

COMPARISON OF TRAINEE-TEACHERS AND PRACTICING TEACHERS' VIEWS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS STUDENTS' ERRORS

Mohammad Abdu Ahmad Al-Mekhlafi (PhD)

*Former Head and Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Faculty of Education, University of Sana'a, Yemen*

Abstract: This paper investigates the differences in perceptions and attitudes among trainee-teachers and practicing Yemeni teachers of EFL towards students' errors. 119 trainee-teachers, just completing their teacher-training program, were sampled using the same questionnaire used with the Yemeni teachers in the secondary schools. Data were compared to the previous sample of teachers who completed this questionnaire. Results indicated that the total average on the ten categories of errors was in favour of the practicing teachers. However, the two samples' performance on the attitudes and perceptions towards students' error was very similar.

1. Introduction: The Context of the Study

This study is a follow-up to the researcher's previous study, Al-Mekhlafi (forthcoming a), conducted in the school year 2003-2004 as to survey the views of Yemeni teachers of EFL at the secondary schools on student errors in the area of Wh-questions. The study concluded that teachers who graduated from the faculty of Education had a better knowledge base regarding this subject than teachers who had a qualification other than a B.A. in education. In this context, Al-Mushriquee (2005: 87) also noticed that his subjects (Yemeni teachers of English at the 9th grade) who had a B.Ed. degree showed more commitment to the implementation of the recommended techniques by the course-book writer than those who graduated from faculties or institutes other than the faculties of education. He states: "...it was found that specialization plays a great role, as those who graduated from the faculties of arts or faculties of languages, for example, showed less commitment to the course-book writer's recommendations". Furthermore, Al-Mushriquee (2005: 97), based on his findings, makes the following recommendation: "In order to teach English in schools properly, the Ministry of Education and the

authorities concerned should employ only those who graduated from the faculties of education”.

Thus, the present study attempts to test the hypothesis that the graduates of the Faculty of Education are likely to do better compared with the 87 practicing Yemeni teachers of EFL at the secondary schools conducted in the school year 2003-2004. The present survey study has as its subjects the output (the graduating class) of the trainee-teacher program at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Sana'a who would qualify themselves for the position of English language teachers at the Yemeni schools just upon completing the current academic year 2004-2005.

The rationale behind the selection of the trainee-teachers in the Faculty of Education, Sana'a University is that they represent the output of the trainee-teacher program. Furthermore, this training program is situated in the capital city of Yemen whose population represents the whole country from Marib in the east to Hodieda in the west and from Aden in the south to Saddah in the north. Therefore, the findings of this study can be applied, at least partially, to the other Teacher-training Programs in the Republic of Yemen.

2. Literature Review

Recently, a number of empirical studies in the area of teacher training have seen the light of the day (cf. Young (1998); Dörnyei (2000); Tercalioglu (2001); Lin and Gorrell (2001). These studies, among others, have concluded that it is of a great value to get the trainee-teachers reflect on their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards their perspective career, teaching, for these attitudes may affect their later practices in the classroom. According to Lin and Gorrell (2001) trainee-teachers perceptions are influenced by cultural and/or social backgrounds, as well as by the context of pre-service teachers' studies, and by the features of particular programs.

Tercanlioglu (2001) studied the views of pre-service teachers of EFL, both as readers and as future teachers of reading. She explored the distinction between pre-service teachers' description of themselves as readers and as teachers of reading, and teacher educator views. She compared the results of trainee- teachers of different genders and at different years of training as to find out differences in views between

these different groups. She also studied her subjects' perceptions of the preparation of trainee-teachers of EFL.

3. Objectives & Questions

The study reported here aims to test the hypothesis that the present sample, the graduates of the teacher-training program at the Faculty of Education, will show a better knowledge base and positive views and attitudes regarding the students' errors in comparison to the previous sample of practising Yemeni teachers of EFL in the secondary schools.

The purpose of this study was also to address the following questions:

1. What views and attitudes do Yemeni trainee-teachers and practicing teachers of EFL have with regard to:
 - a. Errors in the area of Wh-questions?
 - b. Causes and treatment of students' errors?
2. When compared, do differences exist between the views and attitudes of Yemeni trainee-teachers and practicing teachers of EFL with regard to (a) and (b) above?

To achieve this purpose, the researcher followed the following procedures.

4. Method and Procedures

4.1 Participants

119 trainee-teachers at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Sana'a participated in this study. The study was conducted late in the second semester of the academic year 2004-2005, after finishing the last course of Practicum (2) one month before graduation. The present study had as its subjects the graduating class of the trainee-teacher program at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Sana'a. It might be worth noting that they come from more or less the same villages and towns as the villages and towns of the previous sample of Yemeni teachers of EFL at the secondary schools. In fact, the subjects of the present study were among the ones who took the survey questionnaires to the teachers of the secondary schools throughout Yemen while going to spend "Ramadhan" and "Eid" holidays in their villages and towns (November 13 to December 7, 2003). In the present study, there is an overrepresentation of female trainees of younger age compared to the

original sample of practising teachers. However, the original study concluded that differences did not exist based on gender.

4.2 Instrument

This research report is based on data that was collected by means of a closed ended questionnaire intended to elicit trainee-teachers' attitudes, beliefs, conceptions and views regarding students' errors in the area of Wh-questions as well as their views on causes and treatment of students' errors. The survey questionnaire was the same as used by Al-Mekhlafi (forthcoming). The following demographic variables were obtained from the trainee-teachers: age, gender, being to an English speaking country, and teaching experience, if any. The subjects were also asked to rate their own overall proficiency in English (excellent, above average, average, below average or poor). The subjects were also given 30 Wh- questions, drawn from written samples of many Yemeni students of English. They were asked to judge how serious the errors were. The response scale for the errors was 0, .1, .2, .3, .4, .5, .6, .7, .8, .9, and 1. The third part included 20 statements about causes and treatment of learners' errors with which some scholars agree and others disagree such as "Teachers should correct all errors in students' writings." On the following five point Likert-type scale: (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) undecided (4) agree (5) strongly agree, the subjects were asked to express their own views on the causes of learners' errors and the techniques the teachers use in their classes while dealing with such errors. The questionnaires were completed under the supervision of the researcher.

4.3 Data Analysis

After the collection of the questionnaires, the responses were computer-coded using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Program. Data were first analyzed to yield descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages on the subjects' characteristics such as age, gender, qualification, teaching experience, and proficiency of English of the subjects. The t-test as well as means and standard deviations were used for comparative purposes. The significance level in this survey was set at $P < 0.05$.

5. Results

5.1 Characteristics of Subjects

The characteristics of the present sample are mentioned below for the purpose of establishing a comparison between the present sample and that of the practicing teachers. Of the 119 trainee-teachers who participated in this study, 99 or 83.2% were females and 20 or 16.8 % were males, both having an average age of 22.66 years. In this current sample, there was an overrepresentation of females; 83.2% versus 47.10% in the original study of practicing teachers. The average age of this study sample was younger with the whole sample being in the 21 to 27-age range in comparison to 82.76% of Yemeni teachers being in the 22-30 ranges, with the remaining 17.24% in the 31-36 ranges. The subjects of this study were all graduating student teachers in the Department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Sana'a and had no active in-service experience except 3 or 2.5% who had one or two years of teaching experience. 3 or 2.5% of the trainee-teachers had been to an English speaking country.

Like the practicing teachers, the trainee-teachers were asked to rate their own overall proficiency in English according to the context of EFL in the Republic of Yemen and their responses were as follows:

Table (1) The Trainee-teachers and Teachers Rate their own Overall Proficiency in English

English Proficiency	Trainee -Teachers		Teachers	
Excellent	2	1.7%	15	17.24%
Above Average	42	35.3%	32	36.78%
Average	60	50.4 %	29	33.33%
Below Average	10	8.4 %	8	9.20%
Poor	5	4.2 %	0	0
Non-responses	0	0	3	3.45%
Total	119	100%	87	100%

5.2 Comparison of trainee-teachers' and teachers' views about errors in the area of Wh-questions

Table (2) below summarizes the results of means on the ten categories of errors as perceived by practicing and trainee teachers of EFL.

No	Category	Trainee-teachers (N= 119) Mean	Practicing Teachers (N = 87) Mean
1	Main verb inverted	.7857	.7593
2	Auxiliary insertion	.7736	.7460
3	Lack of Auxiliary –verb concord	.6134	.7345
4	Inversion of Aux + main verb	.5782	.6155
5	Inversion retained in embedded questions	.5672	.5287
6	Subject + verb omission	.5462	.6914
7	Auxiliary omission	.5449	.5903
8	Lack of auxiliary inversion	.4689	.4881
9	Lack of verbal form concord	.4490	.6092
10	Auxiliary replacement	.4400	.6807
	Total Average	.5767	.6444

The table above shows trainee-teachers' responses to the questionnaire expressed as a mean score to the 30 Wh-questions that were grouped into 10 grammatical categories. The highest rating was given to the category "Main verb inverted", and the lowest rating was given to the category "Auxiliary replacement". Trainee-teachers' responses are compared with the original responses of practising Yemeni teachers. The scores represent mean percentages for each group. The total average of the means was .5767 and .6444 respectively ($P < 0.000$). This simply means that the practicing teachers' views and perceptions on students' errors in the area of Wh-questions were better than that of the trainee-teachers. However in three out of the ten categories, practising teachers did worse than trainee-teachers.

5.3 Comparison of trainee-teachers' and practicing teachers' views towards students' errors

The results shown in Table (3) below indicate that both the present sample of trainee-teachers and the original one of practicing teachers have similar scores on the 20 statements about students' errors. The highest rating was given to the statement "Most of the errors result from insufficient practice", and the lowest rating was given to the category "We should ignore the spelling errors of our students". The present sample of trainee-teachers has a total mean score of 65.6849 while the original sample of practicing teachers has a total mean score of 67.0918.

Table (3) below summarizes the results of means on the 20 statements about students' errors as perceived by trainee-teachers and practicing teachers of EFL

N	Survey items	Trainee-teachers (N=119) Mean		Practicing Teachers (N=87)	
		Mean	%	Mean	%
1	Most of the errors result from insufficient practice.	4.0336	80.67	3.6782	73.56
2	Correcting students' errors helps them improve their English.	3.9916	79.83	4.2069	84.14
3	Teaching grammar is the key to reducing errors in written English	3.7563	75.13	3.9310	78.62
4	Students' awareness of errors decreases their frequency.	3.6303	72.61	3.5977	71.95
5	Errors are indicators that learning is taking place.	3.6050	72.1	3.3218	66.44
6	Most errors are self-corrected by students over time.	3.5126	70.25	3.3103	66.21
7	Most of the errors are the result of Arabic interference.	3.4958	69.92	3.6092	72.18
8	Only those errors that hinder communication should be corrected.	3.4622	69.24	2.7471	54.94
9	Most errors in English occur because of overgeneralization.	3.4286	68.57	3.2414	64.83

N	Survey items	Trainee-teachers (N=119) Mean		Practicing Teachers (N=87)	
		Mean	%	Mean	%
10	Most errors result from faulty English language teaching.	3.2521	65.04	3.3333	66.67
11	Most of the errors are due to the syntactic complexity of English.	3.2101	64.20	3.5517	71.03
12	The use of the declarative word order instead of inversion is a common error among my students when forming questions in English.	3.1765	63.53	3.3793	67.59
13	Grammatical errors are solely the responsibility of the teacher of Grammar.	3.1681	63.36	2.9425	58.85
14	Many errors cannot be traced to the students' native language.	3.1092	62.18	3.3793	67.59
15	Errors in written English can serve as a diagnostic tool.	3.0504	61.01	3.4023	68.05
16	Teachers should correct all errors in students' writings.	3.0000	60	3.4713	69.43
17	An error indicates a lack of knowledge of the target language.	2.9748	59.50	3.3678	67.36
18	Most of the errors are the result of the strategy of simplification.	2.9370	58.74	2.8391	56.78
19	All errors in written English should be corrected.	2.7899	55.80	3.8506	77.01
20	We should ignore the spelling errors of our students.	2.1008	42.02	1.9310	38.62
Total		65.6849		67.0918	

A statistical comparison for each statement comparing the means for trainee-teachers and that of practicing teachers was performed using a 2-tailed *t*-test for Equality of Means. The *t* value was -0.790 ($P < 0.430$). This simply means that the difference between the views of trainee-teachers and that of practicing teachers is not statistically significant.

5.3.1 Causes of Errors

Results showed that trainee-teachers (80.67%) and teachers (73.56%) believed that most of the students' errors result from insufficient practice. While both trainee-teachers and secondary school teachers agree that most of the errors are the result of Arabic interference, it is the proportion of agreement that divides. Trainee-teachers (69.92%) and secondary school teachers (72.18%) rated mother tongue interference as the second source for students' errors. Furthermore, trainee-teachers placed a greater emphasis on the syntactic complexity of English, it was reported that trainee-teachers' mean was 3.2101, while secondary school teachers' mean was 3.5517. There were no significant differences between the 65.04% of trainee-teachers and 66.67% secondary school teachers who agreed with the statement "most errors result from faulty English language teaching". Some 68.57% of trainees and 64.83% teachers agreed, "Most errors in English occur because of overgeneralization". Similarly 58.74% of trainees and 56.78% of teachers saw the strategy of simplification as being one of the causes of errors.

5.3.2 Attitudes towards Errors

Some teachers consider errors as undesirable and a sign of failure on the part of the learner and/or the teacher, while others think that the making of errors is an essential part for learning to take place. Results indicate that trainee-teachers and practicing teachers appeared to share similar opinions in this area. 72.1% trainee-teachers and 66.44% practicing teachers agreed that errors are indicators that learning is taking place. Some 59.50 % of trainee-teachers and 67.36 % of teachers recognized that an error indicates a lack of knowledge of the target language.

5.3.3 Correcting Errors

Mixed results were obtained in this area. Only 79.83 % trainee-teachers and 84.14% teachers believed that correcting students' errors helps them improve their English. Furthermore, trainee-teachers appeared better informed than practising teachers regarding correcting errors in students' writings. Remarkably 60% of trainees and 69.43%

teachers agreed that teachers should correct all errors in students' writings. However, 61.01% of trainees and 68.05% of teachers saw that errors in written English could serve as a diagnostic tool. Some 69.24% of trainees and 54.94% of teachers recognized that only those errors that hinder communication should be corrected

5.3.4 Teaching Factors

Most trainee-teachers 75.13 % and teachers 78.62 % reported that teaching grammar is the key to reducing errors in written English. Furthermore, trainee-teachers 63.36% and teachers 58.85% indicated that grammatical errors are solely the responsibility of the teacher of Grammar.

6. Findings and Conclusions

The findings of this survey do not support the hypothesis of the study that the graduates of the teacher-training program at the Faculty of Education would show a better knowledge base and positive views and attitudes regarding the students' errors in the area of Wh-questions in comparison to the previous sample of practising Yemeni teachers of English in the secondary schools. However, in some categories the trainee-teachers' knowledge of Wh-questions was more accurate than that of practising teachers. The results can be interpreted to show an improvement in practising teachers' knowledge based on experience and mainly practice. Furthermore, the data of the 2 samples, viz. trainee-teachers as well as practicing Yemeni teachers, indicate that the subjects of the present study, the graduating trainee-teachers of English have similar attitudes, views and perceptions towards students' errors to that of practicing Yemeni teachers of EFL in the secondary schools.

The findings of this study merit replication and, if confirmed in larger samples, have implications for the people concerned in Yemeni TEF, and more specifically for teacher-training programs.

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