

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered

### by Libyan EFL teachers

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#### ملخص الدراسة:

تعليم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية يمثل تحديا حقيقيا لأغلبية المعلمين في ليبيا. الدراسة الحالية تسعى لإستكشاف و فهم الصعوبات الأساسية التي تواجه المعلمين أثناء تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية, و من ثم إقتراح كيفية مواجهة هذه الصعوبات. الأدوات المستعملة من أجل تجميع البيانات اللازمة لإجراء هذه الدراسة كانت عبارة عن إستبيانات و مقابلات مع بعض معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية و متابعة مباشرة لبعض الدروس الإنجليزية لمجموعة من مدارس التعليم الأساسي. النتائج تكشف أن أغلب معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية يواجهون صعوبات متعددة متمثلة في عدم إتباعهم لطرق تدريس فعالة مع غياب البرامج التطويرية, و الإفراط في الإعتماد على طرق التدريس التقليدية الغير مجدية, مما يتسبب في عدم أستعمال الطلاب للغة المتعلمة بقدر كافٍ أثناء الدراسة و ذلك يعزى لنشاطات الفصل ذات الطابع الفردي بحيث يتركز التنافس بين عددٍ صغيرٍ من مجموع الطلاب بالفصل الدراسي, و أعداد الطلاب الكبيرة بالفصل الواحد, و عدم كفاية الوعاء الزمني للمادة, و الإستعمال المفرط للغة العربية بالفصل, و عدم توفر الوسائل التعليمية المناسبة. و لأهمية وسائل التعليم و تقنيات التقييم, نوصي بالتعريف بها للمعلمين لما لها من اثرٍ فعالٍ في تحسين الأداء.

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

### Abstract

Teaching English as a foreign language represents a real challenge to the majority of Libyan teachers. In order to explore and understand these challenges, the present study seeks to investigate the major problems faced by the Libyan EFL school teachers and then to suggest how such difficulties could better be met. Questionnaires, classroom observation and informal interviews with primary and preparatory EFL teachers were used as the basic methods for data collection. Findings revealed that most Libyan EFL teachers encounter different problems including the lack of teaching profession experience and qualifications, lack of teacher training and developmental programmes, overreliance on inadequate traditional teaching methods, and shortage of some basic teaching aids and technologies. The findings also show that most of the EFL teachers cannot provide students with sufficient exposure to the target language due to classroom competitive and individual activities, large classes, time limit and overuse of mother language. The study recommends running regular teaching developmental programmes and workshops to keep teachers informed with the latest innovative teaching and learning theories and other English language teaching and learning related concepts. For their highly significant functions, more attention should be paid to improving the application of teaching technologies and assessment techniques.

### Introduction

There is a massive change in the educational policies and programmes as well as high expectations and potentials of the growing numbers of language learners in Libya during the last 30 years. Amidst these accelerating changes, more attention was drawn to English language teaching and learning. Yet, English language teaching and learning in Libya is still in general exhibiting a fragile and a shaky image as learners' English proficiency is still inadequate and below expectations. Learners, from the researchers' own experience, still perform in English incompetently despite the tremendous efforts being exerted to improve English teaching and learning processes. EFL teaching courses and programmes still fail to achieve as expected. Therefore, there comes the need to implement more purposeful initiatives to diagnose this defect and recommend remedial steps to improve

## **Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers**

proficiency of Libyan learners of English language. Therefore, this paper targets investigating challenges that teachers confront during their English language lessons.

Generally speaking, EFL teachers, whether beginners or experienced (Mustafa,2016), in general encounter a number of challenges ranging from the diversity of students' levels, large classes, lack of teaching aids, and absence of in-service developing teaching performance programmes, workshops, and conferences. Foremost, EFL teaching in Libya represents a real challenge to many Libyan teachers of English because of the dreadful teaching methodology, lack of authentic language teaching/ learning environment, and absence of professional training (ibid). Therefore, depth of knowledge, range of teaching skills and methods, wide understanding of learners' psychological and social needs are needed to be acquainted by English language teachers. Teachers' professional awareness and effectiveness are better to be increased in order to help their students improve their English performance. Some areas of knowledge should be purposefully and explicitly integrated into the preparation and development of teachers in the interest of improving outcomes for English language learners.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges that Libyan EFL teachers encounter in their lessons?
2. How could these challenges be met?

### **Significance of the study**

This study is believed to be of a high significance as it could reveal and shed more light on challenges that confront English language teachers in governmental primary and preparatory schools towards applying remedial initiatives that could achieve more successful English language teaching and learning. The outcomes of this study, as well, could be of a high importance for English language teachers, supervisors, as well as the Ministry of Education as it will provide them with a broad list of the challenges and the recommendations to overcome such challenges. This study also could be of a vital importance within the field of research in to ELT as it could establish a corner stone for further research to investigate and study an EFL classroom context.

### Review of related Literature

#### English language education in Libya

Pressure has been escalating on the successive governmental institutions in Libya to give more attention to teaching and learning English language due to the rapidly increasing demands of local and international careers and institutions. To meet these demands; series of changes in the Libyan educational system have been made for the last three decades. Libyan students needed more training to acquire the skills necessary to perform well in both abroad and local colleges and universities and to compete in the global market which is swiftly advancing. According to Al-Khatib (2008), (cited in Mustafa. 2016, p21)"Teaching English in particular is gaining importance at an accelerated rate in the region, not only because the language has been regarded as a valuable resource for the people's modernization drive, but because it has a great impact on all aspects of their daily life" (P. 233-34).

English language took a minor role in the Libyan educational programmes for quite long years being attributed to political reasons (Mohamed, 2014, 2014). As a result, today's teachers and students are navigating new situations and facing new challenges. This poses a particular challenge, because English is taught as a foreign language in Libya. The difference between second language acquisition and foreign language learning lies in that the L2 acquirers have enough opportunities to practice and use the target language outside the classroom, while FL learners lack such chances which are only limited to their classrooms. English language is rarely used outside the Language classrooms despite the massive change in Libyan current culture and traditions which became more open to English as a language to communicate with and as a culture as well. Yet, many Libyan learners still have some kind of irrational fear towards learning any other foreign language, including English, which escalates the amount of resistance to learning despite their urgent need to learn and skilfully perform in English. Students' experiences in English language classes- whether they are successful in learning English and whether they are able to communicate with other native and non-native English speakers, are not yet adequately studied in the context of Libya. The combination of factors – the previous intended ignoring of teaching English, the present wakefulness of importance of learning English, changes in

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

the Libyan educational system and cultural and political tendencies– creates a unique and complex context for studying EFL in Libya.

In spite of the massive efforts, attention and budgets spent on planning and running teaching English programmes by the Libyan governments, English Language education is not achieving efficiently and productively as expected. Students still show inadequate and unsatisfying levels of English performance. Mustafa, (2016) attributes the suffered setbacks in achieving the plans and objectives of the English language education in Libya to “mismanagement and lack of well-designed, result- oriented policy.”(p.20). The Libyan Educational system in schools primarily uses traditional methods of instruction and does not motivate or encourage independent learning. The traditional teaching philosophy in Libya views the teacher as the source of all the information that learners should learn. Teachers normally are given teaching materials that they must present in the classrooms by the Ministry of Education, and the students are required to memorize information without thinking deeply or critically about them. Then, students ought to accomplish the most important, if not the only, objective which is passing their Exams by copying down what has been memorised.

Most of The EFL teachers are Libyan nationals who lack training in teaching. Libyan Ministry of Education recruit teachers who have Bachelor in English without requiring training or a certificate in teaching. The governmental educational institutions very seldom run pre-service or in-service training courses. Most Libyan teachers learn from their own experiences and devise their own strategies of teaching which may or may not achieve successful outcomes (Ibid).

Teachers can improve their professional experience throughout their teaching practice is a valuable source of learning about the subject being thought as well as developing one’s own techniques of teaching. Teachers can incorporate their own teaching experiences and their reflections on them along with interacting and cooperating with other teachers (Mohamed, 2014). Furthermore, teachers need to be encouraged in doing action research on their teaching and other related problems and share the results with their peer teachers as well as other educational administrations to take necessary steps in overcoming these

## **Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers**

problems. Rather than being just teachers, they should become researchers who study problems in their classes and find effective solutions for the studied problems. Therefore, teachers need to attend special in-service training programmes, seminars, conferences, workshops, where they share their problems, researches, and achievements (Mustafa, 2016).

### **Teachers' beliefs and roles and teaching practices in the classroom**

Teachers' beliefs are significant for understanding and developing educational process as they could guide language teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to cope with their daily language teaching challenges, which in turn, could shape language learning environment, their motivation and their language competence and performance (Li Xu, 2012). Nonetheless, there is encountered the need for developing English language teachers' academic profession by means of updating their professional practice to meet the latest methodological and theoretical improvements (Mohamed, 2014). In the educational setting, the learners' academic achievement is directly related to their teacher's professional identity. The more improved the teacher's profession, the more positive impact it has on students' learning outcomes (Ahmed.et al, 2018). Research found that most of the Arab EFL learners struggle because of the ineffective teaching methodologies and overuse of grammar- translation method by English teachers (Mustafa,2016), even though the new syllabus discards the use of such a method. Therefore, there is an ultimate need for teachers to be aware of learning theories and teaching methods for more successful EFL teaching outcome.

From the perspective of teachers' roles in the EFL classroom, besides being a classroom manager and an instructor, the EFL teacher can play as a motivator. In other words, one of the effective devices that teachers could exploit is increasing learners' motivation as it could play a very important role in enhancing the students' English learning performance. Teachers are responsible to help their students cultivate personal qualities of motivation that are crucial to develop students' aspiration, independent learning and help achieve their goals and strengthen them tackle setbacks. One of the most critical challenges that confront teachers is fostering students' positive motivation which is very important for developing their competence and performance in the foreign language (Alderman, 1999). Teachers can

## **Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers**

apply some strategies to improve their students' motivation. They can create supportive, motivational, and collaborative environment in the classroom by behaving properly and having good relationships with their students. Teachers, as group leaders, can promote their students' viewpoints toward learning by being models of motivation themselves to be taken after. Teachers can activate students' motivation by increasing their goal orientation, making the curriculum more relevant and promoting students to construct realistic beliefs. They also can maintain their students' motivation by setting proximal goals, raising students' self-confidence, and creating autonomous learners (Dornyei, 2001). Therefore, it is the teacher's role to work towards increasing his/her learners' autonomy to create more responsible and decision-making students by helping them develop their learning strategies that better suit them.

For some Libyan students, the level of English courses is higher than their actual English proficiency level. Here comes the need for teachers to understand and employ Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) to help students engage in tasks and to expend the required effort to successfully achieve those tasks. Zone of proximal development, which refers to the distance between what students can do on their own and what they can do with assistance (Brown, 2007), helps teachers recognise the actual level of their students and what they could achieve individually. Then, they can scaffold students to improve their performance by providing them with strategic assistance that helps accomplish the activity that have attainable goals, and by providing informative feedback that helps control and direct students' performance. Eventually, students can gradually achieve tasks more competently and independently without more scaffolding. This permits teachers to mediate a higher level of performance (Rueda and Moll, 1994).

### **Classroom environment: kind of interaction taking place**

One of the basic challenges that could encounter teachers in EFL classrooms is providing learners with sufficient exposure to the target language to launch their learning and improve their communicative competence (Mingzhi, 2005) which in turn could enable learners notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge, and then analyse their existing internal knowledge to bridge those gaps.

## **Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers**

Social support in the classroom that involves interaction between teacher and students and among students affects students' academic competence. Social interaction in the classroom can be accomplished through collaborative learning, in pairs or groups, that encourages students to perform in more supportive and friendly relationships rather than competitive ways toward classmates, provides students good opportunities to improve their achievements, and autonomy (Alderman, 1999), reduces anxiety, and increases self-confidence and motivation (Wachob, 2006).

One other critical challenge is the overuse of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms which represents the main, if not the only, place where students are exposed to the target language. Although systematic and limited use of mother tongue could facilitate the teachers' job, it could be at the expense of learners as it replaced the target language in the classroom. Too much use of mother tongue makes learners have little exposure to English language. Much use of the first language could be attributed to the traditional grammar translation method which evolves out of translation and structure explanation. It could be also attributed to level of teachers' English proficiency. Teachers also might lack techniques for conveying meaning by using visual aids, gestures, real objects or pictures rather than operating the mother tongue (Koucka, 2007).

### **Teaching materials, aids and resources**

Most schools in Libya are not well equipped with relevant teaching resources, like wall charts, flash cards, posters, audio and visual aids, e-learning resources, as well as computer laboratories and other up to date facilities. EFL teachers also lack training in using modern technologies inside the classrooms which has negative impact on the teaching and learning process. Nonetheless, teachers need to take into account that teaching aids and materials, such as pictures, should consider the cultural context in which students act, as well as motivational aspects in order to promote students to learn (Wachob, 2006).

Tasks and activities, as well, should be meaningful, reasonably challenging, and reflect the social context and students' goals to promote them participate in those tasks (Alderman, 1999). Classroom activities should reflect students' cultural and social context in order to insure an internal state of interest, effective participation, and motivated behaviour (Rueda and Moll,

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

1994). Culturally inappropriate course books and activities may isolate learners and initiate negative attitudes towards learning this foreign language (Fareh, 2010). Textbooks are being used in the Libyan classrooms are not designed by Libyan pedagogues but by British institutions like *Grant* which often make Libyan EFL teachers and learners stumble throughout these courses because they are often out of their local level, needs and socio-cultural touch (Mustafa,2016).

One very important learning resource is the Internet which can play a significant role in the classroom. Teachers can exploit applications like youtube, and social media like facebook and whatsapp to engage learners in more language learning activities. Using Internet in EFL classes is an extremely valuable resource that teachers should be encouraged to do. The use of Internet holds considerable promises and potentials for teaching and learning. For instance, it could have helped in running distance-learning during the present pandemic of Covid-19. The availability and knowledge of using the Internet resources could have helped teachers design materials and activities that can engage learners in authentic tasks and activities (Hill and Hannafin, 2001) which could create more responsible and autonomous learners. Luzon (2006) mentions that learners learn by restructuring their experience and constructing knowledge, not by having the teacher's knowledge transferred to them.

### Teachers' Feedback and Assessment

Teacher's feedback as well has an important impact on EFL learning. Feedback may take one of two positions, controlling or informational. Controlling feedback judges students' performance against external standards by comparing students' success and failure against each other, announcing grades, displaying the best papers and achievements. Controlling feedback has a negative effect since social comparison damages intrinsic motivation. Informational feedback, on the other hand, comments on students' competence ( Dornyei, 1994), and informs students that the task outcome is a result of progress in their performance and competency (Alderman, 1999). The more informative the teacher's feedback is, the more competent the students feel (Bernaus and Gardner, 2008). Teacher's feedback should attribute students' success or failure to effort expended (Dornyei,1994) rather than being attributed to their level of intelligence. It should focus on progress of students' competence in order to

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

enhance intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, aspiration, and personal capabilities by providing information about their present performance and how to improve it in future. Teachers should be aware that their feedback may indirectly convey that students have low ability, or may focus on deficiencies which result in undermining self-regulation (Alderman, 1999).

Mainly, the educational system in Libya is examination- oriented one. The majority of EFL teachers use tests and examinations to upgrade their students and to allow students progress to the following academic semester or year. Although passing exams, as a task or activity, can play as a motivating factor, its impact does not extend beyond classroom (Wachob, 2006). Tests and exams should be avoided as much as possible because they damage intrinsic motivation. Exams should function as markers of progress in language learning that provide immediate feedback and incentive to increase and maintain effort, and develop students' self-confidence and efficacy (Dornyei, 1994). Teachers' positive feedback which promotes effort rather than ability can encourage students to have positive self-evaluation and increase their learning satisfaction (Dornyei, 2001)

### PREVIOUS STUDIES

Goss (1999) investigated the challenges, from the perspective of Japanese learners, which are encountered while learning English. He visited a number of schools and attended several classes. He concluded that Japanese learners of English face a number of challenges including inadequate preparation of teachers, lack of students' motivation and large class sizes.

Another study was conducted by Cheng (2004) about the challenges of teaching English as Second Language in China. The researcher examined these challenges at the level of English language teachers, the teaching context and professional development programs. The findings of his investigation revealed that teachers were less prepared in terms of their subject matter and less qualified than their counterparts in other places of the world in terms of methodology. Furthermore, it was reported that teaching takes place in large classes where students are not provided with adequate teaching opportunities.

Fareh, (2010) conducted a study to investigate challenges of teaching English in the Arab world basing her study on her own experience. The findings of this study are based on the

## **Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers**

surveys conducted on hundreds of English language teachers, and the observations collected from many English language classrooms visited in many Arab countries that the researcher has been to. Fareh summarised the found challenges under eight main categories which are improperly trained teachers or inadequate teaching methodology, teacher-centered rather than learner centered activities, students' aptitude, initial preparedness and motivation, Compartmentalization vs. whole language approach, Lack of emphasis on developing skills– emphasis is rather on rote learning, Textbooks and teaching materials, Assessment methods, and minimal exposure to English.

Mustafa, (2016) conducted a study to investigate the major problems faced by the Libyan EFL school teachers. The study used questionnaires, observation and informal discussions with the teachers as the basic resources for data collection. Findings revealed that most Libyan EFL teachers encounter different problems including the lack of teacher-training and development of profession skills, lack of co-ordination among the teachers-school authorities and quality inspection authorities, shortage in the basic educational infrastructure, teaching and learning aids and materials, in addition to the lack of motivation among most of the students. The findings also show that most of the schools do not have ideal teaching and learning environment as undisciplined student behaviour was also reported as a common challenge that impacts the teaching.

Another study conducted by Ahmed, (2018) to survey challenges of English language teaching in Yemeni primary and secondary schools. The study used a questionnaire and ran discussions with senior teachers and supervisors for the purpose of identifying such challenges. Findings show that large classes, lack of teaching aids, teachers' low proficiency in English and their limited experience with communicative language teaching are considered as major challenges of English language teaching in the concerned Yemeni primary and secondary schools.

To sum up, the above presented studies seem to share similar results. Teachers' low proficiency in English, inadequate teaching methodology, lack of proper teacher training programmes, lack of teaching aids, and large classes are the most apparent and common challenges that EFL teachers face.

### Research methods

This is an exploratory descriptive study that targets investigating challenges that encounter Libyan teachers of English at primary and preparatory schools in the city of Missallata. The study also targets suggesting some remedial actions to overcome such challenges.

#### 1. Participants

The study approached EFL teachers in four primary and preparatory schools; two male and two female schools, in the city of Missallata. Those schools were randomly chosen and permission was granted from the Office of Education in the city to approach those schools. A questionnaire was first distributed to the English teachers in the chosen schools to obtain data from the teachers' perspectives about their teaching beliefs, opinions and practices in the classroom. 24 questionnaires were filled out of 40 distributed copies. Then, for obtaining more in depth data, a series of classroom observing visits were carried out by the researchers meeting about 30 teachers in different lessons and different age stages. Some of those teachers were interviewed after they had finished their classes to obtain more detailed explanations about some of their classroom teaching practices.

#### 2. Research instrument

The present study utilised a triangulation of data collecting methods as a questionnaire, an interview and classroom observation were applied to collect data necessary for conducting this study. Firstly, the questionnaire consists of 70 items that require participant to respond by ticking a 4 likert-scale options (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree), and four open questions seeking more detailed data for the purpose of conducting this study. Subsequently, a series of classroom observing visits were performed to gather more detailed data. The observations were conducted against a number of pre-planned criteria needed to collect the required data. Afterwards, some of the observed teachers were interviewed to find more systematic information about some of their teaching opinions, and practices.

#### 3. Ethical issues

The data collection procedures in this research were guided by ethical issues which became a crucial part of the research process mainly because all researchers have obligations

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

towards the subjects who agree to participate in their studies. Before conducting each of the questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews, the subjects were informed with a detailed description of the objectives of the study. Participant teachers were given assurance by the researchers that their responses were to be treated with maximum confidence and that they were to be used only to achieve the aims and objectives of this study. Participant teachers were assured that their personal entities are completely anonymous. Additionally, participants have been informed with their right to withdraw at any time they wish and that their involvement in the study, or not, have no positive or negative effect on their teaching profession.

### 4. Data analysis

In order to analyse quantitative data collected for this study, a series of descriptive statistics such as *Mean* and *Standard Deviation* were measured by using the statistical programme SPSS. Unpredictably, results of the questionnaire were not reflecting some the experienced and expected findings. The participant teachers might have understood this study as a kind of assessment of their teaching practices despite the researchers' constant explanation and confirmation that this study does not aim to judge or evaluate their teaching practices. Comparing the questionnaire results with their real teaching practices reveal that participants' responses were made to defend their teaching positions. Having more participants to respond to the questionnaire was a critical challenge to the researchers as in many cases teachers were reluctant to give back the questionnaire copies. Therefore, due to the critical need to obtain more detailed and real-teaching reflecting data, a series of 30 classroom observations were held. Many participants considered the researchers as evaluators or inspectors to their teaching practices despite the previously made assurances. Finally, some participant teachers were interviewed for further understanding of some occurrences. Results were critically analysed, summarised and presented in the results section.

### The results

The ultimate and above all challenges that EFL teachers encounter is having sufficient teaching experience. The study found (graph 1) that about the half of the participants have less than a year of teaching experience. In the academic year 2018/2019, English language

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

was included at first early stages of primary schools. Due to the sharp shortage of the teaching staff, the Ministry of Education recruited all graduates from English departments irrespective of having an educational degree or teaching certificate. Those novel and inexperienced teachers stand in their classes without any previous preparation like worriers standing in the battle field without carrying shields or defending weapons. Those teachers confront situations in which they ignore what and how to act. One of the interviewed teachers declared “I don’t know how to deal with the course book or with the students.” Results presented in table (1) reveals that participants’ dissatisfaction with their present experience (mean=2.42). The participant teachers’ urgent need for pre-service training courses (mean= 3.58) and any other potential approaches to improve their professional experience (mean=3.29) were clearly expressed throughout the statistic results presented in table (1).



Graph (1): teaching Experience

Results presented in table (1) also reveal that participant teachers benefit from their own experience (mean=3) and from their colleagues’ experience as well (mean=3.42). The interviewed teachers admitted operating their experience as previous learners and in many times they take after their previous teachers. An interviewed participant teacher explained that she still remembers some of the tackles she encountered while learning English language and how she overcame them. Therefore, she attempts to apply her personal-learnt strategies which, from her perspective, are more successful with her students. In addition, participant teachers appear to take advantage of their colleagues as a teaching guiding source, being noticed during the interviews as well as during informal conversations that

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

teachers had in the teaching staff rest room. They discussed some argumentative and problematic areas related to the use of teaching materials and teaching aids, the learners' learning styles, and assessment. Such discussions, as observed, seem to work for some of those teachers who are open to other suggested opinions, but others seem to be resistant and defendant to their own practices irrespective of their highly possible drawbacks.

| Statistics   |       |         |      |                |
|--|-------|---------|------|----------------|
|  | N     |         | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|  | Valid | Missing |      |                |
| not having teaching certificate  | 24    | 1       | 1.75 | .442           |
| not had pre-service training in teaching                                 | 24    | 1       | 1.92 | .282           |
| not had in-service training in teaching                                  | 24    | 1       | 1.88 | .338           |
| I need to take extra training courses to improve my teaching             | 24    | 1       | 3.58 | .584           |
| In service training courses are available                                | 24    | 1       | 2.04 | .908           |
| I learn from my own experiences  | 24    | 1       | 3.00 | .780           |
| I learn from other teachers' experiences                                 | 24    | 1       | 3.42 | .830           |
| I always look for potential ways of improving my professional experience | 24    | 1       | 3.29 | .550           |
| I am sufficient with the experience I have                               | 24    | 1       | 2.42 | 1.139          |

Table (1)

The vast majority of the participant teachers complained about not having an inspector whose job is to visit teachers to evaluate their teaching practice. Teachers seem to benefit from those inspectors because of the retrospective feedback they receive after their lessons. Additionally, participant teachers expressed their eager need to attending regular teaching training courses, workshops and lectures that are seldom held in the city of Missallatta. Not only novel teachers, but also long-term teachers could benefit and update their teaching practices and take note of the improvement and innovations taking place in the field of English language teaching.

Another critical challenge that EFL teachers face is the teaching methods and approaches being used inside the EFL classrooms. Table (2) shows that the majority of the participants focus on teaching language skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary. Participants appear to use traditional teaching methods (mean=3.00) and simultaneously, yet contradictorily, they follow more up to date teaching methods (mean=3.13). The classroom observations revealed that the vast majority of the participant

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

teachers overused the traditional teaching method of grammar- translation. Having focused on presenting and explaining grammatical structures, teachers appear to miss taking care of other linguistic objectives, for example, improving learners' speaking or writing skills.

| Statistics   |       |         |      |                |
|--|-------|---------|------|----------------|
|  | N     |         | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|  | Valid | Missing |      |                |
| I use traditional teaching methods                               | 24    | 1       | 3.00 | .659           |
| I mainly use grammar translation method                          | 24    | 1       | 3.21 | .509           |
| I use a variety of teaching methods that help my students        | 24    | 1       | 3.38 | .495           |
| I use the methods suitable for the lesson objectives             | 24    | 1       | 3.29 | .464           |
| I am aware of a variety of teaching and learning theories        | 24    | 1       | 2.92 | .830           |
| A lot of memorisation is the key of successful language learning | 23    | 2       | 3.26 | .752           |
| English Grammar is the focus in my classes                       | 24    | 1       | 3.29 | .690           |
| Vocabulary is the focus in my classes                            | 23    | 2       | 3.48 | .511           |
| Reading is the focus in my classes                               | 24    | 1       | 3.33 | .482           |
| Writing is the focus in my classes                               | 24    | 1       | 3.42 | .504           |
| Speaking is the focus in my classes                              | 24    | 1       | 3.25 | .532           |
| Listening is the focus in my classes                             | 24    | 1       | 3.50 | .511           |
| I follow more up to date teaching methods                        | 24    | 1       | 3.13 | .680           |
| I encourage my students to speak in my classes                   | 24    | 1       | 3.63 | .495           |
| I do most of the speaking in my classes                          | 24    | 1       | 3.33 | .637           |
| Allowing students to speak a lot makes me lose control           | 24    | 1       | 2.54 | 1.062          |

Table (2)

One other critical challenge is that teachers do not prepare lesson plans. Teachers apparently lack having vivid objectives, which makes them navigate throughout the lesson without having clear outcomes. This could be confusing to both teachers and learners. For example, one of the observed lessons aimed at making learners read two texts to find specific differences. The lesson aims at presenting the use of conjunctive (but) and also to use contraction (do/ have+ not). The texts were printed in the students' book. Yet, the teacher wrote the texts again on the board. She used a different coloured marker to write the full and contracted forms. Then she asked her students to copy the texts in their notebooks. At that point the lesson was terminated. Students neither had a chance to read the texts to find the differences, nor understood how to use 'but' or 'contracted forms of

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

*auxiliary + not*<sup>7</sup>. That teacher apparently gave that lesson without having any logical objectives rather than the muscular efforts of hand copying.

| Statistics   |       |         |      |                |
|--|-------|---------|------|----------------|
|  | N     |         | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|  | Valid | Missing |      |                |
| English language is very important in my society                                 | 24    | 1       | 3.46 | .658           |
| Libyan cultures and traditions encourage Libyan students to learn English        | 24    | 1       | 2.46 | .658           |
| English teaching is very successful in my city                                   | 24    | 1       | 2.54 | .721           |
| Teaching English language is difficult   | 24    | 1       | 2.00 | .722           |
| Teaching English is interesting  | 24    | 1       | 3.67 | .482           |
| My classes are interesting   | 24    | 1       | 2.92 | .584           |
| I am the only source of information that my students learn                       | 24    | 1       | 2.75 | .676           |
| The classroom is the most appropriate place for language learning                | 24    | 1       | 2.79 | .833           |
| I encourage my students for self learning  | 24    | 1       | 3.33 | .761           |
| I am the only source of information that my students learn                       | 24    | 1       | 2.75 | .676           |
| I encourage my students to look for more other resources of language information | 24    | 1       | 3.42 | .584           |
| I am a good source of positive motivation for my students                        | 24    | 1       | 3.17 | .381           |
| I work hard with demotivated students  | 24    | 1       | 3.29 | .751           |
| I help raise my students' self confidence  | 24    | 1       | 3.54 | .509           |
| My students will learn better if they become responsible for their learning      | 24    | 1       | 3.54 | .509           |
| My students will learn better if they participate in class activities            | 24    | 1       | 3.58 | .504           |
| My students will learn better if they think critically                           | 24    | 1       | 2.92 | .717           |

Table (3)

Despite the fact that learning a language implies being, orally and graphically, capable to operate it to express oneself, teachers seem reluctant to allow learners speak a lot during the lessons. This could be attributed to the fear that they could loss control on their classes (mean= 2.54). One other possible reason for ignoring the high significance of developing students' speaking fluency is that many teachers, as observed, have deficiency in operating their speaking skill in English. Once again, it is the overdependence on the dreadful traditional method of grammar translation which makes teaching activities spin around teaching grammatical structures and translation of new words allocating no place for

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

communicative activities that require students to orally communicate with the teacher and classmates.

With regard to challenges related to the teachers' teaching beliefs and roles, the results presented in table (3) show that the majority of the participant teachers encourage their students for self-learning (mean= 3.33). They encourage their students to be responsible for their learning (mean= 3.54) and to look for more other resources for language learning (mean=3.42). Creating autonomous learners is a real challenge in the Libyan classrooms where the teacher is viewed as the only provider of information. Despite these high figures, acquainted from the questionnaire, classroom observations were an evidence of the fact that Libyan classroom setting is mainly a teacher- centred one where it is the teacher's responsibility to provide knowledge while learners just receive whatever their teacher presents. In addition, participant teachers demonstrated high tendency to motivate their learners (mean=3.17) and also to work hard with unmotivated students (mean= 3.29). A real challenge that encounters EFL teachers is fostering positive motivation necessary for improving learners' competence and performance in the target language. Once again, classroom observations found that many teachers lack the skill of positively motivating their students, and in many other occasions, it is the teacher's way of acting and behaving that negatively affects their students' motivation. Many of the participant teachers seem to be unaware of the damaging consequences that their acts could have on their students. Competitive activities, testing students before their classmates, physically punishing students for mistakes, focusing on competent students and ignoring less competent ones are all examples of teaching practices that definitely create unmotivated learners.

Results also reveal that participant teachers believe that learning English language is important in the Libyan community (m= 3.46), yet the Libyan culture and traditions do not encourage English learning much enough (m= 2.46). Participant teachers also believe that teaching English is interesting (mean=3.67), yet difficult (mean=2.00). This could be attributed to, as discussed above, their insufficient experience and lack of teaching developmental programmes as many of the interviewed teachers declared.

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

Another vital challenge that encounters EFL teachers is providing learners with sufficient and fair opportunities to be exposed to the target language as well as performing and participating in the classroom activities. It is essential to bear in mind that English in the Libyan context represents a foreign language one as the target language is rarely met or used outside language classrooms. Participant teachers tend to believe that students could learn better if they participate in classroom activities ( $m=3.58$ ). However, length of lessons and large classes represent a critical obstacle for EFL teachers to involve all students in classroom activities.

The number of students in the observed classes ranged between 20-30 learners who sat in rows facing the front side of the classroom where the teacher usually stands. Teachers were noticed having a difficulty to keep contact with most of the students who sat at the backside of the classroom. Therefore, Most of the teachers focus on learners sitting in the front leaving those who sat at the backside without enough attention. Those teachers need to be enlightened and introduced, via special planned programmes, to a variety of classroom activities that have the potential of tackling the latter challenge.

Another critical challenge is the overuse of mother tongue in the EFL classrooms. The vast majority of participant teachers, as observed, do not only use mother language to give instructions necessary for the learning tasks, but in many cases it replaced English language altogether. Participant teachers gave instructions, translated words and phrases, and explained grammatical structures by using mother tongue. This minimised the amount of exposure to the target language. For example, one teacher follows each structure with immediate Arabic equivalent despite it was apparent that learners understood what they were asked to do without the need for translation. Other teacher shifts the whole lesson with different language skills objectives into a merely translation activity.

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

|   | Statistics |         | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------------|---------|------|----------------|
|   | Valid      | Missing |      |                |
| My students support each other in the classroom | 24         | 1       | 2.50 | .834           |
| They can work in groups                         | 24         | 1       | 3.00 | .722           |
| I use collaborative techniques in my classes    | 24         | 1       | 2.92 | .584           |
| I use competitive techniques in my classes      | 24         | 1       | 3.00 | .834           |
| I focus on individual work                      | 24         | 1       | 2.96 | .806           |

Table (4)

To overcome the above mentioned challenge, teachers could have taken advantage of collaborative learning for providing enough exposure to the target language despite the insufficient lessons time and large classes because it could involve every individual learner in classroom activities. Besides, it has the potential of raising self confidence and creating an anxiety free environment. Activities that require pair and group work could encourage students to participate in more supportive and friendly environment rather than competitive activities, providing learners with appropriate circumstances to improve their achievements, and autonomy (Alderman, 1999), to reduce anxiety, and increase self-confidence and motivation (Wachob, 2006). Yet, classroom observations revealed that there is a massive use of competitive learning in the targeted context even though results of the questionnaire (table 4) give opposing image. The classroom observation interestingly found no trace of collaborative learning. In other words, EFL participant teachers were apparently ignorant of the vital influence that collaborative activities could have on their teaching outcome. It was only one single case, out of thirty, where the teacher divided her students into groups of threes to perform a spelling task in which she uttered one word for each group to be written down on the board. When later that teacher was interviewed, she explained that when she was a student, she found it more productive and rewarding to do her tasks when cooperated with her classmates. It was apparent then that teacher did not have a pedagogical background for her performance, but it was launched via a personal experience.

Statistics

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

|  | N     |         | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|-------|---------|------|----------------|
|  | Valid | Missing |      |                |
| The linguistic level of course book is suitable for my student | 24    | 1       | 2.71 | .751           |
| The course book is interesting                                 | 24    | 1       | 3.08 | .584           |
| The course book is difficult                                   | 24    | 1       | 1.88 | .680           |
| The course book is suitable for my students culture            | 24    | 1       | 2.79 | .588           |
| Time of classes is enough to finish the course book            | 24    | 1       | 2.13 | .900           |
| The course book is the only source I use in my classes         | 24    | 1       | 2.46 | .833           |

Table (5)

As far as challenges related to teaching aids and materials are concerned, results of the questionnaire presented in table (5) show, from the participant teachers' point of view, that the course books do not enough match the linguistic level of students (mean= 2.71) nor suits the students' culture (mean= 2.79). Results of the questionnaire also reveal that the time limit of classes is not sufficient to finish the course book (mean=2.13). Classroom observations found that English course materials including student books and work books are the only teaching materials being used in the observed classes. The observed teachers only utilized whiteboards as the only teaching aids for displaying linguistic items and structures. Some interviewed teachers claimed making use of flash cards. Despite the fact that the most of the visited schools are equipped with language laboratories, teachers seem to be unconscious of their potential benefits. English as a foreign language in the context of Missallate should have been introduced to learners, especially young learners, in a more colourful and animating style. For instance, no use of flash cards or any other auditory or visual materials was noticed in the observed classes. Some of the participant teachers complained about not being provided with the CDs that were designed to accompany the student and work books. Only a few of them made personal efforts to access those materials and some other auditory and visual materials which, as observed, resulted in an obvious and overwhelming interest and beneficiary from the side of learners. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the use of internet could have helped English teachers keep in touch with their students and run some distant-learning activities during the present pandemic of Covid-19 to guarantee learners' language improvement and progress. However, none can

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

ignore the setbacks in the infrastructure in some Libyan rural cities, including Missallatta, that hinders such a potential English language teaching and learning facility.

|   | N     |         | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-------|---------|------|----------------|
|   | Valid | Missing |      |                |
| Preparing students for their exams is the focus in my classes | 24    | 1       | 3.29 | .464           |
| I use tests to diagnose my students' competence               | 24    | 1       | 3.21 | .658           |
| Tests are only to give students marks                         | 24    | 1       | 1.79 | .588           |
| I follow the progress that my students are making             | 24    | 1       | 3.13 | .338           |

Table (6)

With regard to teachers' feedback and assessment, it was the controlling feedback that dominated the observed EFL classroom rather than the informative feedback though participants' responses to the questionnaire (table 6) reveal that the majority of them make use of both types. However, what was vividly observed was that teachers tend to highly focus on controlling feedback. Tests are made to evaluate and grade learners and to determine the extent of success that learners made. Participant teachers appear to miss the drawbacks of relying heavily on controlling feedback as Dornyei (1994) and Alderman (1999) expressed the critical influence that controlling feedback could have on learners as it may demotivate them and threaten their self-efficacy. Feedback that highlights deficiencies may result in undermining self-regulation (Ibid).

The majority of the participant teachers appear to lack theoretical and practical background that could guide and inspire their assessment techniques. Some teachers appear unaware of the negative impact that some assessing techniques could have on their learners. One example scene was about a teacher who dealt with 6/7 years old learners. This teacher stood in front of the class behind a small desk on the top of which there was a stick of wood which was an indicator of possible physical punishment. She nominated her students individually who were requested to approach their teacher's desk. Learners stumbled their way from their desks to the teacher's desk. Reluctance and fear were so apparent on their little faces and on their little shivering bodies. The teacher then asked each nominated learner a question that required an immediate answer. Those little learners' eyes said a lot

## **Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers**

about the tragedy they were living at that moment. A blow of claps and praise followed correct answers, but those who were less fortunate were punished and reproached. Punished students walked back to their desks with broken hearts to shrink themselves there. This scene has been repeated in many classes. One other teacher used lollypops as rewards, but learners who did not have correct responses were negatively affected for not receiving such a reward. A third example teacher viewed her students' homework. One student who did not manage to do his homework immediately covered his face with both of his arms which was a strong evidence of experiencing previous physical punishment. Here comes an urgent need for special training programmes that could provide EFL teachers with appropriate techniques to assess their learners and achieve more successful and more satisfying outcomes. Teachers need to be notified of the psychological damage that their assessing and feedback-giving policies could have on their learners.

### **Conclusion, recommendation, and further research**

To conclude, in the Libyan EFL classroom context, teachers face a variety of challenges that require a well consideration and high professional qualification to be overcome in a planned and systematic approach. Encountered challenges could be attributed to different factors including inadequate preparation of teachers, overreliance on traditional and out of date teaching method represented in grammar translation method, lack of modern educational teaching aids, materials and technologies, lack of sufficient exposure to English language due to competitive and individual classroom activities, time limit and large classes. The study also found that assessing and feedback providing techniques could have a negative impact on learners as they could demotivate them. This study has limitations as the number of participant teachers do not help in generalizing the above discussed findings. Therefore, for a further and thorough understanding of the nature of the challenges and difficulties encountered by EFL teachers, further research is needed to be conducted via micro investigations to study each individual challenge encountered in the EFL classroom. In light of the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following:

## Understanding Professional challenges encountered by Libyan EFL teachers

- The Libyan EFL school teachers should reflect on the problems they encounter and adopt a systematic approach to confront and overcome the problems.
- They also need professional developmental programmes that educate them with innovative English language teaching and learning theories.
- Teachers need to pay more attention to affective and psychological aspects of learners rather than just focusing on cognitive sides of learning.
- Ministry of Education, represented by the Offices of Education in Libyan cities should run regular workshops that could enable teachers to be informed with the latest and up to date English language teaching related concepts and issues.
- Office of Education should run specific workshops that could improve teachers' assessment and feedback techniques.
- More concern should be paid to teaching aids and technologies which should be made available to every teacher in every school accompanied with informing presentations that practically prepare teachers to operate those aids.
- Regular workshops and seminars are a precious opportunity for teachers to share ideas and thoughts and to learn from their colleagues.

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