

An Investigation into Saudi Arabian Final-year Student Teachers' Competency to Teach English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate final-year English major Saudi student teachers' competency to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) in schools after they graduate. There were two research objectives: identifying final-year student teachers' actual preparedness to teach EFL;

exploring their perceptions of preparedness to teach EFL after graduation. An interpretive approach was employed to explore their actual preparedness to teach English as evidenced in established metrics such as Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) in relation to their perceptions of competency. This qualitative process was complimented by focus group discussions to explore student perceptions of their ability to teach EFL upon graduation. A total of 26 final-year student teachers were chosen to represent the sample of this study. All student teachers completed the TKT, from which six candidates were selected for the focus group discussions. The results of the TKT revealed that most of the student teachers fall into Band 2 (as per the established Band Descriptors of the TKT), which means that their teaching knowledge is satisfactory. The focus group discussions further indicated that most participants felt that the B.A. programme only partially prepared them to teach English upon graduation. Student teachers' views varied regarding their competency to teach the four language skills with most student teachers perceiving themselves as not prepared to start EFL teaching upon graduation. The broader implications of these findings suggest that a curriculum review and pedagogical best practice needs to be implemented in the BA programme at the university which is intended to produce competent EFL teachers.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), English Language Program, and Teacher Competency

1. Introduction

Students who want to study English Language and Translation at the university level in Saudi Arabia must study English literature, translation, grammar, reading, writing, and speaking as key modules. It takes these students four years to graduate. After these students graduate, they can work either as interpreters, translators, or as EFL teachers. However, they are expected to be competent English language users who are at least at the level of near-native speakers of English to be able to teach English as a foreign or a second language at schools if they choose to work in the teaching sector. However, researchers such as Al-Saadat1985; Zafer 2002; Al-Hazmi 2003; Al-Osaimi 2014; Al-Seghayer 2011 and 2014; Al-Nasser 2015; Fareh 2010; Alhaisoni 2013; Mitchell and Alfuraih 2017; and Alshumaimeri and Almohaisen 2017, seem to concur that graduates of the current English Language and preparation programmes are not proficient users of English nor are they near-native speakers of the language. These graduates also do not have sufficient teaching skills to enable them to start teaching English as a foreign language after they graduate. In addition, there is consensus among most researchers in the EFL Saudi context that teacher preparation programmes in Saudi Arabia are not effective enough to produce well-prepared EFL teachers.

2. Background

In Saudi Arabia, colleges of Arts and Colleges of Education are the primary providers of teacher education or preparation programmes. Colleges of Arts mainly provide English

Language and Translation programmes in the form of a four-year B.A. degree. Colleges of Education used to provide English Language and Education programmes in the form of a four-year B.A. degree, but nowadays, these colleges of education only offer TESOL MAs and diplomas via the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Methods. Students in the English Language and Translation programmes go through four years of eight semesters. Graduates of these programmes are supposed to teach English as a foreign language after their graduation, or they can work as translators or interpreters. However, there are some differences between graduates of colleges of arts and graduates of colleges of education. For example, year-four students at the colleges of education were allowed to practice teaching (through a practicum) during the last semester of their four-year programme. However, the current teacher preparation programmes do not provide their students with a chance to practice teaching throughout their years of study. The content and graduates of these programmes are under scrutiny and criticism. Zahfer (2002) maintains that EFL programmes share a common ground as they are under one big umbrella, which is the main domain or paradigm that all stakeholders (EFL teachers, college professors and even the whole EFL Saudi community) stick to. This shared paradigm concerns what EFL teachers should be taught in their programmes. He states the problem of the EFL teacher preparation programmes as follows:

Despite the lengthy history of teaching English in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there are no publicly published documents or available publications in relation to any national TEFL standards that may act as a guideline for existing EFL teacher preparation programs. (p. 4)

Subsequently, throughout the Saudi universities, each EFL teacher preparation programme (whether in the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Education) is designed according to its own standards, course specifications, and syllabi according to the perspectives of the programme designers or staff members and the needs analysis they perceive to be proper. In sum, this study is addressed to all the stakeholders in the Saudi EFL context. Zafer (2002: p. 6) maintains that:

EFL pre-service teacher education programmes in the KSA should initiate and develop knowledge, abilities, and attitudes in the teacher to enable him to act as a scholar, decision-maker, and an agent of EFL curriculum change.

3. Literature Review

Graduates of the English language and translation programmes at Saudi universities are recruited and hired as EFL teachers as soon as they graduate. Practitioner experience suggests that, at the time of their graduation, these graduates are not adequately qualified to teach English as a foreign language, nor are they competent English language users. Al-Hazmi (2017, 132) supports this point of view and says that "Anecdotal evidence suggests that a great deal

of EFL teachers, especially at the pre-university level, find difficulty in using English effectively in classroom tasks (e.g., lecturing, giving instructions, or explanations)." He attributes these shortcomings to their "English language education programmes" (2017, 131) and the manner in which they are designed. Even after graduating from their respective colleges, "many teachers lack essential linguistic and pedagogic skills" (Zaid 2003; Al-Hazmi 2003, Al Gublan 2005 as cited in Al-Hazmi 2017, 138). The problem of a lack of preparation may also be ascribed to their preparation at the high school stage. For example, Abdellah (2013, 1) said that "Saudi English majors' level in reading achievement has been reported to be of low quality." He attributes this incompetence in reading to the few items of reading material they read at their secondary school. Al-Seghayer (2011) also agrees with these researchers and confirms that many EFL Saudi teachers are not competent professionally and linguistically. They do not have the required teaching methodology to enable them to teach EFL after graduation. He also contends that these EFL teachers have partial experience in designing educational and relevant materials and ways of applying them. This notion of the weak English language programmes and their failure is also confirmed by Fareh (2010, 1) who contends that "although tremendous efforts have been exerted to improve the teaching-learning process of English, EFL programmes still fail to deliver as expected, and the EFL learners' proficiency in English remains inadequate and below expectation." He also sums up the main challenge of the EFL programmes and those who graduate from such programmes as follows:

Although many of these teachers are B.A. degree holders, most of them have no teaching certificates that qualify them for teaching. Most of them did not take any course in teaching English as foreign language. This may account for the adoption of the Grammar Translation method by most of them. A considerable percentage of the class time is run in Arabic. Such a practice minimises the time of exposure to English and thus the learning outcomes will not be adequately accomplished. (p. 3)

Al-Hazmi (2003) also agrees with Al-Seghayer that studying only one course - which is still true up to this time - of EFL teaching methods is not enough for preparing students for the English major. Also, for him, these English major students study courses like educational psychology, evaluation, school administration, and curriculum courses in Arabic; however, these courses do not meet the expected EFL teaching standards:

Students take only one course on EFL teaching methodology, which is not enough for the diverse needs of EFL teachers. Like novice teachers in other faculties, they take, in Arabic, courses such as educational psychology, evaluation, school administration, and curriculum studies. None of these courses meets the needs of would-be EFL teachers. (p. 341-342)

Furthermore, Melibari (2016) maintains that EFL education in Saudi Arabia suffers from

several problems, such as low standards and an inclination towards prescriptive and authoritarian teaching concepts. Besides, she contends that "there is no cohesive national strategy for EFL teacher training and education, and little emphasis on professional development opportunities for teachers within the EFL field" (p. 3). Zafer (2002) suggested that there should have been an agreement among the stakeholders – the college professors responsible for the preparation and content of EFL programmes and the teachers themselves – to develop the Saudi teacher preparation programmes. He also proposed that such an agreement should have been submitted to the Ministry of Education as a proposal for the suggested development. He emphasised the areas for development, such as "TEFL, teacher education, research on TESL/TEFL teacher preparation, content and linguistic competence of ESL/EFL teacher preparation courses, language teaching, practicum and ESL/EFL teaching methods, Guidelines and ESL/EFL programme components and models, and teachers' input" (p. 129). He confirms his suggestions regarding the EFL preparation programmes as follows:

Based on the review of literature in the study, it is a must to look into EFL teacher preparation programmes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with great care in relation to the areas mentioned earlier in order to develop them to become more effective and meet the developmental needs of the country (p. 129)

The general consensus is that these teacher education programmes do not prepare English language teachers well. They lack methods of teaching English as a foreign language and need to optimise exposure to the target language. Also, most graduates of such teacher education programmes tend to use traditional teaching methods like the archaic grammar-translation method through which these teachers use Arabic as the medium of instruction although they teach English as a foreign language as the target language.

This study's four-year teacher education programme focuses mostly on literary and translation courses rather than on language teaching and its acquisition. These problems warrant further investigation and inquiry. Consequently, this study is set to investigate these graduates' perceptions of preparedness in relation to their actual preparedness to teach English (as assuaged by the TKT) as a foreign language in schools upon graduation.

4. Statement of the Problem

Based on the arguments presented in the background and the literature review, prospective teachers' competency necessitates further investigation. This is particularly so as these students begin teaching without sufficient observation of experienced teachers teaching and little insight into EFL pedagogy as can be evidenced from their training at university. Naturally, these student teachers perceive their competency to teach English based on what they studied during their four-year programme. However, their actual preparedness and competency have to be decided through a reliable test that measures their proficiency in teaching. Accordingly,

two tools were used to assess to what extent these would-be teachers can be competent when they start teaching. The first tool was the TKT, and the second was the focus group discussions.

5. Research Questions

This study looked into two research questions as follows:

- A. What are the perceptions of student teachers about their competency to teach English after graduation?
- B. What is the level of English language competence and teaching ability of student teachers (as measured in the TKT) who graduate from a Saudi Arabian University?

6. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method approach that includes quantitative and qualitative methods with a descriptive research design. Tashakkori & Creswell (2007) define mixed methods as "research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry" (p. 4). The process involved two phases: (a) the Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) and (b) the focus group discussions. These two phases were used to assess student teachers' actual competence in teaching and their perceptions of preparedness to teach English after graduation. After these would-be teachers completed the TKT and were shown their scores, 6 of them (out of 26) were chosen for the focus group discussions.


7. Sample

The selection of the participants in this study was made through 'random sampling', which means that the entire population or all participants have an equal chance of being chosen or selected. The main participants were chosen from the English Language and Translation Department in a Saudi university, wherein the study was conducted. The researcher ensured that adequate sample size was selected. The student participants were final-year students (student teachers) who were about to complete level four (year four) and graduate. In this case study, the number of student participants included 26 final-year student teachers who undertook the TKT, and only six were interviewed through the focus group discussions. Furthermore, these student participants were all males because the research was conducted on an all-male campus with a male researcher, as per Saudi Arabian laws. This means that male researchers can only do their studies with male subjects on their campuses as per the laws of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

8. Research

a) Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT)

Cambridge English Language Assessment Department developed the TKT. The exam consists of three modules. Each module contains 80 MCQ and matching questions. The duration of each module is 1 hour and 20 minutes. Every module assesses an aspect of English language learning and teaching. For example, Module 1 tests a candidate's knowledge of the language itself and their language learning and teaching background. In detail, it tests the candidates' ability to identify terms, concepts, and factors underpinning the learning and teaching of English. Module 1 test takers are assessed according to the table below (adapted from the Cambridge ESOL Band Descriptors). There are four band descriptors according to which the test taker is assessed. For example, if a test taker obtains a score out of 80, this score is compared to one of the four band descriptors.



Cambridge Assessment English	
Module 1: Language systems and background to language learning and teaching	
Band 4	The candidate demonstrates comprehensive and accurate knowledge of all areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with the full range of concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.
Band 3	The candidate generally demonstrates comprehensive and accurate knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with most of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is generally able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.
Band 2	The candidate demonstrates basic knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with some of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations, and occasionally to unfamiliar ones.
Band 1	The candidate demonstrates restricted knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with a limited range of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations only.

Figure 1: TKT Band Descriptors for Module One (Cambridge Assessment English, 2021)

In the TKT, there is no Pass or Fail results. Candidates receive their marks in the form of bands from 1 to 4. While Band 4, which represents wide-ranging knowledge of areas on the TKT, is the highest, Band 1, which means limited knowledge of the TKT content, is the lowest. Band

3 demonstrates a broad and in-depth knowledge of areas of the TKT. Band 2 shows basic knowledge like language systems and language learning and teaching background. The table below shows the equivalent range of marks compared to the four bands. For example, if a candidate obtains 10 out of 80 in Module 1, they will be awarded a Band 1 certificate. Also, if another candidate receives 63 out of 80, they will be awarded a Band 3 certificate.

TKT Module 1	Range of marks out of 80
Band 1	0 -15
Band 2	16 -39
Band 3	40 - 67
Band 4	68 - 80

Table 1: TKT Bands and Range of marks (adapted from Lauran & Zakaria, 2013: p. 65)

b) Focus group discussions

Bell (2010: p. 165) maintains that the objective of focus groups is to "focus discussion on a particular issue." Focus group discussions are considered to be another form of typical interviews. Still, they are better than traditional one-on-one interviews as they are "time-efficient", and they depend on "the group interactions" (Salkind 2010, 500). Mcleod (2014) maintains that focus groups happen when participants are interviewed together. They also believe that the interviewer's role is to "make sure the group interact with each other and do not drift off topic." (p. 3) The focus groups were conducted with two student participant groups (student teachers or would-be teachers) from the English Language and Translation Department at the research site. The first focus group included three student participants - from those who took the TKT. Additionally, the second focus group discussion included four student participants (one of them only attended without participation) from those who took the TKT. Focus group discussions are used to collect qualitative data by using a small number of subjects – who are usually between seven and ten – to have a rational discourse with one another on a specific topic with the help of the researcher (Leung and Savithri 2009; Silverman 2014). The purpose of focus group discussions is to collect data from subjects with the same qualities and who are expected to share their views, perspectives, experiences, and frames of references, which in turn will help the researcher to understand better what these participants feel and think about that topic or issue (Krueger and Casey 2015). Focus group discussions are built on a set of questions and prompts that are usually supported by "stimulus material" that helps facilitate the rational discourse, and that help expand and to elucidate data in the other methods used (Silverman 2014, 206; Flick 2014, 199). For this study, the stimulus material was represented in the TKT that was taken by participants ahead of the focus group discussions. Those focus group discussions were conducted through open-ended questions and stimuli that helped create an atmosphere of informality which assisted participants to engage in verbal communication (rational discourse) and to share their interpretations and

experiences. The researcher's role – during the focus group discussions – was as a facilitator who only asked the questions and gave the prompts (Guillemin 2004; Leung and Savithri 2009; Flick 2014).

9. Results

9.1 TKT Results

Only module 1 of the TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) was given to the student participants of this study. This module is made up of 80 MCQ items that have to be answered in 80 minutes, a minute for each question. Participants are to mark their answers on the answer sheet provided using a pencil or a pen as the test is marked manually. The following table represents the participants' scores after they sat for the test. The table presents the participants' pseudonyms, numbers, scores out of 80, and percentages representing their scores. The table also shows the highest mark (maximum), the lowest mark (minimum), and the average mark or score.

Student no.	Mark out of 80	Percentage %
S1	46	57.5
S2	34	42.5
S3	9	11.25
S4	30	37.5
S5	32	40
S6	33	41.25
S7	42	52.5
S8	43	53.75
S9	35	43.75
S10	62	77.5
S11	27	33.75
S12	38	47.5
S13	50	62.5
S14	63	78.75
S15	58	72.5
S16	27	33.75
S17	54	67.5
S18	36	45
S19	25	31.25
S20	41	51.25
S21	54	67.5
S22	30	37.5
S23	27	33.75
S24	40	50
S25	59	73.75
S26	35	43.75

Minimum	9	11.25
Maximum	63	78.75
Average	39.6	49.2

Table 2: Student teachers' TKT scores and their percentages

Descriptive Statistics:

Participants' results were computed using descriptive statistics, and hereunder is the figure showing the frequency table, the Histogram, and the Frequency Diagram of the Histogram. The following charts show that 26 participants (Total number of scores) wrote the TKT. While the Mean is 39.61538, the Standard Deviation is 13.18811. Also, the lowest score is 9 out of 80; however, the highest score is 63 out of 80. The number of classes in this Histogram is 5, and the most prominent class is 33-44 as 10 participants fall into this category. Class 2 involves seven respondents whose scores range between 21 and 32.

Frequency Table	
Class	Count
9-20	1
21-32	7
33-44	10
45-56	4
57-68	4

Your Histogram	
Mean	39.61538
Standard Deviation (s)	13.18811
Skewness	0.07773
Kurtosis	-0.1525
Lowest Score	9
Highest Score	63
Distribution Range	54
Total Number of Scores	26
Number of Distinct Scores	21
Lowest Class Value	9
Highest Class Value	68
Number of Classes	5
Class Range	12

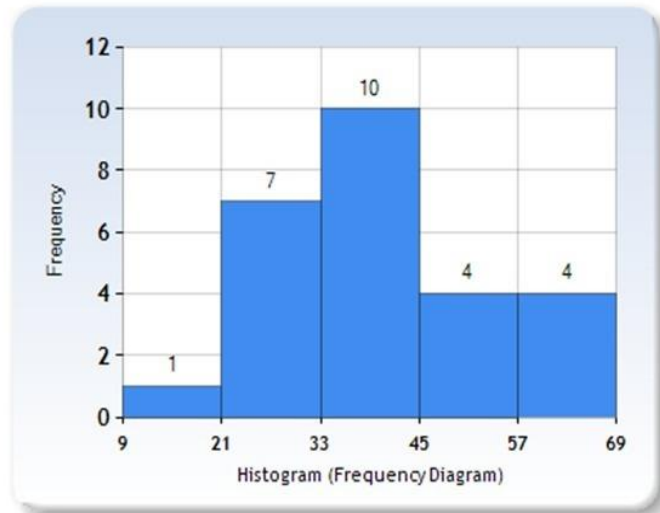


Figure 2: Student teachers' TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) scores computed using SPSS

9.2 Focus Group Discussions Results

Student teachers were asked three questions during the focus group discussions. They gave their responses as follows:

- 1. What is your opinion about the Bachelor of Arts programme? Probe: Has it prepared you enough for teaching English next year? What makes you say that?**

Most participants maintained that the B.A. programme partially prepared them to teach

English after they had graduated. None of them said that the B.A. programme thoroughly equipped them to teach English except for Student 1 FG1, who at the beginning, was confident that the B.A. programme helped and prepared him enough to be a teacher after he graduates. He attributed this to the courses he studied. Also, he was a passionate teacher by nature, but he had reservations regarding the modules in the B.A. programme.

Yes, it help. It helped me a lot. Three courses for grammar. Three courses of writing three courses Listening and speaking it does help yeah with the basic teaching basics basic topics conjunctions vocabs grammar present past. Yeah, but for me, I am passionate teacher, so this one does not satisfy me.

However, he changed his view later in the discussion. Student 2 FG1 agreed with Student 1 FG1 that the B.A. programme prepared him to be a good teacher when he graduated. He affirmed that they had studied many skills that would enable them to teach at the High School, but not at the University because he couldn't teach phonetics or literature yet, *"Yeah we took a lot of skills lecture and it. I think we are prepared to teaching but not like phonetics and literature. to teach in a high school or secondary school. It's it will be okay but not in the University."* At that point, Student 1 FG1 interrupted and supported his view, which he stated at the beginning, that he was ready for teaching; however, he had to improve his teaching techniques because the new generation of students who want to learn English are thirsty for learning it. He also stated that there were people who wanted to learn English as they were used to watching movies, but they did not understand what was going on because they lacked the language that would enable them to understand. That is why these families wanted to learn English as well.

I think I am ready for teaching, but I should improve myself in the techniques of teaching because there is a new generation who is thirsty for being about knowing the English know the knowledge. Now all people in every house you steps in. You watch the family watch an English movie. But the people don't understand. What is that? Just maybe from the moves and the actions that they do it. Maybe they understand what they do. But. They want to know English and know other people.

Likewise, Student 3 FG2 agreed with the other participants' views. He similarly declares that the B.A. programme had prepared them to teach to some extent. However, it had not prepared them sufficiently to teach English after graduation as they still missed out on the practical part (practicum) that could have enabled them to teach well. He also said that they couldn't teach children some subjects (like comparative literature) that they studied during the four years. He contended that these subjects were neither beneficial for their students nor for their teaching. He said:

It has prepared us in some aspects, but we lacked some. But we lacked some certain

aspects like the practical one and to be honest with you Sir we have taken some subjects that it is impossible for us to teach to children. We have taken some certain subjects without naming anything that we see no benefit in them in our field or like in teaching, and I think like comparative lit is not like literature for example.

2. Do you think that you are prepared to teach these language aspects (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening) at least the same way you learnt them? Why? Why not?

Student 1 FG1 thought that teaching any of the skills mentioned above depended on the course's level. However, he did not believe his B.A. was an adequate qualification for him to teach these skills. He thought that he had to have a PhD to be able to teach such skills.

First of all, it depends on the level of the course. And second of all, as a Bachelor, I don't think it's enough. Because I don't think you can teach the students further understandings through reading by Bachelor of English language. I think it has to do with PhD at least with this very basic skills.

In opposition to what Student 1 FG1 believed, Student 2 FG1 thought that the B.A. was a sufficient qualification for him to teach the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking): "*four skills and after you finish the University I think it's enough.*" He was also sure that it was easy to teach these skills, "*Yeah at least for foreign people. Like herein, Saudi Arabia they speak out of it. You will not find it hard to teach them.*" Student 3 FG1 was optimistic as he was confident that the B.A. was an adequate qualification for him to start teaching if he were prepared enough and knew the correct teaching techniques. He said:

I think it would be enough cause if you was prepared and know all of this things perfectly and you able to get the techniques of how you study how you'll teach it. You will be able to teach the other the next generation.

Student 2 FG2 presented a different viewpoint as he thought students had different abilities. For him, he thought he would be good at teaching listening and speaking because he was influenced by his teacher Dr. Y. who had a high impact on him and who taught him how to use his tongue to communicate faster. He said:

I think in every night, and every student have some weak skills and some powerful one. I think I will be good at listening and speaking cause of the teacher because of the doctor Y.. he influenced me so much, and he has a great effect on me, and he make him somehow my tongue can go faster.

3. Use ONE word to express how you feel about yourself as a teacher of English at this point. Follow-up questions: Why did you choose this word? What does this word suggest about your opinion of your preparedness to teach English next year?

While Student 1 FG1 described himself as a qualified teacher, Student 2 FG1 considered himself a very good teacher. However, Student 3 FG1 saw himself as less than average. The researcher asked him, *"So you are not qualified enough?"*, and he replies, *"not qualified. Not qualify enough. But if you want to be a teacher, you should get the techniques first."* He insisted on getting the teaching techniques or methods before he started teaching. Student 1 FG1 explained the word 'qualified' as follows:

You know how to teach, but you are not as the idiom say nobody's perfect. So, you know how to teach you have background, but still you need to learn more. So, you might learn new teaching techniques. You might be able to understand what the students want to say, but he could not say. And this is important for. For the teacher for the qualified teacher.

When the researcher wanted to make sure that Student 1 FG1 meant what he had said, he asked, *"Yeah. So, you mean that you are not prepared 100 per cent, Student 1 FG1 replied, "Exactly."* This meant that he still insisted that he was not qualified enough to start teaching after his graduation. Student 2 FG1 still insisted that he would be a perfect teacher for adults as he said: *"Yeah I'm very good for adults," because he was not suitable for young children yet as he said: "No I'm not for a very young child."* He thought adults can understand him more than young children, and he was confident that he had the right skills for teaching adults. He continued:

And I think because they are begin to understand you and begin to be a man you can speak with then this point can and understand them and I have a good knowledge about as I said skills and I think I'm very good with it.

When Student 3 FG1 was asked again why he thought that he was not yet prepared to start teaching, he clarified his stance and said, *"You should get the methods first. The techniques. And know how to teach children and how they improve their English."* He also insisted that all year-four students are not 100 per cent prepared to start teaching when they graduated as he says: *"Yes, of course. Yeah. Nobody is prepared 100 per cent."* Student 1 FG1 supported his stance and said, *"There is a saying from Einstein if I'm not mistaken. If you could not explain it to a 6-year-old child, you haven't understand anything."*

The participants summarised their abilities (in one word) to teach as follows:

- Student 1 FG2, *"I think the one word would be bad."* He thought he would be a bad teacher and *"not worthy or not prepared."*
- Student 2 FG2 thought that he would be nervous, *"I think I'm gonna be nervous in at least in the first two months or three months of teaching. I think I'll be nervous."*
- Student 3 FG2 thought that he would be *"confused because of the lack of practicality and in our major and we haven't like taught any students at all."*

10. Discussion

This study investigated student teachers' competence to teach English in schools after graduation. Data was gathered through TKT and focus group discussions. The following discussion interprets and discusses the study's findings in line with the research questions.

10.1 Year-four Student Teachers' Teaching Competency as Assessed by the TKT

Student teachers' actual teaching knowledge and ability were measured through their TKT scores. It is stipulated by Cambridge Assessment that their research shows that for a candidate to achieve TKT Band 3, she/he must get a score of at least 45-50 out of 80. As per the results of the student teachers at the TKT, most of them fall into Band 2, which is less than 45 out of 80, as shown in the table below:

Student no.	Mark out of 80	Band
S3	9	Band 1
S19	25	Band 2
S11	27	Band 2
S16	27	Band 2
S23	27	Band 2
S4	30	Band 2
S22	30	Band 2
S5	32	Band 2
S6	33	Band 2
S2	34	Band 2
S9	35	Band 2
S26	35	Band 2
S18	36	Band 2
S12	38	Band 2
S24	40	Band 2

S20	41	Band 2
S7	42	Band 2
S8	43	Band 2
S1	46	Band 3
S13	50	Band 3
S17	54	Band 3
S21	54	Band 3
S15	58	Band 3
S25	59	Band 3
S10	62	Band 3
S14	63	Band 3

Table 3: Student Teachers' TKT scores compared to the four Bands

The table above also shows that only one student (3.85%) scored 9 out of 80, which falls into Band 1. While 17 students (65.38%) fall into Band 2, only eight (30.77%) fall into Band 3. None of these student teachers could reach Band 4.

TKT Band Descriptors			
	Module 1: Language systems and background to language learning and teaching	Module 2: Lesson planning and use of resources	Module 3: Managing the teaching and learning process
Band 4	The candidate demonstrates comprehensive and accurate knowledge of all areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with the full range of concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.	The candidate demonstrates comprehensive and extensive knowledge of all areas on the TKT Module 2 syllabus, i.e., lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching. He/she shows familiarity with the full range of concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 2, which relate to general practice in lesson planning and materials use, reasons for carrying out particular activities in the classroom, and for using particular resources and materials. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.	The candidate demonstrates comprehensive and extensive knowledge of all areas on the TKT Module 3 syllabus, i.e., managing the teaching and learning process. He/she shows familiarity with the full range of concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 3, which relate to teachers' and learners' language in the classroom and options available for classroom management in order to promote learning. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.
Band 3	The candidate generally demonstrates comprehensive and accurate knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with most of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is generally able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.	The candidate generally demonstrates comprehensive and extensive knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 2 syllabus, i.e., lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching. He/she shows familiarity with most of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 2, which relate to general practice in lesson planning and materials use, reasons for carrying out particular activities in the classroom, and for using particular resources and materials. The candidate is generally able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.	The candidate generally demonstrates comprehensive and extensive knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 3 syllabus, i.e., managing the teaching and learning process. He/she shows familiarity with most of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 3, which relate to teachers' and learners' language in the classroom and options available for classroom management in order to promote learning. The candidate is generally able to relate existing knowledge to both familiar and unfamiliar classroom situations.
Band 2	The candidate demonstrates basic knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with some of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations, and occasionally to unfamiliar ones.	The candidate demonstrates basic knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 2 syllabus, i.e., lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching. He/she shows familiarity with some of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 2, which relate to general practice in lesson planning and materials use, reasons for carrying out particular activities in the classroom, and for using particular resources and materials. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations, and occasionally to unfamiliar ones.	The candidate demonstrates basic knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 3 syllabus, i.e., managing the teaching and learning process. He/she shows familiarity with some of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 3, which relate to teachers' and learners' language in the classroom and options available for classroom management in order to promote learning. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations, and occasionally to unfamiliar ones.
Band 1	The candidate demonstrates restricted knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 1 syllabus, i.e., language systems and background to language learning and teaching. He/she shows familiarity with a limited range of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 1, which relate to describing language and language skills, factors in the language learning process and the range of methods, tasks and activities available to the language teacher. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations only.	The candidate demonstrates restricted knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 2 syllabus, i.e., lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching. He/she shows familiarity with a limited range of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 2, which relate to general practice in lesson planning and materials use, reasons for carrying out particular activities in the classroom, and for using particular resources and materials. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations only.	The candidate demonstrates restricted knowledge of areas on the TKT Module 3 syllabus, i.e., managing the teaching and learning process. He/she shows familiarity with a limited range of the concepts, terminology, practices and processes tested in TKT Module 3, which relate to teachers' and learners' language in the classroom and options available for classroom management in order to promote learning. The candidate is able to relate existing knowledge to familiar classroom situations only.

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Figure 3: TKT Band Descriptors (Cambridge Assessment English, 2021)

Student teachers only sat for Module 1, which assessed their knowledge of the language systems and their language learning and teaching background. As per the Cambridge Assessment TKT Band Descriptors for Module 1, as shown in the figure above, about 70 per cent of student teachers fall into Band 2, which shows that candidates show basic knowledge of language systems and background to language learning and teaching. This means that this basic knowledge is insufficient for these year-four student teachers to start teaching after graduation. They need further training courses and practical experience, which is not available as part of the English Language Programme. About 30% of student teachers fall into Band 3, which describes how a candidate generally demonstrates comprehensive and accurate knowledge of language systems and background to language learning and teaching, as shown in figure 3.

As per the Cambridge Teaching Framework (compared to the TKT Bands) 2018, about 70 per cent of year-four student teachers are 'Foundation and Developing' teachers, as per the figure below. A Foundation and Developing teacher can "provide accurate examples of language points taught at A1 and A2 levels" (p. 1). They can also "use basic classroom language which is mostly accurate" (p. 1). Also, a Foundation and Developing teacher can "provide accurate examples of language points taught at A1, A2 and B1 levels" (p. 1). They can "use classroom language which is mostly accurate" (p. 1). However, if these student teachers' levels range between A1 and B1, does this mean they can teach these levels? In other words, if a student-teacher is at A2 Level as per the CEFR, will they be able to teach this level to their students? Only a few of these student teachers would fall into the proficient teacher criteria. None of these year-four student teachers would be seen as an expert in teaching as per the criteria below.

Cambridge English Teaching Framework – at the heart of professional development

We developed the Cambridge English Teaching Framework: to help teachers identify where they are in their professional career to help teachers and their employers think about where they want to go next and identify development activities to get there.

Stages	Foundation	Developing	Proficient	Expert
Learning and the learner	Has a basic understanding of some language-learning concepts. Demonstrates a little of this understanding when planning and teaching.	Has a reasonable understanding of many language-learning concepts. Demonstrates some of this understanding when planning and teaching.	Has a good understanding of many language-learning concepts. Frequently demonstrates this understanding when planning and teaching.	Has a sophisticated understanding of language-learning concepts. Consistently demonstrates this understanding when planning and teaching.
Teaching, learning and assessment	Has a basic understanding of some key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver simple lessons with a basic awareness of learners' needs, using core teaching techniques. Can use available tests and basic assessment procedures to support and promote learning.	Has a reasonable understanding of many key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver lessons with some awareness of learners' needs, using a number of different teaching techniques. Can design simple tests and use some assessment procedures to support and promote learning.	Has a good understanding of key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver detailed lessons with good awareness of learners' needs, using a wide range of teaching techniques. Can design effective tests and use a range of assessment procedures to support and promote learning.	Has a sophisticated understanding of key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver detailed and sophisticated lessons with a thorough understanding of learners' needs, using a comprehensive range of teaching techniques. Can design a range of effective tests and use individualised assessment procedures consistently to support and promote learning.
Language ability	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1 and A2 levels. Uses basic classroom language which is mostly accurate.	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1, A2 and B1 levels. Uses classroom language which is mostly accurate.	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1, A2, B1 and B2 levels. Uses classroom language which is consistently accurate throughout the lesson.	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1–C2 levels. Uses a wide range of classroom language which is consistently accurate throughout the lesson.
Language knowledge and awareness	Is aware of some key terms for describing language. Can answer simple learner questions with the help of reference materials.	Has reasonable knowledge of many key terms for describing language. Can answer most learner questions with the help of reference materials.	Has good knowledge of key terms for describing language. Can answer most learner questions with minimal use of reference materials.	Has sophisticated knowledge of key terms for describing language. Can answer most learner questions in detail with minimal use of reference materials.
Professional development and values	Can reflect on a lesson with guidance and learn from feedback. Requires guidance in self-assessing own needs.	Can reflect on a lesson without guidance and respond positively to feedback. Can self-assess own needs and identify some areas for improvement.	Can reflect critically and actively seeks feedback. Can identify own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, and can support other teachers.	Consistently reflects critically, observes other colleagues and is highly committed to professional development. Is highly aware of own strengths and weaknesses, and actively supports the development of other teachers.

Figure 4: Cambridge English Teaching Framework – at the heart of professional development

(2018: p. 1)

To sum up, student teachers' actual teaching competence has been judged and assessed through more practical and authentic tools (the TKT, the CEFR, and the Cambridge Teaching Framework). This kind of assessment gives a more precise picture of the actual preparedness of the student teachers to teach English after graduation. Although some student teachers' teaching knowledge seems satisfactory for them to start teaching (as per their TKT scores), they still need a practical component through which they can shadow EFL experts teaching, teach some classes and receive feedback for their teaching. However, most student teachers still need extra courses to enhance their linguistic ability in the target language, and they also need methods of teaching English courses to teach them how to teach specific skills. This is in line with the research hypothesis that claims that the Saudi education system (including the English language programme) does not prepare its EFL graduates with English and teaching competence to meet the national standards or the international standards of teaching English as a foreign language. This means that student teachers are not fully qualified to start teaching English as a foreign language upon graduation.

10.2 Student Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach English

Most student teachers stated that their B.A. programme did not fully prepare them to teach English after graduation. Five out of six participants said that the B.A. programme did not thoroughly equip them to teach English. Student teachers' views regarding teaching the four language skills (reading and writing; listening and speaking) varied. Some of them stated that they could teach these skills as their B.A programme helped them to start teaching after graduation. Other students said that they would not be able to teach these skills professionally as their English program did not fully prepare them academically or pedagogically to start teaching. Most students saw themselves as not fully prepared to begin teaching after graduation. They described themselves with adjectives like “bad”, “nervous”, “confused”, and “not prepared” because of the lack of a practical component of practice teaching.

11. Implications and Recommendations

Student teachers ought to know that the current English language programmes do not fully prepare them to be effective EFL teachers. These would-be teachers should understand that if these programmes have partially prepared them linguistically and pedagogically to start teaching after graduation, they are to be held accountable to develop themselves further, professionally before they start teaching. They can start with a kind of self-assessment that includes their language skills and teaching skills. For instance, they can assess their language by taking an IELTS or a TOEFL exam to know how good they are at English. Also, they can undertake a TKT (with its three modules) as a means for evaluating their teaching skills. After they ensure that they are linguistically and pedagogically prepared, they can start practice teaching.

12. Limitations

The first limitation of this study relates to the generalisation possibilities of its findings and results. Any application of the findings or results in different or similar settings may not necessarily yield the desired or identical findings or results. In this regard, any future research on the same phenomenon or similar phenomena would have to acknowledge the similarities and differences between this study's setting, context, and background compared to their research. In addition, the issue of gender emerges as another limitation because this study used only male participants and a male researcher. The procedures, results, findings, and applications would likely be different using only a female researcher and female participants, a male researcher and female participants, and vice versa. Lastly, subjectivity is another issue because the qualitative part of this study (Focus Group discussions) was carried out under the interpretive paradigm's umbrella, which is based on understanding the phenomenon as it is perceived from the individuals' subjective experiences or viewpoints. The findings, results, and conclusions of the qualitative part have also been interpreted according to the researcher's perspectives, assumptions, background, life experiences, and education. Consequently, part of this study could be biased.

13. Suggestions for Future Studies

This study has theoretically and practically proved – using two research tools - that most of the current EFL prospective teachers have not been well-prepared linguistically and pedagogically. Consequently, other studies may focus on other factors beyond this prevailing lack of competency among these would-be teachers. For example, researchers may focus on factors such as the content these student teachers study in the English language preparation programmes, the teachers at these programmes, and any other cultural or social factors that may affect their proficiency. Other longitudinal studies may investigate the assessment methods in the four-year English language programme and whether these assessment methods correlate with students' linguistic and professional competence or not

14. Conclusion

Student teachers' perceptions of proficiency to start teaching English after graduation do not mean they can begin teaching. However, their actual teaching competency can be measured and assessed practically through measurable tools like the TKT. The scholarship, the findings, and the conclusions presented in this study suggest that the English Language Departments' approach in Saudi Arabia regarding preparing EFL teachers to commence teaching after their graduation is in urgent need of revision. Criteria and standards of recruiting EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia should be revised as they are built on recruiting EFL teachers who only have a B.A. in English. English language programmes should provide courses for preparing teachers

to teach if they really intend to produce competent EFL teachers who are prepared academically, pedagogically, and practically. The English language programme at the Faculty of Arts, with its four years, is not sufficient for EFL teachers' training, so a diploma or a certification programme should be created by the Faculty of Education to compensate for the lack of teaching methods and the teaching practice component (practicum). EFL teachers should be recruited on the basis that they have an accredited degree plus any practical certification like CELTA or DELTA or their equivalents and considerable experience in teaching.

Given that the English language programmes have not been properly designed to produce efficient EFL teachers, they must revise their curriculum, considering other successful international EFL programmes. Prospective teachers ought to know that the current English language programmes do not fully prepare them to be effective EFL teachers. These would-be teachers should understand that if these programmes have partially prepared them linguistically and pedagogically to start teaching after graduation, they are to be held accountable to develop themselves further, professionally before they start teaching.

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