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Teachers' Perspectives on ELT: A Research Journey from Challenging to Conflict Circumstances in Syria

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the degree of

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To Syrian teachers and students...
to the ones who continued to teach and learn
despite all catastrophes ...
to the ones who were less fortunate and had to
leave their careers and studies ...
and, more importantly, to the ones who died
trying to teach and learn ...

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List of Abbreviations

BANA contexts: the private sector in Britain, North America and Australasia

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

CS: Code-Switching

EC: Error Correction

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

EFS: English for Starters

ELT: English Language Teaching

E-o policy: English-only Policy

ESL: English as a Second Language

IRF: Initiation-Response-Feedback/Follow-up

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

MoE: Ministry of Education

NNS: Non-Native Speaker

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

TESEP contexts: tertiary, secondary, primary as state education in the rest of the world

TBL: Task-Based Learning

TBT: Task-Based Teaching

TL: Target Language

T-L: Teacher-Learner

TT: Teacher Talk

TTT: Teacher Talking Time

LTT: Learner Talking Time

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or qualification.

Abdulqader Alyasin

Abstract

This thesis is a journey which started investigating CLT innovation and implementation in Syrian schools and, due to the armed conflict in the country, ended with another layer of focus on the impact of Syria War on (education and) ELT, teachers and students.

Employing a qualitative approach, the data incorporated audio-recordings and interviews as the two main research tools in the study. The lesson transcripts from two teachers in Syria (Grade 7) and a teacher in a camp school in Turkey (Grade 8) were explored in light of retrospective interviews to uncover how far teachers responded in their actual classroom practices to CLT curriculum innovation tenets and how implementation challenges, including teachers' cognitions and contextual realities, influenced their practices. Celebrating diversity rather than uniformity, I also endeavoured to appreciate teachers' own complex reasoning on their practices and how they made sense of their teaching in their immediate contexts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 other Syrian teachers to further elicit perspectives on contextual forces and teacher beliefs, suggestions for a locally feasible ELT pedagogy and the impact of the current war circumstances on their lives and careers.

The analysis of the data reveals the value of seeing teachers as agents of their own practice both in 'normally' difficult circumstances and in extreme crisis situations. Teachers' pedagogical decisions and practices seem to be grounded on their beliefs as to what is viable rather than on the MoE plans. The study points to the significance of not only appreciating teacher beliefs and agency in establishing context-sensitive ELT pedagogies, but also capitalising upon local teachers' experiences and perspectives and involving teachers in both educational planning and implementation. The final layer of the thesis shows that it is valuable to explore teacher agency in crisis situations and to consider ways to extend the literature to recognise conflict-affected ELT as a research area in which locally produced pedagogies are encouraged, supported and developed within the constraints of displacement and refugee camp schools.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Before pursuing my MA and PhD studies in the UK, I worked in Syria for some time teaching school-level and, later on, university-level students (in a wide range of departments). Teaching/learning English in Syrian (universities and) schools has been an intriguing area of interest to me ever since I conducted a seminar as part of the English language teaching methods module with two friends of mine in our undergraduate studies. We attended an English lesson in a school in Aleppo for Year 8 and collected observation and audio-recorded data. That brief experience of classroom research introduced me into the field and made me enthusiastic about uncovering details that significantly contribute to the understanding, and consequently betterment, of Syrian classroom realities.

Granted an MA followed by a PhD scholarship from the University of Aleppo, I did my MA dissertation on EFL university-level students, which provided me with interesting insights but, as is the case with most research studies, equally raised more questions than answers. Some of these issues to further explore were closely relevant to the question: why do university students find it difficult to communicate in English although they have spent long time studying it? The first spontaneous reason I considered at the time was: it seems really worth investigating how students are taught in earlier stages at schools that reflects on their later

achievements at the university level. With that in mind, the recent official plans and curriculum innovation in Syrian schools in relation to ELT motivated me to undertake this research in order to come up with concrete evidence. Realising that schools, in fact the whole of the Syrian context, is under-researched, and that studying Syrian English teachers' perspectives and practices is a prerequisite to understanding the situation and developing pedagogical implications and insights, I have embarked on the study.

This chapter starts with setting out the purpose and the scope of the thesis. The significance of the study is also elaborated in detail afterwards. Some basic background knowledge about English language curricular development, the Syrian teacher-learner relationship and the practice of EFL teacher education appears next. The chapter ends with a summary of concluding remarks that make introducing the following chapters flow naturally from a well-defined background and clearly specified aims.

1.1.Scope and Purpose of the Study

This thesis is a journey in which I have had to navigate through different routes from my original intentions to what was eventually possible and sensible to investigate. The unpredictably volatile circumstances in Syria have influenced my research plans, data and, consequently, the focus along the road of my quest. The following chapters of the study, including all aspects of data collection and analysis, reflect this journey, a journey that I have had to take from ordinary classrooms to war-torn situations.

This research was primarily planned to investigate Syrian state schools, particularly the basic education intermediate level. The target group age of the study can be set as 12, the normal age for students in Grade 7. In Syrian schools, recent official innovation plans have introduced CLT into English language classrooms and developed a new communicative-based curriculum. Exploring ELT throws light on these under-explored contexts, specifically with reference to how teaching to the new curriculum innovation and official policy is actually carried out after seven years of introducing it to Grade 1. The study, in short, was originally planned to uncover how far teachers respond in their actual classroom practices to CLT curriculum innovation tenets and how implementation challenges, including teachers' cognitions and contextual realities, influence their practices. By so doing, it attempts to uncover classroom practices and implementation challenges vis-a-vis the new macro educational policy.

Given the gradually unfolding war situation in the country (2011-ongoing), the original set of participants were unable to continue and new priorities (more important than the curriculum guidelines) arose with regard to teaching and learning in crisis, hence the study has developed to include displaced and refugee teachers, in addition to a Syrian camp school in Turkey. As the scope of time has coincided with my PhD period, the impact of the more-than-three-year war on Syrian English teachers and students has, therefore, become a significant part of this research.

In the end, the data analysis investigated lesson transcripts from two teachers in Syria (Grade 7) and a teacher in the camp school (Grade 8), with particular attention given to insights of the workings of teacher agency in difficult and crisis circumstances. It also explored 11 other Syrian teachers' complex reasoning and

perspectives on aspects relevant to their teaching experiences and the impact of the current war circumstances on their lives and careers. Examining teachers' classroom practices in relation to their own interpretations and other Syrian teachers' views assisted my line of enquiry to achieve a better understanding of education in challenging and, later on, war circumstances.

1.2. Significance of the Study

There are multiple aims of this research. First, it is an endeavour to find out how English language is being taught at Syrian basic-education schools following more than 7 years of reforms relevant to introducing English to Grade 1 and requesting that teachers shift from the old curriculum as well as teaching method to the newly-introduced textbooks that are based on CLT. To elaborate, the purpose can be defined as understanding what micro-level decisions are being made in the classroom setting in terms of the strategies and techniques followed to teach. The research explores teachers' implementation of the recent official policy in connection with CLT as suggested by the new curriculum. As this curriculum innovation has been under-researched at Syrian schools, this work endeavours to present concrete evidence and findings as to what extent teachers' practices reflect and match the new intended education policies, what attitudes they hold towards these policies and what challenges impede that implementation. In addition, through a paradigm shift which seeks to empower localised teacher agency, this study goes beyond identifying constraints to provide a new perspective which addresses a realistic educational change.

With the gradual shift of focus and the final layer of the study, another emergent goal is to explore (and document) the inevitable impact that the merciless war has had on Syrian English teachers, schools and schoolchildren. This original aspect can lead to understanding the catastrophic realities associated with the destruction of thousands of schools. Hence, the study attempts to report some of the urgent issues and, later on, recommendations to support and save a (increasingly becoming lost) generation. Education in crisis situations has been for the most part report-based (UNESCO, UNICEF and UNRWA); however, this empirical study provides rather practical insights about English education in crisis, particularly war, circumstances. In fact, this dimension of the study represents a gap in educational (particularly, ELT) research that I have felt was worth filling both from an ethical and an academic point of view.

Thus, the study emphasised looking at teachers as agents of their own practice in their immediate contexts and building on their sense of agency for any realistic understanding of ELT in difficult circumstances and even conflict-affected situations.

1.3. Background: Recent Curricular Development in Syria

This section provides a background to the original study. Arabic occupies the status of the national language, the first language (mother tongue for most Syrians), the official language and the language of instruction in Syria, except for English literature and language departments at the university level where English is the language of instruction. Rarely do people use English elsewhere.

English was taught at schools starting from Grade 7; then it was introduced to Grade 5 and, finally, to Grade 1. To do that, the educational curricula aimed to have an early and gradual introduction of English starting from Grade 1 at the basic education stage (from the school year 2002/2003, basic education came to subsume both the primary (6-11 years) and the intermediate/preparatory (12-14) free and compulsory stages (UNESCO, IBE 2011)). This plan was actually carried out on the ground, and schools started teaching English as the widely-taught foreign language from Grade 1 since 2005. French has also received more attention recently to be included at school curriculum as a ‘second foreign language’ starting from Grade 7. The original target learner group of this research (Grade 7) are exposed to 3 English lessons and 2 French lessons a week (Syrian Ministry of Education, 2012).

After the introduction of basic education in 2002, the Curriculum Upgrading Project started in 2004 (to be completed by 2012) in order to amend school textbooks and follow a more scientific and modern methodology (UNESCO, IBE 2011). The education system administration is centralized where the MoE “defines the educational policy on the basis of the resolutions of the [ruling] Party’s Congress and the general plan of the State, and is also responsible for translating the educational plans into reality” (*ibid.*: 4). Taking into consideration the main objectives of education, the Higher Committee for Curricular Development supervises the development and changes of curricula. Thus, the curriculum is developed at the central level and applied nationwide. The hierarchy of education in Syria represents a complete top-down centralised system, where the power of decision-making lies in the hands of the officers of the MoE. Those MoE officers’ power comes from their influence in terms of allocating funding and resources and

promoting and implementing the government's political framework (Gharib, 2009). All the significant decisions tend to be made on a higher level, and teachers are required to translate these decisions into action on the classroom level.

1.3.1. Overview of Current English Curriculum

For decades, the grammar-translation method has been dominating the teaching-learning settings in Syria. Traditional English language textbooks have been changed. The new textbooks *English for Starters*, which are of an interactive nature, require that Syrian teachers develop their teaching methods and styles in line with the new curricula (Ashour, 2011) to cope with the changes. Many teachers I contacted in my MA dissertation data collection period in 2010 and some that I am still in contact with express the view that they would follow the curricular guidelines only in the presence of inspectors. They return to normal (personal choice of) teaching soon after the inspector's visit ends.

Because both Teacher's Books in *English for Starters 7* and *English for Starters 8* identically illustrate the aims of the curriculum, I will point to one of them only. The *English for Starters 7* is designed to be taught for Grade 7, and it includes a Students' Book, two cassettes with listening material, Workbook and Teacher's Book. Kilbey (2009) states in the Teacher's Book that regional and international topic-based content is provided in the course, where each module focuses on a particular theme that is in turn developed throughout the two units of the module in different ways in order to appeal to the students' educational needs and interests (See Appendix I: 1). The Workbook provides learners with the opportunity to practise the language and skills already covered in the Students' Book, demonstrating how the

two books are closely interlinked. The course also offers a comprehensive language syllabus in which contextualised grammar is presented and reviewed with systematic practice. The Students' Book and Workbook complement each other and consist of 6 modules; each module contains 2 units; each unit has 8 lessons and 1 project as illustrated in the table below:

Table 1.1. Description of Unit Contents and Focus

Description of Unit Contents and Focus		
Lessons	1-4	grammar + vocabulary
	5-6	practice the 4 skills; speaking, writing, reading and listening, with particular attention to reading and writing
	7-8	focus on skills development and include a wide range of reading and writing exercises
	9	Project

1.3.2. The Culture of Syrian Teacher-learner Relationship

The top-down educational hierarchy explained earlier seems to further apply to the teacher-learner (T-L) relationship in classroom. In the Syrian culture, a teacher does not only represent a source of knowledge for their students, but also an adult that should be highly respected. Then, teachers more often than not have power over what goes on in the classroom, and they ask questions, correct answers and name who should be participating after students raise their hands to be allowed to voice out their answers. Students normally extend the belief of asymmetrical power relationship they carry from home to the classroom setting. As it is considered impolite to disagree with adults represented by parents at home, it is equally socially inappropriate to engage in negotiations and disagreement with teachers at school.

Little seems to be known about how far the recent CLT teaching method and curriculum have influenced this traditional asymmetrical relationship. CLT assumes

an interactive atmosphere where students exchange views, engage in pair- and group-work activities, raise questions and bring their experiences into discussions. Such a methodology challenges the Syrian teacher's status as the transmitter of information and endangers them with the idea that students can ask as well as answer questions. Learners can think critically and disagree with the teacher, and that could be socially embarrassing as it may cause a threat to the teacher's authority according to their cultural expectations about their own roles as well their students'.

Another significant factor influencing teachers' socially expected roles is that they, as viewed by parents and students, should be able to prepare students well to pass and score high marks in exams. The assumption then is that good teachers need to be wise enough to focus their students' attention on what they are expected to achieve according to the exam questions rather than to the curriculum design and principles. Thus, socio-cultural factors do have a bearing on how teachers and students perceive their roles in the classroom setting.

In this complex situation, at the beginning of this research journey I wanted to find out the impact of the new CLT-based curriculum on teachers' practices in teaching English to Grades 7 and 8 students. As I embarked on the data collection, and especially the interviews, it struck me that it was more important to investigate what the teachers' beliefs and practices were and why rather than simply report how far their teaching practices followed/diverged from the curricular principles.

In the following section, I highlight the complications to the already existing difficult circumstances which have become further undermined by war.

1.4. More Recent War Circumstances

As I started my PhD in 2011, the Arab Spring (although a controversial term for many) wave of demonstrations, strikes and marches was spreading through several Arab countries. Protests broke out in these countries and forced the rulers of Tunisia and Egypt from power, and as that encouraged similar protests to erupt in other countries including Syria, the situation proved dissimilar in the outcome. In Syria, the demonstrations developed into an ongoing war unresolved until now (2015). The conflicts have led to the displacement of millions of Syrians internally and externally, affecting all sectors including education. Whilst thousands of schools have been destroyed and damaged, other schools have been established in camp schools. This crisis inevitably started to influence my research journey in several ways. As I was planning to visit the country and conduct classroom observations and interviews, the original participants became difficult and then impossible to contact (See Chapter 3). With the ongoing armed conflicts, the new participants were in a situation totally different from normal; some were displaced in different parts of Syria, others refugees in neighbouring countries, and some others became teachers in Turkish schools and institutes. One of the participants I interviewed who was herself a refugee also happened to volunteer as a teacher in a camp school established in Southern Turkey as tens of thousands of Syrians fled across the border.

Summary

This chapter has provided a snapshot of Syria, with particular reference to changes in the curriculum and teaching approaches and the more recent changes in the country which have led to conflict, war and displacement. The scope, purpose and

significance for carrying out this research have been also detailed in order to limit, contextualise and rationalise the study. Thus, this assists me to carefully identify some concerns, critically explore the literature and tactfully set up a direction for investigating them in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature in relation to the complexity of educational change and implementation constraints, highlighting theoretical and empirical studies in ELT contexts. Chapter 3 introduces the research plan, methods, participants and practical considerations to conduct this study.

Chapters 4 & 5 reveal two teachers participating earlier in the study when the circumstances in Aleppo, Syria, did not indicate a war forthcoming. The focus of the research was centred on CLT prescriptions in the MoE policy and teachers' reaction/resistance due to their own cognitions and contextual variables. The teachers' perspectives on their lesson transcripts have made me rethink the focus in terms of the need to look at ELT from a perspective which celebrates complexity and diversity (See Chapter 2, Section 2.3) rather than complies with uniformity and conformity to top-down policies.

Chapter 6 further investigates the themes emerging from the two core teachers by extending the exploration to a larger group of teachers who discuss their experiences at Syrian state schools in the years leading to the war. As the ongoing conflict caused Syria's refugee exodus to reach to millions, some of the participant teachers in this chapter are displaced or refugee people.

Consequently, Chapter 7 extends the analysis of new aspects relevant to (education and) ELT in crisis situations and throws light on the impact of the current

conflict on teachers and students. It also shows a teacher (Salma) who was able to participate in my study after armed conflicts caused the internal and external displacement of millions of Syrians, including the two teachers in Chapter 4 and 5. These war circumstances led to my focusing on Salma, a teacher in a Syrian camp school in Southern Turkey. The immediate thought was to supplement my data with lesson transcripts and the teacher's own interpretations similarly to the other two teachers. However, this chapter also brought other invaluable aspects into the thesis which relate to teacher agency and ELT in conflict-affected situations.

In Chapter 8, I discuss the overall findings in relation to the research questions and literature. Chapter 9 concludes the study with contributions, implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study has undergone three key changes of direction. The original plan was to explore how far classroom realities match the MoE official plans represented in CLT curriculum innovation. To do that, I reviewed the literature on CLT tenets and empirical studies of implementation challenges (2.1 & 2.2.3). However, the initial analysis of teachers' classroom practices and their cognitions has led to shifting the original question from investigating what features they follow in the curriculum into a much more bottom-up, contextually-appropriate approach. This change has enabled me to see how teachers interpret the curriculum and their practices, bridge the gap and make sense of their teaching. In order to appreciate their complex reasoning, I had to engage with the dynamic debate focussed on the problematic aspects of CLT (See 2.2 & 2.3).

Finally, with the war situation in Syria, teachers' lives (all Syrians' lives indeed) have been affected by exceptional circumstances, impacting my research plan, too. The impact of war on education, particularly English language teaching and teachers, in Syria is, therefore, reflected in my data. This political layer has emerged as part of the organic change of the study context that it would have been impossible to overlook the tragic circumstances and changes in the country (Section 2.4).

Therefore, the study is a journey of three stages:

- teachers' implementation of curricular principles;
- those teachers' own beliefs about innovation and how they make sense of the curriculum;
- impact of war on ELT (and education) and teacher agency in these circumstances.

This chapter first reviews the literature as regards the theoretical precepts of CLT, followed by a section on the Syrian *English for Starters 7 & 8* curriculum intrinsically founded on communicative tenets. Empirical studies on the issue of introducing ELT curriculum innovation are also reviewed with close reference to the impact of teachers' beliefs and contextual realities on their classroom practices. Thus, the review premises the theoretical and empirical foundations that guide the research in terms of understanding implementation challenges in various contexts. These challenges develop the line of the study to explore the dynamic debate on the practicality of the communicative approach in light of the local exigencies in non-Western educational environments. With the additional layer of focus on the impact of war on Syria, I discuss how ELT has moved from challenging to conflict circumstances, hence bringing in a new aspect.

2.1. Communicative Language Teaching

The following two sections introduce the theoretical precepts of CLT and the English language curriculum in Syria *English for Starters*.

2.1.1. Essentials, Aims and Principles of CLT

Typical English classrooms at Syrian schools, and for ages, followed the model of the grammar-translation method in which teachers' explanations of grammar and students' practice of controlled phonological and syntactical patterns (with the aim of near-native accuracy) lead to acquisition (Savignon, 2002). This focus on grammar in the traditional syllabi, Mitchell (1994: 35) explains, was based on the assumption that:

the learner's goal was a complete, in-depth mastery of the target language, and also that the learner would be willing to study for some years before applying practically what had been learned.

Disappointment with this method by native speakers and in native-speaking countries gave rise to the philosophy of CLT in the early 1980s based on Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence which was a response to Chomsky's linguistic competence. Ellis (2008: 956) clarifies that communicative competence "consists of the knowledge that users of a language have internalized to enable them to understand and produce messages in the language". In view of that, researchers adopting a broader perspective than the generativists' narrow definition of competence studied not only the knowledge of L2 grammar, but also how learners put this system to use in communication (Ellis, 2008). Elaborating on Hymes' notion, Canale and Swain (1980) point out that communicative competence comprises grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence.

The purpose of communication in a communicative curriculum, Breen and Candlin (2001: 11) argue, is to synthesise "ideational, interpersonal, and textual knowledge—and the affects which are part of such knowledge". In connection with

these functions of language, it is held by Berns (1990), expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning constitute the main concern of communication. Sharing and negotiation, in turn, require particular communicative abilities represented or realised by speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. These skills are the meeting point as well as the means through which competence and abilities are translated into performance (Breen and Candlin, 2001). Breen and Candlin (*ibid.* : 15) also argue that:

the involvement of all the participants in a process of communicating *through* texts and activities, and meta-communicating *about* texts, is likely to exploit the productive relationship between *using* the language and *learning* the language (my italics).

Contrary to the views of traditional structure-centred approaches, being able to communicate in the target language and use these language skills requires ‘linguistic’ and ‘communicative’ competence. That entails “knowing when and how to say what to whom” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 2011: 115). For the authors, linguistic competence is one part of communicative competence, and, therefore, knowledge of forms and meanings must be employed concurrently with knowledge of functions to become a competent speaker in social situations (Brown, 2007).

Savignon (2007: 209) illuminates that the concept of communicative competence, which she introduced in 1972, was used to portray language learners’ ability to “interact with other speakers” and “make meaning” as “distinguished from their ability to recite dialogues or to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge”. To Savignon, these features of communicative competence corroborate the multidisciplinary of CLT as an approach derived from linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology and educational research. Unlike the focus of audiolingualism,

the Canale and Swain framework (1980) represents a “pedagogical breakthrough in extending the description of language use and learning in terms of more than just sentence-level structure” (Savignon 2007: 209).

In terms of language classrooms, various interpretations of the CLT Approach have been suggested; however, the core CLT principles, which Mitchell (1994: 38) believes most commentators would agree on, are classified in terms of language learning theory as the following:

1. Classroom activities should maximise opportunities for learners to use the target language for meaningful purposes, with their attention on the messages they are creating and the task they are completing, rather than on correctness of language form and language structure;
2. Learners trying their best to use the target language creatively and unpredictably are bound to make errors; this is a normal part of language learning, and constant correction is unnecessary, and even counterproductive;
3. Language analysis and grammar explanation may help some learners, but extensive experience of target language use helps everyone!

The three principles inherently take account of many principles Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) list in their description, such as authentic language use, negotiation of meaning, the target language being the vehicle for classroom interaction, errors to be tolerated and considered a natural outcome of students’ communication skills development, encouraging cooperative relationships among students and learners working on all the four skills from the beginning.

Developing communicative competence also necessitates that teachers and students become aware of their new roles which are quite different from the traditional ones. The teacher is not only a facilitator of the communicative process

between students and between students and the activities and texts, but also an interdependent participant within the learning-teaching groups wherein the teacher shares responsibility for teaching and learning with the learners (Breen and Candlin, 1980). Perceiving the students as having significant contributions to make, the teacher seeks potential and exploits it continually through establishing “situations likely to promote communication” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 2011: 122). On the other hand, being *interdependent participants* (Breen and Candlin, 1980), students negotiate meaning and take more responsibility for their own learning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Brown, 2007; Savignon, 2002).

The following section outlines the fundamental tenets upon which the recent curriculum and textbooks *English for Starters* have been designed.

2.1.2. CLT and *English for Starters*

The Syrian MoE introduced a new series of English language curriculum in 2004 based on the principles of CLT and, by extension, teachers had to follow a new methodology of teaching. Embracing CLT principles, the series *English for Starters* has been produced by York Press and Syrian Educational Publishers for primary and preparatory levels at state schools. As the only source available, the Teacher’s Book will be my reference (in this chapter and in the analysis chapters) to highlight and quote key principles and instructions about the methodology of teaching that the curriculum advocates.

According to Kilbey (2009: 4) in the *English for Starters 7 Teacher’s Book*, the materials “have approached the language skills in an integrated way in terms of the tasks and activities for both learners and teachers” (See Appendix I: 1 for further

description of *EFS*). This seems to go in line with Savignon's (2002) argument that the combination of form-focused exercises with meaning-focused experience has been strongly supported by research evidence. And in terms of skills development, the curriculum is designed in such a way that:

provides regular, carefully staged practice in reading, listening, speaking and writing, where the emphasis is on practice and production of language. (Kilbey 2009: 4)

Working on all the four skills in the curriculum corresponds with the communicative view of the necessity to equip learners with the competence and the abilities needed to negotiate and share meanings in communication (Breen & Candlin, 2001; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

As stated in a document obtained from the MoE in 2005, the new ideology of EFL teaching and learning highlighted in the curriculum, Gharib (2009: 8) holds, is that which aims at “developing communicative competence—the book series *‘English for Starters’* does not just enable learners to master the English grammar but also moves a step further ahead to focus on the language as a means of communication”.

The key aims of the curriculum outlined in the Teacher's Book and the MoE document above are based in essence on the essentials of CLT. Targets of the curriculum, such as emphasis on ‘practice and production of language’, ‘developing communicative competence’ and ‘language use as a means of communication’, fall back upon the main principles and central concept of CLT. For instance, the aim of developing students' communicative competence is a fundamental concept (Savignon, 2002) and the goal of language teaching (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson,

2011). In addition, the curriculum provides learners with language exercises in context, a notion widely accentuated by CLT researchers (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Brown, 2007; Mitchell, 1994; Savignon, 2002). Such an emphasis on context is driven by the notion of language use as a means of communication that is part of the new ideology of teaching and learning in the new curriculum. Language as a means of communication seems to be in line with what Savignon (2002: 15) terms ‘Language use beyond the classroom’ where the communicative activities in the classroom, functioning as a rehearsal, prepare learners to use the second language in the world outside. Of course, context can play a crucial factor challenging the goal of preparing students to produce unrehearsed language outside as they “leave the womb” of the classroom (Brown 2007: 45), particularly in EFL contexts (See 2.2.3).

The Teacher’s Book indicates that there are opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills and express their own opinions, aspects which support students to express their individuality (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). As the curriculum puts much emphasis on learners, a notion particular to the new roles of the teacher and learners in CLT settings, Kilbey (2009), in the Teacher’s Book, highlights the significance of pair- and group- work. Working in pairs or groups develops “confidence, one of the main attributes of a fluent speaker of a foreign language. Students can try things out in front of their friends without the pressure of speaking to the teacher (who knows more), or to a large group” (*ibid.* : 6).

EFS Teacher’s Book also underlines that in some parts of the book, “students have the opportunity to listen to an *authentic* poem, linked to the theme, which they then practise reading aloud” (Kilbey 2009: 5, my italics). Authentic materials are

often described loosely as those “which were not originally designed for the purpose of language learning, but that were designed to have some purpose within the target language culture, such as a newspaper or novel” (Pinner 2014: 22). The notion of authenticity, however, has been contested over decades (Pinner, 2014; Badger & MacDonald, 2010; Gilmore, 2007). For example, Badger & MacDonald (2010: 4) argue that:

In many reading and listening classes, there is too much focus on making what happens in the classroom as authentic as possible and not enough on helping learners to develop their skills so that they can read and listen independently.

As Breen (2001: 138, cited in Badger & MacDonald (2010: 4) maintains that “The classroom has its own communicative potential and its own authentic metacommunicative purpose”, Badger & MacDonald (2010: 4) ground their argument on their view of “the language classroom not as a kind of second rate version of the outside world but as a place with its own legitimacy” in which teachers and students develop “authentic voices” (Simpson 2009: 432).

In his comment on the concept of authenticity, Widdowson discusses the following point: “The appropriate English for the classroom is the *real* English that is appropriately used outside it” (1996: 67, my italics). However, he indicates that whilst authenticity “concerns the *reality* of native-speaker language use”, “the language which is *real* for native speakers is not likely to be *real* for learners” (*ibid.*: 68, my italics). Students not only belong to a different community with a different reality, but also lack the “knowledge of the contextual conditions which would enable them to authenticate in native-speaker terms” (*ibid.*). Therefore, the meaningful contexts for those students in the classroom “cannot be replicated

versions of native-speaker contexts of use” (*ibid.*). Their local teachers share the same experience and are therefore “naturally in a better position to construct the relevant classroom contexts and make the learning process *real* than are teachers coming from a different linguistic and cultural background—for example those from an English-speaking community” (*ibid.*: 68, my italics).

Thus, *English for Starters* textbooks have been introduced by the Syrian Ministry of Education with an intention to change the language teaching/learning approach common at Syrian schools. In consonance with the CLT literature, the curriculum aims to address reading, listening, speaking and writing, underlining the ‘practice’ and ‘production’ of language as key goals. According to the planners, the textbooks provide opportunities to develop students’ communicative competence and critical thinking skills and focus on the language as a means of communication through engaging in pair- and group- work exercises.

With close reference to CLT, the following section introduces perspectives on the concept of educational change and the inextricably intertwined dynamics related to innovation implementation. It also highlights how far, as reported in many studies, teachers’ beliefs and contextual realities influence classroom practices, hence their correspondence with and reinterpretation of CLT.

2.2. Curriculum Innovation and Change

CLT can be considered as a curricular innovation in Syria. Introduced in 2004, the new textbooks series *English for Starters* represented a change in curriculum, part of which was a new teaching/learning approach. As centralised education governed state schools, all the country schools were provided with the

textbooks and the teachers were hastily asked to shift their classroom practices in accordance with the aims of the new curriculum. The majority of teachers have had no professional teacher training on how to roll out the ideas into schools, and even those who have been trained expressed negative views about the inadequate training delivered (personal communication).

2.2.1. Perspectives on Innovation and Change

To define the terms in this study, ‘innovation’ and ‘change’ will be employed interchangeably as equivalents to indicate ideas of ‘difference’ and ‘novelty’ (Waters 2009; Wedell, 2009). Attempts to introduce educational innovation and implement any new program or policy need to address the multidimensional issues essential for a significantly real change to occur in practice (Fullan, 2007). The three key dimensions necessary to achieve a particular educational goal involve the “possible use of new or revised *materials*”; “possible use of new *teaching approaches*” and “possible alteration of *beliefs*” (*ibid.*: 30). These dimensions can be understood in light of Kumaravadivelu’s (1999: 454) view that:

What actually happens there largely determines the degree to which desired learning outcomes are realised. The task of systematically observing, analyzing and understanding classroom aims and events becomes central to any serious educational enterprise.

In his discussion of ELT projects, Holliday (1992: 403) states that “there is often failure within ELT projects to produce innovation which is in the long term meaningful and acceptable” due to tissue rejection (See 2.3.3). As educational planners “view the change process as a purely linear, rational-technical planning and legislative matter” in which implementation is “merely a matter of issuing clear instructions to those lower down the administrative hierarchy to introduce changes in

the classroom from a given date” (Wedell 2009a: 2), change initiatives and aims in many countries do not seem to be successful. Instead of ignoring the human factors, educational planning needs to “acknowledge people’s central role in determining the rate and route of a change process” (*ibid.*). The centrality of people’s role, he asserts, comes from the critical influence of what they *believe* and how they *behave* on the outcomes of change initiatives (*ibid.*, my italics).

According to Wedell (2009b: 397-398), failing to take into consideration the following four lessons from innovation theory, much of ELT innovation has been unsuccessful:

- In-depth appraisal of the innovation *context* is vital.
- Certain innovation *characteristics* are *likely to make adoption more successful*. These preconditions (Kelly, 1980) include a. ‘feasibility’ (will it work?), b. ‘relevance’ (is it needed or does it meet the needs of the students?) and c. ‘acceptability’ (compatibility with the existing educational philosophy and teachers’ educational beliefs and teaching approaches).
- The innovation *implementation approach* affects its potential for success. As change needs to address aspects such as alteration of underlying beliefs, teaching methods and materials, a ‘normative-re-educative’ strategy should be the basis for the implementation approach. Kennedy (1987: 164) explains this strategy as “a collaboration, problem-solving approach, with all those affected by the change involved in some way and making their own decisions about the degree and manner of change they wish to accept”.
- Innovation should be *sufficiently systemic*: other aspects of the educational system may be impacted by changing one part.

In his review to innovation in English language education, Waters (2009) highlights that a centre-periphery model of change with a power-coercive strategy (forcing change through legislation) dominates in most reforms initiated by

governments in developing countries. A key problem identified with these types of reforms in the literature, Waters (*ibid.*: 435) holds, is the “lack of ownership and contextual fit” as a ‘one size fits all’ view ignores how teachers experience the change and make it meaningful on a subjective basis. The following section discusses this relationship between agency and structure.

2.2.2. Agency and Structure

As the educational innovation in Syria has been top-down in nature, an important part of it which it has neglected is the agency of teachers and their reactions:

Neglect of the phenomenology of change that is how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms (Fullan 2007: 8).

Drawing on psychologists’ and socio-cultural theorists’ terms of ‘internal locus of control’ and ‘agency’, namely “the feeling of having some control over and responsibility of what happens in the (work) environment”, Wedell and Malderez (2013: 216) emphasise that implementers’ satisfaction with educational change is more likely to grow when they exercise a higher degree of agency. Therefore, involving more teachers in initial decisions about educational planning assists their feelings of not only control but also personal responsibility of change (*ibid.*).

Since no single method will fit across all contexts (See 2.3), it has been increasingly emphasised that teachers “need to trust their own voice and develop a pedagogy suited to their own specific situations” in which they adapt rather than adopt others’ experiences (Littlewood 2007: 248). As teachers represent the most directly impacted group in practice by educational changes (Wedell 2009: 29), it is

substantial to appreciate teachers' agency in response to new approaches of teaching and learning. This is because much national reforms take a top-down mechanistic change with coercive strategies that, in extreme cases, introduce materials and methodologies to teachers as a pedagogic 'package' or a product to implement irrespective of context (Kennedy, 2013). As teachers' ownership is denied, the result can be "resistance, subversion or simply indifference" (*ibid.*: 17). Therefore, drawing on a Tunisian ESP Project case study, Kennedy advocates an ecological model of change, a mix of mechanistic and individual approaches, which:

is person-centred, considers users' needs, identifies problems rather than rushing to solutions, and does not rely on top-down mechanistic models but is a process that works towards interaction between participants at all levels. (*ibid.*: 26)

This ecological model is a strategy of deconcentration that may not be easily implementable in highly centralised systems of education. Some of its characteristics are:

... the general control over the curriculum may remain at the level of the Ministry but care is taken to preserve linkages between curriculum advisers and teachers to ensure a genuine process of feedback between teachers and designers from pre-formulation of plans to implementation and evaluation. The curriculum is designed around the local needs and wants of teachers and learners. (*ibid.* : 21)

In two secondary vocational education schools in the Netherlands, teacher agency, sense-making and ownership appear to play a key role in teachers' professional identity (Ketelaar *et al.*, 2012). Despite being not directly relevant to ELT, they conclude that if teachers "experience enough agency to be able to find their own way in putting the innovation into practice, they can feel a high degree of ownership regarding the innovation" (*ibid.*: 281).

Relative to CLT and the agency of teachers in reform efforts in different contexts (Japan, Hong Kong and Costa Rica, Taiwan and the US), Savignon (2007: 213) argues that “an increasing number of language teaching methodologists are turning their attention to the practical understanding of the participants themselves”. This view, she contends, provides not only validation of “a pragmatic focus for language pedagogy”, but also “a thought-provoking perspective on language teaching today as the collaborative and context-specific human activity that it is” (*ibid.*).

Freeman (2013) maintains that educational change involves three key concepts that drive the sense-making process: the locus, the process and the unit of change. He contrasts the ‘manifest’ and the ‘latent’ frames used to analyse change and argues that the second frame is more coherent. In the ‘locus’ of change, the author clarifies that research has moved from simply studying behaviour to take into account teachers’ thinking or reasoning (Borg, 2006; Freeman, 2002). This cognitive view has implications for the ‘process’ of change as it involves teachers who make sense of the new curriculum rather than be largely invisible and merely carry out implementation accurately as determined hierarchically by specialists. Understanding sense-making enables us to “capture what exactly is happening in the change process as it unfolds for and through participants” (Freeman 2013: 128). In the unit of change, Freeman argues, the conventional focus on the classroom participants’ different ways of acting and interacting needs to be contrasted with latent changes in the participants’ identities. Therefore, the author concludes that an alternative frame “to tease out what is latent in the situation” will involve: “How are the participants making sense of the innovation?” (*ibid.* : 134).

In Syrian schools, the government introduced new materials as well as teaching approaches, but we are left with open questions regarding the possibility of using them in classrooms and the issue of teachers' beliefs that as a result require real changes in conceptions and behaviour. As these changes would require 'reculturing' of teachers which may demand significant adjustments to many of their established classroom behaviours and beliefs (Wedell 2009; Fullan, 2007), I have found it essential to explore Syrian teachers' practices as well as perspectives on change to see if any reculturing has taken place. In addition, Waters (2009) indicates that despite the substantial body of literature on innovation and change, significant lacunae still exist in terms of geographical situations such as the Middle East, where my study endeavours to cover this gap.

In the following sections, I will point out the key factors that researchers report to be essential for the implementation of new curricula. Educational and ELT research has accentuated, *inter alia*, two significant issues to consider in any attempt to reform teaching and learning by introducing a new curriculum based on different theoretical perspectives than those practised in earlier curricula; teachers beliefs and contextual forces (Karavas-Doukas, 1995; Borg 2006, 2009; Breen *et al.*, 2001, Spillane *et al.*, 2002; Bax, 2003; Nunan, 2003; Hiep, 2007; Orafi, 2008; Orafi and Borg, 2009).

2.2.3. CLT Implementation: Teacher Beliefs and Contextual Realities

Many Syrian teachers and some researchers reveal positive attitudes, with some reservation due to challenges, when the idea of introducing CLT is brought into

discussion (personal communication, Maher and Abeer). Long time ago, Karavas-Doukas (1995: 53) has highlighted that curriculum innovations are “rarely implemented as intended, with teachers either rejecting the innovation outright or professing to have changed their practices but in reality carrying on as before”. This view may be explained in the argument of Spillane *et al.* (2002: 394) relevant to the impact of prior knowledge and beliefs on how people see and interpret policy and reform:

An individual's prior knowledge and experience, including tacitly held expectations and beliefs about how the world works, serve as a lens influencing what the individual notices in the environment and how the stimuli that are noticed are processed, encoded, organized, and subsequently interpreted.

Truly, although CLT has been a ‘buzzword’ in the theory and practice of ELT, confusion and debate persist in its design and implementation in reform efforts today in the 21st century (Savignon, 2007).

Since this study examines the implementation of a CLT curriculum in Syrian classrooms, teachers (to use Waters’ (2009: 433) terms “usually the main front-line implementer”) play a pivotal role in “shaping classroom events ... being active, thinking decision-makers” (Borg 2006: 1) rather than “merely ‘a cog in the educational machine’” (Elbaz 1981: 45, cited in Borg 2006: 13). Wedell (2009: 62) establishes a strong link between teachers’ beliefs and their response to and enthusiasm for innovation concepts and implementation outcomes:

How teachers think, and how this affects their behaviour, will strongly affect their response to, and enthusiasm for, change, and so affect the route followed by the implementation process and its ultimate outcomes.

To understand teachers and the teaching process properly, we need insights into “the unobservable dimension of teaching—teachers’ mental lives”, including their thoughts, knowledge and beliefs, that relate to and influence their classroom practices (Borg 2009: 163). Therefore, Syrian teachers’ beliefs in response to the *EFS* need to be addressed in order to identify how curriculum innovation and implementation can actually meet and overcome reasons for disparity. Since curriculum innovation involves deep-rooted conceptual change, implementing a new curriculum requires far more than designing it in congruence with recent and innovative teaching and learning approaches. Abstract policy ideas embody a system of practices, and therefore reform “cannot be accomplished by having teachers learn only the surface form of reform practices” (Spillane et al. 2002: 417). Rather, reform

requires grappling with the underlying ideas and may require deep conceptual change, in which teachers rethink an entire system of interacting attitudes, beliefs, and practices. (*ibid.*)

Although teacher cognition research dates back over 30 years, this tradition emerged in the mid-1990s in L2 research, growing substantially and rapidly (Borg, 2009). However, the concept of belief used widely in the literature, Pajares (1992: 313) argues, seems to be a point of disagreement and lacks a clear definition although the common distinction between belief and knowledge points out that while the former is based on “evaluation and judgment”, the latter is based on “objective fact”. Borg, M. (2001: 186) sums up the concept of *belief* as:

a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour.

Looking for consensus, Pajares (1992: 316) suggests that teachers’ beliefs can be defined as “an individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition, a

judgment that can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend, and do”. In ELT, however, the term *teachers’ beliefs* is “usually used to refer to teachers’ pedagogic beliefs, or those beliefs of relevance to an individual’s teaching” (Borg 2001: 187). A more comprehensive definition that applies to my study appears to be that of Basturkmen *et al.* (2004: 224) adopted by Orafi (2008) in the Libyan context, a very similar context to Syria in many ways (EFL; same L1; CLT curriculum innovation). Basturkmen *et al.* (2004: 224, cited in Orafi, 2008) define teachers’ beliefs as "statements teachers made about their ideas, thoughts, and knowledge that are expressed as evaluations of what should be done, should be the case and is preferable".

According to Borg (2006: 275), the relationship between language teachers’ cognitions and practices demonstrates a process that is neither linear nor unidirectional due to the “dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience”. These aspects together constitute a key issue many researchers have identified as essential for a successful reform. Discussing agents’ (teachers’) faithful but failed attempts to implement reform, Spillane *et al.* (2002: 393), for instance, argue that prior knowledge, beliefs and experience can exercise a significant role in shaping their understanding and relation to policy:

Teachers' prior beliefs and practices can pose challenges not only because teachers are unwilling to change in the direction of the policy but also because their extant understandings may interfere with their ability to interpret and implement the reform in ways consistent with the designers' intent.

This discussion has encouraged me to explore what attitudes Syrian teachers hold towards the curriculum and what impact those teachers’ own beliefs have on their conceptual acceptance and hence classroom implementation of the new

teaching and learning principles. Although teacher cognition has been addressed in many L1 contexts, several L2 education contexts remain unaddressed (Borg, 2009). Not only is Syria a case in point in terms of context, but also the “primary and secondary schools in the state sector” where non-native English teachers work with large classes in the country represent the institutions in which “much work is required” (*ibid.*: 168). In view of the fact that all the teachers participating in the study are in-service teachers, the aim is to understand what they do and what beliefs, knowledge and thoughts underpin their practices (*ibid.*).

In addition to teachers’ thoughts, knowledge and beliefs, an equally significant issue that researchers often point to in the study of teachers’ classroom practices is the *context* of change and its impact (Borg, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009). A teacher’s teaching may not reflect their ideals due to contextual constraints such as “the social, institutional, instructional, and physical settings in which teachers work” (Borg 2009: 167). According to Borg (2006: 40), these contextual factors can either bring about a change in teachers’ cognitions or simply alter teachers’ practices with no change in the underlying cognitions (the latter represents a case of mismatch between stated and observed beliefs).

When examining the implementation of *EFS*, these debates about context bring into focus the socio-cultural factors discussed in Chapter One. The new methodology requires, among other things, that teachers and students adopt new roles rather different from the ones they are accustomed to practising. Therefore, a review to empirical studies focussed on the relevance and impact of teachers’ beliefs and contextual forces on curriculum innovation can enhance our understanding of the possibilities and challenges in EFL contexts similar to Syrian schools.

2.2.3.1 Empirical studies

The vigorous role of teachers in shaping classroom events has been confirmed in empirical teacher cognition research, but a great influence also comes from other contextual dynamics and realities beyond teachers' control (Borg, 2006). Empirical ELT studies such as Karavas-Doukas (1995), Carless (2004b), Hiep (2007), Richards and Pennington (1998), Nunan (2003), Sakui (2004) and Orafi (2008) report teachers' deviations from intended plans for a multitude of reasons, particularly where CLT tenets have been the guiding theoretical grounds for those reforms.

Examining the causes of the (non)implementation of the Greek EFL innovation, Karavas-Doukas (1995), reports two 'most obstructing' teachers' identified factors in secondary schools. The first factor is the failure of the innovation to cater for the incompatibility between the philosophy of the Greek wider educational context (highly teacher-centred) and the learner-centred approach of the new English language curriculum. Therefore, the feasibility of implementing CLT principles "in a school culture that promotes a different type of social order in the classroom" requires awareness, adaptation and research (Breen, 1983; Holliday, 1992, 1994; Tudor, 1992, cited in Karavas-Doukas 1995: 64). The other crucial challenge relates to the lack of teacher training and communication with the curriculum developers, the foreign language advisor, teacher trainers and other teachers.

In a case study conducted with two senior teachers and one junior teacher at a university in Vietnam, Hiep's (2007) findings show that although the stated beliefs

of the three teachers were compatible with CLT principles, they were not able to implement communicative practices such as pairwork and group work. The inconsistency seemed to be caused by a number of contextual factors which

range from systemic constraints such as traditional examinations, large class sizes, to cultural constraints characterized by beliefs about teacher and student role, and classroom relationships, to personal constraints such as students' low motivation and unequal ability to take part in independent active learning practices, and even to teachers' limited expertise in creating communicative activities like group work (*ibid.* : 200).

Although trained to implement the principles of CLT, five novice teachers in secondary schools in Hong Kong find that exam pressures, large classes, discipline issues, learners' low motivation and teacher's lack of confidence to go beyond the textbook heavily influenced their decisions in the classroom (Richards & Pennington, 1998). Such practical and contextual factors, the authors argue, discourage innovation and encourage "a 'safe' strategy of sticking close to prescribed materials and familiar teaching approaches" (*ibid.* : 187). Little teaching was reported to be genuinely communicative and to a great extent "the philosophy of the course was thus stifled by the overriding concern to maintain an orderly class and to cover the prescribed material of the school syllabus" (*ibid.*: 184). Also in Hong Kong, Carless (2004b) concludes that task-based innovation in primary schools is shaped by teachers' beliefs, experiences, classroom context and macro sociocultural realities.

Investigating English language policies and practices, Nunan (2003: 589) also reports a "disjunction between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality" in the countries surveyed (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam). Even though all these countries subscribe to CLT (and some to TBLT)

tenets, teachers' poor skills (if not poor understanding of the ideas) and inadequate preparation seem to be manifested in practice, leading to difficulties in carrying out these principles on the part of implementers (teachers) themselves. According to Nunan (*ibid.*: 609), "there is a widely articulated belief that, in public schools at least, these policies and practices are failing".

Sakui's (2004: 162) study of Japanese secondary school English teachers' understanding and implementation of CLT suggests that in addition to internal factors, teachers frequently face external constraining difficulties including "grammar-oriented entrance examinations, time constraints, classroom management problems, and rigid curriculum schedules". As that may not be equally substantiated by all researchers, the author argues that contextual challenges rather than changes in teacher beliefs drive educational reform.

In a study conducted on ELT curriculum innovation in Libyan secondary schools (a context very similar to Syria in many aspects), Orafi (2008) points to the inconsistency between the intentions of the curriculum and the teachers' actual classroom practices. There is limited uptake of main principles such as pair work, learners' use of the target language and development of reading, listening and writing skills. The author concludes: First, teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning are shaped by their own experiences rather than by the philosophy of the curriculum. Their beliefs about their students' and their own abilities (that the demands of the curriculum are beyond their abilities and understanding) have a great impact on their classroom practices; hence they often omit activities they view as beyond the learner's linguistic abilities. Second, various contextual forces are in tension with the curriculum, such as the social expectations about teachers' and

students' roles, the exam system focusing on grammar and vocabulary and the lack of teacher training and development programmes (Orafi, *ibid.*).

In fact, many of the factors the above studies disclose seem to go beyond teacher's preparation and experience (except for Nunan, 2003) which Savignon (2002) considers the reasons why teachers differ in reacting to CLT. In addition to teachers' beliefs and lack of training and expertise, cultural, personal and systemic constraints constitute serious challenges in a wide range of different contexts and various school and university levels. Borg (2009: 166) underlines the need to address context in addition to teachers' cognition as "teachers' actions are not simply a direct result of their knowledge and beliefs". These issues that reflect on the consistency of teachers' practices with curriculum innovation will be investigated in Syria in order to come up with comparisons and other challenges particular of the Syrian context that impinge on intended policies. Rather than simply react as 'transparent entities', teachers 'filter', 'digest', and 'implement' the curriculum as it suits their own 'beliefs' and 'contexts' (Freeman & Richards 1996; Woods 1996, cited in Sakui 2004: 155). This is where I moved from my original intention of evaluating the extent to which the curriculum was implemented to focus more on how Syrian teachers in fact make sense of their teaching.

Indicating not only a dichotomy between theory and practice, but also a difficulty in identifying the meaning and examples of CLT in local schools, Savignon 2007: 215) summarises the confusion teachers and students have in the following:

Research, however, continues to show a disconnection between the theory explained in university methods classes and classroom teaching practices ...

there persists considerable confusion among classroom teachers and their students as to the meaning of CLT. International students who come to U.S. universities for a Master of Arts degree in the teaching of English as a second language (MATESL) degree with a goal of learning to teach English, must often look hard to find examples of CLT in local schools.

2.2.3.2 CLT: teacher beliefs, context and L1 use

Syrian teachers are expected to follow an English-only classroom policy, promoted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) as a core component of the communicative approach of the English language curriculum. Two main motives made me consider investigating the E-only policy in this study. First, the L1 ban seems to be one of the difficulties in applying CLT in foreign language classrooms. In view of the problems Mitchell (1994) discusses in relation with CLT, the relationship between *doing* and *reflecting* arises. The author argues that high levels of involvement in speaking in the target language and minimising explanations are expected to be performed by the learners. However, developing learner autonomy requires a promotion of learners' awareness of their own learning strategies. Explanations of such strategies seem to be difficult to be conducted without switching to L1. The second motive for exploring the mother tongue role draws on the traditional teaching that characterised Syrian schools for long time involving extensive use of the L1 in English language classrooms.

It is necessary, therefore, to explore how far this deep-rooted practice has changed and what teachers have cognitively altered in order to respond to the top-down policy while having to consider the local classroom realities. It is equally worth investigating whether they resort to the L1 only to promote learners' awareness of their learning strategies (Mitchell, 1994) or also for other pedagogical functions (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989; Macaro, 1995; Ustunel, 2004). In fact, a long

time after introducing a communicative curriculum into Libyan schools, Orafi's (2008) findings show that classrooms are mostly teacher-centred and substantial time seems to be spent on reading, vocabulary, translation into Arabic and error correction.

Although extensive L1 use characterises the grammar-translation approach, which has resulted in learner in-depth language knowledge but a limited capability to put it into communicative effect (Nunan & Lamb, 1996), we need to note that:

there is more to own-language use than the 'static' and 'traditional' impression that the term 'Grammar Translation' portrays, an image which has served to stereotype and marginalise non-monolingual teaching practices around the world (Pennycook, 2004, cited in Hall and Cook 2012: 277).

Nunan and Lamb (1996: 100), perhaps therefore, argue that in foreign language contexts, "attempting to adhere rigidly to the target language at lower proficiency levels is probably unrealistic and counterproductive". L1 use "can greatly facilitate the management of learning" in quick grammatical and lexical explanations and procedures and routines (*ibid.*).

Since teachers' cognitions play a pivotal role in the way they respond to curriculum innovation in their classroom practices, reviewing Syrian teachers' views on L1 use assists our understanding of how far teachers' beliefs influence their classroom language choices. This is because, Hall & Cook (2012: 294) argue, the extent of 'own-language use' depends on the teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of "its legitimacy, value and appropriate classroom functions".

Language teachers vary in their attitudes towards having both L1 and the target language (TL) used simultaneously in classrooms. In a small-scale piece of

research examining 21 Italian teachers' attitudes towards TL use in English language classrooms, Macaro (1995) argues that Italian teachers do not really make fuss about using or excluding the L1 in classrooms, reporting two teachers saying "a wise use of it is needed by any sensible teacher" and "I believe TL is a useful ingredient. It'll never be the whole recipe" (*ibid.* : 54). Only 7 teachers out of 21 believed that it is essential for the teacher to use TL almost exclusively in order to be called a good teacher. A significant number of those teachers tend to believe that organising language activities, evaluating learners' oral performance and building interpersonal relationships can be fulfilled through Italian.

Studies demonstrate differing views on the association of L1 use with teachers' and learners' proficiency. Macaro's (*ibid.*) findings identify teachers' beliefs about their own competence and confidence as a key factor influencing the use of TL (15 teachers out of 21), echoed by what Merritt *et al.* (1992) describe as 'linguistic insecurity' of teachers, and by the findings of Carless (2004a) and Nagy & Robertson (2009) showing that teachers' use of L1 is determined by their target language proficiency. Other studies (Mitchell 1988; Macaro 1997; Crawford 2004, cited in Hall & Cook 2012: 295) suggest that frequently reported teacher beliefs indicate that the balance between the use of the L1 and the L2 "is most consistently affected by learners' ability". In contrast to these findings, van der Meij & Zhao (2010, cited in Hall & Cook 2012) find that teacher or learner proficiency plays no role in code-switching in two Chinese universities. It is also concluded by Raschka *et al.* (2009) that code switching (CS) practices are not due to teachers' insufficient competence; rather, they, in their strategic use of CS, represent a high level of communicative competence. Rezvani and Rasekh (2011) observe that Iranian

teachers tend not to maximise L2 use although they have high English proficiency levels. These beliefs and attitudes possibly vary “according to [teachers’] cultural background and educational tradition” (Hall & Cook 2012: 295).

In a review of empirical studies on teachers’ beliefs, Macaro (2000, 2006) finds that although L1 use is often negatively viewed by teachers’ attitudes, the majority of teachers believe that L1 is necessary in their classes because the right conditions to exclude it completely are not there. Macaro’s findings suggest that recourse to the L1 is a comprehension rather than an acquisition issue as teachers in the secondary sector tend to use more L1 with ‘less able’ learners in order to help them infer meaning (*ibid.* 2006: 68).

Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) report that the majority of teachers (in their interviews and questionnaires) in the Gulf believe that the L1 facilitates the L2 teaching and learning; 63% of the teachers think that they deploy the L1 in what they believe to be beneficial for learners. In Egypt, the majority of teachers believe that the L1 should be used in activities of grammar, vocabulary and dialogues (Mohamed, 2007). Comparing the interviews and field notes with the observations assisted Copland and Neokleous (2011) to figure out the difference between three teachers’ ‘stated behaviour’ (attitudes) and ‘actual behaviour’ (practices), with teachers either under-reporting or differently reporting their L1 practices. Complexities in teachers’ decisions about classroom language choice (use of the L1) are often based on their perceptions of their learners’ 1). affective needs of creating a stress-free environment and 2). cognitive processes of turning input into intake. Not only the teachers’ professed desires seemed to be in conflict with their classroom realities, but also their feeling of guilt was manifest when they were critical of the

amount of L1 used, regarding it a hindrance rather than a resource for teaching and learning L2 (*ibid.*). In another study, Mitchell (1988: 28) reports that the teachers interviewed looked as if “they were making an admission of professional misconduct in “confessing” to low levels of FL use”. It is proposed that instead of “feeling guilty for straying from the L2 path” (Cook 2001: 405), teachers can “deliberately and systematically” use L1 in the classroom (Cook 2010: 11).

As previous sections have identified failure of CLT-based educational changes in different contexts, it follows then that an elaborate discussion is appropriate to the dynamic nature of the approach. Most of the arguments advocated in the following part, at least partly, converge with Ellis’s (1996: 216) statement that it is inaccurate and misleading to assume that “Western culture has discovered a language teaching methodology with universal application, and that communicative competence shares the same priority in every society”. Therefore, the following section extends the research conducted on the gap between theory and practice or innovation and actual implementation to discuss complexity and diversity in educational contexts worldwide.

2.3. From Uniformity to Complexity and Diversity: the Dynamic Debate

West-initiated ELT projects in countries with different educational traditions have revealed that diversity represents the norm rather than the exception (Holliday, 1994; Markee, 1997, cited in Tudor, 2003). In response to ELT innovation projects, teachers in Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan and Sri Lanka continued to follow a ‘hidden curriculum’ as their real needs were not possible to be reconciled with the new

curriculum (Kennedy, 1987; Holliday, 1990, cited in Holliday 1992). Littlewood (2014: 356) highlights that these top-down approaches and policies have ‘lost their validity’:

... top-down approaches, in which policy-makers and other non-teaching ‘experts’ legislate on how language is best taught, have lost their validity. Every teacher is the best expert in his or her own situation but can draw insights from others (theorists as well as teachers) and test them in this situation (Littlewood 2014: 356).

Due to the many CLT implementation challenges in ELT contexts and with the changing conditions to ELT approaches, researchers have not only questioned the concept of method itself and suggested postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001, 2003, 2006; Brown, 2002; Richards, 1990), but also developed notions of context approach (Bax, 2003), ecological practice (van Lier 1997; Holliday, 1994, Tudor 2001, 2003; Hu, 2005) and appropriate methodology/pedagogy (Holliday, 1994, 2005; Kramersch and Sullivan, 1996; Savignon, 2002, 2007; McKay, 2003). These notions will be discussed in the following sections, featuring various arguments and understandings of the complexity of diverse educational settings.

2.3.1. Beyond Methods: Post-method Pedagogy

In the following two sections, I will highlight the authors’ critique to CLT and methods, their alternative approaches and the (in)compatibility of method and postmethod.

2.3.1.1. Shortcomings of methods and alternative approaches

Although Nunan (1991: 248) believes that classroom practice may draw on useful aspects of all methods, he comments that in practice once existing methods reach the

classroom, they “generally become subsumed within the larger concerns of classroom management and organisation” due to two major shortcomings of methods:

1. they are packages of precepts imported into the classroom rather than derived from a close analysis of what actually goes on in the classroom
2. they may divorce language from the contexts and purposes for its existence (*ibid.*).

Due to the complexity of language, teaching and learning, teachers can be seen to have developed the conviction that “no single perspective on language, no single explanation for learning, and no unitary view of the contributions of language learners will account for what they must grapple with on a daily basis” (Larsen-Freeman 1990: 269). In his criticism to the centuries-long quest for a “supermethod that will solve the language teaching problem once and for all” through unlocking the secrets of language learning brought by some linguistic breakthrough, Richards (1990: 1-3) suggests the term (and title) ‘Beyond Methods’ to explore the notion of effective classroom teaching and learning instead of imposing a predetermined set of teacher/student roles and teaching/learning activities. Similarly, Brown (2002: 9-10) believes in the demise of methods and emphasises that the search for the ideal method “generalizable across widely varying audiences” is no longer a central issue. Nor is the methodology the milestone for the teaching journey.

Kumaravadivelu (2003: 23) contends that, more often than not, methods which seem to be radically novel turn out to be variants of already existing methods painted with new terminology. His critique of the “the limited and the limiting nature” (*ibid.*) of the concept of method reveals three inherent limitations:

- Methods are based on *idealised concepts geared toward idealised contexts*, asserting a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Methods tend to wildly *drift from one theoretical extreme to the other*, not anchored in any specific learning and teaching context, and caught up in the whirlwind of fashion.
- Concerned narrowly with classroom instructional strategies, the concept of method is *too inadequate and limited to satisfactorily explain the complexity of language teaching operations around the world* (*ibid.*: 28-29, my italics).

Discussing the efficacy of the three implementation factors (authenticity, acceptability and adaptability), Kumaravadivelu (2006: 64) concludes that CLT has made bold claims as it “is out of sync with local linguistic, educational, social, cultural, and political exigencies”.

Pennycook (1989) reassesses the dominant concept of method and the dimensions of power and inequity involved. Because what actually goes in the classroom is hardly reflected in so-called methods, he suggests that instead of conceptualising teaching within “totalizing or universal discourse, we need to recognize the complexities of language teaching and its contexts, and strive to validate other, local forms of knowledge about language and teaching” (*ibid.* : 613).

Alternative approaches were put forward by some of these authors as a consequence. Redefining the role of the teacher as an investigator rather than a mere performer of a prescribed method, Richards’s (1990) process-oriented approach suggests deriving more effective methodological principles and practices (under the circumstances) through the teacher’s ongoing observation of their own and their students’ classroom practices. Methodology in this sense is a “dynamic, creative, and exploratory process that begins anew each time the teacher encounters a group of

learners” (Richards 1990: 1). Brown (2002), similarly, proposes a ‘principled approach’ of a dynamic nature (as is teaching), hence subject to change with the teacher’s experience and observation. In much the same spirit of Holliday’s (1994) and Savignon’s (2007) arguments (See 2.3.4), Brown (2002) argues that a unifying (and unified) approach, which informs techniques and tasks, rather than a method is what is needed. Thus, his post-method-era approach is grounded on enabling teachers to be responsive to students’ goals and engaging teachers as ‘technicians’ in a cycle of diagnosis (of students’ needs), treatment (with successful pedagogical techniques) and assessment (of the outcome of those treatments) (*ibid.* : 11).

To Kumaravadivelu, the endless cycle of method (life, death and rebirth) has resulted in a postmethod condition (1994) and, as a result, postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Kumaravadivelu’s (2003) framework of three parameters and ten macrostrategies (See Figure 2.2). The Pedagogical Wheel in Kumaravadivelu 2003: 41) stems from the imperative need to move to a context-sensitive postmethod pedagogy in which teachers are strategic thinkers, practitioners and explorers. The three parameters that inform the teacher’s personal theory of practice are:

- *Particularity*: teacher’s ability to be particularly “sensitive to the local educational, institutional and social contexts” within which teaching for a particular set of goal takes place (*ibid.* : 35).
- *Practicality*, within which particularity is deeply embedded, means the teacher’s generated personal theory through practice; and
- *Possibility*, derived from critical Freirean pedagogists, seeks to provide teachers and students with opportunities and challenges “for a continual quest for identity formation and social transformation” (*ibid.* : 37).

The ten macrostrategies can be perceived as general guidelines, theory- and method-neutral to assist teachers in their constructions of “their own situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques”, hence their own theories of practice (*ibid.* : 38). Unlike eclecticism that suggests practices from established methods, principled pragmatism, based on the pragmatics of pedagogy, can be developed through teachers’ ‘sense of plausibility’, namely “their subjective understanding of the teaching they do ... how learning takes place and how teaching causes or supports it” (Prabhu 1990: 172). Because Prabhu (1990) maintains that the ideal of the best method is inherently unrealisable, he introduces the concept of the ‘sense of plausibility’ in which teachers’ (and students’) involvement (rather than methods) characterises good teaching. The sources for the teacher’s personal conceptualisation of this concept originate from their a). experience as a learner b). earlier teaching experience c). being exposed to methods while training d). thinking of other teachers’ actions or views and e). experience as a parent/caretaker. ‘Real’ teaching takes place when this sense of plausibility remains alive, active, engaged and open to change, in contrast to ‘mechanical’ teaching.

While the argument in the previous section has been contentious, the following part provides a more positive perspective to perceive method and postmethod as compatible concepts.

2.3.1.2. (In)compatibility of method and postmethod

Bell (2003) reaches a reconciliatory line of argument proposing that rather than transcending methods, postmethod should understand and transcend the limitations of the concept of method. Method and postmethod, therefore, represent not only

inevitable but also necessary dialectical forces that, taken together, liberate our practices. While the former (in its top-down practices) imposes methodological coherence, the latter (in its bottom-up practices and appreciation of local exigencies) deconstructs teachers' totalising tendencies that result from method. In his empirical study, Bell's (2007) findings indicate that teachers' attitudes are highly pragmatic and in consonance with the practical options and solutions methods provide them in their teaching contexts. For that reason, eclecticism appears to be the overwhelmingly used term to define their methodology in order to respond meaningfully to context sensitivity. In their teaching journals, teachers' concerns focused on local and daily exigencies, use of pair- and group- work, L1 use and teacher talking time. Bell, therefore, concludes that teachers "seem to be aware of both the usefulness of methods and the need to go beyond them" (*ibid.*: 143).

2.3.2. Ecological Practice and Local Realities in ELT

Kramsch (2002: 3) explains 'ecology' as a metaphor used to capture "the dynamic interaction between language users and the environment as between parts of a living organism". Drawing on an ecological perspective (Holliday, 1994; van Lier, 1997), Tudor (2003: 9-10) indicates that the dynamic interaction of local participants with themselves, the methodology and the wider context produces the pedagogical reality in the ecological approach. This contrasts with the linear relationship assumed in the technological approach between methodology principle (input) and pedagogical reality (uptake). Built on the concept of 'local meaningfulness, the ecological perspective opens the door to "a better understanding of the uniqueness of each teaching situation", thereby developing locally relevant and rooted teaching approaches (*ibid.*: 10).

Tudor (2003) emphasises that a sustainable approach needs to incorporate both the ecological (a wide range of human and contextual factors) and the technological perspectives of language teaching. While the technological approach appeals most to the educational authorities who are “further removed from classroom realities”, the practicing teachers live an ecological reality (*ibid.*: 10) where the ecosystem (classroom) with its rules and inner logic within which teachers work makes their teaching more difficult than a simple application of technology.

In their search for an ecological approach to ELT in China, Hu’s (2005: 639) argument supports Tudor’s (2001, 2003) and Holliday’s (1994) views that:

teachers' choice of a particular teaching methodology is shaped by a myriad of contextual influences and that a methodology's appropriateness cannot be investigated independently of the social context of teaching.

Resource factors (lack of teacher education and/or training, scarce teaching facilities and high-stakes exams) and sociocultural influences (knowledge transmission and accumulation and teacher-learner roles) feature as the major aspects in the underdeveloped socioeconomic conditions and educational infrastructure in Hu’s (2005) case study of the effectiveness of an imported CLT methodology in secondary-level ELT in China. A key element in the failure of recent Chinese top-down ELT reforms lies in the technological approach imported and taken to prescribe methodological choices that ignore contextual diversity (*ibid.*). Although it is not a panacea to remedy all the difficulties and problems, the author suggests an ecological approach as “a viable reform strategy” in which ELT can be effectively improved “under the existing contextual constraints” (654). This ecological approach, Hu asserts, encourages institutionally and contextually sensitive practices and necessitates the elimination of centrally imposed pedagogies of “homogenization

around universal principles” (655). In the analysis chapters of my study, therefore, I attempt to look at how Syrian teachers ecologically make sense of their teaching in the local reality in their responses to the prescribed approach in the official documents, *EFS* curriculum and the Teacher’s Book.

Hu’s (2005) argument for an ecological approach appears to draw on an eclectic approach, an array of contextual, appropriate and post-method pedagogies. He believes that teacher education programmes should familiarise teachers with different methodologies and raise their contextual awareness and analysis skills (Bax, 2004; Holliday, 1994). As he holds that “no single established methodology is likely to suffice” due to its context-specific nature, Hu (2005: 655) also suggests that these programmes guide teachers to develop Kumaravadivelu’s (2003, 2006) and Richards and Rodgers’ (2001) sets of guidelines that empower teachers with effective and practical pedagogical decisions. Rejecting universally appropriate or best teaching methodologies, the ecological approach that Hu (2005: 655) calls for as a productive solution to ELT in China adopts “an informed pedagogical eclecticism that encourages teachers to draw on practices associated with different methodologies in light of student needs, contextual constraints, and instructional resources”.

Hu’s (2005: 655) argument that in principle any methodology (traditional or recent) which “works best in a specific context to help students achieve their goals of English learning should be adopted” sharply contrasts with Holliday’s (1994) and Savignon’s (2007) discussion of the developmental (instead of the serial) nature of methodology wherein CLT epitomises a ‘breakthrough’ in the field rather than simply another method.

2.3.3. Beyond ‘Myths’: Appropriate (context-sensitive) Methodology

As context represents a key element to the failure of CLT curriculum implementation in many of the contexts reviewed (Section 2.2.3), there persists a debate on the “dynamic and contextualized nature of language teaching in the world today” (Savignon 2007: 217). It is, therefore, momentous to discuss CLT as method or approach, Holliday’s (1994) notion of appropriate methodology and Kramsch and Sullivan’s (1996) (culturally) appropriate pedagogy.

Closely relevant to contexts is Holliday’s (1994) macroanalytical ecological research in which he explores the transfer of ELT methodology from dominant BANA contexts (the private sector in Britain, North America and Australasia) to subordinate TESEP teaching/learning environments (tertiary, secondary, primary as state education in the rest of the world) and calls for a culture-sensitive appropriate methodology centred on the communicative approach and the notion:

in its widest, strongest form, this [communicative] approach has the potential to bridge the BANA-TESEP divide, provided that it pays heed to the differing social contexts that are involved (1994: 13).

Syrian schools can be located in the TESEP environment despite Holliday’s (2015) critique of the simplicity of this two part divide being too limiting in his talk at the University of Warwick. Instead, he argues that appropriate methodologists need to look widely and deeply at whatever it takes to unlock how to engage with the intelligence of language students.

2.3.3.1. CLT as method or approach

CLT, as put by Harmer (2003: 289), “has always meant a multitude of different things to different people”. Because it fails to account for the context of language teaching in many countries, Bax (2003) argues against the validity of the whole CLT methodology and calls for the enthronement of a Context Approach. We need to demote methodology or CLT to second place in any training course since it seems to have dominated and relegated the crucial context in which it takes place (*ibid.*). In fact, Bax’s approach appears to be an adapted version of CLT in which the teacher identifies a suitable eclectic approach and “CLT will not be forgotten” (*ibid.*: 285). In their discussion of the essentials of a communicative curriculum, Breen and Candlin (2001: 17) have made it clear that “A communicative methodology will ... exploit the classroom as a resource with its own communicative potential”. Hiep (2007: 198), therefore perhaps, envisages a good picture of “the need to adapt rather than simply adopt CLT”, asserting that “CLT should not be treated as a package of formulaic, prescriptive classroom techniques” (*ibid.*: 200). It is teachers’ responsibility to strike the best compromise between their beliefs and “what seems right in the local context” for the benefit of both parties—the teacher and the learners (Scrivener 2005: 17).

Distinguishing between the concept of ‘method’ and that of ‘approach’, Holliday (1994: 166) argues that the packaged and exported communicative ‘method’ that some find ‘unworkable’ in TESEP situations “is a limited version of what a communicative approach can be”. Holliday (2005: 143) further elucidates that appropriate methodology can be achieved by understanding that “there is a difference between (a) communicative *principles* and (b) the large variety of ways in

which they can be realized as very different teaching *methodologies* in diverse contexts”. Similarly to Holliday (1994) and Celce-Murcia *et al.* (1997), in her discussion of the complexity and diversity of contexts that have brought about the argument of postmethod pedagogy, Savignon (2007: 213) clearly accentuates the concept of CLT ‘approach’ from which ‘communicative teaching methods’ should be derived and adapted in different contexts as ‘appropriate’.

2.3.3.2. Culture-sensitive appropriate pedagogy

The ecological approach has become a basic element of Holliday’s (1994) appropriate methodology to reduce ‘tissue rejection’, a term taken from medicine to describe the situation in which curriculum innovation “does not become an effectively functioning part of the system” (Hoyle 1970: 2, cited in Holliday 1994: 134). An example of tissue rejection and inherent weakness at the Damascus University ESP project in Syria is that:

Although there was an intention to develop a curriculum which fitted with the ecology of the university culture and its community, the reality was more to do with adapting the ecology to fit the curriculum. Hence, Syrian colleagues were constructed as the problematic ‘non-native speaker’ subjects of ‘our’ native-speakerist system (Holliday 2005: 147).

Investigating Syrian teachers “as ignorant subjects rather than as collaborating colleagues” (*ibid.* : 149), the project lacked jointly researching and negotiating *with* these colleagues how they make sense of their teaching. My study, therefore, attempts to address this gap of ignoring teachers’ voices in how they in practice make sense of their teaching in the classroom at a school level.

Instead of foregrounding a new approach in the ELT pedagogy, Holliday (1994: 165) advocates the CLT approach as an appropriate methodology since it

encompasses culture-sensitive areas or potentials which can be “enhanced and developed to suit any social situation surrounding any TESEP classroom”. He explains that:

An appropriate methodology, which must by nature be culture-sensitive, therefore, has two major components: a teaching methodology and a process of learning about the classroom. It is the data produced by the latter which makes the former culture-sensitive and therefore appropriate (*ibid.*: 161-162).

In these culture-sensitive elements, he posits that “there is nothing concerning the teaching of communicative competence *per se* which cannot be negotiated in accordance with the requirements of any TESEP social situation” (*ibid.*: 169, original italics). Also, in terms of teaching language as communication, Holliday believes that, contrary to common belief, it is the strong, rather than the weak, version of the communicative approach that “can be almost entirely culture-sensitive” as the weak version “contains elements which are *not* adaptable to any social situation” (*ibid.*, original italics; See ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ CLT in Littlewood, 1981 and Howatt, 1984). With emphasis on language practice, pair/group work (through information gap) and student talking time, the weak version “demands a methodological regime which many teachers with large, monolingual classes find particularly hard to maintain” (*ibid.*: 171). The strong version, however, is adaptable because the lesson input varies to include a piece of writing, a recording, the teacher’s writing on the board, textbooks, materials, teacher talk, student talk and grammar rules (*ibid.*). In brief, Holliday (1994: 171) states that:

Whereas in the weak version the term ‘communicative’ relates more to students communicating with the teacher and with each other to practise the language forms which have been presented, in the strong version, ‘communicative’ relates more to the way in which the student communicates with the text.

As TESEP teachers represent the recipients of a technology transfer in the form of methodologies produced by BANA, Shamim (1996) finds the learning group ideal (oral skills and group work) intrusive and highly problematic. Therefore, this ideal, Holliday (1994: 109) holds, “needs to be taken as a hypothesis for optimum methodologies, which need to be validated and adapted in the light of real socio-cultural situations”. Hence, local factors are seen as *central* rather than inhibiting to designing ELT appropriate methodologies.

According to Holliday (1994: 172), students do not have to be in pairs/groups to do activities because “As long as individual students are communicating with rich text and producing useful hypotheses about the language, what they are doing is communicative”. Very much in common with Holliday’s (1994) argument against CLT misconceptions/myths, Savignon (2007: 213) also asserts that as students’ needs in their contexts define the goals of CLT, “CLT is not concerned exclusively with face-to-face oral communication”; reading and writing activities are equally significant. Although found helpful in enhancing opportunities for communication in many contexts, pair and group work “may well be inappropriate in some contexts” (*ibid.*).

Within a cultural perspective on appropriate pedagogy, Kramsch and Sullivan (1996: 199) contend that contrary to the traditional communicative concept of pair- and group- work, the concept of CLT in their case study reveals aspects of classroom culture represented in a). classroom-as-family b). teacher-as-mentor and c). language-learning-as-play. By comparing Western perspectives with the local cultural educational tradition in Vietnam, they find that authenticity lies more in the local classroom interactions (which are rooted in broader sociocultural issues) than

in the material or texts. The authors emphasise the need to move from authenticity to appropriateness and suggest appropriate (rather than authentic) pedagogy in which students are both local and global speakers of English:

While authentic pedagogy tries to apply native-speaker practices across multiple contexts of use, irrespective of local conditions, appropriate pedagogy tries to revise native-speaker language use and make it fulfil both global and local needs. (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996: 211)

Ellis (1996) also argues that rather than following a purely theoretical mode of CLT with its universal tenets, teachers need to jointly integrate Western and local practices to make the approach culturally attuned and accepted. The ESL/EFL teacher becomes a cultural ‘mediator’ through filtering the approach as appropriate to the local cultural norms and redefining the teacher-student relationship in consonance with the cultural values encapsulated in the approach itself.

In summary, Holliday’s (2005: 143) three principles for a context-sensitive communicative approach are:

1. Treat language as *communication*
2. Capitalize on students’ existing *communicative* competence
3. *Communicate* with local exigencies.

Drawing on these principles and their diversity of application, different methodologies can be developed as “educators and students from outside the English-speaking West have immense abilities to make English and TESOL what they wish them to be” (*ibid.*: 11). Critiquing appropriate methodology, Holliday (2005) argues that he has grounded this approach on the need and struggle to make sense of themselves in the World TESOL. In his observation of a lesson in a Chinese University, he points to emergent communicative practices in which the teacher

makes his own sense out of material brought by a British curriculum project. Although he does not follow the ‘standard’ communicative methodology, his lesson represents a successful application of communicative principles, “an instrumental use of foreign goods” (*ibid.* : 154).

Thus, the thesis has gradually shifted from focusing on how far teachers’ practices match educational innovation to exploring teachers’ complex reasoning of how they make sense of their teaching in their contexts as agents of their own practice. The following part of the chapter marks the third layer of the study, which has emerged and developed organically with the circumstances under which this research has been undertaken.

2.4. ELT: From Challenging to War Circumstances in Syria

In this part, I follow up the debate on complexity and diversity in ELT and endeavour to extend the literature on the area of difficult (or more positively, challenging (Smith, 2015b)) circumstances to include conflict circumstances. Therefore, I start with a review of English language teaching in difficult circumstances. Next, the following sections review the literature on the rationales for education in emergencies and the need for ELT research *in* and *for* conflict-affected situations.

2.4.1. ELT in Difficult and Challenging Circumstances

ELT research has recognised that the notions and methodologies developed in well-resourced ‘BANA’ contexts cannot be simply transferred to ‘TESEP’, usually under-resourced, environments (See the discussion of Holliday’s work in 2.3.3). As put succinctly by Maley (2001:1) 15 years ago, the reality in most English classrooms

worldwide “is far from the ideal world of pedagogical excitement and innovatory teaching we would like to think we inhabit”. In fact, the debate of teaching English in difficult or ‘unfavourable’ circumstances dates back to the 1960s, with the phrase ‘difficult circumstances’ having first been used by West (1960).

Several studies have discussed what constitutes a large class, the effects of class size on teaching and learning in large classes and the challenges and constraints faced in these unfavourably circumstanced contexts (Çakmak, 2009; Emery, 2012; Englehart, 2006; Jimakorn & Singhasiri, 2006; Kumar, 1992; Watson Todd, 2006). The literature on large classes reports varying figures as to class size; however, the majority of the studies reviewed by Watson Todd (2006: 2) show that they are at least 40 to 60 students. Nonetheless, Englehart (2006: 456) believes in the centrality of context, as an idea ignored by the literature on class size debates, and that “class size is but one variable which interacts among many”.

Shifting the focus to exploring ‘some good practice’ in large classes, O’Sullivan (2006) highlights that the findings on class size and children’s achievements in developing countries are inconclusive and student-teacher ratios are likely to remain high in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the author uses four ‘good lessons’ observed in classes of over 70 students in Uganda in order to elicit strategies for effective teaching and learning in large classes. With ‘feasibility’ and ‘reality’ considered, O’Sullivan thereby endeavours to challenge deficit notions of large classes. Instead of exploring classroom size reduction in countries with limited financial resources, the focus should be on finding strategies that “can make teaching in large classes as effective as possible within the limitations of the context” (*ibid.* : 35). These strategies include classroom organisation and management, effective

generic basic teaching skills, variety of approaches and techniques, whole-class teaching and policy (beyond the capacity of teachers) strategies.

Nakabugo *et al.* (2008) similarly suggest alternative solutions to class size reduction in resource-constrained contexts such as Uganda. These are strategies developed by teachers in response to their teaching situations and, also through reflective practice introduced by the authors, identified as having the potential to facilitate and improve teaching and learning in large classes. Thus, Nakabugo *et al.* (*ibid.*) extended O'Sullivan's (2006) study of good practice through involving teachers as active participants in action and reflection in the research process. They undertook the study, first, in a survey in 20 schools among 35 teachers, followed by, second, reflective action of ten teachers in 5 schools. Renaud *et al.* (2007) also discuss major challenges in large classes with limited resources and, based on two large classes observed in Haiti, provide successful techniques for teachers in similar situations.

More recently, Smith (2011: 2) suggested a new research agenda that moves beyond the notion of class size towards a positive focus on developing appropriate methodology 'from the bottom up'. Building on the Lancaster-Leeds project, the 'Teaching English in Large Classes' (TELC) network (<http://bit.ly/telcnet-home>) has been set up for sharing original research into teaching in difficult circumstances (TiDC), including large class teaching research (*ibid.*). Calling for more proactive studies, Kuchah (2013: 55) argues in his PhD study that "it might be more relevant to investigate how good teachers deal with the realities of their contexts, rather than continue to develop a repertoire of problems caused by large classes and other difficult circumstances". With the purpose of developing context-appropriate ELT

pedagogy, Kuchah (*ibid.*) explored Cameroonian teachers' and students' insights regarding good and appropriate English language teaching in their context. Indeed, as Shamim *et al.* (2007: 99) indicate, whilst large classes have been largely investigated as constraints, they have been “neglected as a target for research into innovative methodologies in developing countries”. They provide two case studies of innovations introduced by teachers in their own classrooms in Pakistan.

In Thailand, Nattheeraphong (2013) also investigated secondary-level teachers' beliefs about ELT appropriate methodology. In the Middle East, particularly Syria, the only example of this bottom-up approach is Ajjan's (2012), which sought tutors' and students' views on large tertiary classes. To the best of my knowledge, exploring teachers' own perspectives and thoughts on ELT in under-resourced state schools has not yet been undertaken. My study, therefore, attempts to move beyond simply focusing on difficulties (including class size) constraining teachers' practices towards positively appreciating and uncovering Syrian school teachers' experiences and voices. As emphasised by Smith (2014: 4), top-down innovations “fail to ‘take hold’” because they still overlook “context in the contents of training” and “fail to engage teacher agency”. Seeing teachers as agents of transformations and opportunities in their own contexts, Smith (*ibid.* : 6-7) suggests assisting teachers to identify successes and ‘good practices’ in their immediate contexts despite difficult circumstances. In pursuit of contextually appropriate methodologies, this type of research and exploration centred on reflecting teachers' agency can lead to promising “more localized, bottom-up innovations” as an “alternative to decades of inappropriate top-down reform” (*ibid.* : 6).

In this study, I will investigate Syrian teachers' agency in their immediate contexts of 'difficult circumstances' in state schools. As the following two sections reveal, this research also endeavours to explore this sense of agency in conflict-affected ELT in displacement and refugee camp situations. Hence, this investigation represents an attempt to extend TiDC to 'conflict' and 'crisis' situations which transcend 'normally' challenging circumstances. These situations also go beyond EFL in 'super-difficult circumstance', a term first coined by Phyak (2015) to refer to Nepal's post-disaster situation caused by the recent earthquake.

2.4.2. Education in Emergencies and Crisis situations

Although unplanned to be, this aspect of (English language) education in crisis situations has become an integral part of the study due to many reasons. When I started my research, it was not possibly thinkable to predict the tragic circumstances resulting from the escalating armed conflicts in Syria. Millions of people have either become internally displaced (at least 7.6 million/ 35 per cent of Syria's population, Global Overview, 2015) or fled the war to live as refugees in camps or cities in neighbouring countries (3.9 million registered refugees, UNHCR, 2015). These conditions have hugely impacted education, with 3,465 schools destroyed or damaged and many occupied for military purposes and with 3 million children out of school (Save the Children, 2014). Most of the teachers (in my study) and their families, schools and schoolchildren have been immediately affected by Syria War, hence impacting my data collection and line of research (See Chapter 3 for data collection circumstances).

As I was planning to visit Syrian schools and conduct my classroom observations in 2012, the country went into what the following images partly show.



Figure 2.1. Aleppo During 2012

Source: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article3557240.ece>



Figure 2.2. School in Rubbles

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-20/syrian-school-in-rubbles-after-attack/4583168>

More recently, the following image shows a harrowing example of the impact of war on education, teachers and students: ‘At least seven people were killed, including four children and a school teacher, and dozens were wounded in the air strike that targeted the Seif al-Dawla teaching centre’ (The Guardian, 3 May 2015).



Figure 2.3. Syrian children killed in government barrel-bomb attack, say rights groups

Source: The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/03/syria-children-killed-in-government-barrel-bomb-attack-say-rights-groups>

Despite the fact that schools and teachers are targets of attack, the main concern of donor agencies in humanitarian crises and situations of conflict is normally towards shelter, food and health, and education has often been “a low priority” (Smith 2014: 113) or secondary (Sinclair, 2002, Sommers, 2002; Kagawa, 2005; Winthrop & Mendenhall, 2006). ‘Education in emergencies’ is defined as “education for populations affected by unforeseen situations such as armed conflict or natural disasters” (Sinclair 2007: 52) where “children lack access to their national and community education systems” (Nicholai & Triplehorn, 2003: 2, cited in Kagawa 2005: 494). In this thesis, the situation in Syria falls into the armed conflict category.

Conflict was acknowledged as a challenge to the achievement of the Education for All (2000-2015) at Dakar in 2000, but governments and agencies agreed to enable education in such crisis situations (Davies & Talbot, 2008). In their retrospective investigation of the impact of war on 43 countries in Africa from 1950 to 2010,

Poirier (2012) concludes that a salient factor in the deterioration of education and the rate of school enrolment (influenced by displacement) is armed conflict. Similarly, Standing *et al.* (2012) explore the impact of the 10-year (1996-2006) conflict in Nepal on children, schools and education. They report how the conflict has brought the educational system into a halt sporadically for “an estimated 300 teaching days ... [which] equates to nearly two years of schooling” (*ibid.* 378).

Therefore, the literature points to several rationales for education in emergencies, specifically armed conflict. First, children’s access to education during conflict is an inalienable and fundamental right (Kagawa, 2005; Machel, 2001, cited in Standing *et al.* 2012) enshrined by international human rights such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child and Geneva Conventions (Winthrop & Mendenhall, 2006). Second, education is perceived to provide both a vital physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection (Sommers, 2002; Kagawa, 2005; Davies & Talbot, 2008; Sinclair, 2007) and a preparation for “economic and social reintegration of refugee and internally displaced populations” (Davies & Talbot, 2008: 509). It can be an enabling factor to provide a sense of security and normality (Kagawa, 2005; Sinclair, 2007; Standing *et al.*, 2012; Winthrop & Mendenhall, 2006). As a protective or ‘safe’ place, education can support students’ “psychological healing from traumatic experiences through structured social activities” (Sinclair 2007: 52-53), enable them to cope with war atrocities and restore their sense of hope and purpose for the future (Winthrop & Mendenhall, 2006). These aspects are presented succinctly in the view that education:

... can have a stabilizing effect on the life of children during times of upheaval and can provide a secure and protective space for children's general welfare, enhancing their ability to cope with difficulties and providing a promise for their future in the context of conflict (Save the Children, 2009).

In addition, Winthrop & Mendenhall (2006: 2-3) see education as essential for lasting children's development and skills and their country's long-term peace and development:

Given that the average length of refugee displacement is currently 17 years, not providing education denies an entire generation schooling, literacy and the potential for increased wage-earning. A lack of educational opportunities prevents people from acquiring the needed skills to rebuild their country once peace has been secured, and significantly jeopardises the long-term peace-building process.

2.4.3. ELT in Conflict-affected Contexts

Whilst this final layer of the thesis attempts to link my data to the literature of education in emergencies or crisis situations (Kagawa, 2005; Sinclair, 2002, 2007; Smith, 2005), it appears to be unique in several aspects. The majority of the research conducted in this area is either report-based (Sinclair, 2002, 2007; Winthrop & Mendenhall, 2006), retrospective (Poirier, 2012; Standing *et al.*, 2012) or focussed on the transformative role of education in post-conflict recovery (Barakat *et al.*, 2013). In direct relation to ELT, it has been often the case with studies exploring post-resettlement language education of immigrants (Brown *et al.* 2006 in Australia; Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2011 in the USA) that we know little, if anything, about refugees' current educational lives and experiences in camps and displacement. In addition, one of the pressing challenges to ELT at times of unprecedented displacement is "to strengthen teachers' capacities to serve the needs of English language learners who either are in conflict situations or have lived through them,

and who often have few material resources but abundant legacies of trauma—*refugees of mind*” (Nelson & Appleby 2014: 19).

Summary

My initial interest was exploring Syrian teachers’ response to curriculum innovation, including their practices, beliefs and the factors impacting their implementation of educational change. As flagged in the introduction of this chapter, similarly to the structure of the Literature Review, the research questions also indicate a journey *from* my interest in ‘how teachers meet policy guidelines’ *into* ‘how teachers make sense of their curriculum and their own practices’, finally *adding* in ELT in war/crisis situations. Thus, the study delves into the workings of teacher agency in both ‘normally’ difficult and extreme ‘crisis’ situations. Based on this research journey, the research questions that this study attempts to investigate have developed to be as follows:

1. How do basic-education English teachers make sense of the CLT-based curriculum and their own teaching?
 - a. How far have the teachers reconciled their teaching practices with the educational innovation?
 - b. What are the factors influencing English curriculum implementation in Syria in the years leading up to the war?
 - c. What are teachers’ suggestions for a viable context-sensitive ELT innovation?
2. What is the impact of war on (education and) ELT, teachers and students?
 - a. How do English teachers make sense of their teaching both inside Syria and in a refugee camp school?
 - b. What are the factors shaping their new war-torn realities?

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Literature Review Chapter has introduced the recent English curriculum in Syrian schools. The development of the research has gradually shifted the focus from investigating teachers' response to innovation into a more exploratory study of teachers' complex reasoning regarding how they make sense of their teaching and the curriculum in their immediate contexts and what factors impact their teaching practices. The armed conflicts in Syria have changed my data collection plan (See 3.4.1) and focus. Therefore, the final layer of this research provides a glimpse of the impact of war on ELT (and education), teachers, students and schools.

The following sections fully detail the research design, paradigm, tradition, data generation and collection tools, participants, triangulation and the ethical considerations necessary to explore the research questions of the study.

3.1. Research Design

The methodology implemented is determined by the 'research purpose', the nature of the study and, by extension, the research questions (Dörnyei, 2007; Mason, 2002a). Reviewing the literature has informed me that answering these types of research questions (See Chapter 2: Summary) could be facilitated through employing a qualitative approach that incorporates two main qualitative research tools. The

techniques adopted are audio-recordings of 6 lessons to the three focal teachers of the study (Chapters 4, 5 & 7), retrospective interviews to explore those teachers' reasoning on their own practices and semi-structured interviews with 11 teachers (Chapters 7 & 8) to further investigate the issues emerging from the three core teachers, and also to study the impact of Syria's war on (education and) ELT. Triangulating the data sources is meant to validate and, at the same time, give more depth and appreciation to the research findings.

3.2. Research Paradigm

Planned to be situated within qualitative research, this work can be generally classified to be taking a critical paradigmatic perspective as it entails concerns beyond the scope of the interpretive paradigm. Originating in the Marxist Frankfurt School in the 1930s, critical theory investigates social reality with the aim of understanding power structure and agency (Hartas, 2010). In social structure, while 'structure' refers to "Recurrent organisation and patterned arrangements of human relationships" (Barker 2008: 489), the term 'agency' applies to the "socially determined capability to act and make a difference" (*ibid.* : 474). Social reality is examined, according to Horkeimer (1993: 21, cited in Hartas, 2010: 45), by approaching participants as agents who are actually "producers of their own historical form of life". In terms of education, and in direct connection with the present study, it is worth investigating how teachers reconcile their teaching with educational change in difficult and (later on) war circumstances. To do that is to examine the relationship between the structure dimension, represented in the official national policy, and the agency one, represented in the classroom practices of individual agents. Agents then, although they respond to new policies, negotiate

policies through their own practices and attitudes, hence tensions sometimes arise (Martin, 2005).

3.3. Qualitative Research

In view of the prolific descriptions of qualitative research (Borg, 2006, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007; Holliday, 2010; Kvale, 1996; Mason, 2002a; Richards, 2003; Silverman, 2010), many reasons gave rise to adopting this approach in the thesis. Whereas in quantitative research the researcher stands aside to provide objectivity for the work, the researcher in qualitative studies is in the research process itself (Richards, 2003). Not only is qualitative research “a person-centred enterprise and therefore particularly appropriate to our work in the field of language teaching”, but also its power lies in relying on the particular rather than on generalisability (*ibid.* : 9). These two aspects closely relate to the nature and purpose of the thesis since, attending to “rich, real, and uniquely human material”, my aim is to understand the world through “close and extended analysis of the particular” rather than through quantitatively produced generalities (Hood 2009: 67).

In addition, the dimensions explored through qualitative researching dig into “the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants”, uncovered with the help of tools elaborating richness, depth and context (Mason 2002a: 1). This research model shows unsurpassed capacity for arguing “*how things work in particular contexts*” (*ibid.*). Thus, the teachers’ own perspectives on their teaching practices and on educational innovation inform my line of enquiry.

As qualitative research concerns subjective social issues, Barron (2006) explains that we need to understand “society as social actors perceive and interpret it, and interpretations of social phenomena can vary markedly according to the

standpoint of the social actor” (*ibid.* : 213). Discussing the inevitability of subjectivity in qualitative research, Holliday (2010: 100-101) suggests three principles for good research: *transparency* (full description of data collection and analysis decisions and addressing the influence of the researcher’ beliefs); *submission* (allowing the unexpected to emerge); and *making appropriate claims* (*seem* to be the case in a particular location and time). Where possible, I have considered these principles throughout data collection, analysis and presentation.

3.4. Data Generation and Collection Methods

The following sections discuss practical issues, research tools and data collection plans, challenges, amendment and change.

3.4.1. Preview to Data Collection Procedures and Challenges

With my original aim to investigate to what extent teachers follow the curricular guidelines, I looked for teachers willing to have their lessons recorded. I contacted many teachers to obtain their initial consent in January 2012. The instructions for taking part in the research mainly informed my interest in lessons that represent English language classrooms at Syrian schools in the normal (rather than idealised) day-to-day practice. I also briefly introduced my focus and aim of the study in addition to the expected data required in case any teacher showed willingness to be involved. Some teachers refused to take part due to the intention to involve observations and audio-recordings.

3.4.1.1. First data collection plan

With the recent educational plan of introducing English to primary Year 1, I first planned to examine how far educational innovation gets translated into practice at the beginner level from Year 1 to Year 3. However, due to the volatile and deteriorating situation of the country (with serious warnings from my family and friends), my scheduled flight to Syria (planned to be in March 2012) was cancelled, leaving me with a limited access to the basic education level only as two teachers (Umar & Maher) in two different state schools at Year 7 kindly showed willingness to participate in my research. Very cooperative, they audio-recorded their lessons and sent them via email. Since they were in total control of choice, it can be assumed that they selected the successful or presentable lessons they were happy to release as an example of how they taught. While one teacher happened to be my classmate at university, the other was one of my teachers at preparatory school. The relationship with the teachers and their openness to research (contrary to other teachers) may explain why they were willing to lend a hand and do me a big favour.

The initial data collection procedures were divided into two phases, one preliminary and the other more focused and intensive. In Phase 1, initial audio-recordings were planned to provide me with some data that I would examine in order to decide on aspects of particular relevance to the research scope. Soon afterwards, a piloting interview with each teacher was meant to be conducted to have their views on emerging issues from the analysis of the lesson transcripts. In Phase 2 (which was not possible), starting on the 15th of September and ending on the 15th of October, the two teachers were expected to record and send their own lessons in a similar way to that of the first period (or if circumstances permitted, I would visit the two schools

to conduct classroom observations and interviews). The two teachers' (Umar & Maher) details (later modified) procedures and time phases are illustrated in the following table:

Table 3.1. First Data Collection Time and Plan

First Data Collection Time and Plan		
Grade Level	Year 7 classrooms in two different schools	
Participants	2 basic-education English teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Umar: BA holder, with 20 years of teaching experience - Maher: BA holder (MA student), with 7 years of teaching experience
Time	Phase 1: May 2012 - July 2013	
	May 2012	- Each teacher recorded two lessons only because the term ended sooner than expected due to the political situation in the country
	July 2012	- One piloting interview will be conducted with each teacher after transcribing the lessons
	Phase 2: September 2012 – November 2013 (did not happen)	
	15 th September- 15 th October 2012	- Each teacher to record two lessons a week.
November 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One follow-up interview will be conducted with each teacher to get their accounts and attitudes on specific communicative behaviours and decisions in the classroom. - Transcription and analysis of the two interviews 	

3.4.1.2. Armed conflict and changes in data collection plan

Whereas Phase 1 in the table above was possible as I managed to receive two audio-recorded lessons from each teacher, Phase 2 plan was not possible. Following transcribing the lessons, and because my judgement of the situation in Syria informed of the impossibility to meet the teachers in person, I selected specific extracts from each teacher's lesson transcripts to have their accounts on why certain teaching practices took place (matched or diverged from curricular guidelines), and what reasoning the teachers had in the process and in reflecting on them.

Umar and Maher were dealing with unprecedented circumstances as the Battle of Aleppo (the 19th of July) started between the Syrian Government Military

and the opposition forces. Thousands of people, including the two teachers, were consequently displaced. With many schools becoming shelter sought by thousands of civilians and other schools destroyed, the 2012/2013 school year did not see light. These circumstances have influenced my data, hence the focus of the study to incorporate ELT in war circumstances (Chapter 7).

Conducting the interviews with the teachers was extremely difficult and challenging for two key reasons. Umar and Maher, for example, had more crucial issues to deal with in order to seize the opportunity of having a two-hour electricity a day than actually go online to be interviewed. The second reason is that the Internet connection and phone calls were badly affected.

After a very long time of not being able to reach Umar and Maher through phone calls, I was able to contact Maher through Facebook on Sunday the 9th of December 2012 (7 months after teaching his lessons). It turned out that he was displaced, living at a relative's house due to the dangerous clashes in his neighbourhood. He agreed to conduct the interview on the 12th of December electricity and internet permitting due to the electricity being intermittent and the Internet frequently down! The rationale for this pilot interview was to generally discuss teaching *English for Starters (EFS)* at Syrian schools in order to generate ideas for the broad questions I planned to conduct with each teacher after they comment on the selected extracts of their lessons. It was not possible for Maher to appear online the 12th of December until around midnight in Aleppo due to electricity, and consequently Internet, cuts. I owe Maher much gratitude for his kind insistence on conducting the interview that late night time.

We attempted to conduct the interview via Skype and Viber, but we unfortunately failed due to the poor Internet connection. Maher generously accepted to employ Facebook Instant Messaging instead, and hence we started the interview chat, discussing his background and qualifications, the teacher training programmes available, the curriculum nature, the challenges of conforming to the guidelines of the new curriculum and the new roles of teachers and learners advocated. Then, Maher disappeared until May 2013.

As regards Umar, all my attempts to contact him failed then, and I was informed by a member of his family that his apartment was actually partly destroyed. Therefore, similarly to Maher, he moved to a relative's house in another neighbourhood too. This hindered any attempts for interviewing the two teachers for a long time, and, to my frustration, it seemed to be potentially difficult to obtain the teachers' attitudes on their own recordings, let alone the possibility of obtaining any later classroom recordings. Fortunately, I was finally able to conduct the follow-up interviews with both teachers (on aspects of CLT implementation) in April and May 2013 (See 3.4.2.1.3). Once Umar managed to come back to his flat, we were able to arrange a time for a Skype video call interview on 16/04/2013. As for Maher, after the pilot interview, he had a car accident, and it was not possible to conduct the follow-up interview with him until 01/05/2013. The only option available was conducting the interview on the phone due to the internet low connection.

Indeed, these circumstances, and other unpredictable fighting and bombardment, have made it impossible for some other teachers, who have already expressed willingness, to participate in the study. With the ongoing conflict in the country, millions of Syrians became displaced and refugees, including English

teachers. At this stage, it became clear that I had to abandon my original design (Phase 2, Table 3.1. above) for good, and for a PhD level thesis, I needed more data and further participants in the gradually deteriorating political situation to build on the data from the two focal teachers (Umar & Maher: Chapters 4 & 5). Therefore, the only option was to conduct interviews with available teachers who have taught or are teaching *English for Starters*.

In fact, these access challenges my study went through could be, as voiced by Silverman (2010: 222), resolved by “the creative use of troubles” as “the beauty of qualitative research is that it offers the potential for us to topicalize ... difficulties [over access] rather than just treat them as methodological constraints". The third layer of the study emerged as this large group of teachers (Chapter 6) also related the impact of war on their careers, lives and students’ education (Chapter 7). As pointed out by Silverman, this original aspect in ELT became part of the study due to access difficulties. Salma, one of the teachers interviewed, happened to have become a (refugee) teacher in a camp school in Turkey. After conducting the interview, she recorded two of her lessons and sent them to me, hence she became be my third core teacher (Chapter 7). The following table shows the final data collection time and plans:

Table 3.2. Amended Data Collection Time and Plans

Data Collection Time and Plan				
Grade Level	Year 7 classrooms in two different schools			
Phase 1: May 2012 - May 2013				
Participants	Data obtained		Period	Pseudonyms
2 basic-education English teachers	Audio-recorded lessons	Two audio-recorded lessons (reading + grammar) from each teacher	May 2012	Umar Maher
	Interviews	Pilot interview	December 2012	Maher

		Detailed Follow-up/retrospective interviews	- April 2013 - June 2013 (written comments)	Umar
			May 2013	Maher
Phase 2: November – December 2013				
Participants	Data obtained		Period	Pseudonyms
11 teachers (Larger sample)	Semi-structured interviews		November-December 2013	Ali, Hasan, Firas, Sameh, Samer, Aalaa, Abeer, Hala, Huda, Rana & Salma.
Grade Level	Year 8 classrooms in a camp school in Turkey			
Phase 3: December 2013 – March 2014				
Participants	Data obtained		Period	Pseudonyms
1 basic education teacher	Audio-recorded lessons	Two audio-recorded lessons (reading + grammar)	December 2013 February 2014	Salma
	Interviews	Detailed retrospective interviews	January-March 2014	

3.4.2. Participants and Research Tools in Detail

This section introduces the research tools and the participants involved in the study, not as initially envisioned, but as was practically possible in the circumstances. Classroom audio-recordings and interviews are deployed as the two major research tools in this study. Two types of interviews were conducted in accordance with the purpose of each stage. The first involved retrospective interviews with the three core teachers (See Chapters 4, 5 & 7) to comment on selected extracts from their own recorded lessons. The second type included semi-structured interviews undertaken to further investigate emergent themes and look for commonalities in the Syrian context and the impact of war on ELT (Chapters 6 & 7).

The following table indicates the chronology of data collection against the backdrop of the developing security situation in Syria:

Table 3.3. Data and Developing Events

Data	Developing Events
<p>May 2012:</p> <p>Two audio-recorded lessons (reading + grammar) for Year 7 classrooms from two teachers in two different state schools (Umar & Maher)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Protests broke out in Syria starting from March 2011. ● Due to the volatile situation of the country, my scheduled flight to Syria in March 2012 was cancelled. ● Two teachers (Umar & Maher) in two different state schools at Year 7 kindly audio-recorded their lessons and sent them via email. ● The term ended sooner than expected because of the escalating political situation in the country. ● Due to the Battle of Aleppo (20 July 2012) between the Syrian Government and the Opposition Forces, Umar and Maher disappeared for 7 months. Then I knew that they were displaced in other neighbourhoods in the city. ● Schools were closed, destroyed or became a shelter sought by thousands of civilians. My rescheduled visit to Syria in September 2012 to conduct classroom observations and interviews became impossible. It seemed to be potentially difficult to obtain the teachers' attitudes on their own recordings, let alone the possibility of obtaining any later classroom recordings.
<p>December 2012:</p> <p>Pilot interview (Maher)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It was not possible for Maher to appear online on 12th of December until around midnight in Aleppo due to electricity, and consequently Internet, cuts. Skype and Viber did not work, so we employed Facebook Instant Messaging instead. ● Then, Maher disappeared again until May 2013 due to a car accident.
<p>April- June 2013</p> <p>Detailed follow-up/retrospective interviews with Umar & Maher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The situation in Syria made it impossible to meet the teachers in person. Therefore, I selected specific extracts from each teacher's lesson transcripts to gain their accounts on them online. Conducting the interviews with the teachers was extremely difficult and challenging under these circumstances. ● Once Umar managed to come back to his flat, we were able to arrange a time for a Skype video call interview on 16/04/2013. ● It was not possible to conduct the follow-up interview with Maher until 01/05/2013 over the phone because of the poor internet connection.

<p>November-December 2013</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with 11 Syrian teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With the ongoing conflict, millions of Syrians became displaced internally or refugees in neighbouring countries. ● These circumstances influenced my data, hence the focus of the study moved to incorporate ELT in war situations as this large group of teachers also related the impact of war on their careers, lives and students' education. ● I had to abandon my original research design for good, and for a PhD level thesis, I needed more data and further participants in the gradually deteriorating political situation to build on the data from the two focal teachers (Umar & Maher). Therefore, the only option was to conduct interviews with available Syrian teachers who have taught or are teaching <i>English for Starters</i>. ● This range of teachers included some developing new experiences attempting to teach inside the country under war circumstances (Firas and Aalaa). Others sought refuge in neighbouring countries, and finally some undergraduate students volunteered to teach in a camp school in Southern Turkey (Salma, Ali).
<p>December 2013 February 2014</p> <p>Two audio-recorded lessons (reading + grammar) for Year 8 classrooms from a teacher in a camp school in Turkey (Salma)</p> <p>January-March 2014</p> <p>Detailed retrospective interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In a camp in Southern Turkey, a school was set up and refugees themselves volunteered to teach. ● Salma, one of the teachers interviewed, happened to have become a (refugee) teacher in a camp school in Turkey. After conducting the interview, she recorded two of her lessons and sent them to me, hence she became my third core teacher. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I found it very relevant and significant to throw light on teachers' agency in a conflict-affected context while teaching the same <i>English for Starters</i> curriculum.

3.4.2.1. Three focal teachers

3.4.2.1.1. Teachers' backgrounds

Umar

Umar, a pseudonym, is a male Syrian teacher in his late 40s who holds a BA degree in English Language and Literature and has over twenty years of English language teaching experience across different areas in the city and the countryside. However, he has been teaching in the city for over ten years now. Prior to joining university, Umar has also held a College Diploma in English, an award granted upon completion of a two-year course mainly established for preparing teachers to teach in primary and preparatory stages. The first sentence uttered by Umar in the interview was “I am a teacher without teaching” [16 April 2013] for one year now due to being displaced in several neighbourhoods within the city of Aleppo.

Maher

With 7 years of teaching experience, Maher (a pseudonym) is a 30 year old Syrian male teacher from the city of Aleppo who commutes to teach in the countryside. He holds a BA degree in English Language and Literature and was a full-time MA student of ELT Methods at the start of data collection. Maher considers himself “a self-taught learner” whose “only help to learn English in high school has been Al Mawrid Al Quarib (English-Arabic/Arabic-English) Dictionary”. He has read Ur’s and Harmer’s books before joining the teaching staff; however, he believes the notions advocated in these books do not relate much to his classroom realities (Pilot Facebook Instant Messaging Interview [12 December 2012]).

Salma

Salma represents a novice teacher in this group with three seemingly different kinds of teaching experience in terms of age, circumstances and context. Salma was not in the original plan of the study. However, as she fled the country and became a refugee (teacher) in a camp in Southern Turkey, it was a great opportunity not only to supplement my data, but also to explore teaching the same curriculum under conflict-affected circumstances, an unexpected direction in my research which reflects the whole journey of the thesis (See Chapter 7). Being a final year student of English Language and Literature, Salma volunteered as an English teacher in the camp school once established.

The three teachers noticeably show different career paths and professional experience. At the beginning of the career, Maher, a fairly new teacher of around 7 years of teaching experience, is in the “stabilisation” phase during which he has become more established in the profession (Richter *et. al*, 2011). On the other hand, Umar, in the middle of the career with more than 20 years of teaching, may demonstrate “conservatism”, becoming “sceptical towards educational innovations and critical of educational policy” (Peterson, 1964, cited in Richter *et. al*, 2011: 118). Discussing the difference between experienced and inexperienced teachers in terms of cognitions, Borg (2006: 40) states that

experienced teachers have more fully developed schemata of teaching on which to base their instructional decisions; they also possess vast amount of knowledge about typical classrooms and students to the extent that they often know a lot about their students even before they meet them. Such expert knowledge is not available to inexperienced teachers.

Whether or not the teachers' practices (evident in the lesson transcripts) and beliefs (in the interviews) confirm these views expressed about beginning- and mid- career teachers requires further exploration in the analysis chapters.

3.4.2.1.2. Audio-recordings and lesson transcripts

Recordings of lessons were needed in the hope that the lesson transcripts would highlight genuine aspects in a real classroom setting. Thus, insights about the practices of how language teachers actually teach English in Syrian basic-education schools, particularly in Year 7, can be gained.

Recordings are common methods in qualitative research to generate rich description (Richards, 2003) and unique examples of real people in real situations (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). In discussing the advantages of audio-recording, Tilstone (1998) argues that it can be a permanent record where action replays can be used whenever needed. In their case study of the Ford Teaching Project, Elliott and Adelman (1976) explain that audio recording was the most significant research tool. A tape recorder, Richards (2003: 185) argues, is "a very valuable device to help us get under the skin of interaction". Hence, instances of teaching can be gathered and conclusions would be drawn in parallel with other data sources. It is also important to note that audio-recording is used as a primary data collection tool by many researchers reviewed in Chapter Two (Orafi, 2008; Liu et al., 2004; Greggio and Gil, 2007).

Umar and Maher only managed to audio-record two lessons each because the term ended sooner than expected due to the political situation in the country. These audio-recordings deployed in the research constituted the core source of reporting

how Syrian teachers made sense of the CLT-based curriculum and reconciled their teaching practices accordingly in the year leading up to the war. I also managed to obtain two lessons recorded by Salma, a teacher in a camp school in Turkey, to explore how she coped with English language teaching in a conflict-affected context.

Transcription conventions

After receiving the four audio-recorded lessons (on smart phones) from Maher and Umar, I listened to the recordings first in order to categorise them according to the language focus of the lesson conducted. Fortunately, each teacher happened to send me two lessons (a grammar and a reading comprehension lesson each), allowing for more comparisons and contrasts as to the (dis)similar approaches to teaching similar language foci. Each lesson was transcribed in full for the purpose of analysing the patterns of talk taking place with respect to the first research question of the study.

Realising that a need for transcription conventions arose, I adapted the models suggested by Richards (2003) and Martin (2005) in Table 3.3. The fact that the data involved switching between English and Arabic necessitated including symbols representing where the L1 utterances appeared to be employed and other symbols indicating their equivalent English glosses. Because the relationship between tape and transcript is that between 'realist' and 'constructivist' objects (Ashmore and Reed, 2000 cited in Richards, 2003), I came to realise that I had to transcribe the lessons and also consider important transcription decisions relevant to fitness for purpose, adequacy and accuracy (Richards, 2003).

Table 3.4. Transcription Conventions

Transcription Conventions		
Symbol	Function	Example
T	Teacher	T:
S	Student	S:
Ss	Students	Ss:
?	Questioning intonation	Who was that?
!	Exclamatory utterance	Look!
_	Emphasis	Put it <u>away</u> .
(XXX)	Unable to transcribe	We'll just (XXXXX) tomorrow
(send)	Unsure transcription	And then he (juggled) it
Bold font	Arabic/L1 utterance(s)	Mithal
<>	English glosses	kalimat jdeedeh <new words>
Hhh	Aspirations	That's hhhhhh I dunno
// //	Description of what is going on	//T writing on the board//
[]	Overlap	S: football hhh [tomorrow] T: [tomorrow] ok going to

(Adapted from Richards, 2003 and Martin, 2005)

Transcribing the lessons, I attempted to identify how far teachers reconciled their practices with the curriculum. Thus, theoretical backgrounds can be worked out from the recordings, and then interviews serve the purpose of further exploration as illustrated in the following section. I definitely agree with Braun & Clarke (2006: 88) that “the time spent in transcription is not wasted, as it informs the early stages of analysis, and you will develop a far more thorough understanding of your data through having transcribed it”.

3.4.2.1.3. Retrospective interviews

After transcribing the lessons I received from the three focal teachers (Umar, Maher and Salma), I decided to analyse each teacher’s lesson in relation to their own verbalised thoughts and reflections on key extracts. This is because, as put by Breen *et al.* (2001: 498, original italics), reflecting with teachers on “*actual instances of practice*” is essential to infer their pedagogies. Stimulated-recall interviews were conducted with them and integrated in the analysis of Chapters (4, 5 & 7) as

retrospective interviewing is recommended and implemented in interaction and teacher cognition studies, the two aspects which significantly contribute to this research.

Table 3.5. Phase 1 and 3 Participants

Participants						
	Pseudonym	Post	Degree(s)	Experience (years)	Age Group	Sex
1.	Umar	Teacher	BA (English Language & Literature)	20	45	Male
2.	Maher	Teacher	MA Student (ELT)	7	30	Male
3.	Salma	Teacher	BA Student	1	20-25	Female

Following their performance of a certain task, respondents articulate their thoughts in what is termed as ‘retrospection’ (Dörnyei, 2007; Gass, 2012; Kormos, 1998). In addition to the fact that it can be associated with most other methods, the major advantage of ‘stimulated recall’ is gaining “access to mental processes that are central, for example, to language processing and production ... inaccessible by any other means” (Dörnyei 2007: 150-151). As this study involves teacher cognition that is unobservable, one of the major methods widely used to make teachers’ beliefs and thoughts explicit is the elicitation of their verbal commentaries through stimulated recall (Borg, 2009; Gass, 2012). Kormos (1998) also holds that such method can enhance the richness of the data and the reliability of the analysis. On the other hand, Cohen (2011) argues that because of the time lapse between the task and interview, there is an inevitable loss of information. However, although in theory the time gap should be kept short, “teachers will often have their own schedules and researchers will need to accommodate these” (Borg 2006: 218).

The case of these Syrian teachers was an extreme one affected by armed conflicts and displacement, which delayed Umar’s and Maher’s interviews (See

3.4.1.2 above). I also believe that essentially the recorded lessons were a memorable event for them as they have conducted that for the first time ever. To help the teachers retrieve their thoughts and then articulate “why they did what they did, in their own terms” and in order to “co-construct a “rich” descriptive picture of their classroom practices” (Bishop 2005: 116), I had to employ some tangible reminder of the event itself. I had to include rich contextual information and as strong as possible stimulus of more than one source (Gass and Mackey, 2000). Before conducting the interviews, the stimulus took two shapes: First, I asked the teachers to listen (if possible) to the audio recordings; second, (in a Microsoft Word File) I emailed the transcript extracts that I had selected to be the focus of the interviews. Since I asked the teachers to send me a typical lesson that represents normal everyday teaching, even if the teachers managed to express general views and reflections, that can greatly assist my line of enquiry. In fact, most studies on teacher cognition do not attempt to elicit “teachers’ interactive thoughts” and stimuli are employed

more as the basis of concrete discussions of what the teachers were doing, their interpretations of the events represented in the stimuli and of their reasons for the instructional decisions they were taking. (Borg 2006: 219)

This exactly describes the purpose of my stimulated recall interviews as finding out what the teachers were thinking at that specific moment was neither the intention nor a crucial element of my study.

I had the consent of the teachers to have the interviews audio-recorded on my iPhone 4 by means of the app SpeakEasy. After that, I transferred the recorded files into my laptop using iExplorer as iTunes had a problem synching the files and downloading it. I also downloaded VLC media player to transcribe the interview files fully because it was highly recommended for high volume and clarity. Also, the

interviewees had the freedom to choose the interview language. Whilst Umar preferred English, Maher and Salma spoke in Arabic, and I translated their interviews into English.

As for Umar and Maher, the interviews included: first, specific extracts for the teachers to comment on and highlight the rationale behind these classroom practices; second, specific questions on teachers' actual organisations of lessons compared with the instructions of the curriculum; third, questions relevant to the teachers' personal perspectives in connection with the curriculum orientations and challenges of implementation (See Appendix II: A). For Salma (Chapter 7), the goal in her two interviews was developing to examine how she could cope with the conflict-affected circumstances in the camp school while teaching the same *English for Starters* curriculum.

I should state that I did have some pre-conceived questions (highlighted below each extract presented to the teachers) before conducting the interviews because of my interest in the relationship between curricular plans and actual classroom practices. Asking the teachers to comment freely on extracts in most cases did not yield answers, hence the questions worked as prompts to activate their thoughts. However, at this stage, their arguments and understandings took me beyond those initial questions. Thus, I ensured flexibility to the interviewees to 'lead' (Richards, 2009) and feel free to express their views openly and talk about aspects they felt relevant or interesting to demonstrate. The interactive nature of the interviews co-constructs the events and indicates what roles and identities the interviewer and the interviewees assume, aspects Mann (2010) suggests that researchers take into consideration in their representations of interview data (See

Appendix II: B). In addition, prior relationship with the three teachers influenced not only the way we talked together, but also the degree of openness and frankness involved (Garton & Copland, 2010). The teachers frequently employ terms along the lines of ‘you already know that’ or ‘I’m speaking very frankly’. They were equally informed of my openness to any future contact for any emerging ideas or comments they might have on the extracts or the questions raised in the interview.

Thus, the data attained through retrospective interviews with Umar, Maher and Salma were set against their lesson transcripts to draw more perspectives on the phenomenon in focus, hence more convincing results could be obtained. As a source of collecting in-depth and rich data, the interviews presented those teachers’ “subjective interpretation of their own behaviours and customs” (Dörnyei 2007: 131). This qualitative technique is considered the most often used versatile instrument that different applied linguistic contexts apply for various purposes (Dörnyei, 2007; Holliday, 2007) in which I attempted to “probe beneath the surface of things and try to see things from the [teachers’] perspective” (Richards 2009: 183).

3.4.2.2. Larger-sample semi-structured interviews

To investigate classroom behaviours and customs further and see to which extent the issues emerging from Umar’s and Maher’s (and later on Salma’s) lesson transcripts and retrospective interviews represent a common practice, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 other Syrian teachers (including Salma who initially participated in the interviews, and then became one of the three core teachers above). This not only strengthened the three core teachers’ interpretations, but also gave me

the opportunity to explore commonalities across a larger sample, rather than limiting the data to unique cases (Black, 2007). The following table summarises the participants' qualifications and experiences, indicating interview date, time and mode. All the teachers were given pseudonyms.

Table 3.6. Phase 2 Participants

Pseudonym	Interview			Degree(s)	Experience (years)	Age Group	Sex
	Date	Time	mode				
Ali	21-11-13	45 minutes	Phone	BA Student	3 (2+1 camp)	20-25	M
Hasan	28-11-13	60 minutes	Phone	MA (ELT)	9	25-30	
Firas	19-12-13	1:55 minutes	Skype	BA (English Language & Literature)	10	30-35	
Sameh	02-12-13	1:10 minutes	Skype	MA (ELT)	10	30-35	
Samer	20-11-13	60 minutes	Skype	MA (ELT)	4	25-30	
Aalaa	01-12-13	35 minutes	Viber	BA (English Language & Literature)	4	S	
Abeer	19-11-13	1:10 minutes	Face-to-face	BA (English Language & Literature)	2	25-30	
Hala	24-11-13	45 minutes	Skype	BA (English Language & Literature)	5	25-30	
Huda	21-12-13	1:30 minutes	Phone	MA (ELT)	2	25-30	
Rana	21-11-13	1:15 minutes	Face-to-face	MA (ELT)	6	30-35	
Salma	06-12-13	55:00 minutes	Skype	BA Student	1	20-25	

Although all teachers were given the option to be interviewed in Arabic, the majority preferred speaking in English perhaps due to their identities as English teachers. Since original, some interviews demonstrate grammatical and structural inaccuracies. Only Salma's interviews were conducted fully in Arabic, and I translated them later on. Hala's interview also included a few occasions of resorting to Arabic where she failed to express her thoughts in English. These instances are

clearly indicated in the analysis chapters. Pauses and hesitations were not marked in the transcripts as these features were not part of the focus.

The range of teachers in these interviews can deepen our understanding of different perspectives generated by a variety of experiences and brings richer insights about teachers' beliefs and views. Some of the participant teachers in this group taught *English for Starters* since the ministry first introduced them in 2004 (Sameh, Hasan and Firas); some taught/have been teaching the textbooks for 4-5 years; other novice teachers taught/have been teaching these books for only 1-3 years. Due to the crisis situation of the country, while some teachers seem to have developed new experiences attempting to teach inside the country under war circumstances (Firas), others moved to work in other countries (Sameh), another group sought refuge in neighbouring countries, and finally some undergraduate students volunteered to teach in a camp school in Southern Turkey (Salma, Ali).

Properly conducted, interviews represent a valuable data collection method to teachers in applied linguistics research as "they can provide insights into people's experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and motivations at a depth that is not possible with questionnaires" (Richards 2009: 187). Teachers' experiences and beliefs constitute a significant part of this study due to the fact that teachers are the ultimate implementers of official education policies (Ferguson, 2009; Kennedy, 2013; Nunan, 2003; Wedell, 2009). The choice of the type of the interview relates to the researcher's empirical goals of a study. Whatever the interview structure is, the goal behind a qualitative interview, Richards (2003) holds, is a deep understanding rather than a sheer accumulation of data. Open or unstructured interviews would not generate valid results ever because not all informants would be asked the same

questions (*ibid.*). When a small number of participants are interviewed in-depth “semi-structured or non-structured interviews are more common” (Borg 2006: 190). The semi-structured type seems to be the most common in applied linguistic studies as it makes a compromise between the two structured and unstructured extremes (Dörnyei, 2007; Richards, 2009). In semi-structured interviews, the questions can provide guidance and equally include follow-up interesting elaborations and developments on given emergent concerns (Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, the researcher would not “use ready-made response categories that would limit the depth and breadth of the respondent’s story” (*ibid.* : 136).

Although the interviews were designed to be semi-structured focused on themes identified by Umar and Maher, they had flexibility to cover other topics that emerge (Drever, 2003, cited in Orafi and Borg, 2009). Following an interview guide approach (Patton 2002: 343), I prepared a list of questions (or to be more accurate prompts) as a guide to “ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed”. An interview guide (See Appendix II: C) in which the interviewer covers all the topics intended and the interviewee feels that “they have participated in a ‘conversation with a purpose’”, allowed sufficient flexibility for me ‘to probe some aspects in depth’ and for the interviewee to ‘lead’ (Richards 2009: 185-186). With this flexibility, the interviews developed “in unexpected directions where these open up important new areas” (*ibid.* : 186). Therefore, whilst they attempted to explore how far the perspectives resonate with other Syrian teachers teaching the same curriculum, investigating teachers’ lives in the current situation naturally touched upon the Syrian crisis. Thus, the conflict-affected (education and)

ELT in Syria and in refugee situations and the impact of war on those teachers became part of the study.

In addition, I did not have to follow a chronological order (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) in asking the questions as teachers sometimes answered some other questions listed in the guide. In the interviews, Hasan, for instance, preferred to start with the second main question first, and I gave him all the freedom to do so. Richards (2009: 190-191) suggest “probing in terms of exploring experiences or beliefs in detail, inviting the speaker to paint a more detailed picture”.

In my preparation for the interviews, I also discussed the list of questions with my supervisor who gave me invaluable insights and kindly advised me “to think about how the questions can be grouped under relevant topics” and subtopics (Richards 2009: 187). To encourage participants to answer honestly according to their personal beliefs, I gave them the opportunity to take a look at the interview questions (before agreeing to conduct the interview) and inform me if they were willing to take part in this study. In addition to considering whether or not they would like to explicitly state their own beliefs, another advantage of this approach was that teachers had the opportunity to reflect on the questions and recall their experiences and attitudes.

3.5. Telephone and Online Interviewing

Given the circumstances (See 3.4.1.2. above), online and telephone interviews played a central role as they were the most viable and convenient means to communicate with the participants. While some interviews were conducted on Skype, others were not possible but over the phone (Hasan, Ali, Huda) or via Viber

(Aalaa) because in some cases even the phone connections did not work. With Internet technology, even in normal situations, Hammond and Wellington (2013: 91) question the concept of ‘face-to-face encounters’ in the following:

Interviews are often assumed to be immediate face-to-face encounters but this need not be the case. Telephone interviews have been common for many years and teleconferencing (with more recent variants such as Skype and Facetime) allow face-to-face contact at distance.

Therefore, the authors remark that “it is an open question as to how much difference face-to-face interviewing makes in practice” (*ibid.* : 92). Online interviewing can be a great opportunity for researchers to “access interviewees across distance and time barriers” and a less intrusive environment for the interviewees “providing better opportunities for reflective responses” (*ibid.*). However, a key challenge is to ensure that the participants are comfortable with using the Internet technology. In my study, all the teachers were familiar with Skype and the recent phone applications (such as Viber) except for Umar who had to rely on a member of the family to conduct the Skype interview.

3.6. Data Analysis

Throughout the thesis, I transcribed all the classroom audio-recordings and recorded (retrospective and semi-structured) interviews fully because “to conduct a fully-fledged qualitative investigation we need to have full transcripts of the recordings that we want to analyse” (Dornyei 2007: 248).

After transcribing Umar’s and Maher’s (Phase 1) lessons, initial qualitative analysis was made in reference to the Teacher’s Book guidelines and CLT tenets Integrating the teachers’ reflections and perspectives with their classroom behaviour

produced initial codes and themes. And in terms of the analysis of teachers' accounts, rather than taking introspective reports as the ultimate revelations, I was keen to look at them only as a valuable source of data (like other data sources) subject to qualitative analysis (Dörnyei, 2007) or, more accurately, as a "complement to other data, since other data are used as a stimulus for the recall" (Gass, 2012: 154). Next, I moved to the second stage in which a larger sample of Syrian teachers were interviewed during November-December 2013. Then, the third stage was an unplanned opportunity to have recorded lessons and conduct stimulated-recall interviews with Salma who happened to be a volunteer teacher at the camp school in Turkey.

These stages informed my cyclical and summative analysis (Borg, 2011) which draws on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some of the advantages which encouraged me to opt for thematic analysis are in the following table:

Table 3.7. Advantages of Thematic Analysis

Flexibility.
 Relatively easy and quick method to learn, and do.
 Accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research.
 Results are generally accessible to educated general public.
 Useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators.
 Can usefully summarize key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set.
 Can highlight similarities and differences across the data set.
 Can generate unanticipated insights.
 Allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data.
 Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development.

(Source: Braun & Clarke 2006: 97 [Table 3])

In fact, the analysis of the audio-recorded lessons generated questions that I further explored with each teacher to have their comments on their actions in the classroom. The initial themes that emerged from these interviews in Phase 1

provided me with insights to the interview guide as well as analysis of Phase 2, but new themes also developed at this stage. As the interviewees at that period of time represented a melange of conflict-affected population (displaced and refugees), new aspects of the impact of war on ELT, teachers, schools and students also appeared.

Attending two workshops on NVivo run by the University of Warwick, I found the software immensely time-saving and convenient in terms of sorting and organising data, particularly the larger group of interviewees (Phase 2). As my interview protocol included three main questions subsuming other detailed questions (prompts), the software provided a neat method for organising questions and answers according to paragraph styles. The NVivo nodes classified the interviewees' answers systematically and clearly for coding. Attempting to capture any recurrent ideas, I went through these nodes and read what teachers expressed in their answers. Due to the interrelatedness of the questions, coding through the neat questions-answers technique did not appear to allow rich qualitative analysis that could bring together relevant codes into sub-themes and themes.

Hammond and Wellington (2013: 23) note that using computer software like NVivo as an approach to code qualitative data is more usual today. However, it should be noted that whatever computer programme is employed, Richards (2009: 191) illustrates, "all successful analysis depends in the end on the way in which codes and themes are identified and developed". Qualitative computer programs have been designed to help us with data management. Therefore, they are not really tools for data analysis but rather software for data administration and archiving (Kelle, 2004). The actual coding is the researcher's responsibility and the software simply "stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures your data to enable human

analytic reflection” (Saldaña, 2013: 28). Therefore, after having all the answers reported, I had to go through a secondary analysis that identifies the recurrent themes. Similar to Richards’ (2003) analysis aspects, Holliday (2010) notes classic steps followed in qualitative data analysis. These include:

- Coding: convert the comments on data into key words/phrases
- Determining themes: group recurring codes within themes
- Constructing an argument: themes are used to make thematic headings and subheadings, with extracts as evidence
- Going back to the data: collecting the extracts involve going back to the data, reassessing the codes, refining/changing the themes and redrafting the argument.

3.7. Triangulation and Validity

Triangulation has been strongly recommended by scholars and methodologists in order to increase the validity of research (Holliday, 2002; Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Cohen *et al.* (2011: 195), for example, state that triangulation can “map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint”.

Triangulation between methods involves “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (Cohen *et al.* 2011: 195). This type of triangulation sought in my study is ‘methodological triangulation’, a term Denzin (1970) gives to a multi-method approach to a problem. The goal of ‘between-method’ triangulation is “playing each method off against the other so as to maximize the validity of field efforts” (Denzin 1978: 304). The three focal teachers’ lesson transcripts were used in conjunction with retrospective interviews (See 3.4.2.1 above). To have teachers look at their own transcripts and be interviewed on issues relevant to specific extracts is a powerful technique of triggering their memories and

making them volunteer comments on what was taking place in the classroom discourse (Walsh, 2011) and what reasoning they have to provide. Thus, it was necessary to check the instances in the lesson transcripts with the views of the teachers themselves and to prioritise their own (rather than my) interpretations of their classroom practices (Breen *et al.*, 2001). To validate instances, attitudes and beliefs, other Syrian teachers were interviewed in the second phase of data collection, allowing for the study to be inspected from different angles and individuals (See 3.4.2.2.).

After separate analyses of the audio-recordings and the teachers' comments (Chapters 4, 5 & 7) on the one hand and the large group of interviews (Chapters 6 & 7) on the other, a holistic interpretation of all the data was discussed in relation to the literature (Chapter 8). This holistic interpretation brought together all the threads and shed light on how Syrian teachers made sense of their English language teaching in difficult circumstances further undermined by armed conflicts. Doing that was driven by the purpose of validating the analysis and strengthening the conclusions to be drawn at the end of the thesis.

I also took two steps to ensure validity. In terms of translating some of the interviews, I found it reasonable to conduct that task myself being a certified sworn English-Arabic translator. In addition, I consulted a professional UK-based English-Arabic interpreter/translator. He read samples of the original interviews and their translated copies and was happy with the quality of translation.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

With the growing interest and utilisation of qualitative methods in applied linguistics, ‘ethical stakes’ are also raised due to the fact that “qualitative research often intrudes more into the human private sphere” (Dörnyei 2007: 64). In the initial stage of the research, the idea of access to institutions and acceptance by those the researcher needs their permission, Cohen *et al.* (2011) hold, becomes clearly relevant to the idea of confirmed consent.

Involving a number of participants whose agreements and protections constitute a highly important element of the research ethics that go in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Warwick, this thesis made ‘an information sheet’ in addition to ‘a written consent form’ available for all the participants to be considered and signed when they voluntarily accepted to be involved (Appendix IV). The teachers were absolutely entitled to be on familiar terms with the purpose of the study as well as the procedures, benefits, rights and risks resulting from taking part in the research (Kent, 2000; Dörnyei, 2007; Cohen *et al.* 2011). Teachers, students and all the institutes taking part in the research are guaranteed anonymity, putting none in jeopardy whatsoever and giving them all the right to withdraw at any time. Having all of the above issues thoroughly completed, I embarked on the task of data collection, followed by the analysis stage.

3.9. Researcher’s Background

A former student, teacher and, later on, teaching assistant at one of the Syrian universities, I, as the researcher, can draw on considerable experience relevant to

learning, teaching and a number of schoolteachers contacts in this particular context. I have spent all of my education years in Syria, starting from Year 1 at school until the BA degree at university. Being a student at state schools and, later on, university supported me to be familiar with the current research context, state schools. In addition, because my university major was English Language and Literature, I gave some English tutorials to young learners during my university study. This experience not only allowed me to be in touch with the curriculum at the time, but also with students and teachers of English.

Linked with the available literature and data about teaching and learning English at Syrian schools, my background as an insider helped me refine the topic of the study and understand and analyse the classroom and interview data. Further, my constant friendly personal communication with teachers (some are former colleagues) has disclosed initial understanding of the teaching experience, the teachers' views and the challenges and difficulties of the profession in the country. A wise employment of this background to appreciate the data closely could, I hope, lead to vigour, richness and depth in refining and developing the analysis process, hence the findings and conclusions.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described the details of the research design, indicating the data collection and generation methods and plans, participants and research tools, triangulation and the ethical considerations involved in conducting this research. The two major tools employed in the study are audio-recordings of classroom lessons and (retrospective and semi-structured) interviews. For analysis to lead to clearly

identified themes and categories, I have followed the following pattern. The analysis of the grammar and reading lessons with the teacher's comments (Chapters 4-5-7) has led to the emergence of main themes centred around CLT and its local manifestations and (particularly Chapter 7) the impact of armed conflict on teachers and students. These foremost themes which have emerged from these three focal teachers were the starting point for the interview questions as well as the analysis of the larger sample of interviews in Chapters (6 & 7).

Chapter 4

FOCAL TEACHER 1 (Umar)

Introduction

In this chapter, two lessons (a reading lesson and a grammar lesson) taught in an urban school in Aleppo are investigated in an attempt to partly answer the two research questions (See 3.1) intended to explore Umar's actual communicative practices and the reasoning behind his teaching. Uncovering teachers' practices not only reflects their (dis)alignment with the official instructions and curriculum guidelines, but also leads to appreciating the teachers' own attitudes and beliefs in addition to the emergent patterns of interaction and the factors and challenges involved in shaping and producing classroom realities.

In fact, as illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3, I started out by focussing on where and how Umar deviated from CLT principles and the Teacher's Book. After looking at the data and the teachers' perspectives and reading the dynamic debate on CLT, I decided to explore Umar's own thinking and practices as they make sense in the local context.

I have selected key extracts from Umar's two lessons and had his comments on each extract. The analysis of the transcripts in relation to the teacher's interview has generated main themes that I illustrate in 4.4. Before the analysis, I start with a background introduction to Umar.

4.1. Background

In Umar's classroom, Year 7 English lessons took place on 25/04/2012 (grammar) and 02/05/2012 (reading), at a state basic education school located in the urban area of Aleppo, Syria. The number of students adds up to 40, all males and all speaking Arabic as their L1. While the reading lesson takes around 30:06 minutes, the grammar lesson counts up to 26:07 minutes.

The following sections reveal extracts and reflections/views on these lessons which the teacher selected as good lessons he was happy to send and share. Whilst all the teacher's comments in the reading lesson come from the interview undertaken on 16/04/2013, his written comments on the grammar lesson are dated 28/06/2013. In the discussion of the main themes emerging (See 4.4), teachers' general views come from the broad interview held on 17/04/2013. All these interviews were conducted at very difficult times in Umar's life, in which the city was experiencing unprecedented airstrikes, destruction and horror and schools were closed for over a year. It is evident that it took me a year to be able to conduct the interviews with Umar as a consequence.

4.2. Reading Lesson

The Teacher's Book (Kilbey 2009: 82) illustrates the following key points about Umar's reading lesson *The Smart House*: the *language focus* is revision of *going to*; the *outcomes* expected are that learners can read, speak, listen, write about the future and give opinions; and the *materials* are Students' Book pages 80 and 81 and Cassette 2 (See Appendix III: A for original materials).

OVERVIEW

Outcomes Can read, speak, listen and write about the future; give opinions

Language focus revision of *going to*

Materials Students' Book pages 80 and 81; Cassette 2

After transcribing the reading lesson, matching it against the textbooks and reading it a number of times, I attempted to detail, following the Teacher's Book and the major CLT tenets discussed earlier in Chapter 2, how the lesson is structurally organised, highlighting the different stages that contribute to the overall structure of the lesson. This lesson involves a detailed structure of three stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. In the following discussion, I will start with each stage and incorporate data from classroom transcripts and the teacher interview ([All the quotes in this section come from Umar's Interview: 16/04/2013]).

The *pre-reading stage* can be described to be primarily focused on vocabulary development in terms of pronunciation and translation. Following a quick revision of a previous lesson, the teacher introduced a new reading comprehension lesson by highlighting a list of new vocabulary items relevant to the text. This list is read by Umar first (where students only repeat); then he moves to eliciting translation equivalents from students; and finally before embarking on the reading task, students practise reading and translating vocabulary items (4-5 words each student), and the teacher evaluates that output. The aim seems to be developing students' pronunciation and vocabulary meaning and translation skills and repertoire.

In Extract 1, the goal is familiarising students with the meanings of new words that the teacher has listed on the board prior to reading the text. The

interaction in this extract displays code-switching between English and Arabic, achieved in one of the three main exchanges: teacher reads and translates a word “**thakee** <smart>”, students repeat the translation “**thakee** <smart>”, and then the teacher reiterates the translation again “**thakee** <smart>” (Lines 70-73; 78-81)/teacher reads a word “Inside?”, students volunteer translation “**dakhel** <inside>”, teacher confirms the answer “**dakel**<inside>” (Lines 74-76).

Extract 1 (Pre-reading stage: teacher’s vocabulary list):

70	T: ok I will translate them into Arabic. Smart witty in Arabic thakee <smart> witty
71	or clever smart means witty clever intelligent. In Arabic?
72	Ss: thakee <smart>
73	T: thakee <smart> bareaa aw thakee bilarabee bareaa aw zakee <In Arabic clever
74	or smart> ok? Inside?
75	S1: dakhel <inside>
76	T: dakel <inside> opposite of outside aks <opposite to> out?
77	Ss: side
78	T: side. Virtual not real iftiradhee iftiradhee gheir hakeeki iftiradhee <virtual,
79	virtual, unreal, virtual> not real, virtual?
80	S1: iftiradhee <virtual>
81	T: iftiradhee <virtual> not real, imaginative hhh takhayuli <imaginative>
82	Ss: takhayuli <imaginative >
83	T: iftiradhee <virtual

The features of interaction common in this particular pre-reading stage show instances where students can volunteer answers and repeat in chorus. The classroom discourse suggests that students not only can, but also do indeed volunteer responses in the L1, whether individually or collectively. The teacher tends to allow more flexibility towards language use because the main purpose of this part of the lesson, as he himself points out in the transcript, is to facilitate understanding of the text through familiarising students with words meanings. Anticipating problems with words meanings, the teacher has selected these words and decided that they are significant for students’ comprehension of the forthcoming text. It is only at the end

of the lesson that students ask (once given a task by the teacher to read silently and ask any questions) for the meanings of some vocabulary items.

All participants of the classroom discourse are aware of the English-only policy observed most of the time. It explains why students do not attempt to volunteer Arabic utterances in their communication with the teacher. To Umar, the key focus in English lessons is speaking. Therefore, he encourages students to use English even if mistakes are made:

“It’s an English lesson. I try to make them use English even if they are wrong, just to [make them] speak English. I told them this before to speak English even if they are wrong”.

This emphasis on speaking is reflective of the CLT precepts which the teacher attempts to meet, of which developing students’ oral abilities plays a central role. For Umar who has been teaching English over 20 years, grammar and translation have always been the central aspects of classroom practices in earlier textbooks. His statement *“I try to make them use English even if they are wrong ... I told them this before”* indicates that, contrary to previous textbooks and classroom practices, there is emphasis on language ‘use’ rather than mere accumulation of vocabulary and grammar rules.

Extract 2 shows a task in the pre-reading stage in which students have the opportunity to practise pronouncing and translating the same words covered earlier. In this activity, Umar elicits vocabulary pronunciation and translation from the students. The interaction pattern is exactly the same as that in Extract (1), with the IRF turn-taking pattern in this extract being (S-T) instead of (T-S). Umar repeatedly interferes immediately either to correct pronunciation “virtual” (Line 160) or to

evaluate “yes”, (dis)confirm the student’s output and allocate new turns “thank you, go on Hazem” (Lines 156; 162; 165).

Extract 2 (Pre-reading stage, pronunciation and translation task):

153	T: Now I want you to read I want one student to read them in English and in Arabic,
154	each student reads four or five words only. Ok? Read Omar
155	Omar: smart zakee <smart>
156	T: <u>yes</u>
157	Omar: inside dakhel <inside>
158	T: speak Arabic please loudly loudly
159	S: inside dakhel <inside> virtual iftiradhee <virtual>
160	T: virtual
161	Omar: virtual iftiradhee <virtual>control yusaiter <control>cheap rakhees <cheap>
162	T: thank you, go on Hazem
163	Hazem: energy takah <energy> turn off yutfee <turn off> robot aaleh <robot>recognise
164	yatarraf <recognise>
165	T: thanks, yes please go on (XXX)

Umar comments that the purpose of this activity is to practise pronunciation and encourage all students to speak:

“to make students practise the words ... and to make them speak and listen ... Speaking and listening together is understanding ... Not all the students share with you, so I speak to them by name, everyone by his name to refer to them. You have to share all the students in the class from the back, the front, the middle. So I choose not the hard-working students only, the hard-working students and the silent students”.

Evidently, Umar’s goal is to engage all the students in the class “*from the back, the front, the middle*” in listening (to the teacher and their peers) and speaking (when called to do so), where these two skills, according the teacher, constitute “*understanding*”. Umar attempts to foster student engagement; however, the type of involvement is individual wherein each student volunteers a number of words to pronounce and translate. Although pair- and/or group- work tasks are underlined in the textbooks, the classroom seating arrangements and the large classes seem to require practical rather than ideal solutions.

Contrary to the expectations of the official policy, the activity is designed by the teacher for students to use the L1 as a tool to understand words meanings. When asked about the factors behind his decision to set up this activity, Umar dismisses the idea of limiting teachers to the textbooks as he has his own ‘methods’ to employ:

“Not all the time you limit yourself to the textbook. The teacher has some methods himself or herself. I’ve got information, pre-information, and I try to use them in my lesson”.

This statement expresses the impact teacher beliefs can have on innovation implementation as Umar believes that he draws on his previous knowledge of teaching and learning methods and techniques.

Another emergent aspect of interaction Umar highlights after looking at the extract is ‘repetition’, and his view is:

“And repetition is very important here to make the skill of listening good with them, to practise the skills of listening and speaking”.

The teacher identifies ‘repetition’ as essential to develop students’ listening (input) that only comes from the teacher as he holds: *“I am the only resource for them, and I had no recorder. I tried to repeat the words to them”*. Umar points out, however, that the repetition strategy he follows is ‘useful’ in circumstances where access to audio equipment is limited. Umar argues that repetition comes as a solution, but listening to the *“native speaker”* would have been more rewarding had it been viable:

“... useful when you have no recorder, but if you have a recorder, it’s better to make them listen from the native speaker of English ... [which] helps hearing to clear vocabulary, pronunciation. Sometimes I’m influenced in Arabic language because I am from Arabic origin”.

The *while-reading stage* comprises a reading comprehension where the emphasis is on reading the text and understanding the key idea of each paragraph. Umar's approach involves dealing with six paragraphs, with each paragraph structured as: a). reading by a selected student and b). comprehension questions raised by the teacher to focus students' attention on the main idea of the paragraph and check their comprehension, as illustrated in the following extracts. The following figure shows the reading text:

Skills: Focus on future life

The Smart House

Do you want to see inside the house of the future? Well, let's go on a virtual tour of a smart house – a house run by computers. The smart house does exactly what you want. You can control everything from a keyboard.

Lounge
There is a giant screen for your TV, which is connected to the Internet. You can have any film you want in seconds. Your TV 'reads' how you feel and chooses a relaxing colour for the lights. Your music centre remembers your musical tastes and orders the latest albums for you. Your computer prints out a special newspaper for you each morning.

Bathroom
All the things in the bathroom are low energy. The mirror gives you weather forecasts, news and sports reports. And it also takes good care of you. It takes photos of your skin and your hair and tells you if you need to see the doctor.

Bedroom
Not sure what to wear in the morning? Why not ask your wardrobe? It chooses clothes for you. And it cleans your clothes, too! You can sleep well at night because there are relaxing pictures on the ceiling. And you don't have to get up to go to work. You can stay in bed because it contains a keyboard, mouse and speakers!

An easy life
The smart house is cheap to run. It uses energy from the sun and it is protected against heat and cold. You don't have to turn off the lights because they turn off when you leave a room. And even when you are away from home, you can check things with your mobile phone. When you come home, you don't need keys because a camera 'reads' your eye and opens the door if it recognises you. And a robot does all the housework.

Kitchen
Your kitchen automatically orders food, and a robot opens the door. If you're shopping and you can't remember what to buy, you can phone your fridge and see inside! And you don't make dinner, you choose what you want to eat and the cooker prepares it.

Are you interested in the smart house?
Well, I'm afraid you're going to have to wait a few more years!

80

Figure 4.1. The Smart House, reading text: EFS 7 Teacher's Book: 82

Taken from the while-reading comprehension stage, Extract 3 seems to be characteristically representative of the interaction pattern in the whole lesson. The topic of the lesson is ‘The Smart House’ and, according to the curriculum, giving opinions about future life represents the outcome. Umar’s control over turn-taking displays him as the only participant to allocate turns between the students to read parts of the text “the first one, read” (Line 186).

Extract 3 (Reading stage, Paragraph 1: Reading & Comprehension Questions):

181	T: Now we <u>read</u> the lesson on page 80 page 80. We’ve got some paragraphs here.
182	We’ve got six paragraphs. We’ve <u>got</u> six paragraphs. We read each paragraph and
183	we hhh take the main idea of it nakraa kul annas wa menakhud minnuh elfikraa
184	alraeeseieh lkul maktaa <we read all the text and get the main idea of each
185	paragraph> ok?
186	Ss: Ok
187	T: the first one, read hhh (XXX) but speak loudly please loud your voice
188	S: The Smart House. Do you want to see inside the house of the future?
202	T: future yes. <u>Well</u>
203	T: So what is the smart house? Is it real house?
204	Ss: No No
205	T: No, it is not?

In Lines (181-184), the teacher’s instructions on how this stage of the lesson will be conducted illustrate how he initiates the activity and students respond in turns. However, these clear instructions and organisation equally demonstrate the teacher’s management skills in which his set goals appear to be planned and met skilfully. His long teaching experience could have honed this aspect. Commenting on this extract, Umar confirms the transcript analysis where he is aware why, for instance, he uses the L1 and for what function, expressing the belief that it assists his classroom management to ‘communicate’ the instructions with clarity and to communicate with students as well:

“I’m giving instructions for students because they cannot understand me if I explain them in English. I have to speak Arabic sometimes to make the

students communicate with me. Communication is very important here, and the only method is to speak Arabic sometimes”.

Extract (3) also demonstrates employment of the L1 at the beginning of the reading stage to give clear instructions and make sure that students have got the message across regarding the stages of the reading task. Leaving the students only to say “Ok” (Line 185), the teacher shows an English-only language choice, except for the repetition of the instructions (Lines 183-184). The key factor behind repeating the instructions in Arabic is to ensure comprehension:

“to make sure that all the students can get you ...you have to speak the two languages bilingually so all the students understand you”.

Extract 4 also comes from the reading comprehension stage wherein the purpose appears to be checking students’ comprehension of the paragraph just read, Paragraph 3 in Students’ Book.

Extract 4 (Reading Stage, Paragraph 3, Comprehension Questions):

329	T: ... How do you know that there is no food kaif taref anno la youjad taaam? <
330	How do you know that there is no food?> how do you know? Who tells you who
331	tells you there is no food? In the kitchen who who tells you or which tells you
332	which <u>machine tells you?</u> Yes Hazem
333	Hazem: your fridge
334	T:the fridge, yes the fridge tells you that? there is no? food in the kitchen. Again
335	please?
336	Hazem: The fridge tell you
337	T: tells you tells you
338	Hazem: that there is no food in the kitchen

Umar tends to highly appreciate, emphasise and favour linguistic accuracy over content in students’ responses. Lines (333-337) demonstrate how although Hazem volunteers the right answer, the teacher asks him to repeat the answer in a full sentence, and when Hazem misses the “-s” in “tells” (Line 336), Umar without delay corrects him “tells you tells you” (Line 337). Despite the primary focus on comprehension at this stage, the teacher emphasises accuracy in sentence formation.

As accuracy represents one of the teacher's core beliefs about language teaching/learning, it goes hand in hand with understanding. Therefore, despite Umar's focus on understanding and comprehension in the reading lesson, he attempts to ensure the accuracy of the student's response, too. His comment on this aspect is:

“Umar: ... understanding of the paragraph because it's a reading lesson, it's not a grammar lesson. But if there are some big errors, you have to correct them.

Abdulqader: What are the big errors for you?

Umar: For example, if the student begins with a verb, you have to correct him or her. If the students speak about the present and use the past, this is a big error”.

Another aspect of the interaction pattern is Umar's recurring English repetition of the question. The exchanges are conducted in English, with L1 employed only by Umar to repeat a question already asked in English (Line 329), while students' contributions are solely in English. The teacher's framing of the question goes through six steps, one of which translation, modified from 'How do you know?' to 'Who tells you?', and finally 'which machine tells you?' (Lines 329-332). Modifying the question in English a number of times and translating it into Arabic are frequently practised by Umar, mainly in the comprehension questions following reading each paragraph.

Along with question modifications, the use of the L1 to enable students to understand and answer questions seems to have really encouraged Hazem to contribute. This is confirmed by the teacher's reflection:

“... difficult questions, when the students do not understand the question, you have to translate it into Arabic. There are various levels in the classroom ... [I want] to make sure that all the students get the questions”.

The guiding principles for the teacher’s dynamic practical classroom techniques stem from Umar’s views on the difficulty of the language, keenness on comprehensible input and appreciation of students’ multi-level abilities. His concern over the weaker students indicates that without this strategy to make the questions understood for all the students, not everybody can follow. Although all the students have been studying English since Year 1, there can be seen level difference due to a multiplicity of reasons. Private English lessons, for instance, have been recognised as necessary by some families, hence their children outperform their peers: “*Some of them have some special courses [private lessons] outside*”.

The emphasis of the questions in Extracts 3 and 4 has been placed on the *general picture* of each paragraph in the text. Selected from the reading comprehension stage, Extract 5 below represents the types of questions Umar raises to check students’ *comprehension of specific information* in Paragraph 4. There is a typical IRF pattern wherein Umar checks students’ ability to reproduce specific information from the text in ‘display’ one-word responses. These short responses are facilitated either by the teacher’s constant prompts for students to ‘repeat’ the ‘correct’ answers (Lines 411& 412) or by the students’ in-chorus participation “Internet” (Lines 414-416).

Extract 5 (Reading Stage, Paragraph 4, Comprehension Questions):

409	T: ... Now, in the lounge, what is there in the lounge? There is a?
410	Ss: a big screen
411	T: a big TV a big screen, a large screen, a large?
412	Ss: screen
413	T: screen, is this screen connected to the Internet?
414	Ss: yes
415	T: it is linked, it is connected to the?
416	Ss: Internet

The extract demonstrates three questions directed to the students, but in the third question the teacher may not give them the opportunity/time to answer the question. Instead, he provides the answer with translation of new words and seems to want them to repeat that answer. Repetition is one of Umar's prominent techniques to ensure comprehension. Umar's comment on the purpose of these questions exhibits a set of goals that appear to be beyond the immediate aim:

"It is only to know if the students understand the main idea of each paragraph and to make sure that they know how to use words, what are the meanings of the words ... I want to hear their voices speak, I want them to practise answering questions also".

Umar's reflection comprises numerous purposes: understanding of key ideas (they are specific information questions though), vocabulary meanings and use, speaking and finally practising how to answer questions. Obviously, these aims and actions do not necessarily align with the immediate curricular steps and objectives of the lesson prescribed in the Teacher's Book. The teacher's stated aims reveal his overall set of objectives of teaching reading. Nonetheless, this set seems to drive the teacher's pedagogical decisions and goals in the comprehension stage. In an explicit statement of the influence of his age, experience and old teaching styles on his classroom practices, Umar illustrates how he simply 'cannot' turn a blind eye to all of these factors. When he reflects back on the teaching methods he has learnt 20 years ago and kept practising until now, he appears to be unwilling to shift completely to the new methodology advocated which stresses CLT principles:

"I'm an old teacher and I had learned all methods when I was in the institute. So I apply the old methods, not only the modern. I mix between the modern methods and the old methods. I am not related to the book itself. I try to make use from the old methods also. I cannot avoid these methods which I taught [used] for 20 years because I am old teacher".

The *post-reading stage* is largely focused on *students' opinions and enquiries about the text*. First, the teacher attempts to elicit students' opinions in connection with the general theme of the text just read. However, students' contributions are limited to one-word utterances or mere repetitions of the teacher's answers, the case with most of the interaction pattern throughout the whole lesson. Next, students are asked to silently read the text and direct any emergent questions to the teacher.

Extract 6 comes from the post-reading stage with the purpose of encouraging students to read the text silently and enquire about any emergent questions.

Extract 6 (Post-reading stage, students' enquiries following silent reading):

652	T: Silent reading I mean silent reading for one minute. If you have any question, ask
653	me please.
654	S1: //wants to ask a question//
655	T: Yes ask me
656	S1: check
657	T: check <u>check</u> means yatafahhas <check> ask me
658	S2: inside
659	T: inside inside what does it mean in Arabic?
660	Ss: dakhel <inside>
661	T: dakhel <inside>

Students' enquiries reveal a simple provision of a lexical item, and immediately after that Umar repeats the word and either translates it "*check check means **yatafahhas***" (Lines 656-657) or redirects it to other students to translate "*inside inside what does it mean in Arabic?*"(Lines 659-661). Then the teacher confirms the correct translation if delivered "**dakhel**" (Line 661).

Even though Umar has made a list of the new words at the start of the lesson, the students' focus on vocabulary meaning/translation points to their key concern in reading lessons. In his comment, Umar's aim is "*they ask about any strange words which are not understood*". This gives us an idea about the purpose of silent reading

as there is no sufficient time (one of the most highlighted challenges) for students to read carefully. The teacher acknowledges this aspect of an established classroom procedure or a learning culture:

“... most the time, the students ask about new vocabularies. That’s the fact, I’m speaking frankly. My goal is to [let students] understand the new words and to use them in their daily life”.

Similarly to the reading lesson, the following part investigates the grammar lesson, incorporating the teacher’s interpretations on selected extracts.

4.3. Grammar Lesson

This was the second lesson that Umar sent to me. According to the Teacher’s Book (Kilbey 2009: 80), the *language focus* is *future time expressions*: this afternoon, this evening; the expected *outcome* is that learners can talk about the future; and the *materials* are Students’ Book pages 78 and 79, Workbook page 65, Cassette 2 and (optional) a computer (See Appendix III: B for original materials).

OVERVIEW

Outcomes Can talk about the future

Language focus future time expressions: *this afternoon, this evening*; computers and technology

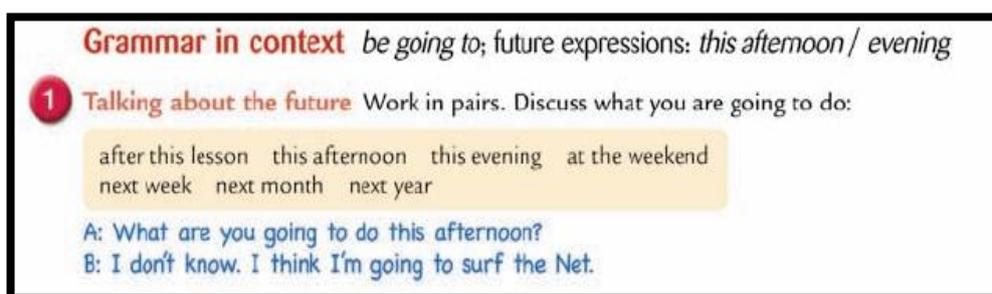
Materials Students’ Book pages 78–79; Workbook page 65; Cassette 2; (optional) a computer

Following the transcription of the grammar lesson and relating it to the original textbooks, I selected some extracts on which I was hoping that Umar would comment to see where he followed the prescribed steps and where he deviated. Despite all our endeavours, it was impossible to conduct the interview on the phone or even on the internet due to power cuts, no internet connection and curfew in

Umar's neighbourhood. The only feasible solution was to have the teacher's written comments on the extracts, later on emailed to me. One of the implications of this was that the teacher's comments were shorter and less elaborate than in the reading lesson as the conversational aspect was unfortunately lacking.

The following analysis demonstrates each extract, integrating data from classroom transcripts and teacher written interview comments ([All the quotes in this section come from Umar's Written Interview: 28/06/2013]) as germane to the line of enquiry. This grammar lesson comprises three main tasks.

In Extract 7, Umar *introduces a list of future expressions*, writes them on the board and then elicits their Arabic translations. In this extract, Umar states that his aim is to 'teach' the future expressions: "*Here, I am trying to teach students the future words especially the adverbs*". Teaching in this sense involves two aspects: listing the expressions and translating them. The book illustrates grammar in context in the following figure:



Grammar in context *be going to; future expressions: this afternoon / evening*

1 Talking about the future Work in pairs. Discuss what you are going to do:

after this lesson this afternoon this evening at the weekend
next week next month next year

A: What are you going to do this afternoon?
B: I don't know. I think I'm going to surf the Net.

Extract 7 (Grammar in Context Exercise 1 p.78):

37 T: hhh first of all we have some words to express the future. In the books, open
38 your book on page 78 page 78, look at the words in the book here. We have some
39 words, the first word or phrase is //T writing on the board// after this lesson, this
40 afternoon, this?
41 Ss: afternoon
42 T: afternoon, at the weekend, or next week, tomorrow etc. ok?
43 Ss: ok
44 T: after this lesson, in Arabic we say **badaa?** <after?>

45	Ss: al dars <the lesson>
46	T: badaa al dars <after the lesson>, what does this mean in Arabic?
47	Ss: badaa al dars < after the lesson >
48	T: badaa al dars < after the lesson >, this afternoon? Yes //addressing a student
49	who volunteers give the translation//
50	S: badaa al thaheera <this afternoon>
51	T: hathihi al thaheera <this afternoon>, next week next week?

The interactional features exhibit predominance of the IRF pattern in which participants resort to both the L1 and the L2: the teacher provides an L2 expression, students respond to the teacher's elicitation with an L1 translation and the teacher finally confirms. In response to the teacher's English initiations, students must speak in the L1 as the main aim is to translate the expressions. Checking students' understanding appears to be the key rationale for the teacher's (elicitation of) translation of expressions. His comment "*to make sure that students understand the future expressions well*" confirms that Umar's strategy to ensure understanding in this classroom is translation. Thus, the teacher's pedagogical purpose here is primarily familiarising students with the future expressions and eliciting their responses (translations) prior to highlighting the grammatical structure later on for use in the exercises (See Extract 8). Line (44) displays the teacher's technique to switch to translation through the phrase "*in Arabic we say badaa?*". The phrase uttered in English signals a shift to Arabic but also includes part of the translation with an elicitive tone made by the teacher for students to complete the translation.

Subsequent to the translation of the future expressions, the teacher explains the grammatical structure (affirmative, negative and interrogative forms) and asks students to formulate sentences in light of that, as illustrated in the following extract.

Extract 8: Grammatical Structure of Sentences with Future Expressions

60 T: here we use be+ going to be?
61 Ss: going to
62 T: going to. Be plus going?
63 Ss: to
64 T: to. Before be we put a subject, what do we put?
65 Ss: a subject
66 T: subject means doer doer subject **fael**<subject>**fael**<subject> noun or pronoun ok?
67 + be, be is?
68 Ss: is, am, are
69 T: yes, what is be?
70 S: is, am, are
71 T: is, am?
72 Ss: are
73 T: are. is, am, are + going to. For example, verb one, verb?
74 Ss: one
75 Y: after going to, we put verb
76 Ss: one
77 T: one in the present, verb in the present, infinitive infinitive verb one. We call it in
78 Arabic **al masdar** <the infinitive> ok?
79 Ss: ok
80 T: after going to, we put **masdar**< infinitive>, what do we put?
81 Ss: **masdar**< infinitive>
82 T: verb in the infinitive **fi al masdar** <in the infinitive> ok?
83 Ss: ok
84 T: hhh for example 1: I am going sentence number one. I am going to play football
85 //T writing on the board// I am going to play football? hhh next?
86 Ss: week
87 T: afternoon, next?
88 Ss: afternoon
89 T: afternoon or tomorrow afternoon or tomorrow?
90 Ss: afternoon
91 T: afternoon. Read this sentence Ahmad
92 Ahmad: I am going to play football next afternoon
93 T: ok, Yousef
94 Yousef: I am going to play football next afternoon
95 T: thanks, this is affirmative sentence, this is?
96 Ss: affirmative sentence

Umar's purpose in Extract 8 is to explain the grammatical structure of how to express future. His experience informs him of anticipated problems that may arise, as illustrated in what follows:

"Here, I explain how to use the verb after 'will/be going to' which is the infinitive forms because some students use the 'ing form' or 'past form' after them".

This extract shows a highly controlled pattern of interaction where students participate either to complete already given information or respond to Umar's initiations in English. In formulating an example sentence, the teacher invites students to volunteer a future expression using the prompt 'next' (Line 85) and their group response is 'week' (Line 86), simply ignored because the teacher had a different one in mind, 'afternoon' (Line 87). In addition, different students are invited to read the sentence that the teacher has written on the board although the aim of the task, described in the Teacher's Book, rather suggests inductively encouraging students to produce their own sentences. Umar delays this production of own sentences until students have absorbed the structures and read the example sentences he has provided. His awareness of students' needs and levels may have changed the way he has introduced the grammar-in-context tasks into less student-centred ones.

The teacher's deductive approach to introducing a new grammatical structure demonstrates tension not only between the curricular principles and the teacher's implementation, but also between the teacher's stated cognitions and enacted practices. Despite the fact that he puts the form on the board, provides examples in the affirmative, negative and question forms and asks students to read/volunteer sentences, his comment suggests a completely inductive approach:

"I give them example from the lesson and from their surroundings, then I conclude the rules with the students".

However, Umar's deductive approach relates not only to earlier methodologies and textbooks, but also to contextual variables which can be

impacting his compromise of the new curricular principles in favour of meeting what he believes to be feasible.

Umar believes that the use of grammatical terminology (Line 78) assists and increases students' understanding. There is also students' repetition of declarative knowledge (grammatical terms) (Line 96). His view of the usefulness of comparing linguistic features and terminology to similar components or structures in the L1 seems to be based on contrastive linguistics:

“to make students compare them with their mother tongue language. They understand the rules quickly by comparing them with their native language”.

Whilst in Extract (7) the goal of translation is to ensure understanding the meanings of the future expressions, translation here serves to ensure understanding the grammar terminology to *“make sure that the students understand them correctly”*.

After introducing and explaining the grammatical structure, Umar invites students to form three sentences using the expressions in Task 1 in the book. Students engage in future expressions exercises from the book on page 78.

Grammar in context *be going to; future expressions: this afternoon / evening*

1 Talking about the future Work in pairs. Discuss what you are going to do:

after this lesson this afternoon this evening at the weekend
next week next month next year

A: What are you going to do this afternoon?
B: I don't know. I think I'm going to surf the Net.

Extract 9: (Student's Book, Grammar in Context, Exercise 1 p.78)

280 T: hhh give me three examples, three sentences in the future to express the future.
281 Use the words in exercise number 1. Look at the words in the exercise number 1
282 page 78, what are the words, after? Read them hhh Umar

283 Umar: after this lesson
 284 T: yes
 285 Umar: this afternoon
 286 T: yes
 287 Umar: this evening, at the weekend
 288 T: mmm
 289 Umar: next week
 290 T: yes
 291 Umar: next month
 292 T: next year, now put next year in a sentence please. Put next year in a sentence,
 293 yes? Sameer
 294 Sameer: We are going to Taj Mahal
 295 T: loudly loudly
 296 Sameer: we are going to Taj Mahal
 297 T: we are going to visit, we are going to?
 298 Ss: visit
 299 T: visit Taj Mahal yes
 300 Sameer: next year
 301 T: Good, this is affirmative or negative?
 302 Ss: affirmative
 303 T: affirmative, can we put it in the negative? The same sentence, yes put it please
 304 Hussein
 305 Hussein: are you going to visit Taj Mahal?
 306 T: no no in the in the negative
 307 Hussein: you aren't go
 308 T: going We aren't going to visit?
 309 S: Taj Mahal next year
 310 T: ok, another sentence hhh put this evening in a sentence this evening yes?
 320 T: in the question? In the question yes?
 321 S: are you hhh going to hhh
 322 T: to watch
 323 S: to watch a film this evening

For this task, the Teacher's Book suggests what follows:

1 Talking about the future (15 minutes)

First, copy the time expressions in the box on to the board. Point to the first one (*after this lesson*) and say *After this lesson, I'm going to ...* (e.g. *have a cup of coffee*). Invite two or three students to complete the sentence with their own plans, then do the same with each of the other time expressions.

Ask the students to prepare seven sentences using *going to* and the time expressions in the box. Go round and offer prompts where necessary. Tell them they don't have to be 'real' plans.

Ask two students to read out the example dialogue, then put the students in pairs to practise asking each other similar questions, using all the time expressions in the box.

Finally, ask different students about their partners' plans (e.g. *What's Jaber going to do after this lesson? He's going to ...*).

Evidently, all the discourse is conducted fully in English, and Umar appears to be consciously following an English only strategy. As indicated earlier, the teacher's approach seems to be principles and organised in terms of goals, in that those expressions have been translated in Extract (7). Hence the purpose at this stage is to enable students to *use the expressions* in full sentences:

"Here, I am teaching students to use the whole structure of the future in sentences 'affirmative and negative forms'".

The teacher provides each student with the expression he would like him to use in a full sentence "*now put next year in a sentence please*" (Line 292); "*put this evening in a sentence*" (Line 310). After that, he asks other students to put the expression in the negative and interrogative forms taught in Extract (8). Umar has explained the affirmative, negative and interrogative forms in Extract (7) to prepare the students for this activity in Extract (8). Despite the emphasis on the affirmative use (Discuss what you are going to do) only in the curricular guidelines, Umar goes

beyond that to develop students' abilities in forming the negative (Line 303) and interrogative (Line 320) forms. Also, these forms prepare students for the next activity in which pairs ask questions and answer in future expressions. Umar believes that students need to know the three forms:

“The purpose is to make students know the three cases of a sentence and how can we change it from one form into another one”.

This view seems to spring from the teacher's experience and earlier teaching methods in previous textbooks.

Similarly to the reading lesson, Line (308) shows Umar's immediate error correction, driven by his beliefs about the importance of accuracy, not only in grammar lessons but also in reading (Extract 4). The only technique followed in Umar's lessons is teacher- rather than self- or peer- correction.

In Extract 10, Umar invites students in pairs to the front of the class to role-play what they are going to do/express future. Pair- and group- work are essential in the curriculum and this role-play represents the only example in Umar's lessons in which we see pair work. Umar employs the concept of pair-work as fits how he interprets this notion in the classroom context.

Extract 10 (Task 1: talking about the future in role-play):

379	hhh yes other two students, other two students, yes come here, come here Umar.
380	Ask him about hhh playing basketball, yes ask him
381	S1: are you did
382	T: are you going
383	S1: are you going to watch
384	T: to to play
385	S1: are are you
386	T: are you going
387	S1: are you going to play hhh
388	T: basketball
389	S1: basketball
390	T: yes yes basketball tomorrow

391 S1: tomorrow

In his comment on whether his goal of pair-work interaction has been achieved through his word-by-word formulation to students' questions and answers, Umar answers positively believing he is a helper only: "*Yes of course because I am a 'helper' here only and not inventor*". Lines (382-391) demonstrate how he co-formulates the question form with the student. However, when the student comes out with his own words, Umar still corrects him and insists on the use of 'play' instead of 'watch' (Lines 383-384).

Lines (392-408) show the teacher's tight control of the students' production to form the answer.

392 S2: no no I I'm
393 T: I'm not?
394 S2: I am not I am not to play
395 T: I am not going
396 S2: I am not going
397 T: to play?
398 S2: to play football
399 T: basketball
400 S2: basketball
401 T: tomorrow
402 S2: tomorrow
403 T: again?
404 S2: I'm not going to play hhh
405 T: I'm not going?
406 S2: I'm not going to hhh
407 T: to play
408 S2: to play basketball tomorrow

In both cases of the question and the answer "*S1: are you did ...T: are you going*" (Lines 381-382); "*S2: I am not I am not to play ... T: I am not going*" (394-395), Umar immediately corrects students' errors as accuracy is one of the core beliefs he holds about language learning.

In this extract, similarly to Line (380), Umar provides the students with suggestions of what to ask about (Line 409).

409	T: ok, now ask him hhh about driving a car, yes
410	S1: are are are you going to drive a car yesterday?
411	T: tomorrow
412	S1: tomorrow
413	T: again
414	S2: hhh I am not going
415	T: are you going to drive a car tomorrow? Yes , after it
416	S2: hhh I am not hhh going to
417	T: No, I am not?
418	S2: No, I am not going to hhh drive hhh
419	T: drive a car
420	S2: to drive a car hhh
421	T: yes?
422	S2: tomorrow

This practice springs from the teacher's belief that this strategy assists students' output, as clarified in his rationale "*Just to remind them about daily activities and how they exploit them in sentences*". Umar states that his primary aim in this activity is to develop students' listening and speaking skills, particularly to express the future:

"Here, the aim is to improve the listening and speaking skill of the students, and especially here to use the future form in speaking and listening".

Within the contextual realities, these instances in which some students speak while others listen are categorised as listening and speaking opportunities that can improve students' language capacities. In the reading lesson (Extract 2), he also expressed the view that "*Speaking and listening together is understanding*".

In the following extract, the pedagogical goal of the task is to allow the students to develop a plan for next week days.

Extract 11: (Grammar in Context: plan for next week days)

426 T: ok thank you. Now hhh I want you put a plan plan **khittah khittah khittah**
427 <plan plan plan> for the next week, a plan for the next week. Five sentences what
428 are you going to do next week on Saturday, on Sunday, on Friday, on Thursday etc.
429 Yes on Saturday what are you going to do? Yes Nabeel
430 Nabeel: I am going to listen hhh my
431 T: to listen to?
432 Nabeel: my favorite music hhh on Saturday
433 T: on Saturday, thanks. Mostafa yes please, what are you going to do on Sunday?
434 Mostafa: going to
435 T: I am
436 Mostafa: going to
437 T: again again I'm going?
438 Mostafa: I am going to watch a film hhh hhh
439 T: I am going to watch a film on?
440 Mostafa: on Sunday
441 T: Sunday ok, hhh repeat
442 Mostafa: hhh I am going hhh I am going to visited my uncle on Sunday
443 T: to visited or to visit?
444 Mostafa: visit
445 T: visit
446 Mostafa: my uncle
447 T: I'm going to visit my uncle?
448 Mostafa: on hhh Sunday
449 T: ok, on Monday on Monday?

In the textbook, it is suggested that the teacher ask students to prepare seven sentences using *going to* and the (7) time expressions in the box. However, the teacher asks students to develop a plan for next week only, limiting their sentences. Umar's main goal in this part of the lesson is to engage students in more speaking 'for a longer time':

"Here I try to make students speak for a longer time in any way, and to make them apply the future expressions in making a plan for the future".

He asks students to make 5 sentences about their plans for the week, and we might expect enough wait-time given to students to formulate some linked up sentences. Before they report to the teacher or each other, Umar immediately starts inviting different students to say their plans and it turns into an IRF pattern in which it is Umar who asks each question and accepts volunteers to answer (Lines 429-433).

As illustrated earlier, Umar follows an immediate error correction strategy (Lines 434-437) which he clearly states in the following comment when asked about his strategies to deal with students' errors:

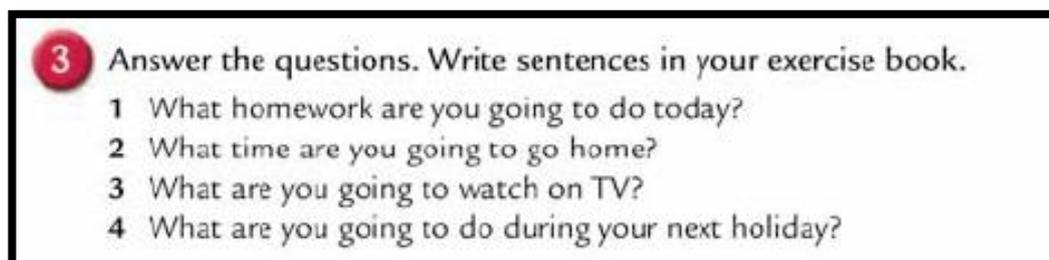
“Let them speak and correct their errors after they stop speaking or during their speech [when they are speaking]”.

He believes that it is important to correct students' mistakes immediately *“When I find a big error that influence[s] the sentence structure”.*

Umar asks for repetition whenever a student gives a partial answer or makes mistakes. The discourse displays that the teacher helps the student to complete the answer, asking him to repeat as in 'repeat' (in this extract) or 'again' (in Extract 10) to make sure the student gives a full answer.

In the book, exercise 2 is a listening task skipped by Umar (reasons will be discussed further in Section 4.4). In Extract (12), Exercise 3 includes four questions about future plans that students need to answer by writing sentences.

Extract 12: (Student's Book, Grammar in Context, Exercise 3 p.78)



3 Answer the questions. Write sentences in your exercise book.

- 1 What homework are you going to do today?
- 2 What time are you going to go home?
- 3 What are you going to watch on TV?
- 4 What are you going to do during your next holiday?

494 T: in the book, question number 1, read it Omar
495 Omar: what homework are are you going to do to do hhh
496 T: today
497 Omar: today
498 T: again, what homework?
499 Omar: what homework hhh are you going to do today?
500 T: ok, can you answer, can you answer? Will you answer? **tjaweb?** <answer?>
501 What's homework? **wajeb**<homework>
502 S: math
503 T: yes, hhhfull sentence, full sentence. In the future, I am going?

504 S: I am going I am going to write
 505 T: to do
 506 S: to write
 507 T: to do, to do to do
 508 S: to do write
 509 T: to do math homework
 510 S: to do math homework
 511 T: today
 512 S: today
 513 T: again again
 514 S: I am I am going
 515 T: I'm going
 516 S: I'm going to I'm going to hhh
 517 T: yes? to do?
 518 S: to do
 519 T: math homework
 520 S: math homework today
 521 T: ok, thank you, number 2 question number two, yes hhhMoutaz
 522 Moutaz: What time are you going to go home? ...
 525 T: yes good again please repeat it mmm repeat it
 526 Moutaz: I am I am going to go home at five o'clock

The Teacher's Book suggests that the teacher ask students to write answers (full sentences) to all the questions, then ask different students to read out their answers.

3 (15 minutes)

Read out the first question and invite a student to answer it. Then ask the students to write answers to all the questions in their exercise books. Make sure they write sentences. Go round and check their work, then ask different students to read out their answers.

Tell the students to exchange exercise books with a partner, then ask different students about their partners' plans (e.g. *What homework is Abla going to do today? She's going to do her science homework.*).

Instead of asking students to write full sentences (and go round and check their work) using the expressions, Umar changes the intended organisation (hence the goal) of the exercise into only inviting different students to answer the questions verbally:

"I am encouraging students here to use the expressions of the future in sentences that are related to their daily lives".

The teacher keeps employing the same discourse pattern in different tasks, showing incompatibility between the curricular goals and the classroom instructional practices. Certain types of drill like/repetitive closely controlled oral exercises pervade the classroom discourse, whereas developing writing appears to be receiving minimum, if any, attention. As accuracy plays a significant role in Umar's personal theory of teaching/learning, even after five oral activities, he continues enabling students to learn the expressions and pronounce them 'correctly' first before writing "*to make students pronounce the expressions correctly and learn them before writing*".

Lines (503-510) demonstrate an interesting exchange where the teacher wants the student to say 'do', but the student says 'write'. After a few exchanges, the student resents saying 'to do write', not realising that 'do' collocates with 'homework' to mean 'write' without actually saying 'write'. The teacher, although should have explained the word usage, does not seem to tend to make students aware of using 'do' rather than 'write' when talking about 'homework'.

In connection with repetition, Umar's practice draws on his view that "*repetition fixes the information and make students keep the information by heart*". He states that he uses repetition himself "*When I see and teach important and new term or information, and when I correct their errors*". Encouraging students to repeat their answers has been a pattern throughout Umar's lessons (Line 513), and his rationale for that is:

"After I correct their errors I ask them to reuse and say the correct ones. I do that to make sure that they have got the right and correct words".

He also points out that he asks students to repeat their classmates' answers *"When other students (the good ones) use the correct answers, I ask other students to repeat their classmate's answers"*.

In the following section, I identify the key themes emerging from linking the two lessons and Umar's comments with the teacher's general views expressed in a broad interview conducted on 17/04/2013. The rationale behind this broad interview includes, inter alia, understanding Umar's a). attitudes towards the curriculum and the approach underpinning the curricular principles and b). the factors influencing his practices.

4.4. Main Themes Emerging

The transcript and Umar's account on the selected extracts established a set of characteristic aspects.

4.4.1. Aspects of Instructional Practices and Teacher Beliefs

The lesson transcripts presented in the chapter show that Umar keeps employing the same discourse pattern in different tasks. This incongruity appears to be due to Umar's reinterpretation of innovation within his own beliefs and local conditions.

Accuracy and Error correction

Accuracy plays a major role in Umar's personal theory of teaching/learning. In both lessons, he emphasises linguistic accuracy over content in students' responses. Extracts (4 and 9 and 12) display accuracy and immediate error correction even in cases where students are not aware of collocations (Extract 12).

Pair- and group- work

The discourse in both lessons displays no pair- and/or group-work activities (except for one instance of pair-work in the grammar lesson role play [See Extract 10 above]), and Umar's challenging realities to these activities relate to time, noise, large classes and students' and their parents' perceptions and expectations of learning as to pass only:

"The time is not enough. The time and the noise. You cannot control all the students in 40 minutes. Some students don't care, I mean half of the students come to school to pass only, not to learn English. Even their parents think so".

In Extract (10), two students each time act expressing the future in front of the whole class. Umar employs pair-work only once and as fits how he interprets this notion according to the classroom realities. Umar has his own way to address these essential notions of the curriculum in a difficult classroom. When interviewed, he stated that

"This is a modern method as they say.... I considered that students are divided into group 1, group 2 and group 3 because I have three queues of students, and every queue has five desks. But I choose a student from each group; it's not necessary to call them group 1 or group 2. I try to share all the students in the back, in the middle ...etc."

The teacher's comment showed an ecologically developed and feasible notion of group work (in contrast with the learning group ideal) in which he tries to 'share' students in the back, the middle and the front. Umar's practices suggest a practical rather than an ideal approach to foster student engagement in large classes where the learning group ideal of CLT does not exist. Nonetheless, the teacher-centred nature of the classroom shows that even in situations where the teacher

believes to have a group work, there is no inter-communication between individuals of that group. Instead, each individual communicates with the teacher.

Repetition as a teaching strategy

Commonly practised in both lessons (Extracts 2, 5 and 12), ‘repetition’ is a significant emerging theme Umar identifies as an essential teaching strategy to ensure comprehension and develop students’ listening (input) which only comes from the teacher, being the sole source of English. Although Umar believes in the native-speaker model (See Extract 2 above) represented in listening tasks, he has developed repetition as a locally-produced strategy/alternative to technology transfer due to under-resourced contexts in which there is no equipment to do listening practice. This reveals a situation where technology transfer and contextual realities diverge and impact on the teacher’s decision to perceive developing listening as difficult to implement. Repetition also features as a technique the teacher uses to ask students to repeat their good classmates’ answers, to develop students’ listening and sentence structure awareness from peers.

Approach to teaching reading

Pair- and group- work, highly emphasised in the CLT literature and the curricular guidelines, are totally absent in the reading lesson although there are certain tasks designed merely for this purpose as accentuated in the Teacher’s Book.

Incompatible with the curricular plans, the pre-reading stage does not invite groups of students to discuss the content of the text, share ideas with the class and write suggestions. In the reading stage, students are not put in pairs, but rather there

is a type of S-T or Ss-T interactional pattern to answer the questions. In the ‘Over to You’ section in the Teacher’s Book, which should be included in the post-reading stage, Umar asks students to give their opinion where they immediately answer him individually or in chorus, but the group-work discussion suggested by the curriculum is absent.

Focus on vocabulary and translation

Focus on vocabulary (memorising lists of words and their translations) characterises students’ concern in the reading lesson (Extracts 4 & 6). There seems to be a culture of learning in which the justification is that students are foreign language learners to whom the key focus, as highlighted from the teacher’s experience, is the vocabulary rather than the content ideas of the text. To him, it is the English surface, not the content substance, with which the students get engaged. This shows that 10 years after curriculum change, classroom practices do not seem to embrace the intended focus on content and meaningfulness.

In Extract (7), translation is part of the concept of teaching vocabulary for Umar. It is also a strategy for checking understanding. The reading lesson transcript also shows that while the reading appears to be conducted thoroughly in English, the comprehension part involves some limited instances of code-switching to the L1 for repeating a question already put in English, clarifying instructions or translating a new word. Umar comments:

“Words meanings, especially in the difficult words, for example, when you say munakh in Arabic, how do you use munakh in pictures? You cannot use pictures here. Or when you say hawas, thaka, thakee, you have to use translation, especially the mere words, not the material words. When you say ‘table’, you can have a picture of table, but when you say ‘thakee’ for

example, or 'ghabi', how do you use pictures? You have to use translation here. In difficult questions, when the students do not understand the question, you have to translate it into Arabic”.

Although this sort of code-switching predominates in certain phases, it emerges as limited and carefully employed for a few words in a full English stage when need arises in others. This is precisely expressed in Umar’s attitude towards the use of L1 in teaching English:

“You are teaching English through Arabic, you are not teaching Arabic through English. It should be limited only 20-30 percent. And the former teachers, our teachers and your teachers, 50 years ago learned English through translation, through Arabic in our country”.

In the grammar lesson, Umar also uses grammar terminology and contrasts that with Arabic equivalents as he finds this technique useful to assist and increase students’ understanding of grammar structures (Extract 8).

As it impacts students’ understanding, Umar believes that English-only is not suitable in his classroom. It drives many students to have private lessons:

“It is good idea, but it is not suitable. It cannot be applied because the students hear English only in the classroom from the teacher himself. It is a good way to mix between the two languages ... because not all the students understand everything in English. Some students tell me from other classes that some teachers speak English all the time and they understand nothing. And they come to me and to other teachers to have private courses because the teacher ... doesn’t care if the students understand or not”.

Emphasis on (controlled) speaking

The most accentuated language skill in Umar’s comments on the lesson transcripts (Extracts 1, 2, 10) is speaking, which he further confirms to be his first priority in the following:

“I develop speaking just to make them move their tongues ... Just try to make students speak, and they will learn everything by the time. They will correct themselves when they try to speak and the complex of speaking will go away”.

The teacher’s focus on speaking and language use shows one aspect reconciled and rescued (although reinterpreted) as positive from the curriculum. In spite of stating elsewhere that he is an old teacher with old methods unable to respond to change, Umar’s emphasis on speaking might look to provide evidence of reconciliation between teacher cognition and the demands of the curricular objectives. However, his notion of speaking and listening as understanding and his implementation of the idea are different manifestations from the common practice in ELT. To illustrate, his notion is accuracy focused, with short bursts of sentences exchanged, and there is no move beyond this to other more spontaneous, more fluency focused practice.

Consequently, certain types of repetitive closely controlled oral exercises pervade the classroom discourse, whereas the least developed (and most difficult to improve) skill, according to Umar, is writing as it requires difficult paragraph writing while students’ abilities are generally below that level:

“I think writing is difficult for them. It can be developed, but it’s not like speaking, especially writing paragraphs. The students face big problems in writing paragraphs, especially paragraphs of 50 words. We are trying to help them, but this is the reality. When you want a student from Grade 7 to write a paragraph of 50 words, it’s difficult for him or for her to write this paragraph”.

The difficulty of improving students’ English writing stems mainly from the arbitrary relationship between spelling and pronunciation and full sentence formation, as explained in the following:

“Writing is difficult for them because they write first of all wrong words because of the problem of pronunciation [], they use for example the letter S instead of C sometimes. And they have big problems in the grammar, especially in the present, the third s in present simple. And they cannot relate these words together in sentences because we have many skills to concentrate in the classroom, we cannot concentrate on four skills at the same time”.

In his classroom context where rote learning is the norm, Umar’s approach to evaluate a student’s level is speaking:

“I consider the student good or weak from his speaking, not from his writing because students sometimes keep writing by heart like poems, and when they come to the exam, they write everything, but they don’t know what they write. But when you ask him to write another paragraph about another thing, he knows nothing ... So I try to make him speak because when he can speak, he can write”.

Grammar teaching

Umar’s beliefs seem to guide his grammar teaching differently from the textbooks. First, he explains grammar and contrasts terminology with Arabic equivalents to ensure understanding (See Extract 8). He gives model examples (Extract 8) and puts the three sentence forms for students to learn although the focus in the book is on the affirmative only (Extract 8). After that, he asks students for examples, insisting on formulating affirmative, interrogative and negative sentences (Extract 9). Umar states that students need to know the three forms of the sentence:

“The purpose is to make students know the three cases of a sentence and how can we change it from one form into another one”.

Also, there is a focus on grammar terminology use and repetition of declarative knowledge (grammatical terms).

Management skills

Umar's grammar as well as reading lessons reveal a recurrent theme of classroom management skills, supported by L1 use. In Extract (3), the teacher gives clear instructions as to the organisation of the text and how they will deal with it. Extracts (8 and 9) also show the teacher's organised and staged approach to grammar where each task leads smoothly to the following activity.

4.4.2. Implementation Challenges: Change and Realities

This chapter has identified several implementation challenges relevant to local realities.

Beliefs about teacher and student roles

In (4.4.1.), student-student(s) discourse is absent, and the dominant pattern is teacher-centred, leading to students' individual or in-chorus responses. A close analysis shows turn-taking controlled by the teacher in all parts of the lessons. Umar, highlighting the students' role in his classroom, illustrates that they are largely 'receivers' of English, exposed mainly in the classroom environment:

"I think the students are receivers of English. They don't have new ideas in learning or in English, they are only receivers because they listen to English only in the classroom. But nowadays some of them listen to English through Internet, and you know the Internet connection is very weak".

The teacher's role, on the other hand, is that of a 'supervisor' and the only source of English:

*"Abdulqader: What is your role in the classroom?
Umar: My own role I am a supervisor inside the classroom, and I am a teacher, I am the only origin [source] of pronunciation, the only origin of*

meaning inside the classroom because we have weak and very little audio and visual aids. I find myself the only origin [source]”.

In his comment on the new teacher-learner roles in the books which give more power to students than socioculturally accepted and historically practised in the country, Umar points to a double role inside and outside the classroom. Whilst the teacher’s authority is important in classroom to have a ‘good lesson’ and avoid students’ disturbance, he can be ‘a friend’ outside the classroom:

“Abdulqader: Do you think you have more power and authority than students?

Umar: Yes, of course we must have more authority because when we have no authority the students will behave badly. We cannot leave students behave freely because they will spoil the lesson ... You have to be a friend and very close to your students outside the classroom. Outside the classroom, they ask me and make jokes with me. But only during the lesson, I make some authority on them to be the lesson good, not to disturb the lesson”.

Teacher beliefs and realities inform practical pedagogy

Ten years after the introduction of the textbooks, Umar’s agency continues to play the most significant role in implementing/or only partially delivering official policies. As Umar resists upholding the principles of educational innovation wholeheartedly, this indicates that being the frontline implementers, teachers cannot be taken for granted. The curricular targets and outcomes anticipated—(in the reading lesson)learners can read, speak, listen, write about the future and give opinions and (in the grammar lesson) can talk about the future—show to be only partially met. Although the guidelines recurrently emphasise *suggesting, discussing* and *sharing* tasks to be created *for* and *by* learners, Umar tends to mould the content of the curriculum within his own beliefs on how teaching/learning should be, beliefs that have also been moulded through experience as what works in the local context.

In order to investigate ‘*why*’ the implementation of the official plans can have challenges, or even get resisted, it is crucial to examine ‘*what*’ attitudes and beliefs teachers (implementers) hold towards the curriculum, the underpinning approach and the contextual challenges. By doing so, we further appreciate the interplay between these aspects and empower our understanding of their practices.

Umar’s understanding of CLT is that “*They mean the accent language, the daily life language, and simply speaking*”. The discussion becomes clearer when it comes to identifying the differences between the aims of the current and the previous curriculum. In contrast with earlier textbooks, listening and speaking are the core elements of *EFS*:

“The old books concentrate on grammar and writing only, but the new books concentrate on the other skills, especially speaking and listening, I mean conversation to make dialogues between students. Students should write some paragraphs, they concentrate on writing, but as I said, on listening and speaking more”.

As Umar is aware of the centrality of listening and speaking, he seems to have accepted these skills and recognised their significance in students’ linguistic development. Therefore, he attempts to foster speaking in all his lessons to encourage students to practise language use and this is clearly reflected in his practices and views (See 4.4.1 Emphasis on (controlled) speaking). In spite of the teacher’s stated and enacted focus on speaking, its manifestation seems to be grounded on his own understanding rather than on the curricular suggestions. He, therefore, engages students in controlled and accuracy-focussed short exchanges.

In discussing what the teacher thinks about the curriculum and CLT, Umar’s view reveals English as a global necessity for students beyond school life:

“It’s good idea, good method as I think, but in simple words and in simple methods. I myself try to make students speak [whether] wrongly or correctly ... Because English is a world language, so they must read and speak English all the time. It’s not only related to the school, it’s related to their lives”.

He elaborates the positive aspects of the authentic language presented in the textbooks, specifically because it relates to what people see on TV or hear on the radio. Umar, nevertheless, indicates that the books should have shorter and less complex reading texts and grammar sections:

“The textbook gives you modern language. It concentrates on the language, the language which we hear in the radio, in the TV. It is modern, I think it’s good, but especially the texts and the grammar are long. They should be simpler and shorter according to the levels I mean, according to level 7. The textbooks are good, but they are long. There are many long texts in the activity book and in the student’s book”.

Despite his positive attitude towards the content of the textbooks and the teaching approach required, Umar’s ‘experience’, rather than the innovation principles, guides his classroom practices. Dismissing restricting teachers to the textbooks, he indicates that he has his own ‘methods’ to employ in the classroom (Extract 2, for example). Familiarity with the teaching principles suggested in the innovation (Teacher’s Book) is necessary for novice teachers to have enough experience, Umar believes:

“I myself don’t read the Teacher’s book. I try to teach through my experience, but fresh teachers go to the Teacher’s Book to have enough experience. I go back very very little to the Teacher’s Book, I think one or two times in a year ... because I have long experience in teaching”.

Clearly stated, the only case in which he reads the guidelines suggested in the Teacher’s Book is when finding out an inspector would attend his classes *“When I find that somebody is coming to my class, the inspectors or supervisors”*. In addition to variables such as large numbers of students, classroom seating arrangement and time, the teacher’s long-established teaching approach influences his classroom

decisions. Extract (4), for instance, shows Umar's dynamic strategy to meet multi-level abilities through translation to make sure that the questions are understood for all the students.

The themes above have demonstrated how the teacher makes sense of the curriculum, what he implements and how far his beliefs and the innovation plans guide his classroom practices.

Contextual factors and challenges

The classroom transcript extracts and the interviews have indicated that although the curriculum is generally seen to be theoretically good in terms of addressing the four language skills, it has several implementation challenges on the classroom level.

Constraints of time, teaching aids, teacher training, teacher competence and large classes:

Umar argues that the pedagogical approach of the curriculum, CLT, does not really address the Syrian context. The methodology of teaching has challenges that need to be met first before implementing it, such as large classes, classroom equipment and incompatibility between content and the time specified. Only then will it be feasible to follow CLT principles:

“It is possible when we have available aids, when we have suitable classrooms, when we have few students. In Syria, we have a lot of students in classrooms 40, 50, sometimes 60 students in one classroom. It cannot be applied in such big classrooms and big number of students. Yeah it is applicable when we have 20 students in class, yeah it's ok, but when we have more, I think it is difficult... There two books and the course is big enough. It's too big and we have only three periods in a week, each period 40 minutes. The time is very very very limited. In the past, we had only one book, five periods, but now vice versa two books, three periods because they put the

French language ... They should put at least 5 periods in a week for this textbook”.

The Project at the end of each module in the books is an opportunity for students’ practice, cooperation and interaction in groups (See Appendix I: B for a full sample).

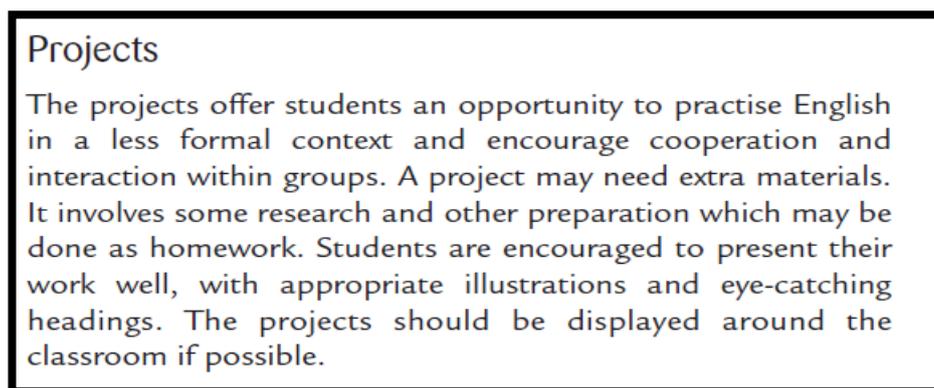


Figure 4.2. Project Aims, EFS7 TB p. 4

According to Umar, this part is centred on student discussions for which there is no time, given that the priority is for texts, grammar and speaking:

“No, and I don’t teach it at all. The students ask me about it. It is good but the time is not enough, and you have to discuss the students, when and how do you discuss them? How do you discuss them? In the classroom? In the classroom, you have to teach them the texts, the grammar, the speaking. And when you have a project, you must have extra time. We don’t have extra time”.

The listening part and the following ‘Giving Opinions’ group discussion task about the recording are skipped. Umar’s reason for skipping these activities is *“Because I am a lazy teacher [laugh]. Seriously it is because I have no recorder in the school”.*

Umar’s local alternative to listening was also designing a pronunciation activity in the pre-reading stage:

“Abdulqader: What’s the purpose of the translation and pronunciation activities you have included in the pre-reading stage?”

Umar: This is to pronounce the words correctly. As I said, because I have no recorder and no aids, they didn’t listen to the native speaker, so I put myself in the room of the native speaker”.

In addition to the lack of English laboratories and other audio and visual aids, other challenges that Umar regards significant in the process of implementation include teachers’ target language competence and pre- or in- service teacher training/professional development:

“My own language is not good enough to speak English because I have no training abroad. The government should send teachers abroad in the university or after university. I myself didn’t see USA or Britain at all. I saw it only on the map and on TV. We don’t have special classrooms for English. We must have English laboratories to put laptops in it and to put overhead projectors, to use the modern aids and other visual aids, recorders”.

Inspectors’ roles in educational innovation:

Umar believes that English language inspectors responsible for ensuring the implementation of the curriculum are not better qualified than teachers at schools in order to have their advice on teaching. In the following conversation, he underlines their emphasis on following the methodology of the textbooks, pronunciation, group work and monolingualism. He also levels criticism against the inspectors’ beliefs which change with the change of the books because they do not hold their own convictions and methods on teaching and learning:

“Umar: Very little and few, and they tell us orally and concentrate on the pronunciation of the teacher. They themselves have some instructions.

Abdulqader: So what are their main comments?”

Umar: They concentrate on the groups. You have to divide the students into two or three groups. They are related to the textbook itself. When we change the texts, they change their methods. They don’t have their own points of view or methods, they are like the book or the text itself. They just want us to use the method of the book. They insist on using English and on pronunciation. I don’t know why they stress on using English only”.

There is clear resistance to inspectors' instructions as they ignore classroom realities *"they forget themselves when they were teachers, they forget the challenges"*. Despite the lack of communication (between staff and between supervisors and teachers) and lack of training, those inspectors insist on teachers to 'apply' the curricular guidelines in their classrooms simply by reading the Teacher's Book:

"We only see the inspectors in a year in correcting the Baccalaureate exams and we don't speak about new methods. We don't have special course, special days to exchange our experience. There is no training. They just want us to read the Teacher's Book and to apply it in the classroom".

Although students started learning English from Year 1, Umar believes that they have weak competence level in English. He points out two reasons for this weakness, lack of specialised English teachers and focus on exam requirements rather than language development:

"Not all the students have good language from the first. They don't have specialised teachers in the first elementary stages. Some of the teachers are teachers in the geography or the mathematics. Not all the students here have English teachers. Only in the intermediate they have specialised English teachers. And they don't concentrate on how to speak English in the elementary school, they concentrate on how to pass the exam, that's all, that's their goal".

Educational change and unchanged exams:

Although Syrian schools witnessed English curriculum educational change, in practice exams were kept unchanged in focus but partly. There is a tension between the teacher's beliefs and the innovation plans on the one hand, and the exam requirements, on the other. While 'communicative competence' is highly accentuated in the curriculum and Umar emphasises speaking as a consequence, the skills assessed in the exam are instead limited to reading and writing:

“Only reading and writing, they read the questions silently and write their answers. We don’t have speaking and listening in the exams. But the questions are a bit different now from the past, we have American a b c d three or four options, and false and right questions ... Here you reminded me something. Here even teachers concentrate on the written questions the questions which are given in the exam only”.

This tension seems to impact how teachers respond to guidelines only partly in order to meet the exam requirements. Teachers opt to rather focus on exercises with more relevance to the exam questions (washback). Umar, therefore, states that innovation should change the exams in order to make them compatible with the curricular goals and contents:

“During the exam we don’t have listening, we don’t have speaking, we don’t have audio, only written questions. It’s not right to change only the textbooks because the teacher can evaluate the students orally and written”.

Summary

In this chapter, Umar’s reading and grammar lessons have been analysed in light of his comments on selected transcript extracts. In addition, the themes emerging have been developed through linking this analysis with a broad interview conducted with Umar to have his general views on key aspects. Despite Umar’s general positive attitude towards the curriculum, he indicates that most listening and speaking activities, pair- and group- work tasks, group discussions and the project the end of each module are skipped due to contextual realities. Umar’s own beliefs seem to be a significantly influencing factor on the implementation of the principles of educational innovation.

As emphasised in the introduction and in Chapter 3 (see 3.4), at this stage of the study, Umar was experiencing the difficulties of displacement and fleeing his neighbourhood seeking safety as unprecedented airstrikes and destruction broke out

across the country. The interviews in this chapter were actually held later on when Umar was able to come back to his property, but still amid curfew.

Chapter 5

FOCAL TEACHER 2 (Maher)

Introduction

In much the same spirit of Chapter 4, this chapter draws on the transcripts of the audio-recordings obtained from Maher's Year 7 English classroom in a rural state school just before its destruction as a result of the ongoing war in Syria. Similarly to Chapter 4, after analysing the reading and grammar lessons transcripts, the main themes emerging in relation to Maher's comments on selected extracts and the broad interview are presented.

The country circumstances were escalating, and although I intended to follow the same procedures of Chapter 4, all my attempts to yield Maher's views on his grammar lesson were not successful. Displaced, this teacher was experiencing very difficult circumstances and electricity and the Internet were not helpful at all. It was only possible to have his comments on his reading lesson and conduct a broad interview on general issues.

5.1. Background

The recording, which took place on 30/04/2012, lasted for 50 minutes because it consists of two consecutive lessons (grammar and reading). Supposedly, each lesson takes 45 minutes, but for two main reasons the audio-recordings turned out to be much shorter. First, the teacher started recording when the lesson really

started and after finishing procedural instructions including marking any homework, not when they entered the classroom. Second, Maher insisted on cutting out parts before sending it to me because the lesson included procedural acts with naughty students he would not be happy to send for research purposes. Although it was his voluntary and free choice to participate in the study, Maher's trimming of the audio-recordings indicates that he is willing to disclose himself and let others know about his classroom to a certain limit only. In his classroom, there were 25 male and 15 female students, all speaking Arabic as their L1.

Maher's interviews and details in this chapter are as follows: pilot Facebook Instant Messaging Interview [12 December 2012: English original]. The teacher's comments on the reading lesson were conducted on 01/05/2013 [My translation]. The broad interview on general themes [My translation] was undertaken on 01/05/2013. Unfortunately, it was not possible to have Maher's comments on the grammar lesson due to his circumstances.

With close reference to key overlapping aspects, the following section presents snapshots via selected extracts from the reading lesson in relation to the teacher's reflections.

5.2. Reading Lesson

Maher's interview data (conducted 01/05/2013 [My translation]) will be also integrated in order to highlight his comments and reflections that guide these practices.

As identified in the Teacher's Book (Kilbey 2009: 66), the language *focus* is *have to/don't have to, describing personal qualities and work*: the *outcome* anticipated is that *learners can describe jobs*, and the materials are Students' Book pages 64–65 and Workbook page 53 (See Appendix III: C for relevant materials).

OVERVIEW

Outcomes Can describe jobs

Language focus *have to / don't have to*; describing personal qualities; work

Materials Students' Book pages 64–65; Workbook page 53

Following the Teacher's Book and the CLT tenets discussed in Chapter 2, the reading lesson involves three main stages. The book suggests dealing with schemata activation at the *warm-up activity* in the pre-reading stage as outlined in the following:

Comprehension

1 (15–20 minutes)

Ask the students to keep their books closed. Write the main heading (*Working with nature*) on the board. Ask the class to suggest jobs that could go under this heading. Supply words in English as necessary.

Suggestions

farmer, gardener, vet, conservationist

Ask the students to open their books at page 64 and read the section with the heading *Park ranger*. Check they understand the vocabulary, then read out the example sentences. Tell them to read the rest of the text and then to prepare two similar sentences for each job, using the ideas in the box.

KEY

(possible answers – there are others)

An animal trainer has to be physically strong. He doesn't have to use a computer or work in an office.

A zoo keeper has to work with animals. He doesn't have to do the same thing every day.

A marine biologist has to work outside. He doesn't have to travel to work.

Extract 1 draws on part of the pre-reading stage in the warm-up as Maher's purpose appears to be stimulating students' schemata about the text through triggering them to guess what jobs the pictures of the text to be read represent.

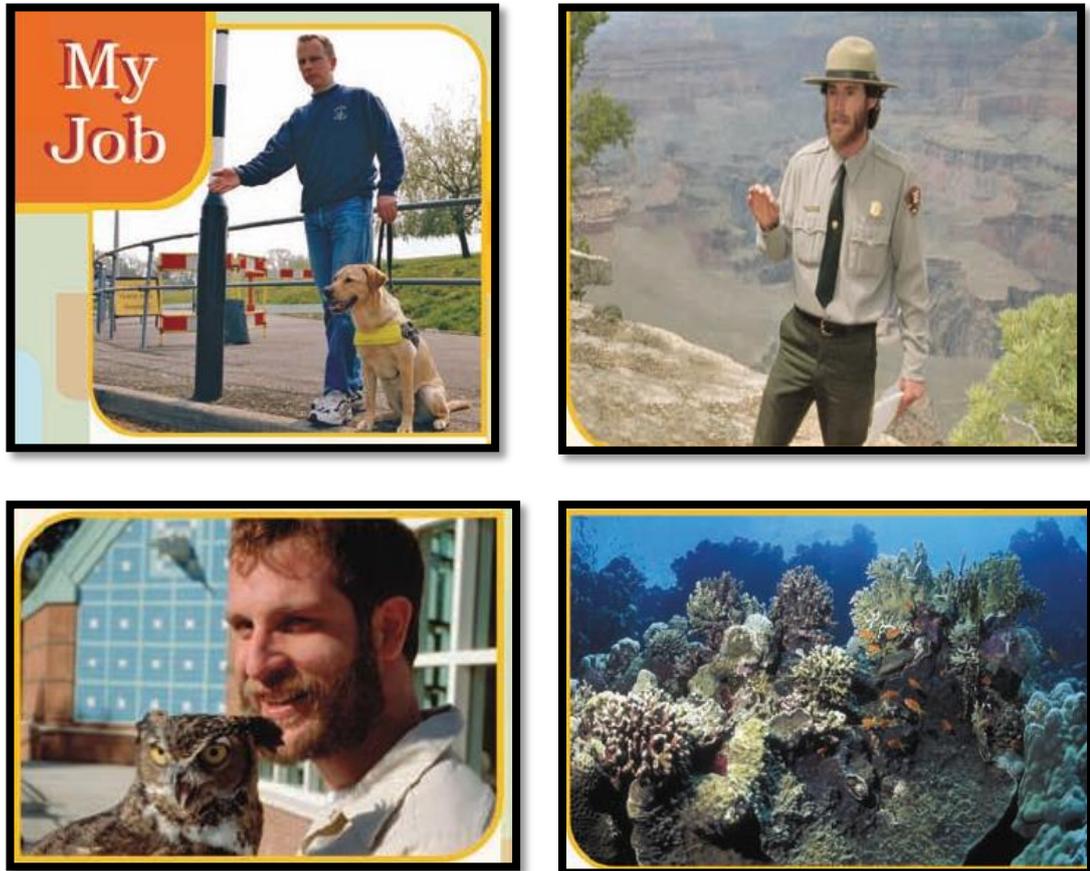


Figure 5.1. Warm-up activity Pictures

Extract 1 (Pre-reading Stage, Warm-up p.64):

5	T: safha 64 <page 64> My Job aamali awwal sourah <My Job, the first picture>
6	S1: //guessing what the picture shows// aama <blind>
7	S2: hares? <goalkeeper?>
8	T: aama! (blind!) Mudarreb haywanat <animal trainer> tani sourah? <the second picture?>
9	
10	S: mustakshaf ustath? <Teacher, is it an explorer?>

Activating schemata through pictures represents one of the essentials of teaching reading according to CLT. Conducted fully in the L1 by the teacher and the students, the warm-up activity displays Maher's attempt to engage students in the

creation of meaning in the classroom discourse through predictions. Although in Arabic, students' suggestions do not exceed one-word utterances (Lines 6; 7; 10) as the teacher directs and controls turn-taking. Also, this part of the lesson represents the only place where teacher-initiated questions appear.

Although it may look like that Maher attempts to relate students' experiences and background information to the text by means of asking students to predict what the pictures show, Maher's comments on the extract reveal another view:

“My first role is to educate them and develop their general knowledge, and then the second goal is to let them memorise the words ... In this school, my students' general background knowledge is below zero due to many factors. For example, their parents are not educated, and this reflects on the children even if they love knowledge. ... they did not know or understand words like park ranger, public park or zoo”.

Maher establishes the concepts first in students' own language and, at a later stage, teaches them the English words and their meanings as his role extends teaching English to educating students whose general knowledge and linguistic competence are weak. One significant factor influencing these students' abilities is that these concepts are culturally alien. It is also rooted in the rather uneducated community and parents. These factors rather than the suggestions in the box above appear to influence and guide Maher's decisions and views on what works in and for this particular classroom context.

Similarly to Umar's view in Chapter 4, Maher states that the students' weak levels do not correspond with the years they have spent learning English. Translation is a teaching strategy to help and ensure students' understanding without which Maher believes they *“would not understand anything”*.

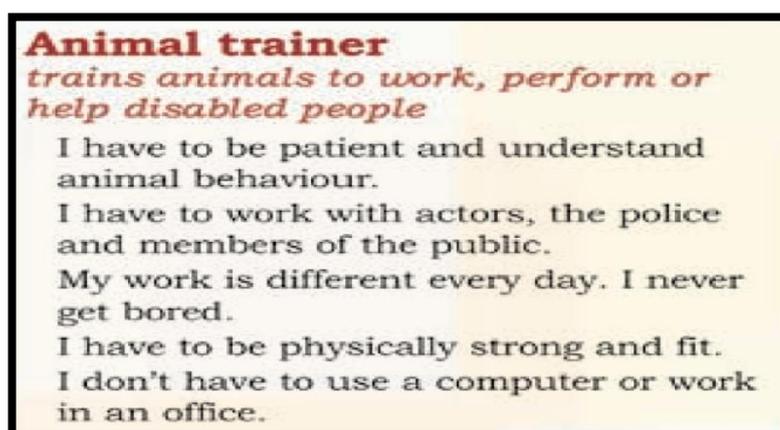
“The mother tongue helps me to make them understand things. If I want to explain in English, students should first have basic background. My students do not know very simple words... When students tried to guess what a park ranger is in their language, they confused it for a gardener, and I had to explain the difference ... Simply without the L1, students would not understand anything. Although we may think they have been learning English for 6 years, the reality is they start afresh every year as if they haven’t learnt English before”.

As evidenced in the extract above, the English words for the jobs demonstrated in the pictures are neither elicited nor given. In response to this, Maher explains:

“I allow students to predict the job names in Arabic because they see the pictures and cannot predict what it is in Arabic, how can they name them in English? They even thought the zoo keeper was a hunter! [laughing]”.

The *reading stage* appears to be predominantly text reading bilingually (a word-by-word translation approach) performed wholly by the teacher in Extracts 2 and 3.

Extract 2 is characteristically representative of how the reading stage is conducted and typical of the interaction pattern throughout the whole lesson.



Extract 2 (Reading Stage, Paragraph 1 Animal Trainer p.64)

36	T: //reading the text// Animal trainer Animal?
37	Ss: haywan <animal>
38	T: hayawan <animal> trainer mudarreb <trainer>

39	S: mudarreb <trainer>
40	T: trains mahmuttuhwazeftuh <his job, mission>trains //addressing a girl// irjaai
41	la waraa Amal <go back Amal> Animal trainer mudarreb? <trainer>
42	Ss: hayawanat <animals>
43	T: hayawanat <animals> mahmmatuh <his job is>trains yudarreb <train>animals?
44	Ss: hayawanat <animals>
45	T: alhaywanat <animals>to work litaamal <work> perform
46	toaddi aw takoum <perform> or help aw tusaaed <or help> disabled people
47	Ss: alnas <people>

With the title ‘My Job’, the purpose of the lesson is to familiarise students with the grammatical structures ‘have to’ and ‘don’t have to’ in a reading text about professions. Although the text is in essence designed to introduce and assist students’ discovery of grammar in context and practise *describing jobs* (Kilbey, 2009), the actual lesson, as the transcript demonstrates, does not seem to meet the goal as the lesson turns into a reading and translation exercise rather than an opportunity to draw attention to language use:

“As a teacher, I wanted them to know how to read. I changed the purpose of the lesson to be suitable for the level of my own students. In this text, I had no choice but to read every single word myself”.

The comment involves seemingly contradictory statements wherein Maher wanted students “to know how to read”, but “had no choice but to read every single word” himself. The teacher confirms my understanding of his concern to develop students’ L2 input when he comments on my enquiry of what role students have in this particular part of the lesson:

“The most important thing to me is that students get used to listening to English and learn how to read. Taking into consideration the students’ level, this is what I can teach in this text”.

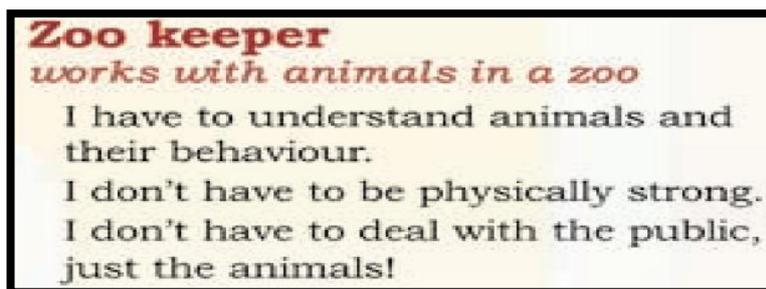
He clearly states that students’ level and needs in this particular context guide his practices.

Similarly to the previous extract, this extract shows the dominant language choice in the lesson, English-Arabic code-switching. A typical IRE pattern, Maher's lesson demonstrates how the teacher accomplishes reading the paragraphs of the text by way of a word-by-word type of English-Arabic code-switching, while students tend to mainly give translations once prompted. He himself reads the text, providing (and eliciting) words translations throughout the whole lesson. Maher argues that he employs a word-by-word translation chiefly because of the students' levels:

“The problem is even if they read an Arabic text, they would not be able to answer the questions that follow! How would you expect to give them the text fully in English and ask them to answer the questions that follow the text? In one of the questions in the first term exam, I asked them to choose “am”, “is” or “are”, around third of the number of students’ answers were “or”! This is an example to show you the level of my students”.

Many instances show Maher eliciting the students' Response part of the IRF sequence by means of intonation employed as a prompt to generate two pattern types commonly practised in this classroom. While the first pattern displays students' use of the L1 to complete the teacher's L1 utterance “Ss: **hayawanat**<animals>” (Lines 41 & 42), the second represents an intonation prompt for students to provide the L1 equivalent (rather than a completion) to the teacher's L2 utterance “T: //reading the text// Animal trainer Animal? Ss: “**haywan** <animal>” (Lines 36 & 37; 43 & 44).

The following extract displays a content-related question raised by a student in Paragraph 2 in the Reading Stage. The following graph shows the part of text which Maher reads.



Lines (105-110) reveal how Maher was reading and translating every word for the students when a student suddenly questioned the information in Line (111).

Extract 3 (Reading Stage, Paragraph 2, Zoo Keeper p.64):

105	T: layanbaghi <don't have to> be physically kawai strong kawi
106	physically badaniyan <physically> aaksmudarreb alhayawanat <contrary to animal
107	trainer> mudarreb alhayawanat yanbaghi an yakoun laik badaniyan <animal
108	trainer has to be physically fit> laken <but> zoo keeper hares hadiket alhayawanat
109	la yanbaghi an yakoun kawi jasadiyan <zoo keeper does not have to be
110	physically strong>
111	S: leish <why?>
112	T: hasab hweh mo mahmmetuh tadreeb alhayawnat <His job is not training
113	animals> mahmmetuh mathalan alhifaz aala nathafet alakfas alhifaz aala
114	alhaiyawanat yummenla taaam <His job, for instance, is looking after the
115	animal's cages and food > fa mafi daai innuh ilmudarreb yerkudd maa
116	alhayawnat <Therefore, there's no need to run with animals.> I don't have to

Although student-initiated questions are uncommon, some extracts illustrate instances where a student volunteers to ask questions related to the content of the text. Unlike the questions posed by students to have the meanings of strange words in Umar's classroom (See Chapter 4 Extract 6), the purpose of the question here is to *understand* why the zoo keeper does not have to be physically strong. The student's enquiry consists of a one-word question in Arabic 'leish' (Line 111), meaning 'why?'. Perhaps the fact that the teacher explains in Arabic has encouraged as well as assisted the student to question the idea. According to Maher, what drives students to ask genuine questions relevant to the content of the text is the fact that the lesson *content* and *language* are new to them in this particular context:

“They ask questions because most of the information is new to them. The more the information is new to them, the more they ask questions. Other students from a different background may already know the information in Arabic, but they only need the English words. In my context, the content is new to them and the language is also new”.

While surface L2 features seemed to be more important than content in Umar’s view (Chapter 4), content and language are equally important for the students in Maher’s lessons.

The teacher’s response is formulated fully in Arabic (Line 112-116). Again, Maher explains that answering the student’s question in detail in the L1 aims not only to ensure students’ understanding of the answer itself but also to *“enrich the student’s background knowledge that he lacks in his environment”*.

Maher acknowledges that he has changed the focus from what is expected in the guidelines to what he believes to be practical for his students’ abilities. He demonstrates an explicit rejection (on this occasion and others) of the official curriculum as that seems to clash with his own beliefs on how to teach in his classroom:

“My focus was different from the purpose of the lesson in the curriculum guidelines because practically I wanted them to know the sentence structure like the auxiliary verb, the negative ‘not’, have to ... etc.”.

This reading lesson concludes with a post-reading stage that includes a grammar-in-context exercise.

4 Copy and complete the paragraph. Use *have to* / *don't have to* and these verbs:
use wear play enjoy ~~be~~ work

Footballers (1) **have to be** physically fit. They (2) a match or do training every day. They (3) in an office and they (4) a computer at work. But they (5) a uniform. And, of course, they (6) playing football!

In the following extract, after introducing Exercise 4 for students, Maher and the students go through the verbs and translate them. The teacher explains how to fill in the blanks with a suitable verb from the list in a similar way to the first example.

Line (307) demonstrates Maher's instructions to the task in which the students fill in the paragraph with 'have to' and 'don't have to':

Extract 4 (Post-reading Stage, Exercise 4 p.65):

307	T: nanistakhdem alafaal hasab maana aljumleh nastakhdem imma <we'll use
308	verbs according to the sentence meaning, either> have to aw nfiaha hweh <or the
309	negative form is> don't have to baadal <after have to> have to waal <and the> don't
310	have to waal <and the> must biji alfiel biseeghet almasdar <the verb is used in the
311	base form> izakan feal al koun hweh <if the verb to be is>am is are menhit feal
312	alkoun seeghet almasdar mennoun <we use the base form which is>be awwal
313	wehdeh mahlooleh <the first example is already answered> Footballers football
314	Ss: fareek <team>
315	T: football kuret alkadam <football> footballer laeb kuret alkadam <footballer>
316	physically fit laek badaniyan <physically fit> have to?
317	Ss: be
318	T: be. Two They a match match mubaraa <match> or do
319	Yakoomoo <do> training tamreen <training> every day kulyawm <everyday>
320	S: play yalaab play yalaabustath <Teacher, it means play, it means play>
321	T: they have to yajeban yalaaboo <have to play>
322	S1: have to play
323	T: a match have to yajeb an yalaaboo mubaraa <have to play a match> they have
324	to play

The task shows how students get involved in the activity and turn it instead into a translation of word meanings exactly following the same principle of what they were doing in the reading comprehension stage. Rather than attending to the language focus of the grammar-in-context exercise following reading a text full of 'have to' and 'don't have to', the classroom participants show that their concern lies primarily in word meanings instead of providing the missing linguistic/grammatical form 'play', clearly displayed in a student's utterance "**yalaab** play **yalaab ustath**<Teacher, it means play, it means play>" (Line 320).

Maher clarifies that the aim which he expects students to meet is to be able to put their linguistic knowledge into some controlled practice:

“to apply the grammatical rule of ‘have to’ and ‘don’t have to’. Now, they increased their knowledge of the words and we are towards the end of the academic year. Our focus here is on applying the rules”.

The following graph from the book gives a snapshot to what is expected in this activity. Due to time constraints, neither Umar nor Maher actually allows time for students to complete a task before checking their answers. Instead, the teacher immediately allocates turns for each student to give the right answer.

4 (15 minutes)

Ask the students to copy the uncompleted text into their exercise books. Then read out the first sentence and invite the students to complete it (with *have to be*).

Allow time for the students to complete the task, then check their answers.

Maher explains, however, that the students who took part, particularly the hard-working ones, were very excited at this stage when they provided correct meanings of words already studied because that gives them a sense of ‘achievement’:

“For them, being able to translate the words is an achievement. The hard working students wanted to show me that they were learning and they memorised the words”.

As is the case with Umar, another lesson focussed on grammar teaching was sent to me by Maher.

5.3. The Grammar Lesson

The Teacher's Book (Kilbey 2009: 64) illustrates that the *language focus* is *must/mustn't*; the *outcome* anticipated is that learners can talk about rules; and the materials are Students' Book page 63 and Workbook page 52 (See Appendix III: D for original materials).

OVERVIEW
Outcomes Can talk about rules
Language focus <i>must / mustn't</i>
Materials Students' Book pages 62-63; Workbook page 52; Cassette 2

The lesson primarily involves four tasks preceded by an introduction and explanation of the grammar rule of *Must/Mustn't*. Therefore, after introducing/transmitting the rule, the rest of the lesson predominantly involves exercises. As it was not possible to have Maher's comments on the grammar lesson, the analysis of the extracts draws on Maher's views on the previous lesson.

The following extract demonstrates Maher's *introduction of Must/Mustn't* prior to the exercises. Maher writes the rule on the board and allows students time to copy it on their copybooks.

Extract 5: (Teacher's Introduction of Rule, Grammar in Context)

4	T: //writing on the board// unwan aldars <the title> Must yajeb <must> aw <or>
5	mustn't?
6	Ss: la yajeb <mustn't>
7	T: talea daftrak wa uktub <get your copybook and start writing> Maher Abdul-
8	Kareem ... Mahmoud ikud mahallak <sit down>
9	Ss: //writing for around 5 minutes//
10	T: Mahmoud ikud mahallak <sit down>
11	S: Ustath Allah yuafkak khallinin arouh ashrah mai <Teacher, please let me go
12	out to drink some water>
13	T: ma fi iskut <no, keep silence> khalastu kitabeh? <Have you finished writing?>
14	Ss: //some shouting yes, others shouting no//
15	T: Must nafiyaha? <the negative of Must is?>

- 16 Ss: Mustn't
 17 T: Mustn't **ikhtisar la**<is the abbreviation of > Must not ... **lamma bikoun**
 18 **ilmutakallam** <when the speaker is > **I ana** <I>**nastakhdem**<we use> must **lileejab**
 19 <for the affirmative> **fi**<there is> Must **wa fi**<and there is>Have to ... Must **daiman**
 20 **lil mutakallam** <always used with the speaker>... Have to **li bakyyet alashkhas**
 21 <always used with the rest>I must study
 22 S: **yadrus** <study>
 23 T: **yajeb an adrus aksaha** <I must study>

Soon after students finish copying the rule (Lines 4-6), Maher explains the usage of 'Must/Mustn't' and ensures students are aware of the different meanings/translations of both modal verbs (Lines 17-21). The approach followed to teach grammar is writing on the board, asking students to copy that, and then reading the sentences for the students as an example. Similarly to Umar's grammar lesson, this deductive approach instead of allowing students to discover them also seems to be the pattern in Maher's lesson. The language of teaching and learning the grammar points is Arabic, which Maher considers essential for students' understanding.

After copying the grammar rule, the classroom participants move to grammar-in-context exercises from Students' Book and Workbook. In the following extract, students work on Exercise 4 in the Student's Book in which they are supposed to complete the sentences from the story with *must* or *mustn't*.

Grammar in context *must / mustn't*

4 Copy and complete the sentences from the story with *must* or *mustn't*.

1 I rescue the birds.	4 You make a sound.
2 You stay with the others.	5 We let the men get away.
3 You move.	6 We open the cages.

In the extract, Maher asks the students to open their books, checks when to use 'must/mustn't' with them and then allocates a turn for a student to complete the sentence with the right answer.

Extract 6: (Student's Book, Grammar in Context, Exercise 4 p.63)

47 T: **mnestakhdem**<we use> Must **aw** <or> Mustn't. Must **maa alilzam**<with
48 obligations> Mustn't **maa?** <with?>
49 Ss: **ashiyaa mamnouaa** <unpermitted things>
50 T: **ashiyaa mamnouaa** <unpermitted things>
51 S: **ustath ay soual?** <Teacher, which exercise?>
52 T: **ilsoual alrabea** Bayan <exercise 4> one I ... rescue my birds.
53 Bayan: Must Must
54 T: **yajeb an unkez altouyour** <I must rescue birds.>
55 S: **ustath ay taeen?**<Teacher, which exercise?>
56 T: **altaeen alrabea**<Exercise 4> Khitam You ... stay **tabqa**<stay> with the others
57 **maa alakhareen** <with the others>
58 Khitam: Must
59 T: You must stay with the others ... Ahmad three You ... move **tataharrak** <move>
60 Ss: Must
61 Ss: Mustn't
62 T: **yajeb an la tataharrak**<You mustn't move>You mustn't move ... Muhammad
63 four You ... make a sound **tousder sawt** <make a sound>
64 Ss: Mustn't
65 T: You mustn't
66 S: **khamsah**<Five> Must **ustath** <teacher>
67 T: **la tkoul aljawab**<Don't say the answer> Ghufraan
68 Ss: must must
69 T: **kulna la tkoulou alhal** <I said don't say the answer>...

The discourse in this extract demonstrates that the teacher reads each sentence and translates it (Lines 56-57), and then he asks a particular student to give a correct answer (Line 58). There is no opportunity given for students themselves to read each sentence fully; however, Maher's comment in the reading lesson on the same idea reveals that his belief that students' level is weak is perhaps applicable here. The student's task is simply to provide 'must' or mustn't'. The guidelines for this exercise are in the figure:

4 (10 minutes)

Tell the students that all these sentences are from the story. Read out the first one and invite them to tell you the missing word (*must*). Then allow time for the students to complete the task. When they are ready, ask different students to read out the completed sentences.

Maher did not point students to check the sentences in the original text. They were not given time to complete the task either. The task has turned into a different activity in which sentences are de-contextualised and students are only required to provide the correct grammatical answer with no reference to the story. Although Maher would like to keep discipline and allocate turns, there are attempts by students to ignore this rule (Lines 67-69).

In the following part of the lesson, after Exercise 4 in Extract (6) above, the teacher moves to Workbook to work on three other exercises. In Exercise 1, students need to answer with must/mustn't according to the picture or signal. As an activity from the Workbook, it is designed for students to further understand and practise the situations in which 'must' and 'mustn't' are used. In practice, it follows the same pattern of the previous exercise. Similarly to Exercise 1, in Exercise 2 (Workbook), students fill in the gaps with must/mustn't. Extracts of Exercise 1 and Exercise 2 have been cut out due to space and essentially revealing the same pattern in Extract (6).

In Extract (7), students need to change the notes into affirmative/negative sentences, using must/mustn't. First, the teacher goes through all the sentences and translates them or elicits their translations. Then, he asks different students to write their answers on the board. In Line (173), Maher gives the instructions for Exercise 3 (Workbook).

Extract 7: (Workbook, Exercise 3 p.52)

173	T: ilmulahazat rah nhawallun la jumal hasab <We are going to change the notes
174	into sentences according to> Must aw <or> Mustn't hasab iza iljumleh manfiyeh
175	mnestakhdem? <If the sentence is in the negative, we use?>
176	Ss: mustn't
177	T: mustn't ... jumleh muthbateh mnestakhdem? <If the sentence is in the
178	positive, we use?>

179	Ss: Must must
180	T: Must wa baadaha mnestakhdem feael <and then we use a verb> ...
224	T: Two
225	S: three ustath <teacher> three
226	T: Three Bayan Only eat and drink in the café You must wella <or> mustn't?
227	Ss: must
228	T: You must eat eat and drink
229	S: eat and drink
230	Ss: //noise//
231	S: ... ustath atlaa aktabeha <Teacher, shall I write it on the board?>
232	T: in the café yallah bas yekhlas Mahmoud <Ok, once Mahmoud finishes>
233	Ss: //writing and making noise//
234	S: ustath manna fahmaneen aalakhath Mahmoud <Teacher, Mahmoud's writing is
235	not intelligible>
236	T: barjaa baktubun <I'll re-write them> ...

We can see that students volunteer to participate and even to write on the board (Line 231). Unlike the allocation technique in Umar's lessons, in Maher's, there is a relaxed classroom environment in which negotiation of participation is actually done by students, even saying 'it's my turn'. Students' participation, nonetheless, is constrained to providing the positive (must) or negative (mustn't) form.

The goal of this exercise is to involve students in changing notes into full sentences in which the affirmative (must) and negative (mustn't) forms are used. The discourse, however, seems to be very similar to previous exercises where filling in the gap was the aim. Nonetheless, Maher in this activity asks students to write their mutually constructed answers on the board.

5.4. Main Themes Emerging

In this part of the chapter, I attempt to identify the themes which have emerged from the analysis of the two lessons vis-à-vis the teacher's comments in relation to Maher's general views in a broad interview (17/04/2013) and a pilot interview (12

December 2012). All Maher's views in this section come from the broad interview unless stated otherwise.

5.4.1. Aspects of Instructional Practices and Teacher Beliefs

The reading and grammar lesson transcripts reveal the same discourse pattern in different stages and tasks. In the following sections, the mismatch between the curricular goals and the teachers' classroom instructional practices can be understood in terms of Maher's reinterpretation of educational innovation within his own beliefs and local conditions.

Pair- and group- work

Similarly to Umar's lessons in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 shows no aspects of activities in which pairs or groups work together. Instead, teacher-fronted IRF pattern of interaction pervades the classroom discourse despite the different stages which have a variety of aims. Maher's view points to the impossibility of implementing these learning styles of pair- and group- work at Syrian schools because of two key reasons. First, the students are not accustomed to them; second, it will be, he believes, an opportunity for the students' distraction from the task:

"You can say once you put students in pairs, they will discuss everything except for the content of the activity. Therefore, it is not possible to achieve that. In addition, students are not used to this style of learning whether pair work or group work ... It is not possible to implement these styles in our schools".

Maher discusses the difficulty due to students' educational culture, large classes and the other subjects' teachers' lack of awareness of these interaction principles.

Relaxed teaching and learning environment

In contrast to Umar's classroom, Maher's reveals a more flexible environment in which students do not need to wait until the end of the lesson to be given an opportunity to ask questions. They can interrupt the teacher and genuinely question the content of the reading text (Extract 2). Genuine questions asked by students are generated due to the fact that content and language are new to students in this particular context (Extract 3). The teacher's explanation of the text in Arabic has encouraged as well as assisted the learner to question the idea in Arabic, too. Instead of being allocated turns in Umar's case, students in Maher's lessons take the initiative and negotiate turns (Extract 7).

Activating students' schemata: a CLT element with a local flavour

In teaching reading, Maher starts with a warm-up activity in which we, at first sight, assume that the purpose is activating students' schemata through showing them pictures of different jobs. His comment on the extract, however, points to the fact that he is rather establishing new concepts for students who lack basic general knowledge in his immediate context. Therefore, he believes that all the activity has to be done in students' L1, even the job names (Extract 1).

Focus on vocabulary and translation

Despite Umar's use of translation to ensure understanding of grammar rules (Chapter 4), there is a minimum employment of translation in grammar exercises. In contrast, translation pervades every move in the discourse of Maher's lessons. Students always translate whatever the teacher says, and this is attributable to Maher's word-

by-word English-Arabic approach. When asked about following English-only in the classroom, Maher believes that it “*places the teacher at distance from his students*”.

According to Maher, students’ level in English competence is particularly weak in speaking; therefore, they even ask questions in Arabic although they know the question words in English (Extract 3). Another factor for Maher’s translation is his belief that some concepts in the textbooks are totally new for his students. Therefore, they need to be familiarised with the concepts in their L1 before they become able to understand them in English (Extract 3). In his general views on the English-only policy advocated at Syrian schools, he adds that it will lead to a situation where the majority of students cannot understand the teacher:

“If you follow English-only policy, you will expect no more than 5 per cent of students who can understand you”.

Similarly to Umar in Chapter 4, Maher also holds the belief that translation is essential for explaining grammar in order to ensure students’ understanding (Extract 5). Maher highlights that translation to the L1 facilitates teaching and learning in situations such as grammar explanation, vocabulary meanings and explaining questions. He also stresses that the underlying rationale for his use of the L1 is of an interpersonal nature:

“Maher: Grammar: if you do not explain the grammar rules in Arabic, students will not understand it. Words: students are used to learn words in a specific pattern like when the teacher says any new English word, they should also give the Arabic equivalent. They expect teachers to translate all new words.

Abdulqader: Do you use Arabic in any other activities?

Maher: If we have a question about the text and it is not clear for students, I explain the question in Arabic. The most important reason for me to use Arabic is to be close to students”.

In Extract (4), according to Maher, when students translate, it gives them a sense of achievement.

Emphasis on listening (to teacher)

In the reading lesson (Extract 2), Maher has emphasised that his priority has been to ensure that the students can hear English and develop their linguistic input so that they can read the next exercise. Given the several constraints and variables in his context, he argued that the practice of allowing students to listen to his reading was the only feasible option to develop their listening skill. Maher further underlines listening as an essential skill which enriches the students' exposure to language, hence it 'triggers' their spoken English:

"The most important skill is listening because I want the students to hear the language. Once students hear English, this triggers their speaking abilities. However, this needs to be done from the very early stages. If you deal with students like a parent, they will love to please you. But if you start this at a later stage when students have grown up, they will not respond to you".

According to him, the effectiveness of developing the students' listening and speaking becomes less likely unless practised at early stages.

Similarly to Umar, Maher also believes that the students' writing skill is the most difficult to develop at Syrian schools due to factors such as time constraints, students are not used to writing even in Arabic and exam-focused learning:

"Maher: Due to time constraints, writing is difficult to develop. You can give students some writing tasks, but if they do not develop this skill themselves, they will forget it.

Abdulqader: Why do you believe writing is the most difficult to develop?

Maher: Students are not used to writing in Arabic, how can they write in English? Students are used to be receivers; they are not used to be interactive with their studies. They learn how to answer exam questions only".

Approach to teaching reading

Contrary to Umar's lesson in which students were allocated turns to read the text, students in Maher's lesson did not read at all, but rather listened to the teacher reads himself because he "*wanted them to be able at least to read the activity sentences later on*". The lesson transcripts in both lessons, however, reveal that students do not really read. Rather, they simply answer. And Maher's reading of the text is a word-by-word type of English-Arabic code-switching, providing (and eliciting) words translations throughout the whole lesson

Grammar teaching

Similarly to Umar's grammar lesson, Maher's shows a deductive approach to grammar teaching/learning. Extract (5) displays how the teacher writes rules on the board, asks them to copy them and reads out some examples. This approach ensures that students know the use, the meanings and examples of how the modal verbs (must/mustn't) are used. There seems to be a de-contextualised grammar (learning and) exercise in Extract (6), too. The sentences come from a story already studied, and there is no reference to this original story when students are completing the task. Rather, students only provide the correct grammatical answer. In contrast, Umar's students (See Chapter 4) show attempts to provide full sentences (although essentially co-formulated with the teacher) and, actually, this is due to the teacher's insistence on accuracy and full answers.

Although the different exercises in the grammar lesson are designed for various aims, Maher's approach shows the same discourse pattern throughout the whole

lesson in which he reads, translates and asks students which option they think is suitable in the gap (Extracts 6 & 7).

5.4.2. Educational Change and Unchanged Realities

This chapter has identified several local challenges which have direct bearing on curriculum implementation and the teacher's classroom practices.

Teacher beliefs, curriculum and realities inform practical pedagogy

Although the curriculum and the teaching/learning approach have changed, Maher's practices do not appear to be highly congruent with these changes. He incorporates few communicative elements (warm-up activity), but the general spirit belongs to already existing practices.

In his introduction to his professional development, Maher illustrates that he has read Ur's and Harmer's books before joining the teaching staff. However, he embraces the belief that ELT literature has little relevance to his immediate context realities:

"... much of my education is of little use in my classes. I found that the literature about teaching doesn't serve me as it does not address my community". (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

In a rather uneducated 'community' (and with uneducated parents), students lack general and linguistic knowledge (Extract 1). Therefore, Maher's ecologically developed (actually developing) approach reflects these realities in introducing unfamiliar concepts in the warm-up activity in Arabic first before introducing the vocabulary of English professions.

Maher's awareness of his students' knowledge and level influences his decision to change the lesson aim from introducing grammatical structures to be discovered in a reading text about professions into a text reading and translation (Extract 2). Therefore, his goal was developing students' reading abilities, but when that was not even possible, he had no choice but to read the text himself. He emphasises that his first priority is developing students' L2 input first through exposing them to more English by listening to him, so that they learn how to read. Like Umar, with no easy access to teaching/learning audio aids, the teacher is the sole source of English. Thus, Maher's practical view does not stem only from his personal beliefs about teaching/learning English and students' needs and levels, but also from the interaction between his beliefs and contextual dynamics which, together, inform his practices (See Contextual Factors and Challenges).

Beliefs (and realities) about teacher and student roles

In his comment on the change of teacher and student roles advocated in the curriculum, like Umar (Chapter 4), Maher alludes to sociocultural aspects that make it difficult to apply:

"They mention something about changing the teacher's role from authoritative into a facilitator. However, this is difficult to apply. Students are used to see teachers as authoritative and they are responsible about everything in classroom. I'm the source of knowledge. And the student's role is passive receivers of information".

Maher's belief that teachers hold the major responsibility in class echoes in Extract (1) in which we see the teacher's educating role beyond language teaching, being a real source of knowledge and language. He even answers students' genuine

questions in their L1 to ensure understanding and ‘enrich’ their background knowledge (Extract 3).

The new roles advocated put the teachers in clash with their cultural roles as they will risk ‘control’ of the class:

“They would lose control of the class, so they can't take that risk. You can't play the role of the facilitator when your learners are used to the authoritative one. The students would think that the teacher is of weak character”. (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

However, we see instances of negotiation in students’ attempts to volunteer participation. This indicates a different student role unlike that revealed in Umar’s lessons. Extracts (6 & 7) display examples in which students interrupt the teacher, question ideas and contribute to the classroom discourse although all conducted in the L1.

Contextual factors and challenges

Maher expresses the belief that the implementation of CLT is very difficult. Despite his suggestion that the students can be exposed to a new approach from early years if success is expected, he confirms that it was a difficult reality with which to deal when he started teaching Year 7 students:

*“Maher: At state schools, it is very difficult to implement CLT unless you yourself as a teacher start with the same group of students from Year 1.
Abdulqader: How can you do it in Grade 7 in your classroom?
Maher: well, it was too late for me to try. I'm outnumbered and my students could only count to 10 and only few of them knew the alphabet”.*

His view about the feasibility of *EFS* at Syrian schools points to the “best conditions” assumed by the curriculum. In other words, the curriculum ideal

principles are far removed from reality in which in addition to contextual challenges, he suggests committed teachers and students need to be available first:

“The textbooks require a lot of conditions to be met first because the curriculum supposes the best conditions. It needs available teachers who are fully free and committed to teach students. It also requires, if we create this expression, ‘available students’ because students should be educated to come to learn. The textbooks designers have in mind the idea that students learn and memorise words from the first encounter at Year 7. The fact is students at this stage do not even know how to read in Arabic, how do you expect them to read in English?”

Students’ levels:

Similarly to Umar’s classroom, students’ weak level (in general knowledge and L2) is the main guiding factor of Maher’s personal view of teaching and learning in his classroom. Therefore, he believes that the unfamiliar concepts introduced the curriculum need to be learned in students’ L1 first (Extract 1). After enriching that cognitive aspect, it is possible to develop their linguistic abilities. Similarly to Umar’s view in Chapter 4, Maher’s students’ levels do not correspond with the years they have spent learning English. Nonetheless, contrary to Umar’s reading lesson where students were allocated turns to read, due to students’ weak level, Maher had to read the whole text himself (Extract 2) following a word-by-word translation approach.

Constraints of time, teaching aids, class layout, large classes, teacher training, teacher competence and social and educational culture:

There is a lack of both teacher training and awareness of CLT for many teachers. Also, students’ needs, being exam-focussed, appear to be inconsistent with the curricular goals:

“... mainly lack of training and honestly, it doesn't address the needs of the students only to score a high mark”. (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

Even when there is training, Maher believes it is ‘useless’ and ‘superficial’. Therefore, teachers follow a similar approach to that of their teachers’ rather than ‘comply’ with CLT, to which only enthusiastic teachers attempt to subscribe:

“Well, the so-called training is useless, it's so superficial. Most teachers teach the way they were taught. Only when a teacher loves the practice of teaching, he reads and practices new methods which comply with the new course i.e. the communicative method”. (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

As the Teacher’s Book represents the only source available for teachers to be familiar with the principles of the methodology suggested, Maher believes that teachers unaware of CLT may not find it very helpful because it characterises a new approach to teaching for them:

“The Teacher’s Book does not have enough instructions for teachers. If teachers are not familiar with CLT, teachers will face a big problem because it asks teachers to teach in a new methodology they are not aware of”.

While the majority of teachers skim through the Teacher’s Book as a reference to have the answers, other teachers do not read it because they find it difficult to implement its guidelines. As a result, they follow their own teaching approaches:

“Most teachers only read the solution to get it from it [The Teacher’s Book]. Others don't read it because it's very hard to apply in our context, so even if you read it, it's hard to apply”. (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

The difficulty of implementation stems from challenges such as large classes, time constraints (See Extract 4), class layout, the students’ educational culture and the other subjects’ teachers’ lack of awareness of these interaction principles (school culture):

“Students’ weak memory because they learn and forget immediately. Also, if the number of students is more than 15, you cannot implement CLT because they will make noise. And time is limited and insufficient when you have a big number of students because you will need to speak to every student, not only with 5 to 10 students ... Having 40 students in my class means I will be able to interact with 10 of them maximum. In CLT, you need to interact with all students and put them in pair work and group work. Pair work and group work are difficult to put into action not only because of time and the number of students, but also due to students’ culture. I think it’s only in English lessons that we have CLT, while in other subjects, teachers are not aware of this methodology. Students even do not accept changing their spaces to be put in pairs and groups, so the class layout is a challenge too”.

Other factors which impinge on the students’ acceptance to learn a foreign language include the community’s lack of education, shortage of full-time teachers and teachers’ competence:

*“Abdulqader: what are the reasons for that?
Maher: mainly lack of education ... Also ... shortage [of teachers] and incompetent teachers. I was the first English teacher who has been hired permanently at my school and there are many cases like this ... the other teachers were all part-time teachers”.* (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

Another difficulty relates to lacking or limited technological equipment needed for the curriculum:

“It is a self-initiative from the teacher. I used to use the projector, but it takes a long time of preparation and time is not sufficient. We only have one room at school that is equipped with a projector”.

Like Umar, Maher confirms that teachers never teach the Project at the end of each module. To him, not only does the Project need access to the Internet to be implementable, the whole curriculum is not appropriate for the Syrian context. Change needs to occur *in* teachers, students and everything, and it is a long-term goal that ‘takes ages’:

“We never teach the Project. Students should have Internet, so that they search and know how to write, but this is not possible to implement. It is a

great curriculum, but it is not for our Syrian students because it does not address them. It takes ages to change students, teachers and everything”.

Supervisors’ and inspectors’ roles in educational innovation:

Both Umar and Maher believe that inspectors provide teachers with little, if any, information on the principles of CLT since inspectors themselves have little knowledge in relevance to the approach of the curriculum. As they may not be really qualified to train teachers (supposedly, they are responsible for developing teachers’ skills), their visits are rather formalities than actual observation and feedback sessions:

“I doubt that they are qualified enough. The new courses concentrate on the communicative method, while most of them know very little about CLT ... they just do that for the pay check. I’m only aware of one who has an MA degree”. (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

In his case, when the inspector observed one of his lessons, the inspector’s feedback was not only ‘useless’, but also centred on the inspector’s own teaching approach; focus on memorising vocabulary:

“The inspector who used to attend my classes only gave me useless feedback and it turned out that it was all about his way of teaching! He used only to teach vocabulary and that’s what he asked me to do. Therefore, forget about CLT”. (Pilot Interview [12 December 2012])

Educational change and unchanged exams:

Similarly to Umar’s view expressed regarding the exam system (Chapter 4), Maher points out that reading and grammar still hold the main focus of exam questions. Listening and speaking are never assessed and, therefore, teachers skip these activities. Innovation has addressed the reality only partly by introducing new textbooks, leaving teachers to follow their old exam techniques for a new textbook:

“Abdulqader: Did the exam system change with the new curriculum?”

Maher: The teachers are themselves so the format of the exams has never changed. When you introduce a new curriculum, you need to train teachers. Inspectors should be responsible about this sort of training, but again inspectors are appointed as you already know [laugh] through connections and they do not really take that seriously.

Abdulqader: What skills do the exam questions test?

Maher: Until now we never test listening and speaking ... The focus is on the reading receptive skill and on grammar.

Abdulqader: Is that the reason why many teachers skip listening and speaking activities?

Maher: Exactly, that’s right”.

Summary

This chapter highlighted Maher’s teaching practices in relation to his perspectives on local challenges and practical solutions. Both the reading and the grammar lessons were analysed in light of his comments on selected transcript extracts. Through linking this analysis with a broad interview conducted with Maher to have his general views on key aspects, the major themes emerged. As indicated in Chapter 4, the broad interview conducted with the teacher assists the line of enquiry to investigate:

- the teacher’s beliefs about the curriculum and the principles underpinning the approach advocated; and
- the factors impacting the teacher’s classroom pedagogy.

In fact, the key themes that emerged from analysing the extracts and Umar’s and Maher’s accounts, particularly the impact of teachers’ cognitions and contextual realities on their teaching practices, made me reconsider the Literature Review Chapter and review studies relevant to teacher agency (See 2.2), the dynamic debate of diversity and complexity (See 2.3) and ELT in difficult and crisis circumstances (See 2.4). Thus, teachers’ reflections and views on their classroom practices in addition to the literature on context-appropriate/sensitive pedagogies redefined my

focus to be rather exploratory. I started to appreciate the complex reasoning that teachers have had in order to do what they have been doing.

As indicated earlier in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, Umar and Maher were experiencing displacement as unprecedented clashes broke out in the Battle of Aleppo (20 July 2012) and across the country. Millions of Syrians became displaced internally or refugees in neighbouring countries, particularly Turkey for civilians fleeing the war from Aleppo. These circumstances seriously impacted my data collection plans due to electricity outages and the Internet disconnection issues (see 3.4). In fact, the interviews in the previous two chapters were undertaken amid curfew. Due to war, Maher's school was destroyed, and he informed me that he changed his profession to be a phone retailer. In our last contact, both Umar and Maher were jobless refugees in Turkey actively looking for a job in order to support their families.

Consequently, the rapidly changing security situation in Syria and my developing sense of a new focus on teachers' agency and context led to the later interviews conducted with 11 Syrian teachers in Chapters 6 and 7. These interviews also developed the focus of the study to incorporate ELT in war situations as this large group of teachers related the impact of war on their careers, lives and students' education.

Chapter 6

LARGE GROUP INTERVIEWS

ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the context of this thesis, and with my interaction with the literature and the data in the previous chapters, I started to place emphasis on teachers' own reasoning in order to derive productive thoughts on ELT innovation and implementation from a grass-root perspective. The three focal teachers' chapters served as a starting point for this chapter. For analysis to lead to clearly identified themes, I have followed the following pattern. In each chapter, the analysis of the lessons with the teacher's perspectives (Chapters 4-5-7) has led to the emergence of key themes. These themes guided my interview questions as well as the analysis of the large sample of interviews in the current chapter. The interviews with 11 other Syrian teachers in this chapter were held to find out whether the three teachers' perspectives on ELT were also reflected in other Syrian teachers' views. Whilst the line of enquiry in the first two analysis chapters was initially drawing on how teachers (dis)align with CLT tenets in their practices, it moved beyond this interest to be more exploratory and appreciative of how they make sense of the curriculum and what their views are.

Following a thematic analysis to the interview data in this chapter, themes emerged as represented in the following sample table:

Table 6.1. Sample Table for Thematic Analysis

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
1. Contextual realities	a. Large classes	1. number of students 2. seating 3. class layout
	b. Time constraints	1. three lessons a week (not enough) 2. stuffed books 3. skipping listening & speaking activities
	c. Exam requirements/system	1. Ts' priorities/exam requirements 2. reading and grammar 3. skipping listening & speaking activities 4. mismatch between curriculum and exam system (e.g. listening/speaking are not tested)
	d. Multi-level classrooms	1. Ss' multi levels in the same class 2. difficulty of attending to individual needs 3. negative impact on stronger Ss 4. T's repetition 5. skipping some higher level parts (link with time)
	e. Objectives versus available resources (context-insensitive curriculum)	1. books 2. lack of teaching aids 3. listening materials 4. lack of technological equipment 5. skipping teaching listening as a result
	f. E-only policy vs. translation practice	1. E-only guidelines vs. translation practice 2. Inspectors' awareness of the difficult of E-only vs. their official responsibility to inform teachers 3. Teaching/learning habits (translation) 4. Ss' beliefs in translation as a tool for understanding
	g. Dearth of teacher training/professional development opportunities and inspectors'/language supervisors' limited roles	1. Teacher's Guide (source of self-training, if available) 2. lack of training courses/info on teaching 3. Ts experiment as their conceptions guide them 4. T's self-initiative to find training courses (e.g. British Council) 5. Inspectors' infrequent observation visits and limited feedback 6. insisting on covering the books 7. inspectors expect (and concerned with) particular lesson plans only (restricting flexibility for Ts to tailor lessons according to realities) 8. Ts' full awareness of Ss' levels & needs vs. inspectors' limited awareness 9. Teacher agency vs. inspectors' suggestions

The following sections discuss the key themes and sub-themes which have been identified in the analysis of all the interviews in the chapter.

6.1. Contextual Realities

In the following sub-sections, I outline the teachers' views and reflections on the challenges and difficulties they have (and have had) at state schools even prior to the outbreak of the war.

6.1.1. Large Classes

The main factor challenging teachers is reported by the majority to be the large number of students. Samer, for instance, states that the *"book is not designed for large number classrooms"*. This issue appears to influence, and even at times change, teachers' decisions to involve students in collaborative practices that require student-student interaction. Although Firas has taught up to '65' students in class, when interviewed, he observes that for a language lesson this case is 'beyond imagination'. The large number of students in class also creates confusion for Hala who appears to be torn between meeting the teaching syllabus and attending to individual students' needs:

"Also the number of the students is important at class. I have to think of all the students. If I have to end all the content of the book, I will not be able to deal with every student individually every lesson". (Hala)

This problem does not only generate the difficulty that teachers report to have in deciding what to prioritise in teaching; attending to students' needs or covering the books according to the official calendar. It also impacts (particularly novice) teachers' classroom management and leaves them struggling with discipline. The challenge of large classes, consequently, creates further interrelated difficulties for teachers to handle: meeting the teaching syllabus, attending to individual students' needs and classroom management. This is clearly illustrated by Huda who struggled with teaching up to 60 students in class:

“... the huge number of students. I used to teach about 60 students in one class, so it’s very difficult to keep silence and to manage the whole classroom and to give a lesson within 45 minutes ...”. (Huda)

6.1.2. Curricular Objectives and Available Resources

Another major challenge relates to the lack of teaching and learning resources needed to meet the requirements of the curricular objectives. In some cases, even basic needs such as the textbooks may not be fully available for all the students, let alone the technological audio or video resources through which the books have been designed to be taught. Abeer describes her experience with this particular problem stating that:

“... books are not available for all students early in the term, and sometimes especially in the village students have got only the practice book ... the teachers too are not provided with the aids because the ministry only says use aids without sending or providing them to the schools”. (Abeer)

Identifying a series of interrelated problems relevant to listening materials, Rana expands on the difficulties that teachers encounter in having access to the audios, tape-recorder or even *“a proper working socket”*. Because of her strong belief in how helpful to learners developing students’ listening can be, Rana has attempted to employ all the means possible to achieve that goal. However, these problems can impede even the committed teachers who have believed in the urgent need for curriculum innovation and in the recent approach to teaching and learning:

“... if we talk about the listening materials, you might be lucky if you can get the listening materials on a CD or you know tape. I mean they don’t usually give to teachers. I mean the schools laboratory sometimes contains some of these materials but they were not always there. So it’s you who should go and find it and usually pay for it. This is one thing. If you manage to bring let’s say this tape or CD-Rom with you, you might not find properly functioning tape-recorder or CD player. Even if you managed to do that, there is also the problem of finding a proper working socket in the classrooms”. (Rana)

Sharing the same concern with the other interviewees, Samer comments that the innovation is context-insensitive in many aspects related to the availability of listening materials and teaching aids:

“I don’t think it’s taking into consideration the different aspects of the difficulties the teachers face while teaching English in Syria, most importantly the availability of listening material as well as the tools inside the classroom. In this way, it’s very difficult to teach students listening”. (Samer)

Despite her indication that *“listening is the most important strategy”*, Hala reports her embarrassment to skip teaching exercises that involve listening due to unavailable materials:

“... sometimes when you teach students you face listening practice but unfortunately we don’t use this media at schools. When I face this practice, I feel it is embracing [embarrassing] for teachers I mean students will feel this is carelessness from the teacher because I am telling them this is a listening practice but I cannot let you listen to anything”. (Hala)

6.1.3. Time Constraints and Exam System

Equally important appears to be the challenge of time as interviewees report inability to effectively handle the requirements and goals of the curriculum due to this constraint. Most of the interviewees have found that with only three classes per week, little is left to teaching and learning to take place while teachers spend considerable time on class management (Firas). Finishing *“stuffed books”* in a situation where *“we don’t have much time”* is, therefore, not realistic for many teachers, such as Aalaa and Huda. Firas explains:

“Sometimes I spend a lot of time on just managing the class. You could say, you sit here, you keep silent, you do this and the class is only 45 minutes. I always said that three lessons of English a week is not enough. We have weekends, we have holidays, we miss a lot of classes”. (Firas)

In this connection, the textbooks offer more than time allows, which leads to skipping listening and speaking exercises by most teachers. As exams have not addressed new aspects upon which the new textbooks have been grounded, it becomes 'quite normal' for teachers to avoid teaching skills and contents in which students would not be assessed. Even the students in Huda's lessons are only concerned about scoring high marks:

"And students in advanced level care only about exams, they don't want, the activities they want only the activities that are related to the exam, they don't like to study anything for general education. They didn't care about anything, just to have good mark". (Huda)

Even though listening and speaking skills constitute the core tenets of language use in CLT around which the curriculum has been developed, teachers do not believe that classroom realities (and the education system altogether) provide a conducive environment. This is demonstrated in detail in Rana's comment which incorporates several inextricably intertwined factors which inform the teachers' practical approaches in accordance with priorities:

"I'd say time was one of the challenges because each unit would integrate the four skills and if you want to spend some time on each skill. I mean what the teachers would do is that they skip listening or speaking skills and they have more time to cover reading and writing and grammar. But then you see what I mean, there is like the one who had prepared the books should have really studied well how each section would take. And they should take into account the level of students, so probably there is more in the books than time allows to do in the class ... but eventually students are not required to do any listening or speaking in the exam. So it's quite normal for teachers to skip these sections". (Rana)

As underlined by Rana, Hala and Firas, the challenge of time develops into another problem in which teachers have to make decisions on teaching according to the curriculum objectives or teaching the whole books irrespective of meeting these objectives. Interrelated with teachers' own initiatives to skip some parts in order to

attend for the time constraints, inspectors' insistence on teachers to complete the course on time brings about the idea of 'skipping' teaching the skills not assessed in the exams. Firas spells out that struggle between meeting the lesson aims, time pressure, inspectors' insistence on ending the course and the exam requirements:

"...sometimes I feel that I need to pay more time on this while the inspectors always pushing me to cover more and more. Whatever is the result, they just claim you need to cover, you need to finish this book, you need to do whatever it's possible even you could skip this or that ok, but they need to cover the whole book. This is another problem for me, pushing on me, pushing on me. Quality is nothing for them, they don't check quality at all". (Firas)

Abeer suggests establishing a strong link between the curriculum and the exam system. The options in that case are: a). adapting the content to be in consonance with the current exam system (getting rid of listening and speaking parts) or b). upgrading the exam system up to the level of the content (assessing listening and speaking):

"In my opinion [the curriculum] is good but needs some changes with deleting parts containing speaking or listening because we do not have the means for them and we do not examine the students in these two parts, or keeping them but dealing with them seriously by teaching them as important parts and having them in the final exam". (Abeer)

6.1.4. English-only Policy vs. Translation Practice

As the curriculum has been planned to be centred on CLT and English-only policy in language teaching, teachers and students alike seem to resist accepting L1 ban for several reasons. While some interviewees, including Aalaa, have argued that "*we can't do it because our classes are multi-levelled*", Rana states that her experience of following E-only in class has been strongly resisted by the students for two main reasons:

- teachers' and students have been used to following an Arabic approach to teach/learn English for years; and
- students' 'conception' that Arabic is a tool for understanding without which knowledge learning does not occur.

These beliefs and habits (See Chapters 4, 5 & 6) have become a challenge:

"... official guidelines tell us that we have to use English all the time and we can't do it. Although they know that we can't do it because our classes are multi-levelled but they feel like it's their duty to remind us that only English should be used". (Alaa)

"And one of the biggest challenges I had as a teacher, that was in the secondary school, using English in the class was something they were not used to it. Like the first lesson you know students told me our teacher last year used to speak Arabic, so please speak Arabic [laughing]... then at that time, I wouldn't just carry on using English, no I would stop and switch to Arabic. But the problem was that students had this you know conception that I mean if they don't hear Arabic they won't understand". (Rana)

6.1.5. Multi-level Classrooms

Students' multi-level abilities in the same class signifies an ongoing issue for many teachers. To Firas, this comes as a first problem for teachers:

"The first problem is different levels of students in the same grade ... you could see maybe few good students, I mean I'm talking about level, and maybe a lot of students which are beyond the level, I could say they are false learners". (Firas)

Although she further extends the point to contrast between curriculum content and students' levels/proficiency, Aalaa echoes a similar concern in the following quote as she has to resort to repetition to ensure that the weaker students follow:

"... the multi-level classes, sometimes I need to skip some of the ideas because they are not suitable for the students' proficiency levels. Sometimes I have to repeat the same idea more than three times for the sake of those weak

students while others are like listening to the same idea being repeated although it's an easy idea for them I mean". (Aalaa)

Students' levels appear to be the key factor which informs Hala's classroom practices irrespective of what the books aim to achieve at that particular stage. She strongly believes that it is the teacher rather than the inspector who can indeed assess their students' levels and needs in a particular classroom and act upon this:

"The needs of my class because when I enter the class I know my students I know their level on something to do. I cannot depend on what the inspector has told me to do this and do this because the teacher is more aware about the situation of the class, more than anyone else". (Hala)

The students' level and large numbers do not appear to be compatible with the objectives of the textbooks, Sameh indicates. Other sources of difficulty Firas and Aalaa illustrate include the inconsistency between the students' levels and textbooks content, particularly the length (and quantity) of reading texts. In the following quote, long texts, new vocabulary and difficulty of grammar are identified by Firas:

"... the texts are really long and full of new vocabulary and the grammar is beyond their level. For example, they talk about all cases of passive voice, all cases of reported speech, all tenses let's say simple present, present continuous present perfect, wish, wish in the past, used to and would. This is very difficult for 9th grade, very very difficult for them, I could spend days and months teaching them the difference between the conditionals first and second and third and fourth condition. It took me ages to explain that. Then I move to reported speech, can you imagine reported speech and reported questions, sometimes it was a mission impossible for me. Then when you go to 12th grade, you find less English, less grammar than 9th grade, why is that? ... So here we have inconsistency between the preparatory stage and the high school or secondary stage". (Firas)

Drawing on the discussion above, it is significant to understand the sources which have assisted teachers to develop the new teaching skills and approaches needed to grapple with the new textbooks which have been difficult to implement.

6.1.6. Dearth of Teacher Training and Professional Development

Grounded on an innovative approach to teaching and learning, the curriculum suggests that teachers be equipped with awareness and knowledge of novel methodologies of learner-centredness. Many teachers indicate that the textbooks have incorporated several innovative teaching and learning approaches/techniques. Still, a major hurdle appears to be lack of teacher training commensurate with the objectives of the books (Samer, Aalaa, Rana, Firas, Ali & Salma).

Aalaa and Rana mutually illustrate that no training programmes prepared them for teaching at schools; the Teacher's Book (and own experience) has informed their knowledge of the curriculum. In the subsequent comments, particularly Rana's, we realise that basic and essential aspects such as lesson plans have been learned and developed by teachers themselves who have never been introduced to the 'how' of the curriculum:

"I wasn't TOLD how to teach this book, I just got a copy of the Teacher's Guide. I added somehow a little experience to it and it worked actually".
(Aalaa)

"You know, no one told me because these activities were there and I just went on and tried them because you normally I mean as a teacher whenever you go to a classroom, you have more than one guide, you can have the Teacher Guide which is that for you to read before the class and like you are assumed as a teacher to prepare like each lesson. Like you should have a plan for each lesson ready". (Rana)

To Firas, all his teaching approaches and techniques draw on his academic study and a course he has been fortunate to attend at the British Council before his graduation. He points to the variety of the modules focused on different aspects of teaching/learning, in particular classroom dynamics that appear to be teachers' least addressed issues at Syrian schools. More importantly, it is intriguing to see the teacher's journey of reflection and realisation of the importance and implication of

the training he has had in developing his awareness of the impact of that on students' learning engagement and progress. Firas stresses the teacher's role in relation to facilitation instead of provision of information:

"... during university, I attended ... three courses at the British Council, each module was focused on one thing, one focus was on the background to language teaching and learning; module two was planning a lesson; module three was managing the classroom. In the third module, managing the classroom the picture became clear; how to divide the students in the class; how to let them work in pairs, to have them work in groups and HOW sometimes to have work is better than giving them the information or this interaction is better sometimes than giving or supplying them with the knowledge because the main focus is to have the students or let the students involved in the lesson rather [than] to give them ready information. Sometimes I felt that when I teach and give everything, that means sometimes nothing, but sometimes when I teach less and have my students work more or get involved more, it was better". (Firas)

Thus, the only three sources that have influenced some of the participants' awareness of teaching the new books introduced include their own self-initiative, the Teacher's Book and prior (language) learning experiences.

Closely related to training, one of the sources of the challenges that some teachers share seems to be the infrequent (or lack of) inspectors' visits and limited feedback. Teachers seem to show disagreement with the inspectors' suggestions, nonetheless (See Chapters 4 & 5). Samer reports that he has been observed only once, and that problem of infrequent visits has made him merely rely on what he has thought suitable for his students without having guidance on teaching approaches. In the following quote, similarly to Hala, he identifies his own agency as of precedence over the observer's suggestions:

"I was observed only once at school. And that's part of the problem. I remember one of the comments of my observer, it was to give reinforcement, like negative or positive feedback, to the students and if a student for example asks me about a grammatical rule, then I should give the students an activity about this grammatical rule rather than just say this rule simply I wasn't

interested in knowing how to teach the book itself, but I was more interested in giving the students what I thought was good for them". (Samer)

Desperate for an observation and some helpful feedback for 10 years, Firas's attempts have not been successful to have an inspector attend his classes:

"Firas: none of the inspectors attended any class for me, none of them.

Abdulqader: none of them attended?

Firas: none of them, they just passed my class, they said hi, how is teaching? I said good and I invited them to attend the class, but they said no we will come back later. None of them were interested". (Firas)

The same concerns are actually expressed by Rana who describes her early teaching days in the following quote. With very limited inspectors' visits (if any), new teachers have a 'daunting' experience to experiment with teaching:

"You were all there by yourself, you have to do it, you have to assess students by the end of the term and you MIGHT like have a visit by the inspector once a term or maybe once a year. So this ... didn't happen most of the time, which was a bit daunting for a fresh teacher you know". (Rana)

Like many other teachers (Umar, Maher, Firas), Rana further believes that the mismatch between the inspectors' instructions and the curriculum objectives creates a further challenge for teachers. While textbooks highlight the communicative approach, inspectors' concerns seem to be constraining as they appear to be more interested in the lesson organisation and plan than in suggesting flexibility and freedom for teachers in tailoring the lesson in accordance with meeting the lesson objectives and students' needs alike:

"I didn't find what the curriculum was suggesting using the communicative approach was very corresponding to what the ministry wanted teachers to do because inspectors were more or less after organisation of your plan or your lesson ... I mean this doesn't give the teacher enough freedom or flexibility because you know every lesson is different. Let's say they prepared a lesson plan and they go to class and they have more than one section, so they would be giving the same class to let's say three sections. You can't guarantee that they would follow the plan to [the] letter in each of them". (Rana)

As a consequence, the discussion in the above section highlights that challenges to teachers' classroom practices include, inter alia, large classes, time constraints, exam system, multi-level classrooms, mismatch between curricular objectives and available teaching/learning resources, English-only policy vs. translation practice and dearth of teacher training.

6.2. Teachers' Attempts to Make Sense of the Curriculum

Although most teachers appear to complain about the mismatch between curricular objectives and contextual realities, some find opportunities in this curriculum to explore novel language teaching and learning ideas. Particularly, those teachers who hold an MA in teaching recognise that, in contrast to their own old English textbooks, the *English for Starters* textbooks resonate (at least partly) with the literature of CLT or TBT they have studied. Some teachers even attempt to overcome the many challenges they have through creative opportunities they invent.

6.2.1. Good Design of Textbooks

Of the positive aspects, teachers believe that the design of the *EFS* textbooks look attractive in terms of engaging students in more active language learning as it incorporates listening (a previously neglected skill) although this puts a challenge for teachers (See 7.1.). In addition, while the books are reported to be teacher- as well as student- friendly, they also incorporate not only structure but also useful content:

“As a textbook, as I found them they are good, they contain many attractive things for the students like pictures, colours, songs, and many practices that are amusing for the students, so I do not find that there is any problem in the books themselves”. (Abeer)

“... the good thing about it is that they had some listening materials for students and you know because we are in an EFL context, students are not exposed to language outside the classroom. So when they have the teacher

bringing the tape-recorder and listen, they really felt engaged and that was one of the good things about these books”. (Rana)

“One of the most important advantages of this book is the way it’s designed. I mean they take into consideration structural as well as topical aspects of language, and the way it’s divided is very interesting for the students and very easy for the teacher to follow and teach”. (Samer)

6.2.2. Engaging Students in Innovative Learning Experiences

As some teachers have demonstrated appreciation of some aspects of the textbooks, they relate their attempts to be creative in personalising lessons through singing, playing music/guitar and creating real-life situations. The purpose was to engage students in what they found interesting opportunities in these books to develop new styles of teaching conducive to learning. Others also attempt to overcome technical resources limitations through availing of teachers’ personal technological items such as mobiles and laptops although this does not prove to be reliable.

For example, believing that listening is a great opportunity for Syrian students, Rana has attempted to overcome the challenges above and operate the listening materials on her mobile phone. Hasan also reports that *“well we really did extra efforts. What we have to do sometimes we use our own laptops”*. Due to sound maximum volume, we would not expect this attempt to be always practical as Rana explains below:

“So the last thing I came up with was using my mobile phone, so I just had to copy and paste them into my mobile phone memory and then to play them. But this didn’t work very well because the sound wasn’t high or loud enough at the time but at least it’s an attempt to do it”. (Rana)

As more focus has been put on personalisation of content in the curriculum, personalising lessons and activities tend to bring rewarding outcomes that produce remarkable memories for the teachers to recall as their best lessons. When describing his most successful lessons, Hasan alludes to a reading lesson in which, for instance,

students enjoyed discussing their favourite food and healthy/unhealthy diets in a text about Ramadan. Thus, personalisation created extra student's contribution and enjoyment:

“Actually I can't forget the passage of Ramadan in series 7 in EFS. It was only two days before Ramadan and students really enjoyed reminding them of traditional, healthy and habits they have to abide for their health. Students started talking about their favourite food and describing them. I also put a couple of pictures about people who follow healthy habits and others who do not ... I was satisfied with my students' contributions in my class”. (Hasan)

Sameh expresses his sense of achievement, given the challenging large number of students, to have been able to facilitate engagement and draw students' attention most of the time through personalising a vocabulary lesson:

“Yeah I guess I videotaped a film that's why it's easy to remember... It was for first graders, most of it was just a review of already learnt vocabs and expressions. I was happy because like I got students engaged and it's not easy with a big number of students. So I personalised the lesson, I could get their attention most of the time. That was an achievement to me because of the big number”. (Sameh)

This also proves successful for Huda who relates how she brought vegetables to class in a reading dialogue on how to make cucumber salad. Involving students in “realistic” learning situations closely relevant to their real-life experiences appears to have significant impact on enhancing the students' engagement and attention. The teacher is also pleased that translation was minimised:

“Huda: I taught a lesson about 'some and any' for 4th grade. It was a reading dialogue about how to make cucumber salad. So students enjoyed a lot because it was relevant to their life, to their own experiences because there were some female students who used to prepare the salad. So the lesson was very easy for them because it was full of illustrations. Yes there were many pictures in the book for example about the cucumber, the yogurt, so they were clear for students. We didn't use a lot of translation. And I brought some vegetables with me.

Abdulqader: Oh that's great.

Huda: [laughing] yes this thing attracted their attention because they thought they will eat [laugh] yes it was similar to their environment, that's why they enjoyed it. It was realistic, so yes they enjoyed it". (Huda)

Aalaa finds it even possible to personalise students' learning experiences in writing activities in which she, like the other teachers, has moved away from the books. She reports students' improved enthusiasm and interest due to personalising writing to be relevant to everyday practice in the immediate context, making tea:

"One of my ideal lessons is the one when I did in the countryside. We had to write a paragraph about how to make tea and they in the countryside drink a lot of tea. The students were enthusiastic because they were going to write about something they knew about. We started with words like water, sugar, pour and their meanings, something like that. Then we started forming the sentences, after forming the sentences, like we made a paragraph. It was really interesting". (Aalaa)

Other teachers provide creative approaches to enhance learning through music or songs. Firas explains one of his ideal lessons that took him "a lot of time to do" not only in terms of preparation, but also in taking two classes to cover it perfectly. Employment of group work and setting the scene with his own initiative to play music/guitar and then act as a waiter seem to be offering students a great opportunity to practise the functional language of ordering in restaurants. As it has increased students' interest, motivation, attention and engagement, this experience shows Firas content with his own practice in that particular lesson:

*"Firas: Yes the lesson talked about food and menus something like that and the language was functional like it's requesting like I would something, how much is this? Can I have a drink? I remember that I divided the class into three groups and I remember that I prepared three menus actually. First of all I modelled the language I'm the waiter and I visit every table, I pick up the request [order] and then I come back to serve them with their requests [orders]. The best moment was when I played music in the class to set the scene of the restaurant for my students. My students were very very very interested in that, were very highly motivated.
Abdulqader: I would like to be your student". (Firas)*

Similarly, Hala describes a reading lesson in which she sang with the students, which appears to have not only facilitated students' learning, but also created an engaging environment:

"I remember one lesson I was enforced to sing for my students. I have to teach them something they have to memorise this but I told you just a little before I don't like enforcing students to memorise something. I present this as a song, we were singing together. After the lesson I was shocked [pleased/surprised] to see that all of the students know what I have told them before". (Hala)

These examples have represented positive aspects of the curriculum and, meanwhile, good and creative teaching moments which can inform the teaching practice of novice teachers as feasible at Syrian state schools. The teachers' descriptions of their techniques emphasise students' motivation, interest and engagement.

6.2.3. Teachers' Approaches to Teaching Grammar

English for Starters textbooks are designed to present and review contextualised grammar and accentuate authentic materials and a discovery approach to grammar teaching/learning. According to Huda, teaching grammar "*the traditional way*" drawing on her own prior learning experience is a practical approach for her students. The teacher's agency also appears in following what she believes is "*beneficial*", including L1 use:

"... it is the traditional way we were taught, I think it works with the students because we were taught in this way and yes it works. It's sometimes useful for students. It's not so bad when using the L1. I make the rule clear, I give examples, I ask them to give me examples, then we read the text, the reading passage, we highlight the sentences, I ask them to give me the sentences that are constructed or structured about this for example about the present simple, I ask them to give me the sentences that they have in the text.

Sometimes I used to follow, and other times I used to do it the way I see it's beneficial". (Huda)

Decisions and approaches for teachers such as Huda and Hala were informed by their students' levels rather than by curricular guidelines. Students' understanding is Huda's key concern in teaching grammar whatever method she adopts, and therefore, she approached grammar teaching as she found it more effective (such as L1 use) in her immediate context:

"... because students' abilities were not very high, so I used to make things easier, I used to simplify things. Even if I used to teach it in a traditional way, so what was important for me it was to make students understand it. .. I used to do it the way I see it more effective". (Huda)

Unlike Huda, Rana finds it good to approach grammar as convergent with the 'inductive approach' presented in the books. When trying it out, this approach proves unsuccessful to be conducive for students who struggle to follow. Only then will she move back to deductive grammar teaching:

"Yeah for me, I like to start with inductive approach, but then it might not work because some students don't know let's say this grammar rule. So they really struggle a lot until they get to the stage where you present the grammar rule. So what I would do at the time I remember, I would start through a text or through doing some demonstration about let's say comparative ... like one is short, one is tall, like one of the students and then you compare them ... But yes when they used to have reading, ok and then you expect them to read and then they just formulate the grammar rule afterwards, I mean at some point you would find students, they won't be following up, so at a point you need just to stop and give the grammar rule earlier because students ... are just switched off". (Rana)

Aalaa points to the simplified presentation of grammar in the textbooks which, unlike her learning experience, draws on an inductive approach where discovery learning should take place. To her, an approach where teachers "discover" grammar with the students rather than 'set' the rules for them to follow is "really interesting":

“Well grammar is presented in a very simple way. In the past, we were taught grammar in a very traditional way like they set the rule and they give you some examples and they explain these examples according to this rule. But now you can for example underline some new points in a text and then you discover that this is the grammar that they want to tell you about, this is one of the ways. So it is really interesting”. (Aalaa)

To Firas, the focus of the book is centred on ‘the use’ of grammar rules, whereas detailed explanations of structure are equally necessary. Therefore, his approach to teaching grammar tends to draw on L1 use to convey the concepts and the grammatical structure as clearly as possible before introducing the usage for the students:

“Of course, I follow the book, but sometimes I give extra like for example if the book itself talks about passive voice, the book itself doesn’t tackle the concept of forming passive voice, how to change, how to omit the subject, it doesn’t mention that. It’s straight with the use, the book says for example use the verb to be and the verb in the third form in passive, and that’s only. But for me, I used to tackle every tense, give extra examples ... sometimes to give ready rules even in Arabic. For example, sometimes I say nahthif al faael we omit the subject”. (Firas)

Sameh’s description reveals full awareness of the inductive in-context presentation of grammar in the textbooks. However, this design of text-based, discovery-oriented grammar learning poses a challenge for the teacher as the texts are not carefully designed to clearly target the grammar point. In addition to the difficulty of the texts, he finds these authentic materials inappropriate to draw students’ attention to particular forms and uses. His own approach, he explained, was to tailor the lesson and focus on the immediate purpose, forms and uses:

“The textbooks are ordered in a way that if you have grammar to teach it in text like you start with a text, then they draw your attention to the form and then the use ... whatever. When it comes to grammar, it was ok, sometimes the texts weren’t that suitable, they were a bit too difficult like full of different uses. For example, if you want to teach the present perfect, it’s better if you find only the use that is targeted but sometimes you find the text like they try to get authentic materials and that wasn’t appropriate. ... I tried to ignore

the different forms and just focus on the forms that suit the purpose of the lesson". (Sameh)

6.2.4. Teachers' Reported Interaction Strategies

As I investigated the nature of classroom interaction in Chapters (4, 5, 7), it was equally important to explore how that resonated with the teachers interviewed in this chapter. Aware that the findings in this chapter draw on interviews, I found it more accurate to use the word 'reported' in my reference to teachers' perspectives on their interaction strategies.

For some teachers, contextual constraints (such as time, large classes and seating) keep them within what they refer to as traditional teaching practices. Despite Ali's attempts to involve students in pair- and/or group- work exercises sometimes, he opts to follow 'the traditional way' due to the time constraint within which he is required to finish the course:

"I think the time is so limited, and the supervisor of English told me you have to finish the course for example after two months. How can I finish the course? I think there is no time. Therefore, I delete this and return to the traditional way". (Ali)

Owing to the same issue of time, Hasan states that while in some cases it has been possible to engage students in group work, so many other situations have not actually allowed for that to be carried out:

"Concerning groups when talking about food for example, what do you think about food? Do you agree with the idea of eating too much food or not? You know again there were two groups and they were almost about to fight [laughing]. In certain exercises I could make groups, in so many others no I couldn't actually, again and again time, only time nothing else". (Hasan)

In addition to the limitation of time indicated by Ali and Hasan, large numbers of students have challenged Firas's attempts to set up communicative and interactional environments, particularly group work:

“Firas: Group work, it’s difficult, very difficult for me. Pair work, yes I USUALLY do it.

Abdulqader: so there is kind of student-student interaction?

Firas: I wanna be honest, I OFTEN not usually because it’s about 50 % I use pair work especially if there is an exercise and this exercise is a bit difficult and I usually ask students to work in pairs ... But when it comes to group work, it’s very very difficult. I seldom use group work.

Abdulqader: is it because of the layout of the desks and the classroom or due to other reasons?

Firas: the number of students and the time of the class, you know 45 minutes is not enough for a class”. (Firas)

One of the ideas that tends to be reiterated by some interviewees is the readiness of beginner students at the early stages to learn, which enables their teachers to employ more communicative techniques:

Abdulqader: Now with this very big number of students in your class, were you able to make a kind of student-student interaction, pair work or group work?

Huda: to some extent yes I could do it especially with the 1st graders, they were ready to learn. For example I remember a lesson about introducing yourself, so I used to go and shake hands with them, say hi my name is bla bla. Yes I asked them to come in front of the class and to introduce themselves. Yes they liked the idea. Yes we could motivate students yes but not embarrassing them in an embarrassing way because there many shy students”. (Huda)

Aalaa employs plus points, authentic stimulus and realia to encourage students’ participation. It is clearly stated that she controls interaction as much as she facilitates it:

“I always use the plus points, I add bonus points to the students who are disciplined students. Sometimes I add extra marks to the students who are like brilliant or who do the homework, I always encourage them. I don’t only facilitate interaction, I also control it. Some other strategies I use are authentic stimulus and realia especially because this is the easiest thing that every teacher can do”. (Aalaa)

Classroom seating creates a challenge to group work activities in Rana’s classes, too. In addition, Rana accentuates how the impact of other subject teachers’ interaction with the students reflects on their appreciation of a totally new

environment in the language classes. Classroom interaction in terms of pairs and groups, therefore, represents a new practice in the educational culture to which the teachers as well as the students belong. As students are used to particular norms of classroom talk in classes of other subjects, they find it incompatible with their typical practices to interact with someone other than the teacher in the language class. As a result, demonstration was the first step to introduce these communication strategies to the students:

“... because you know the way they are seated in the classroom, that doesn't allow for a comfortable environment for group work, so it would happen that you have three students in a desk, then two will be working in a pair and then the third so ... I mean at the time talking in the classroom was something students shouldn't do ... I can imagine that this is totally new to them, I mean why should they talk to someone else other than the teacher? ... because students were not used to speaking and listening to the language, I used to demonstrate first. It could be with one student, and then I could ask two pairs to come the front of class and demonstrate in front of others”. (Rana)

In her answer *“Making groups from time to time, solving exercises together, and repeating new words loudly”*, Abeer confirms most interviewees' comments that group work takes place 'from time to time' in a controlled manner.

Sameh questions real interaction in a teacher-centred environment stating that it can hardly be accomplished as most classes follow a teacher-centred approach due to the challenges set above, including large number:

“I can't say that there was a real interaction in the classroom, most of it was teacher-centred because of all the things I told you about, the number of the students and the gap”. (Sameh)

Thus, this section has revealed that whilst there are aspects which the teachers have reconciled from the textbooks, contextual realities have taken precedence over curricular guidelines in their teaching approaches.

6.3. Teachers' Beliefs about Realistic Change to Take Place

Drawing on their own experiences and challenges, in the following sections the interviewees outline a number of suggestions that they believe, if taken seriously by the MoE and novice teachers, would enhance real innovation in language teaching at Syrian state schools.

6.3.1. Teacher Training Programmes

To achieve educational change, most of the teachers interviewed believe that the first indispensable measure to be taken by the ministry is the introduction of teacher training programmes. This is due to the fact that they have started teaching without practical training sessions, particularly to *English for Starters (EFS)* books.

Drawing on her own experience, Hala believes that pre-service training is a need that “*we don't have*” before “*entering the school*”. She realises that there appears to be a gap between the current curriculum approach and objectives and how teachers actually teach. The teacher points to a very significant issue: many English teachers are actually university students who have just finished their high schools and become teachers with no training at all. Those novice teachers' lack of awareness and training about teaching (English) appears to need urgent attention. Even if teachers start teaching after they hold a university degree, they do not go through a pre-service training or ‘practice’ stage in which they can develop the techniques necessary for teaching (Hala, Rana & Samer). Instead, most English teachers seem to draw on their prior (language) learning experiences and/or theoretical knowledge of teaching, if there is any, as their degree courses focus on

literature, translation and linguistics. Hala identifies learning how to teach English as the missing stage that teachers desperately need before the start of their professions:

“... I mean as teachers we have to be subjected to practice before entering the school because after university we start teaching and we don't have any training. Learning English is different from teaching. We need practice but we don't have this stage”. (Hala)

Even for in-service teachers, Firas illustrates the sudden educational change that teachers have gone through without assistance. Although they were teaching a different curriculum, they had to meet the requirements of new textbooks and shift to different practices that in turn need to reflect a change of teachers' conceptions and cognitions. Teachers' perceptions about the curricular goals are shaped mainly by their reading of the Teacher's Book:

“You go to the book press and you buy the book, you buy the Teacher's Guide, you read it, you prepare anything for it. And then you go on teaching that. No one instructs you what to teach, no one gives you maybe a course, a training course on this course, how to make use of it, how to get the benefit of using this course, what to give, what to avoid”. (Firas)

Hasan also comments on the ministry's limited assistance to teachers in terms of how to teach:

“And they did not really take care of this EFS series, they just said these are the books and that's it and do it. They have to do something like so many sessions to develop the teachers' level in teaching these books”. (Hasan)

According to Samer, this lack of training applies not only to English teachers, but also to teachers of other subjects:

“... there needs to be training for teachers before they begin teaching and we lack this in Syria I mean not only for languages but for all subjects. Students at universities finish their study and go to teach without any training whatsoever”. (Samer)

6.3.2. Bottom-up Approach to Educational Planning and Training

There emerges a need to question the relevance of CLT to the local context and to bridge the gap between curriculum content, teachers' practices and the exam system. In addition to teaching and/or assessing listening and speaking, the teaching methodology seems to be one of Rana's concerns:

"I don't think it's very good one but I think it can still work if we try to bridge the gap like with content, how teachers deal with it, the exams issue ... Yeah the teaching methodology is another like do we really need to apply the communicative approach? Why would we need it if we are EFL context? I mean do we need for instance other approaches?" (Rana)

Sameh tends to be open to a multitude of approaches and underlines knowing when to use which approach or method:

"I believe that all approaches, all methods, are good and I have to know when to use each". (Sameh)

According to Sameh, curriculum planners should have come to the ground and planned from reality rather than from theory or ideal environments what in effect suits Syrian students and their 'situations' with all the challenges available:

"I believe the Teacher's Book is not suitable at all even if the students are good, even if the students are true beginners, the Teacher's Book, as for me maybe I got it wrong, as for me I didn't find suitable. The way suggested doesn't suit the number of students and the nature of students. It is for different situations. Whoever suggested this way of teaching should first have come to the environment, to the schools, then the suggestions will be more logical, to start from reality". (Sameh)

The above comment captures the fundamentals of the phenomenon in focus. The first point Sameh highlights with regard to training is the need for "*qualified trainers who start from reality*". To him, this approach from reality should be a practical (rather than theoretical) training through actual teaching in real-life situations. For training to be realistic and applicable, trainers teach the students in

real (rather than ideal) classrooms with all their contextual challenges. Accentuating the Syrian classroom and school realities, Sameh sees training sessions as designed for teachers to accept new books, objectives and approaches and believe in the feasibility of implementing the ministry's innovation plans. Sameh's second suggestion is videotaping these training sessions to make them available for the wider community of teachers:

“... sure, well qualified trainers who start from the reality, who come and TEACH, it's not TALKING about how to teach, like get some from the British Council or Cambridge who are well qualified and let them teach and the teachers will watch. In any training session, maybe you will have 20 teachers, but if you have a lesson video-taped, all the teachers can watch and it should be a real class, not like typical [ideal] class with only 20 students, no. That's the best thing to do”. (Sameh)

6.3.3. Small-scale Experiment (leading to a community of teachers)

A procedure the ministry should have taken into consideration when (or even before) initially introducing the textbooks is conducting a small-scale experiment in which some schools start teaching the books before implementing them nationwide. Samer's suggestion is:

“First of all, the most important thing when introducing change into a school or into the national curriculum, it needs first to be studied on a smaller scale before going into teaching it in all schools”.(Samer)

Similarly, Rana suddenly finds herself a teacher at school. Contrary to her expectations, she has had to start teaching and assessing students without any guidance or assistance. Not only the teaching experience, but also the books were new for the teacher and the students alike. Therefore, one of the advantages of the initial small-level implementation that the ministry could have administered (raised by Samer and Rana) is what Rana believes to be a community of teachers available as a reference for novice teachers:

“Well I think if they can just try the series on small level like because as a new teacher your first experience, I mean you should get in touch or that there is a community of other teachers who are doing the same job for some time. The element of teaching for the first time was something a bit daunting”. (Rana)

6.3.4. Channels of Communication

Because of the top-down hierarchy of the Syrian education system, teachers and students are reported by the interviewees to have no say at all in the design and content of the curriculum. Therefore, establishing channels of communication between the ministry, curriculum planners/developers and teachers/students can further assist teachers’ understandings of their practices in general and the pedagogy the ministry aims to achieve (Hasan, Rana, Samer and Firas).

The lack of these channels has affected teachers’ response to the textbooks as teachers have found some areas *“somehow difficult”*, but have been left to struggle without the support upon which they can fall back. In his suggestions, Hasan believes teachers-ministry communication is significant for *“clarifications”* on the textbooks:

“...it was a very good book but at the same time somehow difficult book and we need so many clarifications for them, but unfortunately there was no connection [communication], there was no contact you know between teachers and the ministry of education”. (Hasan)

This lack of teachers-ministry communication, Rana believes, also deprives teachers of the opportunity to express their voices/feedback on the methodology and the content of the curriculum. Therefore, she suggests ‘some kind of survey’ in which the ministry attempts to have teachers’ feedback on curriculum feasibility, content, appropriacy to context and suggestions for improvement. These ideas of how the curriculum works in the classroom resonate with Sameh’s call (above) for

actual teacher training in real-life situations that build on Syrian schools realities.

Rana comments:

“Okay now the methodology is one issue which is communicative but the idea of it at the time was completely new for me as a teacher and for students. Well I suggest that they might do some kind of survey with like asking the teachers’ opinions because sometimes the teachers themselves struggle with like a unit. They have to prepare about some boring reading texts that they could’ve been asked about their own suggestions or like how you think these texts turned out in the classroom. Did they really work?”
(Rana)

Rana also suggests encouraging teacher-students communication to create new opportunities to have the students’ voices/feedback on what they find ‘useful’ according to their expectations and language learning needs. In these “*really heavily teacher-centred environments*”, students ‘have no say’ as to the ‘kind of education’ the ministry and the teachers are ‘imposing’ on them. Thus, not only teachers’ but also students’ engagement in the communication advocated seems to be considered a significant factor that can develop teaching English at schools:

“Rana: Or did students find them useful? Because you are just going in imposing whatever kind of education these students to come out with. But then you never question like did they really want to learn about this? I mean why would an 11 year old know about historical place in English? When is he going to use that? I mean why don’t we teach them something that is more relevant for a child at that age if you see what I mean?”

Abdulqader: I like this starting from the context, teachers’ opinions, students’ needs.

Rana: yeah because at the end the students are just left with what’s given to them and they would never tell you by the way if you don’t ask them as a teacher because of these really heavily teacher-centred environments. They never question anything, they just go to class, and attend and then stay. They’d be grateful because you’re doing what you do although they have no say about it”. (Rana)

In addition to attending to context, Samer’s thoughts tend to coincide with Sameh’s and Rana’s. To Samer, investigating and appreciating teachers’ and students’ views and needs is substantially significant:

“I think studying the context is also very important including the teachers and the students and what do students need? And why should they learn English for example? All of this should be included in the plan”. (Samer)

Another aspect of the communication sought is to foster teacher-teacher communication to establish communities of teachers for exchanging ideas and for novice teachers to observe/learn from experienced teachers. Particularly if training is not available, for instance, Rana suggests developing a scheme in which new teachers at least attend experienced teachers’ classes before they embark on their teaching career. Thus, a peer-training/peer-support system is seen to effectively develop teaching skills:

“... for me I’d recommend that at least if you don’t have training for these teachers, why don’t invite them to classes of other teachers who have been in their posts for some time?” (Rana)

6.3.5. Affective Relationships (conducive to learning)

The affective dimension has been emphasised by the majority of the participants. Establishing a ‘good relationship’ with the students can develop new teaching/learning expectations and roles in which students can contribute to classroom discourse. The students would realise that that they have become active participants not only permitted but also anticipated to voice their ideas by speaking and asking questions. Teachers can establish these new roles by complimenting students’ attempts to engage in the co-construction of classroom discourse. In building this constructive relationship and setting up a new learning environment, they ‘convince’ the students and ‘encourage’ their participations and contributions. To Rana, developing this aspect can be a prerequisite to teaching English efficiently because by fostering relations affectively, students become active contributors socially, hence cognitively:

Abdulqader: What would your advice be to new teachers about how the English for Starters is to be taught?

Rana: the good relationship between you and students is very important because once you convince them ... like it's possible for you to speak in the classroom, it is possible to ask questions for instance because you are complimenting let's say their behaviour whenever they ask, whenever they participate. I think yes having good relationship especially with children will help a lot even before you go and try to teach them let's say language".
(Rana)

Expressed in similar veins, affective and friendly relationships contribute to the several traits that Huda believes characterise “a good teacher”. These affective relationships make the students happy, relaxed and willing to learn another language. Thus, there appears to be a link made between teachers’ friendly relationships and their students’ cognitive performance:

“So I think a good teacher should always make his students love him. So you should try as much as possible to be friend for them. Besides, you should be compassionate with young learners. So a good teacher should be also an entertainer. He shouldn't be always serious and frowning, creating that threatening environment. So in this sense, students will be happy and they will feel relaxed but at the same time, teacher should have self-confidence of knowing what he is going to teach”. (Huda)

The two main aspects in Firas’s teaching philosophy involve affective attention to students’ needs and building students’ motivation:

“My belief in teaching English is I like or I want to enter a class where I teach some English, not speak all the time in English but to have my students like not me as a person like what I give them, enjoy what I teach them and they go out of the class and they say to themselves we like English. ... My second belief is to motivate my students, this is very important for me”.
(Firas)

Besides, the affective dimension seems to be an important strategy to enhance classroom interaction. Reflecting on her teaching before fleeing the conflict in Syria seeking refuge in Turkey, Hala asserts that building a good relationship with the students has encouraged their participation:

“Mainly they haven’t to fear me, I have to be friend for them. I make them feel that if they know something about English language it’s not a bad thing if they will not learn quickly ... I always tell this for my students. You have to try this to be like your teacher you will be the same level of your teacher. This means that you know something that you are a good student if you try this”. (Hala)

Similarly, after escaping the war in Aleppo, Huda relates her teaching experience at Syrian state schools. She focusses on building a good relationship with the students and praising them (with gifts and candies), which motivates them. Attention appears to be given to feedback strategies that encourage, particularly shy, students:

“Since I used to teach beginners so the procedure I used was relevant to their age, procedures yes. For me what I used to do with 1st graders is motivating them by giving them some gifts or bring to class some candies and sweets ... They were happy, they were fighting to answer me. Also I used to put some stickers for them in the dictation who gets 10 out of 10 they like stickers, for boys Spiderman and Barbie for girls. I used to praise students even if they don’t give the full answer. This will also motivate them and they will participate in another time” (Huda).

6.3.6. Tailoring Curriculum according to Classroom Realities/Teacher Agency

Some teachers accentuate the need to adapt the curriculum according to what teachers find suitable and in congruence with their beliefs on what efficiently works in their classrooms. The teacher’s beliefs and evaluation of the learning outcomes have precedence over inspectors’ instructions. These guide Hala’s approaches and practices:

“After teaching students you have to know after every lesson that students have kept something in their minds, it’s not only entering and going out of your class. Also, it is not depending on what the inspector has told you, you have to concentrate on the results of the information of your students”. (Hala)

Hasan points to tailoring teaching in a way that incorporates the curriculum and the teacher's beliefs as to what meets students' needs. His 10 years of teaching experience informs of the necessity to respond to curriculum objectives in part while considering practical factors, most importantly students' needs:

"Abdulqader: What would your advice be to new teachers about how the English for Starters is to be taught?"

Hasan: Well my advice he has to mix or combine between what he believes about students' needs and what does the curriculum say ... My advice will be like don't follow everything [laughing] try to mix, try to invent certain things". (Hasan)

Similarly, Aalaa does not attend to an ideal recipe as "what is suitable for students" determines how she teaches in different classes:

"...there is no fixed recipe for all classes, each class should be treated in a different way according to what is suitable for the students. So what might prove as right here might not be right in another class". (Aalaa)

Equally, according to Ali, teaching English should start with what the teacher finds suitable to facilitate students' learning before sticking to the curriculum requirements:

"... if I depend on the official guidelines, I will limit my information. I think I can use my ideas to facilitate for the students the learning of English. Maybe I go to the guidelines after I get them the basics of English ... I think I have to give my good view about English to the learners and make them love English, to be creative". (Ali)

The view held by Sameh tends to be more categorical in that the first piece of advice to new teachers takes account of referring them 'to a better course' to supplement the curriculum with 'better' activities. Although if he had 'the choice' he would rather 'change the course' because he believes 'it's not suitable', another aspect he highlights for new teachers is developing better ways to engage students in interacting with each other and with the book:

“Abdulqader: If I were a new teacher, what would your advice be to me about how to teach English for Starters?”

Sameh: I would refer you to a better course to read it first and try to tailor the same kinds of activities in that course so that the course book would be better. I would try to draw your attention to better ways of getting students’ interaction. If I have the choice, I would change the course, I think it’s not suitable. Now I don’t believe in that course anymore. But if I HAVE to teach it, I need to reconsider the way the students should interact with the book”.
(Sameh)

To be able to tailor the books and the teaching approaches in parallel with students’ needs and classroom realities, some interviewees also illustrate the significance of developing the (uncommon) practice of reading the Teacher’s Book. To Firas and Huda, understanding the targets and expected outcomes of the lessons facilitates teachers’ conceptions of ‘what is required from them’ and how they can possibly achieve that.

In this theme, teachers have addressed key points for a real change to take place effectively in English language teaching at Syrian schools. Introducing pre- and in- service training programmes, a bottom-up approach to training, a small-scale experiment, establishing channels of communication, affective relationships and tailoring curriculum according to classroom realities constitute the main suggestions that the interviewees believe can significantly enhance English language teaching.

The English-only policy has recurrently appeared in teachers’ reflections on classroom practices and their discussions of the challenges at Syrian schools. The following section outlines teachers’ views on English-only and L1 employment in English classes.

6.4. Translation Practice and/vs. E-only Policy

As it is closely linked to other themes and deeply rooted in the educational culture of Syrian schools, I attempt to explore translation in two aspects:

- teachers' beliefs about translation in English language teaching; and
- students' preferences of language use.

6.4.1. Teachers' Beliefs

Several personal, contextual and practical issues identified by the participants appear to impinge on their beliefs as to the appropriacy of the English-only approach at Syrian schools. In many cases, conflict between beliefs and reality shows that even if teachers' beliefs align with educational innovation, the difficulty of implementation stems from classroom realities. For that reason, Huda demonstrates the conflict she has between believing in the English-only approach and the 'reality' that does not match the necessary conditions for implementing it:

"Yes it is for me, it is very useful for students but in reality we cannot apply it even if in our Syrian schools. I believe in it but it's difficult to apply because students for them if they wanted to learn the language, they should learn, they should listen for that language". (Huda)

The limited periods of L2 learning exposure that counts to 3 lessons a week restricts the feasibility of following an English-only approach in teaching English at 'state schools', Firas comments:

"No only English and don't use Arabic, no ... well I could use English all the time in my class, but I will be stupid. My belief is if I'm teaching level 1 to level 3 with a great exposure maybe 10 hours a week of English, in this case I would agree with them because ten hours of English a week, this is great amount of exposure to them ...But when you go with grade 9 and grade 8 and in state schools with 3 lessons a week, no, I'm sorry that's not acceptable". (Firas)

Multi-level classes influence Aalaa's decision to believe in the feasibility of an English-only approach. Due to factors such as the students' 'proficiency' and 'willingness', Aalaa points out that a lesson of this type 'MIGHT' be possible once a year:

“An English-only class is appropriate to the students who need an English-only class, who are up to the level or proficiency to be taught in English-only class even if with a very simple amount of English words ... our classes are multi-levelled, so once in every year you MIGHT conduct an English-only class and successfully, but it won't be needed because some students when they ask you to use English only, they don't prefer it if what you are going to teach them is required in the test”. (Aalaa)

Although attributable to personal beliefs rather than official guidelines, Ali tends to experience the same problem in the camp school. Unlike the situation inside Syria in which inspectors insist on the E-only approach, the camp school seems to leave that practice to be of teachers' own volition. Ali who strongly believes in the effectiveness of the E-only policy in language teaching and learning surrenders to the fact that following his own cognition creates students' resistance, hence it is inapplicable in his context:

“Because if I speak with them just in English, they will be bored, therefore I think if you speak in Arabic it's better. But it's not good way to speak in Arabic, I think it is challenges that face me inside the classroom”. (Ali)

Aside from two participants who strongly believe in the English-only approach (Ali & Hasan), most the other interviewees report positive attitudes towards employing L1 in English classes.

Due to the strict English-only approach that he observes, Hasan reports that 'many students' have left his classes and sought other teachers' lessons in which L1 is employed. Hasan's perspective appears to be more relevant to a personal belief about how language is taught/learned than to his attempts to adhere to the educational policies. This becomes clear in two instances: the first appears in his own comments that he shows flexibility to the use of L1 in teaching 'grammar':

“Well I only excuse teachers for using Arabic in grammar but not about reading, not about I mean listening, not about speaking yeah, only for grammar otherwise I didn't really tolerate for this, the thing that made many

students ... try to find other teachers [laughing] who use more Arabic because I all the time try to use English". (Hasan)

The second instance is Hasan's following response on the practicality and suitability of using English only in teaching Syrian students. Despite his belief that L1 should not be employed in English classrooms unless in 'dead end', he states that an English-only approach is 'not suitable at all':

"No no no it's not suitable at all, but again and again I told you I try to make them relax but when sometimes it comes really to a dead end I use it and then I try to tolerate it with grammar". (Hasan)

All the other interviewees tend to be more lenient in their views on L1 use in their classrooms although they point out that an L2 environment (rather than changing the focus into L1) should be maintained. Here come Huda's and Rana's views of the idea of maximising students' 'exposure' to 'the target language'. Huda's emphasis on a 'balance' in which teachers 'monitor' L1 employment clearly states her belief in the 'limited use of L1' that can both motivate shy students to interact and draw on the similarities with L2:

"...for me I don't deny the fact that a student needs to listen to the target language as much as possible, but we shouldn't forget that using L1 also motivates shy students to participate more. Yes I think we should make a balance, we should monitor that use of the L1 ... so for me I used to, I believe in the limited use of L1 in EFL classrooms which means I as a teacher should make benefit of the similarities between the two languages I mean the target language and the L1". (Huda)

In an attempt to change students' beliefs about language learning, Rana has endeavoured to maximise the use of English in her classes following her MA study in the UK. The belief that students have held states that Arabic is 'the only way' to understand (and learn) English, and this plays a central role to their resistance to the English-only approach. Like Huda, Rana believes that students' exposure to L2

should be maximised, but she acknowledges a flexible approach to L1 use “*whenever they needed it*”.

In their teaching, Aalaa, Hala and Sameh believe that L1 use does not seem to be an option as much as a ‘necessary’ pedagogical tool. Therefore, inspectors’ insistence on English-only teaching/learning has become ‘the most familiar problem’ that challenges teachers like Hala:

“As for using Arabic in teaching English for Starters in government schools, one word NECESSARY”. (Aalaa)

... the most familiar problem from inspectors is that not to speak Arabic in the class. This is not true for me, I cannot lead my lesson without using Arabic language”. (Hala)

Due to the gap between students’ levels and the course, L1 use can be a useful pedagogical tool that supports students. There is also a ‘psychological need’ to employ L1 in English classrooms in order to ‘communicate’ with students in their own language and create a ‘friendly’ environment. Sameh emphasises that this psychological aspect may not be relevant to ‘the teaching purpose’ per se, but it assists students’ attitudes, feelings and identities to learning English when their own teacher speaks ‘their L1’:

“... you need to turn into L1 for two reasons in fact one of them is the level of students is not appropriate to the course being taught, the other like students become aggressive or let’s say unfriendly when you avoid using their L1. It becomes like psychological need, so at least to communicate sometimes with them, I always said it was good to speak the L1 maybe not for the teaching purpose but they need to hear the teacher using their L1”. (Sameh)

‘Communication’ and ‘speaking’ represent two different concepts that teachers should differentiate, Firas illustrates. While the former involves interaction and co-construction of knowledge and meaning, the latter indicates an ability that

may put students off if they do not follow the teacher or are not engaged. Firas's primary concern is, therefore, focused on how to foster communication and interaction through L1 use instead of having "a breakdown in communication". Drawing on 'communication' as a key factor influencing his language use, he believes that teachers should use L1 once needed to keep students 'involved' and 'following' them. It is underlined, however, that teachers' L1 use should be minimised as much as possible in order to observe the L2 focus:

"I would speak English until communication is off, then I would use Arabic. I would be stupid to keep using English and pretend that I am teaching English. ... communication is different from speaking English. I could speak English fifty minutes, ok, but are my students following me, involved with me? This is the question. Unless communication is off, I have to speak English all the time. When there is a breakdown in communication, when there is a problem in communication I will use Arabic. But use it as minimum, as less as possible. I don't have to use, to change the focus from L2 to L1, no". (Firas)

Although those teachers believe in positive aspects of L1 use, most of them warn of how negative it can be as a classroom practice when it creates students' overreliance on L1 for understanding the English input (Ali, Aalaa, Abeer). In this regard, Aalaa and Ali identify a shared concern that students' attention will be focused on the Arabic translation/meaning rather than on English. Hence instead of being a useful tool, L1 turns into a disadvantage for students who, according to Aalaa, become less willing to "to give like extra efforts" to comprehend the L2 version and rather "wait for the Arabic version to come". Therefore, Ali believes that students' focus will be merely on 'meaning' rather than on learning English:

"... they don't pay any attention for the English words, they just try to know the Arabic meaning and they don't know the pronunciation for the word, they just know the meaning". (Ali)

Other teachers like Abeer, Huda and Rana also highlight that L1 overuse may lead to a situation in which students are deprived of ‘target language’ use and practice which is ‘the most important thing’ according to Huda. Learning will be centred on memorising and learning ‘English words’ rather than ‘learning English’ in order to successfully pass the exam instead of developing language skills.

“If a teacher uses Arabic mostly the students will learn and memorize everything in Arabic so in this case we cannot say that students are learning English, we can say we have learners are memorizing some English words to have them in the final exam and then forget everything as soon as possible”.
(Abeer)

Language ‘use’ opportunities constitute key elements of communicative teaching/learning, and these instances, Rana points out, become less created in an environment where students *“just get used to using their mother tongue all the time”*. Instead of creating these instances and encouraging students’ ‘little chances’ to communicate and ask questions in English, teachers may in that case alter the whole methodology and aims suggested in the educational plans. However, she clearly indicates that teachers should not ‘IMPOSE’ the English-only approach on students when they attempt to ask a question in L1.

In the interviews conducted, I attempted to discuss the relationship between Syrian teachers’ target language proficiency and their L1 use in English classrooms. The majority of the interviewees believe that teachers’ employment of L1 in teaching English does not clearly indicate those teachers’ degree/lack of English proficiency. In their comments, however, the participants mostly start with stating that this association may apply to some teachers as Hala asserts *“Sometimes yes but not all of teachers, some of them”*.

Hasan's and Aalaa's comments correlate teachers' L1 use with their students' levels (an issue highlighted on many occasions for various themes) rather than with the teachers' proficiency. It is pointed out by Hasan and Huda that most teachers have sufficient English language proficiency to teach in English, and even the teachers who may not be fluent 'can prepare':

"Actually for some teachers yes unfortunately, but for so many others no ... but again you know students [laughing]. They can do it of course they can do it, even if some teachers can't do it they can prepare. So no it's about the level of students not the level of the teachers' proficiency". (Hasan)

Therefore, to Huda, L1 use relates more to being a 'habit' that teachers have developed than to the teacher's 'proficiency of the target language':

"In my opinion, no because the language of the classroom mm it's not very difficult. Even the teacher who prepares his lesson before he goes to a classroom, he already knows what he is going to teach and consequently the vocabularies that he will be using are included in the textbook ... But I tell you that it becomes a habit, traditional, a tradition for a teacher to use Arabic .. so it is not related to his proficiency of the target language". (Huda)

The only participant who draws a straightforward association between teachers' L1 use in classrooms and their target language proficiency is Firas. He differentiates between two groups of teachers, those fluent and proficient enough to speak in English with their students and their colleagues; and the second group involves teachers whose amount of L1 use in class reflects their English proficiency:

"Yes, well sometimes I meet teachers, they don't like or they don't want to speak English with their students ... You could see that teachers they don't prefer to speak in English and I know they are shy to be exposed, shy to show that they are not good in English, but the good teachers, it's not problem for them, they speak English with you and they keep talking in English with you even they commit mistakes ... There is a relation between the level of the teacher and the amount of Arabic using in the class". (Firas)

Thus, the majority of the teachers interviewed believe that the students' (rather than the teachers') proficiency levels and the teaching/learning habits influence teachers' L1 use.

6.4.2. Students' Language Use Preferences

The majority of students prefer a mixed approach of English and Arabic. Rana explains that she 'never found that class' where students prefer English-only policy and believes that they are 'used' to the English-Arabic classes that their teachers have followed for decades. Pertinent to this is Abeer's experience with a particular class whose former teacher used to follow an English-only approach. She illustrates the students' negative attitude towards English which they do not comprehend with that teacher who 'uses English only'. Instead, with her English-Arabic approach, Abeer states how the students 'started understanding English better'. In fact, we can see the teacher's perception reflected in this argument, too. Not only the students, but also the teacher believes in the positive effect that translation has had on students' affective and cognitive development:

"The students do not prefer English only at all. In the first teaching year I had to teach for the upper class the sixth level instead of the main teacher because he was sick, I used to teach them using both languages and I noticed they got interested in English more because they started to understand what they were studying. When I was about to finish, they did not want me to leave. They said: we don't understand English our teacher teaches us because he uses English only that is very difficult for us to comprehend".
(Abeer)

Huda explains how this English-Arabic approach has become deep-rooted in students' perceptions to language learning that even if they comprehend the meaning the teacher conveys through drawing or miming, they insist on 'the Arabic equivalent'. Students have developed a habit of learning in which L1 assures their

comprehension of L2 input, hence they have become over-reliant on L1 in cases where it may not be required. It has become an established common practice according to students' expectations, and teachers' attempts to introduce new teaching techniques other than translation are challenged by students' resistance to change.

For fun, students prefer the English-only approach as long as the lesson is not required for 'the test', Aalaa highlights:

"They do prefer English-only classes for fun, but if they will be required to study something from this session and they are going to be asked to answer some of these questions in the test they prefer it to be in Arabic to make sure they are on the safe side". (Aalaa)

6.5. Research as an Opportunity for Reflective Practice and Teacher Development in Underdeveloped/Undermined Context

6.5.1. Reflections on Teaching Practices

Some teachers found their participations in these interviews (and research in general) a valuable opportunity to reflect on their classroom practices, question their teaching and consider ways for improving it.

To Firas, the interview questions were 'beneficial' to see himself 'out of the box' and 'rethink about teaching again':

"Abdulqader: Thanks very much for your comments. That was really interesting and you gave me lots of insights.

Firas: Well, I have to thank you... I really enjoyed my time with you. It was beneficial for me to see myself out of the box. Honestly, your questions made me rethink about teaching again... Am I on the right track? Am I teaching the way I have to? Your questions were so deep and profound. Never hesitate to contact me. I'm really happy to be interviewed again or if you need my help.

Abdulqader: thank you! That's very kind of you!" (Firas)

Huda's comment seems to resonate with Firas's thoughts. The interview has motivated the teacher to reflect on her teaching practices, revise her experience and knowledge and regain her confidence to feel she is a teacher, 'not a neglected person':

"Huda: It made me think of the way I was teaching, was I teaching the right way or I only know theoretical things? ... So yes it made me revise my experience and my knowledge. I really thank you because you made me feel I am still a teacher, I am not a neglected person [laughing].

Abdulqader: thank you very much, I have to say thank you very much for this nice interview. I think you have greatly contributed to my study indeed!".
(Huda)

Hasan, like the majority of the interviewees, states that it is their first time to be interviewed for research. The teacher identifies significant points I never considered when I conducted the interviews. It appears to be strikingly rewarding to realise that this has been an opportunity for him to 'think again to evaluate myself'. Establishing this confidence in teachers to 'feel like I am qualified for so many other interviews' also represents an essential element of nurturing the culture of (participating in) research in an under-researched context:

"Yes it is my first time. It added so many things to me in the sense that it made me think again to evaluate myself. It, also, taught me new things about the mistakes I should avoid. Also, the interview taught me something about the correct system of exam questions and this interview made me feel like I am qualified for so many other interviews". (Hasan)

6.5.2. Questioning Teaching Approach and Appropriacy

On another level, taking part in this research has motivated Hasan to ponder 'shaping' his methodology and critically thinking about what methods to follow and what factors to take into account in these decisions. In addition to questioning their goal of teaching 'for the sake of exams or for the sake of English language?', the

teacher started to examine how to deal with the curriculum in the interest of and as appropriate for students:

“Abdulqader: In what way did it make you evaluate yourself?

Hasan: The questions in the interview were very accurate to the extent of shaping my methodology, so I started asking myself questions like shall I apply this way or this method for all of my classes or shall I pay a careful attention about specific cases that some students have? ... Shall I teach my students for the sake of exams or for the sake of English language? Do I have to always follow Teacher's Guides or I have to invent something more suitable for my students?” (Hasan)

6.5.3. Considering Ways to Improve Teaching

Samer, an MA degree holder who states to have participated in two interviews before, finds this experience a useful opportunity to deliberate on their teaching practice, in which ‘our mistakes’ become ‘clearer to us when expressed verbally’. Samer indicates that the situation of the students affected by war ‘is so difficult to deal with’ (See Chapter 7). Therefore, his affective concerns on those students ‘not feeling well’ and perhaps ‘lost a parent or a dear one or even the whole family’ supersede any attempt ‘to think of the curriculum’:

“I think it made me reflect on my teaching to another person rather than self-reflect. I think that is useful because our mistakes in teaching methodology and practice become clearer to us when expressed verbally. In the current circumstances in Syria, maybe it has led me into thinking that as a teacher, I find it so difficult to deal with students who went lost a parent or a dear one or even the whole family. It is so difficult for me to think of curriculum while the student is not feeling well”. (Samer)

Similarly, being in a research project was ‘an eye-opening experience’ for Sameh to reflect on their teaching practice and look for ways to ‘make the teaching process in the environment targeted more fruitful and rewarding’. There is a clear focus on the local exigencies in the teacher’s expression of their reflections. Thus, the interview has left him with more questions than answers:

“In this sense, yes. It's my first time I have an interview as a part of a research. It was an eye-opening experience. It helped me organize my ideas and reflect back on what I had been practicing in the class, before and after. The questions I had to answer, my answers and the questions, the experience raised as a wash-back are all now in mind, trying to come to one end - how can I make the teaching process in the environment targeted more fruitful and rewarding”. (Sameh)

To Ali, the experience of participating in research has supported his ‘confidence’ and ‘motivation’ to develop his teaching practice. It has also focused his attention on developing ‘essential’ teaching techniques and affective aspects (teacher-student relationship) for engaging students more actively in the classroom:

“The interview gave me more confidence and motivated me to work hard on my English and to concentrate about important information. I got many essential and important things from the interview especially the good relationship with the students in addition to improve my techniques in teaching to be able to convey the information in simple ways that make the students to be more active”. (Ali)

Summary

I have explored the contextual realities within which the teachers have been attempting to make sense of their teaching. Incorporating the participants’ perspectives on ways to establish a realistic ELT educational change has also been addressed. As translation appears to be a recurrent theme throughout the interviews, it was necessary to see teachers’ beliefs about L1 use in the EFL classroom and their students’ preferences. The chapter ends with shedding light on teachers viewing their participating in the study as an important opportunity for reflective practice and teacher development in an underdeveloped context further undermined by war.

Chapter 7

IMPACT OF SYRIA'S WAR

Introduction

With the Syrian crisis, one important, emerging aspect to investigate in these interviews with the large group was the impact of war on ELT (and education in general) and the teaching opportunities and initiatives which still exist (or to be accurate, arise) amidst the war anarchy. This aspect particularly developed in the study due to the organic nature of the research and context as schools were closed and Umar (Chapter 4) and Maher (Chapter 5) were displaced. With the tragic circumstances resulting from the escalating armed conflicts in the country, millions of people fled the war to live in camps or cities in neighbouring countries.

In this chapter, therefore, I will also endeavour to throw light on a Syrian teacher who became a refugee (and a) teacher in a camp school in Southern Turkey and the impact of war on her (ELT) teaching/learning context. Salma was one of my students, and in our communication on social media, I came to know that she ended up as a refugee and volunteered to teach in the school established in the camp. Salma was one of these teachers, and when I informed her, she (and also Ali, another teacher in the camp school, See Chapters 6 & 7) kindly expressed her willingness to participate in the interviews conducted with the large group in Chapters (6 & 7).

7.1. Schooling in Wartime and Creating a Sense of Normalcy

When discussing the impact of the war on their teaching and careers, teachers also raised their concerns on students being highly influenced by this traumatic phase in the history of Syria. Their concerns emerged as a significant point as the ongoing war is actually damaging a generation of children.

7.1.1. Internal Displacement: Damaging Conflict vs. Initiatives for Normality and Hope

Due to unceasing ‘bombing and shelling’, a huge number of schools have been destroyed, leaving teachers and students hopeless about their careers and education. In this miserable situation, according to Hasan, some enthusiastic teachers concerned about children’s education sought mosques and churches which “*again ... have been bombed*”. Hasan further remarks that teachers find it difficult to “*teach in normal situations, so what do you think about war?*”:

“And so many schools have been damaged and destroyed of course because of bombing and shelling. Even if certain teachers wanted to teach in mosques or churches, again they have been bombed. There is no safety, we can’t teach in this atmosphere ...” (Hasan)

Alaa does not know anything about her school. Because of the teacher’s insecurity (and the entire country’s indeed), she tends to be uncertain and less optimistic about the schools in her neighbourhood that she reports to be ‘ok still fine STILL’:

“My school is in the countryside, and I can never ever dream of going back there. I really feel sorry and I don’t know anything about my school. For schools in my neighbourhood, they are ok still fine STILL”. (Aalaa)

With more than 7.6 million internally displaced Syrians (Global Overview, 2015), people have sought refuge in some schools (and even at the university accommodation) and, therefore, Huda explains, ‘students didn’t go to school’. Huda recalls the disturbing and frustrating memories before she becomes a jobless refugee in Turkey. She had to teach all the winter without electricity at her (now ‘totally damaged’) school. In the following quote, she also asserts that it has become life-threatening for teachers to go to relatively ‘safe’ schools, too:

“The whole winter we spent without electricity, it was really frustrating and students didn’t go to school because schools were used as refugee places. Some schools were damaged because of bombs ... and I heard that the school is totally damaged, and even the schools in the safe areas as we can say, teachers are not teaching there because it’s a very large number of students and teachers wouldn’t come to these schools because it was dangerous for them to come”. (Huda)

With this catastrophic situation, according to Huda, students’ access to education has become very limited, not only hindering their progress, but also depriving them of learning opportunities. And teaching, which is ‘very bad’ in Syria, is ‘getting worse’, leaving students to face huge challenges:

“Teaching in Syria is very bad. It’s getting worse and worse. Many students are deprived of learning. Even it’s not originally good teaching system, imagine now what’s happening with students! I think they will be suffering a lot ... it [the war] hindered the students’ following their learning process because students I think when we start a new year, we keep on reminding them of what they learned for one month, but what about now three years and maybe more? ... We should start with students from zero level”. (Huda)

All schools in the city have closed for a year following the Battle of Aleppo (20 July 2012). However, some of these schools in relatively (now) ‘safe’ neighbourhoods have opened again to all the teachers and students who belong to the region and those displaced from other neighbourhoods. Firas describes the challenges he has in teaching during the wartime in his ‘new’ school. As a teacher,

he is displaced and even students ‘most of them are displaced’, and, therefore, he believes there is a “*very strange mixture of students in the class*”. Amongst the many people who sought refuge in schools, some of those students “*and their families lived in that school*” last year, and when ‘forced’ to leave it this year, some of them had no choice but to live in ‘tents around the school’. These disheartening circumstances have created new realities for teachers, students and, after all, the learning process itself:

“Firas: ... the students are suffering to some extent, number one with no electricity and mainly with no TV.

Abdulqader: and you said they come from different places right?

Firas: yeah most of them are displaced, they come from different places, some of them lived in this school last year. You know last year with the situation the schools themselves became like a temporary like a dormitory or refugee place for them. So families lived in that school, they forced them to leave it, some of them lived in the university residences and some of them lived in tents, even tents around the school. But you could see very strange mixture of students in the class”. (Firas)

Drawing on that, Firas points to the serious issues that appear in a new context of a school in which not only teachers but also a huge number of students suddenly find themselves. The war circumstances have traumatised children and badly influenced their attention and performance in class. When asked if he is teaching as ordinary, he started questioning whether the students are still ‘normal children’:

“Abdulqader: so is it normal teaching?

Firas: would I say are they normal children? This is number one. The problem is students, with no electricity, shortage of water, and I could say there is an impact for the TV on children. Yeah watching TV for the children though it has negative sides ok but you could say it has very positive sides for them because they see a lot, they learn a lot from watching TV. Now actually they are idle I don’t know what to say in the class, they are pale to some extent, my students from different places”. (Firas)

With these hard conditions, Firas's first priority is to create a sense of normalcy "to have them [students] like school". He clearly indicates that he has been successful to teach '2 units out of 25' only because, similarly to Salma and Samer, he cares less about teaching according to the curriculum:

"Well honestly now even this year they want to teach English for Starters, they are not teaching English for Starters. Even me when I teach grade 1, I'm concerned with two things, number 1 is to teach them with total physical response stand up, sit down, and to teach them songs now and to have them like school, this is number 1. I only implemented so far 2 units out of 25 even we started the school end of October and so far I have covered only two units". (Firas)

In similar veins, Rana recounts these situations in which 'schools close' due to 'fighting' and armed confrontations and other unbelievable cases where some schools simultaneously operate 'for education' and provide 'shelter for displaced families'. It seems to be hard to imagine that a teacher "used to teach in one of these schools in the upper floor where there are other families living in the other floors":

"Well because of the current situation what happens is that when problems start or when there is fighting in one area usually schools close at that area or they stop going to schools for some time ... because these schools have been turned into you know just a place for displaced people to come and live. And one of the teachers used to teach in one of these schools in the upper floor where there are other families living in the other floors. So it was like kind of combined you know multifunction school, so it gives shelter for displaced families and help for education". (Rana)

In these traumatic days in Syria, students' interrupted schooling, behaviour as well as performance need to be addressed as urgent issues. Rana illustrates how the insecurity and the distressing violence may have resulted in a situation wherein a 'child used to bring a knife to class':

"We had problems with students who had dropped schools for a while like it's not just the performance of students, it's also the behaviour of students. One of the teachers told me she had a student ... came from conflict areas. And you know the student felt very it's like how can I say this, they felt less

privileged in this environment where other students just live normally, where he comes from a place where he lost his house, maybe some of his you know parents I'm not sure ... this child used to bring a knife to class, and she really found it difficult like how should she deal with him? I mean maybe because the student didn't feel secure, maybe they felt like they should protect themselves or like if someone attacks them, they should be ready to defend themselves or they could just turned to be violent". (Rana)

These situations emphasise the urgent need to address students' 'emotional support' and 'any kind of support' available in addition to investigating how teachers cope with wartime situations. Therefore, Rana observes that teachers' responsibilities have extended teaching duties to pastoral and emotional roles:

"... your responsibility is not just teaching, your responsibility is to give emotional support probably to your students. It could be a financial, I don't know, it could be any kind of support". (Rana)

Even worse, the conflict, Hasan comments, has badly influenced students' willingness to "*think about going to school*" because "*they couldn't cope with the situation*":

"Well I think we need so many years to compensate for what happened. It made students even don't think about going to school, unfortunately they couldn't cope with the situation". (Hasan)

Volunteering to teach displaced students in campus dormitories with the purpose of bringing back some normality and saving children's education highly attracted my attention in the interviews. These few initiatives and attempts represent invaluable sources of inspiration for teachers and students in order to rescue a loss of a generation. Although she has not been able to make any initiatives in language teaching before leaving to Turkey, Huda describes the situation of a devoted and dedicated friend of hers who 'used to go to the campus' to teach displaced children. With those students being away from schooling, the goal was "*at least to remind students of what they were studying*". Thus, those teachers' key concerns focused on

how to keep children tied to education as time goes by and a generation of Syrian children has been alarmed to be lost:

“... one of my friends used to go to the campus residences. They were teaching students for free for the families were in the campus, they were living there and their children. They were being taught by some volunteers ... it wasn't that an ideal teaching, but at least to remind students of what they were studying”. (Huda)

Although in a calamitous, volatile condition inside Aleppo, Aalaa volunteered to teach English in the weekend in a programme run by UNICEF. What has puzzled me further is her ‘excitement’ and ‘happiness’ about the idea of autonomy given to teachers to employ their own teaching styles away from the constraints of the curriculum. Because of the flexibility and freedom given to teachers, Aalaa’s initiative seemed to her to be ‘an opportunity’ to use the teaching aids that she “*can't use at school*” due to restrictions of time and textbooks. During wartime, she is “*really really happy in this UNICEF programme*”:

“Aalaa: UNICEF has started a programme in which they teach students English for free in the same schools where they go. They go to the same school everyday in the summer, a kind of club Summer Club, but now in winter they go only on Friday and Saturday. There are simple gifts for students and it revolves around teaching English, Arabic, music, arts and sports. So it's for fun more than for education, yet there is kind of education ... As for me, I am fond of collecting teaching materials and aids ... So this is an opportunity for me to use the teaching aids that I can't use at school because of the limited time and amount of information that we have to cover. I'm really really happy in this UNICEF programme.

Abdulqader: is this UNICEF programme a kind of voluntary work or do you have to go?

Aalaa: No I don't have to go like it's not obligatory. I went there because it was voluntary, but then I discovered that they are paying money, that was my surprise”. (Aalaa)

7.1.2. Refugee Education in Camp Schools: Opportunities and Challenges

Some other students have fled the armed conflicts in their neighbourhoods and cities and become refugees in camps in Turkey.

Available resources and facilities

Contrary to our expectations, the camp school, where Salma and Ali teach, happened to be better than some schools in Syria with a ‘very nice’ building:

“As for the schools in my town in Syria, there is no obligation of attendance because of the political reasons and because of the difficult transport. There is a lot of fear in Syrian schools. Here, there is no war, no weapons, no destruction and no bombs. The school in the Turkish camp is very good, better than those in Syria. There is a system in the school, and the building is very nice, the desks, the white board like this [etc.]”. (Salma)

Surprisingly, these concerns about teaching aids and classroom technological equipment are partly resolved in the camp school. This does not indicate that teachers actually take advantage of the availability of these resources due to several factors. When I analysed Salma’s lessons (Chapter 7), there were not any stark differences that I could identify from Umar’s and Maher’s lessons (Chapters 4 & 5) who taught in (prior-to-war) state schools. As teachers in this particular camp school have had access to these facilities, many of them were not ready yet to tackle new teaching methods. There was a lack of computer assisted teaching/learning training, let alone general basic teacher training.

Understaffing

One of the serious issues of this camp school is the lack of funding, which has caused a further understaffing problem, particularly of English teachers. That teaching is voluntary has resulted in a situation where, according to Ali, teachers leave school “*to find work outside of the camp*”. Unfortunately, this represents an extended case of instability that significantly impacts the school, the teaching staff and, more importantly, the students who have been suffering for a while:

“Abdulqader: what are the main difficulties you have as teachers in teaching in this school?”

Ali: I think the difficulty that we face it we teach here now for free, an organisation just paid us for 2-3 months. Last month about 10 teachers left the school and went to the city to find work. And now I’m trying to find job outside of the camp, when I find job in the city I will leave the school. I think not only me but all the teachers, when there is a specific salary for the teachers they will continue and exert more of their efforts”. (Ali)

Dearth of teacher training and professional development opportunities

Salma’s case tells a story about difficult circumstances discussed fully in relation to her classroom practices (See Chapter 7) as she ended up teaching while still a student due to the war in Syria. She illustrates that her prior language learning experience has been a resource for her teaching approach as she has drawn on that to inform her pedagogy as what is effective. In the camp school, even if teachers would like to read the Teacher’s Book, they are unfortunately unavailable. Therefore, the teacher mainly relies on her own conceptions of the books and, based on that, decides how to approach each lesson:

“I depended on myself to know how to teach these books. We are supposed to have the Teacher’s Book, but they are not available unfortunately. So I have a look at the lesson and see what and how I can teach the lessons. Sometimes I add some more information from my own knowledge”. (Salma)

Traumatic experiences and difficult living conditions

Salma's and Ali's attempts to support students were not straightforward due to several war-impacted difficulties, including war traumas, school interruption and living conditions in the camp (See also Chapter 7).

Similarly to their students, Salma and Ali have had an interrupted study experience that they could not finish their final year at university. Student identity has also experienced many changes. Students' schooling was interrupted as they became refugees in camps and then reconstructed their student identities in the camp school in a different country. Ali's and Salma's motivation to teach children who belong to a generation that risk becoming lost has made them take the opportunity of participating in my study as one to develop their teaching. Equally, their teaching is triggered by their motivation to bring back the students' interest in education and learning (bring back normality), reconstruct their identities and save their schooling, hence their future. In the following quote, Salma sums it all up:

“I feel I'm busy doing something at least by teaching in this camp, this helps me feel that these children should have schooling. Therefore, I do my best to give them the needed information to teach them properly as many people lost interest in education during this critical period. The most important thing now is education, I feel guilty if I don't teach properly”. (06-12-2013)

Salma also points to the traumatic experiences such as parents in jail or killed that hinder students' progress and highly influences their attention in class (See Chapter 7). In a Word file emailed to me the day after the interview, Ali outlines the key problems students experience as refugees and refugee students in the camp. Providing an explanation to the issues identified by Salma, Ali sheds light on the

‘difficult conditions’ of students’ crowded accommodation “*in their tents and containers*” that constantly disrupt their study and become reflected at school:

“1-Housing:

A big number of the students complain about the difficult conditions who experience them in their tents and containers. I know that they are right because I am one of them and because I suffer and complain a lot from this problem. For example, many containers contain more than ten persons in one container. That means how the students can study hard or even he/she can just read and review the lessons which they take them in the school”.
(Ali)

Parents’ carelessness about their children’s performance at school seems to be a worthwhile aspect that, to put in Ali’s words, “*increases burdens*” on teachers and their responsibilities:

“2- The interaction between the members of the family:

I am sure that many of the student’s fathers or mothers don’t ask their children about anything related to their study and what they take and learn or even what they do in the school. In addition, I am sure one hundred per cent that their families don’t know their children in which grade they are. They are careless and therefore the students don’t study well. This problem increases burdens of the teaching on the teachers”. (Ali)

Similarly to Salma, although Ali believes that being “*in good relationship with the students*” will make them ‘interactive’ and he does all what it takes to establish that, his beliefs turn out to be at odds with his students’ reactions as his attempts do not appear to yield learning in this conflict-affected school context:

“I suggest for them to be in good relationship with the students. If they be like this, I think the students will be interactive and they can give you more than you need. Believe me I do this with my students, but I find the contrast”.
(Ali)

7.2. Teachers’ Identities in Wartime

Investigating the impact of the war on English teachers and their teaching professions, the interviews revealed distressing and disturbing stories of some

teachers displaced, others becoming jobless refugees, while some others could not simply complete their degrees at university.

7.2.1. Displaced Teachers

Firas describes it as a “*very sad story to talk about*” the influence of war on his colleagues as while some of those teachers he knows “*nothing about*”, others have “*left their jobs*” and sought other professions “*in a way just to make their living*” or have “*had to leave the country*”. These situations can be understood in light of the following description. As the city of Aleppo has become two sides held by two authorities, the government and the rebels, some teachers whose schools were destroyed or who happened to belong to neighbourhoods controlled by the rebels were requested to teach in a different school in the other part of the city. Those teachers were supposed to go through Bustan al-Qasr crossing that divides the city and has become known as the ‘death crossing’ by Syrian civilians. Fear of government forces/rebels closing the crossing or of being shot by snipers, many teachers refused. The quote reveals the situation of Firas himself who has become displaced and teaching in a temporary school:

“... this is a temporary school. My schools, one of them is in the land that belongs to the FSA and the other one is in the frontline. They are closed and they moved teachers to other schools according to their houses or maybe like now I’m displaced. The area I live in now is safe and I have to go to the nearest school to me ... You know in this school now we have ... extra 110 teachers. So in this way we had to share the classes, I had to teach 22 classes a week, now I teach only 10 classes or 8 classes a week with other teachers”. (Firas)

Similar concerns are shared by Aalaa, also a teacher in Aleppo, whose current status is ‘somewhat jobless’. She knows nothing about her school in the

countryside and becomes ‘only required to sign’, rather than actually teach, in a nearby school that she is on duty:

“I don’t go to school this is somewhat jobless you can’t say anything else. We have stopped like working and after teaching for some time in a school nearby, now the ministry’s decision is we are only required to sign”. (Aalaa)

7.2.2. Refugee Teachers in Turkey and Shift of Professions

On the other hand, many of the teachers interviewed have fled the conflict to settle in Turkey, particularly because it is the closest neighbouring country to the north of Syria. Those teachers’ situations fall under three chief categories: jobless refugees, teaching at Turkish schools/institutes or teaching in a camp school.

Hala and Huda were unfortunate to become jobless in Turkey after they left their war-affected neighbourhoods and settled in a Turkish city. In fact, Hala recounts the stories of some teachers who *“were enforced to leave their schools”* by the administration in particular areas where schools *“have enough teachers to teach at this period of time”*. This issue has been caused, as illustrated earlier by Firas and Aalaa, by the displacement of teachers who find themselves in a situation where the (now) ‘safe’ area they seek to reside in has become condensed by large numbers of teachers and students alike.

Due to the unbearable situation in the country, Hasan has fled the war and fortunately managed to find a teaching position in a Turkish school. As emphasised by the teacher, *‘when you have no safety, you can do nothing’*. Therefore, when the Battle of Aleppo started between the Government Military and the rebels in Hasan’s neighbourhood, he travelled with his family seeking safety and jobs in Turkey. In the following quote, he describes the teachers’, students’ and families’ sufferings in

Aleppo that he, like many other teachers and students, left after he ‘stopped teaching’:

“Unfortunately, concerning my career, families were really afraid of sending children to the school, so they stopped ... So it affected all of us, it affected the teachers, the schools, the students, almost everyone. So we stopped teaching, even some teachers couldn’t go to certain places and to certain schools, when you have no safety, you can do nothing. Now some teachers are teaching for free because so many Syrians don’t have jobs and don’t have money. So many others travelled to another country. And of course there is no electricity and water and it comes just at night for two hours, so they can’t do anything”. (Hasan)

The third group of teachers involves Salma and Ali, two final-year students in the English Department at the University of Aleppo, who have fled the armed conflicts and volunteered to be amongst the teaching staff in a Syrian camp school in Southern Turkey due to the establishment of a school in these difficult circumstances. Whereas many teachers lost their professions, Salma constructed a teacher identity as a result of war when a school was established in a refugee camp and there were no enough (qualified) teachers. To Salma, who has been away from her study for more than two years now, her current situation seems to be one of the toughest challenges that impacted her ambition not only to pursue a postgraduate degree in the field, but also to obtain her first degree:

“When I was in Syria, I was a university student and I couldn’t finish my final year because of the situation in the country. When I came to the camp, I became a teacher in the camp school”. (Salma)

Ali has the same issue of not finishing his undergraduate study:

“I think the current situation affected not only me but all of the Syrians in general ... for me I didn’t graduate yet. When I was in Syria I was in the fourth year”. (Ali)

Due to the war, Salma illustrate, *“Most English teachers became news reporters”*. While some teachers *“have found jobs outside the camp and some even*

work in supermarkets”, some other teachers she is aware of have joined the Free Syrian Army which fights against the government, ‘and some of them died’:

“Most English teachers became news reporters. While some teachers are still teaching, some left the country, some joined the Free Syrian Army and some of them died. In my current school in the camp, most English teachers are not graduates. We are students who were not able to complete their studies and became teachers here, waiting until we can complete our degrees at some point hopefully. Some teachers have found jobs outside the camp and some even work in supermarkets”. (Salma)

Amongst the many teachers affected by the war and who left the country, Sameh was lucky to find a teaching opportunity in Saudi. He highlights a significant aspect which relates to teachers’ disappointment and concerns over their professional skills. Those teachers ‘feel that they’ve lost their skills’ because they ‘haven’t been teaching in most schools’:

“It was about 2 years ago since I last taught in Syria, but I guess this is the case for most teachers. Teachers haven’t been teaching in most schools and they feel that they’ve lost their skills. The teachers I know are a bit disappointed because they are not teaching anymore”. (Sameh)

In the following part of the chapter, the focus will be on Salma, a Syrian teacher who became a refugee (and a) teacher in a camp school in Southern Turkey.

7.3. (English Language) Teaching in a Camp School: FOCAL

TEACHER 3 (Salma)

7.3.1. Background

In the middle of the first academic term at the camp school (November), one teacher suddenly left the school to find a paid job outside the camp (the situation of many (See Chapter 7)). In December 2013, Salma happened to take over and started teaching Year 8 students towards the end of that first academic term. Knowing that I

was looking for Year 7 lessons, she contacted me with this information. I was very happy that she sent me two of her Year 8 lessons to include in my study. This gave me an opportunity to include another focal teacher in this study teaching at the same level from the same book but in a very different situation (a camp school).

In light of Chapters (4 & 5), this chapter also features transcripts of two lessons (grammar and reading) that Salma has audio-recorded and sent to me. Unlike the situation of Umar and Maher (Chapters 4 & 5), these two lessons come from a school in a Syrian camp at wartime. Key extracts are analysed with reference to comments from two stimulated recall semi-structured interviews undertaken with Salma. Incorporating Salma's perspectives and interpretations of her own lesson transcripts reveals her teaching practices vis-à-vis her thoughts about how classroom discourse is produced and what factors lead to or shape her ELT approach. In this chapter, therefore, I found it very relevant and significant to throw light on teachers' agency in a conflict-affected context while teaching the same *English for Starters* curriculum.

Before analysing these lessons, some background information on Salma is introduced. While students were in Year 7 in the former two focal teachers' classes (Chapters 4 & 5), Salma's students were Year 8 (See Chapter 3 for details on data selection). The number of students counts up to 25 which is, according to Salma, "*ideal, much better than the primary stages [at the same school]*". This indicates her satisfaction with teaching the upper levels more than with the lower levels (primary stages) in the camp as the number of students is considerably less in the higher level stages. Although the textbooks for other subjects have been partly edited, the school uses the previously used home country English curriculum *English for Starters*

textbooks based on the belief that these refugees will go back to Syria. All my translation from Arabic, Salma's interviews are as follows: The broad interview on general themes took place on 06/12/2013. Whilst the teacher's comments and reflections on the grammar lesson were on 04/01/2014, those on the reading lesson were undertaken on 08/03/2014.

I need to acknowledge that this camp does not represent other camps as the conditions and the school are relatively much better. The following photo is of the camp where the school is located:



Figure 7.1. Camp (Camp School Facebook page, photo accessed 14 March 2014)

7.3.2. The Grammar Lesson

Salma audio-recorded a grammar lesson and sent it to me on 25 December 2013. I listened to the lesson, transcribed it fully and selected key extracts according to the criteria discussed before with Umar and Maher to have her reflections on her teaching practices. Following the same analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, these extracts were analysed with reference to Salma's comments that come from a semi-structured stimulated recall interview conducted on 04/01/2014.

The teacher points out that the lesson, although required in the book *English for Starters* (Year 8), has been taught following her own understanding and knowledge of the present simple:

“The lesson is required in the book, but I taught it from my own knowledge and understanding of the present simple rather than from the book itself”.

Extract (1) demonstrates the first part of the lesson in which the focus is centred on the form of the present simple tense, the affirmative. Lines (4-18) show Salma's deductive approach to teaching grammar wherein she writes the form of the sentence on the board and elicits an example from the students.

Extract 1 (Grammar Lesson: present simple form/affirmative/):

4	T: Our lesson today is about simple present, <u>what do we mean by simple present,</u>
5	<u>who can tell me, simple present?</u>
6	Ss: alzaman alhadher <the present simple>
7	T: alzaman alhadher <the present simple>, excellent (writing on the board and
8	repeating) alzaman alhadher albaset <the present simple tense> or simple present
9	tense. Ok let us start our lesson. First of all we have affirmative sentence. sho yanee
10	affirmative sentence?<what does affirmative sentence mean?> jumleh mothbateh
11	<an affirmative sentence> It consists of, subject
12	S: alfael <subject>
13	T: subject zaed <plus> verb of the sentence plus (writing on the board)
14	Ss: tatimmet aljumleh <the rest of the sentence>
15	T: zaed tatimmet aljumleh <plus the rest of the sentence> example, who can give
16	me an example?
17	S: methal <example>

- | | |
|----|---|
| 18 | T: ateenee methal <give me an example> |
| 19 | S: I go to school |
| 20 | T: I go to school, excellent. (writing on the board) I go to school. |
| 21 | S: He run about school |
| 22 | T: he? |
| 23 | S: He run about school |
| 24 | T: He run about the school. Run bidha shee? <Do we need to add anything to run?> |
| 25 | S1: running -eng |
| 26 | S2: -ing |
| 27 | S: s |
| 28 | T: runs, excellent |

Salma's aim, as she underlines, is to enable the students to learn the present simple and distinguish it from other tenses in later lessons. Although this may sound below the students' levels, it is important to remember that many of those students have had interrupted schooling due to conflict and displacement:

"I'm giving them the present simple tense, and I want them to get it right because later on we will have past simple, past perfect tenses and so on. When we have other tenses in other lessons, they can realise the difference between tenses".

The teacher's rationale for the attention given to the structure of the present simple relates to her concern over the students' incomplete sentence forms produced:

"My aim was to get them know how to form a full sentence because many students do not give me a full sentence. For example, when they want to say 'I am a student', they say 'I a student'".

The first lines (5-6) of the extract demonstrate an event in which the teacher's intentions or expectations do not seem to match with what she wants the students to recognise. While Salma is attempting to elicit the meaning of the present simple, the students' answer relates to translating the term:

*"Salma: I expect them to say present simple. What I wanted them to do is to recognise that this tense is related to present, not past or future.
Abdulqader: So did you expect them to give you the meaning or the translation of the tense?
Salma: When I asked them I was looking more to get the meaning, not the translation".*

In lines (16-18), the teacher elicits an example on present simple in the affirmative. Eliciting an example following her introduction of the grammar structure/rule represents her view of ensuring that understanding has occurred:

“In all my lessons, I give the rule and an example, and then elicit another example from students to confirm their understanding of the rule”.

Lines (21-28) show an example of Salma’s error correction techniques in which questioning (Run **bidha shee?** <Do we need to add anything to run?>) rather than an immediate correction takes place. Falling back on her prior language learning experience, Salma identifies two key goals to her questioning technique in error correction: initiating self- or peer- correction and ensuring learning (not only correction) of the correct form:

“I was hoping that the student may realise the mistake himself and know that he should add ‘s’ to the verb when the subject is ‘he/sh/it’. My goal was not simply to correct it for him and then he forgets it altogether. From my own experience as a student, when my teacher highlighted that there was a mistake in my language and other students corrected it, I used to learn it much better than he would have simply immediately corrected it. Another goal in my technique is to draw other students’ attention to the mistake so that either the student or his peers may find the mistake and correct it”.

In the following extract, Salma explains and translates the first rule of the ‘third person s’ (Lines 49-52).

Extract 2 (Grammar Lesson: present simple third person rule):

49	T: ... First of all, our general rule alkaeda alaammeh <the general rule> We put (s)
50	to the main verb when the subject is he or she or it. yane minhitt (s) lilfeel
51	alraese bilzaman alhadher tabaan lamma bkoun alfael isho? <This means we
52	add ‘s’ to the main verb in the present simple when the subject is?>
53	Ss: he, she aw <or> it
54	T: he, she aw <or> it. Hai fehmnaha tayyeb mathalan atouni mithal <so we have
55	understood this, give me an example>, give me an example?
56	Ss: miss, miss
57	T: lamma bikoun ilfael he or she or it <when the subject is he, she or it>
58	S: he plays football everyday
59	T: excellent

60	S: She goes to school
61	T: excellent. tayyeb minhett iljumleh kamleh <Ok, let's put the full sentence> She
62	goes to the school by bus. (T writing on the board)
63	Ss: bil bas <by bus>

As illustrated in her following comment (and teaching practices in this and the previous extract), Salma's approach to teaching grammar involves introducing the grammar rule, followed by an example and an elicitation of examples from the students. She translates the grammar structure and the examples into Arabic. The teacher's concern about students' understanding and, later on, revision of these grammar points appears to guide and shape her grammar teaching approach:

"I write the grammar lesson in both languages: English and Arabic. For instance, I write the rule subject, verb ...etc. in English and I write the translation below each word. I also write an example in English and the translation in Arabic. This is how I teach grammar.

R: What is the purpose of writing that in Arabic?

T: The purpose is IF they open their books and read the rule later on, they can understand it".

In this extract, the teacher writes the 'third person s' present simple rule in English and in Arabic (Lines 49-54) and elicits several examples from the students (Lines 55-61). Checking the students' understanding of grammar rules and thus their ability to use them, according to Salma, can be achieved through observing their classroom behaviour. To her, students' willingness and enthusiasm to participate and volunteer serve as examples indicative of understanding:

"I make sure they have understood when all the students start shouting to participate and give answers or when they all answer together, even the weaker students".

As the students are capable of producing 'similar sentences to the model', she believes that her approach to teaching grammar is very effective, useful and conducive to the students' learning and understanding:

“I don’t really know the students’ point of view, but I believe it’s very useful if I give them a rule and an example that they follow to give me more examples. Personally, I find it effective because they give me similar sentences to the model sentence I give, so I feel satisfied that they have understood it”.

Line (58) actually demonstrates a student’s contribution in which he volunteers a full sentence in response to the teacher’s prompt. This instance seems to go in line with Salma’s pedagogical goal to enable the students to produce complete sentences (Extract 1 above).

Throughout the grammar lesson, Salma’s assumption is that eliciting some examples from the students indicates understanding and signals the end of grammar presentation and practice related to a particular rule. The teacher appears to be pleased and satisfied with a very snappy repetition of the rule and an example, concluding: *“so we have finished this rule. Let’s move to the next rule”*. Salma’s account on this extract noticeably identifies an overt exam-driven classroom practice:

“Here I want them to understand the rule so that in the exams when they have a verb ending in this letter, they can answer it”.

The students at this school study the same English curriculum studied at Syrian schools and follow the same structure of two academic terms. Each term ends with exams. As the first-term exam was due soon when I collected the data and those students did not have a teacher for a considerable time, Salma’s concern was primarily focussed on how to prepare them to do well in their exams.

With the aim of enabling memorisation of grammar rules, Salma’s grammar teaching involves prompting a student to repeat the rule:

“I wanted them to repeat it so the students can hear it many times and won’t forget it. In this case, I don’t have to repeat the rule as a teacher”.

After that, Salam teaches them another present simple grammar point, the ‘y’ spelling rule that changes into ‘ies’ with the third-person subject in the present simple. Unlike the pattern followed in the previous extracts, in Extract 3 Salma elicits the negative form of the present simple from the students (Line 178).

Extract 3 (Grammar Lesson: present simple /negative form/):

170 T: **tayyeb** <ok> after affirmative case, we have negative
 171 case. **Shoo yanee negative?** <What does negative mean?>
 172 S: **feel manfee?** <verb in the negative>
 173 T: **aywa bravo, feel manfee aw aljumleh manfeiyeh** <yes, well done! The verb in
 174 the negative or the sentence in the negative form> **halaa bidna nishrah ildars**
 175 <now we will explain the lesson> Negative sentence **iljumleh ilmanfiyeh**
 176 <negative sentence> **min sho bititallaf? min sho bititallaf iljumleh ilmanfiyeh?**
 177 **Ya Ali?** <What is the form of a negative sentence, Ali?>
 178 Ali: **ilfael zaed do/does** <subject + do/does>
 179 T: **bil ingleezi** <in English>
 180 Ali: (silence)
 181 T: **kool bilarabee kammel** <ok, continue in Arabic>
 182 Ali: **ilfael zaed do/does not + ilfeel** <subject + do/does not+ verb>
 183 T: excellent, **tayyeb meen bikool bilengleezi?** <ok, who can say this in English?>
 184 S: verb +
 185 T: **yaene** <meaning> negative sentence consists of subject, do/does plus not plus
 186 verb plus the
 187 S: subject+
 188 T: rest of the sentence. **aljumleh almanfiyeh, aljumlee almanfeeya min**
 189 **shoo bititallaf?** <so, what is the form of the negative sentence?> subject + (writing
 190 on the board)

Two main issues attract my attention in the above extract; the use of terminology (Lines 170; 178; 186) and the teacher’s attempts to elicit the negative rule structure in English at first. Using and asking the students to repeat the terminology, the teacher challenges the students, particularly when she asks them twice to use English only to repeat the rule (Lines 180; 184). Despite her belief that the terminology is important for grammar learning, Salma indicates that ‘understanding’ the rule can be more helpful:

*“Salma: These are only important for the grammar lesson.
 Abdulqader: why is it important?”*

Salma: Because I want them to know the meanings of these terminology words; when we say subject, it means 'fael' <subject>, a verb means 'feel' <verb>.

Abdulqader: does this grammar terminology help them learn grammar better?

T: I don't think they help them a lot. Understanding the rule may be more helpful than knowing the terminology".

To Salma, it is important to emphasise the form and structure of the rule first.

This facilitates the students' understanding of grammar in a clear and easy approach, and they simply follow rather than discover rules:

"Salma: Yes it is important to learn the form first because when I teach them the negative, for instance, they put 'not' in the wrong position. They also need to know that the structure lacks an auxiliary verb 'do' or 'does'. I find it very useful if the students follow the rule that I write on the board, like I give them a rule and an example and then they give more examples.

Abdulqader: why do you think this method is useful?

Salma: Everything becomes clear and easy for them this way, and they don't need to ask why it is like this or that. I give them the rule and explain it, then they understand everything and follow the rule".

After introducing the affirmative, negative and interrogative rules of the present simple, Extract (4) reveals the final part of the lesson wherein Salma attempts to teach the 'use' or the meaning of the present simple.

Extract 4 (Grammar Lesson: use of present simple):

322	T: tayyeb khalasna min iljumleh almuthbateh, ilnafee, wa alsoual , affirmative,
323	negative, interrogative khalasna ilthalath halat <Ok, so we have finished the
324	three cases: affirmative, negative and interrogative.> hall bidan nintekl lilzaman
325	alhader istakhdamatoo <Now, we will talk about the uses of the simple present>
326	meen aando fikra alzaman alhadher emta mnestakhdemoh? banoo zaman?
327	<Who has any idea about the use of the present simple?>
328	S: hader <present>
329	T: tabaan min esmoo mbayyen banoo zaman? <Of course, its name is present
330	obviously. Which tense is it?>
331	Ss: bilzaman alhadher <in the present simple>
332	T: bilzaman alhadher tayyeb leesh mnestakhdemoh? <Ok, in the present simple,
333	so why do we use it?>
334	Ss: (noise) fil hadher <in the present>
335	S: anseh liltaabeer aan alafaal aliateyaddieh <, to express things we do
336	regularly>
337	Ss: aw mutakarrira <or repeated actions>

338 T: **aw mutakarrira** <or to refer to repeated actions> **yaanee mathlan** <for
 339 example> **I play, ana alab** <I play> **mnstakhdem alzaman alhadher liltaabeer**
 340 **aan alafaal aleetyaddieh ao al mutakarrira, yanee ana alaab kuret kadam kul**
 341 **isboo** <We use the present simple to express regular or repeated actions, for
 342 example, I play football week > I play football every week. **ya shabab bilakheer**
 343 **entibhoo** <guys at the back, follow the lesson> **ana alab kuret kadam kul isboue**
 344 <I play football every week> **had aam yseer bishakel mutakarrir, etyadee ana kl**
 345 **isboue bilabou kurat kadam** <this happens repeatedly every week> **emat**
 346 **mnstakhdem alzamen alhader?** < When do we use the present simple?>

There appears to be confusion in the students' understanding of the rule of the tense and the function/use. When the teacher elicits the use (Lines 326-27), the students (328, 331) simply volunteer the name of the tense rather than the function. Salma's comment on this is:

"I'm trying to tell them here that we use this tense for actions we do regularly.

Abdulqader: the students do not seem to distinguish the use from the tense.

Salma: yeah that's right they may not know how we use tenses because it's the first tense I have taught them. They find it difficult to know how to use the present simple".

Lines (336-343) demonstrate how the teacher employs L1 to explain the use of the present simple as she believes illustrating grammar rules through Arabic can be very helpful for the students to ensure 'understanding':

"Salma: It helps them to use Arabic because it is their native language which they understand quicker than English.

Abdulqader: What about you as a teacher, how does it help you?

Salma: Well, I think it doesn't help me a lot as a teacher, but I can make sure that they have understood the rules when I speak Arabic".

The following part of this chapter explores Salma's reading lesson, incorporating the teacher's comments on selected extracts.

7.3.3. Reading Lesson

While all the following extracts come from a reading lesson conducted on 25/02/2014, the teacher's comments on the extracts and the lesson overall are part of

the stimulated recall interview held on 08/03/2014. Unlike the grammar lesson in the previous section which comes from the teacher's knowledge about grammar, this reading lesson comes from *English For Starters 8* textbooks. In the Teacher's Book (Kilbey 2010: 26), it is noted that: the *language focus* is university subjects; comparatives; the *outcomes* expected are that students can read and talk about a story; can compare people and things; and the *materials* are Students' Book pages 20 and 21; Activity Book page 16; Cassette 1 (See Appendix III: B for original materials).

OVERVIEW

Outcomes Can read and talk about a story; can compare people and things

Language focus university subjects; comparatives

Materials Students' Book pages 20–21; Activity Book page 16; Cassette 1

This lesson is largely focused on re-reading the text and doing the exercises. Salma clarifies that a reading lesson takes two teaching periods to finish due to classroom management and discipline issues as well as her approach of dividing the lesson into two parts; text reading and exercises:

“They had the text last lesson. I cannot give reading lessons in one period, it takes me two classes to finish a reading lesson as half the lesson is spent on discipline like ‘sit down’, ‘keep silence’ and so on. Therefore, I give the text, I read it; they read after me, and then I give them the vocabulary of the text to memorise. Next lesson, we do exercises”.

Discipline represents a big issue challenging Salma as a novice teacher and affects the time available for the lesson as she needs to spend ‘half the lesson’ dealing with classroom management.

Salma explains that her approach to teaching the reading text is mainly focussed on vocabulary memorisation:

“Abdulqader: so how do you teach the first lesson in which you focus on the text?”

Salma: In the first lesson, I read the text twice, then they read after me. Each student reads a paragraph, of course only those who would like to read because most students do not like to read. Then, I give them the vocabulary items that I want them to memorise from the text, they copy them after me from the board. Next lesson, I check their memorisation of the vocabulary”.

The following short conversation represents the pre-reading stage in which Salma reminds the students of the last lesson and illustrates the structure of this lesson.

Extract 5 (Reading Lesson: Pre-reading Stage p.20):

3	T: shabab aldars almadhi akhadna dars <i>The boy from the past</i> <guys, last lesson
4	was <i>The Boy from the Past</i> >
5	S1: alwalad mina almadhi <The boy from the Past>
6	T: wa ateitkun ana alwazeefeh hallaa bidna nirjaa niqraa aldars wa bidna nhel
7	alwazeefeh killiatna sawa, ittafakna? <and I gave you homework, now we will read
8	the lesson again and do the homework together, ok?>
9	Ss: naam <yes> yes

In her initial remark, Salma found it challenging to freely comment on the extract because she has an awareness of the overall goal rather than the aims of the lesson stages. Her goal is to ensure that the students can ‘understand the text and answer the exercises’:

“Well I don’t really know, I mean I never thought before of dividing the lesson. My general goal was just to make sure that the students could understand the text and answer the exercises. This is what I thought about, not like in stages or parts”.

This indicates that Salma has had no training at all as to lesson planning and aims. However, my interview included prompts and questions which I have developed in the discussions with Umar and Maher (Chapters 4 & 5), and that triggered Salma’s reflective practice and encouraged her to bring in her thoughts as to what she believes she is doing in the classroom and what rationale she has had behind her practices (See 6.4.2 for Salma’s resources as a teacher).

The extract also demonstrates switching between English and L1 by both the teacher and the students. In Line 5 (**alwalad mina almadhi** <The boy from the Past>), the student translates the title without being prompted or asked. The teacher states that this practice relates to ‘habit’:

“I don’t know why he translated, he seemed to be translating without being asked yeah. I think it is because the habit is when I read a word or a sentence, most students try to translate it with me or even before I translate it”.

There seems to be a classroom culture, a school culture or perhaps an educational system culture that has developed over time that the students are used to translate what the teacher says (also in Maher’s lessons, Chapter 5). Similarly to the sense of achievement explained by Maher (Chapter 5), the rationale provided by Salma for the students’ willingness to contribute with translations is that it shows that they are good and attentive students:

*“Salma: Sometimes the text may be already translated in their books because most of them have old books used earlier by former students. Thus, they may like to show that they are good students in translating.
Abdulqader: are those the hard-working students sitting there?
Salma: yes those students sitting in the first rows are usually the hard-working students who always participate”.*

In Extract 6, the teacher reads the text to prepare the students to answer the exercises that follow.

The Boy from the Past
Episode 2: The boy's story

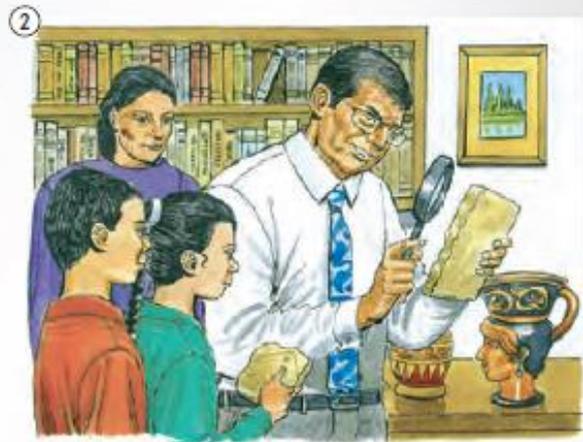


The next day, they went to meet Professor Hussam, an old friend of the family. Laila was studying the stones in the back of the car. The first piece was larger than the second one and its marks were clearer.

Mariam: Professor Hussam is a specialist in ancient history and archaeology. He's also a very close friend of your grandfather. In fact, they met when they were only seven years old!

Omar: That's a long time ago!

Mariam: The professor was cleverer than all the other boys in the school. But your grandfather was much better at sport!



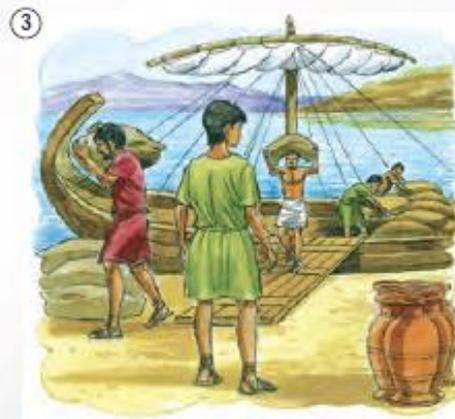
When they arrived at the professor's house, he led them into his study. There were hundreds of books. Omar was amazed. The professor examined the larger piece of stone. He grew very excited.

Omar: Are these Phoenician letters, professor?

Professor: Yes, they are.

Laila: Can you understand them?

Professor: Well, it's a difficult language ... but it's easier to read than Chinese. This piece tells the story of a boy ...



My name is Amer. I come from the city of Tyre. My people are sailors and traders. I love my family's ship. It is faster than the wind and more beautiful than all the other ships. We travel to many countries and carry home precious objects of silver and gold. But there are also thieves in this world and we must ...

Professor: The story stops here. May I see the other piece?

Laila: I think it's a map, professor.

Professor: Yes, you're right. It's definitely a map. And look – there are strange marks, too. This piece is more complicated than the first one. May I take photos of them?

Omar: Yes, of course. And thank you for all your help, Professor Hussam.

Professor: It was a pleasure.

After they got home, Omar and Laila received a mysterious email. It was from a stranger. He wanted to help them to understand their stone pieces. But who was he?

Figure 7.2. Reading Text: *The Boy from the Past*

In Line (17), Salma starts reading the text, and then in Line (28), she speaks in Arabic when the text changes into italics.

Extract 6 (Reading Lesson: text reading Stage p.20):

- | | |
|----|--|
| 17 | T: <i>The Boy from the Past</i> . The next day, they went to meet Professor Hussam, an old |
| 18 | friend of the family ... |
| 27 | This piece tells the story of a boy ... |
| 28 | T: hoon ilqissa halla lalwalad yalli bidou yehki aannoh ildoctor <Now we come |

29 to the story of the boy that the professor will tell> My name is Amer. I come from
 30 the city of Tyre ...
 32 But there are also thieves in this world and we must ... **ma kammal ilkussa, hoon**
 33 **ilprofessor** <he did not finish the story, the professor continues> Professor: The
 34 story stops here. May I see the other piece? Laila: I think it's a map, professor.
 35 Professor: Yes, you're right ...
 38 (Noise ... then it appears that parents came to ask about their child's performance
 39 at school)
 40 T: **shabab minkammel qiraat aldars, wasalna and Umar ma?** <guys let's finish
 41 reading the lesson, we were reading what Umar was saying, right?>
 42 Ss: **eyh anseh** <yes >
 43 T: **la and ilprofessor** <No, the professor's> Professor: It was a pleasure. After they
 44 got home, Omar and Laila received a mysterious email. It was from a stranger. He
 45 wanted to help them to understand their stone pieces. But who was he? **Lahoon**
 46 **karaana ildars minhil alasileh** <So we have read the text, let's do the exercises>

Reading the text primarily functions as a reminder to the main ideas of the text (studied last lesson), hence it facilitates the ensuing comprehension task. And as the text was translated in the previous lesson, the teacher did not translate it again:

"I didn't translate this time because we read and translated the text last lesson. My goal of reading the lesson is just to let them remember the idea of the text. This makes it easy to do the exercises that follow because there is a connection between the text and the exercises".

Line 28 demonstrates the teacher's L1 explanation in order to draw the students' attention to the sequence of the text that includes a conversation followed by a story in a different font style, italics. Salma believes that one of the functions of L1 involves ensuring clarity:

"... the purpose is to avoid confusing them because they may think that the text has ended because it was like a conversation followed by a text. So it is a clarification why the text is taking place this way".

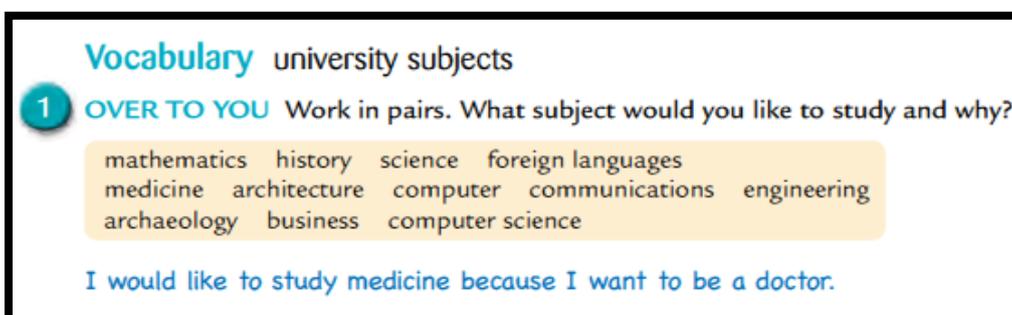
In response to my enquiry about the significance of L1 use rather than English in explanation, Salma points to students' comprehension as the principal motive behind that: *"because they would not have understood it if I have said it in English".*

Although Salma's prior experience as a student may have influenced her teaching approach, her students are used to translation with other teachers and have developed this habit with this new teacher, too:

"Sometimes I forget to translate a sentence after writing it as an example for an explanation about a particular point, but when I move to the following sentence, the students start saying to me: translate it; translate it. Even when I teach them grammar, I give them some vocabulary in English, they start saying: translate the words for us. For example, in the tenses, I say subject, verb, rest of the sentence, once I wrote it on the board without translating, the students started saying: translate them. Thus, I have become used to translating everything I say before they ask me to translate".

This links affective with cognitive dimensions in the teacher's view to language teaching, in that while ensuring comprehension (cognitively), the teacher also acts in congruence with the students' preferences (affectively).

Extract 7 originates from Exercise 1 in which vocabulary items about university subjects are introduced.



Vocabulary university subjects

1 OVER TO YOU Work in pairs. What subject would you like to study and why?

mathematics history science foreign languages
medicine architecture computer communications engineering
archaeology business computer science

I would like to study medicine because I want to be a doctor.

The aim of this exercise, as suggested in the book, is to involve the students in pair discussions of the subjects they would like to study and the whys and wherefores of their choices.

Vocabulary university subjects

1 OVER TO YOU (10 minutes)

First, read out the list of subjects and check that students know all the words. Then read out the instruction and the example sentence. Ask one or two students to tell the class which subject they would like to study (at university) and why, then put the students in pairs, if possible with new partners, to practise telling each other. Go round and listen, making sure they give reasons.

In the extract, the interaction shows that both the suggested form and focus of the exercise have been changed by the teacher. The extract also displays a teacher-whole-class interaction instead of working in pairs. The focus of the activity has changed, and the students only volunteer translations of the vocabulary list.

Extract 7 (Reading Lesson: Exercise 1 Vocabulary - University Subjects p.21):

- 49 T: **tayyeb minballeh hal ilasileh** <ok, we will start doing the exercises>
50 Ss: **anseh anseh** <Miss Miss>
51 T: **aanna awwal taeen Vocabulary mufradat** <the first exercise is about
52 vocabulary>
53 Ss: (noise over who is going to answer)
54 T: **awwal wihdeh in the bil akheer** <the first word, yes you sitting in the back>
55 S: **riadhiat** <mathematics>
56 T: **riadhiat tamam** <mathematics, ok>
57 Ss: (noise over who is going to answer)
58 S: **tareekh** <history>
59 T: **tareekh** <history> **tayyeb aanna science** <ok, we have science>
60 S: **iloum** <science>
61 T: **iloum** <science> foreign languages?
62 S: **anseh lughat ajnabieh** <Miss, foreign languages>

In her comments, Salma confirms that her goal in this exercise is to develop the students' vocabulary memorisation and translations:

"I would like to ensure that they memorise the words with their translations here, and I already gave them these words in a previous lesson".

Her decision to constrain the focus to be centred on vocabulary rather than on the exchange of the students' views is grounded on two issues: time pressure and her own views about the students who will find it an opportunity for distraction:

“Salma: Because they will waste all time discussing and we will lose all the class on this exercise.

Abdulqader: so your aim was to make use of time and let them memorise the words.

Salma: yes because they take advantage of anything that can distract them from the lesson. So if I do the exercise as suggested in the book, they will start making excuses like we are discussing while most of them will not be really discussing the words themselves at all. I don't know. However, I said to myself that I will try these questions that you have asked me about the lesson in this interview. I will try them in some lessons and see, I hope that it will work contrary to my thoughts about the students”.

Similarly to Umar and Maher, Salma's beliefs and contextual realities seem to influence her teaching decisions and practices and how she makes sense of the curriculum. However, the fact that the teacher finds the interview questions an opportunity to try new approaches in her future classes also indicates her willingness to reflect. Salma's reflection has helped her to express her inner thoughts *“However, I said to myself that I will try these questions that you have asked me about the lesson in the interview”*. She will do that in order to challenge her thoughts about the students.

Salma skips Activity 2, and her beliefs about her students' English proficiency influence that decision. To her, open questions which do not have answers in the text are difficult for the students to handle:

“These types of exercises do not have their answers in the text, so students will not be able to answer the questions. Therefore, I said to myself I do not need to teach it as I usually do not do these types of exercises. I don't know, I think they will not be able to find the answers”.

In the following extract, Activity 3 involves specific information questions that the students need to answer from the text.

3 **3.1** Listen and read the story on page 20. Answer the questions.

- 1 Which stone piece is larger?
- 2 Was the professor a good student at school?
- 3 What language is on the first piece?
- 4 Who wrote the carvings?
- 5 What does the professor say is on the second piece?
- 6 Why does the professor want to take photos of it?

The students are supposed to listen to the story in order to find the answers to the list of questions. However, Salma clarifies that the practical solution when the recording is unavailable is to read:

“Salma: We don’t have the recording available at school. For that reason, I read the text because I feel that we can read the text and answer the questions as they can recall the text if they have listened to my reading.

Abdulqader: If the recording were available, would it possible that you play it for the students or would you find it more effective to read the lesson yourself?

Salma: No, I may use it if it were available but it is not now. Even some students do not have the books, only almost half the number of the students have got books”.

In Line (91), Salma reads the first question.

Extract 8 (Reading Lesson: Exercise 3 Comprehension p.21):

87 T: ... **assoal altani anna asileh an aldars bidna nhellah tamam?**
88 <the second exercise has questions about the text that we need
89 to answer, ok?>
90 Ss: (noise)
91 T: **awwal suaal** <the first question> Which stone piece is larger? **Ay kitaet hajar**
92 **hia alakbar?** <Which stone piece is larger?> Mulham?
93 Mulham: ah the first piece is the larger
94 T: the first is larger **tamam** <good> excellent **tayyeb assual althani** Was the
95 professor a good student at school?
96 S: miss miss
97 T: **hal kan al doctor taleb jayyed fi almadrreseh?** <Was the professor a good
98 student at school?> **Birafeaa aleed** <raise your hands to answer>
99 Ss: yes yes
100 S: yes he was
101 T: Muhammad

102	Muhammad: yes he was
103	T: naam hua kana taleb jayyed <yes he was a good student> What language is on
104	the first piece?> Ay lugha kana aala alhajar alawwal? < What language is on the
105	first piece?>
106	S: finikiyeh <Phoenician>
107	T: Phoenician, tamam <good> tayyeb <ok> the fourth question

Regarding the main goal of the activity, Salma's comment points to two key elements: the students' understanding of the questions and locating answers to them:

"In this exercise, I want the students to know the main idea of the text and get the right answers for this exercise from the text. I mean I want them to understand the questions in the exercise and find the answers in the text".

In order to ensure comprehension of the questions, Salma translates each question before turning to the student volunteering to answer (Line 91-92). And the aim of translating the answer is to attract the students' attention to the right answer (Line 103). Lines (102-103) show that although the students have managed to answer the question in English, the teacher insists on translating it due to what she calls a habit the students have developed in her 'to translate everything':

"Salma: This is due to habit because they have developed this habit in me to translate everything I say. I got used to translating everything I say in class.

Abdulqader: ok, any other reason?

Salma: mmm yes I wanted the other students who had a wrong answer to know the right answer or for those how did not understand the translation of the text well to know if their answers were right or wrong. So if they understood the translation of the question, they may look for the answer in the text as they would have got the meaning right through my translation".

Unlike Maher's lessons (Chapter 5), the interaction pattern in this extract (and in Extract 1 and 2) demonstrates a lengthy student contribution (Lines 93-102) rather than simply providing a one-word response.

After revisiting comparative forms, extract (9) shows Exercise 4 Grammar in Context: Comparatives.

Grammar in context comparatives

4 Copy and complete the list. Use words from the story. Which one is irregular?

1 large **larger**

2 clear

3 clever

4 good

5 easy

6 fast

7 beautiful

8 complicated

As the book emphasises grammar in context, the Teacher's Book suggests putting the students in pairs and referring them to the story in order to complete this exercise.

Grammar in context comparatives

4 (10 minutes)

Read out the first word and the answer (*large, larger*) then ask the students to complete the list. Point out that all the answers can be found in the story. Put them in pairs to compare answers.

Ask the students which word appears in the text after each comparative adjective (*than*).

As is the case in both of her lessons, all the discourse pattern in the following extract follows an I-R-F sequence, even in activities intended to be conducted in pairs or groups such as this exercise. Salma's approach, like Umar's and Maher's, also avoids referring the students to the original story/text (context) in which the grammar structures can be found.

Extract 9 (Reading Lesson: Exercise 4: Comparatives p.21):

148 T: Samer, Hazem, Ahmad keep silence. **Tayyeb menintial lal سوال il baaduh** <ok,

149 we will do next question> Copy and complete the list. Use words from the story.

150 Which one is irregular? **keitbin ilna innou bidna niktub sifat ilmukaraneh wa**

151 **niarif ilkalimat illi mai nizamiieh aw shazzeah aan il kaideh** <they mean that we

152 need to write the comparative forms and identify the irregular adjectives>

153 Ss: (noise)

154 T: **shabab hatteen kilmit** <guys they have the adjective> large larger **aala hal asas**

155 **bidna nkammel** <we will do it following this example>

156 S: clear clearer

157 T: **ishoo manat clear btaaref?** <do you know the meaning of clear?>

158 S: **wadheh audhah** <clear clearer>

159 T: **wadheh audhah tamam** <clear clearer, right> **illi baadah** <next one> Ali

160	Ali: clever
161	T: clever
162	Ali: cleverer
163	T: cleverer iesh maanat cleverer <what does cleverer mean?>
164	Ali: athka <cleverer>
165	T: wa clever? <and what is the meaning of clever?>
166	Ali: thaki <clever>
167	T: tamam ish ismak inteh? <ok, what is your name?>
168	S: Ahmad
169	T: Ahmad
170	Ahmad: good better
171	T: ish maanat good? <what does good mean?>
172	Ahmad: good jayed better afdhal

The teacher's practices and goals appear to be exam-driven. The exams at the end of each term are very important, and for Years 9 and 12, although they similarly take an exam each term, the-end-of-year exam is the most important. The emphasis on this theme seems to recur in Salma's thoughts in the interview although there are, of course, pedagogical and linguistic dimensions. In her first comment on the goal of this extract, she explains:

“To understand and focus on grammar in order to do well in the exam. In the exam, they have to choose the right answer, so I would like to ensure that they have understood the grammar points and are able to choose the right answer if I put for them multiple-choice questions in the exam. I want them to learn the adjectives and the comparative forms”.

The teacher's focus on vocabulary and translation dominates even in cases where grammar is the main goal of exercises (Line 155). Although Exercise 4 is intended to improve the students' knowledge and practice of comparative adjective forms, Salma does not isolate the grammatical focus from her attention to vocabulary development. The students translate every adjective form as emphasised and prompted by the teacher (Lines 157, 163, 165, 171). To her, meanings enhance understanding of forms as she wants the students *“to learn the word and its translations in both forms; in the adjective and the comparative”*.

This focus on vocabulary has also emerged from the teacher's concern over the students' weakness in this particular language area as they have had no teacher for a while. At the beginning of the interview, the teacher clearly states that grammar and vocabulary contribute to her key areas of focus as a result of that contextual reality:

"Because I want them to memorise the meaning and the translation of the adjectives.

Abdulqader: So your goal is to teach them adjectives and meanings of words at the same time

Salma: yes because I also gave them these adjectives to memorise with the vocabulary in the previous lesson ... so when I gave them the lesson I explained them in English and translated them into Arabic. I explain to them that in Arabic it means so and so because I want them to learn the word and its translations in both forms; in the adjective and the comparative adjective".

Salma elicits/translates meanings of the vocabulary list in a teacher-whole-class type of interaction before doing Exercise 5. Preparing the students for the exam drives her to ensure that they know the meanings of the words so that *'when they come to study it for the exam, they can remember the meanings of the words ... This way they know what to memorise'*.

Extract 10 highlights Exercise 5 in which the students need to compare things using the list of words and phrases translated in the previous extract.

Comparing things Work in pairs. Compare the things below. Use these words:

5 easy difficult enjoyable boring expensive cheap good bad fast slow

- text messages / emails
- fast food / home cooking
- cars / buses
- football / basketball
- cola / orange juice
- Tigers football team / Stars football team

Text messages are more expensive than emails.

In this exercise, the Teacher's Book also suggests pair work so that the students make their own sentences following the model provided.

5 Comparing things (15 minutes)

Read out the example sentence and ask students to suggest a different sentence comparing text messages and emails (e.g. *Text messages are shorter than emails*). Put the students in pairs to make their own sentences about each pair of things. Go round and offer prompts if necessary. Make sure that they are forming the comparatives correctly. Then invite different students to write sentences on the board, making corrections where necessary.

In Lines (283-285), Salma reads out the example sentence, and then starts initiating responses from the students by inviting those who volunteer to speak out their sentences. The task suggests pair work, but the extract features a teacher-whole-class or teacher-student interaction in an IRF sequence.

Extract 10 (Reading Lesson: Exercise 5 Comparing things p.21):

283 T: **intibhu ala had iltaeen heik bidn nihil** <Listen to me, this is how we are going
284 to answer this exercise> **text messages ilrasael ilnassiey are more expensive**
285 **aghla than emails** <text messages are more expensive than emails>
286 S: fast food are
287 T: **minhit are willa is?** <Do we say is or are?>
288 Ss: is are is
289 T: Fast food is
290 S: **anshe** <> more expensive
291 T: than
292 Ss: **ghali** <expensive>
293 T: **aghla** <more expensive> than home food. **Tamam** <good> **Ya shabab bil**
294 **akheer bala swat** <guys sitting in the back, keep silence> Mulham **keitbeen cars**
295 **sayyarat buses basat** <we have cars and buses> **meen biddou yesawi jumleh ala**
296 **hadoul ilkilimteeen?** <who would like to make a sentence using these words?>
297 S: anseh <miss>
298 T: Mulham
299 Mulham: Cars
300 T: (writes on the board)
301 Mulham: is
302 T: cars? **Fi s bil akheer minhit is willa are?** <the word car ends with s, so do we
303 use is or are?>.
304 Ss: are are
305 S: **biljama are** <it's are in the plural>
306 T: are
307 Mulham: are more expensive
308 T: more expensive
309 Mulham: than buses

The students are supposed to select one of those words that the teacher has already translated to go with the given phrases in a comparative form in a full sentence. Forming a sentence appears to be a hard task, for the students and for Salma, accordingly:

“The challenge is that it is difficult for them to make a sentence in English. This is the difficulty; how to get them to write a sentence or to come up with vocabulary or how to form the sentence ... and this makes my task difficult, too. I need to explain everything for them and ensure that they understand it well”.

One way to introduce this activity in a less challenging nature can be through asking the students to work in pairs. They may be able to co-construct sentences together, a suggestion indicated in the book to which the teacher positively responds in the following:

“I did not think about that before, but after you sent me the extracts and the questions, I started considering that in my classroom for later lessons”.

This represents another instance wherein this study could be seen as a teacher training/development opportunity for Salma as a novice teacher in very difficult circumstances with no access to the Teacher’s book or ELT training programmes.

A close look at this part of the lesson reveals that there appears to be a consistent subject-verb agreement mistake in the students’ output. Lines (287-302) exemplify two identical cases (singular/plural) that Salma effectively addresses by eliciting the correct form following a question technique ‘minhit are willa is? <Do we say is or are?>’. Salma’s thoughts on this mistake link the issue to three key reasons: formulating full sentences is a challenging task for the students. The second is overgeneralization based on the example sentence provided. The third reason can be ascribed to genuine lack of knowledge of the rule. She also adds that the students

keep forgetting or confusing subject-verb agreement in exercises despite the fact that they show understanding of this grammar rule in earlier lessons:

“First, I think the exercise itself was challenging for them because they had to form sentences. Because the first sentence had ‘is’, they may have thought that all the other sentences follow the same pattern and take ‘is’. Some of them do not know. Although I explain the lesson, and they know that the words in the plural which have the plural ‘s’ go with ‘are’, but some of them just follow the first example. Some do not know. When I give them the grammar lessons, I notice that they can distinguish ‘is’ and ‘are’, but they surprise me again that they confuse it in another lesson”.

The above quote shows further evidence of great attempts of reflective practice on the part of Salma. The extracts selected and the interview questions have obviously assisted her journey of professional development from commenting with “*I don’t know, I didn’t think about this*” into actively engaging in providing the rationale for her classroom practices.

The students in this task have also used the same adjective with the other phrases ‘fast food is more expensive than home cooking’ and ‘cars are more expensive than buses’. Even when they were triggered by Salma to choose a different adjective, one of the sentences produced was ‘cola is worse than orange juice’. Whereas they managed to follow the model pattern of comparative adjectives, their attention was highly focussed on form irrespective of meaning.

7.3.4. Main Themes Emerging

The themes which have emerged from the analysis of the two lessons vis-à-vis Salma’s reflections are presented in the following sections. I also sometimes draw on a broad interview conducted on (06/12/2013) prior to having her lessons (See Chapters 7 & 8).

7.3.4.1. Aspects of instructional practices and teacher beliefs

The following discussion highlights significant aspects of Salma's instructional practices and underpinning cognitions in the two lessons.

Pair- and group- work

In both lessons, the classroom discourse demonstrates a prevailing IRF pattern (Extracts 7, 9, 10). In Extract (7), for instance, Salma changes the focus of the activity from exchanging views in pairs into translating vocabulary in an IRF interactional pattern. Her rationale behind this change relates to constraining contextual realities (time pressure) and her own reasoning about the students and their levels. As illustrated by Umar and Maher (Chapters 4 & 5), Salma also adds that putting the students in pairs and groups would lead to noise and distraction:

“That’s right. I do not put students in groups. There is no interaction between students, it is only between me and the students otherwise a big number of students would not pay attention to the lesson and there will be a lot of noise. I mean although I keep the interaction between me and them, they keep getting distracted and making noise, chatting and not focused. I don’t know, I did not even think about putting them in groups before, not for any specific reason, it is just because this is my approach to teach them. I think they would make more noise than the noise they make while I am following the current approach. You can imagine, although I keep the interaction this way, I always need to tell them to keep silence and pay attention to the lesson”. (08/03/2014)

Focus on vocabulary and translation

Salma focuses on vocabulary in her reading lessons as she believes that her students have a weakness in this particular area:

*“Abdulqader: so when you teach reading, what is your main focus?
Salma: to know and memorise new words because they are weak in vocabulary, even sometimes I observe that they don’t know simple and basic words. Therefore, I try to give them more words to memorise”. (08/03/2014)*

The teacher's primary focus on vocabulary in teaching reading also originates from three key elements. To her, vocabulary indicates proficiency and, therefore, this is one of the reasons why she pays much attention to this skill in her reading class. And as clearly expressed, this belief stems from the teacher's own experience as a learner who found that vocabulary memorisation has helped her to become more proficient. The second key element is the exam-driven methodology in which the teacher always links what she teaches to how well the students will do in the exam. The cognitive view represents the third element in which Salma points out that if the students memorise the vocabulary and translations of reading texts, they will develop their language abilities to answer other questions in the exam, including matching or gap-filling:

"I focus a lot on vocabulary, I don't know why, perhaps because when I started learning English and felt I was doing well is the time when I started memorising words to become more proficient. Thus, if they memorised the vocabulary of the text, the vocabulary in the exam wouldn't be new to them and they would know the translation of a sentence as long as they know the vocabulary. They will also be able to do the matching question or the blanks in the exam". (08/03/2014)

Translation also features as a significant aspect in both lessons. The teacher's focus on vocabulary and translation pervades even in cases where grammar is the main goal of exercises (Extract 9). In Extract (4), Salma uses translation as a 'helpful' technique to assist her explanation of grammar points and, consequently, the students' understanding of grammar (and all the other language skills) as they are not proficient enough:

"Yes I think it is helpful because whatever I say in English and try to explain, I expect they would not understand unless I translate and explain in Arabic. I want them to understand the grammar points. If I speak in English, I may spend all the term using English until they become proficient enough to start understanding and following me in English at the end. Therefore, I even teach them this way; I give them the grammar and the vocabulary in English

*and I translate them underneath for example subject, I put **fael** <subject> underneath the word; **fial** <verb> I do the same; then I write the examples in English and put their translations below”.*

Extracts (5& 6) show that in reading lessons, the students’ translation of vocabulary seems to be an educational culture which has originated in Syrian schools even in pre-war conditions. She further argues that translation assists the students’ comprehension (Extract 5) and develops their vocabulary memorisation (Extract 7). In Extract (8), it is a technique used by the teacher not only for the students to understand the questions, but also to enable them to realise the right answers.

Fluency and error correction (minimal involvement in R move)

In both lessons, Salma consistently follows an indirect error correction technique in which she questions rather than immediately corrects the students’ output (Extracts 1 & 10). This practice is informed by her own beliefs and prior language learning experience as a student which state that initiating self or peer correction is conducive to learning. Due to this technique and Salma’s minimal interference in the students’ Response move, unlike Maher’s lessons (Chapter 5), the interaction pattern in her lesson transcripts (See Extracts 1, 2, 8) demonstrates instances of relatively lengthier utterances than simply providing a one-word answer.

Grammar teaching

According to Salma, grammar and vocabulary shape the core elements of language learning:

“I think the most important element in language is vocabulary and then grammar. For example, we are here in Turkey, we learn vocabulary and we can convey the message although with grammar, it becomes much better”.
(04/01/2014)

The prime focus in teaching grammar is teaching tenses, which, as some other teaching practices, draws on Salma's prior experience as a student:

"In grammar, my main focus is on the rules that we are expected to cover in the textbooks. In tenses, for instance, I am concerned about the structure of the tense so when they speak a sentence, they choose the right tense. Although I follow what I am expected to teach in the textbooks, the first points I teach in grammar are tenses.

Abdulqader: Why do you focus on tenses?

Salma: I don't know why really, when I learned English this is what I was taught. We started with tenses, and then we studied other grammar points. I mean it is important to know how to make a sentence with a correct structure". (04/01/2014)

Similarly to Umar (Chapter 4) and Maher (Chapter 5), Salma's approach to teaching grammar follows a deductive perspective in which she introduces and writes the form and the terminology of the present simple tense on the board, translates it, and then elicits some example sentences from the students (Extracts 1 & 2). Meaning of language (use of present simple tense) is taught at the end of the lesson (Extract 4). In addition, Salma's approach in exercises, like Umar's and Maher's, avoids referring the students to the original story/text (context) in which the grammar structures can be found (Extract 9).

This context-sensitive and exam-driven approach grounded on the teacher's concern about students' understanding appears to guide her teaching of grammar which she believes to be effective and conducive to learning. In Extract (3), Salma emphasises the importance of form and structure of grammar rules and the need to follow an easy approach in which the students do not need to discover rules. This view, however, might have changed at the end because the teacher informed me that she would involve her students in the lesson more than before as she realised that she should not make everything ready for them.

Repetition

Repetition seems to be an important feature of classroom discourse in Syrian classrooms although for different purposes. For Salma, the goal of prompting a student to repeat the rule is enabling memorisation of grammar points. Umar, however, underlines repetition as an essential strategy to enhance students' listening (input) to compensate for the lack of listening materials and sentence structure awareness from peers (Chapter 4).

7.3.4.2. Conflict circumstances and the teaching approach

Similarly to Umar and Maher, Salma's beliefs and contextual realities seem to influence her teaching decisions and practices and how she makes sense of the curriculum in the camp school. The practices and comments in the previous sections reveal that the teacher's ecologically developing approach is primarily guided by her reflections on her own learning experience as well as her awareness of the students' needs, levels, preferences and learning experiences. Even in the practice of translation, Salma does not initiate her own approach to show an attempt to make a change (Extract 6). Instead, she follows existing practices and responds to the students' preferences, which are linked to pre-war educational culture at Syrian schools, rather than introduces her own beliefs to this new educational context for both the teacher and the students.

Prior language learning experience as resource for teacher beliefs

With a dearth of teacher training in a war-impacted context, Salma's beliefs draw on two primary sources: her prior language learning experience and her teachers' approaches to language teaching. In her comments on the extracts, Salma's

reflections on having been a learner significantly informed her teaching practices as a novice teacher. Salma's own learning experience appears to be a powerful resource underpinning her beliefs about error correction (Extracts 1 & 10). Also, the primacy of vocabulary memorisation and translation in developing the students' language proficiency stems from her and her students' prior language learning experiences (Extracts 4, 5, 6 & 9).

Exam-driven teaching

Similarly to Umar and Maher, Salma's views about teaching closely relate to preparing the students for the exams. The teacher's concern in teaching grammar immediately centres on ensuring that the students can answer exam questions relevant to verb endings (Extract 2) or choose the right answers of comparative adjectives in multiple-choice questions (Extract 9). The same applies to teaching reading wherein Salma indicates that her focus on vocabulary memorisation and translation of texts and exercises develops the students' English proficiency as well as ability to recall the meanings, and hence answer the exam questions more easily.

In Chapters 4 and 5, similar concerns were voiced for teaching at schools inside Syria in pre-war circumstances. Therefore, the teachers pointed out that their primary focus was centred on preparing the students for the exam rather than on meeting the curricular targets as exams did not change in accordance with the educational change. This has resulted in skipping exercises related to listening and speaking because these skills were not assessed in the exams, neither were they feasible to teach due to contextual and technological constraints.

Impact of war contextual forces on teacher's pedagogy

Several contextual challenges influence Salma's (developing) beliefs underpinning her teaching approach and pedagogical classroom practices. Factors such as time pressure, for instance, inform the teacher's decision to change the focus in Extract (7) from exchanging views into vocabulary translation. Lack of books and listening materials represents another challenge for the teacher to ecologically devise a practical solution to cope with in her context. Where the audio was not available, Salma changed the listening exercise into reading the text for the students so that they would listen to her instead and answer the questions (Extract 8). The teacher illustrates that only fifty percent of the students have books, and, therefore, extensive writing on the board is essential:

"The current teaching is traditional that depends only on books. Now, even the books are not available for some students because we don't have enough copies. Students sometimes share the same book ... For that reason, I cannot depend a lot on the book; I rather write on the board most of the time and they copy that". (06/12/2013)

In the following conversation, Salma elucidates her ecological endeavour to handle the lack of books. As underlined in 6.4.1, vocabulary represents a priority in the teacher's view on language learning and development. For that reason, she ensures writing the vocabulary on the board for all the students to copy. In teaching grammar, the feasible solution she practises is writing/explaining grammar points and exercises on the board:

*"Abdulqader: How do you select what you write on the board?
Salma: I read the lesson, and then I write the words on the board so that all the students have these vocabulary items. Sometimes I see the focus of the lesson, for instance present simple or past simple, I explain it and write exercises from my own knowledge so that those who don't have books can*

understand and follow. After that, we go back to the books if we have homework or other exercises". (06/12/2013)

Other difficulties include large classes (particularly in primary levels in which students count up to 45), students' weakness due to interrupted schooling, different schooling backgrounds and lack of focus:

"The number of students in my classes is big at the elementary stages, around 45 students in each classroom. The classes are noisy because of the number, and sometimes we waste half of the lesson because of that. Most students have been away from schools for a while, so they are somewhat weak. Therefore, I exert much effort to make them understand the lesson. We don't have audio or visual teaching materials that accompany the books. On top of that, students come from different backgrounds and therefore this creates some tensions and problems among students". (06/12/2013)

According to Salma, the biggest challenge is to attract the students' attention to the lesson, particularly those directly traumatised. At first the teacher considered their levels, but then when reflecting on the issue further, she realised that many war-related problems interfere in students' educational progress. A student having her father in prison has immediately affected her performance in the classroom:

"Although they attend their classes regularly, I feel they simply show up to waste time only. I spend much time trying to attract their attention to the lesson and get them focused, which is the biggest challenge I have in class. Abdulqader: Are you aware of any reasons why the students are not able to get focused?

Salma: I don't have a clue, some of them are weak students. One girl was ok in class, but then she became unable to follow me in the lesson. When I knew that her father has been put in jail, I felt guilty that I blame my students but they have many problems and issues at home". (06/12/2013)

Due to the above issues, Salma, like most of her colleagues at the camp school, finds it very difficult to encourage the students to learn:

"I find it very challenging to get the students' attention to the lesson. The students are always looking for ways to avoid following the lesson, chatting, making noise ...etc. I don't know how to grab their attention to the lesson! Abdulqader: do other teachers complain about the same issue?

Salma: yeah most of them” (04/01/2014)

In our discussion, I attempted to prompt the teacher to cogitate about the reasons behind their classroom realities. As illustrated in her first comment below, the teacher’s discussions were centred on their difficulties and constraints, but I was interested in knowing (and also making the teacher aware of) the driving forces for these challenges. For me, raising this awareness in Salma was part of the teacher development I found my study part of although unintended.

The key factors identified to seem to impact on the teaching/learning of English in the camp school, according to Salma, comprise, inter alia, hopelessness, temporary camp life and its constraints on learning, unqualified novice teachers and understaffed school.

Hopelessness:

In response to the destruction of the country, there is an element of hopelessness emerging in the students’ feelings towards their education and impacting their performance at school:

“Abdulqader: have you discussed why that happens?

Salma: We discuss the many problems we have in class with the students, but we haven’t thought of the reasons behind the students’ behaviour.

Abdulqader: In your view, what can be the reason for this?

Salma: mm I don’t know...They may be thinking what’s the point of studying while the whole country is being destroyed? To me, they appear to have dropped schooling off their lives”. (04/01/2014)

Temporary camp life and its constraints on learning:

The students’ perception of their stay in the camp being temporary and then they will go back to their houses and schools in Syria seems to build a sense of detachment

from education. To add, living in caravans restricts the students' learning opportunities as there cannot be study environment:

“They don't see the point of studying because they believe that living in the camp is temporary so they won't stay here for long and that they will go back to their normal lives soon. They come to school just for a change or simply because their families ask them to do so.

Abdulqader: that's really sad! They may not feel settled

Salma: Yes exactly and I can't blame them because their caravans are very small. Each caravan accommodates at least six people and it's very noisy for the students to have an environment to study or even time. Therefore, they think everything is in chaos and that living in the camp is a temporary period that will go by”. (04/01/2014)

Unqualified novice teachers:

As the majority of the teachers at this school have actually started their teaching experience in the camp in response to unprecedented circumstances, the teachers are neither qualified nor trained. The lack of qualifications and experience is a worrying source for Salma over this generation of students:

“And most teachers are not qualified. Most of us are young teachers who have started teaching here and we are really getting our teaching experience in the camp.

Abdulqader: can that be one of the reasons for the students' behaviour?

Salma: yes it can be, it can be a big reason. I'm really worried about the future of this generation because of teachers' lack of qualifications and experience”. (04/01/2014)

Understaffed school:

These wartime difficult circumstances have highly impacted teachers as well as the students in that some teachers have started shifting to other careers such as cashiers in supermarkets or working with International Humanitarian Agencies. Due to the voluntary nature of teaching, (experienced) teachers seek paid jobs outside the camp school:

“Even those who have some experience have found it difficult to teach voluntarily without getting money to live on. Therefore, they left, looking for better opportunities outside”. (04/01/2014)

Those students’ (language) learning progress has been repeatedly interrupted within the past three years, and there should be a sustainable solution to end their (at least) educational misery. Salma’s students in these lessons have not had classes for a long time because their teacher has left school earlier in the term. To enable them to catch up, Salma was only left with few practical solutions. She opted for preparing them for the exam through focusing on what she believed to be core elements; ‘some grammar, tenses’:

“Abdulqader: I have noticed that they are still in unit 3.

Salma: yes they are lagging behind in English because they did not have English classes for a long time in the first term because their teacher left school and the administration did not manage to find another teacher. Then, I started teaching them at the end of the term. I was only able to teach them some grammar, tenses, because when I started teaching them, they only had studied one tense. Thus, I wanted to make sure that they know something about grammar in order to be ready for the exam. I also gave them another reading lesson. This term, they only had this reading lesson until now because I also focus on grammar”. (08/03/2014)

In Salma’s choice of the vital language elements to prepare the students for the exam, her focus was on grammar, which she rated as essential to compensate the students’ lack of English classes for a while. This tells us that Salma’s beliefs select grammar as the most important skill to develop or perhaps the exam questions are grammar-based, and therefore she is aware that they should study grammar to pass.

Research as teacher development in an underdeveloped context further undermined by war

Although it was not the purpose of the study, my intervention served as an opportunity for teacher development in an underdeveloped context in many aspects

(not to mention wartime). The stimulated-recall interviews I have conducted with Salma in the two lessons seem to have actually (as the term suggests) stimulated her thoughts on what she does and made her reflect on considering these issues in later classes. In the interviews, for some time, Salma took the role of the interviewer and started asking me some questions on how to introduce new approaches to conducting the exercises such as the one of the group work which she avoided due to concern over noise and distraction (Extracts 4, 5,7). Immediately afterwards, she considered the idea of trying that, but appeared to lack any training in the dynamics of how to effectively put the students in groups and what tasks to give them:

“Abdulqader: Are there any things in the classrooms or the school that restrict your teaching approach or are you free to teach as you like?”

Salma: No, I can follow any approach I like, but I expect that students would make noise. I will try this method of putting students in groups, but I do not know if it would work or not with them.

Abdulqader: you can try and see what works.

Salma: is it like I ask a question and put students in two groups and simply watch?

Abdulqader: well it depends on the task that you give to students. For instance, sometimes students may need to discuss a point in groups. In your lesson, for example, I have noticed that they could have jointly constructed a sentence together, just as an example.

Salma: well I don't know. I will try, but I expect that they knew that I was recording in this lesson and therefore they appeared to be less naughty and noisy. If it were in a different lesson or if I did not tell them I was recording, they could have been not paying attention to the lesson. They were not as naughty as usual because I informed them you need to behave and show a good picture of our school. Nonetheless, I will attempt to put them in groups and see what they do”. (08/03/2014)

The fact that Salma is willing to ask me questions is indicative of how other teachers expressed that participating in this research has given them a great opportunity to reflect on their classroom practices (See Chapter 7).

At the end of the interviews, Salma's impression shows a deep reflective perspective to her experience in verbalising her thoughts on her teaching practices.

Not only is the teacher considering possible techniques to engage her students, but also extending these ideas to other classrooms/levels she is teaching:

“Seriously, I felt that I am a bit of a failure teacher and that I should have thought about these issues you asked me about. I felt that I should try to think about doing these things that you are asking me about in my teaching. And now I have kept them in mind. For example, I started thinking of putting the students in groups and let them speak themselves in English rather than have everything ready for them and done on my part. Now, I am even thinking of doing that with Year 9 students”. (08/03/2014)

Thus, Salma seems to be willing to compromise some of her responsibility in favour of nurturing learning discovery in the students. As she illustrates, this will be a change in the teaching/learning culture in which the students will find that the teacher no longer has ‘everything ready for them’.

Although the teacher expressed her disappointment with her teaching in the first interview, that experience did not put her off. Instead, she actually showed an extraordinary cooperation and was happy to conduct the second interview. The following reflections come from Salma’s view on her overall experience in participating in this research:

“I have learnt a great deal from this research. It has encouraged me to think of all the steps I need to do to make my lessons more successful. I never thought of why I teach this or that part of the lesson. I have realised that I need to set aims for my classroom practice. Before these interviews, I used to consider the overall aim of the lesson only, but now I have realised that I need to set my aims for each stage in the lesson”. (08/03/2014)

Equally, in the lesson transcripts, Salma finds the interview questions a starting point for teacher development (See Extracts 7 & 10). Confirming my view that this research has served as teacher development opportunity in very difficult circumstances, Salma asserts that the extracts and the interview questions and reflections have motivated her to reflect on her beliefs and practices and consider new classroom practices in later lessons she never thought about before this

experience. Also, awareness-raising to the significance of the war-related challenges (discussed in the previous section) in influencing the students' education was hoped to equip the teacher with a sense of realisation that would take into account external factors other than her teaching approach or the curriculum followed. This awareness was co-constructed, and it was an opportunity in which the teacher verbalised some immediate concerns and realities.

Summary

The analysis of the 11 teachers' interviews has provided significant insights into the unprecedented realities in terms of the impact of the current armed conflicts on (ELT) education in Syria, including teachers' and students' lives. Some Syrian (English) teachers' lives have witnessed a dramatic change in terms of residence, study and profession. Teachers have passed away, worked as news reporters, fled the country, became camp school teachers, worked in supermarkets, and some inside Syria became jobless. While thousands of schools have been destroyed or damaged, some schools have become refugee residences for displaced families. Some other schools in relatively 'safe' neighbourhoods have become the de facto institutions to which displaced teachers and students from other various regions all of a sudden belong. As millions of Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of the war, yet other schools have been set up in camps in neighbouring countries, shaping an increasingly rapid, distressing reality.

In this chapter, I also had the opportunity to see a glimpse of how a (refugee) teacher made sense of the curriculum and her teaching in a refugee camp school. It was important to explore how the teacher developed a new identity as a refugee and

as a teacher with the changing identities of students as refugees and students. War circumstances have led to atrocities; nonetheless, we can see positive aspects in this particular school despite all the challenges. Unlike other camps deprived from education, it was very fortunate for the students to have access to education in this camp school (surprisingly equipped in somewhat better standards than those at some Syrian schools). Whereas facilities and education opportunities seem to vary considerably in different camps, it would be more accurate to assume that the psychological (traumatising) impacts of war can be more or less a common point. Therefore, the situation of education and school cannot be claimed to be representative of all the camps, not even those within Turkey. More studies need to be undertaken in various camp schools (and in all the neighbouring countries immediately affected by the influx of refugees) in order to draw a true sketch of what really takes place as a general feature (in the big picture).

Chapter 8

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this thesis, Chapters (4 & 5) have described how two teachers make sense of *English for Starters (EFS)* in Syria. Chapter (6) has explored 11 other teachers' views with regard to *EFS* and ELT pedagogy at Syrian schools. Chapter (7) has shed light on the impact of war on teachers and students and given a glimpse of teacher agency and how *EFS* is taught in a refugee camp school.

In this chapter, I discuss the collective key findings emerging from all the data sets in relation to the research questions (See Chapter 2) and the literature. These findings include the main themes emerging from focal teachers' lessons and interviews (Chapters 4, 5 & 7) and the main themes of the large group interviews (Chapters 6 & 7). Therefore, the chapter incorporates two main sections corresponding with the two questions of the study. The first section synthesises the findings pertinent to a). teachers' actual classroom practices in their immediate contexts; b). the different factors and constraints underpinning the teachers' ELT pedagogy; c). the previous two aspects assist my investigation into the workings of teacher agency in difficult circumstances and the possibility of establishing new directions into a viable context-appropriate ELT pedagogy as seen and voiced by local teachers themselves. As the ongoing conflict has naturally become part of the study and Syria's refugee exodus has reached to millions, in the second section, I shed light on the impact of Syria War on ELT (and education) and teacher agency in

crisis situations. This includes challenges and realities, but also initiatives and directions for a conflict-sensitive ELT pedagogy in which teacher development is both urgent and beyond traditional. To avoid confusion, I will include the names of the participants in bracket squares so that they can be identifiable from authors' citation.

8.1. Teachers' Actual Practices

8.1.1. Teachers Making Sense of the Curriculum

Although only interviewed, the majority of the teachers in Chapter (6) did not claim to follow CLT in their classroom practices, which not only resonated with the three focal teachers in my study, but also showed that teachers were aware of the incongruence between policy and practice. It equally revealed teachers' sense of agency in their classroom practices.

Teacher-centred classrooms

One key feature of the curriculum (and CLT) involves a shift in teacher-student roles where teachers are assumed to be facilitators and students are active participants in classroom discourse. Whilst *EFS* promotes a more student-centred learning, the classroom transcripts as well as the interviews reveal a different reality.

Despite the overarching teacher-centred nature of all the lessons (Chapters 4, 5 & 7), in some cases, the interaction pattern in Salma's and Umar's lessons reveals a lengthy student contribution (although co-formulated with the teacher in Umar's case) rather than a mere provision of one-word responses as is the case in Maher's

classroom. Although different exercises are designed for various goals and to be conducted in different ways in his lessons, Maher's approach shows constant control in the interaction pattern throughout the whole lessons in which he reads, translates and asks students which option they think is suitable in the gap. Even though Umar (Chapter 4) encourages his students to formulate full sentences, his emphasis is primarily form-focused. Salma's approach, however, seems to be more encouraging and less obstructive to the students' contributions, and hence gives them more freedom to construct their own turns in the Response move. This further emphasises her fluency-focused approach in reading lessons and links with her indirect error correction techniques. Generally, nonetheless, the majority of the teachers report their classroom environment to be teacher-centred and acknowledge being 'transmitters' of knowledge referring to students' roles as 'receivers'. They allude to sociocultural aspects that make it difficult to apply in their classroom contexts. This goes in line with Wedell's (2013: 144) statement that:

English curricula, whose rhetoric presupposes that teachers will be able to make an easy transition from their familiar role as 'transmitters' of knowledge about English, to a new role as 'facilitators' of learners' development of communication skills, underestimate the degree of challenge that such transition entails.

Therefore, the interaction type has been predominantly characterised by individual (T-S) or in-chorus (T-Ss) responses on the part of the learners (Chapters 4, 5 & 7).

In *EFS 7 Teacher's Book* (Kilbey 2009: 6), the curriculum emphasises pair work and group work activities as important opportunities for the students to "discuss their ideas with each other" and "increase the amount of practice" as some students "will be accustomed to the teacher speaking a lot during a lesson". These

activities are also designed to be “a good way to develop confidence, one of the main attributes of a fluent speaker of a foreign language. Students can try things out in front of their friends without the pressure of speaking to the teacher (who knows more), or to a large group (who might not all be listening)” (*ibid.*). This emphasis on tasks appears to echo Howatt’s (2004: 258) view that “the legacy of the CLT classroom that distinguishes it most clearly from its predecessors is probably the adoption of the concept of ‘activities’”.

In the lesson transcripts, there is no evidence of pair- and/or group work tasks (except for one instance of pair work in Umar’s grammar lesson). The majority of the teachers interviewed also report to eschew these activities as they are not possible to implement particularly due to contextual challenging realities (See discussion below). The curriculum also assumes that “Once students realise why it is a good idea, it should be quite easy to ask them to change places with another student on the other side of the room, or get them to organise themselves by lining up in alphabetical order according to their names” (Kilbey 2009: 6). However, some teachers express quite opposite views in that they find it difficult to convince the student to change their seats. Even if some students accept to change places, teachers are concerned that they will be either off-task or making noise. I would argue that awareness should be made that peer interaction does involve this type of ‘productive noise’ that teachers would develop their skills in how to manage it similarly to their acceptance of T-chorus noise.

These findings are in line with other studies which point to the limited uptake in implementing curriculum innovation initiatives (Orafi, 2008; Hiep, 2007). Some of these practical difficulties highlighted by the teachers confirm Carless’s (2004b)

study of curriculum innovation in primary schools in Hong Kong. For instance, Betty, one of the teachers, concludes that “discipline problems were caused when the teacher showed the photos. Sometimes doing the group work is difficult because they just use the opportunity to talk in Cantonese” (*ibid.* : 651).

Nonetheless, other teachers such as Umar (in a state school in Syria) and Salma (in a camp school in Turkey) report to reinterpret group-work activities as feasible within the constraints of their immediate situations and as suits their own agenda. Their classroom-suitable implementation involves regarding the class as three groups based on the three groups of fixed seating in their context. This relates to the learning group ideal debate (Shamim, 1996; Holliday, 1994) in which the authors accentuate the necessity to validate the concept and adapt it according to teachers’ real socio-cultural situations. Although group work and free language production can be possible potentials for language learning, a lesson can be communicative even if it capitalises on means other than group work (Holliday, 1994). Thus, the author asserts, local factors should be seen as central rather than inhibiting to the design of appropriate methodologies. However, unlike Kumaravadivelu’s (2003) view of empowering teachers to act independently through macrostrategies, Holliday does not indicate how and who would design these appropriate methodologies. The central point of argument in a developing country and in camp schools in developing countries will be: how will poorly qualified and/or trained teachers design their teaching approaches?

Drawing on the transcripts and the teachers’ reasoning, the following section highlights the teachers’ approaches to teaching reading and grammar.

Approaches to teaching reading and grammar

Contrary to the goals of the reading texts in the curriculum, the lesson transcripts demonstrate a primary focus on vocabulary and pronunciation in reading lessons. Umar, Maher and Salma indicate that students' levels do not correspond with the years they have spent learning English. Therefore, they generally focus on translation and pronunciation or eliciting translation. While in Umar's lesson students were allocated turns to read the text, students in Maher's lesson did not really read at all as the teacher read. In the camp school, Salma describes her approach teaching reading as centred on developing students' vocabulary memorisation. The translation of vocabulary seems to be part of the concept of teaching/learning and the deep-rooted educational culture in Syrian schools. This, however, displays some incongruity with the design and the principles of the curriculum introduced around 10 years ago as a reaction against traditional approaches to language teaching and learning.

Kilbey (2009), the author of *EFS*, emphasises that the textbooks are designed to present and review contextualised grammar and provide systematic practice, with authentic materials and a discovery approach to grammar teaching/learning:

Grammar is presented through a variety of text types, including e-mails, webpages, articles and a story which has an episode in every module. Recorded texts and dialogues are also used to present and consolidate grammar points. Students are encouraged to listen or read several times to complete different tasks. These tasks encourage them to discover grammar rules themselves and to move from controlled practice to freer, more personalised use of the target language.

The transcripts of the three focal teachers show that their approaches to grammar teaching are generally deductive in which the teacher writes/explains rules

of grammatical structure on the board, asks the students to copy them and reads out some examples. Then the students are invited to formulate similar sentences following the grammar structure presented. The teachers emphasise structure and use grammar terminology in which translation is central. Grammar teaching/learning, therefore, is de-contextualised as the teachers do not attempt to show the grammar instances in the original context of the reading text or story. Many of the teachers in Chapter (7) have also indicated that their grammar teaching is more deductive, with some pointing to their prior learning experiences. Those teachers argue that they taught grammar similarly to the way they have been taught as they found it effective (Borg, 2003). Huda, for instance, clearly states that teaching grammar “*the traditional way*” drawing on her own learning experience is a practical approach for her students. A key factor informing the teachers’ (grammar) practices is their awareness of their students’ levels (Umar, Maher, Salma, Hala, Huda). Sameh also finds the authentic materials of the textbooks inappropriate to draw students’ attention to particular forms and uses. His own approach has, therefore, been based on tailoring the lesson to focus on the immediate purpose, forms and uses of a particular grammar rule. To effectively use language communicatively, Nunan (1989; 2004) argues, an explicit focus on grammar at the rise of CLT, according to some linguists, was not necessary, but later on grammar became an essential resource in making meaning, without which, Savignon (2002) holds, communication cannot take place. More recently, in his study of two Argentinean EFL teachers, Sanchez (2014) concludes that the teachers’ self-perceptions of their knowledge about grammar seem to influence their pedagogical decisions in the classroom.

Translation & teachers' reasoning

Although curriculum innovation has stipulated target language use and practice and despite inspectors' insistence on E-only policy, translation appears to be a debatable deep-rooted common practice in the educational culture of Syrian state schools. In contrast to Umar's approach of translating when necessary (Chapter 4), focus on vocabulary and word-by-word translation pervade every move in the discourse of Maher's and Salma's lessons even in grammar exercises (Chapters 5 & 7). Classroom transcripts and teachers' follow-up and semi-structured interviews (Chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7) have demonstrated that teachers draw on L1 for a multitude of reasons.

First, contextual realities feature as a key rationale interacting with teachers' beliefs about language use. In many cases, conflict between beliefs and reality shows that even if teachers' beliefs align with educational innovation, the difficulty or feasibility of implementation stems from classroom realities (Huda, Abeer, Ali, Hasan, Maher, Rana, Sameh, Aalaa, Umar, Firas). These realities which impinge on their beliefs as to the appropriacy of the English-only approach include the limited periods of L2 learning exposure; multi-level classes (students' proficiency); students' resistance. Liu *et al.* (2004) report similar findings in which teachers resort to L1 due to their students' lack of L2 proficiency that can enable them to understand the teachers. Thus, the guiding principles for the teachers' dynamic practical classroom techniques in my study stem from their views on the difficulty of the language, keenness on comprehensible input and appreciation of students' (weak and) multi-level proficiency levels. In their focus on the use of the first language as an indicator of Hungarian teachers' response to CLT curriculum initiative, Nagy and

Robertson (2009) identify similar findings as having the strongest influence on teachers' language choices in elementary and intermediate level EFL classrooms.

Nonetheless, the teachers in my study unanimously agree that an L2 environment with a maximised students' exposure to target language should be maintained, allowing a flexible approach to L1 use 'whenever they needed it' (Rana). Similarly to the teachers' views in Macaro (1995), most of the Syrian teachers warn of the negative overreliance on L1 that lead to:

- students' attention on (and wait for) the Arabic translation/meaning rather than on the English input
- deprived target language use and practice
- altering the entire communicative approach and curriculum and their core tenets.

According to students' expectations, it has become an established common practice deep-rooted in students' beliefs, perceptions and preferences to language learning, and teachers' attempts to introduce new teaching techniques other than translation are challenged by students' resistance to change (Rana, Huda, Hasan). A strict English-only approach is considered unfeasible in the classroom as it drives some students to leave the class and attend other teachers' lessons (Hasan) or even have private lessons (Umar). This represents one of the visible forms of resistance to change illustrated by Wedell:

... an immediate reaction to an abrupt unsupported shift from one situation to the other among those who will be affected (local administrators, institutional leaders, inspectors as well as teachers) is likely to be some form of visible or invisible 'resistance' (2009: 12-13).

Students' resistance to new ways of learning also features in Richards and Pennington's (1998) study of communicative teaching in Hong Kong.

Second, based on the environment discussed above, most teachers believe that L1 use does not seem to be an option as much as a ‘necessary’ or ‘essential’ pedagogical tool. It is particularly helpful for their explanations and students’ understanding of grammar, explaining questions, checking understanding, clarifying instructions or vocabulary meanings, overcoming communication breakdown, fostering engagement and co-construction of knowledge and meaning. These functions confirm similar findings of other empirical studies in different contexts (Greggio and Gil, 2007; Macaro, 1995, 2000, 2006; Nagy, 2009; Eldridge, 1996; Ustunel, 2004; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989). In relation to grammar, Cook (2005: 59) argues that:

If the goal is for students to understand the grammar itself rather than to benefit from the incidental language involved, the teacher has to choose the best vehicle for conveying this, which may be the first language, as indeed many teachers already prefer.

Howatt (2004: 259) also points out that “the basic position of ELT on this issue [translation]” is “try to avoid switching between languages, but obviously you will have to translate if you want to make sure that the learners understand what they are doing”. Attempting to find answers to what impact and reactions the Ministry’s call for exclusive use of L2 has on the classroom and what challenges teachers and learners face in Korea, Liu *et al.* (2004) have found overcoming communication difficulties a key driver of L1 use.

Third, another important underlying rationale for the teachers’ recourse to L1 is of an interpersonal nature (Maher, Sameh, Huda, Abeer). Maher observes that “*The most important reason for me to use Arabic is to be close to students*” because an English-only approach in his teaching environment “*places the teacher at*

distance from his students". Huda asserts that limited L1 use can motivate shy students. Translation has had positive effects on students' affective and cognitive development as "*they got interested in English more*" because understanding English better and to like it and the class too" (Abeer). This affective aspect is line with previous research conducted by Macaro (1995) in Italy and by Copland & Neokleous (2011) in Cyprus in which teachers' views are based on their perceptions of creating a stress-free environment.

Fourth, the majority of the teachers believe that teachers' employment of L1 does not indicate those teachers' degree/lack of English proficiency. Instead, the students' proficiency levels and the teaching/learning 'habits' are identified as the main reasons. While this finding contradicts the lack of (or limited) L2 proficiency reported in Liu *et al.*(2004), Carless's (2004a) and Nagy & Robertson (2009), it confirms other studies linking L1 use to students' abilities (Mitchell 1988; Macaro 1997; Littlewood, 2007; Crawford 2004, cited in Hall & Cook 2012: 295; Raschka *et al.*, 2009). My interpretation to the contradiction can be based on how the majority of the Syrian teachers participating in my study have insisted on conducting the interviews in English despite being given the option to speak in Arabic. This demonstrates confidence, proficiency and, perhaps, identity as teachers of English.

In relation to students, the data reveal noteworthy findings. Teachers unanimously agree on their students' preferences to the English-Arabic approach reported to be a common practice, and they may prefer the English-only approach in non-assessed lessons. It can be argued that a pattern of students' language choice seems to emerge in the lesson transcripts in conformity with teachers' language choices. Whilst students in Chapters (5 & 7) translate almost everything in response

to Maher's and Salma's word-by-word translation approach, due to Umar's relatively strict language choice (Chapter 4), students do not attempt to volunteer translation unless the teacher has already indicated that the focus is on word meanings. This is similar to Carless's (2004a) finding that students' language use is influenced by their teachers' models of target language/mother tongue in the classroom. In my study, students' translation also appears to give the students a sense of achievement, even in grammar exercises, (Maher) and, in fact, the rationale provided by Salma for her students' willingness to contribute with translations is that it shows that they are 'good students'.

As a final point, Howatt (2004: 155) explains that one of the central principles of the Reform Movement is "the adoption of a basically monolingual teaching methodology through the use of the foreign language as the normal means of communication in the language classroom". However, the author stresses that this principle "never meant 'banning' the use of the mother tongue, except in the more extreme versions of the Direct Method" (*ibid.*).

Repetition

Repetition is a recurrent aspect in the three core teachers' classroom practices. It is a significant emerging theme which Umar identifies as an essential teaching strategy to develop students' listening (input) which only comes from the teacher, being the sole source of English in the classroom. It is also employed to improve listening to the pronunciation of the vocabulary and to ensure comprehension. Although Umar believes in the native-speaker model, he has developed repetition as a locally-produced strategy/alternative to technology transfer (Holliday, 1994) due to under-

resourced contexts in which there is no equipment to do listening practice. Repetition also features in classroom discourse as a technique the teacher uses to ask students to repeat their good classmates' answers to develop students' listening as well as sentence structure awareness from peers. For Salma (Chapter 7), the goal of repetition is enabling memorisation of grammar rules.

Accuracy/fluency and error correction

Whilst Umar appears to highly appreciate, emphasise and favour linguistic accuracy over content in students' responses, Salma consistently follows an indirect correction technique in which she questions rather than immediately corrects the students' output (Alyasin, 2010). Salma's practice, she comments, is guided by her own cognitions and prior experience as a student (Borg, 2003) which state that initiating self or peer correction is conducive to learning. In fact, closely relevant to this is Numrich's (1999, cited in Borg 2003: 88) study in which they found that teachers avoided correcting errors because "their own experiences" of this aspect of "L2 instruction has been negative".

Despite the belief that errors are a natural part and outcome of language learning and development (Mitchell, 1994; Freeman and Anderson, 2011), the data show that teachers' practices and reasoning on error correction vary. This finding seems to go line with Nunan and Lamb's (1996: 68) view that "The way teachers deal with students' errors depends basically on their own beliefs on the nature of the learning process, an awareness of students' needs, and the objectives of the course". Thus, there is a need to acknowledge diversity in teachers' local approaches to dealing with students' linguistic output.

In fact, the collective findings in relation to how Syrian teachers make sense of the curriculum echo Orafi's (2008) findings that a long time after introducing a communicative curriculum into Libyan schools, classrooms are mostly teacher-centred and substantial time seems to be spent on reading, vocabulary, translation into Arabic and error correction. This is also in line with the view that:

Despite decades of educational research, and numerous attempts to introduce more 'communicative', 'learner centred' approaches to education systems worldwide, many features of (language) teaching and learning in most systems remain at, or gravitate back towards, features of [transmission-based classrooms] (Wedell & Malderez 2013: 205).

One contribution of the study, I believe, is in agreement with Sefraj's (2014: 89) idea that with policymakers' initiatives to mirror western models of education:

At present, little evidence is available on how experienced teachers use textbooks and teachers' books, and even less is known about the connections between teacher cognition, teaching resources, and classroom practices when textbook instructions concerning operations in the classroom do not match teachers' views about how languages are learnt/taught.

8.1.2. Realities and Teachers as Agents of their own Practice

The discussion above indicates that ten years after the introduction of the new textbooks, teachers' understanding of their classroom realities continues to play the most significant role. The analysis chapters have shown that teachers have a key challenge which does not seem to be possible to resolve. One of the significant decisions they have to make relates to whether to teach in accordance with the curricular objectives or to cover the textbooks irrespective of meeting these targets. In the following sections, we can see inextricably intertwined factors which inform teachers as agents of their own pedagogical decisions and practices.

Contextual realities

Contextual challenges and realities represent an essential aspect which, along with beliefs and attitudes, guides the teachers' practices in their immediate teaching environments. Therefore, Borg (2009: 166-167) holds that "research into language teachers' cognitions and practices that does not attend to the context ... is ... conceptually flawed".

A major contextual challenge is reported to relate to the lack of teaching/learning resources necessary to meet the requirements of the curriculum. In their discussion of the feasibility of the CLT-based curricular principles, teachers indicate the lack/limitation of suitable and compatible classroom equipment, technological aids and listening materials. Identifying a series of interrelated problems, Rana expands on the difficulties that teachers encounter in having access to the audios, tape-recorder, CD player or even "a proper working socket". Despite her belief in listening as the most important skill, it was embarrassing for Hala to skip the listening activities due to unavailable materials. In some cases, even basic needs such as the textbooks may not be fully available for all the students, let alone the technological audio or video resources through which the books have been designed to be taught (Abeer, Salma). These problems can impede even the committed teachers who have believed in the urgent need for curriculum innovation and the recent approaches to teaching and learning. This situation is an example of a technological approach to educational innovation far removed from the realities of the ecosystem of the classroom (Tudor, 2003; Hu, 2005).

All the teachers in the study have also pointed to the unchanged exam system in parallel with the educational change in the country. Although the intended aims of the curriculum are to provide “regular, carefully staged practice in reading, listening, speaking and writing, where the emphasis is on practice and production of language” (Kilbey 2009: 4), the exam system does not appear to have changed to address, particularly, the listening and speaking skills which constitute the core tenets of language use in CLT around which the curriculum has been developed. Neither does it assess the students’ competence in terms of the production of language in the functional aspects advocated. As the tension between curricular goals and contextual realities has intensified, it has developed into a widely practised state of skipping exam-irrelevant parts of the books. In fact, as EFL contexts represent ‘cultural islands’ in which teachers more often than not can be the only providers of experience in the target language (and students do not have the opportunity to practise language outside the classroom), EFL teachers could be “doing the student a disservice” if the communicative focus of the class does not match with the examination that tests translation rather than oral skills (Ellis 1996: 215).

With these conflicting demands, the majority of teachers indicate that they are in a quandary whether to teach for language development and meeting the curricular targets or for preparing the students to pass their exams; tipping the scales in favour of the latter. Similar concerns are reported by Littlewood (2007: 245) as the systems of assessment in East Asian classrooms “fail to keep pace with other developments in the curriculum” because CLT does not “prepare students sufficiently well for the more traditional, form-oriented examinations which will determine their educational future”. These findings also confirm Wedell’s (2013)

view, in case studies in China and Oman, that there needs to be support from parts of and partners in the system. Contrary to the 10-year nationwide, holistic approach that covered all subjects (including English) and assessment formats in the latter case, the former reveals that:

The content and format of the high-stakes tests had not been changed to be consistent with the goals of the new curriculum ... [There was] lack of fit between what the curriculum claimed to want teachers to do, and what they needed to do in order to help learners pass the test (*ibid.*: 155).

In the context of educational innovation and implementation, teachers point out the lack of pre-/in-service teacher training opportunities relevant to CLT as a major hurdle. The majority of the teachers interviewed assert that they have never known the ‘how’ of the curriculum other than through having a copy of the Teacher’s Book. The only exception is Firas whose teaching, he believes, draws on a course he has been fortunate to attend at the British Council before his graduation. In his study of Syrian schools, Rajab (2013) considers teacher training an important element to the development of classroom interaction to meet the goals of the curriculum at Syrian schools (See my critique in 8.1.3).

In the Syrian education system, the inspectors’ roles include, *inter alia*, monitoring and appraisal. They are supposed to attend actual lessons in order to give the teachers feedback, suggestions and support as to the ‘how’ of teaching at state schools. One source of the challenges that most teachers share in the interviews seems to be the infrequent (or lack of) inspectors’ visits which are rather formalities than actual observation and feedback sessions. Despite the lack of communication (between staff and between supervisors and teachers) and lack of training, those inspectors are reported to insist on teachers to ‘apply’ the curricular guidelines in

their classrooms simply by reading the Teacher's Book. Teachers seem to show resistance and disagreement with the inspectors' suggestions, nonetheless (See Chapters 4, 5 & 7). Some teachers believe that the inspectors, supposedly responsible for developing teachers' skills, are themselves neither serious nor qualified to give guidance and support to teachers. These findings confirm Wedell's (2009a: 1) view that the prospect of change may be viewed differently according to the confidence those involved have in their local and national leadership. Those educational leaders' sole role in change seems to entail passing on a document with limited information from 'above' to teachers to implement (*ibid.* :4).

In addition to the above challenges, all the teachers find large classes a challenging factor to the implementation of CLT principles in their classrooms. As the teachers believe that the pedagogical approach of the books does not address the Syrian context, their classroom realities inform their decisions to avoid involving the students in collaborative activities which require student-student interaction. Similarly, large classes heavily influence the teachers' decisions not to implement CLT in other studies (Hiep, 2007; Richards and Pennington, 1998; Li, 1998). Holliday (1994: 170) argues that the learning group ideal suggested in the literature of CLT works in BANA contexts "in classes of fifteen students, with the right acoustics and furnishings, where the students are mainly adults who come to class with the specific purpose of learning English and are prepared to conform to the learning group ideal". Students' level seems to be an issue highlighted on many occasions for various themes. Most teachers point out the gap between the time the students have spent learning English (from Year 1) and their English competence levels (Umar, Maher, Salma, Sameh and Firas). One important reason for this

weakness is linked to the shortage of specialised English teachers, particularly in the primary stage (Umar). Awareness of the students' weaknesses seems to inform teachers' classroom practices (Umar, Maher, Hala) irrespective of what the books aim to achieve at that particular stage. The students' multi-level abilities in class also constitute a factor that contributes to teachers' negotiations and compromises of guidelines as well as the textbooks content (Firas, Aalaa). In the teachers' comments and views, there is a consensus that time is another challenge to implement the curriculum as the "stuffed" textbooks offer more than the limited and insufficient time allows, particularly with 3 teaching periods a week for a large class.

The above collective findings seem to meet Nunan's (2003: 589) conclusion that English language policies and practices in several countries are actually failing due to the "disjunction between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality". As in Sakui's (2004: 162) study of Japanese secondary school English teachers' understanding and implementation of CLT, teachers frequently face external constraints including grammar-oriented exams, time constraints and rigid curriculum schedules. Therefore, the 10-year interaction between curriculum change and context and beliefs (including teachers' prior experiences) in Syria seems to have resulted in a melange of old and (feasible) new ELT practices.

Teachers' beliefs and agency

Although essential due to teachers being frontline implementers, teacher agency seems to be totally ignored in the Syrian educational innovation initiative. Firas, for instance, points to the lack of any teacher involvement prior to or following introducing the curriculum. To Rana, teachers' voices/feedback on curriculum

feasibility, content, appropriacy to context and suggestions for improvement were not sought by the ministry of education due to the top-down policy. This demonstrates lack of interest to involve teachers neither in pre-implementation planning nor in implementation stages, which leads to less awareness of the practicality of the innovation on the part of the MoE. It is suggested by Savignon (2002: 4) that “Program design and implementation depend on negotiation between policy makers, linguists, researchers, and teachers”. Ensuring effective communication between educational planners and actual implementers is a source of feedback both essential for the appropriacy of the change and insightful for the next stages (Wedell and Malderez, 2013).

Nevertheless, the ministry’s lack of awareness does not in practice prevent teachers’ agency as they seem to ecologically develop suitable teaching approaches for their immediate classroom contexts. Whilst teachers continue to resist the innovation, the MoE seems to take no steps to address the implementation issues and challenges. Nunan’s (2003) study, which investigated several countries (Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam), concluded that CLT policies and practices failed, particularly in state schools. Several empirical studies have explored educational innovation and identified contextual realities and teacher beliefs as key (non)implementation factors (Karavas-Doukas, 1995; Hiep, 2007; Richards and Pennington, 1998; Nunan, 2003; Sakui, 2004; Orafi, 2008).

Instead of only pinpointing constraints in difficult circumstances, my study appreciates teacher agency and investigates teachers’ own practices, perspectives and suggestions (Smith, 2011, 2014; Nakabugo *et al.*, 2008) as active participants in order to establish directions to bridging the gap between educational planning and

implementation. Thus, my findings correspond with Littlewood's (2007: 248) study on East Asian contexts where trusting teachers' voices can be a source to "develop a pedagogy suited to their own specific situations", adapting instead of adopting others' experiences and ideas. Seferaj (2014: 101) also emphasises EFL teachers' say in change initiatives decision-making stages in order for reforms to "best suit the teaching/learning reality". Indeed, as change is seen as a process rather than a product, Freeman (2013: 128) states:

The change process is not simply achieving a specifically intended outcome. It includes, or, better put, is situated within a social fabric of sense-making, which is, by definition, local. So ... both the locus and process of educational change are inherently local or situated.

Consequently, the expectation that teachers would simply change their views about teacher and student roles and hence change their classroom practices has not been given careful consideration by the reform planners. The gap between reform rhetoric and classroom reality lies in understanding the cultural aspects involved in implementing 'imported' teacher-student roles associated with ELT methodology. This is actually an example of what Wedell (2009a: 16) terms 'radical' change in the education system which aims to move from "accurate transmission of knowledge" to developing "learners' ability to acknowledge and understand different points of view, and through thought, interaction and experience, learn how to construct their own, more personal knowledge". An essential aim of my focus on language teacher cognition, which is a young domain particularly in EFL contexts, helps "policy makers become more sensitive to the key role teachers—and their cognitions—play in the implementation of educational innovations" (Borg 2006: 1).

Reflective practice in challenging circumstances: research as an opportunity

As clearly stated throughout the chapter, most of the teachers interviewed in the study have conceptualised their initial ELT teaching based on their prior (language) learning experiences in which rote learning was predominant. This actually confirms Seferaj's (2014) findings in Albania. Unlike other professionals, when they start their career, teachers will have had "plenty of opportunities for the implicit (more or less conscious) learning of teaching" as students merely by 'exposure to others' teaching' (Wedell & Malderez 2013: 135).

One of the key findings of my thesis is that there is hardly any opportunity for reflective/professional practice at Syrian state schools. This study has, therefore, been interpreted as a training opportunity in which the teachers have not only participated or expressed their thoughts, but also reflected on their practices which they (in many cases) may not have had the chance to think about before this occasion. Indeed, as indicated by Garton (2008: 85):

... the practical aim of teacher beliefs and classroom practice must be to empower teachers themselves ... to become more aware of who they are as teachers, what they do and why, thereby allowing them to establish their own professional development agenda

This research is an attempt for reflective practice to be cultivated (Nakabugo *et al.*, 2008) in the Syrian school environments. It endeavours to provide this opportunity for the Syrian teachers to professionally develop from reflecting on their own classroom practices and experiences and from voicing their perspectives on ELT. This aspect is in line with Farrell's (2007) view that the top-down approaches

to training have often had a limited impact as “teachers have been expected to learn about their own profession by studying the findings of outside experts, but not by studying their own experiences”. One of the two potentially key and more satisfactory explanations to the inappropriate curriculum innovation in the Philippines is “the existence of ‘intercultural’ tensions between the policy-making and implementation levels in innovation contexts” (Waters & Vilches 2008: 22). This situation of two different ‘universes’ represented by the government curriculum policy and the school implementation levels has brought about “a ‘two cultures’ situation, where the policy level ‘ethos’ may exhibit a lack of empathy for that of the implementation level” (*ibid.* 20). In fact, as the data show, these two universes, where intercultural communication (if any communication at all) between policy and implementers is extremely difficult, similarly exhibit in the Syrian context. The reality is that teachers make sense of the curriculum in practice as feasible rather than as ideally suggested. Therefore, instead of categorising realities as ‘difficult’ conditions in comparison with ideal imported versions of pedagogy and masking diversity in classroom situations, it is important to explore teachers’ own thoughts (Smith, 2015b).

The discussion in the previous two sections can be understood in light of the interaction between contextual forces and teacher beliefs and agency, aspects acknowledged in the literature of educational innovation but rarely considered the starting point for a realistic and viable change (Wedell, 2009) within and despite difficult circumstances (Smith, 2014; Kuchah, 2013).

8.1.3. Towards a Context-sensitive Viable ELT Innovation: Capitalising upon Local Implementers' Beliefs and Experiences

The findings in the analysis chapters collectively indicate that the *EFS* curriculum is context-insensitive in many aspects. It has become essential to move towards recognising the implementers' capital, from conformity to complexity and diversity. Based on her case study of two teachers who are very successful despite their disparate belief systems, Garton (2008) calls for recognising diversity to supersede concepts such as 'best method'. There is a clear need in Syria for ELT pedagogies "firmly anchored to the specific strengths that local practitioners bring to the classroom, where the local teachers' voices are heard, and where the teaching/learning process is carried out in a more critical and context sensitive way" (Rubdy 2008: 1).

All the approaches/paradigm shifts elucidated in the Literature Review (Chapter 2) originate from an inextricably interwoven interest in both 'context-sensitive' orientation to ELT and appreciation of the significance of teacher beliefs (Borg, 2006, 2009) in shaping innovation (or method) implementation in everyday teaching. Appropriate methodology drawing on the CLT Approach and validated as fits the teaching environment is advocated by Holliday (1994, 2005). Oscillating to the far end of the pendulum, Kumaravadivelu's (2001, 2003, 2006) postmethod pedagogy places significant importance on the bottom-up approach in which teachers critically analyse their context and participants' needs and establish their own personal teaching theories and approaches. In his conceptualisation of a postmethod pedagogic explorer, Kumaravadivelu (2001: 554) holds that research should belong

to “the multiple domains of learners, teachers, and teacher educators alike” rather than to that of the researcher. His ideal framework, when taking into consideration the teachers as the best decision-makers in a given context, ignores the very fact of the challenge of how, when and who to empower teachers with the (research) skills needed to inform their critical analyses and decisions. Easier said than done, his three-dimensional system and framework would provide teachers with a mechanism “to begin to theorise from their practice and practice what they theorize” (2003: 43). In underdeveloped contexts such as Syria, this postmethod, revolutionary concept, when attempting to reconcile (indeed, merge) the dichotomy between teachers and theorists, produces additional challenges in resources and time. With a dearth of teacher training and staff communication, it would be neither practical nor attainable to suggest the notion of teachers as pedagogic explorers.

In recognising teacher’s perspectives and how they make sense of the curriculum in light of contextual realities, researchers tend to avoid treading the road less travelled. This road goes beyond identifying gaps between innovation and implementation to curve around contextual realities and consider them the starting point for locally developed pedagogies. This perspective enables us to achieve what Richards (1996: 281) points to as “the need to listen to teachers’ voices in understanding classroom practice .. to understand teaching from the inside”. Listening to teachers’ voices seeks “to understand teaching in its own terms and in ways in which it is understood by teachers” (*ibid.*: 282). In my study, the three focal teachers’ reflections on their practices (Chapter 4, 5 & 7) as well as the eleven teachers’ views (Chapter 6) have provided rich insights into the observable and unobservable dimensions of education innovation implementation. Hence, we can

appreciate teachers' actual views on teaching instead of only assessing their compliance with the version of teaching the MoE theoretically supposes.

Although studies have been conducted elsewhere, a piece of research looking into the complexity and diversity through the teachers' eyes and attempting to establish a context-sensitive approach to ELT teaching and learning has not been undertaken in Syria. A bottom-up approach seeking development within the existing constraints can outweigh the top-down perspective of the Syrian MoE. Constraints can be turned into advantage and treated as conditions for the design of appropriate methodology (Holliday, 1992). Such an approach throws light on frontline implementers' voices and empowers their teaching beliefs and practices.

In his survey study of 290 elementary EFL reading teachers' readiness to educational reform in Lebanon based on recent trends in foreign language acquisition theories and teaching methodologies, Gaith (2003) concludes that the teaching of reading is more focused on phonics and pronunciation instead of skills. The two possible explanations he provides to this conclusion include the teachers' lack of exposure to these recent trends in teaching EFL reading and their drawing on their past experiences and training as students as well as teachers. My study rather elicits teachers' responses to educational innovation through different sources of data instead of drawing on surveys. The rationale behind this both to gain nuanced views and to have teachers' reflections on actual practices. Therefore, I believe that Orafi's (2009), Gaith's (2003) and Rajab's (2013) studies seem to concentrate more on policy implementation success factors and constraints rather than suggest an alternative paradigm in which teachers' voices and practices become the starting point for change. Instead of investigating Syrian teachers as 'ignorant subjects'

(Holliday 2005: 149), my study attempted to address the gap of ignoring teachers' voices in how they in practice make sense of their teaching and act as agents of their own practice in the classroom.

In line with Seferaj's (2014) conclusion, Sameh (Chapter 6) clearly states the importance of starting reform from the reality of the classrooms:

"I believe the Teacher's Book is not suitable at all ... The way suggested doesn't suit the number of students and the nature of students. It is for different situations. Whoever suggested this way of teaching should first have come to the environment, to the schools, then the suggestions will be more logical, to start from reality". (Sameh)

Teachers' perspectives on their classroom practices and, in particular, their suggestions for a viable curriculum innovation appear to present a wealth of guidance for Syrian teachers to consider an appropriate rather than an imported ELT approach.

First, they accentuate the need to redress ELT at state schools through attention to bottom-up training courses (Sameh, Rana, Firas) in which trainers teach real classes with all their contextual challenges rather than theorise about ideal, imported approaches. A 'normative-re-educative' approach implies that 'teacher development must take place in the workshop context **and** in the workplace' (Karavas-Doukas 1998: 36, original emphasis, cited in Wedell 2009b: 397). Whilst Rajab's (2013) study in Syria focuses on developing teacher training in order to enhance classroom interaction that meets the curriculum, it ignores many other key factors that will still exist even if these suggestions are taken into account by the MoE. My study discusses essential challenges such as teacher beliefs and contextual realities that do not seem to change in the near future in a developing country, further undermined by war. Therefore, instead of a top-down training mechanism, I propose

a bottom-up realistic ELT pedagogy in which rather than foreign specialists, local experts “who fully understand the linguistic, educational, and cultural needs of local EFL teachers ... have to take a more active role in developing teacher training” (Seferaj 2014: 101). Another step can be establishing channels of communication between experienced teachers and novice teachers wherein the latter group observe and learn from the former group’s ‘good practices’ (Rana). An initial small-scale implementation (leading to a community of teacher) before implementing change nationwide will be helpful. This vision relates to other studies which highlight the practicality of embracing what teachers find to be ‘good practices’ in their local contexts (Kuchah, 2013; Nathheeraphong, 2013). In response to the failure of top-down educational change initiatives, Smith (2014) points to the positive power of teachers transforming themselves through sharing successes achieved within their own circumstances, which can support contextually appropriate methodologies. This is also in line with Widdowson’s view that local teachers are “naturally in a better position to construct the relevant classroom contexts and make the learning process *real*” (1996: 68, my italics).

Most teachers (find it vital to) exercise their agencies in tailoring curriculum according to classroom realities irrespective of innovation goals. They believe that they can better judge their students’ needs and what is suitable for them than the inspectors (Huda, Maher, Umar, Hala). Therefore, empowering agency should be the starting point for a practical change in (English language) teaching and learning because “The more ‘agency’ implementers feel they have, the more likely they are to feel satisfied with the ongoing effects of the change process” (Wedell & Malderez 2013: 216). Despite recognising the mismatch between educational innovation and

implementation due to contextual and cultural factors, Orafi (2008) points to the importance of changing teachers, classrooms and schools in parallel with the significant innovation shifts. I would argue that changing a country's culture in response to ELT (or even general) curriculum innovation is far too optimistic. Instead, a realistic suggestion to the MoE can be capitalising on teachers' experiences and listening to their voices. Teachers' experience and knowledge of the local needs and possibilities in their realities contribute to further developing context-appropriate pedagogy. As highlighted by Smith's interview (2015b), bottom-up exploration can be empowering because:

finding out what challenges teachers face, from their perspectives, and what solutions they can imagine, is actually much more worthwhile in the long run than coming in with quick-fix solutions.

The teachers interviewed (Chapter 6) also believe that affective relationships with the students can be conducive to learning. This confirms Tomlinson's (2003: 19) view that affective engagement is "essential for effective and durable learning". It similarly echoes the beliefs of one of Garton's (2008: 73) two participants in the study, Charlotte, whose route to learning is through establishing a positive affective environment wherein students are "interested, engaged and enjoying themselves".

What is (locally) interesting for students seemed to be hailed by teachers in their descriptions of their most successful lessons. Therefore, it is important to build on local teachers' experiences of successful stories/moments of success and creativity of enhancing students' engagement through personalising content. This confirms Smith' (2014: 6) view that identifying successes despite difficulties in a bottom-up exploration of 'good practices' contributes to a promising direction for teacher development and appropriate methodologies.

Some teachers indicate that educational change must address all subjects (not only English) to be effective. It is establishing a teaching/learning culture that must be consistent. Even if English teachers have training programmes and develop their teaching skills, students will have a problem unresolved, how to reconcile their English language learning experience with the overarching learning experience of other subjects at state schools in Syria. This is due to the fact that other subjects' teachers do not follow interactive teaching methods similar to those advocated in the English curriculum. It is argued by Adey (2004: 24) that "individual teacher finds it virtually impossible to maintain a radically new form of teaching while colleagues around them in the same school remain untouched by the innovation". Twenty years ago, this incompatibility between the wider teacher-centred educational philosophy and the learner-centred approach of the English curriculum has been identified as one factor for the failure of innovation in Greece (Karavas-Doukas, 1995). To successfully teach English, reassessment of the whole educational system in Syria in light of context sensitivity should be accomplished. English teaching, this way, represents part of an organic unit that must be addressed more holistically if good outcomes are expected. A locally produced 'teaching and learning culture', thus, incorporates innovation in all other subjects in that neither teachers nor students have to switch to a different teaching/learning culture once the English teacher leaves the classroom. All teachers' (including English teachers') perceptions, therefore, represent necessary elements in the shaping of this organic whole. This finding corroborates Seferaj's (2014: 99) results in a case study of an Albanian teacher's interpretation of CLT in her EFL secondary school classroom context. While the ministry has introduced top-down directives and curriculum to change deep-rooted-transmission-model teaching/learning, the teacher's comment on pair work is:

[it] simply does not work ... our students ... never do any pair work or things like that in other geography/mathematics classes. Are they expected to be taught by each other just in one subject, English? ... these ideas originate from either politicians or educational theorists who are largely ignorant of classroom practice.

In fact, in parallel with the above findings revealing Syrian teachers as agents of their own practice, the literature on ELT in difficult circumstances (See 2.4.1) moved from discussing constraining issues (Çakmak, 2009; Emery, 2012; Englehart, 2006; Jimakorn & Singhasiri, 2006; Kumar, 1992; Watson Todd, 2006) towards looking positively for ‘good’ and ‘appropriate’ ELT (Kuchah, 2013) and developing appropriate methodology ‘from the bottom up’ (Smith, 2011) as developed and identified by teachers themselves in their own under-resourced contexts.

In the following section, I discuss the impact of armed conflicts in Syria on education, with particular attention on ELT, teachers and students.

8.2. Teacher Agency in Crisis Circumstances and the Impact of War on ELT in Syria

8.2.1. Disruption and Destruction

As contemporary armed conflicts have increasingly shifted in nature to take place “in the towns, villages and homes of ordinary people” rather than on “demarcated battlefields”, the majority of casualties, refugees and displaced people are civilians, particularly women and children (Davies 2004: 3). Indeed, in circumstances of conflict, emergencies:

cause major disruption of education systems. Schools and colleges are often damaged during armed conflict, or used for temporary accommodation of people rendered homeless or displaced by war...; and students, teachers and

their families may seek safety in other countries as refugees (Sinclair 2007: 52).

The description above literally applies to what has been taking place in Syria for the past four years. Two of the three focal teachers in the study have become refugees in Turkey, one teaching in the camp school while the other is jobless, and of the large group of interviewees (Chapters 7& 8), two are displaced and six have become refugees in different countries. Many other teachers are reported to have changed their teaching careers, and thousands of schools have been damaged or destroyed. These findings go in line with the impact of war on Bosnia in 2000 (Davies, 2004). Similar conditions in the study of Standing *et al.* (2012: 378) in Nepal show the direct impact of a 10-year conflict on education:

The impact on student performance cannot be underestimated, leaving students feeling exasperated and having little hope for their educational future.

8.2.2. Educational ‘Resilience’: Teacher Agency to Create Normalcy

Davies (2004: 95) discusses “the notion of ‘resilient schools’: how some schools remain operational even in the midst of extreme conflict and danger”. As emphasised by the author, the key to resilience is teachers who exercise their sense of agency “of doing something in the face of adversity” (*ibid.* : 108). In a conflict-affected context where teachers and students struggle to live with displacement and war legacies “while the content [of education] may be traditional, the aims and effects are startlingly transformative” (*ibid.* : 108). Here we can see Firas’s and Aalaa’s inspiring roles in displacement schools in Aleppo despite all the war challenges. They are teaching in a different school in difficult (and war-torn) situations where they and their students are displaced. Relevant are also Salma’s and Ali’s

volunteering initiatives in teaching at the camp school once established in Southern Turkey. Salma emphasises her sense of agency in the following interview quote:

“...I do my best to give them the needed information to teach them properly as many people lost interest in education during this critical period. The most important thing now is education, I feel guilty if I don’t teach properly”.

With the war circumstances, Firas’s first priority in a school for a majority of displaced students is “*to have them [students] like school*” (Chapter 7). He clearly indicates that he has been successful to teach ‘2 units out of 25’ only because, similarly to Salma and Samer, he cares less about teaching according to the curriculum. Education (part of which is ELT) in war/conflict times can be an enabling factor to bring a sense of normality (Sinclair, 2007; Standing *et al.*, 2012) and a ‘sense of purpose for the future’ (Winthrop & Mendenhall 2006: 2) which Salma (Chapter 7) struggles to instil in her students in the camp school.

The findings corroborate the view that despite being enshrined in international law, children’s right to education is “violated on a regular basis” during war (Tomlinson & Benefield, 2005, cited in Standing *et al.* 2012: 372). With particular relevance to the importance of education for children’s development and skills and country’s long-term peace, a UNICEF report on Syria warns that:

Another year without education, without adequate support to overcome their psychological traumas, another year of ill-health and stifled growth, another year of exposure to brutalizing violence will be another year too many for Syria’s children. It will mean the irrevocable loss of the skills and understanding they will need as adults, to play their part in the reshaping of their nation and the restoration of stability to the region. Millions of young people risk becoming, in effect, a lost generation (Under Siege 2014: 2).

On many occasions in the analysis chapters (6 & 7), teachers have expressed similar worries.

8.2.3. Towards Conflict-sensitive ELT Pedagogies

English language teaching “in difficult circumstances” has recently attracted attention in the field (Kuchah & Smith, 2011). This thesis, however, endeavours to extend the concept of “difficult circumstances” to go beyond typical contextual challenges and include conflict-affected and war-related situations. Whilst Poirier (2012) examines the effects of armed conflict on schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1950 to 2010 retrospectively, the objective of my study is throwing light on the impact of the current war on education in Syria, specifically ELT.

Several studies point to the importance and effectiveness of providing participatory and learner-centred teaching to conflict-affected children (Sinclair, 2002; Nicholai & Triplehorn, 2003, cited in Kagawa, 2005). However, as is the case of Salma and as illustrated by Davies & Talbot (2008: 514), teachers in conflict situations “may be untrained or poorly trained. They may lack confidence even in conventional methods, let alone what are seen as more radical ones”. Progressive methods (which draw on learner-centred teaching to enable critical thinking and critical exploration) may be seen as time consuming in an overcrowded curriculum and to contradict the drive for examination passing, qualifications, and jobs, which are very important for giving students hope in the midst of fragile situations (*ibid.*: 514).

The ELT field needs original studies *in* and *for* conflict-affected contexts in order to work with ELT volunteers and teachers on eliciting and developing further ideas to encourage context-sensitive local pedagogies. As asserted by Tabulawa (2003), it is very challenging to introduce ‘once-size-fit-all pedagogy’ in developing countries as well as emergency education. The findings in Chapters (6 & 7) show

that neither teachers nor students are willing or trained to change classroom practices since there are far more priorities than progressive pedagogies such as participatory and learner-centred approaches. Teachers' key concerns are essentially to bring back children to schools and to be able to address their traumas. In Chapter 7, although the textbooks for other subjects have been partly edited, the camp school uses the *English for Starters* home country English curriculum. Based on the belief that these refugees will go back to Syria, the concept of using the home country curriculum is an example of 'education for repatriation' (Sinclair, 2002; Kagawa, 2005) which may provide practical convenience and a sense of security. Indeed, with all the challenges discussed in Chapter (7) such as understaffing, unqualified teachers, displaced and traumatised children with interrupted schooling, ELT in displacement schools and the refugee camp would have been a further burden for both the teachers and the students if a different curriculum was adopted. Nevertheless, integrating psychosocial interventions in the process and content of teaching/learning is found to improve traumatised students' educational potential and recovery (Sommers, 2002) and to restore their sense of purpose and self-esteem (Kagawa, 2005). The ELT literature has recently witnessed a shift towards developing ecological pedagogies (Tudor, 2003; Hu, 2005; Kramsch 2008) and appreciating English language teaching in 'normally' difficult circumstances (Kuchah & Smith, 2011). In this study, however, a new dimension is to consider ways to extend the ELT literature to 'crisis' situations and recognise conflict-affected ELT as a research area in which locally produced pedagogies are encouraged and supported within the constraints of displacement and refugee camp schools. An essential aspect of these pedagogies, it appears, would need to involve interdisciplinary empirical research in order to identify teachers' and students' key concerns and realities and develop feasible

thoughts *with* and *for* teachers as well as students to be empowered to deal with their immediate situations and needs (See 8.2.4).

8.2.4. Teacher Development in Conflict-affected Contexts: Training beyond ELT

My research seemed to have assisted enthusiastic teachers such as Aalaa, Firas, Salma and Ali to reflect on their work in exceptional war-affected circumstances, serving as an opportunity for teacher development. The intervention in collecting data and prompting Salma to reflect on her lesson transcripts (Chapter 7) worked as an eye-opener as I emphasised the teachers' own rationale and justifications for her ELT pedagogy in that particular context. It was strikingly inspiring to see Salma's motivation to record her own lessons and send them to me as she saw that experience a valuable training opportunity.

However, there appears to be a need for conflict-affected ELT as an emergent research area to draw on or conduct interdisciplinary empirical research, particularly sensitive to teachers' and students' challenges and practical solutions. Despite Salma's awareness of her own and her students' traumatic experiences, there does not seem to be a training programme for teachers to address these psychological needs and overcome these difficulties as such (Sommers, 2002). In the camp school, Salma and Ali were unable to attract the students' attention and pointed to several issues that distract the students from education altogether (traumatic experiences such as imprisonment and/or killing of parents, witnessing bombing and shelling; living circumstances such as camp tents and caravans and loss of hope). Similar concerns are expressed by other teachers in situations of displacement (Firas, Rana).

These reflect findings from other reports and studies wherein some students “worry about so many other things” that they do not understand or focus because “they’re frustrated, because their mom was kidnapped, because their dad died” (Munter *et al.* 2012: 57-85). These circumstances evidently influence students’ focus in the classroom (Wachob & Williams, 2010; Nelson & Appleby 2014) who “need maximum attention from the teachers’ (Sinclair 2007: 54).

It has become important to make sure that “teachers, who themselves have witnessed the unspeakable horrors of the Syria conflict, are prepared to take on their role as healers and role models is of the utmost importance” (Guler, 2013). As teachers have also been victims of Syria’s war, it is equally crucial to keep them motivated. Truly, as is the case with some teachers in my study, Nelson & Appleby (2014: 19) indicate that another interrelated challenge to strengthening the teachers’ capacities is that “Some of these teachers are themselves refugees and in situations as dire as their students’, whereas other teachers are struggling to connect with and engage students”. These conflict circumstances involve traumatic experiences to which traumatised teachers and students alike have seemed to have little experience, if any, to overcome. There is emphasis on teachers’ roles to move into uncharted waters, in that they need to be familiar with aspects that lie beyond their teaching expertise as ‘educators’ to involve war-affected pedagogy. In Sierra Leone camps, since war-affected and traumatised children “often do not want to talk about their experiences”, outward expression activities such as sports, play, drama, drawing pictures and telling stories are confirmed by teachers in the RapidEd programme to have “made a large positive impact on the children’s behaviour, who opened up more easily and became less aggressive” (Davies 2004: 150-151). Therefore, one of

the pressing challenges to TESOL at times of unprecedented displacement is “to strengthen teachers’ capacities to serve the needs of English language learners who either are in conflict situations or have lived through them, and who often have few material resources but abundant legacies of trauma—*refugees of mind*” (Nelson & Appleby 2014: 19).

Thus, the final layer of my research examined “the challenges affecting the education of those living in a conflict zone as well as those who have fled or been exiled from one” (Nelson & Appleby 2014: 4). This investigation particularly focuses on possibly uncharted waters in emergency education, ELT in a refugee camp school by a local teacher (Salma, Chapter 7) who herself is a refugee and ELT teachers in displacement. Indeed, conflict-affected English language education has not yet been acknowledged as a research area (*ibid.*). It is hoped that this aspect of the study highlighting the on-the-ground difficulties experienced by English language teachers and students affected by war can be a contribution to what Nelson and Appleby (2014: 1) describe as a need in TESOL for “a robust research base that can provide informed, critical guidance in preparing English language teachers for work in and near conflict zones, for teaching refugees and asylum seekers, and, more broadly, for teaching English in highly militarized times”.

Summary

This chapter has revealed the collective key findings in relation to the research questions and the literature. It moved from identifying challenges in difficult circumstances due to the top-down nature of the change to establishing new directions that celebrate diversity and local teachers’ voices from the bottom up. I also discussed ELT Syrian teachers’ situations and initiatives during the armed

conflict, emphasising teacher agency in crisis circumstances and the urgent need for conflict-sensitive ELT pedagogies.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Taken together, the chapters of this thesis explore English language teaching at Syrian state schools in pre-war circumstances, in displacement and in a refugee camp in Turkey. The chapters have incorporated different sources of data that involve both actual classroom practices and teachers' views.

9.1. Summary of Key Findings

Several important conclusions from this study can be made. It has been shown that one key finding is to appreciate how teachers make sense of their teaching in their actual classroom contexts. Teachers' perspectives represented by their own voices being given the opportunity to express what they believe to be a feasible local pedagogy seem to be a rich source for informing viable rather than ideal classroom practices. Therefore, teacher agency in relation to contextual realities has featured as one of the significant factors which impact not only on their teaching approaches, but also our understanding of their rationale for these approaches.

The results of the study confirm the view that “policy-makers need to be aware of what is happening in the classroom, and how the participants in the classroom are putting policy into practice” (Martin 2005: 94). A key reason for the frequent failure of large-scale ELT educational change initiatives is the failure to recognise that such initiatives are complex (Wedell, 2011). Drawing the attention of

the Syrian policymakers to such aspects would enable them to reconsider serious issues of ‘adequate funding’ and ‘teacher education’ (Nunan 2003: 591) in addition to factors and challenges before and during introducing new plans. Developing such awareness in the Syrian educational system not only assists appreciating how the policy is put into practice, but also encourages and motivates policy-makers to realise how to make a realistically appropriate policy drawing on implementers’ understanding of the sociocultural environment of change.

Some serious issues still await resolution, and these include informing professional development in developing countries and conflict-affected education, preparing teachers to deal with education in displacement and war circumstances and finding ways to restore hope and aspirations for teachers and children.

9.2. Summary of Contributions

Waters (2009) indicates that although a substantial body of literature on innovation and change exists, significant lacunae still exist in terms of geographical situations such as the Middle East. My study, therefore, can be considered to have partly endeavoured to cover this gap. In this study, despite being key implementers, Syrian teachers’ voices do not receive any ‘key’ role by the Ministry of Education (MoE). Making teachers’ voices heard about how they make sense of the curriculum (Chapters 4-5-7) and what perspectives they have about realistic change to take place (Chapter 6) is a new dimension which was left unaddressed in the ELT studies on Syria.

In addition, the majority of the literature on education in emergencies/crisis situations is report-based, drawing on international organisations and agencies. My

empirical study, particularly Chapter (7), attempts to fill in this gap by providing practical insights into challenges and solutions (through interviews with displaced teachers and lessons and interviews with a refugee teacher in a camp school) about English education in conflict-affected circumstances.

One of the most significant aspects of this study, to me at least, is that it has had a naturally emerging training dimension which was not in my research plans. All the teachers have found participating in the study an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices, an opportunity the majority of the participants had never had prior to this study. Research on education in crisis situations or emergencies has been accentuated by several studies as significant to inform policies and bring normality, but it also serves to enhance teachers' professional development (Nelson & Appleby, 2014), particularly if geared to explore what teachers find viable in their immediate contexts.

I also have to acknowledge the importance of Skype, Viber and Facebook as invaluable research tools in my study which emerged unplanned due to the impossibility of travel to Syria. Facebook as a social utility has connected me with many of my colleagues, friends and students. If Salma and Ali had not connected with me on Facebook, I would have never known about their teaching at the camp school in Turkey. Neither would it have been possible to consider researching the camp school (Chapter 7).

9.3. Implications

This endeavour, it is hoped, may provide insights for policy makers, teacher educators and teachers. These insights are closely connected with practices,

challenges and teachers' perspectives regarding new policies about which teachers have had very little, if any, to say due to the top-down nature of the educational change. With the introduction of the MA programme in ELT Methods at the Higher Institutes for Languages at Syrian universities, this work shall be available for students, trainers and the teaching staff. In fact, this Syrian MA programme has been founded essentially to qualify graduates of English Language Departments to be prepared with sufficient knowledge and training in issues related to current language teaching methods, techniques and strategies, teaching and learning challenges and classroom research skills that they shall employ in their teaching at schools. The current research showcases empirical results from the same context, and by that it can both empower trainees and teachers with findings from their areas of interests and encourage them to conduct studies at various schools and offer practical perspectives on ELT in Syria. Thus, several implications can be drawn from the findings of the study on different levels.

9.3.1. Policy Makers

Several studies have pointed out the (in)consistency between educational innovations and teachers' cognitions. This study suggests reconciling those often cited as opposing worlds and instead seeing them as dynamically interwoven. Therefore, successful change needs to involve teachers as decision-makers because for materials to reflect and equally meet local needs, policymakers "need to avail themselves of the wisdom and experiences of teachers ... and learners" (Garton & Graves 2014: 274). If these lesson transcripts and the teachers' interviews provide a glimpse of hope for a new direction in the educational system where teachers' voices are heard

and suggestions taken seriously in the design and implementation of ELT curricula, my thesis would be a great satisfaction to me on a personal level.

The data have demonstrated some teachers' lack of confidence in inspectors who are presumably responsible for ensuring the implementation of educational plans at schools. There is an urgent need to regain (perhaps more accurately, establish) this confidence through enabling teachers to actually choose the right person to represent them instead of having the inspectors hierarchically imposed. They should also be experienced and knowledgeable teachers in order to speak from practice and reality, emphasising realistic rather than idealistic plans.

9.3.2. Governments and International Organisations

Governments should not only actively support education in crisis and emergencies, but also encourage research in this field of for two key reasons: first, to further develop this field; second, to “better inform the policymaking process” of their own ministries of education (Winthrop & Mendenhall 2006: 5). It is also important to support conflict-affected education because, as highlighted by Sinclair (2007: 52), “there is no way to be sure whether the wait will be for weeks, months, years or decades” if no action takes place until the displaced and refugees return home. The final layer of the thesis has attempted to offer some practical insights to ELT professionals, researchers, the UNHCR and ministries of education of countries immediately affected by the Syrian Crisis. The implications can be also valuable for non-Middle-Eastern countries as (English language) education in crisis situations appears to be generally report-based with less practical implications (Sinclair, 2007). Key implications include:

- Despite acknowledging the urgency to “take into account the needs of children and adults affected by armed conflict” by the World Education Forum in Dakar 2000 (Davies 2004: 6), no concrete initiatives seem to have been taken until now, evidenced by the Syrian crisis 15 years later.
- It is suggested by Sinclair (2007: 55) that education assists conflict-affected children and adolescents “to see a positive future rather than suffering debilitating depression or seeking aggressive outlets for their feelings”. Therefore, education is essential for lasting peace and development (Winthrop & Mendenhall, 2006).
- The study indicates that teachers, due to lack of funding, leave the camp school to find any paid job elsewhere, resulting in an understaffing issue. More than 10 years ago, the same problem has been highlighted “Little or no compensation for their efforts. As a result, teachers become frustrated, are frequently absent and often seek other employment in order to care for themselves and their families ... which means that teachers with fewer qualifications replace them and the quality of education deteriorates” (Global Survey on Education in Emergencies 2004: iv). It is very important that governments and agencies support and protect teachers as they plan the next the Education for All framework.
- The ELT field needs further research and original studies to provide ELT volunteers with further ideas to encourage local pedagogies.
- Cooperation between home and host countries to improve education for repatriation in which students not only study home curriculum, but also have their certificates recognised in both countries is essential to enable students’ access to schooling and university. Although the following was written in 2004, the issue of certification and recognition persists until now in the camp school: “Certification and recognition of students’ learning is essential to their futures and to their motivation as students” (Global Survey on Education in Emergencies 2004: iv). However, one problematic issue for materials developers will be creating the balance between students’ realities

and local needs on the one hand and keeping up to the standards of the home country MoE if the certification interrelated problem is to be resolved (Alyasin, forthcoming).

9.3.3. Researchers and Teachers

Several teachers have not only encouraged me to conduct more research, but also expressed their eagerness/willingness to participate in future studies. For them, it has been the first experience to take part in research, but it has been an eye-opening endeavour. Examining ELT in relation to conflict “helps the wider TESOL community at large keep abreast of the language and education implications of some of the most crucial and far-reaching issues of our time: war, militarized conflicts, security, postconflict reconstruction, displacement, and the like” (Nelson & Appleby 2014: 3). The discussion of armed conflict is hoped to make teachers not only aware of its impact on education (ELT), but also more resilient to cope with relevant traumatic experiences. With that, they can be better equipped to help their students overcome the upheavals of war. Participating in this study, the interviewees seem to have had a worthy experience in an underdeveloped context in many aspects. Given their circumstances, it could have, at least for a while, taken them away from the awful situation in the country and made them feel that they are teachers.

In summary, as emphasised by Kagawa (2005: 500), educators, policy-makers and teachers can get a strong rationale, insights and lessons from emergency education because:

Given the present crisis-ridden world, with its confluence of multiple crises, we all need to be ready for, and to have thought about, education for and in emergency. Experience in emergency education could inform educators, educational policy-makers and administrators to prevent future emergencies;

at the very least, lessons learned from emergency education will raise the consciousness of stakeholders in educational systems about the potential negative effects of education or, more particularly, schooling.

9.4. Limitations

This research has highlighted particular aspects of ELT in Syria; however, some limitations are acknowledged in what follows. The small number of teachers participating in the study perhaps limits the nuance of views with respect to imported innovation implementability vis-à-vis context-appropriate pedagogy. However, the teachers come from a multiplicity of different schools and have various teaching experiences and qualifications. This has both enriched the research and given it depth. Nonetheless, a larger sample of Syrian teachers could have been a great opportunity to more details and views. It would shed more light on ELT in different cities in the country and draw a more thought-provoking and informative picture of grass-root practices that can guide context-sensitive educational initiatives. Conducting these studies would not only enable us to appreciate and embrace ‘good’ and ‘successful’ ecological teaching/learning efforts, but also encourage significant shifts in teachers’ position in the centralised education system in which they have no say (See Chapter 1).

While the study addressed teachers’ cognitions to bring up teachers’ voices, the data collection circumstances did not allow for students’ voices to be heard. In the Syrian education system, students’ voices are paid even less attention than teachers’ as students represent the utter consumers at the bottom of the top-down hierarchy. Empowering teachers and students would hopefully create a change in their attitudes to their own locally conducive learning approaches and in their limited representation in decision making.

Although social media such as Skype, Viber and Facebook were great (but the only means) to complete my study, that was not without limitations. With the electricity being intermittent and the Internet frequently down, the teachers had difficulty finding time for me. These may have impacted the teachers' responses as they have had more crucial issues and priorities to deal with and seize the opportunity of having a two-hour electricity a day than actually go online to take part in my study. Another interrelated issue is the low Internet connection, which has either delayed some of the interviews or discourage other participants to participate altogether.

9.5. Suggestions for Further Research

In addition to teachers' cognitions, what students think about their classroom experiences represents a further under-investigated area not only in the Syrian context, but also in other ELT studies in other countries. It seems to be also important to investigate policy makers' views on the same aspects identified in this study in order to see if similarities can be drawn. The significance of such research, if undertaken, lies in attempting to go beyond (mis)matches between teachers' and policy makers' views to examine how far the latter party appreciate not only the feasibility of educational innovations within contextual realities, but also the possibility of considering these realities the foundation for a bottom-up approach to innovation. As there has been a reference to inspectors' insistence on innovation implementation irrespective of contextual factors and their infrequent classroom visits, it is worthwhile exploring inspectors' views in a future study.

In this study, the teachers' perspectives were explored in a very difficult and new context in conflict, displacement and camp schools. We also need research to

establish a way to prepare teachers to teach in these circumstances and challenges based on experiences of teachers who have actually taught in conflict-affected settings. In addition, one of the extremely significant contributions yet to come in this field is exploring students' voices in further research to ELT in conflict-affected and refugee areas as that can highly contribute to investigating the educational needs, obstacles and possible solutions. It would have been very important to investigate displaced and refugee students' on-the-ground experiences and views as voiced by them themselves, but neither access to them nor space in my thesis would have allowed for this aspect.

Concluding Remarks

This journey in my study has highlighted the catastrophic impact of war on teachers and students. It is also worth mentioning that it has deeply concerned and influenced my life as well as a researcher during the full time of my PhD. As it has never been anticipated in my study schedule, the war has scarred me despite being thousands of miles away. Data collection has been particularly distressing as it has been nearly impossible and as it has gone (when it has become possible) into revealing tragic stories which have made my life further stressful. Looking positively at this experience, however, I can see the significance of assisting teachers to stop and think and to realise the great efforts they have exerted to cope with the traumatic war experiences and to insist on doing all they can to save children's schooling. The volatile situation has charted a new path for my research that I have never considered before. It has equally drawn my attention to teachers' efforts as agents of transformations in difficult and extreme conflict circumstances.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: *English for Starters 7*

Appendix I: 1

In *English for Starters 7*, each module starts with an opener that introduces the theme and stimulates learners' interest in the topic and familiarises them with the vocabulary they will meet in the following pages.

In lessons (1-4), emails, articles and stories in addition to recorded texts and dialogues are used to present grammar, where learners are thereby encouraged to discover rules and use English in a freer, more personalised style. The 'Over to you' section allows students to engage in critical thinking and express their own ideas in English in pairs or groups. Further grammar points, revision of structures and practice exercises exist in texts and stories in the Workbook. Vocabulary items are presented through matching, gap-filling, listing and pictures exercises. Students also meet new vocabulary items and revise the items identified in the Students' Book in focused exercises in the Workbook.

Lessons (5) and (6) include practice of the four skills, with particular attention given to reading and writing. Drawing on their own ideas and experiences, students are given a range of controlled as well as freer exercises in context, normally from a text earlier listened to or read. Lessons (7) and (8), which are in the Workbook, mainly focus on skills development and contain a wide range of reading and writing exercises. Lesson (9), the project, is designed to involve group work interaction and encourage cooperation and practice of English in a less formal context.

Introduction

English for Starters 7 is an English course for Primary and Preparatory level students in Syria. This level is for Grade 7.

Each level of *English for Starters* includes a Students' Book, two cassettes with listening material, Workbook and Teacher's Book.

These materials are based on the General Framework and Outcomes of English Curricula in Syria, where this language is regarded as a foreign language. The *English for Starters* materials have approached the language skills in an integrated way in terms of the tasks and activities for both learners and teachers. Therefore the outcomes appearing at the beginning of each unit harmonise with and are relevant to the integrity of these skills and interactivity between learners and teachers.

What the course provides

English for Starters provides a wide range of regional and international topic-based content, both traditional and modern, which is designed to appeal to the educational needs and interests of lower secondary students.

The course also builds on and broadens students' general knowledge, through text-based work within the topics, and vocabulary development. The *Did you know?* boxes present interesting and unusual facts, which the students could collect and add to with their own ideas.

The Students' Book is divided into six modules, each focusing on a particular theme. Each module contains two units, which develop the theme in different ways. At the end of each module there is a project.

Language

English for Starters has a comprehensive language syllabus, presenting and reviewing contextualised grammar and providing systematic practice.

Skills

The skills syllabus provides regular, carefully staged practice in reading, listening, speaking and writing, where the emphasis is on practice and production of language.

There are also plenty of opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills and express their own opinions.

Pronunciation

English for Starters also includes regular Pronunciation sections which provide practice and guidance in areas of difficulty for Arabic speakers. There are many difficult sounds and sound combinations in English. Students will have discovered that some of the sounds that are new for them in English may be difficult to produce and recognise. *English for Starters* contains useful contrasts between English sounds which are easily confused by Arabic speakers, with plenty of practice in recognising the differences as well as listening and repeating.

Projects

The projects offer students an opportunity to practise English in a less formal context and encourage cooperation and interaction within groups. A project may need extra materials. It involves some research and other preparation which may be done as homework. Students are encouraged to present their work well, with appropriate illustrations and eye-catching headings. The projects should be displayed around the classroom if possible.

Components

Workbook

The Workbook is closely interlinked with the Students' Book and is designed to be used in class to provide practice of the language and skills covered in the Students' Book, and also extension work to develop topic and language areas. At the end of each module, there is a Progress Test.

Teacher's Book

The Teacher's Book provides comprehensive guidance notes and full answer keys for teachers, as well as complete tapescripts for listening material and a Workbook answer key at the back. Extra listening exercises for each module are also included.

The roles of the Students' Book and the Workbook

The Workbook is designed to be written in. It is used as part of the lesson but can also be used for extra work for the students to do at home. It is very important that the teacher regularly checks the Workbooks. This could be done as a class exercise or by collecting in the books.

The Students' Book is not designed to be written in, so every student needs an exercise book for writing exercises, and recording what they learn in class. Again, these should be checked regularly.

Students should also be encouraged to record new words in their exercise books or in separate vocabulary notebooks.

How to use the course

Preparing for the lessons

Before teaching the Students' Book unit, teachers should read the Overview, which gives the main aims of the lesson and identifies the language focus. It also lists what materials will be needed for the lesson. Optional materials are sometimes given too – they are suggestions for simple teaching aids that will add interest to the lesson, for example, magazine pictures – preferably English language ones, but any will do.

OVERVIEW

Outcomes Can talk about favourites, family and possessions

Language focus *be; have got; family*

Materials Students' Book pages 6–7; Workbook page 4; Cassette 1; clock or watch

Teachers should then read through the notes for the lesson, making a note of any words which have been identified as possibly difficult, and noting the timings suggested for each stage of the lesson (these are only given as a rough guideline).

In some lessons, extra activities (or 'extensions') are suggested – these can be used if there is time in the lesson. They could also be used at the beginning of the next lesson.

How each unit works

Each unit is divided into eight lessons with an additional lesson at the end of each module for work on the project. Each lesson is designed to take between 40 and 45 minutes. Estimated timings are given for each exercise.

Lessons 1–4

Opener

At the beginning of each module (i.e. Units 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11) there is an *opener* which introduces the theme of the module. Teachers should use this page to stimulate interest in the topic and pre-teach some of the vocabulary which students will meet.

Outcomes

On this page there is also a list of outcomes for the unit. Students should be encouraged to read the list and decide which outcomes are most important for their individual learning.

At the end of each module (i.e. after Units 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12), teachers can refer to the outcomes again and encourage the students to talk about what they found useful, easy and / or difficult.

Grammar presentation

Grammar is presented through a variety of text types, including e-mails, webpages, articles and a story which has an episode in every module. Recorded texts and dialogues are also used to present and consolidate grammar points.

Students are encouraged to listen or read several times to complete different tasks. These tasks encourage them to discover grammar rules themselves and to move from controlled practice to freer, more personalised use of the target language.

The *Over to you* exercises are an opportunity for students to

express their own ideas within the context of the lesson. This 'critical thinking' is an important part of the *English for Starters* syllabus. Students are asked to discuss questions in pairs or small groups, to give them confidence and allow them to express their ideas in English.

The text styles and topics are reflected in the texts used in the Workbook, which further develops students' skills by including other exercise types and vocabulary in the comprehension work.

Some grammar will be new to the students and some will be revising important structures that they have met previously during their studies.

The Workbook contains further grammar practice exercises, with more examples of specific grammar points in short texts and stories, and regular revision of grammar structures throughout.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an important feature of each unit. It is presented in lexical sets and there is a wide range of types of vocabulary exercise – matching, gap-filling, categorising, listing, identifying pictures, etc.

The Workbook contains many vocabulary-focused exercises which may introduce and practise new items, as well as recycling what students meet in the Students' Book.

It is a good idea to encourage students to record vocabulary in special notebooks. Discuss ways of classifying words (e.g. unit by unit, by theme, alphabetically) – perhaps they could use more than one method.

Lessons 5 and 6

These lessons practise the four skills, (speaking, writing, reading and listening) with particular attention to reading and writing. There are opportunities for controlled and freer practice.

Tasks are always in context, usually arising from a text which the students have just read or listened to. They often draw on students' own experience and ideas.

Each *Speaking* and *Writing* task is carefully staged with models and examples to help students. The Teacher's notes often give further suggestions.

A pronunciation task appears on these pages, linked to key language. There is always a recording for students to listen to and repeat.

In some units, students have the opportunity to listen to an authentic poem, linked to the theme, which they then practise reading aloud.

Lessons 7 and 8

These lessons are in the Workbook and focus on skills development. They include a wide range of reading practice, as well as writing practice exercises, from guided writing, with a helpful framework for students to follow, to freer practice, with guidelines.

Lesson 9

This lesson occurs at the end of each module and is focused on the projects. The preparation and drafting of the finished piece of work is carefully staged.

Classroom management techniques

In order for learning to take place effectively, it is essential that the class is well organised so that tasks are carried out quietly and efficiently. There are many instances in *English for Starters* where the teacher's notes make suggestions for how to do this.

Giving instructions

The teacher should make sure that all students in the room are listening when he / she gives instructions. It is important to check that students have understood the instruction if it involves remembering more than one thing. This can be done by demonstrating the activity or part of it with one student or group of students. The teacher may even want to note the stages of an activity on the board as a reminder. If students have to be moved to do an activity, it may be worth waiting until they are in their new places before giving the instructions for a task and then demonstrating it if necessary.

Presenting and practising new language

It is important that the teacher is clear about the new language. (If it is revision for the students, it may not be necessary to spend as much time on the presentation as is suggested in the teacher's notes.) It is a good idea for the teacher to read the teacher's notes for the new language point before the lesson.

Speaking practice

Some learners will be accustomed to the teacher speaking a lot during a lesson. However, a good way to increase the amount of practice all students experience is making sure there are times during the lesson when students can work in groups or pairs. There are a lot of opportunities in *English for Starters* for students to discuss their ideas with each other in pairs and / or groups before demonstrating to the class. This is a good way to develop confidence, one of the main attributes of a fluent speaker of a foreign language. Students can try things out in front of their friends without the pressure of speaking to the teacher (who knows more), or to a large group (who might not all be listening).

Group work gives the teacher time to walk around, virtually unobserved, checking the students' progress as they work, at a time when they are not feeling self-conscious, and therefore what is heard is more likely to be an accurate record of the students' true ability.

If students are not used to the idea of working in pairs or groups the teacher may need to explain the benefits the first few times.

Groups of four or five

If the teacher wants to get students into groups for a quick activity or discussion, the easiest way is to go around the class numbering the students up to the number required in each group. e.g. 1... 2... 3... 4, etc., and then instruct four 1s to work together, four 2s, etc.

Again, the teacher should be aware of the timing of an activity. If most groups have finished, the teacher should be prepared to stop the activity. If one group finishes early, it may be a good idea to set another related task to prevent distraction or disruption. It's possible that there will be a difficulty with the task, in which case the teacher needs to find out what the problem is, and help if necessary.

Pair work

It may not be a good idea to always have students who sit next to each other working together. Factors such as existing knowledge of the language, confidence / personality, and what they already know about each other can all affect the success of the activity. It also helps the atmosphere in the class if students can get to know other classmates during the language activities, and appreciate each other's difficulties and strengths.

Once students realise why it is a good idea, it should be quite easy to ask them to change places with another student on the other side of the room, or get them to organise themselves by lining up in alphabetical order according to their names. Then the teacher can ask them to sit with the person who is standing behind them for a particular activity. If they are going to need their exercise books and pens for the activity, the teacher should ask them at the beginning to pick them up before they move out of their seats.

Listening to students

It is a good idea for the teacher to get used to walking around the class when students are doing group and pairwork to listen to what is going on. The teacher can make notes (either mentally or on paper) of things they would like to correct later, or of anything particularly good that the student or group could report on after the activity.

Using the board

It is worth remembering that students will need to copy examples or ideas that the teacher has written on the board into their exercise books. Board writing needs to be large and clear. The teacher can plan what is needed by reading through the teacher's notes before a lesson. The teacher may like to divide the board into sections, so that all new vocabulary is in one part, grammar examples in another, etc.

B. Sample of Project

Project

A TIME CAPSULE

Materials pictures collected by students; 1 large sheet of paper per student; smaller pieces of writing paper and drawing paper; scissors or paper cutter; gluesticks; coloured pens

Students' Book page 88

Preparation (5–10 minutes)

Ask different students to share their ideas about items for a time capsule with the class. Then tell them to look at the pictures, the captions and the letter; answer any questions about vocabulary.

Put the students in pairs or groups, or let them work on their own. Tell the students to decide what items they will include in their time capsules.

Now you try!

First draft (15–20 minutes)

Tell them to note down ideas for captions which explain what the items are and how they are used. Then tell them to look again at the letter and to prepare a similar one for their own time capsules.

Go round and make suggestions where necessary. Remind them that this is just a first draft; they can change their minds and make corrections as much as they like.

Design the project (5–10 minutes)

Give each student a large sheet of paper and explain that they will stick their pictures and writing on to it. Ask them to think about where they will place their pictures and texts, and while they are doing that, go round and make more corrections to their drafts.

Second draft (15–20 minutes)

Give each student some writing paper and tell them to write their second drafts. Make sure you have seen and corrected their first drafts before they start these final versions. Provide paper for illustrations (i.e. photos or drawings of the items they have chosen to include).

Finally (10–15 minutes)

Tell them to arrange and stick the writing and pictures on the large sheet of paper.

Then tell them to write the title in large, colourful letters (suggest they use a pencil first!) and add further designs as they wish (for example, ruled borders around the pictures and texts would enhance the presentation).

Use the projects for a classroom display.

EXTRA LISTENING page 104

Module 6 Progress Test

WORKBOOK pages 72–75

Project

A time capsule

A time capsule is a container with objects inside it. They represent your life today. Later generations can open the time capsule and learn about the way you lived.

- Plan a time capsule to open in the year 2200.
- Choose five objects that represent your life today.
- Write about the objects and explain why they are important.
- Write a letter to people in the future.
- Talk about your home and family, your interests and the things that you use in your life.

My time capsule

This is a CD. You play it on a special machine. It has music on it.

This is a photo of my family. I'm the one on the left. There's my mum and dad and two sisters.

This is a magazine with lots of information about sports people and film stars.

This is a schoolbook. We study English from this book. It contains lots of information.

This is a mobile phone. It is a machine that uses radio waves so I can speak to my friends and family. I can send text messages and also take photos.

My letter to the future

Dear future people

I would like to tell you about my life. I live in the 21st century, in Syria. I live with my mum and dad and two sisters in an apartment on the fifth floor of a big building.

In the 21st century people use a lot of technology. In my house there are a lot of machines. In my bedroom I've got a CD player. I use it to listen to music.

Appendix II: Interviews

A. Sample of Stimulated-Recall Interview Questions

Part 1: Selected Extracts followed by questions

Extract 8 (30 April 2012, Maher: Pre-reading Stage, Warm-up p.64):

T: **safha64**<page 64> My Job **aamali awwal sourah** <My Job, the first picture>

S1: //guessing what the picture shows// **aama** <blind>

S2: **hares?** <goalkeeper?>

T: **aama?**) **Mudarreb haywanat** <animal trainer>**tani sourah?**<the second picture?>

S: **mustakshef ustath?** <Teacher, is it an explorer?>

T: **tani sourah bihmi alghabat mahamettuh yedour bilghabeh** <the second picture, protects woods, his job is to walk around woods> //shouting at girls// **bala sout banat**<keep silence girls> **awwal sourah mudarreb haywanat tani sourah?** <the first picture is an animal trainer, what about the second?>

Ss: **hami** <protector>

T: **shurti alghabat muhemtuh yehmi ilghabet min istiyad alhaywanat alnadirah** <park ranger, his job is too look after woods and preventing hunting rare animals> **talet sourah?** <Picture number three?>

1. What is going on here?
2. What is the purpose of the activity?/What do you intend to achieve out of this part of the lesson?
3. How far does the use of the L1 help students in this warm-up part of the lesson?
4. What factors make you choose this strategy of introducing the lesson through pictures and through the use of Arabic only?

Part 2: Specific questions relevant to the lessons

The following questions attempt to compare teachers' actual lessons with the instructions of the Teacher's Book.

● The 'Opener' instructions on page 82 detail all the steps of how to engage students in a pre-reading stage where students' schemata about the text can be activated and motivated. That can be done through asking them to look at the pictures, guessing the meaning of the title, noting down the headings, putting them in groups to discuss what they are going to read in each paragraph and inviting students from each group to share their ideas with the whole class and write their suggestions under the five main headings the teacher should have already written on the board. You have organised this stage in your own way, where translation and pronunciation activities are set up instead for students to simply repeat or drill.

- What makes the teacher organise the pre-reading stage in this way including translation and pronunciation activities?

- What are the challenges that make the teacher avoid putting students in groups to discuss what they expect to read in the text?

● In the 'Reading and Speaking' section, the Teacher's Book suggests reading the text, explaining new words, putting students in pairs to discuss a task (the teacher offers help where needed) and inviting students to give the answers. You structure this stage

differently where he asks students to read each paragraph followed by relevant comprehension questions which partly include the task designed.

- What is the purpose of the comprehension questions after each paragraph?
- What does the teacher intend to achieve out of giving students turns to read the text?
- What are the challenges that make the teacher avoid putting students in pairs to discuss each paragraph of the text?

- In the ‘Over to You’ section in the Teacher’s Book, the teacher should ask students to work in groups and discuss two questions, offer suggestions where needed and ask a student from each group to share their ideas with the classroom. You partly involve students in a similar activity in which students answer your questions about their opinion on the content of the text. However, the Listening part and the following ‘Giving Opinions’ group discussion task about the recording are skipped.

- What challenges make the teacher avoid putting students in groups to discuss the text and share ideas with the classroom in relation to the two questions in the ‘Over to You’ activity?

- What factors and challenges make the teacher skip some activities like the listening part and ‘giving opinions’ about the recording?

Part 3: General Questions

1. Can you please identify your personal understanding of CLT
 - a. The new books concentrate on CLT, can you give me a brief idea about whatever you read about it, whatever you have in mind?
 - b. Attitude towards CLT
Is it possible to follow CLT in Syrian schools? What challenges are there?
 - c. Attitude towards the textbooks and curriculum
Do the textbooks address the Syrian context?
 - d. Attitude towards using English only to teach English
 - e. Attitude towards the use of the L1
 - f. Attitude towards the Teacher’s Book. And does it really provide the teacher with skills as how to treat the new curriculum?
2. Can you please briefly explain
 - a. aims of the current English language curriculum/how different are they from the old books?
 - b. personal view about the teaching methodology of the current curriculum
3. What factors and challenges make it difficult for you to teach according to the curriculum guidelines?
4. Which language skills do you develop the most in your classroom, why?
5. Which language skills are assessed in the exams?
6. What is your role/students’ role in your classroom?
7. Where in the language classroom does the mother tongue help the teacher and the students the most?

B. Sample of Stimulated-recall Interview Data

What is the main purpose of reading the text about jobs?
<p>As a teacher, I wanted them to know how to read. I changed the purpose of the lesson to be suitable for the level of my own students. I wanted them to be able at least to read the activity sentences later on. In this text, I had no choice but to read every single word myself. Last year when I used to read fast, the students will get confused and translate the words incorrectly because the structure of sentences is different in Arabic. The year after, I had to follow this word-by-word translation to help them to break down the sentence.</p> <p><i>So, your aim is to help them learn how to read, but in the lesson, it's only you who reads, is it because students are not able to read, or are there any other reasons?</i></p> <p>First, we don't have enough time to let students read the text themselves. They can read the activities in the Workbook. We only have three lessons a week. When we were students, if you remember, we used to have five English lessons a week and the textbook was even shorter. How come they changed the curriculum into two textbooks and reduced the lessons into three instead of five? We need at least five periods, if not six, a week to teach this curriculum in order to finish the textbooks.</p>
What's going on here?
<p>I try to make students practise the words. Some students don't speak. Some students are silent, [so] I try to make them speak. Not all the students share with you, so I speak to them by name, everyone in his name or by his name to refer to them. You have to share all the students in the class from the back, the front, the middle. So I choose not the hard-working students only, the hard-working students and the silent students. And repetition is very important here to make the skill of listening good with them, to practise the skills of listening and speaking, not only speaking, speaking and listening.</p> <p><i>Is it because you are the only resource for them?</i></p> <p>Yes, I am the only resource for them, and I had no recorder. I tried to repeat the words to them.</p> <p><i>And do you think this is a very useful strategy?</i></p> <p>It's useful when you have no recorder, but if you have a recorder, it's better to make them listen from the native speaker of English.</p> <p><i>What does native speaker language help?</i></p> <p>It helps hearing to clear vocabulary, pronunciation. Sometimes I'm influenced in Arabic language because I am from Arabic origin ... to avoid them to influence in Arabic language.</p>

c. *Sample of Large-group Semi-structured Interview Questions (Guide)*

<p style="text-align: center;">1. Teaching Experience & Challenges/Problems:</p> <p>Can you explain your English language teaching experience in Syrian schools, in particular teaching <i>English for Starters</i> and what you think about that?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What do you feel about the textbooks series <i>English for Starters</i>? (advantages and disadvantages)b. How were you told to teach the textbooks communicatively?c. Do you think this curriculum is the right one to implement in Syrian schools? Explain.d. What is your view on the way the curriculum was introduced in Syrian Schools, and what could have been done to better <i>introduce</i> it and <i>implement</i> it?e. What <i>challenges</i> have you had in the classrooms obstructing teaching <i>EFS</i> according to the official guidelines?
<p style="text-align: center;">2. Teachers' Beliefs:</p> <p>Can you explain your own beliefs about teaching English (differences with the official guidelines; what you think about L1 use; how to teach grammar and reading)?</p> <p>I. General teaching beliefs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Can you describe a good lesson you were really pleased with? And why do you believe this?b. What strategies do you follow to facilitate interaction in your classes? <p>II. Beliefs about curriculum/educational innovation and implementation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">c. How far do you agree with the curriculum objectives and the new approach to teaching English in schools and do these fit with your own beliefs of teaching?d. What makes you decide to follow/not follow the curriculum guidelines?e. What would your advice be to new teachers about how the <i>EFS</i> is to be taught?f. What do you suggest to the Ministry of Education to make a real change in teaching English efficiently in Syrian schools? <p>III. Beliefs about L1:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">g. What do you think about using Arabic in teaching English? When do you use it the most? Why?h. Do learners prefer English-only classes, why?i. Do you think teachers' use of L1 is related to their own English proficiency?
<p style="text-align: center;">3. Impact of Current Situation in Syria on Teachers & Students</p> <p>How has the current political situation impacted (Education and) ELT?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. How has the political situation affected you and your career?b. What is the situation of schools?c. How have students been impacted as a consequence?

Appendix III: Book Materials

A. Classroom (1) Reading Lesson Materials:

OVERVIEW

Outcomes Can read, speak, listen and write about the future; give opinions

Language focus revision of *going to*

Materials Students' Book pages 80 and 81; Cassette 2

Students' Book page 80

Opener (10 minutes)

Ask the students to look at the pictures on page 80 and read the title of the text. Ask them to guess the meaning of *Smart House* (it means a house that is computerised). Ask them to note down the five headings, then tell them to close their books and then put the students in small groups. Ask them to guess what they are going to read about in each paragraph.

While they are talking, write the five headings on the board. Then invite students from each group to share their ideas with the class and write sensible suggestions on the board under the appropriate headings. Supply the English words where necessary (see suggestions below).

Suggestions

computers, robots, TV screens, sound systems, security systems, washing machines, 'intelligent' fridges and cookers

Students' Book page 81

Reading and speaking

1 (15 minutes)

Ask the students to open their books at page 80 and read the text straight through.

Explain any new words, then refer them to the words on the board and ask *Were you right?*

Ask the students to read the task and the example answer, then put the students in pairs to discuss numbers 2-8. Go round and offer help where needed, then invite different students to give the answers.

KEY

- 2 'reads' your eye and opens the door
- 3 automatically orders food
- 4 chooses a relaxing colour for you
- 5 remembers your taste and orders albums
- 6 gives you the weather forecast, news and sports results; takes good care of you
- 7 chooses and cleans your clothes
- 8 contains a keyboard, mouse and speakers

2 OVER TO YOU (10 minutes)

Read out the first question and invite different students to answer it (*Yes, I would / No, I wouldn't*). Then read out the second question and invite different students to suggest some ideas (e.g. *I would add a games room; I would have a special room for my homework*, etc.).

Put the students in small groups and ask them to discuss both questions in more detail. While they are talking, go round and offer some suggestions if necessary.

Finally, ask a student from each group to share their ideas.


Skills: Focus on future life

The Smart House

Do you want to see inside the house of the future? Well, let's go on a virtual tour of a smart house – a house run by computers. The smart house does exactly what you want. You can control everything from a keyboard.



An easy life
The smart house is cheap to run. It uses energy from the sun and it is protected against heat and cold. You don't have to turn off the lights because they turn off when you leave a room. And even when you are away from home, you can check things with your mobile phone. When you come home, you don't need keys because a camera 'reads' your eye and opens the door if it recognises you. And a robot does all the housework.

Kitchen
Your kitchen automatically orders food, and a robot opens the door. If you're shopping and you can't remember what to buy, you can phone your fridge and see inside! And you don't make dinner, you choose what you want to eat and the cooker prepares it.

Lounge
There is a giant screen for your TV, which is connected to the Internet. You can have any film you want in seconds. Your TV 'reads' how you feel and chooses a relaxing colour for the lights. Your music centre remembers your musical tastes and orders the latest albums for you. Your computer prints out a special newspaper for you each morning.

Bathroom
All the things in the bathroom are low energy. The mirror gives you weather forecasts, news and sports reports. And it also takes good care of you. It takes photos of your skin and your hair and tells you if you need to see the doctor.

Bedroom
Not sure what to wear in the morning? Why not ask your wardrobe? It chooses clothes for you. And it cleans your clothes, too! You can sleep well at night because there are relaxing pictures on the ceiling. And you don't have to get up to go to work. You can stay in bed because it contains a keyboard, mouse and speakers!



Are you interested in the smart house?
Well, I'm afraid you're going to have to wait a few more years!

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Listening

3 11.4 (10 minutes)

Tell the students they are going to hear some scientists talking about the future. Read out ideas **a–e** and check the students know the vocabulary. Ask them to point to each one as they hear it mentioned. Play the first part of recording 11.4, and check that the students are pointing to **c**. Continue, pausing each time to check that they are pointing to the correct idea.

Tapescript 11.4 – see page 100

KEY

1 c 2 b 3 d 4 e 5 a

4 Giving opinions (10 minutes)

Play the recording again, then ask two students to read out the example dialogue. Put the students in small groups and ask them to discuss the topics in exercise 3. Which one do they think is the most important? Go round and listen to their discussions, then invite different students to perform a similar discussion for the class.

Writing

5 OVER TO YOU (10 minutes)

Ask the students to suggest some predictions for the next ten years. Write the best ideas, in note form, on the board. Then tell them to note down four ideas, either from the board or their own ideas. Ask them to complete the paragraph. Go round and check their work, then invite three or four students to read their work out to the class.

Note: Here, the students are asked to refer to the future with *going to*. *Going to* is probably the most common way of referring to the future, but *will* is also correct; they will practise using *will* in the next unit.

Pronunciation *cup, car*

6 11.5 (10 minutes)

Play recording 11.5, pausing after each word for the students to repeat it.

Play the recording again and ask them to underline the vowel sound in each word.

Tapescript 11.5 – see page 100

KEY

1 cup butter colour must tongue
2 car answer heart laugh star

7 11.6 (10 minutes)

Ask the students to copy the table into their exercise books and do the same on the board. Then play recording 11.6, pausing after each word for the students to find it in the list and copy it into the correct column. Play the recording again for them to check.

Tapescript 11.6 – see page 100

KEY

1 cup	2 car
honey	guitar
London	clerk
cousin	bath

Did you know?

Have your students seen any films or read any books about robots?

Lessons 7 and 8

WORKBOOK pages 66–67
Skills development

Your future **11**

Reading and speaking

1 Read about the future house on page 80 and say what each of these things does:

1 uses energy from the sun

1 the house	4 TV	7 wardrobe
2 a camera	5 music centre	8 bed
3 fridge	6 bathroom mirror	

2 OVER TO YOU Work in groups. Discuss the questions.

- Would you like to live in this future home?
- What improvements would you make to it?

Listening

3  11.4 Listen to the experts talking about the future. Put the ideas in the order you hear them.

a finding life on Mars	d studying the universe
b computers that don't use electric energy	e finding cures for diseases
c saving the environment	

4 Giving opinions Work in groups. Which achievement do you think is important?

A: I think saving the environment is important because it helps the world.
B: I don't agree. I think we should find cures for diseases. This helps people.

Writing

5 OVER TO YOU In your exercise book, write a paragraph about four things you think are going to happen in the next ten years.

In the next ten years a lot of things are going to happen. Firstly,
 Secondly, Thirdly, Finally,

Pronunciation *cup, car*

6  11.5 Copy the words. Then listen, repeat and underline the sounds.

1 cup butter colour must tongue
2 car answer heart laugh star

7  11.6 Copy and complete the table.

<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">1 cup</th> <th style="width: 50%;">2 car</th> </tr> <tr> <td>honey</td> <td>guitar</td> </tr> <tr> <td>London</td> <td>clerk</td> </tr> <tr> <td>bath</td> <td>cousin</td> </tr> </table>	1 cup	2 car	honey	guitar	London	clerk	bath	cousin	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> Did you know? The word robot comes from the Czech language. Robot means 'servant'. </div>
1 cup	2 car								
honey	guitar								
London	clerk								
bath	cousin								

Technology quiz score

So how much do you like technology? You have the best of both worlds. If you answered mostly 's' Oh dear, you don't like technology, do you? I think it's time for you to learn some basic computer skills. Its nothing to be afraid of! If you answered mostly 'w' Well, don't! You like technology but you like older ways of doing things too! You have the best of both worlds. If you answered mostly 'c' Don't forget that meeting real people and talking can be fun too. Technology is useful but make sure you get some exercise and see your family and friends too! If you answered mostly 'e' If you answered mostly 'w'

B. Classroom (1): Grammar Lesson Materials

OVERVIEW
Outcomes Can talk about the future
Language focus future time expressions: *this afternoon, this evening*; computers and technology
Materials Students' Book pages 78–79; Workbook page 65; Cassette 2; (optional) a computer

Students' Book page 78

Grammar in context be going to; future time expressions: *this afternoon / evening*

1 Talking about the future (15 minutes)

First, copy the time expressions in the box on to the board. Point to the first one (*after this lesson*) and say *After this lesson, I'm going to ...* (e.g. *have a cup of coffee*). Invite two or three students to complete the sentence with their own plans, then do the same with each of the other time expressions.

Ask the students to prepare seven sentences using *going to* and the time expressions in the box. Go round and offer prompts where necessary. Tell them they don't have to be 'real' plans.

Ask two students to read out the example dialogue, then put the students in pairs to practise asking each other similar questions, using all the time expressions in the box.

Finally, ask different students about their partners' plans (e.g. *What's Jaber going to do after this lesson? He's going to ...*).

2 11.2 (10 minutes)

Tell the students that they are going to hear four people talking about their plans for the weekend. Play the first part of recording 11.2, read out the example answer and play the recording again to check it. Then play the next part of the recording and ask the students to write a sentence beginning *She's going to ...*

Continue with the third and fourth parts of the recording.

Play the whole recording straight through, then check their answers.

Tapescript 11.2 – see page 100

KEY
2 She's going to send lots of text messages to her friends.
3 He's going to buy some new CDs and he's going to do his homework.
4 She's going to visit her aunt and she's going to put her holiday photos on her website.

3 (15 minutes)

Read out the first question and invite a student to answer it. Then ask the students to write answers to all the questions in their exercise books. Make sure they write sentences. Go round and check their work, then ask different students to read out their answers.

Tell the students to exchange exercise books with a partner, then ask different students about their partners' plans (e.g. *What homework is Abba going to do today? She's going to do her science homework.*).

WORKBOOK page 65 exercises 4–6 (15 minutes)

You and the future

Grammar in context *be going to*; future expressions: *this afternoon / evening*

1 Talking about the future Work in pairs. Discuss what you are going to do:

after this lesson this afternoon this evening at the weekend
next week next month next year

A: What are you going to do this afternoon?
B: I don't know. I think I'm going to surf the Net.

2 11.2 Listen and write what the students are going to do at the weekend.

1 He's going to play his computer game.

3 Answer the questions. Write sentences in your exercise book.

1 What homework are you going to do today?
2 What time are you going to go home?
3 What are you going to watch on TV?
4 What are you going to do during your next holiday?

Vocabulary computers and technology

4 11.3 Match the words with the parts of the picture. Then listen and check.

screen keyboard mouse cable port
icon folder file menu

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C. Classroom (2): Reading Lesson Materials

OVERVIEW

Outcomes Can describe jobs

Language focus *have to / don't have to*; describing personal qualities; work

Materials Students' Book pages 64–65; Workbook page 53

Students' Book pages 64–65

Comprehension

1 (15–20 minutes)

Ask the students to keep their books closed. Write the main heading (*Working with nature*) on the board. Ask the class to suggest jobs that could go under this heading. Supply words in English as necessary.

Suggestions

farmer, gardener, vet, conservationist

Ask the students to open their books at page 64 and read the section with the heading *Park ranger*. Check they understand the vocabulary, then read out the example sentences. Tell them to read the rest of the text and then to prepare two similar sentences for each job, using the ideas in the box.

KEY

(possible answers – there are others)

An animal trainer has to be physically strong. He doesn't have to use a computer or work in an office.

A zoo keeper has to work with animals. He doesn't have to do the same thing every day.

A marine biologist has to work outside. He doesn't have to travel to work.

2 OVER TO YOU (10–15 minutes)

Put the students in pairs to discuss which of the four jobs in the text is the most interesting, well-paid, etc. Tell them that there is no correct answer and encourage them to give reasons for their opinions.

When they are ready, invite different students to tell the class what they have decided, and why.

WORKBOOK page 53 exercises 5 and 6 (10 minutes)

Working with nature

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My Job



Animal trainer
trains animals to work, perform or help disabled people

I have to be patient and understand animal behaviour.
I have to work with actors, the police and members of the public.
My work is different every day. I never get bored.
I have to be physically strong and fit.
I don't have to use a computer or work in an office.



Park ranger
works in national parks

I have to wear a uniform but I don't have to work office hours.
I have to work in a team, but also be independent.
I have to lead groups of visitors and help lost walkers.
I have to be physically strong because I'm outside all day.
I don't have to do the same thing every day.
I have to teach the public.



Zoo keeper
works with animals in a zoo

I have to understand animals and their behaviour.
I don't have to be physically strong.
I don't have to deal with the public, just the animals!



Marine biologist
studies marine plants and animals

I have to work outside, often in the sea, so I have to be a good swimmer.
I don't have to travel to work, because I live near my work place.
I have to put data into a computer and write reports.
I have to teach students and the public and communicate my ideas.

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Grammar in context *have to / don't have to*

WORKBOOK page 53 exercises 7 and 8 (10 minutes)

3 (10 minutes)

First, tell the students to read the text again. Then read out the first sentence, pausing for the students to supply the missing words (*have to*). Repeat with the second sentence (*don't have to*).

Explain that in the affirmative, *must* and *have to* have very similar meanings, but the negative forms do not: *mustn't* means it is not allowed; *don't have to* means it is not necessary (but you can do it if you want to).

KEY

1 have to 2 don't have to

4 (15 minutes)

Ask the students to copy the uncompleted text into their exercise books. Then read out the first sentence and invite the students to complete it (with *have to be*).

Allow time for the students to complete the task, then check their answers.

KEY

1 have to be 2 have to play 3 don't have to work
4 don't have to use 5 have to wear 6 have to enjoy

Vocabulary work

5 Describing jobs (15 minutes)

Tell the students to think of a job (it doesn't have to be one that has already been mentioned). Tell them to look at the ideas in the box. Explain any new vocabulary and decide which words apply to the job they have chosen. Choose a job yourself, too.

Ask two students to read out the example dialogue as a demonstration. Then invite the class to guess the job you have chosen, asking similar questions and using the ideas in the box.

Put the students in pairs to take turns to ask and answer similar questions and guess their partners' jobs. Make corrections if necessary.

The work we do 9

Comprehension

1 Read the article on page 64 and write two sentences about each job. Use *has to / doesn't have to*.

has to:	work outside	work with animals
	work with the public	wear a uniform
	be physically strong	
doesn't have to:	use a computer	work in an office
	do the same thing every day	be physically strong

A park ranger **has to** work outside.
He **doesn't have to** work in an office.

2 **OVER TO YOU** Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.
Which job do you think is:
interesting? well-paid? exciting? dangerous? tiring?

3 **Grammar in context** *have to / don't have to*
Copy and complete the sentences with the correct option.
1 On Sunday morning I *have to / don't have to* get up early because I have school.
2 I *have to / don't have to* play football with my friends if I don't want to play.

4 Copy and complete the paragraph. Use *have to / don't have to* and these verbs:
use wear play enjoy ~~be~~ work
Footballers (1) have to be physically fit. They (2) a match or do training every day. They (3) in an office and they (4) a computer at work. But they (5) a uniform. And, of course, they (6) playing football!

5 **Vocabulary work**
Describing jobs Work in pairs. Use the words below to talk about a job. Don't say the name of the job. Your partner has to guess.

be:	independent	enthusiastic	energetic	flexible	patient
	creative	physically strong	a good communicator		
work:	in a team	from 9 to 5	outside	in an office	in a hospital
	with computers	with the phone			
wear:	a uniform				
do:	the same thing every day	research			

A: They have to work with people. They have to be patient.
They have to be good communicators.
B: Are they nurses?

D. Classroom (2): Grammar Lesson Materials

Grammar in context *must / mustn't*

4 (10 minutes)

Tell the students that all these sentences are from the story. Read out the first one and invite them to tell you the missing word (*must*). Then allow time for the students to complete the task. When they are ready, ask different students to read out the completed sentences.

KEY

1 must 2 must 3 mustn't 4 mustn't 5 mustn't 6 must

5 (10–15 minutes)

Ask the students to think of the names of some national parks and write them on the board. Ask who has visited them and what they saw there.

Read out the example sentence, then ask the students to write rules for a national park, using prompts 2–8 and *must* or *mustn't*.

When they have finished the exercise, ask them to think of four more rules and write those down, too. Go round and check their sentences while they are working.

KEY

- 2 You mustn't leave rubbish behind.
- 3 You must camp only on special camp sites.
- 4 You must be quiet and respectful.
- 5 You mustn't run after animals or birds.
- 6 You must close all gates behind you.
- 7 You mustn't use shampoo in lakes or rivers.
- 8 You mustn't go fishing.

WORKBOOK page 52 exercises 1–4 (20 minutes)

6 (15–20 minutes)

Tell the students they are going to write their school rules down. First, read out the two examples and check that they agree they are indeed school rules. Then put the students in pairs and tell them to list at least five school rules. Go round and make suggestions if necessary.

When they are ready, put pairs together to make groups of four to six and tell them to compare ideas. Then ask a student from each group to read out all the rules they have written down.

Did you know?

What do your students know about national parks in their country?

Extension

Ask the students to imagine the perfect school (or the most awful school in the world) and write the school rules.

The work we do **9**

Before you read

- 1 Look at the pictures on page 62 and guess the answers.
 - 1 What is in the cages?
 - 2 Why is Ahmed with Mahmoud?
 - 3 What do you think will happen to Ahmed?

Comprehension

- 2 **9.1** Listen and read the story. Complete the sentences with a, b or c.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Mahmoud wanted to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a rescue his birds. b stay with the others. c drive to the police. 2 Samira wanted to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a go to the police. b go with Ahmed. c stay in her tent. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3 The hunters had: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a a plane. b a big car. c a helicopter. 4 Ahmed disobeyed Mahmoud. He: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a whistled. b spoke. c moved.
---	--
- 3 **OVER TO YOU** Answer the question.
What do you think will happen next?

Grammar in context *must / mustn't*

- 4 Copy and complete the sentences from the story with *must* or *mustn't*.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 I rescue the birds. 2 You stay with the others. 3 You move. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 You make a sound. 5 We let the men get away. 6 We open the cages.
---	---
- 5 Write rules for your national park. Use *must* or *mustn't* for these things:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 You mustn't pick flowers or damage plants. 1 pick flowers or damage plants 2 leave rubbish behind 3 camp only in special campsites 4 be quiet and respectful 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 run after animals or birds 6 close all gates behind you 7 use shampoo in lakes or rivers 8 go fishing
--	--
- 6 **Talking about rules** Work in pairs. Talk about your school rules.
You mustn't chew gum.
You must arrive on time.

Did you know?
Greenland National Park is the world's largest national park. It covers 972,000 square kilometres.

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Appendix IV: Ethical Forms

Information Sheet (1)

Centre for Applied Linguistics/University of Warwick

Name of Researcher: Abdulqader Alyasin

Research Title: ‘Teachers’ Perspectives on ELT: A Research Journey from Challenging to Conflict Circumstances in Syria’

Dear Participant,

I would like to inform you that your participation in my PhD study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

This study is an attempt to investigate English language classrooms at Syrian state schools in order to closely look at how teachers make sense of their teaching at the basic education level. In addition, the participant’s perspectives are examined through interviews conducted following the analysis of the classroom transcripts.

The transcripts and findings of the study shall be available for the participant. Information relevant to the participant will be kept anonymous and strictly confidential.

Where the participant prefers to speak in Arabic, the researcher is happy to conduct the interviews in Arabic.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at my email address:

A-Q.Alyasin@warwick.ac.uk

Information Sheet (2)

Centre for Applied Linguistics/University of Warwick

Name of Researcher: Abdulqader Alyasin

Research Title: ‘Teachers’ Perspectives on ELT: A Research Journey from Challenging to Conflict Circumstances in Syria’

Dear Participant,

I would like to inform you that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

Part of my PhD study is to attempt to investigate English language classrooms at a Syrian camp school in order to closely look at how teachers make sense of their teaching at the basic education level. In addition, the participant’ perspectives are examined through interviews conducted following the analysis of the classroom transcripts.

The transcripts and findings of the study shall be available for the participant. Information relevant to the participant will be kept anonymous and strictly confidential.

Where the participant prefers to speak in Arabic, the researcher is happy to conduct the interviews in Arabic.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at my email address:

A-Q.Alyasin@warwick.ac.uk

Consent Form (interviews)

Name of Researcher: Abdulqader Alyasin

Research Title: ‘Teachers’ Perspectives on ELT: A Research Journey from Challenging to Conflict Circumstances in Syria’

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project which I may keep for my records and have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have.

I agree to take part in the above study and am willing to be interviewed and have my interview audio-taped.

I understand that my information will be held and processed to be used anonymously for Abdulqader’s PhD thesis and any future publications or conferences.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

For any questions or queries, I should feel free to contact Abdulqader Alyasin at his email address A-Q.Alyasin@warwick.ac.uk

I have read the above description, and I give my consent for the use of the information as indicated above.

I can keep a copy of this consent form for my records.

_____	_____	_____
Participant	Date	Signature

As a researcher, I will keep a copy of this consent form for my records.

_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

