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جامعة الملك فيصل  
KING FAISAL UNIVERSITY



# Measuring the Knowledge of Senior English Department Students at KFU in Teaching the English Language.

I certify this research is solely conducted based on my personal study and research and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

**Ahmed 240**

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## **Abstract**

This current study sheds light on KFU Senior English students' cumulative knowledge on teaching target language (vocabulary and grammar), henceforth putting their knowledge in comparison with the P.P.P. (Presentation, Practice, Production) method (See Harmer, 2013). The targeted sample of participants (ten male and ten female students) are distant-learning senior students (level 7 & 8), interviewed using information-based questions to collect data and observe its merits and drawbacks. In the hope of underlining the current knowledge of KFU English students, this study's subsidiary goal is to give recommendations to reconsider revisiting the study plan at the English Language Department to add more dedicated ESL- teaching-related courses, which in return equip soon-to-be graduates with authentic knowledge of teaching.

## **Introduction**

King Faisal University is highly reputed for graduating Saudi teachers for many decades. Today, the university has expanded upon its programs by capitalizing on the use of distant-learning education. Public and private education has employed King Faisal University graduate students. King Faisal University furthermore flourishes in a variety of teaching-related fields; one of those fields is English language teaching.

The current common practice of teaching target language (grammar and vocabulary) among Saudi English teachers in the classroom is grammar-translation method. The teacher translates the target language and puts the translated language point side by side with the original for either comparison or correlation. This conventional method is practiced for its convenience and feasibility. The second notorious method local teachers rely on is introducing the target language in isolation or chunks. It imposes memorization of structures or individual words with no situational context. The last method is the technique for checking learners' understanding. Asking "Do you understand?" or "have you got it?" contains a huge deficiency; it is the broad assumption that all learners "have got it" where in reality it could be otherwise.

These commonly practiced methods have a grave repercussion, neither do they teach authentic English nor do learners produce accurate use of language. The reliance on translation and memorization is a hindrance to producing language properly in the classroom. Consequently, the learners transiently store the target language and tend to forget it rather quickly. In the many years to come, a huge proportion of English learners cannot utter a solitary, meaningful sentence; in other words, they are unable to communicate.

Teachers practicing these methods in the classroom drive me to assess the knowledge of teaching target language of soon-to-be graduates. As I speculated during my CELTA training course<sup>1</sup> at the British Council Riyadh in August 2015, the main cause is the lack of emphasis on teaching approaches and methodologies in the rigorous study plan at universities, including King Faisal University. Theories of language teaching and second language acquisition are merely units

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<sup>1</sup> CELTA is an initial qualification-teaching certificate issued by Cambridge University, UK.

found in one course – Applied Linguistics, Level 6 of the study plan in the English Language Department at King Faisal University. Approaches to teaching grammar and vocabulary are absent from the curriculum such as P.P.P. method (Presentation, Practice, Production).

In Presentation, the teacher can use situational-structure context for learners such as a story, illustrations, or reading/listening text and in the process, you elicit each grammatical or vocabulary point from students rather than give them the target language bit. In Practice and Production, the teacher builds up the target language by controlled practice, gradually moving to free and freer practice where learners get to focus on the production stage (writing or speaking).

This speculation is attested when I attempt to measure the knowledge of distant-learning senior English students at King Faisal University (Level 7 & 8) on teaching target language (grammar and vocabulary). In this study, I use three stages to attest their knowledge:

1. The teaching methodology in introducing giving advice (grammar) and words about food drinks and sports (vocabulary) to English language learners.<sup>2] [4]</sup>
2. The types of activities and exercises given for learners to practice and produce the target language.
3. The approach used to check learners' understanding of the target language.

These three criteria determine whether or not senior students have acquired knowledge on teaching target language effectively. Moreover, students' knowledge is compared with how relevant their knowledge is with the renowned book, *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (Chapter 4: A2) by the famous ESL practitioner Jeremy Harmer.

Two reasons justify why I convincingly chose this particular book. First, it was a huge help for me personally when I embarked on the one-month intensive teacher-training course, CELTA. Having this book beside me assisted me with keeping up with the overwhelming course load. Second, it became more relevant even long after, I had finished the CELTA. Till this day, I frequently refer back to it as a reference for my classes.

## **Literature Review**

Thus far, there has not been any substantial literature on measuring the knowledge of graduates, but rather measuring knowledge of teachers already on the job. Only a handful of previous studies explored related topics (teaching grammar and vocabulary in Saudi Arabia or courses at university).

“The methodology courses that come under the category of applied linguistics courses or, to be more precise, English-teaching methods, constitute no more than three courses, due to the condensed nature of courses depicted above.” (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 21) <sup>[1]</sup>

"Teachers' lack of skill, proper methodology and strategy obstruct to learn grammar rules of the language in the classroom." (Chowdhury, 2014, p. 2) <sup>3]</sup>

## **Significance of Research**

The importance of this research is essential for King Faisal University as the reputed teacher-graduating academic platform to focus on preparing students with theoretical teaching methodologies prior the actual practice in the classroom. In turn, English language students are likely to become more aware of the knowledge on teaching target language. In retrospective light to reconsider revising its curriculum, the English Language Department at university considers the recommendation to dedicate more ESL-related courses in the study plan to graduate qualified English teachers.

## **Research Question**

How knowledgeable are KFU senior English students (Level 07 & 08) on teaching target language (grammar and vocabulary) to learners?

## **Data Collection Methodology and Ethical Discretion**

Twenty KFU distant-learning senior English students (ten males and ten females) from level 07 and 08 are interviewed using information-based questions to give more room for elaborative answers. After that, I measure the knowledge of teaching target language by comparing the student's answers with the P.P.P. method – Presentation, Practice and Production – found in Harmer's The Practice of English Language Teaching.

On an ethical note, in respect to the Saudi tradition and custom, all participants in this research have been given the option to share any personal information (gender, name, age, contact info. and address). The participant's anonymity remains unrevealed in case he or she inadvertently gives away personal information.

## **Limitation of Research**

Securing a classroom of learners to measure students' knowledge – particularly females – was never actualized. Due to that, the data collected has heavy implications of students' own impressions on how knowledgeable they truly are in the real classroom. On top of that, the students found it hard to elaborate (due to language incompetence) and justify their approaches, as they have no prior theoretical framework of teaching methodologies for both grammar and vocabulary.

## **Expected Results**

Current senior English students at King Faisal University have studied for almost four years, attending courses on literature, translation and linguistics – which branches to sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. Present in Applied Linguistics, gives a general snapshot of theories of language acquisitions, designing curricula, and attesting language proficiency and competency. Unfortunately, only mere handful of lessons covers teaching methodologies, which provide bits and pieces of real knowledge of teaching. With that taught in isolation, students do not attain any significant knowledge of the language world around them. Henceforth, the student's own teaching

style does not develop appropriately, leaving large chunks of improvement more apparent post-graduation.

When interviewing the students (level 07 and 08), most of them inclined using visual aids to demystify the idea of the grammar handed to them (giving advice... You should...). Few of them emphasized on using a YouTube video for clear explanation of giving advice. One student surprisingly opted for approaching the grammar, giving advice, through the deductive approach followed by the P.P.P (Presentation, Practice and Production).

For teaching vocabulary about food, drinks and sports, most students too reported using visual aids (pictures and cartoons) to illustrate the objects alongside the written form. Few of the students reported teaching vocabulary through the image and its spoken form – without giving the written form. However, one student advised listening regularly to the radio, practice with natives or near native-level speakers, and play games – which is completely irrelevant to teaching.

Following the teaching approach for grammar and vocabulary is the types of activities and exercises. Almost students participating in this study did not relied on the book. No creativity or adaptation of materials was felt in their answers. Their answers sounded subtle, because they suggested watching movies, playing games and entering the chatroom boards to practice English. Finally, students reported that students' understanding of the target language should be tested via short quizzes.

The absence of the P.P.P and similar teaching methodologies for target language is clearly apparent among senior English students at King Faisal University. The P.P.P. – according to Jeremey Harmer's *The Practice of English Language Teaching* - gradually scaffolds the target language and adequately builds students' independence of using it accurately and correctly. Therefore, in the presentation, the focus tips down on the teacher, given the fact he or she has to present the language using situational-structure context. From there, students are guided through carefully controlled practice until the production stage (where students personalize language to their everyday life.)

The denominating discrepancy in soon-to-graduate students' perception of teaching grammar and vocabulary is their knowledge of real teaching itself, let alone making the class interactive and engaging. For the most part, it is teacher-centered especially in providing exercises and activities. The students who could be teachers someday are unaware of the importance of classroom student-centeredness.

Sadly senior English language department students of King Faisal University have not acquired dispositional knowledge of teaching English, specifically target language (vocabulary and grammar).

English major students at King Faisal University undoubtedly need to obtain teaching language knowledge. Instead of compiling them as short taught units in courses like Applied Linguistics, they could be independent courses, taught with much emphasis on language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and language systems (vocabulary, grammar, phonology, functions.) All this knowledge is indispensable for the students before stepping into

the real classroom. In this light, fresh graduates gain easy-to-apply theoretical knowledge and unshakable confidence with the students.

## **References**

1. Al-Seghayer, K, 2014 The Four Most Common Constraints Affecting English Teaching in Saudi Arabia.
2. Cunningham, S, Moore, P & Crace, A, 2013 Cutting Edge (Third Edition): Unit 3: Work and Rest, Grammar Focus 1 should, shouldn't, page. 26.
3. <http://express-journal.com/pdf/mehmoodchoudharyteachinggrammarinsaudiuniversities.pdf>
4. Soars J & L, 2013 New Headway Plus (Special Edition): Unit 5: The Way I Live, Starter, page 32.

## **Appendix**

Interview Questions:

1. What is the teaching approach you would take to introduce a grammar lesson about giving advice?
2. What is the teaching approach you would take to introduce vocabulary about food, drinks and sports?
3. What types of activities and exercises should students practice in order to produce the target language accurately?
4. How would you check your learners' understanding?