feelings and experiences- have said or done in viva sessions. It had to examine the meaningful content of the data. So, the textual analysis was a way to organize information about how students and educators made sense of the interactions and experienced the world, and specifically the viva sessions. This data-gathering process analyzed the emerging features and interactions on the text. The strategy of inquiry of the present work was ethnography by which I got involved in academic cultures and settings for discovering culture sharing attitudes and ideologies. It was also a methodology for understanding how members of the elite group and the students made sense of whom they were ideologically and of how they fitted into the academic world in which they lived. The textual analysis was the main method through which the data were collected and organized. It was also exploratory so that by passing the time more and more features were emerged and explored and it had much to do with intuition, thinking, classification, and coding. The interpretive textual analysis included semiotics, rhetorical analysis, and more importantly ideological analysis, among many others. These types of analysis sought to get beneath the surface (denotative) meanings and examine more implicit (connotative) social meanings. I used some techniques for the textual analysis of the interactions in viva sessions, among which were high frequency words, collocations, and the immediate linguistic environment of a specific word.

As advocacy/participatory knowledge claims have "political, empowerment issue-oriented, collaborative, change-oriented positions" (Creswell, 2002, p. 6), they call for change at the end, and question the existing asymmetrical structures. Having this theoretical framework for the present study, it is hoped that naturalized ideas leading to marginalization of some students are all resolved by increasing consciousness of both students and professors.

3. Results

After codifying the interactions, two categories of surface features of viva sessions and higher (hegemonic) features were emerged which are drawn below. According to Fairclough (1989), there are three stages of critical discourse analysis: Description, Interpretation, and Explanation. In description, the analyst explores micro features of discourse, like passive vs. active sentences, tag questions, diction, nominalization, positive vs. negative sentences, modes of discourse (declarative, grammatical questions, imperatives, and nonverbal), modality, pronouns, turn taking system, etc. In interpretation, the analyst is concerned with the interaction of texts from production to processes of understanding_ viz., cognitive processes are involved. Finally, in the explanation stage, the analyst deals with the link between interpretations and macro social contexts. Building on the model of Fairclough (1989), the data were transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted, having in mind the triangulation of discourse, ideology, and power. Figure 1 demonstrates this model in order to fully understand the surface layers of Critical Discourse Analysis in the present work. This study shows the way power is enacted, that is, through the invisible link to ideology, and by means of verbal and nonverbal discourses. By critically analyzing the data, some themes were explored which were in line with maxims of CDA, especially ideology and power relations manifest in the institutional orders of discourse.

This work has a voluminous corpus, some part of which is shown here. All the two categories are randomly exemplified below.

3.1 interruptions

Examiner: “Those which have two numbers, then... (decreasing the tone).”

The student: “I see, you mean if... (seeking for clarifications).”

Examiner interrupted: “Hey look, you should have told that.”

3.2 Informal language and humor

Advisor: “The students write some stuff so simply, all in vain and spurious. Ha-ha. The fact is that it is just for filling the forms! But THIS (referring to the student) has known this.”

Advisor (referring to the student): You pinned the blame on me? Huh? Ha-ha-ha.”

Examiner (looking humorously): “You are conversant, versant! Ha-ha-ha...”

3.3 Ignoring the defending students

Examiner: “As a reader, I have always had this question. Why ...?”

Supervisor: “Dr. if you let me, I will answer. Look ...”

Advisor: “I did not get what that automatic mean!”

Supervisor: “Well ...”

Examiner: “But, the linguistic issues...”

Examiner: “I saw Dr. X’s presence everywhere in this thesis, which has turned it to a good one, and it’s his noble disposition and true-heartedness which has influenced you not to be bias.”

3.4 Power asymmetry and knowledge management

Examiner: “In the first page, the translation of systemic-functional theory is really problematic by itself. You should change it totally to Persian.”

Audience: “Sorry, but we see that in all translations, they write ‘systemi-naghshi.’ System is used a lot in Persian.”

Examiner: “They have made a big mistake. It’s not a good choice, anyway.”

Audience: “Dr. X, this form is still used by the Persian Language and Literature Academy. I don’t think it’s wrong”

Examiner: “I’ll talk about it later.”

Examiner (totally changes the topic): “Well, her thesis is mostly statistically-oriented.”

Examiner: “Regarding the year and page number, you’d better revise them; Note that because it is a very good work, it’ll be really better not to have these minor problems.”

Examiner: “Well, on page 8, for this good work it seems that you should explain more concepts, not just two. You have limited the key concepts in just two, while if you consider in Halliday’s theory there are many concepts to talk about.”

3.5 Ceremonial aspects

Advisor: “I ask permission of all dear professors, you have twenty minutes to present. Please start your presentation and after that, dear examiners do us favor...”

Student: “Seeking permission of all my dear and honorable professors and the audience, I start my presentation under the title ...”

Examiner: “Do you permit, Dr.?”

Advisor: “My pleasure! I’m at your service.”

Examiner: “With all your permission Dr. Well Ms. X, thank you, more power on your elbow. I have two assessments.”

3.6 Personal beliefs and focus on form

Examiner: “it seems that you must explain more concepts.”

Examiner: “I feel your key words are more than two, and I feel the part 2.3.5 is redundant.”

Examiner: “My suggestion is that it should have a little difference.”

Examiner: “there are some parts to be revised, and they are formal problems. I have neither expertise nor capability to comment on content. However, I have checked some forms which I tell you.”

Examiner: “You have written an extra ‘to’ right there. I have checked some trivial things too. Don’t say they are too strict!”

Examiner: “Ms. X, answer in a short time, if the questions were answerable, not just the professors say all the things, and finally finish it; I mean it should have the form of a defence session.”

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to increase the awareness of some features of academic settings explored in the data, and to avoid further marginalization of those with low power, because “consciousness is the first step towards emancipation” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 233). In order to decrease the chance of further marginalization, it is really important to be conscious of discourse types which bring discriminations with themselves. Likewise, it is important to re-produce meanings with change. It would be really better to change the viva sessions to communicative and interactive encounters in which everyone even the defending students have the right to ask questions and to manage themselves and the settings.

“Lack of power is also measured by its lack of active or controlled access to discourse” (Van Dijk, 1993). If we recognize that we do not have access to a specific order of discourse while the other side has this right and access, then we can understand that we are powerless. Recski (2005) discussed Ph.D. viva sessions and disclosed some features and conditions while stipulating that for an outsider visiting a viva

session it may seem like a 'battle for power.' Van Dijke (2003) asserted that power leads to stereotyping and discrimination, while adding that power relations exist in all the settings in which people interact. So, we may conclude that interactional contexts result in reinforcing stereotypes, and specifically discriminations. If so, the role of awareness is vital, because without awareness the powerful exert a lot of power and inequalities are spread out. Power abuse may seem 'jointly produced' and it is not to think of power as 'unilaterally imposed on others.' The reason is that power takes the form of power only and only when accepted as natural from the other sides (Van Dijk, 1993). Power holders need others in order to transfer their powers. The contention is that there should be a counter-power if one wants to avoid repercussions of power. It should be noted that power is exerted only when the other side accept it. This point must be kept in mind if we want to support the agenda for changing the traditional conventions and structures. This is somehow supported by Lee & Tiedens's (2001) study which has a very interesting discussion on the features of power holders. This study shows that power holders actually need others. So, it is up to the dominated whether to accept or to reject inequalities. This study argued that power holders have independent self construals which make them separated from others and interdependent relational structures which put them in a network of relations and connections, while co-occurring. These power holders are socially embedded and interdependent on others for having power in the absence of others is nonsense.

Getting familiar and familiarizing everyone or let us say foregrounding the academic interactions is the best solution for changing the traditionally-held beliefs in favor of caring relations in education, especially higher education. So, social struggle is the aim of the present work achieved by foregrounding the status quo.

5. CONCLUSIONS Contrary to the discussions on the power exerted by the elite groups for having a special knowledge and expertise, Carter (2008) regarded the oral exams as a 'dialogue between equals' (p. 371). If the interaction of the defending students and professors is a dialogue between equals, then elite power seems vague.

As Winograd (2002) discussed, power and resistance are situational and shifting and not fixed. By seeking assistance from this study, we can ensure that a student who complied with different orders of discourse can change her stance and use counter-power strategies. Another study suggested that power and counter-power co-exist in pedagogy and curriculum and they work in a dual process of interacting (Benesch, 1999). We can come to the understanding that it may be a false belief to think of power merely as a means by which one group exercise it over the others. It means power is negotiated in a continuum ranging from fully complying and accepting to fully resisting.

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TOWARDS A BETTER EFL LEARNERS' MANAGEMENT OF THEIR INDEPENDENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a research work that has sought to investigate the characteristics of students' management of their English language learning and has attempted to correlate it with effective, independent, autonomous learning. It stresses the importance of improving students 'learning how to learn skills' through implementing an instructional programme based on autonomy fostering. It is undeniable that the ultimate objective of Education is targeting quality assurance and enhancement for facing twenty first century education challenges. Therefore, the primary goal of higher education is to prepare learners to function independently and appropriately into this world in constant motion. It is our role as teachers to equip them with the necessary tools and skills so that they manage both content and the way to learn it and use it for future employability objectives. Major researches in the area of learner autonomy in language learning will be reviewed drawing the characteristics of the autonomous learning behaviour as well as the main variables influencing its practice. The research adhered to a descriptive interpretative type of research, where we have attempted to investigate whether students were able to manage, monitor and self-regulate their learning and make it more self-directed and more successful. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected thanks to a triangulation of research tools used before and after the instruction in learning skills and competencies. Some of the results revealed that while for the majority of learners, autonomy fostering was welcomed and gave significant results, not all students were ready to function independently from a teacher for their language learning.

Key words: Autonomy fostering- language learning-higher education.

1. Introduction

Among the key concepts and key issues in language education today is Autonomy, or what we often refer to as the capacity to take charge of, and be responsible for one's own learning. Autonomy is, indeed, a goal to reach in today's instruction, especially at higher-level ones. More than a new tendency and orientation in today's pedagogy, it is a necessary instructional component the teacher has to foster in his learners.

It is often the case that students reach university with different backgrounds and different levels. Most of the time, they show very little disposition for independent learning that they are supposed to have acquired before and which is a prerequisite for undertaking university studies.

In this paper, we address the idea that empowering learners with the essential means to manage their own learning, to make appropriate choices and options and reach quality in view of reaching national and international stakes should be on top of the priorities of university teaching today. One of the key roles higher education has to efficiently fulfil at present time is to enhance students 'learning management skills and foster their ability to function independently and appropriately in this increasingly and inevitably global world. If education has concentrated so far on imparting knowledge, it is essential today that it provides

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the means to manage it and use it for study purposes but, also and so much, for adapting to new and future challenges.

As far as the English language is concerned, it has achieved a legitimate place in different educational stages in Algeria because of its international status. As it is strategic to consider that the access to knowledge requires the mastery of languages, full priority has been given for the learning of foreign languages and English is still at the top of the list. In addition, Learner autonomy is a concept that finds its place appropriately in the LMD (Licence, Master and Doctorate) context and is one of its objectives. Today the LMD system has been generalised throughout all universities in Algeria, in different fields and among them English language learning. According to the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (March, 2010), the system has been adopted in the frame of the global reform of Higher Education as a way to participate into the development and modernisation of the Algerian University. By adopting the LMD system at tertiary education, the objective was to integrate the new international trends and tendencies into higher education by giving the Algerian university the pedagogical, scientific and human means that would make it possible to respond to societal demands of the twenty first century challenges.

From this perception of things, we have undertaken a research work trying to examine some of the issues, which characterise autonomy and independent language learning with an attempt to promote it and foster it in our language classrooms. The investigation has focused on the exploration of the nature of students' management (if any) of their learning. It has stressed students' perceptions and conceptions of their English language learning and has studied the possibility of independent learning fostering in language teaching at University level.

The motivation behind undertaking such a research work sprang out of several years of the researcher's personal experience as a practicing teacher trying to answer the question of: What type of learning management could make language learners become more effective and proficient learners who are able to function independently even after they leave university? Therefore, the aim of the research was to determine the extent to which students were showing any kind of Autonomy. The research also strived to find the best way to foster some kind of Autonomy within learners and see if this had a significant correlation with good and poor language learning behaviour or not. We have then, hypothesised that the answer possibly lied on encouraging learners to take their learning in charge in a better way, by being responsible for it and by managing it in a way to achieve more effective and successful results. We have also hypothesised that developing increased awareness of independent learning and its benefits, will enhance student's capacity to learn independently and that fostering students' autonomous learning through a program would contribute to a higher achievement and motivation in English language learning.

2. Theoretical framework

LA (Learner Autonomy) is a concept used in different fields of education. In 1979, Holec -considered as the father of the concept of autonomy- makes a clear cut with previous teacher- centered methodologies in language learning by stressing the necessity of fostering autonomy within language learners to have results that are more effective in this field. He describes it as **“the ability to take charge of one's own learning”** (1981, p. 103). Many researchers explored the concept in relation to two directions of research:

First, some researchers (mainly in Europe) concentrated on the development of learner autonomy by means of a training in school and independently from it. We can mention the most influential researches of Benson (1997-2001), Dickinson (1987) and Holec (1979-80-81).

The second direction of research focused on identifying the characteristics of “good language learners”, focusing on learners' strategies and strategy training: Wenden & Rubin (1987), O'Mallet & Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990-2000-2003), Cohen & Macaro (2007). These researches have indeed been the logical consequence of shifts in educational philosophy, including new variables in language education theories. To these factors we can add wider access to education in relation to international relationship development within the framework of globalisation that increased the need for commercialisation of language provision and easier availability of educational technology (Dafei, 2007).

Autonomy is often referred to as a multi-dimensional construct. It is therefore, difficult to be defined and to be distinguished from the other concepts related to it. In this study, we have associated the term autonomy to the one of independent learning as we think learners need to be shown how to be autonomous in their way of becoming independent. Since the 1970's, the pedagogical field research interest in EFL has shifted from teacher-centred methodologies to a greater focus on students' learning. Increasing numbers of studies have been undertaken from the students' perspective, and teachers and researchers started to recognise the importance of the role students can play in their learning of a language. For language researchers and teachers, language learners are becoming the main source of information for classroom activities. The concept of LA became then, an area that has moved the ideas of teaching and learning professionals into more responsibility sharing on the part of the learner with the educational team. Therefore, the focus today is on learners being able to assume a more active and participatory role than is usual in traditional language teaching approaches. Students are more and more being given practice in decision-making, and thus accepting responsibility for their own learning and gaining experience in managing and self-assessing their progress.

The concept was later on, largely promoted by researchers in the field especially in the context of language education in Europe, and since then, has become largely researched and taken as a goal of instruction in many parts of the world. From a capacity that learners can develop, to a process to be acquired or an individual characteristic, researchers agree that an autonomous learner shows a positive attitude towards learning, is equipped with effective learning strategies, reflects upon his own learning, interacts continuously with others and manages his learning behaviour in a more personal way. For Benson (2001:02): **"Autonomy can be broadly defined as the capacity to take control over ones' own learning."** He makes, in fact, the distinction between the construct of control and the one of taking in charge or the one of responsibility, as control seems to be more open to investigation according to him. He sees the concept not as a method but as an attribute to the learners' approach to the learning process. For him, Autonomy is a legitimate goal of language instruction as it is the individuals' right to possess the means for learning which is supposed to be a life-long need. For other researchers, it seems that independent learners make use of a 'learning contract' Knowles (1975), with themselves and it includes setting goals for learning, using different learning resources and strategies, and need to have evidence of accomplishment. Showing an autonomous behaviour involves, therefore, to be more responsible for one's learning, increasing self-esteem and continually questioning one's learning, checking progress and identifying causes of failure.

It must be noted, however, that although LA has benefitted from the contribution from several expert authors 'researches, it has been the subject of many conflicting views. In fact, researchers did not agree on the concepts of LA and self-direction for example. Let us take as an illustration, Dickinson's (1987) distinction between autonomy that the individual manifests as an attitude of responsibility in a particular situation, and between self-direction as being the attitude of responsibility. This can be contrasted to Holec's (1979) early definition that referred to LA as the learner's ability to be responsible for his own learning, and later, in (1981) he spoke of an attitude of responsibility. At the same time, the concept of 'self-direction' meant for Holec, the learning situation where the learner displays his Autonomy. In addition, while Little (1996) assumes LA is a matter of maturity so that it is often achieved by older learners, Dam (1995) demonstrated that there was no age-related barriers to LA through her classroom experiments with younger learners.

Rivers (2001, In Oxford, 2003) has referred to LA as being a request of change of the content and structure of the course on the part of the learner. We would therefore, define it as a characteristic of the individual displaying intentional behaviour in his everyday learning. In addition, according to Little (2000), the principle of reflectivity that involves learners to reflect on their own learning processes is already implied by the principle of learner empowerment. If learners are given the opportunity and ability to do so, this would indeed, better involve them in learning. He also stresses the fact that reflection in the autonomous language classroom, begins as a collaborative activity in which teacher and learners seek to make explicit their joint understanding of the process they are engaged in. For him, reflection is necessary and must be pursued as a routine that expands learners' responsibility. This is likely to be made possible through making students word out their own reflections about their learning. Therefore, autonomy involves being independent from a teacher but also involves getting the means to be so and this can be well given by a teacher. Independent learners are, thus, engaged in self-regulation strategies and are characterised

by being reflective learners. They know how to manage, plan and monitor their learning, and establish objectives specific to their own needs. They evaluate their own learning and constantly check their understanding and seek to correct their errors.

It is essential to note, here, that what makes the autonomy approach much discussed and debatable among teachers is its practical implementation, especially when it comes to the cultural side of the teaching situation. Several studies have revealed that self-directedness in learning is a form of socio-cultural awareness (Sert, 2006). Many investigated the question of autonomy and its relationship with one's own culture and studied how the two interact in different learning contexts. Thus, they have argued that the idea of LA is a Western invention, inappropriate to other culturally different educational contexts. In some socio-cultural contexts, the learner may experience a restricted individual freedom, depending on the way teaching and learning are defined by the means available, learner awareness and willingness, the teacher's awareness, willingness and autonomy, the institution's goals, the curriculum planners, decision makers and the social norms concerning learning. The concept may have a different meaning in diverse contexts of a particular culture and may not always be an appropriate educational goal across cultures.

3. Autonomy and its Influence on Language Learning

Several authors claim the positive correlation of LA and effective language learning. Benson (2001) suggests that Autonomy can be a combination of directly and indirectly observable behaviours where learners show control over an aspect of their learning process. He claims that this control can be on the management of learning or control over the content of their learning, which is leading to achievement. Several studies among them the one undertaken by (Dafei, 2007) indicate that students' language proficiency is very often influenced and is positively and significantly related to learner autonomy. It is important to note, however, that not all learners may have such a naturally developed level of autonomy.

Researchers in the field have used the term autonomisation. Little (1991-2000) to refer to the process of helping learners become more autonomous. This is influenced by Neo-Vygotskian psychology where learning is seen as a process requiring support from the teacher. Therefore, the teacher has an important role, providing learners with a classroom environment supportive of an effective learning. However, as stressed by Little (2003) sometimes all forms of autonomisation threaten the power structures of educational culture. For example, "learning how to learn" skills appear inseparable from a teaching content. Consequently, there is an important distinction to be made here as for the difference between the process of autonomisation that is undertaken by the teacher inside the classroom in order to foster autonomy within learners and autonomous learning that is displayed by the individual learner himself.

Although no evidence -and evidence is often hard to obtain here- has been obtained in the field, a number of researchers claim and assert that autonomy is unquestionably and necessarily related to successful language learning. Little (1994, p. 341) in Benson (2007:740) claims that "**all genuinely successful learning is in the end autonomous**". Language learners often show a kind of control or what may be referred to as management of their learning processes as well as over the content presented to them. Nevertheless, and however logical this claim may be, it does not make the task of fostering autonomy in learners a guarantee of successful language learning. Indeed, it is difficult to implement it and to evaluate its success and effectiveness. However, it remains essential for life-long learning.

The different concepts put forward by research although sometimes, different have all one common feature: they all describe an independent, responsible learner who takes his learning in charge so as to manage it in his own way, according to his own pace and progression, in the objective to fulfill his pre-established language learning aims.

3. Research context and methods

The present investigation takes the form of a descriptive, interpretative type of research as it involves the description and systematic collection and analysis of data in a learning practice context with its interpretation. It is also a case study research type as it involved the study of first-year LMD students at the department of English at Djilali Liabes University, Sidi-bel-Abbes, Algeria. It must be noted that a triangulation of the research tools has been used all along the data collection phases in order to cross

check the results and validate them. We have used questionnaires, interviews, a learning how to learn skills instruction, proficiency tests, and classroom observation through impressionistic notes taking. We have tried to maximize our evaluation of the autonomous learning behaviour -as it is difficult to be tested- as objectively as possible-. Evidence of learners' autonomous behaviour is often difficult to establish based on students' performance data. Indeed, given the abstractness of the concept, it was felt necessary to gather and consider a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources of data.

The research work, as mentioned earlier, has sought to investigate the extent to which learners showed any kind of independent learning and whether this had any significant correlation with their effective language learning. Therefore, the investigation has focused on the evaluation of students' ability to set objectives for their learning, to identify their needs and their difficulties, their individual learning potential, their ability to reflect on their learning and self-assess their strengths and weaknesses along with their language aptitude assessment.

The data was gathered all along the academic year, and then was compiled at the end of it. However structured it may be, data collection and its results should be regarded as preliminary rather than hard evidence of specific findings. The learning how to learn skills training was undertaken during fifteen weeks between semester one and semester two. It may constitute a particular challenge when promoting independent language learning because those skills are more likely to be areas where learners are likely to need most support. However, before this step was undertaken, students' way of organising their language learning was investigated through the evaluation of the way they control their learning and the extent to which they are responsible for its management.

Four phases made up the data collection methodology: First, a diagnostic phase with the setting of learning goals and learning management ability evaluation, the language proficiency test, the questionnaire to teachers, and the questionnaire to students. This phase aimed at diagnosing students' ability to set goals for their learning, determine their needs and difficulties as well as evaluate their language proficiency and learning management potential. The second phase included the training in some learning how to learn skills, the classroom observation as well as students' self-report comments. The third phase consisted in testing students' proficiency gains after the training and awareness raising about learning management skills. It included a post-training test that aimed also at testing students' linguistic development after the training and a post-training interview. The last phase consisted in analysing the results obtained and their interpretation in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

The researcher has first focused on students' setting of goals, as they are an indicator of students' perceptions of learning and achievement. In fact, achievement goals have been defined, as reasons or purposes individuals perceive for achievement in learning (Ames, 1992; Urdan & Mestas, 2006) in (Mansfield, 2009). Goals are generally defined as the mental representations of desired outcomes that initiate and direct behaviour. In addition, Senko and Harackiewicz (2005) -in the same source- argue that individuals may either intensify or switch goals depending on feedback and evaluation of goals. The researcher also strived to determine whether students were able to manage their learning through planning their study time, managing their learning tasks and selecting appropriate material and content.

Questionnaires and interviews were used to investigate learners and teachers' perceptions of independent learning. The questionnaire to teachers aimed at collecting significant data on learners' autonomous learning behaviour -if any- from teachers' viewpoint. It also aimed at measuring teachers' awareness of this aspect and the space they devoted to fostering it in their teaching.

As far as the Questionnaire to Students is concerned, data was first collected by means of a two-part questionnaire. The statements of questionnaire one have sought to establish whether learners reaching university knew how to determine their immediate objectives and needs. Its objective was to determine whether students were able to identify and look for learning resources and assess their learning progress. It was administered in the first week of the training course. Part two of the questionnaire to students aimed at determining the extent to which students showed any kind of autonomous behaviour or a readiness to develop it. The open response questions that asked students to justify their yes/no answers encouraged students to give additional information on their perception of learning.

The researcher has also used an interview in order to crosscheck and verify the questionnaire and the proficiency tests results. It also aimed at seeking explanations to some students' responses on learning behaviour as well as on their motivation.

On the one hand, we have used the language skills proficiency tests to identify the participants' English language proficiency as well as their areas of difficulty. The first test was used in the beginning of the course, before students received any kind of training. It aimed at testing and evaluating students English language proficiency as well as their ability to deal with some Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension, and Written Expression skills essential for academic language learning development.

On the other hand, during the fifteen weeks of the instruction, students were observed at different times. An impressionistic, unstructured classroom observation was used during the course with note taking about any of students' reaction, learning behaviour, motivation or de-motivation related to the programme taught. Regular observation yielded very useful information about students' learning behaviours and all the changes observed in students' dealing with leaning management. Some of students' self-report accounts were recorded too.

Another test (a post-training test) was administered to students at the end of the training. It was used in order to measure students' proficiency gains after the training. It aimed at testing students' ability to use the skills taught to them and eventually determine any progress in English language proficiency. Indeed, it would be difficult to foresee any progress and achievement in language as being the result of one factor only. Nevertheless, it was significantly important to assess students' linguistic progress as compared to the beginning of the course.

The learning how to learn instruction has focused on the teaching of some fundamental learning management skills in different language learning areas, essential for students' language development along with a skilled learning management. The training started with making students establish learning goals in the form of short-term and long-term objectives. Then, students were asked to identify their needs and describe their difficulties. Introspective reflection was indirectly promoted.

The training has concentrated on developing the following learning Skills through constant and systematic practice. Examples of such skills are general cognitive skills such as thinking skills involving data gathering skills that would require students to learn to acquire information by observation, locate information from a variety of sources, compile, organize, evaluate and interpret information. Intellectual skills involving learners to compare between aspects, ideas, events and situations based on similarities and differences and draw conclusions or inferences from evidence. Interpersonal skills that make learners see things from the point of view of others, give and receive constructive criticism to work effectively with others as a group member.

The training programme has also included the practice of comprehension skills, which enable students to understand written and oral languages along with literary skills and thinking and expression skills practice. Furthermore, the training included developing vocabulary activities, reading skills and strategies practice, making an oral presentation, preparing for tests and examinations, and using reference and internet resources.

4. Main Findings

The results obtained out of the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis suggest first, that some teachers' decisions as for their teaching methodology seem to be based on content rather than on learners' needs and characteristics. Teachers still believed students' motivation can only come from them and that it is not a priority. They seem to be aware of autonomous learning aspects and do even correlate it with a good language proficiency, as all of them said that autonomy was essential to language learning. Although teachers make use of very limited pedagogic means to foster autonomy and self-directed learning, they all agreed on the fact that autonomy fostering should be included in all the modules.

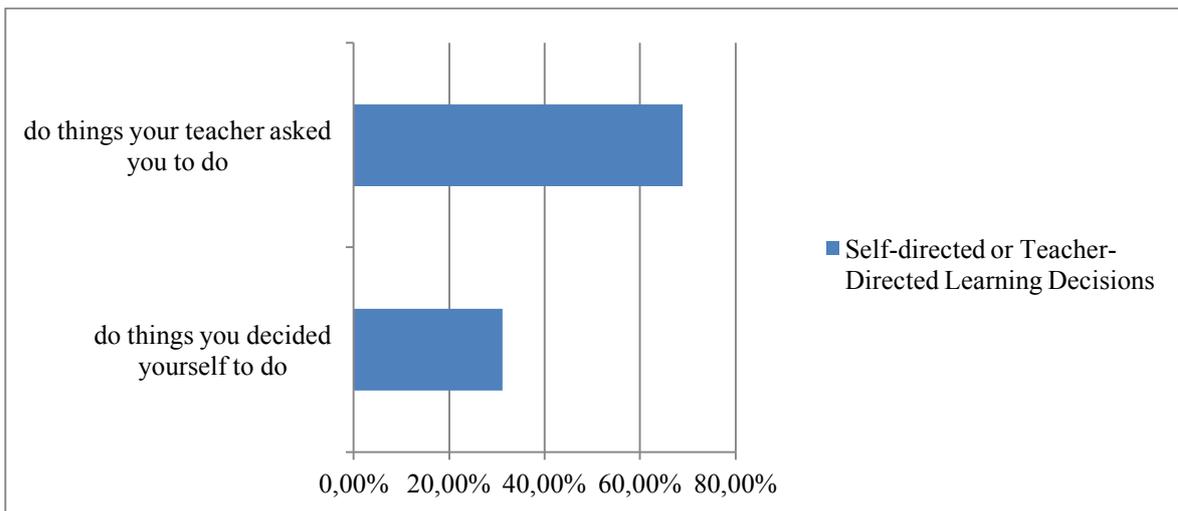
Before the training and awareness raising about LA, we have found that most of students identified their needs as being linguistic only. Most of them were not aware of their 'learning how to learn' needs, of

their roles as learners and of their ability to set long-term and short-term objectives. Many students still over-relied on the teacher's input and help.

Table 1. Students' Perception of their Role as Learners.

Q: How do you see your role as a learner?
A- Perception of students' role reflecting their independence
-my role is more important than the teacher's
-work continuously
-do research
-develop my level with research
-my role is better and more important than before
-not to rely on the teacher
-make efforts-work hard
-succeed in studies and social life
-be more responsible
-read a lot and develop what the teacher gives us
-listening and taking notes
-try to do my best
-take everything seriously
-rely on myself and get knowledge from different sources.
B- Perception of students' role reflecting dependence on the teacher
-doing few things compared to the teacher
-follow teachers
-listen to teachers and understand
-have a good behaviour in class
-take information and knowledge from the teacher
-accept all that the teacher says

Another finding was that students lacked appropriate study skills to manage their learning and make it more effective. Students' identification of their needs showed that they were realistic about their poor linguistic level, but not all of them regarded 'Learning how to learn' skills as immediate needs. Teachers seem to be the only reliable source of knowledge of some students who seem to stick to an old habit of relying solely on the teacher to learn. For them, autonomy was not felt as a need, as they saw their role as still very subordinate to their teachers' one. Overall, students found answering the questionnaire very helpful for them too as they reported being more able to articulate and word their impressions, opinions, learning modes, etc. The following graph illustrates the percentage of students relying more on the teacher or on themselves to learn and describes the extent to which students show some kind of autonomy or not.

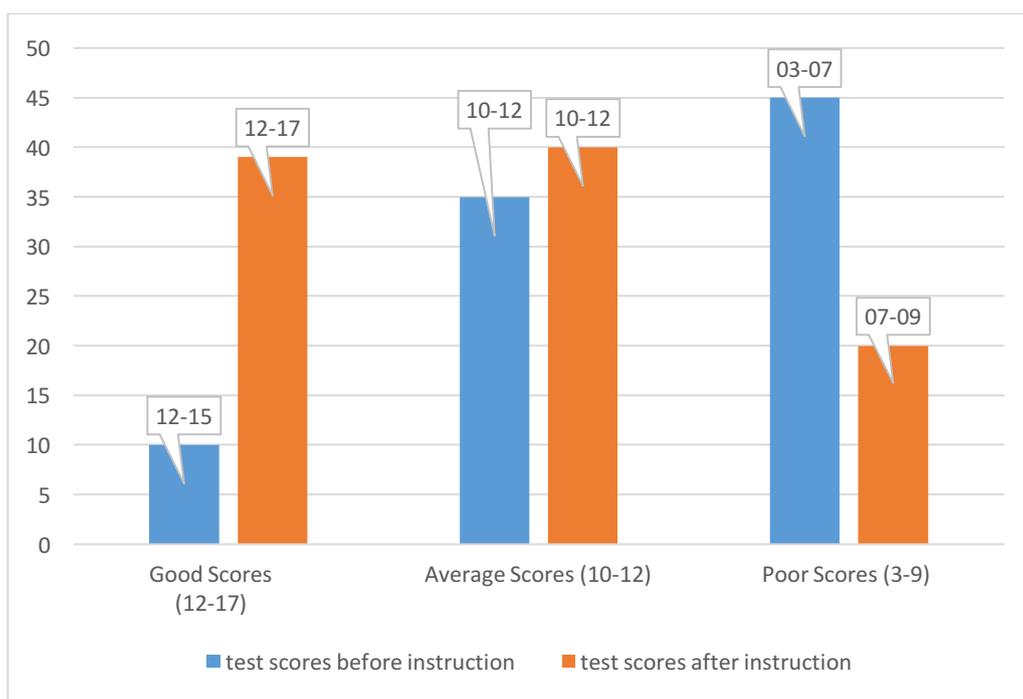


Graph1: Students' Self-directed or teacher-directed learning decisions

Therefore, not all learners displayed autonomous learning nor the learning management abilities for fulfilling it. Moreover, and although few learners showed some aspects of autonomy, they needed more learning skills to be more independent. Another significant finding was that some others still preferred to be guided by a teacher.

One of the key findings was that the majority of students enjoyed being given the means to function independently, and learner training in the use of learning how to learn skills proved having been valuable and beneficial to them. Students reported being satisfied with what they learned in the module that they conceived as important learning gains. They reported having discovered the usefulness of being shown how to learn. Students' motivation and confidence in their study ability were raised as the perceived value of the instruction was a key aspect in the motivation expressed about the 'learning how to learn skills'.

Students' scores at the post-training test appeared to relate to their proficiency level. Overall, the students who obtained good scores in the first proficiency test similarly did in the post-training test. The students showing more autonomy still obtained good scores in the post-training test as shown on the graph below:



Graph 2: Students' scores in the proficiency and the post-training test.

Moreover, the students who obtained poor scores still got bad marks but did slightly better than in the first proficiency test. This may be due to the gains in their proficiency in English language. Indeed, their linguistic level was much better as compared to the beginning. This was also felt through the classroom observation and the self-report comments. However, as some displayed a weak level and a low motivation, they still had difficulties. Although they reported being better able to learn using the learning skills, they still had difficulties with the language and with some modules.

The majority of students performed much better in the post-training test and no autonomous behaviour observed was accompanied -in the majority of the case study- by a low proficiency in the English Language.

Although students reported being very helped by the instruction and by self-assessing their learning and reflecting about it, it remains unclear whether their linguistic progress and learning gains were due to autonomy fostering or not. Little(1991:05) points out at the fact that autonomy is likely to be hard won and its permanence cannot be guaranteed and that the learner who displays a high degree of autonomy in one area may be non-autonomous in another. In addition, Benson (2001:54) stresses the idea that autonomy calls for a fundamental reconceptualization of the learner's role in the learning process. In addition, the description of specific levels of control over learning is a far easier task than the description or measurement of autonomy in general.

5. Pedagogical Implications

In general, the findings in the present study, suggest that learner autonomy fostering in LMD English classes should progressively become an essential syllabus component. The theory is much corresponding to the university students showing more ability, willingness and degree of self-direction in learning. However, sometimes, students are ill prepared for autonomy implementation in their classroom or are simply reluctant to the concept. Teachers are often not ready to leave their role of supremacy over the classroom. However, believing in the necessity of learner autonomy development instead of encouraging their over-dependence on them would indeed bring a change inside the classroom that would be beneficial for both teachers and learners.

The teacher's role then is to support learners and supervise them. This type of support can be seen as a control over learning in initial stages of instruction that allows for more autonomy in later stages. It also requires a change in attitudes, whereby learners and teachers abandon their traditional roles, accept the greater level of responsibility put upon the learner and encourages students to commit themselves to take active part in their learning and in the quality development of their 'learning how to learn' skills.

Most of the time, it is the task of the teacher to adjust the atmosphere of his classroom to his learners' needs, expectations and preferences in the attempt to raise their motivation and help them acquire effective learning habits. For example, teachers may opt for some assignments involving setting goals activities, reading motivation activities, self-assessment activities and self-monitoring activities.

6. Limitations of the Study and Encountered Problems

It must be noted that the practicability of undertaking the present investigation has sometimes been subjected to constraints of time, lack of motivation on the part of learners, lack of objectivity in students' responses and difficulty to identify the variables influencing the learning of the language and the acquisition of a 'learning how to learn' skills. Nevertheless, the researcher has tried to diversify the research tools to obtain the maximum of data to be analysed. In fact, autonomy being difficult to quantify, the research methodology needed to use many and varied means to obtain some results. Because of the slippery nature of the concept and because learning events were difficult to observe, obtaining evidence out of data collection was difficult. It was difficult to distinguish between what constituted causes and what could be considered as an effect of a learning event. It was difficult to get students' motivation for a process that may appear abstract for them.

7. Conclusions

We have tried to present through the investigation described in this paper, an interpretation of autonomy in language learning that translates our own vision of the concept. This broad approach to the learning process, once determined, identified and explored, would undoubtedly, contribute to teachers' better management of language learning programmes designed to be more likely suitable to learners' performances and needs as far as language learning is concerned.

In our everyday practice, we constantly wonder about the reasons behind the students' lack of systematicity and effectiveness in learning. However, we rarely succeed to fulfill the objective of making students able to encode the content presented to them, in their own way and be able to link it to other contexts, allowing them to avoid knowledge fragmentation and misconceptions. We need, undoubtedly to help students reflect on their own processes of learning by developing their thinking skills essential to life-long learning, creativity, skepticism and imagination. Autonomy is to take initiatives, to be curious, develop abilities and creativity, widen one's knowledge, be curious, discover, and learn to express oneself and one's own ideas, to exchange and share with others. All this makes one grow more responsible and independent and more able to take his own learning in charge.

Investigating LA helps in understanding learners' characteristics and the specificities of the learning context. Furthermore, we have to recognise that we may evaluate students' ability to take control but we need to evaluate whether the learning context allows this control.

It is clear that only if teachers as well as learners are fully involved, open to challenge and change, autonomy fostering can be implemented. Indeed, Autonomy fostering depends on the teacher's will and awareness of the process, on the learning situation conditions, but also on the learners' will and ability to become autonomous.

Therefore, autonomy is rather something we nurture. It is not something we get on the spot and we need to get the means for its practice. It takes time to develop progressively and depends on a complementary teacher autonomy. While students' limited linguistic ability keeps being a major obstacle, independent learning remains a factor contributing to life-long and effective learning.

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RECENSIONES / REVIEWS

Serrano, R., Gómez, M.E. & Huertas, C. (2016). *La educación sí importa en el siglo XXI*. Madrid: Síntesis, 286 pp. ISBN: 9788490772706

En *La educación sí importa en el siglo XXI* encontramos un recorrido por distintas áreas temáticas con un claro denominador común: la educación. Bien sea basada en el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua o en relación a la diversidad cultural, lo cierto es que este compendio de capítulos aporta una visión enriquecedora de distintos ámbitos educativos, comprendidos en tres grandes bloques: Educación Intercultural y segundas lenguas, Formación del profesorado y Escuela y diversidad. Todos ellos presentan un denominador común: la generación de ideas y planteamientos sobre el verdadero significado de la palabra educación.

En primer lugar, es destacable el prólogo, realizado por Santos Guerra, catedrático emérito de Didáctica y Organización Escolar de la Universidad de Málaga, en el que se alude a la finalidad de la educación. Santos Guerra señala que la educación no consiste en la mera transmisión de contenidos, sino en el desarrollo de la capacidad de pensamiento, de los valores que deben guiar a cualquier sociedad (pensada para todas las personas) como pueden ser la convivencia o la cultura, destacando la finalidad que en este libro se presenta: la importancia de la educación, con todas sus implicaciones, en nuestros días.

El primer bloque, "Educación intercultural y segundas lenguas", comienza con el capítulo de Rodríguez-Hidalgo, quien realiza una descripción del fenómeno denominado "bullying étnico-cultural", presentando en líneas generales los modelos educativos que se han ido sucediendo en relación a la atención a la diversidad y, finalmente, propone un Modelo Educativo de Convivencia Intercultural que se postula como alternativa a los diferentes modelos. A continuación, Pérez Gracia desarrolla una panorámica general de la educación intercultural y multicultural en Europa, estudiando su evolución en el sistema educativo español con el fin de conocer su grado de adecuación y sus necesidades de mejora.

Gutiérrez Fresneda y Díez Mediavilla tratan en el tercer capítulo las habilidades favorecedoras del aprendizaje de la escritura en función de la edad y el sexo de los estudiantes. Estos autores confirman las teorías de que el aprendizaje de la escritura está ligado a estos factores y, podemos decir incluso que mediado por el aprendizaje de la lengua oral, como ponen de manifiesto a través del análisis que han llevado a cabo.

En el cuarto capítulo, Gómez Parra nos introduce en una visión de la educación en la que el desarrollo del plurilingüismo es fundamental. Para ello, analiza los conceptos de educación bilingüe y de educación intercultural, comentando, a continuación, sus implicaciones como garantía de calidad de la educación que ha sido promovida por las Naciones Unidas. Además, nos introduce en el enfoque AICLE, un modelo para la enseñanza de segundas lenguas que está siendo ampliamente implantado en Europa.

Unido a la temática de la enseñanza y aprendizaje de las segundas lenguas encontramos el capítulo realizado por Huertas Abril, en el que se abordan propuestas metodológicas para la creación de actividades de iniciación temprana a las segundas lenguas. Estas propuestas resultan de gran interés para el profesorado, ya que no solo fomentan el aprendizaje en el alumnado, sino que facilitan el desempeño docente. Esto se debe a que lo dotan de un mayor dinamismo que, de forma circular, alimenta el deseo de aprender de los más pequeños, que muestran una mejor actitud hacia las diversas lenguas y, por tanto, culturas.

Para finalizar el primer gran bloque de contenidos del presente libro, encontramos el capítulo en el que Ruiz Mezcuca reflexiona sobre el papel del intérprete como mediador o pieza clave en labores de cooperación internacional, haciendo un recorrido a través de la historia para comprender la evolución de su labor.

En el segundo bloque temático, dedicado a la "Formación del profesorado", encontramos capítulos referentes a la docencia universitaria, como los realizados por Amor Almedina, en los que aborda las funciones tutorial y docente en espacios de educación superior y el modelo de orientación integral, que pone de manifiesto una de las necesidades reales del alumnado universitario, el apoyo o la tutorización a través de la orientación.

Por otra parte, en los capítulos de este bloque se presentan investigaciones ligadas al pensamiento de los docentes, tanto en su formación inicial como en su futuro, a través de la transferibilidad del aprendizaje en los procesos de evaluación que proponen Pérez Pueyo y Hortigüela Alcalá. Otro elemento destacable en este bloque referido al docente es la educación en la lengua oral, sobre la que trabaja Juan Luis Luengo-Almena, quien señala la estrecha relación entre “habilidades sociales y habilidades orales”.

También se abordan en el capítulo once los Trabajos de Fin de Grado en el área de Educación en el sistema universitario español, en el que se repasa la trayectoria que han seguido los mismos desde que se implantaran tras la instauración del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Así, Gómez Parra, Serrano-Rodríguez y Huertas Abril realizan una propuesta unificada y con una visión de conjunto de los mismos.

Cierra este bloque de contenido Bullejos Martín, que aporta una perspectiva de la cooperación al desarrollo desde la ingeniería universitaria, presentando experiencias con realizadas con alumnado universitario en las que se evidencia la necesidad y, al mismo tiempo la oportunidad que supone desde el ámbito laboral tomar conciencia del significado que entraña el concepto de cooperación al desarrollo.

Los capítulos que componen el tercer bloque temático del presente libro, “Escuela y diversidad”, abordan aspectos relacionados con la escuela y la diversidad. De este modo, Trillo Luque y Saco Lorenzo exponen uno de los elementos que está constituyendo el cambio educativo, como es la realización de las prácticas externas en la formación inicial de los docentes.

Ruiz-Olivares nos presenta, en el capítulo 15, una visión psicológica junto con las implicaciones educativas que de ella se derivan analizando el apoyo conductual positivo en las escuelas, definiéndolo desde un punto de vista teórico y proponiéndolo como alternativa ante los problemas de conducta más habituales que se pueden observar en los centros educativos. Seguidamente, Raya Trenas y Morales Repiso amplían otro aspecto de la realidad escolar: la relación familia-escuela y sus implicaciones en el desarrollo social y académico del alumnado, a través de un estudio en el que analizan los diversos niveles de implicación de las familias en los centros educativos, así como sus principales beneficios y obstáculos.

Bermúdez Vázquez, por su parte, aporta una interesante visión sobre las implicaciones de la filosofía al ámbito educativo, especialmente en la etapa universitaria, destacando la necesidad de retomar un análisis de la misma, ya que está desapareciendo del ámbito de las humanidades.

Finalmente, en los dos capítulos que cierran este libro, Álvarez-Sotomayor y Martínez-Cousinou, y Coronado-Hijón hacen referencia a la realidad intercultural en las escuelas españolas. Los primeros exponen una investigación sobre el etiquetado docente, la profecía autocumplida y la desventaja académica de los hijos de inmigrantes, considerando las implicaciones que de ello se derivan en la escuela. Coronado-Hijón introduce, sin embargo, la visión sobre la orientación y la atención a la diversidad en las transiciones educativas interculturales, tomando estas transiciones como momentos clave en el posterior desarrollo psicoeducativo de los niños y niñas.

El conjunto de capítulos presentados en este volumen no solo dan a conocer la importante labor de investigación que se lleva a cabo desde la Universidad, sino que fomentan el interés por la formación del personal docente y, en general, de cualquier lector que tenga oportunidad de disfrutar de este trabajo. La organización por temáticas no solo ayuda al lector a ubicarse en un determinado planteamiento, sino que permite observar la interrelación que se da entre las diferentes propuestas presentadas y que tiene un hilo conductor indudable: la mejora, la calidad y el enriquecimiento de la educación desde una perspectiva multicultural.

[Rocío Luque González]