

Jordanian English Language Teachers' Awareness and Performance of Essential Teaching Skills

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at exploring whether Jordanian teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) are cognizant of, and do perform, essential teaching skills in their classroom instruction. Participants in the study were 60 teachers teaching English Language for basic stage students in the University of Jordan District in Amman. Two research instruments were used to collect data: An open questionnaire and a scale of teacher performance evaluation.

Research findings revealed that participants in the study were aware of the teaching skills necessary for every teacher, namely lesson planning and preparation, lesson presentation and lesson management, classroom climate and discipline, assessment of student progress, and reflection and self-evaluation. However, although the participating teachers were rated to be satisfactorily performing such skills in their classroom practice, this degree of performance is not the standard expected from such established teachers. With respect to experience, it was found that less experienced teachers performed better on lesson planning and preparation and on reflection and self-evaluation; experienced teachers did better on lesson presentation and management, assessment of student progress and discipline.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that pre-service and in-service training courses, focusing on the essential teaching skills mentioned in the study, should be organized for teachers. Further studies that consider other variables, such as academic and professional qualifications, are recommended.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is an extremely complicated process (Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 2000; Trigwell, 2001). It involves a large number of skills and competencies as well as complex activities, of which effective teachers should be aware and able to perform. However, one of the most problematic issues in the teaching profession is to properly qualify such competent and effective teachers. Such qualification requires providing teachers with essential skills. According to many researches, successful and effective instruction lies in developing essential teaching skills amongst teachers. Such teaching skills operate in two ways: *Decision-making skills* represented in the teacher's knowledge of what and how to do, and *action skills* represented in the implementation of that

knowledge (Wragg, 1989 and 1993; Carlgren et al., 1994; Cooper and McIntyre, 1996; Kyriacou, 1998).

Perrott (1982) described how teaching skills are acquired and developed by teachers. She mentioned three stages: the *cognitive stage* which involves: developing an awareness, through study and observation, of what the skill is, identifying the different elements of the skill, knowing why the skill is used, and knowing how this particular skill will benefit the teacher's teaching; the *practical stage* which involves a short practice of a specific skill in actual classroom or in controlled settings as part of a training course; and the *evaluative stage* which provides feedback that may enable the teacher to enhance his performance of the given skill. However, Parrott sees the three stages as a *recursive process*, in which the evaluative stage may feed back into the other stages.

Kyriacou (1998) talked about three discernible elements of skills that should be considered by teachers: *knowledge* which comprises the teacher's knowledge about subject matter, students, curriculum, teaching techniques, and knowledge about the teacher's own

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teaching skills; *decision making* which comprises the thinking and decision making that takes place before, during and after the lesson, regarding how to attain the best educational outcomes intended; and *action* which comprises the teacher's overt behavior undertaken to foster student learning. More specifically, he listed seven essential teaching skills which teachers should be aware of: lesson planning and preparation, lesson presentation, lesson management, classroom climate, discipline, assessment of student progress, and reflection and self-evaluation.

Much research has been conducted to explore whether teachers in the field are aware of such skills in their actual practices, and to find out how important such skills are for teachers. However, it appears that there is no single study which could investigate all the above skills together. Most studies focused on one, two or three essential skills used by teachers. Darling and Ghallagher (2003), for instance, studied the importance of implementing a self-assessment process. They found that self-assessment was a useful measure to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers.

Vonk (1983) conducted a study in which he asked a sample of 21 novice teachers to keep a diary of their teaching experiences. He asked the participants to complete a questionnaire about novice teachers' teaching skills. Of the problems identified to be common they mentioned: teachers' difficulty in knowing what to do when; students' difficulty in understanding the teachers' explanation; teachers' lack of knowledge of how to cope with students working at different rates (individual differences); teachers' difficulty with determining which curriculum components require more attention in teaching; and teachers' problems with what to do with a student whom they cannot control.

Wragg and Wood (1989) tried to compare novice teachers with experienced teachers, highlighting the development of teaching skills. They noted that novice teachers were more often involved in private exchanges with individual students, and so they lost their overall perception of what was going on elsewhere in the classroom. In contrast, experienced teachers were able to divide their attention between the individual student and the rest of the class, and knew what was happening elsewhere.

Similarly, Berliner (1987) compared between three groups of teachers: experienced teachers, student teachers, and students training in education intending to

become teachers. The three groups were given a series of teaching tasks such as lesson planning. In this particular task, participants were given information to provide in the planning task. The experienced group of teachers were more selective in using the information provided, relying on their own knowledge of what they could normally expect from students of the age and class size given. It was also found that experienced teachers could utilize their repertoire of how to set up and carry out learning activities, while this repertoire did not exist amongst the other two groups.

In a longitudinal study of stages of beginning teacher development in a field-based teacher program, Watzke (2003) found that candidates who completed their master's degree coursework had reduced concerns for classroom management at the beginning of their full-time teaching. Their concerns, however, increased for delivery of instruction as they were *immersed* in full-time teaching. It was also found that after a full year of teaching, strong concerns for professional development emerged.

Meister and Melnick (2003) studied first- and second-year teachers' concerns in four areas of teaching skills: classroom management, time management, communication with parents, and academic preparation. Findings indicated that newly-qualified teachers needed more direct experience in school settings and continued assistance in discipline, time management, and communication skills. Those teachers were less confident of their acquired knowledge and skills. Respondents believed that more training in pre-service preparation is needed.

To conclude, most of the research conducted in the area of teaching skills investigated either individual skills or a limited number of skills, but not all of them together. The reason for this could be attributed to time constraints, for this kind of research entails visiting a considerable number of teachers in schools, and using qualitative research tools such as interviews and participant classroom observations. Unlike the previous studies, the present study attempts to bridge the gap in considering all the essential teaching skills together, instead of studying one or two skills at a time, and in using qualitative research instruments such as classroom observations, instead of questionnaires.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The course of Practical Education is an essential component of the study plan/program offered to

students doing their B.A. in education at the University of Jordan. The researcher has been involved in supervising those student teachers who have joined the program over the last few years. Visiting, and meeting with, those student teachers doing the assignment at local schools, the researcher noted some irregularities in their classroom practices, such as planning and preparing for their lessons, instructional techniques, classroom management and assessment practices. When asked about the cause of such irregularities, student teachers answered by saying that they were carrying out what cooperating teachers usually instructed them to do. In other words, cooperating teachers were the student teachers' models in the field. The present study comes, as a result, to explore if such irregularities do occur with EFL established teachers, who guide and take charge of training student teachers in the field. Therefore, the study aims to investigate whether Jordanian English Language teachers (JELTs) are aware of, and do appropriately perform the essential teaching skills needed in classroom practices. More specifically, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What teaching skills do JELTs report as being essential in their teaching practices?
2. To what degree do JELTs use essential teaching skills in their actual practices?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in the ratings of JELTs' performance of essential teaching skills that can be ascribed to experience?

3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Participants

Sixty (60) Jordanian teachers teaching English as a foreign language in public and private schools located around the University of Jordan in Amman were subjects of the present study. These teachers were selected purposefully on a convenient ground: first because of the location of their schools, i.e. close to the university where the researcher works, second because they were cooperating teachers, working with our student teachers who joined schools for their practicum course. With respect to experience in teaching English, they were distributed in three groups: eighteen (18) had less than five years of experience, twenty-four (24) had experience between five to ten years and eighteen (18) had more than ten years of experience.

Instruments and Data Collection

Two data collection instruments were used to provide data for the present study: a *survey* in which participants in the study had to answer an open question: *what are the essential skills which you think teachers need in their teaching?* Accordingly, participants' responses were classified into nine effective teaching skills (Table 2). Participants had to write down all the skills they thought to be necessary for their classroom teaching. Beside using this survey to answer the first question of the study, the researcher benefited from it in two ways: first, in developing the second research tool: the scale used to explore teachers' performance on essential teaching skills, and second, in validating the findings of the second question of the study.

The second data collection instrument was a Scale of Teacher Performance Evaluation (STPE), which was used as a rating scale intended to explore the degree to which JELTs were able to perform effective teaching skills in their actual practices. The scale is a five-point scale (1 representing very poor, 2 poor, 3 satisfactory, 4 good, and 5 outstanding), developed by the researcher, basing most of its items on Kyriacou's (1998) sets of questions raised in his book on essential teaching skills. The scale in its final version comprised sixty-six (66) items, distributed in five main dimensions, representing essential teaching skills: lesson planning and lesson preparation (items 1-11), lesson presentation and lesson management (items 12-34), classroom climate and discipline (items 35-49), assessing student progress (items 50-60), and teacher reflection and self-evaluation (items 61-66).

The evaluation scale was validated by a jury of 5 judges (three university professors of curriculum and instruction and two professors of measurement and evaluation). They suggested combining and reducing the main dimensions from 7 to 5. They also suggested modifying and adding some items to the scale. The scale in its first versions consisted of 46 items, and in its final version 66 items.

The rating scale was piloted with 20 cooperative teachers. The internal consistency of the five dimensions of the scale (STPE) was estimated through using Cronbach Alpha coefficient. Table (1) shows the dimensions, number of items in each dimensions and Cronbach Alpha coefficients.

Two experienced teachers holding an M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) were trained to carry out the rating process. They visited

participant teachers in classes twice, observed their classroom practices and rated their performance against the evaluation scale provided. The data

collected were entered into the computer and analyzed by using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

Table (1)
Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each dimension of the evaluation scale.

No.	Dimension	No. of items	Reliability
1.	Lesson planning and preparation	12	0.82
2.	Lesson presentation and management	23	0.94
3.	Classroom climate and discipline	10	0.96
4.	Assessment of student progress	11	0.92
5.	Reflection and self-evaluation	6	0.89

Table (2)
Frequencies and percentages of the skills as reported by participant teachers.

Essential teaching skills as reported by respondents	Frequencies (N=60)	Percentages (%)
Lesson Presentation and Methodology	53	88.3
Lesson Planning	51	85
Motivation & Encouragement	50	83.3
Questioning	48	80
Assessing student achievement	46	76.6
Management	45	75
Discipline	45	75
Preparation of materials	40	66.6
Reflection and Self-evaluation	33	55

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study are based on the analysis of the data collected through the main research instruments: the survey and the scale of teacher performance evaluation, which were developed for the purpose of exploring the degree to which JELTs were aware of, and able to perform, essential teaching skills in their classrooms.

Findings Related to Question One

What teaching skills do JELTs report as being essential in their teaching practices?

As noted above, to explore whether JELTs were aware of the skills needed in the teaching profession, an open question was given to the participant teachers in the study. In the question, the researcher asked respondents to write down the necessary skills a teacher should possess to do his job of teaching properly.

Nine essential teaching skills were reported by the participants in the study to be essential in the teaching profession. Table (2) shows the participants' responses to

the question, arranged in a descending order.

As noted in Table (2) above, 75% or more of the participants reported the following to be essential in their teaching practices: lesson presentation and methods of teaching (88.3%), lesson planning (85%), motivation and encouragement (83.3%), questioning (80%), assessing student achievement (76.6%), management (75%), discipline (75%). This finding indicates that EFL teachers in Jordan appear to be aware of most of the essential skills needed in the instructional process. This could be interpreted by the supervisors' constant recommendations to the teachers in the field to pay attention to such skills in their practice. This is emphasized in forums and training courses held by the Ministry of Education in Jordan. Most of what the participating teachers reported in their answers to the question raised, regarding the skills needed in their teaching practices, appear to be consistent with the literature on effective teaching (Berliner, 1987; Cooper and McIntyre, 1996; Kyriacou, 1998; Meister and Melnick, 2003).

However, the preparation of teaching materials was

perceived by only 66.6% of the participants to be necessary in teaching. This may be attributed to the fact that most of our teachers are restricting themselves to the textbook; so, they do not bother themselves with preparing other teaching materials. This may be also ascribed to the Jordanian educational system which appears to ask teachers to stick to the books assigned to be finished in time. On the other hand, only 55% of the participating teachers emphasized reflection and self-evaluation as an essential teaching skill. This finding can be interpreted through the teachers' lack of awareness of the importance of such an essential skill in

teaching. Furthermore, the researcher could find out through asking a number of teachers doing their graduate courses at the University of Jordan that this dimension appears to be tolerated in both pre-service and in-service training courses.

Findings Related to Question Two

To what degree do JELTs use essential teaching skills in their actual classroom practices?

Table (3) shows the participant teachers' performance on the five major dimensions of essential teaching skills, as revealed through using the rating scale (STPE).

Table (3)
Means and standard deviations of EFL teachers performance according to the STPE.

Essential Teaching Skill	Means	Standard Deviations
Assessment of Student Progress	3.65	0.64
Classroom Climate and Discipline	3.63	0.77
Lesson Planning and Preparation	3.62	0.44
Lesson Presentation and Lesson Management	3.50	0.57
Reflection and Self-evaluation	3.47	0.71

As noted above, the scale used in rating the participant teachers' performance is a five-point scale (1-5), where 1 represents *very poor*, and 5 represents *outstanding*. As can be seen in the table above, the mean scores, achieved on the five dimensions of essential teaching skills by the teachers participating in the study, ranged between 3.47 and 3.65 out of 5.

It appears that the teachers' ratings lie in the category of "satisfactory", which ranges between 3.00 and 3.74*. However, one can notice that the participants did better on: assessment of student progress, classroom climate and lesson planning and preparation with mean scores of 3.65, 3.63 and 3.62, respectively, than on: lesson presentation and lesson management, and reflection and self-evaluation, whose mean scores were 3.50 and 3.47, respectively.

Such findings may mean that teachers have to work a little harder to reach at least the "good" category, which ranges between 3.75 and 4.49*. The strange thing about such findings is that teachers appear to be in need for reviewing their performance, especially with regard to the last two dimensions: lesson presentation and lesson management, and reflection and self-evaluation, which are essential teaching skills every teacher should develop. This *malfunction* in these two dimensions should be dealt with and attended to seriously throughout pre- and in-service training courses.

A quick look at the standard deviations in Table (3) indicates that the ratings of participants' performance were close and similar with respect to the dimensions of lesson planning and preparation and lesson presentation and lesson management, with standard deviations of 0.44 and 0.57, respectively. This is not the case in the rest of the dimensions, where standard deviations were higher, which means that a discrepancy in the ratings of teachers' performance did exist. This could be interpreted as follows: most of the training given to teachers both at the university and in the workplace focuses on lesson planning and preparation, and lesson presentation and lesson management. Teachers in such courses are trained on how to plan for their lessons and present them using different methods and techniques. And when supervisors visit teachers for annual appraisals in classrooms, they focus on lesson planning and lesson presentation. Supervisors, for example, ask teachers to show them their planning journals and check whether a plan follows a proper format and has all necessary elements such as objectives, procedures and evaluation.

Other skills seem to be tolerated and neglected by both teachers and supervisors. A little attention is given, for instance, to assessment practices and reflection. Teachers do not vary their assessment tasks to cover both formative and summative purposes. They do not use

various types and techniques of assessment. Their focus is on formal tests. Teachers' reflection and self-evaluation is also neglected. They rarely reflect upon and evaluate their current teaching practices.

Findings Related to Question Three

Are there any statistically significant differences in the ratings of JELTs' performance of the five essential teaching skills altogether (the five dimensions of the STPE) that can be ascribed to their experience?

A Multivariate-Analysis Of Variance (MANOVA) test was used to test if there were any statistically significant differences in the ratings of the participant

teachers' performance of essential teaching skills that can be ascribed to their level of experience. The test results indicated the existence of statistically significant differences (Wilks' Lambda equals 0.131 and P-value equal 0.000, which is less than alpha = 0.05) in the ratings of teachers' performance on the five dimensions altogether that can be attributed to the level of experience. An Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) followed the MANOVA to test each individual dimension separately, to determine if there are any statistically significant differences that can be attributed to experience. Table (4) shows the results of the ANOVA test on the five dimensions of the evaluation scale.

Table (4)
ANOVA test of the five dimensions of the rating scale (STPE).

Dimensions	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F-value	P-value
Lesson Planning and Preparation	9.96	2	4.98	24.85	0.000
Lesson Presentation and Lesson Management	6.58	2	3.29	23.49	0.000
Classroom Climate and Discipline	4.29	2	2.15	21.45	0.000
Assessment of Student Progress	4.34	2	2.17	29.62	0.000
Reflection and Self-evaluation	18.18	2	9.09	86.88	0.000

Table (5)
Post-hoc comparisons of lesson planning and lesson preparation with respect to experience.

Experience		Mean Differences (1-2)	Standard Errors	P-Value
(1)	(2)			
0-4 years	5-9 years	0.22	0.10	0.034*
0-4 years	More than 9 years	0.81	0.11	0.000*
5-9 years	More than 9 years	0.59	0.11	0.000*

* Significant at (alpha=0.05).

Table (4) shows that there are statistically significant differences in the ratings of participant teachers' performance on all the five dimensions of essential teaching skills (lesson planning and preparation, lesson presentation and lesson management, classroom climate and discipline, assessment of student progress, and reflection and self-evaluation) that can be attributed to the level of experience. The F-values were 24.85, 23.49, 21.45, 29.62, 86.88, respectively; all these values are statistically significant at alpha = 0.05 (p-value was 0.000 for all dimensions). To determine which level of experience contributed to the statistical difference in each dimension, post-hoc comparisons were carried out, using Tukey test. Table (5) shows the post-hoc comparisons of lesson planning and lesson preparation with respect to

participants' experience.

According to the post-hoc comparisons carried out, it is obvious that statistically significant differences (alpha = 0.05) exist among the different levels of experience. Having a look at Table (5), it can be noticed that the teachers with less experience perform better than those with more experience. This can be justified when we know that newly-qualified teachers usually attend to lesson planning. Their lesson plans are usually detailed. This finding is consistent with research on beginning teachers' instructional practices (Kyriacou, 1998; John, 1993).

Table (6) shows the post-hoc comparisons of lesson presentation and lesson management regarding participants' experience.

Table (6)
Post-hoc comparisons for lesson presentation and lesson management with respect to experience.

Experience		Mean Differences (1-2)	Standard Errors	P-Value
(1)	(2)			
0-4 years	5-9 years	-0.56	0.12	0.000*
0-4 years	More than 9 years	-0.75	0.12	0.000*
5-9	More than 9 years	-0.2	0.13	0.137

* Significant at (alpha=0.05).

As can be noted from Table (6) above, it appears that there is a statistically significant difference between the performance of teachers with 0-4 years and those with 5-9 years of experience. The same applies to the performance of teachers with 0-4 and those with more than 10 years. This could be interpreted to be logical when we know that the teachers who have longer experience can deal easily with the content and instructional techniques. They can also manage their lessons properly. However, this difference does not exist between the performance of teachers with 5-9 and those with more than 9 years, which supports the former finding. There seems to be no big difference in experience between these two groups of participant teachers, regarding lesson presentation and lesson management in particular.

Talking about classroom climate and discipline, we

notice that some statistically significant differences exist between the performance of teacher participants due to different levels of experience (between 0-4 years and 5-9 years, and between 0-4 and more than 9 years). But this difference is not found between the performance of teachers with 5-9 years and more than 9 years. Having a look at Table (7), it is noticed that the teachers with more experience appear to perform better on lesson presentation and lesson management than those with less experience. This finding supports Watzke (2003) and Meister and Melnick (2003) who found that more experienced teachers perform better classroom practices than teachers with less experience. Therefore, more pre-service and in-service training is needed.

Table (8) shows the post-hoc comparisons for teachers' assessment of student progress with respect to experience.

Table (7)
Post-hoc comparisons for classroom climate and discipline with respect to experience.

Experience		Mean Differences (1-2)	Standard Errors	P-Value
(1)	(2)			
0-4 years	5-9 years	-0.90	0.17	0.000*
0-4 years	More than 9 years	-1.12	0.18	0.000*
5-9	More than 9 years	-0.22	0.19	0.239

* Significant at (alpha= 0.05).

Table (8)
Post-hoc comparisons for teachers' assessment of student progress with respect to experience.

Experience		Mean Differences (1-2)	Standard Errors	P-Value
(1)	(2)			
0-4 years	5-9 years	-0.57	0.14	0.000*
0-4 years	More than 9 years	-0.98	0.15	0.000*
5-9	More than 9 years	-0.42	0.16	0.010*

* Significant at (alpha = 0.05).

With respect to the fourth essential teaching skill: assessing student progress, it is clear from Table (8) that there are statistically significant differences between the teachers' performance due to experience, i.e., the more the experience, the better the performance. The reason behind more experienced teachers becoming better in assessing their students' progress may lie in the ability

which such teachers have developed over the years. The more you involve yourself in assessing and evaluating student learning, the better assessor you become (Madsen, 1983).

Finally, Table (9) shows the post-hoc comparisons for the performance of teacher participants on the fifth essential teaching skill: reflection and self-evaluation.

Table (9)
Post-hoc comparisons for teacher reflection and self-evaluation with respect to experience.

Experience		Mean Differences (1-2)	Standard Errors	P-Value
(1)	(2)			
0-4 years	5-9 years	0.50	0.11	0.000*
0-4 years	More than 9 years	1.77	0.12	0.000*
5-9	More than 9 years	1.27	0.13	0.000*

* Significant at (alpha = 0.05).

Statistically significant differences seem to exist between the different levels of experience. Looking at Table (9), it can be noticed that the teachers with less experience perform better than those with more experience. The interpretation of such a finding may refer to the fact that, unlike experienced teachers who believe that their expertise helps them minimize teaching problems, beginning teachers usually self-evaluate themselves after they have taught. They tend to reflect upon their classroom practices such as instructional techniques, classroom climate and assessment methods (Pollard, 1997; Smith, 1990).

In conclusion, we can say that Jordanian teachers of English as a foreign language appear to be cognizant of the importance of teaching skills such as lesson planning, lesson presentation, classroom management and assessment, and they feel such skills are essential in classroom practices. However, when it comes to implementation, Jordanian EFL teachers seem to neglect such essential skills in their teaching practices. Further, the results of ANCOVA showed statistically significant differences that could be ascribed to the participant teachers' educational experience. The results of the post-hoc comparisons showed that while teachers with long experience performed better on the three essential teaching skills: lesson presentation and lesson management, classroom climate and discipline, assessing student progress; teachers with short experience performed better on the two skills: lesson planning and lesson preparation, and teacher reflection and self-evaluation.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, it is recommended that:

Pre-service training courses on such effective teaching skills should be considered, and become an essential component of the university training program. University training at the present time lacks emphasis on the significance of the teaching skills mentioned above. For example, little is given to the students in the departments of English about how to plan for a unit or a lesson. They are not also given a single course on methodology or assessment, to mention nothing about practical education which may help student teachers to cope with the teaching profession. In departments of Curriculum and Instruction, students may be given some courses on methodology, but such courses are limited and they concentrate more on theory, not practice.

In-service training courses should also be held. In such courses, teachers have to be trained on how to plan for lessons, how to present a lesson using adequate techniques, how to assess their students' progress using formal, informal, formative and summary evaluation methods, and how to reflect upon what to teach in classroom.

Teachers themselves should work harder, grow and professionally develop themselves through reading recent books and research articles on methodology and related subjects. They should also be encouraged and funded to join forums and participate in symposia and conferences locally, nationally and internationally. Finally, the Internet has become an easy and convenient resource, so

teachers are recommended to utilize it.

Further research studies should be conducted in this area that may consider the impact of other variables such

as teachers' academic and professional qualifications and in-service training on teachers' awareness and performance of essential teaching skills.

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