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**Teachers' Attitudes towards Selected Foreign Language
Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Practices**

Abdu Moh'd Al-Mekhlafi

Sultan Qaboos University

P. N. Ramani

Ministry of Manpower, Oman

Abstract

The paper reports a study undertaken to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes towards selected curriculum, instruction and assessment practices with reference to teaching English as a foreign language in relation to their demographic characteristics. The study aimed to find out whether there were significant differences in their attitudes in relation to nationality, age, teaching experience, educational qualifications and the level taught. The subjects completed a questionnaire (adapted from Wolf, Jr. and Riordan, 1991) comprising 20 statements to which they responded on a 5-point scale of agreement. Item reliability, overall mean score, mean scores for the variables, and t-test were used to interpret the data. The main findings of the study are reported with implications for both pre-service and in-service training.

Introduction

EFL teachers make decisions every day about what they should teach and why, when, how and to whom it should be taught. They make decisions that affect the learning of students and their future learning and academic progress. They may be influenced in all of these important decisions by their knowledge and understanding, qualifications and experience, purposes, values, attitudes, and beliefs. The better informed they are, the more likely they are to make sound decisions that they can defend.

Teachers of English as a foreign language at the tertiary level have different demographic characteristics (e.g., nationality, qualifications, experience). They are of different nationalities and with or without much experience of teaching. Even when they have teaching experience, the contexts of their previous teaching differ widely, for example, the level (primary/secondary/tertiary), the learner profiles (L1 learners / immigrants in an English speaking country / ESL/EFL learners), and the learners' language proficiency level (pre-elementary to advanced).

It is also important to recognise the fact that the EFL environments that most of our learners find themselves in are removed from a lot of "naturalistic", non-classroom, English speaking settings. An understanding of these realities and the principles that govern realistic classroom learning can be useful to teachers in choosing the appropriate approach(es), methods and classroom practices in a specific context (Nunan 2005).

In such a context where EFL teachers have divergent demographic characteristics and students' proficiency levels in English range from 'false beginners' to intermediate / advanced, exploring the teachers' attitudes and perceptions is an important means of understanding classroom practices with a view to improving them for better student learning and the curriculum itself. There is a need to make the teachers reflect on their own assumptions and best practices in relation to their teaching of English as a foreign language. Such critical reflection can help teachers deal with unanswered questions or issues consciously and intelligently.

It, therefore, becomes necessary to find out to what extent EFL teachers' attitudes towards selected practices in relation to curriculum, instruction and assessment concur or differ so that improvements to the curriculum, instructional methods and assessment strategies could be made. Their views will also help curriculum developers and teacher trainers make the right decisions with regard to instructional methods and assessment techniques.

Review of Literature

A quality curriculum development process should address four key elements, namely *standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment*. All of these are interwoven in the

teaching-learning process and each element informs and influences the others. *Standards* define what we expect students to know and be able to do. *Curriculum* defines a body of learning experiences that are designed to reach the standards. *Instruction* provides the specific learning experiences and ways of managing these experiences to ensure student learning. *Assessment* measures the attainment of learning to inform instructional practices and curriculum.

It is the teacher's responsibility to make the curriculum relevant, interesting, meaningful and enjoyable. Instruction has two components: teaching and learning. The former refers to what the teacher does and the latter to what the students do. Assessment refers to the process of testing, appraising or evaluating students' work – their achievement and growth, the product as well as the process of learning. It provides both students and teachers with a tool for assessing what has been learnt and what needs to be taught again. It is an integral part of instruction, providing information about how well students are progressing toward expected standards (Day & Skidmore, 1996; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2007).

McTighe (1996) states that "the principle of establishing clear performance targets and the goal of teaching for understanding fit together as a powerful means of linking curriculum, instruction and assessment." The perception of curriculum as a finite body of information to be learned by students and of instruction as the transmission of that information to students, who are looked upon as empty vessels, is outdated from a truly educational perspective. It is now acknowledged that the essence of education is to promote the growth of the individual, the development of the whole person.

Several theories about L2 instruction and language pedagogy have been proposed, for example Krashen's Monitor Model (Krashen 1981), Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), VanPatten's input processing theory (VanPatten 1996, 2002) and Ellis's theory of instructed language learning (Ellis 2005). All these theories address the relationship between L2 instruction and acquisition.

The literature on curriculum innovation and implementation suggests that one of the causes of the discrepancy between teachers' claims and practices may be teacher attitudes (Karavas-Doukas, 1996). Wolf and Riordan (1991), in their study, drew upon survey data to describe the demographic characteristics and attitudes of a random sample of foreign language teachers affiliated with a state-wide professional association to changes taking place in foreign language curriculum, instruction and assessment. They found that the typical person responding, i.e. the "modal teacher", favoured foreign language curriculum, instruction and assessment practices associated with teaching for proficiency over those associated with traditional teaching.

Martyn and Voller (1993) reported the details of two surveys of teacher attitudes to self-access learning conducted at the University of Hong Kong during 1991–1993. The earlier survey reported by Martyn and Chan (1992) confirmed that although most teachers had a fairly positive view of self-access learning, they were concerned about its implementation and effectiveness as a required course component. The results of the later survey suggest that teachers see self-access as a useful way of individualising learning

and leading to independent learning, but are not certain how to make self-access effective.

Felder and Henriques (1995) defined several dimensions of learning style thought to be particularly relevant to foreign and second language education, outlined ways in which certain learning styles were favoured by the teaching styles of most language instructors, and suggested steps to address the educational needs of all students in foreign language classes. Their study was based on mismatches identified between the learning styles of students in a language class and the teaching style of the instructor, resulting in poor quality of students' learning and their negative attitude towards the language class and the language itself.

Numerous studies have investigated the effects of instruction on L2 learning (Norris and Ortega 2000). Their comparisons of about fifty experimental and quasi-experimental investigations (published between 1980 and 1998) into the effectiveness of L2 instruction indicated that focused L2 instruction results in large target-oriented gains, that explicit types of instruction are more effective than implicit types. Their comparisons also indicated that "focus-on-form" interventions (involving attention to linguistic features in the context of communicative activities derived from a task-based syllabus or some kind of combination of the two) and traditional "focus-on-forms" interventions (involving the systematic teaching of grammatical features in accordance with a structural syllabus) result in equivalent and large effects.

In the context of a plethora of approaches and methods and claims and counter claims about their effectiveness, Ellis (2005) has summarised clearly the general understanding in the profession on "instructed language learning". He points out that there is no agreement about the efficacy and timing of teaching explicit grammatical knowledge or about the type of corrective feedback to be provided.

Onalan (2005) reports a study undertaken to investigate Turkish teachers' opinions and beliefs on the place of target cultural information in English language teaching, as well as their related practices and applications in EFL classrooms in the context of Turkish higher education. He found that teachers mostly define culture in the sociological sense, such as values and beliefs and, in the ELT context, in terms of the more visible aspects, such as food and clothing. Culture being defined in this way, the study revealed the Turkish teachers' positive attitudes towards incorporating cultural information in their EFL instruction.

Today the teacher who, according to Wiggins (1998), is dedicated to students' achievement of "progressive understanding" through teaching is called upon to become a reflective practitioner and to improve continuously through reflective practices. It is in this context that the present study was undertaken on teachers' attitudes towards selected EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices. There is a need to gather the critical reflections of EFL teachers on these three areas in relation to their demographic characteristics.

Research Methodology

The present study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes towards EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in relation to their demographic characteristics. Consequently, the study tried to answer the following research questions.

General Question

What are EFL teachers' attitudes towards EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in relation to their demographic characteristics?

Specific Questions

1. Is there a significant difference among EFL teachers in their attitudes towards EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in relation to their nationality?
2. Is there a significant difference among EFL teachers in their attitudes towards EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in relation to their age?
3. Is there a significant difference among EFL teachers in their attitudes towards EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in relation to their teaching experience?
4. Is there a significant difference among EFL teachers in their attitudes towards EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in relation to their relevant educational qualifications?
5. Is there a significant difference among EFL teachers in their attitudes towards EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices in relation to the level they teach (e.g., Advanced)?

Population and Sample

Thirty-five teachers teaching English at the Foundation level (35% of the population) in a government-run college of technology in Oman were selected for the study and the research tool, namely a questionnaire, was given to them; 34 completed questionnaires were returned.

Research Tool

The research tool used for the present study was a questionnaire consisting of 20 items or statements and the subjects were asked to respond to each of these statements on a five-point Likert scale of 'strongly agree' (5 points) to 'strongly disagree' (1 point) (See Appendix 1). The statements were adopted from Wolf, Jr. and Riordan (1991) and focus on attitudes of foreign language teachers towards language curriculum, instruction and assessment.

While Wolf and Riordan (1991: 477) categorised the statements into two groups: items pertaining to a traditional teaching approach and those pertaining to a teaching-for-proficiency approach, they were categorised as follows for the purpose of the present study:

- Curriculum: Statements 2, 4, 13 & 15
- Instruction: Statements 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17 & 18
- Assessment: Statements 3, 5, 7, 19 & 20

It so happened that, by adopting the tool from Wolf and Riordan, there were more items for 'instruction' than for the other two aspects. This may be because classroom instructional practices are more critical for teachers than issues relating to 'curriculum' and 'assessment'. The questionnaire was again checked for the validity of the items by a panel of EFL practitioners and teacher educators. Interviews were not used, as the questionnaire, adopted from a previous study, was felt to be comprehensive and hence adequate for the purpose of the present study.

Data Analysis

The subjects' responses to the statements in the questionnaire were organised and statistically analysed using the SPSS software. In particular, item reliability, measures of central tendency, and t-test were used to interpret the data. These made possible comparisons between demographic and attitudinal data. The next section will present the data and interpret the results, and the section that follows it will report the main findings and draw conclusions.

Results and Analysis

The descriptive analysis of data shows that the *overall* mean score for all the items for all the respondents was 3.26 (Table 1-A). This indicates that a majority of the respondents agreed with most of the items included in the survey tool. The overall mean scores for items related to instruction (3.43) and assessment (3.37) were, however, higher than the mean score for curriculum (2.66).

Table 1-A: Mean Responses – Statement wise and Total

#	Item Analysed	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Foreign language classes should include activities involving real communication.	4.7647	.49597
2	In foreign language classes students should focus on the grammar and mechanics of the language.	3.8235	.96830
3	Students can demonstrate language proficiency in structured role-play activities in all stages of language learning.	3.8824	.97746
4	Students are not able to use language in a personalised way until they reach higher levels.	2.3235	1.03633
5	Direct translation into the native language is the most effective way to evaluate reading comprehension skills.	1.7059	.75996
6	Personalised question activities are appropriate for foreign language classes.	3.5882	.85697

#	Item Analysed	Mean	Standard Deviation
7	Native language paraphrasing is not an acceptable way to evaluate reading comprehension.	3.6471	1.01152
8	Activities which focus on listening for the general idea help students improve their listening comprehension skills.	4.1471	.82139
9	Students are not able to give free responses to personalised questions in foreign language classes.	2.8824	1.03762
10	Survey and poll-taking activities are suitable for foreign language teaching.	3.3235	1.06517
11	Nonverbal response activities are appropriate in foreign language classes.	3.3529	1.04105
12	Teachers must be certain that students are able to understand every word in a reading passage before using it in class.	2.1176	.94595
13	Students are not able to speak about their immediate surroundings.	2.4118	1.07640
14	Paired student activities are not productive uses of language class time.	1.8235	.83378
15	It is only after three or four years of language study that a student is able to begin to communicate in the language.	2.0882	1.13798
16	Mini oral interviews can be used with success in foreign	4.1471	.89213

#	Item Analysed	Mean	Standard Deviation
	language classes.		
17	Personal interviews with report back procedures are good techniques for foreign language classes.	3.8824	.91336
18	The most effective way to prevent student repetition of grammatical errors is regular error correction by the teachers.	3.1471	1.43827
19	Teachers should evaluate communication activities by the success of the communication.	3.8235	.99911
20	Teachers should include some communication activities in student evaluation procedures at all levels of instruction.	4.2941	.75996
	Total	3.2588	.37446
	Total – Instruction	3.4294	.37782
	Total – Curriculum	2.6618	.72791
	Total – Assessment	3.3725	.46972

Table 1-B summarises the results for all the demographic variables studied.

Table 1-B: Overall Mean Responses for All the Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
				F	Sig.

Nationality	Native	13	3.0269	.26896	1.761	.194
	Non-Native	21	3.4024	.36245		
Age	Young	13	3.1962	.27798	2.498	.124
	Old	21	3.2976	.42529		
Experience	</= 2 years	15	3.1733	.34062	.668	.420
	>/= 3 years	19	3.3263	.39489		
Qualification	Bachelor's	17	3.1118	.35024	.173	.681
	>/=Master's	17	3.4059	.34726		
Level Taught	Advanced	17	3.3971	.31398	.299	.588
	Lower	17	3.1206	.38732		

Nationality

With reference to EFL teachers' nationality, Table 2 shows no significant difference in the overall mean scores between 'native' and 'non-native' teachers. The overall mean scores for 'native' and 'non-native' speaker teachers were 3.03 and 3.40 respectively (Table 2). Across the three dimensions, however, the mean scores for the two categories of teachers in relation to curriculum were divergent – 2.08 for 'native' and 3.02 for 'non-native'. The table also shows a significant difference at the 0.05 level in favour of 'non-native' teachers with regard to the dimension of "curriculum". This indicates that the statements relating to curriculum have a greater significance and importance for 'non-native' teachers than it does for 'native' teachers.

Table 2: T-test Results for the Comparison between Native and Non-Native Teachers

Dimension	Nationality	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
					F	Sig.

Overall	Native	13	3.0269	.26896	1.761	.194
	Non-Native	21	3.4024	.36245		
Instruction	Native	13	3.3385	.37978	.140	.710
	Non-Native	21	3.4857	.37455		
Curriculum	Native	13	2.0769	.37339	4.310	.046
	Non-Native	21	3.0238	.65626		
Assessment	Native	13	3.1410	.44538	.044	.835
	Non-Native	21	3.5159	.43431		

Age

With reference to EFL teachers' age, Table 3 shows no significant difference in the overall mean scores between 'young' (less than 40 years old) and 'old' (more than 40 years old) teachers. The overall mean scores for 'old' and 'young' teachers were 3.3 and 3.2 respectively (Table 3). The mean scores for instruction and assessment, however, were closer to the overall means than the ones for curriculum were – 2.77 for 'old' and 2.48 for 'young' teachers, while the mean scores for instruction and assessment for both categories of teachers were around 3.3/3.4. The table also shows significance at the 0.02 level in favour of 'old' teachers with regard to the dimension of "assessment".

Table 3: T-test Results for the Comparison between 'Young' and 'Old' Teachers

Dimension	Age	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
					F	Sig.
Overall	Young	13	3.1962	.27798	2.498	.124
	Old	21	3.2976	.42529		
Instruction	Young	13	3.4000	.34400	.467	.499

	Old	21	3.4476	.40450		
Curriculum	Young	13	2.4808	.58150	2.169	.151
	Old	21	2.7738	.79806		
Assessment	Young	13	3.3333	.23570	6.439	.016
	Old	21	3.3968	.57367		

Experience

With reference to EFL teachers' experience, Table 4 shows no significant difference in the overall mean scores between 'young' and 'old' teachers. With regard to *experience*, the overall mean scores for teachers with '2 or fewer' and those with '3 and more' years of relevant experience were 3.17 and 3.33 respectively (Table 4). The mean scores for instruction and assessment, however, were again predictably closer to the overall means than the ones for curriculum were – 2.60 for teachers with '2 or fewer' and 2.71 for those with '3 and more' years of relevant experience, while the mean scores for instruction and assessment for both categories of teachers were around 3.3/3.5 to 3.3/3.5. There is also no significant difference in favour of either category of teachers with regard to any of the three dimensions.

Table 4: T-test Results for the Comparison between Less Experienced and More Experienced Teachers

Dimension	Experience	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
					F	Sig.
Overall	2 years & less	15	3.1733	.34062	.668	.420
	3 years & more	19	3.3263	.39489		
Instruction	2 years & less	15	3.3467	.39437	.371	.547
	3 years & more	19	3.4947	.36128		
Curriculum	2 years & less	15	2.6000	.61091	1.141	.293

	3 years & more	19	2.7105	.82185		
Assessment	2 years & less	15	3.2667	.32611	1.114	.299
	3 years & more	19	3.4561	.55233		

Qualifications

With reference to EFL teachers' qualifications, Table 5 shows no significant difference in the overall mean scores between less qualified and more qualified teachers. The overall mean scores for teachers with a 'bachelor's degree' and those with a 'master's degree and above' were 3.11 and 3.41 respectively (Table 5). The mean scores for instruction and assessment, however, were predictably closer to the overall means than the ones for curriculum were – 2.38 for teachers with a 'bachelor's degree' and 2.94 for those with a 'master's degree and above', while the mean scores for instruction and assessment for both categories of teachers were around 3.3/3.2 to 3.3/3.5. There is also no significant difference in favour of either category of teachers with regard to any of the three dimensions.

Table 5: T-test Results for the Comparison between Less Qualified and More Qualified Teachers

Dimension	Qualification	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
					F	Sig.
Overall	Bachelor's	17	3.1118	.35024	.173	.681
	Master's & above	17	3.4059	.34726		
Instruction	Bachelor's	17	3.3059	.38482	.198	.659
	Master's & above	17	3.5529	.33749		
Curriculum	Bachelor's	17	2.3824	.65621	.406	.528
	Master's & above	17	2.9412	.70450		

Assessment	Bachelor's	17	3.2745	.48570	.006	.941
	Master's & above	17	3.4706	.44580		

Level Taught

With reference to level taught by the EFL teachers, Table 6 shows no significant difference in the overall mean scores between less qualified and more qualified teachers. The overall mean scores for teachers teaching 'advanced' and those teaching 'lower' levels (i.e., Pre-Elementary, Elementary and Intermediate) were 3.40 and 3.12 respectively (Table 6). The mean scores for instruction and assessment, however, were again predictably closer to the overall means than the ones for curriculum were – 2.80 for teachers teaching 'advanced' and 2.53 for those teaching 'lower' levels, while the mean scores for instruction and assessment for both categories of teachers were around 3.6/3.3 to 3.5/3.2. There is also no significant difference in favour of either category of teachers with regard to any of the three dimensions.

Table 6: T-test Results for the Comparison between Teachers Teaching Advanced Level and Those Teaching Lower Levels

Dimension	Level Taught	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
					F	Sig.
Overall	Advanced	17	3.3971	.31398	.299	.588
	Lower	17	3.1206	.38732		
Instruction	Advanced	17	3.5588	.27170	6.012	.020
	Lower	17	3.3000	.43012		
Curriculum	Advanced	17	2.7941	.74601	.031	.862
	Lower	17	2.5294	.70646		

Assessment	Advanced	17	3.5294	.33456	2.422	.129
	Lower	17	3.2157	.53930		

Conclusion

Some important conclusions and implications can be drawn from the data reported and the statistical analysis presented.

In Wolf and Riordan's (1991) study, "a positive relationship was discerned between subjects' age and amount of teaching experience on the one hand, and the strength of their preference for teaching-for-proficiency considerations on the other." Moreover, the 'modal responses' suggested that the typical person responding preferred "concepts associated with teaching-for-proficiency over concepts associated with traditional teaching." (p.477)

In the present study, however, the EFL teachers' attitudes to the main issues related to EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment are uniformly high for all the statements and demographic variables. Relatively speaking, however, the attitudes to curriculum issues show a slightly lower significance than those of instruction and assessment. The dimension of curriculum, therefore, needs special emphasis in teacher awareness and preparedness, and this has implications for pre-service and in-service training. This is in conformity with the conclusion of Yoon (2005:15) that "it is necessary to investigate which specific approach gives the best theoretical basis" for the curriculum, "how actual teaching is carried out under its influence and how the curriculum could be improved by changing or refining the curricular decisions."

Again, the attitudes of 'native' teachers show a slightly lower significance than those of 'non-native' EFL teachers. Since teachers are generally influenced in their perceptions and views by the educational systems they come from and the cultures they belong to, this might mean that 'non-native' teachers have come from or are more familiar with educational systems and cultures that are similar to the Arab context. This also has implications for in-service training and professional development activities.

With regard to the seemingly contradictory or weak views that teachers hold about EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices, it should be mentioned, as Karavas-Doukas (1996) also does, that these might arise from teachers contextualising the statements in the questionnaire in two different teaching-learning situations – one in which they are able to practise what they have learnt from the literature or from training programmes and the other in which they have to be eclectic in their approach to teaching. In this process, they tend to de-emphasise some of the practices that are necessary for developing communicative abilities in students (Mangubhai et al., 1998:9).

Another value of this study has been that teachers with divergent backgrounds have given insightful views on EFL curriculum, instruction and assessment practices, which could not have been obtained if all the subjects of the study had only been Arab teachers of English as a foreign language or even native-speaker EFL teachers. Teachers' perceptions based on their reflections on their own classroom practices are indeed valuable, and getting teachers to articulate them in teacher training programmes will be a useful technique for teacher trainers. Lamb (1995) has emphasised forcefully that the focus of teacher training courses should be the teachers' beliefs: "These need first to be articulated, and then analysed for potential contradictions with each other, the teaching circumstances, and the beliefs of the learners" (p. 79). It is hoped that this study will encourage EFL teachers to become reflective practitioners.

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Appendix – Questionnaire

SECTION – A: Background Information (Please tick [] as applicable)

Name(optional): _____

Gender: Male Female Nationality: _____**Age Group:**Under 25 25 – 30 31 – 40 41 – 50 51 – 60 Over 60 **Qualifications:**Certificate/Diploma Bachelor's Master's Ph.D. Others (Specify): _____**Years of Teaching Experience:** 1–5 6 – 10 11 – 15 16 – 20 More than 20 **Level you are now teaching:**Pre-Elementary Elementary Intermediate Advanced **SECTION – B: Questionnaire**

Please respond to each of these statements by saying whether you agree or disagree with it according to this scale:

Strongly agree: 5; Agree: 4; Not sure: 3; Disagree: 2; Strongly disagree: 1

#	Statement	5	4	3	2	1
1	Foreign language classes should include activities involving real communication.					
2	In foreign language classes students should focus on the grammar and mechanics of the language.					

#	Statement	5	4	3	2	1
3	Students can demonstrate language proficiency in structured role-play activities in all stages of language learning.					
4	Students are not able to use language in a personalised way until they reach higher levels.					
5	Direct translation into the native language is the most effective way to evaluate reading comprehension skills.					
6	Personalised question activities are appropriate for foreign language classes.					
7	Native language paraphrasing is not an acceptable way to evaluate reading comprehension.					
8	Activities which focus on listening for the general idea help students improve their listening comprehension skills.					
9	Students are not able to give free responses to personalised questions in foreign language classes.					
10	Survey and poll-taking activities are suitable for foreign language teaching.					
11	Nonverbal response activities are appropriate in foreign language classes.					
12	Teachers must be certain that students are able to understand every word in a reading passage before using it in class.					
13	Students are not able to speak about their immediate surroundings.					

#	Statement	5	4	3	2	1
14	Paired student activities are not productive uses of language class time.					
15	It is only after three or four years of language study that a student is able to begin to communicate in the language.					
16	Mini oral interviews can be used with success in foreign language classes.					
17	Personal interviews with report back procedures are good techniques for foreign language classes.					
18	The most effective way to prevent student repetition of grammatical errors is regular error correction by the teachers.					
19	Teachers should evaluate communication activities by the success of the communication.					
20	Teachers should include some communication activities in student evaluation procedures at all levels of instruction.					