The Gap Between Theory and Classroom Practice: Perspectives of English Teaching Graduates

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Article information	Abstract
	This study explored the gap between theory and classroom practice. It investigated English graduates perspectives of the challenges they faced when they attempted to carry out theoretical knowledge they learned in the university study. The study aimed to provide the key factors that contributed to the gap between theory and practice in teaching English. Moreover, it investigated the role of syllabus design in bridging this gap between theoretical courses in Faculty of Education and the practical application in public schools. A descriptive research was employed to gather insights into the challenges English graduates faced in their teaching. The participants of the study were 36 of English graduates studied in Faculty of Education. Findings revealed that there was a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical use. Moreover, the study found out that the basic key factors that contributed to challenges that prevented graduates to apply theoretical knowledge were students' low proficiency, lack of school supplies, test-oriented students, lack of training workshops, managing mixed- ability students and large class sizes. Furthermore, it concluded that the syllabus found in public school was designed to suit innovating English teaching methodology.

I.   Introduction

Teaching English methodologies had received much attention in recent years. Educators often concentrated on how teachers aught to deal inside their classrooms. However, students in their university studied many theories and how these theories could be turned into methods. The problem was that some of graduates faced problems when they transitioned into practical fields.

English teaching graduates studied many theories in university that they found them difficult to be reflected in real classroom contexts. According to Cambridge University Press, some teachers insisted that they did not want to study theories but they only wanted to learn practical ideas they could use in their classrooms.On the other hand, other researchers and educators often tended to follow research-based theory.

The two terms 'theory and practice' were compared by Burg (2008). He claimed that there was some kind of interplay between theory and practice. He reported that there was merely a difference between general and abstract theories on the one hand and the more concrete and

particular problems on the other hand. However, some researchers argued that teaching was not simply implementing of knowledge graduates learned in their university, it is rather a much more complex cognitively process that affected by classroom condition, the teacher's goal and the students motivation. (Hammond, 2006).

In the same way, Johnson (2009) claimed that the knowledge base of a second language teacher education did not only rely on disciplinary or subject knowledge that defined how language was taught but also account on the context of language teaching.

Several research were investigated the gap between theory and practice. For instant, Hatasa (2013); Karim (2021) & Ramirez (2021). Hatasa (2013) claimed that one of the significant cause of the gap between theory and practice was that there was a difference in perceived social status between teachers and researchers. That was, teachers' cultural orientation depended on personal, particular and exponential orientation whereas researchers depended on analytical, theoretical and intellectual orientation.

Students of English specialization often graduated with knowledge about theories of how to teach English. In the Faculty of Education- Misurata University, students in English department studied linguistic theories of how children acquired their first language and how second language learners could learn a second language. In addition, they studied two related courses of teaching methodology I & II. In these courses, they learned various teaching methods like the Grammar- Translation method, the Direct Method, the Audiolingual method, the Total Physical Response, the Communicative Language Teaching & the Task- Based Language Teaching. These courses were taught theoretically and practically. However, English graduates faced challenges in their teaching when they transitioned to their schools.

According to Karim (2021), there was a number of reasons for this gap that existed between second language acquisition (SLA) theory and its implementation. He asserted that this gap often resulted from the high-stake examination which mostly aimed to assess students' linguistic knowledge but no attention was paid on their communicative abilities. Karim (2021) investigated the gap between SLA theory and research. He concluded that bridging translation from theory into practice was neglected aspect. That is, Karim (2021) claimed that teaching theories had stepped far a way from modern methodology. Graduates often focused on explicit instruction of grammatical rules, deductive approach and use of traditional lectures-based methods.

There were some views regarding whether this gap should be filled or not. Some researchers reported that it was necessary to fill this gap. (Chapelle, 2007). While others claimed that this gap was general in all fields and it was in nature to be found. (Han, 2007). However, practitioners argued that empirical work was significant to fill this gap, but researchers claimed that research based pedagogical implication should be shed light on. However, Based on Hatasa 92013), teacher- researcher collaboration was a best process to be conducted to solve this problem and to find a suitable solution to this gap.

Ramirez (2021) conducted a study on 45 pre-service students to understand why there was a gap between theory and practice. He insisted that six gaps emerged between theory and practice of pre-service science teachers, namely, lesson planning, pedagogical skills, communicative skills, classroom management, personal attribute and professional attribute.

Talaee & et al. (2023) argued that several teachers could not always appreciate the relevance of the theoretical knowledge to practical applications in schools.This meant that practitioners should concentrate on ways to improve communication and relationship with their students. Moreover, Yin (2019) examined 15 undergraduate juniour in Korea who were enrolled in an intensive course. They insisted that they gained benefit from their university

theoretical methodology courses. On the other hand, the participants experienced difficulties when they transitioned to the practical field due to the gap that existed between theory and practice.

Zeichner (1992) argued that there were limits since the university setting did not translate the theoretical knowledge to practical application.

Yet, no study was conducted on the gap between theory and practice that English graduates of Faculty of Education found when they transition from studying in the Faculty and practise in the classrooms. This study shed the light on this gap.

Questions of the Study

The basic questions of this study are:

- To what extent teachers of English who have graduated from Faculty of Education can benefit from theories they have studied in their teaching?
- What are the most challenges teachers face in implementing ELT methodologies?
- What role do syllabus design plays in translating theory to practice?

Objectives of the Study

Theoretical concepts are often easier to understand more that to apply them practically. Teachers in their classrooms find some theories difficult to be implemented. To clarify the challenges that graduates face, some goals are put in this study,

- To explore English graduates' perceptions of the gap between theory and practice in teaching English in public classrooms.
- To identify key factors that contribute to the gap between theory and practice.
- To investigate the role of syllabus design in bridging the gap between theoretical courses in faculty of Education and the practical application in English classrooms in public schools.

Significance of the Study

Although much attention had been paid on modern methodologies recently in teaching university courses, English graduates from Faculty of Education faced many challenges when teaching English in public classrooms. This study explored to what extent teachers of English practise theories they studied in the college. This study investigated whether the syllabus design contribute to bridge the gap between theory and practice or not. Moreover, this study supported English graduates by highlighting the challenges they faced to adapt theoretical knowledge to teaching contexts.

Problem Statement

Despite students in faculty of Education study courses that gave them intensive knowledge of theories and methodologies of how they could teach English by modern methods. Many English teaching graduates struggled to use these methodologies in their real-life. This study investigated the extent and nature of this gap and attempted to understand the key factors beyond this problem. However, students' levels in Misurata public schools showed much lack in understanding and proficiency in English language. This might come because of lack of theories transitioning the graduates studied in university.

Methodology of the Study

This study used a quantitative research implemented by a descriptive method to explore basically the gap between theory and practice regarding teaching English focusing primarily on the challenges that graduates faced when they transitioned into practical settings. This research relied on a questionnaire to collect data needed and analyzed their perceptions about

to what extent English teaching graduates found difficulties in translating theories of learning and teaching language into their practical applications.

Participants

In order to investigate to what extent the gap between theory and practice contributed to the challenges that English graduates faced in their teaching, 36 students who graduated from Faculty of Education- Misurata University were randomly chosen as participants in this study. The sample of participants was made up of 33 females and 3 males who had various experiences in teaching English in Misurata Public schools. The male number was low due to the small number of male graduates of English department in Faculty of Education. The questionnaire was distributed to some graduates from Faculty of Education who studied some relevant courses as language acquisition, teaching methodology I and teaching Methodology II in the faculty.

Research Instrument

Questionnaire

Questionnaire was defined as any text-based instrument that provides survey subjects a series of questions to answer or statements to either by indicating a response, ticking or marking. (Brown, 2001) . These questions were put based on the questions of the study being conducted. The questionnaire in this study used five-scale Likert which required participants to (1) strongly agree (2) agree (3) neutral(4) disagree or (5) strongly disagree

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, quantitative data was analyzed using excel programme. The questionnaire results were entered and analyzed by excel programme to identify the percentages of the results. However, using descriptive analysis was used to calculate the percentages of the graduates who participated in this study.

In this study, three objectives were investigated according to the questions of this research.
● The graduates' perceptions about the gap between theory and practice.
● The key factors that contribute to the gap between theory and practice.
● The syllabus and its relationship to the gap between theory and practice.

Each group of items were analyzed individually. As a result the data can be identified and reached to a clear conclusion. All data were analyzed to understand the answers of the questions which were put previously

Results from the Questionnaire

In this study, the total number of the participants who replied to this questionnaire was 36. All participants graduated from Faculty of Education- Misurata University. The following table (1), English graduates showed to what extent they found the gap between theory and practice between the underlying knowledge they gained from their study and the actual use in their classrooms.

Table (1)

Item	strongly agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 1	11 (31.4%)	22 (62.4%)	0(0%)	1 (2.9%)	1(2.9%)
Statement 8	10 (27.8%)	22(61.1%)	1 (2.8%)	3 (8.3%)	0(0%)
Statement 9	9 (25%)	15 (41.7%)	9 (25%)	2 (5.6%)	1 (2.8%)
Statement 10	16 (44.4%)	14(38.9%)	5(13.9%)	1(2.8%)	0(0%)

Table (1) showed to what extent English graduates thought there was a gap between theory and practice. A significant maturity of the participants highlighted that

there was a gap between the underlying knowledge and the actual use. 11 (31.4%) of the respondents reported that there was a gap between the theories they studied and the practical application they faced when they transitioned to practical field.

Interestingly, 22(62.4%) of the participants agreed that there was a gap and they found much gap between what they studied and how they could translate it to actual use. On the other hand, a few participants displayed that there was a gap between theory and practice. Only 2(5.8%) of them reported there was no gap between theory and practice.

In viewing their perceptions about whether real-world teaching conditions were different from theoretical knowledge they gained from university courses, surprisingly, 32 (88.9%) (27.8% strongly agree & 61. 1%) agree) of the participants revealed that there was a clear gap between the theoretical courses they have studied and the practical field. On the contrary, 3 (8.3%) of the participants claimed that real-world teaching conditions were not different and the same was between them.

In one of the items of the questionnaire about whether studying language acquisition theories helped English graduates in their teaching or not, majority of the respondents 30 (83.3%) strongly agreed and agreed that the courses they studied in the university helped to develop their teaching. While only 1(2.8%) of the participants claimed the opposite.

According to respondents about whether college courses provided them with the strategies they needed to use in their practical field, 9(25%) of the respondents felt very confident that their university courses provided them with effective strategies they needed in their actual world. Moreover, 15(41.7%) of the participants reported that they found college courses helpful and effective. In comparison, 2(5.6%) of respondents claimed that the university courses they studied in the college did not provide them strategies they needed in their teaching and 25% of respondents were undecided agree or disagree.

Table (2)

Statement	Strongly agree	agree	Nuetral	disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 2	13 (36.1%)	16 (44.4%)	7 (19.4%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
Statement 3	8(22.4%)	18(51.4%)	3(8.6%)	5(14.3%)	1(2.9%)
Statement 5	18 (50%)	8(22.2%)	7(19.4%)	3 (8.3%)	0 (0%)
Statement 6	6 (16.7%)	19 (52.8%)	7(19.4%)	4(11.1%)	0(0%)
Statement11	4(11.1%)	18 (50%)	8(22.2%)	6(16.7%)	0(0%)
Statement12	26(72.2%)	7(19.4%)	2(5.6%)	1(2.8%)	0(0%)
Statement13	7(9.4%)	24(66.7%)	4(11.1%)	1(2.8%)	0(0%)

This table showed what challenges English graduates faced to implement theories they studied in university. As shown in the table, 29 (80.5%) of respondents positively replied the statement (2) . They revealed that their schools lacked adequately preparation to handle classroom needs. They faced some challenges regarding their needs they requested to practise modern methods they studied. Amazingly, no one 0(0%) replied "disagree nor strongly disagree".

Likewise, one of the challenges English graduates faced when they implemented the methods they studied was the students' low proficiency. 18 (51.4%) of the participants reported that students' low proficiency prevented them to translate modern ELT strategies in their teaching. Furthermore, 8(22.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that students' low level prevented them to apply innovating ELT strategies. On the contrary, a small number of

the participants reported that students' low proficiency did not prevent them to implement these strategies. While only 3 (8.6%) were neutral.

Workshops were needed to English graduates to be able to implement modern English language teaching methods. As shown in table (2), 26(72.2%) of that participants claimed they needed training workshops to clarify how teachers could adapt theory into practice effectively. On the other hand, 3 (8.3%) of respondents reported that they did not lack training workshops. While 7(19.4%) of the participants were neutral.

Test-oriented students are those who focus primarily on preparing for and performing well in standardized tests or exams. This would be one of the challenges English teachers faced. As shown in the participants' replies, majority of the respondents 25 (69.3%) displayed that their students were test-oriented. Students were studying because they wanted to pass the examination. However, 4 (11.1%) of the participants claimed the opposite. They showed that their students wee keen on learning and interested in learning.

One of the statements that showed one of the most significant reasons faced was whether large class sizes was one of the challenges they faced to implement innovating ELT methodologies. Remarkably, (89.6%) of the respondents strongly agree and agree that large class size was one of the most important ELT methodologies. Only 1 (2,8%) of the respondents said the opposite.

More crucially, the statement (12) replies showed that one of the key factors of the challenges graduates faced was managing mixed-ability students in classroom. Most of graduates (86.1%) stated that when they had mixed-ability students in class, they found difficulty to manage their knowledge and how s/he could switch from one level to another. Whereas only 1 (2.8%) of English graduates who participated in this study reported that it was not one of the key factors that they faced. 11.1% of respondents were undecided 'neutral'.

Table (3)

Statement	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 4	4 (11.1%)	14 (40%)	8 (22.9%)	9 (25.7%)	0(0%)
Statement 7	5(13.9%)	13(36.1%)	9(25%)	7 (19.4%)	2 (5.6%)

Table (3) showed whether there was a relationship between syllabus in public schools in Misurata and implementing modern English language theories in classrooms. As shown in the table, responses of the statement (4) displayed that the majority of the respondents 18(51.1%) agreed and strongly agreed that the syllabus was considered well-designed to implement modern methodologies. Whereas, 9 (25.7)% of them claimed that the syllabus was not appropriate to apply innovating methods.

Likewise, statement (7) showed whether syllabus used in public schools were relatively evenly distributed between agree and disagree. Some of the participants (13 (36.1%) stated that the syllabus designed encouraged teachers to use creative teaching strategies which derived from ELT theories. While 7 (19.4%) of the participants claimed that the curriculum was not appropriate for using innovating strategies inside classrooms.9 (25%) of the responses wee neutral.

Overall, based on the responses of the questionnaire statements, English graduates revealed that there was a gap between theoretical knowledge they learned in university and classroom realities. These theories tended to be challenging when English graduates attempted to adapt them to suit the diverse needs of students. However, the key factors that English graduates found they lacked teaching supplies, training workshops, schools tools, students' low proficiency, test-oriented students and large class sizes. Furthermore, English graduates displayed that public schools syllabus was designed to suit innovating teaching methodology.

Conclusion

The gap between theory and practice for English graduates caused many challenges in translating linguistic theories, pedagogical methods and literary criticism which could be abstract from classroom realities.

English graduates found that theoretical knowledge they gained from university courses were not sufficient. They insisted that teaching theories had stepped far a way from real world life. Moreover, English graduates displayed that they faced access to modern tools in schools which prevented them to implement theoretical strategies effectively. This study concluded that 93.8% of English graduates who participated claimed that there was a gap between the underlying knowledge and the actual use. Furthermore, 88.9% of the English graduates revealed that real world conditions were different from theoretical knowledge they gained from university courses. Moreover, there were various key factors that contributed to some challenges of implementing theoretical competence to practical performance. The graduates displayed that students' low proficiency, lack of school supplies, test-oriented students, lack of training workshops, managing mixed- ability students and large class sizes. Remarkably, 89.6% of English graduates insisted that large class size was one of the significant key factors that contributed to challenges of teachers faced when applying theoretical theories.

English public school syllabus was designed to suit innovating English methodology. 51.1% of the English graduates in this study revealed that teachers of English could apply innovating methods using the syllabus designed in public schools.

Recommendations

The gap between theory and practice is a common phenomenon in the field of linguistics. As concluded in this study, here are some recommendations to lessen the challenges English graduates encounter:

1. **Enhancing students' proficiency**: This can be done by performing language support programmes. Students in schools have low proficiency that need to be developed so teachers can implement innovating methodologies inside their classes.

2. **Supporting teachers to access teaching materials and supplies**: Schools should be supported with innovating materials that help teachers to practise modern teaching methods. Teachers often find teaching interesting when accessing to teaching supplies.

3. **Addressing test-oriented teaching**: encourage students to shift from test-oriented trending to competency-based trending. Graduates have to focus on students' practical language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) rather than just exam performance.

4. **Offering training programmes:** Training workshops may help graduates to implement theoretical knowledge they have learned in university and how they can use these theories effectively.

5. **Managing mixed-ability classes:** English graduates should be supported to practise how to use differentiated instructions techniques to deal with all students inside classrooms. Moreover, introducing inclusive teaching practice can be helpful to teachers to progress their students by ensuring that each student can progress at their own pace.

6. **Large classroom management:** English graduates can be trained with professional in development classroom effective strategies. In addition, using technology can help teachers with large class size.

7. **Developing using syllabus in public schools**: Teachers should cover all skills of language. Students can not develop their language by learning only some of these skills.

8. **Reflective teaching workshops:** Teachers of English should meet from time to time to exchange techniques and strategies they find them effective and innovate new methods that can be appropriate in their fields.

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Appendix I

A Questionnaire on **"Gap Between Theory and Classroom Practice: Perspectives from English Teaching Graduates"**

Instruction: Please state whether you totally agree, agree, neutral, disagree or totally disagree with the following statements by putting a tick (√) in the appropriate column

	statement	Totally agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Totally disagree
1	There is a gap between the theories I have studied and the methodologies I use in the reality.					
2	My school lacks adequately preparation to handle classrooms needs.					
3	Many students low English proficiency prevent me to implement modern ELT strategies.					

	statement	Totally agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Totally disagree
4.	The syllabus aligns well with modern methodologies I have studied in my college.					
5.	I need teacher training workshops to develop my teaching.					
6.	Students are test-oriented that makes me unable to use interactive ELT methods.					
7.	The syllabus designed in the public schools encourages the use of creative teaching strategies which derives from ELT theories.					
8.	My college courses provided me with the strategies I need to use theories in my teaching methods.					
9.	Real-world teaching conditions are totally different from theoretical knowledge I have gained from university.					
10.	Studying language acquisition helps me to develop my teaching in schools.					
11.	I lack supplies to implement ELT methodologies in my classrooms.					
12.	Large class size is one of the significant reasons behind not implementing innovating ELT methodologies.					
13.	Managing mixed-ability students is challenging to teachers in our public schools.					
14.	The syllabus I teach has clear objectives that reflect theoretical principles I have studied.					

الفجوة ما بين النظرية والتطبيق داخل الفصول: منظور خريجي قسم اللغة الانجليزية

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الملخص

تتحقق هذه الدراسة في مدى الفجوة ما بين النظرية والتطبيق داخل الفصول الدراسية. كما تدرس ما هو منظور خريجي قسم اللغة الانجليزية للصعوبات التي يواجهونها عند تطبيق المعرفة النظرية ال تي درسوها خلال دراستهم الجامعية. وتهدف هذه الدراسة للتعرف على العوامل الرئيسية التي أدت إلى هذه الفجوة بين نظريات تدريس اللغة الانجليزية وتطبيقها داخل المدارس. علاوة على ذلك، فه ي تتحقق ما هو دور المنهاج الدراسي في المدارس العامة في تغطية هذه الفجوة. هذه الدراسة هي د راسة وصفية حيث استخدمت استبانة لجمع البيانات ووزعت على 36 من خريجي قسم اللغة الانج ليزية ـ كلية التربية. حيث تستنتج هذه الدراسة إلى أن خريجي كلية التربية يرون ان هناك فجوة بي ن نظريات التدريس التي تعلمونها داخل الجامعات وتطبيقها داخل المدارس وتتركز الأسباب الرئي سية والصعوبات في تطبيقها إلى انخفاض الكفاءة اللغوية في مستوى الطلاب وقلة التجهيزات داخل المدارس، وأيضاً قلّة ورش العمل التدريبية وإدارة الطلاب بمستويات مختلفة وكذلك الأعداد الكبيرة داخل الفصل الدراسي الواحد. كما تستنتج هذه الدراسة إلى أن المنهج الدراسي داخل المدارس ملائم لتطبيق نظريات تدريس اللغة الحديثة.